Mentor and Student Teachers’ Feedback on Mentoring Issues during Clinical Experience Program

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Abstract: This study was conducted to obtain mentor and student teachers’ views on the mentoring practice during their 16-week clinical experience program (CEP). This study involved 22 student teachers who had completed their 16 weeks CEP and 19 mentor teachers. The research employed qualitative research design whereby data was collected using written feedback form. Data was analyzed using thematic content analysis to look for emergent themes. The themes emerged related to issues faced during CEP were categorized according to three dimensions which are affective, professional and technical and linked to the five-factor mentoring model developed by Hudson (2007). Mentor feedback and mentor-mentee relationship are two themes that emerged under the affective dimension while pedagogical knowledge and mentoring knowledge were categorized under professional dimension. For technical dimension, the theme time limitation emerged as a dominant theme. This study values mentor and pre-service teachers’ feedback as the crucial factors in revisiting the mentoring program. It is hoped that better understanding of mentoring practices during clinical experience for pre-service teachers can help in improving the quality of mentoring during CEP.

Keywords: Mentor Teachers, Student Teachers, Clinical Experience Program, Mentoring Practice

1. Introduction

The 21st Century Education Standard has made every country in the world strive for the best quality of education. This changing trends and expectations in education are phenomenal and it has an impact on the quality of teacher education programs (Omebe, 2014; AzlinNorhaini and MohdIzham, 2017). Training of teachers has to be strengthened and areas that develop student teachers’ personal and professional knowledge should be emphasized and critically reviewed. One of the key areas to be strengthened is the mentoring process during clinical experience program (CEP) (IntanSafinas et al., 2017).

Preservice teacher mentoring is a type of structured mentorship model that pairs experienced teachers with preservice teachers for short periods of time within a teacher education program. This mentor-mentee process commonly occurs during CEP in a teacher education program. During CEP, many student teachers struggle to master the demands of teaching such as preparation of lessons and materials, classroom management and adapting to the school culture (Wong et al., 2015; IntanSafinas et al., 2017). They often feel at lost on how to properly manage their duties and their problems are often exacerbated due to the fact that they are unfamiliar with the school setting (Ambrosetti, 2014; Wong et al., 2015; IntanSafinas et al., 2017). Hence, it is common scenario that every pre-service teacher is assigned an experienced teacher in the school to play the role as a mentor teacher. The mentor teacher carries multiple roles such as being a role model, guide and counsellor in order to guide pre-service teachers into effectively fulfilling their roles as teachers. The mentor teachers also assist pre-service teachers to become accustomed to working in classrooms and schools, allowing them to face professional challenges more confidently as they should feel more supported as novices. (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Coffey, 2010)

Clearly, during this school attachment, effective mentor teachers are crucial in helping pre-service teachers to fit into the profession and build their knowledge, confidence and skills in teaching (Scherer, 2012). Therefore, careful consideration must be given in order to select and prepare mentor teachers who are professionally skilled and capable of guiding and coaching the pre-service teachers under them.

Mentor Teachers’ Role

There are many views and definitions on the role of a mentor, but most of the definitions relate to assisting and supporting. Past literature highlights that the most important role of the mentor is giving guidance, advice and counsel (Bray & Nettleton, 2006; Sundli, 2007; Hall, Draper, Smith & Bullough, 2008; Shaw 1992; Wilkin 1992). These roles can help all mentees to review and identify their own strengths and areas for further development, develop skills and understanding and see a clearer path for their personal and professional development as teachers (Mountford, 1993).
According to Ambrosetti, A., & Dekkers, J. (2010), mentors can provide not only pedagogical guidance, emotional support and professional socialization, but also empathy and serve as role models. Mentor teachers need to assure that the mentoring roles they take and the strategies they use to support mentees’ learning are related to their mentees’ concerns and suitable for their current stages of professional development (Hennissen, et al., 2011). Considering that teachers’ knowledge and skills are event-structured, context-based, and practice-oriented in nature (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996), mentor teachers have multiple roles. This statement also reflects the views of many authors, since most mentoring involves someone older than the learner, it cannot escape from an advising and counselling relationship (Brooks and Sikes; 1997).

