



Challenges and Prospects for School Based Mentoring in the Professional Development of Student Teachers in Zimbabwe: Academics, Mentees and Mentors Perceptions

Maxwell C.C. Musingafi

Programme Coordinator, Development and Peace studies, Zimbabwe Open University, Masvingo Regional Campus, Zimbabwe

Racheal Mafumbate

Programme Coordinator, Counselling, Zimbabwe Open University, Masvingo Regional Campus, Zimbabwe

Abstract

In this qualitative study we sought to establish the usefulness of school based mentoring in the professional development of student teachers in Zimbabwe using schools in Masvingo urban as case studies. The central question guiding us in this study focuses on what student teachers and their mentors felt towards the current school based student teachers practicum supervision. Many contemporary authorities believe that an effective teacher training programme can be ensured when both the school and the college (department of teacher's training) work in tandem. They argue that whereas the college plays a leading role during the days of classroom-based theory exposition, this leading role is subsequently ceded to the field or school-based mentor. In the college, students are fed with theoretical concepts of the teaching and learning process. But these theories mean nothing if they do not guide practice. How then can we ensure that theories guide practice? Traditionally teaching practice (without mentors as we know them today) has been believed to be the best way of attaining this goal. In this study, most participants felt that both the college lecturer and an experienced and knowledgeable person in the school compound should supervise students on teaching practice. They agreed that school based supervision is of great value as it plays a critical role in the development of student teachers, but still it requires enough resources and the complementary role of the college professional supervisor.

Keywords: Mentoring, Value, School-based supervision, Student teacher, Professional development, College, Teaching practice.



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Asian Online Journal Publishing Group

Contribution/ Originality

The overall aim of this study is to contribute a theoretical framework that will help towards pre-service training of teachers and teaching practice in Zimbabwean high schools. The study aims at enlarging considerably the knowledge base and understanding of pre-service teacher training in Zimbabwe.

1. Introduction

As in all other applied social sciences, there is no universal theory on how students learn to teach despite the fact that there is an abundance of literature on learning to teach. Some studies, however, suggest that teachers do learn from their individual and collective experiences (Furlong and Maynard, 1995). In this paper we assess the value of school based mentoring in the development of student teachers using Christian College High School, Muccheke High School and Ndarama High School as case studies. In the first part of the paper we address theoretical underpinnings of the issues at stake before we explore the empirical evidence from our study in the second part. We close the discussion by drawing some conclusions and recommendations as determined by our findings in this study.

2. Terminology

Before we get deep into the discussion in this paper, it is important that we define some key concepts: Supervision, school-based supervisors, teaching practice and professional development. In this paper supervision refers to the act of assisting and assessing student teachers' performance. Its main concern is the improvement of classroom practice for the benefit of students, regardless of what else may be entailed. School-based supervisors include not only those who use the term in their title, but also school heads, deputy heads and all those who monitor the work of other teachers and help them to improve their performance at school level. Among these supervisors we find the student mentor. A mentor can simply be described as a teacher, guide, counsellor, sponsor or facilitator. Ehrich and Hansford (1999) see the generic meaning of a mentor as a 'father' figure who sponsors, guides and instructs a younger individual who is known as a protégé. Teaching practice is a form of work-integrated learning that is described as a period of time when student teachers are working in the school to receive specific in-service training in order to apply theory in practice (Kiggundu and Nayimuli, 2009). In this study we use the term teaching practice interchangeably with the term practicum. Generally, the concept of professional development refers to the growth of practitioners (teachers) in their profession. This is defined by Villegas-Remers (2003) as "a long-term process that includes regular opportunities and experiences planned systematically to promote growth and development in the profession".

3. Statement of the Problem

In the mid-1990s Zimbabwe replaced the traditional lecturer supervision teaching practice with the contemporary school based supervision and mentorship in the professional development of student teachers. The major argument for this shift was that the new approach created a more conducive environment for student teachers to translate what they have learned in the teacher education programme into practice during the practicum. The new approach would be implemented through the utilization of classroom practitioners as cooperating teachers (mentors) to monitor and supervise student teachers' teaching. How effective have the mentors been in performing the new task? What is the impression of both the student teachers and their mentors towards the new system?

