

Reimagining Teacher Preparation in Kenya: Embedding Mentorship and Community Service Learning in TP1 Reform

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ABSTRACT

Teaching Practice 1, currently implemented in Year 2 of Kenya's Bachelor of Education program, is intended to introduce student-teachers to school environments. However, its potential remains underutilized due to unstructured mentorship, limited community engagement, and fragmented supervision. Kenya's teacher education system faces a critical need to reimagine its early practicum phase (TP1) to better prepare pre-service teachers for the complex realities of classroom practice and community engagement. This policy paper proposes a transformative framework that positions mentorship and community service learning as central pillars of TP1, beginning in Year 2 of teacher preparation. Drawing on global best practices—including models from Singapore, New Zealand, and Tanzania—and grounded in Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), the paper outlines a context-sensitive approach that blends educative mentoring, reflective practice, and experiential learning. Stakeholder analysis identifies key actors—mentor teachers, principals, university faculty, and community partners—and proposes capacity-building strategies to support their roles. The paper presents three policy options and recommends a full redesign of TP1 as a non-evaluative, developmental phase supported by trained mentors, community-based projects, and digital reflective tools. A monitoring and evaluation framework is included to guide implementation and assess impact. The proposed reform aims to institutionalize a mentorship culture that fosters professional identity, pedagogical competence, and civic responsibility among future educators. By embedding mentorship and community service learning into TP1, Kenya can cultivate a new generation of teachers who are not only skilled practitioners but also transformative agents within their communities.

Keywords :Teacher preparation, Mentorship, Community service learning, Teaching Practice Phase One (TP1), Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), Teacher education reform, stakeholder engagement.

INTRODUCTION: REFRAMING TP1 IN KENYA'S TEACHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

Mentorship in teacher education is globally recognized as a transformative tool for professional growth, reflective practice, and school-university collaboration. In Kenya, the integration of mentorship into Year 2 Teaching Practice (TP) represents a significant policy shift aimed at improving the quality and consistency of teacher preparation. The Teachers Service Commission (TSC) formalized this shift through its Policy on Mentorship and Coaching in the Teaching Service (2020), which emphasizes professional support, career development, and preventive strategies to enhance teacher conduct and performance. Similarly, the Ministry of Education's Mentorship Policy for Early Learning and Basic Education (2019) underscores mentorship as a critical service for nurturing values, competencies, and ethical citizenship among learners.

Mentorship in teacher education has evolved globally as a structured, evidence-based practice that supports novice teachers through guided reflection, professional modeling, and contextual learning. In high-performing systems such as Finland, mentorship is embedded in practicum experiences, with trained mentors facilitating co-teaching and dialogic feedback (Sahlberg, 2011). Singapore integrates mentorship into its teacher induction programs, emphasizing professional standards and continuous development (Ng, 2013). In South Africa,

mentorship has been used to bridge theory-practice gaps, though challenges persist around mentor training and institutional support (Samuel & Stephens, 2000).

In Kenya, the policy landscape has begun to recognize mentorship as a strategic lever for teacher quality. The TSC Mentorship and Coaching Policy (2020) outlines mentorship as a preventive and developmental strategy for teachers, while the Ministry of Education Mentorship Policy (2019) frames it as a tool for nurturing ethical, competent learners and educators. However, implementation within universities remains uneven. Studies by Ongong'a & Simatwa (2016) and Kafu (2011) highlight the lack of structured mentorship programs, limited mentor preparation, and weak school-university linkages.

Despite these policy advances, the implementation of mentorship in Year 2 TP across Kenyan universities remains fragmented. Each institution has adopted its own approach, often without standardized training, monitoring, or collaboration frameworks. While a few universities have piloted mentor training for school principals and teachers, the majority operate without clear guidelines, resulting in inconsistent mentorship experiences for student teachers. This fragmentation undermines the potential of mentorship to foster reflective practice, professional identity, and school-based learning.

The problem is compounded by limited coordination between universities and placement schools, lack of national standards for mentor selection and training, and absence of robust evaluation mechanisms. As noted in studies on mentorship practices in Kenyan higher education, mentorship programs often exist in rudimentary form, with limited time allocation and unclear expectations. Without a harmonized framework, mentorship risks becoming a symbolic rather than substantive component of teacher preparation.

