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Mentoring Feedback to Support Teaching: Changes in Teacher's Practice in Government Aided Secondary Schools in the Acholi Sub-Region

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Abstract

This article presents changes in practices of teachers in government aided secondary schools in the Acholi Sub-region taking part in mentoring feedback to improve teaching processes. Data was collected using questionnaire survey, interviews and documentary analysis with teachers, Director of studies, Deputy head teachers, Head teachers. Results describe that quality mentoring feedback is a significant contributor to professional and academic success as this helps mentors share professional experiences at different stages of teachers' career. The study concluded that mentoring feedback improves teacher practices and further helps them to learn new activities which maintain their relevance in the contemporary world. The study recommends that mentoring guidance should focus on giving feedback, social interaction, instructional practices and clarity in teaching that have direct measurable impacts on students learning.

Keywords

Feedback, Mentoring, Teacher Effectiveness, Government Aided Secondary Schools

1. Introduction

Teachers' professional development is inextricably linked with the present search for ways to improve teaching and to build effective schools. Policy makers devise ways to achieve quality education, including teacher improvement strategies for teacher effectiveness, which leads to learner's quality achievements.

Feedback can be understood as the hinge that joins teaching and learning (Pollock, 2012), and yet the concept remains largely undeveloped in the literature. The paper is divided into seven sections namely, introduction, methodology, findings, discussions, conclusions, recommendations and references.

Feedback is considered as a vital approach to facilitate students' development as independent learners in order to monitor, evaluate, and regulate their own learning (Ferguson, 2011). The quantity/quality of feedback provided and its helpfulness to the mentee, appears to range widely, and can give rise to uncertainty and confusion (Gamlem, 2015). Feedback can be a great support for improving teaching and students learning in Government-aided secondary schools (Gamlem, 2015 in Tillama et al., 2015: p. 1). It is a powerful tool in students learning and it is important for mentees' professional development. Although feedback is generally considered to be beneficial, there is debate as to the nature of good feedback.

Hattie and Timperley (2007) note that quality feedback can be a significant contributor to academic success. Agudo (2016) explains that the quality of feedback provided by school mentors during the practicum experience constitutes the main focus. Mentors' feedback plays an important role in shaping the professional identity of mentees (Pekkanli, 2011) in (Agudo, 2016: p. 2).

Traditionally, a "mentor" is a more experienced member of staff who seeks to share their skills and expertise with less experienced mentees with a view to improving their development. It should be a safe, non-judgmental relationship that facilitates a wide range of learning and development. Mentors' supportive and constructive feedback is imperative for the professional preparation of mentees since, otherwise, they would feel lost in their self-reflections and evaluations of their teaching (Pekkanli, 2011: p. 60). Constructive feedback focuses on changing teaching behaviors as well as continuous positive reinforcement and ongoing encouragement (Gutierrez, 1996; Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Gatbonton, 1999; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Wright, 2010). Mentors' feedback can contribute to improving mentees' professional teaching competency in terms of self-awareness (Ximena & Méndez, 2008; Pekkanli, 2011; Hudson, 2013; Gutierrez, 1996).

Mentoring guides the teacher in building their proficiency, and can be done as a regular practice among teachers and their head teachers in a school or through participation in an in-service education course. A backdrop is that research findings and expert opinions about how traditional feedback from classroom observations affects instruction and student achievement are not encouraging (DuFour & Marzano, 2009).

1.1. Mentoring in Ugandan Government Aided Secondary Schools

The mentoring process in Government-aided secondary schools in the Acholi sub-region in Uganda, has not been adequately available to all academic staff. This study focused on the Acholi sub-region because it is strategically located and experienced insurgency for many years which interrupted teacher support

(mentoring) for effective teaching and learning. Most stakeholders believe that the professional opportunities to make teachers effective in teaching are inadequate. Teachers' behaviours such as dodging lessons, reporting late to school, making excuses due to laziness, inadequate preparation, use of poor methods of teaching and the inability to control learners' behaviours, may be an indication of inadequate mentoring practices (MoES, 2012). These behaviors undermine teachers' ability to use appropriate classroom practices, thus, leading to poor performance among learners.

Yet mentoring helps and supports teachers to manage their own learning, maximize their professional potential and improve their performance. What remains undiscovered is, whether mentoring feedback improves on mentees teaching process in government-aided secondary schools. This study investigated whether mentoring feedback improves teacher effectiveness in Government-aided secondary schools in Acholi Sub-region. It analyzed what mentees teachers value and expect from their mentors in terms of feedback and to what extent the feedback provided meets their needs and expectations in teaching.

1.2. Transformation

This study was guided by transformational theory. It is a new and evolving theory resulting from the research and work of scholars such as Daloz (1986). It is a theory of existence that views people as subjects not objects. People are constantly reflecting and acting on the transformation of their world so that it can become a more equitable place for all to live (Daloz, 1986). The concept of transformation refers to change. Some transformational theorists share the humanistic view that learners are capable of changing and free to act on the world Daloz (1986) addresses the impact education has on the diversity of adult learners. Adult learners' theories have been identified as the dominant theoretical foundation behind mentoring because it makes a mentees' experience meaningful (Knowles, 1984). The goal of transformational theory is social transformation by explaining reality, where the oppressed develop critical consciousness.

Mentoring helps mentors (senior teachers), guide and encourage mentees (junior teachers) to become more effective in teaching. Transformational theory is the centrality of critical reflection with the purpose of rediscovering power and helping mentees to develop an awareness of the urgency to transform society and their own reality. Mentoring guides mentees to develop their talent, skills, knowledge and to change attitudes towards teaching. It is a liberating approach couched in an act of cognition not in the transfer of information (Daloz, 1986). Mentoring makes mentees to think critically, creatively and become reasonable, reflective practitioners. It is a problem posing and dialogical methodology. Through the mentoring process mentees are supported on the job to gain more courage and to learn continuously in order to perfect their skills in teaching and become more effective. It is a horizontal mentor-mentee-relationship where the mentors work as political agents and on an equal footing with mentees.

Daloz's (1986) model locates mentees growth as a teacher within a context of challenge and support and identifies that development can help the mentor guide, challenge, support and illuminate the way ahead. The model is based upon the view that where support is low, there is little opportunity for any challenge to occur and the mentee may withdraw from the mentoring relationship. Conversely, if support is high, new knowledge and images of teaching become possible for mentees. In this case, Daloz's (1986) concept of mentoring is not only concerned with developing cognitive competence but more importantly in fostering the personal growth of a mentee to be effective in a teaching and learning environment. Personal development is facilitated by the relationship between mentors and mentees.

Through a mentoring relationship consisting primarily of one-to-one interactions, mentee and mentor construct meaning and make sense of their respective world (Prickel, 2013). Mentoring as a professional tool thus improves teacher effectiveness in that inexperienced teachers (mentees) are paired up with experienced teachers (mentors). Therefore, mentoring has been accepted as an effective method of preparing the mentees to enter the teaching profession (Sundli, 2007).

2. Methodology

The study used a mixed method, cross-sectional survey design through which the researcher collected data on mentoring feedback and teacher effectiveness in Government -aided Secondary schools from varied categories of the population (Creswell, 2012). The data collection was triangulated, whereby the research team used multiple research methods (mixed method), multiple sources within a single method, multiple analysis and perspectives. The qualitative approach was used to build a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, with detailed views of information and conducted in a natural setting (Creswell, 2012; Koul, 1997), while the quantitative approach was used to enable a large quantity of relevant data to be amassed and subjected to statistical analysis techniques for greater representation (Punch, 2006).

The study collected both primary and secondary data. The researcher used questionnaires, open-ended interviews and documentary analysis to collect the data. The source of questionnaire was researcher made as a result of the research questions and Hypotheses. Quality control was ensured through determining validity and reliability. Data analysis was aided by the Statistical Package of Social sciences (SPSS) version 18.0 for both inferential and descriptive statistics. The analysis was done in two phases. In phases one, Chi-square test descriptive analysis was used as guided by the research hypotheses, while in-phase two, the descriptive responses from the head-teachers, deputy-head teachers-(academic)-directors of studies and teachers were organized according to the themes identified from research questions and analyzed using a qualitative data analysis software method called "customs table".

The study focused on Government-aided secondary schools in the eight districts of the Acholi sub-region of which Gulu district has 9, Omoro 6, Kitgum 8, Pader 7, Agago 6, Amuru 4, Nwoya 4 and Lamwo 4 schools respectively; adding up to 48 Government-aided secondary schools. Acholi sub-region was chosen because it is strategically located and experienced insurgency for many years which interrupted teacher support (mentoring) for effective teaching and learning. Secondary schools that have both ordinary and advanced levels of education were selected. The target population included Head teachers (HT), Deputy Head teachers (DHT), Directors of studies DoS) and teachers in Government-aided secondary schools in the Acholi Sub-region. These were targeted because they have different perceptions and ideas about mentoring and its impact on teacher effectiveness in teaching. 14 Head teachers, 14 Deputy Head teachers, 14 Directors of studies, and 336 teachers were targeted because they have different perceptions and ideas about mentoring and its impact on teacher effectiveness in teaching which may lead to variations in teacher effectiveness. Government-aided secondary schools and teachers in the Acholi sub-region were sampled using stratified random sampling technique. The Head teachers, Deputy Head teachers and Directors of studies in the Government-aided secondary schools were sampled using purposive sampling. The researchers rely on their own judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in their surveys. The teachers from the Government aided secondary schools were selected using simple random sampling technique where 8 teachers comprising of 4 males and 4 females were selected in each school making a total of 336 teachers. Following the above, 14 Head teachers, 14 Deputy Head teachers and 14 Director of studies were selected using purposive sampling technique making a total of 42. The total samples of all respondents were 378 as shown in Table 1.

The ethical considerations were addressed by the researcher who obtained a letter of introduction from Gulu University, Faculty of Education and Humanities and Gulu University Research Ethics Committee to introduce him to the Resident District Commissioners, District Education Officers and Head teachers of the selected Government-aided secondary Schools in the Acholi sub-region. Confidentiality and anonymity were also addressed by keeping especially personal information or sensitive issues confidential and anonymous so that readers

Table 1. Showing sample frame for the target population.

Categories of respondents	Target population	Samples	Percentages	Sampling techniques
Head teachers	48	14	4%	Purposive
Deputy head teachers	48	14	4%	Purposive
Directors of studies	48	14	4%	Purposive
Teachers	966	336	89%	Stratified random sampling
Total	1110	378	100%	

are unable to discover the identity of the respondents. Personal life records, attitudes and feelings were kept private and protected in a lockable place and were used by the researchers only.

3. Findings

Table 2 below shows teachers' responses on the effects of mentoring feedback on teacher effectiveness in government aided secondary schools in the Acholi sub-region.

Feedback to improve teacher effectiveness in the Acholi sub-region was assessed as presented in Table 2 below. Majority of the teachers (64.5%) strongly agreed with the statement that; quality feedback can be a significant contributor to professional and academic success. Furthermore, (58.1%) strongly agreed that feedback is a powerful tool in students learning and is important for teachers' professional development. 51.6%, in turn, agreed that mentors' feedback plays an important role in shaping the professional identity of teachers. This implies that giving feedback to teachers helps to improve teacher effectiveness in the Government-aided secondary schools in Acholi sub-region. Therefore the null hypothesis that there is no effect of feedback on teacher effectiveness in government aided secondary schools in the Acholi sub-region was rejected because chi-square calculated is 0.64 and p-value is 0.01.

Qualitative data was analyzed to establish the extent to which feedback improves on teacher effectiveness. The responses by the various participants such as the DoS, D/Htr and H/tr were analysed. Of the DoS who participated in the study, (85%), strongly agreed that feedback is significantly effective in improving teacher effectiveness. For example DoS 4 reported that feedback is very important as:

Table 2. Responses on the effects of mentoring feedback on teacher effectiveness.

	SA (%)	A (%)	NAN (%)	DA (%)	SDA (%)
Feedback is the hinge that joins teaching and learning	45.2	32.3	16.1	3.2	3.2
Feedback is a powerful tool in students learning and it is important for teachers' professional development.	58.1	41.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
Quality feedback can be a significant contribution to professional and academic success	64.5	35.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Mentors' feedback plays an important role in shaping the professional identity of teachers.	29.0	51.6	16.1	3.2	0.0
Mentors' supportive and constructive feedback is imperative for the professional preparation of the teachers	39.4	41.3	19.4	0.0	0.0
Mentors' feedback can contribute to improving teachers' professional teaching competency in terms of self-awareness.	50.3	30.3	15.2	1.0	3.2
AVG	47.7	38.8	11.1	1.2	1.1

Source: Primary data, 2020.

it helps teachers to improve their methodology,
it also helps teachers to become confident, as they
identify their areas of strengths and weaknesses,
by having perspective in mentoring and by being positive

Meanwhile Htr 3 Observer that

feedback is a process of improving mentoring effectiveness
It is an accountability of teaching process, and
helps to confirm the processes of teaching. Helps to improve
services of teaching/learning process by being patient and
constructive in giving feedback

The findings from the school mentors (HT, DHT and DOS) indicate that mentoring feedback are significant teaching. This because it helps teachers to improve their teaching methodology, teachers confidence, it is an accountability of improving teaching processes. Mentoring feedback helps a teacher to be patience and constructive in teaching. Mentoring feedback is significant in the teaching learning process.

4. Discussions

According to the assessment by the teachers, the results show that mentoring feedback has effects on teacher effectiveness: The chi-square calculated (0.64) is more than p-value which is 0.01 which shows that the result is significant. The school mentors (DoS, D/Htrs and Htrs) who were interviewed also revealed that mentoring feedback has effects on teacher effectiveness in Government-aided secondary schools. These findings agree with both (Gamlem, 2015 and Ferguson, 2011), who noted that feedback is vital to facilitate students' development as independent learners. This further concurs with transformational theory which emphasises the importance of support in fostering creativity and critical reflection. The teachers' responses therefore reveal that quality mentoring feedback can be a significant contributor to their professional and academic success.

The participants further revealed that feedback is essential in mentoring, but not all kinds of mentoring feedback have the power to support learning. Hattie & Timperley (2007) argue that quality mentoring feedback can be a significant contributor to academic success if it is conducted in accordance with the research on effective mentoring feedback. The lived experiences of academic teachers as they engage in mentoring feedback have received relatively little research attention compared to students perspectives on feedback. Mentoring feedback plays an important role in shaping the professional identity of teachers. The school mentors revealed that mentoring feedback is significantly effective in improving teacher effectiveness. Mentoring feedback in schools is very important as it helps teachers to improve on their methodology, it also helps teachers to become confident, as they identify their areas of strengths and weaknesses. According to DuFour & Marzano (2009) a backdrop is that research findings

and experts opinions about how traditional feedback from classroom observations affects instruction and student achievement are not encouraging. However, this accords with the findings from Gamlem & Munthe (2014) that feedback is often more encouraging and affirming, rather than promoting information about learning in lower secondary classroom (Gamlem & Munthe, 2014; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In such situations, students do not receive feedback on how to strengthen their learning processes, nor the regulatory processes needed to achieve set learning goals.

The findings explain why mentoring feedback is a process of improving teacher effectiveness. It is an accountability of teaching process. It helps to improve on teaching-learning process. The findings confirmed what (Agudo, 2016: pp. 1-2) explains that the quality of feedback provided by school mentors during the practicum experience constitutes the main focus this day. Feedback helps teachers to improve on teacher effectiveness which later make them improve on students' achievement. The finding matches with Hattie and Timperley's (2007) findings that quality feedback can be a significant contributor to academic success. The researcher agrees that feedback is important in improving teacher effectiveness. Pekkanli (2011) in (Agudo, 2016: p. 2) found that Mentors' feedback plays an important role in shaping the professional identity of mentees. The activities carried out in schools require feedback in order to improve on the practice. There has been a tendency in recent decades to view feedback through the lens of higher education students' experiences, with focus on student learning rather than teaching (Haggis, 2006; Tuck, 2012).

5. Conclusion

Teachers in Government-aided secondary schools in the Acholi sub-region need mentoring feedback to maintain their areas of strengths and improve on areas of weakness in teaching process. Quality mentoring feedback can be a significant contribution to professional and academic success. Mentoring feedback is a powerful tool in students learning and it is important for teachers' professional development. It plays an important role in shaping the professional identity of teachers. It helps teachers to improve their methodology; it also helps teachers to become confident, as they identify their areas of strengths and weaknesses. Mentoring feedback is a process of improving teacher effectiveness in Government-aided secondary schools in the Acholi sub-region.

6. Recommendations

Feedback from a supervisors or a trained support person applies new skills and strategies more frequently and appropriately and adopts a more diverse range of instructional practices than teachers who do not receive such supports. Mentors should guide and encourage teachers to get involved in receiving mentoring feedback. The quality feedback would help the teachers to realize their strengths and weaknesses. The input from the feedback helps the teachers to improve on

their teaching process in the Government-aided secondary schools in the Acholi sub-region.

School mentors' feedback is essential in that their experience in providing teachers with constructive feedback focused on changing teaching behaviours as well as continuous positive reinforcement and ongoing encouragement. Teachers would feel lost in their self-reflections and evaluations of their teaching. School mentors as expert or experienced teachers are expected to provide authentic, experiential learning opportunities through modelling. School Mentors should be trained to help teachers overcome context-specific difficulties. Mentor teachers' feedbacks are essential as it contributes to improving teachers' professional teaching competency in terms of self-awareness.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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