

## CHAPTER 5

### **Mentoring as a Tool for Quality Assurance in Teacher Education: The Case of Zambia**

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#### **Abstract**

The core issue of this article is to argue for a new perspective on the need for mentoring of novice lecturers in teacher education as a tool for ensuring quality assurance. The article explores, identifies and considers various and pertinent explicit or implicit aspects of novice lecturer mentoring in teacher education. The first part of the article argues that formal mentoring of novice lecturers in teacher education can help in promoting the newcomer's career advancement, personal growth and development and education through a person-centred approach. The areas in which novice lecturers need mentoring include: pedagogy, assessment tools, designing appropriate curricula, research, publications, presenting conference papers, professional ethics, and so on. The next section of the paper addresses the multiple challenges novice lecturers face which, if not managed and controlled, can lead to substandard performance among novice lecturers. One of the most important challenges that can impact on the quality of teaching is the lack of pedagogical skills. It is, therefore, essential that novice lecturers are given maximum support and encouragement by their seniors. The final section describes the need for the institutionalisation of mentoring; and the strategies which include capacitating potential mentors through training, reducing the workload of senior staff, and offering monetary and other incentives. The author concludes that mentoring is the best tool for supporting the quality of performance of novice lecturers.

**Keywords:** Mentoring, challenges, novice lecturer, pedagogy, collegiality

## Introduction

Mentoring in teacher education as a quality assurance process within the wide understanding of total quality management has many benefits for educational institutions. In countries such as Israel, the debate has shifted from quality issues to concerns with total quality management in which the attention is no longer on the inputs, but on the processes of education (Koul, 1997). In different ways, organisations worldwide are trying to find new ways of assuring quality, and this paper argues that mentoring of novice lecturers is one of such viable and proven approaches. Yet, in Zambia and most African countries, mentoring at tertiary level is missing. This paper, therefore, presents the Zambian case as a prototypical African country. As they have expanded, and overwhelmed by the enrolment figures, many universities in Zambia have found themselves with unfathomable levels of novice lecturers to handle the huge demand. This has huge implications for universities, particularly public universities which operate within a general policy framework articulated by the Government.

The Ministry of Education (1996: 97), argues in its policy framework *Educating Our Future; National Policy on Education*, that academically in Zambia, like elsewhere around the globe, universities through their own efforts must attract respect and recognition, and that:

...each university is responsible for determining its own programmes of instruction at all levels... Each university engages its own staff, manages its own affairs, charges fees, and carries out any business or undertaking that seems proper to it.

To win international recognition, academic staff must be of international repute with a record of publishing internationally. In this vein, as MoE (1996: 98) asserts:

The achievement of this necessitates the ability to recruit and retain good quality staff, to admit and stimulate good quality students, and to function in a supportive and enabling environment.

However, most of the universities are still developing and place heavy reliance on novice staff who are still finding their feet in the world of academia. In addition, the publication output of most universities in Zambia, both public and private, has remained very low over the years (Chipeta & Nyambe, 2012; Chanie, 2010). This can be attributed to a number of factors; among them the heavy workload of staff that reduces time spent on writing activities and lack of research funds which implies that staff have little research data on which to base their writing.

The paper agrees with Harvey and Green (1993), by arguing that quality assurance is important because the presence of lecturers in lecture rooms

does not automatically imply that proper and effective teaching is taking place. There is need, therefore, for internal procedures and mechanisms for evaluating the teaching and learning process in order to achieve excellence in teaching, research and publication. Before presenting and examining mentoring in teacher education in detail, let us examine and discuss the concepts relevant to our discussion and the meanings attached to them within the context of teacher education.

### **Defining Quality Assurance**

In any discussion of quality, two twin concepts are unavoidable. One is that of *quality control* and the other, *quality assurance*. However, a definition of either quality control or quality assurance, must, as a matter of necessity, be precipitated by a definition of quality. Hornby (1989: 1187), defines quality as 'the practice of managing the way goods are produced or services are provided to make sure they are kept at a high standard.' Simply put, *quality is a degree of goodness*. Quality refers to the degree of fit between what a customer wants and what a customer gets. It entails doing the right things right.

