



THE ROLE OF MENTORSHIP IN TEACHING PRACTICE FOR DIPLOMA IN PRIMARY EDUCATION PROGRAMME

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Abstract:

This study examines the concerns of student-teachers at Serowe College of Education in Botswana on the role of the mentor teacher during Teaching Practice (TP) for professional development. The study adopted a qualitative methodological approach where only online interviews were used in order to observe Covid- 19 protocols for the protection of both the student -teachers and the researcher. The study sampled four (4) third year student-teachers just about to complete their course to share their experiences during TP. The findings reveal that the current arrangement where student-teachers are assigned to any class teacher in a practicing school does not benefit most of them in terms of professional development. This study also identified various factors that may contribute to the improvement of mentor-mentee relationships such as communication between mentor teachers and the higher institutions of learning (Colleges of Educations) through workshops as well as developing a mentor guide booklet to help mentor teachers to fully understand their roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, it would be necessary to assign mentor teachers to mentees based on the areas of specialisation of the student-teachers and also motivate the mentor teacher with some incentives to ensure quality in the education system that is competitive globally.

Keywords: student-teachers, mentor teachers, teaching practice, professional development, Colleges of Education, Botswana

1. Introduction

This article argues that the proper use of mentoring during TP could help produce quality teachers that the institutions of higher learning so desperately need. The introduction of the Diploma in Primary Education (DPE) was as a result of the Revised National Policy on Education in 1994 aimed at the production of quality teachers in order to improve results in Botswana Primary Schools. The DPE program is currently offered in two Government Colleges of Education; namely, Serowe and Tlokweng Colleges of

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Education as well as other private-owned institutions of higher learning in the country. The DPE program is a three-year full-time course extending over six semesters, divided into subject component, research component and teaching practice (Tlokweng College of Education, 2018). This study focused on the use of mentoring student-teachers by class teachers during the three years of their training as primary school teachers.

Teaching Practice (TP) is one of the fundamental cornerstones for training quality teachers by most institutions of higher learning. TP offers student-teachers the opportunity to put theory into practice as they are allocated classes to teach. During TP, the student-teachers have to practice using teaching strategies learnt at tutorials to find out if they work with pupils in a real classroom situation. At tutorial sessions, student-teachers teach their peers to practice strategies and techniques of teaching using a lesson plan with teaching aids, and colleagues give feedback to sharpen their skills of teaching. Of equal importance is the use of repetitions to reinforce the technique of teaching because, after every critical positive feedback, the student-teacher is expected to re-plan, re-teach and be given another feedback until mastery of the skills is achieved. With advanced technology, some use videos for recording teaching and reviews of lessons to highlight areas of proficiency and deficiency and then reteach the lesson (Hong & Riper, 2016). Different research findings indicate that peer teaching improves the student-teachers' quality in learning how to teach through the use of self-reflection (Velez, Canon, Whittington & Wolf, 2011), building confidence before real teaching with learners (Seenan, Shanmugam & Stuart, 2016), gives student-teachers the opportunity to experience new roles which help to provide them with the chance to be co-constructors of their learning process (Carvalho & Santos, 2021) and gives experience in lesson planning, materials development and presentation as they reflect on their teaching behaviours (Kavanoz & Yuksel, 2010). All the above-mentioned practices take place within the first and second year before embarking on the real TP at practicing schools.

In Botswana Colleges of Education, the first-year student-teachers go for two weeks of class observations in practicing schools of their choice and write a report at the end of the exercise (Serowe College of Education Handbook, 2011, p.7). The mentor class teacher is expected to demonstrate how to manage pupils' behaviour, demonstrate a variety of lessons, display skills on how to deliver the content and give a general feel of what it is to be a class teacher at the primary level of education. During the second year, TP runs for a duration of fifty days which is equivalent to a whole term. In the same manner, the student-teachers are still assigned a teacher mentor who has to demonstrate classroom procedures in teaching and managing learners. The same applies to the final third-year TP. However, despite the importance of mentorship to student-teachers during TP which dominates the classroom experience, there is no document that guides class teachers on their expected responsibilities as mentor teachers; yet, the whole student-teachers' experiences under this mentor influence and shape their perceptions and attitudes towards the teaching profession. It is from this context that the article investigates the extent to which the use of class teacher mentorship helps in guiding student-teachers for a successful TP experience for professional development.

