

PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS EXPERIENCES OF MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS DURING TEACHING PRACTICE

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Abstract: Mentorship is a global phenomenon where a skilled individual trains a less experienced individual. During teaching practice, pre-service teachers often learn the necessary skills and knowledge they can use when practicing as future teachers. This learning usually requires pre-service teachers (mentees) and in-service teachers (mentors) to establish good and professional relationships where there is support, learning and professional growth. The purpose of this study was to explore experiences of mentoring relationships that mentees form with their mentors during their teaching practice. This study employed a qualitative approach within a case study methodology. Three undergraduate pre-service teachers were purposively selected to generate data on their mentoring experiences that allowed them to form specific relationships with their mentors. Semi-structured interviews were used to generate data from these participants. The data was analysed using thematic analysis in conjunction with the Cognitive Apprenticeship Theory (CAT). The findings of the study indicated that mentees were able to establish positive mentoring relationships with their mentors, which were influenced by many factors such as professionalism and prior interaction. However, in certain experiences, participants faced challenges establishing professional relationships with some of their mentors. Therefore, we concluded that the participants in this study can use what seemed to be negative relationship experiences as learning curves for their future teaching careers. Moreover, the study recommended that agency should be developed with mentees to be able to deal with both positive and negative mentoring relationships.

Keywords: pre-service teachers, mentoring, teaching practice, mentors, mentees, school-based mentoring

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INTRODUCTION

Educational authorities in developed and developing countries; for example, England and India respectively, have increasingly allowed pre-service teachers to practice in schools as a way of strengthening their initial teacher education training (Hobson, 2002). Additionally, countries such as China, Norway, and Israel have also employed school-based mentoring owing to its significance in developing and improving pre-service teachers' pedagogic practices (Pillay,

2012). Straus, Chatur and Taylor (2009) note that teacher training institutions emphasise school-based mentorship because it is regarded by many as a catalyst for career success, advancement, and productivity in education. In South Africa, teacher education institutions such as universities have developed associations with schools to help train and prepare pre-service teachers for classroom practice. This seasonal collaboration between schools and universities is termed as a teaching practice and intends to produce quality pre-service teachers through its mentorship programme (Department of Education, 2006; Department of Higher Education, 2015). Thus, teaching practice is a training requirement for undergraduate Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) or Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) studies offered at teacher training institutions. During this training, a structured mentorship programme is undertaken by pre-service teachers in schools, where they are supervised and trained by in-service teachers (Department of Education, 2006; Lejonberg, Elstad, Sandvik, Solhaug, & Christophersen, 2018). Hence, pre-service teacher mentorship during teaching practice has been used as a strategy to develop professional skills in several teacher training institutions (Pather, 2010). In-service teachers thus act as mentors to pre-

service teachers who become mentees under their guidance.

During the teaching practice period, mentoring relationships are often formed between mentees and mentors. Graves (2010) argues that through properly established mentoring relationships, mentees are likely to acquire relevant support, nurturing and guidance from their mentors. Therefore, mentors play a pivotal role in the training of mentees in schools. Nonetheless, literature has identified that most mentoring relationships have been found to lack proper guidance, support and nurturing because of minimal communication and interaction from both mentors and mentees (Du Plessis et al., 2011; Heeralal & Bayaga, 2011; Hoxha, 2016). As a result, this study aimed to explore the relationships that formed between mentees and mentors focusing particularly on mentees experiences during teaching practice. This study argues that for mentoring to occur effectively, suitable mentoring relationships need to be created as a means to equip mentees with the necessary skills and knowledge they can use to teach successfully in schools

