



Mentoring in teacher education: An experience that makes a difference for college of education student teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study sought the perception of College of Education students on the importance of mentoring, in the teacher education program at Enugu State College of Education Technical. The study also examines the roles that mentors and mentees play in a mentoring relationship and how they interconnect. The study was a descriptive study guided by two research questions and one hypothesis. The population comprised 153 Postgraduate diploma in education students in the College during the 2017/2018 academic year participated in the study. The instrument for data collection was a designed researchers' structured questionnaire in three parts – A, B, and C. part A contained information on respondents' bio-data; part B elicited information on the roles played by mentors who have experienced trained teachers as mentors to the mentees while part C sought information on the strategies used in mentoring the college students. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, mean, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics. Based on the findings, some recommendations were made.

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INTRODUCTION

Mentoring is widely used all over the world and it is operational among individuals who want to acquire certain skills and knowledge. This also applies to student-teachers in Colleges of Education who are under the mentorship of the school of education, academic matters, and other areas of development. Mentoring is one of the most effective ways of developing student teachers' quality during teacher training. Mentoring is about changing lives and it is commonly seen as a situation where an individual assists another individual to develop him/herself in different areas. Mentoring is an effective way of developing professionals and it has been applied in the areas of medicine, building, and the military with effectiveness according to Strong & Baron, (2004). The term mentoring describes the support given by one (usually more experienced) person for the growth and learning of another, and their integration into and acceptance by a specific community. Mentoring is a process whereby an older experienced guide acceptable to the young person helps to ease the transition to adulthood by a mix of support and challenge.

It is a hierarchical relationship in which the mentor is more experienced than the mentee, or that the mentor has or can provide knowledge and skills that the mentee wants or needs. Mentoring supports and encourages people to manage their learning so that they may maximize their potentials, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the persons they want to be. Mentoring can also be described as a technique for allowing the transmission of knowledge, skills, and experience in a supportive and challenging environment through coaching (Adeyanyu, 2013). Mentoring is the oldest form of knowledge transfer that uses the skills of questioning, listening, clarifying, and reframing in transferring learning. Mentoring is a particular mode of learning wherein the mentor not only supports the mentee but also challenges him productively so that progress is made (Smith, 2007). It involves supporting and providing feedback to the mentee without judgment or criteria. Mentoring involves guidance and suggestion, as well as the development of autonomous skills, judgments, personal and professional mastership, expertise, trust, and the development of self-confidence over time. Mentoring in education involves pairing young people with an older peer or volunteer, who acts as a positive role model. In general, mentoring aims to build confidence, develop resilience and character, or raise aspirations, rather than to develop specific academic skills or knowledge. Furthermore, mentoring plays an important role in enhancing inexperienced teachers' opportunities to learn within the contexts of teaching. It also helps student-teachers to develop teaching behaviors and strategies, involving a nurturing relationship between a less experienced person and a more experienced person where the mentor guides by serving as a role model and advisor. Mentoring in a specific context not only allows student-teachers to acquire context-specific knowledge but also develops situation-based skills, which can be transferred to similar future situations in that context. For the reason that teachers need to learn to teach in a particular context (Feiman-Nemser, 2003) and specific mentoring will occur that is dependent on the contextual circumstance. Each educational jurisdiction will, therefore, have different forms and expectations of mentoring. Mentoring, therefore, is a process that involves the mentor, the mentee, and the relationship. In a mentoring relationship, the mentees learn from their mentors to be transformed from passive receivers to active learners; to expand their perspectives; to use the forum as a platform for accelerated learning; to build the confidential relationship, and gain different insights into their career development from the experience of their mentors; to have ownership of self-development, and to initiate most contacts with their mentors.

According to Portner (1998), for mentoring to be effective, a mentor has to function by relating, assessing, coaching, and guiding. These mentoring functions do not occur in isolation; they consistently overlap and complement one another during the mentoring process this implies that ineffective mentoring of College of Education students, the mentors (lecturers and significant adults), and the mentees (students) have important roles to play. Nevertheless, the roles are not clearly defined in terms of what actions occur during the process of mentoring. There is a clear link between the roles of mentors and mentees, but there is a significant gap in research about the synergy between mentor and mentee roles and how the roles interact and react. There is limited research about the role of mentees in the pre-service teacher context. The focus of most research studies is the role of mentors. Therefore, there is a need for investigation about the role of mentees from the perspective of mentors and mentees. A mentor is a guide who helps the mentee to find the right direction as well as develop solutions to career

