THE PERFORMANCE OF NEW ENTRY PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN ETHEKWINI METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA: DOES MENTORING STRATEGIES MATTER?

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the efficacy of mentoring strategies on the performance of newly recruited primary school teachers in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality of South Africa. A descriptive survey research design was employed to investigate the research problem in the study location. The study population consists of principals of public and private primary schools across the study location. The stratified random sampling methodology was used to sample25 principals of twenty-five primary schools in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, South Africa (20 principals of public primary schools and 5 principals of private primary schools). A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. To ascertain the internal consistency of the data-gathering tool, the instrument was subjected to a reliability test using the Cronbach Alpha reliability parameter. The reliability index turns out to be 0.79 which indicates that the survey tool is reliable and consistent. The data collected from the field was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and t-test. Empirical results from the t-test statistics found collaborative curriculum alignment and classroom observation mentoring strategies to be positive and significantly related to the high performance of newly entry teachers across the sampled primary schools in the study location. The study findings also revealed no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals of public and private primary schools in the study area on the efficacy of collaborative curriculum alignment and classroom observation mentoring on the performance of new-entry primary school teachers. The research concluded that collaborative curriculum alignment and classroom observation mentoring strategies are effective strategies for supporting newly recruited teachers in primary schools and their instructional practices for better performance. Following the result from the research findings, this study recommends that government, non-governmental organizations, and educational authorities in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality should provide high-quality professional development programs for newly recruited primary school teachers in the study location. This will enable them to acquire competencies and skills necessary for improved performance in their teaching profession.

Keywords: Mentoring, Mentoring Strategies, New Entry Teachers' Performance, eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, South Africa.

IINTRODUCTION

Education forms the bedrock of every society. It is a key and vital element in the broad development of the nation's youth's capacity to address and solve difficulties. Education forms the basis for the proactive and positive economic, social, and political changes in the society. Education remains the key to empowerment of the people and the nations as a whole (Koledowo, Alani &Alapini 2018). Teacher education which relates to the production of teachers at all levels has been recognized as a major concern for the nation since no school

whatever level, can be run without a teacher. Newly recruited teachers are not left out in the task of producing potential teachers who would take up the challenges. Primary school teachers play prominent roles in preparing pupils to become responsible citizens, capable of making astute economic decisions that would benefit their personal and professional lives. Changes have been witnessed continuously due to technological advancement globally and as such, primary school teachers become increasingly important for preparing young learners to imbibe these changes. The role of newly recruited primary school teachers as a handy tool in the realization of self-reliance in a country cannot be overemphasized.

The quality of teaching is the key factor in improving learner achievement in any academic setup. Fagbemi and Aribisala (2020) noted that teaching aims to effect changes in learners' which can only come as a result of effective teaching and learning through the adoption of suitable teaching strategies. Also, Alomo and Bala-Gbogbo (2018) affirmed this by stating that for teaching and learning to be effective, relevant strategies must be adopted by the teacher, who is the distributor of knowledge, in order to capture and sustain learners' interest in the course being taught and learned. These strategies are effective practice tools, and teachers should plan for whole class, small groups, and independent work. Within these contexts, effective teachers will provide a varying degree of support that reflects the needs of the students and the challenges in learning. It can also be maintained that discovering the best strategy for teaching will enhance students' learning process through active participation in the classroom. The quality of teachers who work in a specific educational system helps in the attainment of positive learning outcomes in schools.

Teacher quality is a key determinant of student learning outcomes, and teachers will play a key role in closing the gap between poor and good-quality education, by maximizing the benefits of learning in every classroom for every child (UNESCO, 2023 & UNICEF, 2024). Therefore, to achieve quality education, more efforts should increasingly focus on teacher quality, as many teachers are unqualified or underprepared to meet the educational demands of the 21st Century (UNESCO, 2024). Teacher retention is a growing problem in the 21st century. New teachers entering the profession are leaving within their first 3 years, with half leaving the profession in the first 5 years which results in widespread shortages of qualified teachers. One common reason new teachers' report for leaving the profession is lack of support (Henshaw, Olabode & Abdulkadir 2019). Quality teachers are instrumental to the success of our public education; therefore, induction and mentoring programs that meet the needs of new teachers are essential components for schools to improve teacher retention and effectiveness. In the field of education, mentoring is one way new teachers may receive the necessary support they require as they develop within their first years.

