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# Student mentoring during school experience: Perceptions of mentors and student-teachers in selected primary schools of Solwezi and Mufumbwe Districts in Zambia

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**Abstract**
It has been unclear whether staff responsible for mentoring student-teachers during School experience have the rightful training and skills to effectively discharge their duties. The study aimed at establishing the extent to which staff responsible for mentoring student-teachers in schools were qualified and experienced to effectively perform their mentoring duties. Interview guides and questionnaires were used to collect data from mentors and student-teachers in schools. The study revealed that mentors lacked sufficient training and experience to provide quality mentoring to student-teachers as only 10% of mentors had training in mentoring. The study concluded that generally mentors showed good mentoring characteristics and relationships with student-teachers although these relationships were not supported by sufficient training and experience in mentoring. One key challenge that mentors faced was lack of mentor's guides to help them with their work. This study recommended a college-based training for mentors and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes for student-teachers.

**Keywords:** school experience, mentorship, competencies, counseling, role modelling

## 1. Introduction

Student mentoring in schools is an integral part of any successful Primary Teachers' Diploma (PTD) training programme in which School Experience plays a part in the fulfillment of the requirements for the successful training of students. It is usually expected that mentors are fully aware of their responsibilities and should effectively carry out their work of mentoring for the benefit of students and the training programme as a whole. Simon and Wardlow (1989) [30] found that mentored teachers exhibited more effective teaching behaviors, higher levels of teacher efficacy, and were better equipped to handle classroom issues, exhibited and expressed more positive attitudes than did teachers without formal mentorship. In addition, mentoring has been found to increase job satisfaction, reduce the stress level of newly qualified teachers and assist their professional growth (Galvez-Hjornevik, 1985) [9]. According to National Universities Commission (NUC, 2007) Benchmark and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE, 2015), the following sets of objectives have been established on why School Experience is a mandatory component of teacher training: i) to expose student-teachers to real life classroom experiences under the supervision of professional teachers, ii) to provide the forum for student-teacher to translate educational theories and principles into practice, iii) to enable student-teachers discover their own strengths and weaknesses in classroom teaching and provide opportunities to enable them address their weaknesses and enrich their strengths, iv) to familiarize student-teachers with real school environment as their future work place, v) to provide student-teachers with an opportunity for further acquisition of professional skills, competencies, personal characteristics and experience for full-time teaching after graduation, vi) to help student-teachers develop a positive attitude towards the teaching profession and vii) to serve as a means of assessing the quality of training being provided by teacher training institutions, (Aglazor, 2017) [1]. According to Rowley (1999) [28], a mentor is an experienced person who assists and helps a less experienced person while Penner (2001) [24] adds on to say a mentor is a person offering mentoring to a learner teacher. In either of the definitions, a less experienced person or a learner teacher (mentee) is, in this study, a student-teacher who is working under the supervision of a more skilled or experienced teacher (mentor) and who is a partner in the mentoring process. Phillips-Jones (2003) [25] argues that effective mentoring requires more than common sense. Research indicates that mentors and mentees who develop and manage successful mentoring partnerships demonstrate a number of specific, identifiable skills that enable learning and change to take place. However, Berk *et al* (2005) [4] argue that over the past 25 years, there has been a lack of clarity about the characteristics and outcomes of mentoring relationships, despite a growing body of research globally.

It is worth noting that in 1996, a new programme of training lower and middle basic school teachers called the Zambia Teacher Education Reform Programme (ZATERP) was introduced as a pilot programme. This was first run on a pilot basis for two years in three selected Colleges of Education namely Kitwe, Mufulira and Solwezi. From the year 2000 to 2013, this programme was then offered in all the Basic Colleges of Education under the name ZATEC. In the case of Zambia, from the time of the ZATEC programme when school mentors were formally being trained in colleges, it has not been clear whether the current crop of members of staff responsible for mentoring students on School Experience had the rightful training and skills to effectively carry out their work of mentoring students in schools. There have been growing concerns that probably members of staff who are being used for mentoring students in most schools today may not have been trained to carry out their work. There have also been concerns that mentors

who might have received some form of training/orientation during the ZATEC period may have either retired or have been elevated to management positions. Furthermore, literature, as reviewed by Phillip-Jones (2003) [25], indicates that students cannot benefit much from School Experience if they are not assisted by trained mentors because a mentor who is not trained may not know exactly how to go about mentoring the students and may thus end up de-motivating them and hence giving a wrong impression of the whole teaching profession. In addition, insights that have been gathered from the mentoring training activities that have been going on in the area of Early Childhood Education (EEC), as reported by VVOB (2016) [31], indicate that there is need to find out if mentors of the PTD students have the required competencies to mentor students on School Experience. It is against this background that this study was designed to explore the perceptions of school mentors and student-teachers on the quality of mentoring and mentoring relationships in selected primary schools of Solwezi and Mufumbwe districts of Zambia and to explore the challenges that mentors were facing in discharging their duties during School Experience in schools.

### 1.1 Significance of the study

The study is important because it would inform Colleges of Education and the Ministry of General Education (MoGE) in general as to whether there was need to train school mentors. This is because, just as students need quality mentorship during School Experience for them to progress in their career and grow professionally, mentors also need preparation, in-service training and ongoing support in order for them to effectively discharge their duties and be relevant to their clients. The study is also important because it would help establish the extent to which mentors had the required competencies to perform their duties so that skilled and experienced mentors would be assigned to students during their School Experience. Furthermore, the study is important because it would enhance the students' opportunities to put into practice what they learnt in the college classroom.

