

# The Influence of Mentor, Trainee-Teacher Relationships on the Efficacy of the Trainee-Teacher in Rural Schools: A Case of Bubi District.

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## ABSTRACT

The atmosphere that a trainee-teacher experiences in the school has a great impact on the professional development of a teacher. Several studies have focused on various aspects of school atmosphere that affect the teacher. This study focuses on one area that has received relatively low research attention especially in rural areas, the relationship between mentors and trainee- teachers and their influence on the efficacy on the later in their teaching profession. A case study of Bubi district in Matabeleland North province was used in this study. Eight in-depth interviews were conducted with both trainee-teachers and mentors. The study sample was purposively selected to capture both young and old mentors and trainee-teachers from four different secondary schools in the district. The general results show that there are good relationships between mentors and trainee-teachers, which result in increased performance by the trainee-teachers in rural areas. The synthesis of the findings stresses the importance of a systematic, long-term and research-informed mentoring education that equips the mentors for their tasks.

**Keywords:** Trainee-teacher, Mentor, Efficacy, Relationships

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Teaching practice is a component in teacher education, which provides a transition from theory to real teaching contexts. Teacher preparation is done at colleges and universities where the trainee-teachers are taught theories of education to be applied during teaching practice. After learning the theories, trainee-teachers are then deployed to various schools where they are to apply education theories in and outside classroom setups. Trainee- teachers are assigned mentors who are school based. Mentors are teacher educators who provide appropriate guidance and support for the non-experienced teacher. Mentoring plays a very important role in nurturing and guiding trainee-teachers to become experienced and experts in the teaching profession. The following factors cultural issues, economic issues and academic issues influence the trainee-teacher and mentor relations.

### Cultural Issues

Understanding interactions across racial and tribal groups is critical given the changing nature of organizations and the composition of the people within them. Culture might have an impact on the relationship between the mentor and trainee-teacher especially if they come from different cultural backgrounds as one might tend to be ethnocentric .Ethnocentrism is a wide spread tendency for people to favour their own group, tribe or culture over another on the belief that one's own ethnic group or culture is superior to the other group. It refers to the way we look at the world from our perspective or from our filter of meaning (Burns 2007). It assumes that our understanding is the only valuable understanding. For example, during the mentorship period, the mentor may want to indoctrinate the trainee-teacher into accepting or even following his or her own norms and values, failure to that may lead to conflict of interest. Moggs, (2009) posits that ethnocentrism prevents understanding and incites conflicts as words and actions are seen as threats rather than different ways of experiencing life. Barker, (2014) who asserts that the problem of ethnocentrism is that it leads to misunderstanding of others as our own

tinted glasses falsely distort what is meaningful and functional to other people supports this. If the trainee-teacher and mentor are not mature enough, they may be trapped by the cultural issues and their interaction becomes counterproductive.

### **Socio-Economic Issues**

Mentors and trainee-teachers may be in different socio-economic positions due to social stratification processes. There may be generational differences, different ethnics and religious heritage or from different socio-economic groups. Generational differences may be an obstacle for the mentor and trainee-teacher especially if the mentor is older than the trainee-teacher is. The mentor can bridge the gap by trying to remember his or her young days thus bringing the trainee-teacher closer, although youngsters nowadays behave differently from what the elders used to do (Lindhard, 2008).

Hansman (2003) outlines that mentoring is a social constructed power relationship. The power that mentors have and exercise within mentoring relationships can be helpful or hurtful to trainee-teachers. If mentor and trainee-teacher are of the same age, they may try to out compete and outdo each other instead of helping each other grow professionally. Cunningham (2005) posits that mentors and trainee-teachers need to plan together and should be paired to like personalities. Mentors and trainee-teachers should be friends with each other as to improve efficiency in mentoring programs. Mentors have a unique role in the lives of trainee-teachers. They are like an ideal older brother, sister even mother and father; they can also be likened to a peer because they enjoy having fun with their trainee-teachers (Herrera 2004).

