Mentoring dilemma in facilitating career development and providing psychosocial support to trainee teachers in Zimbabwean teachers' colleges

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Abstract

This article examines challenges encountered by mentors in facilitating career development and providing psychosocial support to trainee teachers during teaching practice in one teachers' college in Zimbabwe. The study employed the interpretive paradigm and used the qualitative approach and case study research design. Purposive sampling was used to select 24 participants, including nine mentors and 15 trainee teachers. The study was informed by Gray's Developmental Model of Mentoring (1994 cited by Hudson, Hudson & Bloxham, 2013). Data were organised and initial codes were created, reviewed, revised, and combined into themes which were presented in a cohesive manner. The study revealed that both the mentors and trainee teachers faced problems which hindered the smooth flow of the mentorship programme. Gaps noted were a lack of qualified school mentors, financial constraints, and loopholes in mentor selection. Furthermore, financial constraints hindered capacity building programmes for mentors. The study recommends that the Ministry of Higher Education consider a mentorship policy that fuses global and national trends. Resources should also be mobilised by all the stakeholders to give mentors incentives to motivate them to do the work correctly and to provide alternative mentorship models.

Keywords: Mentor, Mentees, Career development, Psychosocial support, Trainee teachers

Introduction

In schools, the selection of mentors has been a great challenge for school heads since not all senior teachers, no matter how experienced and suitable, are prepared for mentoring and the initiation of trainee teachers. Turner and González (2023) espouse that the outcome of a successful mentoring relationship can have a long-lasting intense effect on a person's professional career and mentors who are not well coached may not be able to perform well in the mentorship process. Furthermore, they reveal that the mentor-mentee relationship is a complex process that can occur through formal and informal mechanisms, structures, and styles. Therefore, there is need to probe more deeply into the challenges encountered by mentors and their mentoring styles. Tshuma and Ndebele (2015) as well as Maphosa and Ndamba (2012) indicate that there may be anxiety and fear on the mentors' part due to a sense of inadequate preparation caused by poor relationships between trainee teachers and mentors. They further state that some teachers demonstrate negative attitudes towards mentorship as they do not want to assist the trainee teachers during teaching practice. They fear becoming overburdened by mentoring duties and the absence of remuneration for the mentorship was mentioned as a challenge (Johnson, Long, Smith & Griffin, 2023). In support, Mullen (2023) indicates that other studies have established that mentors are not trained to become mentors
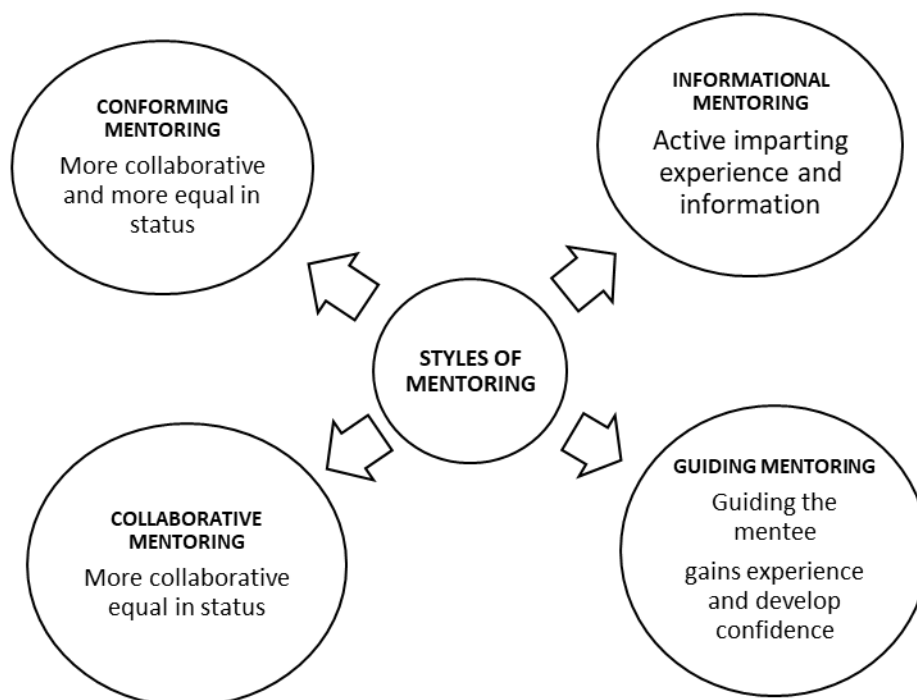
and therefore may not know how to assist the trainee teachers since they are not adequately skilled for the mentorship. Tsang (2023) suggests that assistance from the mentors is useful for academic studies, socialisation, and adaptation to colleges and universities.

