



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH
(Scholarly Peer Review Publishing System)

EXAMINING THE ROLE OF THE MENTOR IN TEACHER EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE.

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ABSTRACT

There have been reforms in teacher education in Zimbabwe. The reforms were intended to improve the quality of teachers. The reforms in teacher education have resulted in primary teacher education colleges adopting a new model of teacher education. The model is the 2-5-2 model. The model created a new role for mentors in teacher education as students are out on teaching practice for most of their training period. A study was carried out to examine the role of the mentor in teacher education in Zimbabwe. The study used the qualitative methodology and the case study design. Two primary schools were conveniently selected. A total of twelve mentors and twelve student teachers responded to open ended questionnaires. The study observed that differences in ages between mentors and student teachers were at times marginal. It was also observed that the relationship between the mentors and student teachers was mostly free and open, and at times a parent/child relationship depending on age difference. There appeared to be no clear system of selecting mentors. When it came to models of mentoring, there was no specific model that appeared to be followed, as the model followed was a combination of the apprenticeship model and the competence based model. Whilst most student teachers, appreciated the role of the mentor there were cases where they felt that some mentors were taking advantage of them. It was also observed that mentors lacked training in mentoring and this compromised their roles in teacher education. The study ends with the recommendations that the selection of mentors in schools should be rationalised and that there is need to conduct a similar study at national level.

Key words: Mentor, protégé, mentee, student teacher, models, teacher education, relationship.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The models of teacher education have evolved over the decades in Zimbabwe. They have evolved from two years of training, to three years, to four years and back to three years training for primary school teachers. At some stage in the



early 1980s the government of Zimbabwe followed two models of training primary school teachers. One model trained teachers in three years and the other model trained teachers in four years. The major differences in the two models were that the three year programme was biased towards theory as student teachers spent most of their time at college. The four year model placed emphasis on learning on the job. From the two models, there emerged a fusion of the two that produced the 2-5-2 model. The model represents the terms student teachers spend at college and on teaching practice, thus the first two terms and the last two terms are spent at college, while the five denotes the terms that are spent on teaching practice. This is a model that has been adopted by all teachers colleges that train primary school teachers in Zimbabwe.

The adoption of the 2-5-2 model of teacher education by teachers' colleges created a new role for trained and experienced teachers. This is the role of mentoring. In other programmes like the Zimbabwe Integrated Teacher Education Course (ZINTEC) the school head had to play the most critical role in terms of assessment of the student teacher. The introduction of the ZINTEC programme was an innovative way of training teachers. This was a way of training teachers through the Open & Distance Learning (ODL) model. The current model of teacher education has elements of the ZINTEC programme as it places emphasis on the apprenticeship model of training teachers, which in turn emphasizes the role of the mentor in skills development.

The role of mentoring in skills development is contained in its definition. Blackwell (1989) defines mentoring as a process by which a person of superior rank, special achievements and prestige, counsel, guide and facilitate the intellectual and or career development of persons identified as protégés. This definition is supported by Anderson (1987) who also views mentoring as a nurturing process in which a more skilled or more experienced person serving as a role model teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional and or personal development. The two definitions highlight the role of the mentor as noted above. Of note is the need for the mentor to be skilled and specialised in the area he/she is mentoring.

Teacher education takes centre stage in most developing countries. Concerns for education are premised on the assumption that both primary and secondary education contribute to the development of human capital. Considering the link between education and development such assumptions have a strong base. As such, education at both levels plays a pivotal role in both social and economic development. de Kadt (2009) observed that in South Africa for example, the quality of education has been compromised by a number of factors which included poor curricula, poor teachers and lack of supervision among other problems. It is important to note that teachers have a role to play in contributing to quality education and development. The poor teachers referred to above can be the results of many factors that include poor training methods and to some extent failure of the education system to attract high calibre students to train as teachers. On a similar note, Bloch (2009) identifies lack of subject knowledge and under-qualification as the major impediments in the performance of teachers in South Africa. This brings in key issues in the training of teachers at colleges. First we have to be concerned about those who teach the teachers and secondly we have to be concerned with teacher development mechanisms when newly qualified teachers are deployed for teaching, and thirdly we also have to be concerned with the extent to which reforms in teacher education have contributed to improvements in education.

