



**Full Length Research Article**

**CHALLENGES IN ACHIEVING EFFECTIVE MENTORING DURING TEACHING PRACTICE IN  
TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study sought to find out the challenges in achieving effective mentoring during teaching practice in the teacher education institutions in Zimbabwe. The multiple case study design was used and five teacher colleges participated in this study. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants. The participants included student teachers and mentors. Data were generated through focus group discussions for both student teachers and lecturers. Data were analysed through interpretive study analysis. The study found out that a number of factors affected the quality of mentoring. These included competencies of mentors, selection of mentors, lack of readiness on the part of student teachers to do practical teaching and lack of effective communication between the teachers colleges and the schools. The study recommended that mentors should be trained to enhance their skills in mentoring. Teachers colleges need to produce a mentoring handbook to use during the mentoring process. The study concluded that the quality of mentoring was negatively compromised because of poor mentoring practices in schools.

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**INTRODUCTION**

In Zimbabwe primary teachers training colleges offer a diploma in education which is a three year programme. The student teachers are equipped with theory in the first session of two terms while they are resident in the teachers college, the second session, is a five term teaching period and the last two terms involve acquisition of theory and writing of the final two terms in college. The student teachers go on teaching practice (Ngara *et al.*, 2012, Department of Teacher Education (DTE Handbook, 2013). During teaching practice student teachers are attached to qualified teachers who act as mentors. The student teachers have the opportunity to grow professionally under qualified teachers. According to Chakanyuka *et al.*, (2006) this model was put in place with the understanding that student teachers are equipped with adequate theory during the residential session in college during the six month period. The mentors are expected to play a key role in ensuring student teachers develop professionally. During teacher preparation, teaching practice is a critical element student teachers should be exposed to.

Teaching practice ensures that student teachers acquire teaching competencies (Calderhead and Shorrock, 1987). During teaching practice in Zimbabwe, student teachers are attached to qualified teachers who are the mentors. Mentoring is the most effective way of training quality teachers and it has been applied with success in the areas of medicine, building and the military (Strong and Baron, 2004). Although literature confirms that mentoring contributes positively to the professional development of student teachers it has its own problems. It assumes that all qualified teachers can guide student teachers to become quality teachers. It also assumes that qualified teachers are willing to become mentors and can provide the professional social support the student teacher need (Caffarella, 1992). Mentors are assumed to be competent in subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Rogers (2007) identified other problems negatively affecting mentoring as poor relationship between the mentors and the mentee as well as misunderstanding between them resulting in ineffective mentoring. Lack of training of the part of the mentor and lack of respect between the mentor and the mentee rendering mentoring ineffective (Delvin, 2007). The research sought to find out the challenges militating against achievement of effective mentoring. In

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Zimbabwe a number of challenges have been identified which affect effectiveness of mentoring. These include lack of preparation for the mentoring role, disabling traits of individuals and lack of time to achieve optimum mentoring (Ngara *et al.*, 2012). Effective mentoring involves both the mentor and the mentee contributing to its success.

## Literature Review

Literature review focuses on defining what mentoring is the characteristics of a good mentor, the benefits of good mentors and challenges related to bad mentoring. Mentoring is defined as a caring relationship in which qualified a teacher with experience works with a novice teacher to promote professional and personal development (Caffarella 1992). Another definition by Shea (2002) defines mentoring as a process involving the mentor and mentee working together to discover and develop the mentee's latent abilities and ensure the mentee acquires knowledge and skills of teaching. Rogers (2007) considers a mentor as a career friend, someone who knows the ropes in an organisation and can act as sponsor or patron. Hence mentoring is a process and not an event and should promote professional development of student teachers. According to Maphalala (2013) mentoring is crucial in the growth and development of a student teacher and the mentor has the greatest influence on the professional development of the student teacher. Mentoring makes the following assumptions on the professional development of student teachers. The mentor is able to impact practical knowledge to the mentee. Professional development of the novice teacher is the responsibility of the qualified and ex-renewal teacher. Mentors provide professional and social support to the student teachers. The mentor inducts the student teacher to school culture. Mentors are competed in subject matter knowledge and practical teaching and are sensitive to the needs of student teachers (Baran, (2004).

