

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHING PRACTICE SCHOOLS CONTEXTUAL
CHARACTERISTICS AND STUDENT TEACHERS PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KANDARA SUB -COUNTY, KENYA.**

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ABSTRACT

Education, and by extension teacher education is a dynamic process as well as an important component of human development. Initial Teacher Education programmes (ITEPs) require their students to take part in a field experience, which is the culminating experience where student teachers practice in a school environment. The main purpose of this study was to identify the relationship between teaching practice schools contextual characteristics and student teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Kandara sub-county. The specific objectives were to identify challenges in the placement schools contexts that affect the performance of student teachers, to establish the extent to which regular and mentor teachers affect the performance of student teachers and to examine their performance in relation to the leadership styles in the placement schools contexts. This study employed the Social constructivist learning theory developed by Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). The study applied both qualitative and quantitative research methods which were applied interchangeably. Correlational research design was applied which described in quantitative terms the degree to which the teaching practicum schools contexts and student teachers performance are related. The study participants were drawn from public secondary schools in Kandara sub - County. The sample population included 15 principals, 75 teachers (which include student teachers) and 150 learners who were selected through systematic random sampling, stratified sampling and multi stage sampling. To collect the opinion of the respondents, questionnaires were administered and interviews were conducted. On reliability, the pilot study enabled the researcher to assess the clarity of the questionnaire and interview guide items while on validity, the researcher sought for assistance of Mount Kenya University lecturers and the supervisor who are experts in research and this helped to improve content validity of the instruments. Qualitative and quantitative coding technique was used to develop common themes/categories of information. Data collected was cleaned, coded, keyed in a computer and analyzed using the SPSS computer program. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze quantitative data by calculating the mean scores, frequencies and percentages which were then presented in tables, charts and graphs. Qualitative data from questionnaires was thematically presented in narrative form and where applicable in tables. The study established that the experiences that the student teachers had, was not satisfying as they encountered a lot of challenges during teaching practicum. The major challenges experienced by these teachers were dealing with indiscipline cases among learners, managing large and congested classes, lack of assistance by some regular teachers, heavy workload, negative attitude of learners towards subjects, inadequate teaching resources. To address these challenges, the study recommends that; student teachers need special guidance and support from all the school stakeholders and especially regular teachers and the students. This would help to enhance their learning and make their experience less frustrating; student teachers should have their own leader who would air their concern to the administration. Student teachers practicum duration should be prolonged so as to give them enough time to familiarize themselves with the teaching profession and mastering of the subject content; among other recommendations.