Statement of the problem

The problems affecting development in Africa are varied. Some of them are attributed to lack of skills, and lack of relevance of the education curriculum. At the same time, there are global concerns for quality education. In an attempt to address some these problems teacher education has come under scrutiny. There have been reforms in teacher education in Zimbabwe. Such reforms were intended to improve teacher education. The reforms include the adoption of the 2-5-2 model of teacher education. This model places emphasis on the role of the mentor in teacher education. It is important that we interrogate the role of the mentor in producing a quality teacher. The statement of the problem can therefore be in question form: How have mentors played their roles in teacher education?



Purpose of the study

Mentors now play a very crucial role in teacher education in Zimbabwe. The introduction of the mentor in the training of teachers is a development among others aimed at improving the quality of education. It is important that the role of the mentor in teacher education is interrogated. The purpose of the study is therefore to examine the role of mentors in teacher education in relation to producing a quality teacher.

Objectives of the study

- To identify how mentors are selected.
- To describe the relevance of the mentors' qualifications and experience.
- To explore areas that mentors assist their protégés at school.
- To establish the relationship between mentor and student teachers.
- To examine the contribution of mentorship to quality education.

Research questions

To find answers to the main research question the study sought to find answers to the following research questions:

- How are the mentors selected?
- What are the qualifications and experience of the mentors?
- How do mentors assist their protégé in schools?
- What are the challenges associated with the mentor and protégé relationship?
- Has the introduction of mentorship improved the quality of teachers and education?
- What mentorship model is being used in teacher education in Zimbabwe?

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The study reviewed literature in the area of teacher education. It also identified and discussed different models of mentoring and attempts being made to make them applicable to education.

Mentoring: the concept

To explain the concept mentoring we begin by examining the definition of mentoring as given by the University of Cambridge. It defines mentoring as a system of semi-structured guidance one person shares their knowledge, skills and experience to assist others to progress in their own lives and careers

(<http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/hr/ppd/pdp/mentoring/what/>). Rhodes and Dubois (2006) define mentoring in terms of its functions. According to them mentoring provides a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement. There are a number of aspects that



stand out as we make an attempt to conceptualise mentoring. These are aspects to do with developing the individual in different facets of life. In that regard, mentoring can be used in education not only for training purposes, but for the development of those who are already trained and practising. Mentoring as a process is premised on the understanding that skills and attitudes have to be improved and passed from one generation to the other. Shadiow (1996) observes that mentoring in addition to providing professional guidance; it demonstrates a commitment to education and hope for the future.

In describing mentoring, Shea (1992) brings out features that characterise mentoring. For Shea (1992) mentoring is characterised by investment of time, knowledge and effort through a relationship of helping, caring, sharing and developing. All these are done with the aim of promoting the protégé's personal growth, knowledge, and skills. In that respect mentoring has to go through different stages and processes in order for it to provide continued professional growth. These stages include the need to develop rapport, setting goals and establishing the means of reaching these goals. Establishing rapport is very important in any relationship as it enables the mentor and protégé to develop trust and establish confidentiality. Such elements of a relationship are critical in goal attainment.

In the same vein, the Baylor University's Community Mentoring for Adolescent Development (http://www.mentoring.org/downloads/mentoring_428.pdf) identifies four stages of mentoring a relationship. According to them at the first stage, the mentor and protégé "become acquainted and informally clarify their common interests, shared values, and future goals and dreams". This is a stage that is concerned with establishing common ground between the two and as such is very much similar to the stage as noted by Shea (1992). The other stages include communication of expectations. This is very much similar to goal setting as noted above. The third stage is the actual process on accomplishing the actual purpose of the mentoring, which in a way is similar to the stage on reaching goals and the final stage is closure which leads to the redefining of the relationship between the mentor and mentee.