Literature review

Theorising mentoring experiences

According to Dewey (2005), experience is founded on the interaction between persons and the environment in which they exist. To put differently, Sokhulu (2021) posit that experience refers to one's participation in various events during the course of their life. People can engage in specific behaviours, portray certain skills and be involved in various situations as part of their life experiences (Dewey, 1986). Thus, experiences can be argued to be central to human existence. This research specifically studies pre-service teachers experiences in order to explore the

mentoring relationships that formed during teaching practice. Mentoring is defined as a learning process whereby an experienced person develops and trains the inexperienced one to improve their professional skills (Premkumar 2007; Rags & Kram, 2007). In teacher education, mentoring can be seen as a process by which a mentor professionally guides a mentee in order to practically train and equip them with skills and knowledge suitable for their teaching career (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Maphalala, 2013; Segoe, & Dreyer, 2015). This mentoring that occurs through guided practice is what Mbalamula (2016) regarded as professional scaffolding in his study about mentees' experiences of mentoring during teaching practice in Tanzania. Mentoring is essential for preparing mentees for the realities of teaching in a classroom space. Literature shows that novice teachers' experiences about their mentoring relationships with their school-based mentors have been receiving attention (Harrison, Dymoke & Pell, 2006; Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, and Tomlinson, 2009; Graves, 2010; Greiner, Hofmann & Katskaller, 2017). However, such studies have been silent about pre-service teachers' experiences, particularly mentoring relationships formed during teaching practice. Therefore, the need for this study, which focused on pre-service teachers' mentoring relationships with their mentor teachers.

An international lens in mentoring relationships

Leshem's (2012) case study research revealed that mentorship relationships between mentors and mentees showed significant complications in Israeli schools. The complications that Leshem (2012) referred to included mentors and mentees having; conflicting teaching worldviews, cultural differences, and lacking consensus in mentor ideologies because mentees were often too afraid to

ask. Leshem's study concluded that mentoring relationships between the mentor and mentee were dynamic; thus, they needed contextual adaptations to situations.

In the same spirit as Leshem, an earlier study by Straus et al. (2009) found that nine out of fifteen mentees reported mentoring relationship difficulties with their mentors in Canada. These difficulties included mentors not establishing mentoring relationships with them, mentors plagiarizing mentees' work, perceived competition with their mentors, and a lack of overall mentorship. These literature findings are further supported in Kelly and Tannehill's (2012) mixed-method study, which postulated the challenging experiences of a mentee receiving little feedback from his mentor about teaching and learning processes. The findings additionally assert that the mentee had no formal relationship with his mentor during his teaching practice because they only communicated informally in the staffroom and corridors of the school. In other words, the mentee was not given a formal platform to interact with their mentor. The concern on mentoring relationships arising from mentor and mentee differences gave impetus to explore mentoring relationships, particularly from the South African context, to provide further insight. Hence, the significance of this study.

The South African context: literature findings

South African universities that offer the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) qualification align their academic programmes with teaching practice sessions to train and expose their students to real-life classroom situations under the guidance of mentors who are usually more experienced (Wagenaar, 2005; Maphosa, Shumba & Shumba, 2007). The mentoring that occurs during teaching practice is crucial for mentees'

professional development since they get to apply the theory in practice (Department of Education, 2006; Wilson & Demetriou, 2007; Campbell & Brummett, 2007; Du Plessis, 2013).

Several studies in South Africa have explored mentoring relationships between mentees and mentors (Du Plessis, Van Schalkwyk & Marais 2011; Heeralal & Bayaga 2011; Du Plessis 2013; Nkambule & Mukeredzi 2017). These studies' findings revealed that mentees struggle to form solid relationships with their mentors. For example, Du Plessis et al. (2011) reported that mentees have minimal communication and interaction with their mentors. Other studies such as those by Heeralal and Bayaga (2011) and Nkambule and Mukeredzi (2017) revealed that mentees had misunderstandings between mentor and mentee roles. Furthermore, a recent study has shown that mentees complained of mentor absenteeism and lack of professional guidance (Jiyane & Gravett, 2019). Such experiences were theorised by Scandura (1998) as dysfunctional mentoring relationships since they involve unpleasant incidents that may result in misunderstanding rather than learning. The above findings contradict the ultimate goal for implementing mentoring programmes in schools, which allow mentees to learn from practice using guidance from a mentor to link theory with practice (Department of Higher Education, 2015). Practical application of theory in practice is possible if a positive relationship exists between a mentor and a mentee during school-based mentoring for pre-service teachers to learn how to teach successfully (Heeralal, 2014).

