RURAL SCHOOL TEACHING IN ZIMBABWE: MENTORING EXPERIENCES OF 'BEGINNING' PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

Lilian Manwa[1], Tabitha Grace Mukeredzi[2] and Lokadhia Manwa[1]

[1]*Faculty of Education, Great Zimbabwe University*

[2]*School of Education, Faculty of Arts and design, Durban University of Technology*

ABSTRACT

The first year of teaching is the most formative period in a teacher's career. Support is therefore crucial if they are to develop the competencies, confidence and attitudes that will help keep them contented and effective in the classroom. One way of enhancing these aspects is through induction and mentoring. This will help ensure a firm foundation for professional growth and career development. This qualitative inquiry sought to establish the mentoring experiences of 'beginning' teachers in rural primary schools in Masvingo District of Zimbabwe. Data were generated through in-depth interviews and open-ended questionnaires from thirty purposively selected novice teachers. Findings indicate that most beginning teachers in this study did not experience mentoring and consequently smooth transitions from student-hood to teacher-hood, but were left to navigate their new environment alone. Their experiences seemingly impacted negatively on their career prospects as some indicated interest in careers outside the teaching profession. The education system needs to offer on-going, in-service mentor training courses to practicing teachers to expose them to mentoring, thereby preparing them for professional guidance of beginning teachers. This will promote professional learning and development, adding qualitative commitment and competence to the growth trajectory of both novice and practicing teachers, which in turn may motivate new teachers to stay in the profession.

Key Words: Zimbabwe, beginning teachers, mentoring experiences, rural schools

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Employment, grooming and socialisation of newly qualified teachers into teaching through mentoring is essential to the continuing growth of education systems globally as this is crucial for bringing new ideas and skills into the profession (Moon, 2007; Zapeda & Mayers, 2001). However, attracting young and mature entrants into the teaching profession and retaining the qualified teachers remains a cause for concern for developed and developing countries alike (Moon, 2007). Early career teaching experiences cannot be underestimated given that they determine whether or not new teachers remain or leave the teaching profession. The graduation/certification ceremony in Zimbabwe and other countries marks the end of direct support to students/graduates by the host teacher education institutions. While getting into the world of work may be exciting, early career teaching has been understood as a challenging phase to navigate (Morrison, 2013). Consequently mentoring has become an issue under scrutiny because of its importance in retaining novice teachers in the profession. The transition between teacher training and early career

teaching for Zimbabwean teachers has often been precarious with diverse and complex experiences which are often heightened by contextual factors such as the lack of induction and mentoring.

A lot has been written on Beginning Teachers (BTs') experiences (Brown, 2008; Buchanan, Prescott, Schuck, Aubusson, Burke, & Louviere, 2013; Fetherstone & Lummis, 2012). However, literature on the topic seems to be thin in the Zimbabwean context (Manwa, 2013; Murerwa, 2004; Shizha & Kariwo, 2012). This study sought to explore a group of BTs' interpretations of their experiences in rural primary schools in their first year of teaching. This study focuses on the rural Zimbabwean schools because rural schools are confronted by challenges that are different from urban due to inter alia under-resourcing, poverty and marginalization. Murerwa (2004) asserts that most of the rural areas of Zimbabwe are marginalised, and conditions of service are generally unbearable due to the lack of basic facilities. Insights from the study may assist schools, education departments and teacher education institutions to review their approaches to supporting BTs to foster positive experiences in these rural schools.

The key questions that are addressed in the study are:

1. How do BTs navigate the rural primary school contexts in their first year of teaching?
2. What meanings do they make of mentoring experiences, as they begin teaching?