2. Statement of the problem

After every TP at the second and third years at Serowe College of Education, there is an evaluation exercise meeting where student-teachers share their experiences. During these meetings, student-teachers complain a lot about class teachers who were not cooperative to guide them in general procedures of managing and teaching a lesson. Others complain of differences in the subject specialization of the mentor teachers and the student-teachers assigned to mentor them. In addition, it was revealed that the mentor class teacher had no clearly defined, specific guidelines to be followed when mentoring student-teachers during TP; yet they are expected to guide them in areas such as the scheme of work, teaching plan and use of teaching aids, class management, assessment and others during the TP exercise.

Furthermore, a number of subject specialties have specific teaching pedagogies with their own teaching strategies and therefore, needs someone who is trained and has mastery of the subject. In spite of this, the mentor teacher's area of specialisation is not always considered when placing student-teachers in their classrooms for mentorship. This lack of subject specialty skills frustrated both the student-teacher and the mentor teachers as they could not work well together due to a lack of mentoring guidelines and specialisation skills expected from the mentor teacher. The student-teachers claim that some mentor teachers absent themselves from class due to a lack of knowledge on how to guide the student-teachers while others claim that some of the mentor teachers preferred to be hostile to the student-teachers in order to hide their ignorance. This was a source of conflict between student-teachers and their mentor teachers which resulted in a lack of mentorship.

Worse still, when the college lecturers go for lesson observation, they do not evaluate student-teachers based on their subject specialization. The lecturers just observe all student-teachers across the board in that particular practicing school regardless of their areas of specialization. This practice also was a source of frustration to the student-teachers as the only interest of the college lecturers is general interactions taking place during teaching and not how certain special pedagogies for specific subject areas are applied in teaching. The failure to observe specific pedagogies in their areas of specializations demoralizes student-teachers regarding the purpose of mastering such skills while not being sure if lecturers of such subject areas will observe them. Furthermore, when preparing for TP during tutorials, the student-teachers are mostly mentored by their subject lecturers who spend most of the time helping them to master the teaching of their particular subject area, even though during TP the tutor may or may not observe them for grading but this may be done by any lecturer from the College of Education. In the absence of any study done in Botswana Colleges of Education on the use of proper mentorship exercise during TP, this study undertook an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon.

2.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which mentorship is used adequately during TP in Colleges of Education (Primary) for the utmost benefit of the student-teachers' professional development.

2.2 Research questions

- What are the student-teachers' perceptions on the use of mentorship by class teachers they are assigned to during TP?
- From the student-teachers' experience, how could the challenges of mentorship be resolved for proper professional development?

2.3 Significance of the study

This study will benefit higher institutions of learning involved in teacher training, especially Colleges of Education and their stakeholders by identifying issues of concern and challenges faced by student-teachers on the use of mentorship during TP. It will provide relevant information to the Department of Teacher Training and Development on how best mentor teachers can be used for the professional development of the student-teachers as well as how Colleges of Education could relate with practicing schools for mutual benefit in the provision of quality education that is competitive globally. It is hoped that this will enhance instructional techniques and enhance the working relationship between mentor-mentee for the improvement of the standard of teaching in primary schools.

3. Literature review

Several literature reviewed shows that mentorship of student-teachers by class teachers is a vital exercise done by most international teacher training institutions. The class teacher mentorship exercise is incorporated into the curriculum of higher institutions of learning in order to produce expected results. While at higher institutions of learning, the student-teachers are assigned to tutees in their areas of specialisation to mentor them in classroom teaching procedures and during TP the class teacher mentors them in real practical teaching experiences to develop the necessary skills of a competent teacher. Thus, mentoring has become a crucial component of student-teachers field experience.

