

## The Perceptions of Teachers towards the Effectiveness of Class-based Mentors in the Mentoring of Student Teachers on Teaching Practice

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**ABSTRACT** This research sought to determine the effectiveness of mentoring of student teachers on teaching practice by class-based mentors as perceived by teaching diploma holder in Binga District Primary Schools. In this research, a random sample of 30 teachers, conveniently selected from six primary schools was used as research subjects. The descriptive survey was the research method suitable for the research and a self-administered questionnaire was used as the research instrument to gather relevant data. The rate of return of the questionnaire was 100%. Data collected was presented through tables and graphs. The research study showed that while class-based mentors played a significant contribution in the professional development of student teachers on teaching practice, they lacked the necessary mentoring knowledge and skills to perform their roles with expertise particularly in the areas of joint approaches, building positive mentor-mentee relationships and assessment. It was also revealed that class-based mentors were not committed to their duties. The research recommends that class-based mentors be given the necessary orientation and training in mentoring knowledge and skills. It is also necessary to attach student teachers to teachers with less school duties so that there is adequate time for joint approaches.

### INTRODUCTION

The significant role played by the school in the provision of the practical component in training student teachers has seen training institutions internationally adopting school based teacher training programmes. In such programmes, student teachers are attached to schools to be under the guidance and supervision of experienced and qualified teachers. This is viewed as the best means of "providing preparation for joining the teaching profession" (Fish 1995). The apparent recognition of schools' critical role in the training of student teachers ushered a new form of partnership between the training institutions and the co-operating schools. Such a partnership is recognized by her Majesty Inspectorate's Report, as cited in Chakanyuka (2006: 98), which observes that:

*The success of school based training depends on the quality of the relationship between the training institution and the school, the significant involvement of teachers in the planning, supervision and assessment of student teachers' training.*

The above reiterates the view that teaching is a practical activity which has to be learnt by engaging in the actual practice of teaching in real school environments in order to make training more relevant and effective. The need for meaningful close collaboration between teacher training institutions and schools cannot be over-emphasized, so that the latter can meaningfully complement colleges' supervisory and assessment processes.

In Zimbabwe, the historical development of teacher training reflects considerable changes in the training systems in primary education in particular. The high demand of qualified teachers led to the launch of an initiative 4 year unconventional in-service type of teacher training system, the Zimbabwe National Teacher Education Course (ZINTEC) in 1981. This was to run concurrently with the existing 3 year conventional training system. Training methods in ZINTEC differed substantially from those used in the conventional system. The major difference was that whereas under the conventional system, student teachers spent two years (the first and third years) in college residence undergoing the theory part of training, and one year (the second year) on teaching practice, in ZINTEC, the student teachers spent only a sixteen week (4 months) residential term undergoing theory

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before being deployed to teach in schools for the rest of the four year training period. Student teachers under both systems handled full classes on their own while on teaching practice but only the ZINTEC student teachers were regarded as full time employees.

The supervision of student teachers on teaching practice seems to have been faced with several challenges. Although schools provided the expected supportive role of creating opportunities for student teachers to practice their teaching, school based supervisors or mentors' effectiveness was questionable. In his research, Shumbayaonda (1997) revealed that 77.8% of lecturers were not satisfied with the training given to college supervisors or school-based mentors. Kerry and Mayes (1995) cited time management, training and unclear communication as some of the problems experienced by mentors. The selection of mentors was not systematic as Magunje (2001) noted in his study that mentors were usually of different academic and professional qualifications and competences, thus compromising their effectiveness in assisting student teachers under their care. Mukeredzi and Ndamba (2005) also revealed that the roles of school based mentors were not clearly defined and their positions were vague.

### Conceptual Framework of Mentoring

Coaching and mentoring share many similarities so it makes sense to outline the common things coaches and mentors do whether the services are offered in a paid (professional) or unpaid (philanthropic) role.

- ♦ Facilitate the exploration of needs, motivations, desires, skills and thought processes to assist the individual in making real, lasting change.
- ♦ Use questioning techniques to facilitate client's own thought processes in order to identify solutions and actions rather than takes a wholly directive approach
- ♦ Support the client in setting appropriate goals and methods of assessing progress in relation to these goals
- ♦ Observe, listen and ask questions to understand the client's situation
- ♦ Creatively apply tools and techniques which may include one-to-one training, fa-

cilitating, counselling and networking (Parsloe 2013; Ingersoll and Strong 2011).

Mentoring can also be explained in terms of its historical development which stems from a Greek mythology in which Odysseus entrusted the care and education of his child, Telemachus, to a friend named Mentor, while the father was away on his adventures and travels. According to Kerry and Mayes (1995), Mentor was charged with the responsibility of protecting, advising, guiding and nurturing Telemachus and the entire royal family. The authors further point out that it was also the duty of Mentor to ensure the son's appropriate growth and development in wisdom and loyalty. Mentoring has thus come to be used for a variety of relationships. The person offering the mentoring is usually referred to as a mentor, while the recipient or partner may be identified as a mentee or protégé. The mentors have come to be regarded synonymously with the terms role models, coaches, guides, sponsors, friends and advisors to the mentees.

Bay and Parker-Katz (2009) define mentoring as a developmental partnership through which one person shares knowledge, skills, information, and perspective to foster the personal and professional growth of someone else.

### Types of Mentoring

Common types of mentoring programmes are:

**Informal:** This is what most people think of when they think of mentoring: a spontaneous, casual relationship where a senior person takes a junior person "under his or her wing" and provides long-term guidance and counsel. Yet many people who want mentors do not have them. The desire to give everyone access to mentoring has led many organizations to start "formal" or structured mentoring programs (Clandini et al. 2009).

Structured-Structured mentoring programs are designed to create a culture where people can proactively support the development of one another. In these programs, mentors are generally matched with mentees to support specific goals such as leadership development, diversity, or retention (Clandini et al. 2009).

Tomlison (1995) explains mentoring as a process of assisting student teachers to learn

how to teach in school based settings. In concurrence, Chakanyuka (1999) agrees that mentoring is a school based training system whereby a student teacher is attached to a qualified experienced and practising teacher during school experiences and teaching practice. The truth cannot be far from these views when one considers the current teacher training system of attaching students teachers to class-based mentors during teaching practice. The success of mentoring depends on the kind of relationship existing between the mentor and mentee. Madziyire (2000) points out that the mentor should be a confidante and a friend. A colleagueship relationship should exist between the mentor and mentee. Both should learn to co-exist, accept and respect each other in order to work together.

The roles of a mentor are demanding hence the need for careful selection of mentors with the necessary characteristics, skills and knowledge. A mentor should be one with greater skills, experiences and wisdom. Various authors cited in Kerry and Mayes (1995) indicate that a mentor should be a person of greater rank or expertise, an influential person, an experienced adult and a competent person. In addition, Edwards and Collision (1996) regard a mentor as a person of superior rank, special achievements and prestige. These same attributes are cited by Chakanyuka (2000) who views mentoring as a process of pairing a skilled and experienced person with a less skilled deliberately to enable the former to acquire and develop specific competencies. The class-based mentor is expected to have similar attributes so as to effectively perform expected duties.

The foregoing recurring themes underpinning the concept of mentoring can be best summed up by Kerry and Mayes (1995: 29) who defines mentoring as:

*a nurturing process in which a more skilled or more experienced person serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional and or personal development.*

The definition above points out to five striking features of mentoring namely: A nurturing process, the act of serving as a role model, the five mentoring functions- teaching, sponsoring,

encouraging, counselling and befriending, the focus on professional and or personal development and the ongoing relationship. Most of these features have been alluded to previously but two need further attention. First, the idea of nurturing reflects a process of development or growth in stages until something reaches maturity level (Hanson 2007). The concept relates to the professional development or growth of student teachers who also pass through certain phases or stages until the level where they become qualified teachers. Second, the act of serving as a role model reflects the need for a professional and competent mentor (DuBois and Karcher 2005). Chakanyuka (2006) concurs with this perspective by pointing out that by being a role model, the mentor gives the student teachers, a sense of what he or she is trying to become in future.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As the research sought to determine the perceptions of teaching diploma holders towards the effectiveness of mentoring the researchers felt it necessary to employ the descriptive survey method because of its flexibility. The descriptive research method can be used for descriptive, explanatory and exploratory purposes. According to Cohen and Manion (1994: 76), descriptive research method is concerned with "conditions or relationships that exist, practices that prevail, beliefs, points of view or attitudes that are held, processes that on-going and effects that are developing." Considering the above perspective, the descriptive survey method was therefore found relevant to the present study which sought to investigate the conditions, practices and attitudes held with regards mentoring of student teachers by class-based mentors, based on the current attachment model of teacher training system.

In this study, the questionnaire was used. The questionnaire contained 37 closed-ended and 10 open-ended questions. The open-ended questions, based on a Likert scale were designed in such a way that they would elicit information on a variety of perceptions from each respondent. In the Likert type of scale, a set of statements were presented for each of the sub-problem area of which the subjects responded in terms of one of the following categories: Strong-

ly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) or alternatively, to a very great extent, to some extent and to a little extent. Each of the categories was allotted weightings of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 or vice versa respectively.

Sample refers to a small number, group or subjects of the population selected. Out of the 57 primary schools in Binga District, the researchers considered a sample frame of 18 primary schools in Binga North. This was 31.8% of the total school population. Of the 18 primary schools in Binga North, 6 comprised the accessible school population sample. This was 10, 53% of the total school population in Binga District. Over three hundred primary school teaching diploma holders were deployed in Binga District to replace all untrained teachers. Of these, the researchers considered a sample frame of 120 out of the 138 teachers in the 18 primary schools in Binga North's Siabuwa Cluster. This sample frame was 40% of the total teacher population.

Out of the sample frame of 120 teachers, 30 teachers were selected as respondents, which was 10% and 25% of the teacher population and target accessible teacher population respectively. It was the researchers' opinion that the school sample of 6 schools and the respondents' sample of 30 teachers being 10.53% and 10% respectively constituted reliable representative samples to make inferences about the nature of the total population itself. Convenience sampling method was used to select the 6 schools. These were within the researcher's radius with the furthest school being about 20km away. For the respondents, 5 were selected at each school through simple random sampling to ensure that each subject had an equal opportunity of being selected. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that at least two female teacher respondents were selected in order to get a fair gender balance.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the researchers will present data collected during the research in tables and graphs. Variables that can be combined will be presented in the same tables and graphs. The two outside categories of the Likert scale will be combined in analyzing data from the questionnaires. In the data presentation, frequency (F) refers to the number of times an option was cho-

sen by respondents. The percentage given is the frequency rate of the chosen option.

**Table 1: Frequency distribution of respondents according to teaching experience before college training (N = 30)**

Teaching experience	Male		Female		Total	
	F	%	F	%	N	%
Yes	9	30	2	7	11	37
No	6	20	13	43	19	63
Total	15	50	15	50	30	100

The majority of respondents in Table 1, 19 (63%) did not have any teaching experience prior to college training. Of these, 13 (43%) were female while 6 (20%) were male. Only 11 (37%) of the respondents had some stint of temporary teaching experience.

**Table 2: Respondents' perceptions towards the gender of the class-based mentors as a problem in the mentoring relationships (N = 30)**

Response	Male		Female		Total	
	F	%	F	%	N	%
Yes	3	10	3	10	6	20
No	12	40	12	40	24	80
Total	15	50	15	50	30	100

Table 2 results reveal that 24 (80%) of the respondents had no problems with the gender of class-based mentors while 6 (20%) felt that the aspect was a cause of concern.

**Table 3: Respondents' perceptions towards the age range of class-based mentors as a problem in the mentoring relationships (N = 30)**

Response	Male		Female		Total	
	F	%	F	%	N	%
Yes	3	10	3	10	6	20
No	12	40	12	40	24	80
Total	15	50	15	50	30	100

The data in Table 3 indicate that 24 (80%) felt that the age range of the class-based mentors was not a problem while 6 (20%) thought otherwise.

Table 4 results indicate that a total of 24 (80%) of the respondents had 'O' level education while 6 (20%) had done 'A' level.

**Table 4: Profile of respondents according to academic qualifications (N = 30)**

Qualification	Male		Female		Total	
	F	%	F	%	N	%
'O' level	11	36.7	13	43.3	24	80
'A' level	4	13.3	2	6.7	6	20
Total	15	50	15	50	30	100

### Sub-problems Data Presentation and Analysis

**Sub-problem a:** The professional development areas in which class-based mentors are perceived as effective in the mentoring of student teachers on teaching practice.

According to data presented in Table 5, the levels of respondents' satisfaction with class-based mentors' contribution in the professional development areas shown was emphatic. 28 (93.3%) expressed satisfaction in the areas of record keeping and professional roles and ethics, 27 (90%) in the area of class control, 26 (86.7%) in the areas of lesson preparation and planning as well as classroom management, 25 (83.3%) in the areas of language and communication including evaluation and assessment, 23 (76.6%) in the area of knowledge and content, 22 (73.3%) in the area of problem-solving skills and lastly 21 (70%) in the area of teaching methodologies.

The above positive results are in line with research findings from Shumbayaonda (1997) which indicated that student teachers were satisfied with mentors' contribution in the areas of lesson preparation and planning (58.2%), language and communication skills (63%) and

teaching methodologies (55.6%). However, 57.2% were not satisfied with mentors' contribution in the area of problem-solving skills compared to 73.3% who indicated positive in the current study. Shumbayaonda and Maringe (2000) urged mentors on the practicum to focus on this neglected area. However, based on the positive emphatic results from the current study, one would argue that the area was attended to. Related literature therefore confirms with the view that class-based mentors contribute effectively in the professional development areas of student teachers on teaching practice (Hanson 2007).

**Sub-problem b:** The roles of class-based mentors and the extent to which they are effectively performed.

According to Table 6, item R21, 16 (53.3%) of the respondents were positive that class-based mentors effectively carried out needs analysis while 14 (46.6%) respondents negatively. Item R24 indicates that 15 (50%) of the respondents showed that class-based mentors effectively supported the teaching activities effectively. Item R25 shows that class-based mentors provided adequate feedback of work done. Also, 17 (56.7%) confirmed satisfaction with class based mentors' performance of this role while 13 (43.3%) were not satisfied. Although the majority indicated that class-based mentors performed the above three roles effectively, there was a significant number, in each case, that expressed that the roles were not performed effectively. The equally low ratings in all cases would suggest that class-based mentors were not very effective in performing these roles. Item R23 further confirms the above as 16 (53.3%) of the

**Table 5: The extent to which class-based mentors contributed effectively in the professional development areas of student teachers (N = 30)**

Professional development area	S.A		A		S.D		D		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	N	%
PD.11. Lesson preparation and planning	9	30	17	56.7	3	10	1	3.3	30	100
PD.12. Class control	13	43.3	14	46.7	2	6.7	1	3.3	30	100
PD.13. Classroom management	13	43.3	13	43.3	3	10	1	3.3	30	100
PD.14. Language and communication	10	33.3	15	50	5	16.7	0	0	30	100
PD.15. Knowledge and content	7	23.3	16	53.3	6	20	1	3.3	30	100
PD.16. Teaching methodologies	8	26.7	13	43.3	7	23.3	2	6.7	30	100
PD.17. Record keeping	10	33.3	18	60	1	3.3	1	3.3	30	100
PD.18. Evaluation and assessment	5	16.7	20	66.7	5	16.7	0	0	30	100
PD.19. Problem-solving skills	1	3.3	21	70	6	20	2	6.7	30	100
PD.20. Professional roles and ethics	9	30	19	63.3	2	6.7	0	0	30	100

**Table 6: Respondents' perceptions towards class-based mentors' effectiveness in performing their roles (N = 30)**

Role	Rating										Total	
	5		4		3		2		1		N	%
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
R21 Needs analysis	3	10	13	43.3	10	33.3	3	10	1	3.3	30	100
R22 Joint lesson preparation and planning	5	16.7	4	13.3	8	26.7	10	33.3	3	10	30	100
R23 Observing lessons	3	10	11	36.7	9	30	5	16.7	2	6.7	30	100
R24 Supporting teaching activities	7	23.3	8	26.7	7	23.3	7	23.3	1	3.3	30	100
R25 Providing feedback	5	16.7	12	40	2	6.7	10	33.3	1	3.3	30	100

Key: 5 – To a very great extent. 4 – To a great extent. 3 – To some extent. 2 – To a little extent. 1 – To a very little extent.

respondents felt that class-based mentors did not effectively observe lessons compared to 14 (46.7%) who thought they were effective.

