

EFFECT OF MENTORING ON THE TEACHERS TEACHING LEARNERS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN SOUTH KOREA: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

GLORIOUS SAMKELISIWE MQADI

School of Health, Social Care and Education

Middlesex University London

Email: smotho.motho@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Approximately one in five children experience learning and attention difficulties. Teaching learners with learning difficulties requires teachers to differentiate instruction and adapt their teaching approaches to meet individual learning needs. However, teachers may struggle to do so effectively when they lack adequate training and support. Teacher mentoring therefore has the potential to enhance classroom practices, teaching skills and teachers' emotional wellbeing. This study empirically examined the effectiveness of a teacher mentoring programme on the teaching skills and emotional wellbeing of teachers working with pupils with learning disabilities in South Korea. Four teachers participated in an eight week action research study. Data were collected through pre and post classroom observations and semi structured interviews. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. The study employed quantitative and qualitative approaches to address the research problem. The findings indicated positive changes in the teaching skills and emotional wellbeing of teachers following their participation in the mentoring programme. Based on the findings from this research, this study recommends that school administration not only implement mentoring programmes but also create and sustain a mentoring culture to improve the skills and emotional wellbeing of teachers as well as the learning outcomes of learners.

Keywords: Mentoring, Teaching, Disability, Inclusiveness & implementation, Teaching Skills

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education requires all learners' needs to be met in one educational setting (UNESCO, 1994). Teachers, who are at the forefront of implementing inclusive education in classrooms, ought to be empowered with various skills to make this a reality. However, the literature reveals that teachers who deal with learners with special needs are not adequately equipped and supported to fulfil inclusive practices (Kim & Chung, 2012; McLachlan & Davis, 2013). Although various instruments are used to empower teachers, Schulleri (2020) highlights mentoring as a professional development tool to enhance teachers' skills to deliver inclusive practices. Schulleri's assertion is supported by Grima-Farrell (2015), who also posits that mentoring helps teachers to feel valued and enhances their skills and confidence, which can contribute to quality education for all.

Friedman et al. (2021) state that mentors should ensure that mentees are valued and their abilities recognised in an inclusive setting. Similarly, Abetang, Oguma and Abetang (2020) concluded that a good mentoring programme has the ability to improve job satisfaction and teaching skills and reduce attrition. Ward, Thomas and Disch (2014), however, stress the importance of

carefully planning and evaluating the process to ensure that the desired outcomes are achieved. These findings indicate that mentoring may provide teachers with important professional support, although its effectiveness may depend on how the programme is designed, implemented and evaluated.

The need for effective professional support is particularly important for teachers working with learners with learning difficulties. Such teachers may be required to adapt their teaching approaches, differentiate instruction and respond to individual learning needs. Where teachers have limited professional experience or mentoring beyond induction, structured mentoring may provide an opportunity to strengthen their teaching skills and confidence while also providing emotional support. Against this background, this study aims to evaluate the effect of a teacher mentoring programme on the teaching skills and emotional wellbeing of teachers teaching learners with learning difficulties. Therefore, in view of the aforementioned problems, this study seeks to provide an answer to the following research question: What is the effect of the teacher mentoring programme on the skills and emotional wellbeing of teachers teaching learners with learning disabilities in South Korea?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Literature

Mentoring has continued to gain attention in the field of special education. Alston and Hansman (2020) define mentoring as a process where an experienced individual shares experiences and skills with the less experienced. In this paper, mentoring is viewed in the inclusive context as a process that requires mentors to acknowledge and value the ideas and skills of mentees so that both are empowered and inclusion is promoted (Friedman et al., 2021; Astrove & Kraimer, 2022), and to ensure that the culture of learning is promoted (Castanheria, 2016).

The concept of mentoring is particularly relevant to teachers working with learners with learning difficulties because such teachers may require professional support to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence necessary to respond effectively to diverse learning needs. Mentoring provides an opportunity for experienced individuals to share knowledge, skills and professional experiences with less experienced teachers. Within an inclusive educational setting, this process may support teachers in developing appropriate teaching approaches and responding to the individual needs of learners.

Mentoring can also contribute to the development of professional relationships between mentors and mentees. Friedman et al. (2021) and Astrove and Kraimer (2022) emphasise the importance of recognising and valuing the ideas and abilities of mentees. Mentoring should therefore not be viewed simply as the transfer of knowledge from an experienced teacher to a less experienced teacher. Rather, it can involve professional interaction, support, shared learning and the development of confidence. Castanheria (2016) similarly associates mentoring with the promotion of a culture of learning.

Empirical Literature

The benefits of mentoring have been reported by many researchers. Bowman (2014) demonstrates mentoring as a tool that promotes leadership, job satisfaction and consistency among teachers. He also stated that it promotes learner engagement and academic achievement. Examining the impact mentoring has on teachers' teaching practices, Hudson (2013) found it effective. Similarly, Ullah and Jundran (2014), through the evaluation of the mentoring programme provided to primary school teachers, found that the programme helped teachers to improve their teaching skills and improve interaction between the teachers and the students.

These findings suggest that mentoring can contribute to teachers' professional development and classroom practices. According to Lyne (2013) and Chiznik, Chiznik, Close and Gallego (2018), mentoring has the ability to improve teachers' self-efficacy. Ismail, Abdullah, Norshaffika, Ghani and Omar (2015) state that mentoring enhances confidence. Abetang, Oguma and Abetang (2020) recommend all countries to implement mentoring to improve effective learning and teaching after having reviewed literature and established that a cohort of teachers who did not participate in mentoring usually exhibit stress and low confidence, whereas those who participated have high confidence and are able to manage the classroom confidently. Cross et al. (2019) mention that professional development of teachers can be limited if mentoring is not implemented in schools. Abetang, Oguma and Abetang (2020) also associate high rate of attrition with lack of mentoring.

The empirical evidence therefore suggests that mentoring may influence several aspects of teachers' professional experiences, including teaching skills, confidence, self-efficacy and professional development. These areas are relevant to teachers working with learners with learning difficulties because effective teaching may require teachers to adapt their classroom practices to individual learning needs.

To provide evidence for mentoring teachers who deal with learners with special needs, Schulleri (2020) evaluated the effectiveness of mentoring by interviewing international teachers who were mentoring native Kazakhstan teachers in a school of gifted learners and found it helped teachers to improve teaching skills and build stronger relationships between the mentors and the mentees. This finding provides further support for the potential value of mentoring in educational contexts involving diverse learner needs.