### **Academic Relations**

Academic and professional qualifications may positively or negatively affect the relationship between the mentor and trainee-teacher. The colleagues regard professional competence as an attribute of an outstanding teacher. A mentor who has excellent knowledge of pedagogy and subject matter, and has confidence in his or her own instructional skills can better influence the trainee-teacher positively (Valencia et al, 2009). Such kind of a mentor who is professionally competent will not be intimidated by the trainee-teacher instead he will be able to teach the trainee-teacher new concepts and be willing to learn from the trainee-teacher. According to Valencia et al (2009), some relationships may be sour especially if a trainee-teacher holds a higher qualification than the mentor does. The mentor may have good intentions but supervising a more qualified person than them may not be easy. The mentor tends to be withdrawn thinking that he or she is professionally inferior.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to interrogate the relationships that exist between the mentors and trainee-teachers showing how this impact on the efficacy of the trainee-teachers.

### **Research Questions**

How do trainee-teachers relate with their mentors?

What are the views of trainee-teachers on mentorship program?

What can be done to improve the relations between the mentor and trainee-teachers?

### **Conceptual Framework.**

The study is premised on the thinking that good relationships between the mentor and the trainee-teacher coupled with the appreciation of the mentorship programme leads to a great trainee –teacher who would later become a well-groomed professional teacher, capable of delivering worthwhile lessons that would not only improve academic achievement of learners but would also motivate the learners to be independent and critical thinkers and contributing to the wellbeing of their communities. Figure. 1 below captures the tenets of the conceptual framework well.

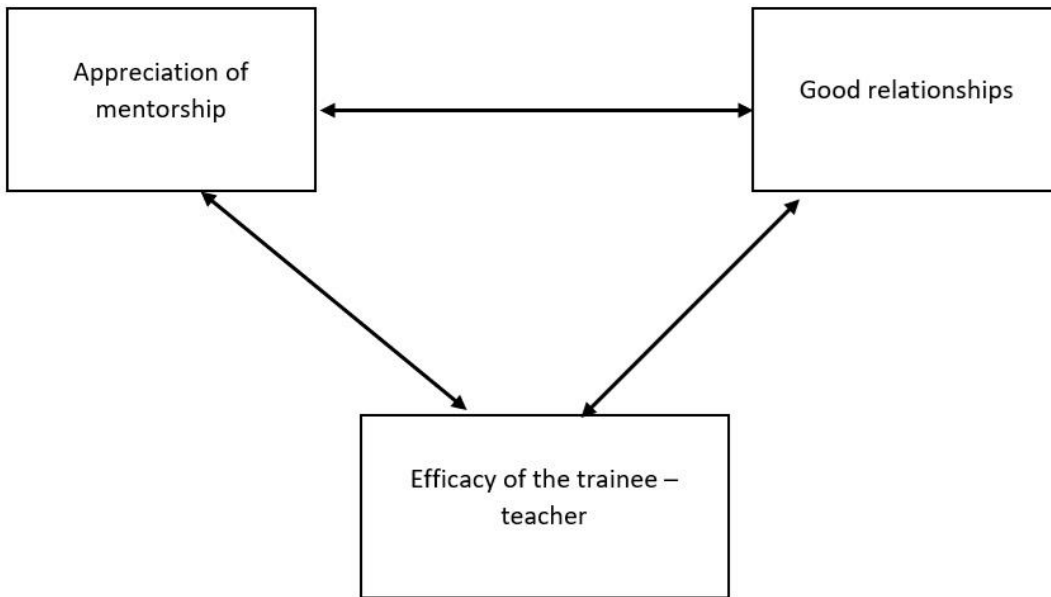


Fig.1. The key variables on the development of a trainee-teacher

## METHODOLOGY

A case- study design was used by purposively sampling four mentors and four trainee- teachers in Bubi district in Matebeleland north province, based on their different teaching experiences and age variations. Eight interviews were conducted as to get a detailed understanding of these relationships. To keep the interviews and research discussions natural and realistic pseudo names were used for all the interviewees. The researchers as to ascertain the relationships that occur between the trainee-teachers and their mentors also took observations. These observations were done during lesson times and outside the class to see the informal relations after the working hours.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Views from the Trainee-Teachers

The trainee-teachers were asked on their views on their relationship with their mentors and following are their responses.