In the process of becoming a teacher, literature shows that the student-teacher revolves around mentorship at the higher institution of learning and the class teacher at a practicing school. This is so because the student-teacher learns theories of teaching and gets teaching practice experience with real pupils at a given school. Musingafi and Mafumbate (2014) define mentorship as a nurturing process in which a more skilled or more experienced person serving as a role model teaches, espouses, encourages, counsels and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional and or personal development. Rebecca and Musisi (2022) define mentoring as a dynamic relationship which leads to creativity, professional growth and

mastery over problem-solving techniques, while Petrovska, Popeska and Runcheva (2018) define mentoring as a process where an expert with experience helps less experienced colleagues in further development of their competencies in the teaching profession. Deduced from the above definitions, the mentoring process plays a vital role in the successful performance of student teachers during teaching practice. From the definitions above, it can be concluded that mentoring is the major technique used to groom student-teachers to be professional teachers as they learn from the class teacher throughout the TP exercise.

Of significance, in the mentor-mentee process is the understanding of roles by each person involved in the process of developing student-teachers' professionalism. According to Petrovska, et al. (2018), the role of the mentor teacher is to help the student-teacher successfully pass the TP by dedicating their time to monitoring, giving feedback, transferring good practices, building views and values important in the teacher's profession as they combine the theory learnt and the real practice of teaching learners in the classroom environment. In mentoring student-teachers, the mentor teacher has to be involved in co-planning, guide creativity in delivering content and give critical feedback for the growth in the professionalism of the mentee. However, student-teachers' major challenges on arrival in a practicing school are self-positioning as a teacher, maintenance of discipline in a classroom, planning lessons, motivating pupils to study and sometimes even understanding the school culture (Bossler & Lindahl, 2017). Similarly, Asuo-Baffour and Agyemang (2019) reveal that mentees face various challenges in relation to the attitudes of mentors, some teachers as well as community-related challenges. In reality, the mentor teacher's unpreparedness to work collaboratively with mentees and the absenteeism of mentors are the major challenges confronting mentees in their mentoring programme. In a well-organized mentorship program, there has to be a guide on how to mentor student-teachers in order to boost the mentor teacher's confidence on what to do. This calls for higher institutions of learning to organize workshops and seminars for all who are to be mentor teachers to be trained in order to understand the expectations of their mandate in the professional development of the student-teacher. Asuo-Baffour and Agyemang (2019) substantiate that training mentor teachers reduce conflict between mentors and mentees because everyone understands the role expected of them. As has been noted, a mentor teacher has to help introduce student-teachers to the traditions and internal rules of their school for quick adaptation which leads to the smooth running of classroom procedures to meet the expectations of the learners.

Equally important is the communication between the higher institutions of learning (Colleges of Education) and the practicing schools on the expectations of mentor teachers during their stay with the student-teachers. Maunganidge (2015) study found that a lack of mutual sharing of ideas, skills, knowledge and information on mentoring between training colleges and practicing schools has a negative impact on the quality of graduate teachers, while Killian and Wilkins' (2009) study point out that the major weakness in mentoring student-teachers is the segmentation and isolation of supervision processes where the college lecturers never discuss the performance of their student-

teachers with the mentor teachers. Admittedly, both the college lecturer and mentor teachers train the student-teachers to develop professionalism and this mandates communication which may act as feedback on the strengths and weaknesses to allow both parties to share on how to deal with grey areas observed. A point often overlooked is the fact that student-teachers are taught theories at the institutions of higher learning while at the practicing schools, the theory is put into practice and the two professional bodies need to share their observations for the benefit of the student teacher in order to receive proper guidance. Therefore, communication strategies help to break barriers between colleges and schools so as to enhance the effectiveness of the mentoring approach. In fact, where the expectations are clearly shared between the higher institutions and the mentor teachers, the exercise becomes beneficial to both parties. In this case, both benefit because the college of education shares up-to-date pedagogies with the mentor teachers during workshops while the student-teachers gain teaching experiences from the mentor teachers. Hence, it is the interaction of the pre-service and in-service at play at the same time which allows for a symbiotic relationship and creates a high chance of growing together in professionalism (Huong, Tung, Hong, & Hung, 2020).

