UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE EDUCATION LIBRARY

Volume 23 Number 3, November 2011
ISSN 1013-3445
CONTENTS

Student Teacher Perceptions of the Role of Classroom Mentors on Attachment Teaching Practice: The Case at Morgan ZINTEC College.

Manuel Rwodzi, Francis Muchenje, and Beatrice Bondai
Faculty of Education, University of Zimbabwe

ABSTRACT

This study sought to identify the perceptions that student teachers hold towards their mentors whilst on attachment teaching practice. The sample consisted of 80 final year students. 80 questionnaires were administered to the students at the college. Focused group discussions were conducted with the students in the sample at the college. The study found out that student teachers have a positive attitude towards mentors, teachers with other responsibilities should not be appointed as mentors and that teaching practice is an important component of Initial Teacher Education. The study recommends that: teachers' colleges should conscientise mentors on their roles, mentors need to create a harmonious working relationship with student teachers and that a change of class and mentors should be kept at a minimum during attachment teaching practice.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching Practice (T.P.) is an important component of Initial Teacher Education (ITE).Teaching practice aims to equip the student teacher with the skills that he or she will require to give effect to the most important aspect of his/her task (Walters, 1994:1) This approach is influenced by the view that teaching is fundamentally a practical activity, student teachers are not able to begin to develop their own body of practical professional knowledge until they enter the classroom (Maynard and Furlong, 1995:182).

There are a number of changes that have taken place in teacher education in Zimbabwe particularly in the area of teaching practice since 1980. The duration and format of teaching practice has undergone some important changes. Up to 1981 teaching practice in Zimbabwe conventional primary school teachers' colleges lasted for about a term with the student teacher practising under the supervision of a qualified teacher. From 1982 to 1984 teaching practice in the conventional colleges was three terms long with one term in the second year and two terms in the third year. Thereafter students in conventional colleges spent two of the four years on teaching practice. During teaching practice the student teacher took full responsibility of the class. The prolonged period of teaching practice in the conventional primary teachers college was influenced by the Zimbabwe Integrated National Teacher Education Course (ZINTEC) programme where the first and last terms were spent at college while the rest of the time was spent in the field with students working as full time teachers (Chivore, 1994). According to Zvobgo (1986:86) the programme was a kind of in- service or apprenticeship course in which the student learns the skills of the profession on the job. A number of primary school teachers' colleges have adopted the ZINTEC model.

From 1995, student teachers were now regarded as full time students and they no longer carried full teaching loads (Taruvinga and Museva, 2003). This change saw the birth of the mentorship programme where student teachers have to practise under the mentorship and supervision of the classroom teacher who assumes the role and responsibility of mentor. It is the contention of this paper that the success of this relatively new innovation largely depends on the perceptions that student teachers hold towards the mentorship programme. This paper seeks to investigate these perceptions from a sociological point of view.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by symbolic interactionism which is a micro sociological theory that focuses on meanings that arise out of the process of interaction (Kirby et al. 1997:38ʼ Giddens 1997:564). These meanings are important as they come to influence subsequent

interaction (Haralambos and Holborn, 1985:16, Ritzer, 1992: 348)
Meanings derived from the interaction situation may lead to labeling
which may result in the self fulfilling prophecy (Levin and Spates,
1990: 285). Where labeling has taken place, the label influences the
interaction process as further interaction is conducted on the basis of
the initial label attached. Therefore, in terms of symbolic
interactionism, the interaction process is influenced and sustained by
the way the situation is defined. As student teachers and their
mentors interact, meanings emerge and these meanings may lead to
positive and negative labeling. The question that can be posed is,
'How do student teachers define the role of classroom mentors on
attachment teaching practice?' Cooley's concepts of the looking
glass self is relevant here as the process of interaction affects one's
self esteem (Ritzer, 1992: 200; Kirby et al. 1997: 442) The
interaction between the student teacher and the mentor in the
classroom has an influence on the self esteem of the former.

