

# CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

BY MENTOR TEACHERS WHEN MENTORING PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS DURING TEACHING PRACTICE

## **DESAFÍOS A LOS QUE SE ENFRENTAN LOS PROFESORES MENTORES A LA HORA DE ORIENTAR A LOS PROFESORES EN FORMACIÓN DURANTE LA PRÁCTICA DOCENTE**

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### ABSTRACT

As part of their duties, in-service teachers are expected to provide mentorship to pre-service teachers placed by teacher training institutions in their schools. As a result, some mentor teachers encounter various challenges when mentoring pre-service teachers. Therefore, this qualitative study investigates the challenges faced by mentor teachers during the mentoring of pre-service teachers in teaching practice. This study is situated within the interpretive paradigm, and a multiple case study was adopted as its research design. The snowball sampling technique was used to select twelve participants from primary schools in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data collected through open-ended questionnaires. The study's key findings indicate that mentor teachers face numerous challenges when mentoring pre-service teachers. Among these challenges is the lack of content and pedagogical knowledge among pre-service teachers. Furthermore, some pre-service teachers are reluctant to accept guidance from mentor teachers. Based on the findings, this study recommends that teacher training institutions work closely with mentor teachers to mitigate these challenges.

**Keywords:** Content knowledge, Mentoring, pedagogy, Pre-service teachers, Teaching practice

### RESUMEN

Como parte de sus obligaciones, los profesores en activo deben tutorar a los profesores en formación que las instituciones de formación del profesorado colocan en sus escuelas. Como resultado, algunos profesores mentores se enfrentan a diversos retos cuando son tutores de profesores en formación. Por lo tanto, este estudio cualitativo investiga los retos a los que se enfrentan los profesores tutores durante la tutoría de los profesores en formación en la práctica docente. Este estudio se sitúa dentro del paradigma interpretativo, y se adoptó como diseño de investigación un estudio de casos múltiples. Se utilizó la técnica de muestreo de bola de nieve para seleccionar a doce participantes de escuelas primarias de la provincia sudafricana de KwaZulu-Natal. Se empleó el análisis temático para analizar los datos recogidos mediante cuestionarios abiertos. Las principales conclusiones del estudio indican que los profesores tutores se enfrentan a numerosos retos cuando asesoran a profesores en formación. Uno de ellos es la falta de conocimientos pedagógicos y de contenidos de los profesores en formación. Además, algunos profesores en formación son reacios a aceptar la orientación de los profesores tutores. Basándose en los resultados, este estudio recomienda que las instituciones de formación del profesorado colaboren estrechamente con los profesores mentores para mitigar estos problemas.

**Palabras clave:** Conocimiento del contenido, Tutoría, Pedagogía, Profesores en formación, Práctica docente.

## INTRODUCTION

Pre-service teachers who are enrolled in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes at South African universities are expected to undergo teaching practice during their studies. This highlights how integral teaching practice is in ITE programmes (Mukeredzi & Manwa, 2019). The importance of teaching practice in teacher education is underscored by its ability to enable pre-service teachers to put theory into practice. During teaching practice, pre-service teachers have the opportunity to teach under the guidance of more experienced mentor teachers, which helps them to be oriented to the teaching profession. Engaging in teaching practice also provides pre-service teachers with an opportunity for professional growth and development through the mentorship they receive from experienced mentor teachers (Mukeredzi & Manwa, 2019). In other words, exposing pre-service teachers to teaching practice aids their professional growth.

Furthermore, teaching practice is praised for providing pre-service teachers with insights into how teachers use their pedagogical and subject knowledge to create conducive learning environments for learners to acquire knowledge (Moosa & Rembach, 2020). In other words, teaching practice creates a platform for pre-service teachers to learn how to teach in an actual classroom context. As future teachers, it also exposes them to real school environments and allows them to experience school dynamics such as overcrowded classrooms and diverse learners from different backgrounds. Ndebele & Legg-Jack (2022) assert that teaching practice exposes pre-service teachers to real problems as they occur in the school context. This exposure can help them develop skills to address real issues that arise in the classroom or at school. As they engage in resolving real problems that occur in classrooms, pre-service teachers have the opportunity to demonstrate the practical aspects of the theoretical knowledge gained from universities (Ndebele & Legg-Jack, 2022). Being involved in actual school and classroom activities may shape pre-service teachers into competent teaching professionals (Mukeredzi & Manwa, 2019).

From the preceding discussion, it is clear that teaching practice plays a significant role in orienting pre-service teachers to the teaching profession. It is also evident from the discussion that mentoring during teaching practice is important in shaping the experiences of pre-service teachers (Mukeredzi & Manwa, 2019). Therefore, pre-service teachers should be assigned to knowledgeable

and experienced mentor teachers to receive proper and effective mentorship during teaching practice. Mentor teachers are school-based in-service teachers who have extensive experience in teaching and mentoring (Orland-Barak & Wang, 2021). Although mentor teachers are trusted with the responsibility of guiding and coaching pre-service teachers during teaching practice, mentoring is not always an easy task. It is against this backdrop that this study explores the challenges encountered by mentor teachers when mentoring pre-service teachers during teaching practice. To understand the challenges faced by mentor teachers, two research questions were formulated. These questions are as follows:

1. What are the challenges that mentor teachers encounter when mentoring pre-service teachers during teaching practice?
2. What strategies do mentor teachers adopt to overcome the challenges they encounter when mentoring pre-service teachers during teaching practice?

## Mentorship during teaching practice

Mentoring during teaching practice occurs when an experienced teacher provides guidance to a new and inexperienced pre-service teacher (Hoben, 2021). In other words, mentoring happens when an experienced in-service teacher offers support and coaching to orientate the pre-service teacher to the teaching profession. Orland-Barak & Wang (2021) advocate that mentor teachers play a significant role in empowering and guiding pre-service teachers professionally. Therefore, Mahofa & Adendorff (2022) suggested that a mentor teacher should be someone who is knowledgeable about the teaching profession and possesses solid subject knowledge. Mentor teachers should be willing to support pre-service teachers during teaching practice (Mbhiza et al., 2024). From this, it is clear that mentor teachers should be carefully selected because pre-service teachers need to learn from their mentors during teaching practice. Clarke & Mena (2020) stressed that mentor teachers influence the understanding of pre-service teachers regarding their professional roles, hence the importance of assigning knowledgeable and experienced mentor teachers to pre-service teachers during teaching practice.

Furthermore, mentor teachers should have the ability to build trust and goodwill with pre-service teachers to enhance their professional learning and growth (Mukeredzi & Manwa, 2019). This suggests that mentor teachers should be capable of developing a conducive mentoring environment that allows pre-service teachers to grow professionally. A supportive mentoring environment can be cultivated through regular mentoring meetings where both

parties can discuss the mentoring process (Mukeredzi & Manwa, 2019). The discussions between the mentor and the pre-service teacher during mentoring meetings should be characterised by a reciprocal exchange of ideas and joint construction of knowledge. In other words, both parties should actively contribute to the mentoring process by suggesting ideas that could enhance it. Having a reciprocal mentoring process can help both parties benefit from the mentoring relationship (Ghosh et al., 2020). Mentor teachers can further create a conducive mentoring environment by providing continuous feedback to pre-service teachers during teaching practice. They can hold mentoring meetings with pre-service teachers after lesson observations (Mukeredzi & Manwa, 2019), where the mentor teacher offers constructive and non-judgmental feedback to the pre-service teacher. This would enable pre-service teachers to benefit from critical self-reflection and learn from their practices. Additionally, receiving timely and constructive feedback from the mentor teacher would help develop the content and pedagogical knowledge of pre-service teachers.

The preceding discussion highlights the complexity and breadth of the mentoring process that mentor teachers are required to engage in as they guide pre-service teachers during teaching practice (Kasapoglu et al., 2023). Despite this complexity and breadth, mentor teachers are expected to provide quality mentoring to help build capacity and resilience among pre-service teachers (Mkhasibe & Sunday, 2019). Therefore, it can be inferred that mentor teachers face several challenges during the mentoring process. The existing literature on the challenges that mentor teachers encounter when mentoring pre-service teachers during teaching practice is reviewed below.

### **Challenges associated with mentoring during teaching practice**

Mentor teachers provide ongoing support for professional development to pre-service teachers, and during the mentoring process, they encounter various challenges. These challenges may include busy schedules due to the demands of different teaching responsibilities. Since mentoring responsibilities are coupled with regular teaching duties, mentors can become burnt out over time. A study of 56 Ugandan teachers and education administration officials found that mentor teachers can be overwhelmed by the workload of mentoring pre-service teachers (Okumu et al., 2023). Furthermore, Schulleli & Saleh (2020) found that resistance was observed among pre-service teachers during mentoring. This included an unwillingness to try new things, an unwillingness to acknowledge their limitations, and passiveness in action (Schulleli & Saleh, 2020). This suggests that some pre-service teachers become

reluctant to accept guidance from mentor teachers during teaching practice. The reluctance among pre-service teachers may have serious implications for their learning as mentees. Additionally, the reluctance of pre-service teachers to take guidance during teaching practice may result in some mentor teachers becoming hesitant to share their experiences with them.

Another challenge mentor teachers face is a lack of mentoring skills. Some mentor teachers possess limited skills in mentoring pre-service teachers during teaching practice. This is partly because they do not receive any mentoring training before working with pre-service teachers during their teaching practice (Holdheide & Lachalan-Hach, 2019). Not receiving adequate training on how to mentor pre-service teachers can compromise the quality of mentorship that mentor teachers provide. In other words, the lack of proper mentoring skills among mentor teachers may negatively impact their effectiveness. For some mentor teachers, the inability to provide quality mentorship may be concerning, leading to decreased confidence in their roles. This is due to the fact that some mentor teachers are not familiar with mentoring pre-service teachers, and for some, it is their first experience.

Furthermore, mentor teachers are sometimes presented with pre-service teachers who lack both content and pedagogical knowledge. A study conducted by Ramirez (2021) revealed that mentor teachers reported some pre-service teachers as lacking pedagogical understanding. This indicates that some pre-service teachers engaged in teaching practice do not possess sufficient subject knowledge in their area of specialisation. Ramirez (2021) further revealed that some pre-service teachers struggle to impart what they learn at university to learners at the school level (Ramirez, 2021). This implies that while some pre-service teachers may have content knowledge, they struggle to convey it to learners during teaching practice. Mentor teachers are then required to assist pre-service teachers in adjusting their instruction to match the learners' level of understanding and age. For some mentor teachers, this may be challenging, as they would expect pre-service teachers to engage in teaching practice with a certain level of content and pedagogical knowledge. If that is the case, the role of the mentor teacher will be to guide pre-service teachers on how to translate the theoretical knowledge acquired from university into practice in an actual classroom.

### **Situating the gap**

Based on the literature reviewed above, it is evident that several studies on mentoring during teaching practice have been conducted both locally (Ndebele & Legg-Jack,

2022) and internationally (Mukeredzi & Munwa, 2019). Mukeredzi & Munwa (2019) conducted a study in Zimbabwe, reporting that pre-service teachers had positive relationships with their mentor teachers and held formal meetings weekly, fortnightly, and monthly. The study also revealed that pre-service teachers gained content and pedagogical knowledge from their mentor teachers during these mentoring meetings. Similarly, Ndebele & Legg-Jack (2022) conducted a study in South Africa that explored the impact of mentoring on teachers and found that pre-service teachers were positively influenced by mentoring, gaining both content and pedagogical knowledge during the process. Furthermore, Dyosini (2022) conducted a study investigating the mentoring provided to novice teachers in South African schools. This study uncovered that mentorship helps equip pre-service teachers with crucial soft skills such as empathy, resilience, flexibility, and teamwork, which in turn improves their teaching practices.

From the literature above, it can be noted that most existing studies did not pay attention to the challenges that mentor teachers encounter when mentoring pre-service teachers during teaching practice. Thus, there is a need for this current study, as it delves into the various challenges that mentor teachers face when mentoring pre-service teachers. This study makes a significant contribution to the body of knowledge on teacher education. It sheds light on several challenges that mentor teachers encounter while mentoring pre-service teachers during teaching practice. The findings of this study provide teacher training institutions with empirical evidence regarding the challenges mentor teachers face during teaching practice. Teacher training institutions working with schools can use this empirical evidence to address the challenges that mentor teachers experience when mentoring pre-service teachers during teaching practice.

#### Theoretical framework

The Situated Learning Theory (SLT) of Lave & Wenger (1991) was adopted as the theoretical lens for this study. Situated Learning Theory asserts that learning is more effective when it is connected to its environment (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Due to its applicability to teacher learning experiences before a real classroom setting and the social dynamics of mentorship, this theory was selected. Through practical experience, pre-service teachers acquire essential knowledge and gain a deeper understanding of the teaching profession in the unique setting of a school. Pre-service teachers engage in teaching practice in the actual school under the guidance of a mentor teacher. The mentorship provided by mentor teachers during

teaching practice plays a key role in bridging the gap between theory and practice (Hamman-Fisher & McGhie, 2021). By allowing pre-service teachers to observe, engage in, and reflect on real-world teaching practices, mentor teachers help them integrate their theoretical knowledge with practical abilities (Hamman-Fisher & McGhie, 2021).

Furthermore, SLT emphasises the role of meaningful and relevant tasks in promoting learning in an authentic context. During teaching practice, pre-service teachers have the opportunity to work on real teaching duties, such as lesson planning, classroom management, and assessment. Mentoring relationships also foster a sense of community among pre-service teachers and mentor teachers, creating a supportive environment where knowledge and expertise are shared. Lave & Wenger (1991) refers to this collaboration among people who share a common goal as a Community of Practice (CoP). Both mentor teachers and pre-service teachers share a common goal to serve learners and schools, thus highlighting the need for collaboration and the sharing of expertise between them. This collaborative approach encourages pre-service teachers to actively engage with their mentor teachers, ask questions, seek feedback, and co-construct knowledge through dialogue and reflection. SLT emphasises the importance of collaboration and interaction between the mentor and the mentees during the learning process, requiring mentor teachers to adapt their mentoring styles to meet the individual needs and preferences of pre-service teachers.

Despite the benefits of mentoring anchored in the principles of SLT, the mentoring process can still present challenges for mentors. Mentor teachers may face difficulties in navigating interpersonal dynamics and communication within the mentoring relationship. Establishing trust, building rapport, and providing constructive feedback are essential aspects of effective mentoring, but they can be challenging to achieve, particularly when working with pre-service teachers who may be experiencing feelings of vulnerability or uncertainty. Mentor teachers may also struggle to find the right balance between providing support and fostering independence in pre-service teachers (Orland-Barak & Wang, 2021).

This study argues that mentor teachers encounter various challenges when mentoring pre-service teachers during teaching practice. Thus, SLT was used to frame this argument and to understand the different challenges that mentor teachers face when mentoring pre-service teachers during teaching practice.



## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This section outlines the methodology that was followed to collect the data used to answer the research questions of the study.

### Research paradigm, approach, and design

This study is located within the interpretive research design. The interpretive paradigm maintains that multiple realities exist because external reality is variable. In other words, interpretivists believe that truth is variable. This is because research underpinned by the interpretive paradigm is based on the subjective beliefs of the participants about the truth. According to interpretivists, researchers rely on the subjective experiences of the participants regarding the phenomenon under investigation. Furthermore, given the nature of this study, a qualitative research approach was employed. Adopting a qualitative approach allowed participants to freely share the challenges they faced when providing mentorship to pre-service teachers. A qualitative study focuses on describing the research phenomenon to help researchers gain a complete understanding of it. This was evident in this study because the researchers gained a deep understanding of the phenomenon being investigated, as the participants provided accounts of the challenges they faced when mentoring pre-service teachers during teaching practice. This study adopted a multi-case study as its research design. According to Tremblay et al. (2015), the design of multi-case studies helps researchers gather rich and comprehensive data. Therefore, this enables researchers to obtain detailed insights about the phenomenon within the context of its parameters. In this study, researchers were able to gather rich and in-depth data on the challenges faced by mentor teachers when mentoring pre-service teachers during teaching practice.

### Sampling and sampling technique

Sampling is the process of selecting study participants. In this study, a snowball sampling technique was used to select twelve teachers from twelve primary schools located in KwaZulu-Natal province. Parker et al. (2019) asserts that adopting snowball sampling helps researchers to have access to geographically dispersed participants due to the social links of the participants. Initially, two teachers were recruited based on their experience in mentoring pre-service teachers. They were then requested to recruit other teachers with more than five years of experience in teaching and who had previously mentored pre-service teachers.

Table 1 below shows the biographical data of the twelve teachers who were sampled for this study. The table shows that the study sample consisted of four male and eight female teachers. This indicates that both genders were represented in the study. The table also depicts that teachers of different age categories were represented in the study. The age categories of the participants ranged from 30 to 60 years old. Furthermore, Table 1 below displays that the sampled teachers possess a Diploma in Education, Bachelor of Education, and Honours in Education. Their teaching experience in the Intermediate and Senior Phase ranges from 7 years to 28 years. Based on the qualifications and experience of the participants, it can be concluded that the appropriate group of teachers was sampled for this study.

Table 1: Current study's participants biographical data

Participants		Gender		Age group	Highest qualification	Teaching experience
Lolo		Male		30–40	B Ed Honours	9 years
Nandi		Female		30–40	B Ed	7 years
Bheki		Male		40–50	B Ed Honours	10 years
Lutho		Female		30–40	PGCE	15 years
Abel		Female		50–60	Diploma	28 years
Zolani		Female		40–50	B Ed	20 years
Mthetho		Male		40–50	B Ed	15 years
Mabutho		Female		40–50	B Ed	11 years

Londa		Female		50-60	Diploma	13 years
Mveli		Female		30-40	B Ed	10 years
Nana		Male		40-50	B Ed	16 years
Gobani		Female		40-50	B Ed	12 years

Source: own elaboration.

### Data collection and analysis

The open-ended questionnaires designed using Google Forms were then distributed to participants via WhatsApp. A link to access the Google Forms was sent to participants, who were given three weeks to respond to the questionnaire. Allowing participants three weeks to complete the questionnaire provided them with sufficient time to reflect on the phenomenon under investigation. After receiving responses from all twelve participants, the researchers engaged in data analysis. A thematic analysis was adopted to analyse the data. In accordance with thematic analysis, the researchers organised the data, read it multiple times to gain a deep understanding, and began to assign different codes to it. The codes assigned to the raw data were then developed into themes that were used to report the findings of the study.

### Ethical Considerations

Ethics clearance was obtained from the academic institution where this study was conducted. The ethics review committee issued ethics certificate number 2023/08/10/90256867/20/AM. According to ethical considerations, participants were informed of their rights during the study, including their right to withdraw from participation. Furthermore, to protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were used to report the findings of the study.

### Findings

The two main themes that emerged during data analysis were used to report the findings of the study. These themes are the challenges faced by mentor teachers and the strategies they use to overcome the challenges of mentoring pre-service teachers.

### Challenges faced by mentor teachers

This theme reports on the various challenges that mentor teachers face when mentoring pre-service teachers during teaching practice. Some of the mentor teachers noted that certain pre-service teachers are not receptive to constructive criticism. Nandi said:

Some pre-service teachers are not open to positive criticism as they view criticism as an attack on their theoretical

knowledge, rather than professional development. They also feel intimidated when given advice because they feel they know everything and some of them would rather be absent than teach a lesson they think would reveal their inadequacy.

The sentiment from Nandi suggests that some pre-service teachers do not like to be critiqued by their mentor teachers during teaching practice. This can be a serious challenge for mentor teachers because providing feedback to pre-service teachers during teaching practice is fundamental to ensuring their professional development.

Bheki also noted that some pre-service teachers do not want to be corrected. He said:

The challenge is that some pre-service teachers do not want to be corrected all the time. Sometimes they pretend like they know it, although they don't.

Similarly, Londa underscored that:

They feel more criticised than developed and do not accept feedback from us as mentor teachers.

From the assertions above, it is clear that some pre-service teachers do not want to learn from their mentor teachers. This might suggest that some pre-service teachers doubt the knowledge possessed by their mentor teachers. Such an attitude may negatively affect the mentorship relationship between mentor teachers and pre-service teachers, as mentor teachers possess experience and knowledge acquired over time that they need to share with pre-service teachers during teaching practice. On the other hand, pre-service teachers have theoretical knowledge that they need to apply in their classrooms during teaching practice. Ideally, both parties involved in the mentoring process should share the knowledge they have to enrich the experience.

Another challenge that emerged from the accounts of the participants is that some pre-service teachers lack content and pedagogical knowledge. Mentor teachers indicated that they sometimes encounter pre-service teachers who do not have foundational knowledge of their subject majors. The mentor teachers articulated:

***Most pre-service teachers do not have adequate content knowledge to teach their majors.*** - Nana

Abel noted:

The challenge is that some of them do not communicate honestly about their weakness in the subject. During their observation, they do not ask questions.

From the assertions above, it can be inferred that mentor teachers expect pre-service teachers to enter teaching practice with foundational knowledge of their subject specialisations. At the same time, mentor teachers such as Abel appreciate that pre-service teachers, like any other teachers, have some weaknesses in understanding their subject specialisations. However, he expects them to be honest about their limitations and to ask questions of their mentors in order to receive assistance in improving their weaknesses.

Furthermore, Zolani indicated that some pre-service teachers struggle with pedagogical practices. He said:

***They struggle to bring the lesson to the cognitive level of the learners, and they assume that all the learners are functioning at the same level, and they do not use teaching techniques that help the learners learn from each other, such as grouping.***

Mthetho also stated:

They understood the content at a more complex level and could not filter it at an age-appropriate level during teaching and learning.

The participants' statements cited above show that some mentor teachers are concerned about the lack of content and pedagogical knowledge among certain pre-service teachers. The accounts of the participants revealed that some pre-service teachers understand the content of their subjects at a higher level but do not impart knowledge to learners at an appropriate age. For pre-service teachers, this is to be expected because they are not yet familiar with the art of teaching; therefore, mentor teachers should help them adjust their subject knowledge to tailor their instruction to the learners' level of understanding and age.

Mentor teachers also reported that some pre-service teachers lack confidence when teaching during their teaching practice. ***"Some of them lack confidence, and this is sometimes evident to the learners during lesson delivery."*** – Mabutho

Nana added:

***Normally, they lack confidence and therefore tend to make mistakes in their content delivery.***

The comments above show that a lack of confidence can have negative implications for the delivery of pre-service teachers' lessons. This lack of confidence among pre-service teachers can be attributed to the fact that some are not familiar with the school context and the large classrooms they are expected to teach during their teaching practice. Therefore, understanding these factors may help mentor teachers assist pre-service teachers in building their confidence as they engage in teaching practice.

### **Strategies to overcome the challenges of mentoring during teaching practice**

This theme reports on the strategies used by the mentor teachers to overcome the challenges they encountered while mentoring pre-service teachers during their teaching practice. The mentor teachers' accounts revealed that they adopted various strategies, including moulding pre-service teachers. Mthetho alluded:

***I tell him not to panic. My job is not to criticise him or her, but to support him and develop her so that he can become a better teacher in the near future.*** - Mthetho

From the above commentary, Mthetho showed that he understands the importance of encouraging pre-service teachers to keep calm when engaging in teaching practice. Encouraging pre-service teachers not to panic might assist when faced with pre-service teachers who lack confidence. Mentor teachers who encourage pre-service teachers to keep calm during teaching practice also understand how frightening teaching practice can be, especially for pre-service teachers who engage in it for the first time.

Furthermore, Xolo and Gobani mentioned that they expose pre-service teachers to different initiatives that help them develop their content knowledge.

***I first communicate with the teacher in the pre-service teacher to find out his weaknesses and strengths on the subject. I introduce him to our development team for support. Subject committee team and topic cluster. They help and support the pre-service teacher to improve his or her content knowledge.*** - Xolo

The comment above suggests that Xolo works with the pre-service teacher under her guidance to determine their strengths and weaknesses in the subject. After identifying the pre-service teacher's strengths and weaknesses, she then exposes them to professional development programmes to assist in improving their content knowledge.

Gobani also adopted a similar strategy, noting:

***I encourage pre-service teachers to reflect on what they are good at and identify weak areas where they would***

***seek help. Provide guidance, monitor progress, and give feedback on time, provide opportunities for the pre-service teacher to give his own views and make informed decisions.***

From Gobani's sentiments, it can be assumed that he encourages pre-service teachers to engage in self-reflection to identify their weaknesses and strengths. After identifying these, he expects them to approach him to seek guidance in developing as teachers. Although this is another good strategy to help pre-service teachers evaluate themselves, it cannot always be ideal, especially for those who are in the early stages of their studies. Such pre-service teachers heavily rely on their mentor teachers to work with them to identify their weaknesses and strengths and help them improve.

Other strategies used by some mentor teachers to assist pre-service teachers who lack content and pedagogical knowledge include lesson observations and one-on-one discussions. This transpired from the comments of Mabutho and Lutho.

For example, Mabutho said:

I allow them [pre-service teachers] to teach the lesson up to the end without disturbing the lesson. I identify the gaps in the lesson and note them down so that it is easier for me to give support and develop them where it is needed.

And Lutho stated:

***I provide one-on-one discussions, familiarise the novice with appropriate terminology, demonstrate how content is applied to learners' daily experiences when incorporated in lesson teaching.*** - Lutho

The comments of both participants imply that they sit down with pre-service teachers and provide feedback on their performance during lesson presentations. According to them, this helps pre-service teachers improve their content and pedagogical knowledge. In the commentaries, it appears that during the one-on-one mentoring discussions, the pre-service teachers learn how to incorporate the daily experiences of the learners into their lessons, as well as improve the delivery of the lesson and understand the key terminology of their subject specialisations.

#### Discussions

This study sought to explore the challenges encountered by mentor teachers when mentoring pre-service teachers during their teaching practice. The study reported that some mentor teachers are concerned about pre-service teachers who are not receptive to constructive criticism. Having pre-service teachers who are not open to positive feedback may hinder the mentoring process. Mentorship

should be open and reciprocal between the parties involved. A study conducted by Schulleti & Saleh (2020) reported resistance among pre-service teachers during the mentoring process. This included an unwillingness to try new approaches and an inability to recognise their limitations and weaknesses (Schulleti & Saleh, 2020). To overcome this, the current study revealed that mentor teachers attempt to collaborate with pre-service teachers to identify their strengths and weaknesses during the mentoring process. This finding contrasts with that of the study conducted by Mukeredzi & Manwa (2019), which found limited cooperation between mentor teachers and pre-service teachers during teaching practice. From the findings of the current study, it appears that the mentor teachers were willing to support pre-service teachers in their professional growth. This aligns with SLT aspirations that require mentors to create a supportive mentoring environment where knowledge and expertise are shared.

Furthermore, it emerged from the study that some pre-service teachers lacked content and pedagogical knowledge in their subject specialisations. These findings corroborate the results of the study carried out by Ramirez (2021), which found that mentor teachers reported that some pre-service teachers lacked content and pedagogical knowledge. In the same study, the mentors noted that some pre-service teachers struggled to impart knowledge acquired from the university to learners in the classroom. To overcome this challenge, participants in the current study reported that they expose pre-service teachers to various professional development programmes to help nurture their content and pedagogical knowledge during teaching practice. It transpired that mentor teachers organise one-on-one mentoring discussions with pre-service teachers to assist them in refining their content and pedagogical knowledge. It also emerged that some mentor teachers allow pre-service teachers to participate in subject meetings where curriculum-related issues are discussed. Some mentor teachers reported that they observe pre-service teachers delivering lessons and provide feedback after each lesson. Proponents of SLT support this because they believe that it enables pre-service teachers to learn from practice and integrate their theoretical knowledge with practical beliefs (Hamman-Fisher & McGhie, 2021). They also view this as a means of promoting learning in an authentic context since pre-service teachers have the opportunity to teach in a real classroom.

Another notable finding from the current study is that mentor teachers reported that some pre-service teachers lack confidence when delivering lessons during teaching practice. However, to overcome this challenge, mentor teachers recognise that teaching practice can be



frightening and stressful for some pre-service teachers, and they encourage them not to panic during their teaching practice. This finding resonates with the principles of SLT, which encourage mentor teachers to provide support to pre-service teachers by establishing trust and building rapport. As mentor teachers support pre-service teachers, especially those who lack confidence, Orland & Wang (2021) caution that mentor teachers should find a balance between providing support and fostering independence in pre-service teachers. In other words, mentor teachers should encourage pre-service teachers to engage in certain activities independently to a limited extent during teaching practice. This still aligns with SLT, which stresses that pre-service teachers should be introduced to specific tasks that would propel them to learn.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the challenges encountered by mentor teachers when mentoring pre-service teachers during teaching practice. It found that mentor teachers face several challenges in this role. Some of the key challenges include resistance from pre-service teachers during mentoring, pre-service teachers who lack content and pedagogical knowledge, and some pre-service teachers who lack confidence. Interestingly, this study revealed that most mentor teachers devise different strategies to overcome these challenges, including working closely with pre-service teachers to identify their weaknesses and strengths in order to tailor the interventions needed from them. Furthermore, mentor teachers expose pre-service teachers to one-on-one mentoring sessions and subject meetings to nurture their content and pedagogical knowledge in their subject specialisation. Based on the findings, the study concludes that the mentor teachers who participated in this study understood their roles in coaching and guiding pre-service teachers. The understanding and willingness of mentor teachers to support pre-service teachers despite the challenges may have been informed by their substantial experience in the teaching profession.

Given the findings, the study recommends that teacher training institutions build strong relationships with mentor teachers, as they are important stakeholders in teacher training. Teacher training institutions can achieve this through workshops, seminars, and by creating open forums where mentor teachers can share their experiences and challenges encountered while mentoring pre-service teachers. Experiences and ideas shared by mentor teachers would be their voices to help minimise some of the challenges they face during mentoring, since they are at the coalface of the process. For future research, a study of

a similar nature should be conducted where both mentor teachers and pre-service teachers participate. This would help to solicit the experiences and challenges of both parties, which will assist in minimising challenges related to mentorship during teaching practice.

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