In all the roles investigated, item R22 received the highest rating of dissatisfaction as 21(70%) of the respondents indicated that there was no joint lesson preparation, planning and teaching while 9 (30%) expressed that class-based mentors were involved. The results are however not consistent with Shumbayaonda's (1997) earlier research findings where 58.2% of the student teacher respondents expressed satisfaction with the effectiveness of mentors on the same aspect. A possible explanation for this could be that teaching diploma holders in the current study had a better understanding of the meaning of joint approaches in teaching better than student teachers in the earlier study. This is similar to conclusion reached by Parsloe (2013) that class-based mentors did not effectively perform their roles in this area as joint lesson preparation and planning in the current study implies a clinical supervisory approach in the mentoring process.

When asked to indicate the roles of class-based mentors rated as most important, respondents identified these as assisting in scheming, planning and teaching, observing and assessing lessons, conducting demonstrations lessons and record keeping. Also indicated were activities such as class control, classroom management, producing time-tables, joint marking and being a model. The picture one gets from such variations is that most student teachers had not been adequately conscientised about the most important roles of class-based mentors.

**Sub-problem c:** Factors affecting the effectiveness of class-based mentors in mentoring student teachers.

According to Table 7, orientation of student teachers was adequately done by colleges I the roles of the mentor, 26 (86.7%), scheming and planning, 28 (93.4%) class control, 18(60%), classroom management, 20 (66.7%) record keeping and teaching methodologies 29 (96.8%).

The above results are in direct contrast with earlier findings by Shumbayaonda (1997), Nyuke (2004) and Clandini et al. (2009). In his study, Shumbayaonda (1997) found that 60.7% of stu-

**Table 7: Respondents' perception towards the adequacy of orientation by colleges (N =30)**

Aspect	Very adequate		Adequate		Very inadequate		Inadequate		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	N	%
	F 26 Roles of the mentor	9	30	17	56.7	1	3.3	3	10	30
F 27 Scheming and planning	11	36.7	17	56.7	1	3.3	1	3.3	30	100
F 28 Class control	8	26.7	10	33.3	9	30	3	10	30	100
F 29 Classroom management	8	26.7	12	40	8	26.7	2	6.7	30	100
F 30 Record keeping	12	40	17	56.7	0	0	1	3.3	30	100
F 31 Teaching methodologies	11	36.7	18	60	0	0	1	3.3	30	100

dent teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the orientation they received from colleges while Nyuke (2004) indicated that 100% of lecturers in his study revealed that they did not adequately orient student teachers due to the limitations of the 2-5-2 training system. The conclusion from the current study could be that colleges now prepare or organize thorough orientation programmes for their students before they proceed on the practicum. Adequate orientation could have enhanced the class-based mentors' effectiveness in their contribution towards the professional development areas of student teachers since the latter were adequately prepared for the practicum.

**Table 8: Respondents' ratings of mentor-mentee relationships as a factor (N = 30)**

Category	F	%
To a very great extent	3	10
To a great extent	9	30
To some extent	17	56.7
To a very little extent	1	3.3
To a little extent	0	0
Total	30	100

Table 8 reveals that 18 (60%) of the respondents thought that class-based mentors failed to build positive mentor-mentee relationships based on collegiality while 12(40%) thought that the relationships were positive. The explanation could be that a number of class-based mentors lacked formal training. It could therefore be concluded that mentors' failure to build positive relationships could have affected their effectiveness in performing their roles. When asked to mention possible reasons for the mentors' failure to build relationships, respondents indicated these as mentors failure to give demonstration lessons, failure to share subjects or lessons fairly, disagreements about teaching methods and letting student teachers do most of the workload such as marking.