### 1.2 Scope and limitations of the study

The study focused on mentors in the selected primary schools of North-western province of Zambia where students from Solwezi College of Education were sent to do their School Experience from. The study focused on collecting reflections and perceptions of both officers in management positions (senior teachers, deputy heads and head-teachers) and student-teachers on the roles and responsibilities of mentors and the type of relationships that existed between mentors and student-teachers in the selected primary schools. The assumption was that the current crop of staff who were given the responsibility to mentor students from Solwezi College of Education during School Experience might not have been carrying out their work effectively for one reason or another. This research was limited to regular students and mentors of regular students in the two districts of North-western province only. Students on distance education programme were not included in this study because most of them were already serving teachers and due to limited resources available from Solwezi College of Education to enable the researchers to carry out a full-fledged study that would cover the whole province.

### 1.3 Theoretical framework

This study was guided by Kram's' Mentor Role Theory (1985) which suggests that mentoring is a developmental relationship that enhances professional growth and advancement in an individual. These types of assistance can be summarized in two broad categories, namely, career and psychosocial assistance. First, career assistance serves, primarily, to aid advancement up the hierarchy of an organisation. It serves career-related ends of the junior person by helping him or her learn the ropes of organizational life, gain exposure, and obtain promotions. This structural role relationship enables the senior person to provide the key career assistance through sponsorship, coaching, protection, exposure, visibility and challenging work assignments in order to help a junior colleague navigate effectively in the organizational world. Second, psychosocial assistance refers to those aspects of a relationship that enhance an individual's' sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness in a professional role. Psychosocial assistance affects each individual on a personal level by building self-worth inside and outside the organisation. This assistance includes role modelling, acceptance and co-confirmation, counselling, and friendship. Through this assistance, a young adult launching a career clarifies personal values, develops confidence in a unique style, and can address dilemmas that surface during early adulthood. However, Kram's' theory focuses solely on what Cochran-Smith and Paris (2005) [6] cited in Richter *et al*. (2013: 168) [26] referred to as knowledge transmission. According to the knowledge transmission model, mentors perceive their role as expert teachers and transmit their knowledge within a hierarchically structured relationship. In this learning environment, novices are socialized into the prevailing culture of schooling, which manifests the status quo.

Kram's model of mentorship focuses on 'situational adjustment to the new school environment, technical advice, and emotional support. Moreover, conventional approaches view the newly qualified teacher as a recipient of knowledge and the mentor as the expert teacher (Richter *et al*., 2013:168) [26]. As Richter *et al*. have argued, this approach to mentoring by Kram has a leaning towards behaviorist theories of learning 'which conceptualize learning as the accumulation of knowledge provided by experts. From this perspective, learning is a unidirectional process in which learners are passive recipients of information.' This mentoring style is what Richter and others have labelled transmission-oriented mentoring. Cochran-Smith (2005) [6] cited in Richter (2013) [26] has argued that other than knowledge transmission that Kram advocated for, 'the knowledge transformation model assumes an asymmetrical but collaborative relationship with the mentor teacher, in which knowledge about teaching is mutually generated.' This approach facilitates the exchange and generation of ideas and may support change and innovation in classroom practice. In transformation mentoring, also coined as educative mentoring by Feiman-Nemser (2003) [8] as cited by Richter (2013) [26], mentors provide opportunities that foster growth and development. They interact with their novices in a way that supports inquiry and that enables them to learn in and from their practice. The knowledge transmission model reflects a constructivist learning theory,

whereby, according to Shuell (1988) [29], learners construct their own knowledge by connecting new information to their prior knowledge. Richter *et al*. (2013) [26] have labelled this model of mentoring constructivist-oriented mentoring. This viewpoint is supported by Bell and Goldsmith (2013:7) [3] who state that mentoring 'is not a one-way, master-to-novice transaction' and that 'the principal goal of mentoring is to create a self-directed learner, that the primary tool for learning is discovering, and that the most effective context for reaching that goal is a learning partnership.

The current study therefore, while adopting Kram's mentor role theory and its behaviorist orientation, incorporates the constructivist interpretation to learning and assumes a combination of the two orientations in explaining the mentoring relationship and process between a student-teacher and an expert teacher in a school situation. While a student-teacher has prior knowledge from his/her initial training, this knowledge blossoms faster and more effectively through career and psychosocial assistance which is supplemented via the knowledge and wider experience, influence and achievement of the expert teacher. This assistance of an old hand is invaluable to the newly qualified teacher. In the current study, the clients are the learners in the school setup. An effective, efficient and highly competent student-teacher of his/her own accord is meaningless to the school until these attributes begin to filter down to the learners and begin to affect their learning outcomes positively. In spite of the flaws discussed above, Kram's mentor role theory was still seen as highly appropriate to guide this study. It guides this study's focus of its investigation of both career and psychosocial assistance to student-teachers by long serving teachers. The professional growth and personal well-being of student-teachers are both important for the production of a well-rounded competent teacher.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1 Description of the study area

Solwezi is one of the seven districts in North-western province of Zambia and it is the provincial capital. The district covers a total surface area of 30,361 square kilometres and has a total population of 265,789 people according to the national census conducted in 2000, (GRZ-CSO, 2000). Solwezi is becoming a household name in mining activities. After the reopening of Kansanshi mine and the opening up of Lumwana mine, which is the largest open pit mine in Africa, this has attracted a tremendous increase in the population of the area. Solwezi district has a total of 45 primary schools and 15 community schools all spread across the district. The population explosion in the district has further exerted pressure on education facilities resulting in crowded classrooms, inadequate staff accommodation, inadequate water and sanitation facilities, desks, learning materials and teachers.