In addition to the above functions and processes, as noted by Anderson (1987) in his definition of mentoring, mentoring involves the process of nurturing, role modelling and the ability to develop a sustaining continuous relationship. The processes should be able to promote the key mentoring functions. Within the context of mentoring in education, the stages should enable the mentor and mentee to successfully perform mentoring functions. Such mentoring functions include professional development, teaching, class management, and assessment of pupils.

The purposes of mentoring in education

The purposes of mentoring in education can actually be derived from the definition of the term. Some definitions as noted above explain mentoring in terms of the functions it performs in education. These include the definition by Anderson (1987) who describes mentoring as "a nurturing process". Nurturing as a process involves providing guidance and advice. To focus on guidance and advice as the central purpose of mentoring seems to ignore the central aim of teaching and learning. Mentoring is therefore expected to contribute to the core business of education, thus improvement in teaching and learning, through human development and professional development. The term professional development as explained by Fish (1995) focuses on providing education to the mentees and newly qualified teachers that equips them with the autonomy to judge and take action and decisions that are informed in the best interest of those whom they are in the business to serve. In other words, in order to achieve these there are skills, values, norms and attitudes of the trade that have to be developed in student teachers and newly qualified teachers. From this it can be noted that if professional development is to serve its intended purpose in education student teachers and newly qualified teachers have to develop an understanding of the pupils they teach, at the same time develop an appreciation of the diversity of the pupils' background and the heterogeneous nature of the pupils cultures.



On the other hand, professional development enables the student teachers and newly qualified teachers to expand knowledge and skills in teaching. According to BusinessDictionary.com professional development helps build and maintain morale of staff members. In addition to that, professional development prepares newly qualified teachers and student teachers for challenges that are associated with the professional, at the same time giving them opportunities to proffer possible solutions to these problems. According to Edutopia.org professional development enables teachers to learn from each other, at the same time keeping them up-to-date with new approaches in teaching and new technology.

Mentoring models: The Apprenticeship model

There are different models that have been adopted by organisations as a means of training personnel. These include the apprenticeship model, the competence based model, the reflective model, the developmental model, resource-based mentoring, one-on-one mentoring, group mentoring, training based mentoring and executive mentoring. The first four models of mentoring tend to focus on how the mentee benefits from the mentoring. The last group of models focuses on the process of interaction and who is involved. The Apprenticeship model, is viewed as the traditional model of mentoring. Apprenticeship model is derived from how people were trained in different industrial trades. An apprenticeship is the training in an art, trade, or craft under a legal agreement that defines the duration and conditions of the relationship between master and apprentice (The Encyclopedia Britannica, 2013). On the Apprenticeship model Kerry and Mayes (1995) observed that the student teacher learns how to teach and manage classes. Nielsen and Kvale (1999) observed that the apprenticeship model is characterised by: participation in a community of practice; professional identity; learning through imitation of the mentor; and the quality of the work is evaluated through practice. The apprenticeship model emphasizes learning by doing and observing and emulating others doing it. It entails learning from experienced teachers. The 2-5-2 model has the characteristics of the apprenticeship model, as the student teacher is attached to an experienced teacher and at the same time is responsible for teaching some of the subjects in the curriculum. In this regard, the student teacher under the apprenticeship model is like an apprentice in some form of industry where he/she learns the skills of the trade (teaching) in a real classroom situation, with real pupils and applying proper classroom approaches. Under the apprenticeship model the student teacher views the experienced teacher as a model. Within the context of the apprenticeship model as noted by Rogoff (1990) in cognitive apprenticeship the student is able to gain knowledge from those who are more experienced in the community through participating in on-going daily routines and activities, which encourages cross-cohort relationships critical to developing norms and values [Workplacementoring.co:http://apprenticeship.nsc.ca/mentoring.course.Introduction.pdf](http://workplacementoring.co/http://apprenticeship.nsc.ca/mentoring.course.Introduction.pdf): observes that apprentice benefits include fast-track apprentice learning curve; improves performance quality; prepares apprentice for industry certification; promotes benefits of lifelong learning; helps set realistic career goals and pathway; and builds foundation for future for future mentorship.