Abetang, Oguma and Abetang (2020) further recommend all countries to implement mentoring to improve effective learning and teaching after reviewing literature and establishing that a cohort of teachers who did not participate in mentoring usually exhibit stress and low confidence, whereas those who participated have high confidence and are able to manage the classroom confidently. Ismail, Abdullah, Norshaffika, Ghani and Omar (2015) state that mentoring enhances confidence. Cross et al. (2019) mention that professional development of teachers can be limited if mentoring is not implemented in schools. Abetang, Oguma and Abetang (2020) also associate high rate of attrition with lack of mentoring.

Although mentoring has been found beneficial, there are possible factors that can result in it being ineffectual. Starr (2013) mentions lack of clear goals, while Cross et al. (2019) state lack

of valuing and respecting abilities and ideas of mentees by mentors. Straus, Johnson and Marquez (2013) suggest lack of communication, lack of commitment, competitive mind set and conflict of interest as factors that may affect the effectiveness of mentoring. These findings indicate that the availability of a mentoring programme alone does not necessarily guarantee positive outcomes. The objectives of the programme, communication, commitment and the relationship between mentors and mentees may influence the effectiveness of the process.

This review reveals a gap in literature on mentoring to support teachers who work in inclusive settings, particularly those who deal with learners with learning difficulties. Additionally, a review of literature by Spooner-lane (2017) establishes a gap that exists on mentoring teachers in primary schools. Although previous studies have established that mentoring can improve teachers' teaching skills, confidence, self-efficacy and professional development, there remains a need to examine its effect on teachers who teach learners with learning difficulties, particularly within the South Korean context. This gap provides a basis for the present study, which examines the effect of a teacher mentoring programme on the teaching skills and emotional wellbeing of teachers teaching learners with learning difficulties in South Korea.

Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical framework that underpins this research is the self-efficacy theory. The choice of this theory is based on the nature of the research problem, which requires evaluating the effectiveness of a teacher mentoring programme on the teaching skills and emotional wellbeing of teachers teaching learners with learning difficulties. Self-efficacy theory is based on the beliefs of a person's ability to succeed in the midst of challenges (Bandura, 1977). It could be argued that mastering relevant teaching skills through mentoring can improve teachers' confidence to teach effectively. You, Kim and Shin (2019) support this claim by stating that teachers with a high self-efficacy tend to be more flexible in accommodating learners with diverse needs and create teaching strategies that will accommodate them.

Self-efficacy theory is relevant to this study because teachers' beliefs about their ability to perform their professional responsibilities may influence how they respond to challenges in the classroom. Teachers working with learners with learning difficulties may encounter situations that require them to adapt their teaching approaches and provide differentiated support. Mentoring may provide teachers with opportunities to develop relevant teaching skills, receive professional guidance and strengthen their confidence in dealing with classroom challenges.

The relationship between mentoring and self-efficacy is also supported by the empirical literature. According to Lyne (2013) and Chiznik, Chiznik, Close and Gallego (2018), mentoring has the ability to improve teachers' self-efficacy, while Ismail, Abdullah, Norshaffika, Ghani and Omar (2015) state that mentoring enhances confidence. The theory therefore provides a useful framework for understanding how mentoring may contribute to changes in teachers' confidence and teaching practices.

Within this study, mentoring constitutes the professional intervention, while self-efficacy provides a theoretical explanation for how the intervention may influence teachers' confidence and ability to respond to learners with learning difficulties. The theory also provides a

connection between the development of teachers' professional skills and their emotional experiences within the classroom. Thus, self-efficacy theory provides an appropriate theoretical perspective for examining the effect of mentoring on teachers' teaching skills and emotional wellbeing.

Based on the literature reviewed and the identified gap, this project aims to examine the effectiveness of a teacher mentoring programme for teachers who are dealing with learners with learning difficulties. The study therefore seeks to answer the question: How effective is a teacher mentoring programme towards teachers who are dealing with learners with learning difficulties?

3. METHODOLOGY

Four teachers with less than five years of teaching experience participated in this action research study over a period of eight weeks. Pre and post intervention data were collected through classroom observations and semi structured interviews to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. The study employed quantitative and qualitative approaches to address the research problem. The quantitative component involved examining changes in teachers' classroom practices before and after the intervention, while the qualitative component explored teachers' experiences and perceptions of the mentoring programme through semi structured interviews. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants who were considered appropriate for the purpose of the research (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016).

During the recruitment stage, five South Korean teachers were identified and approached regarding participation in the intervention programme; however, only four agreed to participate. Consequently, the study comprised four participants, all of whom held a Bachelor of Education degree. The selection criteria required participants to be teachers working with learners with learning difficulties, to have less than five years of teaching experience and to have had limited experience of mentoring beyond the induction period. All participants had only experienced mentoring during their induction.

Research Setting

The research was conducted in a small public primary school located in the eastern part of South Korea. The school has twenty teachers, and I have worked there for over three years as the only foreign teacher, while all other teachers are Korean. The school has a strong support system for learners and established traditions that promote and enhance their social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. However, comparatively less support is provided to teachers, and the school experiences a high rate of staff attrition, with approximately five teachers leaving each year.

The setting provided an appropriate context for examining teacher mentoring because the study focused on teachers working with learners with learning difficulties and who had limited experience of mentoring beyond their initial induction. The difference between the support available to learners and that available to teachers also provided an important context for

examining whether a structured mentoring intervention could support teachers' professional and emotional needs.

As stated by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018), action research is not exempt from ethical considerations. Therefore, appropriate ethical procedures were followed throughout the research process. Permission to conduct the project was obtained from the vice principal of the school and Middlesex University prior to the commencement of the research. Following discussions with the participants regarding the purpose and procedures of the project, written consent was obtained from all participants. Pseudonyms were used in place of participants' names to maintain confidentiality and protect their identities.

Intervention Process

Before and during the intervention stage, each teacher identified the areas in which they required assistance, particularly in relation to specific teaching skills and emotional support needed to perform their roles effectively. This approach ensured that the mentoring provided was tailored to the individual needs of each teacher.