Teacher-Trainee	Submissions
Mr. Hlongwane	My mentor is supportive, he is always willing to an extra mile with me, he assisted me to get used to the community and their expectations.
Miss Thebe	I relate well with my mentor in and outside the classroom. She helps me in lesson planning, she also allows me to observe her teach and at times, we mark together.
Ms. Mugwagwa	My student is cold to me, I find it difficult to ask anything from her. She just does the basics and does not attend my lessons.
Ms. Mabuza	My mentor is sociable and we share experiences both professional and social. When she observes me, she is constructive and this really builds me up.

The above submission were then subjected to coding as to get the themes that could summarize the relationships that exists between the trainee-teachers and their mentors. The table below shows the emerging themes.

Relationship Type	Evidence from submissions
<b>Supportive</b>	My mentor is supportive at times, we relate well to each other even out of class (Hlongwane).
<b>Professional and cordial</b>	I relate very well with my mentor in and outside class. She always has time for me. I really enjoy my work because of my mentor (Miss Thebe).
<b>Cold, closed and discouraging</b>	My mentor is cold to me; she is not open to me. I have lost interest in teaching due to the atmosphere I am exposed to Ms. (Mugwagwa).
<b>Warm and constructive</b>	When she observes me she is constructive and tends to build me up. I am now confident in my teaching because of her warmth (Ms. Mabuza).

Out of the four participants, three claimed that their relations with their mentors were positive and constructive. They said that they had no difficulties working with their mentors and this improved their efficacy in teaching process. This demonstrate that the trainee-teachers and mentors have managed to put aside their various differences for the sake of professionalism. One of the four trainee-teachers has good working relations with her mentor even after working hours. She said assistance was offered to her timeously and supervision was done fortnightly. *‘My mentor was devoted and sometimes even worked beyond the stipulated dismissal time’*. Key to their relationship was the mentor’s willingness to assist the trainee-teacher whenever she had challenges. Regardless of their age difference, the two had mutual understanding, which was seen even after working hours as they had social walks and meals together. Miss Thebe also liked her mentors’ diligence, which presented a platform for productive teaching and learning. She intoned that the mentor was always willing to assist and ready to teach the trainee-teacher ‘new things’ and was free to seek assistance from the trainee-teacher as reflected by words ‘I liked that she was helpful and willing to teach new things’. Whenever she needed help, she was free to ask. This boosted Miss Thebe’s self-esteem knowing that a qualified mentor valued her contribution.

Qualifications amongst mentors vary which results in variations between them and trainee-teachers. Responses also varied due to experience and age. Some mentors have been in the teaching field for quite some time. If mentors hold less qualifications as compared to trainee-teachers, working relations may be strained as the mentor may feel inferior to the trainee-teacher, however in this study this perception was not witnessed as the trainee-teacher gave their mentors due respect. This was due to the communal spirit that exist in rural areas where respect is a desired virtue and ubuntu philosophy overrides all other values other.

Wilkinson (2009) argues that one of the primary pitfalls, which make mentoring difficult and almost useless, is the mentor, trainee- teacher clashes. The behaviour of mentors has a serious impact on the trainee-teachers learning process. Mentors who exhibit the value of ubuntu promoted good relations with their trainee-teachers. Samkange (2015) emphasises that the rural settings present conducive atmosphere for trainee-teachers to do their teaching practice as the teachers there are still informed by thee precepts of working, playing and living together and their successes and failures are shared among themselves, unlike in other settings where individualism is now rife.

### Responses of Mentors on their Relationship with their Trainee-Teachers

Mentor	Response
<b>Mrs. Sithole</b>	We work together well. We share the burdens of teaching together. We cook and take walks together in the community.
<b>Mr. Chisango</b>	We scheme and plan together, we share our marking, and we teach together, observe, and learn from our lessons.

