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The Effects of Mentoring Programme Practices on the Retention of Novice Primary School Teachers in Bahi District, Tanzania

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Abstract: This study explored the influence of mentoring programme practices on the retention of novice primary school teachers in Bahi District-Tanzania. The study was conducted in ten primary schools of Bahi District involving 10 head teachers, 120 novice primary school teachers. The study was exploratory in nature, based on a descriptive survey involving ex-post facto research design. To achieve the objectives of the study interview and likert scale questionnaires were used for data collection. The findings of this study suggest that most of the visited primary schools had mentoring programmes for novice teachers. The study also revealed that mentoring programmes practiced in Bahi District has had an indirect impact on retention of novice teachers. Generally, it was concluded that the mentoring programme practice by the school contribute to novice teachers' retention.

Keywords: *Mentor, mentoring program, mentorship, novice teachers, retention*

1.0 Introduction

Research in other contexts has highlighted the importance of mentoring programmes for novice teachers at school. Mentoring programmes are necessitated by the large number of graduates who, in spite of formal training, do not feel sufficiently prepared to overcome teaching challenges such as student discipline or completion of management tasks associated with teaching (Koerner and Baumgartner, 2002; Ambrosetti, 2014). Related to this problem, is that some of the novice teachers are assigned to teach the most difficult subjects or classroom/students for which they are inadequately prepared and unfortunately lack adequate support from expert teachers in this regard (Boniface, 2016). As a result, novice teachers can become frustrated, with many deciding to leave the teaching profession only a few years after employment (Boyer and Gillespie, 2000).

Research has indicated that lack of support for these teachers upon their transition from pre-service to first year teaching has contributed to this problem (Ragins and Kram, 2008; Potemski and Matlach, 2014; Mulkeen, *et al*., 2007). They also added that most of the novice teachers become frustrated because they are unable to implement what they learned at their teacher training colleges. This creates what has been described as a transition shock for novice teachers in their new teaching environments (Moir and Gless, 2001). Pre-service programmes have been found to be insufficient preparation for graduate student-teachers in this regard (Malisa, 2015; Keilwitz, 2014; Kavenuke, 2013; Kardos, 2004). This being the case, there is a high need for other strategies to support novice teachers in their transition from teacher training to teaching practice. This study examines one such intervention that of experienced teachers to mentor novice teachers to orient them with the teaching and learning procedures and practices at

school. Mentoring refers to the personal guidance provided, usually by seasoned veterans, to beginning teachers in schools (Jorissen, 2002).

Globally, it is maintained that the novice teachers mentoring programmes at school are pivotal for staff retention among other things. For example, Breaux and Wong (2003) reported that 33 percent of novice teachers in the USA leave the profession within the first three years due teaching challenges. Most importantly, Darling-Hammond (2003) found that more than half novice teachers will leave teaching profession after only five years, after failing to cope with teaching and classroom management challenges. In a similar manner, in Sub-Saharan African countries, studies also show teacher retention to be a problem in education. For example, Hobson *et al.* (2009) reported a high rate of turnover in countries such as Lesotho, Uganda, Malawi and Tanzania has been associated with lack of adequate mentoring programmes. This is happening while schools are claiming to provide mentoring to novice teachers. It is therefore important to investigate the current status of mentoring programmes provided to novice teachers and whether there is any association between mentoring programmes and teachers retention levels. This question is examined through this study of staff perceptions of mentoring programmes in Bahi District in Dodoma region, Tanzania.

2.0 Research Methodology

This study was conducted in Bahi District in Dodoma Region, Tanzania. The selection of this district was appropriate in that it has the highest rate of novice teachers' turnover in Dodoma Region (Dodoma regional data, 2015). The current study was exploratory in nature based on a descriptive survey involving ex-post facto research design. Conversely, ex-post research design is defined as a research design in which the independent variable had already manifested and a researcher seeks to find the relationships between independent and dependent variables after an action or event has already occurred (Creswell, 2012). Since the researcher's goal was to determine whether the independent variable (mentoring programme) had any effect on the outcome of dependent variable (novice teachers' retention). The target population comprised of all novice teachers from 2010 to 2015 and were still working at Bahi District as well as heads of school at this district. The choice of the sample was determined by a representative sample, whereby 120 novice teachers currently working at the district and 10 heads of schools were selected using a purposive random sampling technique. Interview guidelines and questionnaires were used in data collection. Interviews were conducted with heads of schools to have their views on the status of mentoring programme and its influence on novice teachers' retention. For further authentic information about the status of the mentoring programme and its influence on novice teachers' retention, questionnaires were used to capture the experience of novice teachers about the nature of the mentoring programme and how the current mentoring programme influenced their retention in current working station. All interviews and questionnaire were exclusively in Kiswahili language and the responses were translated into English language. This was done to allow the respondents use the language in which they are more confident.