Approaches leading to positive mentoring relationships

A positive mentoring relationship can be achieved through a variety of approaches. These approaches, according

to Spangenberg (2014), involve mentees developing cordial, supportive, and empathetic relationships with their mentors, in which they openly share concerns. Pfund (2016) and McMorris et al. (2018) further postulate that positive mentoring relationships are inspired by growth, learning, development and support between mentors and mentees. Such findings were supported by Hoxha's (2016) study, where mentees experienced guided and supportive relationships with their mentor teachers. Thus, through these approaches, mentees and their mentors were able to form positive mentoring relationships essential for mentees' development during teaching practice.

Concluding literature remarks

Literature findings offering an international perspective indicated challenges in mentoring experiences where mentees are often faced with complex situations presented by mentoring relationships between themselves and their allocated mentors. Similar incidents were observed locally in South Africa, where school-based mentoring is usually severely challenged because mentees often lack support from their mentors, especially when the mentoring relationship was not clearly established (Heeralal & Bayaga, 2011). The lack of support and guidance in mentoring also result in unprofessional relationships which trigger more difficulties (Kelly & Tannehill, 2012; Jiyane & Gravett, 2019). Even though the reviewed studies explored mentees' relationships with their mentors, the purpose of their research was broad with a focus on other aspects of mentoring. As a result, a study that focuses only on identifying and discussing mentoring relationships is needed to build a deeper understanding. Moreover, the dilemmas found within school-based mentoring relationships imply that there is a need to improve mentoring practices. Therefore, this study is significant because it raises

awareness of the type of mentoring relationships that occur throughout teaching practice, allowing for appropriate suggestions and preparation.

Theoretical framework

To examine mentees' mentoring relationships, this study used the Cognitive Apprenticeship Theory (CAT) as a theoretical lens to analyse and interpret findings. Dennen and Burner (2008) postulate that the CAT focuses on social learning where a mentee can interact with a mentor during teaching practice, to form mentoring relationships. Social learning is rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) Constructivist Theory, which sees mentees constructing meaning out of their social and experiential learning (with mentors) during teaching practice. Dennen and Burner (2008) further explain that mentor-mentee relationships occur socially, focusing on developing cognitive and practical skills for mentees. Thus, social learning underpinned by the CAT suggests the significance of exploring mentor-mentee relationships that exist in a school context during teaching practice. Furthermore, social learning allows mentors to support and guide mentees to successfully achieve the required skills and knowledge, which will enable them to be competent in their jobs (Graves, 2010).

CAT, developed by Collins (1987), is an extension of Vygotsky's (1978) constructivist learning theory, which focuses on socially negotiated knowledge through interaction and dialogue. The main aim of the CAT, as argued by Steedman (2001), is to improve mentees' experiences in their careers by enhancing their practical and professional skill levels, in a way that will also develop their cognitive abilities (outside-in approach).

Moreover, the CAT negotiates six key concepts or phases which holistically aid in mentees'

professional development; 1. *Modelling* 2. *Coaching* 3. *Scaffolding* 4. *Articulation* 5. *Reflection*

6. *Exploration* (Collins, 1991). In discussing the first key concept, Collins, Brown and Holum (1991) posit that *modelling* is a phase where the mentee observes how the mentor executes different tasks. This modelling phase is designed to help mentees acquire various skills through observation and support (Parscal & Hencmann, 2008). During the modelling phase, the mentor explicitly communicates and demonstrates what needs to be done so that the mentee can learn and understand how the task can be accomplished (Collins, 1991).

Extending from observation and support displayed in the modelling phase, Collins (1991) noted that *coaching* is also necessary for developing mentees professionally. Coaching is whereby mentees practically show what they learned from observing the mentor. Creemers (2005) explains that coaching allows mentees to solve problems on their own and find ways to accomplish tasks while the mentor actively negotiates what is required for the activity. For example, after the mentor has modelled what needs to be done, the mentee can then practice the teaching, under the professional guidance of the experienced mentor teacher. Jiyane and Gravett's (2019) study emphasises that mentees learn best about teaching when they are in classroom contexts coached and supported by experienced mentors who model the practices they need to learn.

