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The Effect of Attaching Student Teachers for five Terms for their Teaching Practice

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Abstract

The research explores the effect of attaching student teachers to primary schools for five terms in line with the 2-5-2 teacher training model. The thrust of the research was to establish the extent to which students' attachment to schools is benefitting schools since existing research suggests that only the student benefits from the practice. The descriptive survey research design was employed. The population comprised 70 teachers and 3 school heads from 3 schools in Masvingo District. Data was collected through questionnaire, interview and observation. Findings indicated that Teaching Practice benefits both the student teachers and the schools to which they are attached. Students play a significant role in the establishment of Early Childhood Development (ECD) outdoor and indoor centres. The research also revealed that students make immense contributions in class management and this enhances schools' pass rates. On the other hand, it emerged that some student teachers often have problems in content mastery. It was recommended that stakeholders be sensitised on the contributions made by student teachers towards the wellbeing of the school so that they give them the necessary support for the student teachers to do even better.

Keywords: Mentoring; 2-5-2 Model, Attachment

Background to the Study

The 2.5.2 teacher training model that Masvingo Teachers' College follows is derived from the philosophy that gave rise to the ZINTEC programme. As noted by Chivore (1992; see also Chivore & Masango, 1982), the main aims of the ZINTEC programme were to ameliorate the critical teacher shortage in schools following rapid expansion in education at independence, creation of a relevant teacher for the ensuing environment following political independence and to develop an all-round

primary school teacher (Chivore & Masango, 1982:29) relevant for the changed times. To fulfil these obligations, teacher training took on various forms; the ZINTEC model, the four-year conventional teacher education programme and the three-year conventional teacher education programme.

The 2.5.2 model that primary teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe follow is located in the three-year conventional teacher education programme. The 2.5.2 teacher education model is meant to give trainee teachers more time in the teaching field and emphasizes on the job training (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2004:13-14). Majoni and Nyaruwata (2015:4140) state that the programme is structurally organised in such a way that for the first two terms, the student teachers are resident at college to be equipped with theory on teaching as well as subject matter content. The second session is a Teaching Practice session that runs for five terms after which they then return to college for two terms in which the student teacher is further equipped with content and pedagogy (Majoni & Nyaruwata, 2015). The Teaching Practice component of the teacher education programme has been integral to teacher training time immemorial (Musingafi & Mafumbate, 2014). During Teaching Practice, the student teacher is expected to put theory into practice. Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) observe that Teaching Practice is a form of work-integrated learning that is described as a period of time when student teachers are working in the school to receive specific in-service training in order to translate theory in practice in classroom setup. Under the 2-5-2 teacher training model, the student teacher is attached to a school and to a mentor where he/she is expected to apply the theoretical aspects learnt during the first two residential training at college. Perry (2004) is of the view that Teaching Practice gives the student teachers experience in the actual teaching and learning environment. The student teacher is therefore attached to a mentor who is supposed to give him/her guidance in the teaching process. Musingafi and Mafumbate (2014) are of the view that, "The aims of Teaching Practice are to provide opportunities for student teachers to integrate theory and practice and work collaboratively with and learn from experienced teachers" (p.34). This means that the mentor is indispensable for the student teacher on Teaching Practice since the mentor acts as the *confidante* from which the student teacher can continuously tap from for the five terms they are on Teaching Practice. For that reason, mentors should be vastly experienced to help the mentees develop positive repertoire for teaching. Therefore, the mentor should advise the student teacher on good practices as well as advising on essential resources as well as rehearse lesson delivery and observation to prepare the student teacher for external supervision.