The mentoring process was reviewed weekly to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies being implemented. Strategies that were found to be effective were continued, while those that were less effective were modified or replaced with alternative approaches to better address the teachers' identified needs. This iterative process was consistent with the action research design because it allowed the mentoring intervention to be reviewed and adjusted in response to the needs identified during the study.

The intervention therefore focused on two interconnected areas: the development of teaching skills and the provision of emotional support. By allowing teachers to identify their individual needs and reviewing the mentoring strategies on a weekly basis, the intervention sought to provide responsive professional support throughout the eight week period.

Participants

Participant A is a 23 year old female teacher who had recently graduated and commenced her teaching career at the beginning of the academic year in March. She teaches English to students from third to sixth grade and is also my co teacher.

Participant B is a 27 year old female special needs teacher who teaches students from first to fifth grade and has four years of teaching experience.

Participant C is a 27 year old female teacher who teaches sixth grade students and has four years of teaching experience.

Participant D is a 27 year old male teacher who teaches sixth grade students and has three years of teaching experience.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The hypothesis of this study is to evaluate the effect of teachers' mentoring programme on the teaching skills and the emotional wellbeing of teachers teaching pupils with learning disabilities. Data from classroom observations were analysed through Microsoft Excel. The Likert scale was used to rate scores; 5 was rated as excellent, 4 as good, 3 as average, 2 as attention needed and 1 as much attention needed. To evaluate the differences in the pre- and post-observations, an average across all participants was calculated.

Interviews were subjected to themes. A thematic analysis was adopted for interviews due to its flexibility and its capability to excerpt codes and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A deductive approach was used because the researcher had pre-conceived themes that were expected to emerge from the data due to the problem having been identified in the researchers' workplace, which is frustration of teachers teaching learners with learning difficulties and also the high attrition rate. The theoretical framework of self-efficacy theory gives a compelling idea of the possible themes that would emerge from the data (Lyne, 2013). A semantic approach was followed due to an interest in the participants' stated opinions, as these opinions will help to formulate the intervention programme and help build up data that will lead to the answering of the research question, and subsequently the post-interview data will facilitate answering the research question. The study adopted six steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) to assist in the process of analysing data. During the familiarisation stage, these were the notes taken by the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

'The teachers seemed to be stressed due to lack of support and lack of skills to differentiate instruction; as a result, this sometimes affects their confidence in delivering instruction. The teachers clearly indicated how they would appreciate effective strategies that will enable them to teach effectively.'

Codes were generated after, and this was done by hand, working through the hard copies with pens and highlighters, and thereafter codes were collated into themes.

At the pre-intervention stage, the themes identified were lack of confidence, lack of teaching skills to differentiate instruction and lack of support. Some of the evidence of remarks made by participants is also provided.

'I have not been looking much into that; I just prepare my lesson following the curriculum generally.' (A)

The participant acknowledges that she has not been differentiating instruction to be able to ensure learning takes place for learners in her classroom, including those with learning difficulties.

'I really need support with managing discipline in my class. Trying effective strategies would go a long way.' (B)

The participant has expressed the need for support with different strategies to manage learners with special needs in her classroom.

At the post-intervention stage, the themes generated were increased confidence, improved wellbeing, improved teaching skills and improved job satisfaction. Evidence is some of the extracts from participants below.

'The programme was effective because even though I am a special needs teacher, I realised that there are strategies I overlooked which were very helpful during the classroom.' (B)

Participant B states that the mentoring programme helped her to evaluate her teaching strategies that she may have taken lightly but were quite effective.

'..... I have also realised that the way I relate with other teachers has improved. I feel more confident in expressing myself now.' (C)

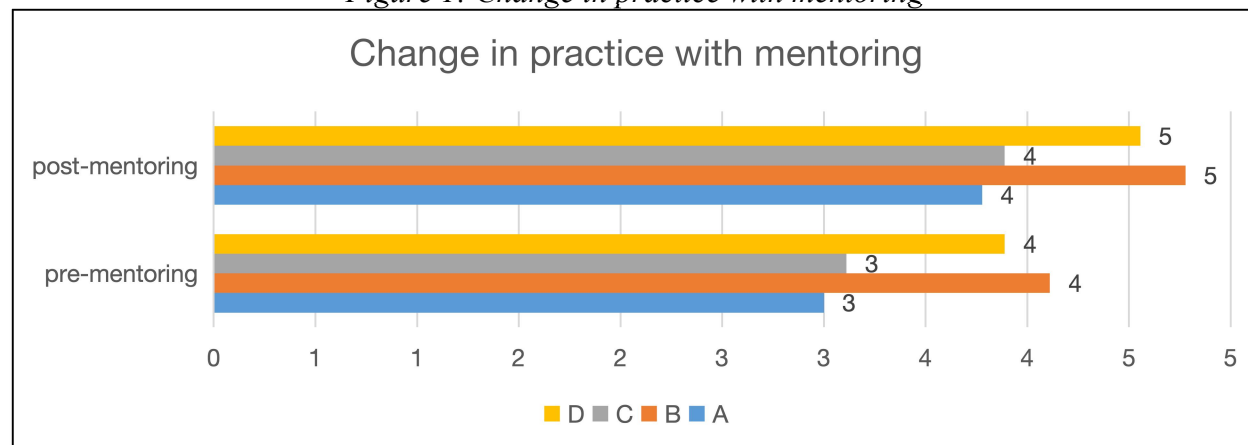
The participant makes interesting remarks about the intervention programme, which not only has helped her to improve relationships with her colleagues but also makes her confident to express herself.

