Challenges Faced by Mentors and Mentees in Teacher Education in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: Mentoring has remained crucial in the development of human capital in different fields, which include commerce, industry and education among others. Like other fields, education has adopted the mentoring approach in the training of teachers. This paper examines the characteristics of mentoring in education. It identifies and discusses the different models of mentoring in education. The 2-5-2 model, which is used in teachers colleges in Zimbabwe is analysed in detail in order to identify the challenges that are associated with its implementation. Among other challenges, the major challenges faced by mentors and mentees are related to ethical issues, lack of training of mentors and school heads, personal differences between the mentor and the mentee, the selection process and limited resources. The paper concludes by making recommendations that there should be a collective effort to address the challenges affecting this model of mentoring for the model to be in line with the demands of modern education.

Keywords: Mentor, mentee; protégé, teacher education, challenges

INTRODUCTION

Mentoring plays a very important role in nurturing and guiding young adults in society. Mentoring can be in two forms, which are natural mentoring and planned mentoring. In both forms of mentoring, the relationship that exists between the mentor and protégé determines the outcome of the mentoring programme. The implementation of such mentoring programmes is guided by the models that are adopted. These models include the apprentice model, competency-based model, attachment model, developmental model and the systematic enquiry model among others. Some of these models have been adopted in teacher education in Zimbabwe. Implementation of mentoring programmes has often met challenges. These challenges include those that are related to the personality of the mentor and protégé, poor relations, qualifications, ethical issues and limited resources. This paper discusses the challenges encountered by mentors and mentees in the mentoring programme in Zimbabwe. The challenges are discussed in relation to the 2.5.2 model of teacher education adopted by teachers' colleges in 2002, from which specific examples will be drawn. The following key terms are defined: mentors and mentee.

Definition of terms

Kerry and Mayes [1] define a mentor as a person of greater rank or expertise, who teaches, counsels, guides and develops a novice in an organisation or profession. Kishan [2] also defines a mentor as a person who supports guides and counsels a young adult as he/she accomplishes mastery of the adult world or the world of work. The two definitions concur on what a mentor is and what is expected of a mentor. The elements that stand out in the definitions are the need for the mentor to have skills from which the protégé can learn that one has to be able to provide guidance within a profession or at a work place. A mentor can therefore be defined as someone who occupies a position of influence and is well qualified to guide and advise others in his/her area of expertise, at the same time being a role model.

A mentee, according to Mincemoyer and Thompson is a person who is advised and counselled by a mentor. Fish [3] refers to a mentee as the one who is supposed to benefit from the skills and experience of the mentor in order to develop professionally. From the two definitions it can be observed that a mentee is a protégé who learns and acquires skills and values that are relevant to the new trade or profession he/she is studying.

Characteristics of mentoring

Mentoring is characterised by a process that goes through stages. Shea [4] identifies stages of mentoring a relationship. These stages include the mentor and mentee becoming acquainted and establishing common ground, communication of expectations and thus setting goals, establishing the actual purpose of the mentoring, and closure and

redefining of relationships [4]. Mentoring therefore involves establishing a relationship between the mentor and the mentee and the goals that have to be achieved in this relationship. It is very important to mentor relationships. McIntyre and Hagger [5] note that mentoring a relationship plays a role in the development of student teachers and such a relationship enables both mentor and mentee to carry out their responsibilities.

Mentoring serves different purposes. According to Kishan [2] mentoring programmes serve at least three broad purposes. These are educational or academic mentoring, career mentoring and personal development mentoring. The major differences between the above programmes are in that educational or academic mentoring focuses on improving academic attainment, whereas career mentoring focuses on developing the necessary skills that relate the chosen career or profession, and personal development mentoring focuses on guidance and counselling for decision making and managing personal stress.

Mentoring plays a very critical role in professional development. Fish [3] argues that mentoring is expected to contribute to the core business of education through human development and professional development, and professional development provides education to the mentee and newly qualified teachers in order to equip them with the autonomy to judge and make decisions. Through professional development trainee teachers are able to keep in touch with new developments in education. Mentoring as professional development is influenced by a number of factors. Among other factors, Strike [6] observes that mentoring as professional development in teacher education is influenced by such factors as expectations of the development programme, the structure, style and content of the formal curriculum of teacher education, technology employed by the student teachers and the work environment. All these factors have a bearing on the outcome of the mentoring programme.

Models of mentoring
Mentoring as a process is guided by the different models. These models include the apprenticeship model, the competence based model, reflective model, and the developmental model. These models have a bearing on the mentoring programme that has to be implemented. In theory, the models can be different, but in practice it may be difficult to draw a clear boundary between the models. In teacher education in Zimbabwe, Samkange [7] observed that there is no clear model of mentoring that we can say teacher education in Zimbabwe was following, as the model can best be described as a combination of both the apprenticeship model and competence-based model of mentorship.