**Table 9: Class-based mentors' availability in the classrooms as a factor (N = 30)**

Response	F	%
Most satisfied	8	27
More satisfied	13	43
Somewhat satisfied	7	23
Not satisfied	2	7
Total	30	100

Data presented in Table 9 indicates that most class-based mentors were mostly available in the classroom. 21(70%) of the respondents showed satisfaction with their mentors' availability while 9(30%) were dissatisfied. It is however difficult to establish a close association between mentor availability and their effectiveness in performing their roles since results earlier tables indicated respondents minimal satisfaction with mentors' performance of some of their roles. Besides this, Hanson (2007) postulates that there is a relationship between mentor availability and their effectiveness in performing their roles.

**Table 10: Class-based mentors' commitment to their duties as a factor (N = 30)**

Response	F	%
To a very great extent	10	27
To a great extent	14	47
To some extent	0	0
To a little extent	12	40
To a very little extent	1	3
Total	30	100

According to data presented in Table 10, 24(74%) felt that their mentors were committed to their duties while 13(43%) thought they were not. It could therefore be concluded that lack of commitment could be a factor that compromised mentors' effectiveness in performing their roles. When asked to give reasons for class-based mentors' lack of commitment and, or availability, respondents indicated these as personal activities to augment salaries, pursuit of professional studies and dealing with administrative duties. In order to enhance the class-based mentors' commitment and, or availability, respondents suggested that incentives should be offered, subjects to be shared equally, mentors to be also assessed by school heads and that student teachers should not be attached to classes of school administrators or to class teachers with too many school duties.

**Sub-problem d:** The perceptions of teaching diploma holders towards mentoring student teachers on teaching practice by class-based mentors as an effective model of teacher training.

According to Table 11, 29 (97%) of the respondents felt that the attachment model was an effective training system in the mentoring of student teachers on teaching practice. When asked to state the greatest challenges they faced during teaching practice respondents identified

**Table 11: Respondents' perceptions mentoring of students teachers by class-based mentors as an effective model of teacher training (N = 30)**

Response	F	%
Very effective	10	33
Effective	19	64
Very ineffective	0	0
Ineffective	1	3
Total	30	100

aspects such as inadequate financial and teaching resources, work overload and inability to interpret syllabi correctly. In a study conducted by Parsloe (2013), the same factors were mentioned by the respondents.

### CONCLUSION

The study found out that class-based mentors played a significant contribution towards the student teachers' professional development in a number of areas but failed to perform some of their expected roles with expertise. The failure to implement joint approaches and observing lessons meaningfully could be attributed to inadequate knowledge and skills in mentoring. A close association between class-based mentors' lack of commitment and poor performance of their roles was established. The minimal involvement of class-based mentors in joint lesson preparation, planning and teaching, supporting the teaching activity and providing meaningful feedback could be attributed to their inability to have time for mentoring due to commitments elsewhere.

It was observed that assessment of student teachers by class-based mentors affected the latter's effectiveness in performing their roles. The poor mentor-mentee relationships could be attributed to the challenges posed by assessment in mentor-mentee relationships. While the attachment of student teachers to class-based mentors was noted as an effective training system due to the daily guidance of class-based mentor, challenges such as shortage of teaching materials, high workloads and inadequate finances were revealed as affecting student teachers, which would in the long run also affect the class-based mentors' efforts.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the above conclusions, the researcher has made the following recommendations: -

- Teacher training institutions should launch in-service workshops for all class-based mentors with a focus on mentoring skills and mentor roles so that they perform their duties with expertise.
- Schools should ensure that class teachers with many school responsibilities such as heads, deputy heads and teachers in-charge or teachers with other commitments such as personal studies should not be mentors so that adequate time is given to mentoring and class-based mentors should be given some incentives to enhance their commitment to their duties.
- Assessment of student teachers should be done by the head, deputy head or a delegated senior teacher so that class-based mentors are relieved of the assessment role.
- Schools should make efforts to minimize student teachers' challenges by addressing concerns such as teaching resources and ensuring that class-based mentors' work is supervised.
- The study lastly recommends that further research be conducted in order to establish empirical evidence on what takes place during the mentoring interactions.

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