Mufumbwe is one of the nine districts in North-western province, which is situated 244 kilometres west of the provincial capital, Solwezi. The district covers a total area of 21, 050, 000 square kilometres of which 80 percent of the land is covered by woodlands and streams. Mufumbwe district shares its borders with six districts of which are Kaoma in the south, Manyinga in the west, Mwinilunga in the north-east, Mumbwa in the south-east, Lukulu in the south-west and Kasempa in the east. According to the 2010 census of population and housing, Mufumbwe district has a population of 55, 063 people who comprise mainly the youth (GRZ-CSO, 2010). Under the education sector, Mufumbwe district has a total of 76 schools. These include eight day-secondary schools, 46 primary schools and 22 community schools all spread across the district.

### 2.2 Research design

The study used a mixed methods research design in the collection and analysis of data which takes advantage of using multiple ways to explore a research problem and possibly to overcome the limitations of a single design. Creswell & Plano Clark (2011) [7] define mixed methods research design as a method which focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone. Specifically, in order to best understand or develop more complete understanding of the research problem by obtaining different but complementary data, the study used the convergent parallel design.

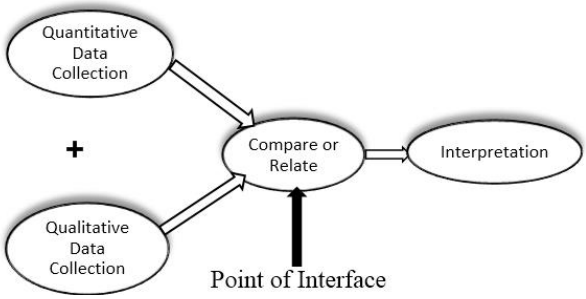


**Fig 1:** Convergent parallel design diagram **(**Creswell & Plano Clark 2011: 8-9)

What the convergent parallel design tries do is to help in the collection and analysis of two independent strands of quantitative and qualitative data at the same time in a single phase by prioritizing the methods equally. It keeps the data analysis independent and mixes the results during the overall interpretation while at the same time trying to look for convergence, divergence, contradictions, or relationships of the two sources of data. The point of interface is a point where the two strands are mixed.

### 2.3 Study population and sample

The target population for this study was all the 312 mentors (who included senior teachers, deputy and head-teachers) and 230 second-year and third-year students from Solwezi College of Education who had their School Experience in Mufumbwe and Solwezi districts. A total of 547 students were deployed by Solwezi College of Education for School Experience to various practicing schools dotted across the districts of North-western province out of which, 182 were sent to do their School Experience in Solwezi district schools while 48 were sent to do their School Experience in Mufumbwe district. A total sample size of 120 respondents comprising 40 mentors (14 from Mufumbwe district and 26 from Solwezi district) and 80 students (30 from Mufumbwe district and 50 from Solwezi district) were selected from 20 primary schools of Mufumbwe and Solwezi districts from which students from Solwezi College of Education had their School Experience exercise.

### 2.3.1 Sampling techniques

The study used two sampling techniques namely purposive sampling and random sampling techniques. Alkassim, Etikan & Musa (2016) [2] define purposive sampling technique, also called judgment sampling, as the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses. It is a nonrandom technique that involves identification and selection of individuals or groups of individuals that are proficient and well-informed with a phenomenon of interest. In this study, a purposive sampling technique was used to select mentors (who included senior teachers, deputy heads and head-teachers) from Solwezi and Mufumbwe districts schools. Purposive sampling was used to identify these respondents because the above cited subjects were the target group of people believed to be key informants in terms of providing relevant and reliable information related to the study due to their positions at the place of work and their training background.

Alkassim, Etikan & Musa (2016) [2] also define random as having the "distinguishing characteristic that each unit in the population has a known, nonzero chance of being included in the sample." In this type of sampling also known as probability sampling, each element in the population has a known nonzero chance of being selected through the use of a random selection procedure. In this study, a simple random sampling technique was employed to select schools and students from Solwezi and Mufumbwe districts. Thus, all the 45 primary schools in Solwezi district were subjected to a random sample from which 13 schools were selected for the study while all the seven schools in Mufumbwe district were picked for the study. Furthermore, using a list of School Experience postings as a basis for selecting students who had done their School Experience in Solwezi and Mufumbwe districts, a lottery method was conducted which resulted into 50 out of 182 students being drawn from Solwezi district and 30 out of 48 students being drawn from Mufumbwe district; making a total of 80 sampled students.

