

Strengthening the Adoption of Learner-Centred Pedagogies in Teacher Education in Uganda through Video-Based Self Reflection & College-Based Mentorship System

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Vol 1 No 1 2019

ISSN: 2788-6298

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35293/tetfle.v1i1.70>

ABSTRACT

The intermittent pedagogical support received by teacher-trainers from the central level makes it difficult to implement new practices in teacher training institutions in Uganda. This mixed-methods study investigated teacher-trainers' perceptions of a pilot pedagogical support system implemented by college-based mentors. Qualitative and quantitative data were elicited using an online questionnaire completed by teacher-trainers (n=100) and video-records of interviews with selected college-based mentors (n=6) who reflected on their own experiences to propose ways of improving the system. The findings revealed that irrespective of years of experience, teacher-trainers appreciate the contribution of college-based mentors towards the adoption of learner-centred pedagogy. It also revealed that the opportunity for self-reflection and collegial critique afforded by video enhanced the practices of the mentees and greatly enriched the mentorship process. Nonetheless, the teacher-trainers expressed the need to broaden mentorship activities to include subject-specific pedagogical support.

Keywords: Learner-centred pedagogy, College-Based Mentorship, Reflective Practice
Mixed-methods study, teacher-trainers, video-records, self-reflection, collegial critique

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Introduction

For quite some time, training of teacher educators was treated as a once-off process with only minimal support being provided for continuous professional development (CPD).

Teaching methods of teacher educators therefore largely facilitated learning by rote (i.e. memorization) and were rooted in what is often referred to as chalk-and-talk with little, meaningful teacher-student interaction or other student activity. Recognising the importance of secondary teacher training, the Government of Uganda, in collaboration with the Belgian Government through the Teacher Training Education (TTE) project, agreed to support interventions geared towards the improvement of teacher training provided by the National Teachers' Colleges (NTC) (MoES, 2011). One of the major objectives of the Teacher Training Education (TTE) project, is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the teacher training institutions by changing the paradigm from teacher-centred to learner-centred pedagogies (LCP) during teacher preparation.

To promote more LCPs in teacher education, the Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports, in partnership with the Belgian Technical Cooperation, initiated a capacity building program in nine teacher training institutions through the Teacher Training Education (TTE) project, (MoES, 2011). Aware of the significant role that Pre-service teachers have to play in the sustained application of LCP in schools, the project deemed it important to expose these pre-service teachers to effective application of LCP during their training. Therefore, the strategy was to use teacher educators as role models. It was further argued that the driving force for change and improvement must come from the teacher educators and training colleges. The approach of improving the quality of teaching and learning in teacher training institutions is essentially a *college-based one*. It involves bringing about change and improvement in the teaching and learning process with *on-site support* provided in all partner colleges. In the next sections we discuss college-based mentorship as a form of community of practice; the use of video in teacher education and how the TTE project has harnessed video as a tool to support a college-based mentorship system.

College-based mentorship as a Community of Practice:

Mathisen (as cited in Kerstin & Gunilla, 2017) defines mentorship as being a two-pronged process, where one part is career-oriented, to develop professional knowledge, and the other part deals with support in psychosocial development. Recent definitions of mentorship, further emphasise the process of deepening thoughts, reflections and knowledge by the members in the community of practice (Kerstin & Gunilla, 2017). Wenger, McDermott & Snyder (2002) define Community of Practice (CoP) as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (2002,p. 7). College-based peer mentoring as a form of a CoP, therefore, seeks to pursue teacher change and development through peer review and collegial interaction as a way to improve practice. A central part of these interactions, is to reflect on practical work, professional identity, artefacts and theoretical understanding (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Moreover, the constructive feedback, emotional support, professional socialisation and pedagogical guidance which are inherently part of quality mentorship can be catalysts for sustainable continuous professional development of teachers. Institutional-based professional development has been credited for its direct linkage with the daily activities of teachers and learners (Darling-Hammond, 2006). It is in acknowledgement of the above arguments that the TTE project opted to pilot a college-based mentorship system to support teacher trainers in implementing LCP. Next, we briefly discuss the use of video in teacher education.