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

Pre- and post-observations

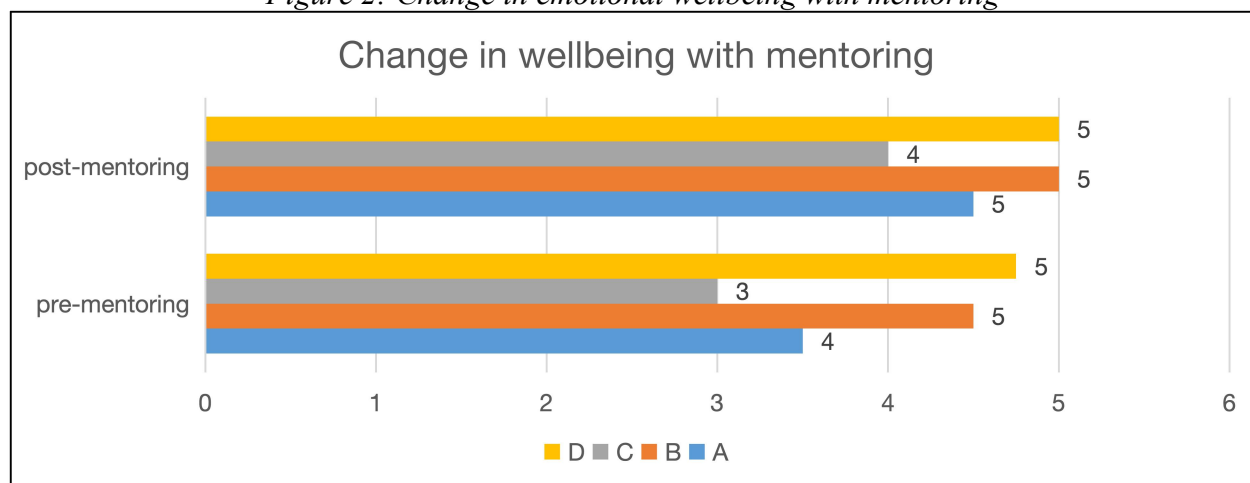
Pre- and post-observations helped in determining the differences that occurred through the implementation of the mentoring programme. As previously mentioned, observations were classified into two categories, the curriculum dimension and the psychosocial dimension. The curriculum dimension focused on the teaching skills, while the psychosocial dimension looked into the emotional wellbeing of teachers.

Figure 1: Change in practice with mentoring



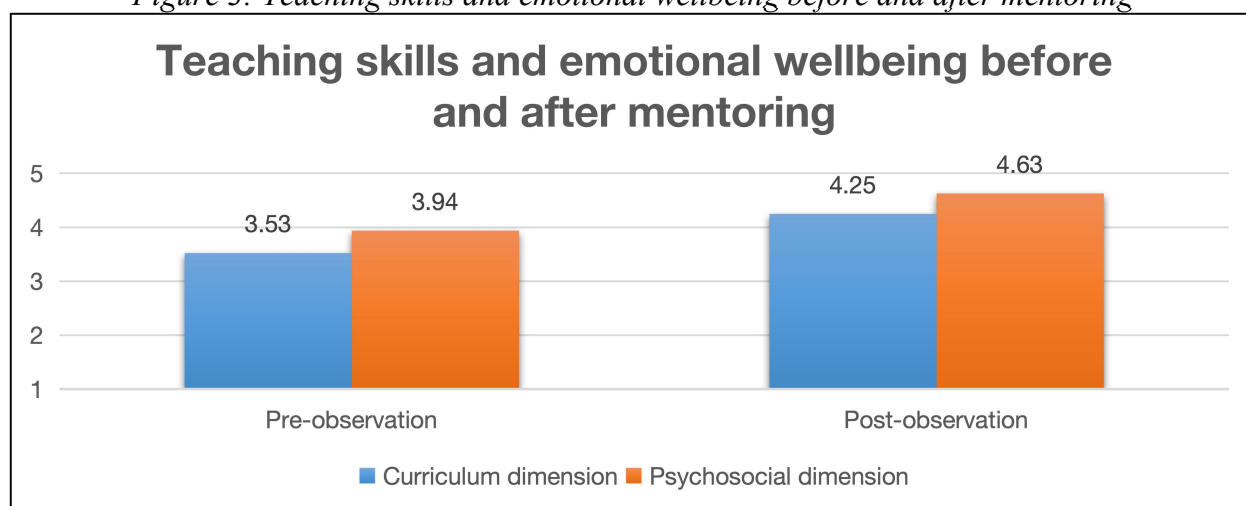
Source: Author's Computation (2023)

Figure 2: Change in emotional wellbeing with mentoring



Source: Author's Computation (2023)

Figure 3: Teaching skills and emotional wellbeing before and after mentoring



Source: Author's Computation (2023)

The full score is 5; if mentoring helped to improve teachers' teaching skills and emotional wellbeing, post-observation scores will be higher than pre-observation scores. Figures 1 and 2 show changes that occurred in the teaching skills and emotional wellbeing of teachers as a result of mentoring. Whilst the average from the four participants is seen in Figure 3, revealing that teaching skills scores increased from 3.53 to 4.25, this is approximately an increase of 20.5%, whereas the emotional wellbeing scores increased from 3.94 to 4.63 with an increase of approximately 17.5%. This implies that the intervention programme resulted in a significant change in teachers' skills and emotional wellbeing. Implementing a teacher mentoring programme has the ability to enhance the teaching skills and emotional wellbeing of teachers, which was the hypothesis for this study.

4.2 Qualitative Data Analysis (Pre- and Post-Interviews)

In this section, each theme included data from pre-intervention and subsequently from post-intervention. For example, the theme 'Increased confidence' will first provide information prior to intervention and after intervention, respectively. The final themes concluded upon are shown in figure 4 below.

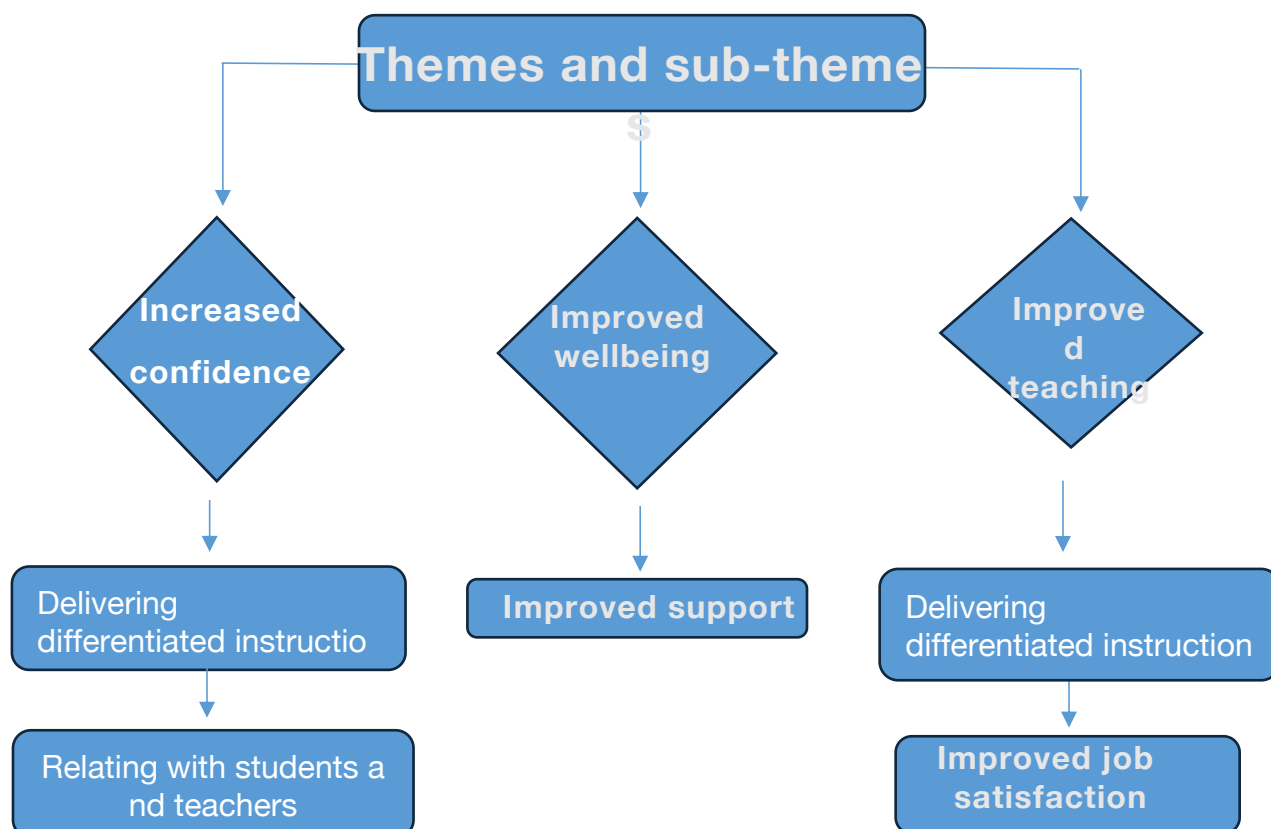


Figure 4: Themes and sub-themes

Theme 1: Increased Confidence

The theme 'confidence' refers to the participants' ability to confidently deliver differentiated instruction and relate with learners.

Subtheme 1: Delivering differentiated instruction

'I have not been applying curriculum differentiation because it is difficult to implement, and to be honest, I do not know how to do this well, so I feel shy in doing so.' (A)

The participant states she lacks confidence to deliver differentiated instruction due to her inability to implement this approach. Her lack of skills in ensuring that all learners are able to

learn effectively regardless of their learning differences has put the learning of learners with learning difficulties at stake. Reddy and Anuradha (2013) explain that lack of mentoring is prevalent in schools, and unfortunately, this translates to lack of confidence, as participant A has indicated. Additionally, when teachers lack the confidence to implement curriculum differentiation, the learners will continue to experience difficulty in the classroom (Reddy & Anuradha, 2013).

'I found it useful to my career and my life in general, as I am now happier and slowly falling in love with the teaching profession.' (A)

The strong statement made by the participant of falling in love with the profession due to her ability to differentiate instruction is a clear indication of how mentoring has helped to improve her skills and confidence. This is supported by the study of Lyne (2013), Aslan and Ocal (2012) and Abetang, Oguma and Abetang (2020).

Subtheme 2: Relating with students and teachers

'Surprisingly, I did not believe that it would help me, but I was willing to give it a try; however, it was quite helpful because, among other things, it has improved my confidence, and I can relate with other teachers better. So, I can say it was useful.' (C)

The participant expresses how hesitant she was about the programme but found it very beneficial. The participant further states that through mentoring, her ability to relate to other teachers increased.

Similarly, Ullah and Jundran (2014) found that mentoring helps teachers to relate better with their colleagues.

Theme 2: Improved wellbeing

The theme 'wellbeing' refers to how participants' emotional wellbeing is affected by their work.

'I enjoy most things about the job except for the workload. Lack of support to develop my skills in my profession is one of my concerns because the workload is much, and it gives me stress.' (C)

In the extract above, the participant explains that due to a lack of support, she is often overwhelmed and has a lot of stress, and this impacts her work negatively.

'Over the years I have been working on improving resilience so that I see challenges in a more positive way. It has not been easy, as working with learners with special needs is stressful.' (B)

Participant B explains that she has resorted to improving resilience in order to help her cope and develop her skills. The participant further explains that learners with special needs have posed as a great challenge, and the experience has been filled with stress.

'I try to maintain a balance between work and social life. Work has been so stressful that it affects my happiness...' (D)

Similar to other participants, participant D expresses how stressful work has been because he finds it difficult to balance his personal life and work duties, so his happiness is affected. Delivering teaching instruction to learners with diverse learning needs can be challenging and daunting (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell & Hardin, 2014). Learners with diverse learner needs require specialised attention and accommodations when teachers are overwhelmed **Subtheme 1: Delivering differentiated instruction**

'I have not been applying curriculum differentiation because it is difficult to implement, and to be honest, I do not know how to do this well, so I feel shy in doing so.' (A)

The participant states she lacks confidence to deliver differentiated instruction due to her inability to implement this approach. Her lack of skills in ensuring that all learners are able to learn effectively regardless of their learning differences has put the learning of learners with learning difficulties at stake. Reddy and Anuradha (2013) explain that lack of mentoring is prevalent in schools, and unfortunately, this translates to lack of confidence, as participant A has indicated. Additionally, when teachers lack the confidence to implement curriculum differentiation, the learners will continue to experience difficulty in the classroom (Reddy & Anuradha, 2013).

'I found it useful to my career and my life in general, as I am now happier and slowly falling in love with the teaching profession.' (A)

The strong statement made by the participant of falling in love with the profession due to her ability to differentiate instruction is a clear indication of how mentoring has helped to improve her skills and confidence. This is supported by the study of Lyne (2013), Aslan and Ocal (2012) and Abetang, Oguma and Abetang (2020).

Subtheme 2: Relating with students and teachers

'Surprisingly, I did not believe that it would help me, but I was willing to give it a try; however, it was quite helpful because, among other things, it has improved my confidence, and I can relate with other teachers better. So, I can say it was useful.' (C)

The participant expresses how hesitant she was about the programme but found it very beneficial. The participant further states that through mentoring, her ability to relate to other teachers increased.