However what mentors need to know and be able to do, does not have a common ground agreed upon (Ames, 2009). The roles of the mentor according to Lam and Fung (2001) include introducing the student teacher to real world of teaching, helping the student teachers acclimatise to classroom teaching and ensure learning takes place. The mentor should prepare workspace and a conducive environment for the student teacher to teach and learn as well as orient the student teacher to the school culture, facilities, staff and policies. The student teacher and the mentor need to plan and execute teaching activities together. According to Johnson (2009) a mentor should possess cognitive abilities, emotional abilities and virtues to ensure effective mentoring takes place. The cognitive abilities the mentor should possess as theoretical learning, experimentation, dedication and sense of caring. Emotional abilities include self-awareness and relational abilities include empathy, respect and compassion. Virtues the mentor should possess include integrity, caring, and prudence. The competences the mentor should possess include understanding the learning process, and understanding the developmental needs of mentees. Other competences are problem-solving skills, technical skills and recognizing the mentoring boundary (Clutterback, 2013). On the other hand Dovesch and Playk (1995) identifies the strategies mentees should adopt to ensure that the mentoring process is a success.

They include student teachers, taking responsibility for their own learning, effective communication with mentors, respecting the mentor and taking initiative and developing trust with mentor. The mentee should ask questions and be resourceful and developing observation skills and learn from the mentor, engaging in critical self reflection, trying out various teaching skills and appreciating the assistance offered by the mentor and the school (Clutterback, 2013). Although literature confirms that mentoring contributes positively to the professional development of student teacher it has its own weaknesses. Rogers (2007) identified aspects that could render mentoring ineffective. These are misunderstanding between the mentor and he mentee are occurrences and these render mentoring in effective. Mentor and mentee may not like each other and the result is a poor working relationship between them. The mentor might not be trained on how to nature or mentor student teachers and are not sure of where to do. Lack of respect between the mentor and the mentees has negative consequences on the effectiveness of the mentoring process. Lack of professionalism on the part of the mentor can results in most of the work being done the mentee without hence learning taking place. Mentoring is beneficial to the student teacher if the mentoring process is well organised. A number of researchers have reported positive benefits derived from an effective mentoring successful mentoring experience for the student teacher. These include getting opportunities to teach and reflect their teaching with the help of the mentor. The mentee is able to understand own teaching practices and gain confidence. Lindgren (2003) identified increase confidence and increases self-reflection for of the student teachers as the major benefits of mentoring. The student teachers can be more conscious of what they will be doing, from scheming planning lesson to lesson delivery. Mentoring can be effective if it is well organized and well implemented by the schools and colleges in collaboration.

## Statement of the problem

Absence of clearly articulated guidelines on mentoring in Teachers Colleges in Zimbabwe has created challenges related to the mentoring process for both the student teachers and the mentors. Anyone who is a qualified teacher is considered good enough to be mentor. The questions are all qualified teachers good mentors and what challenges impact achievement of effective mentoring.

## Research Questions

- What student related factors impact on the quality of the mentoring?
- What mentor related factors impact on the quality of the mentoring?
- What challenges are being faced during the mentoring process?

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This was a qualitative research. Qualitative research involves the researcher studying the participant in their natural setting (Cresswell, 2007). The natural setting is the schools. Qualitative research was preferred because it allowed the researcher to conduct the research in a natural setting in this

case it was the schools. The researcher visited the research sites and interacted with the participants.

### **Research Design**

A multiple case study design was used in this study to study the mentoring processes in the various schools to which student teachers from Teachers' Colleges are attached. The case study design was preferred because it allowed the research to focus on key players and situation on mentoring.

### **Sampling Procedure**

According to Best and Khan (1993), a case study enables the researcher to examine a social unit of institution in a given context and be able to understand it better. The researcher wanted to get a better understanding of the mentoring process in the schools. To purposive sampling techniques was used to identify the participants to this study. The participants included student teachers on teaching practice and the mentors to whom student teachers were attached. The purposive sampling technique enabled the researcher to pick individuals with the vital information to ensure relevant data would be collected (Crewell, 2007). The participants were student teachers and mentors who selected to participate in this study. Student teachers selected were second year students on teaching practice and the mentors in the schools in which the students were attached.

### **Data Generation and analysis**

To generate data interviews and focus group discussions were used with both mentors and student teachers. Semi – structured interview were used with pre-determined questions to guide the dialogue (Cresswell, 2007). The researcher was able to clarify complex questions and follow up on the responses made by the participants.