In the context of training a student to be a teacher, the following are leading roles: (1) training students to teach their particular subjects; (2) developing their understanding of how pupils learn; (3) training them to manage classes and assess pupils; (4) supervising them in relation to school-based elements of the course; and (5) assessing their competence in subject application and classroom skills (Kirkham 1993; Wilkin 1992). Therefore, to develop the student, a mentor needs preparation to fulfil these roles. Smith (1989) states that the success of school-based training and staff development can be highly dependent on the knowledge, skill and personal qualities of the mentor.

A mentor will need an understanding, which may be partly intuitive, of what a learner is trying to achieve. Related to this is the fact that mentors also ideally need experience or knowledge of the organisation in which the mentoring relationship takes place (Brankin and Bailey 1992).

According to Parsloe (1992) good mentors are:

(1) good motivators, who are perceptive and able to support the objectives of programmes and fulfil their responsibilities to the candidate;

(2) high performers, secure in their own occupied position within the organisation and unlikely to feel threatened by, or resentful of, the candidate’s opportunity;

(3) able to show that a responsibility for mentoring is part of their own occupied job description;

(4) able to establish a good and professional relationship, sympathetic, accessible and knowledgeable about the candidate’s area of interest;

(5) sufficiently senior to be in touch with the corporate structure, sharing the company’s values and able to give the candidate access to resources and information;

(6) good teachers, able to advise and instruct without interfering, and

(7) good negotiators.

According to Carter and Lewis (1994) a mentor should be credible to a learner and demonstrate an open approach, accessibility and many of the key behaviours that a learner might be trying to develop, such as personal organisation or a managerial style. Carter and Lewis (1994) refer these skills as excellent interpersonal skills. Nias (1989) argues that interpersonal skills like questioning and observation are extremely important. In addition, being a good mentor requires analytical skills like interpretation (Fisher 1994) and creative thinking (Brooks and Sikes 1997). Good mentors will, it seems reasonable to assume, keep to their commitment and want to become even better at their job. Although the qualities and skills that a mentor possesses are vital to the effectiveness of the relationship, the qualities of a mentee are also influenced by the qualities, skills and characteristics of the linked mentor (Carter and Lewis 1994).

Carter and Lewis (1994) take the view that a mentor needs to be able to support a learner having regard to his particular strengths and weaknesses in the process of development. Whatever the specific functional or technical skills, at the end of the process or relationship, a learner will probably need to employ some of the following: (1) learning skills; (2) setting goals; (3) identifying own learning needs; (4) planning own learning; (5) listening; (6) accepting help and feedback; and (7) risk taking. It is worth emphasising that mentoring is not an additional management task. Its main function is to enhance performance and to support people in their natural development. All the aforementioned qualities of a mentor are clearly reenacted in Hudson’s Five Factor Mentoring Model.

**Hudson’s Five Factor Mentoring Model**

The mentoring model developed by Hudson (2004) entails five main factors for quality mentoring. Embedded within the model is the notion of educative mentoring which is “mentoring helps novices learn to teach and develop skills and dispositions in order to continue learning in and from their practice” (Feiman-Nemser, 1998, p.61).
This five-factor mentoring model includes:

- The mentor’s Personal Attributes for facilitating the mentoring process
- Mentoring about the essential education System Requirements
- The mentor’s Pedagogical Knowledge
- The mentor’s Modelling of teaching practices, and
- Quality Feedback provided by the mentor

The model proposed by Hudson (2004) is used in this study to identify the challenges faced by both mentor and pre-service teachers in the context of the five main factors that underlie a mentoring program.

