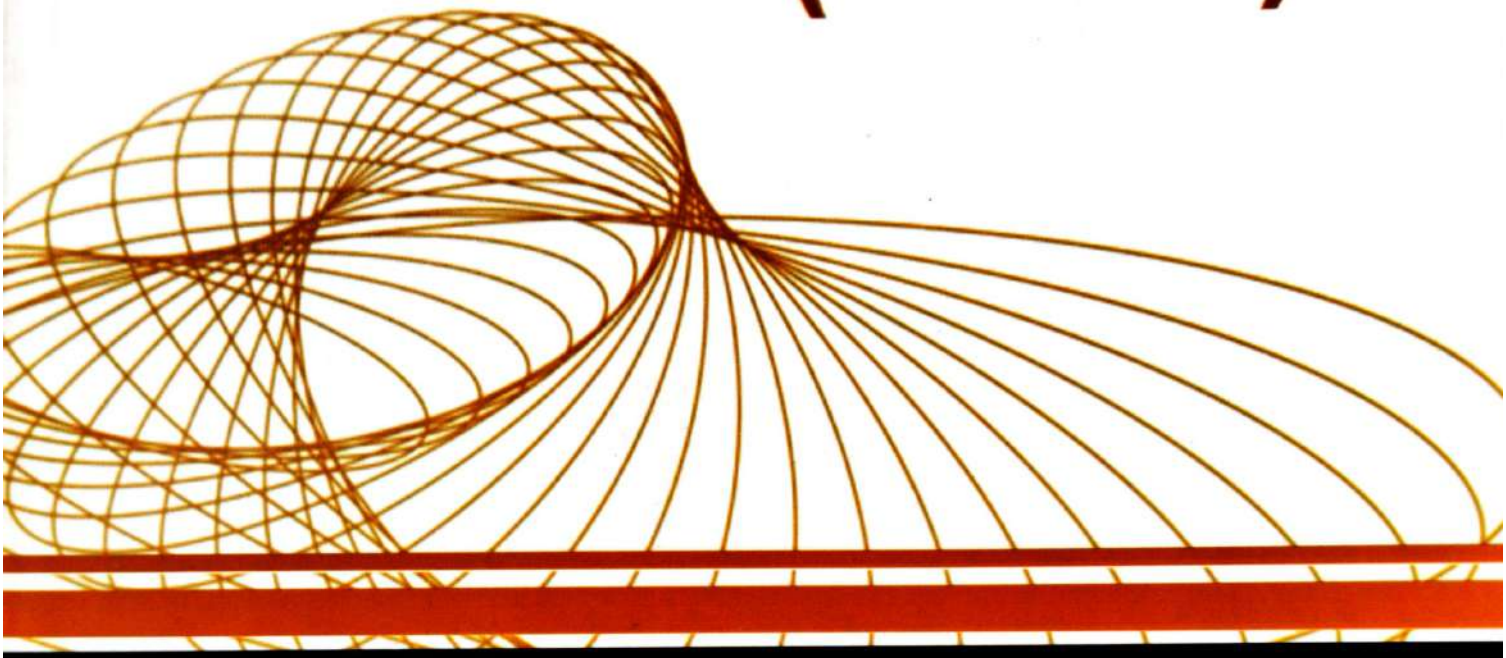
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ENHANCING MENTOR TEACHERS' COMMITMENT IN DURING TEACHING PRACTICE IN TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES: FACTORS, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Abstract
This study utilized a descriptive survey design to examine mentor teachers' level of commitment to teaching during teaching practice in teacher education programs. three research questions were raised for the study. The population were the pre-service teachers in faculty of education from three purposively sampled Universities in Ilorin. While the target population were the 400 level pre-service teachers from the sample institutions. The 400 level students were 3861 out of which 641 were sample using proportionate sampling procedure. A researcher-designed Likert scale questionnaire with a psychometric properties of content validity and a reliability index of 0.73 was the instrument used to elicit the needed data. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the data collected. Findings revealed that the level of commitment mentor teachers is low, and it is influenced by factors such as inadequate facilities, low qualifications, and poor remuneration. Recommendations include implementing mentor training programs, enhancing school facilities, and establishing clear selection criteria for mentor teachers. Addressing these factors is essential for improving the mentorship experience and enhancing the quality of teaching practice for pre-service teachers. By enhancing mentor teachers' commitment and support, teacher education programs can better prepare aspiring educators for their future roles.

