

# Reconceptualizing the Norms and Standards of Mentor Selection in Malawi's 1+1 Initial Primary Teacher Education Model: Implication for Teacher Development

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**ABSTRACT** Mentoring student teachers during the practicum is a pivotal dimension of quality of teacher development. The key determinant of quality of mentoring is, however, the school mentor. This paper reports on a study, which examined the norms and standards that guided selection of school mentors in primary schools in the 1+1 Initial Primary Teacher Education Model in Malawi. The study employed a mixed methods sequential explanatory design comprising a survey followed by a case study. Data was collected from 92 mentoring primary schools with a total of 183 informants comprising 91 school head teachers and 92 school mentors. Quantitative data was analyzed by employing univariate analysis, and qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis. The findings revealed that school mentors were selected based on professional behavior, moral behavior, teaching experience, academic qualification, professional grade, age, school responsibility, mentoring experience and gender in order of decreasing frequency of use. A model of mentor selection anchored by the theoretical insights and the research findings is proposed.

## INTRODUCTION

The perennial quality debates in pre-service teacher education center around balancing theory and practice (Moyo 2014; Korthagen 2010; Day 2004; Husebo 2012; Trent 2013; Darling-Hammond 2006; Allen and Wright 2014; Heeralal and Bayaga 2011). As such, there is a range of models of pre-service teacher education from fully college-based (theory first and teach later) to school-based (teacher first and theory later). In between this continuum lies a variety of mixed models with different structures of college-based and school-based components (Mattson 2006; Day 2004; Allen and Wright 2014). The Malawi's 1+1 Initial Primary Teacher Education model is an example of mixed models of pre-service teacher education. It consists of a one year of college-based component- followed by one year of mentoring in a primary school context (MIE 2006). All the models, however, rely heavily on mentoring of student teachers by practicing teachers. The school mentors play a critical role of supporting student teachers to link theory and practice. The quality of the school mentors is therefore a key determinant of the outcomes of the mentoring program (Hegstad 1999; Hobson et al. 2009; Rose 2003; Alhija and Fresko 2014). As such, careful selection of school mentors is vital in a pre-service teacher education mentoring program.

## National Contexts

Malawi, like many developing countries, is experiencing an unprecedented demand for more and better teachers (MoEST 2008(a), 2008(b)). The realization of the Millennium Development Goals (UN 2000), Education for All goals (UNESCO 2000), the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (OAU 1981), the Southern Africa Development Cooperation Protocol on Education and Training (SADC 2007), and Malawi's Vision 2020 and Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (GoM 2011) hinge on both the quantity and quality of teachers. This demand has given rise to a corresponding pressure to balance access and quality in teacher education and development.

Malawi introduced Free Primary Education (FPE) in 1994 to increase access to primary teacher education (Kunje 2002; Kunje et al. 2003; Chimombo and Goodson 2005). The policy heightened the demand for more teachers, hence rendered the traditional program of a two-year college-based training program inefficient (Kunje 2002). According to Kunje, Malawi has since then experimented on over two models of pre-service primary teacher education programs. They include the Malawi Special Teacher Education Program (MASTEP) (1994 - 1996) with a structure of one year of school-based components followed by one year of college-based components (1-1). The Malawi In-service Teach-

er Education Program (MIITEP) (1997-2003) had a structure comprising three months of college-based components, 20 months of school-based components and 1 month of college-based components (3-20-1) (Kunje 2002; Kunje and Lewin 2000; Kunje et al. 2003).

The aforementioned studies indicate that both programs relied heavily on support from school mentors. They contend that the key challenge, which necessitated Malawi, to move from one model to another was the low quality of teachers graduating from the programs. The pre-service teacher education programs compromised quality over quantity (Kunje 2002). It can also be argued implicitly that in this regard, the mentoring programs were, in part, ineffective. Hence raising doubts on the quality of the school mentors. As such, the models seemed struggling to find the optimal balance between theory and practice. Hence, the introduction of the 1+1 Initial Primary Teacher Education model in 2005 as an improved model over its predecessor, the MIITEP (MIE 2006).