The apprenticeship model of mentoring is therefore characterised by how human beings learn through modelling. It appears to support social learning theories by social psychologists like Albert Bandura. Bandura advanced the social learning theory in which he advocated for learning through modelling. Such modelling involves observing others. Like with the apprenticeship model of mentoring, Bandura's social learning theory has the following factors that are key to the success of learning through modelling: the ability of the learner to pay attention; the ability remember and retain what has been observed or learned; the ability to reproduce what has been learnt from the model; and lastly, there should be the motivation to imitate the model. To this end, the relationship between the mentor and protégé becomes critical.

The apprenticeship model has its own limitations as a model of providing teacher education. Such problems are related to the selection of the mentors. If the mentors do not have the requisite skills that they should share with the mentee, this is most likely to have a negative impact on the end product (the teacher to be produced). In that regard a mentor who is lazy and not committed is most likely to pass these vices to the mentee. If student teachers are exposed to teachers of a poor quality in their apprenticeship chances of them becoming bad teachers are high (Stones, 1988).



The competence based model

As the term implies, during the teacher education programme the student teacher and the mentor have to focus on the development of competencies that will assist the student to become a competent teacher. The focus is on helping the student teachers to acquire professional qualifications in teaching practice. The competencies that have to be developed are functional competencies; personal competencies; and meta-competencies (Cheetham and Chivers, 1998). Within the context of these competencies there are at least four aspects that we are concerned with in the development of the student teacher. These are the professional knowledge base of the student teacher, teaching skills, lesson evaluation and assessment of pupils' work (Maynard and Furlong, 1992) (Edwards and Collison, 1996). The role of the mentor within the context of the competence model is that the mentor becomes the coach and the student teachers are given responsibilities over their class. Such an arrangement enables the student teachers to teach as they learn and learn as they teach. This promotes the student teachers chances of trying their own ideas. If the student teachers are to develop the competencies noted above it is important that they have full control and responsibilities of their classes with the mentor coming in as a coach. The metaphor of a coach is important in that the coach in a football team assists players during training, and on the day of the match the players are on the field for the 90 minutes on their own. The players take responsibility for what goes on during the 90 minutes of play, whilst the coach can come in with ideas that may help the player at half time the responsibility to perform is the player's. The focus on competencies is premised on the understanding that they are predictors of future performance and success (McClelland, 1973). Through the model student teachers are expected to apply the knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviours, and perform critical teaching tasks (Ennis, 2008). The mentors in both models are facilitators of learning.

Mentoring at school level can be done by senior teachers and school heads. Studies by Chiwore (1995) observed that student teachers who were mentored by school heads as they were also leaders who had the welfare of the student teachers at heart, tended to also acquire leadership skills. As such the mentoring provided by school heads was seen as essential as it provided direction and feedback, and their contact with school heads provided both professional competencies at the same time helping the student teachers to acquire administrative and management skills. However, the challenges of having school heads in the present model of teacher education as mentors is most likely to impact negatively on the training of teachers. It should be noted that the presence of the mentor to supervise and monitor the student teacher is very critical. In that regard the school heads, apart from providing instructional leadership they have to perform administrative and management functions. Such functions by their nature entail that the student who is mentored by a school head is alone most of the time, taking full responsibility of a class. In such cases the possibility of student teachers being treated as relief teachers is very high.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used the qualitative research methodology. The methodology had the advantage of giving the respondents the opportunity to freely express their views about mentoring of student teachers on teaching practice and the practice of teacher education. The study used the case study design. This allowed the researcher to focus on small units of analysis that helped to explain the role of mentors in supervising student teachers on teaching practice. This also allowed the researcher to handle manageable data. The sample for the study was conveniently selected. The researcher selected two primary schools for the study. One of the schools was in the Mufakose Education District of Harare and the other one was in the Chegutu Education District of Mashonaland West. These were selected on the basis of easy accessibility to the researcher. The school in Harare was a government primary school and the one in Chegutu was a church-related school. The total number of respondents was twenty four. These were comprised of twelve student teachers and twelve mentors. Data was collected through the use of open-ended questionnaires. These acted like interviews as respondents were able to express their views unlike with structured questionnaires.