issues. The mentor is acting as a change agent. The mentor is an individual with expertise who can help develop the career of a mentee. According to Smith (2007), a mentor can be a co-worker or a peer, someone who is equal in status and age. Peers who are mentors can be more experienced than the mentee or at the same developmental levels. Mentors, in the traditional sense of the term, are usually people in leadership roles or are people whom the mentee aspires to be like (Cox, 2005). Mentors nurture the development of the mentee through building rapport. They also use such interpersonal functions as supporting, advising, empathizing, and role modeling. Mentors are therefore advisers, educators, counselors, and role models who pass their experience on to less experienced people. As a mentor, a more experienced person facilitates the professional development of a new teacher or someone new to a particular stage in a career. This confirms that mentoring is also used to make newcomers aware of how a specific workplace operates. This aspect of mentoring is partly relevant to the mentoring process in initial teacher education where tutor-mentors have to teach student-teachers the principles of teaching and learning. Mentoring provides the mentee with an opportunity to have a clear career path, options, and consequently progress. Mentoring is considered a valuable process that assists professional and mentoring personal development. For a mentoring process to be complete there is a need for a mentee. A mentee is someone who wants to move up to the academic/career ladder following in the footsteps of the mentor (Adeyanyu, 2013). Student teachers usually experience several different school sites throughout their degree program, thus encountering a variety of mentor-teachers. Invariably, the kinds of mentoring relationships that student-teacher form with their mentor may be significantly different to a professional who has mentored for an extended period.

There are different types of mentoring that can be used in a mentoring relationship according to Wang and Odell (2002). These include: The Humanistic perspective on teacher mentoring which deals primarily with emotional support, this approach helps the novice teacher to deal with the “reality shock” in a school, to reduce psychological stress, and to empower self-esteem. The mentor is a counselor who helps by giving personal support and encouragement. Mentor training programs refer to communication skills, positive feedbacking, and supervision techniques. Mentoring is more or less a process of adjustment to the situation, not an innovative approach. The Situated apprentice perspective on teacher mentoring is concentrated on giving field-related technical support; develop situated knowledge in a process of observation; modeling; demonstration and reflection. The mentor acts as a guide who helps to develop practical teaching skills and knowledge. The mentor-mentee relationship is hierarchical, aiming at a functional adaption to existing teaching practice. The critical constructivist perspective on teacher mentoring involves the processes of learning that are shaped according to assimilation and accommodation.

The three different types of mentoring will not occur in pure shapes and there will be bridges between them in reality. They are formed in a successively complex way: the personal relationship with emotional support is a basic involvement of the mentee; on a second level mentoring involves active guidance and technical support; on a third level mentoring involves collaboration and change. The types are stages in the development process of mentoring. What is important is the differentiation of underlying assumptions about teaching, learning, and how one can learn how to teach. Mentoring can be formal or informal and at the same time internal when it is managed inside the organization or external when it is developed outside the organization and it can be a combination of the two, Buell (2004). Mentoring can further be divided into academic, career, personal development, and informal mentoring according to Omoteso (2019). To mentor students effectively, different approaches or strategies can be undertaken by mentors and mentees in the mentoring relationship, depending on the context and the goals to be achieved. The mentoring strategies include: School-based approach: - The mentor meets with the students in school and facilitates school work while acting as a supportive role model. They may also play games, do crafts or partake in non-academic activities (Herrera, Grossmen, Kauh & McMaken, 2011). Community-based approach: - The mentor takes/meets youth in the community such as a church, community facility, or by taking them to community events (Pryce, Goins & Reiland, 2011). Individual approach: This approach can take place both in school and community. It involves one on one setting, where there is one mentor who repeatedly meets with the same mentee for the duration of their program (Farruggia, Bullen, Davidson, Dunphy, Solomon & Collins, 2011). Group approach: -This approach is best used where there is a shortage of mentors. This works with career-oriented mentoring when the focus is to encourage the future success of the individual by bringing in successful professionals as mentors. (Gruber, 2012). In Nigeria, this type of mentoring is done by inviting professionals to

interact with students in schools. Volunteer mentoring approach: - This involves relationships between youths and adults who offer assistance in meeting the youths' academic, social, career, and/or personal goals (DuBois & Karcher, 2005).