On the contrary, where there is no document and clear procedure on how the mentor teacher should guide the student-teacher, the chances of being frustrated are very high. Musingafi and Mafumbate (2014) argue that low and uneven levels of teacher expertise and sometimes lack of discipline among a wide cross-section of class teachers may frustrate student-teachers who come into their class highly expectant of pedagogical knowledge practices and meeting learners' needs in teaching standards. Student-teachers would expect their mentors to be risk takers, who exhibit high levels of professionalism in learner-centred approach coupled with the control and tolerance of differences of all forms of behaviour from learners. This is true because not everybody who is a teacher can mentor every student-teacher during their TP as some are very energetic and enthusiastic to learn new strategies of teaching. Thus, studies have supported the need to provide careful selection procedures on who can be a mentor, and proper preparation for the roles and responsibilities of mentorship be made for the smooth running of the program for expected results (Musingafi & Mafumbate, 2014; Galamay-Cachola, Aduca & Calauagan, 2018; Ambrosetti, 2012).

In addition, the mentor serving as a role model to the student-teacher is very critical because it means being competent in all aspects that make one a good teacher. Literature shows that mentor teachers act as advisers, teachers and coaches to the student-teachers within their classroom teaching and learning environment. Furthermore, mentorship is taken seriously as other nations worldwide have handbooks for guiding the program and the mentor-mentee relationship for professional development and uniformity of approaches in mentorship is established (Gray & Goregaokar, 2013). For example, Shanghai has a structured teacher mentoring system where experienced teachers with three years and above teaching experience are assigned student-teachers to mentor and account to the school leadership (Hairon & Charlene,

2013), while Yafar-Werman's (2019) study findings show that New Jersey District has a mentoring program which offers support, helps student-teachers teach better, feels a greater sense of efficacy and self-confidence while rates of attrition decrease. In this case, efficacy and self-confidence could be boosted by the use of areas of specialisation during mentorship for it gives direction to the mentorship program of the student-teachers.

Furthermore, the area of subject specialisation of student-teachers should be considered when choosing mentor teachers during TP. This is so because each area of specialisation has unique pedagogies which are used to deliver the content. Moreover, the tutor at colleges of education mentors the student-teachers in their areas of specialisation in order to have a firm grip of the subject matter and in-depth mastery of how to deliver the content of that particular subject area. As a result, the use of areas of specialisation enhances the quality of mentorship as the mentor and the mentee understand each other's point of departure in teaching strategies for that specific area of specialisation. The student teacher would be well prepared to deliver the content area thereby creating a stimulating learning environment which is educationally inclusive of the tutorials at colleges of education (Petrovska, et al., 2018; Ndhlovu, Nkhata, Chipindi, Kalinde, Kaluba, Malama, Mambwe, 2021). For this reason, Poland, Colburna and Long's (2017) study found that areas of specialisation reduce workload while allowing for content mastery and improved instruction which is preferred in the high climate of accountability of results in the USA. Ndhlovu et al., (2021) in Zambia reveal that primary school teachers in Lusaka preferred the use of subject specialisation as it enhances the quality of teaching and learning and it gives them ample time to prepare lessons as well as leads to improved academic performance in schools practicing it. Similarly, Prasad's (2017) study concludes that using subject specialisation for Fijian Primary School teaching produces excellent results as teachers focus on their areas of strength. As a result, when teachers are grounded in their subject area, it makes them more relevant, effective, and efficient as they become knowledgeable and experts in the subject matter. This argument propels us to conclude that if specialisation helps teachers to be experts in their subject area, then an improvement in the performance and quality of the results in primary schools will be highly anticipated and will encourage every education system interested in good results to adopt the principle.

