Mentoring Teacher Trainees in Universities in Uganda: A Dimension of Continuous Supervision of School Practice

Dr. Joyce Bukirwa Rebecca[1], Dr. Badru Musisi[2]

Muni University, Uganda.
Makerere University, Uganda.

Abstract: *While the globe is faced with COVID-19 pandemic, there are reforms that need to be advanced to ensure continuity in education while maintaining the standards of quality. Uganda's university curriculum for teacher training provides for two school practice placements for student teachers before they can qualify to register as professional teachers by the ministry of education and sports. The fact that schools are being opened in a staggered way with increased online teaching and learning this has limited the exercise of student teachers moving into schools to carry out school practice. There is need for Teacher educators to devise new ways of helping the students to attain the objectives of the curriculum to which they were admitted and fulfill the requirements of professional training. This paper draws stakeholders' attention to such important matter of mentorship for teacher trainees in Ugandan universities and a model is hereby provided as a way forward. A framework of assessment is suggested to enable adaptability of the contents of this model. This paper has adopted a documentary review methodology and has been guided by the following objectives. To describe the mentorship role of a Lecturer at the University; To analyze mentorship in schools; To examine the process of mentoring student teachers at the universities; To develop a mentorship model for teacher training at University and Assessment of School Practice under mentorship.*

I.   Introduction

All Uganda's Teacher Training Curricular in Universities and other Tertiary teacher training institutions spell out two teaching practices for the teacher trainees as a requirement for completion of the level of training and subsequently register as a professional teacher in the Ministry of Education and Sports. Most of these institutions organize for school practice in the second and third year. This is meant to improve the performance of student teachers as professionals. The question at hand is how can this be maintained during COVID-19 pandemic where opening of schools is done in a staggered manner and learning is mainly done online?

Some Universities have carried peer teaching instead of the traditional school practice while others left the students to identify a student whom they taught and took videos of the sole teaching done and submitted that to the supervisor to be awarded marks. All these endeavors compromised the quality of a very critical aspect of teacher training.

There is need to have a guided approach to professional training of teachers that will address the component of school practice and maintain the standards of quality of teacher training in Uganda. With restricted physical contacts and movements, student teachers are not able to access schools for practice as it

were in the time before COVID-19 pandemic hence the need for devising means of mentoring teacher trainees during their stay at Universities. Teacher Mentoring seeks to strengthen professional competencies of Teacher Trainers and future teachers graduating from Ugandan universities.

Teacher Mentoring is being carried out in National Teachers Colleges since 2017 when it became Institutionalized under ENABEL. The major emphasis of Mentoring under this project is induction of newly recruited lecturing staff, Support of old lecturing staff, team teaching, Action research, management of large classes, portfolio development and support for Secondary teachers who have patterned under the National Teachers' College Structure.

Mentoring can be defined as a dynamic relationship, which leads to creativity, professional growth and mastery over problem solving techniques. A Mentor is a person who provides profession related support, guidelines and motivation to improve skills, enhance knowledge and improve efficiency of the in-service and prospective teachers. A Mentee can be defined as a person who needs support and guidance of a senior qualified person in order to bring a positive change in his/her attitude and behaviour (Pask & Joy, 2007). Shadio (1996) stated that the heart of mentorship comes from a commitment to education, a hope for its future and a respect for those who enter into its community.

The Mentorship Role of a Lecturer at a University

Teachers are valuable resources in education, and high quality performance in teaching is an essential ingredient of educational improvement or reform. To assist teacher trainees, it is necessary to support their performance in the classroom from the very beginning of their teaching careers. Support in the form of well-designed mentoring programs can be pivotal in inducting new teachers into the profession and keeping them in education (Donald, 2008).

Johnson(2008) asserted that in the early years of the profession, teachers need assistance and guidance during the induction period. He added that the role of a mentor is to help teacher mentees enhance knowledge, skill and attitudes which effective teaching requires that can guide mentees to build self-confidence and self-direction for their own professional development. Cunningham (1999) stated that mentoring in the induction time can help the new teachers to gain some competences and experience from the experienced teachers, which let the new teachers adapt well in their new working environment. Wenhui(2018) reported that teachers' competencies can be developed through mentoring.

According to Anderson and Shannon (1985) the concept of Mentoring requires that a senior teacher or person should be made responsible to bring about behavioral change in the new comer and ensure his professional development in order to be more effective in teaching and learning process. A mentor would be expected to carry out his functions within the context of on-going process and simultaneously maintaining the relationship with the Mentee. Rowley (1999) viewed that Mentoring was a relationship of mutual trust and confidence between an experienced person and a young person. The mentor teacher therefore is a teacher who provides access to his or her classroom/ learning environment for the purposes of supervising, coaching and mentoring pre-service teachers to successfully complete a professional experience placement and develop their teaching capabilities. Similarly, the mentor lecturer is a lecturer who provides access to his or her classroom/ learning environment for the purposes of supervising, coaching and mentoring teacher trainees to successfully complete a professional experience placement and develop their teaching capabilities.