4. Research Objectives

- to distinguish between the mentoring and the traditional approaches to teaching practice in Zimbabwe;
- to determine the value of the mentoring approach to teaching practice when compared to the traditional approach; and
- to establish views of both mentors and mentees to the current school based supervision in teaching practice in Zimbabwe; and
- to establish challenges faced in the implementation of the mentoring approach to teaching practice in Zimbabwe;

5. Methodology

This study is based on both theoretical and empirical data. A wide spectrum of sources was consulted to ensure a broad and balanced review of both primary and secondary sources of relevance. These include government policy documents, workshop reports and minutes, as well as published academic works, academic journals and magazines.

The scope of the empirical investigation was limited to six schools in the city of Masvingo: Christian College High School, Mucheke High School; Ndarama High school; Burombo Primary School; Chikato Primary School: and Shakashe Primary School.

Data was collected through the use of experiential observation, documented and interview data collection techniques. We conducted this study when one of us (the writers) was on teaching practice at Christian College High School in May-June 2014.

For the formal interviews, we sampled two student teachers and their mentors from each of the six participating schools. This made a total of twenty-four respondents. Since the sampling procedure was based on convenience sampling to ensure that both female and male respondents were equally represented, interviewees were given an option to either participate or decline participation. None of the approached participants declined to participate in the study

6. Literature Review

In this section we review arguments and findings from both theoretical literature and previous empirical studies in different countries. The purpose of this review is to put this study into its wider context.

6.1. The Concept of Teaching Practice

Teaching practice has been an integral component of teacher training since time immemorial. It gives student teachers experience in the actual teaching and learning environment (Ngidi and Sibaya, 2003; Marais and Meier, 2004; Perry, 2004). It serves as an introduction to the realities of the situation in the teaching profession. The experience also allows the student teacher an opportunity to determine whether he / she has made an appropriate choice. During the practicum, student teachers get the opportunity to try the art of teaching before actually getting into the real world of the teaching profession (Kasanda, 1995). Thus it can be concluded that teaching practice provides for the real interface between studenthood and membership of the teaching profession. As such, teaching practice creates a mixture of anticipation, anxiety, excitement and apprehension in the student teachers as they commence their teaching practice (Manion *et al.*, 2003; Perry, 2004). But what does the term teaching practice mean?

Teaching practice is the practical component of all teacher training and development programmes the world over. It is, however, known by different but related terms. Some of such terms include: the practice teaching, student

teaching, teaching practice, field studies, infield experience, school based experience, practicum or internship (Taneja, 2000). Thus teaching practice covers all the learning experiences of student teachers in their host schools. The term has three major connotations: the practicing of teaching skills and acquisition of the role of a teacher; the whole range of experiences that students go through in schools; and the practical aspects of the course as distinct from theoretical studies (Ibid). Thus, as observed by Marais and Meier (2004), teaching practice represents the whole range of experiences to which student teachers are exposed when they work in classrooms and schools.

Marais and Meier (2004), 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 teachers' performance during teaching practice and may in the long run affect their perception of the teaching profession (Quick and Sieborger, 2005).

The aims of teaching practice are to provide opportunities for student teachers to integrate theory and practice and work collaboratively with and learn from experienced teachers. In the ideal situation student teachers observe subject teachers at work so as to learn about teachers' skills, strategies and classroom achievements. These student teachers also evaluate their own teaching experiences through discussions with teachers and lecturers; and through self-reflection and implementation of a variety of approaches, strategies and skills. All this is done so as to bring about meaningful learning. This results in student teachers gaining experience in managing and evaluating class work; in maintaining discipline and order in the classroom; find their own teaching style and personality and become acquainted with school organisation and administration.

Menter (1989) notes that there has been a shift in the literature from the concept of traditional teaching practice (associated with an apprenticeship model) to the concept of field/school experience (associated with an experiential model). Lave and Wenger (1991) point out that however way it may be envisaged, the notion of teaching practice is entrenched in experience-based learning initiated by Dewey (1938), Vygotsky (1978) social cognitive theory, and founded in the premise of situated learning. Consequently as suggested by the South African Norms and Standards for Educators (Republic of South Africa, 2000), teaching practice is meant to provide for the authentic context within which student teachers are exposed to experience the complexities and richness of the reality of being a teacher. This brings us to the concept of mentoring, in this case school based supervision.