On the contrary, there are studies which show the negativity of the area of specialisation when used at the primary level. Samkange (2015) found that most primary teachers in Zimbabwe opt for socialization of learners than performance as they preferred one teacher to teach a class due to the fact that children at this level need motherly and fatherly care throughout the day. This was due to the fact that there is no compromise of the discipline of learners when using generalist teachers. By all means, generalist teachers' focus is on the holistic care and development of the learner, and not necessarily on academic performance only. This is in line with Fryer's (2018) study in Texas in the United States of America which found that teacher specialisation decreased pupils' attendance and increased behaviour problems possibly due to a lack of bonding with any teacher as they keep on alternating throughout the day. With both negative and positive

reasons on area of specialisation, every education system may either choose to rely on the system that gives the best academic performance or strike a balance with the one that also considers the behaviour of learners for proper mentoring of socialization, and for the good of societal relationships.

Moreover, this mentor teacher position, if properly utilized can help keep the quality of teaching high as long as the professional development of both student-teachers and the newly employed teachers are concerned. For instance, where the mentor teacher position is highly regarded, monetary incentives are used to motivate and retain competent teachers for this position. For instance, in The Republic of Macedonia, the mentor teacher is a promotional position acquired after a thorough evaluation to be awarded a certificate to mentor student teachers because of their competences in teaching (Petrovska, et al., 2018). As earlier mentioned, Shanghai has a structured teacher mentoring system where experienced teachers with three years and above teaching experience are assigned student-teachers to mentor and account to the school leadership (Salleh & Tan, 2013). Other European countries such as Poland, Romania, Portugal, Spain, Greece and Turkey also train mentor teachers on how to support student-teachers for successful professional development (Duse, Duse & Karkowska, 2017). Yafar- Werman's (2019) study findings show that New Jersey district has a mentoring program which offers support, helps student-teachers teach better, and feels a greater sense of efficacy and self-confidence while rates of attrition decrease. Furthermore, elsewhere other nations worldwide have handbooks for guiding the program of mentorship for maintaining the quality standard of professional development of both student-teachers and newly employed teachers (Gray & Goregaokar, 2013). Thus, literature shows that mentorship as a role model to the student-teacher and newly employed teachers is very critical and should be used to maintain a high standard of professional development to keep a culture of excellence in a number of education systems worldwide. It is used as a tool that maintains competence and instills a culture of unity and cooperation among beginning and experienced teachers for the upliftment of the quality standard of the education system. By so doing, a mentorship program helps the education system to always close the gap between higher institutions of learning and quality practices in schools.

4. Research methodology

This study adopted the qualitative interpretivist approach, which provides the opportunity of studying a phenomenon holistically in the way it is experienced by participants to get comprehensive findings regarding the use of mentorship during TP in higher institutions of learning (Mohajan, 2018; Tuffour, 2017; Cropley, 2019; Cal & Tehmarn, 2016). This study was carried out at Serowe village in the Central District of Botswana. In Botswana Colleges of Education, students across the country apply and get admitted depending on their performance at the Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) and all student-teachers go for TP yearly from Year one,

Year two and Year three, respectively. This yearly TP varies depending on the level of the student-teachers. Whenever student-teachers are on TP, they are under the mentorship of the class teacher who has to guide them in every aspect of classroom teaching procedures. The researcher had to seek permission from the rightful authorities to carry out this study in Serowe College of Education, Botswana.

