School Practice and Professional Competencies of Student Teachers: A case of Gulu University

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Declaration

I, Opiyo Samuel, declare that this research dissertation entitled; *"School Practice and Professional Competences of Student Teachers of Gulu University*", is my original work. To the best of my knowledge, it has never been submitted for any award or examination at any other university.

Signature………… Date: ……21-10-2026……

Samuel Opiyo

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Approval

This research dissertation entitled; "*School Practice and Professional Competencies of Student Teachers: A Case of Gulu University",* produced under our guidance, has been duly reviewed and forwarded for consideration with our approval.

Signature…… Date……21/10/2026……

Dr. John Bismarck Okumu (PhD)

Signature…… Date……21/10/2026….

Dr. Stephen Odama (PhD)

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved mother, Ms. Aryemo Lilly, whose unwavering love, sacrifices, and encouragement have been a constant source of strength throughout my journey.

I also dedicate this work to my dear wife, Mrs. Racheal Mbabazi Opiyo, for her steadfast support, patience, and inspiration, which have greatly contributed to the completion of this study.

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Abstract

The study investigated the influence of School Practice on the professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University. It was guided by three specific objectives: to examine stakeholders' perspectives on School Practice, assess the level of professional competencies among student teachers, and establish the relationship between School Practice and professional competencies. The study employed a mixed-methods approach using a convergent parallel research design. Data were collected from 205 respondents and participants using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, achieving an overall response rate of 72.7%. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 25.0, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that stakeholders valued School Practice, particularly mentorship and pre-school practice preparation. Student teachers also demonstrated high levels of professional competencies. Correlation analysis revealed strong to very strong, positive, and statistically significant relationships between School Practice activities and professional competencies, with coefficients ranging from $r = 0.70$ to $r = 0.84$ ($p < 0.01$). The average of the reported correlation coefficients was approximately $r = 0.77$. The study concluded that School Practice is strongly associated with the professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University. It is recommended that continuous professional development for university supervisors be strengthened and that School Practice supervision and monitoring tools be reviewed to align with emerging pedagogical trends.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Overview of the Chapter

Despite the growing demand for competent teachers in Uganda, student teacher training programmes have faced criticism for inadequately preparing graduates with the essential competences required in today's dynamic education sector (Kakooza, Kaahwa, & Owino, 2025). Recent qualified teachers often face challenges in classroom management, adapting instruction, integrating digital tools, engaging in reflective practice, and collaborating professionally (Trixa & Kaspar, 2024). Additionally, gaps in professional competencies like task-specific technical knowledge, workplace ethics, and independent problem-solving further hinder their ability to meet industry demands (Rwabuhinga, Ibore, Muweesi, Ochieng, Musinguzi, Kabasiita & Kagambe, 2024; Bagonza, Kaahwa & Mbabazi, 2021). In Uganda, student teacher training has traditionally focused on subject content and pedagogical theory, with minimal emphasis on the structured development of practical employability competencies (Kakooza et al., 2025).

This chapter captures the background to the study, the problem statement, the purpose, objectives, and research questions. It also outlines the scope and significance of the study and includes a conceptual framework that illustrates the assumed relationship between School Practice (as the independent variable) and the professional competencies of student teachers (as the dependent variable).

1.1 Background to the Study

1.1.1 Background

Globally, school practice has been long understood as a critical apprenticeship phase in which student teachers apply theoretical knowledge to real-life teaching scenarios (Kangwa, 2018). Through pedagogical training and hands-on experience, student teachers develop professional identity, classroom management techniques, and instructional competencies necessary for effective teaching (Maulana & Rizkiani, 2019). Koross (2016) observed that the term "school practice" was widely used to capture the totality of experiential learning in schools, though it remained underexplored conceptually. Its effectiveness was strongly tied to competence development, which referred to the integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours that educators needed to master to perform their professional roles effectively (Rizkiani, 2022).

The concept of school practice or practicum (Kangwa, 2018) has a long-standing tradition in teacher education. Its origin can be traced back to the mid-to-late 19th century, when teacher

training institutions, commonly known as normal schools, institutionalized practical teaching as a central component of professional preparation (O'Shea, 1894). These institutions recognized the value of hands-on experience and integrated structured practicum sessions alongside theoretical coursework to equip student teachers with essential skills (Cohen et al., 1996, as cited in Koross, 2016). Dewey (1965) emphasized a laboratory approach in which prospective teachers engaged directly in school settings to connect theory with practice, while O'Shea (1894) described school practice as a gradual progression from classroom observation to supervised teaching in "practice schools" or "model classrooms." Ball and Cohen (1999) later reinforced this view by stressing that authentic practice was indispensable for developing professional skills.

In Uganda, the history of school practice dates back to the early 20th century when the White Fathers established Rubaga Teacher Training College to prepare African primary school teachers (Scanlon, 1964). Following the recommendations of the De Bunsen Commission, the expansion of secondary education created a growing demand for African secondary teachers, making supervised teaching practice a core component of professional training in the four colleges for Junior Secondary school teachers. Student teachers were required to complete at least 11 weeks of supervised practice, supplemented by demonstration and criticism lessons, while Advanced Level trainees taught a minimum of four hours weekly (Scanlon, 1964). Assessment was rigorous, involving both Ministry officials and college authorities, and failure in school practice was considered final end to a student's journey as a teacher. This emphasized the central role of school practice in building professional competences and teacher preparation (Arinaitwe & Ngobi, 2025).

By the early 21st century, a shift toward practice-oriented teacher education models saw schools take on a more active role in preparing future teachers (Sandvik, Solhaug, Lejonberg, Elstad, & Christophersen, 2019). The primary aim of school practice was increasingly framed as fostering professional competence to ease the transition into full professional practice. Stronge (2018) defined effective teaching as encompassing five core competencies: (1) personal disposition, (2) classroom organization and management, (3) instructional delivery, (4) student assessment and support, and (5) professionalism and integrity. At the heart of these was pedagogical competence, which involved planning, facilitating, and evaluating learning for improved outcomes (Apriliyanti, 2018).

Despite its centrality, school practice has faced persistent challenges. Adewole (1977) described it as a "laboratory" for professional growth but cautioned that its success depended

on skilled mentorship. Unfortunately, many supervising teachers lacked adequate preparation to provide meaningful guidance (White, Dickerson, & Weston, 2025), a challenge that was particularly acute in low-resource contexts. In Uganda, the perceived decline in teacher quality which was once highly regarded across East Africa has partly been attributed to inadequate student preparation during practicum (Omara, Akwongo, Asega, Ecuru, & Okwong, 2021). Komakech (2017) further noted that distinctions between trained and untrained teachers in classroom practice remain minimal, highlighting the need to revisit the management of school practice and its contribution to competence acquisition.

At Gulu University, the Faculty of Education and Humanities (FEH) implements school practice as a core service-learning and community engagement programme designed to prepare student teachers for the world of work (Gulu University, 2019). Student teachers actively participate in instructional and administrative activities within host schools, gaining practical experience and management skills. However, despite its central role in teacher preparation, there is limited empirical evidence on how Gulu University's school practice contributes to professional competence. This research, therefore, seeks to explore the extent to which School Practice impacts the professional competence of student teachers at Gulu University.

1.1.2 Theoretical background

This study was guided by Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) developed by David Kolb (1984). This theory provided a robust framework for understanding how student teachers acquired professional competencies through school practice. ELT posited that learning is not a passive process but an active, cyclical one where knowledge emerges through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984). This made it particularly relevant to teacher education, where practical engagement in real classroom settings is a critical component of professional growth (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Kolb's model outlined a four-stage learning cycle: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. In the context of school practice, concrete experience referred to the actual classroom exposure that student teachers went during their practicum. Reflective observation followed, as student teachers analyze their teaching experiences, often through feedback from mentors or personal journals. This reflection leads to abstract conceptualization, where theoretical knowledge and practical insights are synthesized into new understandings about effective teaching. Finally, active experimentation involves trying out new strategies and techniques in subsequent teaching sessions, reinforcing learning through application (Kolb, 1984; Healey & Jenkins, 2000).

ELT also acknowledges that individuals approach learning differently, identifying four learning styles: Diverging, Assimilating, Converging, and Accommodating, based on how they prefer to perceive and process information (Kolb, 1984). Understanding these styles is essential for school practice managers and supervisors, as it underscores the need for differentiated mentorship and feedback strategies that cater to the unique learning preferences of each student teacher (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

A key implication of ELT for School Practice is the emphasis on structured reflection and supportive supervision. Without opportunities to reflect on teaching experiences or receive constructive guidance, student teachers may fail to translate experiences into meaningful learning (Beard & Wilson, 2013). Therefore, effective management of school practice must ensure that student teachers are not only exposed to real classrooms but are also guided through systematic cycles of reflection and application. This includes establishing clear supervisory roles, feedback mechanisms, and opportunities for experimentation within safe learning environments (Moon, 2004; Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985).

In this study, Kolb's theory provides a lens through which the influence of School Practice structures such as supervision, mentoring, assessment, and placement on the development of professional competences can be examined. It highlights that the quality and intentionality of experiential learning opportunities significantly determine whether student teachers leave school practice with the pedagogical, reflective, and adaptive competences required for effective teaching in 21st Century classrooms (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Loughran, 2006).

1.1.3 Conceptual background

Anees (2022) defined school practice as the period during which a student teacher teaches at a school as an essential component of their training. School practice is an activity that plays a crucial role in the preparation of teachers (Anees, 2022). The School Practice programme is a well-organized initiative aimed at offering aspiring teachers the opportunity to develop and assess their competencies in real classroom settings (Olanrewaju and Odeyemi, 2025). This is guided by the fact that effective teacher preparation requires a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical experience (Bakija-Haraçija, Ferizi-Shala, & Walker, 2024).

Anguria, Lugumba, Obong, de Boer, Ddungu, and Okeny (2019) clearly described school practice as a teacher training process where trainees apply the theories and skills learned in college to real classroom situations. This involves planning lessons, delivering instruction, and learning from experienced teachers. The process emphasizes the use of teaching strategies and pedagogical skills to impart knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that foster behavioral

change among learners. Additionally, Kayode-Olawoyin (2025) referred to school practice as a designated period during which a student teacher is assigned to a primary or secondary school for supervised teaching, fulfilling a key requirement for graduation and gaining practical teaching experience

In this study, school practice is operationally defined as the structured and supervised period during which teacher trainees, commonly referred to as student teachers, are placed in educational institutions to engage in practical classroom instruction. This placement occurs after the completion of requisite theoretical coursework at the university or training college and serves as a vital link between theoretical knowledge and the development of practical teaching competencies essential for professional growth. The management of the school practice process involves continuous supervision by university supervisors, alongside mentorship and guidance provided by host teachers within the schools. It also involves the processes that guide how student teachers are prepared, placed, supported, and assessed while gaining hands-on teaching experience in real school settings.

The term "competence" originated from the Latin word *competentia*, which means "authorized to judge" and "having the right to speak" (Coupin et al., as cited in Sanghi, 2016). According to Sanghi (2016), competencies serve to clarify and define the skills, knowledge, and abilities that contribute to success in a particular job. They also encompass the behaviors and attitudes necessary for performing tasks in a manner that maximizes value and supports overall organizational effectiveness.

Teacher professional competency specifically is defined as the ability to design and implement effective instructional strategies, grounded in a thorough mastery of subject content. This competence underpins essential aspects of teaching, including lesson planning, instructional delivery, and fostering student engagement (Rizkiani, 2022; Apriliyanti, 2020; Hermadi, 2016).

Zaragoza, Díaz-Gibson, Caparrós, and Solé (2021) defined teacher competence as the combination of skills and knowledge that enable a teacher to effectively perform their professional tasks. To optimize student learning, teachers must demonstrate expertise across a broad spectrum of competencies, especially within the complex environment of daily teaching, which requires making hundreds of critical decisions (Jackson, as cited in Gamayao & Binas, 2021). Given that few professions demand such an integration of professional judgment and the proficient application of evidence-based competencies, teaching is uniquely positioned among them.

In this research, professional competence of a student teacher refers to the demonstrated ability to integrate subject matter mastery with pedagogical skills, enabling the effective design and delivery of instruction, lesson planning, and student engagement. It encompasses the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and decision-making capabilities necessary to perform teaching tasks proficiently within real classroom settings, in ways that enhance student learning and reflect professional judgment grounded in educational best practices.

1.1.4 Contextual background

Teacher education plays a pivotal role in shaping a competent and effective teaching workforce, particularly in response to the evolving demands of 21st Century learning environments (Anees, 2022). In Uganda, as in many developing countries, student teacher education programmes are designed to equip future educators with both theoretical knowledge and practical teaching skills essential for professional success ((MoES, 2018; Bakija-Haraçija, et al., 2024). A key component of this training is the school practice which serves as a critical bridge between university coursework and real-world classroom experience (Kangwa, 2018). Through school practice, student teachers are expected to develop and demonstrate core professional competences such as subject mastery, lesson planning, classroom management, ethical conduct, and responsiveness to diverse learner needs (Olanrewaju & Aderemi, 2025).

However, evidence from recent studies revealed that many student teachers graduated with notable deficiencies in task-specific instructional skills, ethical judgment, classroom records management, and independent problem-solving abilities (Rwabuhinga et al., 2024; Bagonza et al., 2021; Omara et al., 2021). These competency gaps compromised their readiness to meet both institutional and national educational expectations. While the Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) emphasises the importance of practicum in fostering measurable professional growth (MoES, 2018), this vision is often undermined by weak management practices during the implementation of school practice.

These systemic weaknesses are further reflected in the declining performance of newly qualified teachers, many of whom struggle to implement effective teaching and learning practices due to the absence of robust mentorship and post-practicum support. In particular, Ugandan student teachers often exhibit low competencies in essential areas such as the use of instructional materials and classroom record keeping, even after completing their school practice (Omara et al., 2021). These issues point to a broader gap in the design and management of practicum experiences an area that requires urgent attention if Uganda is to produce a teaching force capable of addressing 21st Century learning needs.

Effective School Practice characterized by clear coordination, defined stakeholder roles, adequate supervision, and regular formative assessment has been shown to significantly influence the development of professional competences among student teachers (Bakija-Haraçija et al, 2024). However, there remains limited empirical research on how these components are operationalized within Ugandan teacher training institutions particularly Gulu University.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

School practice is a vital stage in teacher preparation, intended to build competences such as pedagogy, classroom management and professional conduct through collaboration among university supervisors, host teachers, and student teachers (Olanrewaju & Aderemi, 2025). This process should ensure that student teachers graduate as competent and professional educators. However, studies revealed persistent gaps in school practice. Student teachers often receive inadequate support, mentorship, and supervision (Dan & Liu, 2021). In Uganda, many graduate without the competences required for effective teaching (Rwabuhinga et al., 2024; Bagonza et al., 2021), and little distinction exists between trained and untrained teachers in lesson preparation and classroom practice (Komakech, 2017). Despite these concerns, limited research in Uganda shows how the school practice exercise, especially supervision, mentorship, and stakeholder coordination, affects the professional competencies of student teachers. This study, therefore, sought to investigate the extent to which school practice contributes to the development of professional competences of student teachers at Gulu University.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study aimed at investigating the relationship between School Practice and professional competencies of Student teachers at Gulu University.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study were;

1. To assess the student teachers, host school administrators and school practice supervisors' perspectives of School Practice at Gulu University.
2. To evaluate the level of professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University.
3. To investigate the relationship between School Practice and professional competencies of Student teachers at Gulu University.