Some authors like Robinson et al. (2013) have come up with expected competences for mentors if they are to meaningfully provide guidance to the student teacher. According to them, mentors should possess the ability to assume the roles of a facilitator, supervisor, reviewer, goal setter and critical friend. Good mentoring makes the mentor a critical component in the life of a student teacher during Teaching Practice. Those highly motivated and experienced teachers have the responsibility to groom student teachers into full-fledged, positively turned out qualified teachers. A respondent in a research carried out by Musingafi and Mafumbate (2014) noted that mentoring is putting student teachers under the supervision of experienced teachers so that they learn the practice of teaching from the most experienced teachers. This view of mentoring is in line with Rogers' (2011:36) assertion that "mentoring is mirroring or modelling a certain type of expected behaviour on a one-to-one relationship." It is the mentor who models the student teacher to behave in certain ways expected of teachers. In a way, good mentoring supports positive manifestation of creativity in

student teachers allowing them to be developers of pedagogy than simply consumers of it. Mentoring should thus not stifle creativity and the spirit of experimentation informed by reasoned principles. Mentoring student teachers should not be a 'know what I know' but rather an 'explore your potential' approach where more and more enterprising teachers may manifest. In this way, positively turned out student teachers would have a chance to make useful and sometimes telling contribution to their host schools.

As was the rationale for the ZINTEC teacher education programme, the 2.5.2 teacher education model ensures that trainee teachers spend the greater part of their training in the field developing practical skills in actual classroom practice. What this means is that trainee teachers spend the first two terms in college getting tuition on the pedagogy followed by five terms of Teaching Practice which would be capped by another two terms of residential tutoring. Notwithstanding the misgivings by some that this model sends trainee teachers for Teaching Practice before they are well grounded in the mechanics of teaching, the current research aimed at examining the effect of attaching student teachers for five terms to mentors and to schools. These researchers note the near-silence in research, of the positive contributions and impact that student teachers make or can make during their teaching practice. It is for that reason that we set out to examine the effect of attaching student teachers to mentors and to schools for five terms.

Framing the 2.5.2 teacher training programme

The success of the said teacher education programme rests mainly on a clear understanding of the concept of mentoring. Both the mentor and the mentee should share an understanding of their complementary roles for successful teaching practice. They both should necessarily share a vision of what it means to be attached to someone as well as to have someone attached to one.

Mentoring

In teacher education, 'mentoring is a means to an end' in which the end in view 'is successful transition from teacher education student to independent professional practitioner' (Louden, 2015:4). Mentoring is a viable means of improving the Teaching Practice component of teacher education. Successful mentoring should necessarily provide with frequent opportunities for practice with continuous feedback as key for the professional growth of the mentee. Systematically and progressively, the mentee must be given opportunity to take responsibility for all aspects of classroom teaching with the mentor working in the background to help direct the mentee's activities. Such occasions should be characterized with opportunities for the mentee to reflect on practice with an eye to improve teaching (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2005). Mentoring should thus reflect a highly professional relationship between the mentor and the mentee and between the school and the teacher trainee. In that regards, the mentor should share with the mentee important educational issues that are crucial in developing critical skills in the mentee. The mentor should also direct or share critical resources with the mentee. More importantly, the mentor should challenge the mentee to move beyond his or her comfort zone, that is, push the mentee towards total development (Reh, 2017). In a way, the mentor should take a long-range view on the mentee's professional growth thus helping the mentee to see the destination but at the same time not giving the mentee the detailed roadmap to get to that destination. By offering encouragement and support,

the mentor should subtly allow and enable the mentee to develop his or her own range of repertoire for achieving his or her set goals.

These researchers note that mentors should not necessarily be providing the mentees with answers but rather helping them to develop their own toolkits to solve classroom problems. For that reason, not every teacher in the school can be a successful mentor. School heads thus need to be clearly decided on who can professionally and successfully mentor teacher trainees in their schools. We note that "lack of investment in school-university/teachers' colleges partnerships and poor induction" (Louden, 2015:3) of both mentors and mentees is a persistent problem threatening the viability of teaching practice. Where there is breakdown of relationships between the mentor and the mentee, the five terms for teaching practice can turn into a long and tortuous time for both mentor and mentee threatening the philosophy behind the 2.5.2 teacher training model. We would want to strongly caution that teacher trainees on teaching practice are certainly not the host teachers' messengers to be running around the mentor's chores.