DEFINITION OF TERMS
In order to appreciate the position and role of the mentors, it is
imperative to define two closely related key terms. These are
supervision and mentoring.

SUPERVISION
Wiles and Bondi (1996:9) define supervision as action and
experimentation aimed at improving instruction and the instruction
programme. Glatthorn (1994) in Taruvinga and Museva (2003:114)
defines supervision as 'a process of facilitating the professional
growth of a teacher by giving the teacher feedback about classroom
interactions and assisting him or her to make his or her teaching
effective'. In mentoring, there is supervision involved as the mentors
ensure that the student teacher acquires teaching skills that facilitate
effective instruction. This means that the student teacher receives
constant feed back on performance. Supervisors should possess
certain qualities so that they execute their roles effectively.
Sergiovanni (1982) says that the supervisor should be competent,
compassionate, professional, it should be emphasized that

supervision represents a good deal of effective tinkering. Wiles and Bondi (1996:19) outline skill areas for effective supervision as follows: supervisors are instruction specialist and this speaks volumes about the school selection of mentors Supervisors are human relations workers as supervision includes a special capacity to motivate others and supervisors are managers of change. These views then summarize the role of mentors as that of supervisors.

MENTORING

Mentoring has been defined in a number of ways. Mclntyre and Hagger (1994) in Taruvinga and Museva (2003:116)) see mentoring as' a school based activity undertaken by qualified and experienced teachers to provide practising teachers with advice, guidance and support during teaching practice'.

Mentoring therefore refers to the nature of the relationship between the student teacher and the mentor. This relationship will determine whether the student teacher acquires the relevant skills, knowledge and attitude about teaching.

These two terms should be seen to complement each other since in mentoring supervision is also involved. In other words, these two terms should be seen as representing the different dimension of the mentors' role.

THE MENTOR'S ROLE

Schools in partnership with Higher Education Institutions (H.E.I.) have come to play an important part in teacher education in a number of countries. This development is not only limited to Zimbabwe but has also been the trend in other countries such as the United Kingdom (Hawkey ,1998: 331). In this partnership, schools assume greater responsibility in teacher education. This is because the transition to more school based initial teacher education has seen the widespread adoption of the mentorship programme (Hawkey ,1998:331) Therefore, there has been recognition by those involved in initial teacher training for schools to be actively involved in the professional preparation of teachers (Maynard, 1997). In the relationship between Higher Education Institutions and schools, the

student teacher is attached to the classroom. It should be noted that the role and responsibility of the mentor in Zimbabwean primary schools has not only been misunderstood by some school heads but also by some mentors. This has resulted in situations where the selection of school mentors has been done without reference to the mentor's supervisory and professional skills. Teaching school heads have at times allocated themselves student teachers so as to lighten their workload as this creates more time for their administrative duties. At times student teachers have been attached to untrained teachers (Hapanyengwi, 2003).

The question that has to be answered is: What exactly is the role of the mentor in Zimbabwean primary schools? Yeomans and Sampson (1994) in Taruvinga and Museva (2003:115,116) outlines the following; the mentor role is that of planner, organizer, negotiator and inductor hence the mentor should create a positive and conducive classroom environment. The second role of the mentor is a supportive one where the student teacher must have confidence and trust in the mentor as a professional who gives supportive criticism. Thirdly in a professional role, the mentor is a teacher, educator, supervisor and assessor. Student teachers often see the classroom mentor as the most significant person in their school based training (Maynard, 1997:13). Haberman and Harris in Hapanyegwi (2003:6) found that 70% of the student teachers interviewed after teaching practice felt they learnt more about teaching practice from mentors than from college supervisors. In Zimbabwe, during seminars organized by the Department of Teacher Education of the University of Zimbabwe, student teachers stated that they had undergone rapid skills development under the supervision of qualified mentors and that mentors who have been overburdened with other responsibilities have been found to be less effective (Taruvinga and Museva, 2003). This observation places heavy demands on the selection of mentors. Maynard (1997:10) argues that mentors should be allowed 'protected time'(priority time during school hours) for formal discussion, planning and feedback with students. The goal of the mentorship programme is to provide collegiality (Segiovanni, 1982:42, Sergiovanni and Starrat, 1993:103.)