Data presentation and analysis

The bio-data of the respondents is presented in tabular form for easy analysis. The data from the second section of the questionnaire focusing on mentoring is presented qualitatively. The data is then discussed and analyzed on the basis of the themes that emerged from the responses by the mentors and student teachers.

Table 1: Respondents by gender

Respondents	Male	Female	Total	% Male	% Female	% Total
Mentors	2	10	12	17	83	100
Student Teachers	4	8	12	33	77	10

The table above shows that 17% of the mentors were male and 83% were female. This shows that the number of mentors in the two primary schools was skewed in favour of females. For the student teachers 33% were male and 77 % were female, once again demonstrating a gender imbalance in favour of females. It is difficult to measure the extent to which gender affects the mentors' effectiveness in mentoring student teachers on teaching practice. There are also arguments to the effect that effectiveness on mentoring is at times affected by gender. It is often argued that our attitudes, opinions and values are often times influenced by gender (Turner, 1996).

Table 2 (a): Respondents by age

Age range	Mentors	%	Student teachers	%
26-30	1	8	5	42
31-35	5	42	4	33
36-40	1	8	3	25
41-45	3	25	0	0
46 and above	2	17	0	0
Total	12	100	12	100

The table above shows that there was only one mentor (8%) in the 26-30 age range, five (42%) were in the 31-35 age range, one (8%) in the 36-40 age range, three (25%) in the 41-45 age range and two (17%) were in the 46 and above age range. As for the student teachers five (42%) were in the 26-30 age range, four (33%) were in the 31-35 age range, three



(25%) were in the 36-40 age range and there were no student teachers above forty years of age. The table shows that most of the mentors were in the 31-35 years age range, whereas most of the student teachers were in the 26-30 years age range. However, the table also shows that in some cases there was not much difference between the ages of the mentors and the student teachers. This could be a positive development in teacher education in many respects, considering the discourse surrounding age and mentoring. Studies by Hagger and McIntyre (1994) concluded that young mentors were better than old mentors. According to them, young mentors had the advantage that they were still fresh from college and always have the enthusiasm to improve themselves and try new ideas. At the same time older mentors have the experience to share with student teachers and newly qualified teachers.

Academic and professional qualifications

Most of the student teachers had O' level academic qualifications and only three had A 'level qualifications. This is understandable, as the minimum qualification for one to train as a primary school teacher in Zimbabwe is five O' level subjects including Mathematics and English. As for the mentors, eleven (92 %) indicated that they had a Diploma in Education and only one (8%) had a Bachelor of Education degree. The Diploma in Education is the minimum qualification to teach in Zimbabwe. Low professional qualifications are most likely to affect the quality and effectiveness of the mentors. Sprinthall (1980) observed that mentors who had low qualifications were most likely to be less responsible in their mentoring responsibilities.