As mentioned above, any discussion of quality inevitably relates to quality control. Quality control is 'the practice of checking goods as they are being produced, to make sure that they are of a high standard (Hornby, 1989; 1187). In a similar vein, Guri-Rosenblit (1997: 27), states that quality control procedures refer to:

...a set of operations that measure, and if necessary adjust, a product's appropriateness according to a set of predetermined required criteria... it is particularly complicated to define the exact standards against which it is possible to evaluate the fitness of an academic course for its purpose and how that fitness should be assessed.

On the other hand, *quality assurance* is the evaluation of quality. In other words, there must first be quality before quality assurance can be undertaken. And to explain this, various definitions have been cited in an attempt to provide diverse understanding of the concept of quality assurance. Guri-Rosenblit (1997: 27), has argued that 'quality assurance does not purport to clarify the standards or specifications against which to measure or control quality.' Further, Harvey and Green (1993: 19-20), have advanced that:

Quality assurance is about ensuring that there are mechanisms, procedures and processes in place to ensure that the desired quality, however, defined and measured, is delivered. The assumption implicit in the development of quality assurance is that if mechanisms exist, quality can be assured.

At the Distance Education and Teacher Education in Africa Conference, held at the University of Nairobi in July 2013, some prominent scholars of teacher education made attempts to define quality assurance in teacher education. Notably, Kanwar (2013), defined quality assurance within the context of education as, 'The enhancement and preservation of quality in teaching.' In addition, Chakwera (2013), says quality assurance is about ensuring that there is quality according to defined standards or performance as expected; and that whatever activity is being carried out is relevant and conducted as planned. The point being made is that every institution has various mechanisms to assure quality. In most countries including Zambia, the responsibility for quality assurance rests within the educational institutions themselves (MoE 1996). Universities worldwide are expected to establish quality assurance mechanisms by which they can set performance indicators.

This resonates well with the similar example in Norway where in 1992, the law was changed to ensure that the responsibility of quality assurance was relocated from governmental control and placed under the control of educational institutions (Bo, 1997). This move assumed there had been weaknesses in the old system; however, the government had recognised the high levels of competence offered by private institutions offering distance education and took appropriate action. It was also a reflection of new ideas about how efforts to improve quality of could be organised (Bo, 1997). The new arrangement of resting quality improvement systems to institutions is the mode that Zambia has adopted with varying degrees of success.

### **So what is Mentoring?**

Various definitions of the concept of mentoring exist but no single definition can suffice. Mentoring is a professional relationship between a mentor and mentee for the purpose of professional instruction and guidance. In providing a definition of mentoring, Ragins and Kram (2007: 5), have expressed their thoughts as follows:

Although the definition of mentoring has been refined over the years, a core feature that defines mentoring relationships and distinguishes it from other types of personal relationships is that mentoring is a developmental relationship that is embedded within the career context. While learning, growth, and development may occur in many different types of work and close personal relationships, mentoring relationships are unique in that the primary focus of the relationship is on career development and growth.

In other words, mentoring describes a process by which a more experienced skilful or knowledgeable individual offers assistance to a less expert individual.

## **Theoretical Model**

Although relational theories could equally be used to explain mentoring, my analytical framing for this article employs Kram's (1985) mentor role theory. Kram, the most widely cited author on mentoring, argues that mentoring is a type of developmental relationship in which mentors provide two types of functions:

- (a) career functions, which focus on skill development of the protégé; these functions increase the likelihood of the protégé becoming successful, and include; sponsorship, exposure and visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments; and
- (b) psychosocial functions, which are centred on providing support and encouragement to the protégé. Psychosocial functions include; acceptance, counselling, friendship, and role modelling. These functions enhance an individual's 'sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness in a professional role' (Kram, 1985: 23).

## **Rationale for Mentoring of Novice Lecturers**

The literature reviewed in this section focuses on the purpose and benefits of mentoring for novice lecturers. Since Kram's seminal work on mentoring, many others have been interested in the role of mentoring in educational systems in general and higher education in particular. The purpose of mentoring is multifaceted, and has far-reaching personal benefits for novice lecturers. Little wonder then, that many teacher education programmes around the globe place a high premium on novice lecturer mentoring. Such mentoring is particularly important in institutions like the University of Zambia where about one-third of lecturers in the School of Education, for example, are in the category of novice lecturers.