This paper seeks to address these gaps by analyzing current practices, identifying best models, and proposing a scalable, context-sensitive mentorship framework for Year 2 TP in Kenya.

Historical Evolution of TP1

Teaching Practice Phase One (TP1) was introduced in Kenyan universities as part of a broader effort to bridge theoretical coursework with practical classroom experience. Traditionally placed in Year 2 of the Bachelor of Education program, TP1 was intended to expose student-teachers to school environments early in their training, allowing them to observe, assist, and reflect before taking on full teaching responsibilities in later phases (Kafu, 2011). However, TP1 has remained loosely defined across institutions, with limited national policy guidance on its structure, objectives, or expected outcomes.

To meaningfully reform TP1, it is essential to first understand the historical, institutional, and pedagogical contexts that have shaped its current form. While TP1 was originally envisioned as a scaffolded entry into professional practice, its implementation has been hindered by fragmented policy guidance, limited mentor preparation, and a lack of integration with community-based learning (Kafu, 2011; Ngugi et al., 2020). These challenges reflect deeper systemic tensions between theory and practice, centralization and school autonomy, and academic rigor versus social relevance.

TP1 was introduced to expose student-teachers to school environments early in their training. However, its structure remains loosely defined across institutions (Kafu, 2011). Despite its formative potential, TP1 faces several systemic challenges: Unprepared Mentor Teachers: Many mentor teachers lack formal training in mentorship, resulting in inconsistent support and unclear expectations (Ngugi et al., 2020). Absence of Structured Mentorship Models: TP1 often lacks a pedagogical framework to guide mentor-mentee interactions, leading to passive observation rather than active learning (Republic of Kenya, 2019). Limited Integration of Community Service Learning: Although TP1 offers opportunities for civic engagement, most placements focus narrowly on classroom exposure, missing the chance to link teaching with local development goals and fragmented Monitoring and Evaluation: Universities vary widely in how they supervise, assess, and document TP1 experiences, making it difficult to track impact or ensure quality. (Ngugi et al., 2020)

These gaps have contributed to a disconnect between TP1's intended purpose and its actual implementation, undermining its role as a developmental bridge between coursework and full teaching practice.

Objectives of the study

1. To critically analyze the current implementation of Teaching Practice 1 (TP1) in Kenya and its limitations in mentorship, community engagement, and reflective practice.
2. To draw insights from global best practices in teacher preparation that integrate structured mentorship, community service learning, and digital tools for reflection.
3. To propose a context-sensitive reform framework for TP1 that embeds mentorship, CSL, and digital reflective practice, aligning with Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum and strengthening teacher professional development.

Statement of the Problem

Teaching Practice Phase One (TP1), introduced in Year 2 of Kenya's Bachelor of Education program, was intended to provide early exposure to classroom practice and professional growth. However, TP1 remains largely underutilized, with most placements reduced to passive observation, inconsistent supervision, and fragmented mentorship. Despite national policies emphasizing mentorship as a tool for teacher development—the Teachers Service Commission Policy on Mentorship and Coaching (2020) and the Ministry of Education Mentorship Policy (2019)—implementation in TP1 is uneven, with mentor teachers rarely trained and community service learning overlooked. This gap undermines TP1's potential to link theory to practice, cultivate reflective professionalism, and nurture civic responsibility. Unless mentorship and community service learning are embedded as central pillars, TP1 risks remaining a symbolic exercise rather than a transformative developmental phase. Reimagining TP1 is therefore critical to preparing competent, reflective, and socially responsive teachers aligned with Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Comparative Insights from Global Practice

To strengthen Kenya's Teaching Practice One (TP1) program, it is essential to draw inspiration from global models that have successfully embedded mentorship into teacher preparation

Globally, mentorship in Teaching Practice 1 (TP1) has emerged as a cornerstone of teacher preparation, though its design varies by context. In the United Kingdom, mentorship is embedded within Initial Teacher Education (ITE), where trainee teachers are paired with school-based mentors who are trained to provide structured coaching, feedback, and support throughout their practicum (Hobson & Malderez, 2013). This approach highlights the importance of recognizing mentors as professionals with explicit roles in shaping future teachers. To meaningfully reform TP1, it is essential to understand the historical, institutional, and pedagogical contexts that have shaped its current form.