Research Question

What is the effect of attaching student teachers for five terms during their teaching practice?

Research Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this research. Myers and Avison (2009) say that it is the best method for researching social and cultural phenomena, since it is concerned with understanding people and the socio-cultural contexts within which they live. This design was therefore suitable for this research as it enabled the researchers to get information directly from the respondents, thus ensuring the authenticity of the research results. It enabled the researchers to get first-hand information by visiting Mutirikwi, Mutorahuku and Mupfure¹ Primary Schools and observing the real situations so as to establish the impact of attaching student teachers to schools. In this research all the qualified teachers who once mentored Masvingo Teachers' College trainee teachers at the three schools under study constituted the population. These amounted to 70 teachers. The schools, school heads and participating teachers were purposively selected. Only those teachers currently mentoring Masvingo Teachers' College student teachers took part in this research. Robson (1998:141) posits that, "The principle of selection in purposive sampling is the researcher's judgment as to typicality of interest." This implies that if the researcher judges a population typical to answer research questions then he/she can purposively select it. In this research, the three primary schools were selected because they have been mentoring students from the three colleges in Masvingo Province and hence it was felt that due to their vast experience in mentoring, they could provide useful insights on the contributions, if any, made by student teachers to the well-being of their schools during the five terms of teaching practice. The heads were selected purposively as the researchers were aware of the critical role they play in the supervision of the student teachers on Teaching Practice.

¹ These names are not the actual school names. Pseudonyms have been used in conformity to ethical considerations.

The researchers collected data from the respondents through observations, interviews and questionnaires. The research being largely qualitative in nature was field-focused (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:145). In this research the researchers observed the classrooms and outdoor areas as a way of establishing the contributions made by student teachers to the schools they are attached to. In this study the researchers used an observation schedule to guide in the collection of data. Observation time was dependent on the time allocated for that in a particular school. The researchers consistently used the observation schedule to collect data, upon which items on the observation schedule were completed.

Besides observations, interviews were also used during the research. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), the interview is the most favourable methodological tool of qualitative research. Gray (2014) sees an interview as a verbal exchange in which one person, the interviewer attempts to acquire information from and gain understanding of another person, the interviewee. This implies that, the purpose of interviewing research participants is for the researcher to acquire information that would help him/her answer the research question. The interview is viewed by Cohen et al. (2007) as a powerful implement for researchers because it is a flexible tool for data gathering because it enables multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal and non-verbal. In this study, the researchers used the semi-structured or open-ended interviews and focus group interviews. This, therefore, enabled the researchers to elicit participants' meanings and how they make sense of important events in their lives (MacMillan and Schumacher, 2006).

In this study the researchers interviewed three school heads of the participating schools to establish from them what they viewed as the effect of attaching student teachers to schools for five terms. Shank (2002:33) observes that, "We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe." Thus, one-on-one interviews were conducted in quiet places to avoid any form of disturbance during the interview process. Interviews focused on school heads' and mentors' views on whether and how schools also benefit from the attachment of student teachers to their respective schools for five terms. Particular focus was on indoor and outdoor activities as means to learner improvement. Both the observations and the interview yielded qualitative data that was then interpreted to explain the participants' point of view (Rossman & Marshal, 2006). All the interviews were tape recorded with the consent of the interviewees. Merriam (2009) states that tape recording the interview ensures that everything said is preserved for analysis. In this study audio recordings of the interview sessions were done to ensure that all the interview data was captured for analysis.

