

The Extent to Which the Provision of Mentor Support Services in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 Teaching Practice Enhances Continuous Improvement of Student Teachers' Teaching Skills and Competences

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ABSTRACT The study sought to determine the experiences and perceptions held by mentors, teaching practice lecturers and student teachers on the extent to which mentors are provided with support services to enhance continuous improvement of teaching skills and competences of student teachers in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. The mixed methods design was used to collect data in two phases. The first phase used questionnaires to collect quantitative data while the second phase collected qualitative data through interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. The researchers sampled 28 teaching practice lecturers, 100 mentors and 100 final year student teachers from the ten national primary teacher education institutions to participate in the first phase. Three teaching practice lecturers, three mentors and three focus groups of six students each were conveniently selected from neighbouring host schools for interviews in the second phase. The research findings revealed that mentorship was the mainstay of the 2-5-2 teaching practice yet mentors were not adequately provided with support services like in-service training, mentor handbooks, Department of Teacher Education (DTE) assessment/grading scale, regular communication and incentives. It also emerged that mentors were provided with assessment crit forms, though student teachers took the burden to photocopy them to facilitate their own assessment. The study recommended that Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teacher education institutions provide mentors with adequate support services to enhance continuous improvement of teaching skills and competences.

INTRODUCTION

Universities in developed countries such as the United States of America and the United Kingdom have produced many research publications in mentoring and mentor training and developed special mentor-training courses that are offered by teacher training institutions as support services in their bid to enhance continuous improvement of student teachers' teaching skills and competences (Dreyer 1998; Chakanyuka 2006; Thornton et al. 2010; McCarthy 2012). Dreyer (1998) advises that successful mentor training depends on a collaborative approach between training institutions, educational

authorities and experienced school teachers in the designing, delivery and evaluation of training programs. Lowther in Mukeredzi and Ndamba (2005), Judith and Tirivanhu (2014), Tirivanhu (2014) and Hanover Research (2014) recommend arming mentors with a range of target prerequisite skills which they have to use in guiding student teachers during their teaching practice, particularly in the areas of analyzing teaching and assessing student teachers. Providing mentors in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice with support services such as in-service training, mentor handbooks, assessment criteria, DTE grading scale, regular communication, and incentives enhances quality teaching practice and continuous development of the students' teaching skills hence resonates well with current global trends in teacher education.

A study carried out by Marais and Meier (2004), concluded that written guidelines and in-service training opportunities, for supervisors or mentors focusing on the general induction of

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student teachers, lesson presentation and feedback were ideal for promoting quality teaching practice among student teachers. Studies by Mukeredzi and Ndamba (2005), Judith and Tirivanhu (2014), Tirivanhu (2014) and Hanover Research (2014) all recommended that teacher education institutions should mount in-service training workshops for mentors to enable mentors gain information on lesson supervision and reflective teaching, mentor roles, college/university expectations, competency in mentoring, action research and the role of trial and error in teaching practice. Such mentor in-service training is crucial as it facilitates a paradigm shift in both school heads and mentors and its success depends on the closeness of relationship and partnership between the training institution and the mentors (Quick and Sieborger 2005; Hanover Research 2014). Studies by Fish (1995), Maphosa et al. (2007), Judith and Tirivanhu (2014) and Tirivanhu (2014) revealed that mentors in Zimbabwe's teacher education regarded student teachers as relief teachers to make their work lighter mainly because the supervising class teachers were not adequately informed, trained or advised of the concept of attachment and expectations of colleges.

In Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 model all the mentors are expected to assess student teachers' classroom practice using the DTE assessment/grading scale (amended version of ACC/9/89), (DTE Handbook 2004) and forward the completed assessment form to the relevant teacher education institutions because the mentor assessments contribute to the students' final teaching practice mark. Mentor in-service training equips mentors with appropriate supervision and assessment knowledge and skills that make them efficient and effective school-based teacher educators whose student teacher development is in tandem with the expectations of the teacher education institutions.

Research studies by Mhandu and Mashava (2001), Judith and Tirivanhu (2014) and Tirivanhu (2014) revealed that Zimbabwe's teaching practice program lacked mentor in-service training and other support services that empower and guide mentors' supervisory and assessment practices. Literature by Mhandu and Mashava (2001), Judith and Tirivanhu (2014) and Tirivanhu (2014) in Zimbabwe showed lack of support services such as in-service training in the form of workshops, seminars and staff development

workshops to update school-based mentors on the teacher education institution's expectations. The study further indicated that these workshops and seminars were ideal in that they create a platform for dialogue for the lecturers and mentors to share expectations and give each other critical feedback for professional improvement. Lack of in-service training has resulted in mentors in Zimbabwe's teacher education, through no fault of theirs, failing to supervise the student teachers effectively to facilitate continuous improvement of their teaching skills and competences as in most cases, supervision of student teachers is taken as a formality of satisfying college requirements (Mhandu and Mashava 2001). Interviewed school-based mentors in studies by Judith and Tirivanhu (2014) and Tirivanhu (2014) revealed their lack of confidence to assess or supervise student teachers on teaching practice due to lack of training in mentorship. Hence the importance of this study cannot be over emphasized.

Studies by Maphosa, Shumba and Shumba (2007) in Zimbabwe's teacher education revealed that the multi-faceted role of mentorship placed great responsibility on the mentor in leading, guiding, directing, nurturing and supervising the student teachers hence the need for in-service training of mentors cannot be over emphasized. A study by Nyaumwe (2001) quotes Mavhunga and Ndawi who posit that insufficient funding in Zimbabwe's higher education has not made it possible to train mentors or familiarize them with their roles. In another study Mhandu and Mashava (2001) revealed that mentors in Zimbabwe did not seem to be aware of what to do with student teachers as colleges had not been able to clarify fully the mentor's role. The school heads and school-based mentors in studies by Nyaumwe (2001), Judith and Tirivanhu (2014) and Tirivanhu (2014) indicated that they were operating in schools without proper guidelines and documentation such as mentor handbooks from the teachers education institutions that spell out their expectations and how mentorship should be carried out.

The provision of mentor incentives as a form of support service could motivate mentors to apply themselves more fully in the development of student teachers in order to enhance the attainment of continuous improvement of their teaching skills and competences. Kerry and Mayes (1995) in Mukeredzi and Ndamba (2005)

argue that mentors could be incentivized in the form of extra time to perform their mentoring duties. This could include time for training, contact time with mentees, observation and debriefing of mentees during the post lesson observation conference. The recognition of mentorship as added advantage when mentors apply for further studies and promotion, could serve as a more valuable form of incentive than payment. School-based mentors indicated in studies by Judith and Tirivanhu (2014) and Tirivanhu (2014) that after all they were not paid by Government, Colleges or by the host schools for their time and mentoring services they rendered the students and demanded payment. Mukeredzi and Ndamba (2005) quote Bourdillon (1998), in an unpublished paper on mentor training where the suggestion of issuing of certificates to mentors as another form of incentives was recommended.

Studies by Chakanyuka (2006) and Mhandu and Mashava (2001) revealed that mentors in Zimbabwe's teacher education do not receive mentor training as supporting services hence the provision of other support services such as regular communication, provision of mentor handbooks and incentives is doubtful. Interviews with the school-based mentors in Judith and Tirivanhu (2014) revealed that there was lack of communication between schools and the teacher training institutions. In all intents and purposes, the success and failure of student teachers' practical teaching practice in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teacher education system hinges on the amount and type of support mentors receive from teacher education institutions, hence the greater the support, the greater the chances of student teachers' success.

In Zimbabwe, all primary teacher education institutions follow the 2-5-2 teacher education model in which student teachers spend the initial two terms (thirty-two weeks) at college learning theory of education, applied education and research methods and then proceed on teaching practice for five terms (eighty weeks) and finally return to college for revision and examinations for two terms (thirty-two weeks) hence is referred to as 2-5-2 model. Under Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teacher education model, student teachers spend most of their course duration time (55%) of five terms or eighty weeks on teaching practice in host schools. During the five terms or eighty weeks student teachers are in host schools, they are attached to experienced classroom practitioners although in some cases these

experienced teachers are not available in schools and student teachers end up being allocated to novice teachers.

Studies by Mhandu and Mashava (2001) revealed that lecturer visits to student teachers on teaching practice are erratic in Zimbabwe's teacher education in general hence the provision of mentor support services enables them to become effective school based teacher educators. Lack of mentor support services in Zimbabwe's teacher education in general prompted this investigation into the degree of provision of support services in the 2-5-2 teaching practice in particular for continuous improvement of students' teaching skills and competences.

The Main Research Question

This study was guided by the following main research question:

What is the extent to which the provision of mentor support services in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice enhances continuous improvement of student teachers' teaching skills and competences?

