# IMPACT OF PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

**ODUMADE Akorede Serifat[1]**
odumadeas@tasued.edu.ng

**IMOH Simon Iruoghene[2]**
simonimoh1@gmail.com
Department of Educational Management[1&2]
Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ogun State.

## Abstract

*The study explored the impact of practicum experience on students professional development in Ogun State, Nigeria. A descriptive research design survey type was used. The population of the study comprised 358 final year educational management students of Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ogun State who were eligible for the 2023/2024 practicum exercise. A simple random sampling technique was used to select a sample of 100 students representing 28% of the total population. Data were collected using a well structured questionnaire tagged "Practicum Professional Development Questionnaire (PPDQ)". The instrument demonstrated good internal consistency with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.867. Findings revealed that practicum significantly influences students' professional competencies, students encounter moderate challenges during practicum, and mentorship shapes students' professional outlook during practicum. It was concluded that practicum is an indispensable component of professional development, as it creates an avenue for students to develop the practical skills and competencies required for their future careers. The study recommended; enhanced collaboration between universities and practicum schools, provision of adequate resources, and improvement in mentorship quality.*

**Keywords:**Practicum, Educational Management, Professional Development, Higher Education

## Introduction

A critical aspect of the school system that should be prioritise across tertiary institutions globally is students professional development. It is essential for tertiary institutions to produce graduates who can apply the theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom in a real world setting. In order to further enhance the application of theoretical knowledge into practice, the National Universities Commission (NUC) integrate a compulsory internship or practicum exercise for undergraduates studying education related courses like educational management, guidance and counselling to mention but a few in Nigerian universities (NUC, 2023).

Practicum provides students with the opportunity to apply knowledge to everyday administrative and management challenges in educational institutions such as; schools, ministries of education and educational agencies (Ezewuzie & Anazodo, 2021). This allows

students develop essential professional competencies such as leadership, decision-making, communication and problem-solving. In Nigeria, the integration of practicum into the curriculum of Educational Management programmes is designed to equip future educational administrators and managers with the necessary skills to handle the complexities of managing schools and educational systems. Thus, practicum is essential as it ensures that students are adequately prepared for leadership roles in education.

Practicum placement aims to expose students to various aspects of educational management including; planning, policy implementation, resource management, quality assurance, management information system, and interaction with stakeholders such as teachers, students and parents. Despite the importance of practicum in shaping professional skills there is limited research that examines its impact on the development of educational management students in Nigerian institutions. Moreover, factors such as the challenges encountered during practicum, the quality of mentorship and differences in practicum settings (urban vs. rural schools) may influence it effectiveness. Hence, the study explored the practicum experience of university students in Ogun State, Nigeria. Specifically, among final year educational management students in Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ogun State with a focus on three key aspects; the professional competencies gained, the challenges encountered and the role of mentorship.

The study will be hinged on Kolbs (1984) Experiential Learning Theory which posits that learning is a cyclical process where knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. In the practicum setting, students engage in hands-on activities (concrete experience), reflect on their experiences (reflective observation), conceptualize what they have learned (abstract conceptualization) and apply these concepts in future situations (active experimentation). This cycle is particularly relevant to practicum experiences where students are expected to integrate theoretical knowledge from their coursework into practical administrative and management tasks in real-world educational settings.

The acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills through practical learning experiences for personal growth or career advancement is necessity for undergraduates especially within the field of education. Practicum has been recognized as an essential phase in the professional training of future educators, healthcare workers, and other professionals. It offers students a real-world experience in which they can apply theoretical knowledge, reflect on their practice, and refine their skills. Martins et al. (2023) highlights that practicum especially in teacher education, fosters the development of critical competencies such as reflective practice and problem-solving. In her study of pre-school and primary education students in Portugal, she noted that practicum provides opportunities for students to engage in self-assessment and reflect on their learning processes. This reflection, in turn, enhances their ability to adapt theoretical knowledge to practical challenges in the classroom.

