

Assessing Teachers' Collaborative Practices in School Setting: Insights from Teacher Mentoring Cycle Programme in Plateau State Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the experiences and views of teachers participating in a mentoring program in Nigerian public primary school settings. The research investigated the benefits and challenges of mentoring, as well as the role of school leadership in supporting teacher development. The population consisted of 48 teachers out of which 8 were randomly selected for the study. Qualitative research design was used for the study, Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions respondents. The study found that improved teaching practices, increased confidence, and enhanced professional development were some of the benefits of the mentoring cycle.. However, the study revealed that finding time to meet with mentors and lack of support from school leadership are some of the major challenges faced by teachers. The critical role of school leadership in supporting teacher development and mentoring programs was emphasized, with teachers stressing the importance of adequate support and resources. The study recommends among others that schools and policymakers develop structured mentoring programs, provide adequate support and resources, and foster a supportive school culture.

Keywords: Teacher Mentoring cycle, Collaboration, Primary School

INTRODUCTION

The education sector in Nigeria is faced with numerous challenges that impact the quality of teaching and learning. Research reports continue to show worrisome trends of declining teacher quality. One of the significant concerns is the ripple effect in poor performance of students in national and international assessment. Furthermore prevailing skills gap in key industries in Nigeria. This poor performance can be attributed to various factors, including inadequate teacher training, lack of resources, and limited opportunities for continuous professional development. (Analiza 2023; Ansari 2022).

Despite the fact that teachers play a critical role in shaping the educational experiences of students; many teachers globally and in Nigeria face challenges in their teaching practices, including: lack of necessary training and qualifications to effectively deliver the curriculum. Limited resources such as textbooks, technology, and infrastructure, which can hinder their ability to provide high-quality instruction (Morgan, 2022). Limited opportunities for professional development limits access to opportunities for professional development, such as workshops, conferences, and mentoring programs, which can help them improve their teaching practices. (Weller 2023). The consequences of these challenges can lead to: Teacher burnout. Teachers may feel overwhelmed and unsupported, leading to burnout and decreased job satisfaction. Another challenge is low morale: Teachers may develop low morale when they feel undervalued and unappreciated, leading to decreased motivation. High attrition rates may set in due to lack of support, resources, and opportunities for professional development such as teacher mentoring programme. Hence the need for a teacher support programme such as mentoring.

Globally, mentoring cluster programs have been identified as a potential solution to teacher professional development challenges (Geletu, 2020, Ansari, 2024). Mentoring can provide teachers with the support,

guidance, and resources they need to improve their teaching practices and advance their careers (Brooks, 2023). However, there is limited research on the effectiveness of mentoring programs in Nigerian school settings. This study aims to investigate the experiences and perceptions of teachers participating in a mentoring program in Nigerian schools. The study will explore the benefits and challenges of mentoring, as well as the role of school leadership in supporting teacher development. By examining the experiences of teachers in mentoring programs, this study seeks to contribute to the understanding of how mentoring can be used to support teacher development and improve teaching practices in Nigerian schools. The research findings will have implications for education policy and practice in Nigeria, particularly in the areas of teacher development, mentoring, and school leadership. By identifying the benefits and challenges of mentoring programs, the study will inform the development of effective mentoring programs that can support teacher development and improve student learning outcomes.

In the realm of education, teacher collaboration has emerged as a vital component of school improvement and student success. When teachers work together, share their expertise, and support one another, they can create a more effective and nurturing learning environment. Despite its importance, fostering teacher collaboration remains a challenge in many educational settings, particularly in Nigeria. This study aims to explore the potential of teacher mentoring cycles in promoting collaboration among teachers in Nigerian school settings. By examining the experiences of teachers participating in a mentoring program, we seek to gain insights into the design and implementation of teacher mentoring initiatives that can foster a culture of collaboration and improve teaching quality. The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the development of effective teacher mentoring programs that can enhance teacher collaboration, improve instructional practices, and ultimately benefit student learning outcomes. By shedding light on the challenges and opportunities associated with teacher mentoring cycles in Nigerian schools, this research can inform education policy and practice, both locally and internationally.