Once a mentee is satisfied with what they have observed and learnt in the modelling and coaching phases, they can demonstrate their learned teaching skills independently. This action is known as the scaffolding phase in the CAT. Collins et al. (1991) note that *scaffolding* is when a mentee is provided with an opportunity to do activities independently to indicate their prior learning. During this phase, the mentor provides support and assistance to the mentee when they cannot fully complete the tasks

independently (Rasmussen, 2001). Thus, the scaffolding practice emphasises developmental learning which enables mentees to do tasks on their own in the absence of a mentor in the future (Verenikina, 2003). It can therefore be suggested that scaffolding allows mentees to apply their creativity while the mentor teacher is close by to intervene when needed to shape learning.

Articulation is an extension of scaffolding that allows mentees to show their in-depth thinking based on the scaffolding they received (Collin, 1991). In addition, mentees may bring in their own beliefs, philosophy of teaching and prior knowledge during the articulation of independent teaching (Graves, 2010). In other words, mentees are afforded a platform to articulate their personal meaning of the skills and knowledge gained through modelling, coaching and scaffolding. These attributes are articulated in how they conduct pedagogical tasks such as employing specific teaching strategies, discipline control and lesson planning.

Upon demonstrating their learnt skills and creativity, mentees must then reflect on their experiences. This may also involve comparing their teaching abilities with others. Thus, as a fifth key concept, the CAT proposed the essence of reflection. Creemers (2005) asserts that *Reflection* is a process by which the mentees compare their findings against that of their mentors. Mentees do this to evaluate their thinking and teaching with that of their mentors. Reflection helps the mentee determine the similarities and differences between their practice and that of their mentor (Parscal & Hencmann, 2008). This reflection is crucial in mentees' training if they are to improve in their practices.

Exploration encourages mentees autonomy in identifying and solving problems. During exploration, mentees learn to tackle various challenges, try out

different strategies, and set achievable goals (Wilson & Cole, 1991). The strategies include those that they learnt from their mentors and those which they are already familiar with. In essence, both reflection and exploration occur as an ongoing process throughout the mentees' teaching practice experience. Mentees constantly have to make links and reflect on their experience so that they can improve. The CAT framework was selected to provide a guiding lens for the study, as it indicates how learning can socially occur through school-based mentorship which requires the formation of appropriate mentor-mentee relationships. Through the use of the CAT, we were able to identify, explore and understand mentoring relationships that existed between mentors and mentees during teaching practice. The theoretical framework was also used as an analytical tool to understand the study's findings.

Research purpose, objectives and questions

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand pre-service teachers (mentees) experiences of mentoring relationships during teaching practice. The study aimed at addressing the following question:

1. What type of relationships exist between a mentee and a mentor during teaching practice?

Methodology

5.1 Research approach, style, methods and selection of participants

This study draws from a larger master's dissertation which explored pre-service teachers' experiences of mentoring during teaching practice. This article focuses on pre-service teachers' mentoring relationships as a theme identified from the initial master's study. We adopted a qualitative case study methodology that sought to understand the various types of mentoring relationships that were established

during teaching practice. The study was located within the interpretive paradigm, whereby data were generated using semi-structured interviews from three pre-service teachers. Data from the semi-structured interviews provided us with rich and in-depth findings for analysis. In addition, through semi-structured interviews, we were able to probe participants for more information thus descriptive findings were obtained (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The three out of five pre-service teachers were purposively selected as there were in their third- and fourth-year level of their B. Ed. (two third year and one fourth year). Thus, these participants had already taught practically in schools under the guidance of a mentor or mentors. Furthermore, their responses reflected experiences on mentoring relationships which were relevant for the study's explored theme.