6.2. Mentoring and School Based Supervision

Anderson and Sharmon as captured in Heung-Ling (2003) view mentoring as a nurturing process in which a more skilled or more experienced person serving as a role model teaches, espouses, encourages, counsels and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional and or personal development. In the teaching profession, mentoring deals with assisting student-teachers to learn how to teach in school-based settings (Tomlison, 1995). Thus, schools that provide mentoring programmes assign a veteran teacher to act as adviser, teacher, and coach to beginning teachers within their schools.

In education, mentoring evolved from the concept of traditional teaching practice which has been an important component of becoming a teacher. We have already observed that teaching practice (and now in its mentoring form) grants student teachers experience in the actual teaching and learning environment. The mentoring relationship has as its core purpose the professional development of the student teacher through the counsel and guidance of the mentor. It is argued that a successful mentoring relationship provides positive outcomes for both the mentee and mentor through the expansion of knowledge, skill, energy and creativity. According to Harris and Wiggans (1993), mentoring is based on the workplace learning model of teacher professional development. It offers the opportunity to integrate theoretical and practical elements in the experience of the student teacher and also offers to enable the development of relevant knowledge bases and practical skills.

It has been observed that college supervisors are of critical importance to the development of student teachers and typically fulfill a constructive, supervisory role in providing feedback to their interns Gimbert and Nolan (2003). In the traditional perspective of teaching practice supervision, college supervisors periodically visit the student teaching site to observe and evaluate the teaching performances of student teachers (Anderson and Radencich, 2001). However, Slick (1997) argue that college supervisors are many times seen as outsiders who enter the classroom infrequently, which may be perceived as posing a threat to the mentor and student teacher alike. In comparison to the literature on the other members of the triad, the research examining the perspectives of college supervisors is rather sparse and outdated (Brown and Steadman, 2011). Brown and Steadman (2011) speculate the reason for the lack of research on college supervisors by stating:

In part, the absence of research on the work of university supervisors may reflect the tension that exists between the conceptual and pragmatic aspects of teacher education. Teacher education classes often focus on theoretical aspects of teaching, while university supervisors often concentrate on the practical application of such theories.

Despite the possible knowledge base and mentoring capabilities of college supervisors, mentor teachers have been cited as the most influential individual in shaping student teachers' practices and beliefs (Killian and Wilkins, 2009). As such, studies have supported the need to provide careful selection procedures and proper preparation for the roles and responsibilities of mentor teachers (Alger and Kopcha, 2009; Killian and Wilkins, 2009). Other issues include the ill-defined responsibilities and expectations for all individuals involved in the triad relationship (Silva and Dana, 2001; Gimbert and Nolan, 2003; Alger and Kopcha, 2009), as well as, the lack of effective communication among them (Alger and Kopcha, 2009).

It is therefore critical that college supervisors and mentor teachers effectively work together to prepare student teachers for the varied challenges they will encounter in the classroom (Brown and Steadman, 2011). However, college supervisors are frequently pressed for time and limited in the amount of time they can spend in the field with

observing, evaluating, and providing feedback primarily due to other demands and responsibilities including teaching, research, and various service commitments (Anderson and Radencich, 2001).

Most teachers claim that the most important elements in their professional education were the school experiences found in student teaching (Guyton and McIntyre, 1990). Student teaching is the culminating experience in a teacher education programme. For good or ill, this experience has a significant impact on the student teacher who must juggle the responsibilities of teaching while establishing and developing relationships with one or more mentors and a college supervisor. Student teachers are surrounded not only by other adults who share in certain power relationships with them but also with children with whom they share a different sort of power relationship (Anderson and Radencich, 2001).

It is thus argued that an effective teacher training programme can be ensured when both the school and the college (department of teacher's training) work in tandem. In the department, students are exposed to theoretical concepts of the educational psychology, management of classroom, teacher taught relationship and various philosophies dealing with education. Teaching practice is a time when all these learned concepts have to be applied successfully in real life situations.

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6.3. The Relationship among Student Teachers, Mentors and College Lecturers

The major weakness of supervision practices in traditional teaching practice is segmentation and isolation of the supervision processes. The college gives students theories of teaching based on written literature. When these student teachers go to their host schools for practicum they receive traditional advice from experienced teachers. There is a barrier between teachers, colleges and schools. The initial teacher-training course involves student teachers trying to learn in different sites: colleges and schools with two sets of personnel, a tutor and school mentor. As observed by Furlong and Maynard (1995), this poses problems for a student teacher who perceives a lack of coherence in the learning on two sites.