Similarly, a study by Yoon (2023) on prospective health teachers demonstrates that practicum is instrumental in professional development through collaborative teaching, peer observation and continuous reflection. The research emphasizes that during the practicum, students are encouraged to collaborate with each other, share insights from their teaching experiences and modify lesson plans based on real-time feedback. Such collaboration not only enhances

individual teaching proficiency but also fosters a collective professional growth environment. Sapriadi and Munthakhabah (2023) studied the implementation of a virtual-based practicum model in vocational schools specializing in computer networking. Their findings suggest that practicum helps students acquire practical skills by simulating real-world tasks and providing them with the necessary tools to navigate complex technical problems. This aligns with the growing emphasis on digital competencies in modern vocational training programs

Allen and Wright (2014) examined how pre-service teacher education programs could better integrate theory with practice. Their study revealed that student teachers highly valued both the theoretical components of their coursework and the practical experiences gained during practicum. However, many felt that there was insufficient clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders (e.g., mentors, students, and faculty), which hampered the integration of theory and practice. They suggest that linking practicum assessments to academic coursework could be an effective strategy to bridge this gap, making theoretical concepts more relevant to real-world teaching scenarios. Masood et al. (2022) also addressed this issue in their study on feedback mechanisms during teaching practicum. Masood highlights the critical role that feedback from mentor plays in helping students contextualize theoretical knowledge during their practical training. However, they found that in many cases, feedback was inconsistent or poorly structured, leading to missed opportunities for learning. Their findings suggest that providing more targeted, timely feedback could significantly enhance the integration of theory and practice in professional training programs.

Liao and Manalon (2015) explored professional development in the context of nursing and midwifery education, focusing on the application of Essential Newborn Care (ENC) protocols. Their study revealed that nursing students often struggled to apply theoretical knowledge during their clinical placements, leading to inconsistencies in care practices. This highlights the need for more structured support and guidance during clinical practicums to ensure that students can effectively apply what they have learned in their theoretical courses. In addition, Khan (2018) points out that many practicum programs fail to fully meet their objectives due to a lack of coordination between educational institutions and placement sites. His research on the B.Ed. (Hons) program in Pakistan found that despite the emphasis on practicum as a key component of teacher training, many prospective teachers did not achieve the expected level of professional development. This was largely due to insufficient alignment between the theoretical content of their coursework and the practical tasks they were expected to perform during their placements. Khan advocates for a more structured and coordinated approach to practicum design, ensuring that the objectives of the practicum align with the desired professional outcomes. However, practicum remains an indispensable element of professional development, offering students a vital opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings.

**Objectives of the Study**
The main objective of this study was to assess the impact of practicum experiences on the professional development of educational management students at Tai Solarin University of Education, Nigeria. The study sought to achieve the following specific objectives:

    i.   evaluate how practicum experiences influence the development of professional competencies in educational management students.

    ii.  identify the challenges students face during their practicum.

   iii. examine the effectiveness of mentorship in shaping students professional outlook during their practicum placements.

## Research Questions
The following questions were raised for the study:

   i. How does practicum influence the professional competencies of educational management students?

   ii. What challenges do students encounter during practicum?

   iii. How effective is mentorship in shaping students' professional outlook?

## Methodology
The study adopted a descriptive research design of survey type. The population of the study comprises all the three hundred and fifty eight (358) educational management final year students on practicum exercise in Tai Solarin University of Education (TASUED) for 2023/2024 academic session. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 100 final year students of educational management on practicum exercise representing 28% of the total population, as they all have equal chance of been selected. A standardized questionnaire designed by the researchers "Practicum Professional Development Questionnaire (PPDQ)" was used for collecting data. The reliability of the instrument was done using Cronbach's alpha with a coefficient of 0.867 indicating a good internal consistency. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics (mean, frequency distribution, standard deviation and percentage) were used to analyse research question one to three.

## Results
**Research Question One:** How does practicum influence the professional competencies of educational management students?