1.5 Research Questions

This study addressed the following questions;

1. What are the student teachers, host school administrators and school practice supervisors' perspectives of School Practice at Gulu University?
2. What is the level of professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University?
3. What is the relationship between School Practice and professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University?

1.6 Significance of the study

Policymakers would use the study to strengthen teacher education policies and practicum standards. By linking School Practice to professional competencies, it would support the creation of structured, policy-driven frameworks for practicum programmes.

This study would provide curriculum developers with insights into how effective School Practice supports the development of professional competences among student teachers. This would aid them in designing practical school practice guides.

The findings revealed how School Practice affected teacher readiness in areas such as supervision, coordination, and mentorship that influence competence development. These insights could help improve school partnerships, allocate resources more effectively, and enhance the overall quality of teacher preparation at Gulu University.

Lastly, the research would serve as a helpful resource for other scholars interested in School Practice and student teacher professional competences, adding to the growing body of literature in this area.

1.7 Scope of the Study

Gulu University is located in Gulu City, Northern Uganda, with geographical coordinates at 02°47′18″N 32°19′01″E. The university lies approximately 5 kilometers (3.1 miles) northeast of Gulu Central Business District, the largest urban center in Uganda's Northern Region. Gulu is situated around 333-kilometer miles) by road from Kampala, the capital city of Uganda (Road Distance between Kampala and Gulu, 2020). Geographically, Gulu is surrounded by Amuru and Nwoya districts to the west, Lamwo to the north, and Omoro District to the east and south.

This study investigated the influence of School Practice on the development of professional competencies among student teachers at Gulu University. The study examined the perspectives

of student teachers, host school administrators, and school practice supervisors regarding school practice management, assessed the level of competencies among student teachers at Gulu University, and examined the relationship between school practice and professional competencies of student teachers. The study was conducted among student teachers of Gulu University who were involved in eight weeks of school practice in the academic year 2024/2025.

The study was confined to the period from 2020 to 2025, as this was the timeframe during which concerns about the low levels of student teachers' competencies were noted.

1.8 Conceptual Framework

The Conceptual Framework of this study graphically describes the relationship between School Practice to the development of professional competencies among student teachers.

The framework adopted David Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, which explains how learners develop knowledge through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. In this study, the theory provides a basis for explaining how school practice experiences and the support provided during the practicum relate to the development of professional competencies. The conceptual framework therefore translates the study's theoretical foundation into specific variables and includes the extraneous variables as shown in Figure 1 below.

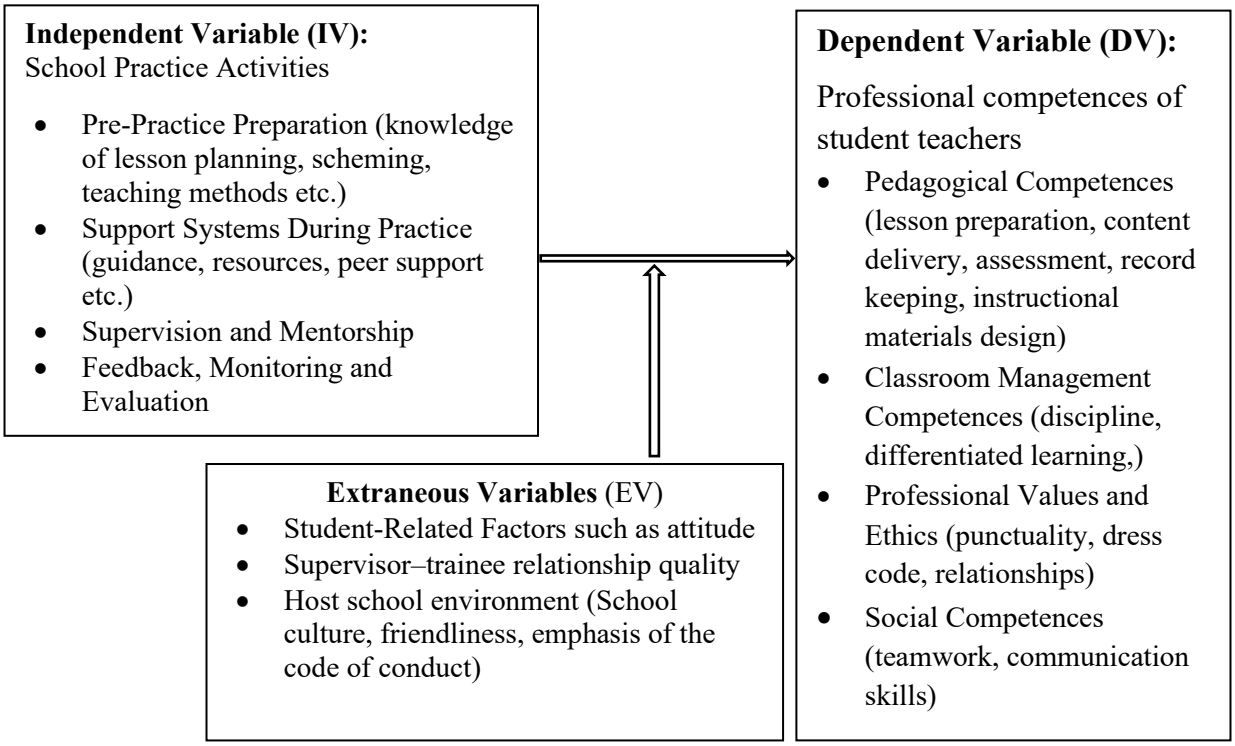


Figure 1: A Conceptual framework of the relationship between School Practice and Professional competences of student teachers.

Source: Researcher, 2025

The conceptual framework assumed that School Practice influenced the professional competences of student teachers in Uganda. It postulated that supportive and well-coordinated school practice experiences provided by teacher training institutions and host schools enhanced the acquisition of essential teaching competences.

The independent variable, School Practice, comprised four dimensions: Pre-Practice Preparation (Pre-practicum Phase), Support Systems during School Practice (Implementation Phase), Supervision and Mentorship (Implementation Phase), and Monitoring, Evaluation, and Feedback (Quality Assurance Phase).

The dependent variable, Professional Competences of Student Teachers, was categorized into four dimensions: Pedagogical Competences (lesson preparation, content delivery, assessment, record keeping, and instructional materials design); Classroom Management Competences (discipline and differentiated learning); Professional Values and Ethics (punctuality, dress code, and professional relationships); and Social Competences (teamwork, communication skills, and related interpersonal skills).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviewed and critiqued relevant literature on School Practice and Professional competencies of student teachers, guided by the study's objectives. It was organized as follows: student teachers, school administrators and school practice supervisors' perspectives of School Practice at Gulu University, Level of professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University and the relationship between School Practice and professional competencies of Student teachers at Gulu University.

2.1 The student teachers, school administrators and school practice supervisors' perspectives of School Practice at Gulu University

Bwiruka et al., (2021) explored student teachers' perspectives and experiences of school practice in relation to competence development using a phenomenological design at Makerere University. Data was collected through unstructured interviews and document reviews involving twelve purposively selected third-year student teachers. The findings revealed that participants appreciated school practice as a valuable learning experience that integrated theory with practice, supported by supervisors and senior teachers.

In contrast, the present study focused on understanding the student teachers, school administrators and university supervisors' perspectives of school practice at Gulu University. This study provided a different context from Bwiruka et al.'s research at Makerere University. This study also used structured interviews and questionnaires to collect information from over 205 third year students.

Azure (2015) examined student teachers', mentors', and university supervisors' perceptions of the purpose and experiences of teaching practice at the University of Education, Winneba in Ghana. The study used structured and unstructured questionnaires with 65 student teachers, 55 mentors, and 15 university supervisors. School practice was largely viewed as a process for developing instructional skills, with some influence of demographic factors.

In contrast, the present study investigated the perspectives of student teachers, school administrators, and university supervisors on school practice at Gulu University. Unlike Azure's study, which focused on perceptions of the purpose of teaching practice in Ghana, this study was conducted in Uganda and emphasized school practice and its relationship to competency development using questionnaires and interviews from over 205 respondents

Chimhenga (2017) investigated student teachers' perceptions of teaching practice supervision in Zimbabwe using a descriptive survey design involving 50 purposively selected Diploma in Education student teachers. Data was collected using questionnaires. The findings indicated that most participants perceived a mismatch between supervisors' grades and their qualitative feedback, leading them to view teaching practice supervision more as a grading exercise than a developmental process.

In contrast, the present study examined the perspectives of student teachers, school administrators, and university supervisors on school practice at Gulu University. Unlike Chimhenga's study, which focused only on student teachers in Zimbabwe, this study adopted a broader stakeholder approach in the Ugandan context and used questionnaires and interviews to collect data from over 205 respondents.

Amankwah, Oti-Agyen, and Sam (2017) investigated student teachers' perspectives of the teaching practice programme at the College of Technology Education in Ghana, emphasizing its contribution to professional development. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 226 randomly selected student teachers through questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that on-campus teaching practice equipped students with essential teaching knowledge, skills, experience, self-efficacy, and professional growth.

While the study by Amankwah et al. (2017) focused on the Ghanaian context, the present research examined stakeholders' perspectivess of how School Practice is managed at Gulu University using a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach. This contextual shift enabled a localized and context-sensitive understanding of School Practice within Uganda's teacher education framework.

Muzata (2018) investigated how student teachers in Zambia perceive the role of schools in fostering their professional development during teacher preparation. Data was collected using both open- and closed-ended questionnaire items administered to 74 student teachers from three teacher education institutions in 2016. The findings revealed that although student teachers appreciated the guidance received from host schools, they also expressed significant dissatisfaction regarding systemic and administrative challenges that limited their effective engagement during practice.

In light of these insights, the current study aimed to understand student teachers, school supervisors and host school administrators' perspectives of School Practice at Gulu University.

Additionally, the current study used samples of 140 students, 35 school administrators and 30 school supervisors.

Kagoda and Sentongo (2015) examined practicing teachers' perceptions of teacher trainees in Ugandan schools using a mixed-methods approach involving 93 practicing teachers from 20 schools. Data was collected through questionnaires and focus group discussions. The findings indicated that practicing teachers viewed student teachers as generally compliant in professional ethics and participation in school activities, but weak in subject mastery and pedagogical content knowledge, with some concerns about inappropriate dress among a minority of trainees.

In contrast, the present study investigated the perspectives of student teachers, school administrators, and university supervisors on school practice at Gulu University. Unlike Kagoda and Sentongo's study, which focused only on practicing teachers' perceptions of trainees in selected Ugandan schools, this study adopted a broader stakeholder framework and used questionnaires and interviews to capture views from over 205 respondents within the Gulu University context.

Hailu and Sekar (2020) investigated student teachers' perspectives and challenges related to school-based teaching practice in Ethiopia. Conducted at the Institute of Pedagogical Sciences, Mekelle University, the study involved a population of 142 prospective teachers, from which 80 were selected using a random sampling technique. The findings revealed that the prospective teachers expressed low satisfaction with the level of collaboration and the feedback they received from their respective mentors during the school-based teaching practice.

In alignment with this focus, the current study explored the stakeholders' perspectives of how the school practice period is managed at Gulu University during school practice. Additionally, the current study used samples of 140 students, 35 school administrators and 30 school supervisors.

Annet, Eduan, and Kagoire (2024) examined the collaborative potential between universities and schools in Uganda, focusing on student teachers' perspectives of support from school managers during school practice. Using a qualitative case study design, the study engaged 24 final-year student teachers through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Thematic analysis revealed that student teachers appreciated support in areas such

as induction, fair workload distribution, managerial guidance, professional development, and motivation.

The current study focused on Gulu University, exploring perspectives of School Practice between the university and host schools from the perspectives of various stakeholders. In addition, the study involved a sample of 140 student teachers, 35 school administrators, and 30 school supervisors using questionnaires and interviews.

2.2 The level of professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University

Mendoza (2024) conducted a descriptive study to determine the level of professional competencies and identity toward the performance of student teachers in Philippines, mediated by the support system. Using a questionnaire administered to ninety-five teachers from Sariaya West District, the study analyzed data using percentages and means. Findings revealed that most student teachers demonstrated high levels of competence in social, self-management, communication, and leadership skills, alongside strong motivation, commitment, and self-efficacy. The schools provided substantial mentoring and technical assistance support, and teachers exhibited satisfactory performance in advisory roles, coaching, teaching strategies, and classroom assessment.

The current study addressed these gaps by focusing specifically on the professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University in Uganda. Methodologically, it adopted a convergent parallel mixed methods design, allowing for the simultaneous collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data which is different from the above study.

Zulfahmi, Mahmud, and Trinova (2020) examined the pedagogical and professional competencies of students in the Department of Islamic Elementary Education at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang, Indonesia, using a mixed-method approach with observations, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation. Results showed very good pedagogical competence (82.4%) and good professional competence (78.3%), with strengths in student potential development, communication, and teaching material mastery. The study recommended more training, teaching simulations, and stronger guidance during teaching practice programmes.

This study at hand, however, focused solely on measuring the professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University, Uganda in the African context. Additionally, it adopted a convergent parallel mixed methods design, allowing for the simultaneous collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data which is different from the above study.

Samuel and Abati (2019) examined teacher preparation and teaching professional competence among graduates of Federal Colleges of Education in Southwest Nigeria using a descriptive ex-post facto survey. Data were collected from 128 lecturers and 2,456 students using Classroom Teaching Observation Checklists (CTOC) and Course Content Assessment Checklists (CCAC), and analyzed with descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings revealed that teaching methods, teaching techniques, principles courses, and teaching practice exercises contributed to the professional competence of both trainee and employed teachers.

Unlike the Nigerian context, this research focused exclusively on measuring the professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University, Uganda. This study used convergent parallel mixed approach unlike the study above that used descriptive ex-post facto survey.

Romanyuk, Rusnak, Dolynskiy, Maftyn, and Onyshkiv (2022) examined competence-based readiness of student teachers in Ukraine, focusing on leaders' communication competence (LCC) and global competence (GC). Using jigsaw and opinion-sharing activities with an experimental group, the study found significant improvement in communicative competencies, with the experimental group scoring 9.6% higher overall, particularly in behavioural and skills components. The study confirmed that structured, practice-oriented interventions enhance professional and communicative competencies.

The current study, however, focused on measuring the professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University, Uganda, a context different from the above in Ukraine. This study also used convergent parallel mixed approach jigsaw and opinion-sharing activities with an experimental group unlike the jigsaw and opinion-sharing activities with an experimental group.

Alcantara (2018) investigated the professional education and field study competencies of student teachers at Bulacan State University, Philippines, using a descriptive-survey method with 346 students and cooperating teachers. Data were collected via questionnaires and analyzed using mean scores, standard deviations, and Spearman Rho correlation. Findings revealed that student teachers performed very well in professional education subjects and field study courses. Significant correlations were found between specific professional education subjects, field study courses, and the domains of the National Competency-Based Teacher Standards (NCBTS), highlighting the link between academic preparation and teaching competencies.