Practices in schools do not influence theories in colleges and, theories in colleges are not fully welcomed in schools, hence development of college/school conflicts as reported by some students who reported negative teaching practice experiences. Student teachers supervision by college lecturers is based on theories of teaching and learning from various authors, whereas in schools, mentors base their supervision on practical experience. The supervised students seem not to offer any input to the supervision process, but are supposed to conform and accept mentor/headmaster supervision model, and also supposed, silently, to accept comments from college tutors without question, otherwise they risk getting mediocre marks/grades. It is against such background situation that mentorship and a blended supervision model has been developed in most countries.

Blended supervision is an interactive cyclical approach to supervision of student teachers premised upon what Cogan (1973) and Goldhammer (1969) espoused as reflective practice, collegiality and collaboration. They regard blended supervision as the major cornerstone of any strategy which is likely to succeed in improving teaching. Berlak and Berlak (1981) raised similar when they observed that, 'We have some evidence that teachers learn their craft largely from one another'.

The starting point for the student teachers is to observe how the mentor and the college tutor teach. Slowly they begin to develop their own experiential and practical theories. Through collaborative teaching, student teachers become 'insiders', planning along experienced teachers and discussing jointly taught lessons afterwards. Through collaborative teaching, student teachers have legitimate peripheral participation (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). Legitimate peripheral participation is a situation whereby a novice has a legitimate right to be an insider to a complex process and is thus progressively guided to take over more and more responsibility for that performance. It is by reflecting on teaching, thinking about it and trying to express it in words that student teachers begin to transform the behaviour they have copied into concepts and theories which they own for themselves. This reflective process is strengthened if it is systematically supported by an experienced teacher in the form of a mentor.

7. The Evolution of Teaching Practice in Zimbabwe

Teaching Practice is a major and central course in teacher education in Zimbabwe. At independence in 1980 student teachers were treated as apprentices and they taught under the supervision of experienced teachers. This, however, changed in 1982, because of the high demand for teachers in the country. The situation forced the government to engage student teachers as full-time teachers with classes to themselves.

As the teacher availability improved in the late 1990s student teachers were again placed under the guidance and mentorship of qualified and experienced professionals. Since then the 2-5-2 teacher training model is used in teacher training colleges in Zimbabwe. During the first two terms student teachers are in residence at the training college. They then spend five school terms doing teaching practice at a host school. The last two school terms they go back to the training college for preparation of their final examinations.

The training institutions are responsible for deployment of students for teaching practice. Also, all effort is made to attach students to competent qualified teachers by closely liaising with school heads. The supervision of these student teachers is done through coordinated partnership between school personnel and college lecturers.

8. Empirical Findings

In this section we discuss findings from the empirical studies at the six schools. For the purpose of promoting anonymity, since our sample per school was very small, we tend to generalise the findings rather than being specific.

We start by looking at the demographic characteristics of participants before we get into their perceptions towards mentoring in teaching practice.

8.1. Demography of Participants

At the secondary schools, the conveniently sampled participants were distributed by discipline as follows:

- Christian College High school: male student teacher and his mentor from the languages department and female student teacher and her male mentor from the sciences department, making a total of 3 male participants and 1 female participant (see Table 1 below);
- Mucheke High School: male student teacher and his female mentor from the languages department and female student teacher and her male mentor from the commercials department, making a total of 2 male participants and 2 female participant (see Table 1 below); and
- Ndarama High School: male student teacher and his female mentor from the Sciences department and female student teacher and her female mentor from the commercials department, making a total of 1 male participant and 3 female participants (see Table 1 below).

Table 1 below summarises the distribution of the twenty-four interview respondents. The table shows that all participants were at the age of 21 years and above; all student teachers were in the 21 – 29 age group; male and female student teachers respondents were equally represented at 25% each; all the 6 mentors were above 30 years old; and mentors were also equally represented at 25% male and 25% female. Since the study participants were conveniently sampled, response rate was at 100%.