Challenges in mentoring

According to Dunne & Bennett (1997), many mentor teachers rely on their own years of experience in the process of mentoring but being a good teacher does not necessarily translate into being a good mentor teacher because the application of one’s experience and knowledge in the day-to-day practice translate differently in terms of intellectually and interpersonally for the others to fully comprehend and benefit from the knowledge. (Dunne & Bennett, 1997). McCann (2013) mentioned that a mentor teacher must be equipped with the skill and knowledge about mentoring. The mentor must be a good communicator and a reflective thinker who also encouraged the mentee to be reflective. In addition, Roehrig, Bohn, Turner, & Pressley, (2008) also include that a mentor should be willing, enthusiastic, and committed in order to be able to communicate and collaborate with adults besides enjoying teaching as a profession. Hence, despite the fact that mentor teachers support the pre-service teachers to develop in their profession, their presence alone is not sufficient to get the job done, let alone purely relying on their personal experience in conducting their mentoring program (Beutel& Spooner-Lane, 2009). They require proper training as well as being provided proper guidelines to carry out effective mentoring.

In the Malaysian context, mentoring is not new. It is a crucial part of teacher education program particularly during teaching practice or attachments at industries. However, research have shown that it has not been properly emphasised and given enough attention, particularly in the guidelines on mentoring practices to mentor pre-service teachers in schools (Azman, Abdullah, & Sebastian., 2009, Wong, Rosnidar&Syakirah, 2015). As experienced practitioners, mentor teachers are often knowledgeable in pedagogy, classroom management, students’ needs and behaviour and school management but it is very difficult to uphold a certain standard in mentoring when mentor teachers typically receive little to no training before being assigned to pre-service teachers (Roegman, Reagan, Goodwin & Yu, 2016; Wong, Rosnidar&Syakirah, 2015).

In Malaysia, the common practice of mentoring training is through invitation of school principals or school representatives to attend a few hours of meetings to discuss about teaching practicum topics such as practicum procedures, supervision, discussion on completing evaluation forms, and grading system (Lingadu, 2008; Wong, Rosnidar&Syakirah, 2015 Vikaraman, Mansor, & Hamzah, 2017). Though the Teacher Training Division in the Ministry of Education structured the mentor programme, there is no official standardised training provided for effective mentoring and coaching skills given to the mentor teachers for them to effectively carry out their duty (Vikaraman, Mansor, & Hamzah, 2017). Unlike in some countries like Australia, United Kingdom and South Africa, whereby the institutions provide substantial training for the selected mentor teachers from time to time, through the use of Mentor Training Programs built on justified mentoring models with the aim to empower them to guide their student teachers effectively and efficiently (Ambrosetti, 2014; Maphalala, 2013).

Although mentoring has been highlighted as a significant contributing component in the professional development of pre-service teachers, there are considerable studies highlighting challenges faced by mentor teachers and pre-service teachers during the mentoring program that affect the quality of mentoring (Hakwendenda&Njobvu (2019), IntanSafinas et.al, 2017; Arrend and Beets, 2010; Kiggundu and Nayimuli, 2009; Bradbury and Koballa, 2008). Some of the challenges highlighted by mentor teachers are lack of resources to be used in mentoring, mentor teachers have already been assigned with many responsibilities, communication breakdown with institution supervisor, difficulty in mentoring pre-service teachers who lack sound pedagogical knowledge, pre-service students’ negative attitude towards teaching (Hakwendenda and Njobvu (2019), IntanSafinas et.al, 2017; Arrend and Beets, 2010; Kiggundu and Nayimuli, 2009; Bradbury and Koballa, 2008). Hakwendenda and Njobyu (2019) highlighted in their study that the quality of mentoring can be affected by the fact that some mentors lack training to become mentor teachers while some lack experience in mentoring. They also argued that mentor teachers should be provided with a mentoring guideline that clearly outlines a mentor’s roles, responsibilities and mentoring practice. Other studies highlighted challenges such as the conflict between both mentor and mentees in their expectations of the mentoring relationship (Bradbury and Koballa, 2008) and in
terms of mentor does not support pre-service teacher’s new ideas or style of teaching (Nillas, 2010; Wang and Odeli, 2007). There are studies that reported mentees feeling exploited by mentor to assist them with their workload (Kinggundu and Nayimuli, 2009; Shumba and Shumba, 2007). Quality feedback has also been highlighted as an issue during mentoring program. Studies have reported that mentees felt they did not receive constructive feedback instead were given feedback that were inconsistent and unspecific (Nillas, 2010).