The relationship between mentor and mentee is built on mutual trust, respect, and professionalism. Relating behaviors create an environment conducive for mentors to understand mentees' ideas and needs and to encourage honest sharing and reflecting on their experiences. A mentor is expected to develop and maintain a productive relationship with a mentee from the beginning. This can be achieved by establishing trust according to Portner, (1998). It is pertinent to investigate the relationships of the mentoring strategies with a component of learning outcomes of the student-teachers. Therefore, the relationship between the teaching performance of student-teachers and the mentoring strategies used was examined. Numerous works of literature in teacher education point out that mentoring plays a significant role in the development of student-teachers within teacher education programs. Mentoring in teacher education is a complex social interaction that mentor-teachers and student-teachers construct and negotiate for a variety of professional purposes and in response to the contextual factors, they encounter according to Fairbanks, Freedman, and Kahn (2000). Student teaching practice in the school serves as the most significant factor in the shaping of student-teachers experience of training to be a teacher. The mentor-teacher is the individual most responsible for the quality of experience the student-teacher receives. Teacher training programs have received attention as researchers and practitioners attempt to understand how to best ensure that graduates are equipped to teach all learners and schools can reduce turnover rates (Ludwig, Kirshstein, & Sidana, 2010). Enugu State College of Education technical (ESCET) uses mentoring as a strategy to assist student teachers to develop their skills during the period of teaching practice.

Teaching practice is the period in which a student-teacher gains the first-hand experience in working with a particular group of children. It is also the opportunity given to the trainee to develop and improve his/her professional practice in the context of the real classroom, usually under some form of guidance and supervision. Marais & Meier (2004) assert that the term teaching practice represents the range of experiences to which student-teachers are exposed when they work in classrooms and schools. Marais and Meier (2004) further argue that teaching practice is a challenging but important part of teacher training, especially in developing countries, where the effectiveness of the teaching practice can be diminished or eroded by a range of challenges, such as geographical distance, low and uneven levels of teacher expertise, a wide-ranging lack of resources as well as a lack of discipline among a wide cross-section of learners and educators. These challenges, if not addressed, may affect student teacher's performance during teaching practice and may in the long run affect their perception of the teaching profession. Student-teaching according to Agalazor (2017) is the most important experience in the teacher education program and is generally based on national educational policy. Teaching a compulsory course for all aspiring student-teachers registered preparation programs in Nigeria. It is one-semester induration; usually lasting from the ending to the end of the First Semester of the final year of students' training. During this period, most programmers focus on: instructional planning, instructional technology, micro-teaching mentoring (model teaching, assessment, feedback reports, etc.), studies in teaching methods, and posting of students to schools where they can practice their major courses of study. Teaching Practice experience consists of an extensive period of school-based activities such as observations, discussions, planning, and teaching, assessing, evaluating, and reflecting. All of these activities are undertaken in supervised work through mentoring.

The initial days of the teaching practice at school could be used by the student teacher to observe a range of teaching and learning situations, to familiarize him/herself with school routines and activities, to gather information needed for teaching tasks, and to plan and discuss lessons with practicing teachers. The teaching practice exercise is the culminating point where the relationship among the three major players: College of Education supervisor, host teacher, and aspiring teacher interface to determine the quality of experience the aspiring teacher will take away. It is, therefore, becomes the bedrock on which the aspiring teacher once certified and employed builds their professional identity. It is, therefore, necessary that aspiring teachers are paired with competent, knowledgeable, and concerned supervisors to help in mentoring them with the full range of duties of a teacher during this hands-on training period. Host teachers equally have a vital influence on aspiring teachers' professional growth and

development. The student teaching program at any College of Education is a well-structured program designed to provide an opportunity to develop and evaluate aspiring teachers' competence in an actual classroom within school settings.

In ESCET, teaching practice involves the student-teacher working under the direct and continuing supervision of an experienced teacher. During the period of teaching practice, the student-teachers can observe the entire work of the school and participate actively in all the important professional activities of a teacher both in and out of the classroom. Teaching practice also contributes not only to the development of professional norms of teaching but also to learning classroom techniques. Teaching Practice provides student teachers with practical experience in teaching and enhances student-teachers abilities to further develop their knowledge and skills in the areas studied in their education courses and to apply these in teaching pupils in schools. Student teachers will be able to draw on a given scheme of work to produce lesson plans for all activities they plan. During teaching practice, student-teachers will be able to work with the individual pupil, and will also organize and teach groups and whole classes to facilitate learning in pupils. Student-teachers will be able to monitor and evaluate the work produced by the pupils and also adjust teaching and future planning in the light of this information. Therefore, student teachers will be able to evaluate each lesson taught, reflecting on their professional development, and demonstrate a sound understanding of the role of the teacher. Therefore, it is imperative to examine the importance of mentoring as experienced by the student-teachers doing Post Graduate Diploma in Education at ESCET.

