Supervision and Assessment of Student Teachers:
A Journey of Discovery for Mentors in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

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Supervision and assessment are viewed as key aspects of the work done by mentors engaged in mentoring pre-service student teachers in Zimbabwe. Mentors who understand their roles are in a better position to guide and support student teachers in their professional development. The purpose of this study was thus to examine the views of mentors on their supervision and assessment roles on student teachers on Teaching Practice in the Bulawayo urban primary schools. The descriptive survey design was used on a sample of 94 mentors who were mentoring students from three teachers' colleges. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect the data which was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The study found that most mentors were comfortable with the supervision and assessment of student teachers using their intuition and common sense as they had not attended any workshops on mentoring. Mentors expected a high level of conformity by prescribing teaching methods to their mentees. Willingness to mentor was not considered as a critical issue when school heads appointed mentors. The study recommends that teachers' colleges should train mentors on supervisory skills that promote reflection in student teachers. 'Mentoring' as a module (course) should be taught to pre-service student teachers

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INTRODUCTION
In Zimbabwe, primary teachers' colleges offer a 3 year diploma programme that follows a 2-5-2 model whereby student teachers attend the first residential session for two terms before going on Teaching Practice (hereafter to be referred to as TP) for five terms. During the last two terms, students come back to college to complete their course and write their final examinations. The focus of this study is on the TP segment where student teachers spend 20 months attached to qualified teachers who are supposed to mentor them. This makes the role of the mentor very crucial in the Zimbabwean context as the student teacher is attached to a mentor for a period of one year and eight months continuously.

Ideally, mentors should be volunteer-experienced teachers who are expert classroom practitioners and who are prepared to share their expertise with the student teachers (Chakanyuka, 2006; Nilsson and Van Driel, 2010; Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Orland-Barak and Hasin, 2010). Anderson in Kerry and Mayes (1995:29) defines mentoring as:

> *A nurturing process in which a more skilled or more experienced person serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional and/ or personal development.*

A closer look at the above definition which is self explanatory unfolds a summary of the significant roles played by the mentor, mainly with regards to supervision. Shumbayaonda in Shumba (1992) states that although there is a relationship between supervision and assessment these two terms differ considerably. Supervision should not be viewed as 'assessment, evaluation or inspection'. In the current study, a mentor was expected to be a supervisor and an assessor with the hope that these roles would empower the student teacher with the necessary skills for classroom practice.

Supervision of the Student Teacher
The major role of the mentor is to supervise the student teacher on TP (Nyaumwe and Mavhunga, 2005; Ndamba and Chabaya, 2011). Through well conceived expert advice, guidance and set of alternatives, student teachers are exposed to a variety of stimulating teaching methods and worthwhile alternatives (Shumbayaonda in Shumba, 1992). Most of the supervision is informal, as viewed by Sergiovanni and Starratt (1993), since the mentor does not write formal reports on all the lessons that he or she observes. In a study on the supervision of student teachers by lecturers and mentors, Tillema (2009) observed that during the process of supervision, lecturers preferred to take a reflective role, acting as a critical friend, whereas mentors preferred a steering and performance-oriented

advisory role. This shows that mentors play a crucial role of advising students since they are with them for most of the time during TP as opposed to college or university supervisors who come once in a while. However, mentors just like lecturers, also require competence in reflective skills and ability to act as critical friends in order to allow student teachers to become reflective practitioners (David and Roger, 2002; McKimm, Jollie and Hatter, 2007; Hennissen, Crasborn, Bouwer, Korthagen and Bergen, 2010; Clarke, 2006). To further boost the morale and confidence of the student teacher, the mentor can introduce collegial supervision, where the mentor and mentee criticise each other's lessons (Lu, 2010). This would, of course, depend on the mentor-mentee relationship. If there are a number of student teachers practising at the same school, such student teachers can benefit from supervising each other (Ndamba, 2007).