In this paper, following some glimpses from literature on beginning teachers, a brief discussion on the controversial notion of rurality, which constitutes the location of the study, is presented. The specific data production strategies employed constitutes the next section. A close analysis of how beginning teachers navigate their rural school contexts reveals their mentoring experiences and the meanings they make of those experiences. Finally, the conclusion and implications/recommendations for the Zimbabwean education system are discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic work in Canada (Cherubini, 2009) on BTs' experiences generally highlights both positive and negative aspects. Positive experiences have been associated with having supportive and empathetic mentors and collaborative mentoring that encourages reflection in the workplace giving rise to continuing professional learning. Buchanan et al. (2013) from an Australian perspective also suggest that partnerships between schools and higher education institutions are valuable for enhancing early career experiences and continued professional learning. In developed countries such as the United States of America, many BTs in rural settings have neither traumatic nor upsetting experiences (Hebert & Worthy, 2001; Brown, 2008) as most of these rural areas in the United States are developed and have fewer challenges compared to those in developing countries such as Zimbabwe.

Cherubini's (2009) literature review on BTs' experiences globally over the last 35 years indicates that new teachers in both rural and urban contexts consistently negotiate the tension inherent within teaching experiences due to hardships emanating from lack of mentoring. While such tensions may be experienced in all settings, they are often more pronounced in rural areas. A consequence of this tension is that new teachers particularly in rural settings may abandon pedagogical practices that resonate with their students' intellectual, moral and creative development. These observations by Cherubini were indicative of the need for mentoring BTs. Other studies on BTs (Brown, 2008; Buchanan et al., 2013; Fetherstone & Lummis, 2012) highlight experiences related to: adjusting to full-time teaching demands; managing colleague and parent relationships; understanding the cultural contexts of the school; and coping with the clash between expectations of pre-service teaching and the realities of in-service classroom practice as some of the many challenges they encounter. Such challenges are often minimized by induction and mentoring.

Manuel (2003) suggests a range of strategies identified by Early Career Teachers (ECTs) in different Australian contexts which, *they consider to be a first step to overcoming some of the major difficulties experienced during the first year out* (p. 148). These include release from full teaching load, harnessing the rich resources of professional teaching associations, funding to participate in professional development, additional support for initiation into the profession and, pastoral care at the local level. However, as noted by Mukeredzi (2013) and Pennefather (2011) such support structures are not available in many rural contexts in developing countries like Zimbabwe. Manwa (2013) from a Zimbabwean context highlights substantial relationships between higher education institutions, education authorities and schools as vital for enhancing a smooth transition from student-hood to teacher-hood, in particular to support BTs in rural schools. Such relationships can manifest through induction and mentoring. In this regard, Buchanan et al. (2013) identified a supportive school mentoring culture as a major determinant of early career teachers' satisfaction. In other words, a supportive and encouraging school culture would be a critical variable for helping novice teachers to cope with the rigours and complexities in their new career. In the same vein, communication, recognition and a sense of value, as well as support to foster success in their teaching, have also been noted as very crucial for BTs (Buchanan et al., 2013; Cherubin, 2009; Manwa, 2013). These authors add that BTs in rural settings in some developing countries often struggle to discover both the written and unwritten organisational rules and protocols. Further to this, Cherubini (2009) points out that perceptions of success have been noted as effective in promoting positive experiences.

THE ZIMBABWEAN RURAL CONTEXT

Coming up with a clear and objective definition of rural appears to be a conceptual problem. Coladarci indicates that: *there is no singular or multifaceted definition that will suffice to satisfy the research, programmatic and policy communities that employ the concept* (2007, p. 2). Some authors allude to the slipperiness of the definition, given its ambiguity and the subjective nature of distinctions with urban that overlook the contextual differences (Abd-Kadir & Hardman, 2007; Anaxagorou, 2007) as school curricular and practices are often remarkably similar. Rural schools in Zimbabwe like all other schools in rural areas the world over, experience obstacles to improved student learning: poor funding and limited resources requiring schools to do more with less; issues of 'hard to staff, harder to stay' exacerbated by inadequate mentoring support; schools remotely located and serving high poverty communities; limited economic opportunities and a paucity of family social and cultural amenities; low population density, family isolation and community remoteness; daily life patterns shaped by rural geographies; and, lowly educated communities (Emerging Voices, 2005; Kline, White, & Lock, 2013; Lowe, 2006; McEwan, 1999; Redding & Walberg, 2012).