Similarly, Ullah and Jundran (2014) found that mentoring helps teachers to relate better with their colleagues.

Theme 2: Improved wellbeing

The theme 'wellbeing' refers to how participants' emotional wellbeing is affected by their work.

'I enjoy most things about the job except for the workload. Lack of support to develop my skills in my profession is one of my concerns because the workload is much, and it gives me stress.' (C)

In the extract above, the participant explains that due to a lack of support, she is often overwhelmed and has a lot of stress, and this impacts her work negatively.

'Over the years I have been working on improving resilience so that I see challenges in a more positive way. It has not been easy, as working with learners with special needs is stressful.' (B)

Participant B explains that she has resorted to improving resilience in order to help her cope and develop her skills. The participant further explains that learners with special needs have posed as a great challenge, and the experience has been filled with stress.

'I try to maintain a balance between work and social life. Work has been so stressful that it affects my happiness...' (D)

Similar to other participants, participant D expresses how stressful work has been because he finds it difficult to balance his personal life and work duties, so his happiness is affected. Delivering teaching instruction to learners with diverse learning needs can be challenging and daunting (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell & Hardin, 2014). Learners with diverse learner needs require specialised attention and accommodations; when teachers are overwhelmed with workload, these needs go unmet (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell & Hardin, 2014). As the participants have expressed, these challenges lead to difficulty in performing at their best level and consequently lead to decreased confidence and increased stress levels. Reddy and Anuradha (2013) stressed the importance of supporting teachers who teach learners with special needs and additionally pointed out that teachers who do not receive support may become frustrated, anxious and less confident. The participants in this study have shown that lack of support and mentoring leads to negative emotions that affect job performance and the overall emotional wellbeing of teachers.

'I have also realised that the way I relate with other teachers has improved. I feel more confident...' (C)

The participant states that she feels more confident because of mentoring. Nwankwo, Okechi and Nweke (2015) state mentoring increases good working relationships and contributes positively towards teachers' emotional wellbeing. The researchers also claim that a positive relationship exists between self-esteem and psychological wellbeing, implying that people with high self-esteem often perform well and are overall happy in their work environment (Nwankwo, Okechi & Nweke, 2015).

Subtheme 1: Improved support

Support refers to how the support participants receive at school affects them.

'I would like to be assisted with new ideas of becoming happier with my job and also teaching learners with learning difficulties.' (A)

The participant expresses her desire to be equipped to teach learners with learning difficulties, as this seems to be affecting her emotional wellbeing.

'I enjoyed exploring different ways to help learners with learning difficulties. I really felt like I was making a difference no matter how little it was. I also realised that this tends to make me feel relieved and less anxious even though you had been motivating, which made a difference, but helping learners with learning difficulties makes me happier.' (A)

The participant shared that she now finds fulfilment in teaching and helping learners with difficulties. The participant has reported that her emotional wellbeing has been enhanced due to the support she acquired during the intervention programme. Mentoring has increased the participants' self-confidence and overall professional image.

Delivering differentiated instruction to students with varying learning needs can be difficult and intimidating (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell & Hardin, 2014). If there is a lack of support, this may lead to teachers being frustrated, which can have a detrimental impact on their self-confidence (Reddy & Anuradha, 2013). In order for teachers to effectively instruct all students, it is necessary to expand their knowledge and abilities; this increases their sense of self-efficacy (Versland & Erickson, 2017). It is evident in the above extract that receiving support can lead to positive outcomes of self-confidence and a positive impact on learners with different learning needs.

Theme 3: Improved teaching skills

The theme 'teaching skills' refers to the teachers' ability to implement different strategies to ensure learners with learning difficulties learn, such as differentiated activities and assessments.

Subtheme 1: Differentiating instruction

Before the mentoring programme, participants reported different challenges with regard to implementing curriculum differentiation.

'I have not been applying curriculum differentiation because it is difficult to do.' (A)

'The afternoon remedial class has been the main one I have been using, as I found it better because differentiating the curriculum during the normal class can be time-consuming.' (C)

Participant A reported that applying curriculum differentiation to suit the diverse needs of the learners in her classroom is a great challenge and poses great difficulty. Similarly, participant C explains that she is only able to apply curriculum differentiation adequately in their afternoon remedial class because in the main classrooms, time becomes a constraint that prohibits her from having a specialised method of delivering the curriculum to learners with learning difficulties (Tomlinson, 2014).

Kim (2013) suggests that teachers often feel overwhelmed with the responsibilities of their professions, and in that, they neglect areas such as curriculum differentiation. It is similarly observed in the above extracts that the overwhelming demand of the profession leads teachers to neglect the needs of learners with challenges. Similarly, Schulleri (2020) indicates that teachers are unwilling to learn new methods and processes because they are too busy with other aspects of teaching. In the above extract, the teacher had not been applying differentiation because she felt it was too difficult. Reddy and Anuradha (2013) and Schulleri (2020) indicate that mentoring can benefit teachers by enhancing their confidence in their abilities. Mentoring can also increase awareness of the importance of issues in the classroom and contribute to teachers implementing curriculum differentiation (Schuller, 2020).

'As I have mentioned other things before, it has also helped me to relate better with the students, especially those with learning difficulties, and also helped me to be able to be creative and think of ways to differentiate the curriculum.' (A)

In the extract above, the participant has reported that the mentoring programme has helped her to differentiate instruction and improved her level of creativity.

Lyne (2013) reported that mentoring helped to improve teachers' skills, and also McLachlan and Davis (2013) emphasised the importance of implementing development programmes in order to improve teachers' skills.

Sub-theme 2: Improved job satisfaction

The theme 'job satisfaction' refers to how participants feel about their jobs.

During the pre-intervention interviews, participants voiced out different concerns regarding lack of support.

'Honestly, I am not enjoying teaching yet. I have moments where I do enjoy it, but those have been far fewer than the ones I do not enjoy. I have a lot of stress with adapting to the profession, and it is affecting my wellbeing, as oftentimes I have no zeal for coming to work.' A)

The participant has expressed that she does not find enjoyment in her occupation. She expresses that the negative emotions outweigh the positive ones. The participant explains that the emotional turmoil of the profession affects her wellbeing, and she is unhappy.

Novice teachers often find the demand of teaching overwhelming and are often met with new challenges they did not expect.