5.2 *Trustworthiness and authenticity*

Trustworthiness and authenticity were maintained by means of credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). In the larger master's study, data generated from semi-structured interviews were recorded and manually transcribed to ensure credibility. In addition, all transcribed interviews were sent back to participants to verify representation. Through this verification process, participants were also able to confirm whether what was transcribed reflected their true reality (confirmability). Furthermore, Shenton (2004) asserts that dependability refers to the provision of a detailed report based on study findings thereby enabling future researchers to repeat research using similar methods. Thus, to ensure dependability, detailed descriptions of participants' experiences were presented and analysed. The findings presented were also to maintain transferability, thus the thick description of data was provided to allow readers to

be able to transfer findings to their own realities or contexts. To adhere to research ethics, ethical approval was granted by the university in which the pre-service teachers were studying in. Additionally, consent was sought and obtained from participants, agreeing to be part of the study. Participants' anonymity was ensured using pseudonyms in reporting the findings of this study. The participants were named Tumelo, Lebo and Rori (in no particular order).

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Data generated from the semi-structured interviews were analysed using the thematic analysis and the CAT. Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas (2013) explain thematic analysis as a qualitative and descriptive approach used to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within the data. As a result, three themes emerged from the study findings. The data obtained from the themes were discussed according to the key research question.

Key Research Question: What type of relationships exist between a pre-service teacher and a mentor teacher during teaching practice?

To answer the key research question, **we created** three themes from the data. The mentoring relationships seemed to have operated at three levels, that is, positive and enabling relationships (theme one), uncaring and uncomfortable relationships (theme two), and the value of good mentoring relationships (theme three) (see Figure 1). Direct quotes were used to indicate participants' verbatim utterances and these direct quotes contain alphanumerical codes at the end which identify where precisely from the transcript the quote was taken.

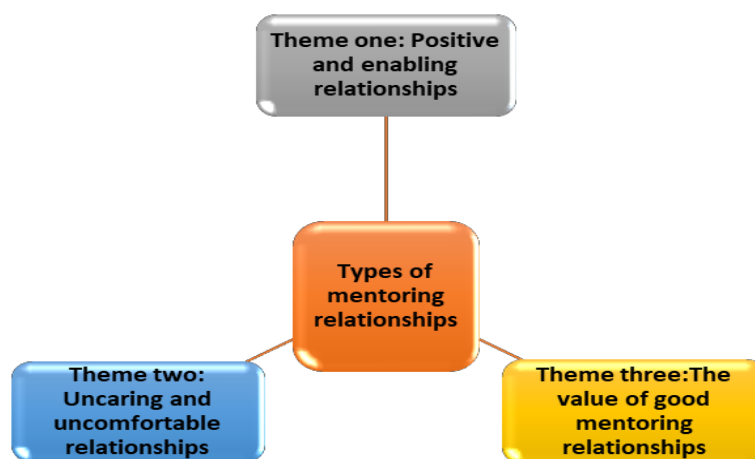


Figure 1: Types of mentoring relationships that transpired as themes from this study findings

Theme one: Positive and enabling relationships

This theme was formulated from responses about the types of mentoring relationships that mentees formed with their mentors during teaching practice. Regarding forming positive and enabling relationships, Tumelo, a third-year pre-service teacher said:

My relationship with my mentor was of [a] mother-daughter relationship. I had previously gone to the school before my practice to introduce myself to her so when I came, she was expecting me. She was really excited that one of her former students was coming to teach what she was teaching (Tu4). Tumelo further explained: My mentor teacher, who is also my former Drama teacher is the reason why I became a teacher in the first place (Tu8).

Tumelo's responses indicated that she had a positive relationship with her Dramatic Arts mentor who was motherly in nature. Furthermore, the mother-daughter relationship could have transpired from the fact that Tumelo and her mentor had a previous relationship as a teacher and a learner. Her articulation of 'she was excited that one of her former

students' indicate how Tumelo and her mentor were able to strike a mother-daughter relationship that aided in a positive welcome. This is a good start to any mentoring relationship. Expanding on the kind of mentoring relationship she had with her mentor, Tumelo said:

Wanginikeza ne-feedback (my mentor teacher also provided me with feedback). When the end of my teaching practice approached, she told me she loved the way I was teaching....she told me my strong points and also my weak points and she gave me suggestions on how I would work on that. She explained it verbally and also wrote it down on the document that I was to give back to the university (Tu10).