Permission to conduct the study was sought from the Ministry of Tertiary Education, Research, Science and Technology as well as from Serowe College of Education. Thereafter, participating student-teachers' written assent was required. In addition, all the participants were informed not to write their real names during the entire period of study and were assured about the confidentiality of the information they provided. In this case study, four third-year student-teachers at Serowe College of Education were solicited through convenient purposive sampling and due to the Covid 19 protocols, they were both virtual semi-structured interviewed individually, and as a focus group to give in-depth insight on issues under investigation (Rania, Coppola & Pinna, 2021; Mohajan, 2018; Webber-Ritchey, Simonovich, & Spurlark, 2020; Rania, Coppola & Pinna, 2021; Roberts, Pavlakis & Richards, 2021). Third-year student-teachers have relevant information and were requested to share their experiences in relation to the use of mentorship during TP in higher institutions of learning as they are just about to complete their training as prospective teachers. Pseudonyms were used for participating student-teachers. Data was collected using recorders during interviews to improve reliability and facilitate data analysis. Content analysis was employed to evaluate qualitative data and themes were identified as they emerged from the interviews to be coded into various categories. Thus, after coding, patterns were established from emerging themes and refined to make a detailed report.

5. Findings and discussions

The student-teachers pointed out that there are several challenges in how mentor teachers are supposed to guide them during the entire TP period. For instance, there is no guiding policy or document indicating the responsibilities of the mentor teacher towards student-teachers as they come under their supervision in the classroom environment. In addition, the mentor teachers are not willing to demonstrate their classroom teaching in the presence of the student-teachers. The requirement is that the first two weeks of the student teacher is reserved for observations of classroom procedures but the class teacher does little except giving notes and make pupils read stories without demonstrating teaching sessions. Obviously, this does not happen, as most of the mentor teachers absent themselves from classes, give revision exercises or any other activity which does not require them to use formal teaching. This practice is contrary to Petrovska, et al's (2018) study which state that the role of the mentor teacher is to help the student-teacher successfully pass the TP by dedicating their time to monitoring, giving feedback, transferring good practices, building views and values important in the teacher's profession as they combine the theory learnt and the real practice of teaching learners in

the classroom environment. In reality, the dilemma is possibly caused by the incompetence of the mentor teacher or due to lack of orientation on what is the expectation of the student-teachers the moment they start their TP. Failure to organize orientations for mentor teachers on how they should help student-teachers causes a lot of confusion. Furthermore, when the mentor teacher comes in only to correct the student-teacher as they teach while they failed to demonstrate the art of teaching at the beginning makes student-teachers suspicious of their goodwill. When student-teachers are suspicious of the advice they give, it means they are likely not to take them. As a result, the mentor teacher misinterprets the student-teacher to be stubborn while in reality, failure to demonstrate the art of teaching is the source of the misunderstanding regarding whatever advice is given by the mentor teacher. One of the student-teachers interviewed, Mr John said:

“My class teacher mentor does not teach in my presence because of no confidence in the content knowledge and teaching approaches to be used. It seems even the lesson planning is not done at all times. If she had a lesson plan then why couldn't she teach according to the plan? Even the class walls say it all as there are very few teaching aids displayed to prove that effective teaching takes place in her class.”

Another student-teacher, Miss Chipo, said:

“I am skeptical about some of the class teacher mentors who we are assigned to their class. It seems they are not trained in the way they handle themselves in their classes. They mostly make learners read textbooks without explaining the concepts to the class. The next thing is to give learners an exercise to write from the textbooks and learners do the corrections on their own which seems to be the use of learner-centred approach according to my observations.”

While another participant, Mr. Amos, said:

“My mentor teacher during second year teaching practice was always full of excuses. She would be absent during the first two weeks of my observations schedule. I started teaching the class before the time due to her absenteeism from class. The other stream teacher informed me that she shared with them that with a student-teacher in her class is time to sort out her business as there is someone to keep the class busy”.

Similarly, Miss Uyapo expressed these sentiments about the arrangements of TP and said:

“I do not blame the class teacher mentors as the seminar meetings were held for the school head only. The Colleges of Education did not bother to orientate class teachers who were to mentor student-teachers on the expectations and responsibilities that go with mentorship.”