<b>Mrs. Gumede</b>	We respect each other's experience and we learn from our different backgrounds. He is always willing to assist and learn.
<b>Mr. Mthombeni</b>	We do not relate much, it is just short talks, our relationship is dry and I do not know what to do as a mentor.

The above responses were subjected to coding as to come up with emerging themes. The table below summarizes the resultant themes.

<b>Relationship Type</b>	<b>Evidence from the submissions</b>
Positive relationship	We share the burdens of teaching together and we share social life as well.
Collegiate and Cordial	We plan together and assist each other in class. I think she will be a great teacher through this mentorship programme.
Constructive	He thinks I have the experience that he needs for his professional growth.
Uncertain	Our relationship is dry. I do not even know my role as a mentor.

From the four mentors interviewed, three had sound and professional relationships, trainee-teachers and were equally willing to learn from them. Only one mentor stated that their relationship was dry and full of uncertainties, with the mentor no sure of the duties to be performed. Differences in personalities between the mentor and trainee-teacher could make learning difficult for the trainee teacher. Bubb (2010) alludes that behaviour of trainee-teachers had a serious impact on their learning process. Feiman-Nemser (2001) postulate that in as much as trainee-teacher and mentor relationship depend on personalities, the setting plays a major role. The culture that exist in the community has a bearing on these relationships. Rural settings are still very conservative and show great importance in living together as a large family.

Observations done by the researchers showed that trainee-teachers and mentors who enjoyed collegiate relationships during the working hours had vibrant interactions after work, they cook and eat together. As pointed out in the conceptual framework and literature review, harmonized professional relationships lead to effectiveness in the teaching and learning process that benefits the trainee-teacher. For a collegiate relationship to be built amongst trainee-teachers and mentors, they should be respect, appreciation and tolerance of each other.

### **Appreciation of the Mentorship Program**

This study also concerned itself with the appreciation of the mentorship program by both the trainee-teachers and the mentors. Trainee-teachers and mentors were then asked on their understanding of the mentorship program. The following are the views from trainee-teachers.

Mr. Hlongwane... *“mentorship program is whereby my mentor is supposed to help me to scheme and plan my lessons, and grow professionally”*.

Miss Thebe.....*“Mentorship is whereby mentor and trainee-teachers work together and learn from each other, since teaching is a dynamic process that has various aspects that no one individual can know it all.”*

Miss Mabuza..... *“the mentor should be knowledgeable and should be directing things, telling me what to and what not to do.”*

Miss Mugwagwa.... . *“in this programme while the mentor should be the fountain of knowledge, he should also be aware that there are some issues that he can benefit from me as a trainee-teacher hence we should both*

*be willing to listen to each other. He should know everything.’’*

The three trainee-teachers, Mr. Hlongwane, Ms Thebe, and Miss Mugwagwa view mentorship as a learning programme where both parties learn from each other in a collegiate relationship. One, trainee-teacher Ms Mabuza expects passive learning from the mentor who is perceived as all knowing. During the interviews carried out, trainee-teachers expressed that some mentors have adequate knowledge and skills required thus providing support to the trainee-teachers. The trainee-teachers appreciated the efforts made by their mentors. From the interviews it emerged that the roles of both trainee-teachers and mentors are not clear with each part doing what they think is the best and convenient. The responses of the trainee-teachers are supported by Cox (2005) who alludes that there is an urgent need to work shop the mentors on their mentorship expectations.

### **Views Emanating from Mentors**

Mr. Chisango... *“Mentorship should not be a burden to me. However, a service to the profession. I should be able to assist trainee-teachers whenever time permits.”*

Miss Sithole..... *“Mentorship is all about contributing to the personal development of trainee-teachers, helping them to overcome the fear of the unknowns in becoming teachers. Frankly speaking, it has been quite difficult to do that as we are also trying to cope with the changes introduced in the new curriculum”.*

Mrs. Gumede.....*“Being a mentor means that I should be well versed with the subject mastery, and give positive assistance to the trainee-teacher. I should also fill the gaps, which the colleges and universities might not cover during their teacher preparations.”*

Mr. Mthombeni.....*“A trainee-teacher should work, I should only assist in a few scenarios since am not equipped in mentorship”.*

The mentors seem to have a good understanding of their mentorship roles and most of them are full applying themselves to these tasks not for any rewards but as a professional responsibility to grow the profession and teachers in particular. While the mentors stressed the need for workshops in mentorship roles, they are doing the best they can.