The role of the mentor

The mentors were asked to identify what they did as mentors in their effort to assist student teachers on teaching practice. Some of the mentors described their role as that of providing exemplary teaching. Apart from teaching, some mentors viewed their role as that of advising student teachers on different aspects of the profession and social life as well. In that regard, they saw themselves as providing the student with learning through mentor's practice. Such practice included how the mentor planned the lesson and delivered it. On the other hand some mentors viewed their role as that of advisor, guide, and supervisor. It is important to note that all the mentors in the study did not occupy administrative and management positions in their schools since they were not school heads or deputy school heads. Supervision is key to the continued development of newly qualified teachers and student teachers. Much depends on the nature of supervision. It should be the supervision that caters for both the mentor and mentee's needs. Focusing on the student teacher's weaknesses during supervision if not professionally handled may contribute to destroying the student teacher's self-esteem and confidence. Supervision at this stage should be handled with the care it deserves. The greatest challenge for mentors in this regard is their lack of supervisory skills, as they were all classroom practitioners.

The other functions that emerged from the mentors included assisting the student teacher on acquiring skills of class management, and monitoring the work of the student teacher. Monitoring involves collection of information for specific purposes. The mentor has to collect information for at least five purposes: which are assessment and evaluation; provision of internal and external accountability; decision making; feedback and advice and the identification of problems that can impact on skills development.

Teaching and professional development

Mentors were asked to describe their roles in mentoring. The major areas that mentors indicated included advising student teachers. They were then asked how often they advised student teachers on their professional work. The mentors gave varied responses which included when necessary, often, everyday, daily, and very often. In all responses by the mentors, there were no specific number of times that were indicated. However, the responses above and the terms used indicate



that advising student teachers was a daily routine for the mentors. When it came to the number of lessons the student teachers taught in a day, these varied from mentor to mentor. The Zimbabwe primary school curriculum provides for at least eight lessons per day depending of the grade levels. The responses indicated that the number of lessons that student teachers taught varied from class to class. In some cases the number of lessons differed depending on the college of origin of the student teachers. Three (25%) of the mentors indicated that the student teachers had six lessons per day, two (17%) mentors indicated that their student teachers taught five lessons per day, four (33%) mentors noted that their student teachers had four lessons per day, two (17%) indicated that their student teachers had three lessons per day, one (8%) mentor noted that their student teachers and another one (8%) noted that the number of lessons the student teachers taught very much depended on the college of origin. In that regard the number of lessons taught by student teachers during the five terms that they are away from their colleges depends on the college as indicated above. Whilst the number of lessons student teachers taught were varied, they had the opportunity to learn from the mentors' practice, at the same time learning from their own practice.

The teaching practice that student teachers go through is expected to provide them with knowledge on how pupils learn. As noted by Kerry and Mayes (1995) mentoring in education should be long enough to be able to provide for professional development, through growth in knowledge and skills. Within the context of learning how to teach and develop professionally, student teachers identified areas they felt the role of the mentor was most helpful. They chose from the following areas: professional knowledge (subject knowledge and teaching skills); class management; assessment and recording of pupils' progress; interaction with pupils, teachers and parents; and contribution to school performance (e.g. sport). The area with the highest responses was assessment and recording of pupils' progress, indicated by 25% of the student teachers. The other areas that the student teachers indicated that they found the role of the mentor helpful were interaction with pupils, teachers and parents (20%); contribution to school performance (e.g sport) (20%); professional knowledge (subject knowledge and teaching skills) (20%); and class management (15%). The gap between the area with the highest responses and the lowest responses in terms of how the student teachers viewed the role of their mentors was not very wide, suggesting that they found the mentors playing important roles in different aspects of their professional development.

Similarly, the mentors commented on the strengths and weaknesses of the student teachers during teaching practice. Student teachers were found strong in the following areas: subject application; professional knowledge; class management; assessment and recording of pupils' progress; interaction with pupils, teachers and parents and contribution to school performance (sport and other areas). However, there were areas that some mentors felt their mentees needed to improve. For example, two mentors noted that their students were not very firm when it came to class control and management as "they lacked the knowledge of handling cases of indiscipline". Some of the mentors noted that when it came to professional knowledge student teachers "need to read widely before conducting lessons" and that "some did not want to learn from others". The other weaknesses noted were lack of variations of teaching methods, lack of coordination and correct sequencing of topics and various aspects of the lesson, lack of interaction with qualified personnel; and some of the student teachers were not active in sporting activities. It is hoped that the areas of weaknesses as noted can be improved by the student teachers' association with their mentors as most of the student teachers were either in their first year or second year of teaching practice.