Mentoring is a frequently used model in providing personal and professional development. Mentoring as a learning partnership, is one of the most effective ways to transfer skills and offer people the opportunity to learn needed skills that allow them to function at a more senior level. It provides workplace learning in a less stressful environment. Mentoring can also be seen as the personal guidance provided, usually by seasoned veterans, to beginning teachers in schools which is an ongoing relationship that extends throughout the first year of a new teacher's professional practice. Teacher mentoring fosters a relationship of ongoing support, collaboration, and the development of knowledge and skills that translate into improved teaching strategies (Eze & Pere, 2021). The relationship is a supportive one, with the mentor acting as a role model, facilitator, coach and advisor, and sharing experiences and knowledge with the new teacher (Alaso-Adura, Usman &Babatope, 2018). In recent decades, teacher mentoring programs have become a dominant form of teacher induction (Oladipupo,

Arapaja & Agunbiade, 2020; Bruce, Gilbert, & Ahmed, 2018). Beginning teachers serve as a powerful workforce to support future development of a school. As they are new to the teaching profession and the school, mentoring and professional development are effective ways to integrate the beginning teachers to the learning community and its culture. Providing an accommodating environment to beginning teachers will help retain the best teachers in school. Principals assume a significant role in working with beginning teachers to facilitate their entry to the teaching profession. Mentoring programs provide beginning teachers with support during the transition into the classroom. These programs recognize the support needed by beginning teachers. Although many states require some form of induction program, many such programs fall short of empowering new teachers in the classroom. While providing new teachers with a mentor is a step in the right direction, it is essential for schools to provide these teachers with an induction program that encompasses all aspects of the beginning years in the classroom. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future identified mentoring as merely a component of a successful induction program (Badaru, Hitler & Garba, 2018).

Today, organizations are embracing the concept of mentoring as a professional development tool through which improvements in efficiency, productivity and the passing of corporate knowledge and leadership skills can occur. The success or failure of any nation depends largely on the quality of its educational system. This in turn depends on the quality of her teachers (Pillai &Asiyai, 2018). An effective mentoring program positively affects the quality of teaching, student achievement, retention of trained teachers, and the teaching profession as a whole. The importance of mentoring beginning teachers cannot be overstated. Recently, there has been a shift in thinking on the most effective way to mentor beginning teachers. An important element of successful mentoring is the development of a positive relationship between mentor and mentee. Gaius and Dinardo (2020) identified four strategies: building relationships, extra motivation, firmer limits, and having a mentor to hold them accountable. Additional factors contributing to successful mentoring initiatives include active participation and recognition of success. Problems must be identified and resolved early on, requiring assurance of feedback and support between mentor and student (Austine, Usman, Audu, Bello & Ibrahim, 2021). The focus of this is on two very important mentoring strategies which are: collaborative curriculum alignment and classroom observation.

The increasing diversity in classrooms requires a curriculum design mentoring strategies framework that allows mentors to work collaboratively with the new teachers on curriculum alignment for all learners to effectively support their progress in an inclusive context (Adebola & Daniel, 2018). The curriculum embraces rich learning goals and achievement standards supported by a range of strategies, technologies, resources, activities, and assessments to meet the needs of diverse learners. Therefore, it takes the joint expertise and insight of all professionals to make sure that the diverse needs and strengths of students are understood and considered in the curriculum and instruction process. Developing curriculum is a comprehensive and multidimensional process, in which curriculum is planned, designed and then implemented in the classrooms (Adam, 2019; Mustapha & Gabriel, 2021). There are a number of curriculum development models attributing teachers to an essential role as a curriculum designer. One of them is curriculum mapping. It is a new and innovative approach to curriculum development process in which curriculum planning, teacher-teacher collaboration, reflective inquiry, technology integration, and academic standards are included as important components (Adewale & Muyiwa, 2018). Curriculum mapping is particularly effective for collaborative curriculum planning and standards alignment. Ademulegun and Oluwafemi (2019) recognized that teachers think positively and specified numerous benefits

of curriculum mapping. In secondary school context, Adewale and Adeyemi (2018) demonstrated that teachers having five or more years of teaching experiences and taking one or more professional development trainings (teacher mentoring program) have positive views of curriculum mapping and they consider curriculum mapping as having positive effects on collaboration and standards alignment. Thus, it is important to reveal what teachers think about this process. If a newly employed primary school teacher wants to map curriculum, the best way will be to work with experienced teachers (mentors). Mentors may have the responsibilities to keep curriculum alive by providing continuous curricular feedback for beginning teachers, small in service trainings and instructional leadership. It is important to note that using curriculum mapping ensures coherency in both daily and yearly planning. The very advantage of this dual planning is that teachers have a structure for planning curriculum according to academic standards. It takes some time for beginning teachers to adapt to changes in their daily routines, which in turn, have positive effects on their professional development, instructional choices and dialogue with other teachers.