The researchers observed that some mentors had heavy loads but still accepted to be mentors thus showing how dedicated they are to the professional. Mentors had full teaching loads; some had other work commitments such as being sport directors and chairpersons to various committees in their schools. Mentors saw mentorship program as a teacher development programme. This is supported by Lindhard (2008) who articulates that mentorship is concerned about developing a holistic teacher who can blend theory and practice amicably. Although both the teachers and mentors fully supported the mentorship program, the study showed that there is need for workshops in these areas for both parties so that the program is well appreciated and leads to the maximum benefits to the trainee-teacher.

### **Methods of Improving Appreciation of Mentorship Program**

As a way of improving the trainee-teacher and mentor relationships, the study tried to find ways of improving the mentorship program. Trainee-teachers and mentors were interviewed on ways that can be employed to improve appreciation of mentorship program. Their responses are as follows:

#### **Views from Trainee-Teachers on Improving Mentorship**

Mr. Hlongwane... *“Qualifications and experience should be considered when assigning mentors to trainee-teachers. Mentors should demonstrate subject mastery skills. ’There should be a document that details how mentorship is to be conducted.*

Miss Thebe.... *“Colleges and universities should produce a manual for the teaching practice so that all the expectations are met.*

Miss Mabuza ... *‘Mentors should be competent enough; they should possess the expertise, commitment and time*

to provide assistance to trainee-teachers. Maybe they should attend seminars to be effective mentors.

Miss Mugwagwa... “those partaking in the mentorship program should be appreciated for the extra work they are doing. Mentors should be relieved from other duties such as sports and other demanding jobs as to fully concentrate on mentoring. Where resources permit, mentors should be awarded for the hard work that they are doing so that they take pride in it”.

### **Views from the Mentors on Improving Mentorship Program.**

Mr. Chisango... “Mentors should be trained to enhance their skills in mentoring. They should be refresher courses, workshops conducted prior to mentorship program such that those selected to be mentors will have an idea of what they are supposed to do this will help to reduce the possibility of conflicts arising during the period”.

Miss Sithole... “Those selected to become mentors should have at least five years’ experience and should be a holder of a first degree. Those without degrees will find it difficult to give out services especially if assigned to trainee-teachers who are pursuing degree programs”.

Mrs. Gumede... “Gender should be taken into consideration when assigning mentors to trainee-teachers, to safeguard any possibilities of abuse.

Mr. Mthombeni... “Universities and colleges should come up with a mentoring manual which will be used throughout the mentorship period. The manual should act as a guiding tool for both mentors and trainee-teachers during”.

As articulated by Garringer and MacRae (2008), proper selection of mentors should be informed and functional as to avoid harassment of both mentors and trainee-teachers. All key factors should be taken into consideration in this selection, so that mentors and trainee-teachers are able to blend and accommodate each other.

Mentoring programs should be put in place such that mentors undergo training for them to be effective and be able to nurture others (Freedman, 2003). Induction of trainee-teachers has to be developed as to help them clematise to the school environment. Mentors also have to be inducted especially those who would be in the mentoring program for the first time. Lawrence (2005) argues that mentoring could only be very possible in schools where the mentor are adequately trained. Lawrence (2005) further points out that trainee -teachers could benefit a lot when they are guided by mentors who fully understood their mentoring roles. According to Hankey (2004), induction programs can include the use of orientation seminars, workshops and professional collaborations.

Trainee-teachers and mentors should have social time together as social barriers might lead to challenges in mentorship program (Smith 2009). Universities and colleges must address how to support and enable relationships among people who come from diverse cultural backgrounds and perspectives as a way of improving mentor, trainee-teacher relations. As buttressed by Fischer and Andel (2008), communication skills, professional competence as well as interpersonal skills should be included in the manual and those who do not meet the requirements should not partake in the program.