Objectives of the Study

The following research objectives were used in this study:

- (a) to determine mentor support services being provided in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice; (b) to investigate the extent to which the provision of mentor support services in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice enhances continuous improvement of students' teaching skills and competences;
- (c) to determine the implications of the provision of mentor support services in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice; and
- (d) to determine the extent to which the provision of mentor support services in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice is in tandem with current global practice.

METHOD

Research Design

The mixed methods design was preferred for this study because it enabled the researchers to use both qualitative (case study) and quantitative (survey) approaches in a complementary

manner and provided interaction rather than a dichotomy between these approaches (Gelo et al. 2008). The use of mixed methods enabled the researchers an opportunity of checking findings from one method against findings from another hence provided a more complete analysis of the research problem through comparing data produced by the different methods. The mixed methods research design enabled the researchers to overcome the limitations of purely quantitative or qualitative approaches by maximizing the advantages and minimizing the disadvantages connected to the single application of one of the two approaches (Creswell 2007; Gelo et al. 2008; Maree 2007).

The mixed methods design enabled the researchers to triangulate the quantitative and qualitative methods and data sources as well as provided a convergence and corroboration of results from the different methods and designs in studying the same phenomenon (Creswell 2007; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). The use of mixed methods in this study produced different kinds of data on the same phenomenon that allowed the researchers to see and understand the problem under study in a more rounded and complete fashion than would be the case had the data been drawn from just one method. Through mixed methods, the researchers were able to collect data in two separate phases. The first phase used survey questionnaires to collect quantitative data while the second phase used interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis to collect qualitative data.

Target Population

The target population comprised all three teaching practice lecturers, all final year student teachers and their mentors in each of the ten (10) national primary-teacher education institutions in Zimbabwe. The target population was too large for all members to participate hence the researchers drew a sample of the final year student teachers on teaching practice, that of their mentors and sampled all three teaching practice lecturers from the ten primary teacher education institutions that participated.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling procedure was used to extract 28 teaching practice lecturers from the

ten national primary teacher education institutions that responded. Due to the geographical spread of host schools in which student teachers were deployed and the prohibitive travelling cost involved, the researchers used convenience sampling to select host schools from which 100 mentors and 100 students who responded to survey questionnaires during the first phase of this study were drawn. Convenience sampling also enabled the researcher to sample the college of his employment as the case to study and to select host schools from which three mentors and three groups of six student teachers were identified for face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions respectively. The survey questionnaires generated 228 general overview responses, while interviews and focus group discussions generated in-depth understanding of the extent to which the provision of mentor support services in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice enhances continuous improvement of student teachers' teaching skills and competences.

Data Collection

The researchers used questionnaires to collect quantitative data in the first survey phase of the study. The questionnaires provided a general overview of perceptions and experiences held by lecturers, mentors and students on the extent to which mentor support services are provided in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. The questionnaires collected quantitative data in the first phase and comprised of both open-ended and closed-ended questions that were administered to final year students on teaching practice, their mentors and teaching practice lecturers. Qualitative data were collected in the second phase through semi-structured interview schedules that comprised a few structured questions that were followed by unstructured open-ended questions which enabled the researcher to collect descriptive data from the information rich respondents. The interview schedule enabled the researcher to document real events, record verbatim what people said and observe the behaviour of participants who were immersed in the natural setting of everyday life in which the study was framed (Maree 2007; Neuman 1997). The semi-structured interviews enabled the researchers to recognize several nuances of attitude and behaviour that could have gone unnoticed had he used other methods. The

use of focus group discussions enabled the researchers to acquire in-depth understanding of student teachers' experiences and perceptions on the provision of mentor support services in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. The researchers also analyzed available teaching practice documents which store data that reflect the extent to which mentor support services are provided in the Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice.

Data Analysis

Data analysis enabled the researcher to systematically search, organize, synthesize, present and transform data from questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis into manageable units and increased the researchers understanding of the phenomena under study (Borgden and Biklen 1992; Leedy 1993). Data analysis enabled the researchers to bring order, structure and interpretation to the mass of collected data which resulted in the generation of patterns, themes, categories, constructs and inferences relating to the research question.

In the first phase, the quantitative numerical data collected through survey questionnaires had raw data coded or organized into a computer readable format (Neuman 1997). The collected data was summarized through a table of frequency distributions and percentages that were displayed in graph form. The table and graph of frequency distributions were manipulated to reveal patterns, relationships and trends of student teachers' experiences and perceptions (Creswell 2007; Maree 2007) on the provision of mentor support services in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice.

In phase two, the researchers used interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis to collect qualitative data. The qualitative data were organized on the basis of themes, categories, general ideas, concepts or similar features that related to the main research question. In analyzing qualitative data, the researchers sought to summarise what had been seen and heard in terms of common words, phrases, themes or patterns that aided the understanding and interpretation of that which was emerging (Maree 2007). This study transcribed verbatim the audio taped interviews and the results were cross-checked with the participants before their analysis. After the quantitative and quali-

tative data had been analysed and interpreted separately, inferences from the separate findings were made and integrated for interpretation. The qualitative data served to confirm the results of the quantitative data in instances where all the responses pointed to similar conclusions. In instances where responses revealed incongruities, the qualitative data did not confirm the quantitative data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The major purpose of providing mentors with support services in teaching practice is to facilitate the improvement of the quality of mentoring and ensure that all students who enter the teaching practice program exit with the requisite quality of teaching skills and competences. The concern of this study is to establish the extent to which mentor support services are provided in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice towards promoting continuous improvement of students' teaching skills and competences in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. The study reviews the provision of mentor support services such as in-service training, mentor handbooks, assessment critique forms, DTE assessment scale, constant communication with mentors and incentives. The provision of in-serve training is discussed first.

Provision of In-service Training

Data from mentors (51%) in Table 1 item 1.1 shows that mentors received in-service training in student teacher supervision and assessment while 48% show that they did not. Only one (1%) was not sure. Data from mentors (24%) in Table 1 item 1.2 reveal that mentors received in-service training in the use of the DTE assessment scale while the 68% indicate that they were not trained and 8% were not sure. Data from mentors (73%) in Table 1 item 1.3 reveal that mentors were not exposed to any school-based in-service training workshop focusing on teaching practice issues while 27% disagreed. Data from mentors (75%) in Table 1 item 1.4 reveal that mentors were not exposed to any college-based workshop on teaching practice issues while 24% disagreed and one (1%) was not sure. Data from mentors (64%) in Table 1 item 1.5 reveal that mentors were acquainted with teaching practice policies while 30% were not and 6%

Table 1: Areas in which mentors received in-service training

	<i>Items</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Unsure</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
1.1	1.1. Supervision & assessment	51	51	48	48	1	1	100	100
1.2.	Interpreting DTE Grading scale	24	24	68	68	8	8	100	100
1.2	1.3. School-based T.P workshops	27	27	73	73	0	0	100	100
1.3	1.4. College-based T.P. workshops	24	24	75	75	1	1	100	100
1.4	1.5. Acquaintance with T.P Policies	64	64	30	30	6	6	100	100

were not sure. What emerged is that while some teacher education institutions in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice provided mentors with in-service training in the supervision and assessment of student teachers most teacher education institutions do not provide its mentors with in-service training.

One student teacher from the case study institution responded to a focus group interview by saying;

Right, in this case I am very brave to mention that the college itself is not doing its role adequately because my mentor does not even know how to rate me well. When she is assessing me she uses other crits that were written by the lecturers themselves to check how to rate me. I think this is a weakness as she must be able to rate me herself and not by checking from the lecturers' crits.

The above statement shows that some mentors lack the knowledge and skills of assessing student teachers using the DTE assessment/grading scale hence the need for in-service training of mentors in the assessment and supervision of student teachers cannot be over emphasized. A considerable amount of agreement is noticed in the findings of this study and of Fish (1995), Maphosa et al. (2007), Mhandu and Mashava (2001), Judith and Tirivanhu (2014) and Tirivanhu (2014) which all revealed that due to lack of in-service training mentors were not adequately informed, and advised of the concept of attachment and expectations of colleges. Hence, lack of in-service training in Zimbabwe's teacher education system resulted in mentors, through no fault of theirs; failing to supervise the student teachers effectively as in most cases, supervision of student teachers is taken as a formality of satisfying college requirements. The findings of the study concur with that of Edwards and Collins (1996) in Mukeredzi and Ndamba (2005), Maphosa et al. (2007), Mhandu and

Mashava (2001), Judith and Tirivanhu (2014), Tirivanhu (2014) and Hanover Research (2014) in that the multi-faceted role of the mentorship placed great responsibility on the mentor in leading, building trusting relations, guiding, directing and supervising the student teachers hence demand in-service training regarding these requisite skills and is not an instinctive activity which can be carried out by any good classroom practitioners as another layer of one's professional function as class teachers.

The absence of mentor in-service training in student development does not help enhance continuous improvement of students' teaching skills and competences and leaves the effectiveness with which mentors perform their mentoring roles and the credibility of their assessment grades in doubt. Failure to provide mentors with in-service training by teacher education institutions does not ensure that mentors' supervision and assessment of students is in tandem with college expectations and requirements. Lack of mentor in-service training leaves the training of student teachers to chance hence compromises the quality of the next generation of teachers as the quality of future teachers depends on the quality of mentoring that current student teachers receive.

This study concurs with that by Dreyer (1998), Maphosa et al. (2007), Mukeredzi and Ndamba (2005) and Quick and Sieborger (2005) in that in-service training of mentors is a collaboration of training institutions, educational authorities and experienced school teachers in the designing, delivery and evaluation of mentor in-service training programs. The study also concurs with (Chakanyuka 2006; Dreyer 1998; McCarthy 2012; Thornton et al. 2010; Judith and Tirivanhu 2014; Tirivanhu 2014) in that it is the responsibility of teacher education institutions in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teacher education to develop and mount special mentor training workshops

and seminars, involving lecturers and mentors in their bid to enhance continuous improvement of student teachers' teaching skills and competences in line with global practice in teacher education institutions. Judith and Tirivanhu (2014) and Tirivanhu (2014) argue that in such mentor training workshops and seminars, the each teacher education institution will be able to explain and clarify its mentoring guidelines and school-based assessment criteria to the school heads and school-based mentors. Mentor in-service training is very crucial in Zimbabwe, where most student teachers are deployed in rural host schools and lecturer supervision visits are irregular (Mhandu and Mashava 2001) and mentors acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to make them effective school-based teacher educators.

Provision of Mentor Handbooks

Mentor handbooks seek to guide and ensure that mentors' supervision and assessment of student teachers is in tandem with that of lecturers and college expectations. Survey data from mentors (81%) in Table 2 item 1.1 reveal that mentors were not provided with handbooks while 14% indicated that they were provided and 5% were not sure. Survey data from teaching practice lecturers (76.86%) in table 2 item 1.2 show that mentors were not provided with handbooks while 28.57% indicate that they were provided and 3.57% were not sure. Survey data from student teachers (60%) in table 2 item 1.3 reveal that mentors were not provided with handbooks while 13% indicate that they were provided and 27% were not sure. The majority of mentors (81%), teaching practice lecturers (76.86%) and students (60%) reveal that mentors are not provided with handbooks in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. Interviews with teaching practice lecturers, mentors and students from the case study institution revealed that mentors were not provided with handbooks to guide them in student teacher development. The picture that eventually emerged is that most primary teacher education institutions in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice did not provide mentors with handbooks as support services for enhancing continuous improvement of student teachers' teaching skills and competences.

The research findings concur with Chakanyuka (2006), Dreyer (1998), Judith and Tiri-

vanhu (2014) and Tirivanhu (2014) in that mentors should be provided with guidelines such as mentor handbooks as a support service to ensure consistence and uniformity in the supervision and assessment of student teachers by both mentors and lecturers. The study further agrees with that by Marais and Meirer in Jeevanantham (2004), which concluded that written mentor guidelines or handbooks focusing on the general induction of student teachers, lesson presentation and feedback were ideal for promoting quality teaching practice among student teachers. The findings of this study also concur with studies by Nyaumwe (2001), Chakanyuka (2006), Mhandu and Mashava (2001), Judith and Tirivanhu (2014) and Tirivanhu (2014) that identified lack of guiding blue print guiding materials such as mentor handbooks as the main undoing of most mentors in Zimbabwe's teacher education that resulted in mentors, through no fault of theirs, failing to supervise the student teachers effectively. In Zimbabwe, where student teachers are deployed in far flung rural schools and supervision visits by lecturers are irregular (Mhandu and Mashava, 2001), the provision of mentor handbooks is crucial as it provides mentors with reference material that helps to ensure that mentors' supervision and assessment of student teacher is in tandem with that of lecturers and college expectations. Failure to provide mentors with handbooks does not help align mentors with college expectations and does not enable them to effectively fulfill their role of being school based teacher educators in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice hence does not enhance continuous improvement of students' teaching skills and competences.

Provision of Assessment Crit Forms

Data in Table 2 item 2.1 by mentors (80%) show that mentors were provided with assessment crits while 20% indicated that they were not. Data in Table 2 item 2.2 from the teaching practice lecturers (89.29%) indicated that mentors were provided with assessment crits forms while 10.71% show that they were not. Data in Table 2 item 2.3 by student teachers (75%) revealed that mentors were provided with assessment crit forms and 21% show that they were not and 4% were not sure. The data strongly show that mentors in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice are provided with assessment crit

Table 2: Provision of other mentor support services in the 2-5-2 practicum

	<i>Items</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Unsure</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
2.1	Mentor handbook-mentors	14	14	81	81	5	5	100	100
2.2	Mentor handbook-lecturers	28.57	28.57	76.86	76.86	3.57	3.57	100	100
2.3	Mentor handbook-students	13	13	60	60	27	27	100	100
3.1	Assessment crits-mentors	80	80	20	20	0	0	100	100
3.2	Assessment crits-lecturers	89.29	89.29	10.71	10.71	0	0	100	100
3.3	Assessment crits-students	75	75	21	21	4	4	100	100
4.1	DTE grading scale-mentors	45	45	51	51	4	4	100	100
4.2	DTE grading scale-lecturers	28.57	28.57	71.43	71.43	0	0	100	100
4.3	DTE grading scale-students	30	30	44	44	26	26	100	100
5.1	Constant communication-mentors	34	34	66	66	0	0	100	100
5.2	Constant communication-lecturers	46.43	46.43	53.57	53.57	0	0	100	100
5.3	Constant communication-students	33	33	49	49	18	18	100	100
6.1	Incentives-mentors	3	3	91	91	6	6	100	100
6.2	Incentives-lecturers	3.57	3.57	96.43	96.43	0	0	100	100
6.3	Incentives-students	19	19	44	44	37	37	100	100

forms to assess student teachers. It however emerged from the focus group discussions with student teachers that the assessment crit forms of the case study institution were actually photocopied by the student teachers to facilitate their assessment by mentors and were not provided by the college. In such circumstances, student teachers subsidized teacher education institutions. This practice does not guarantee constant supply of assessment forms as some students are unable to photocopy enough assessment forms due to financial constraints while some simply de-test being assessed.

Data from this study differs with findings by Chakanyuka (2006) and Mandu and Mashava (2001) which revealed that most mentors in Zimbabwe's teacher education do not receive assessment crit forms as in this instance they do though produced by students. The provision of student assessment crit forms in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice is in tandem with the current global trends in enhancing continuous improvement of students' teaching skills and competences.

Provision of DTE Assessment Scale

The provision of the DTE assessment scale to mentors ensures that mentor assessment of student teachers is in tandem with that of college lecturers. According to the amended version of ACC/9/89 of the DTE Handbook (2004), all the mentors in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching

practice are expected to assess student teachers' classroom practice using the DTE assessment/grading scale to ensure uniformity and align the student assessment by mentors with that of lecturers since the school based assessment contributes to the student's final teaching practice mark. Survey data in Table 2 Item 3.1 from mentors reveal that mentors (51%) were not provided with DTE assessment/grading scale while 45% indicate that they were provided. Only 4% were not sure. Data in Table 2 Item 3.2 by lecturers (71.43%) show that mentors were not provided with DTE assessment scale while 28.57% indicate that mentors were provided. Data in Table 2 item 3.3 by student teachers (44%) indicate that mentors were not provided with DTE assessment/grading scale while 30% disagreed and 26% were not sure. Document analysis of the assessment crit forms in students' files of the case study institution revealed that some assessment forms had the DTE assessment scale printed at the back while most the recent assessment crit forms in use did not have the scale printed at the back side. The study therefore shows that mentors in the case study teacher education institution used to be provided with the DTE assessment/grading scale for guidance in their grading of student teachers on teaching practice as reflected in the older crit forms and are no longer provided as reflected in the latest crit forms.

Data from this study revealed that mentors were provided with the assessment crit forms

with some institutions passing the buck over to student teachers in order to facilitate their assessment hence the erratic provision. The erratic provision partly confirms studies by Chakanyuka (2006) and Mhandu and Mashava (2001) which revealed that mentors in Zimbabwe's teacher education are not provided with the assessment/grading guidelines to align mentor assessment of student teachers with that of college lecturers.

Constant Communication with Mentors

Survey data in Table 2 item 4.1 by mentors reveal that mentors (66%) were not constantly communicated with during the five terms of teaching practice while 34% indicated that they were. Survey data in Table 2 item 4.2 by teaching practice lecturers (53.57%) reveal that mentors were not constantly communicated with during the five terms of teaching practice while 46.43% indicate that they were. Data in Table 2 item 4.3 by student teachers (67%) also revealed that mentors were not constantly communicated with during the five terms of teaching practice while 33% revealed that they were. Only 18% were not sure. Interviews with individual mentors from the case study institution revealed that, mentors were not constantly communicated with by the teacher education institutions. What emerged from the study is that while a few teacher education institutions communicated with their mentors the majority did not.

The interviews revealed that lecturers mainly focused on assessing the student teachers' teaching skills and did not involve mentors in their post-lesson discussion with students or share their assessment findings with mentors yet mentors are expected to remain rectifying the observed weaknesses and fortifying strengths. Failure by visiting lecturers to involve mentors in their post-lesson discussions with students contravenes the recommendations of Workshop 2 (2004) that stipulate that lecturers ought to conduct their student assessment in conjunction with mentors. The study concurs with Maphosa et al. (2007), Judith and Tirivanhu (2014) and Tirivanhu (2014) in that regular communication helps to keep mentors informed of college administrative and professional matters as well as of college expectations and greatly reduces the mistrust that usually exists between tutors and mentors, which is largely a re-

sult of the former failing to consult the latter during teaching practice visits. The overall picture that emerged from the study was that most mentors in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice lack regular communication with their teacher education institutions. The study revealed that communication between mentors and teacher education institutions needs overall improvement.

Provision of Incentives

The study also sought to establish whether mentors in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teacher education received incentives as support service to enhance the continuous improvement of student teachers' teaching skills and competences. Survey data in Table 2 item 5.1 by mentors reveal that mentors (91%) did not receive incentives for their mentoring roles while 3% disagreed. Only 6% were not sure. Data in table 2 item 5.2 by lecturers (96.43%) reveal that mentors were not incentivized while 3.57% disagreed. Survey data in table 2 item 5.3 by student teachers (44%) reveal that mentors did not receive incentives for their mentoring role while 19% disagreed and 37% were not sure. Data from interviews with mentors from the case study institution strongly revealed that mentors were not incentivized. What emerged from the study is that mentors in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice are not incentivized for their mentoring role to enhance mentor effectiveness and commitment.

The findings of this study concur with recommendations by Kerry and Mayes (1995) in Mukeredzi and Ndamba (2005), Bourdillon (1988) in Mukeredzi and Ndamba (2005), Judith and Tirivanhu (2014) and Tirivanhu (2014) which pointed out that provision of mentor incentives could include extra time allowance to perform their mentoring duties, letters of commendation, improved chances for promotion, financial rewards, reduction of responsibilities at institutional level and issuing of certificates to mentors that provide added advantage when applying for further studies and promotion. These incentives aim at motivating mentors to apply and commit themselves more fully in the continuous development of student teachers' teaching skills and competences. Lack of mentor incentives in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice does not assure total mentor commitment in student teacher development.

CONCLUSION

Provision of In-service Training

Mentor in-service training is very important in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teacher education, since lecturers take too long to come out and college-based supervision visits are irregular hence it equips mentors with the skills and knowledge necessary to make them effective school-based teacher educators, henceforth is recommended. The study shows that some teacher education institutions in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice provided their mentors with in-service training on general teaching practice issues while some did not. The provision of in-service training for mentors aligns their student development activities with the respective teacher education institutions' expectations and enables them to become effective school-based teacher educators. Lack of in-service training for mentors leaves the training of student teachers to chance and raises the question of how the alignment between school based mentor directed student development and college expectations is achieved. Failure to provide mentors with in-service training by teacher education institutions leaves the training of student teachers to chance and does not promote continuous improvement of student teachers' teaching skills and competences hence is not in tandem with global practice in teacher education. Provision of mentor handbooks is discussed next.

Provision of Mentor Handbooks

Data revealed that the majority of teacher education institutions in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice did not provide their mentors with handbooks to guide them in student development activities as school based teacher educators. Mentor handbooks are crucial in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice where students are mainly deployed in rural schools and lecturer visits are irregular hence act as sources of reference for guiding and ensuring consistence and uniformity in student teacher development by mentors and that mentor activities are in tandem with college expectations. Failure to provide mentor handbooks does not align student development activities by mentors with that of lecturers and college expectations and does not ensure continuous improvement of students'

teaching skills and competences. Provision of assessment crit forms is discussed next.

Provision of Assessment Crit Forms

The study revealed that most mentors in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice were provided with assessment crit forms to ensure that their assessment of students is in tandem with that of lecturers and college expectations. The provision of the assessment crit forms in some teacher education institutions was the responsibility of student teachers, who in some instances, were unable to regularly supply their mentors with adequate assessment crit forms due to financial constraints to photocopy the forms or simply because they detested being assessed. Leaving the provision of the assessment crit forms to student teachers does not guarantee constant supply hence does not ensure continuous improvement of student teachers' teaching skills and competences. The study therefore recommends that teacher education institutions take full responsibility of providing mentors with the assessment crit forms to ensure regular student teacher assessment and should not pass on the responsibility to students. The provision of DTE assessment scale is discussed next.

Provision of DTE Assessment/Grading Scale

The study revealed that despite being responsible for student teachers' professional development for most of their course duration time of five terms or eighty weeks which is 55%, mentors in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice were not provided with the DTE assessment/grading scale to ensure that their assessment is in tandem with that of lecturers and college expectations. All mentors and lecturers are expected to use the DTE assessment/grading scale to ensure consistence and uniformity in the assessment and grading students' classroom practice. The study revealed that some institutions used to print the DTE assessment/grading scale at the back of the assessment crit forms for use by both mentors and lecturers and that the current assessment crit forms were without the assessment/grading scale at the back. Data show that the printing of the assessment/grading scale at the back of the assessment crit forms had been discarded leaving the consistence, uniformity and alignment of mentor assessment and the

grades with that of lecturers and college expectations in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice in doubt. Provision of constant communication with mentors is discussed next.

Constant Communication with Mentors

Data revealed lack of regular communication, liaison and collaboration in student teacher assessment between mentors and college lecturers in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. Lack of regular communication between mentors and teacher education institutions deprives mentors as school based teacher educators of recent college administrative developments and expectations. Failure to communicate and liaise between mentors and lecturers on the student assessment creates a gap between what lectures do or expect and what mentors do and understand and only intensifies mistrust between lecturers and mentors hence does not ensure continuous improvement of student teachers' teaching skills and competences. This inadequacy signifies lack of collegiality and collaboration between mentors and lecturers and does not promote continuous improvement of student teachers' teaching skills and competences and is not in tandem with current global trends in teacher education. The study concurs with Maphosa et al., (2007) in recommending regular communication between teacher education institutions and mentors in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. Provision of incentives is discussed next.

Provision of Incentives

The study revealed that mentors in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice were not provided with incentives to help motivate them commit themselves more in student teacher development. Despite of the overwhelming evidence that mentors are the mainstay of student teacher development and transformation in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice data show that they are not incentivized for their sterling commitment and contribution to teacher education. The use of incentives motivates greater mentor commitment towards enhancing continuous improvement of students' teaching skills and competences and is recommended for Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. Recommendations by the study are discussed next.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the above findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made for consideration by teacher education institutions and practitioners as well as researchers in teaching practice:

- (a) that Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teacher education institutions mount regular in-service training workshops for mentors to include the supervision and assessment of students, their overall professional development, reflective teaching, mentor roles and competency, college expectations, action research and the role of trial and error in student teacher development;
- (b) that Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teacher education institutions provide mentors with guiding handbooks for guidance and reference since student teachers in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 spend most of their course duration (55%) under the guidance and tutelage of mentors and visits by college lecturers are irregular.
- (c) that teacher education institutions take full responsibility of providing mentors with the assessment crit forms and should not overburden students with this responsibility.
- (d) that teacher education institutions provide mentors with the DTE assessment/grading scale to align mentor supervision and assessment of student teachers with that of lecturers and college expectations.
- (e) that teacher education institutions put in place an effective communication system that promotes liaison, collaboration and collegiality among lecturers and mentors and keep mentors informed on administrative and professional developments.
- (f) that mentors in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice be provided with incentives to help motivate them commit themselves more fully in student teacher development to enhance continuous improvement of students' teaching skills and competences.
- (g) that since mentoring is an integral component of teacher training teachers ought to be trained as mentors if mentees are to receive effective assistance in host schools.

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