Classroom observation mentoring strategies enables a mentor to collaborate with the beginning teacher to conduct classroom observations and gather general data on practices and have a brief reflective conversation with the beginning teacher regarding knowledge gained from the data. Observation is a powerful strategy in supporting the professional learning of teachers. The professional conversations that we undertake as part of the mentoring relationship are an opportunity to carefully look at students as they go about their learning and to observe what teachers actually do as part of their classroom practice. Visiting the classrooms is an opportunity to learn and share teaching and learning, collaborate, reflect, share best practices, and support each other to live the shared commitments (UNESCO, 2019). It is not evaluative but rather an indispensable component of productive collaboration. Newly employed primary school teacher does not only have an opportunity to get concrete feedback, but also naturally reflects on his or her own practices and gets ideas from the observed teacher. Providing feedback to teachers about the results of their observations and helping them reflect on this feedback in productive ways provides the bridge between knowledge about what matters for students and changes in teachers' actual practice. Both the content and style with which feedback is communicated are important areas to consider.

Feedback is most effective when it is focused on increasing teachers' observation, promoting reflection and self- evaluation skills, promoting intentionality around behaviors and patterns of interaction with students, helping teachers see the impact of their behaviors more clearly, and assisting teachers in improving their implementation of lessons and activities (Osinowo & Babawale, 2020). Doing this means providing feedback that is very specific and behavioral in nature and balances attention to positives/strengths with providing constructive challenges. Use of video cameras and videotaping can be an extremely effective tool in providing specific, constructive feedback to teachers about their behaviors with students (Ifeajuna& Madueke, 2018). When video footage is available, it allows consultants to not only tell teachers what they saw, but to watch the interactions alongside the teachers in a highly objective way. Teachers are better able to share their perspectives when they are able to watch interactions on video after the fact.

Considering the above views, it seems that professional development is most effective when it is constructed around helping teachers make improvements in areas of their job that really matter for students, when those areas targeted for observation and improvement are clearly defined, and when all participants agree that the targets of the observation are valid goals to work towards. To support new teachers, mentoring seems to be a common solution and one

of several strategies that may be deployed in order to support beginning teachers. Newly employed teachers in government owned and private primary schools need to be provided with continuous professional development and support in order to bring them to acceptable standard. To improve teaching and learning, both beginning teachers' emotional and professional needs as well as their students' needs should be addressed (UNICEF, 2020), which is the overall aim of mentoring. However, in a changing society, there is a need for continuous professional development since all teachers have to adapt to changes. In the education sector in South Africa, guiding younger teachers toward skills has become more important than ever before. Employed teachers in public and private primary schools need to be provided with continuous professional development and support in order to bring them to acceptable standard. According to UNESCO (2024), 65% of new teachers in South Africa leave within the first five years of entry into teaching profession. There are many reasons, ranging from high stress levels, heavy workload, or poor working conditions. Many teachers experience physical, mental and emotional exhaustion especially those who are working in low performing schools.

Major problems for beginning teachers including classroom discipline, student motivation, student assessment, dealing with individual differences, and insufficient planning time, have been well documented in educational literature. Beginning teachers who are unable to meet these challenges experience a feeling of inadequacy often resulting in high levels of attrition. New teachers often find themselves isolated, they are often assigned students with the most difficult challenges, with no mentor, and without professional learning to further develop the skills they began to acquire as student teachers. It is important to disrupt the institutionalized isolation of the new teacher. When new teachers engage in professional development and mentoring that promotes collective participation, focuses on content and encourages coherence to and alignment with standards and assessments, they are more likely to develop and practice a classroom pedagogy that emancipates their students and themselves new teachers can feel less pressure from legislative mandates, reinforce student-centered methodologies and master practices learned as pre-service teachers when supported in their new profession. The problems and issues faced by many newly recruited teachers during their first year of teaching in primary schools justify the purpose of this research. Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of mentoring strategies on the classroom performance of newly recruited primary school teachers in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality of South Africa.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey research design was employed to investigate the research problem in the study location. The study population consists of principals of public and private primary schools across the study location. The stratified random sampling methodology was used to sampled 25 principals of twenty-five primary schools in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, of South Africa (20 principals of public primary schools and 5 principals of private primary schools). A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. To ascertain the internal consistency of the data gathering tool, the instrument was subjected to a reliability test using the Cronbach Alpha reliability parameter. The reliability index turns out to be 0.79 which indicate that the survey tool is reliable and consistent. The Data collected from the field was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics such as mean, standard deviation and t-test. The actual restrictions of numbers were taken into consideration when choosing the questionnaire items. Any mentoring program that received a mean rating of 4.50–5.00 improved newly recruited primary school instructors very much; an item with a