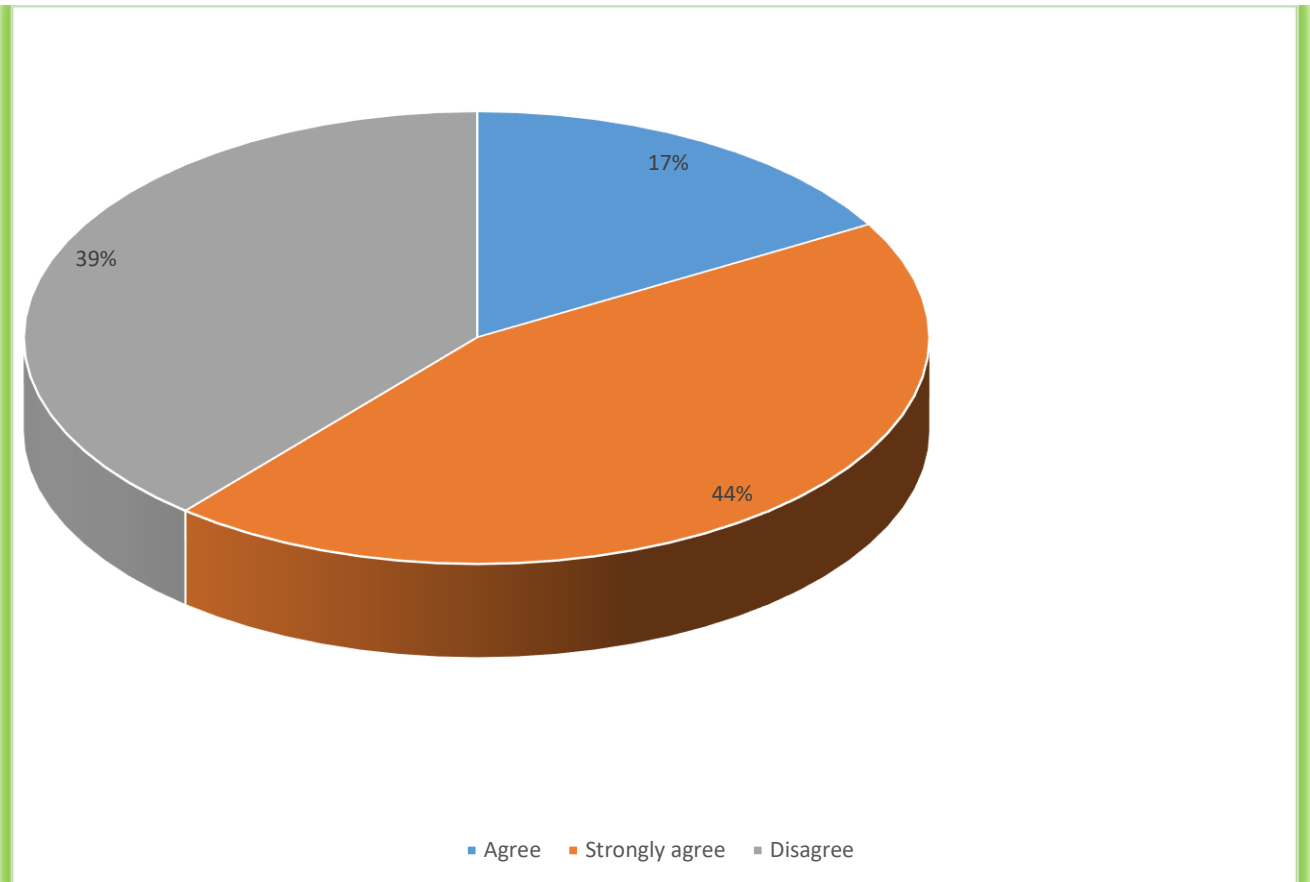
Copies of the questionnaire were administered to the ten teachers at each of the 3 schools by the researchers in person and collected immediately after completion for analysis. The interviews on the other hand were conducted with the school heads and they yielded qualitative data that was used to establish their views (Rossman & Marshal, 2006). A total of six class observations together with environment inspections per each school were made to establish whether or not the students' presence in the schools had an impact on the well-being of the school. Thus, information about the physical environment and about human behaviour was recorded directly by the researchers without having to rely on retrospective or anticipatory accounts of others (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006). The data from questionnaires were presented in tables and graphs for interpretation of mentors' views on the contribution made by student teachers during Teaching Practice to the well-being of the school.

A thematic analysis of interview and observational data was done to establish the impact of attaching students to schools for five terms.

Results and Discussion

Figure 1 below present data collected from mentors' views on student teachers' contribution in establishing outdoor centres.

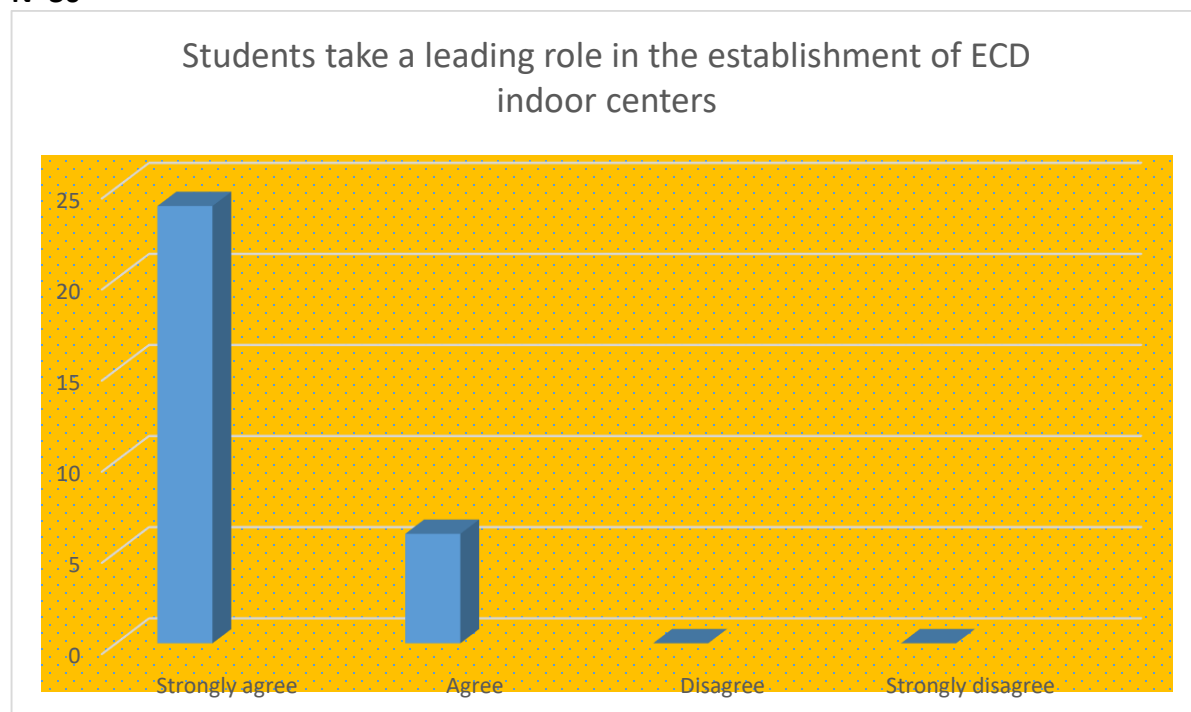
Figure 1: Mentors views on student teachers' contributions in the establishment of ECD outdoor centres.



The results above indicate that mentors feel that student teachers are making immense contributions in the establishment of ECD outdoor centres in the schools they are attached too. Of the total, 44% strongly agreed and 39% agreed with the view that the student teachers in their schools contributed in the establishment of ECD outdoor centres in their respective schools. These responses were also consistent with the sentiments of Mutirikwi and Mupfure primary school heads who spoke highly of the majority of student teachers who they noted actively took part in the establishment of the ECD centres which are indispensable in the teaching and learning of ECD pupils. The observation by these researchers established that all the three schools had functional ECD outdoor play centres. It was therefore felt that the student teachers on five terms Teaching Practice are making a meaningful contribution to the schools they are attached to. The Head of Mutorahuku Primary School actually indicated that the ECD outdoor play area at his school was established by student teachers on