In order to estimate the reliability of the effects of mentoring on teachers' retention, the researcher administered the survey to 120 novice primary school teachers at first. After administering the test, the researcher scrutinized all the answer-scripts thoroughly. In this process, 6 respondents they did not return their questionnaire. The remaining 114 test scripts were included in data analysis. In this stage, *Cronbach's Alpha* and *Split-half* methods were

employed to estimate reliability coefficient. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was found 0.85 while Split-half reliability coefficient was found 0.86. This indicates that the mentoring programme scale was highly reliable. On the other hand, all the instruments were further subjected to validity test. Categorically, validation of the instruments was carried out by taking expert opinions in account. Data in this study were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively in two phases. First, qualitative data obtained from interviews and the open ended questionnaire was subject to qualitative content analysis. Second, quantitative data was coded into a coding sheet and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science software (SPSS 21.0). Mainly, both descriptive statistics (mean, and standard deviation) and inferential statistical techniques (Chi-square, Independent sample t-test) were used.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Status of Mentoring Programme Practices

As it can be seen from Table 1, majority of the teachers agreed that novice teachers were welcomed by school management and introduced to teachers, students and supporting staff as well as school surrounding. Almost, 105 (92.1%) teachers agreed with the statement that "As I arrived to this school, the school management welcomed and introduced me to teachers, students, supporting staff and school surroundings." This result suggests that on their arrival novice teachers were introduced to teachers, students and supporting staff by school management. Similarly, 81(71.1%) teachers agreed with the notion that "I receive orientation about school culture and infrastructure when I first came to this school."

Table 1: Teachers' views on status of mentoring programme

S/N	Statement	Agree		Disagree	
		F	%	F	%
1	As you arrived to this school, the school management welcomed and introduced you to teachers, students, supporting staff and school surroundings?	105	92.1	9	7.9
2	Did you receive any orientation about school culture and infrastructure when you first came to this school?	81	71.1	32	28.1
3	Did you get mentoring support on social and economic affairs?	66	57.9	48	42.1
4	Did you get guidance or coaching when preparing for teaching from peers?	86	75.5	28	24.6
5	Are formal mentoring programs available at your school, ward or district level?	58	50.9	56	49.1
6	Were the mentors willing and ready to help develop workable lesson plans? (joint lesson plans)	85	74.9	29	25.4
7	Did you get support when working with other staff Members? (peer collaboration)	103	90.4	11	9.6
8	Have you ever done any co-teaching with your mentor?	62	54.4	52	45.6
9	Do you get supportive communication with your leaders at school? (Heads of School, Academic Master, Second Master).	106	93	8	7
10	Have received support on classroom management from peers?	111	97.4	3	2.6

Source: Field data, 2017

The study also revealed almost 85(74.9%) of the novice teachers agreed that the mentors were willing and ready to help them to develop workable lesson plans (joint lesson plans). This result indicates that novice teachers received mentorship in lesson preparation. Experienced teachers helped novice teachers to prepare lesson plan. This was also supported by most 103(90.4%) of

the teachers who agreed with the notion that "I get support when working with other staff Members" (peer collaboration). Table 1 presents the summary of the study findings.

With regard to whether novice teachers received classroom management support from experienced teachers, data in the Table 1 show that a majority (111 responses or 97.4%) of teachers agreed that they have received support on classroom management from peers. It is evident that novice teachers got mentorship on classroom management from their few peer teachers. The study also revealed that novice teachers received community support from school leaders. 103 respondents (90.4%) agreed with the notion that "Do you get supportive communication with your leaders at school? (Heads of School, Academic Master, Second Master). This was also supported by interview findings from heads of schools. During one semi-structured interview, the head of school A had this to say:

Whenever a novice teacher reports to this school, I must take off the position to welcome her/him to our school. Then, I introduce him/her to all other teaching and non-teaching staff. Thereafter, introduction is similarly done to all students so that they are also known to them (Interview with the Head of School A: 9th August, 2017).

Another head of School F seemed to provide similar observation:

For teachers who come to our school for the first time, it is my duty as head of school to welcome and introduce them to all staff and students. I usually talk with novice teachers about the history of the school as well as the school culture. Furthermore, the introduction of novice teachers to other colleagues is done during teachers' meeting after breakfast. Besides, during the morning assemble, the novice teachers are introduced to the students before they meet them in the classes (Interview with the head of School F: 17th August, 2017).