From this claim, it seemed that Tumelo was confirming the nurturing and enabling type of relationship she had with her Dramatic Arts mentor. The fact that the mentor voiced out her affirmation and approval of how Tumelo conducted her lessons, was indicative of the supportive environment she worked in. Moreover, the developmental guidance she was offered was indicative of a nurturing relationship that any motherly person would offer to those they care about.

Likewise, Lebo another third-year pre-service teacher talked about a positive kind of relationship that she experienced with her Technology mentor, she said: *I was provided with guidance (Technology mentor). He gave me guidance before I did a lesson He would look into my lesson plans and chart and ask me to do a mini presentation on how I will make the chart interactive in class. The technology mentor also gave me pointers on the way engikhuluma ngayo (about the way I speak), and to move around while I was teaching (L16).* These findings indicate that Lebo and her mentor were able to form a relationship that was professionally driven where the mentor guided her on classroom practice in order to improve her teaching. Again, here we see a guided form of a nurturing and enabling relationship, as witnessed from Tumelo's experience. This type of relationship enabled Lebo to stay prepared because the mentor was always available to guide her with his expertise.

Theme two: *Uncaring and uncomfortable relationships*

Lebo, who experienced positive mentoring with her Technology mentor, was also exposed to a negative and uncaring experience with her other mentor for Economic Management Sciences (EMS). She revealed that: *The EMS mentor was ...I don't know whether to say problematic... because when the term started, that is, when my teaching practice started, she was not there (L4).* This remark by Lebo shows that her mentor was not available to supervise her during the initial stages of her teaching practice when she needed her guidance the most. The absence of the EMS mentor meant that Lebo could not establish any solid relationship with her mentor. Therefore, it seems that the mentoring relationship was non-existent. For Lebo to use such words as '*problematic*', implies that the relationship was misunderstood by the mentee from the start of their teaching practice. When she was further probed on

what her mentor did when she finally arrived at school, she explained: *she told me [that] I'll be taking over her class and then I was the EMS teacher throughout my teaching practice. She also just sat in her car or went out to the shopping centre near the school (L6).*

Even though the reason of the mentor's initial absence was unknown, when she finally arrived, she still did not show any willingness to establish any form of relationship with her mentee as she chose to engage in other activities rather than mentoring the mentee. Lebo's sudden classroom takeover reveals that there was no clear communication, instruction or proper mentoring from her EMS mentor, as she did not get any demonstration or guidance on what to do. The statements such as '*she just sat in her car*' shared by Lebo showed that the mentor teacher did not care to supervise and guide her mentee during teaching practice. Lebo further explained that:

The EMS mentor also asked what marks I wanted for assessment, and she made me fill in the forms [for myself and then] give her to sign where applicable (L17).

Lebo's comment suggests that the EMS mentor allowed her to do a self-assessment of the lessons without any input or feedback. Unlike Tumelo, whose mentor teacher personally filled out the assessment documentation. Lebo's mentor's signature was appended to a document that she did not fill out. What Lebo could have learnt from this experience could be "what not to do as a mentor," which was a very unprofessional experience because her mentor falsely assigned marks without basing them on Lebo's actual practice. By implication, Lebo might have missed the significance of formal assessment for her EMS subject to evaluate her actual practice of teaching. Furthermore, the credibility and authenticity of the assessment report

were questionable because of the baseless assigning of marks.

Rori spoke about an uncomfortable mentoring experience. She was a participant who had experienced teaching practice twice as a fourth-year pre-service teacher; at a township (mono-racial) school and a multiracial school. Regarding uncomfortable relationships, she solely drew from her experience in the township school. Rori mentioned that: *At the township school, I was mentored by a male teacher and that was a very uncomfortable relationship because he'd touch me and say [to the learners] aah she's so young guys, and she's beautiful* (R2). The statement by Rori suggested not only a gendered mentoring but a skewed power relationship which negatively affected her experience as she became uncomfortable with her mentor. Having the mentor comment on the mentees' beauty in front of the learners also indicated a lack of professionalism. The 'touching' of a female mentee by a male mentor was highly problematic as it was clear that Rori did not appreciate it, nor the comments made about her age and appearance. The comment was not well-received since it had a condescending tone or attitude.