Teaching Practice as their (student teachers') community project. According to him, the school was yet to establish the outdoor play centre and the work done by the students was greatly appreciated by the school administrators. This led these researchers to conclude that, whilst student teachers benefit from their interaction with qualified teachers, schools equally benefit from student teachers owing to their initiative, for example, in the establishment of ECD outdoor play centres. Of equal importance is the issue of ECD indoor play areas. Data collected and analysed show that by and large student teachers are making a noticeable contribution in the establishment of these centres as shown by the results from the questionnaire responses as presented in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Mentors' views on the contribution made by student teachers in the establishment of ECD indoor centres
N=30

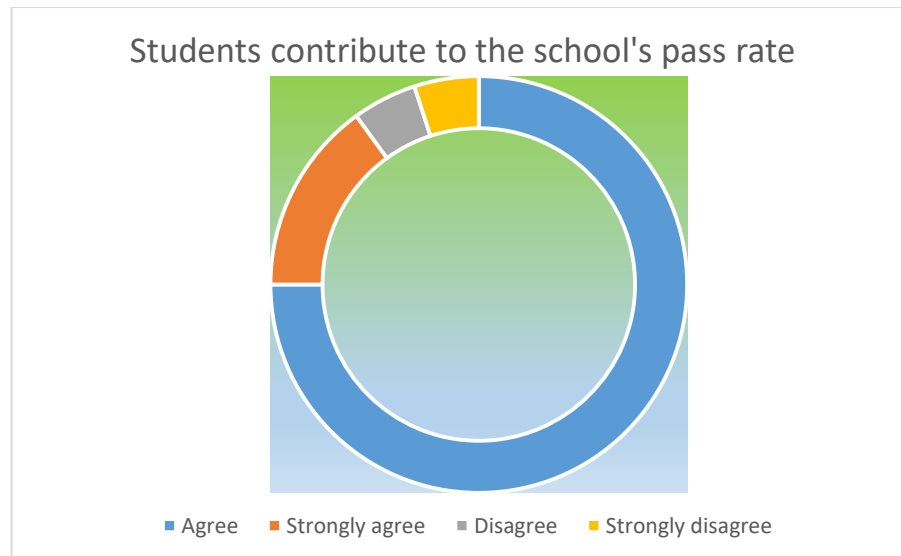


The data presented in Figure 2 above points to the fact that teachers at the three schools are in agreement to the fact that student teachers are taking a leading role in the establishment of ECD indoor centres. 24 teachers strongly agreed and 6 agreed that the student teachers were active in establishing and stocking indoor learning centres. In an interview with the Mutirikwi Primary School head, it emerged that it was solely the student teachers who stocked materials in the indoor centres. The Mupfure Primary School Head reiterated that the student teachers were doing a great job in establishing and maintaining the centres. The observation of ECD classrooms by these researchers confirmed the findings above where it was established that there were varieties of materials in the established indoor centres.

Research findings also revealed that even trainee teachers in upper grades are also doing well. To quote the Mutorahuku Primary School Head verbatim, "Students produce media, classrooms are

good looking. This school head actually acknowledged that the student teachers make meaningful contribution in enhancing the classroom appearance. This, in turn, has an impact in the pupils' learning. In response to a question which sought to establish whether student teachers on teaching practice use current teaching methods, 3 strongly agreed, 24 agreed, 2 disagreed and 1 strongly disagreed. This shows that a total of 27 teachers are in agreement that student teachers use current methods which are participatory in nature. Participatory methods classroom procedures like the Communicative Language Teaching method and use of role play were identified as some of the methods and activities that student teachers are using in their teaching. The Mutorahuku Primary School Head actually confirmed that they learnt of the new teaching methods, especially reading games at Grades 1 and 2, from the student teachers on attachment. The Head admitted that in as far as new methods of teaching are concerned it was more of the school (than the student) that was actually learning the new ways of teaching reading. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that student teachers have a positive contribution towards the general school pass rate. Figure 3 below confirm these sentiments.