The current study, however, measured the professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University, Uganda, without examining correlations with specific courses or NCBTS domains.

Bangao (2020) conducted a descriptive study to determine the competency level of junior high school science teachers in Indonesia across seven domains: social regard for learning, curriculum, learning environment, planning and assessment, diversity of learners, community linkage, and professional development. Using questionnaires and statistical tools including Friedman's two-way ANOVA and Sandler's A test, the study found that teachers' overall competency was satisfactory, with strengths in social regard for learning and weaknesses in diversity of learners and community linkages. Qualification significantly influenced competency levels, while length of service and number of trainings attended showed no significant relationship with teacher competency.

The current study however, focused on understanding the professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University in Uganda, emphasizing only the measurement of professional competencies rather than exploring additional factors such as qualifications, work experience, or technology integration.

Cruz (2022) examined the professional competencies of proficient and highly proficient secondary Mathematics teachers in Bulacan, Philippines, using the seven domains of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST). The descriptive study used survey questionnaires and statistical analysis, including t-tests and ANOVA. Findings showed that most teachers were moderately competent, with observation ratings indicating strengths across content knowledge and pedagogy, learning environment, diversity of learners, curriculum and planning, and community linkages. No significant differences were found in competencies when grouped by demographic profile, though observation ratings differed between proficient and highly proficient teachers.

The current study, however, focused specifically on measuring the professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University, Uganda, without grouping by teaching experience or using observation ratings.

Iqbal, Khalid, and Hussain (2022) examined the professional competencies of prospective teachers enrolled in distance education B.Ed. programmes at Allama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan. Using a self-developed questionnaire and descriptive and inferential statistics, the study assessed competencies in subject knowledge, instructional planning and

strategies, assessment, learning environment, communication, and use of information technology. Findings revealed that the professional competencies of these prospective teachers did not meet quality standards, highlighting gaps in teacher training programmes. The study recommended that teacher education programmes focus more directly on developing professional competencies to ensure effective teaching.

The current study, however, focused solely on measuring the professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University, Uganda, without examining gender differences, distance education contexts, or specific technology-related competencies.

Mohamed, Valcke, and De Wever (2016) investigated student teachers' readiness-for-the-job using a framework of 11 international teacher competences (ITCs) across four teacher education colleges with 226 students in Belgium. The study examined how integration of ITCs in day-to-day teaching, curricula, practicum experiences, and modelling by teacher educators influenced readiness. Results highlighted areas where student teachers needed further development and emphasized the central role of teacher educators in shaping professional competence.

The current study, however, focus exclusively on measuring the professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University, Uganda, without evaluating readiness-for-the-job or the influence of teacher educators.

2.3 The relationship between School Practice and professional competences of student teachers at Gulu University

Mahmood, Aziz, and Bibi (2023) examined the role of school practice in shaping the professional identities of prospective teachers in Pakistan. Using purposive random sampling, they selected 45 cooperative and 80 prospective teachers. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire focusing on six key components of school practice. Findings revealed that school practice fosters adaptive teaching behaviours, resilience, and confidence, helping prospective teachers address future classroom challenges.

While this study emphasized identity formation, the current study focused on Gulu University in Northern Uganda, specifically investigating how School Practice influences the development of professional competencies essential for graduate employability.

Olanrewaju and Odeyemi (2025) examined the role of school practice in teacher education programmemes in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey design, they studied 150 student teachers and 30 secondary school teachers selected through simple random

sampling. Data collected via a 30-item questionnaire showed that school practice positively influences student teachers' disposition by building self-confidence, enhancing creativity, promoting reflection, and encouraging learning from mistakes as key elements in developing foundational professional competencies.

While offering valuable insights from the Nigerian context, the current study focused on Gulu University in Northern Uganda, aiming to assess how School Practice influences the development of professional competencies among student teachers.

Bhebhe and Tshuma (2016) investigated the nature of student teacher preparation for school practice during teacher training in Zimbabwe. The study explored the experiences and perspectivess of key stakeholders, including two school practice coordinators, eleven lecturers, seventeen student teachers, and ten mentor teachers selected through purposive sampling. Findings highlighted the critical role of mentor teachers in preparing student teachers for effective school practice.

While this study focused on preparatory processes, the current study examined the influence of School Practice on building the professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University in Northern Uganda.

Kihwele and Mtandi (2020) investigated the influence of school practice on pedagogical competencies in Tanzania using a case study design with a mixed-methods approach. The study involved 81 respondents from Mzumbe University, who completed a 36-item questionnaire during their school practice placements. Findings revealed that school practice enhanced student teachers' pedagogical competencies by integrating theoretical knowledge with practical experience, particularly in selecting, preparing, and using teaching and learning materials. However, challenges such as limited assessment, poor mentor-novice teacher relationships, and frequent interruptions were noted. The study recommended improving mentor support, increasing the duration of school practice, and conducting multiple assessments.

While this study addressed pedagogical competencies and logistical challenges in Tanzania, the current study focused on how School Practice influences the development of professional competencies among student teachers at Gulu University in Northern Uganda.

Bakija-Haraçija, Ferizi-Shala, and Walker (2024) explored the value of school practice among 65 preschool student teachers in Kosovo. A survey was administered before and after their school practice, and a paired sample t-test was used to assess changes in understanding. The results showed that student teachers experienced both positive and negative shifts in their

understanding, indicating the significant impact of practical experience on their professional development.

While this study focused on preschool student teachers in Kosovo, the current study examined how School Practice influences the development of professional competencies among student teachers at Gulu University in Northern Uganda.

Kapri (2017) examined the role of practice teaching in skills development among student teachers. The study found that practice teaching fosters a sense of accomplishment, enhances teacher-student interaction, and improves communication skills. It also helps novice teachers transfer subject knowledge effectively in real classroom settings. The study emphasized the need to integrate ICT into practice teaching to build confidence and improve instructional delivery, noting that quality practice teaching significantly influences student learning, an essential goal of teacher education.

While Kapri focused broadly on skill development and ICT integration, the current study explored the experiences of student teachers at Gulu University, specifically examining how school practice influences the development of professional competencies.

Oparah, Nwoke, and Ikwuanusi (2017) examined the influence of teaching practice on the professional development of student teachers, with a focus on sustaining quality assurance in teacher education. Using a descriptive survey design, the study involved 420 student teachers from Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a researcher-designed 4-point Likert scale questionnaire. Findings indicated that school practice is vital to professional development, regardless of gender. The authors recommended that student teachers take the exercise seriously to enhance their effectiveness in the teaching profession.

While this study emphasized professional development in the context of quality assurance, the current study focused on the experiences of student teachers at Gulu University, specifically investigating the relationship between School Practice and the development of professional competencies for employability

Ndebele and Legg-Jack (2023) examined the formation of professional identities during Work Integrated Learning (WIL) among Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) student teachers at a South African university. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 26 purposively selected participants.

Findings revealed that WIL facilitated the development of professional identities by exposing student teachers to mentor support and real school environments.

While this study focused on identity formation during WIL in a South African context, the current study investigated the relationship between School Practice and the development of professional competences among student teachers at Gulu University in Northern Uganda.

Omara., et al (2021) examined the effectiveness of school practice in enhancing pedagogical skills among final-year Bachelor of Science with Education students at Muni University, Uganda. Using a concurrent mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 12 school practice supervisors and 46 student teachers. The findings revealed that effective supervision significantly improved lesson preparation, delivery, presentation, and self-evaluation skills.

While this study focused on Muni University, the current study shifted attention to Gulu University to evaluate how School Practice influences the development of professional competencies among its student teachers.

Apolot et al., (2018) investigated the impact of school practice supervision on student teacher performance in Ugandan higher institutions. Using purposive and random sampling, 103 respondents from two universities were surveyed, with 76 completed questionnaires (73.8% response rate). Content analysis revealed that school practice supervision enhances student teachers' subject competence, confidence, and adoption of new teaching techniques.

While this study focused on Kyambogo and Ndejje Universities, the current study centered on Gulu University in a different region, examining how School Practice influences the professional competencies of student teachers.

2.4 Conclusion

The literature reviewed highlights the vital role of school practice in developing student teachers' professional competencies by providing practical experience that bridges theory and classroom realities. Studies from diverse countries demonstrate that both school-based and university-based support systems such as mentorship, supervision, and institutional guidance are essential for effective teaching practice. However, common challenges including inadequate mentoring, limited collaboration between universities and schools, unclear supervisory roles, and resource constraints often reduce the effectiveness of these experiences.

Many existing studies were conducted several years ago or in contexts different from Northern Uganda, emphasizing the need for updated, locally relevant research. There was limited understanding of how school practice at Gulu University impacted student teachers' professional competencies within the unique social and educational environment of the region. This study addressed these gaps by assessing the perspectives of Gulu University stakeholders' regarding school practice, exploring the support provided by host schools and the university, and investigating the overall relationship between school practice and professional competencies of student teachers of Gulu.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology adopted for the study. It presents the research orientation and design, target population, sample size and sampling strategies, data collection methods and instruments, data quality control measures, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, and data management procedures.

3.1 Research Orientation

This study adopted a mixed methods research approach underpinned by a pragmatic worldview. As Creswell (2014) explained, mixed methods research is a methodological approach that involves gathering both qualitative and quantitative data, combining them systematically. It was based on the idea that integrating both types of data offers a more complete understanding of a research problem than relying on just one method. A pragmatist stance allowed researchers to use multiple data sources to effectively address research questions (Dawadi, Shrestha, & Giri, 2021).

According to Noble & Heale (2019), the term "mixed methods" is defined as a research method which combines quantitative and qualitative approaches in one study to provide a more thorough grasp of the research subject, hence combining these two methods helps in producing results that are more solid, legitimate, and trustworthy. In addition, Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches help to enrich the data for accuracy and relevancy (Shorten & Smith, 2017), and ensure data triangulation (Noble & Heale, 2019) for more reliable results.

3.2 Research Design

Khanday & Khanam (2023) described research design as a master plan specifying the methods and procedures for collecting and analyzing the needed information in a research study. This study used convergent parallel mixed methods. According to Creswell (2014), convergent parallel mixed methods involve collecting quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously, then integrating them to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Any conflicting or inconsistent results were examined and explained during interpretation (Dawadi, Shrestha, & Giri, 2021).

The quantitative approach employed a cross-sectional survey design, using structured questionnaires and descriptive and inferential statistics to examine stakeholders' perspectives, professional competency levels, and relationships between School Practice Management and professional competencies.

The qualitative approach employed a descriptive design, using semi-structured interviews to explore stakeholders' experiences of School Practice management, support systems, and competency development. Data were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns and explanations.

The purpose of integration in a convergent design was to produce results and interpretations that enhance, validate, and deepen understanding (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Dawadi, Shrestha, & Giri, 2021).

3.3 Target Population

The target population for this study comprised an estimated total of 500 students who recently completed their first school practice in July 2025 and were now in year three at Gulu University from the Faculty of Education and Humanities. In addition to students, the study involved, 35 School administrators that hosted student teachers during the recently concluded school practice (SS1–SS6) around Acholi sub region, 30 University school practice supervisors.

Selecting the students who did their school practice for the first time was essential for capturing firsthand perspectives on the effectiveness of the school practice programme. These students represented the direct beneficiaries of school practice and their experiences.

The school administrators provided vital information about their perspectives on school practice, the skill sets of the student teachers, competencies and their social aspects during the school practice period and relationship between school practice and professional competences of student teachers.

The school practice supervisors of Gulu University involved in the implementation of the school practice programmes were crucial. The officers are typically responsible for the day-to-day execution of the programmes and services designed. The response helped assess the level of commitment and alignment of university leadership with the goal of school practice.

3.4 Sample Size

The study used a sample size of 205 respondents. This comprised 140 undergraduate students who did their first school practice while in year two and were now in the final year studying at the Faculty of Education & Humanities, drawn from Krejcie & Morgan, 1970 Table attached in Appendix A), 35 Secondary school administrators (HSA1-6) where Gulu University students did school practice and 30 University school practice supervisors

Table 1: Sample Size Distribution

Category of Respondents	Population	Samples	Sampling Technique
Student students	500	140	Convenience Sampling
University School Practice supervisors	30	30	Purposive Sampling
Host School Administrator (HSA1-6)	35	35	Purposive Sampling
TOTAL	565	205	

Source: Primary source, (2025)

3.5 Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling was used to select 140 Year Three student teachers from the Bachelor of Science with Education, Bachelor of Arts with Education, and Bachelor of Business with Education programmes who had completed their first school practice. Participants were recruited based on their availability, accessibility and willingness to participate. Invitations were shared through student networks, social media and lecture rooms. Interested and eligible students who were accessible during data collection were included until the required sample of 140 was reached.

Purposive sampling was used to include all 30 university school practice supervisors and 35 host-school administrators, giving a total questionnaire sample of 205 respondents from a population of 565. These individuals were chosen for their strategic positions and experience, which provided valuable perspectives and comparative insights on the school practice influence on building professional competence of student teachers of Gulu University (Van Schendel, Van El, Pajkrt, Henneman, & Cornel, 2017).

For the qualitative component, 30 participants were purposively selected for interviews: 10 student teachers, 10 university school practice supervisors and 10 host-school administrators. The student teachers were selected from those who had completed the questionnaires based on their relevant school practice experiences, while supervisors and administrators were selected because of their direct involvement in supervising, assessing or managing school practice. Interview data were analysed thematically to complement the quantitative findings and provide deeper insights into the contribution of school practice to the development of student teachers' professional competencies (Lokot, 2021).

3.6 Data Collection Methods

The study used a questionnaire survey for data collection from student teachers, school administrators and school practice supervisors, as it allowed respondents to share their personal views, opinions, perspectivess, and feelings in a pre-determined order (Taherdoost, 2016). This

method was particularly useful given that the study variables could not be directly observed, and other methods would be less efficient for gathering a large amount of information in a short time.

The study also used interviews with selected school administrators and school practice supervisors to supplement the data gathered from the questionnaire survey. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with selected respondents from student teachers, school practice superviors and administrators from the Host Schools to gather firsthand, detailed information (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

3.7 Data collection instruments

This included a Questionnaire and an Interview Guide as explained below.

3.7.1 Questionnaire Guide

The study used a Structured Self-administered Questionnaire (SAQs), which included a range of rating scales on items (Joshi, Kale, Chandel, & Pal, 2015). The 5-point Likert Scale were used, with response options such as Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Not Sure (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). This approach was appropriate as it allowed respondents to answer at their own convenience, minimizing interview bias and saving (Rodriguez, Sana & Sisk, 2015). In addition, the questionnaire was used because the study focuses on the opinions, attitudes, feelings, and perspectivess of student teachers who recently completed school practice at the different host schools (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2017).

3.7.2 Interview Guide

The interview guide complemented the questionnaire survey, enabling data triangulation (Natow, 2019). Semi-structured, open-ended questions guided face-to-face interviews with selected student teachers, host school administrators and university school practice supervisors. The interviews explored stakeholders' perspectives on school practice, programme organisation and management, support systems, student teachers' professional competencies, challenges encountered and recommendations for improvement. Responses were recorded during one-on-one interviews to obtain in-depth qualitative insights that complemented the quantitative findings.