### 2.4 Methods of data collection

In order to collect detailed data that would help understand the phenomenon under study, two data collection instruments were used. Interview guides were used to collect data from mentors who included senior teachers, deputy head-teachers and head-teachers from the selected primary schools in the two districts, who were interacted with in order to get their views and opinions about the roles, duties and competencies of mentors in schools and to explore how individual participants described the current topic. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data from selected students on either School Experience or who had had their School Experience from these schools in order to get their views and opinions about their mentors' competencies. Secondary data were collected through content analysis of authentic documents like annual college reports, teacher education literature and internet documents related to the study. The cited data collection instruments were chosen because they were suitable for descriptive studies as they allowed the researchers to interact with the respondents and the study locations from a natural context that was cardinal for collecting extensive data as supported by Leedy and Ormrod (2010) [17].

### 2.5 Methods of data analysis

The study employed the use of both qualitative and appropriate quantitative methods to analyze data. Qualitative data from different sources were categorized thematically and analyzed with emphasis on crosschecking most of the data received. The qualitative data obtained from various respondents were coded and analyzed while quantitative data were conducted using descriptive statistics to arrive at the conclusion of each point being investigated. In cases where respondents made general comments on the issues under investigation, those comments were used to arrive at the generalization regarding those issues. However, information obtained from students' questionnaires was compared with that obtained from interview schedules in order to arrive at tangible conclusions. Graphs and charts were carefully drawn using Microsoft Excel.

### 2.6 Ethical considerations

It is important to mention that participants to this study were treated with respect they deserved and consent was obtained from them before allowing them to take part in the study. In addition, all participants had the right to understand what the researchers were doing and the researchers, in turn, were obliged to share the research findings with them for their comments. Therefore, before conducting the field-based part of this study, clearance was obtained from Solwezi College of Education administration and from the Provincial Education Office (PEO).

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Presentation of Results

#### 3.1.1 Assessment of mentors' required training and skills to carry out their work

Figure 2 shows whether practicing schools attached student-teachers to mentors as a basis for determining whether mentors were accorded an opportunity to mentor students during their School Experience. The results of the graph indicated that 97% of practicing schools attached student-teachers to mentors for mentoring while only 3% of schools did not attach student-teachers to mentors for mentoring. Thus, the results indicated that there was overwhelming evidence that student-teachers were assigned to a more experienced person to mentor them in most practicing schools.

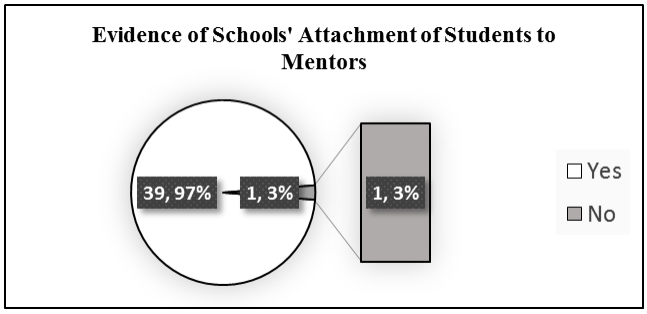


**Fig 2:** Evidence of schools' attachment of students to mentors

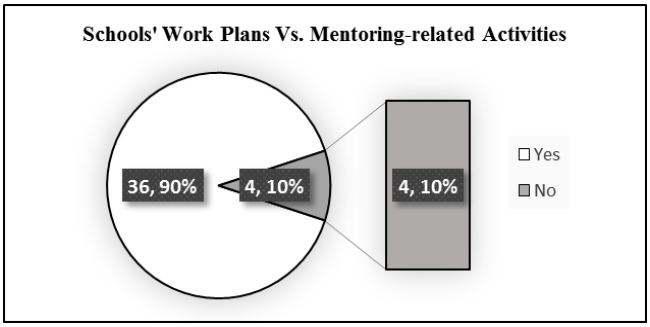


**Fig 3:** Schools' work plans vs. mentoring-related activities

Figure 3 shows whether practicing schools' work plans reflected any mentoring-related activities as a basis for determining whether schools were planning for the mentorship of students during their School Experience. The results indicated that 90% of respondents agreed to the fact that current schools' work plans reflected mentoring-related activities while 10% of them said schools did not reflect any mentoring-related activities in their current work plans. This shows that most schools were expecting to receive students on School Experience.

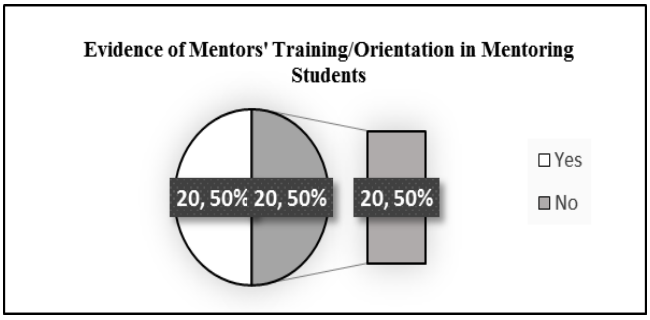


**Fig 4:** Evidence of mentors' training/orientation in mentoring students

Figure 4 shows whether mentors had received any form of training/orientation in mentoring students on School Experience as a basis for assessing mentors' competencies to effectively discharge their duties. The results indicated that 50% of mentors had received some form of training/orientation in mentorship while the remaining 50% had not received any form of training/orientation in mentorship at all. Out of the 50% who had received some form of training/orientation in mentorship, 10% had had formal training in mentorship from Solwezi College of Education in particular while 40% of them had received their mentorship orientation through school-based Continuing Professional Development (CPD) workshops in their respective schools.