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic data of respondents

Variables	Responses	Frequency (N)	Percentages (%)
Sex	Male	21	13.7
	Female	132	86.3
Age	21 – 30	29	18.9
	31 – 40	68	44.4
	40 and Above	56	36.6
Qualification	HND	69	45.1
	B. Sc.	84	54.9

Table 1 shows that there were 132 (86.3%) female and 21 (13.7%) male student teachers. The majority of the respondents, 68 (44.4%), fell between 31 – 40 age groups. The table further indicated that 69 (45.1%) respondents were graduates with HND while 84 (54.9%) respondents were university graduates with B. Sc. degrees in different disciplines.

Table 2: Mean response on the roles played by mentors to support the mentoring relationship with the mentees

S/N	Item Statement	X
1	The mentor and mentee relationship enables mentees to become aware of their potential and to be successful in teaching.	3.86
2	The mentor and mentees working in close physical proximity to one another	3.26
3	A well-considered teaching load and class allocation, which takes into account the student-teacher's experiences and needs.	3.02
4	Time allocation – as reduced allotment, time for mentoring activities and time for professional learning activities.	3.52
5	Regular and timetable by mentoring meetings on a weekly or fortnightly basis	2.91
6	Use of intensive professional dialogue between the mentor and mentee.	3.76
7	Orientation to the profession and the school by the mentor to the mentees.	2.54

8	Possession of relevant curriculum knowledge and being a role model for student-teachers.	2.33
9	Building effective, 'trusted', positive working relationships by relating, assessing, coaching, and guiding student-teachers.	2.85
10	Mentors ability and willingness to listen to the mentee.	2.25
11	Mentors being accessible to the student teachers; having time to spend with them and being responsive to their needs	3.01
12	Good communication skills between the mentor and mentees	3.24
13	Building effective working relationship by assessing the student-teachers.	2.02

Table 2 present the roles played by the mentor to support mentoring relationship with the mentees. Items 1, 6, and 4 had mean scores of 3.86, 3.76, and 3.26 respectively, show that the college lecturers support student teachers effectively, using professional dialogue, and also allocate adequate time to the student-teachers for professional learning activities. Moreover, high are items 2, 3, 10, and 12 with mean scores of 3.26, 3.02, 3.01 and 3.24 respectively indicating that a sound and the trusting relationship relies upon the degree of understanding and responsibility shared by the mentoring partners. Items 8, 10, and 13 with mean scores of 2.33, 2.25, and 2.02 respectively recorded very low means.

Table 3: Percentage response of the mentoring strategies used to mentor the postgraduate student-teachers

S/N	Strategies	Responses	N	%
1	Individual Mentoring Approach	Yes	85	55.6
		No	68	44.4
2	Group Mentoring Approach	Yes	79	51.6
		No	74	48.4
3	Volunteer Mentoring Approach	Yes	67	43.8
		No	86	56.2
4	School-Based Mentoring Approach	Yes	91	59.5
		No	62	40.5
5	Community-Based Mentoring Approach	Yes	39	25.5
		No	114	74.5

Table 3 shows a set of five strategies employed to generate information from the student-teachers about the strategies used to mentor the postgraduate student-teachers in the College of Education. The table shows that 55.7%, 51.6%, 43.8%, 59.5%, and 25.5% of the student teachers responded positively to the different strategies used by College of Education Lecturers to mentor the postgraduate student-teachers. The table also reveals that most of the student teachers 114 (74.5%) disagreed that mentors employ the community-based mentoring approach while mentoring the student-teachers. Also, the respondents agree that mentors usually employed a school-based approach, 91 (59.5%), and an individual mentoring approach 85 (55.6%) as effective strategies to assist student-teachers to develop skills during the period of teaching practice.

Table 4: Test of significance between mentoring strategies and teaching performance of Student-teachers

Variables	N	X	SD	df	r	Sig.(2-tailed)	Decision
Teaching performance	153	65.61	16.25	151	-.041	.613	Accept Ho
Mentoring Strategies	153	64.18	18.69				

The result of the analysis shown in Table 4 reveals that $r = -0.041$, $df = 151$, p (sig.) = 0.613. Since p is greater than the level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$), the null hypothesis which states that there was no significant difference between the mentoring strategies and teaching performance of student-teachers is not rejected. This means that there was no significant difference between mentoring strategies and the teaching performance of student-teachers.