**Table 1: Practicum and Students Professional Competencies**

| Items | SD | D | A | SA | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The practicum experience helped me develop strong communication skills. | 5(5.0) | 1(1.0) | 71(71.0) | 23(23.0) | 3.12 | .656 |
| I gained confidence in managing classroom environments during my practicum. | 3(3.0) | 2(2.0) | 75(75.0) | 20(20.0) | 3.12 | .573 |
| The practicum helped me understand the dynamics of school leadership. | 4(4.0) | 5(5.0) | 68(68.0) | 23(23.0) | 3.10 | .659 |
| I was able to apply theoretical concepts learned in class to real-world situations during the practicum. | 2(2.0) | 7(7.0) | 81(81.0) | 10(10.0) | 2.99 | .502 |
| The practicum significantly improved my decision-making skills in a school management context. | 1(10.0) | 5(5.0) | 73(73.0) | 21(21.0) | 3.14 | .532 |
| I enhanced my problem-solving abilities while working in a school setting. | 1(1.0) | 7(7.0) | 75(75.0) | 17(17.0) | 3.08 | .526 |
| The practicum experience improved my understanding of school administration processes. | 1(1.0) | 4(4.0) | 72(72.0) | 23(23.0) | 3.17 | .533 |
| I learned how to effectively manage time and prioritize tasks during my practicum. | 1(1.0) | 2(2.0) | 77(77.0) | 20(20.0) | 3.16 | .487 |
| The practicum helped me develop conflict resolution skills within the school environment. | 3(3.0) | 3(3.0) | 75(75.0) | 19(19.0) | 3.10 | .577 |
| My practicum experience has prepared me for a future career in educational management. | 1(1.0) | 5(5.0) | 66(66.0) | 28(28.0) | 3.21 | .574 |

Key Source, SD D A SA: Threshold: Mean < 2.5 is low, Mean = 2.5 is Moderate while Mean > 2.5 high

Research question one evaluate how practicum experiences influence the development of professional competencies in educational management students. The result obtained shows a grand mean of 3.12 as shown in Table 1, meaning practicum significantly influence students professional competencies.

**Research Question Two:** What challenges do students encounter during practicum, and how do these affect their development?

**Table 2: Challenges Encountered During Practicum**

| Items | SD | D | A | SA | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lack of resources (e.g., teaching materials) at my practicum placement hindered my professional growth. | 5(5.0) | 40(40.0) | 44(44.0) | 11(11.0) | 2.61 | .751 |
| Inadequate supervision during practicum affected my learning experience. | 11(11.0) | 52(52.0) | 31(31.0) | 6(6.0) | 2.32 | .750 |
| The school where I was placed had poor infrastructure, which impacted my practicum experience. | 9(9.0) | 54(54.0) | 31(31.0) | 6(6.0) | 2.34 | .728 |
| I experienced difficulties adjusting to the working culture of my practicum school. | 7(7.0) | 46(46.0) | 40(40.0) | 7(7.0) | 2.47 | .731 |
| I faced challenges in managing the large number of students in my practicum classroom. | 9(9.0) | 59(59.0) | 25(25.0) | 7(7.0) | 2.30 | .732 |
| Mentorship from school staff during my practicum was lacking. | 16(16.0) | 65(65.0) | 17(17.0) | 2(2.0) | 2.05 | .642 |
| The practicum school did not provide sufficient opportunities for me to develop leadership skills. | 10(10.0) | 63(63.0) | 22(22.0) | 5(5.0) | 2.22 | .690 |
| Balancing practicum responsibilities with academic work was difficult for me. | 8(8.0) | 49(49.0) | 36(36.0) | 7(7.0) | 2.42 | .741 |
| I encountered challenges in collaborating with other staff members during my practicum. | 9(9.0) | 62(62.0) | 24(24.0) | 5(5.0) | 2.25 | .687 |
| I faced personal difficulties (e.g., accommodation, transportation) during my practicum, which affected my performance. | 7(7.0) | 38(38.0) | 39(39.0) | 16(16.0) | 2.64 | .835 |

Key Source, SD D A SA: Threshold: Mean < 2.5 is low, Mean = 2.5 is Moderate while Mean > 2.5 high

Research question two identified the challenges students face during their practicum. The result obtained shows a grand mean of 2.36 as shown in Table 2, meaning students encounter challenges during practicum though the difficulties they face are not overwhelmingly severe.

