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## Effectiveness of Teaching Practice Mentoring in Primary Teacher Training Colleges in Zimbabwe

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### **Abstract:**

*This study sought to establish the effectiveness of mentoring to student teachers on teaching practice in primary schools in Zimbabwe. Previous studies revealed that no workshops or training were given to mentors by colleges to equip them with the skills and enlighten them on what is expected of mentors. The study thus, endeavoured into establishing how the mentors carried out their roles of mentoring without orientation. A qualitative approach was employed using face to face interviews to collect data from a sample of 20 participants from 5 schools with student teachers under their mentorship. Literature states that mentoring is meant to promote the growth and development of the beginning teacher to improve student learning and model how teaching and learning activities should be carried out. Findings of this study indicate that there is need for orienting teachers on how to effectively carry out their duties as mentors. The current study recommends serious collaboration between schools and colleges to equip mentors with the skills of mentoring and provide clearly documented guidelines for college expectations.*

**Keywords:** teaching practice, mentor, mentee, mentoring, student teacher

### **1. Introduction**

Teacher training became one of the most taken professions in (1980), as Zimbabwe gained independence (Nziramasanga, 1999). According to Mpofu and Matienga (2016), the dawn of independence in African countries and Zimbabwe in particular ushered in an era of massive expansion at all levels of education especially at primary and secondary school levels which subsequently resulted in high demand for teachers.

Collegeshold the leading role of teaching theory exposition, which is subsequently ceded to the field for Teaching Practice (TP). Musingafi and Mafumbate (2014) argue that, these theories mean nothing if they do not guide practice. TP is the period at which students put into practice the teaching skills that they learn at college. However, this cannot be enhanced from a vacuum but through different forms of guidance and supervision from the college and schools where the students are practicing from. Raaen (2011) points out that whilst there are many strategies that are used to enhance the teaching and learning of student teachers at various stages of their teacher training course, it is generally agreed that TP mentoring is a teaching practice approach that is meant to develop student teachers professionally.

The concept of mentoring as a teaching practice strategy was adopted by teacher training colleges in Zimbabwe in 1995 as an economical valuable paradigm shift after the economic downturn of the 90s (Bhebhe, Runhare & Monobe, 2015). Bhebhe et al., (2015) describe TP mentoring as the professional support which is largely employed by schools in conjunction with teacher training colleges to enhance student teacher proficiency in the job they are training for.

Primary Teacher Training Colleges in Zimbabwe train students in Early Childhood Development (ECD) and the general teaching course. The program runs for 3 years on a 2-5-2 system where students are in college during the first 2 terms, followed by 5 terms of teaching practice and then the last 2 terms the students return to college for the final term. This implies that students spend more time on TP than they spend in college combined. It is during this period that the students are attached to qualified teachers.

#### *1.1. Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to investigate the implementation levels and effectiveness of teaching practice mentoring in Primary Teachers' Colleges.

#### *1.2. Research Questions*

1. To what extent are teacher mentors prepared to guide and supervise students during teaching practice? 2. How effective is school-based mentoring during teaching practice for students.

### 1.3. Statement of the Problem

The introduction of mentoring came into effect in 1995, replacing the apprenticeship system where student teachers would have their own classes. The major reasons for the shift were to reduce government expenditure on salaries as well as creating placements for student teachers which had become scarce as the demand for teachers had improved with time. However, teachers were not trained for their roles as mentors. Studies on mentoring carried out in some provinces of Zimbabwe so far, established that some teachers were not aware of what the colleges expected from them as mentor teachers and as a result had challenges in effectively executing their TP mentoring roles (Maphosa & Ndamba, 2012; Wadesango, Kurebwa & Nyoni, 2014). This prevalent aspect of school-based mentoring programs presents special challenges that are further exacerbated when mentor teachers receive no or inadequate training for their work. With such challenges there is cause for serious investigation through this study to establish the implementation levels and effectiveness of mentoring as a TP approach in the current province in Zimbabwe whose results may be computed with findings from other studies previously carried out for the attention of the Ministry concerned to rectify.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Design

This case study employed a qualitative approach to establish the participants' perceptions on the effectiveness of mentoring during TP.

### 2.2. Population

The population of this study comprised of mentors and students from 5 urban primary schools.

### 2.3. Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed to come up with 20 participants who included 10 mentors and 10 students. No mentor was selected together with their mentees to widen the chances of variation in responses.

### 2.4. Instruments

Face to face interviews with open-ended questions were used to gather data.

### 2.5. Ethical Consideration

Permission to carry out this study was sought from the Ministries and college concerned before the study was carried out. Written consent was provided in all cases. Participants voluntarily consented to participating in this study. Confidentiality was exercised as no names were used in this study.

### 2.6. Data Analysis

Thematic approach was used where data was grouped according to common themes and patterns as well as differences in the participants' responses.

## 3. Results and Discussion

This section discusses the results and the discussion of the study findings.