From the responses above, it is clear that even though student-teachers are attached to class teachers for mentorship, preparations for the exercise are not done. The fact that class teachers are not oriented to understand the expectations of the student-teachers is a serious oversight. From the above, it means the exercise of mentorship depends on the commitment of the individual teachers who are assigned to mentor student-teachers. In actual fact, the mentor teachers were once student-teachers who perhaps had the same experience during their teacher training and this proves that the majority of student-teachers suffer the same fate. Consequently, mentor teachers do not take into consideration that whatever mistake they make seriously affects the student-teachers. For a smooth working relationship to develop, the mentor teacher needs to display knowledge, attitudes and skills for a successful lesson delivery which will help the student-teacher to build confidence in the mentor teacher. Thereafter, the mentor teacher can be involved in co-planning, guide creativity in delivering content and give critical feedback for the growth in the professionalism of the mentee. However, these expectations are not realized, instead, student-teachers' major challenges on arrival in a practicing school are self-positioning as a teacher, maintenance of discipline in a classroom, planning lessons, motivating pupils to study and sometimes even understanding the school culture (Bosser & Lindahl, 2017).

In addition, student-teachers are mentored by tutees who are subject specialists of a particular category at Colleges of Education. As Diploma in Primary Education in Botswana was introduced with student-teachers preferred areas of specialisation, there is a need for its consideration when assigning mentor teachers during TP. This is so because each area of specialisation has unique pedagogies used to deliver the content. According to Petrovska, et al., (2018), the use of areas of specialisation boosts the student-teacher's content knowledge and pedagogical delivery of the subject, creating a stimulating learning environment which is educationally inclusive. According to the current system and requirements, all primary school teachers should be able to teach all subjects offered at that level (Botswana Government, 1994). Moreover, this may help in implementing specialisation at the primary level though it is not yet clear why it fails because the majority of teachers have a Diploma in Primary Education and others have a Degree in Primary Education. Obviously, the above qualifications mean that all teachers trained at that level have an area of specialisation. As a result, the use of areas of specialisation boosts the quality of mentorship as the mentor and the mentee understand each other's point of view in teaching strategies for that specific area of specialisation and would be well prepared to deliver the content area creating a stimulating learning environment which is educationally inclusive from the tutorials at colleges of education (Petrovska, et al. (2018; Ndhlovu, et al. (2021). For this reason, Poland, et al.'s (2017) study found that area of specialisation reduces workload while allowing for content mastery and improved instruction. Similarly, Prasad's (2017) study concludes that using subject specialisation at primary school teaching produces excellent results as teachers focus on their areas of strength. Moreover, when teachers are grounded in their subject area, they

are more relevant, effective, and efficient as they become knowledgeable and experts in the subject matter.

Furthermore, communication between colleges of education and practicing schools is very crucial for the smooth running of TP. The colleges of education are supposed to communicate the expectations of the mentee from the mentor teacher through gatherings like workshops or seminars. During these seminars, mentor teachers need to be oriented on how they should mentor the student teachers and be allowed to seek clarity where they do not understand so that everything is done in a professional manner. Similarly, it is through such meetings that mentor teachers' areas of specialisation can be identified so that they mentor student-teachers of the same subject specialization. The point that is often overlooked is the fact that most orientations or sometimes meetings are held with Senior Management Teams (SMT) only and those teachers who are to mentor student-teachers are sidelined. This was evidenced in responses from interviews by student-teachers when answering the question: Are your class teachers oriented on how to mentor student-teachers in their class?

Mr. John responded by saying:

"I doubt it because my class teacher wanted me to explain to her how to use the observation schedule form from the college. It was clear that she did not understand some terminology used in the form yet she was to assess using them because it's a requirement that class teachers should do it".

Miss Chipo stated clearly that:

"My class teacher was complaining that whenever college staff come to their school meet only the school principal and they are never called yet there are the one working with student-teachers in their classes".

Mr. Amos said:

"I am not sure because most of the time my class teacher is absent from work which I doubt if he ever attended any meeting with the college staff. He is not even interested to assess me though other student-teachers have been assessed by their class teachers. When I consulted him about assessment, he simply said I can give myself whatever mark that satisfies me".

Miss Uyapo's response was very clear as she said,

"My class teacher told me that they are sidelined when it comes to meeting with college lecturers concerning TP yet there are the one who work and mentor student-teachers at their classroom teaching and learning".