The role of mentors in the classroom teaching process depends on the perceptions of the nature of teaching and the teaching profession. Three models put forward by Furlong and Maynard (1995:57:178) are worth considering here. These are the neo- liberal view, the performance view and the competency view. Neo- liberals argue that teaching is essentially a natural process based principarilly on a sound knowledge and deep love of one's subject beyond that teaching is too idiosyncratic to be personalized (Maynard and Furlong, 1995: 57) .In this context, learning to teach is achieved through the emulation of an experienced practitioner, the mentor. In this regard, teaching practice or learning to teach rather becomes a form of apprenticeship training. The question that comes to mind is, 'How much autonomy does the mentor give to the student teacher to try out new ideas?' This is influenced by the view that new ideas are always coming into the profession. Stones (1984:6) argue that this model encourages students to copy isolated bits of teaching behavior and attitudes since the master teachers can only offer the student a limited set of skills.

In the performance model, teaching is understood to involve a number of behavioral skills where learning to teach involves the mastery of these discrete skills (Maynard and Furlong 1995:57). The role of the mentor is to act as a systematic 'skill' based trainer. In this regard, the mentor should be someone knowledgeable in the art of teaching. The cognitive model recognizes that competence involves knowledge and judgment as well as practical skills (Furlong and Maynard 1995: 579). In this regard, mentors must support students in developing and exercising appropriate knowledge and judgment in relation to practical skills.

The three models outlined above should not be viewed as isolated; rather they should be complementary for effective mentoring. They should create room for collaborative teaching where students are given access to the wealth of practical knowledge that experienced teachers possess (Maynard, 1997:38). Student teachers will find collaborative teaching beneficial. Lave and Wenger (1991) in Hawkey (1998:332) argue that the development of learning takes place through 'legitimate periphery participation' where the

participation of the new comer gradually increases in engagement and complexity whilst working alongside an 'old timer'.

The views outlined above determine the nature of the mentor-student relationship as well as the process of student- mentor interaction and student teacher- pupil interaction. It will also determine the way teaching skills are disseminated.

There are a number of factors that hinder classroom mentors from discharging their duties effectively. Taruvinga and Museva (2003: 119) identified the following: mentors are not paid responsibility allowances by the government or honorarium allowance by Higher Education Institutions. There are no professional qualifications specific to mentors, and lack of training in mentorship as well as lack of financial and promotion incentives. Hapanyengwi (2003: 6) also observed the following issues: some mentors did not allow student teachers to implement new ideas and methods. These factors influence the way and manner in which mentors discharge their duties as well as the perception of their role by student teachers.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Changes in initial teacher education have made the classroom mentor part of initial teacher education. Thus the classroom mentor plays an important role in initial teacher education. The effectiveness of the mentorship programme tends to be limited by the perceptions that student teachers have of their role. Perceptions, like attitudes tend to influence performance. Negative perceptions of the role of mentors does not augur well for the success of the current initial teacher education model. Thus this research seeks to identify the perceptions that student teachers hold towards the mentorship programme.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research study seeks to address the following research questions:

a) What are the perceptions of student teachers on the mentor's classroom role?

b) Does the attachment of a student teacher to classroom mentors increase the effectiveness of the student teacher?

c) What are the advantages and disadvantages of the student mentorship programme?

d) What are the student teacher perceptions of mentor awareness of their roles?

e) Do mentors allow student teachers to experiment with new ideas?

f) What problems do student teachers experience in their relationships with classroom mentors?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology adopted for this study is the descriptive survey method. Surveys allow the collection of detailed description of existing phenomena with the intent of using the data either to justify or repeal current practice or to make more intelligent plans to improve them(Mushoriwa, 1998).