Figure 3: Mentors' views on whether or not student teachers contribute to the school pass rates
N=30



These results clearly indicate that the benefit of extended teaching practice is two-way, that is, student enrichment and school improvement.

Table 1: Other areas in which students Teachers are Excelling**N=30**

Students play a role in:	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Co-curricular activities	9	17	2	2
Maintenance of discipline	6	20	2	2
Lesson Delivery	3	24	2	1
General classroom appearance	12	17	1	0
Making Assemblies interesting and didactic	2	23	4	1

Table 1 above shows teachers' responses on additional areas in which student teachers are excelling. It is evident from Table 1 above that by and large mentors are appreciating the student teachers' contribution to the well-being of the school. For example, 9 teachers strongly agreed whilst 17 teachers agreed with the view that student teachers are excelling in co-curricular activities. Only four (2 disagreed & 2 strongly disagreed) with the expressed view. In response to a follow up question which sought to establish the co-curricular activities that student teachers engaged in, respondents cited different sporting disciplines like training teams in soccer, netball, hockey and volleyball among others. In an interview with the Mutirikwi Primary School Head, she mentioned one of their former students who had taken his team to the provincial level of the ball games competitions. Another school head indicated that some student teachers introduced rugby and chess at the school and he was impressed with this initiative. These results give clear evidence that student teachers are indispensable to the schools they are attached to since they are fully engaged in most of the activities that contribute to the well-being of the school. However, there were four teachers who disagreed with the view that student teachers are excelling in co-curricular activities. What this shows is that, despite the fact that most of the student teachers are doing well, there are some who may not be eager to seriously participate in co-curricular activities. The same sentiments were echoed by the Mutorahuku Primary School Head who noted that some were not active in sports. This shows that, despite the fact that the majority of student teachers are doing well, there are some who are posing problems to the administration by failing to positively contribute to the well-being of the school. This number is, however marginal, that is, 18% dissatisfied with the student teachers whilst 82% are happy with their participation in co-curricular activities.

The statistics in Table 1 above show that student teachers are also making an impact in the maintenance of discipline, lesson delivery and general classroom appearance. In an interview with all the school heads, it emerged that classroom walls are decorated with colourful charts made by student teachers. The Mutirikwi Primary School Head actually indicated that most qualified teachers at the school did not bother themselves writing charts because they think it is the duty of the student teachers. She indicated that the school provided stationery to the mentors but most of them usually handed it over to the students so that they would design the charts. Another interesting issue that was raised by all the 3 school administrators is that there is usually conflict between the

administration and qualified teachers if they are not assigned student teachers. Asked why they complain if they are not given student teachers, one school head said it is because student teachers do a lot of work in classrooms as well as manage classes well. These researchers are thus convinced that schools are benefitting a lot from the student teachers on attachment for five terms. In fact, two of the school heads stated that if student teachers were to be removed from the schools, classrooms would be as empty as church walls because very few or no charts belong to the mentors. It is generally the students who are worried about beautifying the classrooms with educative charts.

The observations by these researchers confirmed the above points raised by the administrators. Very colourful charts and learning centres were available in all the classrooms visited. It was also confirmed that the bulk of the charts in the classrooms were owned by student teachers as most (and all in some cases) of them had student teachers' signatures at the right hand corner. Student teachers put their signatures on the charts for assessment purposes and this helped these researchers to identify student teachers' materials without even asking the mentors. These researchers therefore concluded that inasmuch as the student teachers benefit a lot from their practicing schools and mentors as alluded to earlier on and by scholars like Musingafi and Mafumbate (2014), Rodgers (2011) and others, schools are equally benefitting from student teachers through the different aspects discussed above.