Keywords: "Pre-service teachers", "Educator", "Teaching Practice", "Commitment" and "Facilities"

Introduction

Teaching practice occupies a key position in the teacher education program, serving as the culminating experience in teacher preparation; it offers beginning teachers the opportunity to practice in a real setting and be socialized into the teaching profession (Smith, 2020). Overall, the teaching practice experiences of pre-service teachers are determined by multiple integrated and interrelated factors, including the nature of the school environment for the teaching practice, the duration of the teaching practice exercise, the effectiveness of the teacher educator who evaluates the student teachers, the expertise of the mentor teachers, and the nature and consistency of the feedback received from both mentor teachers and teacher educators (Brown & Jones, 2019). A recent study has revealed that pre-service teachers face challenges with on-time placement in schools, placement in approved schools to undertake teaching practice, and supervision and mentoring during the teaching practice

(Johnson et al., 2021). Some schools, for example, while willing to accommodate pre-service teachers, may struggle with poor management, non-existent timetables, insufficient staff, and inadequate mentoring, all of which can be detrimental during teaching practice exercises and leave students feeling demotivated and disillusioned (Adams, 2022).

Teaching practice effectiveness is determined by several factors: adherence to the norms and standards that govern acceptable school-based-student teacher practice assessment and student-teacher assignment to teaching schools (Robinson, 2019). At the heart of the teaching experience are two relationships: one between mentor teachers and student teachers and the other between teacher educators and pre-service teachers in the assessment of their practices (Evans & Clarke, 2020).

Assessment plays a multifaceted role in supporting the process of learning, in judging student achievement about course requirements, and in maintaining standards of the profession (Garcia, 2021). As enacted in the teacher program, assessment assists teacher educators in the formative and summative evaluation of pre-service teachers when assigned for teaching practice in teaching schools (Miller, 2019). Doherty (1999:6) defines a mentor as: … a person who oversees the career and development of another person, usually a junior, through teaching, counselling, providing psychological support, protecting, and at times promoting or sponsoring.

Here is the rewritten text with updated authors for the references:

From the observation above, it is clear that the learning experience that pre-service teachers gather will depend on the practical and theoretical knowledge of the mentor with whom the pre-service teacher is placed. Available literature provides many definitions for the word mentor. Harrison (2022) defined a mentor as someone who is a trusted and experienced counsellor who can influence the career development of an associate in a warm, caring, and helpful relationship. Harrison admits that the definition of a mentor is elusive and varies according to the view of the author.

Mentoring is when an experienced teacher gives support to a student teacher during teaching practice. In underlining the important role of the school-based mentor, mentor teachers may serve as educational companions who help students or beginning teachers reflect on their experiences to gain insights that will support the development of their teaching skills. Mentor teachers who act as agents of change seek to break down barriers that prevent teachers from sharing, inquiring, and collaborating about their teaching. During the teaching practice session, the importance of 'significant others' is critical. Pre-service teachers are individuals who study to become teachers while working in schools under the supervision of a teacher. Also, a student teacher is a pre-service teacher who practices teaching in a school under the guidance of a licensed teacher. Additionally, student teachers are usually higher institution students who are completing their graduation requirements. They study to become educators or prepare themselves for careers in tutoring.

Commitment can be seen as the time, effort, and energy input towards the achievement of a set goal or objective. The state or quality of being dedicated to a particular cause or activity is the willingness to give your time and energy to a job, activity, or something that you believe in. According to Walker and Thompson (2021), "it entails a concern for the future and stability of the relationship

along with the desire for the relationship to continue." It is something that you must do or deal with that takes your time. Kim and Lee (2019) offer a further distinction, identifying three components of commitment: 'continuance,' 'normative,' and 'affective' commitment. These they describe as 'have to,' 'ought to,' and 'want to.' Each component of commitment has different behavioral outcomes though an individual may reflect varying degrees of all three components of commitment to a particular focus (Kim & Lee, 2019).

A key predictor of the desire to stay or leave is commitment to the organization (Chen, Huang, & Liu, 2020). Normative commitment is "the internalized normative pressure to act in a way which meets organizational goals and interests" (Park, 2018, p. 421). This has been studied extensively, especially in the "psychological contract" between an employer and employee (Nguyen, 2017). Affective commitment is described as "the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization" (Singh, Mishra, & Rao, 2020, p. 27). This is probably the most beneficial component of commitment for an organization to engender within its employees as it is associated with productive behavior aimed at contributing meaningfully to the organization (Kim & Lee, 2019). Behavior associated with affective commitment includes those defined as organizational citizenship behavior (Ali & Ahmed, 2018). These are behaviors that are "discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization" (Patel, 2019, p. 4). Employees with strong affective commitment appear more willing to engage in organizational citizenship behavior than those with weak affective commitment (Kim & Lee, 2019; Zhao & Xu, 2021).