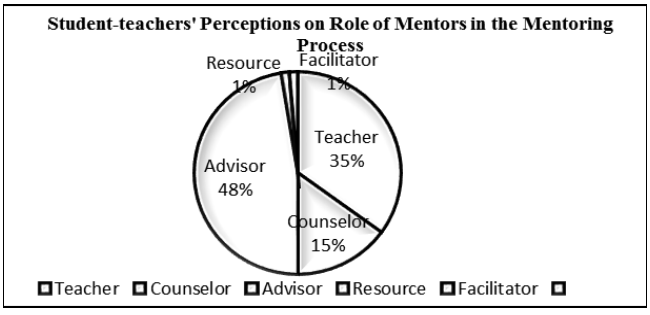


**Fig 5:** Student-teachers' perceptions on role of mentors in mentoring process

Figure 5 shows student-teachers' perceptions on role of mentors in mentoring students during their School Experience as a basis for determining student-teachers' expectations from their mentors. The results of the graph indicated that 48% of student-teachers, in most schools, regarded their mentors as advisors to them, 35% of them were of the view that the mentors were teachers to them while 15% of them viewed mentors as counselors to them. The remaining 2% of them viewed mentors as either resource persons or facilitators.

### 3.1.2 Assessment of mentors' shared experiences and answers with students

Figure 6 shows how often student-teachers in schools communicated with their mentors as a basis for determining the strength and level of relationship between mentors and student-teachers. The results of the graph indicated that 80% of student-teachers said they met and communicated with their mentors on a daily basis while 10% of them said they only met and communicated with their mentors when there was need for them to do so. The remaining 11% of student-teachers said they only met and communicated with their mentors either on a weekly or fortnightly basis.

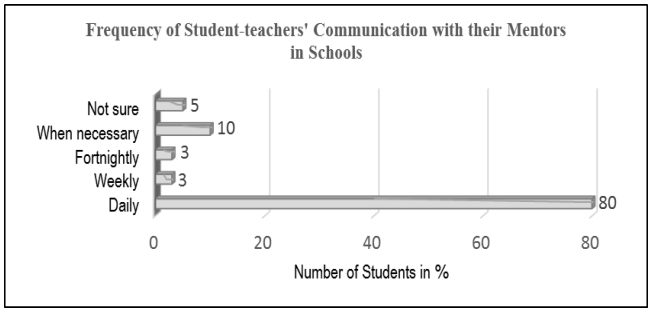


**Fig 6:** Frequency of student-teachers' communication with their mentors in schools

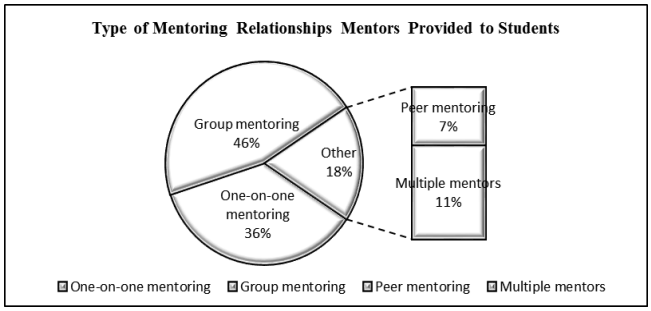


**Fig 7:** Type of mentoring relationships mentors provided to students

Figure 7 shows the type of mentoring relationships mentors provided to their mentees (student-teachers) in schools to determine the strength and effectiveness of the mentoring relationships that existed between mentors and their mentees. The results indicated that 46% of mentors in schools were engaged in group mentoring in which one mentor was mentoring a group/groups of student-teachers at a time while 36% of mentors were engaged in one-on-one type of mentoring in which one mentor was mentoring a single student-teacher at a time. The remaining 18% was shared between peer mentoring (where student-teachers were mentoring each other) and multiple mentoring (where more than one mentor were mentoring the same student-teacher(s) at different intervals.