However, there are also challenges associated with attaching students to schools. One of the greatest challenges that schools are encountering with student teachers is that of cheating. Some mentors indicated that some students evaluate untaught lessons. They also indicated that student teachers are in the habit of using media only when their lecturers visit for assessment. In fact, those in this habit of using media only when lecturers are around underperform when there are no lecturers. Other mentors also stated that they encountered problems with student teachers who are incompetent and deliver lessons in the L₁. These sentiments seem to suggest that there are some student teachers who do their work half-heartedly. One school head said that there are some student teachers who come unprepared for lessons but they are the first to ask for permission to go for pay. For this particular head, this behaviour by some student teachers suggests that some student teachers only care about money and not the responsibility that comes with it. However, mentors indicated that they are equal to the task because they set standards that student teachers should adhere to. This confirms Rodgers' (2011) sentiments that the mentoring practice enables the mentors to model a certain type of expected behaviour, which, in this case is the professional behaviour which is expected of all teachers.

Other challenges highlighted included the view that some student teachers were undisciplined, could not teach big classes and avoided teaching challenging as well as practical subjects. Another challenge is that most student teachers come for Teaching Practice without full knowledge of scheming and planning. When asked how they dealt with these challenges, some mentors indicated that they simply plan and teach the classes. One teacher stated that student teachers have problems especially on the construction of objectives that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Result-oriented and Time-framed (SMART). School heads reiterated that mentors were doing a great job in assisting students with student teachers' scheming and planning.

Other solutions to the challenges were that mentors tried as much as possible to be good role models in the use of the English Language when delivering lessons to help those students who lacked

proficiency in the language. Other mentors also pointed out that they provided teaching resources to the student teachers. They also helped in the collection of relevant media for the lessons as well as trying to advise errant teacher trainees on good teaching practice behaviour. Where there is breakdown in relationship as shown above, the five terms for Teaching Practice can be tortuous for the mentor, the school and the student teacher.

The research also sought to establish from the mentors and school heads areas for improvement by the colleges. The following suggestions were given; that teacher training colleges should make sure that more attention is given to teaching students proper ways of scheming before they are sent for teaching practice, that student teachers are also given more practice on chalkboard work before going on teaching practice, and that colleges give students teachers fewer assignments during teaching practice to allow them to pay full attention to teaching practice. These findings indicate that colleges have to revisit some of their practices so as to improve the performance of student teachers during Teaching Practice.

The discussion above has shown that on the whole both the student teachers and the schools benefit from the five terms teaching practice. Whilst mentors do a splendid job of grooming student teachers into full-fledged teachers, students are also making meaningful contributions in various areas including ECD outdoor and indoor centres and in co-curricular activities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the researchers recommend the following:

- that mentoring workshops should be held between the teachers' college and the mentors to chart mentoring ways that help student teachers during teaching practice;
- that Mentors should not undervalue the contribution of student teachers attached to them as they are equipped with some current methodology;
- that student teachers should always tap from their experienced mentors so as to improve their practices;
- that the first part of the current 2-5-2 teacher training model should be strengthened to ensure that trainee teachers are thoroughly grounded both theoretically and content-wise before teaching practice.

Conclusion

This research concludes that, when managed effectively, the 2.5.2 teacher-training model allows teacher trainees to make a positive impact on both school and class environment. The length of the teaching practice period allows teacher trainees to embark on useful projects in the school owing to the realisation that they would be part of the school for an extended period. From the discussion of findings above, it can be concluded that the benefit for mentoring teacher trainees is twofold, that both the schools and student teachers contribute to the well-being of each other. Both the mentors and mentees at the schools under study learned from each other. This contributed to the improved pass rates in these schools. This research has illuminated contributions made by student teachers to the well-being of the schools they are attached to. It also acknowledges the obvious, but very critical role played by schools in developing competent teacher trainees. Possible solutions to challenges

encountered by both the mentors and student teachers were highlighted. Finally, recommendations on how the tripartite system (schools, student teachers and colleges) could be improved were given.

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