The prospects of teacher mentoring are a manner in which novice teachers can be ushered into the new profession. Bressman, Winter and Efron (2018) agree and further recommend that schools implement mentoring programmes even after induction to ensure teachers are retained and kept motivated. The emotional wellbeing of novice teachers is important, as their emotional wellbeing will be the element that ensures that they remain motivated, resilient to negative factors and enjoy their work (Wilcoxon, Bell & Steiner, 2020).

'The most important thing I have also noted is I seem to be looking forward to going to work rather than before...' (A)

The participant has made a statement about the remarkable change regarding her job contentment.

As stated by Abetang, Oguma and Abetang (2020), mentoring has the ability to improve job satisfaction. Due to mentoring, the participant's job contentment seems to have improved (Wilcoxon, Bell & Steiner, 2020).

DISCUSSIONS

As previously mentioned, at the pre-intervention stage, lack of confidence, lack of teaching skills and lack of support were identified as the main themes. At the post-intervention stage, increased confidence, improved teaching skills and improved emotional wellbeing emerged as the main themes. To report these findings, the themes identified from the pre- and post-intervention interviews were consolidated.

I reported the theme 'Increased confidence' as a first theme because all participants gave account of it and because it is closely related to the theoretical framework guiding this study, self-efficacy theory. As stated by Bandura (1977), self-efficacy enables people to see difficulties as challenges, not as threats. This implies that people with a high self-efficacy do not lack confidence (Dixon, McConnell & Hardin, 2014). Improved emotional wellbeing' was reported as the second theme because participants' accounts suggested that their emotional wellbeing was closely connected to their confidence and their ability to carry out their teaching responsibilities effectively. Additionally, a teacher who is happy and feels supported is able to teach effectively and is able to be creative to ensure that all learners in the classroom teach (Jones et al., 2015). The last theme that was reported is 'Improved teaching skills'. Reporting this as the last theme sums up to a conclusion that a teacher who is confident, emotionally well and has the necessary teaching skills to fulfil his or her functions effectively is mostly likely to be content with their job (Lyne, 2013).

The changes observed in Participant C were particularly notable. Prior to the intervention, she was generally shy, appeared less enthusiastic and tended to keep to herself. She also rarely attended school gatherings. Initially, she was reluctant to participate in the project and expressed doubts about whether it would make any difference. During the intervention, however, arranging discussion times was challenging because she frequently stated that she was busy. Towards the end of the project, this changed, as she began reminding me about our meeting times. She also initiated informal conversations with greater enthusiasm and began attending school gatherings. These changes suggest an increase in her confidence and engagement and are consistent with the findings of Abetang, Oguma and Abetang (2020).

Overall, the findings indicate that the teacher mentoring programme was an effective intervention for enhancing teachers' teaching skills and emotional wellbeing. The observation findings demonstrated improvements in both teaching skills and emotional wellbeing, while the interview findings further indicated positive changes in these areas. However, it is difficult to

determine at this stage whether the mentoring programme contributed to reducing teacher attrition, as this would require a longer period of observation and evaluation. Nevertheless, the mentoring programme continued beyond the duration of the study to support the development and sustainability of a mentoring culture within the school. Based on the findings, I proposed to the school's senior leadership that mentoring for newly appointed teachers should continue beyond the induction period and be sustained throughout the early stages of their teaching careers. This recommendation aims to provide new teachers with continued professional and emotional support, which may strengthen their teaching skills and emotional wellbeing and, in the longer term, contribute to reducing teacher attrition within the school.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Ensuring that inclusive education is effectively implemented is a shared responsibility of the school and its teachers, who need appropriate strategies and support to promote learning for all learners. This study investigated the effectiveness of a teacher mentoring programme. Overall, findings from the observations and interviews suggest that the mentoring programme contributed to improvements in teachers' teaching skills and emotional wellbeing. However, it was not possible to determine within the eight-week intervention whether the programme contributed to reducing teacher attrition, as this would require a longer period of observation and evaluation. Future research should therefore consider conducting similar studies over a longer period and across culturally diverse school settings.

Based on the findings of this study, I proposed to the school's senior leadership that mentoring for newly appointed teachers should extend beyond the induction period and continue throughout the early stages of their teaching careers. Sustaining mentoring beyond induction would provide new teachers with continued professional and emotional support, which may further enhance their teaching skills and emotional wellbeing and, in the longer term, contribute to reducing teacher attrition within the school. In addition, the development and sustainability of a mentoring culture within the school is recommended to promote continuous professional learning and support among teachers.

REFERENCES

- Abetang, M., Oguma, R. & Abetang, A. (2020). Mentoring and the difference it makes in teachers' work: A literature review. *European Journal of Education*. 7, (6), p. 301-323.
- Adams, W. (2015). Conducting semi-structured interviews. In: Newcomer, K.E., Hatry, H.P. and Wholey, J.S. (Eds). *Handbook of practical program evaluation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. p. 492-505.
- Alston, G., & Hansman, C.A. (2020). Mentoring in adult and continuing education. In Rocco, T., Smith, C., Merriweather, L. and Hawley, J. (Eds). *Handbook for adult and continuing education*. (2020 Ed.) Sterling VA: Stylus Publications.
- Aslan, B., & Ocal, S. (2012). A case study on mentoring in teacher development program. *Journal of Education and Future*. 1, (2), p. 31-48.
- Astrove, S.L. & Krainer, M.L. (2022). What and how do mentors learn? The role of relationship quality and mentoring self-efficacy in mentor learning. *Personnel Psychology*. 75, (2), p. 485-513.

- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change. *Psychological Review*. 84, (2), p. 191-215.
- Bowman, M. (2014). Teacher Mentoring as a Means to Improve Schools. *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*. 6, (1), p. 47-51.
- Bradbury, H. (2015). *The sage handbook of action research*. (3rd Ed). London: Sage Publications.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. 3, (2), p. 77-101.
- Bressman, S., Winter, J. & Efron, S. (2018). Next generation mentoring: Supporting teachers beyond induction. *Teacher and Teacher Education*. 73, p. 162-170.
- Burkholder, G.T., Cos, K. A. & Crawford, L.L. (2016). *The scholar-practitioner's guide to research to guide to research design*. Baltimore: Laureate Publishing.
- Castanheira, P. (2016). Mentoring for educators' professional learning and development: a meta-synthesis of IJMCE volumes 1-4. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*. 5, (4), p. 334-346.
- Chiznik, E.W., Chiznik, A.W., Close, C. & Gallego, M. (2018). Developing student teachers' teaching self-efficacy through Shared Mentoring in Learning Environments (SMILE). *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*. 7, (1), p. 35-53.
- Clark, A., Holland, C., Katz, J. & Peace, S. (2009). Learning to see: lessons from participatory observation research projects in public spaces. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*. 12, (4), p. 345-30.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research Methods in Education*. (8th Ed). London: Routledge.
- Creswell, J.W. (2015). *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage publications.
- Ross, M., Lee, S., Bridgman, H., Thopa, D. K., Cleary, M. & Kornahaber, R. (2019). Benefits, barriers, and enablers of mentoring female health academics: An integrative review. *PLoS One*. 14, (4), p. 1-21.
- Dixon, F., Yssel, N., McConnell, J., & Hardin, T. (2014). Differentiated Instruction, Professional Development, and Teacher Efficacy. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*. 37, (2), p. 111-127.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S.A. & Alkassim, R.S. (2016). Comparison of convenience and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*. 5, (1), p. 1-4.
- Friedman, D.B., Yelton, B., Corwin, S.J., Hardin, J.W., Ingram, L.A., Torres-McGehee, T.M. & Alberg, A.J. (2021). Value of mentorship for equity in higher education leadership: a school of public health focus with implications for all academic administrator. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*. 29, (5), p. 500-521.
- Grima-Farrell, C. (2015). Mentoring pathways to enhancing the personal and professional development of pre-service teachers. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*. 4, (4), p. 255-268.
- Hudson, P. (2013). Mentoring as professional development: Growth for both mentor and mentee. *Professional Development in Education*. 39, (5), p. 1-17.
- Ismail, A., Abdullah, N., Norshaffika, I., Ghani, A. & Omar, N. (2015). Mentoring Program as an Instrument of Enhancing Mentee's Self-Efficacy. *Acta Universitatis Danubius*. 9, (1), p. 14-32.

- Jones, P., de Kock, J., Charles, D., Jourdan, N., Copeland, S., & Willis, S. (2015). Insider perspectives on mentoring of teachers of students with complex disabilities: A New Zealand story. *Journal of International Special Needs Education*. 18, (2), p. 41-50.
- Jyoti, J., & Sharma, P. (2015). Impact of Mentoring Functions on Career Development: Moderating Role of Mentoring Culture and Mentoring Structure. *Global Business Review*. 16, p. 1-9.
- Kim, Y. (2013). Inclusive education in South Korea: Policy, Practice and Challenges. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*. 10, (2), p. 79-81.
- Kim, M. J. & Chung, K.S. (2012). Relationships among the teachers' factors, professional learning environments and inclusive empowerment of teacher in inclusive child care center. *Korean Journal of Child Care Educ*. 67, p. 19-42.
- Lyne, M. (2013). Effects of Teacher Mentoring Programme in Malaysia on Improving Teachers' Self-Efficacy. *Malaysian Journal of ELT Research*. 9, (1), p. 1-8.
- McLachlan, B., & Davis, G. (2013). Educating the educators: developing those who support learning for students with additional learning needs. *Support for Learning*. 28, (4), p. 173-180.
- Nwankwo, C., Okechi, B. & Nweke, P. (2015). Relationship between perceived self-esteem and psychological well-being among student athletes. *Academic Research Journal of Psychology and Counselling*. 2, (1), p.8-16.
- Reddy, G., & Anuradha, R. (2013). Occupational stress of Higher Secondary Teachers in Vellore District. *International Journal of Educational Planning and Administration*. 3, (1), p. 9-24.
- Schulleri, P. (2020). Teacher Mentoring: Experiences from International Teacher Mentors in Kazakhstan. *Asian Journal of Education and Training*. 6, (2), p. 320-329.
- Spooner-Lane, R. (2017). Mentoring beginning teachers in primary schools: research review. *Professional Development in Education*. 43, (2), p. 253-273.
- Starr, J. (2013). When mentoring relationships fail to thrive-mentoring, managing and organizational agenda. *Development and Learning in Organizations: An International Journal*. 29, (4), p. 19-21.
- Straus, S., Johnson, M., Marquez, C. & Feldmand, M. (2013). Characteristics of successful and failed mentoring relationships: A qualitative study across two academic health centers. *Acad Med*. 88, (1), p. 82-89.
- Stucky, H.L. (2018). Three types of interviews: Qualitative researcher methods in social health. *Journal of Social health and Diabetes*. 1, (2), p. 56-59.
- Timmins, P., Shepherd, D. & Kelly, T. (2003). The Research and Development in Organisations approach and the evaluation of mainstream behaviour support initiative. *Educational Psychology in Practice*. 19, (3), p. 229-242.
- Timmins, P., Bham, M., McFadyen, J., & Ward, J. (2006). Teachers and Consultation: Applying research development in organisations (RADIO). *Educational Psychology in Practice*. 22, (4), p. 305-319.
- Tomlinson, C.A. (2014). *The Differentiated Classroom. Responding to the needs of all learners.* (2nd Ed). Alexandria: ASCD.
- Ullah, T. & Jundran, S. (2014). Impact of District Teacher Educators' Mentoring support on Professional Development of Primary School Teachers. *Journal of Educational Research*. 7, (1), p. 112-130.

- UNESCO. (1994). The Salamanca Statement and Framework for action on special education, the world conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality education. Spain: UNESCO. [online]. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000098427> [Accessed 28 October 2022].
- Versland, T. & Erickson, J. (2017). Leading by example: A case study of the influence of principal self-efficacy on collective efficacy. *Cogent Education*. 4, (1), p. 1-17.
- Ward, E.G., Thomas, E.E. & Disch, W.B. (2014). Mentor service themes emergent in holistic undergraduate peer-mentoring experience. *Journal of College Student Development*. 55, (6), p. 563-579.
- Wilcoxon, C., Bell, J. & Steiner, A. (2020). Empowerment through induction: supporting the wellbeing of beginning teachers. *International Journal of Mentoring and coaching in Education*. 9, (1), p. 52-70.
- You, S., Kim, E.K., & Shin, K. (2019). Teachers' belief and self-efficacy toward inclusive education in early childhood settings in Korea. *Sustainability*. 11, (5), p. 1-12.