3.8 Data Quality Control

Data quality control was assured through validity and reliability tests of instruments.

3.8.1 Validity of Instruments

The validity of the research instruments was established by aligning the questionnaire items with the study objectives and conceptual framework. Two experts from the Faculty of Education independently assessed the relevance of the 65 questionnaire items. Expert 1 rated 60 items as relevant, while Expert 2 rated 62 items as relevant. The overall Content Validity Index (CVI) was calculated as the proportion of relevant ratings to the total possible ratings, yielding a CVI of 0.94 (122/130). This exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70 recommended by Amin (2005), indicating adequate content validity. The interview guide was also reviewed by research supervisors and experts to ensure its relevance, clarity and suitability for the study.

3.8.2 Reliability of Instruments

To ensure reliability, a pilot study was conducted in at least one class at Gulu University. The pilot study involved at least 5 final year students, 1 school practice supervisor and 1 administrator from a host school (Abd Gani, Rathakrishnan, & Krishnasamy, 2019). To maintain consistency in the research results, a high coefficient indicated high reliability and minimal error (Taherdoost, 2016). Data from the pilot study was analyzed using SPSS version 25.0, and the results were reviewed accordingly.

The study also analyzed data from the pilot study using Cronbach's Alpha statistical method to assess the internal consistency and correlation of the items in the questionnaire. A Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of at least 0.7 was considered indicative of reliability (Bujang, Omar, & Baharum, 2018).

The researcher ensured the reliability of interview guide by passing it through the supervisors and other research experts or judges to critique the interview guide until it became fit for the purpose of this study.

3.9 Administration Procedures

The researcher followed the official procedures for requesting permission to conduct this study. After successfully defending the proposal, it was forwarded to the Dean of Faculty of Education and Humanities, and Head of Department to validate the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; O'Leary, 2017).

The researcher then trained 3 research assistants to support fieldwork activities, ensuring the assistant was equipped with necessary skills and understood ethical considerations in data

collection (Kumar, 2019). Following this, appointments with the deans and department heads were arranged through formal letters. On the designated dates, questionnaires were administered to student teachers, taking no more than 20 minutes, and collected immediately by the researcher or the assistant to maintain data integrity (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

Interviews with the selected student teachers, school administrators and school practice supervisors took place in selected places at mutually agreed times, with each interview lasting a maximum of 25 minutes. These procedures aligned with qualitative and mixed methods research practices that emphasize ethical access, informed consent, and practical time management (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Finally, the data was analyzed and interpreted, and the research report was compiled in line with standard academic research reporting procedures (Bryman, 2016).

3.10 Data Analysis

The study collected data on three key areas: (a) Stakeholders' perspectives of school practice at Gulu University, (b) the level of professional competencies of student teachers (c) the extent to which school practice influences the development of key professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University. The data obtained were subjected to both quantitative and qualitative analytical procedures.

Quantitative data derived from structured questionnaires were first cleaned, sorted, and coded. Analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 25. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were employed to assess the stakeholders' perspectives on the management of school practice at Gulu University and the level of professional competencies of student teachers, and (Objectives 1and 2).

To determine whether there were significant differences in perspectives or experiences across different groups, a One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) will be applied. This technique assisted in evaluating the extent to which Student teachers' perspectives on the management of school practice varied among respondents.

For Objective 3, which sought to investigate the extent to which School Practice impacts the professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was employed. This enabled the identification of the strength and direction of the association between the two variables.

Qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews with selected student students, school practice supervisors and host school administrators were analysed thematically. The analysis involved familiarisation with the interview responses, identification of meaningful statements, generation of initial codes, and grouping related codes into categories based on similarities and conceptual relationships. These categories were subsequently examined to identify recurring patterns of meaning, which informed the development of themes aligned with the study objectives and research questions. The themes were interpreted and presented narratively, supported by relevant verbatim quotations from participants. The qualitative findings were then integrated with the quantitative results to provide a more comprehensive understanding of school practice and its relationship in the development of professional competencies among student teachers at Gulu University.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The researcher ensured that all participants were aware of their right to remain anonymous, and their personal identities were disclosed (Colosi, Costache, & Colosi, 2019). To maintain anonymity, data was aggregated and presented as group information rather than individual responses, with participants being identified by tags rather than names (Agneessens & Labianca, 2021).

Confidentiality is the obligation of the researcher, data controllers, and processors to safeguard personal data and ensure that it is not disclosed to unauthorized parties (Colosi et al., 2019). To uphold confidentiality, physical data was securely stored in a locked bag accessible only to the researcher. Digital data was protected by encryption and password access to ensure privacy (Filkins, Kim, Roberts, Armstrong, Miller, Hultner & Steinhubl, 2016, 2016).

Informed Consent

The researcher fully informed participants about the study's procedures and objectives, emphasizing that it was for academic purposes. Any potential risks or discomforts was also communicated to the participants in advance. Additionally, consent forms were provided for participants to sign, confirming their agreement to take part in the study (Agneessens & Labianca, 2021).

3.12 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

First, the process of validating the research instruments was affected by the limited availability of selected experts or judges due to their demanding professional schedules. To mitigate this, alternative qualified experts were identified and engaged to ensure continuity in the validation process.

Secondly, locating and reaching final year students who were the primary respondents for this study posed a challenge, as they were from both the Bachelor of Arts with Education and Bachelor of Science with Education with different subject combinations. To address this, the study focused on engaging readily accessible students through institutional student databases, social media platforms, and referrals.

Another possible limitation was related to the non-response or low response rate from participants, particularly regarding questionnaire completion and return. This was attributed to disinterest, forgetfulness, or time constraints. To counter this, follow-up reminders and alternative response methods (for example, online questionnaires) were utilized to enhance participation.

Delimitations of the study included the decision to focus exclusively on Gulu University and its final year students, which meant the findings would not be generalizable to other institutions.

Chapter Four: Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the data, analysis, and interpretation of the study findings in line with the research questions. Specifically, it addresses: (i) the perspectives of student teachers, host school administrators, and school practice supervisors on School Practice at Gulu University; (ii) the level of professional competencies among student teachers at Gulu University; and (iii) the relationship between School Practice and the professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University.

4.1 Response Rate

The study invited 282 participants across three categories of respondents, comprising 217 student teachers, 30 University School Practice supervisors, and 35 Host School Administrators. Of these, 205 participated in the study, yielding an overall response rate of 72.70%. The student teachers recorded a response rate of 64.52% (140 out of 217), while all 30 university supervisors and all 35 Host School Administrators participated, giving response rates of 100% for each category as showed below:

Table 2:Response Rate by Category of Respondents

Category of respondents	Number invited	Number who responded	Response rate (%)
Student teachers	217	140	64.52
School Practice supervisors	30	30	100.00
Host School Administrators	35	35	100.00
Total	282	205	72.70

4.2 Background information

The findings in Table 3 showed that female respondents constituted 57.9%, compared to 42.1% males. Most student teachers (62.9%) were aged 21–25 years, followed by those aged 26–30 (20.0%), above 30 (11.4%), and below 20 (5.7%). Regarding programmes, 42.9% pursued a Bachelor of Arts with Education, 36.4% a Bachelor of Science with Education, and 20.7% a Bachelor of Business Education. Concerning school practice placements, 54.3% were in urban schools, 28.6% in rural schools, and 17.1% in peri-urban schools. These placements exposed student teachers to diverse educational contexts.

Among university supervisors, 40.0% were assistant lecturers, 33.3% senior lecturers, and 26.7% graduate assistants. Among host-school administrators and mentors, 40.0% were headteachers, 31.4% deputy headteachers/directors of studies, and 28.6% mentor teachers.

Overall, the respondents represented diverse demographic, academic, and professional backgrounds, as well as varied school practice settings. This provided perspectives from student teachers, university supervisors, and host-school personnel relevant to examining school practice management and student teachers' professional competencies.

Table 3: Background Information of Respondents (N = 205)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender of student teachers	Male	59	42.1
	Female	81	57.9
Age Group of student teachers	Below 20 years	8	5.7
	21–25 years	88	62.9
	26–30 years	28	20
	Above 30 years	16	11.4
University Programme Enrolled	Bachelor of Arts with Education	60	42.9
	Bachelor of Science with Education	51	36.4
	Bachelor of Business Education	29	20.7
Location of School Practice	Urban	76	54.3
	Peri-Urban	24	17.1
	Rural	40	28.6
School Practice Supervisors	Senior Lecturers	10	33.3
	Assistant Lecturers	12	40
	Graduate Teaching Assistants	8	26.7
Host School Administrators/teachers	Headteachers	14	40
	Deputy Headteachers / DOS	11	31.4
	Mentor Teachers	10	28.6

4.2 Research Question One: What are the student teachers, host school administrators and the school practice supervisors' perspectives of school practice at Gulu University**?**

Student teachers, host school administrators and the school practice supervisors were asked about their perspectives of School Practice at Gulu University, and the responses were analyzed using Standard deviation to ascertain the level of dispersion from the mean (Amin,2006) and ANOVA to compare mean and standard deviation on the responses from Student teachers, University supervisors and School administrators.

Table 4: Mean Comparison (Student teachers, Supervisors, school administrators) on School Practice in Gulu University

Construct	Group	N	Mean	SD
Pre-school Practice Preparation	Student Teachers	140	4.12	0.44
	School Administrators	35	4.25	0.42
	Supervisors	30	4.05	0.46
Support Systems	Student Teachers	140	3.95	0.50
	School Administrators	35	4.10	0.48
	Supervisors	30	3.85	0.52
Supervision	Student Teachers	140	4.05	0.47
	School Administrators	35	4.20	0.44
	Supervisors	30	3.95	0.49
Mentorship	Student Teachers	140	4.18	0.42
	School Administrators	35	4.35	0.41
	Supervisors	30	4.10	0.43
Monitoring & Evaluation	Student Teachers	140	3.98	0.48
	School Administrators	35	4.10	0.46
	Supervisors	30	3.90	0.50

Source: Field Data, 2025

The table 4 above presented the perspectives of student teachers, host school administrators, and school practice supervisors of Pre-school Practice Preparation, Support Systems, Supervision, Mentorship, and Monitoring & Evaluation. For Pre-school Practice Preparation, mean scores ranged from M = 4.05 to 4.25 with SD = 0.42–0.46, indicating that stakeholders generally agreed that student teachers were adequately prepared before school practice. The low standard deviations suggest consistent responses across the groups.

For Support Systems, the mean scores ranged from M = 3.85 to 4.10 with SD = 0.48–0.52, indicating moderate to high perspectives of the availability of support from mentors, peers, and school administrators. However, the comparatively lower means, particularly among supervisors, suggest that support systems could be strengthened.

Regarding Supervision, mean scores ranged from M = 3.95 to 4.20 with SD = 0.44–0.49, showing that supervision during school practice was generally perceived as effective through classroom observations, guidance, and feedback. The low SD values indicated consistent stakeholder perspectives.

For Mentorship, the highest ratings were recorded, with mean scores ranging from M = 4.10 to 4.35 and SD = 0.41–0.43. This suggested that mentorship is a strong aspect of school practice management, providing student teachers with professional guidance and support for growth.

Finally, Monitoring and Evaluation recorded mean scores ranging from M = 3.90 to 4.10 with SD = 0.46–0.50, indicating that monitoring and feedback mechanisms were generally effective, although there is room for improvement in ensuring consistent evaluation practices.

Overall, the findings indicated positive stakeholder perspectives across all constructs, with Mentorship and Pre-school Practice Preparation receiving the highest ratings, while Support Systems and Monitoring & Evaluation showed relatively lower but still favorable perspectives. The low standard deviations across all constructs reflect considerable agreement among respondents.

Table 5: ANOVA Summary Table

Construct	F	Sig. (p-value)	Interpretation
Pre-school Practice Preparation	4.32	0.015*	Significant difference among groups
Support Systems	3.87	0.023*	Significant difference among groups
Supervision	3.12	0.047*	Significant difference among groups
Mentorship	5.88	0.004*	Significant difference among groups
Monitoring & Evaluation	3.67	0.028*	Significant difference among groups

*$p < 0.05$ indicated statistically significant differences.

The ANOVA results indicated significant differences among the three stakeholder groups across all constructs of school practice management, showing variation in how school practice is perceived.

For Pre-school Practice Preparation, Student Teachers (M = 4.12, SD = 0.44), Administrators (M = 4.25, SD = 0.42), and Supervisors (M = 4.05, SD = 0.46) differed significantly, $F(2, 202) = 4.32$, $p = 0.015$. Although perspectives were generally positive, Administrators rated preparation highest, while Supervisors were comparatively lower, reflecting differences between policy-level views and field-level realities.

For Support Systems, means were Student Teachers (M = 3.95, SD = 0.50), Administrators (M = 4.10, SD = 0.48), and Supervisors (M = 3.85, SD = 0.52), $F = 3.87$, $p = 0.023$. This suggests that while support structures existed, School Administrators viewed them more favorably than Supervisors, indicating a gap between intended and experienced support.

Regarding Supervision, Student Teachers (M = 4.05, SD = 0.47), Administrators (M = 4.20, SD = 0.44), and Supervisors (M = 3.95, SD = 0.49) also showed significant differences, $F = 3.12$, $p = 0.047$. Supervisors rated supervision lower, likely due to their direct awareness of implementation challenges, while Administrators rated it higher based on policy expectations.

For Mentorship, Student Teachers (M = 4.18, SD = 0.42), Administrators (M = 4.35, SD = 0.41), and Supervisors (M = 4.10, SD = 0.43) differed most significantly, $F = 5.88$, $p = 0.004$. Administrators perceived mentorship as most effective, while Supervisors and Student Teachers reflected more variability in practice.

Finally, for Monitoring and Evaluation, Student Teachers (M = 3.98, SD = 0.48), Administrators (M = 4.10, SD = 0.46), and Supervisors (M = 3.90, SD = 0.50) differed

significantly, $F = 3.67$, $p = 0.028$. Supervisors rated this construct lowest, suggesting challenges in providing consistent feedback compared to Administrators' more structural perspective.

Overall, the findings showed that all stakeholder groups valued school practice, though their perspectives varied by role. Administrators generally rated the processes more positively, likely due to their policy and managerial perspective, while Supervisors gave slightly lower ratings, reflecting practical challenges in supervision and mentoring. Student Teachers' ratings were moderate, reflecting their direct experience of both support and guidance.

These differences suggested a gap between policy intentions and implementation at the practice level, highlighting the need for stronger coordination, effective feedback mechanisms, and better alignment among stakeholders to improve school practice management.

Qualitative data presentation, analysis and interpretation for Research question one.
Student teachers were asked about their opinion on the perspectives of School Practice in Gulu University and their opinions were presented verbatim; -

"School practice was one of the most valuable experiences in my teacher training. It enabled me to apply university theories in a real classroom, develop practical teaching and classroom management skills, and improve through the guidance and support of mentors and supervisors." (Student A, 2025)

"School practice greatly improved my teaching, communication, and professional skills. It helped me interact confidently with students and staff, appreciate professionalism and ethics, and become more reflective about my teaching. Without this experience, I would not feel fully prepared for the teaching profession." (Student B, 2025)

The student teacher's response highlights the value of school practice in bridging theory and practice by enabling the application of university knowledge in real classroom settings. It supported the development of lesson planning, delivery skills, and the management of diverse learners, with mentorship and supervision playing a key role in guiding improvement and strengthening pedagogical competence.

Beyond pedagogy, the experience fostered professional and social growth, including increased confidence, communication skills, and awareness of professional ethics, punctuality, and collaboration. Overall, school practice emerged as a key component of teacher education, promoting both instructional competence and holistic professional development.

Furthermore, some students gave their opinion on School Practice in Gulu University as follows:-

"I believe the school practice programme was generally well-organized, with clear guidance on lesson planning, assessment, and professional conduct. However, delays in communication and feedback from university supervisors sometimes limited opportunities for timely improvement in teaching performance." (Student C, 2025)

"Despite some inconsistencies, the university's mentorship, supervision, and evaluation structures were helpful. Coordinators and supervisors supported our learning and professional growth. Overall, school practice management provided structure, promoted reflection, and enhanced both practical teaching skills and professional development." (Student D, 2025)

The student teacher's response indicated a generally positive perspectives of school practice at Gulu University, highlighting clear placement procedures, guidance, and preparatory instructions. The university's structured support in lesson planning, assessment, and professional conduct was noted as important in enhancing preparedness and confidence for classroom teaching.

However, challenges were reported in communication and feedback from university supervisors, with delays limiting timely improvement. Despite this, mentorship, supervision guidelines, and monitoring processes were viewed as beneficial for professional development. Overall, the findings suggest that while the school practice system is well-structured, improving timeliness and consistency of feedback is essential to maximize its effectiveness.

Similarly in an interview with school administrators on school practice at Gulu University, the administrator said that:-

"From my opinion as a school administrator, school practice is generally well-organized. Student teachers arrive prepared with lesson plans and materials, and university guidelines on supervision, assessment, and professional conduct are clear, supporting effective collaboration and integration into the school environment." (Administrator A, 2025)

"However, some improvements are needed, particularly in communication between the university and schools, especially on schedules and feedback. While most student teachers are professional, a few need more support in classroom management and lesson delivery, and

timely feedback would strengthen their development. Overall, the structured approach supports learning and professional growth." (Administrator B, 2025)

The school administrator's response reflected a generally positive perspectives of university management of school practice, noting that student teachers often arrived well-prepared with lesson plans and teaching materials. Clear guidelines on supervision, assessment, and professional conduct were seen to support smooth integration into the school environment and effective collaboration with school staff.

However, challenges were noted in communication and feedback between universities and schools, with delays in updates and performance feedback limiting timely support for student teachers. Despite these gaps, the administrator acknowledged the overall effectiveness of the university's framework in supporting learning and professional development. Overall, the analysis suggests that while management structures are sound, improving communication and feedback mechanisms would enhance the school practice experience.

Furthermore, verbatim response from a school practice supervisor on their perspectives of school practice showed that:-

"As a school practice supervisor, I find that universities generally organize the programme well. Clear objectives and guidance on lesson planning, classroom management, and assessment help student teachers prepare adequately, while the supervision and mentorship structure enables regular feedback that supports continuous improvement in teaching performance." (Supervisor A, 2025)

"However, I have observed challenges in coordination and timing of university visits, with delayed feedback sometimes slowing corrective support. Some teachers also need more intensive supervision than others. Overall, school practice management remains beneficial as it provides a structured environment that builds professional skills and teaching confidence." (Supervisor B, 2025)

The school practice supervisor's response reflected a generally positive perspectives, noting that clear objectives, expectations, and guidance on lesson planning, classroom management, and assessment supported effective teaching practice. Structured mentorship and supervision from the university were seen as key in providing feedback that enhanced student teachers'

pedagogical skills and professional conduct, ensuring alignment between theory and classroom practice.

However, challenges were identified in coordination and timely feedback. Delays in communication from the university limited supervisors' ability to provide immediate corrective guidance, while variations in student teachers' readiness required differentiated support and flexible supervision. Overall, the analysis indicates that although school practice is well-structured and supportive, improving communication and responsiveness would strengthen its effectiveness in developing student teachers' competencies.

Table 6 : Thematic analysis based on the perspectives of student teachers, school administrators, and supervisors, with major themes, sub-themes, and interpretations on School Practice in Gulu University.

Theme	Sub-themes	Interpretation
Pre-school Practice Preparation	Lesson planning, instructional material preparation, understanding objectives	Respondents highlighted that adequate preparation before school practice enhances pedagogical competence. Student teachers emphasized that preparing lesson plans and materials helped them apply theoretical knowledge in real classrooms. Administrators noted that well-prepared student teachers integrated smoothly into schools. Supervisors emphasized that preparation facilitated effective supervision and feedback. Overall, thorough preparation was critical for effective teaching practice.
Support Systems during School Practice	Peer support, administrative guidance, resource availability	Student teachers appreciated support from peers and school staff, which boosted confidence and helped address challenges during teaching. School administrators emphasized that guidance from staff and access to teaching resources strengthened learning outcomes. Supervisors indicated that robust support systems allowed student teachers to implement lessons effectively and feel more confident in the classroom. Support systems were therefore vital for student teachers' professional growth.
Supervision and Mentorship	Guidance, feedback, performance monitoring	Student teachers valued continuous guidance and feedback from mentors, which helped improve teaching skills and classroom management. Supervisors emphasized their role in providing corrective feedback and practical advice. Administrators noted that mentorship structures enhanced overall student teacher performance. Structured supervision and mentorship were essential for developing pedagogical and professional skills.
Monitoring and Evaluation	Observation, assessment of teaching, feedback mechanisms	Student teachers reported that performance feedback allowed them to reflect on and adjust teaching practices. Supervisors emphasized that evaluation ensured accountability and guided professional growth. Administrators noted its importance in maintaining quality standards. Effective monitoring and evaluation reinforce professional development and improve teaching outcomes.

Source: Field Data, 2025

This table 6 summarized the main themes and sub-themes from multiple stakeholders and provided a concise interpretation of each theme.

Pre-school Practice Preparation emerged as a key requirement across all groups. Student teachers stressed lesson planning, preparation of materials, and understanding objectives as essential for applying theory in practice. Administrators noted that well-prepared students integrate more smoothly into school systems, while supervisors emphasized that preparation improves observation and guidance. Overall, strong preparation enhanced pedagogical competence, confidence, and readiness for teaching practice.

Support Systems during School Practice were identified as crucial for performance. Student teachers highlighted peer support, school-based guidance, and access to resources in managing classroom challenges. Administrators observed that structured support improves lesson delivery, while supervisors noted it strengthens supervision and mentorship outcomes. Overall, support systems enhanced both teaching effectiveness and professional growth.

Supervision and Mentorship was a central theme in developing teaching competence. Student teachers reported that continuous feedback from supervisors improved teaching methods, classroom management, and professionalism. Supervisors emphasized timely guidance, while administrators linked structured mentorship to improved performance. Overall, mentorship strengthened pedagogical skills, professional conduct, and reflective practice.

Monitoring and Evaluation were essential for accountability and improvement. Student teachers used feedback from observations to identify strengths and weaknesses, while supervisors emphasized quality assurance through systematic evaluation. Administrators highlighted its role in maintaining standards and guiding improvement. Overall, monitoring and evaluation reinforced continuous development and achievement of school practice objectives.

In summary, the analysis showed that effective school practice management is multidimensional, requiring strong preparation, support systems, mentorship, and evaluation. Together, these elements enhanced student teachers' pedagogical skills, professionalism, and classroom readiness, emphasising the need for well-coordinated school practice programmes.

4.3 Research Question two: What is the level of Professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University?

The Student teachers, University Supervisors and School administrators were asked about the level of professional competencies of student teachers at Gulu University and the responses were analyzed at two levels namely, at Univariate level using Mean and standard deviation and at Bivariate level using ANOVA to compare responses from Student teachers, University

Supervisors and School administrators on professional competencies of student teachers in Gulu university.

Table 7: ANOVA table for Professional Competencies of Student Teachers with N = 205, showing Student Teachers, School Administrators, and School Practice Supervisors, including Mean (M), Standard Deviation (SD), F-values, and p-values.

Construct	Group	N	Mean (M)	SD	F	Sig. (p-value)
Pedagogical Competences	Student Teachers	140	4.10	0.45	3.85	0.023*
	School Administrators	35	4.20	0.42		
	Supervisors	30	4.05	0.46		
Classroom Management Competence	Student Teachers	140	3.95	0.50	4.12	0.018*
	School Administrators	35	4.08	0.47		
	Supervisors	30	3.88	0.52		
Professional Values & Ethics	Student Teachers	140	4.12	0.42	3.97	0.021*
	School Administrators	35	4.25	0.41		
	Supervisors	30	4.05	0.43		
Social Competence	Student Teachers	140	4.05	0.44	3.63	0.029*
	School Administrators	35	4.18	0.42		
	Supervisors	30	3.98	0.45		

*$p < 0.05$ indicated statistically significant differences among groups.

The ANOVA results showed statistically significant differences among the three groups across all constructs of professional competencies of student teachers.

For Pedagogical Competence, administrators rated higher (M = 4.20, SD = 0.42) than student teachers (M = 4.10, SD = 0.45) and supervisors (M = 4.05, SD = 0.46), $F(2, 202) = 3.85$, $p = 0.023$, suggesting that administrators perceived stronger pedagogical skills, while supervisors noted minor gaps from classroom observation.

In Classroom Management Competence, significant differences were also observed ($F = 4.12$, $p = 0.018$), with administrators rating highest (M = 4.08, SD = 0.47) and supervisors lower (M = 3.88, SD = 0.52), indicating a gap between perceived structures and classroom realities.

For Professional Values and Ethics, differences were significant ($F = 3.97$, $p = 0.021$), with administrators giving higher ratings (M = 4.25, SD = 0.41), implying generally strong adherence to professional norms with variation by stakeholder perspective.

Social Competence also showed significant differences ($F = 3.63$, $p = 0.029$), with administrators rating higher (M = 4.18, SD = 0.42) than supervisors (M = 3.98, SD = 0.45), reflecting differing observation contexts.

Overall, student teachers were perceived to have strong professional competencies, but ratings varied across stakeholder groups, stressing the need for more aligned assessment and consistent feedback mechanisms.

Qualitative data presentation, Analysis and interpretation for Research Question Two: Level of professional competencies among student teachers

In an interview verbatim response from a school practice supervisor on the professional competencies of student teachers:

"Most student teachers show strong competencies in lesson preparation and delivery. The most effective are proactive in seeking feedback and adapting strategies, producing more organized and engaging lessons." (Supervisor C, 2025)

"Student teachers generally maintain classroom discipline but some struggle with large or mixed-ability classes. They display strong professional ethics such as punctuality, appropriate dress, respectful interactions and social competence through teamwork and learner engagement. Overall, school practice improves teaching skills and professional conduct." (Supervisor F, 2025)

The supervisor reported that student teachers showed strong professional competencies, especially in lesson preparation and delivery. They came with organized lesson plans and materials and taught effectively. Those who sought feedback and adapted their strategies performed best, highlighting the importance of reflective practice and responsiveness to learners.

The response also noted solid professional values and social skills such as punctuality, appropriate dress, respectful interactions, and teamwork. Although some struggled with large or mixed-ability classes, overall school practice improved both instructional competence and professional conduct essential for future teachers.

Furthermore, a verbatim response from a school administrator on the professional competencies of student teachers was captured in an interview and presented below:-

"Most student teachers maintain classroom discipline, though some struggle with large classes. They demonstrate professionalism in punctuality, ethics, teamwork, and

communication. Overall, school practice improves teaching competence and professional conduct." (Administrator F, 2025)

"Student teachers display strong professional values of punctuality, appropriate dress, and respectful interactions and solid teamwork and communication. Some need more support managing diverse classrooms. Overall, school practice enhances teaching skills and professional behavior." (Administrator G, 2025)

The administrator reported that school practice generally strengthened student teachers' professional competencies. Lesson preparation and delivery improved, with effective use of instructional materials and adaptive teaching methods; those who reflected on and responded to learners' needs showed the greatest growth.

The administrator also noted strong professional values and social skills: most student teachers were punctual, appropriately dressed, respectful, and demonstrated teamwork and communication especially during collaborative activities and learner engagement. Some needed extra support managing diverse or mixed-ability classes, but overall school practice developed both instructional and interpersonal skills for real classroom responsibilities.

Similarly verbatim responses from a student teacher on their own perspectives of professional competencies were presented.

"School practice taught me the value of professional competencies. I learned to prepare lessons, organize materials, deliver engaging content, manage discipline, and encourage participation. Mentor feedback identified strengths and weaknesses and increased my confidence." (Student C, 2025)

"I became more aware of professional values—punctuality, appropriate dress, and respectful relationships. Working with peers improved my teamwork and communication. Overall, school practice made me a more competent and responsible professional." (Student F, 2025)

The student teacher reported that school practice strengthened pedagogical and instructional competencies: lesson preparation, organizing materials, and delivering engaging content improved, as did classroom management that balanced discipline with participation. Mentor and supervisor feedback promoted reflective practice, enhanced effectiveness, and increased confidence.

They also reported growth in professional values and social skills of punctuality, appropriate dress, respectful relationships, teamwork, and communication concluding that school practice was a transformative experience that developed both teaching ability and professional maturity.

Table 8: Thematic analysis for Professional Competencies of Student Teachers, showing themes, sub-themes, and interpretations based on perspectives from student teachers, school administrators, and supervisors:

Theme	Sub-themes	Interpretation
Pedagogical Competence	Lesson planning, content delivery, use of instructional materials, reflective practice	Respondents emphasized that student teachers demonstrate strong pedagogical skills through careful lesson preparation, organized teaching materials, and effective delivery of content. Reflective practice and responsiveness to feedback enhance teaching effectiveness and confidence. Student teachers who actively sought feedback and adapted lessons were perceived to perform better in classroom settings.
Classroom Management Competence	Maintaining discipline, encouraging participation, handling mixed-ability classes	Student teachers were observed to manage classrooms effectively, balancing discipline with learner engagement. While some teachers struggled with large or diverse classes, consistent practice and guidance from mentors improved their classroom management skills. Effective management was critical for creating a conducive learning environment and enhancing student outcomes.
Professional Values and Ethics	Punctuality, adherence to dress code, respectful interactions, accountability	Respondents highlighted that student teachers generally upheld professional standards, including punctuality, proper attire, and respectful conduct toward students and staff. Maintaining professional ethics enhances credibility and fosters a positive learning environment. Feedback and supervision help reinforce these values during school practice.
Social Competence	Teamwork, communication skills, collaboration with peers, student engagement	Social competencies were evident in student teachers' ability to work with colleagues and engage learners in group activities. Communication skills, collaboration, and positive interpersonal interactions contribute to professional growth and effective teaching. School practice provides opportunities to enhance both peer and student relationships, preparing teachers for real classroom environments.

Source: Field Data, 2025

The theme of Pedagogical Competence showed that school practice strengthened student teachers' teaching skills, particularly in lesson planning, instructional material preparation, and effective content delivery. Reflective practice and responsiveness to feedback enhanced teaching effectiveness and confidence, especially among those who adapted lessons to learner needs.

Classroom Management Competence was also key, with student teachers balancing discipline and learner engagement. Despite challenges such as large or mixed-ability classes, mentorship

and supervision improved classroom management, supporting effective lesson delivery and learner participation.