The review of literature has revealed that mentoring although significant in developing both mentor and pre-service teachers’ professional knowledge, it also can pose challenges to both parties. The challenges faced need to be explored to identify the actions to be taken in improving mentoring for both parties. In the Malaysian context, teacher training institutions can benefit from the data on the challenges faced by their pre-service teachers. The issues can be addressed and the preparation for student teachers can be further improved. As for the mentor teachers, identifying the issues faced by the appointed mentor teachers can make teacher training institutions see their challenges that also need to be addressed in order to avoid conflicts in the partnership between schools and teacher training institution.

**Context of the study**

This research investigates mentor teacher and pre-service teachers’ feedback on the issues faced in the mentoring program during the 16-week CEP. The research was guided by the following question:

1) What are the issues faced by mentor teachers and pre-service teachers in the mentoring program?

2. **Materials and Methods**

This study utilized mixed methods research design which utilizes both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. The rationale in using both approaches is to gather wide-ranging and in-depth findings that give better understanding of the issue being explored (Creswell, 2007).

The research samples include 19 mentor teachers and 22 pre-service teachers. The samples were chosen as they willingly agree to participate in the research. The pre-service teachers were in their final year of Teaching English as a Second Language, Bachelor in Education program. The mentor teachers were the mentor to the pre-service teachers who participated in the study. The mentor teachers who participated in the study varies in terms of their teaching experience and mentoring experience.

The data was collected using two instruments. The first instrument is a feedback form whereby the mentor teachers and the mentee were asked to share their views about the mentoring program. The feedback form for the mentor teacher requires the mentor teachers to share their mentoring practice, the challenges faced in mentoring and recommendations for improvement. As for the feedback form distributed to the pre-service teachers, it consists of questions to gather pre-service teachers’ feedback on the mentoring they received, the challenges they faced and their suggestions to improve the mentoring program. The feedback form was developed following the five-factor mentoring model proposed by Hudson (2004) that highlights personal attributes, system requirements, pedagogical knowledge, modelling and feedback. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic content analysis to look for emergent themes.

3. **Results and Discussion**

What are the issues faced by mentor teachers and pre-service teachers in the mentoring program?

The findings are discussed based on three dimensions which are affective, technical and practical as used by Shwartz and Dori (2016) in their study on mentor and novice teachers’ perceptions of their mentoring experiences. The data are also linked to the factors in mentoring mentioned by Hudson (2007) which are personal attributes, system requirements, pedagogical knowledge, modelling and feedback.

**Affective**

Based on the data from the written feedback of the mentor teachers, two themes emerged under the affective category. The themes are feedback and relationship. Under feedback, the mentor teachers and pre-service teachers diverge in the issues they highlighted. The mentor teachers focus on the pre-service teachers’ attitude towards feedback whereby some mentor teachers described pre-service teachers being unreceptive and passive. Some mentor teachers also highlighted that the pre-service teacher mentored by her keeps repeating the same mistake although the mentee has been given feedback to revise her strategies.
The pre-service teachers’ comments relate to the way feedback is given to them. Some pre-service teachers mentioned that they find it difficult to follow what mentor teacher advised and they were not able to apply the advice the real context. They reported that the mentor teachers gave comments on their teaching but did not show or demonstrate to them how to carry it out or improve their teaching. Hence, these pre-service teachers feel demotivated and they were not sure of how to improve their teaching as commented by the mentor teachers.