DATA GATHERING INSTRUMENTS

Data gathering instruments consisted of the questionnaire, interview and focused group discussions. The questionnaire had closed and open ended questions.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The population consisted of all final year students at Morgan ZINTEC College. From the population a sample of 80 students was selected using simple random sampling technique.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data from this study were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively, the main thrust was on the latter.

The responses of the student teachers were compiled and analyzed to look for themes related to the research problems.

FINDINGS: STUDENT TEACHERS QUESTIONNAIRES AND FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Class taught on Teaching Practice

It was found out that all the students were assigned to classes ranging from grade 2 to 6. None of the students in the sample was assigned to a grade one or seven class. Twenty two percent of the students in the sample taught two different classes during the five term teaching practice period, ten percent taught three different classes and another three percent taught five different classes during the same period. While a change of classes widens the students experience, there is need to consider situations where the student teacher changes classes more than twice bearing in mind that teaching practice is only five terms long. A change of class in most instances involves a change of mentor and this does not augur well for continuity and skills acquisition (Walters, 1994)

Attachment to a Qualified Teacher

The study found out that eighty percent of the students were attached to a qualified teacher. Those students who were not attached to qualified teachers experienced some problems as shown by their responses which included the following:

- o I was given my class for a term when some of the teachers were leaving the profession. I had a lot of work to do as I had to plan for everything.
- o The school was understaffed and so the class had no teacher and the arrival of a student teacher was a relief to the school. I had to teach all the lessons daily and do assignments as well.

o   The teacher was on maternity leave for the first term and
     after that she took leave and the strike affected the school. I
     had no one to assist me with all the knowledge I was
     expecting.

Similar views were expressed during focused group discussions
where some of the responses included that:

o   There was a shortage of teachers, so I had to do it alone for
     the two years that I was on teaching practice. I handled the
     class single handedly and, this put a lot of pressure on me as
     I had to plan, teach, evaluate and record.

Failure to provide mentors to student teachers defeats the purpose
and goals of attachment teaching practice as teaching practice is seen
as a form of apprenticeship (Zvobgo, 1986 Maynard and Furlong,
1995: McIntyre and Hagger, 1994 in Taruvinga and Museva, 2003:
Hapanyengwi, 2003). Student teachers have high expectations of the
mentors' role (Maynard, 1997: 13).

Collegiality, Joint Planning and Teaching Sessions.

Seventy three percent of the students indicated that they at times held
joint planning and teaching sessions with their mentors. These were
found to be helpful as shown by the following responses:

o   They were very helpful as they allowed the sharing of ideas
     between the students and mentor.
o   The mentor used to elaborate where I did not understand.
o   These were helpful sessions because I learnt a lot and the
     mentor also learnt from me.

In focused group discussions, the students reinforced the above
responses. Some of their responses included the following:

o   They were very helpful because I planned and taught
     relevant information always and this minimized some
     corrections by the mentor.
o   The joint sessions created a very good working relationship.

The responses of the students show that they have a positive attitude
towards the role of a mentor. Joint lesson sessions appear to benefit

the student teacher and this summarizes the role of mentors on teaching practice (Yeomans and Sampson in Taruvinga and Museva, 2003) The views expressed by the student teachers highlight the neo liberal view of teaching (Maynard and Furlong 1995: Lave and Wenger in Hawkey, 1998).

Liberty to Try Out New Ideas

Ninety percent of the student teachers felt that they were given the liberty to try out ideas by their mentors. Some of their responses included the following:

- o She allocated time for the students to have more time with the pupils.
- o She never stopped me from teaching whenever I wanted to do so.
- o We used to share subjects for the whole week. So when planning we used to discuss and she welcome my new ideas that I brought from college.

During focused group discussions the students expressed similar sentiments. Some of their response included the following:

- o Actually, the mentors I got were so resourceful that they allowed me to express myself in the way I was taught at the college and in the way that I believed as an individual.
- o Yes she did. She was quite aware of our differences in methodologies and with that we learnt new ideas from each other.

In this regard, mentors can be seen to play a positive role in the professional development of the student teacher. This tends to confirm and emphasize the cognitive model of teaching (Furlong and Maynard 1995: 579; Yeomans and Sampsons, 1994 in Taruvinga and Museva, 2003: 115) However, these findings contradict the observation made by Hapanyegwi (2003; 6) where student teachers revealed that some mentors did not allow student teachers to try out new ideas.

Advantages of the Mentorship Programme

Ninety five percent of the student teachers felt that there are some advantages associated with the mentorship programme. Some of their typical responses included the following:

- o You gain confidence since you will be assessed on how to tackle some teaching tasks
- o One learns the skills of attending to parents and other members of the community as well as identifying pupils with problems.

Similar views were also expressed during focused group discussion where some of the responses included the following:

- o Mentor assists through lesson demonstration
- o Working with a mentor reduces the student's workload and this enables the students to have more time to do college work.

The views expressed by the students emphasize the role that mentors play in Initial Teacher Education as well as the importance attached to teaching practice in equipping student teachers with the relevant skills (Walters, 1994: 1; Maynard and Furlong, 1995: 182; Sergiovanni, 1982). The mentorship programme creates an environment that enables student teachers to gain essential skills in teaching (Lave and Wenger, 1995 in Hawkey 1998: 333)

Disadvantages of the Mentorship Programme.

The study found out that seventy five percent of the students felt that there are some disadvantages that are associated with the mentorship programme. Some of their response included the following:

- o There is a disadvantage if there is a poor relationship between the mentor and the student teacher, pupils tend to discover the conflict between these two teachers hence they will then develop bad moral values.

o   There is need to handle the class individually so as to see if one is good at controlling the class.

o   There is bound to be conflict if the two of you do not click.

In focused group discussions, the student teachers expressed similar views. Some of their responses included that:

· o   Mentor interest in some subjects like physical education, music and art leaves a lot to be desired. These subjects are not liked and are therefore not taken seriously.

o   Sometimes the mentor is scared of losing the children's affections as the pupils become close to the student teacher who is usually young and brings in new ideas.

Although the students admitted that the mentorship programme has its own merits, the disadvantages highlighted above are significant. There is need for mentors and student teachers to improve their interpersonal relationship as different meanings arise out of the interaction process (Kirby et al. 1997: 38; Haralambos and Holborn, 1985; 16: Ritzer, 1992: 348; Levin and Spates, 1990: 285). At the same time, mentors need to reexamine their roles since they have a key role to play in the development of the student teacher (Yeomans and Sampson in Taruvinga and Museva, 2003: 115: Maynard 1997: 13 Maynard and Furlong, 1995: 579).

Value of Skills Imparted by Mentor

Eighty eight percent of the students felt that they gained more in terms of teaching skills from their mentors. This is shown by their responses which included some of the following:

o   From my mentors I learnt that teaching, especially at primary school level, requires flexibility and someone who is resourceful.

o   She taught me how to handle or deal with pupils with individual problems.

o She used to give drills on how to introduce any lessons in
various ways.

During focused group discussions, the following issues were raised:

o I used to observe the mentor teaching and some skills like
use of media in maths which I did not know were learnt from
my mentor.
o I learnt syllabus interpretation, remedial skills and record
keeping.

The views expressed by the students summarize the important role
that the school and the mentorship programme play in Initial Teacher
Education (Hawkey, 1998: 331; Maynard 1997:13 Harris in
Hapanyengwi 2003: 6, Maynard and Furlong, 1995).

Mentor Awareness of College Expectations in Terms of Teaching Practice

The study revealed that seventy eight percent of the students felt that
mentors were fully aware of college expectations in terms of
teaching practice. Some of their typical responses included the
following:

o Whenever the supervisors came, my mentor would sit down
with them and discuss the college expectations in order to
help me
o She allowed me to write my records according to the college
format.
o She was trained here at Morgan Zintec College, so she knew
the expectations of the college.

The views expressed by the students during focused group
discussions were similar to the ones above. Some of the responses
included the following:

o The teacher – in charge explained the expectations to the
mentor the moment I got into the class.
o She would assess my work almost like everyday, checking
the detailed lesson plan and schemes of work as well as the
evaluations.

Mentor awareness of college expectations ensures the smooth implementation of Initial Teacher Education. This is so because schools have come to play an important role in teacher education (Hawkey, 1998: 331; Maynard 1997)

Mentor Preparedness for the Challenges Presented by Teaching Practice

Sixty five percent of the students felt that the mentors were not adequately prepared for the challenges presented by teaching practice. Some of their responses included the following:

o   Some mentors have no knowledge whatsoever of the reason for students to go out on teaching practice.
o   They are not prepared as shown by their attitudes toward student teachers. Most of their attitudes are negative.
o   Not all mentors are adequately prepared for the challenges. This is due to the fact that some of them did their teaching practice way back.

These views were also reinforced by the responses of students during focused group discussions. Some of their responses included the following:

o   Some mentors are over protective of the classes (*Unonyanya kutyirwa, Ukanyanya kutyirwa hauzodzidzi*) that the student teacher does not get valuable skills
o   The issue of age comes in; some mentors belong to the old school.

Lack of preparedness is an issue that can negatively affect the goals of attachment teaching practice (Hawkey, 1998.331)

Apart from lack of preparedness, the majority of students, that is seventy three percent, felt that mentors face some problems in carrying out their duties. Some of their responses included the following:

o   Problems like lack of resources due to economic difficulties affect the mentor to fully help the student teachers.

o   Being assigned to other duties besides mentoring hinders
    their ability to discharge mentoring duties efficiently.
o   There might be some differences between the student teacher
    and mentor, planning and scheming formats might not tally
    or they cannot even listen to student suggestions.

During focused group discussions, similar sentiments emerged.
Some of the responses included the following:

o   There were inadequate resources like textbooks, instructional
    materials and practical facilities
o   Some mentors lack motivation.

From the observations of the students, it appears as if lack of
appropriate resources greatly affects the way mentors carry out their
duties. This tends to present problems considering the fact that there
has been wide spread adoption of the mentorship programme
(Hawkey, 1998:331). Ways of enhancing mentor motivation need to
be explored (Taruvinga and Museva, 2003: 149).

Assessment of Student Teachers by Mentors

It was found out that the majority of students, eighty three percent of
the sample, were frequently assessed by their mentors. Those who
were not frequently assessed felt that their teaching practice was
negatively affected as shown by some of their responses:

o   My teaching experience was hooked to colleagues since the
    mentor was not on duty most of the time.
o   The student teacher had to teach without knowing wrongs
    and rights.
o   Not at all, the head and her deputies were ever busy.

Information obtained from focused group discussions reinforced
the sentiments expressed by students. Some of the responses
included the following:

o   The mentor was not there hence I never got assessed by one.
o   Most o the time I did not know where I managed and where I
    went wrong.

Although the number of students who were not assessed
frequently is small, it affects students as they do not get frequent
feedback which is an important component of supervision

(Glatthorn, 1998 in Taruvinga and Museva, 2003; Wiles and Bondi, 1996:19; Sergiovanni, 1982: 42; Sergiovanni and Starrat, 1993: 103).

Creation of Conducive Classroom Environment by Mentor
Eighty four percent of the students felt that their mentors created a conducive classroom environment. Some of their responses included the following:

- o She was calm and as a result I could ask her some questions if I was not sure of a concept.
- o They organize students and then look for stationery and material for science and social studies corners.
- o She was very accommodating, caring, humble, responsible, honest and would help wherever possible with good ideas.

These views are similar to those raised during Focused Group Discussion where some of the responses included the following:

- o The pupils were told that we were all teachers and that we were there to impart knowledge.
- o She used to make sure that all the teaching and learning material was in place before the lessons started.

The responses of the students show the importance that they attach to the role of mentor. The mentor's role enables students to develop their own body of practical knowledge before graduation (Maynard and Furlong, 1985:182 Yeomans and Simpson in Taruvinga and Museva, 2003).

Differences Experienced with Mentors
Only Thirty-five percent of the students indicated that they had experienced differences   with their mentors. Some of their responses included the following:

- o Mentor was proud and mocked me before pupils saying she is learning like you, you are just the same, meaning I was equal to pupils.
- o On teaching subjects like physical education and art, sometimes she would use that time for maths and English.

o   I was always treated by other senior staff as a tabular rassa;
     they always tended to put information into me, though I
     always fought back.

These views were supported by information obtained during focus
group discussion where some of the responses included the
following:

o   Bringing in new ideas.
o   Teaching areas, mentor preferred to teach some subjects and
     not to teach other subjects.

Although the number of students who experienced differences with
mentors is small, it needs to be emphasized that some of the
differences affect the mentor- student teacher relationship which in
turn may affect the student's self esteem (Ritzer, 1992; 200; Kirby et
al. 1997: 442). Such differences can be overcome if mentors possess
effective supervision skills (Segiovanni, 1982; Wiles and Bondi,
1996: 10).

Student Teachers' Opinions of Mentors' Perception of Student Teachers.

The study found out that seventy three percent of the students were
of the opinion that their mentors viewed them as colleagues. Some of
their responses included the following:

o   She referred to me as a colleague. We would help each other
     in carrying out classroom duties, she treated me with respect.
o   Because she was always taking me and addressing me as a
     teacher like other qualified teachers
o   The mentor viewed me as a colleague, she was very
     supportive, and whenever I encountered a challenge, she
     used to assist me whole- heartedly.

Similar views were raised by students during Focus Group
Discussion where some of the following responses were raised:

o   The mentor viewed me as a colleague since we planned our
     lessons together, we shared equally.

o My mentor viewed me as a colleague; she gave me the opportunity to learn whatever I wanted and even to do my research with the pupils.

The student teachers' responses show that a positive relationship existed between them and their mentors. Such a relationship influences the student's self esteem positively (Ritzer, 1992; 2000; Kirby et al. 1997: 447). Such a relationship is essential for the establishment of collegiality which is a goal of the mentorship programme.

Criterion in Mentor Selection

Eighty eight percent of the students felt that teachers with other responsibilities such as school heads, deputy heads, and teachers in charge and sports organizers should not be appointed as mentors. The responses included some of the following:

o Since they perform other duties, the student will be alone most of the time and mentoring will not take place.

o Because most of the time they will be absent leaving the load to the student who is also there to learn from the mentor.

o Because they are so strongly attached to other school duties, they do not have time to monitor the student teacher.

Similar views were raised during focused group discussion where some of the following responses were recorded:

o Most of the times these people are occupied in the other business and as a result the student teacher is left on his/her own with the class.

o The student teacher can not learn much as far as lesson delivery is concerned. No one can correct the student teacher, most of the time they will be committed to administrative issues.

The views of the students highlight the need for mentors who spend most of the time with student teachers since in the attachment teaching practice format student teachers no longer carry full teaching loads (Taruvinga and Museva, 2003). The absence of the mentor means that the student teacher is deprived of immediate feedback about classroom interaction and

instruction which is the essence of supervision (Glatthorn 1994 in Taruvinga and Museva 2003; 14).

Student Teacher Perception of the Importance of Teaching Practice

All the student teachers in the sample felt that teaching practice was an important component of Initial Teacher Education. Some of their responses included the following:

- o It helps a lot because teachers will gain experience since teaching is a practical thing.
- o After qualifying, the student teacher knows many things about school life and dealing with pupils, colleagues and community.
- o Yes, though I managed the class single handedly, I improved a lot in organizational skills, disciplinary action and other things.