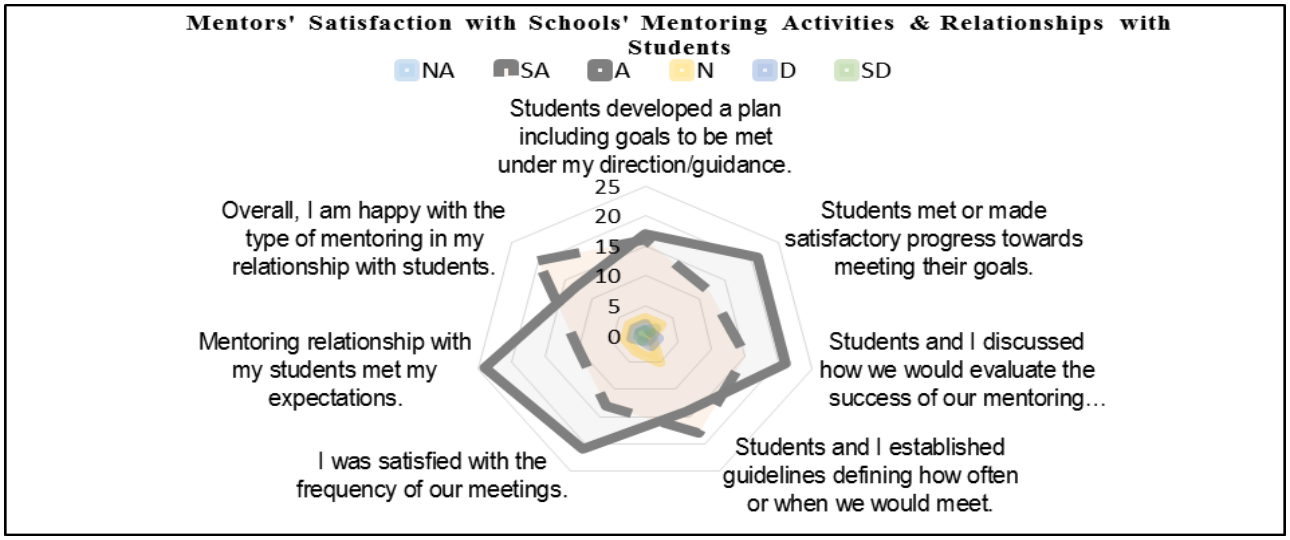


**Fig 8:** Mentors' satisfaction with schools' mentoring activities and relations with students

Figure 8 shows the level of mentors' satisfaction with practicing schools' mentoring activities and relationships with their student-teachers during School Experience. The results indicated that most of the mentors, if not all, were agreeable to the fact that they were satisfied with schools' mentoring activities and that they found the experiences with their student-teachers during School Experience quite fulfilling. The results further indicated that student-teachers made satisfactory progress towards meeting their own goals and that them (student-teachers) and their mentors established guidelines on how often and when they would meet to discuss.

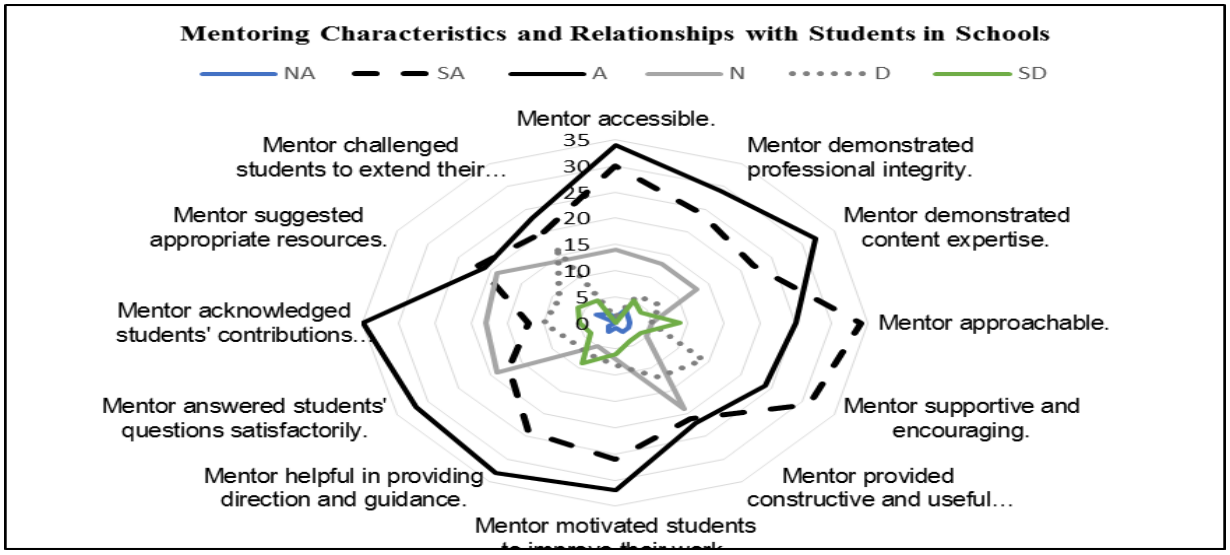


**Fig 9:** Mentoring characteristics and relationships with students in schools

Figure 9 shows the type of mentoring characteristics and relationships that existed between mentors and their mentees (student-teachers) in practicing schools. The results indicated that most, if not all student-teachers, described the mentoring characteristics and relationships with their mentors in schools as very good as shown by most of the student-teachers' responses which fell in the category of '*Strongly Agree (SA)'* and *'Agree (A)'*. The majority of student-teachers interviewed admitted that most of their mentors were approachable, supportive and encouraging and generally demonstrated professional integrity and expertise although a fraction of student-teachers was neutral on whether mentors answered their questions satisfactorily or whether they acknowledged their contributions appropriately.

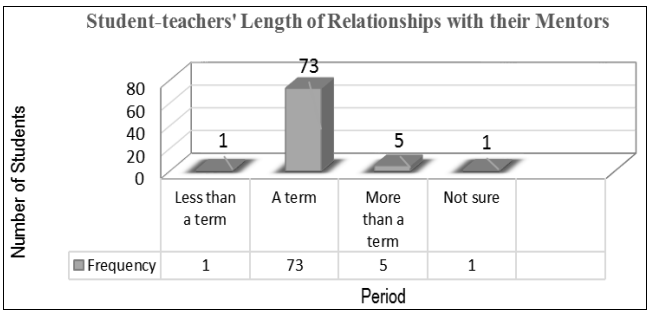


**Fig 10:** Student-teachers' length of relationships with their mentors

Figure 10 shows how long student-teachers had known their mentors as a basis for determining the strength of relationships that existed between mentors and their student-

teachers in schools. The results of the graph indicated that 92% of student-teachers had only known their mentors for a term; just during the period of their School Experience while the remaining 8% of them were either not sure of the length of their relationship with their mentors or had known their mentors for less or more than a term.