Table-1. Distribution of participants

School	Status	Sex	Age Group (Years)				Total
			Under 20	21 – 29	31 – 39	40 and above	
Christian College High School	Mentor	Male	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (8.4)	2 (8.4)
		Female	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Mentee	Male	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)
		Female	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)
Mucheke High School	Mentor	Male	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	1 (4.2%)
		Female	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)
	Mentee	Male	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)
		Female	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)
Ndarama High School	Mentor	Male	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
		Female	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	1 (4.2%)	2 (8.4%)
	Mentee	Male	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)
		Female	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)
Buroombo Primary School	Mentor	Male	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	1 (4.2%)
		Female	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	1 (4.2%)
	Mentee	Male	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)
		Female	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)
Chikato Primary School	Mentor	Male	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
		Female	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	1 (4.2%)	2 (8.4%)
	Mentee	Male	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)
		Female	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)
Shakashe Primary School	Mentor	Male	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)
		Female	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	1 (4.2%)
	Mentee	Male	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)
		Female	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.2%)
Grand Total			0 (0%)	12 (50%)	4 (17)	8 (33)	24 (100%)

Source: Primary data

At the primary schools, the conveniently sampled participants were distributed by grade as follows:

- Buroombo Primary school: male student teacher and his female mentor from Grade five and female student teacher and her male mentor from Grade three, making a total of 2 male participants and 2 female participant (see Table 1)
- Chikato Primary School: male student teacher and his female mentor from Grade seven and female student teacher and her female mentor from Grade four, making a total of 1 male participant and 3 female participants (see Table 1); and
- Shakashe Primary School: male student teacher and his female mentor from Grade six and female student teacher and her female mentor from Grade two, making a total of 1 male participant and 3 female participants (see Table 1).

8.2. Respondents' Comparative Understanding of Mentoring in Teaching Practice

The following are unedited sample definitions of mentoring in teaching practice by both student teachers and their mentors:

Sample student teachers:

- teaching attachment in which student is put under the supervision of an experienced teacher who guides and monitors his / her teaching (female, primary school);

- this involves the student teacher being assisted by an experienced teacher who becomes his or her supervisor throughout the teaching practice period (male, primary school);
- mentoring in teaching practice involves the student teacher observing experienced teachers teaching before he / she also practices teaching under the guidance of an experienced teacher (female, secondary school); and
- this is teaching practice in which the student teacher is attached to somebody (male, secondary school).

Sample mentors:

- mentoring is whereby an experienced teacher takes the father and consultant role to a student teacher attached to him / her, and in ideal situations such student teacher would not have an independent teaching load as the student teacher and the mentor would take turns in teaching whilst the other is observing and critiquing the teaching and learning process (male, secondary school);
- mentoring in teaching practice is a two way process in which, although the mentor takes the fatherly role, both the student teacher and the mentor learn from each other as they observe and critique each other in action (female, secondary school);
- this is a situation where we have student teachers assigned to a senior and experienced teacher for the purpose of teaching (male, primary school); and
- mentoring is about putting student teachers under the supervision of an experienced teacher so that they learn the practice of teaching from the experienced teacher (female, primary school).

The above sample definitions of mentoring show that respondents had some idea of what mentoring is all about. It is therefore concluded that their answers to thematic or research questions were a true reflection of their experiences and what they felt towards mentoring in relation to the traditional teaching practice.

8.3. Mentoring At Primary and Secondary School in Zimbabwe

In this study we established that sometimes mentoring is implemented differently at secondary school and primary school levels. Unlike in the primary school where mentors and mentees always teach the same grade, in the secondary school there are cases where the mentee teaches different classes. Whereas all mentees in the 12 case studies at primary school level taught the same classes as their mentors, there were two cases where mentees had independent classes. The head of department concerned explained this scenario as a temporary arrangement to cater for a situation that had arisen due to the fact that some established teachers were on leave. The mentees were thus used as relief teachers. The major challenge with mentor and mentee teaching different classes is that some mentors may fail to provide regular coaching and feedback. Coaching and feedback are essential for pre-service teachers to know areas they are doing well in or need to improve on.

8.4. School Based Mentoring Versus Traditional Approaches to Teaching Practice

Most respondents felt that school based mentoring would yield better results than the traditional approach to teaching practice. Following are sampled responses from both student teachers and their mentors.

‘For most of us teaching practice is our first time to stand in front of a crowd. We lack confidence and sometimes shak in front of pupils. Having someone experienced to show you how it is done is quite beneficial. My mentor started by teaching the class whilst I observed her teaching and also participated in the discussions. With time I also started conducting lessons whilst she observed and participated in the discussions. It was easy for me to perform because she had instilled confidence in me. The only big challenge came when we organised group lesson observations in which other teachers and my peers had to observe me teaching, and when the headmaster came to observe me teaching. On both these occasions I shook, but very few people noticed, one of them my mentor who would quickly bring back my confidence by simply nodding (you can do it). All these occasions were a success because I got high ratings, praises and handshakes after the lessons. These opportunities are not provided for in the traditional teaching practice where both the college supervisors and school based supervisors (the headmaster and the deputy headmaster) just pop in as some strangers to assess your performance. With school based mentoring you are at home in a family set up where you feel no one is thinking bad of you’ (female primary school mentee).

‘My experience is like this. My mentor gave me her schemes and lesson plans to peruse through before making my own schemes and lesson plans. This gave me an opportunity to compare what we were taught at the college with how they do it at school. There wasn’t much difference, of course. She then asked me to scheme and plan for the next three weeks lessons. Although I planned for these lessons, she led the lessons in the first and second week such that when I took over the leading role in the third week I had built a lot of confidence. I had already established rapport with my students. Even when the college supervisors came for assessment, I was fully prepared for them. Yes, I would have finally got the professional experience required through traditional teaching practice, but it would not have been as quick as the mentoring experience. At college we are given educational theories. These have to be complimented with field knowledge from experienced practitioners’ (male secondary school mentee).

‘When I found myself attached to a male mentor my heart sank. How would I conduct myself? I don’t know what got into me. I simply saw an abusive relationship ahead. The fact that he was still young increased my fears. In our first discussion I was apprehensive. What was this man planning to do with me? But, to my surprise, the relationship remained friendly, helpful and professional. In fact I ended up being ashamed of myself’ --- (female secondary school mentee).

‘Yes, this is a very good innovation. We have been supervising these student teachers since long back. The new approach, however, calls for more collaborative work between the college supervisor, the student and the school based mentor. Perhaps the only challenge for some of us is that we were not oriented in the new system. At least some form of capacity building would have been helpful. Otherwise we are working well. The new approach is very welcome (male primary school mentor).

8.5. Challenges to School Based Mentoring in Zimbabwe

However, from the researchers' experience as student teachers and the discussion with research participant we observed that school based mentoring in Zimbabwe comes with its own challenges that may militate against the drive for quality education if they are not addressed. Some of the challenges affecting this contemporary approach to teaching practice in Zimbabwe are the following:

- lack of formal training of school based mentors, who, in most cases, were not equipped with any specific mentoring skills by colleges during their training days at college;
- at secondary school level some mentors just had academic degrees and several years teaching experience without any education professional qualification;
- the 2-5-2 Teacher Training Model means that the pre-service students spend more time in the schools than in the colleges, yet, as observed above, there are no teachers trained in mentoring and coaching to support students for professional growth;
- from the discussions in the interviews and our experiences as student teachers we found that mentoring end up creating a close relationship between mentors and mentees such that subjectivity replaces objectivity – yet mentors are part of student teachers assessors (see student teachers narratives in 8.4.1); and
- with the current poor economic environment in the country, most schools operate without required resources and this tends to negatively affect the effectiveness of school based mentoring as demonstrated in the case where mentees had full and independent loads because their mentors were on vacation leave

9. Conclusion

In this study both mentors and mentees were in agreement that the college supervisors and school based supervisors should work together in the supervision of student teachers on teaching practice. They argue that this holistic approach would help in bridging the gap between theory and practice by making sure that lecturers work together with experienced practitioners. As such segmentation and isolation of the supervision processes is avoided. This translates to what Cogan (1973) and Goldhammer (1969) espoused as reflective practice, collegiality and collaboration, or simply blended supervision. We thus agree with these authors and many others (among them (Blumberg, 1980; Berlak and Berlak, 1981) that blended supervision is the major cornerstone of any strategy which is likely to succeed in improving teaching. Collaboration and blended supervision harmonises the diversity of supervisory belief-systems between and among student teachers, mentors and college lecturers.

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