CITATION

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to advocate for the institutionalisation and implementation of mentorship in the quest to ensure quality assurance among secondary school teachers. Mentorship is hardly a new phenomenon. Interest in mentorship of newly qualified teachers has a long history spanning as far back as the 1930s (Greiman, 2002). Discussions of quality assurance must logically be preceded by discussions of quality. Only after we have a clear understanding of the quality we aspire for can we begin to engage in discussions of how to evaluate it. With reference to the newly qualified teachers, we cannot focus on their performance before we have clear notions of how and at what levels we expect them to perform. It becomes apparent therefore that in order for quality assurance to have any meaning we must first invest in the determination of the key variables that constitute quality performance. Quality, it must be noted, does not operate in a vacuum. Furthermore, we must, as a matter of logical necessity, first ensure and preserve quality and quality assurance during training before we can discuss quality and quality assurance in teaching. Our understanding of quality assurance is perhaps best guided by Harvey and Green (1993:19-20) who have explained that:

> Quality assurance is about ensuring that there are mechanisms, procedures and processes in place to insure 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.

In simple terms, quality assurance is the evaluation of quality. In the context of this current discussion, what this means is that before we demand quality from our newly qualified teachers, we need to have clear notions of what quality we desire or expect from them according to defined standards or performance indicators. This paper argues that this quality is related to and affected by the presence or absence of mentorship for newly qualified teachers.

Interestingly, mentorship is understood differently by different people as a function of perception. As a result of its worldwide public importance, mentorship in education has been adopted as a programme in many countries in the west; but not so in Africa. It is in this latter context that I locate my unease. This paper therefore presents the Zambian case as a prototypical African country. This discussion uses the Zambian scenario as a mirror of the Sub Saharan African landscape.

Overview of Zambian Education System

The Zambian education system is designed to provide nine years of universal basic education, three years of secondary education, and four years of university education (9-

3-4 structure). Secondary school education runs from grades 10, 11 and 12. Secondary school education runs for three years and is part of the general education. Over the years large numbers of pupils are pushed out of the school system through examinations at grade 7 and 9 largely because of the limitation of school places. Similarly, nationally held competitive examinations are used to determine progression to tertiary level education, particularly public universities and colleges. There are three public universities and about 15 private universities. In public universities and colleges overenrollment is the order of the day thereby compromising the quality of education on offer. The output from university teacher education programmes and colleges of education has failed to meet the national demand for teachers. This is made worse by economic policies, usually donor instigated, that force newly trained teachers to room the streets for a full year before being employed. The shortage means newly qualified and other teachers are overloaded with work, further weakening the education system at the school level.

The Ministry of Education, through the Teaching Service Commission, a pseudo government organ, is responsible for providing education to its citizens and has direct responsibility for the employment of teachers for government schools and implementation of education policies, among other things. In Zambia, specifically the Teacher Education Department (TED) which falls directly under the Ministry of Education, is responsible for teacher training affairs. The TED is charged with setting standards for teacher education in Zambia while another unit still under the Ministry of Education, the Teacher Education and Specialised Services (TESS) is mandated to ensure compliance to professional standards in the work place.

In the quest to improve the professional standards of teachers, both in the public and private sectors, and reverse the declining fortunes in educational provision, government through the Ministry of Education has in recent times enacted a number of regulatory frameworks. These include the revised Education Act of 2011, the Higher Education Act of 2013, and the Teaching Profession Act of 2013. These are complemented by the existing policy documents such as the 1996 Educating our Future; National Policy on Education. Sadly, this policy document is virtually silent on the matter of mentoring newly qualified teachers.

Definition of mentoring

Mentoring has been defined in several ways by different scholars based on their philosophical and other convictions. According to Bell and Goldsmith (2013) mentoring refers to a learning partnership in which the mentor uses his/her expertise in a wisdom-building approach that leads to creativity to facilitate and enable discovery and leaves the protégé wiser. Stanley and Clinton cited in Egeler (2003) have defined mentoring as:

> a relational process in which a mentor, who knows or has experienced something, transfers that something (resources of wisdom, information, experience, confidence, insight, relationships, status, etc) to a mentee, at an appropriate time and manner, so that it facilitates development or empowerment.

Whatever definition of mentorship is adopted however, no one single definition can suffice, but the gist of mentoring is that it is a professional relationship between a mentor and mentee for the purpose of professional instruction and guidance. In other words, the term 'mentoring' is explicitly conceived in terms of a process by which a more experienced, skilful or knowledgeable individual offers assistance to a less expert individual. Defined in this manner, mentoring is a viable tool for supporting the

development of the individual teacher. In what follows I discuss the why of mentorship of newly qualified teachers.

Purpose of Mentorship in Education

As discussed above, mentorship is a co-operative effort involving newly qualified teachers and veteran teachers that must be supported by clearly defined school goals and policies for the purpose of supporting the development of the individual teacher. According to Kram (1985) a mentorship relationship must incorporate issues of intellectual, social, affective, moral and spiritual qualities. As Lankau and Scandura (2007: 95) have argued:

> 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.

It should be clear from the above quote that mentoring is desired for the acquisition of competence by the newly qualified teacher. However, strategies for the introduction of mentorship are not without challenges. The following section discusses some of the more common challenges of mentorship with specific reference to newly qualified teachers.

Challenges and Needs of Newly Qualified Teachers

To reiterate, as expected, every newly qualified teacher faces numerous challenges and must not be left alone to deal with the problems that arise behind the closed classroom door. Often times the newly qualified teachers are left on their own to find their way round whatever challenges the system throws at them. This is clearly detrimental to the newly qualified teachers as it erodes their self-esteem.

Beginning teachers in Zambia often face many challenges, such as learning a new language of instruction and finding adequate housing when it has not been provided by the government or school (Thomas, Thomas and Lefebvre, 2014). In a study I conducted on the perceptions of teachers and head teachers towards mentorship of newly qualified secondary school teachers in Zambia, one of the objectives was to find out the challenges that newly qualified teachers faced in their workplace. Newly qualified teachers refer to teachers who had been working for between 0-9 months. The accessible sample was 92 newly qualified teachers, 99 Heads of Department, 15 head teachers and 9 senior Ministry of Education officials. These were drawn from 18 government run secondary schools in 3 provinces and 6 districts of the Republic of Zambia. The respondents were unanimous in their agreement that newly qualified teachers faced challenges and needed help from long serving teachers in the discharge of their duties with particular reference to lesson preparation and lesson delivery. The other expressed challenge was that of working in an unsupportive work environment.

This aspect of work environment is largely affected by what type of school one is working in. Key to helping a newly qualified teacher settle in his/her new workplace are the traditions of the school. To what extent, for instance, does the school create and maintain a conducive environment that enables the newly qualified teacher to flourish? Does the school have in place a strong induction system that supports the development of newly qualified teachers to their full potential? What this entails is that school authorities must recognise that newly qualified teachers, just like any other teacher, has individual needs which must be addressed. In so doing, resources must be easily accessed by newly qualified teachers.

Other than the problems caused by apparent inadequate initial training and lack of collegiality, the newly qualified teacher is faced with learners who themselves have social problems and learning difficulties (MoE, 1996). In the case of Zambia some studies have pointed to work overload (Thomas, 2008) which places unreasonable demands on the newly qualified teacher. This is made worse for newly qualified teachers by the constant introduction of educational policies particularly those that relate to the curriculum (Kalimaposo, 2010).

In general, there is a noticeable similarity in the type of prominent challenges that newly qualified teachers face across the globe; notwithstanding the fact that context specific challenges also occur. Interestingly, newly qualified teachers from around the globe face similar challenges in their work. Hedges cited in Thomas (2014) stated that newly trained teachers in Ghana had difficulties adjusting to life as teachers in rural areas beacause f such challenges as finding ration money whenever government salaries came late, thereby further complicating the transition process for new teachers.

In Finland, everyday problems and challenges included 'problem pupils, pupils' behavioural disturbances, interaction with their parents and cooperation with fellow teachers.' In a study of newly qualified teachers by Jokinen and Valijarvi (2007) participants felt that these and similar issues had not been accorded sufficient attention during initial teacher education.

McCaughtry, Cothran, Kulinna, Martin and Faust (2005) citing Kent (2000) have said 'teaching is a complex and challenging profession and the demands can be overwhelming particularly for novice educators. Newly qualified teachers face many immediate challenges such as developing year-long curricula, organizing classrooms, implementing effective classroom management, learning the organizational structure of the school, meshing with colleagues, and working with diverse students and parents as well as struggles of learning new curriculum, and effective communication. The implication of this is that newly qualified teachers are faced with the twin task of learning what they should have ordinarily learnt during training but they simultaneously have to develop into fully fledged teachers in an environment that is new and unfamiliar to them. So phenomenal are the challenges that as McCaughtry, Cothran, Kulinna, Martin and Faust citing Montgomery-Halford (1998) and the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1997) have established, up to 30% of new teachers in the U.S.A quit teaching within the first 5 years of teaching.

Tragically, although the problems of newly qualified teachers are well known and well documented over the years (Banja, 2012, Thomas, 1998) and despite the huge volume of literature pointing to the benefits of mentoring newly qualified teachers, very little has been done to find lasting solutions to these problems.

Benefits of mentorship in Education/Impact of lack of mentorship

In order to demonstrate the utility of my arguments for mentorship of newly qualified teachers, this article provides evidence of the many and varied benefits of mentorship. As Greiman (2002:24) has said 'few experiences in life have such a tremendous impact on the professional and personal life of a teacher as does the first year of teaching.' Further, Greiman (2002) argues that:

> beginning teachers make attachments to significant experiences during their first year of teaching. When the initial experiences are pleasurable, the imprinting is mainly positive. However, when the first experiences are negative, and paired with feelings of discouragement and discomfort, the imprinting is negative (p.24).

One of the most important aspects of mentoring as Jokinen and Valijarvi (2006) have postylated, is that it offers newly qualified teachers reasons and an opportunity for therapeutic discussions on topics centred on the functioning of the school community in general and teaching in particular. In doing so mentoring can be used as a vehicle to discuss and address challenges confronting newly qualified teachers in an innovative manner.

Literature around the world is full of arguments for the purpose and outcomes of mentorship for newly qualified teachers. Newly qualified teachers have to be mentored because of an identified need that needs to be attended to. It should come as no surprise that the limited research on the outcomes of mentoring programs suggests that teachers who receive mentoring are more likely to stay in teaching, be satisfied, hold better teaching attitudes, and implement more effective instructional practices and long term planning McCaughtry *et al.* (2005). In addition, Serpell & Bozeman, and Smith & Ingersoll cited by McCaughtry *et al.* (2005) observed that administrators of mentored teachers note fewer problems.

Researchers in general education and in mentorship share common ground. These researchers have found that effective mentoring seems to have a positive influence on new teachers' transitions into teaching. Although some informal mentoring occasionally occurs outside the context of planned programmes, it is the formal institutionalised mentoring that seems to generate easily identifiable desired results.

While in the west literature shows a clear link between mentorship and a reduction in new teacher challenges, unfortunately this level of analysis in Zambia is hardly possible given the lack of formal mentorship arrangements. As indicated earlier, the Zambian scenario is typical of Sub-Saharan Africa as Thomas, Thomas and Lefebvre (2014) have shown that:

> In contrast to the vast number of extant studies of beginning teachers' experiences in the global North, there exist few investigations of a similar nature conducted in the global South, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Comparatively few researchers have explored experiences of both student teacher trainees and beginning teachers in various countries.

Basing their position on the findings of other scholars, Thomas *et al* (2014) have further argued that there is a clear lack of formally organised mentoring that supports newly qualified teachers in various Sub-Saharan countries such as Kenya, Malawi, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

In concluding this section it is important to mention that although the argument for mentorship is a compelling one, there is no guarantee that one who is mentored will necessarily perform as expected. This is on account of the fact that there are so many other factors that affect the level of performance of a teacher, besides the nature and scope of mentoring offered to them.

The Need for Mentorship Training

The two preceding sections demonstrate clearly the need to incorporate mentorship into the education system; the current section discusses the need to train stakeholders at all levels of the education spectrum in all aspects of mentorship. A study by Malasha (2010) on the induction practices in Zambia's secondary schools identified different groups of factors that contributed to the ineffectiveness of teacher induction programmes, one of which was linked to the inefficient manner of organising and running the components of the programmes. She found that there was a noticeable lack of consistency in the

induction practices of schools. It was found for example, that the teacher induction programmes lacked emphasis on standard practices and consequently lacked any systematic guidelines on the most effective teacher induction strategies. This culminated into a lack of comprehensiveness, continuity, consistency, support and formalisation in the teacher induction programmes. There were far to many grey areas relative to the duration of the programme, people responsible, types of induction practices to be focussed on, the major themes of the induction and so on.

The second group of factors was related to the insufficient awareness and understanding of the issues surrounding new teacher induction by stakeholders. This was apparent because respondents equated the induction process relative to orientation to school facilities and financial incentives. This last point agrees with the findings from a study I carried out in 2011 on the perceptions of teachers and head teachers on the mentorship of newly qualified secondary school teachers in Zambia, already discussed under the section on challenges of newly qualified teachers, that showed that the majority of secondary school head teachers and Heads of Department in the sample were ignorant or deficient in their knowledge about basic but key concepts about mentorship and easily confused it with orientation to one's workplace. Heads of department acknowledged not having been formally trained in mentorship and expressed willingness to be trained. This willingness to be trained must be harnessed and used as a rallying point in the quest for the systematic introduction of mentorship of newly qualified teachers. This becomes more so critical when considered against the fact that even teacher educators at tertiary level are rarely trained in mentorship (Banja, Ndhlovu and Mulendema, 2012). This scenario calls for mentorship training.

During this training, potential mentors should be equipped with appropriate content and must be familiar with circular and pedagogical knowledge as well as interpersonal skills. Unfortunately, most mentors have not received formal training in the skills needed to guide newer teachers' growth and development (Ganser, 1999; Podsen & Denmark, 2000). This training must start from a theoretical perspective of mentorship so as to create a deep understanding of the subject matter. By conceptualising mentorship we can anchor it on appropriate intellectual rigor and build it on existing knowledge and skills, in order to be able to support teachers in their day-to-day work. This is important if mentorship training is to have any real positive impact and not be a programme merely to fill up space. It would seem that for this impact to materialise, the training must focus not just on the qualifications but also on the on quality of service to be provided. In essence it must recognise that the newly qualified teacher is still learning and developing intellectually, emotionally, and socially.

Jokinen and Valijarvi (2006) further state that formal training in mentorship can help bring about solutions to some of the challenges these teachers face in finding ways to incorporate innovative teaching strategies and locally relevant content and sills that can enhance the required objective of the curriculum. As Odell (1990) and Odell and Ferraro (1992) cited by Greiman (2002: 33) have suggested 'mentor teachers need preparation and training on such topics as: purposes of teacher induction programmes; stages of teacher development; working with the adult learners; schema theory; concerns and needs of beginning teachers; clinical supervision; classroom observation and conferencing skills; and teacher reflection.'

In addition, this training must be complete with coverage of ethics, knowledge and skills, and methodologies. Based on a study by McCaughtry *et al.* (2005) the areas of training could include but not be limited to the following areas of competency (a) developing performance-coaching skills, (b) displaying sensitivity to individual differences, (c) modelling and coaching effective classroom-management standards, (d)

modelling and coaching effective teaching standards, (e) nurturing the novice, (f) promoting collaborative learning, (g) shaping professional relationships, and (h) understanding the mentoring role.

As has been argued so far, to achieve all the above, mentorship endeavours must first be part of the education policy; it must not be an appendage to any policy no matter how well meaning that policy is. Indeed Zambia needs a formal policy backup for mentoring new teachers. This will not only ensure uniformity in practice and procedure among schools thereby avoiding individual schools' approach to mentorship but ensure a national character. When considered against the fact that teachers get transferred from one school to another, uniformity becomes crucial and should therefore not depend on the individual initiative of a newly qualified teacher or a senior teacher. More importantly, it might also unlock the doors to budgets that hitherto have excluded mentorship.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that career and psychosocial/emotional mentorship is a necessity for newly qualified teachers who intend to improve their efficiency and levels of competence. Given that teachers themselves desire to benefit from a more collaborative school culture than currently exists in countries such as South Africa, as Steyn, cited in Thomas *et al* (2014) has established, there is urgent need to put considerable importance on development of mentorship as a sure and long-term means for solving the problems of newly qualified teachers. As I have argued elsewhere (Banja, 2015) to ensure that mentorship as an approach to professional development becomes effective in ensuring quality, there is need for a national policy that will institutionalise mentorship of newly qualified teachers and give it a national character. I believe that mentorship must stand as a distinct discipline that is interdisciplinary in nature. It must have a variety of strategies to ensure meaningful implementation. Specific units charged with the responsible of overseeing teacher education and teacher performance such as the Teacher Education Department and the Teacher Education and Specialised Services must champion the fight to institute mentoring of newly qualified teachers.

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