In what follows, a variety of data sources to advance the argument have been cited. Mentoring researchers have empirical evidence that supports the role of mentoring for career advancement. Substantial evidence from a wide variety of studies exists which demonstrate the efficacy of mentoring in work places (Lennox, Skinner and Foureur, 2008; Enerson, 2001; Powell, 1997; Simon and Wardlow, 1989). This point is emphasised by Lawson (1992), who contends that mentoring is a process that encourages self-efficacy and enables one to take on a new role successfully and become a fully committed professional. In short, mentoring is about support for new faculty. One way of supporting novice lecturers in being successful is through mentoring. Through systematic mentoring, universities and other tertiary institutions of learning can help facilitate novice lecturers' quick transition to teaching. These arguments are attempts to advance the conviction that what novice lecturers

learn during mentoring is crucial in helping them adapt as quickly as possible to the various demands of their new jobs.

As more and more inexperienced, but highly qualified young people continue to penetrate into every sector of academic life in Zambia, the need to help these upcoming scholars has been recognised and has created a fertile ground for the initiation, and development of mentoring of novice lecturers in teacher education.

A study by Banja, Ndhlovu and Mulendema (2011), on the perceptions of university lecturers towards mentoring of novice lecturers pointed to the fact that under ideal circumstances, the process of mentoring is beneficial to novices in ways that include confidence to teach effectively, improved collegiality with senior staff (novice lecturers also benefit from an ongoing relationship with an experienced faculty member as they develop their teaching and service expertise), easy adaptation to their job, acquisition of skills on time management and goal-setting, and understanding their job descriptions. This agrees with the findings of other researchers on the subject such as Kram and Ragins (2007: 668) who have argued that:

There is now a collective view that outcomes related to personal learning, development, and growth are equally relevant and important.... These new outcomes include factors such as personal and task learning, organisational socialisation, relational competencies, adult development, personal growth, physiological outcomes and other factors related to the non-work domain.

The benefits of mentoring are identified in a simpler but more clearer way by Godshalk and Sosik (2007: 171), who have contended that:

Mentoring relationship also provide substantial benefits to mentors, protégés and organisations. Mentors may gain prestige, a sense of generativity, and internal satisfaction. Protégés may build social networks, develop and learn new career-related skills, and gain promotions, pay raises, and job and career satisfaction.

Further, William and Blackburn (1998), studied faculty mentoring in eight nursing colleges and found that, mentoring types of role specific teaching, and encouragement were related to protégés research productivity.

From the aforesaid, it is not far-fetched to infer that novice lecturers need expert guidance from experienced lecturers to be able to perform their roles successfully. Hence, mentoring is very crucial during the early years of novice lecturers' life for them to be able to develop both personally and professionally as fully fledged academicians. Mentoring becomes a huge asset in helping to adequately prepare novice lecturers for the demands of academic life.

Mentoring of novice lecturers as reviewed in the literature, will take place in an ideal environment. However, it must be acknowledged that the mentoring process can sometimes be messy. Even though the literature has demonstrated beyond doubt that mentoring relationships are beneficial for novice lecturers, studies on mentoring have simultaneously shown that many mentoring programmes have their own problems that are worth discussing. To start with, mentoring does not answer all problems of novice lecturers. Mentoring outcomes are affected by different aspects. These include; gender, characteristics of the mentor, and characteristics of the protégé amongst others (McKeen and Bujaki, 2007). In assessing the difficulties which are inherent in determining outcomes of mentoring, Kram and Ragins (2007: 668) have argued that:

As we progress in our understanding of variations in the quality and processes of developmental relationships, we have also begun to acknowledge that these outcomes may be more difficult to measure yet are critical for understanding the full impact of mentoring on individuals, relationships, and organisations.

Literature on the subject of the role of the mentor takes cognisance of the fact that mentoring does not exist in a vacuum, and is depended upon and affected by a myriad of factors. Mentoring needs to be contextualised, taking into account other relationships, within and outside institutions.