Assessment of Student Teachers

The supervision of student teachers on TP leads to assessment of their teaching performance (Shaw, 1995). It aims at providing information feedback to help the student teacher gain insight into his or her performance so that it is valuable to his or her professional growth (Tillema, 2009). Student teachers are assessed in order to provide information on how well they are performing to detect difficulties and alert them to areas that need to be strengthened (Nyaumwe and Mavhunga, 2005). Assessment also helps student teachers to implement teaching methods promoted in their teacher education curriculum, evaluate their teaching and reflect on their instructional practice. Chakanyuka (2006) adds that assessment serves to ensure that only those student teachers who have developed sufficiently are allowed into the teaching field and to determine how much the student teacher has acquired in terms of professional knowledge and skills.

The weighting for TP students from various colleges in the present study was such that two-thirds weighting of the final mark came from lecturers and the other one-third came from the mentor. Tillema (2009) views this arrangement as shared appraisal or multirator assessment which is also adopted in other professions like nursing and hospitality management. During TP, friendship develops between the mentor and mentee. In view of this situation, Shaw (1995: 81) observes that "- - - it is hard to reconcile the role of a friend and that of an assessor." Consequently, most mentors tend to inflate their assessment grades in order to protect the established friendship. Chakanyuka (2006) observed that mentors in her research did not give honest assessment as they felt that in doing so they would dampen and destroy the students' confidence. Nyaumwe and Mavhunga (2005) found out that the mentors awarded high grades because they only assessed lesson delivery

and did not look at documents because these were assumed to be in order. Assessment of learning to teach that uses a variety of information sources provides further opportunities for reflection and students need guidance for future action (Tillema, 2009; Nilsson and Van Driel, 2010; Clarke, 2006).

Apart from their experience as classroom practitioners, mentors are expected to be well read and abreast of current waves of thinking in teacher development (Maynard, 1997). They must have a keen interest in updating their knowledge on issues related to the teaching profession to enable them to pass on that knowledge to others, especially the student teachers under their charge (Feiman-Nemser, 1999; Rowley, 1999). This skill is not automatic to all teachers as active mentoring is not the same as teaching children (Orland-Barak, 2001). Edwards and Collison (1996:27) assert that,

> Rather our findings tell us that mentoring consists of a set of skills that have to be learnt; that there is a knowledge base to teacher training into which mentors themselves need to be inducted---.

It is therefore vital for mentors to be trained in order to acquire expertise in using supervisory skills which enable them to elicit student teachers' concerns and to encourage reflection (Strong and Baron, 2004; Norman and Feiman-Nemser, 2005; Moon, 1994; Crasborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen and Bergen, 2008). Allen (2011) advocates for strong partnerships between teacher education institutions and schools to allow for the training of mentors and to provide an opportunity for ongoing communication with each other. In a study by Hennissen et al (2010) entitled 'Supervisory Skills for Mentors to Activate Reflection in Teachers (SMART), mentors demonstrated an increased awareness of their use of supervisory skills as a result of training. Mentors in Zimbabwe need to be given incentives in the form of allowances or temporary honorariums as a way of recognition for the invaluable services they offer since that is the practice in other countries (Shaw, 1995; Kerry and Mayes, 1995; Allen, 2011; Hennissen et al, 2010).

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of mentors towards supervision and assessment of the student teacher on TP in primary schools. This was because mentoring in education in Zimbabwe is a relatively new innovation which has been operational for just over a decade, hence the need to assess its strengths and weaknesses with a view to improving the quality of the mentoring programme. The success of the attachment programme largely depends on the perceptions held by mentors towards what they consider to be their supervision and assessment roles.

Research Questions
The questions that guided the study were as follows:

- What are the perceptions and experiences of mentors towards mentor training, mentor selection and incentives?
- How effectively do mentors supervise student teachers?
- What are the views of mentors towards assessing student teachers?

METHODOLOGY
Design
The study employed a descriptive survey design within the qualitative paradigm. Questionnaires and interviews were used to gather qualitative and quantitative data. A survey was suitable as the study involved administering questionnaires to a relatively large number of mentors. The qualitative approach was useful for this study as it enabled researchers to conduct open-ended interviews which yielded direct impressions with regards to their experiences, knowledge, feelings and opinions about mentoring student teachers on TP.