Ngara, Ngwarai and Ngara (2013) as well as Tshuma and Ndebele (2015) concur that, in some cases, mentors have been accused of failing to assist trainee teachers and sometimes absenting themselves from school, leaving trainee teachers exposed to making many mistakes particularly if they carry an unrealistic teaching load. The contributory to this may be that some mentors are not clear on how they should perform their duties as a result of a lack of appropriate skills in preparation of records and lesson delivery (Shumba, Rembe, Chacko & Luggya, 2016). These challenges are likely to compromise the roles of mentors and the quality of trainee teachers (Asiyai, 2017). To curb persistent obstacles to mentorship, Turner and González (2023) recommend that mentors in colleges and schools should be provided with an effective mentoring model for their mentoring relationships. This will equip mentors to assist the next generation of mentees and change the whole mentoring landscape in higher and tertiary education. Thus, this article provides a perspective on the challenges encountered by mentors in facilitating career development and providing psychosocial support to trainee teachers during teaching practice. The study intended to find out whether the challenges cited in the literature are prevalent in Zimbabwe teachers' colleges and schools during teaching practice, with a view to making recommendations so that the mentoring programme could be more effective.

The information provided in this article is insightful and informative in order to experience mentoring in deeper and impactful ways and to bridge the gap between mentors and mentees (Alkhawalda, 2017). Furthermore, teachers, mentors, and other educators may benefit from this study as they would be fully equipped with appropriate support systems, approaches, and strategies for effective mentorship during teaching practice (Mullen, 2023). The article further provides essential reference material for other researchers who may want to carry out similar studies in areas related to the provision of career development and psychosocial support to trainee teachers. Through the theory of Developmental Model of Mentoring (Gray, 1994 cited by Hudson et al., 2013), the article explores the following research questions: What are the challenges encountered by mentors during teaching practice? How do these challenges affect the career development and psychosocial support of trainee teachers?

Gray's Developmental Model of Mentoring

This study was informed by the Developmental Model of Mentoring proposed by Brian Gray (1994 cited by Hudson et al., 2013). The model enables an informed interrogation of mentorship practices in relation to career development and psychosocial support of trainee teachers during teaching practice. This four-dimensional model, which entails 1) informational mentoring, 2) guiding mentoring, 3) conforming mentoring and 4) collaborative mentoring, illustrates the stages that mentors and mentees must go through to ensure the success of mentoring relationships.

CONFORMING MENTORING
More collaborative and more equal in status

INFORMATIONAL MENTORING
Active imparting experience and information

STYLES OF MENTORING

COLLABORATIVE MENTORING
More collaborative equal in status

GUIDING MENTORING
Guiding the mentee
gains experience and develop confidence

On the first dimension of the model, mentors are expected to actively impart knowledge, experience and information to their mentees. On the second dimension, they must guide the mentees to gain experience and develop confidence in their duties. On the third dimension, the gains of the mentoring process may start to show when the mentor and mentee start to operate on an equal status. This will lead to the fourth dimension where the mentor and mentee pass the mentoring stage and get to a collaborative approach. Cleveland (2018) found this model suitable to inform the practice of the mentor in facilitating career development and providing psychosocial support to trainee teachers during teaching practice. In support of the above discussion, recent research into faculty mentoring by Philips and Denison (2023) has increasingly emphasised the need for introducing impactful mentoring models to improve the education system.

In addition to the above model, Butler and Cuena (2017) suggest that mentors must be trained because they are expected to strike a balance between the career and psychosocial roles that are performed during teaching practice. Alkhawalda (2017) adds that the support to be provided must include: material resources; holding workshops regularly for mentors and trainee teachers; giving updates to all stakeholders; supervising mentors and trainee teachers; a review of mentorship programmes; and giving mentors and trainee teachers incentives for motivation, orientation, induction, and capacity building. Furthermore, Pilot, Suprise, Dinius, Olechowski, and Habib (2023) propose looking at the trainee teachers' academic performance and the psychosocial aspect of life, such as the issues of relationships, food, accommodation, social background, gender, sex, culture, exposure to various situations, and trainee teacher characteristics and learning styles, as a yardstick for successful mentoring relationships.

Challenges encountered by mentors during teaching practice

Caires, Almeida, and Vieira (2012) postulate that, during teaching practice, both mentors and trainee teachers can encounter successes and challenges. However, Gray's four-dimensional model suggests that the challenges in mentoring could emanate from the use of poor mentoring strategies and styles. Wang, Odell, and Schwille (2008) argue that, if the models are used accurately, there may be fewer problems in mentoring. Thus, the mentors and trainee teachers must be aware of some of the problems that may hinder their progress during teaching practice which are either career or psychosocially based.

Kyriacou and Stephens (1999) explored some of the challenges encountered during teaching practice. They included: mentors not being regarded as real teachers; they must first deal with disruptive behaviour instead of mentoring; they become disciplinarians; they find it difficult to get the teaching right; they teach about sensitive issues; they are unable to cope with heavy workloads; and have too little time to prepare for teaching practice. According to Clark, Ponjuan, Orrock, Wilson, and Flores (2013), the major problems are: a lack of mentorship skills and awareness of the roles of the mentor; a lack of time for supervision and logistics; a lack of mentor training; and no orientation into this relationship. Therefore, college lecturers and mentors need to establish and sustain fruitful relationships for the mentoring programme to be a success (Marino, 2021).

Foncha, Abongdia and Adu (2015) state that the above-mentioned problems are not the only ones which the trainee teachers and mentors encounter during teaching practice. There are different problems which may arise depending on the environment, background, and other determinants within the schools or colleges. Furthermore, Lane (2020) explains that trainee teachers may get insufficient emotional, social, psychosocial, career, economic and spiritual support during teaching practice. However, Fantilli and McDougall (2009) argue that the lack of support may have a negative impact on the trainee teacher and the mentor despite the use of an effective mentoring style. Those trainee teachers who fail to cope with stress have been reported to the colleges as having withdrawn, failed, committed suicide, repeated or deferred. Tidmore (2018) highlights the challenges encountered during the monitoring of mentor practices as the colleges' and the mentors' lack of resource material and the deployment of some trainee teachers to areas far from the colleges which involve high transport costs. Furthermore, Tsang (2023) notes that a major problem is the fact that the college lecturers, the mentors and the other staff members lack the skills to provide career development and psychosocial support to trainee teachers. This may result in trainee teachers failing, withdrawing, repeating the course or being deferred (Caduff, 2023). Mpofu and Chimenga (2016) add that some of the places where trainee teachers are deployed are unreachable because of poor roads and negative attitudes displayed by the colleges or school staff members which can affect the whole mentoring programme. Studies have noted that the monitoring of the mentor practices may be neglected due to the problems discussed above (Butler & Cuenca, 2017; Klassen & Kim, 2017; Smith & Member, 2018).

The above-mentioned discussion shows that there are many challenges that may hinder the mentoring programme. The DTE, colleges and schools need to be aware of such problems and find solutions. Orland (2023) encourages the development of multi-dimensional and integrated models of mentoring focusing on mentor-mentee collaborative interactions.

Research methods
Research approach and selection of participants

A qualitative approach was adopted in this study, where the researchers understood the events and individuals in their natural states. The study employed an interpretive paradigm and case study research design. Purposive sampling was used to select 24 participants who were perceived to be rich informants. These participants included nine mentors and 15 trainee teachers from three secondary schools where they were doing their teaching practice. There were therefore five trainee teachers and three mentors from each school.

Data collection process

The data were collected from the nine mentors through face-to-face interviews, whereas data from the trainee teachers were collected through focus group discussions. There was also documentary analysis. Three different data collection methods were chosen for the purpose of triangulation. Barbour (2014) defines triangulation as the use of different methods and sources to check the integrity of or extend inferences drawn from the data. The main research question and reviewed literature were used as a guide in the development of the research questions and there was an expert in the field to verify the questions. The researchers were familiar with the site and were given permission to undertake the study. All participants gave written consent to participate voluntarily, and their anonymity was guaranteed before the data collection procedure commenced. Thus, an ethical process was taken into consideration.

Data analysis

The data obtained through face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions and documentary analysis on which the main themes of the mentoring dilemma emerged, were transcribed verbatim into textual data. The transcribed data were coded, categorised and themes generated by the two researchers. The analysis of the literature created eight themes which emerged from the data that were collected from the participants and are discussed below. The unedited comments of the respondents were extracted verbatim to avoid misrepresentation. Where there was a potential for negative connotation or devaluing of participants' contributions, minor editing was done. The trustworthiness of the data was ensured by interview reflection, triangulation, comparing the voice recordings and field notes as well as member checks. The study also investigated how the identified challenges might be resolved in the future. This is discussed in the findings.

Research findings

The following themes that emerged are discussed below. They include (1) mentoring styles used by mentors; (2) poor relationships and communications between mentors and trainee teachers; (3) the selection of teaching methodology; (4) a lack of proper supervision on both mentors and mentees; (5) a lack of resources, financial constraints and electricity; (6) a lack of guidance and mentorship skills; (7) time and workload; and (8) malpractices by mentors and trainee teachers.

Mentoring styles used by mentors

Carmi and Tamir (2023) argue that trainee teachers need mentors who are guided by an effective mentoring style. In addition, Hobson (2020) and Burger, Bellhaeuser, and Imhof (2021) maintain that mentors must be experienced teachers assigned to support the mentees' learning, development and well-being, and to observe and provide them with instructional support and feedback. This is in line with the model by Gray (1994 cited by Hudson et al., 2013) which emphasises that mentors must provide appropriate and adequate career development and psychosocial support to trainee teachers through the four-dimensional mentoring styles. Therefore, it was appropriate to ask the mentors from the three schools if they had adopted any mentoring style in their mentoring practices. All the mentors responded that they had not received any training on mentoring, so they had no idea about the mentoring styles. School A mentor said,

> "I was not taught how to mentor the student teachers. I am using my own knowledge."

School B mentor said,

> "I received staff development on effective teaching. I think we are also supposed to be trained on how to mentor student teachers and to be exposed to different mentoring styles so that we can choose what is more appropriate to the prevailing situation."

School C mentor said,

> "We really need to be taught about mentoring styles and how to go about them. Myself, I know nothing, and we are facing a lot of challenges."

Butler and Cuenca (2017), Klassen and Kim (2017), and Smith and Member (2018) agree that mentors are not trained and have not adopted any mentoring style in their mentorship. As a result, the mentors recommended that mentors should be trained and taught about various mentoring styles which would guide them in the process of mentoring trainee teachers during teaching practice. The findings of the current study agree with the findings of Orland (2023) that there is need to develop multi-dimensional and integrated models of mentoring focusing on mentor-mentee collaborative interactions. Thus, the mentoring model's purpose is to renew the mentor's ways of

thinking and mentoring. The above suggestions are in line with the reviewed literature by Denison (2023) who emphasises the need for introducing impactful mentoring models to improve the education system.

Poor relationships and communications between mentors and trainee teachers

The mentors encountered challenges with staff members at the schools in terms of communication. This was revealed when one of the participants said,

> "The mentors and mentees might not have good communication skills. So I tried to give them direction or the correct way to talk to their HODs and to the headmasters when they come across challenges."

Ngara et al. (2013) as well as Tshuma and Ndebele (2015) agree that, in some cases, mentors have been accused of failing to assist trainee teachers and sometimes absenting themselves from school leaving the trainee teachers exposed to making many mistakes particularly if they carry an unrealistic load of teaching. This means that the mentors failed to use collaborative mentoring as illustrated by the developmental model of Gray (1994 cited by Hudson et al., 2013). Caires et al. (2012) believe that both mentors and trainee teachers can encounter successes and challenges during teaching practice therefore mentors and trainee teachers are expected to be aware of some of the problems that may hinder their progress.

Selection of teaching methodology

Despite these challenges, there were some pockets of good practices in mentors' facilitating career development and providing psychosocial support to trainee teachers on teaching practices. They included the induction and orientation of trainee teachers by mentors, the use of effective strategies by mentors during mentorship, and mentors acting as role models. Regarding the use of methodology, one participant indicated:

"My mentor was an old teacher who was trained long back when these learner-centred methodologies were not yet applicable. So, when I went with the issue of media, like charts and laptops for printing, my mentor could not accept that, so we fought a battle to explain to the mentor the importance of using some charts."

The findings of the study corroborate what was found in the literature review that mentors were taught how to introduce a lesson, develop a lesson and to conclude it, as well as the use of media and classroom management but they were not taught the mentoring styles and current methods to suit the prevailing situations (Bukari, 2015).

Lack of proper supervision of both mentors and trainee teachers

The researchers also checked documents regarding the mentorship and discovered that the challenges outlined by the participants during mentorship were also confirmed by the information from document analysis. For instance, a supervision report dated 18-01-16 reported:

"The student had serious problems as regards to documentation, such as stating of objectives, evaluation, and record of marks, social record book and other record books."

The information entailed in the documents supports Shumba et al. (2016) who emphasise that the trainee teachers were ill-prepared due to the lack of proper supervision by mentors and that the mentors were offloading their teaching burdens onto trainee teachers who were not yet able to teach. This resulted in some trainee teachers absenting themselves from school, failing or withdrawing from the teaching profession. To solve this problem, the participants recommended that the mentors should adopt an effective mentoring style that allows the schools and colleges to strike a balance by attending to both career development issues and psychosocial support issues. Furthermore, Wang et al. (2008) add that, if the models are used accurately, there may be fewer problems in the mentoring programme. Results from the current study confirmed that poor performance by trainee teachers also reflects the mentors' performance. Tsang (2023) suggests that assistance from the mentors is useful for academic studies, socialisation, and adaption to colleges and universities.

Lack of resources

Regarding the lack of resources, mentors identified the challenges they faced during mentorship which they believed were preventing them from facilitating career development and providing psychosocial support to trainee teachers during teaching practice. One participant explained:

"The major problem is the issue of resources. They try hard to monitor progress but if there are no resources, it will be difficult to monitor progress. There is also the new curriculum. We are facing shortage of textbooks."

The above sentiment was supported by documentary evidence from a letter written by a trainee teacher to the teaching practice office which reads,

"I am willing to change the school for teaching practice due to several reasons that are as follows: the school is not providing resources such as stationery, manila sheets, bond paper and printing facilities."

The mentor outlined that,

"the school were facing a challenge on the issue of incentivising us because I cannot work without money; money always motivate everyone so I cannot do work, as it is required by the college or by the school. So, mentors should be paid for mentorship."

The lack of resources also found to be disempowering teaching practice officers as they indicated:

"We used to invite mentors for workshops but, due to economic challenges, we no longer do that. We will find ourselves far-fetched if we are to talk of having workshops of that sort. So, those are the main challenges before we attempt to go there. Thus, it is difficult, and we are no longer in touch with our mentors due to financial constraints or economic situations."

Alkhawalda (2017) agrees with these findings as he indicates that the support given to mentors and mentees should include providing material resources in schools and holding workshops regularly for mentors and trainee teachers. The interview participants recommended that mentors should be provided with enough resources during teaching practice and incentives for motivation.

Mentor training and mentorship skills

In line with the above ideas, reviewed literature stressed that there was a mixed bag of experienced and inexperienced mentors. This was highlighted by one of the mentors who said,

"If they train us, we are going to be aware of what to assess when assessing their students. I am not aware of what I should be assessing."

Furthermore, another mentor stated that

"I suggest they should come to the schools to train mentors, invite them at one central point. There are so many challenges that are faced by schools in training the mentors, such as shortage of cash. So, every institution is suffering from economic crisis."

It emerged from the findings of the current study that teachers were not trained for mentorship. This is significant for the preparation of trainee teachers in teacher education, and the type of mentors they will encounter in schools (Makura & Zireva, 2011; Mapfumo, Chitsiko & Chireshe, 2012; Marais & Meier, 2004).

The findings of the study revealed that most mentors depend on knowledge they attained from the colleges when they were trained as teachers and from school staff development programmes. The above view coincided with recent studies which have shown that mentors are often not sure about their roles (Shumba et al., 2016). The

participants' responses in this study showed that there should be a policy on the selection and capacity building of mentors since it is concern in many schools and colleges. The findings of the study revealed that there was a need for the training of mentors, and workshops and staff development meetings for all stakeholders, to solve some of the challenges and to improve on mentors' practices in facilitating career development and providing psychosocial support to trainee teachers on teaching practice. They also mentioned that the mentors should adopt effective models for mentorship.

Time and workload

The findings of the study concur with Tidmore (2018) who indicates that, although the DTE and teachers' college lecturers supervise trainee teachers during teaching practice, mentors need to improve their practices in facilitating career development and providing psychosocial support to trainee teachers. The participants noted that mentors may overload trainee teachers with work and some of them are bullied by the learners they teach (Flore, 2013). In addition, Caduff (2023) explained that another challenge was that the mentees were being looked down upon by some teachers and they faced sexual harassment from teachers and mentors at their schools. Furthermore, the findings show that some trainee teachers blamed the mentors for the challenges they encountered while the mentors blamed the trainee teachers for their failings (Lane 2023). Thus, the participants reported that the whole mentorship programme was ineffective due to the way it was being implemented. As a result, a new model for the mentorship programme would be beneficial.