Theme three: The value of good mentoring relationship

In this theme, all three participants referred to the value of having good mentorship experiences with their respective mentors. They also shared what they thought constitutes a good mentoring relationship that can be established during teaching practice, learning from their own experiences. Rori indicated her experience regarding the relationship she had with her mentor in her 'multiracial school.' *I feel that mentoring relationships are needed because, for example, my mentor teacher at the multiracial school wayenginika (gave me) a chance yokuthi ngifundise (to teach) and she was always close by* (R16). This

comment showed how much Rori valued mentoring relationships because of what she experienced with a mentor that was not only available when needed; but someone she could rely on for guidance to improve her teaching. She further added that: *mentorship helped me find my teaching style. Mentors also help you with employing different methods of teaching content* (R13). Essentially, learning from a mentor can be easily achieved by establishing appropriate professional mentoring relationships. Rori's learnings about incorporating different teaching methods and finding her unique teaching style were accredited to the valuable professional mentoring relationship she had with her mentor teacher.

Similarly, Tumelo commented: *I feel that mentoring relationships are very important because, as a mentee, I learnt where I went wrong with the guidance from the mentor and how I can improve. I also gained pointers from my mentors on how to approach certain topics and how to use various resources in my teaching* (Tu18). This remark suggests that Tumelo noted that it was not easy to improve one's practice without identifying and understanding what one is doing wrong in practice. Hence, the value she seemed to put in a positive mentoring relationship she had with her mentor, which created opportunities for her to learn how to teach effectively using different methods

On the contrary, Lebo's comment leaned more on the clarity of roles. Her comment on the mentoring relationships during teaching practice; was: *I feel that respect and a healthy relationship are required for mentoring and for one to know their roles. For example, we must have mutual respect* (L21). The statement such as 'know their roles' indicates that Lebo was aware that both mentors and mentees have essential roles to play in a mentoring relationship for the relationship to be a success. It could be argued that Lebo understood her role as a

mentee and respected her mentor's feedback as she listened to the advice her Technology mentor provided to her. Lebo added: *I feel that mentoring relationships also need dedication from the mentor because obviously the mentee usuke engazi lutho kwi field ukuthi kwenziwa kanjani (does not know how the field operates) (L23)*. Lebo's response 'need dedication from the mentor' implies that she viewed mentorship dedication from a one-sided perspective (Mentor). She suggested that the mentor is the one who needs to show more responsibility since they are an expert in the field. However, Lebo seemed

to be neglecting that the mentee also had some responsibilities and that the dedication had to be a dual practice. The duality of the commitment rests upon the provision of professional mentoring that caters to the mentee's needs as well as the ability of the mentee to complete all the assigned tasks. Nonetheless, all three mentees seemed to value mentoring relationships that occurred during teaching practice, even though these relationships were not always positive. Figure 2 indicates characteristics of a good mentoring relationship as identified in the data findings of this theme.



Figure 2: summarises the characteristics of a good mentoring relationship as identified in the findings

According to figure 2, mentees felt that having a good relationship with a mentor enabled them to improve their teaching abilities. They also attested that a good mentoring relationship could exist if there is respect, professionalism, acknowledgement of roles, and dedication from both mentor and mentee. As revealed in the findings, some of the mentees had reliable mentors who offered professional advice under guided practice. Such experiences and attributes

contributed to the value of a good mentoring relationship.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS IN RELATION TO LITERATURE AND THE CAT