Eby and McManus (2004), examined the specific types of dysfunctional experiences that mentors report in mentoring relationships. The themes identified include negative relations involving exploitation and egocentricity, malevolent deceptions, sabotage, harassment, interpersonal difficulty, spoiling, benign deception, submissiveness, performance below expectations, and unwillingness to learn.

In addition, there is extra demand on any senior in terms of their time. Mentoring increases the workload for both the mentor and the mentee, and might require freeing some people, both mentors and mentees of teaching time.

According to Nikandrou, Panayotopoulou and Apospori (2008), there are many determinants of career advancement. These include individual, interpersonal, organisational, human capital and family determinants. Individual determinants include personality traits and other psychological factors that concern one's capacity for managing, for example, motivation, career aspiration and gender role orientation. Kram (1985) and Allen (2007), say studies have found that rigid organisational structures, unclear expectations, job pressures, and a competitive environment impede the mentor's ability

to mentor others. However, interpersonal determinants which involve supportive relationships at work, such as; mentors and peer network facilitate advancement of the novice employee.

Powell (1997), suggests that a successful mentoring programme results from significant commitment and ownership by all stakeholders, namely; the employing organisation, mentors and protégés. Regarding the mentoring relationship, Kram (1985), alludes to the need for mentees to be receptive to the programme and make it their priority to learn what the mentor has to offer. This requires the novice to respect and be grateful to the mentor and emulate him/her. The goal is for the mentee to identify with and imitate the mentor, receive reinforcement for positive behaviours and attitudes, learn how negative and inappropriate behaviours may interfere with emotional growth, and develop educational and work goals.

Powell (1997), argues that mentoring is one component which is integrated into a broader individualised development effort. The degree to which mentoring is integrated with other interventions affects its potential for success. It would, therefore, be naïve and erroneous to assume that one can only succeed as a novice lecturer if they were mentored by someone. As Dougherty and Dreher (2007), state, not all mentoring functions are provided by mentors. The danger lies in overemphasising the role of mentoring to the exclusion of other equally important aspects of ensuring competence in newly qualified teachers.

Among the first steps in developing and sustaining relationships between the mentor and the mentee, and ensure that mentoring becomes an effective quality assurance tool, is the need to institutionalise mentoring of novice lecturers in teacher education programmes. Key to this process is an institutional policy that facilitates institutional commitment to mentoring. However, structured mentoring programmes around the world are not common (Clutterbuck, 2007) because of numerous reasons some of which are discussed in the section to do with challenges facing novice lecturers.

That said, creating a framework for introducing mentoring is not sufficient on its own. What is needed is to translate the policy into an implementation strategy. Such a policy orientation would provide the enabling environment in which all aspects vital to successful mentoring would be catered for. These include guidelines of rules and procedures and the roles and functions of all stakeholders.

### **Challenges Facing Novice Lecturers**

Let me now cast this discussion in the context of some of the challenges facing novice lecturers. The literature on mentoring in teacher education also contains a great deal of information about the challenges novice lecturers face in the execution of their duties. Banja *et al.* (2011), established that despite their

potential and actual contribution to institutional and national development, the role of novice lecturers has been constrained by a number of factors particularly in areas critical to their success as upcoming academicians. This notwithstanding the fact that many novice lecturers are not prepared to face the scenarios they encounter as lecturers during the early years of their working life. Novice lecturers lamented about the lack of a systematic approach for identifying novice lecturers who needed help in their professional life. The most difficult problem that novice lecturers encountered in their duties was the lack of pedagogical skills.

Some novice lecturers in Banja's *et al.*, study (2011), further reported that they experienced challenges in a number of areas including; conducting research, designing appropriate curricula, development of course materials, academic paper publications, conference paper presentations skills, evaluation of students' work and counselling students. Other challenges related to understanding professional ethics and effective pedagogy. As a result, novice lecturers continue to encounter the challenges discussed above.