Statement of Problem

Assessing teachers' collaboration in school settings is crucial for understanding the effectiveness of teacher mentoring programs, such as the Teacher Mentoring Cycle programme. Despite its importance, there is a need to investigate the following problems:

1. Limited understanding of teacher collaboration dynamics: There is a lack of comprehensive understanding of how teachers collaborate, share knowledge, and support each other in school settings, particularly within the context of the Teacher Mentoring Cycle programme.
2. Insufficient evaluation of mentoring programs: The impact and effectiveness of teacher mentoring programs, such as the Teacher Mentoring Cycle, on teacher collaboration and student outcomes are not well understood, making it challenging to identify areas for improvement.
3. Barriers to effective collaboration: Teachers may face various barriers to effective collaboration, including limited time, inadequate resources, and lack of administrative support, which can hinder the success of mentoring programs.
4. Need for evidence-based insights: There is a need for empirical evidence on the effectiveness of teacher mentoring programs, such as the Teacher Mentoring Cycle, to inform policy, practice, and future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is grounded in several theoretical frameworks that inform the assessment of teachers' collaborative practices in school settings, particularly within the context of the Teacher Mentoring Cycle programme. The key theoretical frameworks used is the Communities of Practice (CoP) Theory. Community of Practice (CoP) theory was developed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in the early 1990s. The theory posits that learning is a social process that occurs through participation in communities of practice, where individuals with shared interests and goals interact and collaborate to achieve a common purpose. The key idea is that Groups of people with shared interests and goals can develop a sense of community and shared practice through regular interaction and collaboration. This theory is relevant as it highlights the importance of teachers' collaborative

practices in developing a shared understanding of teaching and learning, and in improving their professional practice. The

Teacher mentoring practices have been recognized as a vital component in supporting new teachers, collaboration and enhancing teacher retention. Research highlights the significance of mentorship in teacher development, particularly in the Nigerian context is crucial for developing 21st century skills (Geletu, 2023). Mentoring programs are designed to support novice teachers in becoming proficient educators. Studies Arnesson, & Albinsson, (2017) have shown that mentorship increases job satisfaction, fosters leadership among teachers, and enhances student achievement and engagement. Effective mentorship can also reduce teacher attrition rates, with research indicating that mentoring programs can significantly influence teacher retention. (Analiza 2024). Despite the benefits of pedagogical mentoring, many schools in Nigeria lack formalized mentoring programs. Informal mentoring arrangements are common, but these may not provide the structured support that new teachers need. Research suggests that the absence of formal mentorship frameworks contributes to high attrition rates among beginning teachers. Ambrosetti and Dekkers framework (2010) emphasizes the relational, developmental, and contextual aspects of mentoring. This framework guides the development of effective mentorship programs, ensuring that mentors and mentees engage in meaningful relationships, foster professional growth, and address specific challenges in the educational context.

Effective mentoring programs include Mentor-Mentee Ratio: A ratio of 1:3 to 1:5 allows for personalized attention and manageable mentorship loads. Regular Meetings: Structured and informal mentoring sessions, with regular feedback and support. Classroom Observations: Real-time observations and feedback to improve teaching practices. Assessment and Evaluation: Regular assessments and evaluations to track progress and identify areas for improvement. Mentoring benefits both mentors and mentees, including: Improved Teacher Retention: Mentoring programs can reduce attrition rates and improve job satisfaction.

Professional Growth: Mentoring fosters professional development, leadership skills, and confidence among teachers. Enhanced Student Achievement: Effective mentoring can lead to improved student outcomes and academic performance. Recommendations for effective Mentoring Programs included:

To establish effective pedagogical mentoring programs, schools should develop Structured Mentoring Frameworks. These formalized frameworks ensure consistency and quality in mentoring practices. Provide Training and Support: Mentors should receive training and ongoing support to effectively guide mentees. Monitor and Evaluate: Regular monitoring and evaluation of mentoring programs can help identify areas for improvement. Arnesson, and Albinsson, (2017) investigated the impact of mentorship on pedagogical method for integration of theory and practice in higher education the study found that pedagogical mentoring improved teachers' basic professional competencies, contributing to students' learning engagements. The mentoring practices accounted for 24.37% of the variation in teachers' competencies. Geletu, (2023) studied the effects of pedagogical mentoring and coaching on primary school teachers' professional development practices and students' learning engagements in classrooms in Oromia regional state: implications for professionalism. Mentoring and Teacher Effectiveness: Research result showed that beginning teachers who participated in induction programs, including mentoring, performed better in classroom instructional practices than those who did not receive such support. This highlights the importance of mentoring in enhancing teacher effectiveness. Ingersoll and Strong (2011). Investigated the impact of induction and mentoring programs for beginning teachers: a critical review of the research. They found that Integration of Theory and Practice through Mentorship: A study on mentorship in higher education found that it played a crucial role in integrating theoretical knowledge with practical skills. The results emphasized the significance of mentorship in developing competent professionals. These empirical studies demonstrate the positive impact of pedagogical mentoring on teacher development and student learning outcomes. It is at the backdrop of this that this research investigates extent of Teachers' Collaboration skills utilization within the public primary School setting from a Teacher Mentoring Cycle programme in Nigeria

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the potential of teacher mentoring cycles in fostering collaboration among

teachers in Nigerian school settings. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Investigate the impact of teacher mentoring cycles on teacher collaboration: To understand how mentoring cycles can promote collaboration, improve instructional practices, and enhance professional growth among teachers.
2. Identify the key factors that facilitate or hinder the effectiveness of teacher mentoring cycles: To determine the critical factors that contribute to the success or failure of mentoring cycles in promoting teacher collaboration.
3. Inform the design and implementation of teacher mentoring programs: To provide insights and recommendations for educators, policymakers, and school leaders on how to design and implement effective teacher mentoring programs that foster collaboration and improve teaching quality.

Research Questions

This study aims to explore the potential of teacher mentoring cycles in fostering collaboration among teachers in Nigerian school settings. The following research questions guided the investigation:

1. How do teacher mentoring cycles influence teacher collaboration in Nigerian schools?
2. What are the key factors that facilitate or hinder the effectiveness of teacher mentoring cycles in promoting collaboration among teachers?
3. How do teachers perceive the impact of mentoring cycles on their instructional practices?
4. How do teachers perceive the impact of mentoring cycles on their professional growth?
5. What role does school leadership play in supporting or hindering teacher mentoring cycles and collaboration?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design, utilizing a case study approach to explore the experiences of teachers participating in a Teacher Mentoring Program by TCEIPEC in Nigerian schools. The population consisted of 48 teachers out of which 8 were randomly selected for the study. Data was collected using interviews with teachers who have participated in the mentoring program to gather data on their experiences and perceptions. Also Focus group discussions was held with the teachers to explore their experiences and perceptions of the mentoring program. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying, coding, and categorizing themes and patterns in the data. To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the findings, the study employed: Triangulation: Multiple data sources and methods were used to triangulate the findings. Participants were provided with the opportunity to review and comment on the findings. The study was reviewed by peers to ensure the quality and validity of the research. Ethical Considerations receiving informed consent of Participants about the purpose and procedures of the study. Participants' identities and responses were kept confidential. The research instrument for this study was a semi-structured interview guide and focus group discussion guide. These instruments were designed to gather data on the experiences and perceptions of teachers participating in a mentoring program in Nigerian school settings.

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions that allowed participants to share their experiences and perceptions of the mentoring program. Some sample questions include:

Can you describe your experience with the mentoring program?

How has the mentoring program supported your professional development?

What challenges did you faced in the mentoring program, and how did you addressed them?

Focus Group Discussion Guide

The focus group discussion guide used consisted of open-ended questions that facilitated discussion among participants. Questions used include:

How do you think the mentoring program has impacted your teaching practices?

What role do you think school leadership plays in supporting teacher mentoring programs?

What suggestions do you have for improving the mentoring program?

