

EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Edited by

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BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS RESEARCH

Selected, peer reviewed papers from the 2012 ,

September 28-29, 2012, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Peer-reviewed

Edited by

Feng Tao

EFFECTS OF MENTORING AND TEACHING PRACTICE PROJECTS ON NIGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT: IMPLICATION FOR QUALITY TEACHING

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Abstract. Efforts have been on in the search for strategies that could improve teachers' knowledge and pedagogic skills for classroom practice. The student teaching practice (a period of internship) has been an age long practice of enabling pre-service teachers acquire teaching experiences and improve their skills about the profession. However, the need to explore other possibilities that could enhance the acquisition of the desired teaching skills informed this study. A sample of two hundred and forty teacher education students participated in the study out of which one hundred and twenty received mentoring either by an expert or from a peer before proceeding on teaching practice. A quasi experimental design was adopted. Data was collected using Teachers Test of Classroom Competency (TTCC). Result showed a higher competence level of mentored group over the control group (Non-mentored). The inclusion of mentoring as an additional strategy in would-be teachers training programme was recommended.

Keywords: Mentoring Teaching Practice, Teacher Education, Peer Mentoring

1. Introduction

Different scholars have struggled to develop various definitions of the term 'mentoring'. This could be as a result of prevalence of mentoring in various settings and the wide range of issues which mentors address. Some scholars describe mentoring as a concept of process (Roberts, 2000). Others describe it as a specific set of activities (Bowman and Bowman, 1990), while Moorhead and Griffins (2004) conceptualized it as an arrangement in which more experienced workers help less experienced workers grow and advance by providing advice, support and encouragement. It is also a managerial process or technique that aims at entrenching organizational culture and philosophy (Cox, 1997). Garvey and Alfred (2003) described mentoring as a learning partnership between a more experienced and a less experienced individual, while Grossman and Rhodes (2002) see mentoring as a process involving emotional (friendship, acceptance, supports etc) and instrumental information, coaching, advocacy, sponsorship and a relationship that becomes more impactful over time. The process of mentoring

can be formal or informal. Formal mentoring involves a structured and intentional approach to offering students those experiences and benefits similar to the ones provided by persons that students come in contact with. Such initiative are often facilitated by an agency or programme dedicated to purpose and consists of both one-on-one relationships between an adult and the student or older more experienced peer and a younger peer, as well as small groups of students working with an adult or older peer towards a particular goal. In all instances mentoring activities take place at regularly scheduled times over an extended period and most often only one component of comprehensive programme (Sipe and Roder, 1999). Informal mentoring refers to naturally occurring, supportive relationship students have with more experienced individuals such as parents, extended family members, neighbours, teachers, ministers and others with whom students have regular contacts.

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Though mentorship has penetrated different cultures and structures', today mentoring is practiced as a system of passing on cherished values across cultural and religious boundaries such as among Hindu, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and apprenticeship among the Ibos of South Eastern Nigeria. Mentoring serves different purpose, especially based on the individual age and needs. Mentoring for students focuses on developing the knowledge, competencies and confidence needed to successfully undertake their responsibilities such as career, social and emotional support in a safe setting of self-exploration that results in positive academic and personal outcomes (Johnson, 2006). Human relationships are built within social setting and hinges on interactions. The social learning theory as stated by Bandura (1976) provides explanation for understanding social relationship in learning environment. In Bandura (1976) idea, "learning would be laborious if not hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effect of their own action to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behaviours are learned idea of how new behaviours are formed and on later occasions, it is coded. Information serves as a guide for action. The social cognitive theory also acknowledged observation as an important modeling behaviours as that found between mentor and mentee. One of the very important phases in teacher education programme in Nigeria is the teaching practice exercise. Tanaja (2000) sees teaching practice as field studies, internship, or student teaching while Nakpodia (2011) states that teaching practice comprises of all the experiences in and out of classroom which preservice teachers gather as they embrace real teaching in real classrooms. According to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) only theoretical teaching of methodology cannot adequately prepare teachers to teach. For Nakpodia (2011), supervised teaching practice aims at correcting some pedagogic error, helping students develop confidence as well as

opportunity to assess student teacher performance in the acquisition of pedagogic skill. The importance of teaching in the development of teaching skills has been stressed. Without Teaching Practice, all that a pre-service teacher has will remain knowledge about teaching and no teaching per se. The teaching practice exercise exposes the pre-services teacher to the tacit aspects of teaching which cannot be captured in theoretical courses. Roth. (1998) explained that there are some aspects of teaching which are inaccessible to description. He posited that “understanding teaching is difficult because it, like the practice to be taught, has aspects which are tacit and thus cannot be brought into the domain of discourse.” Teaching is thus domain specific and situational (Relative to context). The student practicing teaching must be able to revise the belief (domain specific and context specific from time to time in order to adapt them to classroom situation). The teaching practice affords students teachers the opportunity to do so within the context of a school. Nakpodia (2011) after a review of Akbar (2000) listed the following as some of the objectives of student teaching practice:

- To provide prospective teacher with opportunity to establish appropriate teacher-pupil relationship.
- Opportunity to assess student potential as a teacher and suitability for the job.
- Development of personal relationship with others
- Providing practical experience in school
- Opportunity to put theory into practice
- Practical planning and preparation of lesson
- Develop skills in use of fundamental procedures, techniques and methods.

2. Statement of Problem

The prevalence and positive impact of mentoring in organization has generated a large body of social science research on its various dimensions. Prominent among them is its effect on human capacity building and its relationship with cognitive apprenticeship traditionally practiced in Nigeria. In the education sector, guiding younger teachers. toward skills has becomes more important than ever before. The need to understand the combined effect of mentoring and teaching practice and the sole use of teaching practice for developing teachers' competency is likely to produce insight into future teacher training programmes.

3. Research Hypotheses

This study tested the following null hypotheses

- There is no significant difference in the competence level of mentored and non-mentored student teachers
- There is no significant difference in the competency level of student teachers mentored by expert and those mentored by their peers.

4. Method of the Study

Student teachers from three Colleges of Education in Delta State, Nigerian formed the population of the study. A total of two thousand five hundred (2500) students registered for the programmes in the 2010/2011 academic year. Two hundred and forty student teachers (9.6%) was sampled by stratified random sampling. Of this number, one hundred and twenty of them were specifically assigned to either expert or peer mentors while the other one hundred and two were not mentored before they proceeded on teaching practice programme. The mentoring programme focused on development of pedagogic skills, effective use of instructional material, evaluation techniques and mastery of contents of the subject. A quasi-experimental (non-randomized pre-test-post-test control group) design was adopted. A twenty item (20) teachers test of classroom competency (TTCC) consisting of four subscales was used to collect competency data. Each of the subscales contained five items in a 3-point likert in format. The items were scored from 3 to 0 for positive items and the reverse for negative items. The reliability of the instrument was found to be 0.67. data generated was analyzed using t-test, standard deviation and mean.

5. Result

Table 1: t-test summary of experimental and control groups achievement in TTCC

| Instrument | Groups | | N | Mean | SD | tcal | ttab |
|---------------------------------------|---------|-----|-------|------|-------|-------|------|
| Teachers test of classroom competence | Expt. | 120 | 12.88 | 2.93 | 18.51 | 1.960 | * |
| | Control | | 120 | 0.70 | | | |

Table 2: t-test of mentored group based on type of mentoring

| Instrument | Groups R | | N | Mean | SD | tcal | ttab |
|---|-------------|----|------|------|------|-------|--------|
| Teachers test of classroom competence | Expt. | 60 | 9.28 | 2.42 | | | |
| | Control | | 60 | 4.25 | 2.28 | 20.65 | 1.96 * |

6. Discussion

Result of analysis of data in respect of hypothesis one presented in Table 1 revealed that the subjects who went through the experimental treatment showed higher level of competence in the four subscales when analyzed together than subjects who were not mentored before proceeding on teaching practice (controlgroup). Hypothesis two was formulated in order to get an empirical evidence to support the assertion that the competency of student teacher improved when exposed to expert mentors then when mentored by their peers. Table 2 showed that the mentees in the experimental group produced higher competency level than the control groups ($t=20.65$) at 0.05 level of significance.

7. Conclusions

The findings of this study have shown that mentoring has positive effect on mentees teaching competency level and that this also improved when expert mentors were used. The process may be rigorous; mentors have to sacrifice this to the aims of practicality. The relationship or level of competency of student teachers after exposure to expert mentors and those of peer group mentors clearly indicated that the use of expert mentors are mostly produced better results.

8. Recommendations

It is the recommendation of this study that mentorship should be included in the teacher education curriculum not only to enhance but as an additional strategy for pedagogic equipment of trainee teachers for the teaching profession. Professional relationship should be encouraged between mentors and trainee teachers as this can bring about professional guidance, motivation, acquisition of ethical aspect of the teaching and thus boost teacher's role in fostering successful teaching and learning. Though peer mentoring failed to equal expert mentorship, it should be encouraged to help students with learning difficulties.

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