The two preceding quotes have indicated that the heads of school had the role of welcoming novice teachers in the school environment. The introduction practice familiarizes novice teachers to the school to feel comfortable with their new working environment. This suggests that some forms of mentorship were practiced in all selected primary schools. Mentoring according to Ganser (2002) refers to ongoing systematic support and training for novice teachers before the first day of school and continuing throughout the first three or four years of teaching. Due to its necessity, UNESCO (2005) shows that more than 65% of schools visited in developed countries provided some form of support services for teachers at the beginning of their careers. Furthermore, Odell and Huling (2000) and Mulkeen and Crowe-Taft, (2010) argue that in recent years, school systems have acknowledged the importance of providing guidance and support for all teachers transitioning in their first years of teaching. Voluntary Services Overseas (2007) also asserts that mentoring has numerous objectives such as socialization, assessment and adjustment of novice teachers to new work places.

3.2 Forms of mentorship offered to novice teachers

The questionnaire also revealed that a majority (96 responses or 84.2%) mentioned classroom management support as the most common form of mentorship they received. 90 respondents (78.9%) said that joint lesson plan preparation was provided, while 78 (68.4%) respondents also highlighted emotional support as a component of mentoring received.

Table 2: Forms of mentorship offered to novice teachers in selected schools

S/N	Forms of mentoring	Agree		Disagree	
		F	%	f	%
1	Emotional support	78	68.4	36	31.6
2	Classroom management support	96	84.2	18	15.8
3	Supportive collaboration	61	53.5	51	44.5
4	Team teaching	66	57.9	48	42.1
5	Reflection activities	67	58.8	47	41.2
6	Joint lesson plan preparation	90	78.9	24	21.1
7	Social and welfare orientation	61	53.5	51	44.5
8	School routes orientations	79	69.3	35	30.7

Source: Field data, 2017

It is evident from Table 2 that 79 (69.3%) of teachers said they were also oriented on school routines while 61 (53.5%) said were given social and welfare orientation. One head of school, 'F' had this to say in a semi structured interview:

Team teaching is done by both veterans and less experienced teachers where they volunteered their personal properties for teaching purposes. Less experienced teachers are ought to have teaching aids as TV, CDs, flashes with full of notes and questions for students to learn easily. This team teaching facilitated better performances to students in all subjects than one man show teaching (Interview with Head of School F: 17th August, 2017).

It can be deduced that experienced teachers supported the less experienced by volunteering their teaching properties so as to make novice teachers able to teach well through the available teaching and learning processes. This finding concurs with Walker (2003), who suggests that team teaching helps novice teachers to adjust well in their teaching profession. They hence, recommended that supporting novice beginning teachers should be perceived as a continuum, which begins with personal and emotional support and extends to specific task-related support. Also, Wenestam (1999) found that school mentoring systems may assist novice teachers in learning professional responsibilities and having a positive impact on student achievement. Wildman *et al*. (1999) recommended that both instruction-related support and psychological support are necessary to novice teachers.

3.3 The Correlates of Mentoring Proramme Practices with Novice Teachers' Retention

In order to see the association between mentoring programme practices and overall teachers' retention, analysis and interpretation were completed as part of the study. Coefficients of correlation between mentoring programme and novice teachers' retention with respect to total sample study is provided in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation between mentoring programme practice and retention of novice primary school teachers (N=114)

Variables	Coefficient of correlation	Level of Significance
Retention programme practices Retention of novice primary school teachers	.70	.01 Level

Source: Field data, 2017

Table 3 reveals that the co-efficient of correlation between mentoring programme practices and retention of novice primary school teachers with respect to total sample study is .70, which is significant beyond .01 level. It indicates that, the relationship between the two variables is positive and a high significant positive relationship is found between mentoring programme practices and retention of primary school teachers. It suggests that, with the increase in mentoring programme practices, the retention of novice primary school teachers increases to a great extent and with the decrease in mentoring programme practices, the level of novice teachers' retention is likely to decrease to a great extent. Thus, it can be interpreted that, mentoring programme seems to reveal a strong positive association with the novice teachers' retention in primary schools. Therefore, Hypothesis-1 (Hy-1) of the present study which projected that, there exists a significant positive relationship between mentoring programme practices and retention of novice primary school teachers is retained for the total sample of the study. This finding concurs with Nziku (2013) and Lucas (2001) who found support offered to novice teachers increase their retention possibility. Similarly, Little (1999) study found that there was a significant relationship between teachers' retention and mentorship. The study found that novice comers, who did not received mentorship left the teaching career with 20%. On other hand, novice comers who received mentorship had reduced attrition of 11.8. novice comers with mentors were less likely to leave teaching profession by 7.1%.

4.0 Conclusions of the Study

Basing on the research findings, it can therefore, concluded that, most of the primary schools visited had mentoring programme for novice teachers. And it was mostly provided in form of introduction, orientation, social and economic affairs, coaching support in teaching and learning activities, classroom management as well as supportive collaboration. It was also concluded that, provision of mentoring programme to novice primary school teachers had significant contribution to rate of teachers' retention.

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