DISCUSSION

The study found out that the respondents benefited from the PGDE course. However, all respondents felt that in as much as the theory acquired during lectures provided them with enough information on how to teach, it was the teaching practice that introduced them to and gave them exposure to the experiences of the real teaching world. This is in support of arguments by researchers such as (Marais & Meier, 2004; Quick & Sieborger, 2005) asserted that student-teachers view teaching practice as an important component in their training because it exposes them to the actual teaching and learning environment in which they can contextualize their theoretical knowledge gained during training. To this effect, Perry (2004) also points out that, although students gain much-specialized knowledge by attending lectures and doing assignments. Teaching practice adds meaning to this knowledge when a student-teacher comes into contact with the real classroom situation. It is during teaching practice that knowledge is affirmed.

However, teaching practice provides student-teachers with the opportunity to integrate the theory of education with that which they are experiencing at first hand. The findings concerning the influence of the mentors in the present study varied from student-teacher to student-teacher. Some significant adults like the College lectures (mentors) effectively fulfilled their role of guiding student teachers. They offered student-teachers under their supervision guidance and showed them what to do. Some student-teachers echoed the description by Marais and Meier (2004) of mentors as being exemplary role models who set a worthwhile example to follow. The findings indicated that some student-teachers indicated a supportive relationship with the mentors and student-teachers. They experienced feelings expressed by Maphosa, Shumber & Shumber (2007) that the mentors saw student teachers as relief teachers, who ended up taking full loads while mentors took a back seat.

This disheartened the student-teachers because such behavior is contrary to the concept of mentorship as described by Maphosa et al. (2007) in which the mentor operates normally in his or her classroom with the student teachers observing and learning and not given full charge of classes when they would still be learning the trade. While some mentors overloaded student-teachers, other mentors did not have confidence in the student-teachers, and consequently they would not leave their classes in the student-teachers' care. Others would not let student-teachers teach at any time because they felt that student-teachers were delaying and wasting learners' valuable time and they had to finish the syllabus before the end of the year. This resulted in the student-teachers getting discouraged and experiencing feelings of inadequacy and loss of confidence in their ability to teach. Such feelings of inadequacy could have negatively influenced the student-teachers perception of the teaching profession. The want-teachers were received and treated varied from one to another. The majority of student teachers in the present study tested the fact that they were mentored very well and introduced at their school's cement and that resulted in other teachers and learners not respecting them. This sign of respect influenced student teachers' performance during teaching practice and positively influenced their perception of the teaching profession in general. Learner discipline was a serious restraint for the student-teachers. The teaching environment did not allow student-teachers to execute what they had learned at university.

CONCLUSION

This study examined critically how mentoring is conceptualized in the literature as well as aimed to arrive at a description and/or a definition of mentoring as it might apply with a pre-service teacher education context. Also, the study examined the roles that mentors and mentees play in a mentoring relationship and how they interconnect. Mentoring is defined in various ways by different researchers. It is a non-hierarchical, reciprocal relationship between mentors and mentees who work towards specific professional and personal outcomes for the mentee. Mentoring is a valuable process that impacts both mentors and mentees. The impact must be positive. The study reveals that roles undertaken by mentors and mentees in a mentoring relationship are numerous, depending on the context and the goals to be achieved. It has also been revealed that there is a clear link between the roles of mentors

and mentees, but there is a significant gap in research about the synergy between mentor and mentee roles and how the roles interact and react. The study concluded that student-teachers mentoring provides the opportunity for less experienced students to learn from more experienced significant adults over some time. There are many and varying strategies through which this can be done. When these strategies are effectively employed in teacher education it enhances the professional development of pre-service teachers and leads to the production of competent teachers thereby meeting the global demand.

RECOMMENDATION

Mentoring plays an important role in enhancing novice teachers' opportunities to learn within the contexts of teaching. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. The institution should value mentoring at all levels of educational development. If implemented well, mentoring can provide excellent support, challenges, and development opportunities for both mentors and mentees.
2. To develop the commitment mentioned, the college should establish clear guidelines for the mentoring system.
3. The college should hold workshops to develop mentoring skills among the lecturers. Also, workshops for the student teachers regarding their responsibilities and expectations should be held.
4. Given the high number of student-teachers more full-time and, part-time lecturers should be employed.
5. Student-teachers should be made to take teaching practice exercises seriously during their training program.
6. The government and curriculum planners should increase the time for teaching practice to a full session to enable student-teachers to be grounded in the field.
7. Only competent hands should be allowed by teacher training institutions to supervise student teachers in teaching practice.

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