Rurality in Zimbabwe is understood as areas comprising either, black owned, sparsely populated, small-scale market gardening lands or typical traditional village style, sparsely inhabited remote homesteads, and communal lands known as 'tribal trust lands' or 'reserves' (Mlahleki, 1995; Mukeredzi, 2009; Nhundu & Makoni, 1999).The areas are marked by poor topography and other physical infra-structure, and inadequate provision of resources, facilities, and other services (Hlalele, 2012). Mukeredzi noted that communication facilities are minimal, electricity or piped water is not available, and roads are poor which make transport limited and unreliable. When available, the transport charges are beyond the reach of the communities. 'Rurality' is also understood as synonymous with remote. The term 'remote area' refers to under class models that describe a notion of rurality in social development (Chikoko, 2011). Consequently, rurality signifies social disadvantage on the people under discussion. Chikoko adds that people in such settings are usually socially excluded, fully or in part, from active participation in national mainstream socio-political activities. Further, 'remote' denotes physical road distance to the nearest urban centre where geographic distance exerts the highest restrictions (Kline et al., 2013). Zimbabwean remote

rural areas, located several hundreds of kilometres away from towns and cities, are distinct by the large tracts of infertile land for market gardening, peasant farming and animal grazing (Peresu, Nhundu, & Makoni, 1999). It is against this conception that rurality is understood in this research.

Zimbabwean rural primary schools are located in remote areas as described above. Characteristically, there is an absence of infrastructure; schools in most cases are severely under-resourced and teachers often have to 'make-do' (Mlahleki, 1995; Mukeredzi, 2009). Often teachers in these Zimbabwean rural communities are either newly qualified or professionally unqualified, as competent, qualified and experienced teachers shun rural postings citing geographical isolation, socio-economic conditions and the dominant discourse of deficiency that views teaching in rural schools as inferior (Pennefather, 2011, Mukeredzi, 2013). It is in such schools that beginning teachers explored in this study were teaching.

While all newly qualified teachers in Zimbabwe are deployed to rural schools as it is in these schools that there is often the greatest need (Murerwa, 2004), there are generally no structures for beginning teacher induction and or mentoring. School Heads expect a powerful injection of new blood and ideas into the system and an ability to perform as experienced teachers when they arrive at the door (Mukeredzi, 2009). Buchanan et al. (2013) add that as the two parties come face-to-face, in most cases they are not sure of what has to happen on the ground. Some practicing teachers may see the new BTs as threats, while others expect them to carry on with the routine teaching duties. This study therefore sought to understand BTs' mentoring experiences in rural primary schools in Masvingo District of Zimbabwe.

TEACHER RECRUITMENT IN ZIMBABWE

Teacher Education in Zimbabwe, resides in teachers' colleges and universities, and teacher recruitment and deployment are provincially centralized (Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) Action Plan, 2010). Upon attainment of independence, most African countries embark on massification of educational provision across all levels (Kapfunde, 1999; Mukeredzi, 2016; Wolhuter, Lemmer, & deWet, 2007) consequently leading to teacher demand exceeding supply. One dimension of educational massification at Zimbabwean independence was the construction of schools in rural areas where no schools had been envisaged before, to enable children to attend school nearer their homes (Murerwa, 2004). To meet the consequential high level of teacher demand in these new rural schools, a ministerial New Teacher Deployment Policy was instituted which required all new entrants into teaching to take up posts in rural school settings (MoHE, 2010; Murerwa, 2004). After a three-year minimum rural experience, teachers could then seek transfer into towns/cities. The Zimbabwe Government's stance on rural teaching experience following graduation has remained operational up to this day (Mukeredzi, 2016).

This situation remains despite teacher dissent and high attrition rates through resignations, and consequential migrations across the spectrum which have also risen phenomenally in recent years (Shizha & Kariwo, 2012). While accurate Zimbabwe statistics were not immediately available because of an absence of comprehensive records and sometimes due to the clandestine nature of the resignations and migrations, Weda and Lemmer (2014) indicate that Zimbabwe had lost 75 per cent of its teaching corps by 2010, not only to the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia, but also to neighbouring countries like Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia. While the figure might include BTs from rural schools, who might have left subsequent to disappointing early years, the mass teacher exodus has been blamed on poor remuneration, diminished social status, political interference and lack of security and safety (Shizha & Kariwo, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

This study sought to understand mentoring experiences of BTs in rural Zimbabwe schools. Thus, the nature of the study located it in the qualitative design where interviews and questionnaires

with open-ended questions were employed to generate subjective data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Purposive sampling was the overarching sampling design adopted to extract participants for the study. Purposive sampling enables targeting those participants that are likely to yield the richest data for the topic. Drawing on Bhengu, *… the researcher must ensure that informants are information rich* (2005, p. 58) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011) who add that purposive sampling extracts groups, settings and individuals where the processes under exploration are likely to occur, participants fitting within these definitions were selected. The population for the study was 120 teachers in Masvingo District with one year teaching experience. Forty teachers who agreed to participate in the study were asked to provide their demographic details. This data was used to identify the locations of their schools and from these, 30 who were located in accessible rural schools were selected. These participants self-selected after receiving an explanation of the research and its demands on them. The 30 participants were from 22 schools that were between 45 and 60 kilometres outside Masvingo Town. Their demographic details indicated that there were twenty one (21) female and nine (9) male teachers. Eighteen (18) had a Teacher's `Diploma and twelve had undergraduate degrees. Their ages ranged from 24 to 35 years.

In-depth interviews and questionnaires were used to solicit data. All questions on the questionnaire were open-ended. Data collection took place over seven working days. The process commenced with administration of questionnaires to 20 participants who were at schools that were furthest away from town. Completing questionnaire lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and the questionnaires were collected immediately after. Face-to-face interviews with the ten participants at schools closer to town were conducted within the last three days of the field work. The questionnaire was used as the interview schedule during face-to-face interviews. The in-depth interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and were audio-recorded. All participants answered the same questions following the same sequence. Before administering each questionnaire or commencing the interview the researcher explained the research. Combining questionnaires and in-depth interviews was meant to enhance credibility and trustworthiness of the study. Data generation commenced after participants had given their consent by signing consent forms. This was subsequent to gaining authority from the Provincial Education Director and the school Principals.

Content analysis was used to analyze data. According to Plunkett and Dyson (2011) content analysis involves a *careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases, and meanings* (p. 37).This process entailed transcribing the interviews and reading the transcripts over and over, making brief notes in the margins when interesting/relevant information emerged. The notes were then reviewed and the different types of information compiled. Based on this list, each item was then categorized in a way that described what it was about. Following this a determination was made as to whether or not the categories could be linked and listed as major categories/themes. This was followed by comparing and contrasting the various major and minor themes. The stages were repeated for each transcript. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) suggest involvement of independent judges to verify categories of relevant meaning. The data set were therefore sent to a third colleague who had not been involved in the analysis to identify any errors and omissions. After analysing all transcripts, all themes were collated and examined each one in detail, considering its relevance to the data. In this way, all transcript data was categorized into minor and major themes and the data re-examined to ensure that the information was appropriately categorized. All the categories were then reviewed to ascertain whether some could be merged, or if subcategories were required. Finally, the original transcripts were returned to ensure that all the information that needed to be categorized had been included.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of the research was to explore the experiences of novice teachers in rural primary schools. Data from both instruments were pooled together and are presented in a narrative form. Findings generally indicate that most BTs were neither inducted into the profession nor mentored, but were left alone to explore and discover the new environment and its operations. With regard to lesson preparation, most BTs were left alone to find their way and they experienced challenges related to the availability and use of teaching media. Both BTs and mentors handled large classes and this to some extent contributed to the lack of effective mentoring related to marking and evaluation of pupils' work. Most BTs had no mentors, consequently school norms and values were learnt through discovery. Findings also indicated that BTs lacked confidence for classroom management and learner discipline, and there was no one to encourage and enhance their confidence and development. In addition to the heavy teaching loads, most BTs had additional responsibilities related to co-curricular activities. An absence of supportive mentors to assist them through these negative experiences, gave rise to high levels of stress which seemingly had an influence on their decisions to stay or leave the profession.

Experiences Related to Preparation

Generally, the BTs found the transitional process stressful as most of them did not have mentors to initiate them into the profession. They reported that they were left alone to find their way around their teaching and the school context. Twenty beginners indicated that they managed to cope with planning demands by copying other people's work or begging for advice. Teacher preparation processes like scheming and evaluation, involved duplicating colleagues' old schemes. One BT explained:

> I did not get any help in scheming and evaluation, I did not know what to do so had to copy some stuff from old scheme books.

This confirms observations by Kim and Roth (2011) that beginning teachers often explore and discover pathways for finding work related information and daily routines. Other participants reported that they ended up duplicating colleagues' previous work including information which they would never use in their teaching. What this is saying is that duplicating material was done out of context. If these BTs had some reference materials like work schedules or guides, they probably would have picked only that which was relevant. One male participant commented that:

> ...we just write and fill counter books (96-page hard covered books used for scheming and planning) because our Head wants to see written books on the first day of term.

It appears that what these novice teachers were doing was just meeting the requirements without taking note of what is to be taught, when and how that teaching should occur. Further, simply copying work of experienced teachers has the potential to result in an inappropriate conservatism (Putnam & Borko, 2000) and in being limited to *imitation or cloning, devoid of insight and initiative* (Ethell, 1999, p. 2). The BTs apparently did not look beyond the 'how' of the experienced teachers' teaching. This was seemingly difficult without effective mentoring practices.

Shumbayaonda and Maringe (2000) further pointed out that practices that require teachers to produce thick documents of preparatory work are often aligned to neo-scientific management where supervisors simply check to ensure that duties are being performed according to the laid down procedures and expectations, without close scrutiny of what is done, its relevance and accuracy. In her South African study of teachers in rural schools, Mukeredzi (2009) discovered that one of the key dimensions to education growth is within school management and administration of activities such as mentoring. This was lacking in these contexts. The evidence provided by BTs above also raises questions around teacher preparation. Why the BTs immediately started duplicating other people's work instead of preparing and planning for lessons following ways that

they had learnt during Initial Teacher Education (ITE) is a question that needs to be answered. It is also unclear whether it was an issue of limited reading resources given the general under-resourcing in rural schools which forced BTs into duplicating old records. However, Nottis, Feuerstein, Murray and Adams (2000) state that the teacher education programs tend to primarily orient pre-service teachers either theoretically or practically and the type of course can affect the success of beginning teachers. Thus, as Tope (2012) argues, induction and mentoring can go a long way in guiding the newly qualified teachers on personal conduct, scheming, lesson planning, social issues and also career ethics and policies so that they gain confidence in all their activities.

Experiences Related To Teaching

Lesson presentation

Other experiences related to the use of media. Nineteen (19) of the BTs indicated that they taught most of their lessons without media. They blamed this on the lack of resources pointing out that:

> …*it is difficult to use your experiences and learning from college when resources are not available.*

Another teacher revealed that sometimes she would borrow teaching and learning aids from other teachers in the school or in a nearby school. Teaching aids are known to be an essential part of teaching and learning. In lower primary in particular, teachers often draw upon aspects of constructivism which validate the argument that children operating in the Piagetian stages of 'pre-operational' and 'concrete operational' modes of thinking need to manipulate objects to make sense of, and develop, ideas (Moyo, 2002; Villegas-Remers, 2003). While economic levels in the surrounding communities may be low, which undermines schools' possibilities for pooling resources together, the agency portrayed by the teacher to obtain resources and enhance her teaching is commendable.Thus learning aids enhance learning by providing interesting, reality oriented and tailor-made aids to facilitate self-correcting and the refinement of sensory perceptions (Moyo, 2002). Mlahleki (1995) commented that teachers in most Zimbabwe rural schools have to 'make-do' in order to teach. In Zimbabwe, the remoteness and issues of geography which create some degree of isolation, tend to compel strong relational dimensions and collaborations within and between schools. However, mentoring would still further strengthen these aspects and promote teacher effectiveness in the classroom.

Marking and evaluation of pupils' work

Participants also reported experiences related to marking and evaluating pupils work and keeping records of work. They revealed that it was a challenge due to the large class sizes. Most BTs indicated that going through large piles of books was not easy with comments such as:

> …*it takes up all your time, it's like a way of life, of occupying yourself because there is nobody else who cares about you.*

Regarding evaluation of all records, generally participants were frank that they were not honest most of the time as they were unable to do all the planned activities. These results indicate that novice teachers need to be mentored and oriented to plan activities which are practically feasible. Kasambira (1993) asserts that it is through guidance, support and rigorous practices, that beginning teachers can plan, teach and evaluate work in an honest manner. Opportunities to collaborate, and even team teach with other experienced teachers, as part of the mentoring program may also help to glean mentors' styles and learn from them. Tope (2012) states that good settlement of the new teacher is largely determined by the relationships established during the first days, thus the findings of this research indicate that most beginning teachers did not work with experienced teachers because of the nature of the welcome and support that they received.

Relationships

Naturally, it is very difficult to adjust to a new environment if there is no one to welcome, mentor and give you pointers to the norms, values and procedures of that community, given that schools operate according to school rules, and cultures (Haralambos & Holborn, 2011). The majority of the participants (21) indicated that they felt they were looked down upon by the older teachers. This diminished their confidence in most of what they did. One female teacher said:

> At first I was much excited to be a qualified teacher but I ended up being like a fool because I always begged for their help which they offered with some scornful eye.

She went on to say that she was given a grade she had never taught. Even after begging for a grade that she taught during teaching practice, the school refused. Many participants told similar stories of begging for classes that they were familiar with which could enhance their confidence and teaching efficiency in front of pupils. If that were the case, then they would draw on their teaching practice experiences while adjusting to the new environment. However, the question that also comes to mind is that primary school teachers are generally trained to fit within two or three phases. For two Phases it is often Foundation Phase (Grades R-3), and General Education and Training and Senior Phase (Grades 4 -7). For three phases there would be: Foundation Phase, General Education and Training (Grades 4-5) and Senior Phase (Grades 6-7). If these BTs were given classes outside their specialist phases then it was very problematic. Kim and Roth (2011) state that the daily work within schools is embedded in contexts and novice teachers experience unexpected events and situations that occur daily in school life. Without proper guidance from mentors it may be difficult for the novice teachers to effectively manage the eventualities.

As social beings in a rural set-up, most beginning teachers indicated that their schools had cliques or factions. Based on their comments, trust was a key issue among teachers. These BTs thus struggled in identifying who to or not to trust within the power circles of their school communities. Kim and Roth (2011) also state that in such a scenario, beginning teachers may struggle with interpreting some of the work-related information and making decisions about the information's usefulness for their work tasks and daily routines. They go on to say that, some novice teachers may fall prey to negative factions that may instil unethical behaviour such as conceit and non-conformity to norms and values of the school community. Hence, the school social climate should be conducive to creating good relations among the old and the new staff (Manwa, 2013). In this regard mentoring is one of the key processes that can enhance good collegial relations.

Classroom management

Commenting on their experiences in classroom practice, eighteen (18) BTs revealed that they were not confident to stand in front of pupils especially those who were given upper grades (five to seven) to teach. They stated that they were very shy and nervous to discipline learners. The remaining twelve (12) were a little confident although they indicated unfamiliarity with some of the things they were expected to do in the absence of induction and mentoring. One BT further intimated that she had become used to mentor support as a student, to an extent that now on her own she lacked confidence in classroom management and learner discipline. Garvely (2003) posits that BTs need to be mentored to move from the initial orientation stage to improved professional practice stage to gain confidence and learn the tricks of effectively carrying out teaching duties.

Regarding their experiences during lesson presentations, eighteen (18) participants revealed that they were nervous, expressing that they would have been comfortable if they were allocated the grades they had taught during practicum. Some of the twelve (12) who were given classes they had taught while awaiting entry into ITE, indicated that this prior experience had helped them and they remembered vividly how they handled classes. This implies that the exposure that these BTs had was further enhanced during practicum giving them an advantage over those who had not

had any experience before they enrolled for ITE. Half of the participants also indicated that they sometimes faced problems of choosing the suitable teaching methods for particular topics. One participant commented:

> …sometimes I was confused as to what could be the best method to teach a concept.

These findings show limitations related to pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). PCK is the disciplinary-specific pedagogic knowledge required for teaching particular subjects or concepts to make them accessible to learners. Thus, as Shulman (1987) said, it is an amalgam of content and general pedagogy which transcends subject matter per se to the dimension of subject matter knowledge for practice, which is uniquely the province of teachers. The implication here is that BTs need to be assisted through mentoring in planning lessons to ensure a proper match between general pedagogy and content, especially when teaching grades with which they may not have adequate experience. Flores (2004) asserts that teachers develop sociologically and psychologically in schools and those schools can be professional learning centres in which teachers collaboratively learn with and from one another and develop their knowledge and skills. In this regard, Bertram, Mthiyane and Mukeredzi (2013) noted that PCK can be gained from collaborating and talking to other teachers as they continue to be mentored.

On whether BTs were happy with their management and lesson pacing, very few (6) could confirm that they performed these tasks effectively. The majority indicated they always failed to provide adequate time for pupils' classroom written work. Some ended up being harsh to pupils when they failed to write in the minimum time given. Moyo (2002) notes that one significant stumbling block to the flow of instruction, is in-attention to transitions between activities, lessons or class periods. The flow of instructions require rigorous guidance and proper mentoring that assists the novice teacher in acquiring teaching skills. It is in this regard that the BTs are likely to feel that they are less effective in maintaining the flow of instruction. Effective transitions are structured to move pupils from one activity to another, both physically and cognitively. Thus, the goal of smooth transitions is to ensure that all pupils have the materials and mind-sets that they need for a new activity (Kasambira, 1993).

Allocation of Classes and Teaching Load

Participants were asked to comment on their teaching load. Only ten (10) participants were happy with their teaching loads and participated in all co-curricular activities and social events. The rest indicated that they had stressful situations where they had heavy loads with no free period as the Ministry of Education Policy on co-curricular activities compelled all teachers to participate regardless of the teaching load. Most BTs lamented that the only time they had for marking and planning was at night or over weekends. One commented:

> If it was possible to drop these activities, I would be the first one to drop because they interfere with my marking load and family responsibilities.

Such sentiments were expressed by most of these BTs as they viewed these co-curricular activities as an added 'extra'.

BTs' Expectations from Mentoring

Most beginning teachers in this study experienced limited mentoring which minimized their professional growth and development, contrary to their expectations in rural primary schools. Generally they all expected to grow academically and professionally through effective mentoring. Those teaching Grade 7 indicated that they had hoped to excel as the best teachers in their clusters through production of good results with the support of effective mentoring. The majority also indicated intentions to advance their academic qualifications and those without degrees indicated a great desire to study for undergraduate degrees, while the BTs with undergraduate degrees looked forward to enrolling for post-graduate programmes. This suggests that these teachers

were not contented with their qualifications. Twelve (12) participants indicated that they needed induction and mentoring during the first year of their career. Very sensible reasons were expressed such as the need to understand the school values, culture and work ethics. According to Ritzer (2008), behaviour presumed during the first days of the career may have long term effects on the career of the beginning teachers. Thus those who expected induction and mentoring anticipated doing things correctly from the beginning.

Another group of eight (8) expected to grow continuously through mentoring, workshops and seminars within and outside the school. This seems to be in tandem with Villegas-Remers' (2003) conclusions that teacher professional learning is a long-term process. These teachers were worried about professional deterioration in rural schools. They anticipated that interacting with colleagues in urban schools would help keep them abreast of professional knowledge and information as indicated by the following comment:

> I feel good when I attend seminars with my colleagues who teach in town because I get current information as I teach in a rural area, I know one day I will have the opportunity to teach in town.

The implication is that these teachers were aware that remaining in rural settings without constant interaction with professional colleagues would not enhance their professional growth.

Six (6) expected growth through in-school mentoring support from experienced colleagues and school management team, and through the provision of teaching and learning resources. This group aimed to grow into experienced teachers and role models. Kim and Roth (2011) indicate that the degree to which teachers can interact and learn through and with one another depends on many factors, like school size, policies and procedures, school climate and practices. Often an isolated physical environment and the school climate can create a hurdle to information sharing both physically and emotionally among teachers. Thus, mentoring and socialisation processes are effective ways for novice teachers to professionally learn from colleagues and other stakeholders.

The last four participants had no growth expectations apart from looking forward to moving to urban schools with better facilities and services such as electricity, piped water and accessible transport. One teacher described her situation as having problems of accessing fresh foods, clean drinking water and transport to visit her parents over weekends. Such situations often lead to stress and low morale as well as job dissatisfaction. Given the nature of the school's physical environment, the researchers noted that the teacher did not exaggerate. Many rural schools and communities in Zimbabwe are the most economically disadvantaged as they do not have good staff accommodation and classroom structures. In these circumstances, these BTs view rural schools as unconducive to professional growth.

Perceptions of Future Career Prospects

Asked to comment about their future career prospects, fourteen (14) participants submitted that their future career prospects were outside the teaching profession due to low remuneration and lack of both professional and social support from within and outside the schools. The issue of resources was also highlighted as one of the frustrating aspects of rural school teaching which heightened the lack of job satisfaction. Commenting on the level of support from the school administration, BTs indicated that generally school leaders were supportive on the surface, however such support did not translate into getting them inducted, mentored and socialized into the profession. Support by experienced teachers was minimal. Participants generally reported that experienced colleagues ignored them. They viewed BTs as possessing all the information needed for teaching from ITE, and just concentrated on their own workloads. Lack of in-school cooperation and support from experienced teachers was also noted by Zehava and Salman (2008) where experienced colleagues were not willing to mentor and cooperate with novice teachers, treating them without respect and belittling them. In such situations, novice teachers are often daunted

with stress from feelings of vulnerability and isolation and, conflicts between personal and professional needs often hinders smooth transition into the profession. Hence, the chain of support from school inspectors to school management is critical for effective induction and mentoring of novice teachers. The focus of the support should be to offer help and advice, as absence of such support often leads to inefficiency in, and neglect of, the core teaching duties as well as low morale, lack of job satisfaction and poor retention in the profession.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore BTs' mentoring experiences in rural primary schools. The results revealed that most of them were not happy with the way they were introduced to their new career. They lamented that they were not well inducted and mentored into the profession, but were left alone in the deep end to discover their 'new world'. Most BTs in this study had no one to mentor them consequently they learnt school norms and values through discovery. In most cases they had to find their way around lesson planning without any guidance. With regard to teaching, they faced problems emanating from limited resources and use of teaching media without any mentoring guidance and support. Both BTs and mentors handled very big classes and heavy teaching loads and this hindered effective mentoring guidance around assessment of pupils' work, classroom management and learner discipline. Most BTs revealed that they lacked confidence in class management and pupil discipline and did not receive any encouragement or support to foster confidence in classroom practice. The heavy teaching loads that they handled were compounded by co-curricular duties and this made their work stressful. All these negative experiences seemingly influenced their decisions about whether or not to stay in teaching. The limited mentoring seemingly thwarted their career prospects as most of them expected mentoring to open professional avenues, including further studies which would point them to other possibilities beyond the classroom and the teaching profession. Such prospects would however, have implications for the demand and supply of qualified teachers in rural areas. This study suggests that the education system should offer comprehensive on-going mentoring training courses for practicing teachers, to expose them to effective mentoring practices and activities. This would prepare them not only for professional guidance of novice teachers, but would be vital for promoting their own professional learning and development. Furthermore, in addition to the growth of both novice and practicing teachers as a result of well-informed mentoring, it may also motivate the BTs to stay in teaching. This is a very small research which explored only thirty (30) BT s in rural Zimbabwe schools. Given that mentoring is regarded as the single most powerful process of classroom practice intervention (Du Plessis, Marais, Van Schalkwyk, &Weeks, 2010) in particular for BTs in rural school settings, more comprehensive research is required.

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