The common mentoring programme in teacher education is based on the 2-5-2 model of training teachers which was adopted by teachers' colleges that train primary school teachers in 2002. The five in the model represents the number of school terms student teachers are supposed to be out on teaching practice and attached to a mentor. The mentoring of student teachers under this model is school based. The mentoring is done by the class teacher. The mentors are selected by the school heads. As noted by Samkange [7] the selection of mentors in schools was based on factors such as experience, qualification, teacher performance and the school head's preference. Shumbayawonda [8] observed that the 2-5-2 model of teacher education provided the teacher and student teacher enough time to help each other at the same time creating time for them to plan their mentoring strategies. Other positive aspects noted were that the five terms on teaching practice gave students and their mentor's time to experiment and develop professionally which was in line with modern trends in education [8]. Such length of time gives the student teacher enough time to learn and acquire skills and competencies from the mentor in such areas as scheming, planning, stating of objectives, and sequencing of lessons, lesson delivery and other professional attributes.

Challenges in mentoring
The above mentioned mentoring programme has faced a number of challenges at its implementation stage. These challenges are related to a number of factors. According to Strike [6] there are a number of ethical issues in teaching that negatively impact on mentoring. These include indoctrination, the problems of personal relations, teacher behaviour and character. Indoctrination comes about as a result of lack of flexibility on the part of the mentor. When relations between the mentor and mentee are strained this is most likely to affect the development of the student teacher. In that regard, the long period of attachment disadvantages the student teacher, if relations between the mentor and mentee are negative. In that regard, there is need to make sure that relations between the mentor and mentee are maintained. This where the role of the school head becomes paramount, as the head has to create a school climate that promotes good relations.

The other challenges are related to the mentor selection process. The selection of mentors in the 2-5-2 model is not rationalised. Samkange [7] observed that the selection of mentors was the prerogative of the school head. There was no clear procedure to be followed in the selection of mentors. In some instances, experience took precedence over qualification and expertise. There is no mechanism to monitor the mentor's skills and the extent to which they are compatible with modern trends in education. The selection of a mentor at school level may disadvantage the student teacher, as there are experienced teachers

with very low qualifications who are still in the education system. As noted by Campbell and Kane [9] mentors have to develop an understanding of professional issues related to teaching in addition to personal and social skills.

Another challenge that relates to the 2-5-2 model is lack of training of mentors. Mentor training is meant to equip the mentors with modern skills in teacher education. As noted by Furlong and Maynard [10] mentor training is supposed to explain the teacher education programme, the mentoring programme, benefits and roles of the mentor and provide back-up skills to the mentors. In a study on the role of the mentor in teacher education in Zimbabwe, by Samkange [7], it was observed that 83 percent of the mentors had not attended any workshops or training on mentoring in education. Lack of training in that regard compromised the mentoring programme. There are many contributory factors to this and one of them is lack of resources.

Another challenge is lack of clarity on the role of the school and district education officers in teacher education. In relation to the important role that the school has to play in mentoring, Fish [3] observed that the success of the mentoring programme at school level depended on the relationship of the teachers' college and the school and other stakeholders. In that regard, supervision of students on teaching practice at times lacks consistency and at times some mentors tend to overburden the mentees with responsibilities. At times there is lack of clarity on the role of the mentor. As such student teachers end up acting like relief teachers at the school.

Other challenges related to the problem of resources. The extent to which the student teacher would excel during teaching practice was very much determined by the availability of resources at the school. These resources that are often in short supply include textbooks, facilities for practical subjects and charts for teaching and learning aids.

Recommendations to improve mentoring in teacher education

The 2-5-2 model of teacher education in Zimbabwe has provided an ideal model for training teachers, as it emphasizes on the hands-on approach to teacher education. It provides for an apprenticeship model of teacher education. The benefits of the model can only accrue to the education system if the challenges noted above are addressed. In view of the challenges related to mentoring in education identified above, the paper makes the following recommendations:

➢ Qualification, performance and experience have to be considered when selecting mentors at school level;

➢ Mentor-mentee relationship has to be clearly defined by policy;
➢ There is need for a universal criteria for selecting mentors;
➢ There should be measures in place to guide against indoctrination;
➢ There should be provision of resources to support trainee teachers on teaching practice;
➢ There should be training and staff development of both mentors and school heads in modern trends in education;
➢ To get important exposure, the trainee teacher has to do teaching practice at two schools in different environments (urban and rural) before graduating.

CONCLUSION

The paper examined the major characteristics of mentoring in education. It then looked at the 2-5-2 model of teacher education. The paper gave examples of how the model works. To bring the discussion into context, the paper examined some of the models of mentoring. The paper discussed the challenges that are related to mentoring in education in Zimbabwe. The main challenges discussed are ethical issues, lack of mentor training, personal differences, mentor selection process and limited resources. It can be concluded that whilst the mentoring programme has some challenges, mentoring in teacher education in Zimbabwe is in line with modern trends in education.

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