Clutterbuck (2007), acknowledges that literature recognises that mentees have needs though there has been little focus on the specific and individual requirements of mentees. The lack of mentoring for novice lecturers can constitute a severe barrier to the formation of positive self-concept and self-image. This agrees with Centra (1978), who reports that faculty members in their first or second year of teaching, encounter a lot of difficulty to teach effectively. And, yet, critical to the whole concept of quality assurance in teacher education is that of the ability to teach. New staff require more than specialised knowledge in a discipline. It is not sufficient for the faculty to know only the content of their fields.

Lankau and Scandura (2007: 95) have argued that:

Learning from training programmes and books will not be sufficient to keep pace with required competencies for success in today's fast-paced work environment. Individuals often must look to others to learn new skills and keep up with the demands of their jobs and professions. Mentoring relationships can serve as a forum for such personal learning in organisations.

Organisations being referred to by Lankau and Scandura above include universities and other tertiary learning institutions. It is not adequate to simply introduce novice lecturers to their new work stations; the goal should be to develop lecturers that are effective in all their roles as teacher educators. Therefore, the ability to teach must take the centre stage. This is critical given the current scenario in most universities where 'aspiring for excellence in research is a common goal of all universities, but excellence in teaching is rarely rewarded' (Guri-Rosenblit, 1997: 26).

What is of particular interest to this discussion is that many novice lecturers possess little in terms of teaching experience, having been drafted as staff development fellows upon completion of their undergraduate studies. However, individual lecturers retain a high degree of control over every aspect of their work. The very same idea is expressed by Guri Rosenblit (1997:30-31) as follows:

The concept of academic autonomy assumes that what goes on in a particular classroom is the sole responsibility of the professional scholar concerned, which rests on a view of the academic 'as professionally competent over the full range of activities he/she undertakes, and this competence includes the necessary knowledge and skills to make or seek insightful and valid appraisals of his work and act on these appraisals.

In short, these factors militate against novice lecturers attaining levels of competence, efficiency and effectiveness that is expected of them. So, the questions at stake are, how well-equipped are novice lecturers to teach, do research and publish? To what extent can mentoring help to develop the required competencies of novice lecturers? It is hypothesised that through systematic mentoring, competencies of novice lecturers in teaching, research and publications could be improved.

Despite the perceived challenges, mentoring can help address disparities in experiences and qualifications, beliefs and perceptions between novice and senior academic staff, and subsequently, help boost the aspirations and self-worth of novice lecturers. This being the case, the author argues that one other process in the quality assurance system that has been neglected is the mentoring of novice lecturers.

### **Suggested Strategies for Implementing Mentoring**

In order to operationalise the institutionalisation of mentoring, a multi-faceted approach is imperative. First, there is need to build capacity among potential mentors by training senior academic staff in matters of mentoring. The belief that a senior academician demonstrates mentoring ability by virtue of their qualifications and experience is often taken for granted as a truism. Not all senior lecturers are sufficiently knowledgeable about issues of mentoring to offer appropriate help to novice lecturers. The varying levels of appreciation of novice lecturer mentoring and the shortage of trained and experienced mentors among the cadre of senior academic members, is a major challenge. Whatever policy and strategy for staff training are adopted, there is need to:

define and agree within the organisation the general and particular needs for training, based on a systematic needs analysis... select appropriate training events and interventions, construct a coherent training plan in the light of available resources, communicate to all concerned and build a supportive climate for training...  
(*Commonwealth of Learning, 1997: 27*)

The role and place of mentoring in teacher education, can best be explained by developing a generally accepted understanding of mentoring as a distinct field of study in its own right. Therefore, those who undertake to mentor others must first be equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills to do so, to avoid displaying little basis for understanding the nature and goals of mentoring and consequently, not lend their time and energy to this important activity.

Further, the policy must provide for a sustainable structure to ensure continuity and positive impact. But, this can only be made possible if both academic and administrative managers offer support and get actively involved in mentoring activities as an integral part of an academic culture. Such commitment and involvement from senior academic and administrators and management, is crucial to the successful implementation of mentoring. It is through such support that education, training and other forms of assistance can be offered to employees.