Similar views emerged during focused group discussions where the responses given include the following:

- o Students will be prepared practically and theoretically.
- o Teaching practice is very essential because it helps the student teacher to put into practise what he or she learnt during the course that is theory into practice.

These views tend to emphasize the view that teaching is a practical activity where students need to practice before entering the profession (Walter 1994; Maynard and Furlong 1995; 182).

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study makes the following recommendations:

- o Change of class and mentors should be kept at a minimum to enable student teachers to gain meaningful skills.
- o Teachers with other responsibilities, especially school heads and deputy heads, should not be appointed mentors.

o   There is need for teachers' colleges to conscientize
    mentors of their roles and college expectations before
    the commencement of teaching practice.
o   Colleges have to ensure that all student teachers are
    attached to a qualified mentor throughout the teaching
    practice period.
o   Colleges should hold workshops and seminars in order
    to enlighten mentors on their responsibilities in
    mentoring practice period.
o   .Mentors should be flexible enough to allow student
    teachers to implement new ideas.
o   It is the responsibility of mentors to create a harmonious
    working relationship with student teachers.

CONCLUSION

The study has shown that student teachers have a positive perception
towards the role of classroom mentors. There are a few issues that
need to be attended to for the role of classroom mentors to be
effective. These include the holding of workshops and seminars for
both mentors and student teachers on mentoring.

REFERENCES

Bogdan, R.C.and Bilken, S.K. (1992). *Qualitative Research for
    Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*. London:
    Allyn and Bacon.

Chivore B.R.S. (1994). *The Effectiveness of the Primary School
    Teacher in Zimbabwe*. Gweru: Mambo Press.

Furlong, J. and Maynard, T. (1995). Mentoring Student Teachers: *The
    Growth of Professional Knowledge*. London: Routledge.

Giddens, A. (1997). *Sociology*. London: Polity Press.

Hapanyengwi, O. 'Modern Trends in Teaching Practice' in Zindi, F. Batidzirai, B. and Nyota, M. (Eds.) (2003). Improving Teacher Preparation: *Teaching Practice Guide*. Harare: Human Resources Centre University of Zimbabwe.

Haralambos, M. and Holborn, M. (1985). *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*. London: University Tutorial Press.

Hawley, K.' Consultative Supervision and Mentor Development: An Initial Exploration Study' in Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice Volume 4 Number 2 October 1998

Kirby, M. (et al.) (1997). *Sociology in Perspective*. London: Heinemann.

Levin, J. and Spates, J.L. (1990). *Starting Sociology*. London: Harper and Row Publishers.

Maynard, T. (1997). *An Introduction to Primary Mentoring*. London: Cassell.

Mushoriwa, T.D. (1998)' A Study on the Attitudes of African Parents in Masvingo District Towards Educational Change Introduced Into Zimbabwean Secondary Schools Since Independence' in *Zimbabwe Journal of Educational Research. 10 (3)*

Ritzer, G. (1992). *Sociological Theory._* New York: McGraw Hill.

Sergiovanni, T. (1982). *Supervision of Teaching*. Washington: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Sergiovanni, T. and Starrat, R. J. (1993). *Supervision: A Redefinition* New York: McGraw- Hill

Stones, E. (1984). *Supervision in Teacher education; A Counselling and Pedagogical Approach*. London: Methuen.

Taruvinga, C. R. and Museva, S. 'Mentoring and Supervision' in Zindi, F. Batidzivai, B. Nyota, M. (Eds.) (2003). *Improving Teacher Preparation: Teaching Practice Guide*.

Harare: Human Resource Research Centre University of Zimbabwe.

Walters, R. A. (1994). *Micro-·Teaching and Teaching Practice: A Guide for Student Teachers*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller.

Wiles, J. and Bondi, J (1996). *Supervision: A Guide to Practice*. New Jersey: Merril.

Zvobgo, R J. (1986) *Transforming Education: The Zimbabwean Experience*. Harare: College Press.