The research instrument was developed based on a review of the literature on teacher mentoring programs and was pilot-tested with a small group of teachers to ensure its validity and reliability. The interview guide and focus group discussion guide was administered by the researcher, who conducted the interviews and focus group discussions in a neutral and non-threatening environment.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative discussion was based on the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The discussion focused on identifying themes, patterns, and insights that emerge from the data.

Themes

Benefits of Mentoring: Teachers may discuss the benefits of mentoring, such as improved teaching practices, increased confidence, and enhanced professional development.

Challenges of Mentoring: Teachers discussed challenges they faced in the mentoring program, such as lack of support from school leadership, inadequate resources, or difficulty in finding time for mentoring.

Role of School Leadership: Teachers discussed the importance of school leadership in supporting teacher mentoring programs, including providing resources, encouragement, and a conducive environment for mentoring.

Patterns

The patterns that emerge from the data include: **Variation in Mentoring Experiences:** Teachers had different experiences with mentoring, depending on factors such as the quality of the mentor, the frequency of meetings, and the level of support from school leadership. **Impact on Teaching Practices:** Teachers discussed how the mentoring program has impacted their teaching practices, including changes in instructional strategies, classroom management, and assessment methods.

Insights

Insights that emerged from the data include: **Importance of Structured Mentoring:** Teachers emphasize the importance of structured mentoring programs that provide clear goals, regular meetings, and feedback. **Need for Ongoing Support:** Teachers may highlight the need for ongoing support and resources to sustain mentoring programs and ensure their effectiveness.

1. How do teacher mentoring cycles influence teacher collaboration in Nigerian schools?

Response about benefits of mentoring cycle

"The mentoring cycle has been a game-changer for me. My mentor has provided me with valuable feedback and guidance that has helped me improve my teaching practices." (Teacher 1) "I feel more confident in my ability to manage my classroom and engage my students since participating in the mentoring program." (Teacher 2)

"The mentoring cycle has helped me develop my instructional strategies and improve student learning outcomes." (Teacher 3). This is agreement with Ansari, (2022) who discovered that collaborative discourse enhances teachers' performances. This calls for structured implementation of these strategies for improved teacher performance

2. What are the key factors that facilitate or hinder the effectiveness of teacher mentoring cycles in promoting collaboration among teachers?

Response about challenges of mentoring cycle

"One of the biggest challenges I faced was finding time to meet with my mentor. We were both busy with our teaching schedules, and it was hard to find a time that worked for both of us." (Teacher 4)

"I would have liked more support from school leadership. Sometimes, I felt like I was on my own in implementing the mentoring program." (Teacher 5)

"I struggled with feeling overwhelmed by the demands of the mentoring program. It was a lot to take on, especially when I was already struggling with my own teaching responsibilities." (Teacher 6). Brooks (2023) and Morgan (2022) findings is of the opinion that time, resources and motivation were factors in teacher commitment to mentoring cycle participation. This calls for actions that provide teachers with the motivation needed to undertake collaborative peer mentoring activities enhancing teacher quality and effective teaching.

R3. How do teachers perceive the impact of mentoring cycles on their instructional practices?

Teachers' Responses

Positive Impact on Instructional Practices

"The mentoring cycles have helped me to develop more effective lesson plans and improve my classroom management skills. I feel more confident in my ability to engage my students and promote a positive learning environment." (Teacher 1)

"I have learned new strategies for teaching and assessing my students. The mentoring cycles have provided me with valuable feedback and support, which has helped me to refine my teaching practices." (Teacher 2)

"The mentoring cycles have helped me to develop a more student-centered approach to teaching. I have learned to tailor my instruction to meet the diverse needs of my students, which has led to improved student outcomes." (Teacher 3)

The response reveals that teachers perceive mentoring cycles as having a positive impact on their instructional practices and professional growth. Through regular meetings with their mentors, teachers reported gaining valuable insights and feedback that helped them refine their teaching strategies and improve student learning outcomes. Regarding impact on Instructional Practices Teachers reported that mentoring cycles helped them develop more effective lesson plans, incorporating best practices and innovative strategies. Teachers also credited mentoring cycles with helping them develop better classroom management skills, creating a more conducive learning environment. Increased student engagement: Teachers reported that mentoring cycles helped them design more engaging lessons, leading to increased student participation and motivation.