**Research Question Three:** How effective is mentorship in shaping students' professional outlook?

**Table 3: Effectiveness of Mentorship**

| Items | SD | D | A | SA | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| My mentor at the practicum school provided useful guidance throughout the placement. | 4(4.0) | 6(6.0) | 72(72.0) | 18(18.0) | 3.04 | .634 |
| Regular feedback from my mentor helped me improve my teaching and management skills. | - | 4(4.0) | 74(74.0) | 22(22.0) | 3.18 | .479 |
| My mentor helped me set clear professional goals during the practicum. | 3(3.0) | 6(6.0) | 72(72.0) | 19(19.0) | 3.07 | .607 |
| The mentor encouraged me to take on leadership roles during the practicum. | 1(1.0) | 7(7.0) | 70(70.0) | 22(22.0) | 3.13 | .562 |
| The mentorship experience helped me identify areas where I needed improvement. | 1(1.0) | 3(3.0) | 74(74.0) | 22(22.0) | 3.17 | .514 |
| My mentor provided support when I encountered challenges in my practicum school. | 1(1.0) | 4(4.0) | 76(76.0) | 19(19.0) | 3.13 | .506 |
| The mentor encouraged me to reflect on my experiences and learn from them. | 2(2.0) | 5(5.0) | 79(79.0) | 14(14.0) | 3.05 | .520 |
| The mentor was available and accessible when I needed help or advice. | 1(1.0) | 4(4.0) | 73(73.0) | 22(22.0) | 3.16 | .526 |
| I felt that my mentor was genuinely interested in my professional development. | - | 1(1.0) | 73(73.0) | 26(26.0) | 3.24 | .495 |
| Mentorship during my practicum significantly contributed to my confidence as a future educational manager. | 1(1.0) | 3(3.0) | 68(68.0) | 28(28.0) | 3.23 | .548 |

Key Source, SD D A SA: Threshold: Mean < 2.5 is low, Mean = 2.5 is Moderate while Mean > 2.5 high

Research question three examines the effectiveness of mentorship in shaping students' professional outlook during their practicum placements. The result obtained shows a grand mean of 3.14 as shown in Table 3, meaning mentorship shapes students professional outlook during practicum.

**Discussion of the Findings**
The first research question sought to evaluate how practicum experiences influence the development of professional competencies in educational management students. The findings revealed that, practicum significantly influence students professional competencies. This findings agrees with Bartual-Figueras et. al. (2019) stating that practicum positively influences students' professional competencies, including instrumental, interpersonal, and systemic competences, and their professional adjustment in the labor market. This suggests that practicum programs effectively bridge the gap between theoretical instruction and practical application, enabling students to gain the competencies required for successful careers in educational management.

The second research question sought to identify the challenges students face during their practicum. The findings revealed that, students encounter challenges during practicum though

the difficulties they face are not overwhelmingly severe. This finding agrees with Raheem (2023) stating that student-teachers face challenges during practicum, such as shortage of practicum period, traditional methods, lack of teaching facilities, large classes, and lack of evaluator visits. These obstacles likely diminished the overall effectiveness of the practicum in fully preparing students for their future roles.

The third research question sought to examine the effectiveness of mentorship in shaping students' professional outlook during their practicum placements. The findings revealed that, mentorship shapes students professional outlook during practicum. The finding agrees with Hamilton et al. (2019) stating that mentorship programmes increase job search self-efficacy, provide practical career-related support, and provide a more realistic view of the workplace and career options for undergraduate students. The high level of satisfaction with mentorship suggests that when properly implemented, mentoring can significantly enhance the practicum experience, equipping students with the skills and confidence needed to excel in their careers.