The relationship between mentors and student teachers

For mentoring to be effective, the relationship between the mentor and protégé should be cordial. As noted by Barnes and Stiasny (1995) the relationship between the mentor and protégé should be a partnership where both are equally willing participants. The willingness of both to work together determines the success of the relationship. Student teachers were asked to identify terms they would use to describe their relationship with their mentors. The terms that were used by student teachers to describe the nature of their relations with mentors were parent/child relationship; free and open relationship; near colleagues; and collegial relationship. Six (50%) student teachers described their relationship with their



mentors as a free and open relationship. Three (25%) student teachers described their relationship as a parent/child relationship, whilst one (8%) referred to their relationship as near colleagues and another one (8%) student teacher referred to their relationship as a collegial relationship.

The responses show that the way students viewed their relationship with their mentors had a bearing on how they got along. It is suffice to say that a free and open relationship allows both mentor and mentee to freely share ideas, whilst the relationship of parent/child had its limitations. It can be presumed that may be as a result of the age difference between the mentor and mentee. In the Shona and Ndebele tradition anyone who is old enough to be the same age with your father is referred to as *baba* or *ubaba* and has to be treated as such. Anyone who is the same age as your mother is referred to as *amai* or *umama*. Whilst such a relationship might be helpful, it may be skewed in favour of the mentor in terms of power relations. Relationships in mentoring are very important as they help both the mentor and mentee to achieve the desired goals. Through developing a cordial relationship they are able to accommodate each other. It may be difficult to recommend a particular relationship, but it is suffice to say that whatever kind of relationship that is developed between the two it should be beneficiary to both.

Training of mentors and the link between the student and college during teaching practice

Other areas that emerged from the responses were the training of mentors and the communication between student teachers and their colleges. Training of mentors is very important. The assumption that experience in teaching alone is enough to produce good mentors has to be corrected as mentoring and teaching are two different issues. Mentor training is critical in that it equips them with the necessary mentoring skills and an understanding of the mentoring programme. As noted by Cobb, Hensman, Jones & Richards (1995) apart from developing skills, mentor training helps to identify the roles of the mentors and the nature of support that they need from both the teachers' colleges and the ministry of education. On whether the mentors had attended any training, ten (83%) mentors indicated that they had not attended any workshops or training on mentoring in education and only two (17%) noted that they had attended training sessions organised by the teachers' colleges. The responses appeared to suggest that some of the teachers' colleges were not organising workshops with mentors or it might be that the mentors were not attending workshops organised by the teachers college. Whatever the case might be such a scenario is detrimental to the training of teachers through the mentorship model as the mentors may lack the requisite qualities, skills and knowledge that will help them in playing their roles in teacher education. Such qualities and skills include interpersonal skills relevant to teacher education, modern teaching methods, and development of self-confidence in the student teachers, communication and the ability to handle adult learners. As noted by Campbell and Kane (1996), in playing their roles mentors have to develop an understanding of professional issues related to teaching in addition to personal and social skills. They also have to be able to handle problems that may develop during the mentoring process. Workshops and mentor training are critical in teacher education as they do not only provide a platform for mentors to have a good understanding of their roles, but provide a platform for feedback.