In terms of relationship, some mentor teachers described the pre-service teachers mentored by them as passive learners making communication difficult. They also commented that the pre-service teachers were not receptive of the feedback given to them. The pre-service teachers on the other hand described having tensions and conflicts in their relationship with their mentor teachers because their mentor teachers were not supportive. The mentor teachers were described as not supportive when the pre-service teachers would like to try new strategies or when the pre-service teachers were having difficulties with class control.

One pre-service teacher mentioned that the mentor teachers tend to control her decisions and was dominant. Another pre-service teacher mentioned that her mentor gave very limited guidance and did not observe her until the end of her teaching lesson. Some pre-service teachers also mentioned that they were scared to disturb their mentor teachers and this indicates that they do not have a close relationship nor good communication with one another. Several pre-service teachers also indicated that their mentor teacher interrupt them in class while they were teaching in order to control the class. This makes the pre-service teachers feel that they are lacking in class control.

The themes feedback and relationship in the context of affective dimension relates to personal attributes in Hudson’s five-factor mentoring model. Hudson (2007) mentioned personal and interpersonal communication skills as key mentoring skills that mentor teacher should possess. The skills enable mentor teachers to build strong relationship with mentees and make the mentees feel supported. Based on the data, some mentor teachers and mentees had some challenges in building their mentor and mentee relationship.

**Professional**

Both mentor teachers and pre-service teachers highlighted on pedagogical knowledge in describing the issue related to professional dimension. Some mentor teachers highlighted that they feel they may not be competent in new teaching methods or assessment. They also feel that they may not be able to use particular current terms associated with 21st century teaching. For the pre-service teachers, they feel that demonstrations are required in the pedagogical aspect of their mentoring experience. They commented that having the mentor teachers showing them the way to use certain strategies or how to control class will be more effective than only giving them oral feedback. Some pre-service teachers reported that they were not clear on the way to strengthen their teaching as the feedback given on the pedagogical aspect was unclear.

In the aspect of professional dimension, the mentor teachers also highlighted that they lack in the knowledge of mentoring. Although some of them are experienced teachers, but they feel that mentoring is a skill that need to be acquired. They related that a guideline and training should be given to strengthen mentoring practice on the part of the mentor teachers.

**Technical**

One theme emerged under the technical dimension which is time limitation. Both mentor teachers and pre-service teachers converge in their feedback regarding time limitation. Both parties mentioned that due to the mentor teachers’ busy schedule, the mentoring sessions were limited. The pre-service teachers mentioned that some mentor teachers were occupied as they held administrative positions in the schools. Some mentor teachers were also always away for courses while some were reported as having overlapping time table with the pre-service teachers. Data from the mentor teachers echoed the issues mentioned by pre-service teachers. Some mentor teachers highlighted that they realized that they need to give time for conferencing with the pre-service teachers but were not able to manage the meetings with the mentee due to their busy schedule.

4. Conclusion

Mentoring has been highlighted as one of the key components in the development of pre-service teachers. Nevertheless, the challenges faced by both parties during mentoring experience have been reported by many scholars (Hakwendenda&Njobvu (2019), IntanSafinas et.al, 2017; Arrend and Beets, 2010; Kiggundu and
Nayimuli, 2009; Bradbury and Koballa, 2008). Data from the study have revealed the issues that affected mentor teachers and pre-service teachers during CEP. These issues that relate to affective, practical and technical dimensions provide evidence of the tensions and conflicts that occur during mentoring in the Malaysian teacher training context. The data further support the claims that mentoring requires a strong relationship between both mentor teacher and pre-service teacher (Hakwendenda & Njobvu; 2019, Intan Safinas et al., 2017; Eller, lev, & Feurer, 2014). The data also indicated that training and guidelines need to be given to mentor teachers to strengthen their knowledge, skills and values about mentoring. Partnership with schools is also crucial to assist mentor selection and mentor support.

This study has contributed to the growth and development of mentoring practice by providing evidence of the challenges that need to be addressed to make the program more effective and lead to the production of quality pre-service teachers.

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