Lack of interest in being a role model on the part of the teacher can be something that can determine the level of commitment and willingness of the teacher, the teacher might not see him/herself as someone worthy to be called a role model this may be due to lack of confidence in his/herself, he might not see himself as someone who has anything to offer to the student teacher thereby causing the teacher to lose interest in anything that has to do with the guidance of the Pre-service

For instance, a teacher who is just going to school for the fun of it and just to get paid his/her salary at the end of the month does not even understand the importance of being a mentor teacher such a teacher does not have the interest of the school at heart he/she is just concerned with going to the school at the set time, teaching the pupils or students and at the end of the month getting his salary such a teacher does not care about the well-being of the school or even protecting the image of the school because if the teacher really cares about the school and it's well being he would take playing the role of a mentor teacher very seriously and do it with all dedication, hence seeing to it that the school is well represented.

Level of reinforcement can also play a part in determining how committed a teacher will be towards the mentoring role. Human beings are wired in such a way that we tend to want to do more when we are getting the right rewards we are supposed to get and getting them at the right time, the reward in this context is the salary. The amount a teacher is being paid and the period a teacher is being paid might play a part in determining how responsive a teacher would be towards the mentoring

role. For instance, a teacher who has not eaten since probably the previous day or a teacher who is thinking about how to settle some bills at home like a child's school fees or accommodation issues, Such a teacher would not be keen about being the mentor teacher at that particular time he/she might not pay any attention at all to the student teacher who has been sent there to learn from him thereby making the purpose of the student teacher being sent to such school not to be achieved. Communication is important in interacting effectively and efficiently in any given society without communication to achieve certain things would be very difficult such as in the case of a mentor teacher and a student teacher because without effective communication it would be almost impossible for the mentor teacher to guide the student teacher. Willingness and obedience to the instructions passed by the mentor teacher can also determine the level at which communication would be effective between them If the student teacher is willing to learn and obeys every instruction that is given by the mentor teacher their relationship and communication will be hitch-free, But if the student teacher does not heed to instructions or take to corrections that might hinder the flow of effective communication and it can also put a strain on their relationship. The teacher might just be forced to neglect his/her responsibilities and leave the student teacher to be on his own due to the lack of adherence to the mentor teacher's instructions.

Statement of the Problem

The research work on mentor teachers' level of commitment to teaching during teaching practice was motivated by the recognition of the critical role that mentor teachers play in the development of pre-service teachers. Teaching practice is a fundamental component of teacher education programs, providing aspiring teachers with hands-on experience in real classroom settings. The quality of mentorship and guidance provided by mentor teachers during this period significantly impacts the professional growth and preparedness of pre-service teachers. Overall, the motivation behind this research work stemmed from a genuine interest in enhancing the mentorship experience for pre-service teachers, recognizing the pivotal role mentor teachers play in shaping the future generation of educators.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to assess Mentor Teacher's Level of Commitment to teaching during teaching practice. Specifically, the study examines;

a. Mentor Teacher's level of commitment to teaching during teaching practice.
b. Assessment of the factors that determine a teacher's level of commitment to teaching during teaching practice.
c. Possible solutions to the factors that affect Mentor Teacher's level of commitment.

Research Question

The following research questions guided this study;

a. What is the Mentor Teacher's level of commitment to teaching during teaching practice?

b. What are the factors that determine a Mentor Teacher's level of commitment to teaching?
c. What are the possible solutions to the factors that can affect Mentor Teachers' level of commitment to teaching?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive form of survey design used to examine pre-service teachers' responses to mentor teachers' level of commitment to teaching during teaching practice exercises. The population of this study consisted of Pre-service Teachers in the faculty of Education from three Universities in Ilorin, these are University of Ilorin, Kwara State University and Al-Hikimah University. The target population were the 400 level pre-service teachers of these sampled schools. The total population of the 400 level from the sampled school are 3861 in the ratio 3671 for University of Ilorin: 121 for Al-Hikimah University: 70 for Kwara State University respectively. A sample size of 641 were sampled in line with the Research Advisors' (2006) sample size table. It was analyzed and concluded that in a population of 3500 -5000 at a confidence level of 95%, and margin of error 3.5% is 641 respondents is appropriately sampled. Representing ratio 609:20:12 respectively.