On a related note, student teachers were asked to indicate how often they went back to their colleges for tutorials per term during teaching practice. The question was premised on the understanding that the Departments of Distance Education in teachers' colleges had to be in constant communication with student teachers on teaching practice. Such communication could be in the form of tutorials and workshops during school holidays or week-ends. Such tutorials would also help in terms of improving on areas of weaknesses communicated to the college by the mentors. Secondly, considering that student teachers will be spread throughout the different regions where they may not be exposed to new technology, workshops and tutorials provide opportunities for student teachers to keep abreast with new developments in education. The relationship between the teacher's college and the student has to be maintained even during teaching which is five terms; the student teacher is out on teaching practice. When it came to the student teachers response on the number of times they went back to their teachers' colleges for tutorials, eleven (92%) student teachers noted that they went back to their colleges for tutorials at least three times per term or once per month and only one (8%) noted that she went back to



her college four times of education. It can be observed that the colleges maintained communication with the students during the terms they were on teaching practice.

Challenges and suggestions

There are areas that both student teachers and mentors felt the mentorship model of teacher education was facing challenges. Among the student teachers the main challenges had to do with shortage of resources whilst they were out on teaching practice. These resources included the shortage of textbooks and lack of facilities for practical subjects such as Art and Design and Home Economics. The mentors also concurred with the views expressed by some of the students. They also lacked the financial resources to support themselves and their families whilst on teaching practice. To this end there were suggestions for improved government support for students on teaching practice. Such support could be in the form of loans that they would pay back once they completed training. Another form of support would be increases in the allowances they receive.

Other problems raised by student teachers related to their relationship with the mentors. Some of the students felt that some of the mentors tended to be selfish and ended up overburdening the student teachers. Some noted that they at times lacked guidance from educational experts whilst there are out on teaching practice. This was related to the qualifications of the mentors who in some cases only had a Diploma in Education as the highest professional qualification.

Some of the mentors noted that some of the student teachers lacked consistency in the way they were supervised by their colleges. They were concerned with the frequency of the visits by college lecturers. In some cases others felt that the supervision was not as thorough as expected as the lecturers were always under pressure to cover many student teachers on teaching practice within a short time. Some mentors also suggested that there should be regular mentor training and workshops to equip them with the requisite skills for mentoring.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study made a number of conclusions and recommendations about the role of the mentor in teacher education in relation to the questions raised in the background to the study. It could be concluded that the selection of teachers to be mentors did not follow any particular pattern. It could not be said that it was based on qualification as most (92%) of the mentors had the Diploma in Education as the highest professional qualification. Age and experience also play a critical role in the selection of mentors. The age range with the highest number of mentors was the 31-35 age range. Considering the ages of the students as indicated above, this may suggest that some of the mentors were of the same age range with the students or were at times younger. One may therefore speculate that the selection of the mentors was not based on experience and qualification but other factors that could include teacher performance or the school head's preference.

It can also be concluded that the success of the mentorship model depends to a very large extent on the relationship between the mentor and mentee. The free and open relationship was found to be the most common in the two schools. This was followed by the parent/child relationship.

The forms of mentorship and roles played by the mentors indicate that there is no clear model of mentorship that we can say teacher education in Zimbabwe was following. The model can best be described as a combination of both the apprenticeship model of mentorship and competence-based model of mentorship. The model being followed can be referred to as the “*apprentice-competence*” model of mentorship.



It can also be concluded that the role of mentors in teacher education is being compromised by lack training in mentoring as demonstrated by 92% of the mentors who indicated that they had not received any training in mentoring. Lack of training of the mentors may also compromise the quality of teachers produced.

In view of the above conclusions, the study recommends that:

- The selection of mentors in teacher education should be rationalised, so that only teachers with specific qualifications and defined years of experience are selected for mentorship;
- That teachers' colleges hold regular training workshops to improve the quality of mentorship they provide to students. These will enable the mentors to play their roles much more effectively;
- In view of the problems and challenges that the student teachers face whilst on teaching practice, the government should consider reintroducing the loan scheme for student teachers on teaching practice;
- The study used the case study design, in view of the limitations of the case study design the researcher recommends that a study on the role of mentors in teacher education be conducted on a wider scale using a different research design.

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