New Zealand: Educative Mentoring and Induction

Globally, countries such as Singapore, New Zealand, and Tanzania have reimagined early teaching practice as a mentorship-driven, community-embedded experience. Singapore's SIMA model emphasizes instructional coaching and mentor training (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), while New Zealand's educative mentoring approach integrates reflective practice and cultural responsiveness (Timperley, 2001).

New Zealand's approach centers on educative mentoring, which goes beyond emotional support to focus on professional growth: Induction and Mentoring Guidelines: All provisionally certified teachers (PCTs) must be supported by trained mentors who guide them toward full certification, enhanced Induction and mentoring (EIM): University-based mentors collaborate with school mentors to offer structured feedback, classroom observations, and reflective practice. There is also the face-to-face and online workshops for mentors and mentees, emphasizing culturally responsive practice and well-being.

Kenya's TP1 can benefit from New Zealand's dual mentorship model, pairing school-based mentors with external academic mentors, and its emphasis on structured induction.

In Finland, mentorship emphasizes reflective practice and the integration of research into teaching. Student teachers are guided by mentors who help them bridge theoretical coursework with classroom realities, fostering a culture of inquiry and professional identity formation (Jyrhämä et al., 2008).

Similarly, in the United States, mentorship is facilitated through clinical partnerships, such as Professional Development Schools (PDS), which ensure a close alignment between university coursework and school-based practice. These partnerships often involve co-teaching, systematic observation, and feedback cycles that strengthen both practice and pedagogy (Darling-Hammond, 2014).

Beyond country-specific approaches, several international mentorship models provide valuable insights that can inform teacher mentorship in Kenya. For example, the Urban Teacher Residency (UTR) model in the United States integrates a year-long mentorship with graduate-level coursework, closely pairing aspiring teachers with experienced mentors in high-need districts (Guha, Hyler, & Darling-Hammond, 2016; Chu & Wang, 2022), ensuring that novice teachers receive both practical guidance and theoretical grounding simultaneously. Similarly, the Teachers Mentoring Teachers program developed at Harvard emphasizes peer mentoring, collaborative lesson planning, and constructive feedback, fostering a culture of professional dialogue and continuous learning. This integrated approach strengthens the link between theory and practice and helps recruit—and retain—diverse, qualified educators (Guha et al., 2016; Chu & Wang, 2022).

Singapore: Instructional Mentoring for Pedagogical Excellence

Singapore's mentorship model is highly structured, with cooperating teachers offering stepwise guidance that gradually shifts responsibility from observation to independent teaching. This scaffolding process builds novice teachers' confidence and competence in a supportive environment (Ng, 2012). In South Africa, mentorship extends beyond instructional skills to include the socio-cultural dimensions of teaching, ensuring that pre-service teachers learn to respond to the realities of diverse learners and community contexts (Botha & Rens, 2018).

Singapore's Instructional Mentoring Programme (IMP) is a structured, school-embedded model that emphasizes pedagogical growth through:- SIMA Framework: The Singapore Instructional Mentoring Approach focuses on: Promoting Mutual Growth: Both mentor and mentee benefit. Relationship Building: Trust and collaboration are central. Localising Mentoring: Tailored to school contexts- Mentor Preparation: Mentors undergo formal training under the Skillful Teaching and Enhanced Mentoring (STEM) program. Embedded Practice: Mentoring is integrated into daily teaching, not treated as an add-on.

Tanzania: School-Based In-Service Teacher Training (SITT)

Tanzania's SITT model, is transforming mentorship through: Peer Coaching and Team Teaching: Teachers mentor each other through collaborative lesson planning and classroom practice. Embedded Professional Development: Training occurs within schools, making it continuous and context-sensitive. Gender-Inclusive Leadership: SITT promotes women's participation in mentorship and decision-making. Use of Local Resources: Teachers innovate with locally available materials, enhancing relevance and sustainability.