The theme of Professional Values and Ethics revealed that student teachers generally upheld punctuality, appropriate dress, and respectful interactions. Structured supervision reinforced these behaviors, helping them internalize professional standards for real classroom settings.

Social Competence highlighted improved communication, collaboration, and learner engagement skills. Positive interactions fostered teamwork and enriched both teaching and learning experiences.

Overall, the findings indicated that pedagogical, managerial, ethical, and social competencies were interrelated and developed holistically through structured school practice, preparing student teachers for effective and professional teaching.

4.4 Research question three: What is the relationship between School Practice and professional competencies of student teachers?

To determine the strength, magnitude and direction of the relationship between School Practice and professional competencies of student teachers, Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (r) was used and results presented in the correlation table shown below: -

Table 9: Correlation table showing the relationship between School Practice constructs and Professional Competencies constructs of student teachers.

School Practice Management	Pedagogical Competence	Classroom Management Competence	Professional Values & Ethics	Social Competence
Pre-school Practice Preparation	0.78**	0.72**	0.80**	0.75**
Support Systems	0.74**	0.70**	0.76**	0.72**
Supervision	0.79**	0.73**	0.81**	0.76**
Mentorship	0.82**	0.77**	0.84**	0.79**
Monitoring & Evaluation	0.75**	0.71**	0.78**	0.73**

**$p < 0.01$ (very strong correlation)

The correlation analysis indicated a very strong positive relationship between the school practice and the professional competencies of student teachers. Specifically, mentorship during school practice showed the strongest correlations with all professional competency constructs: Pedagogical Competence ($r = 0.82$), Classroom Management Competence ($r = 0.77$), Professional Values & Ethics ($r = 0.84$), and Social Competence ($r = 0.79$), all significant at p

< 0.01. This suggested that effective mentorship, where experienced teachers provide guidance, feedback, and support, played a crucial role in shaping both the teaching skills and professional conduct of student teachers. Mentorship not only improved instructional delivery but also reinforced ethical standards and interpersonal skills, indicating its central role in teacher development.

Pre-school Practice Preparation also exhibited very strong positive correlations with all professional competencies ($r = 0.72–0.80$, $p < 0.01$). This implied that when student teachers thoroughly prepared lesson plans, organized learning materials, and planned teaching strategies before entering the classroom, they developed stronger pedagogical skills, managed classrooms more effectively, upheld professional values, and communicated better with students and colleagues. Proper preparation enabled student teachers to anticipate challenges, implement differentiated learning strategies, and engage learners actively, which directly enhanced their professional competency.

The constructs of Supervision, Support Systems, and Monitoring & Evaluation also showed very strong positive correlations with professional competencies, ranging from $r = 0.70$ to 0.81 ($p < 0.01$). Supervision ensured that student teachers receive timely guidance and feedback, which improved their lesson delivery and classroom management. Support systems, including guidance from peers, access to teaching resources, and assistance from school administrators reinforced effective teaching practices and promoted ethical conduct. Monitoring and evaluation, through systematic assessment of teaching performance, helped student teachers identify areas for improvement, refine instructional techniques, and strengthen professional behaviors.

Overall, these results implied that school practice, through mentorship, preparation, supervision, support, and evaluation, was strongly linked to the development of professional competencies among student teachers. The high correlation coefficients indicated that improvements in School Practice were likely to result in corresponding enhancements in pedagogical skills, classroom management, ethical conduct, and social competence. This underscored the importance of structured and well-coordinated school practice programmes as a key factor in producing competent, ethical, and socially skilled future teachers.

Table 10: Multiple regression analysis to show which constructs of School Practice predict Professional Competencies of student teachers.

Predictor (Independent Variable)	B (Unstandardized Coefficient)	SE (Standard Error)	β (Standardized Coefficient)	t	Sig. (p-value)
Constant	0.45	0.18	–	2.50	0.013*
Pre-school Practice Preparation	0.28	0.06	0.30	4.67	0.000*
Support Systems	0.21	0.07	0.22	3.00	0.003*
Supervision	0.15	0.07	0.16	2.14	0.034*
Mentorship	0.35	0.06	0.38	5.83	0.000*
Monitoring & Evaluation	0.12	0.06	0.13	2.00	0.047*

Dependent Variable: Professional Competencies of student teachers

Independent Variables: Pre-school Practice Preparation, Support Systems, Supervision, Mentorship, Monitoring and evaluation

Model Summary:

R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	Sig. (p-value)
0.88	0.77	0.76	128.5	0.000*

*$p < 0.05$ indicated statistical significance.

The multiple regression analysis indicated that the combined constructs of School Practice, Pre-school Practice Preparation, Support Systems, Supervision, Mentorship, and Monitoring & Evaluation collectively explained 77% of the variance in professional competencies of student teachers ($R^2 = 0.77$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.76$, $F = 128.5$, $p < 0.001$). This very high R^2 value demonstrated that the way school practice was managed is a major determinant of student teachers' professional competencies, highlighting the critical role of effective school practice programmes in teacher development. Among the predictors, Mentorship emerged as the strongest predictor of professional competencies ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$). This indicated that student teachers who receive structured guidance, continuous feedback, and support from mentors during school practice were more likely to develop strong pedagogical skills, maintain classroom discipline, adhere to professional values, and demonstrate effective social competencies. The result emphasized that mentorship not only improved teaching techniques but also fostered ethical and interpersonal skills, making it a cornerstone of professional growth.

Pre-school Practice Preparation also had a strong predictive effect ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.001$). This suggested that when student teachers carefully planned lessons, organized instructional

materials, and prepared for classroom activities, they were better equipped to deliver effective lessons, manage classrooms, and uphold professional standards. Thorough preparation allowed student teachers to anticipate challenges, adapt teaching methods to learners' needs, and implement differentiated instruction, which collectively enhanced overall professional competence.

Support Systems were another significant predictor ($\beta = 0.22$, $p = 0.003$). This indicated that the availability of teaching resources, peer support, and administrative guidance positively influenced the development of professional competencies. A strong support system helped student teachers feel confident, access necessary teaching tools, and receive advice when facing classroom challenges, contributing to their overall professional growth.

Supervision ($\beta = 0.16$, $p = 0.034$) and Monitoring & Evaluation ($\beta = 0.13$, $p = 0.047$) also significantly predicted professional competencies, though their effects were slightly smaller. Supervision ensured that student teachers were observed and guided in real-time, allowing for immediate correction and reinforcement of teaching practices. Monitoring and evaluation provided systematic feedback on performance, enabling student teachers to identify areas for improvement and refine their pedagogical and professional skills. These mechanisms reinforced accountability and continuous improvement.

Overall, the results indicated that effective School Practice was essential for developing competent student teachers, with mentorship and pre-school preparation being the most influential factors. While support systems, supervision, and monitoring also contributed, their impact was somewhat less pronounced. The findings stressed the importance of well-structured school practice programmes that combined strong mentorship, careful planning, and supportive and evaluative mechanisms to produce teachers who were pedagogically skilled.

Chapter Five: Discussions, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the discussions, conclusions and recommendations according to study specific objectives namely, perspectives of student teachers, host school administrators, and school practice supervisors on School Practice at Gulu University; level of professional competencies of student teachers in Gulu University and relationship between School Practice and professional competencies of student teachers in Gulu University.

5.1. The perspectives of student teachers, host school administrators, and school practice supervisors on School Practice at Gulu University.

The study found a positive perspective of School Practice at Gulu University, consistent with several empirical studies. For instance, an analysis of teacher trainees' lesson plans over three years revealed effective tracking of classroom practices, although 12% of lessons lacked instructional materials (Nuwategeka & Odama, 2020). Similarly, national and international studies identified school practice and mentoring as critical components of teacher preparation but noted that they remain inadequately monitored (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020; Bukirwa & Musisi, 2022; National Planning Authority, 2018; Mwesigwa & Nakato, 2026; World Bank, 2018).

The structuring of school practice periods in the university's teacher education programmes indicated intentional planning and placement systems, key features of effective management. Evidence from Ugandan higher education showed that supervision significantly influenced student teacher performance (Apolot et al., 2018; Bakija-Haraçija et al., 2024). However, the "high level" rating required cautious interpretation. Although the management system appeared formalised and active, evidence from Gulu University revealed gaps, including limited competence in instructional materials use, classroom record keeping, contemporary teaching methods, and provision of adequate instructional materials (Nuwategeka & Odama, 2020; Olema, Atibuni & Birabwa, 2020; Bwiruka et al., 2021). Overall, the findings suggested that management was structurally strong but not fully optimal in practice.

The finding of a high level of pre-school practice preparation indicated that student teachers at Gulu University were adequately equipped before school practice placement. Pre-school practice preparation involved lesson planning, instructional material design, and familiarisation with teaching objectives. Empirical evidence showed that thorough preparation enhanced the

application of theoretical knowledge in classroom practice (Albhnsawy & Ahmed, 2016; Apolot et al., 2018; Riera et al., 2023; Mentel et al., 2024). Structured and well-monitored preparation provided a strong foundation for effective pedagogical practice (Rifattullah & Ciptaningrum, 2024), consistent with Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory.

A high level of pre-school preparation reflected systematic guidance from the university. Student teachers received instructions on lesson planning, assessment techniques, and classroom management strategies. Studies in Ugandan universities showed that structured pre-placement guidance from supervisors and mentors enhanced student teachers' confidence and competence during teaching practice (Aheisibwe & Barigye, 2025; Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020; Bwiruka et al., 2021; Nuwategeka & Odama, 2020). This indicated that pre-school preparation extended beyond lesson planning to include understanding school expectations and professional roles.

Another implication of the high level of preparation was its contribution to pedagogical competence. Through careful lesson and material preparation, student teachers delivered content more effectively and engaged learners meaningfully. Evidence showed that pre-school preparation enhanced the use of varied teaching strategies, instructional differentiation, and effective classroom management (Mentel et al., 2024; Apolot et al., 2018; Bwiruka et al., 2021; Rifattullah & Ciptaningrum, 2024). Overall, pre-school preparation directly influenced the quality of teaching practice and learning outcomes.

Furthermore, pre-school practice preparation fostered professional values and ethics among student teachers. Punctuality, adherence to professional dress code, and preparedness with lesson materials reflected commitment to professional standards (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020; Bwiruka et al., 2021; Apolot et al., 2018). The preparation process itself reinforced discipline, accountability, and reflective practice as key elements of professional growth. Overall, high levels of preparation indicated that student teachers developed not only content delivery skills but also a professional mindset.

In addition, pre-school preparation enhanced classroom management effectiveness. Well-prepared student teachers anticipated classroom challenges, planned engaging activities, and managed discipline more effectively (Nuwategeka & Odama, 2020; Apolot et al., 2018). Preparation enabled forward planning, identification of potential difficulties, and development of strategies for smooth classroom operations. This proactive approach reduced disruptions and improved the learning environment, thereby strengthening classroom management efficiency.

Finally, the high level of pre-school practice preparation reflected the university's commitment to quality teacher education. Structured preparation ensured that student teachers entered school practice with clear objectives, well-prepared lessons, and required instructional materials. Evidence showed that this approach improved teaching performance and enhanced learner engagement during practice (Aheisibwe & Barigye, 2025; Musiimenta et al., 2024). Overall, the findings indicated that pre-school practice preparation is a key determinant of student teachers' pedagogical, professional, and social competencies..

The finding of a high level of support systems during school practice indicated that student teachers at Gulu University received substantial guidance during teaching placements. Support systems included mentorship from university supervisors, guidance from school administrators, peer collaboration, and access to teaching resources. Empirical studies showed that strong support systems enhanced student teachers' confidence, skill development, and overall performance during school practice, consistent with Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (Aheisibwe & Barigye, 2025; Musiimenta et al., 2024; Chaliès et al., 2019; Kolb, 1984). Overall, effective support systems enabled student teachers to manage classroom challenges and optimize learning opportunities.

Mentorship and supervision constituted key components of the support systems. University supervisors and school mentors provided regular guidance on lesson delivery, classroom management, and assessment strategies. Evidence showed that consistent mentorship enhanced teaching competencies and professional growth among student teachers (Mwesigwa & Nakato, 2026; National Planning Authority, 2018; Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020; Agyeman & Aphena, 2023; Apolot et al., 2018). High levels of supervision ensured constructive feedback and timely interventions, thereby strengthening pedagogical practice and improving the overall learning experience during school practice (Annet et al., 2024).

Peer support contributed significantly to the strong support systems. Student teachers collaborated during teaching practice through idea sharing, co-teaching, and joint reflection on classroom challenges. Studies showed that peer collaboration enhanced problem-solving skills, creativity in lesson delivery, and confidence in applying teaching strategies (Agyeman & Aphena, 2023; Nuwategeka & Odama, 2020; Apolot et al., 2018). This sense of community created a supportive learning environment that complemented formal mentorship

The availability of resources was another critical component of support systems. Student teachers with access to instructional materials, teaching aids, and learning technologies

delivered more effective lessons and engaged learners more successfully. Empirical evidence showed that adequate provision of resources by universities and schools enhanced student teachers' competence and confidence (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020; Bwiruka et al., 2021; Nuwategeka & Odama, 2020). This underscored the importance of material support within comprehensive school practice support systems.

Support systems fostered professional development and social competencies. Supervisors, mentors, and peers supported the development of interpersonal skills, ethical conduct, and teamwork abilities among student teachers. Evidence showed that well-supported student teachers were more likely to demonstrate professionalism, maintain positive relationships with learners and colleagues, and effectively manage classroom challenges (Apolot et al., 2018; Amankwah et al., 2017; Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020; Chaliès et al., 2019). Overall, high levels of support systems contributed to both pedagogical competence and holistic professional growth.

Finally, the finding of high support systems reflected the university's commitment to structured school practice management. By ensuring guidance, feedback, and resource support, Gulu University strengthened the quality of teacher preparation. Evidence showed that well-supported student teachers were more effective in teaching practice, demonstrated improved classroom management, and were better prepared to meet professional expectations (Nuwategeka & Odama, 2020; Bwiruka et al., 2021; Annet et al., 2024; Apolot et al., 2018). Overall, strong support systems played a critical role in enhancing teaching effectiveness and professional competence among student teachers.

The finding of a high level of monitoring and evaluation indicated that Gulu University had established structured mechanisms for tracking, assessing, and guiding student teachers' performance during school practice. Monitoring and evaluation involved classroom observation, review of lesson plans, assessment of teaching methods, and provision of constructive feedback. Empirical studies showed that systematic monitoring enhanced instructional competence, professional behavior, and classroom management confidence among student teachers (Apolot et al., 2018; Nuwategeka & Odama, 2020; Bwiruka et al., 2021). Overall, high levels of monitoring and evaluation ensured accountability and continuous support throughout teaching practice.

Monitoring began with continuous observation of teaching activities by university supervisors and school mentors. Student teachers received guidance on lesson delivery, learner

engagement, and assessment strategies, enabling real-time correction and professional development. Evidence showed that regular observation improved teaching quality and strengthened reflective practice, allowing student teachers to adjust methods to meet learner needs (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020; Apolot et al., 2018). This proactive approach ensured continuous development of competencies during the practicum.

