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Bridging Theory and Practice: Insights into the Experiences and Support Needs of Student Teachers During Field Practice

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*Student Teachers,
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The transition from student to teacher is a key phase in the development of professional teachers, yet it is often accompanied by challenges. This study examined the emotional, psychological, cultural, economic, and institutional barriers faced by student teachers during their teaching practice in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria with a population of 1,450. The study utilized a structured questionnaire which was administered to 522 student teachers which served as the sample for the study, whose reliability was $r = 0.87$. The instrument assessed the experiences of student teachers in specific areas such as the preparation of lesson notes, anxiety towards grooming standards, financial constraints and institutional support given. Findings revealed that 53.3% of student teachers experienced anxiety in preparing lesson notes, while 55.4% felt pressured to meet teaching expectations. Also, 53.6% felt ostracized due to institutional grooming policies, while 85.4% reported financial strain in maintaining recommended professional attire. The study highlighted that there was limited integration of modern teaching technologies, with 63.2% suggesting that they lacked virtual supervision. 66.1% reported that no access to automated feedback tools. These challenges emphasised the need for targeted interventions, such as inclusive institutional policies, enhanced psychological support and financial aid programs among others. These interventions are critical for addressing the Sustainable Development Goals of Quality Education, Reduced Inequalities, and Good Health and Well-being. Addressing these barriers will not only improve student teachers' experience but will also contribute to strengthening teacher education in Nigeria. The study advocated for a collaborative approach among educational institutions, policymakers, and stakeholders to enhance teacher preparation and equip future educators for the demands of the 21st century.

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INTRODUCTION

The student teacher is an individual who is an intending educator, who is engaged in a supervised teaching practice. This aspect ensures that the theoretical knowledge gap is correctly matched with practical classroom experience under the mentorship of experienced educators. This phase is pivotal in developing the skills needed for effective teaching post-graduation. As the demands of 21st-century education evolve, modern technology plays an increasingly significant role in shaping teaching methodologies, enhancing digital literacy, and fostering innovative teaching practices. These technologies provide dynamic learning environments, improving both the engagement and the readiness of student teachers to face contemporary educational challenges (Smirnova et al., 2018; Ikogho & Akpokiniovo, 2025).

The transition from theory to practice is often marked by a complex interplay of challenges, requiring adaptability, creativity, and resilience (Izadinia, 2013; Ikogho & Akpokiniovo, 2025). Student teachers must design lesson plans, manage classrooms, implement diverse teaching strategies, and create inclusive learning environments (Sadler, 2012). This process is not without emotional and psychological stress, as many student teachers experience anxiety and self-doubt while attempting to translate theoretical knowledge into effective teaching practices. The balancing act of academic, teaching, and personal responsibilities often leads to emotional exhaustion (Seher et al., 2023; Ikogho & Ikogho, 2022).

Additionally, the challenge of reconciling personal teaching styles with the expectations of the "ideal teacher" further complicates this transition (Annan-Brew & Arhin, 2022; Boyd & Harris, 2010; Ikogho,

2025). Integrating modern technology into teacher education is a transformative strategy to address these challenges. Technologies that promote student-centred learning and critical thinking offer significant potential to enhance teaching practices. However, barriers such as the digital divide and resistance to change hinder the effective integration of these tools, necessitating systemic interventions for equitable access. Studies stressed the importance of shifting paradigms in teacher education programs to incorporate modern technological tools (Ikogho, 2022; Orfali et al., 2024; Subrata, 2023).

The digital divide and resistance to change remain pivotal challenges in teacher education. Addressing these issues is vital for enhancing educational quality and ensuring equitable access to resources, particularly in under-resourced regions like sub-Saharan Africa (Rodrigues & Mogarro, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed these inequities, underscoring the need for more robust technological infrastructure and teacher training to bridge the gap (Ikogho & Onoharigho, 2025).

Cultural identity constitutes an essential part of shaping a teacher's authenticity and connection with students. Policies requiring student teachers to conform to specific grooming standards may clash with their personal or cultural identities, leading to feelings of alienation. Education systems that fail to celebrate diversity risk discouraging individuals from underrepresented backgrounds from pursuing teaching careers (Wang, 2024; Smirnova et al., 2018). Balancing professionalism with personal identity can hinder the formation of authentic teacher-student relationships, essential for effective teaching (Izadinia, 2013; Kovalčikienė & Bukšnytė-Marmienė, 2021).

Student teachers in the Delta region face additional challenges, including limited resources, inadequate mentorship, and institutional hurdles, such as overcrowded classrooms and diverse student needs. These factors often leave pre-service teachers feeling underprepared and unsupported. Addressing these challenges, through scholarships and broader institutional reforms, can alleviate some of the barriers faced by these aspiring educators (Subrata, 2023; Kang et al 2024). Moreover, digital technologies such as virtual supervision and voice analyzers are emerging as tools to enhance quality assurance in education, providing real-time feedback to improve teaching practices (Mutevere et al., 2024). These technologies can contribute to more effective teacher training by enabling personalized feedback and tracking progress over time (Nicolas et al., 2015; Karam et al., 2021; Eseoghene, 2021).

The challenges faced by student teachers also have broader implications for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being). Supporting the mental and emotional health of student teachers not only improves their teaching effectiveness but also enhances their long-term career satisfaction (Enggar et al., 2024; Ikogho & Igbudu, 2013). This study aims to explore the multifaceted challenges encountered by student teachers during their field experiences. By identifying the obstacles related to cultural identity, professionalism, economic barriers, and institutional support, this research seeks to inform teacher training programs and develop strategies that will help future educators overcome these challenges.

Statement of the Problem

The transition from student to teacher is a pivotal phase in the professional development of educators. However, this journey is often fraught with multifaceted challenges, including emotional and psychological stress, conflicts between professionalism and personal identity, economic barriers, and institutional hurdles. In the Niger Delta region, these issues are compounded by cultural and contextual factors such as grooming standards that may conflict with personal or cultural identity, financial constraints, and the logistical challenges of

balancing academic and practicum responsibilities. Despite the critical role of the teaching practicum in shaping competent educators, there is limited research exploring the intersection of these challenges, particularly within the context of Niger Delta Universities. Furthermore, existing studies often overlook the cultural, economic, and institutional factors unique to this setting, leaving significant gaps in understanding and addressing these issues.

Cultural identity and expression are essential components of personal well-being, and their impact on student teachers can differ based on gender. Both male and female student teachers face challenges related to the balance between professional expectations and cultural identity. For men, the pressure often relates to masculinity and personal appearance, while women face specific gendered grooming expectations. Ultimately, educational institutions must recognize and respect diverse cultural identities to create an inclusive, supportive environment for all student teachers, regardless of gender.

Research Questions

- What are the emotional and psychological challenges faced by student teachers during their teaching practice exercise?
- How do grooming standards and cultural identity affect student teachers' sense of self and professional development in the Niger Delta region?
- What economic and logistical barriers hinder the effectiveness of the teaching practicum for student teachers?
- How do institutional policies and resources at the Universities in the Niger Delta region influence the teaching practice experience?
- What strategies can be implemented to address these challenges and improve the teaching practicum experience in the region?

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a descriptive survey research design, considering that the study examined

emotional, psychological, cultural, logistical, and institutional factors influencing teaching practice experiences. This was considered good because the study explored personal experiences such as stress, anxiety etc, the survey perceptions utilized structured instruments like Likert scales and research involving large populations of 1,450 (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The population of this study was retrieved from records of student teachers from three universities faculty of education who took part in the 2023/2024 teaching practice session in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, specifically, Edo, Delta and Bayelsa States. Consent to participate in

the study was sought from respondents. They were also told that they could withdraw at any stage of the work if they so desired. Ethical approval was also obtained from the Ethical Committee of Delta State University.

(Approval No: RBC/FBMC/DELSU/524 to ensure adherence to ethical standards. A stratified random sampling technique was adopted to select a sample size of 522 student teachers, using a Cochran's formula at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error distributed as follows:

$$n = \text{each university} = 522/3 = 174n$$

Table 1: Demographic Variables (n = 522)

S/N	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender			
1	Male	186	35.6
2	Female	336	64.4
Age			
1	18–22 years	374	71.6
2	23–27 years	111	21.3
3	28 years and above	37	7.1
Academic Level			
1	200 Level	336	64.4
2	300 Level	186	35.6

Instrumentation

Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire in five domains as follows:

The questionnaire was validated by experts in Health Education and educational management for content and construct validity. A reliability test using Cronbach's alpha yielded a coefficient of **0.87**, indicating high internal consistency. A multistage sampling approach was employed:

Stage 1: students' names were arranged alphabetically using the admission registers of each university.

Stage 2: from each university's alphabetical list, odd-numbered students were selected systematically until the required 174 were obtained. A structured questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. Responses were collected over four weeks aided by three research assistants. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages.

Participation was voluntary; informed consent was obtained from all participants.

FINDINGS

Research Question 1: What are the emotional and psychological challenges faced by student teachers during their teaching practice exercise?

Table 2: Emotional and Psychological Experiences of Students

S/N	Emotional and Psychological experiences of students	Always 3	Sometimes 2	Never 1	Total
1.	Anxiety in preparing lesson notes.	278 (53.3%)	72(13.8%)	172(32.9)	522
2.	Pressure to meet teaching practice expectations.	191(36.6%)	289(55.4%)	42(8.0%)	522
3.	Stress from balancing work-life and personal responsibilities.	44(8.6%)	66(12.6%)	412(78.9%)	522
4.	Fear of being judged during teaching practice.	145(27.8%)	142(27.2%)	235(45.0%)	522

The data analyses indicated that anxiety in lesson notes was reported as an always experience (53.3%), while 72 students (13.8%) experienced it sometimes, with 172 students (32.9%) reported never feeling anxious. Pressure to meet teaching practice expectations was predominantly experienced sometimes by 289 students (55.4%), while 191 students (36.6%) always felt pressured, with only 42 students (8.0%) reported never experiencing such pressure. Stress from balancing work-life and personal responsibilities was largely absent among the students, with 412 (78.9%) reporting never

experiencing it. Only 66 students (12.6%) reported experiencing it sometimes, while 44 (8.6%) always experienced this stress. Fear of being judged during teaching practice was experienced always by 145 students (27.8%), sometimes by 142 students (27.2%), and never by 235 students (45.0%).

Research Question 2: How do grooming standards and cultural identity affect student teachers' sense of self and professional development in the Niger Delta region?

Table 3: Cultural Identity and Professionalism Experiences of Students

S/N	Cultural Identity and Professionalism experiences of students	Always	Sometimes	Never	Total
	Do you feel alienated due to grooming standards required by the teaching practice board?	280(53.6%)	120(23.0%)	122(23.4%)	522
	Do you have difficulty reconciling personal and professional identity?	236(45.2%)	277(53.1%)	9(1.7%)	522
	Are you comfortable with the dress code requirements for teaching practice?	177(33.9%)	155(29.7%)	190(36.4%)	522
	Does your institution adapt grooming policies to accommodate diverse cultural identities?	274(52.5%)	235(45.0)	13(2.5%)	522

Table 3 revealed that Alienation due to grooming standards required by the teaching practice board was reported always by 280 students (53.6%), sometimes by 120 students (23.0%), and never by 122 students (23.4%), suggesting a significant level of discomfort among students regarding grooming requirements. Difficulty in reconciling personal and professional identity was experienced always by 236 students (45.2%), sometimes by 277 students (53.1%), and never by only 9 students (1.7%), indicating that most students struggled with balancing their cultural identity and professional expectations. Comfort with dress code requirements for teaching practice was reported always by 177

students (33.9%), sometimes by 155 students (29.7%), and never by 190 students (36.4%), suggesting that opinions on dress code requirements are divided. Institutional adaptation of grooming policies to accommodate diverse cultural identities was reported always by 274 students (52.5%), sometimes by 235 students (45.0%), and never by 13 students (2.5%), indicating that most institutions demonstrated flexibility in grooming policies.

Research Question 3: What economic and logistical barriers hinder the effectiveness of the teaching practicum for student teachers?

Table 4: Teaching Practice Strategies

S/N	Teaching Practice Strategies	Always 3	Sometimes 2	Never 1	Total
1.	Do you use technology-assisted feedback (e.g., recordings, voice analysis) to enhance your teaching skills?	29(5.6%)	143(27.4%)	350(67.0%)	522
2.	Are online platforms or apps used effectively for communication and reporting during your teaching practice sessions?	12(2.3%)	67(12.8%)	443(84.9%)	522
	Does your institution use digital tools to track students' progress and provide personalized feedback?	95(18.2%)	275(52.7%)	152(29.1%)	522
	Do you think modern technology reduces the logistical burden (e.g., commuting, paperwork) of teaching practice?	157(30.1%)	179(34.3%)	186(35.6%)	522

Table 4 presented data analyses on the use of technology-assisted feedback (e.g., recordings, voice analysis) to enhance teaching skills was reported always by only 29 students (5.6%), sometimes by 143 students (27.4%), while the majority (350 students, 67.0%) reported never utilizing such tools, indicating limited adoption of technology-assisted feedback. The effectiveness of online platforms or apps for communication and reporting during teaching practice was reported always by only 12 students (2.3%), sometimes by 67 students (12.8%), and never by 443 students (84.9%), indicating a significant underutilization of digital platforms for communication and reporting. Institutional use of digital tools to track student progress and provide personalized feedback was

acknowledged always by 95 students (18.2%), sometimes by 275 students (52.7%), and never by 152 students (29.1%), indicating that while digital tracking is present, its effectiveness may vary among institutions. The perceived impact of modern technology in reducing the logistical burden (e.g., commuting, paperwork) of teaching practice was reported always by 157 students (30.1%), sometimes by 179 students (34.3%), and never by 186 students (35.6%), reflecting a divided perception on the role of technology in easing logistical challenges.

Research Question 4: How do institutional policies and resources at the Universities in the Niger Delta region influence the teaching practice experience?

Table 5: Economic and Logistical Barriers

S/N	Economic and Logistical Barriers	Always 3	Sometimes 2	Never 1	Total
1.	Difficulty affording transportation to teaching practice locations.	77(14.8%)	264(50.6%)	181(34.7%)	522
2.	Financial strain in maintaining professional attire	24(4.6%)	448(85.4%)	50(9.6%)	522
3.	Challenges balancing teaching commitments with other financial responsibilities.	129(24.7%)	230(44.1%)	163(31.2%)	522
4.	Limited access to teaching resources	233(44.6%)	188(36.1%)	101(19.3%)	522

Table 5 presents data difficulty affording transportation to teaching practice locations was reported always by 77 students (14.8%), sometimes by 264 students (50.6%), and never by 181 students

(34.7%), indicating that transportation costs are a moderate to significant barrier for many students. Financial strain in maintaining professional attire was reported always by 24 students (4.6%), sometimes by 448 students (85.4%), and never by 50 students (9.6%). This suggests that while professional attire is a financial concern for most students, it is not a persistent burden for all. Challenges in balancing teaching commitments with other financial responsibilities were reported always by 129 students (24.7%), sometimes by 230 students (44.1%), and never by 163 students (31.2%),

highlighting that financial constraints affect a large proportion of students. Limited access to teaching resources was reported always by 233 students (44.6%), sometimes by 188 students (36.1%), and never by 101 students (19.3%), indicating that nearly half of the students experience persistent difficulties in accessing necessary teaching materials.

Research Question 5: What strategies can be implemented to address these challenges and improve the teaching practicum experience in the region?

Table 6: Institutional and Administrative Support

S/N	Institutional and Administrative Support	Always 3	Sometimes 2	Never 1	Total
1.	To what extent does your institution provide access to modern teaching technologies (e.g., virtual supervision, voice analyzers)?	270(51.7%)	70(13.4%)	362(69.3%)	522
2.	Do you receive orientation before proceeding to the regular teaching practice?	199(38%)	236(45.2%)	87 (16.7%)	522
3.	Does the institution use virtual supervision models to monitor and support your teaching practice exercise?	99(19.7%)	93(17.8%)	330(63.2%)	522
4.	Have automated tools like voice analyzers been used to give feedback on your classroom communication?	103(19.7%)	74(14.2%)	345(66.1)	522

Table 6 examined the institutional provision of modern teaching technologies (e.g., virtual supervision, voice analyzers) was reported always by 270 students (51.7%), sometimes by 70 students (13.4%), and never by 362 students (69.3%), indicating a gap between availability and accessibility of modern teaching tools. Orientation before proceeding for regular teaching practice was reported always by 199 students (38.0%), sometimes by 236 students (45.2%), and never by 87 students (16.7%), indicating that while orientation is commonly provided, some students may not receive adequate preparation. The use of virtual supervision models to monitor and support teaching practice was reported always by 99 students (19.7%), sometimes by 93 students (17.8%), and never by 330 students (63.2%), showing that virtual supervision is not widely implemented in most institutions. Use of

automated tools (e.g., voice analyzers) for classroom communication feedback was reported always by 103 students (19.7%), sometimes by 74 students (14.2%), and never by 345 students (66.1%), indicating limited use of technology-enhanced evaluation methods.

RESULTS OVERVIEW

Key findings from the data analysis revealed:

1. These findings indicated that anxiety in lesson preparation and pressure to meet expectations are most prevalent, whereas stress from balancing responsibilities is less frequently reported. Fear of judgment seems to be evenly distributed across the response categories.

2. These findings indicated that while institutional policies on grooming may accommodate cultural

diversity, a significant number of students still struggle to align their personal and professional identities. Additionally, dress code requirements appeared to be a contentious issue among students.

3. A gap in the integration of digital tools in teaching practice, with most students reporting low engagement with technology-assisted feedback and communication platforms was implicated. However, there was moderate institutional use of digital tracking tools, and opinions on technology's ability to reduce logistical burdens remain mixed.

4. The study findings suggested that economic factors such as transportation costs professional attire, and financial responsibilities are challenges for students, while limited access to teaching resources further compounds the logistical difficulties of teaching practice.

5. The findings highlighted gaps in institutional support, especially in the implementation of modern teaching technologies and virtual supervision. Although orientation programs are relatively common, there is still room for improvement in preparing students for teaching practice.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study revealed that a proportion of student teachers experience anxiety when preparing lesson notes (53.3%) and feel pressured to meet teaching expectations (36.6% always, 55.4% sometimes). These findings aligned with prior research that suggested that the transition from theory to practice induces self-doubt and stress (Izadinia, 2013; Ikogho & Akpokiniovo, 2025). The emotional exhaustion associated with other aspects of balancing academic teaching, and personal responsibilities was also evident, with a considerable number of student teachers expressing fear of being judged during teaching practice (27.8% always, 27.2% sometimes). These findings reinforced the argument that effective teacher preparation must integrate psychological support mechanisms to help student teachers navigate stress and performance anxiety (Sadler, 2012). However, contrasting studies suggested that anxiety levels can be reduced through reflective teaching practices (Enggar et al., 2024).

Cultural identity on the other hand emerged as a key factor in authenticating teacher education, yet institutional grooming standards are a hindrance to achieving this objective for many student teachers, with 53.6% reporting feelings of exclusion. This finding corroborated Wang (2024) and Smirnova et al. (2018), who argued that policies dismissive of cultural identity can lead to disengagement. Additionally, 45.2% of student teachers reported difficulty reconciling their professional identity. However, studies by Kovalčikienė and Bukšnytė-Marmienė (2021) suggested that institutions that incorporated flexible cultural policies promote stronger professional identities among student teachers. This finding indicated that institutional policies on grooming require further adaptation, as 52.5% of students acknowledged institutional efforts to accommodate diverse cultural identities.

Also, over half of the respondents reported strain in affording transport costs to their posted schools, while a striking 85.4% struggled to maintain professional attire. These findings aligned with Subrata (2023), who suggested financial strain is a major challenge in teacher education, especially in developing countries. While prior research has focused on financial support as a remedy, alternative studies suggested that community partnerships and resource-sharing initiatives can provide more sustainable solutions (Mutevere et al., 2024). By acknowledging these challenges and implementing targeted reforms, schools in the Niger Delta region can create a more supportive and inclusive teaching practice experience for future educators.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made;

1. The University Counseling Centers in conjunction with the Ministry of Education should establish mentorship and counseling programs to help student teachers manage stress, anxiety and fear related to lesson planning and teaching expectations.
2. Educational Institutions in the Niger Delta region should revisit grooming policies to ensure inclusivity and respect for cultural diversity. Sensitivity training for educators and administrators can help foster an environment

where student teachers feel accepted and valued for their individuality.

3. Institutions and stakeholders should provide financial assistance, such as transportation allowances or scholarships. Access to essential teaching materials should be prioritized, possibly through partnerships with NGOs or corporate sponsors.
4. Institutions should invest in digital tools and infrastructure to enhance the teaching practice experience. Virtual supervision models and automated feedback mechanisms should be integrated into the practicum. Orientation programs should be standardized to ensure consistency and effectiveness.
5. Universities can strengthen Quality Assurance Systems and implement evaluation frameworks utilizing supervised machine learning and other digital tools. Provide training on using modern teaching tools and platforms to enhance lesson delivery.

Limitation of Study

The study examined challenges faced by student teachers during their teaching practice. Limitations included unequal access to technology, and the cross-sectional nature of the research. Additionally, institutional variability may limit the generalizability of the findings.

Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

The Research Ethics Statement

The authors hereby confirm that Participants in this study were duly informed of the option to withdraw from the study during and at any point of the study when they wish to. There is also no relevant financial or non-financial interest to disclose or hide.

Conflict of Interest

The authors hereby declare that they have no conflict of interest at all.

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Consent for Publication

All participants gave informed consent for the publication of this work

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