Tanzania's SITT model embeds mentorship within peer-led, school-based professional development (HELVETAS, 2020). These models demonstrate that when mentorship is intentional and community engagement is structured, early teaching practice becomes a powerful site for professional growth.

Taken together, these global experiences demonstrate that effective TP1 mentorship requires structured guidance, trained mentors, integration of theory and practice, and sensitivity to cultural contexts. For Kenya and other African systems, key lessons include the need to professionalize mentorship through policy and capacity building, strengthen university-school partnerships, scaffold student teacher responsibilities, and cultivate reflective practice that is responsive to the challenges of large classes, resource constraints, and inclusive education.

Australia Models in Teacher Mentorship

The Future-Focused Mentoring (FfM) model in Australia reframes mentorship by nurturing essential intellectual virtues, such as curiosity, humility, open-mindedness, and tenacity, through a structured Reflect-Reimagine—

Realise cycle that emphasizes relational partnerships and adaptability (Larsen, Jensen-Clayton, Curtis, Loughland, & Nguyen, 2023; AISNSW, 2023).

Creative approaches, such as Australia's Bell Shakespeare Mentorship, demonstrate the value of arts-based pedagogy in stimulating creativity, critical thinking, and learner engagement. Additionally, digital mentorship platforms—adopted globally by initiatives such as Teach Educator and the New Teacher Center—expand opportunities for professional guidance beyond geographical boundaries, enabling rural and remote schools to access high-quality mentorship. The Future-Focused Mentoring (FfM) model in Australia further enriches mentorship practice by cultivating intellectual virtues such as imagination, courage, and open-mindedness, which are crucial for adaptive teaching in dynamic educational contexts.

These international models collectively highlight the importance of: Structured, sustained mentorship, with clearly defined mentor roles and ongoing support. Interdisciplinary professional learning, blending coursework with hands-on application. Relational trust and emotional intelligence, fostering meaningful mentor-mentee bonds. Adaptive, future-oriented dispositions, enabling teachers to thrive amid evolving challenges.

For Kenya, these models underscore the importance of structured frameworks with clearly defined mentor roles, sustained professional development opportunities, and the integration of emotional intelligence and relational trust into mentorship practices. Furthermore, leveraging technology-enabled mentorship could address disparities in access to experienced mentors, particularly for teachers in remote and underserved areas. By adapting these global best practices to Kenya's cultural and policy context, the teacher preparation process can be strengthened to produce confident, competent, and reflective practitioners.

Kenya can adopt SIMA's emphasis on instructional mentoring and mentor training to ensure TP1 mentors are pedagogically equipped and context-aware. From Tanzania SITT's embedded, peer-driven model aligns well with Kenya's decentralized school system and can be adapted for TP1 to foster collaborative learning.

Policy Opportunity and relevance for Kenya

Kenya's Teacher Education Framework (Republic of Kenya, 2019) and the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) reforms offer a timely opportunity to reposition TP1 as a learning-first phase. By institutionalizing mentorship and community service learning, TP1 can become a cornerstone of teacher development—cultivating reflective, socially responsive educators equipped for the complexities of modern classrooms

TP1 represents a critical opportunity to bridge theory and practice in teacher education. Yet, many mentor teachers lack clarity on their roles, and student-teachers often engage passively in school placements. This paper advocates for a redesign of TP1 as a mentorship and community service learning phase, drawing on global best practices and aligned with Kenya's Teacher Education Framework and CBC reforms (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Ngugi et al., 2020; Republic of Kenya, 2019).

These global models underscore the value of establishing structured mentorship frameworks with clearly defined roles, fostering continuous professional development, and nurturing emotional intelligence alongside relational trust. They also highlight the potential of technology-enabled mentorship to extend quality support to teachers in remote and underserved regions.

To guide strategic decision-making, three policy pathways for reforming TP1 in Kenya. Each option is evaluated based on feasibility, scalability, and alignment with national education priorities.