Cohen (1995) documented that Mentoring was a one-to-one relationship between Mentor and Mentee which passed through different phases to develop separately or in combination, the personal, educational and professional potential of the mentee.

Donald (2008) viewed that Mentoring in schools played significant role in improving communication and pedagogical skills of newly inducted personnel of education department. Novice teachers could benefit from this mechanism as they worked towards raising the standard of education. He recognized the importance of Mentor's interpersonal communication skills in how they supported less qualified and novice teachers. He also

opined that Mentoring was essentially a mutual relation of co-operation whereby the Mentor assisted a mentee to enhance his/her learning and address issues and problems the latter was confronted with.

Teacher mentorship in schools

Mentors can help new teachers in many ways. They assist new teachers to adapt to the school climate and culture. They Supervision of student teachers by University lecturers is based on theories of teaching and learning from various authors, whereas in schools, Mentors base their supervision on practical experience. The supervised students seem not to offer any input to the supervision process, but are supposed to conform and accept mentor/headmaster/principal supervision model, and also supposed, silently, to accept comments from University lecturers without question, otherwise they risk getting mediocre marks/grades. It is against such background situation that mentorship and a blended supervision model has been developed in most countries including Uganda.

The major weakness of supervision practices in traditional teaching practice is segmentation and isolation of the supervision processes. The Universities give students theories of teaching based on written literature. When these student teachers go to their host schools for practicum they receive traditional advice from experienced teachers. There is a barrier between teachers, universities and schools. The initial teacher-training course involves student teachers trying to learn in different sites: universities and schools with two sets of personnel, a lecturer and school mentor. As observed by Jones, (2012) this poses problems for a student teacher who perceives a lack of coherence in the learning on two sites. Mentoring will help bridge this gap in segmentation and isolation of supervision processes although it may not completely do away with undemocratic supervision.

In facilitating learning and education among Mentees, Mentors have to possess the required educational qualifications, skills, abilities and an approachable attitude. They have to implement proper teaching-learning methods and instructional strategies. They need to make sure that these are put into practice in accordance to the needs and requirements of the mentees.

Working at more than one school may well benefit the student teacher. Teacher development will take place more effectively in schools with a culture of collaboration, because such schools encourage pedagogical partnerships that not only counter professional isolation, but also contribute to the enhancement of practice (Williams, Tanner & Jessop, 2007). Referring to a study by Donald, (2008) student teachers say that they feel totally involved in the school – 'just like part of the school'.

Mentoring student teachers at the universities

Teaching student teachers at the University requires many of the same approaches as that of a mentor but in subtly different ways. Here the Lecturer takes a holistic overview of the student teacher's development. Teaching practices used by Institutions influence mentoring of teacher trainees in universities . Musingafi, & Mafumbate, (2014) assert that the starting point for the student teachers is to observe how the mentor and the university lecturers teach. Slowly they begin to develop their own experiential and practical theories. Through collaborative teaching, student teachers become 'insiders', planning along experienced teachers and discussing jointly taught lessons afterwards. Through collaborative teaching, student teachers have legitimate peripheral participation. Legitimate peripheral participation is a situation whereby a novice has a legitimate right to be an insider to a complex process and is thus progressively guided to take over more and more responsibility for that performance. This is missing out in most of the Ugandan universities.

It is by reflecting on teaching, thinking about it and trying to express it in words that student teachers begin to transform the behaviour they have copied into concepts and theories which they own for themselves. This reflective process is strengthened if it is systematically supported by an experienced teacher in the form of a Mentor. Some universities in Uganda have adopted micro teaching approach where teacher trainees are organized to teach their own peers. This does not provide a true school setting for the teacher trainees to experience effectively.

Mentoring can play a critical role in continually improving the professional knowledge and skills that teachers need to instruct and prepare students for the next century. It is often vital for the teachers to develop interest and enthusiasm towards Mentorship programmes (Tillema, Smith & Leshem, 2011).

Way forward

The researchers have proposed a mentorship model to allow professional development through continuous school practice.