The objective of this study was to explore pre-service teachers' experiences of mentoring relationships during teaching practice. In addressing this objective, the findings of this study indicated that two participants were able to form positive and enabling

relationships (Tumelo and Lebo), uncaring and uncomfortable relationships (Lebo and Rori). These findings suggest that each mentee had a unique relationship with their mentors which informed their teaching practice experiences. For example, having a positive and enabling relationship allowed Tumelo and Lebo to experience guided practice where feedback was provided to them, and they could use it to improve their teaching. Similar findings were reflected in Dennen and Burner (2008); McMorris et al. (2018); Pfund (2016) studies respectively, where mentees were supported with guided practice which further aided in their development. Hudson (2010; 2016) also pronounces that a positive relationship between a mentor and a mentee leads to effective provision of feedback and helps the mentee to grow significantly in their cognition and practical teaching skills. According to the CAT, Lebo and Tumelo were provided with timely scaffolding, and they were also able to reflect on their teaching experiences as guided by their mentors' feedback (Collin, 1991). Such experiences were enabled because they had established positive and enabling relationships with their mentors.

The findings on the positive and enabling mentoring relationships are in line with Byington's (2010) study which indicated that mentee's professional needs were met when they included effective communication, support, and relevant feedback that stimulated growth and learning. However, in this study, positive relationships were not evident in all three participants; for example, Rori attested to having an uncomfortable relationship with a male mentor who created a negative mentoring experience for her. Eby et al. (2010) describe a negative mentoring relationship as one that occurs when a mentor makes inappropriate remarks towards the mentee. Moreover, the coaching that the mentor provided to Rori could have been negatively affected by this uncomfortable experience (Collins, 1991). As highlighted

in the analysis section, we argue that the mentor's remarks on the mentee's beauty and youthfulness were unnecessary, unprofessional, and sexist especially since they caused discomfort for the mentee.

As evident in the findings, Lebo had two mentors one of whom was an absent mentor. As a result of lacking a proper relationship with her mentor, Lebo skipped the modelling experience which Collins (1991) highly emphasised in the CAT, where the mentor teacher needs to demonstrate how activities are done in order to enable learning for the mentee. This lack of modelling experience could have left Lebo confused and discouraged about practical teaching and learning. Moreover, studies (Du Plessis 2013; Nkambule & Mukeredzi 2017; Straus et al., 2009) have also indicated that the absence of a proper relationship with a mentor can result in negative experiences for the mentee. This issue of having an absent mentor is mostly found in minimal caregiving (or uncaring) relationships between a mentor and a mentee (Amedeker, 2018). This kind of relationship occurs when mentor teachers are partially absent and only see their mentees occasionally. In minimal caregiving relationships, mentors do not provide necessary feedback to their mentees (Amedeker, 2018). Such instances were prominent in Lebo's relationship with her EMS mentor. Nonetheless, all three participants were noted to value mentorship and the relationship they built in their teaching experience whether negative or positive because in one way or another they learnt something valuable from it.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has provided insight into mentoring relationships between mentees and mentors using pre-service teachers' experiences. Particularly adding onto the South African perspective. Similar to the explored literature, the analysed data clearly showed the complexity of mentoring relationships.

However, the literature lacked focus and in-depth scrutiny of these mentoring relationships as other aspects of mentorship were simultaneously explored. This article showed how some mentoring relationships were positive and enabling, while others were uncaring and uncomfortable through the discussion and analysis of the data. We then argue that even though mentoring relationships are not always positive and enabling, mentees can also use uncaring and uncomfortable relationships as learning curves for their future practices. While mentees can learn how to improve their classroom teaching practice from professional and positive mentoring relationships, they can also learn to become problem solvers and be self-reliant through negative mentoring relationships.

The study was limited in that it did not explore enough about the impact of gender in mentoring relationships as there is a dearth of studies that explore such factors of mentoring relationships. However, it is worth noting that it was beyond the scope of this study to address the influence of gender in mentoring relationships as it derives a new focus for the study. Thus, by implication of the findings, this study recommends that further research should establish the influence of gender in school-based mentoring relationships, especially between mentees and mentors during teaching practice. In addition, the study recommends that higher education institutions should expose pre-service teachers to situations that encourage agency that can capacitate them to deal with both positive and negative mentoring relationships which may transpire during teaching practice.

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