Use of video in Teacher Education:

The potential use of video to enhance reflective practice is well documented in the literature (Schön, 1987). The ability to digitize video has contributed even further to the way in which video is being utilized by teacher educators. As pointed out by Sherin (2004), the possibility to explore a video in a non-linear fashion, thus enabling viewers to move through time, rewind actions, and jump to different segments, makes it such a powerful reflection tool hence its use in college-based mentorship. In the next section, we discuss how TTE has utilised videos to support a college-based mentorship system.

How the TTE project is utilising Videos in Teacher Education:

As part of the training on LCP, all teacher trainers who participated in the training were requested to develop a portfolio across a period of one year. Among the artefacts in this portfolio, were at least two videos showing how the teacher trainer was implementing LCPs and progressive mentorship reports which were based on class observations and video analysis of both the teacher trainers and their respective college-based mentors. In addition, the TTE project would organise two one-day workshops per year, for the teacher trainers within the college to critique sample videos, purposefully selected based on a given theme related to LCP. In such workshops, participants would reflect upon what occurred, from their own standpoints, with the explicit intention of considering ways to improve pedagogical practices. Consequently, based on the critique from the teacher trainers, the areas of improvement as pointed out from the video would constitute the topics/areas to be included in the subsequent continuous professional development training. Relatedly, the videos were also used for purposes of preserving best practice without neglecting the less perfect examples; as these were seen as opportunities for discussion and reflection on realities that are context specific.

Statement of the problem:

Whereas teacher trainers demand that teacher-trainees apply learner-centred methods during their school placements, most of the lessons conducted in teacher training colleges by the teacher trainers remain largely teacher-centred (MoES, 2011). Moreover, whereas teacher trainers in National Teachers' Colleges report many years of teaching experience, much of it is at the level of secondary school teaching with only a few reporting more than ten years' experience in a teacher training institution. Generally, many of the teacher trainers lack the requisite skills of teacher educators (including the ability to model LCP), hence the need for pedagogical support. Unfortunately, owing to several constraints, the pedagogical support from the mandated stakeholders at the central level is always intermittent.

Purpose:

This study was to investigate teacher trainers' perceptions of pedagogical support provided by college-based mentors especially in the implementation of learner-centred pedagogies in four National Teachers' colleges supported by the project.

Specific objectives:

- 1) To identify what the teacher trainers perceive as the usefulness of a college-based mentorship system on the implementation of learner-centred pedagogies
- 2) To determine the experiences of the college-based mentors in supporting teacher trainers in the implementation of learner-centred pedagogies.

Methodology:

Mixed methods studies as a methodology, has been credited for its ability to make sense of the world, help readers better understand the study, increase confidence in findings, improve accuracy and completeness, and inform and contribute to overall validity (McKim, 2017). Equally, as a project with sufficient resources and focused on adoption of new practices, use of mixed methods methodology offered a balanced perspective (Morse & Chung, 2003); in terms of tracking numbers of teacher trainers that were adopting the new practices in addition to how well they were applying the new skills, as a means of evaluating the intervention. This mixed-methods study, surveyed teacher-trainers' perceptions on pedagogical support provided by college-based mentors in the implementation of LCP in four project-supported colleges. Examining the ways in which these teacher educators implemented LCP, the study drew on data generated from class observations, semi-structured interviews with mentor teachers and responses to an online questionnaire of all the teacher trainers who participated in the LCP training.

Both quantitative data from close-ended question and qualitative data from open-ended questions were gathered using this questionnaire. Whereas Uganda has mainly three categories of teacher training; this study was carried out in four purposefully selected National Teachers' Colleges that train grade V teachers for lower secondary, aware that they were all direct beneficiaries of the project intervention on the implementation of LCP.

Sample:

In total, 100 participants responded to the online questionnaire. Six mentors whose contacts were readily available; having been trained for the role of mentors by the project, were also purposefully sampled to participate in the focus group interviews. Purposeful sampling has been credited for the opportunity it avails to select information-rich cases for in-depth study (Patton, 2002). Having been at the core of the college-based mentorship system, the mentors were a critical source of experiences that were of central importance to the purpose of this study. This paper draws on data collected in 2016, particularly focusing on the perceptions of teacher educators towards a college-based mentorship system.

Findings:

The research results are contextually situated in four National Teachers' colleges spread in various regions of Uganda.

Table 1. Responses to teacher trainers' perception on the mentorship system

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
(a) I am satisfied with the amount of supervision / mentoring provided.	2%(2)	3%(3)	79%(79)	16%(16)
(b) I am satisfied with the quality of supervision / mentoring provided	3%(3)	7%(7)	74%(74)	16%(1)
(c) My classroom instruction has improved as a result of supervision/mentoring	2%(2)	5%(5)	65%(65)	28%(28)
(d) Video-based lesson analysis has contributed to the quality of my teaching	-	-	46%(35)	54%(54)
(e) I feel comfortable with receiving feedback from peers during the video-based lesson analysis sessions	-	-	71%(71)	29%(29)
(f) Video-based lesson analysis has increased my level of confidence in the classroom	-	-	50%(50)	50%(50)

From **table 1** above, over 90% of the teacher trainers sampled are satisfied with the amount of pedagogic mentorship received during the period of intervention with less than 10% expressing dissatisfaction. The trend remained consistent with 90% indicating they were satisfied with the quality of pedagogic support offered by the mentors. It is, however, important to note that 10% of the respondents were not satisfied with the quality. Unfortunately, in this analysis, it was not possible to establish whether respondents not satisfied with the amount of support were equally not satisfied with the quality. 83% of the respondents also agreed that their classroom instruction had improved as a result of supervision/mentoring.

All the respondents who participated in the video-based lesson analysis sessions indicated their satisfaction level at either agree or strongly agree to the fact that these sessions had increased their level of confidence in the classroom, they felt comfortable with receiving feedback from peers during these sessions and indeed it had contributed to the quality of their teaching.

The respondents were also asked to rate the usefulness of feedback received from the peers and the mentors. 77% of the respondents indicated that the feedback was very useful for most of the aspects, 12 % indicated it was somehow or partially useful with only 2% percent indicating the feedback as not useful or of limited relevance. The respondents were further asked to suggest ways of improving the mentorship system. Some of the suggestions given by different participants include:

“It is important to train a mentor for each subject so that the staff teaching the subject can be guided on how the difficult topics can be taught effectively.”

“Mentors should also become more confident”

“I would like to suggest that; mentors should be more committed to mentoring their mentees”

“Incorporate mentorship in the school programme and facilitate mentors”

Some critical themes from the above suggestions that clearly came out and may further be explored include: the *need for additional training of mentor teachers, facilitation*

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(motivation) of mentor teachers, the institutionalisation of mentorship as part of the college programme and scaling up mentorship to include subject content.

On the other hand, during the focus group interview for the mentors; the mentors expressed some of the challenges they face. For instance, the workload for mentorship was like an extra assignment in addition to their normal job description. They also expressed the lack of cooperation of some of the mentees, making it difficult to fully support them.

During the interview, one mentor remarked that,

“..there is need to continue following up on the mentees. There is a tendency to revert to the old traditional teacher-centred methods which appear less cumbersome in terms of lesson preparation time.”

The mentors, however, felt that mentorship was more of a symbiotic process where their own practices had also improved through mentoring others. Mentors also acknowledged how video recordings had simplified their work of supporting the mentees since all the discussion points were based on evidence from practice. The mentors indicated it was now possible to evaluate the progress of the mentees in the implementation of LCP since videos shot at different intervals of support constituted part of the portfolio.

Conclusion:

The above presentation and discussion indicate that teacher-trainers appreciate the contribution of college-based mentors towards the improvement of their pedagogical practices. This study has also revealed the essence of harnessing low-cost technology to enhance evidence-based mentorship. The need for a sustainable college-based pedagogical support system cannot be over-emphasised. The need for mentorship at subject level is also very evident. It remains a responsibility of all relevant stakeholders to explore how college-based mentorship systems can be strengthened in the future.

Recommendations:

In this study, we were able to show that even teacher-trainers require some form of pedagogical support to enable them to adopt new pedagogical innovations. With the proliferation of low-cost tools that are capable of shooting videos, teacher training institutions ought to harness the capabilities of video in enhancing the reflective practices of the teacher trainers in their quest to improve pedagogical practices. Finally a sustainable pedagogical support mechanism such as the college-based mentorship system ought to be explored to support the adoption of innovations in practice.

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