The findings of this study stand to benefit several stakeholders including students, educators and policymakers. For students, the research will provide insights into the effectiveness of their practicum experience helping to identify areas for personal improvement and greater professional readiness. For educators, the findings will inform adjustments to the practicum curriculum, ensuring that students receive adequate mentorship and face fewer obstacles during their placements. Finally, for policymakers, the study will offer data that can be used to enhance educational management programmes at the institutional and national levels, ultimately contributing to the production of more competent and effective educational administrators.

## Conclusion
On the basis of the findings of the study, it can be concluded that practicum significantly influence students professional competencies, as they encounter challenges during practicum, although, the difficulties they face are not overwhelmingly severe, mentorship shapes students professional outlook during practicum. Practicum is an indispensable component of professional development for students as it creates an avenue for experiential learning, enabling them to develop the practical skills and competencies required for their future careers.

## Recommendations
The following recommendations are made:

a.  Universities should establish formal partnerships with practicum schools to synchronize theoretical instruction with practical tasks. This includes periodic meetings, workshops, and resource allocation to ensure meaningful professional experiences for students.
b.  Several students reported challenges due to lack of teaching materials, poor infrastructure and other resource constraints which hindered their professional growth. Schools hosting practicum students should be equipped with essential resources, such as updated teaching aids, ICT tools and infrastructural support to facilitate a conducive learning and working environment for students.
c.  Educational institutions should implement structured mentorship programmes ensuring that mentors are adequately trained and accessible. Regular evaluations, reflective sessions and

feedback mechanisms should be incorporated to align student development with practical skills.

## References

Allen, J. M., & Wright, S. E. (2013). Integrating theory and practice in the pre-service teacher education practicum. *Teachers and Teaching, 20*(2), 136-151. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2013.848568

Bartual-Figueras, M., Purroy-Sánchez, P., &Turmo-Garuz, J. (2019). Practicum and development of professional competences: The case of business students. *EDULEARN19 Proceedings.* https://doi.org/10.21125/EDULEARN.2019.0768.

Ezewuzie, J. J., &Anazodo, O. G. (2021). Vital role of practicum in qualitative education: implications for future Nigerian educational managers. *African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies, 3*(1), 36-41.

Hamilton, L., Boman, J., Rubin, H., & Sahota, B. (2019). Examining the impact of a university mentorship program on student outcomes. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education.* https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-02-2018-0013

Khan, W. M., Urooj, S., & Ahmed, A. (2018). Perceptions of prospective teachers about effectiveness & professional development of practicum. *NICE Research Journal,* 1-14. https://doi.org/10.51239/nrjss.v0i0.61

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development.* Prentice-Hall.

Liao, A. G. O., &Manalon, R. C. (2015). Theory and practice: Identifying the gaps in essential newborn care practice of nursing and midwifery students during their clinical practicum. *Asia Pacific Higher Education Research Journal (APHERJ), 2*(2).

Martins, R., Paulo, E., Noronha-Sousa, D., Costa, E., &Pascoinho, J. (2023). Professional skills developed in a E@D practicum. *Smart Innovation, Systems and Technologies,* 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-9960-4_1

Masood, F., Khan, A. R., &Munawar, U. (2022). Bridging theory-practice gap: Connecting feedback with teaching practicum. *Review of Education, Administration & Law, 5*(3), 419-428. https://doi.org/10.47067/real.v5i3.264

National Universities Commission (2023). *Core curriculum and minimum academic standards (CCMAS) for Nigerian universities.* www.nuc.edu.ng

Raheem, K. (2023). Practicum process and its challenges from students teachers' perspective: Kurdish Department of Sulaimani University as example. *Halabja University Journal.* https://doi.org/10.32410/huj-10462.

Sapriadi, S., & Munthakhabah R, C. S. (2023). Development of a virtual-based skill competency test (ukk) practicum model in vocational schools department of computer

networking engineering. *Journal Peqguruang: Conference Series, 5*(2), 615-615. https://doi.org/10.35329/jp.v5i2.4846

Yoon, S. (2023). A qualitative study of prospective teachers professional development in health education through the teaching practicum. *Korean Association for Learner-Centered Curriculum and Instruction, 23*(15), 667-680. https://doi.org/10.22251/jlcci.2023.23.15.667