### **Data Analysis**

The interpretative study analysis was used to analyse the data. During data analysis the following steps were followed coding, and which involves describing relationships action, events and the intervention of the participants

## **RESULTS**

### **Student related factors**

The focus group discussion for both mentors and student teachers generated the following responses. Mentors raised the following concerns about the quality of student teachers attached to their classes. Student teachers lacked theoretical knowledge on classroom teaching. Student teachers could not formulate aims or objectives during lesson planning and this affected the quality of lesson delivery. On participant mentor actually said, "It's like I have to teach them the basic of teaching yet I do not have time to do that I have a class t attend to". Mentors do not have time to teach the student teachers theory of classroom teaching because they have a syllabus to cover and children to attend to. On the other hand student teachers identified mentor related factors affecting the quality of mentoring. These include: Student teachers were attached to

mentors with administrative responsibilities in the schools such as Teachers-in-charge (TIC), deputy headmaster, senior teacher and the school head. In some instances student teachers were attached to temporary teachers. These factors impacted negatively on the quality of teaching practice. There was poor relationship existed between some student teachers and mentors and this affected the performance and confidence of student teachers. Mentors dressed down student teachers in front of children especially where inappropriate content was taught. Some mentors left all the work to the student teachers including marking while mentors only taught a few lessons. Mentor had the following challenges: Mentors did not have knowledge of the college expectations on how to assist student teachers and were not trained in the area of mentoring. Qualified teachers who had trained a ten years back or more were of little assistance the professional development of student teachers since their experiences were no longer relevant in some instances.

### **Challenges faced During the Mentoring Process**

A few workshops were organised by the teachers colleges to staff develop mentors and these were few and far between, and were attended on voluntary basis. The student teachers were not regularly assessed by their mentors. College lecturers did not create time share notes on the student performance with the mentor. Mentors were not paid for the work they were doing in teacher preparation. Student teachers were overloaded with open and distance learning assignments and this affected their performance.

## **DISCUSSION**

Student teachers when they are in college for two terms during teacher preparation. They are equipped with theory of teaching and learning as well as the content (DTE Handbook 2013). However it seems the student teachers are not equipped with adequate pedagogical content knowledge the subject matter knowledge to ensure they excel during teaching practice. The mentors have the extra responsibility of teaching them the basics of syllabus interpretation as well as how to scheme and plan. Mentors considered teaching student teachers the theory as not their responsibility. There was absence of criteria for selection of mentors who had mentor student teachers. This responsibility is left to school heads to decide. The school head, attach student teachers to teachers with extra responsibilities in the school so that classes have someone to attend to the pupils hence, mentors were not selected on the basis of effectiveness.

According to Mtika (2008) the mentor is expected to impart practical knowledge and should be competent in subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. The mentor should provide professional and social support to the student teacher. The data revealed that this is not the case in the mentoring process in Zimbabwe. The mentors are not trained in mentoring and are not aware of the college expectations on how to assist a student teacher. Some teachers go on a "sabbatical" and leave all the work to the student teacher. Some mentors actually dress down student teachers in the face of the classroom children. All the factors raised militate against effective mentoring. Teachers colleges are not

regularly holding workshops to staff develop mentors. When the workshops are held they are usually optional and those who attend do not get certificates of attendance. During assessment of teaching practice college lecturers do not create time to discuss the progress the student teacher is making and the challenges he or she is facing. The absence of close communication between lecturers and mentors did not promote a professional development of student teachers. The student teachers were overloaded with ODL assignments which impact negatively on their effective planning and lesson delivery during teaching practice. Mentors were not being rewarded for the work they are doing in training teachers. Mentors did not get incentives for the work they are doing.

### Recommendations

- A model for mentoring of student teachers need to be developed in Teachers' Colleges in the context.
- Teachers colleges need to educate school administrators on the approaches they can use to select mentors for effective mentoring
- Mentors need to be staff developed on how to mentor student teachers to improve the quality of mentoring.
- Mentors need to be given incentives on the work they are doing in teacher development

### Conclusion

The study concluded that the quality of mentoring was compromised by poor student preparation for teaching practice, lack of training on or staff development of mentors and lack of symbiotic relationship between the schools and the Teachers' Colleges. The quality of mentoring can be improved by reviewing the whole mentoring process.

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