A researcher's design four-Likert scale questionnaire was the only instrument used for eliciting the needed data from the respondents. The validity of this instrument was ascertained through content validity, while the reliability of this instrument was addressed using the split-half method adopted within a sample size not included in the main study. And a reliability index of 0.73 was obtained which meant that the instrument was reliable enough. self-administration of the questionnaire was adopted in the procedure of data collection. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data collected.

Results

The datL collected was analysed and presented as follows:

Research Question One: What is the mentor teacher's level of commitment to teaching during teaching practice?

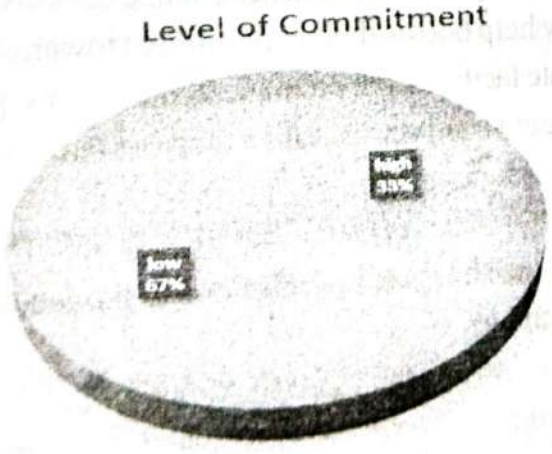


Fig.1: Percentage of mentor teacher's level of commitment to teaching pre-service teachers.

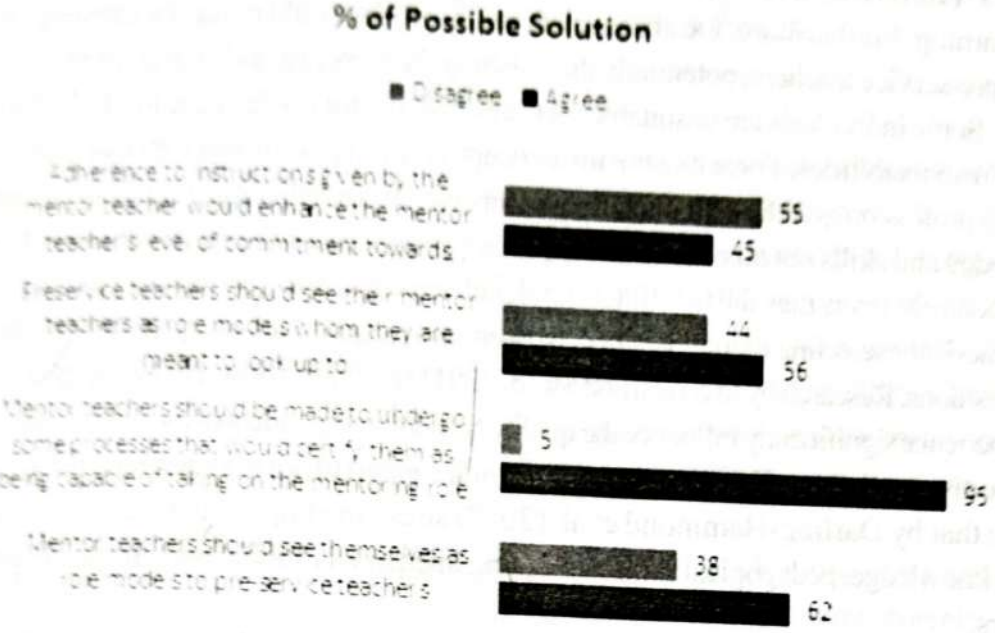


Figure 3: Percentage of possible solutions

Fig. 3 shows some likely solutions to some of the factors that can affect mentor teacher's level of commitment. The finding revealed that 95% agreed with the fact that mentor teachers should be made to undergo some due processes that would certify them as being capable of taking on the mentoring role, there is also the need for mentor teachers to see themselves as role models whom they are meant to look up to (62%), Also 56% agreed that pre-service teachers should see their mentor teacher as role models whom they are meant to look up to.