It may be necessary for the colleges of education to keep track of their former student-teachers who excelled during TP so that they can be used as role models in their areas of specialisation as well as liaise with Education Officers in Regional offices to help identify exceptional teachers to be used as mentor teachers. This would mean wherever these excelling teachers are, student-teachers would be posted there for observation and guidance by someone who has a clear record of being a good teacher. As a matter of fact, it will attract some expenses as such teachers may be working at far places from the college but it will help keep track of good teachers who would help colleges of education to continue to produce high-quality teachers. While responding to the question: What could be done to help student-teachers to be mentored by competent mentor teachers, the student-teachers interviewed gave the following responses: Mr. John said,

“...student-teachers should be assigned to former student-teachers who passed with merit or better to coach them on the strategies they used for them to excel, not as it is where by you are attached to any teacher regardless of their performance”.

Miss Chipo said,

“If the colleges of education could have some incentives for the mentor teachers, maybe it would help boost mentor teacher’s commitment to guiding the student-teachers as there is nothing for free these days”.

Miss Uyapo responded by saying,

“...student-teachers must be attached to well-performing schools as it is obvious that such schools have a culture of doing well which can be passed to student-teachers to implement for good results”.

From the responses of the student-teachers above, their major concern is that competent teachers should be used for mentoring student-teachers. In reality, only competent teachers could be used to demonstrate how to prepare, teach a successful lesson plan and demonstrate classroom management skills which are beneficial to the student-teachers. This would allow the competent teachers to co-plan, co-teach and give feedback to student-teachers on successful teaching strategies that could be used for success in the teaching profession. Literature shows that other countries around the world have devised some strategies to track good teachers and use them to mentor either new teachers or student-teachers to ensure quality in their education system. For instance, The Republic of Macedonia uses teachers with at least five years of teaching experience for mentoring; a promotional position earned due to excellent performance, expertise in the field of teaching, and leadership skills that benefit the smooth running of the school (Petrovska et al., 2018). Furthermore, mentorship is taken seriously as other nations worldwide have handbooks for the program which guide the mentor-mentee

relationship for professional development and uniformity of approaches in mentorship (Gray & Goregaokar, 2013). According to Hairon and Charlene (2013), Shanghai has a structured teacher mentoring system where teachers with three years and above teaching experience are assigned student-teachers to mentor and account to the school leadership, while Yafar-Werman's (2019) study findings show that New Jersey District has a mentoring program which offers support, helps student-teachers teach better, feels a greater sense of efficacy and self-confidence while rates of attrition decrease.

6. Conclusion

The findings of the study show that the use of mentor teachers during TP is not done properly to benefit the student-teachers maximally. It emerged in the study that necessary preparations such as communication between colleges of education and practicing schools through workshops for mentor teachers to fully understand their expected roles are not done. With mentor teachers not understanding their roles in preparing student-teachers to develop into professionals the whole process of producing quality teachers is undermined because the application of the theory of teaching learnt at colleges of education are not channeled into classroom practice and learning with real learners of a particular level. Furthermore, failure to use areas of specialisation of the student-teachers to assign mentor teachers for proper mentorship causes a lot of confusion in terms of specific pedagogical applications which the mentees mastered from tutorial groups while at colleges of education. This practice contradicts the logic behind the use of areas of specialisations in the training of primary school teachers at colleges of education while it is not recognised during TP for grading purposes of student-teachers in order for them to display mastery of what they practiced in preparation for the teaching experience. Based on the findings, the study, therefore, recommends that there should be thorough communication and engagement between higher institutions of learning (colleges of education) and the practicing schools to ensure proper preparations of student teachers for TP. Furthermore, mentor teachers should be assigned to student teachers on TP based on their areas of specialisation. Finally, the study recommends the production of a mentor guide booklet to assist mentor teachers in mentoring student teachers so that they experience professional growth during their TP and to ensure quality in the education system for global competitiveness.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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