The Minimal Reform Orientation-Based Mentorship, in this approach involves basic mentor orientation workshops and informal student-teacher placements. While low-cost and easy to implement, it lacks pedagogical depth and fails to address systemic gaps in mentorship quality and community engagement. Then we have the moderate Reform Structured Mentorship and Service Integration. This model introduces modular mentor training, reflective tools (e.g., journals), and embedded community service learning projects. It fosters professional growth and civic engagement while remaining institutionally manageable.

The last option is the Transformative Reform Full Redesign of TP1. This comprehensive model positions, TP1

as a non-evaluative, developmental phase. It includes a national mentorship framework, trained mentor teachers and principals, community co-teaching projects, digital portfolios, and a monitoring and evaluation system. The recommendation is that transformative model is best suited to address Kenya's teacher development goals and institutionalize mentorship as a core component of practicum.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, particularly the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasizes that learning occurs through guided interaction with more knowledgeable others. In the context of TP1, the mentor serves as the knowledgeable other, scaffolding the novice teacher's development from observation to independent practice. Additionally, Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory informs the design of mentorship as a cycle of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation, ensuring that practice is continually refined. These theories justify mentorship as a dynamic, relational, and iterative process that enables student teachers to internalize both pedagogical skills and professional dispositions.

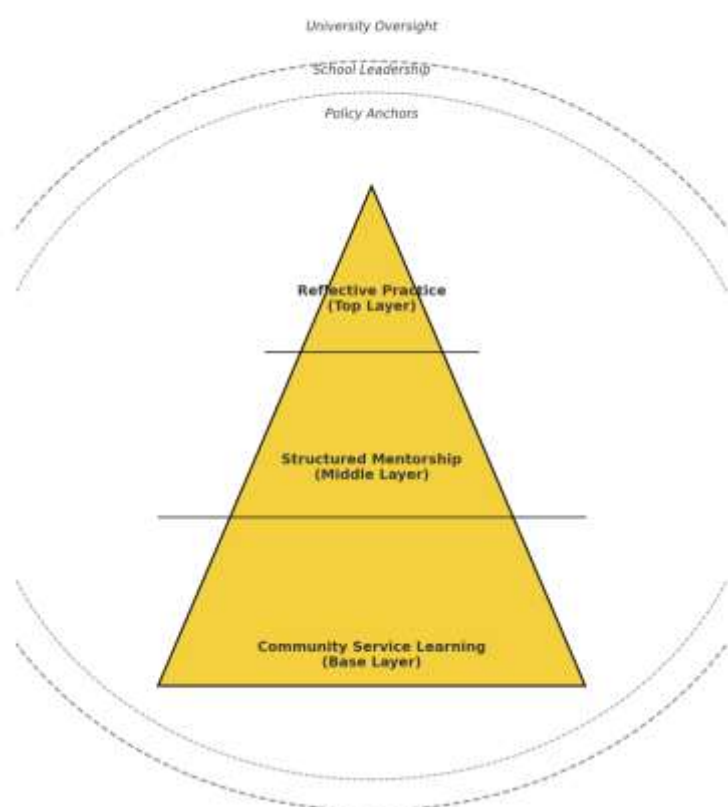
Theoretical foundations such as Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and Schön's Reflective Practitioner Model provide a lens for understanding mentorship as a scaffolded, relational process. These models emphasize the importance of guided learning, feedback, and professional identity formation—elements that are often missing in fragmented mentorship systems.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This conceptual framework clarifies how structured mentorship and community service learning (CSL) operate as interconnected pillars within TP1, working together to cultivate reflective, competent, and socially responsive teachers. Drawing from proven global models and adapting them to Kenya's educational realities, the framework positions TP1 not merely as a practicum period but as a transformative phase of professional formation.

Fig 1: Online generated for adaption and use 2025

Conceptual Framework: TP1 Mentorship & Community Service Learning



The framework can be envisioned as a three-tiered triangle: Base Layer – Community Service Learning: Student-teachers engage in authentic projects such as literacy drives, environmental clubs, or health awareness campaigns, linking teaching to community transformation. Middle Layer, – Structured Mentorship: Mentor teachers provide scaffolded support through classroom modeling, constructive feedback, and co-teaching opportunities.