Sample
The sample was drawn from a target population of 280 teachers who were mentoring student teachers from three teachers' colleges which had deployed students in the Bulawayo urban primary schools in Zimbabwe. Cluster sampling was used because the target population was widely dispersed in the Bulawayo urban area. For the purposes of this study Bulawayo urban was divided into six zones. In each zone, three schools closest to each other with at least five mentors were identified. The 18 schools which were finally identified had 105 mentors and from this number, 94 mentors participated in the study. Six teachers who were involved in the interviews were randomly sampled to represent the six zones.

Instruments
The questionnaire was the major instrument used in the examination of the role of the mentor in the supervision and assessment of student teachers on TP. Most questions in the questionnaires were in closed form and that made the quantification and analysis of data easy. Some questions were followed by contingent questions where responses were directly related to the previous responses. The open ended questions on the interview guide gave the respondents the opportunity to express their opinions, attitudes and feelings freely (Tuckman, 1994) towards the mentoring programme.

PROCEDURE
Researchers got authority to conduct the study from the Bulawayo Provincial Office of Education. Heads of the eighteen sampled schools were given the questionnaires to distribute to willing mentors. After one week, the questionnaires were collected with the response rate of 94 mentors. Interviews were personally conducted by the researchers as they moved around collecting questionnaires. The study was conducted in 2010.

DATA ANALYSIS
All data collected was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Qualitative data from interviews followed a thematic approach in its description and interpretation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Biographical Data
Of the mentors in the sample, 79 (84%) were female while 15 (16%) were male. Sixty-two percent (62%) of the mentors were in the 31 to 45 year age group. That age group generally consisted of teachers who had the capacity and energy to help the student teachers. The 46 to 60 years and above age group comprised 26% of the mentors. This age group, by virtue of their mature age, had the potential of developing a motherly/ fatherly relationship with their mentees. However, Tomlinson (1995) is of the view that long serving teachers may find it difficult to be flexible and appreciate new ideas student teachers bring with them. Finally 12% of the mentors fell in the 21 to 30 year age range. Felder (1993) calls these teachers novices who themselves needed assistance from experienced teachers. However, Tomlinson (1995) is of the view that mentors closer to the mentees in age may be better placed to understand the mentees. They may also be at a stage in their teaching career where they are still flexible in their ideas and skills of teaching. The teaching experience for the mentors ranged from 1 to 45 years, with 84% having teaching experience ranging from 6 to 45 years and only 16% of them had teaching experience which ranged from 1 to 5 years. All the mentors in the study were qualified teachers.

MENTOR SELECTION
When they were asked to comment on how they became mentors, 19% said they volunteered while the other 81% indicated that they were simply asked by the school head to be mentors. Those who volunteered gave the following as some of their reasons for volunteering:

- Desire to share teaching skills with a student teacher;
- Desire to learn from a student teacher;
- Reduction of work load.

Although some mentors volunteered for genuine reasons, it appears that others volunteered for wrong reasons, particularly when they thought that their work load would be reduced (Chakanyuka, 2006).
The majority of the mentors did not volunteer and some of the reasons given during interviews were as follows:

The student teacher that I got was assigned to teach Grades 4 and I happened to be the class teacher of that grade;

I have mentored student teachers before and helped them to pass TP with distinctions;
As a teacher with other responsibilities in the school, the headmaster gave me a student teacher so that my class would not suffer when I am busy elsewhere;
The policy at this school is that we are asked to mentor student teachers in turns, so this time it was my turn.

The above responses appear to suggest that school heads did not appoint teachers to be mentors mainly for competence and ability to guide and assist student teachers (Rwodzi, Muchenje and Bondai, 2011). A student teacher attached to a mentor with other responsibilities was unlikely to benefit much since the mentor would frequently be away attending to other school duties which have nothing to do with the classroom business (Nyaumwe, 2001; Ndamba, Mufanechiya and Mukeredzi, 2008). There was also no guarantee that the mentors would be committed and give of their best if the school head used his or her authority to pick on teachers who were not willing to be mentors (Ndamba and Chabaya, 2011).

Mentor Training

Only 12% of the mentors had attended mentoring workshops organised by teachers' colleges, so very few mentors were conversant with what was expected of them. At workshops they got to know what to expect from student teachers and how to use the Supervision/ Assessment critique forms used by teachers' colleges. The rest of the mentors (88%) used their intuition and common sense to help their mentees. Mentoring is a skill which should be learnt through training, so the use of common sense is not the ideal in student supervision and assessment (Tomlinson, 1995; Crasborn et al, 2008). When asked about the prevalence of school based workshops on mentoring, 37% of the mentors said they held such workshops once at the beginning of each term. The fact that the majority of schools did not hold staff development workshops at school level seems to indicate that mentoring was viewed to be the same as teaching, yet the acquisition of mentoring skills is vital for effective mentoring (Moon, 1994; Orland-Barak, 2001; Hennissen et al, 2010; Norman and Feiman-Nemser, 2005; Crasborn et al, 2008).

Although most of the mentors in this study had not been trained, all of them said they enjoyed a lot of professional benefits derived from mentoring (Nilsson and Van Driel, 2010). Professional growth through the mentoring exercise does not only occur in the mentee but can also occur in the mentor (Feiman-Nemser, Parker and Zeichner, 1992; Tauer, 1998; Clarke, 2006; David and Roger, 2002).

Mentor Incentives

When they were asked for their views on giving mentors allowances, 72% of the mentors indicated that respondents should be paid while 28% said that it was not necessary. Mentors felt they should be paid as they were involved in the assessment of student teachers, which was primarily the responsibility of lecturers (Bey and Holmes, 1992; Brown and Nacino-Brown, 1990; Allen, 2011). These findings were consistent with Mukeredzi and Ndamba's (2005) findings on secondary school mentors who wanted incentives in various forms for their role in mentoring Zimbabwe Open University students on TP.

The Mentor and Teaching Practice Supervision

When asked how much help they gave to their mentees with regards to scheming, 68% of the mentors said they helped their mentees while 32% said they did not. On lesson planning, 87% indicated that they helped their mentees. These findings show that the majority of mentors were willing to help their mentees in scheming and lesson planning (Blunt and Connoly, 2006) but those who were not comfortable to help their mentees disadvantaged them as these mentees could not draw from the mentors' expertise. Although it is the responsibility of the mentor to monitor the mentee's documentation, some mentors gave various excuses for not doing so (Nyaumwe and Mavhunga, 2005; Ndamba and Chabaya, 2011).

Mentors were asked if they prescribed to the mentees what methods and media to use when teaching. It emerged that 64% of the mentors prescribed while 36% did not. Mentors who prescribed mainly felt that their experience had taught them what methods and media were effective in teaching certain topics. One respondent said:

Prescribing teaching methods and media saves a lot of time since achievement of objectives is almost certain, and there would be no need for me to re-teach a poorly taught lesson.

Another mentor said,

I am accountable for all the teaching that goes on in my classroom, so I am not prepared to take chances with the trial and error methods of the student teacher.

Mentors who expected a high level of conformity thwarted all forms of freedom, originality, creativity and experimentation on the part of the mentee (Shaw, 1995; Wubbels and Korthagen, 1990; McKimm et al, 2007). Mentees need to learn from their own practice through trial and error (Maynard, 1997).

On collegial supervision, 73% of the mentors said they encouraged their mentees to observe lessons of fellow student teachers. However, due to time constraints and the crowded school timetable, only 32% of the mentors confirmed that their mentees managed to observe and supervise each other's lessons. The mentors confirmed that their mentees who supervised each other benefitted a lot from criticising each other as peers, friends and colleagues (Lu, 2010). When mentors create such opportunities

for their mentees to learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses, they enhance reflection in student teachers (Mertler, 2006; Turner, 1992; Feiman-Nemser, 1999; Ndamba, 2007).