### 3.1. Students Were Used as Relief Teachers

The purpose of attaching students to mentors is so that they may coach the students and groom them. However, it was evident through this current study that most students were used as relief teachers especially those attached to heads and deputy heads as they were more often occupied with administrative matters. One deputy head mentor echoed that: "*Students are very helpful especially for some of us who are always busy with administration duties*". This suggests that even the school authorities did not seem to understand the rationale behind attaching students to experienced teachers.

Other mentors also expressed that they preferred having students working with them for their convenience. One student complained that: "*I do all the work including marking, while my mentor sits and does not even concentrate on what I will be doing. Sometimes she absents herself for her private business*". Rowley (1999) points out that a good mentor is highly committed to the task of helping beginning teachers find success and gratification in their new work, shows up for, and stays on, the job.

One student was left without a mentor after the mentor went for vacation leave and was not replaced. In one interesting case, a mentor proceeded on vacation leave and was replaced by an untrained teacher who was now the class teacher responsible and the student was working under the untrained teacher. This should have been taken care of during deployment that teachers due for any form of leave should not be allocated a mentee.

### 3.2. Mentor Teachers Did Not Understand Their Roles

It is irrational to expect a teacher to commit to a role that has not been clearly defined. The results of the study indicate that mentors did not know how the colleges expected them to carry out their duties as mentors. The best mentoring programs provide specific descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of mentor teachers (Rowley, 1999). The mentors who were interviewed indicated that they were never oriented on how to mentor the students but were however trying their best to help the students. Students also had concerns in this regard when they echoed that what the mentors advised them to do was sometimes different from what they were taught at

college. All the students under study intimated that: “Our mentors want us to plan the in a way different from what we have been taught at college. Formal mentor training is a prerequisite to effective mentoring.

### 3.3. Students Were Not Placed to Mentors According to Their Subject Specialization

Mentors indicated that though they helped students sometimes they had little idea of their main subjects especially practical subjects like Home Economics, Art, Music and Physical Education. Students also indicated the same that they had very minimal help or none at all in those subjects. A mentor teacher echoed that: “I majored in Mathematics at college and the other subjects especially Art, Music and HE, I did not understand them at all”. Most students indicated that even in teaching, mentors usually demonstrated in the teaching of Mathematics, English, Shona/Ndebele and Content but not in practical subjects. The majority of the students were of the view that, these subjects were examinable while the earlier mentioned were not. Eight out of ten students under study revealed that their mentors asked them to teach Maths or English during the time for Practical subjects. This showed that practical subjects were not taught completely in the majority of cases.

### 3.4. Students Who Were Attached to Mentors Who Specialized in the Same Subject Major Performed Better than Their Counterparts

Two students who were majoring in Home Economics had their mentors who also specialized in Home Economics. The students were performing very well in their teaching practice as they got help from the subject specialists. One student mentioned that: “Life is easy for me as I get all the help I need from my mentor. She is very good in Home economics and she has taught me how to teach it”.

### 3.5. Mentor Attitudes Impacted on Students’ Performance

Student teachers enter teaching practice with varying degrees of skill in instructional design and delivery and good mentors are willing to coach beginning teachers to improve their performance wherever their skill level (Veenman, 2014). Some students indicated that they had hard times with their mentors who were lazy and never demonstrated to them how to conduct lessons. They would only write critiques when the head of the school asked for them. Some students indicated that: “Some lecturers asked us if we had ever observed mentors teaching”. On the other hand some mentors were too friendly to the students that they ended up not doing their roles properly, such as giving the students unwarranted marks. However, students who had good mentors were well developed and performed quite well.

### 3.6. Effectiveness of Mentoring

There were mixed feelings towards the effectiveness of mentoring from students as some considered it effective while others considered it not. Those who had hardworking and responsible mentors were very confident that mentoring was effective but the majority found it not worth while. All the students who participated in the study agreed that the effectiveness of mentoring approach is dependent on the mentoring implementing levels. Alger & Kopcha (2009) argue that no matter how much mentoring may promote students teaching skills, without proper supervision of the mentors’ performance, it reaps no results.

## 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study concluded that the implementation levels of mentoring is very low and the majority of student teachers received very little assistance from mentors in lesson presentation especially in practical subjects and other non-examinable subjects. Findings further indicate that mentors had no mentoring skills. There were also concerns from student teachers that even lecturers did not assess them in practical subjects, they would ask them to teach any other subject instead. Schools were not always in a position to place student teachers with appropriately experienced staff who had the necessary skills for effective mentoring. In some instances formal mentoring meetings was less regular due to time constraints and competing priorities on the time of heads of schools or departments. Schools needed to ensure that time allocated for mentoring was protected and minimise changes to planned activities. A sustained focus on developing teachers’ skills in the process of mentoring would ensure sufficient challenge and progression in developing the practices of student teachers.

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