The 1+1 Initial Primary Teacher Education model refers to one year of college-based components followed by one year of school-based one (MIE 2006). According to Mattson (2006), this is an example of an IN-OUT model of teacher training. During the college-based component, student teachers acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes from a variety of content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and practical teaching courses. The theories embodied in teacher education are therefore at the center of the college-based component. During the one year of the school-based component, student teachers are attached to a school mentor at each of the mentoring schools. Many studies confirm that the main success story of the model is that it is a fast-track model of teacher education (DeStefano 2012; Heirstein 2013; MoEST 2014; Ndalama and Chidalengwa 2011). Their findings also indicate that the mentoring phase of the 1+1 model was plagued by many quality-related challenges such as inadequate teaching and learning resources, inadequate financial resources and inadequate support from school mentors. These challenges are encountered amid the Government of Malawi's efforts of improving quality of the 1+1 pre-service teacher education model through increased funding, providing teaching and learning resources, providing in-service training to primary school teachers, and

upgrading the qualifications of college lecturers. Hence, there was still the need to reconceptualize the quality of mentoring the 1+1 IPTE Model.

### **The Definition and Practices of Mentoring**

The definition of mentoring varies across and within disciplines (Hansford et al. 2003). For instance, Eby et al. (2007) identified over fifteen definitions, and Haggard et al. (2011) reported over twenty definitions. In pre-service teacher education, Tomlinson (1995:7) defines mentoring as 'the process of assisting student teachers to learn how to teach in a school-based setting'. This definition is echoed by Sergiovanni and Starat (2002:265) who define pre-service teacher mentoring as 'a process that is intended to help new teachers successfully learn their roles, establish the self-images as teachers, figure out the school and its culture, understand how teaching unfolds in a real classroom and achieve other goals that are important to the teachers being mentored'. As pointed by Scandura (2009), in such definitions, mentoring assumes the characteristics of being a hierarchical relationship between the senior (practicing teachers) and a junior person (student teacher). As such, mentoring is a socialization process of student teachers into the teaching profession by experienced teachers with a primary objective of enhancing the student teachers' competences.

Studies consistently confirm that mentoring serves three main functions to the student teachers: career, psychosocial and role modeling functions (Kram 1985; Scandura and Ragins 1993; Castro et al. 2004). Literature, however, also consistently confirms that the benefits of mentoring in pre-service teacher education extend to school teachers and quality of the education system as a whole (Kram 1985; Phillips and Fragoulis 2010; Scandura 2009; Eby et al. 2007; Ghosh and Reio, Jr. 2013; Hobson et al. 2009; Hansford et al. 2003). It is, therefore, important that the quality of mentoring is assured in order to accrue the direct and indirect benefits from it.

Pre-service teacher mentoring is a formal mentoring program. This means that it comprises sets of planned activities (Hansford et al. 2004; Weinberg and Lankau 2011; Parise and Forret 2008; Inzer and Crawford 2005). They also point out that formal mentoring programs are characterized by norms and standards that define the

space of operation, including selection of mentors. According to Bayaga and Moyo (2009: 57), standards help rationalize the definition of quality, and make it more objective.

Hegstad's (1999) Formal Mentoring Theory shows that mentor selection is one of the antecedents of any formal mentoring. It is clear from this theory that the quality of mentoring is influenced by mentor's demographics characteristics and profile. Findings from studies by Afolabi (2013), Finkelstein et al. (2003), Ismail and Jui (2006) and Allen et al. (2006) have revealed that age, gender, teaching experience, mentoring experience, professional status and academic qualification are critical ingredients to the outcomes of a mentoring program. This suggests that the demographics characteristics and profile of the school mentors are pivotal to the outcomes of a mentoring program.

The term *quality* is multifaceted. Hence, there are a variety of definitions for it. Harvey and Green (1993) provide the most quoted framework of definitions of quality (Harvey 2007; Martin and Stella 2007; Bayaga and Moyo 2009). In the context of this paper, quality refers to fitness for purpose and fitness of purpose (Harvey and Green 1993; Harvey 2007). According to Harvey (2007: 7), fitness for purpose and of purpose refers to meeting generally accepted standard as defined by the institution, nation, government, discipline, and professional or other (threshold) expectations. The main distinction between fitness for purpose and fitness of purpose is that the former focuses on compliance to internal standards (mission and goals of an institutions or program) while the later is about compliance to external standards. Hobson et al. (2009) contend that mentoring is most effective where it is fit for purpose and fit of purpose. However, as pointed out by Bayaga and Moyo (2009), the main weakness with this definition lies in using standards, which could be rigid in an ever-changing environment. For purposes of this paper, the definition was, however, more embracing.

Literature indicates that studies on mentoring have focused on many aspects of mentoring, including models of student teacher placement (Huizing 2012), mentor-student teacher relationship (Leshem 2012), outcomes from mentoring (Phillips and Fragoulis 2010; Handsford et al 2003), supervision and assessment (Maphosa and Ndamba 2012), roles of stakeholders (Am-

brossetti and Dekkers 2010; Hall et al. 2008), mentor competences (Johnson 2003), and ethics in mentoring (McDonald and Hite 2005). The findings from these studies provided the conceptual framework of practices in mentoring for this paper. Despite the plethora of studies on mentoring, little is known about assuring the quality of mentors from the context of the 1+1 Initial Primary Teacher Education model in Malawi.

### **Vygotsky's (1978) Social Development Theory**

There are many theoretical lenses to understand and interpret mentoring practices in pre-service teacher education (Ehrich et al. 2001). This study was, however, anchored in Vygotsky's (1978) Social Development Theory. The central theme in the Social Development Theory is that social interaction is the foundation of meaningful learning (knowledge, skills and attitudes) (Vygotsky 1978; Moalosi 2013). As such, Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes that meaningful learner development requires both the social and cultural contexts.

The Social Development Theory stipulates that social development of learners requires three main ingredients: (1) social interaction within a community of practice, (2) support from the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), and (3) learning space known as the Zone of Proximal Development. Thus, cognitive development is a product of interaction or collaboration between the learner and More Knowledgeable Others within a Zone of Proximal Development. Without interacting with the MKOs, the quality and quantity of learning are compromised as less than marginal learning is achieved (Moalosi 2013).

This study was grounded in the principle of the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). The More Knowledgeable Others (MKO), in this context refers to anyone with superior understanding and competences (skills, knowledge and attitudes) to a given assignment than the learner (Vygotsky 1978). Thus, parents, teachers and peers are examples of the MKOs (Moalosi 2013). According to Vygotsky (1978), the quality of the MKOs and their activities are pivotal in the Zonal of Proximal Development (ZPD). In the context of this paper, mentoring is a social development process (Kram 1985; Hansford et al. 2003; Allen et al. 2006; Scandura 2009), and

the MKOs refer to school mentors. The fundamental question, however, is: what are the quality dimensions of the More Knowledgeable Other in a pre-service teacher mentoring program?

### Statement of the Problem

Literature indicates that mentoring of student teachers during the practicum is a key facet of the quality of pre-service teacher education programs (Hobson et al. 2009; Mattson 2006; Hansford et al. 2004; Maphosa and Ndamba 2012). Mentoring is a critical conduit for balancing theory and practice in teacher education in pre-service teacher education programs (Zeichner 2010; Korthagen 2010). Despite this acknowledgement and understanding, pre-service teacher education programs have always grappled with how during the practicum mentoring is fit for purpose and fit of purpose (Cohen (Sayag) et al. 2013; Mashava and Chingombe 2013). The 1+1 Initial Primary Teacher Education model in Malawi is no exception to this challenge (MoEST 2013; Ndalama and Chidalengwa 2010; DeStefano 2012).

In the context of this paper, it can be argued that Government of Malawi's efforts of increasing funds, capacity-building of stakeholders, and providing teaching and learning materials are necessary but not sufficient to assure the quality of mentoring in the 1+1 model (MoEST 2011; GoM 2011). Hence, there was still a knowledge gap on how to assure the quality of mentoring in the 1+1 Initial Primary Teacher Education model in Malawi.

Without quality mentoring, there is a risk of having student teachers learn teaching practices that do not reflect quality teaching in schools (Wang 2001). Scandura (1998) therefore, warns that bad mentoring may be destructive. Ragins et al. (2000) also add that bad mentoring is worse than no mentoring at all. This suggests that bad mentoring is not only ineffective but also inefficient. The study's focus on school mentor selection, which is a vital component of the teaching practicum in the 1+1 model, seeks to address this problem.

### Research Questions

This study examined how the quality of mentoring in the 1+1 Initial Primary Teacher Education model in Malawi was assured through the

selection of school mentors or the More Knowledgeable Others. The research questions, which guided this study, were as follows:

1. What are the norms and standards that guide the selection of school mentors in the 1+1 Initial Primary Teacher Education model in Malawi?
2. What are the implications of the findings for a new model of mentor selection in the 1+1 Initial Primary Teacher Education model in Malawi?

### RESEARCH METHODS

This study was anchored in a post-positivism paradigm, which employed mixed-methods sequential design comprising a survey followed by a case study (Creswell 2013, 2014; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2003). The target population was 92 school mentors and 92 head teachers from a total of 92 public primary schools. In the first phase, a drop-and-pick census survey (Dillman 2000) of all the informants yielded a ninety-nine percent response rate. The second phase comprised a case study of two schools in which two head teachers and two school mentors participated in a total of four one-on-one face-to-face interviews (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). The survey and case study data was triangulated and complemented with data from the review of documents. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 20 and content analyses were employed on quantitative and qualitative data. Some of the qualitative and the quantitative data were qualitized and quantized- respectively (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2003).

### RESULTS

Ninety-two primary schools participated in this study giving a total of 183 informants comprising 92 school mentors and 91 head teachers. Sixty-two percent of the school mentors and eighty-two percent of the head teachers were male. This indicated, in part, that mentoring responsibilities were skewed towards males. However, participation by both male and female informants was important in this study in order to get a balanced set of experiences. Of the 92 school mentors, seven percent were between 20 and 29 years, thirty-eight percent between 30 and 39 years, forty-three percent between 30 and 49 years, and nine percent between 50 and 59

years. Similarly, of the 91 head teachers four percent were between 30 and 39 years, fifty-one percent between 30 and 49 years, forty-one percent between 50 and 59 years, and three percent between 60 and 59 years. This indicated that the informants were mature enough to participate in this study.

### **Finding 1: The Norms and Standards for the Selection of School Mentors (More Knowledgeable Others)**

Data for this finding was deduced from the characteristics of the school mentors who participated in the study supplemented by the head teachers' responses on the criteria they used to select school mentors.

#### **1. Characteristics of School Mentors (the More Knowledgeable Other) in the 1+1 Model**

##### **a. Teaching and Mentoring Experiences of School Mentors**

Informants were asked to indicate their teaching experience in primary school and mentoring experience on a six-point interval scale of less than one year, 1-3 years, 4-6 years, 7-18 years, 19-30 years and 30+ years. This adapted scale is referred to as Huberman's (1989) Stage Theory of teacher development. Table 1 gives the summary of the distribution of informants by teaching and mentoring experience.

**Table 1: Distribution of mentors (n=92) by teaching and mentoring experiences**

	<i>Teaching experience (in percent)</i>	<i>Mentoring experience (in percent)</i>
Less than 1	0	37
1-3 years	2	59
4-6 years	20	3
7-18 years	48	1
19-30 years	30	0
31+	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

It can be seen from Table 1 that ninety-eight percent of the school mentors had four or more years of teaching experience. This finding was confirmed by data in the IPTE handbook (MIE

2006) and Partnership Agreement (MoEST 2013), which indicated a minimum of three years of teaching experience. Content analysis of qualitative data from interviews with head teachers and document analysis also revealed that experience in teaching was a critical criterion for mentor selection. This suggests a norm and standard of appointing mentors with at least four years of teaching experience. Table 1 also shows that two percent of the school mentors were in their first three years of teaching at primary school. According to Huberman (1989), this indicated a category of teachers who themselves needed mentoring. As such, this raised doubts over the quality of mentoring provided by this category of teachers.

It can also be seen from Table 1 that an open-ended approach was taken with regard to the mentoring experience. However, ninety-six percent of school mentors had less than four years of mentoring experience. This indicated a relatively new cohort of schoolteachers who were assigned the responsibilities to mentor student teachers. It also suggests that mentoring experience was not a critical norm and standard for the selection of mentors. Considering that the IPTE program was launched in 2005 (MIE 2006), the results raised doubts over the stability of mentors in the program.

#### **2. Professional Grade of School Mentors**

School mentors were requested to indicate their highest professional grade or rank in the teaching profession. Table 2 gives the distribution of headteacher mentors and school mentors by their professional grade.

**Table 2: Distribution of school mentors (n=92) by professional grade**

<i>Professional grade</i>	<i>Teacher mentors (in percent)</i>
PT4	38
PT3	44
PT2	16
PT1	2
P8	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

*Note:* P8 is the highest professional grade in the primary teaching profession; PT4 is entry grade to the profession. All grades from PT3 to P8 are achieved through promotion (EMIS 2011).

Table 2 shows that the majority of the school mentors (62%) were above the PT4 grade (the

entry grade into the teaching profession). This indicates that student teachers were being mentored by largely senior and successful school mentors above their entry grade. There was therefore a professional grade span between the majority of the student teachers and their school mentors. According to mentoring Hegstad (1999), Frels et al. (2013) and Lawal (2011), such a grade span is an essential ingredient to quality of mentoring. As such, the results suggest that seniority in professional grade was to a large extent a norm and standard for mentor selection. It can also be seen in Table 2 that thirty-eight percent of the school mentors were at the entry grade of the teaching profession. This finding casts doubt on the quality of the role-modeling responsibilities of such school mentors.

**3. Academic Qualification of School Mentors**

Each school mentor was asked to give his/her highest academic qualification. Table 3 gives a summary on the distribution of informants by highest academic qualification.

**Table 3: Percentage of school mentors by highest academic qualification**

Highest academic qualification	Teacher Mentors (in percent)
MSCE	87
JCE	13
Total	100

*Note:* MSCE stands for Malawi School Certificate of Education (equivalent to O level). JCE is Junior Certification of Education (lower than MSCE)

It can be seen from Table 3 that eighty-seven percent of the schoolteacher mentors possessed a Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) certificate. MSCE is the highest official academic qualification for primary school teachers in Malawi (MoEST 2011). This indicates that the majority of the school mentors possessed the official highest academic qualification, further suggesting that they had adequate subject knowledge. However, Table 3 also shows that thirteen percent of the school mentors possessed a Junior Certificate of Education qualification as their highest academic qualification. Considering the Initial Primary Teacher education program recruits student teachers with the Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE),

the results means that some of the school mentors had academic qualification lower than their student teachers. In this case, such a finding raises doubts on the quality of mentoring with regard to subject knowledge level of the school mentors and their role modeling functions in the mentoring program. For the student teachers, the results indicated adherence to the program’s policy of recruiting only MSCE candidates into the IPTE program (MIE 2006).

**4. Criteria for Selection of Mentors used by Head Teachers**

Head teachers of mentoring schools, who were responsible for selecting and recommending school mentors, were asked to indicate the frequency with which they used a criterion for selecting their school mentors on a three-point Likert scale where, 3 = Always; 2 = Sometimes and 1 = Never. The scores for “Always” and “Sometimes” were then combined as they at least indicated the practice in selecting school mentors. In this study- a percentage of ninety and above indicated the norm and standard for selecting school mentors. Table 4 presents the rank ordered criteria for selection of mentors as given by head teachers.

**Table 4: Head teachers’ criteria for selection of school mentors**

Rank	Criterion	% of head teachers using the criterion
1	Professional behaviour (n = 90)	98
2	Moral behaviour (n = 87)	95
3	Teaching experience (n = 86)	94
4	Academic Qualification (n= 87)	91
5	Professional grade (n = 89)	83
6	Age (n = 82)	77
7	School responsibility (n = 81)	74
8	Mentoring experience(n = 86)	65
9	Gender (n = 88)	35

*Note:* The total number of respondents (n) was not the same for the entire criteria due to missing responses

It can be seen from Table 4 that the most frequently used criteria were professional behavior (98%), moral behavior (95%), teaching experience (94%) and academic qualification (91%). Of these, professional behavior was the top most frequent criterion for selecting school mentors. This indicates that head teachers at-

tached a lot of value to the professional behavior of the school mentors. Perhaps, they were quite mindful of the mentors' roles of adviser, counselor and role models, which are often best defined within the professional behavior. Table 4 also shows that gender was the least criterion for mentor selection. Perhaps this was because the primary teaching force in Malawi was dominated by male teachers (MoEST 2011). It can also be seen from Table 4 that there was some lack of uniformity in the criteria for mentor selection among head teachers. This indicated a weakness in implementing the norms and standards for mentor selection and monitoring of mentoring practices in schools.

Content analysis of the qualitative data from the semi-structured mailed questionnaire revealed that professional behavior was the most widely used criteria. The head teachers explained that being exemplary in professional matters, accepting responsibility, good listener and approachable were elements of professional behavior.

The handbook on Partnership Agreement between Teacher Training Colleges and Teaching Practice Schools (MoEST 2013) and IPTE handbook (MIE 2006) also outlined the criteria for selecting school mentors. They include: qualified teacher- minimum of three years of teaching experience- possession of a Malawi School Certificate of Education- knowledgeable in subject matter, approaches to teaching and experience in teaching methodologies- committed and able to help student teachers grow professionally- and able to organize continuing professional development activities. The personal attributes of the school mentor included in the criteria were: approachable, accommodating, supportive, emphatic, tolerant, impartial, good listener, exemplary with good morals, flexibility and a desire for continuous learning. Data from two handbooks triangulated expanded and elaborated the findings in the survey questionnaire. For instance, there was convergence on teaching experience, moral behavior and professional behavior, expansion on organizing continuing professional development activities, and elaboration on teaching experience. Perhaps, impartiality was included as an attribute because the teacher mentor was responsible for a number of student teachers, hence the need to treat them equally.

## DISCUSSION

A critical component of mentor selection relates to the person or persons shouldering the responsibility to select mentors (Alhija and Fresko 2014). In the case of the 1+1 model, head teachers played a central role in selecting school mentors (MoEST 2013). The results revealed that the four most common criteria used by head teachers to select teachers to serve as mentors were: professional behavior, moral behavior, teaching experience, and academic qualification. Data also revealed that gender was the least commonly used criterion for mentor selection. The results also confirmed literature on mentor selection based on teaching experience and academic qualification (Hobson et al. 2009; Rose 2003; Alhija and Fresko 2014).

### Professional Behavior

Professional behavior of teachers ranked first among the nine criteria for mentor selection as indicated by the head teachers. This suggests that head teachers attached a lot of value to the professional competences of the teachers. As such, they seem to indicate that mentoring is a tool for developing high standards of professional competences in student teachers. The findings confirm the importance attached to professional behavior of school mentors in the teaching profession and mentoring program (Hamilton and Brabbit 2007; McDonald and Hite 2004; Heeralal 2014). Their studies also showed that student teachers, teachers, head teachers and other key stakeholders regarded mentoring as a professional identity-formation process. As such, mentors needed to support the acquisition of professional competences. In line with this view, McDonald (2004) contends that mentors are gatekeepers to the profession, and they have a central role in building and maintaining teaching as a high status profession. Thus, professional behavior of practicing teachers was a critical criterion for selecting school mentors who are regarded as upholders of the teaching profession. According to Hamilton and Brabbit (2007), professional identity-formation in student teachers could, therefore, be regarded as a fourth function of mentoring, in addition to career development, psychosocial development and role modeling.

### **Moral Behavior**

Moral behavior ranked as the second most common criteria used by head teachers to select mentors. This suggests that the head teachers strongly regarded mentoring of student teachers as concerned with moral development. The finding is consistent with the principle that teaching, in general, and mentoring in particular has a moral dimension (Cummings et al. 2007; Hunink et al. 2007; Johnson 2003). In this context, as pointed by Hunink et al. (2009), morality refers to a set of values, norms, rules and habits that binds the behaviors of practitioners in a profession. As pointed out by Cummings et al. (2007) and Hunink et al. (2007), mentoring of student teachers is equally concerned with moral development; hence, it must be hinged on advancing moral reasoning among student teachers. As such, the head teachers used the teachers' moral uprightness as another critical criterion for selecting school mentors.

This study examined the norms and standards that guided the selection of the school mentors or the More Knowledgeable Others (Vygotsky 1978) in the 1+1 Initial Primary Teacher Education model. Analysis of data revealed that mentor selection was one of the key activities of the 1+1 Initial Teacher Education model. This confirms that mentor selection is one of the characteristics of a formal mentoring program (Weinberg and Lankau 2011; Allen et al. 2006; Jones 2013). Perhaps mentor selection is carried out because not all practicing teachers have the attributes of being a school mentor or a part of the More Knowledgeable Others (MKO) for student teachers as pointed out (Hobson et al. 2009; Rose 2003).

Empirical evidence also suggests that mentoring of student teachers during a practicum is a pivotal teacher professional development tool of student teachers (Sundli 2007; Luneta 2006; Hudson 2013a, b). At the center stage of this outcome of mentoring is the school mentor. Vygotsky (1978) concurs that the More Knowledgeable Other, which in this context of the school mentor, is instrumental in the social development of individuals. Kram (1985), Castro et al. (2004) and Hobson et al. (2009) have also echoed the critical role that the school mentors play in mentoring student teachers. Heeralal (2014) argues that mentor teachers assist students in bridging the gap between theory and practice

and give students an insight into the real world of the teaching profession. As such, mentor selection is carried out to ensure the effectiveness of a formal mentoring program (Hobson et al. 2009; Rose 2003; Heeralal 2014).

### **Teaching Experience**

The results have revealed that teaching experience was a criterion for mentor selection, as indicated by the majority (98%) of the school mentors with four or more years teaching experience. The results corroborate previous empirical findings on criteria for mentor selection (Heeralal 2014; Hobson et al. 2009; Rose 2003). This also confirms one of the principles of Vygotsky's (1978) Social Development Theory, which argues for the presence of a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) in a social development process. As pointed out by Heeralal (2014) and Korthagen (2010), mentoring during the practicum serves as bridge between theory and practice in pre-service teacher education programs. As such, it can be argued that experienced mentors are critical to this endeavor. Experienced mentors become sources of the theories of teaching, which have been developed over and above college-based theories (Baird 2010; Allen and Wright 2014; Moyo 2014).

Using Huberman's (1989) Stage Theory of Teacher Development, school mentors' experience in teaching need to be bound. It is implied, from the theory that school mentors needed to have a minimum of four years experience and maximum of seventeen years. According of Huberman, from three years and below, which is known as the Career Entry Stage, the teachers themselves are learning how to teach and work with pupils, navigating teaching and developing a sense of survival. As such, they themselves are in need of mentoring. As such, they need not be entrusted with the responsibility to mentor student teachers. Thus, the two percent of school mentors who were within the 1-3 years category of experience raises doubts over the quality of mentoring which they provided to student teachers- as they were not from the category of the More Knowledgeable Others. Huberman's Theory further shows that between 19 and 30 years of teaching experience, the teachers are characterized by being rigid, stubborn, and resistant to innovations and disengaged from the professions. Similarly, above 30 years

of experience, teachers are characterized as being disengaged from the teaching profession and use much of their time for personal gains. As such, it can be argued that those with over 18 years of experience may minimally serve as effective mentors. Thus, the thirty percent of mentors who had over 18 years of teaching experience further heightened the issues of the quality of their mentoring services.

### **Academic Qualification**

The results revealed that the majority of the school mentors (87%) possessed the formal highest academic qualification for the subsector of the education system. This means that most student teachers were paired with school mentors whose subject content was the same as theirs. Thus, there was no seniority in subject content between the mentors and student teachers. The finding contradicts the formal definition of a mentor as a more knowledgeable person, which includes being knowledgeable in subject content (Kram 1985; Hobson et al. 2009; Alhija and Fresko 2014). In this case, the school mentors could not be acclaimed as the More Knowledgeable Other (Vygotsky 1978) with respect to subject content. Further analysis of the data revealed that thirteen percent of the school mentors had lower academic qualification than their mentees. This means that over seventy student teachers were being mentored by school mentors who had lower academic qualification than them. In this regard, it can be concluded that the student teachers had more subject content than their mentors, thereby raising concerns over the quality of role modeling functions of such mentors. As argued by Vygotsky (1978) in the Social Development Theory, social development demands the presence of More Knowledgeable Other.

### **Professional Grade**

Seniority in the teaching profession in Malawi is reflected in the achieved professional grade of teachers. As an achieved status, the professional grade also indicates competences of the teachers. It can therefore be argued that the higher the professional grade, the more competent the teacher. The results indicate that sixty-two percent of the school mentors were above the entry grade. This suggests that the majority of the school mentors were more senior and com-

petent in the profession than the student teachers they were mentoring. The finding confirms the traditional definition of a mentor as a senior person (Kram 1985; Hobson et al. 2009; Sergiovanni and Starrat 2002; Scandura 2009; Lawal 2011; Allen et al. 2006). Seniority of mentors seems to be associated with authority and respect as well as the role modeling function of mentoring. As pointed out by Koc (2011), Alhija and Fresko (2014) and Ambrosetti and Dekkers (2010), mentors play a critical role of a modeler to the student teachers, and this is embedded in the professional status. Alhija and Fresko (2014) concur that mentors must carry with them the respect and recognition within the profession. As such, the thirty-eight percent of school mentors at entry grade in the 1+1 model raises concerns over the quality and quantity of the role mentoring services that they provided to student teachers.