Discussion

One significant finding was the low commitment exhibited by mentor teachers, posing a potential obstacle to the goals of the teaching practice program. This trend could diminish the significance of teaching practice, deterring pre-service teachers from fully engaging and questioning its relevance. The attitude of mentor teachers greatly influences the effectiveness of the teaching practice, shaping pre-service teachers' perceptions and willingness to participate. Additionally, some pre-service teachers may overlook the importance of training, viewing it as a waste of time, despite its crucial role in professional development. A study by Smith and Johnson (2018) revealed that mentor teachers with low commitment tended to offer inadequate feedback and guidance, hindering the growth of new teachers.

The availability of school facilities significantly impacts mentor teachers' commitment to teaching pre-service teachers. Inadequate resources can diminish their motivation, making them less inclined to engage with students. Essential facilities such as classroom technology, a well-stocked library, and textbooks are crucial for an effective teaching practice. Without these resources, mentor

teachers' efforts may be in vain, as these tools are vital for helping pre-service teachers actualize their learning. Furthermore, the absence of these facilities could make the teaching practice seem dull to pre-service teachers, potentially diminishing their interest and engagement.

Some individuals are unsuitable for the role of mentor teachers due to a lack of understanding of their responsibilities. There exists a misconception among some teachers that mere entry into the teaching profession qualifies them for mentorship, which is not the case. Mentorship requires specific knowledge and skills not automatically acquired through teaching experience alone. Consequently, many mentor teachers may fail to fulfill their roles effectively due to this misunderstanding. Establishing clear criteria for selecting mentor teachers is essential to ensure that only qualified individuals assume these positions. Research by Ingersoll and Strong (2011) highlights how mentor teachers' qualifications and experience significantly influence the quality of mentorship. Adequately qualified mentors possess the expertise needed to offer valuable guidance and support to novice teachers. Furthermore, studies such as that by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) stress the importance of mentors having deep subject knowledge, pedagogical skills, and strong interpersonal abilities to effectively guide aspiring teachers.

In some educational institutions, teachers are inadequately compensated for their efforts despite being expected to excel in their daily duties, including guiding and supporting pre-service teachers. This disparity in remuneration can negatively impact teacher morale and performance, as financial incentives play a significant role in job satisfaction. Therefore, schools and administrations must prioritize increasing teacher salaries to foster a supportive environment. Feiman-Parker's research (2018) underscores the importance of fair compensation for mentor teachers, highlighting its role in maintaining high-quality teacher training programs. Inadequate compensation, as identified by Ingersoll and Strong (2011), can lead to dissatisfaction and a lack of motivation among mentor teachers. Thus, fair and competitive remuneration is vital for attracting and retaining experienced and qualified mentors, ensuring the effectiveness of teacher preparation initiatives.

Conclusion

The research on mentor teachers' commitment during teaching practice underscores the crucial role of mentorship in the professional development of pre-service teachers. The study identified several challenges, including low commitment, inadequate facilities, and misconceptions about mentorship roles. Addressing these issues through targeted interventions, such as comprehensive mentor training programs and clear selection criteria, is essential for improving the teaching practice experience. Additionally, fostering a culture of continuous professional development for mentor teachers can enhance their skills and commitment. Providing regular feedback, recognition, and opportunities for professional growth can motivate mentor teachers and improve their effectiveness. Establishing robust support systems, such as peer mentoring and collaborative networks, can also alleviate some of the burdens faced by mentor teachers, promoting a more positive and engaging environment. By enhancing mentor teachers' commitment and support for pre-service teachers, teacher education programs can better prepare aspiring educators for their future roles. This, in turn, contributes to the

overall quality of education in schools, ensuring that new teachers are well-equipped to meet the diverse needs of their students and adapt to the evolving educational landscape.

Recommendations

i. The school of primary assignment should develop structured mentor training programmes to equip mentor teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support pre-service teachers during teaching practice. Training should focus on mentorship best practices, communication strategies, and the importance of being a role model for aspiring educators.

ii. Universities sending pre-service teachers out on teaching practice should endvour to send students to those schools that have adequate resources such as classroom technology, libraries, and textbooks to support mentor teachers in their role. Access to essential facilities can enhance mentor teachers' motivation and engagement, leading to a more effective teaching practice experience for pre-service teachers.

iii. School of primary assignment should make sure that they define specific criteria for selecting mentor teachers based on qualifications, experience, and commitment to mentorship. By ensuring that only qualified individuals assume mentorship roles, teacher education programs can improve the quality of mentorship and support provided to pre-service teachers during their training.

iv. There is the need for schools to stablish regular evaluation and feedback mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of mentor teachers' support and commitment. Solicit feedback from pre-service teachers on their mentorship experiences and use this information to continuously improve the mentorship programme.

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