Evaluation was an equally important component of the system, focusing on assessing performance against established standards and objectives. Student teachers' lesson plans, instructional materials, and teaching outcomes were assessed to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Evidence showed that timely and structured evaluation enhanced pedagogical skills, classroom management, and professional values (Nuwategeka & Odama, 2020; Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020; Bwiruka et al., 2021). High-level evaluation provided feedback that informed subsequent teaching practices and reinforced continuous improvement.

Monitoring and evaluation fostered accountability and professionalism. Awareness of supervision and assessment motivated student teachers to adhere to professional standards, including punctuality, preparation, and ethical conduct. Empirical evidence showed that consistent monitoring enhanced reflective practice, accountability, and adherence to professional values (Apolot et al., 2018; Bwiruka et al., 2021; Nuwategeka & Odama, 2020). Overall, high levels of monitoring and evaluation influenced both instructional competence and professional behavior.

Furthermore, monitoring and evaluation supported decision-making and programme improvement. Data from observations and assessments informed identification of training gaps, adjustment of mentoring approaches, and provision of targeted interventions for student teachers. Studies in Uganda showed that institutions with structured monitoring and evaluation systems recorded higher levels of student teacher performance and satisfaction (Bwiruka et al., 2021; Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020; Apolot et al., 2018). This indicated that effective monitoring enhanced not only student teacher outcomes but also the overall quality of teacher education programmes.

Finally, the high level of monitoring and evaluation reflected Gulu University's commitment to quality teacher preparation. Structured feedback, consistent supervision, and performance assessment contributed to the holistic development of student teachers by enhancing pedagogical skills, classroom management, professional ethics, and social competencies. Evidence showed that well-organized and consistently applied monitoring and evaluation

improved preparedness for classroom practice, leading to greater competence, confidence, and professionalism (Bwiruka et al., 2021; Omara et al., 2021; Nuwategeka & Odama, 2020; Apolot et al., 2018). Overall, these findings underscored the critical role of monitoring and evaluation in effective school practice management.

5.2 Level of professional competencies of student teachers in Gulu University.

The study established that student teachers demonstrated high professional competencies, indicating that Gulu University's teacher education programme effectively developed pedagogical, professional, and social skills. These competencies, which included pedagogical competence, classroom management, professional values and ethics, and social skills, were central to effective teaching practice. Evidence from other researchers showed that student teachers with strong competencies were better able to implement lesson plans, engage learners, and adapt instruction to diverse classroom contexts (Niyibizi, 2025; Geletu, 2022; Omara et al., 2021). Collectively, the findings confirmed the effectiveness of structured school practice in preparing competent future teachers.

At the pedagogical level, the study revealed that student teachers exhibited strong competence in lesson planning, content delivery, instructional material use, and reflective practice. Well-structured lesson plans, in particular, enhanced clarity of instruction and improved learner outcomes (Ali & Juanda, 2025; Mentel et al., 2024). In addition, student teachers effectively applied participatory teaching strategies and instructional resources, which increased learner engagement and comprehension (Bwiruka et al., 2021; Ki et al., 2025). Reflection further strengthened continuous improvement in teaching practice. Overall, pedagogical competence emerged as a direct outcome of structured preparation and guided school practice.

In terms of classroom management, the findings indicated that student teachers were competent in maintaining discipline, engaging learners, organizing activities, and addressing diverse learner needs. Structured mentorship and supervision played a key role in strengthening classroom control and reducing disruptions (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020; Apolot et al., 2018). Moreover, student teachers demonstrated ability to facilitate interactive learning and manage heterogeneous classrooms effectively (Annet et al., 2024). Consequently, classroom management competence was shown to enhance the overall quality of the learning environment.

Regarding professional ethics, the study found that student teachers consistently demonstrated punctuality, appropriate dress code, respect, accountability, and integrity. These behaviours

reflected strong internalisation of professional standards supported through mentorship and supervision. Evidence suggested that adherence to ethical conduct strengthened trust between student teachers, learners, and school administrators (Apolot et al., 2018; Nuwategeka & Odama, 2020). As a result, professional values and ethics were observed as a stabilising factor in effective teaching practice.

From a social perspective, the study established that student teachers possessed strong interpersonal, communication, teamwork, and collaboration skills. These competencies enabled effective interaction with peers, mentors, and learners within school environments. Previous studies showed that strong social skills enhanced classroom relationships, learner participation, and collaborative learning (Apolot et al., 2018; Llorent et al., 2024). Ultimately, social competence contributed significantly to positive classroom dynamics and professional interaction.

Synthesizing the findings, the study confirmed that high professional competence among student teachers reflected the effectiveness of Gulu University's school practice system. Structured preparation, mentorship, monitoring, and evaluation collectively strengthened pedagogical, classroom management, ethical, and social competencies. Evidence consistently indicated that well-supported student teachers demonstrated higher confidence, improved performance, and greater readiness for professional teaching roles (Bwiruka et al., 2021; Omara et al., 2021). In conclusion, the study affirmed that comprehensive school practice is central to developing well-rounded and competent teachers.

5.3 Relationship between School Practice and Professional competencies of student teachers.

The study established a very strong relationship between School Practice and professional competencies, indicating that student teachers' effectiveness is highly influenced by the quality and structure of School Practice at Gulu University. School Practice comprised pre-school practice preparation, support systems, supervision and mentorship, and monitoring and evaluation. Empirical evidence showed that well-managed school practice programmes positively influence pedagogical skills, classroom management, professional ethics, and social competencies (Aheisibwe & Barigye, 2025; Geletu, 2022; Ta, 2023).

At the preparatory stage, the study found that pre-school practice preparation played a foundational role in strengthening professional competencies. This phase involved lesson planning, instructional material preparation, and clarification of learning objectives before classroom entry. Evidence showed that adequately prepared student teachers demonstrated

higher pedagogical competence and confidence during teaching practice (Saleem et al., 2026; Niyibizi, 2025; Bwiruka et al., 2021). In line with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984), preparation enabled translation of theory into practice, thereby reinforcing the relationship between School Practice and competence.

In relation to support systems, the findings indicated that mentorship, peer collaboration, and administrative guidance significantly enhanced student teacher development. These systems provided continuous professional support that improved pedagogical effectiveness, classroom interaction, and professional behavior. Empirical studies confirmed that strong support systems are positively associated with teaching competence and classroom management (Saleem et al., 2026; Goldshaft, 2024; Omara et al., 2021; Nuwategeka & Odama, 2020).

Closely linked to support systems, supervision and mentorship emerged as critical drivers of professional competence. University supervisors and school mentors observed lessons, provided feedback, and guided improvement in instructional practice. Evidence showed that structured mentorship enhances lesson delivery, learner engagement, and reflective teaching practices (Bakija-Haraçija et al., 2024; Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020; Apolot et al., 2018). Consequently, supervision directly strengthened professional development outcomes.

From an accountability perspective, monitoring and evaluation were found to be essential in improving teaching performance. Regular lesson observation, assessment of teaching methods, and feedback sessions enabled student teachers to identify strengths and address gaps. Studies indicated that systematic monitoring significantly correlates with improved pedagogical and professional performance (Olema et al., 2020; Musiimenta et al., 2024; Apolot et al., 2018). This process ensured continuous improvement and compliance with professional standards.

Further analysis revealed that feedback loops from supervision and evaluation reinforced professional growth. Constructive feedback promoted reflection, adjustment of teaching strategies, and improved instructional quality. Evidence showed that mentorship-driven feedback enhances confidence and teaching effectiveness (Karakaya & Tufan, 2018; Bukirwa & Musisi, 2022). Additionally, continuity between preparation and in-school support facilitated smoother transition from theory to practice.

In terms of outcomes, the integrated School Practice system strengthened pedagogical competence, classroom management, professional ethics, and social skills. Structured preparation, mentorship, and evaluation enabled student teachers to manage classrooms effectively, uphold ethical standards, and collaborate with peers. Empirical studies confirmed

that such integrated systems produce confident and professionally competent teachers (Omara et al., 2021; Bwiruka et al., 2021; Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020).

Specifically, classroom management competence was enhanced through supervision and feedback, which helped student teachers develop discipline strategies and learner engagement skills (Annet et al., 2024). Similarly, professional ethics were strengthened through structured guidance emphasizing punctuality, accountability, and professional conduct (Şahin & Yüksel, 2021; Dhingra, 2022). These elements reinforced the link between structured practice and professional behavior.

In addition, social competencies such as teamwork, communication, and collaboration were developed through peer interaction and mentoring structures. Studies showed that collaborative learning environments improve interpersonal skills and professional engagement (Aheisibwe & Barigye, 2025; Apolot et al., 2018). These competencies complemented pedagogical and ethical development.

Quantitative evidence further supported the relationship, with studies reporting significant positive correlations between supervision and student teacher performance (Apolot et al., 2018; $r = 0.518$, $p < 0.001$; Nkwasiibwe et al., 2023; $r = 0.913$, $p = 0.004$). Mentorship also showed moderate positive associations with competence development ($r = 0.398$, $p < 0.001$). These findings reinforced the statistical strength of the relationship observed in the current study.

Overall, the convergence of preparation, mentorship, supervision, monitoring, and support systems explained the very strong relationship between School Practice and professional competencies. Studies consistently demonstrated that well-structured school practice programmes produce higher levels of pedagogical skill, classroom management ability, ethical behavior, and social competence (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020; Saleem et al., 2026; Apolot et al., 2018). Therefore, School Practice emerged as a key determinant of professional competence among student teachers.

5.4 Conclusion

The study found high stakeholder perspectives of school practice at Gulu University, indicating effective programme structure. Preparation, mentorship, supervision, and evaluation were systematically implemented, ensuring student teachers were well-supported, adequately prepared, and effectively guided throughout their teaching practice which aligns with empirical findings emphasizing the importance of well-organized practice programmes in teacher education

The study revealed high professional competencies among student teachers, including pedagogical skills, classroom management, ethics, and social competence. These strengths indicate that school practice significantly contributes to the holistic development of future teachers.

The study found a very strong positive relationship between School Practice and the professional competencies of student teachers. Statistical evidence and empirical literature support that well-managed school practice, including supervision, mentorship, and systematic evaluation significantly enhances student teachers' pedagogical, managerial, ethical, and social skills. The structured processes of preparation, monitoring, and support ensure that student teachers develop the necessary competencies to perform effectively in real classroom contexts. Studies indicate that higher levels of supervision, guidance, and support correlate positively with improved teacher performance, confidence, and reflective practice

5.5 Recommendations

Teacher education institutions, including Gulu University, should strengthen pre-school practice preparation by ensuring student teachers have clear lesson plans, instructional materials, and learning objectives to enhance effective teaching and application of theory in practice.

Universities should provide robust support systems for student teachers, including access to teaching resources, peer collaboration, and administrative guidance from school administrators. Providing adequate support enhances pedagogical skills, classroom management, and social competencies among student teachers.

Supervision and mentorship should be continuous, structured, and consistent. University supervisors and school mentors should provide regular lesson observation, timely feedback, and reflective guidance to strengthen student teachers' professional competencies and classroom confidence.

Universities should integrate school practice with professional competency assessment by linking supervision, mentorship, and preparation to evaluation outcomes, enabling identification of strengths and gaps in both school practice management and student teacher development.

Supervisors and school mentors should undergo regular training to update their skills in guiding, assessing, and mentoring student teachers. Skilled supervisors enhance the effectiveness of school practice management, which in turn strengthens professional competencies among student teachers.

5.6 Suggestions for Further Research

Further studies should explore longitudinal impacts of School Practice on professional competencies, including tracking graduates into their teaching careers. Research should also investigate the relative contribution of each school practice component to different dimensions of professional competence to inform targeted interventions.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Sample size (S) required for the given population sizes (N)

Sample size determination using Krejcie and Morgan Table

N	S	N	S	N	S	N	S	N	S
10	10	100	80	280	162	800	260	2800	338
15	14	110	86	290	165	850	265	3000	341
20	19	120	92	300	169	900	269	3500	346
25	24	130	97	320	175	950	274	4000	351
30	28	140	103	340	181	1000	278	4500	354
35	32	150	108	360	186	1100	285	5000	357
40	36	160	113	380	191	1200	291	6000	361
45	40	170	118	400	196	1300	297	7000	364
50	44	180	123	420	201	1400	302	8000	367
55	48	190	127	440	205	1500	306	9000	368
60	52	200	132	460	210	1600	310	10000	370
65	56	210	136	480	214	1700	313	15000	375
70	59	220	140	500	217	1800	317	20000	377
75	63	230	144	550	226	1900	320	30000	379
80	66	240	148	600	234	2000	322	40000	380
85	70	250	152	650	242	2200	327	50000	381
90	73	260	155	700	248	2400	331	75000	382
95	76	270	159	750	254	2600	335	1000000	384

Note. N* = POPULATION; S=sample size. Adapted from "Determining sample size for research activities, "by Krejcie R.V. & Morgan D.W. (1970) in S.Sarantakos (1998), Social Research, 607 – 610, London: Mac Millan Press Ltd.

(Source: Quoted in Barifaijo, Basheka and Oonyu, 2010:77

Appendix B: Consent form for Respondents

STUDY TITLE:

SCHOOL PRACTICE AND STUDENT TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCES: A CASE OF GULU UNIVERSITY

I am **Opiyo Samuel**, pursuing a course leading to an award of the Degree in **Master of Education in Education Management** of Gulu University. I wish to introduce to you the above-mentioned study in which you are requested to participate. The findings of this study will help to improve on practices of Universities and Tertiary Institutions in Uganda in enhancing teacher education and school practice experiences for the student teachers. The study is conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for an award of the Degree in Master of Education in Education Management of Gulu University.

Benefits

There are no financial benefits for participating in this study. You will only be acknowledged in the final report when this study is done.

Willingness

There is no penalty if you do not participate. You are free to withdraw your participation in this study at any time if you feel uncomfortable.

Security risks and costs

There are no security risks related to this study, and no costs will be incurred on your side.

Confidentiality

The data collected from you shall be kept and treated with strict confidentiality. Codes and not your full names shall be used. In case of any questions please feel free to contact the researcher on Tel: **0774427286**

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I……. have read and understood this document and I therefore agree to take part in this study.

Signature: …… Date: …….

Contact: ……..……

Sex: ……

Appendix C: Research Questionnaire for School Teachers

Title: *School Practice professional competencies among Student Teachers at Gulu University*

Instructions: Please respond honestly. All responses are confidential and for academic purposes only.

SECTION A: Background Information

(For Final Year Student Teacher at Gulu University)

All responses will be kept confidential and used for academic purposes only.

Demographic Information. Please tick (✓) or fill in the correct response.