In addition, mentoring must be integrated as part of departmental work and those providing mentoring must be rewarded for their efforts and achievements. Rather than leave it to individual goodwill, the provision of mentoring should be formally made one of the responsibilities of senior lecturers with accompanying incentives such as, making it as a promotion requirement for those applying to move from one level to another; payment of allowances could be another incentive. If and when institutions put such a premium on mentoring, senior academic staff would more likely be persuaded to provide this experience for their new staff. Some universities in Africa such as the University of Nairobi (Rambo, Personal Communication, Thursday, 01/08/2013), and the University of Botswana, have already effected some of these incentives (Kanduza, 2012). Whether they work or not, only time would tell.

At the University of Zambia, there is no specific mentoring programme for young lecturers; even though the need for such mentoring of novice lecturers has since been recognised by the university authorities, and has been included in the *2013-2017 Strategic Plan University of Zambia* (2012). However, this Strategic Plan does not spell out in sufficient detail a policy that is effective

and anchored on a solid framework for promoting and supporting the development, implementation and sustainability of novice lecturer mentoring. The need for such a policy which would create a conducive environment for mentoring cannot be overemphasised.

In addition, to build the culture of mentoring that is being envisaged, there is absolute need to reduce the heavy workloads among senior academic staff which makes it difficult even for the most enthusiastic lecturer to respond adequately, effectively and efficiently to the increasing needs of diverse novice lecturers whose numbers keep rising. In Zambia, most public tertiary institutions are understaffed because of stringent recruitment procedures and exodus of highly qualified local staff who leave in search of greener pastures. Lecturer attrition has resulted in a significant decline in staff numbers (MoE, 1996). The senior staff have multiple demands on their time, and, as a result, they are overloaded leaving them with little time for mentoring activities. The severity of the situation described above is captured vividly in the following account by the Ministry of Education (1996: 99):

Between 1984 and 1994, the University of Zambia alone lost over 230 of its lecturers, 161 of them being PhD holders with a considerable degree of seniority. The loss to the institution, in terms of replacement needs, disrupted programmes, and demoralisation of ongoing staff, is incalculable. The loss of so many members of academic staff puts quality teaching of students at risk, since the services of the remaining staff must be dispersed over ever larger student numbers.

It also leads to the reliance on a small albeit junior academic staff including staff development fellows, to handle most of the tutoring and teaching responsibilities. As things stand presently, most universities in Zambia are not sufficiently well equipped for this responsibility.

With highly demanding job descriptions, it is hardly possible to allocate sufficient time to the mentoring relationship and help monitor the quality of teaching and learning.

Another implementation strategy is to institute deliberate steps which must be taken to encourage, support and enhance collaboration between senior and novice academic staff in such areas as authorship and presentation of academic papers at local and international fora; in conducting research and consultancy and other areas of academic pursuit. This will undoubtedly accord novice lecturers the opportunity to learn from their senior colleagues,

notwithstanding the fact that the success of such a mentoring relationship depends in part on the expertise, experience, and/ or position of the mentors in the organisation.

While these suggested strategies may be common and not new in Western literature and practice, in most of Africa where mentoring is largely a new concept, these strategies are novel and, therefore, worthy of trying out.

## **Conclusion**

The main task of this article was to present novice lecturer mentoring as a viable alternative in assuring quality within teacher education. This paper has argued that tertiary institutions should include a formal system for mentoring novice lecturers in all aspects of professional development. The calibre of teaching staff, amongst others, is important in determining the quality of those who emerge from higher level institutions MoE (1996). Without mentoring of novice lecturers, the quest for excellence remains illusory and jeopardises the mission and responsibility of these institutions to offer high quality education and knowledge to their clients. If well done, however, mentoring can be a critical quality assurance tool with huge benefits for novice staff.

In addition, the role of novice lecturer mentoring should be seen in the wider context of the mandate of the university. Mentoring of novice lecturers can contribute to the fulfilment of institutional achievements. Improving novice lecturer effectiveness contributes to the achievement of the school goals and to overall institutional organisation.

Quality, quality control, quality assurance and mentoring of novice lecturers will continue to be discussed in teacher education. This article makes it explicit that if we are to talk about quality assurance in teacher education, a discussion of mentoring must be part of that discussion.

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