Malpractices by mentors and trainee teachers

The documentary evidence outlined allegations of misconduct by trainee teachers who were involved in improper association and drunkenness. A mentor presented the view that,

"there are some career development challenges that these mentees bring to me on a daily basis, especially on the issue of code of conduct. They also have some financial problems. They need money to buy food, materials to use during teaching and for transport. The teacher has been persistently and habitually reported late for lessons ... The trainee teacher altered marks, i.e., recorded marks for work she had not given and marked … Following the meeting on 16/07/18 … made learners write several exercises during the night backdating it to 26/06/18."

Thus, the research findings have also shown that some of the negative behaviour portrayed by both the mentors and the trainee teachers was a result of the poor mentorship systems (Pilot et al., 2023; Turner et al., 2023). Furthermore, the findings also revealed that some trainee teachers were withdrawn from host schools because of misconduct related to bad language and physical violence.

Challenges from the reviewed literature were consistent with the findings of this study. They included: a lack of respect; work overload; gossiping among trainee teachers in trying to gain favour from learners; threats from staff members; improper associations; cheating by both mentors and trainee teachers; and unfair supervision practices by mentors. There were also incidents of conflict between mentors and trainee teachers on the use of methodology and media. A lack of mentorship resulted in failure, deferring, repeating or withdrawals of trainee teachers from the profession.

Discussion of findings

This section discusses the findings of the study on the challenges encountered in facilitating career development and providing psychosocial support to trainee teachers on teaching practice. The findings of the study revealed that there were challenges in facilitating career development and providing psychosocial support to trainee teachers during teaching practice due to poor strategies used by mentors and a lack of respect by mentors and learners. Trainee teachers were overloaded with work, lacked knowledge on the use of technology, received threats from staff members, had improper associations at school and were subjected to unfair supervision practices by mentors. In addition, there were incidences of cheating by both mentors and trainees in the programme.

The study also found that the mentors and trainee teachers showed negative attitudes towards the career development and provision of psychosocial support; some mentors were not supervising trainee teachers as noted

by lecturers in charge; and the situation was intensified by economic hardships which led to immoral conduct; trainee teachers were looked down upon by teachers; and mentors were not clear on how they should perform their duties as they lacked appropriate skills such as the preparation of records and lesson delivery (Shumba et al., 2016).

The above compromised the quality of monitoring and the quality of trainee teachers and the work done by schools. Furthermore, studies revealed that some mentors were harsh on trainee teachers and they were unable to implement scaffolding, assuming that trainee teachers were experts. Such mentors lacked mentorship skills and they usually refused to participate in staff development workshops or any other learning activities (Bryant et al., 2019; Chizhik et al., 2017; Girvan, Conneely & Tangney, 2016; McLaughlin, 2012).

After observation and follow-ups, the current study found that most of what was written on the supervision documents by the schools and colleges was not a true representation of the actual situation. The college lecturers and mentors in schools would monitor the programme properly if they were motivated to do so through incentives or other forms of appreciation. It also emerged from the findings that mentors had not adopted mentoring styles in their mentorships. Thus, this article conceptualises and justifies the development of a robust theoretical and practical model that addresses the complex and global educational landscape of today and in the future.

Recommendations

Mentor training, staff development and in-service training programmes for school mentors are required as some mentors are not trained. The effectiveness of this programme is dependent on a fully functional and trained staff so that trainee teachers are developed holistically. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and Schools should reduce the workloads of mentor teachers so that they can focus more on the provision of career development and psychosocial support. The school heads and mentors should not overload the trainee teachers. They should adhere to the stipulated load as recommended by the college and teaching practice policy document. There is a need for colleges to train mentors to reach out to the wider school population and the increasing number of trainee teachers from various teacher training institutions and to develop a theoretical framework that is suitable for the current trends in higher and tertiary education.

Conclusion

This article aimed to explore the challenges encountered by mentors in facilitating career development and providing psychosocial support to trainee teachers during teaching practice in Zimbabwean teachers' training colleges. Even though the mentors knew how they should facilitate career development and provide psychosocial support to trainee teachers during teaching practice, both the mentors and trainee teachers faced problems which hindered the smooth flow of the mentorship programme. The challenges were classified as career development and psychosocial development. Supervisors and mentors noted that schools and colleges should strike a balance by attending to both career development and psychosocial support issues. Literature disclosed various challenges in mentorship that were also confirmed during the collection of data.

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