mean rating of 3.50–4.49 improved newly recruited primary school teachers very much; and an item with a mean rating of 2.50–3.49 improved newly recruited teachers somewhat.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Research Question: What is the effect of mentoring strategies on classroom performance of newly recruited primary school teachers in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality of South Africa?

Table 1: Average responses of principals on the effectiveness of collaborative curriculum alignment mentoring strategies on newly recruited teachers' performance in primary schools

S/N	Collaborative Curriculum Alignment	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Remarks
1.	Helps in planning and organizing instruction	3.58	0.49	High Extent
2.	Helps in aligning curricula to standards and assessments	3.59	0.49	High Extent
3.	Helps in interpreting the provisions of the curriculum	4.40	0.51	High Extent
4.	Helps in discussed problem solving in teaching and learning	4.06	0.58	High Extent
5.	Helps in classroom management	4.50	0.55	Very High Extent
6.	Helps in providing for the diverse needs of the students	4.48	0.50	High Extent
7.	Helps in recommending suitable textbooks on the subject	4.60	0.56	Very High Extent
8	Helps in obtaining and using resources effectively	4.40	0.52	High Extent
9.	Helps in building staff capacity	4.36	0.51	High Extent
10.	Helps in developing relationship and communicating with stakeholders	3.75	0.50	High Extent
	Cluster Mean	**4.17**	**0.52**	**High Extent**

Author's Computation (2024)

Data in Table 1 show a cluster mean of 4.17 which reveals that the principals rated collaborative curriculum alignment mentoring strategies to a high extent in enhancing newly recruited teachers' performance in primary schools in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. The table illustrates that item 5 and 7 principals rated collaborative curriculum alignment mentoring strategies to a very high extent in enhancing newly recruited primary school teachers' performance with mean ratings of 4.50 and 4.60. Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9 and 10 with the mean ratings ranging from 3.58 to 4.48 rated collaborative curriculum alignment mentoring strategies to a high extent. The standard deviation scores of 0.49 to 0.58 shows homogeneity in the responses of the respondents.

Table 2: Average responses of principals on the effectiveness of classroom observation mentoring strategies on newly recruited teachers' performance in primary schools

S/N	Classroom observation mentoring strategies	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
11	Helps in building the skills and capacity of beginning teachers	3.48	0.49	Moderate Extent
12	Helps in providing opportunity for new teachers to	3.45	0.4	Moderate

	indulge in self-reflection		8	Extent
13	Helps in widening new teachers' professional competence	4.43	0.53	High Extent
14	Helps stimulate and develop new practice	4.18	0.58	High Extent
15	Helps in identifying ideas and strategies for effective teaching practice	4.65	0.60	Very High Extent
16	Gives professional support during the transition from theory to practical	4.48	0.58	High Extent
17	Helps teachers see the impact of their behaviours more clearly	4.30	0.56	High Extent
18	Helps teachers in improving their implementation of lessons and activities	4.70	0.65	Very High Extent
19	Use of videotaping allows discussions to home in on specific behavioural sequences	3.36	0.46	Moderate Extent
20	Helps identify personal learning needs	3.75	0.50	High Extent
	Cluster Mean	**4.08**	**0.54**	**High Extent**

Author's Computation (2024)

Table 2 depicts the cluster average of 4.08 which indicates that the principals rated classroom observation mentoring strategies to a high extent in enhancing newly recruited teachers' performance in primary schools in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. Item by item analysis in shows that in 15 and 18 principals rated classroom observation mentoring strategies very high extent in enhancing newly recruited teachers' performance with mean ratings of 4.50 to 4.60. Items 13, 14, 16, 17 and 20 with the mean ratings ranging from 3.75 to 4.48 indicates that the respondents rated classroom observation mentoring strategies to a high extent, while in items 11, 12 and 19 with mean ratings ranging from 3.36 to 3.48 indicates that respondents rated classroom observation mentoring strategies to a moderate extent. The standard deviation scores which ranged from 0.46 to 0.65 shows that there is homogeneity in the mean ratings of the respondents.

Table 3: t-test comparison of the average ratings of Principals on the extent collaborative curriculum alignment mentoring strategies enhances newly recruited primary school teachers' performance.

Source of Variation	N	-----X	SD	Df	P-value	Decision
Principals in public schools	20	4.17	1.07	176	0.389	Not Significant
Principals in private schools	5	4.15	1.01			

Author's Computation (2024)

Table 3 shows the p-value of .389 which is greater than the significant level of 5%. This is an indication that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals of public and private primary schools on the extent to which collaborative curriculum alignment mentoring strategies enhances newly recruited primary school teachers for greater

performance in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. Hence, the null hypothesis is therefore not rejected.

Table 4: t-test comparison of the average ratings of Principals on the extent classroom observation mentoring strategies enhances newly recruited primary school teachers' performance

Source of Variation	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	df	P-value	Decision
Principals in public schools	20	4.06	1.05	176	0.456	Not significant
Principals in private schools	5	4.05	1.04			

Author's Computation (2024)

Table 4 illustrates that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals of public and private primary schools on the extent to which classroom observation mentoring strategies enhance the performance of newly recruited teachers in primary schools in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. This is indicated by the p-value of .387 which is greater than the significant level of 0.05. The null hypothesis was therefore not rejected.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study indicated that mentoring helps newly recruited teachers in classroom management and in recommending suitable textbooks on the subject to a very high extent. They also assist in interpreting the provisions of the curriculum, discussing problem solving and in obtaining and using resources effectively to a high extent. This implies that collaborative curriculum alignment offers an environment in which beginning teachers in secondary schools develop their curricula by working with their mentors, they have opportunities to share opinions about curricula on what they plan, teach and assess. This finding is consistent with that of Ifeajuna and Madueke, (2018) who stated that the teachers who have more experience, spend more time and prior knowledge about curriculum mapping consider curriculum as an effective tool for collaborative curriculum planning and standards alignment. In addition, Ifeajuna and Madueke (2018) opined that the best way newly employed teachers map curriculum is to work with experienced teachers (mentors) who may have the responsibilities to keep curriculum alive by providing continuous curricula feedback for beginning teachers. This ensures coherency in both daily and yearly planning.

The testing of the first hypothesis revealed that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals of public and private secondary schools on the extent collaborative curriculum alignment mentoring strategies enhances newly recruited teachers for greater performance. The results of the study revealed that mentoring strategies assist newly recruited primary school teachers in identifying ideas and strategies for effective teaching practice and implementation of lessons and activities to a very high extent. They also assist in widening new teachers' professional competence, help stimulate and develop new practices, help teachers see the impact of their behaviors more clearly, and identify personal learning needs to a high extent. They equally assist in building the skills and capacity of the beginning teachers, providing new opportunities to indulge in self-reflection and in the use of videotaping to a moderate extent. Classroom observation is a powerful strategy in supporting the professional learning of teachers which provides feedback on the behaviour of the beginning teachers' performance in teaching and learning environment. This is supported by the view of Aladesanmi and Olawoye (2023) that new teachers seem to have specific needs in terms of professional development in comparison with the more experienced teachers. In

addition, Sirika and Idris (2021) noted that professional development is most effective when it is constructed around helping teachers make improvements in areas of their job that really matter for students. Providing feedback to teachers about the results of their observations and helping them reflect on this feedback in productive ways provides the bridge between knowledge about what matters for students and changes in teachers' actual practice. Findings from the second hypothesis indicated that there was no significant difference among the mean ratings of principals of public and private primary schools on the extent classroom observation mentoring strategies enhances newly recruited teachers for greater performance in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Following the findings of the study, the research concluded that collaborative curriculum alignment and classroom observation mentoring strategies are effective strategies for supporting newly recruited teachers in primary schools and their instructional practices. Good quality mentoring in primary schools makes an important contribution to developing the professional skills of new teachers and ensuring the best quality learning experiences for students. Based on the results of the research findings, this study recommends that government, non-governmental organizations and educational authorities in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality should provide high quality professional development programmes for newly recruited primary school teachers in the study location. This will enable them acquire competencies and skills necessary for improved performance.

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