### **Experience as a Mentor**

The results revealed variations in experience in mentoring among mentors. This suggests that mentor selection was not guided by experience in mentoring. The possible reason for this could be that the 1+1 model was relatively new (MIE 2006). As such, there was no sufficient pool of mentors from which to select. Another reason could be the emphasis on mentor training. The results do, therefore, support the idea that recruitment of mentors must be influenced by the experience in mentoring (Eby et al. 2007; Kram 1985; Simpson et al. 2007; Hobson et al. 2009; Allen et al. 2006). As argued by Hobson et al. (2006), effective mentoring is influenced by the initial and continuing professional training in mentoring that mentors receive rather than prior experience in mentoring.

### **Gender of School Mentors**

The results of this study indicate that gender was the least commonly used criterion for recruitment of school mentors by head teachers. This confirms the statistics for the respondents in this study, which showed that sixty-two percent and thirty-eight percent of school mentors (n=92) were male and female- respectively. This showed male dominance in mentoring responsibilities. The results confirm the male dominance (60.1%) among primary school teach-

ers in Malawi (MoEST 2011). Perhaps, this pool, which is skewed towards males, could have been a contributing factor. In addition, the inequality could be magnified by the practice of appointing an on-school mentor per school (MIE 2006). The results, however, show that female teachers had been marginalized in mentoring responsibilities. The results, therefore, also confirm the gender imbalance in many leadership positions in primary education (Chabaya et al. 2009). The results contradict Article 20 of the Constitution of Malawi, which bars any form of discrimination on the basis of gender. There is, therefore, the need to demystify gender in mentoring responsibilities in the 1+1 model. Both male and female school mentors are needed for the development of student teachers (Fowler and O’Gorman 2007; Afolabi 2013; O’Connor and Garansson 2014).

**A New Conceptual Framework of Mentor Selection in the 1+1 Initial Primary Teacher Education Mode**

The foregoing sections indicate that the model or norms and standards of mentor selection in the 1+1 Initial Primary Teacher education model is plagued by a few weak practices which have the potential to influence the quality of the mentoring program. Thus, the results from this study, coupled with literature, indicate a need for a new model of mentor selection. Table 5 gives a summary of the old model as well as a proposed model of mentor selection.

**CONCLUSION**

The findings in this study have shown that mentor selection in the 1+1 Initial Primary Teacher education was guided by such norms and standards as professional behavior, moral be-

havior, teaching experience, academic qualification, professional grade, age, school responsibilities, mentoring experience and gender. This list is in order of most commonly utilized to least commonly used criterion. The gender imbalance in the mentoring responsibilities is however a cause of concern in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER DEVELOPMENT**

It is evident that Social Development Theory, that the school mentor (More Knowledgeable Other) plays a critical role in pre-service teacher development during a practicum. The norms and standards for mentor selection can, therefore, have important implications on the performance of mentors, consequently on the quality of the student teachers. As argued it is one thing to attach student teachers to mentors and quite another to have meaningful mentorship taking place. As such, the findings imply that the selection criteria for the mentors such as professional behavior, moral behavior, teaching experiences, academic qualification and professional grade have the potential to influence the effectiveness of pre-service teacher development during a practicum.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings and the discussion of the results, it is therefore recommended that the Ministry of Education and Stakeholders in the mentoring program should review the criterion for selecting mentors. This will ensure that the inherent weakness in the current practices including gender stereotyping in selecting school mentors is removed. It is further recommended that a larger study and a comparative study be carried out to confirm the findings from this study.

**Table 5: Old and Proposed model of mentor selection**

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Current practice</i>	<i>Proposed practice</i>
Teaching experience	Mostly from four or above	Between four and 17 years
Mentoring experience	Open-ended	Experience in being mentored during pre-service years
Professional grade	Open-ended	From PT3 to PT1
Academic qualification	JCE and MSCE	MSCE
Gender	Male dominance	Gender equality in mentoring

Responsibilities (two mentors per school: one male and one female)

Key: JCE: Junior Certificate of Education; MSCE: Malawi School Certificate of Education

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