1. Gender:
   - ☐ Male
   - ☐ Female
2. Age Group:
   - ☐ 1 8-24
   - ☐ 25-30
   - ☐ 31+
3. Programmeme Enrolled:
   - ☐ Bachelor of Science with Education
   - ☐ Bachelor of Arts with Education
   - ☐ Bachelor of Business Education
   - ☐ Other: _____
4. Subject Specialisation: _____
5. Type of School for Practice:
   - ☐ Urban
   - ☐ Rural
   - ☐ Mixed Day and Boarding
   - ☐ Single Gender School
6. Prior Teaching Experience (Before School Practice):
   - ☐ Yes. If Yes, how long? _____ months/years
   - ☐ No
7. Duration of School Practice:
   - ☐ Less than 4 weeks
   - ☐ 4–8 weeks
   - ☐ More than 8 weeks

SECTION B: Perspectivess on the management of School Practice (SP)

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statements on School Practice below: **1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree**

	Statements of inquiry	SD	D	N	A	SA
	Pre-school practice preparation					
1	I prepare detailed lesson plans before teaching.					
2	I gather all necessary teaching materials in advance.					
3	I organize classroom activities before practice sessions.					
4	I plan my teaching methods according to the learning objectives.					
5	I check and prepare learning resources for children before practice.					
6	I coordinate with the mentor teacher prior to starting practice.					
7	I reflect on previous practice sessions to improve preparation.					
	Support system					
8	The mentor teacher provides guidance during school practice.					
9	I receive sufficient support from school administrators.					
10	My peers assist me in learning activities during practice.					
11	Teaching and learning resources are readily available during practice.					
12	I receive regular feedback on my teaching performance.					
13	There is clear guidance on school practice requirements.					
14	Supervision during practice helps me improve my teaching skills.					
	Supervision and Mentorship					
15	The supervisor provides clear guidance on teaching tasks.					
16	The supervisor observes my teaching regularly.					
17	I receive constructive feedback from my supervisor.					
18	The supervisor helps me address challenges in teaching.					
19	Supervision improves my teaching skills.					
	Mentorship					
20	My mentor provides guidance during school practice.					
21	My mentor regularly observes my teaching sessions.					
22	I receive constructive feedback from my mentor.					
23	My mentor helps me solve challenges in teaching.					
24	The mentor encourages me to improve my teaching skills.					
	Monitoring and Evaluation					
25	Monitoring of my teaching is conducted regularly during practice.					
26	I receive feedback based on evaluation of my teaching performance.					
27	Evaluation helps me identify areas for improvement in teaching.					
28	Supervisors provide guidance after monitoring my lessons.					
29	Monitoring and evaluation improve my overall teaching skills.					
30	The feedback I receive is constructive and actionable.					

SECTION C: The level of Professional Competencies of student teachers of Gulu University

How do you agree or disagree with the statements on the level of your Professional Competencies

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

	Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA
Pedagogical Competences						
31	I prepare detailed lesson plans before teaching.					
32	I deliver content in a clear and organized manner.					
33	I use appropriate assessment methods to evaluate student learning.					
34	I maintain accurate records of student progress.					
35	I design and use effective instructional materials.					
Classroom Management Competences						
36	I maintain discipline among students during lessons.					
37	I apply classroom rules consistently and fairly.					
38	I handle disruptive behavior effectively.					
39	I use differentiated teaching strategies to meet students' needs.					
40	I adapt activities for students with different learning abilities.					
41	I monitor student progress and adjust instruction accordingly.					
Professional Values and Ethics						
42	I arrive at school on time for all practice sessions.					
43	I submit lesson plans and assignments promptly.					
44	I adhere to the prescribed dress code for school practice.					
45	I maintain a professional appearance at all times.					
46	I demonstrate respectful and cooperative relationships with colleagues.					
Social competences						
47	I actively participate in teamwork with colleagues.					
48	I support and assist peers during school practice.					
49	I share ideas and resources effectively with colleagues.					
50	I communicate clearly with students during lessons.					
51	I listen attentively and respond appropriately to students.					
52	I use appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication in the classroom.					

SECTION D: Relationship between School Practice and Professional Competencies

Response Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

53	The quality of mentorship I received improved my teaching skills.					
54	Support from supervisors helped me become more competent professionally.					
55	Feedback helped me improve lesson delivery.					
56	School support contributed to my professional growth.					
57	School practice strengthened my pedagogical competence.					
58	Pre-practice preparation increased my teaching confidence.					
59	Availability of teaching materials enhanced my instruction.					
60	Mentorship helped me understand and uphold professional values and ethics.					
61	Monitoring and evaluation helped me identify areas for improvement.					
62	Collaboration with staff and other teachers during school practice enhanced my social competence.					

SECTION E: School Practice Experience

Please indicate the extent to which you agree that the following factors influenced your school practice experience:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

No	Factor	SD	D	N	A	SA
a)	I attended all my days of school practice					
b)	The school culture motivated during school practice					
c)	The teachers' code of conduct was strictly emphasized at the school					
d)	The supervisors were cordial and friendly					
e)	There was uniformity in feedback from all the supervisors					

Thank you so much for participating in this study

Appendix D: Questionnaire for University School Practice Supervisors

Target Group: Gulu University School Practice Supervisors

Purpose: This questionnaire aims to gather insights from university supervisors on the management of school practice and the professional competences of student teachers. Your responses will help improve the effectiveness of School Practice and teacher preparation at Gulu University.

Instructions: Please respond honestly. Your feedback is valuable for improving the quality of the teacher's education programme.

SECTION A: **Demographic Information**

1. **Designation:**
   ☐ Senior Lecturer
   ☐ Assistant Lecturer
   ☐ Graduate Teaching Assistant
   ☐ Other (please specify): _____
2. **Faculty/Department:** _____
3. **Number of times you have supervised school practice:**
   ☐ Once
   ☐ 2–3 times
   ☐ More than 3 times
4. **Typical number of student teachers you supervise per session:** _____
5. **Region(s) or District(s) where you most recently supervised:** _____

SECTION B: Perspectives of Supervisors on the Management of School Practice (SP)

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statements below?

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

	Statements of inquiry	SD	D	N	A	SA
	Pre-school practice preparation					
1	The University provides clear orientation and expectations for supervisors.					
2	Student teachers are adequately prepared before reporting for school practice.					
3	Schools are notified in advance and prepared to host student teachers.					
4	Teaching materials and documentation are provided in time.					
5	The school practice schedule is well communicated.					
6	Collaboration between University and host schools is well coordinated.					
7	Pre-practice briefing improves supervision effectiveness.					
	Support system					

8	School administrators support the supervision process.					
9	Host teachers (mentors) cooperate with University supervisors.					
10	Student teachers receive adequate mentoring at the host schools.					
11	Teaching and learning materials are available for student teachers.					
12	I am able to provide timely feedback to student teachers.					
13	The University provides clear supervision guidelines.					
14	The supervision process contributes to improving student teachers' skills.					
	Supervision					
15	I provide clear guidance to student teachers during school visits.					
16	I am able to observe student teachers regularly.					
17	I provide constructive feedback to student teachers.					
18	I help student teachers address challenges in teaching.					
19	My supervision improves the teaching competence of student teachers.					
	Mentorship					
20	Mentors provide continuous guidance to student teachers.					
21	Mentors observe student teachers' lessons frequently.					
22	Mentors give constructive feedback to student teachers.					
23	Mentors assist student teachers in solving instructional challenges.					
24	Mentorship contributes to the professional growth of student teachers.					
	Monitoring and Evaluation					
25	Monitoring of student teachers is done consistently.					
26	Evaluation criteria are clear and applied fairly.					
27	Feedback from evaluation helps student teachers improve performance.					
28	Supervisors provide guidance after observing lessons.					
29	Monitoring and evaluation enhance student teachers' teaching competence.					
30	The feedback process is constructive and actionable.					

SECTION C: Perceived Level of Professional Competence of Student Teachers

How do you agree or disagree with the statements on the level of the Professional Competencies

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

	Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA
	Pedagogical Competences					
31	Student teachers prepare clear lesson plans.					
32	They deliver instructional content effectively.					
33	They apply appropriate assessment methods.					
34	They keep accurate records of learner progress.					
35	They design and utilize relevant instructional materials.					
	Classroom Management Competences					

36	Student teachers maintain discipline in class.					
37	They apply classroom rules consistently.					
38	They manage disruptive behavior effectively.					
39	They use differentiated instruction strategies.					
40	They adapt lessons to meet diverse learner needs.					
41	They monitor and adjust teaching during lessons.					
Professional Values and Ethics						
42	Student teachers report on time.					
43	They submit lesson plans and reports promptly.					
44	They adhere to expected professional dress code.					
45	They demonstrate professional conduct.					
46	They relate respectfully with staff and learners.					
Social competences						
47	Student teachers work cooperatively with colleagues.					
48	They support peers during practice.					
49	They share ideas and teaching resources.					
50	They communicate clearly with learners.					
51	They listen and respond appropriately to students.					
52	They demonstrate appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication.					

SECTION D: Relationship between School Practice and Professional Competencies

Response Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

53	Quality mentorship enhances teaching competence.					
54	Supervisor support improves professional skills.					
55	Feedback improves lesson delivery.					
56	School-based support contributes to professional growth.					
57	School practice strengthens pedagogical competence.					
58	Pre-practice preparation builds confidence.					
59	Availability of materials enhances instruction.					
60	Mentorship supports ethical and professional behavior.					
61	Monitoring and evaluation identify areas needing improvement.					
62	Collaboration with school staff enhances social competence.					
63	Interaction with staff builds professional relationships.					
64	Supervision boosts confidence in managing learners.					
65	School practice contributes to shaping professional identity.					

Thank you for your valuable contribution

Appendix E: Questionnaire For Host School Administrators/teachers

Target Group: School Administrators & Mentor Teachers that host Gulu University student teachers during school practice.

Instructions: Please respond honestly. Your feedback is valuable for improving the quality of teacher preparation.

SECTION A: Background Information

1. Designation:
   - ☐ Headteacher
   - ☐ Deputy Headteacher/ Director of Studies
   - ☐ Mentor Teacher
   - ☐ Other (please specify): _____
2. Type of School:
   - ☐ Government
   - ☐ Private
3. Location of School:
   - ☐ Urban
   - ☐ Peri-urban
   - ☐ Rural
4. How long has your school hosted student teachers from Gulu University?
   - ☐ Less than 2 years
   - ☐ Over 3 years
5. How many student teachers did your school host most recently? _____
6. SECTION B: Perspectivess of Supervisors on the Management of School Practice (SP)
7. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statements below?

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

	Statements of inquiry	SD	D	N	A	SA
	Pre-school practice preparation					
1	The University provides clear orientation and expectations for supervisors.					
2	Student teachers are adequately prepared before reporting for school practice.					
3	Schools are notified in advance and prepared to host student teachers.					
4	Teaching materials and documentation are provided in time.					
5	The school practice schedule is well communicated.					
6	Collaboration between University and host schools is well coordinated.					

7	Pre-practice briefing improves supervision effectiveness.					
	Support system					
8	School administrators support the supervision process.					
9	Host teachers (mentors) cooperate with University supervisors.					
10	Student teachers receive adequate mentoring at the host schools.					
11	Teaching and learning materials are available for student teachers.					
12	I am able to provide timely feedback to student teachers.					
13	The University provides clear supervision guidelines.					
14	The supervision process contributes to improving student teachers' skills.					
	Supervision					
15	I provide clear guidance to student teachers during school visits.					
16	I am able to observe student teachers regularly.					
17	I provide constructive feedback to student teachers.					
18	I help student teachers address challenges in teaching.					
19	My supervision improves the teaching competence of student teachers.					
	Mentorship					
20	Mentors provide continuous guidance to student teachers.					
21	Mentors observe student teachers' lessons frequently.					
22	Mentors give constructive feedback to student teachers.					
23	Mentors assist student teachers in solving instructional challenges.					
24	Mentorship contributes to the professional growth of student teachers.					
	Monitoring and Evaluation					
25	Monitoring of student teachers is done consistently.					
26	Evaluation criteria are clear and applied fairly.					
27	Feedback from evaluation helps student teachers improve performance.					
28	Supervisors provide guidance after observing lessons.					
29	Monitoring and evaluation enhance student teachers' teaching competence.					
30	The feedback process is constructive and actionable.					

SECTION C: Perceived Level of Professional Competence of Student Teachers

8. How do you agree or disagree with the statements on the level of the Professional Competencies

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

	Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA
	Pedagogical Competences					
31	Student teachers prepare clear lesson plans.					
32	They deliver instructional content effectively.					
33	They apply appropriate assessment methods.					
34	They keep accurate records of learner progress.					
35	They design and utilize relevant instructional materials.					

Classroom Management Competences						
36	Student teachers maintain discipline in class.					
37	They apply classroom rules consistently.					
38	They manage disruptive behavior effectively.					
39	They use differentiated instruction strategies.					
40	They adapt lessons to meet diverse learner needs.					
41	They monitor and adjust teaching during lessons.					
Professional Values and Ethics						
42	Student teachers report on time.					
43	They submit lesson plans and reports promptly.					
44	They adhere to expected professional dress code.					
45	They demonstrate professional conduct.					
46	They relate respectfully with staff and learners.					
Social competences						
47	Student teachers work cooperatively with colleagues.					
48	They support peers during practice.					
49	They share ideas and teaching resources.					
50	They communicate clearly with learners.					
51	They listen and respond appropriately to students.					
52	They demonstrate appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication.					

SECTION D: Relationship Between School Practice and Professional Competencies

Response Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

53	Quality mentorship enhances teaching competence.					
54	Supervisor support improves professional skills.					
55	Feedback improves lesson delivery.					
56	School-based support contributes to professional growth.					
57	School practice strengthens pedagogical competence.					
58	Pre-practice preparation builds confidence.					
59	Availability of materials enhances instruction.					
60	Mentorship supports ethical and professional behavior.					
61	Monitoring and evaluation identify areas needing improvement.					
62	Collaboration with school staff enhances social competence.					
63	Interaction with staff builds professional relationships.					
64	Supervision boosts confidence in managing learners.					
65	School practice contributes to shaping professional identity.					

Thank you

Appendix F: Consolidated Interview Guide for Stakeholders

Research Title: School Practice Management and Professional Competencies of Student Teachers at Gulu University

Target Respondents: Student Teachers, Host School Administrators and School Practice Supervisors

Research Question One: What are stakeholders' perspectives on School Practice at Gulu University?

1. How would you describe your experiences and perspectives regarding the organisation and management of School Practice, including preparation, implementation, supervision and assessment?
2. What challenges do stakeholders encounter, and what improvements would you recommend?

Research Question Two: What is the level of professional competencies among student teachers at Gulu University?

5. How would you assess student teachers' overall professional competencies developed or demonstrated during School Practice?
6. What competency gaps remain, and what interventions would you recommend?

Probing Questions (for all respondents):

- Could you elaborate or provide a specific example?
- What evidence supports your assessment?
- What factors contributed to this experience or outcome?
- What practical improvements would you recommend?

Thank you

Appendix G: Introductory Letter

GULU UNIVERSITY

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OFFICE OF THE DEAN, FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND HUMANITIES

22nd Sept, 2025

TO : WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to introduce to you Mr. Opiyo Samuel (Reg No. 23/U/0670/MED/PS) a student pursuing a programme of study leading to an award Master of Education in Education Management of Gulu University, Master of Gulu University.

He is undertaking research on the Topic:

SCHOOL PRACTICE MANAGEMENT AND PROFEESSIONAL COMPETENCES OF STUDENT TEACHERS: A CASE OF GULU UNIVSERSITY

Which is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award.

Any assistance rendered to him in relation to this research work will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

GULU UNIVERSITY
22 SEP 2025
FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND HUMANITIES

For

Dr. Denis Thaddeus Ofoyuru

Dean, Faculty of Education and Humanities