Figure 1: Mentorship model- a dimension of continuous school practice in teacher education at Universities in Uganda
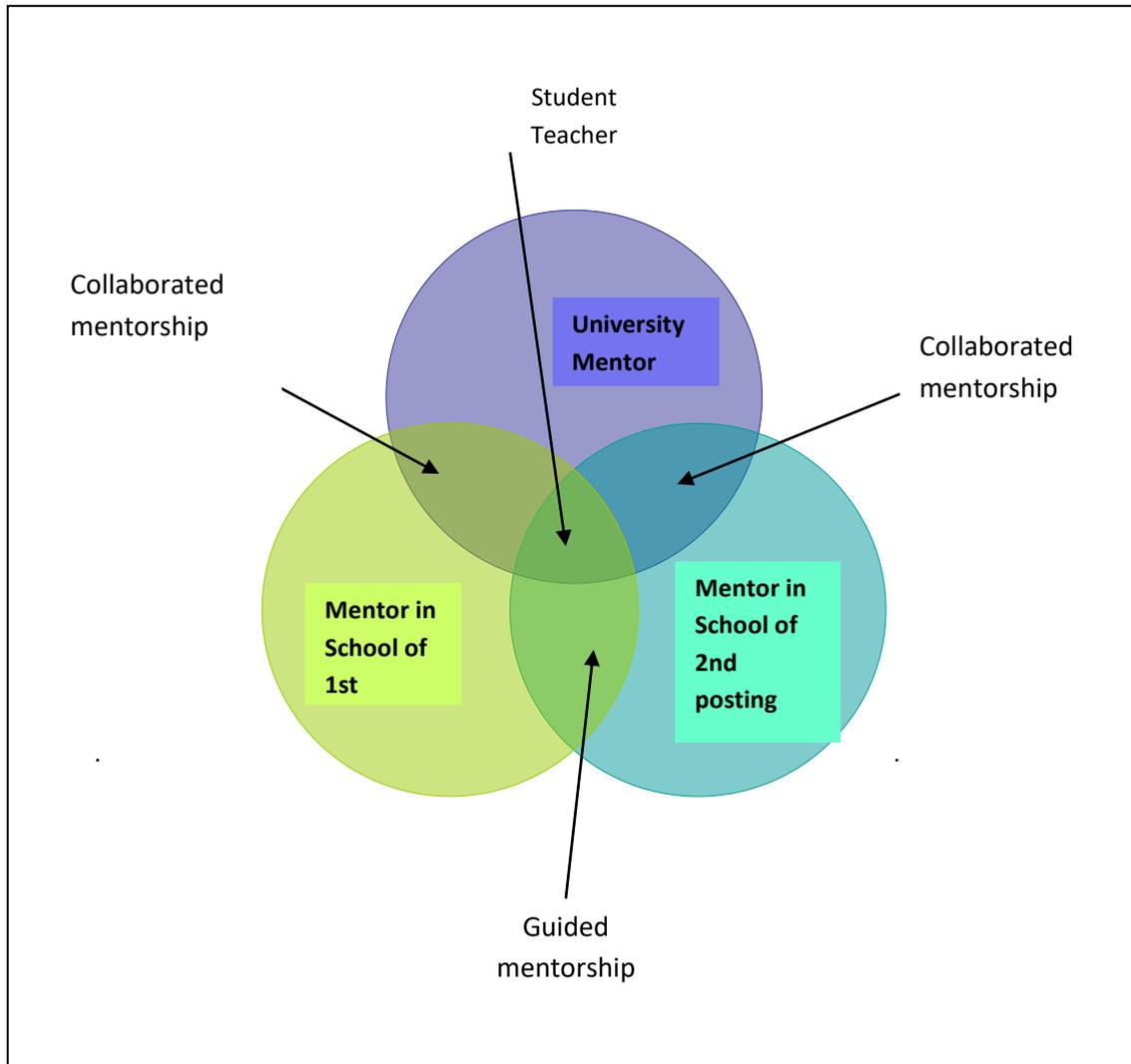
This model provides an alternative to the way school practice has been traditionally handled. It points to the need to have collaboration between the university and the secondary schools where the students can interact for professional development. It supposes that each student should have a mentor at the university who is a lecturer and a secondary school mentor at each school of placement for each of the teaching subjects. This means that the student will be attached to a school while learning theory and time is put aside by the university administration say two afternoons for two days a week where teacher trainees are allowed to go to secondary schools to interact with their school mentors. Here they continuously experience real life situations in school settings. While at the university teacher trainees are continuously mentored by a university lecturer who collaborates with the teacher mentors in schools. This model allows for continuous assessment of school practice. Therefore school practice can be handled in an integral manner (sandwich) where students learn

while school practice is ongoing. This would require introduction of mentorship in teacher training at universities. Ideally, every student requires at least one Mentor at the university and another mentor in secondary school in each of the teaching subjects. The great advantage of Mentors as teacher educators is that they are full-time practicing teachers who, in effect, are standing right next to the student teacher (McIntyre, 1997: 10). The mentors at both the university and the secondary school will collaborate in the process of supporting the teacher trainee to develop as a professional teacher.

Baruch, (2004)asserts that there is need to encourage initiation of mentor-mentee relationships", "Provide opportunities for professional interaction to share skills in Mentorship, learn from others and improve Mentoring skills".