R4. How do teachers perceive the impact of mentoring cycles on their professional growth?

Impact on Professional Growth

"The mentoring cycles have helped me to grow professionally and personally. I have developed new skills and knowledge, and I feel more confident in my ability to take on new challenges." (Teacher 4)

"I have appreciated the opportunity to network with other teachers and share best practices. The mentoring cycles have provided me with a sense of community and support, which has been invaluable." (Teacher 5)

"The mentoring cycles have helped me to reflect on my teaching practices and identify areas for improvement. I have developed a growth mindset and am committed to ongoing professional development." (Teacher 6)

Suggestions for Improvement

"I would like to see more opportunities for peer mentoring and collaboration. This would allow us to share best practices and learn from each other in a more formalized way." (Teacher 7)

"I think it would be helpful to have more frequent mentoring sessions, perhaps every few weeks. This would provide us with more regular support and feedback." (Teacher 8)

"I would like to see more emphasis on technology integration in the mentoring cycles. This would help us to stay current with the latest trends and best practices in education." (Teacher 3)

Overall, the teachers' responses suggest that mentoring cycles have had a positive impact on their instructional practices and professional growth. This agrees with Geletu (2023) who discovered peer collaboration positively impacts pedagogical practices for students and teachers. Respondents also appreciated the support and feedback provided by the mentoring cycles and have developed new skills and knowledge as a result. On impact of cycle on Professional Growth, Teachers reported feeling more confident in their teaching abilities, thanks to the support and guidance provided by mentors. They also credited mentoring cycles with helping them stay updated on best practices, new technologies, and innovative methodologies. Teachers appreciated the opportunity to network with colleagues and mentors, sharing experiences and expertise.

5. What role does school leadership play in supporting or hindering teacher mentoring cycles and collaboration?

Regarding role does school leadership play in supporting or hindering teacher mentoring cycles and collaboration. The following were responses from respondents:

"Our school leadership has been very supportive of the mentoring program. They provide us with resources and encouragement, which has made a big difference." (Teacher 7)

"I think school leadership plays a critical role in the success of mentoring programs. They need to provide the necessary support and resources for mentors and mentees." (Teacher 8)

"Without the support of school leadership, I don't think the mentoring program would have been successful. They helped us stay on track and provided valuable feedback." (Teacher 1)

These responses illustrate the diverse experiences and perspectives of teachers participating in a mentoring cycle in Nigerian school settings as opined by (Weller 2023). Result also highlighted the benefits and challenges of mentoring, as well as the critical role of school leadership in supporting teacher development.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study explored the experiences and perceptions of teachers participating in a mentoring program in Nigerian school settings. The findings highlight the benefits and challenges of mentoring, as well as the critical role of school leadership in supporting teacher development.

Benefits of Mentoring: Teachers reported improved teaching practices, increased confidence, and enhanced professional development as a result of participating in the mentoring program.

Challenges of Mentoring: Teachers faced challenges such as finding time to meet with mentors, lack of support from school leadership, and feeling overwhelmed by the demands of the mentoring program. **Role of School**

Leadership: Teachers emphasized the importance of school leadership in providing support, resources, and encouragement for mentors and mentees as well.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that mentoring programs can be an effective way to support teacher development and improve teaching practices in Nigerian school settings. The findings highlight the benefits of mentoring, including improved teaching practices and increased confidence, as well as the challenges faced by teachers, such as finding time to meet with mentors and lack of support from school leadership. The study also emphasizes the critical role of school leadership in supporting teacher development and mentoring programs. By providing adequate support and resources, school leaders can help ensure the success of mentoring programs and improve teaching practices. Overall, the study suggests that mentoring programs have the potential to make a positive impact on teacher development and student learning outcomes in Nigerian school settings. By investing in mentoring programs and providing adequate support and resources, schools and policymakers can help improve the quality of teaching and learning in Nigeria.

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