Top Layer, Reflective Practice: Experiences from mentorship and CSL are synthesized through structured reflection, enabling student-teachers to refine their professional identity and encircling the triangle are three concentric support rings: University Oversight: Ensures curriculum alignment, conducts supervisor visits, and applies consistent assessment rubrics. School Leadership: Principals coordinate placements, prepare mentors, and sustain a culture of professional support. Policy Anchors: The National Teacher Education Framework and CBC goals provide strategic direction, ensuring the model's relevance, scalability, and sustainability.

This integrated approach aligns with international best practices while being responsive to Kenya's teacher preparation needs, ensuring TP1 serves as a foundation for lifelong professional growth.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a desk review methodology, drawing on existing literature, policy documents, and institutional reports to analyze the current state of mentorship in Kenyan teacher education. Key sources include:

1. National policy documents such as the TSC Mentorship and Coaching Policy (2020) and the Ministry of Education Mentorship Policy (2019)
2. University Teaching Practice guidelines and mentorship pilot reports
3. Peer-reviewed studies on mentorship models in sub-Saharan Africa and globally
4. Comparative frameworks from international teacher education systems (e.g., Finland, Singapore, South Africa)

The desk review enables a critical synthesis of existing knowledge, identification of gaps, and formulation of recommendations grounded in both global best practices and local realities. No primary data collection was undertaken at this stage; however, findings will inform future fieldwork, stakeholder consultations, and pilot program design.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that Teaching Practice 1 (TP1) in Kenya is constrained by fragmented implementation, weak mentorship structures, limited community engagement, and poor university–school coordination. Although national policies emphasize mentorship, their application within TP1 has been largely symbolic, leaving student-teachers with limited professional growth opportunities.

Evidence from global best practices demonstrates that structured mentorship, reflective practice, and community service learning, when supported by digital tools, can transform early practicum into a developmental phase that nurtures both pedagogical competence and civic responsibility.

To align TP1 with the Competency-Based Curriculum, this study proposes a reform framework that embeds mentorship, CSL, and digital reflection, supported by national mentorship standards and stronger university–school partnerships. Reframing TP1 as developmental rather than evaluative will enable Kenya to prepare teachers who are effective practitioners, reflective professionals, and socially responsive educators.

Teaching Practice 1 (TP1) in Kenya must shift from an evaluative exercise to a developmental phase anchored in structured mentorship and community service learning. Establishing national mentorship standards, embedding CSL, and strengthening university–school partnerships will better align TP1 with the Competency-Based Curriculum. Such reforms can prepare a new generation of teachers who are both effective practitioners and socially responsive educators.

FINDINGS

Fragmented Implementation of TP1

Universities run TP1 without national standards, resulting in inconsistent mentorship, supervision, and assessment practices.

Mentor teachers are often unprepared, leading to passive observation rather than active professional learning (Kafu, 2011; Ngugi et al., 2020).

Policy, Practice gap in Mentorship

While the TSC Mentorship and Coaching Policy (2020) and MoE Mentorship Policy (2019) recognize mentorship as central to teacher development, their application within TP1 remains symbolic and uneven.

Limited Integration of Community Service Learning (CSL)

TP1 placements emphasize classroom exposure, overlooking opportunities for student-teachers to connect with local communities through service-learning projects that could foster civic engagement.

Weak University School Partnerships

Coordination between universities, principals, and mentor teachers is minimal, resulting in poor alignment between coursework and practicum.

Global Evidence on Effective Mentorship

International models (e.g., New Zealand, Singapore, Tanzania, Finland) demonstrate that structured, educative mentorship combined with reflective practice and community engagement can transform early practicum into a powerful developmental phase.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop a National Mentorship Framework, define clear competencies, roles, and standards for mentor teachers and institutionalize mentor training programs, supported by the Teachers Service Commission and Ministry of Education.
2. Embed Community Service Learning (CSL) in TP1, requiring student-teachers to engage in structured, school, community projects that connect pedagogy with civic responsibility.
3. Strengthen university, school partnerships, formalize collaboration agreements where principals, mentor teachers, and university supervisors jointly support TP1 implementation.
4. Leverage digital tools for reflective practice, provide platforms for student-teachers to maintain digital teaching portfolios, journals, and peer dialogue logs to enhance reflective learning.

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