### 3.2 Discussion of Results

#### 3.2.1 Assessment of mentors' required training and skills to carry out their work

In this study, we examined whether members of staff who were responsible for mentoring student-teachers in schools had the required training and skills to effectively discharge their duties. We also examined the type of experiences and assistance mentors shared with their student-teachers in schools. We assessed mentors' level of experience in their work of mentoring and we also identified challenges that mentors were facing in discharging their duties in schools. The study suggests that most practicing schools visited were able to assign student-teachers to more experienced persons for mentoring and that most of the respondents asked agreed that schools' work plans reflected mentoring-related activities. This was indicative of the fact that practicing schools were expecting to receive students on School Experience and hence planned for them. Nevertheless, such claims were not backed by any documented evidence in form of any mentoring activity plans available in schools which information should have also been found in the practicing schools' annual work plans.

The study revealed that the majority of student-teachers interviewed regarded their mentors as advisors and teachers to them. Student-teachers strongly felt that mentors were helpful to them and that they (mentors) just needed to be supported in their mentoring work. Most mentors interviewed agreed that they found the experiences with their student-teachers quite fascinating in the sense that the majority of them sought mentors' input on how best to mentor them. Literature, as reported by Mtika (2008) [21], indicates that a mentor is expected to impart practical knowledge and should be competent in the subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge. However, the findings of the study suggest that most of the mentors had not received any formal training in mentoring from any reputable institution of learning such as a college or a university. Those who were privileged to have some orientation in mentoring received such training from school-based CPD workshops in schools. Only a small number of mentors, among whom were serving in management positions, had formal training in mentoring. This was possibly a group of old mentors who were trained during the ZATEC programme. Notwithstanding the mentors' general lack of training in mentorship, they showed willingness to get involved in any future mentoring of students during School Experience.

#### 3.2.2 Assessment of mentors' shared experiences and answers with students

The study findings suggest that the majority of student-teachers were of the strong view that they met and communicated with their mentors on a daily basis even though some of the issues they discussed during such meetings were not always academic in nature. The study further revealed that the majority of mentors in schools were engaged in group mentoring in which one mentor was mentoring a group/groups of student-teachers at a time while a good number of other mentors were engaged in one-on-one type of mentoring in which one mentor was mentoring a single student-teacher at a time. This meant that, in some cases, most of the mentors were overwhelmed with work since they were also required to perform other duties and responsibilities in their schools besides those of mentoring.

The study findings show that most student-teachers described the mentoring characteristics and relationships with their mentors as very good as was reflected in most of the student-teachers' responses which fell in the category of '*Strongly Agree (SA)'* and *'Agree (A)'*. The majority of student-teachers admitted that most of their mentors were approachable, supportive and encouraging and generally demonstrated professional integrity and expertise. The study further revealed that most of the mentors were equally agreeable to the fact that they were satisfied with schools' mentoring activities and that they found the experiences with their student-teachers quite fulfilling. The study further showed that student-teachers made satisfactory progress towards meeting their goals and that they (student-teachers) and their mentors established guidelines on how often and when they would meet to discuss. Mentors encouraged their student-teachers to attend professional meetings such as Teacher Group Meetings (TGMs), CPD workshops for their professional growth and development while other mentors helped student-teachers with the production of teaching and learning aids, preparing teaching tools such as schemes of work, weekly forecasts and lesson plans and observing their student-teachers' during their lesson implementation. A small number of mentors also offered some guidance and counselling to their mentees and helped them in the formation of new clubs and getting involved in debate and competitions such as the Teaching of Handwriting, Reading and Spellings (THRAS).

#### 3.2.4 Assessment of mentors' level of experience in mentoring students

The study findings suggest that most mentors in schools had only been in service for a period ranging from 0-5 years. This meant that the quality of mentoring which was being offered to student-teachers by such inexperienced mentors was somehow compromised. While the study conducted by Rogers (2007) [27] indicates that lack of experience and professionalism on the part of the mentor could result in most of the work being done by the mentee without any meaningful learning taking place, the 2018 Manchester Metropolitan University Mentoring Guide, indicates, to the contrary, that mentoring is not the same as training, teaching or coaching, and therefore, a mentor doesn't necessarily need to be a qualified trainer or an expert in the role the mentee carries out. The study findings also suggest that a moderate number of mentors were found to have been in service for a period ranging from 6-15 years. The remaining small number of old experienced mentors, who probably comprised, among others, serving deputy heads and head-teachers, had served for a period of 16-25 years. The findings of the study suggest that most student-teachers had only known their mentors for a period of a term (three months) indicating that they had no prior knowledge of their mentors.

### 3.2.5 Assessment on problems of student-teachers and challenges faced by mentors

Although literature confirms that mentoring contributes positively to the professional development of student-teachers as reported by Anderson and Sharmon in Heung-Ling (2003) [13], it has its own weaknesses. Lack of respect between the mentor and the mentee, for example, can have negative consequences on the effectiveness of the mentoring process. Nevertheless, the study found that most mentors considered teaching student-teachers the theory part of it as not their responsibility. The criteria for selecting mentors who had mentored student-teachers before was absent as this responsibility was usually left to head-teachers who often did not select mentors on the basis of their effectiveness. It was strongly felt that this selection method used by head-teachers was unprofessional. The study further found that guidance of student-teachers on co-curricular activities was weak in schools and hence most mentors felt that there was need to improve the prevailing status quo. The study found that some mentors were weak at organizing academic activities for student-teachers as they were only helpful in terms of planning but did not find time to help student-teachers improve their actual teaching in class.

The study revealed the following as major challenges that mentors faced in schools: lack of materials/resources to use in their mentoring work; communication breakdown between mentors in schools and supervisors in colleges; too much work for mentors who were also required to take up responsibilities elsewhere; difficulties in handling students who were not adequately grounded in pedagogy; varying lesson formats used in schools and colleges; difficulties in managing overcrowded classes; students' negative attitude towards school work which occasionally led to their late coming and absenteeism from school; students' reluctance to continue teaching after they had been observed by college supervisors; and student-teachers' lack of full involved in co-curricular activities.

### 3.3 Gaps and implications of the study

The major research gaps for this study were that mentors lacked sufficient training and experience to provide quality mentoring and support services to students on School Experience because only 10% of mentors had formal training in student mentoring. This is supported by a study conducted by Mtika (2008) [21] which found that most mentors were not trained in mentoring and were not aware of the college expectations on how to assist student-teachers during School Experience. The study findings also suggest that the majority of student-teachers interviewed were being supervised and guided by less experienced mentors who had only served for a period of 0-5 years. This meant that the quality of mentoring and support mentors provided to their student-teachers in schools was compromised and ineffective. The other research gap was that most mentors in schools lacked requisite materials such as mentors' guides (manuals) in which their roles, responsibilities and guidelines on student mentoring were expected to be outlined and explained. One other outstanding research gap was that there was a weak link between college supervisors and school mentors which resulted in weak partnerships, collaboration and varying lesson plan formats used in schools and colleges. A study conducted by Mtika (2008) [21] again found that the absence of close communication between college tutors and mentors did not promote professional development of student-teachers and that mentors did not get any incentives for mentoring student-teachers in schools.

The finding that most mentors lacked sufficient training and experience to provide quality mentoring and support services to student-teachers implies that quality was compromised and therefore there was need to design a training programme which would formally train all mentors in schools in order to equip them with the rightful competencies and skills to effectively discharge their duties. In addition, the finding that there was lack of requisite materials for planning purposes also implies that planning was weak and ineffective and that there was urgent need to purchase requisite materials especially mentors' guides (manuals) to help them with their mentoring work and to make them understand their roles, duties and responsibilities better. A weak link between college supervisors and school mentors suggests that school-college relationships/ties were weak and that there was need to strengthen this seemingly weak linkage for improved partnerships, collaboration and harmony and for the overall consistence in students' planning to teach and lesson implementation.

## 4. Conclusion and recommendations

The study concluded that most of the mentors lacked formal training in mentorship from any reputable institution of learning such as a college or a university. Those who were found with some form of orientation in student mentoring had received such training through school-based CPD workshops within their respective schools which was not accompanied with any training plan/manual. Generally, there existed a harmonious and cordial relationship between student-teachers and their mentors as mentors equally found the experiences and relationships with their mentees quite fascinating in the sense that most of the student-teachers sought their mentors' input on how best to mentor them. Mentors generally possessed a certain level of skills that seemed to be helpful in mentoring student-teachers although such skills were not supported by training in student mentoring. The study further concluded that most mentors were agreeable to the fact that they were satisfied with schools' mentoring activities and that they found the experiences with their student-teachers quite fulfilling. Student-teachers made satisfactory progress towards meeting their goals and that they and their mentors established guidelines on how often and when they would meet to discuss matters related to School Experience. As most school mentors had only been in service for a short period of time, this meant that the quality of mentoring provided by these inexperienced mentors was compromised and ineffective. Mentors considered teaching student-teachers the theory part of it as not their responsibility. Furthermore, the criteria for selecting mentors who had mentored student-teachers before was absent as this responsibility was usually left to head-teachers who often did not select mentors on the basis of their effectiveness. Even though mentors and their mentees were impressed with each other's relationships and work culture, these relationships were not supported by mentors' sufficient experience and training in student mentoring. Thus, the mentors' relative inexperience and inadequate training in mentorship could have impacted negatively on the quality of mentoring provided to student-teachers in schools although part of the reviewed literature showed mixed perceptions

among researchers as to whether being a qualified trainer or an expert in mentoring was a necessary prerequisite in the role the student-teacher carried out in schools.

To overcome many of the challenges and stress faced by students on School Experience, the study recommends that an improved initial teacher training, orientation and induction, career and psychosocial mentorship as well as CPD programmes of student-teachers in schools were desirable. A national policy on mentorship of student-teachers in schools should be developed and institutionalized by MoGE. As part of the implementation strategy of a national policy on mentorship of student-teachers in schools, the study recommends that there should be a formal training for school mentors to adequately equip them with requisite knowledge and skills on how to mentor student-teachers. The study recommends that a deliberate policy should be put in place to make it mandatory to attach a cooperate teacher to every student who was on School Experience and that observation of students should be done twice or more to improve their pedagogical content knowledge and competencies. In order to overcome the problem of attaching inexperienced mentors to student-teachers in schools, mentors should be carefully and deliberately selected to better suit the needs of pre-service teachers. This should preferably involve teachers who strongly believe in the genuine importance of students' School Experience and have good enough experience in teaching.

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