A mentorship manual should be developed as to help both trainee-teachers and mentors to conduct their selves properly. Kishan (2011) articulates that universities, colleges and schools should come up with a mentoring manual, which would act as a guiding tool for the mentors and trainee-teachers so that both parties are clear about their roles. The manual will lay down all the procedures that are to be followed during the teaching practice phase.

Key to the success of any mentoring program is the competence of the mentor who must possess the expertise, commitment and time to assist trainee- teachers. Mentors should also be conversant with the studies that the trainee-teacher is undertaking. All those in mentorship roles should seek to develop themselves in and around the ethics of education. Highly skilled teachers should be selected for mentorship program as to make sure the trainee-teachers benefit from their experience and expertise. Mentors should demonstrate mastery of pedagogical

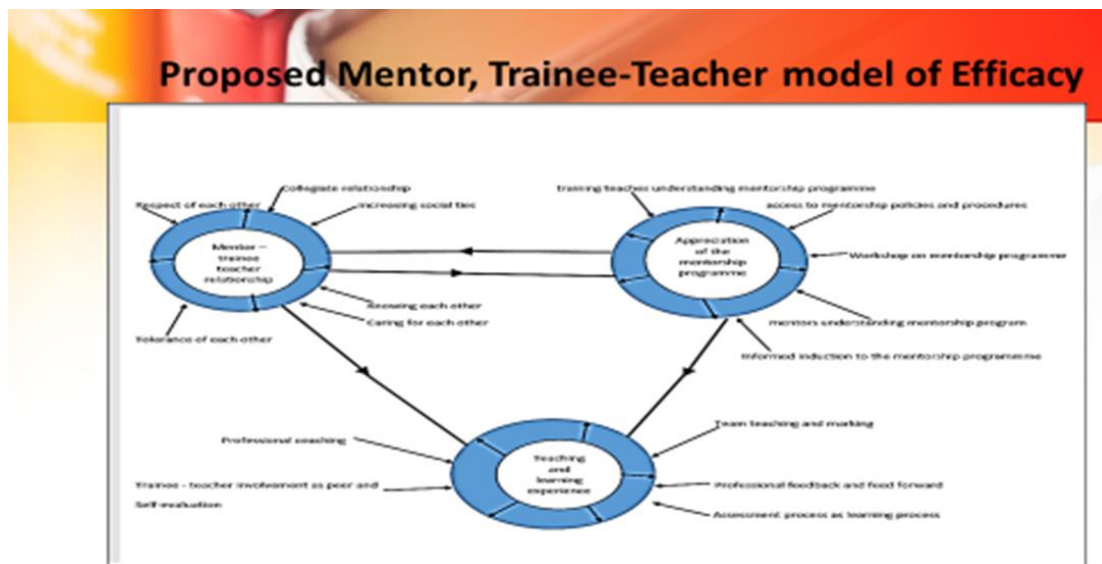
strategies and subject mastery content Cox (2005). Mentors should have a first degree and or at least five years' experience in their area of specialization and should be confident in their subject areas.

Those in mentoring services should be appreciated for the extra work that they are doing in order to help fulfil the dreams of the trainee- teacher. Mentors have to be given some incentives to boost their efficacy in mentoring. Mentoring is viewed as an extra load to mentors hence there is a need for a token of appreciation for the extra work (White, 2000).

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study found that there are collegiate relationships between the trainee-teachers and mentors, where they work as a team. The philosophy of ubuntu is valued in this district and team teaching is practiced due to communal living where the goal and outcomes are communally owned leading to high educational outcomes.

The findings from the three objectives can be summarized in the following model, which emphasizes that if mentorship program is understood well, it will lead to good relationships thereby leading to productive teaching and be of great benefit to the trainee-teacher. Both mentors and trainee-teacher should show appreciation of one another for the good of their professional development. Tolerance, respect and love for one another as to improve efficacy in the mentorship program.



Ncube& Ndlovu model 2020.

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