When mentors were asked whether they welcomed criticisms of their lessons from their mentees, 90% of the mentors said they were quite happy to discuss strong and weak points of their own lessons with the mentees. The following reasons were given by some respondents:

- *I would be forced to be always on my toes so that each lesson that I teach becomes a 'demonstration lesson';*
- *That shows how much the student teacher has learnt especially if he or she has reached the stage of identifying strengths and weaknesses of my lesson;*
- *The mentee would not feel cheated or treated unfairly when I criticise his or her lessons.*

These views indicate that in this study, mentors were open-minded and that given proper training, they had the potential of becoming reflective practitioners who are keen to improve their practice (Dart and Drake, 1993; Davies, 2005; David and Roger, 2002; Nilsson and Van Driel, 2010).

The Mentor and Teaching Practice Assessment

Part of the mentor's role in the present study was to assess the mentee by attaching a mark to the quality of the mentee's performance in teaching which would contribute 33, 3% of the total assessment grade. When mentors were asked how confident they were in assessing the performance of their mentees, an overwhelming 96% said they were confident. Further investigations revealed that all those who were not confident had less than six (6) years teaching experience. The long teaching experience made mentors confident in the assessment of student teachers even if they had not attended workshops on mentoring. Such responses may be an indicator that mentors thought that mentoring was instinctive, yet it is crucial for them to be trained in order to acquire the necessary supervisory and assessment skills (Davies, 2005; Moon, 1994; Hennissen et al, 2010; Allen, 2011). With regards to their relationship with the mentees, 60% of the mentors indicated that it was very good, 38% said it was good and only 2% said it was poor. On whether their relationship affected the mark awarded during assessment, 30% said it did while 70% stated that their relationship had no effect at all. Mentors who said their relationship did not affect the assessment mark said they were not prepared to sacrifice their integrity and professionalism for a smile (or lack of it).

However, mentors who said relations affected assessment admitted that sometimes they awarded marks without putting much thought into the lesson taught in order to avoid hurting the student teacher. Such mentors found it hard to reconcile the role of a friend with that of an assessor (Maynard, 1997; Nyaumwe and Mavhunga, 2005; Chakanyuka, 2006). Mentors were asked whose responsibility they thought it was to prepare student teachers to face external assessors. It emerged that 66% of the mentors viewed themselves as being responsible for preparing their mentees for external assessment. Twenty-three percent (23%) said it was the responsibility of the lecturers, 8% indicated that it was the duty of the school head and only 3% felt it was the responsibility of other student teachers. This shows that mentors in this study regarded themselves as key figures that played a prominent role in teacher preparation during school experiences (Blunt and Connoly, 2006; Tillema, 2009; Nilsson and Van Driel, 2010).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the majority of cases, there was evidence of constructive dialogue between mentors and mentees during supervision of lessons, and mentors took it as their responsibility to make students pass TP. School heads simply used their authority to select mentors without considering whether they were willing or not. Most respondents had not attended any mentor training workshops but, however, felt confident to supervise and assess student teachers using their experience, intuition and common sense. The majority of mentors expected a high level of conformity by prescribing teaching methods and not allowing students to experiment using teaching techniques learnt at college. Mentors in this study also felt that they should get incentives for their role in teacher development as school- based supervisors.

These findings call for seminars to be conducted by teachers' colleges in order to spell out their expectations on school heads and mentors pertaining to mentor selection and mentoring strategies respectively. Mentoring as a topic for study could be included in the teachers' college curriculum in order to prepare qualifying teachers for mentoring. All universities that offer in-service programmes for primary school teachers should introduce 'Mentoring' as a module (course) to empower qualified teachers with mentoring skills. Development of reflective skills should be the main thrust during mentor training so that mentors can learn how to guide and assist student teachers to develop their own theories about teaching. Awarding some form of incentives should be seriously considered by the diploma awarding institutions so that mentors can apply themselves fully as partners in teacher development.

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