Student teachers need help not just to monitor, but also to explore, interpret and explain the how and why of what they want . This then flows naturally into the next phase of the teaching cycle, namely, the (re)planning of the next piece of teaching. This leads to reflection . Reflection is thinking critically and inquiring into our practices with a view of improving performance. Participation is a way of learning which allows the learning curriculum to unfold in opportunities for practical engagement, in accordance with situated learning theory which enhances mentee success during the Mentorship programme (Villani, 2006).

With a professional university mentor to lead the professional teacher education work and a Mentor teacher in each subject where student teachers are being placed, one has the basis for 'school practice' to become an Institution for 'school-based initial teacher education'.

Assessment of School Practice under mentorship

Padua (2003) pointed out that feedback allows the pre-service teachers to reflect and improve teaching. This implies that if feedback is continuously given then improvement in professional development of the teacher trainees is likely to be enhanced.

Carrying out observations of the student teacher is an important part of mentor activity and one of the major ways that mentors gather evidence to improve practice especially when it is followed by an opportunity for the mentor and student teacher to debrief the session, consider the implications of what happened and set targets for further development. This gives room for formative assessment and critical self- reflection. The positive aspects of the students' relationship with teachers during teaching practice are based on the teachers' professionalism and expertise in Mentoring.

The discussion after an observed lesson should be structured so that the mentor and student teacher analyze the session together. An important aspect of this process is to draw attention to what evidence either the mentor or the student teacher can bring to support their view. As the student teacher progresses through the course they will need to be challenged to set their own agenda for development and to develop a rigorous approach to self - evaluation.

The assessment of school practice can be a collation of the continuous grading from the school mentors and that of the University mentor.

With this model, student teachers would not be affected since they would be engaging with their mentors in online teaching.

II. Conclusion

Teachers are valuable resources in education, and high quality performance in teaching is an essential ingredient of educational improvement or reform. To assist beginning teachers, it is necessary to support their performance in the classroom from the very beginning of their teaching careers.

Successful initial teacher education relies on all partners working effectively together, to create an environment where student teachers can learn effectively by observing, questioning, discussing and critically reflecting on their experiences in a structured way to allow progress.

Student teachers need to be aware that the knowledge they are developing is constructed from a combination of their personal experiences, the literature and the professional wisdom of experienced teachers. Cautionally, mentors should not become overly dominant, causing the mentees to lose their sense of

self-sufficiency. Teacher trainees should not put the needs of their mentor ahead of their own as a career strategy.

III. References

1. Anderson and Shannon, L. (1995) Towards Capitalization of Mentoring. A Journal of Teacher Education, 39(1), 38-42. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Amsterdam: Elsevier Publishing Co.
2. Baruch, Y. (2004). Transforming careers: From linear to multidirectional career paths: Organizational and individual perspectives. Career Development International, 9 (1), 58-73.
3. Cohen, N. (1995) Mentoring Adult Learners: a guide for educators and trainers, Krieger Publishing Company, Malabar, Florida
4. Cunningham, S. (1999) The nature of workplace mentoring relationships among faculty members in Christian higher education, Journal of Higher Education vol. 70(4), pp-441-63
5. Donald, G. (2008). 'Mentoring in Teacher Education'. City: New York. Publisher: Clare Franz Mentor to Sanford Weill(Latin Teacher at Peekskill Military Academy).
6. Jones, K. (2012) Coaching and Mentoring: a new concept? National Organization of Practice Teachers, NOPT conference, UK.
7. Musingafi, M. C. C., &Mafumbate, R. (2014). Challenges and prospects for school based mentoring in the professional development of student teachers in Zimbabwe: Academics, mentees and mentors perceptions. *Asian Journal of Economics and Empirical Research*, *1*(2), 32-39.
8. Pask & Joy (2007).'The Importance of Mentoring for School Principals'. City: Massachusettes (USA) Publisher: Oxford Butterworth Heinemann.
9. Ragins, B.R. (2002). Understanding diversified mentoring relationships: definitions, challenges and strategies. In D. Clutterbuck& B.R. Ragins (Eds). Mentoring and diversity: an international perspective (pp. 23-53). Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
10. Rowley, J. B. (1999). The Good Mentor. Educational Leadership, 56(8), 20-22. Malabar, FL: Krieger *Publishing*.
11. Shadiow, L (1996) Remembering a mentor. Clearinghouse v69n5, 277-79
12. Tillema, H, Smith, K. and Leshem, S. (2011) 'Dual roles – conflicting purposes: a comparative study on perceptions on assessment in mentoring relations during practicum'. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, Vol. 34(2), pp. 139 – 159.
13. Villani, S. (2006) *Mentoring and Induction Programmes that Support New Principals.* Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA.