REFLECTIVE MENTORING SCHOOLS: TOWARD A NEW DESIGN FEATURE FOR ASSURING THE QUALITY OF THE INITIAL PRIMARY TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN MALAWI

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Abstract
Reflection in action and reflection on action by a practitioner are critical lenses through which to assure and ensure that services are fit for purpose and fit of purpose. The study is a critical realist analysis of the design features of mentoring schools in the 1+1 Initial Primary Teacher Education in Malawi in the context of self-reflection. The study was grounded in a post-positivist orientation whose methodology employed a mixed methods approach. In the quantitative approach, 183 key informants comprising 92 school mentors and 91 headteachers; and drawn from 92 primary schools in four education districts, participated in a census survey. The questionnaires were administered through a drop-and-pick technique and the response rate was 100% for school mentors and 97% for headteachers. In the qualitative approach, a convenience sample of 2 headteachers and 2 school mentors drawn from two instrumental case schools participated in face to face interviews which were complimented and triangulated by non participant observations and document analysis. The qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed by content analysis and descriptive statistics respectively. Results reveal that mentoring schools were not reflective institutions. This was evidenced by lack of reflection in action nor reflection in action; lack of a generic theory in which to reflect on their practices; lack of built-in processes to enhance their competences in mentoring; lack of internal practices to identify and remove impediments in mentoring student teachers. The study further revealed that voluntary participation and collegial approach are critical additional antecedents to self-reflective mentoring schools. A new design feature of Reflective Mentoring Schools (RMS) is proposed in the 1+1 Initial Primary Teacher Education mentoring programme. And it is recommended that this new design feature of mentoring schools as Reflective Institutions be made compulsory.
Key Words: Quality, Quality Assurance, mentoring, Reflective mentoring schools, Initial Primary Teacher Education

Introduction

Preservice teacher education is grappling with how to assure the quality of mentoring student teachers during the teaching practicum (Mwanza, 2014; Mwanza, Moyo and Maphosa, 2015; Maphosa, Shumba and Shumba, 2007). However, Barnett (199, p. 178) argues that optimum quality evaluation gains its greatest justification when, as a result, the

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actors centrally involved in offering programmes in higher education learn about themselves and, as a result, change, improve and even transform the quality of their own professional activities and services to society.This suggests that for meaningful gains to be made, quality assurance practices must be institutionalized in the providers of the services (Verkleij, 2000; Selesho, 2008). In the context of this study, it suggests that practices of maintaining and enhancing quality of mentoring student teachers must be institutionalized in mentoring schools. In this regard, mentoring institutions must be the entry point to maintain and enhance the quality of mentoring services. As pointed out by Harvey (2002(a), 2002(b)), the impact of quality and quality assurance practices of service or product is significant when the practices are driven by the practitioners themselves. This gives rise to the concept of self-evaluation (Eurydice, 2006) or self-reflection (Lackshmi and Rama, 2007) within the mentoring literature. The phenomenon of self evaluation or self reflection raises the question of: 'what design features of mentoring schools have the potential to maintain and enhance the quality of their mentoring services and products? It is important that mentoring schools have definite design features which empower them to own the primary responsibility for assuring quality of mentoring services.

Driving forces for quality mentoring in primary schools in Malawi

The demand for quality teacher education, and with it quality mentoring of student teachers, is world-wide. For Malawi, the driving forces are both internal and external. Internally, the Government of Malawi is obliged to reduce poverty through economic growth and infrastructural development (GoM, 2006; 2011; Mwanza, 2008, 2014). The lynchpin to the realisation of this obligation hinges on the provision of quality education at all levels (GoM, 1994; MoEST, 2012), which has raised demand for quality teachers and preservice teacher education (MoEST, 2008(a), 2008(b); 2012; 2013). The external forces have included the commitment to achieve supra-national, regional and internal obligations. For instance, Malawi, like all signatories, is obliged to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (UN, 2000); Education For All (EFA) goals (UNESCO, 2000); the World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st century (UNESCO, 1998); African Charter on

Human and Peoples Rights (OAU, 1986). Quality teacher education is also a central pillar to the realisation of the multiple goals. Globalisation and internationalization, despite being criticized as a modern forms of cultural imperialism (UNESCO, 2007; Machingambi, 2014; Dzvimbo and Moloi, 2013), have also heightened the demand for quality preservice teacher education. Since mentoring is a critical component of quality preservice teacher education (Disckson et al., 2014; Mwanza, 2014; Hansford, Ehrich and Tennent, 2004; Hansford, Tennent and Ehrich, 2003), then there is an equally unprecedented demand for quality mentoring schools in Malawi's education sector. However, the unresolved and fundamental issue hinges on design features which would constitute quality mentoring schools.

The Theory of Quality

Quality is a contextual and stakeholder-relative concept (Harvey, 2007; 2006; Harvey and Green, 1993; Green, 1994). As such, there are many definitions and at the same time no universal definition of quality. Thus, Lagrosen, Seyyed-Hashemi and Leitner (2004) categorizes the definitions into transcendent- based; user-based; product-based; manufacturing-based; and value based. However, Harvey and Green (1993) provide a typology consisting of five conceptualizations of quality which have been widely adopted and adapted in higher education as well as in teacher education. They define quality as exceptional fitness of/for purpose; perfection or consistency; value for money; and transformation. Kis (2005) argues that education may not produce zero-defects graduates; as such the conceptualization of quality as perfection rarely applies to education in general and teacher education in particular. Kis contends that the two most definitions applicable to teacher education are fitness for/or purpose and transformation. Biggs (2001) adds value for money to the list. For Harvey (2006), transformation is more embracing a definition of quality. As such, quality is a contested concept in preservice teacher education and it is not uncommon that institutions may embrace more than one definition of quality in their programmes and services. Despite this contestation, service providers, such as mentoring schools, have the responsibility to define their conceptualization of quality and how they intend to assure it.

In the context of this study, quality is defined as fitness of purpose and fitness for purpose. The central feature in fitness for purpose is that the institution says what it does, does what it promises and proves it to the third party (Bayaga and Moyo, 2009, p. 57). In the words of Green (1994, p. 15), a high quality institution is one that clearly states its mission (or purpose) and is efficient and effective in meeting the goals that it has set itself. Harvey's (2006) "fitness for purpose" is a definition of quality that allows institutions to define their purpose in their mission and objectives, so "quality" is demonstrated by achieving these. It is therefore a mission and standards based definition of quality. Fitness of purpose entails being responsive to standards set by governmental, professional bodies and supranational bodies (Harvey, 2007). According to Swanepoel and Mays (2010), fitness of purpose is concerned with doing the right things. It therefore provides a check on the relevance and adequacy of the quality assurance practices of the institution (Harvey, 2007). Hence, Swanepoel and Mays claim that fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation may be embodied in fitness of purpose. Fitness for/of therefore essentially demands institution to be responsive to internal and external interest groups of the services or products.

There are four rationales for adopting the definition of quality as fitness for/of purpose in this study. First, Harvey (2007) and Parri (2006) concur with Green (1994) that fitness for/of purpose is the most popular definition of quality in higher education institutions. Secondly, Koslowski III (2006) also argues that fitness for/of purpose has the potential to bring about the optimum quality of a service. In this regard, it could be argued that where as fitness for purpose is internally focused; fitness of purpose enables one to assess the adequacy of the practices with respect to external demands and expectations of national, regional, supra-international and professional agencies. Thirdly, literature indicates that mentoring is most effective when it is fit for purpose and fit of purpose (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009; Mwanza, 2014). In the context of this study, fitness for purpose and fitness of purpose was finally appropriate because it could be assessed quickly through a cross-sectional design. However, the fundamental question in this study is: what design features would make mentoring institutions to be fit for/of mentoring student teachers?

However, the definition of quality of a service or product as fitness for/of purpose is not devoid of limitations. First, it is not holistic in defining quality of service or product particularly in education (Harvey, 2006). Harvey (2006, p. 22) further argues that fitness for/of purpose is merely lazy pragmatism that redefines quality as accountability; fitness for purpose transmutes quality into quality assurance; it fails to engage with the conceptual nature of quality per se (that is, removes the focus on the essential quality of provision). It may also be argued that in the education sector fitness of/for purpose has the potential to undermine the core business of transformation in cases of weak purposes (Bayaga and Moyo, 2009). Nevertheless, fitness for/of purpose was appropriate and more embracing because it could be assessed easily and quickly within the cross-sectional design of the study.

The Theory of Quality Assurance in Teacher Education

Just like quality, Quality Assurance (QA) is a contested concept. As claimed by Singh and Lange (2007, p. xii), Quality Assurance (QA) can be described as a discursive field whose dimensions and sub-fields are still evolving. As such, meanings and interpretations of Quality Assurance appear vary from one stakeholder, context, country and institution to another (Singh, 2010; Bayaga and Moyo, 2009; Loukkola and Zhang, 2010). However, in its simplest sense, it is an umbrella term for the practices of maintaining and enhancing the quality of a product or service. More precisely, QA is an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a higher education system, institutions, or programmes (Martin and Stella, 2007, p. 34). There are two types of quality assurance: internal and external (Barnett, 1994; Stella and Martin, 2007; Harvey and Newton, 2004; Harvey, 1997; Biggs, 2001). In the context of this study, the focus is on Internal Quality Assurance (IQA). Internal quality assurance practices refer to those policies and practices whereby academic institutions themselves monitor and improve the quality of their education provision (Dill, 2007, p. 1). This implies that institutions themselves plan, implement and monitor the activities; and utilize the results for purposes of maintaining and enhancing the quality of their services or products. Thus, IQA is about self-evaluation

(Eurydice, 2006), or self-analysis (Lackshmi and Rama, 2007) by providers of the services themselves. It is about self-reflection and feedback on institutional performance (Verkleij, 2000). The primary purpose of QA is capacity building within the institutions so that it improves the quality of the service or product (Lackshmi and Rama, 2007). Lackshmi and Rama further contend that the condition for effective QA is that it must involve collective thinking and shared action (participation by all members of the institution) in addition to regular training of participants. The question of interest is: what are the practices of internal quality assurance in mentoring schools which could make mentoring of student teachers during teaching practicum fit of purpose and fit of purpose?

The merits of internal quality assurance are multifaceted. Harvey (2002a, 2002b) argues that internal QA are more accurate and fruitful than external QA. Perhaps this is because the internal stakeholders own the QA process from planning, implementation, evaluation to utilization of the findings. Barnett (1994, p.178) echoes that optimum quality evaluation gains its greatest justification as a result when, the actors centrally involved in offering programmes in higher education learn about themselves and, as a result, change, improve and even transform the quality of their own professional activities and services to society. This stance is also supported by Eurydice (2006, p. 27) who contends that internal evaluation offers opportunities for quality enhancement in so far as it is a collective appraisal of structures and practices existing within the institution concerned. IQA is an integral and indispensable component of QA system in any institution (Verkleij, 2000). Verkleij further contends that continuous improvement is a responsibility of institutions rather than external agencies.

'Charity begins at home', so the saying goes; and perhaps the home of QA in mentoring is in the institutions themselves. Hence, to support the improvement purpose of QA, the primary responsibility to assure the quality of a service or product needs to lay with the providers themselves rather than those who monitor the provision from outside. In the context of this study, it may entail that the schools need to assume the largest obligation to assure the quality of mentoring student teachers during the teaching practicum rather than the Teacher Training College

which organises the mentoring programme. This raises a question of: what practices of mentoring schools would demonstrate their primary responsibility in maintaining and enhancing the quality of mentoring student teachers during the teaching practicum? For Biggs (2001), Lackshmi and Rama (2007), Selesho (2008) and Verkleij (2000), self evaluation or reflection is pivotal in this agenda. According to Verkleij (2000), the necessary conditions for self-reflection include vision or preliminary theory about the future of the institution, ample room for flexibility, solving problems when one meets them and goal oriented; trust (openness of intended goals, involvement of staff in the design of QA, rewards for those who are successful; openness of procedures and follow up mechanisms; external evaluation to add up rigour to self reflection. In this regard, self-evaluation needs to be informed by developments in scientific contexts, professional contexts and institutional contexts. That is, self reflection must be fit for purpose and fit of purpose.

In his framework of Ecology of Quality Assurance system, Wong (2012, p. 40) argues that the effective system must have the ‘what’, the 'who' and the 'how' of quality assurance. In this case, the what refers to the infrastructure for assuring quality whose critical elements are a communication system regarding control and feedback, resources that allow effective and efficient execution, and an organisational culture that cultivates team spirit and encourages fresh approaches to new tasks; the who refers to practitioners or the quality people entrusted with the service; and the how encompass the operational details of policies, practice codes and standards. For Eurydice (2006) self reflection may focus on issues such as the content of teacher education curricula, the teaching methods used, the balance between professional training and general education, school placements for student teachers, the trainer/student ratio or the general infrastructure of the higher education institution concerned. Verkleij (2000) specially mentions teaching services, research and management, input, process and output as areas to reflect upon. However, an important ingredient in self reflection is the involvement of all members of staff (administration and academic) in the improvement agenda (Lackshmi and Rama, 2007). Thus, these elements of internal quality assurance system are critical during self reflection.

Reflection in action and Reflection on action (SchÖn, 1987**)**

The terms reflection, reflective practices and reflective practitioner as they relate to education and teacher education have their roots in Dewey's (1933) Reflective thought and transformative action. According to Schon (1987), two types of reflection are critical in professional practices such as teacher education: 'Reflection in action' and 'Reflection on action'. Reflection-in-action takes place when professionals are faced with a situation which they experience as unique or containing an element of surprise; rather than applying theory or past experience in a direct way, professionals draw on their repertoire of examples to reframe the situation and find new solutions (Griffiths, 2000, p. 241). Griffiths identifies three key elements of Schon's reflection in action paradigm: conscious (though not necessarily articulated in words); critical, involving questioning and restructuring; and of immediate, giving rise to on-the-spot experiment and new actions. This suggests that Reflection in action hinges on problem solving while in the course of implementing an action. For Schon (1987), Reflection on action refers to Reflection after action (Schon, 1987). Hence, it is about evaluating and making sense of the past experiences (Griffiths, 2000, p. 544). Both Reflection in action and Reflection on action are goal oriented: to improve practice or improving quality of performance of practitioners all the time. In the context of this study, it can be argued that mentoring schools need to be engaged in Reflection in action and Reflection on action for the purposes of maintaining and enhancing the quality of their mentoring services. The question of interest at this stage relates to the elements that constitution a reflective mentoring school.

Reflective Institutions (Biggs, 2001)

Biggs (2001) provides a framework for interrogating internal quality assurance practices of an institution known as the Reflective Institution. In this theory, quality assurance is simply a process of maintaining and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. Thus, a Reflective institution is one that continuously maintains and improves the quality of its core business. Therefore, Biggs contends that a Reflective institution has three distinctive characteristics. First, it has an espoused theory in which services are grounded. Such a theory drives the agenda for what

teaching and learning will look like in the institution. Thus, Biggs calls this characteristic as a Quality Model (QM). Theoretical paradigms such as constructivism and critical realism are clearly identified and used in the teaching and learning processes. The espoused theory defines what the student is; what the teacher does and what the student does. Secondly, an institution must have built-in mechanisms that allow it, like the individual reflective teacher, to continually review and improve current practice. According to Biggs (2001, p. 227), Quality Enhancement (QE) is about improving the competences of practitioners through such avenues as staff meeting, seminars and conferences or any other form of continuing professional development. The final characteristic feature is Quality Feasibility (QF). Quality Feasibility related to practices of removing impediments in the provision of the service. In other words institutions answer the question: what can be done to remove impediments? This involves removing institutional polices and structures that impede the provision of quality teaching. A quality institution is therefore one that has high level aims that it intends to meet, that teaches accordingly, and that continually upgrades its practice in order to adapt to changing conditions, within resource limitations (Biggs, 2001, p. 223). He further emphasizes that a reflective institution is fit for purpose and fit of purpose at the same time. In the context of this study, the question worth answering is: how reflective are mentoring primary schools in the 1+1 IPTE programme?

Mentoring: Theory and practice

Mentoring is a contextual and stakeholder relative term (Bozeman and Feeney, 2007). This makes it too elusive a concept to get its universal definition. The complexity is demonstrated in the literature reviews by Eby, Rhodes and Allen (2007), Bozeman and Feeney (2007) and Haggard, Dougherty, Turban and Wilbanks (2011) which reported fifteen, thirteen and forty definitions of mentoring. However, the common element among the definitions is that mentoring is a social development process of one person by another. Using Vygotsky's (1978) Social Development Theory, mentoring primarily entails a social development process of a less knowledgeable other by a more knowledgeable other. Traditionally it is conceptualized as a relationship between an older, more knowledgeable and experienced person (known

as mentor) and a younger, less knowledgeable and experienced person (known as mentee) for the purposes of development of the less experienced person (Kram, 1985). In the context of this study, mentoring is the process by which school teachers assist student-teachers to learn how to teach in school-based settings (Tomlinson, 1995, p. 7). In this case mentoring is a formalized apprenticeship-type of learning (Maphosa, Shumba and Shumba, 2007). Mentoring in preservice teacher education may therefore be regarded as a critical tool for teacher quality (Mwanza, 2014).

Mentoring is therefore a planned activity. It serves three broad categories of functions to mentees such as student teachers: psychosocial; career and role modelling (Dickson et al., 2014; Kram, 1985; Castro, Scandura and Williams, 2004; Parise and Forret, 2008; Scandura, 2009). These may be termed as triangular functions of mentoring. The psychosocial function relates to the provision of social support to the student teachers such as encouragement, friendship, counselling, support, acceptance, advice and feedback on performance; the career function entails building of competencies (skills and knowledge) through provision of challenging work, coaching, exposure, and protection; and the role modelling function is about provision of best practice benchmark (positive role modelling of best teachers in the profession) to the student teacher (Parise and Forret, 2008; Scandura, 2009; Castro et al., 2004; Mwanza, 2014). In his Five Factor Theory of mentoring, Hudson (2010) contends that mentoring of student teachers involves development of personal attributes; exposure to systems requirements; development of content and pedagogical knowledge; modelling effective teaching and classroom management; and observing lessons and giving feedback. It may therefore be argued that mentoring is a worthwhile activity in preservice teacher education. A study by Hobson (2002) revealed that student teachers rated mentoring as a critical competent of their teacher education programme. However, as claimed by Sundli (2007), poor design features of the mentoring programme could be detrimental to the quality and quantity of mentoring. As such, Ragins, Cotton and Miller (2000) have also warned that poor mentoring could be more disastrous than no mentoring at all. This suggests that a mentoring institutions need to have mechanisms to maintain and enhance the quality of the

mentoring process. The question is: what constitutes such mechanisms? How mentoring institutions should be designed so that they serve the three functions? According to Mwanza (2014), achieving mentoring functions hinges on such factors as recruitment and screening of mentors, initial training and regular retaining of mentors, matching strategy, support and recognition and the monitoring process; and collegial culture.

Impediments to mentoring services in mentoring schools

Mentoring of student teachers in schools is not free from challenges. A study by Hobson et al. (2009) revealed that the dark side included increased workload; sense of insecure, threat, and isolation from fellow teachers. Further, Long (1997) identifies lack of time for mentoring, inadequate funding and insufficient resources for mentoring. Johnson (2002) found that obstacles to mentoring were in three main clusters: organisational obstacles (incentives, rewards and recognition); departmental obstacles (mentors' lack of time and interest, lack of training); and individual obstacles (lazy mentees, uncooperative mentors). A study by Pinho, Coetzee and Shreuder (2005) also revealed that mentoring schools experienced challenges related to time constraints, trust, jealousy, cross-gender relationships and mentoring style. Verkleij (2000) contends that self evaluation is the primary strategy to remove impediments to mentoring. This suggests that self evaluation is essentially the first step of all efforts to maintain and enhance the quality of the mentoring services. It is therefore important that the design of mentoring schools must be such as to make the schools integral components of quality assurance system of the mentoring programme. But as claimed by Biggs (2001), reflective institutions need to be always proactive in identifying and removing the challenges that they encounter.

The Study

There is a high demand for quality preservice teacher education world-wide. However, one of the key quality challenges in preservice teacher education is to ensure that mentoring programmes of student teachers during the teaching practicum are fit of purpose and fit for purpose (Mwanza, 2014; Maphosa et al., 2007; Makura and Zireva, 2013). In Malawi, this challenge is empirically evidenced in the Initial Primary

Teacher Education (IPTE) programme (Steiner-Khams and Kunje, 2011; DeStefano, 2012; Gunsaru and Salagi, 2012; Herstein, 2013; MoEST, 2014). According to Dean et al (2005: 284) in Chong (2014), if preservice teachers do not receive the highest-quality teacher preparation, then we cannot meet the demand for high quality and effective teachers. We may also risk the training a cadre of teachers who could be more of liabilities than assets in the teaching profession. For Malawi, it may further be argued that low quality teacher preparation has the potential to negate the efforts to achieve national, regional and supranational goals aimed at reducing poverty. Thus, this study sought to understand the design features of mentoring schools in the IPTE mentoring programme which could be instrumental in maintaining and enhancing the quality of mentoring services.

Main Research questions

- How reflective institutions are mentoring schools in the 1+1 Initial Primary Teacher Education programme in Malawi?

Sub-research questions

- What are the design features of mentoring schools in the IPTE mentoring programme?
- What are the implications of the findings for a new design feature of mentoring schools in the 1+1 IPTE mentoring programme?

The Research Methodology

This research study was grounded in Postpositivist orientation whose methodology employed mixed methods approach. Moyo (2004), van Rensburg (2001), Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011) and Mertens (2010) contend that the central tenet in Postpositivism is that there is no absolute reality; as such researchers aim to get as much close to reality as possible. In addition, Creswell (2009, 2014) argues that Postpositivism focuses on understanding the root causes of a social problem. The paradigm was therefore instrumental in unravelling issues surrounding the seemingly low quality of mentoring in the 1+1 IPTE mentoring

programme (Mwanza, 2014). The mixed methods approach in this study involved mixing of quantitative and qualitative research approaches at various stages in a single study (Moyo, 2004; Creswell, 2014; Johnson and Onwuegbuzies, 2004; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner, 2007).

In the quantitative approach, a census survey design was employed to collect data from 92 school mentors and 92 headteachers drawn from 92 mentoring schools in four education districts; and a 100% and 97% response rates were obtained respectively. In this phase, self-administered questionnaires, informed by Dillman's (2000) Total Design Methods, were dropped and picked to/from headteachers and school mentors. The qualitative approach employed a case study of two instrumental (Yin, 2014) mentoring schools in which four one-on-one face to face interviews involving two headteachers and two schools mentors were conducted. Observation and document analysis (Prior, 2008; Lincoln et al., 2011) also formed important methods to collect data in this second phase. Thus, the mixed methods approach was used specifically for data expansion and triangulation. Content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Guba and Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln et al., 2011) and descriptive statistics (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2010) were employed to analyse quantitative and qualitative data respectively.

Results of the study

In this study, 183 key informants were drawn from 92 mentoring schools in four education districts. Table 1 gives a summary of the demographic characteristics of the key informants.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants

(i) *Distribution of participants by mentoring responsibility (n=183)*

Headteachers	49.7%
School mentors	50.3%
Total	**100%**

(ii) Distribution of participants by gender (n=183)

Male	*72.1%*

Female	*17.9%*
Total	**100%**

(iii) Distribution of participants by years of experience in mentoring student teachers

Years of experience	
Less than 1 year	34.4%
1 year and above	65.6%
Total	**100%**

(iv) Distribution of participants by mentoring schools and Education Districts (ED)

	ED1	**ED2**	**ED3**	**ED4**	**TOTAL**
% of mentoring schools (n=92)	**26%**	**18%**	**30%**	**22%**	**100%**
% of participants (n=183)	**26%**	**18%**	**30%**	**22%**	**100%**

It can be seen from Table 1(i) that mentoring responsibilities were held by headteachers and school mentors; and that school mentors had a slight majority (50.3%) over headteachers (49.7%). This indicates that the key participants in mentoring student teachers participated in the study. The participation of both headteachers and school mentors was crucial in this study for purposes of collecting accurate and reliable information about the design features in their mentoring schools.

Table 1 (ii) shows that the majority of the participants (72.1%) were male. This indicates that mentoring responsibilities were skewed towards male. Hence, it further suggests a need to demystify gender in mentoring responsibilities in mentoring schools. However, participation by both genders was advantageous in this study for purposes of getting balanced and holistic mentoring lived experiences.

Table 1 (iii) also shows that 65.5% of the participants had at least one year of experience in mentoring. Thus, the majority of the participants had relevant experience of the design features of their schools in mentorship of student teachers. Participation of this category of participants was crucial in this study for purposes of collecting reliable data.

It can also be seen in Table 1(ii) that participants were drawn from 92 mentoring schools, clustered in four Education Districts (ED1, ED2, ED3 and ED4). However, there was unequal distribution of mentoring schools and participants among the Education Districts; such that the largest number of mentoring schools (29%) and participants (30%) were in ED3. This spread of participants in this study was useful in collecting accurate data regarding the design features of mentoring schools.

Findings for research question 1: What are the design features of the mentoring schools in the Initial Primary Teacher Education programme in Malawi?

(a) Criteria for selecting mentoring schools

Data reveal that there are a set of criteria for selecting schools to be mentoring schools. In the context of this study, the most critical ones were: a competent headteacher; a trained school mentor or a qualified and experienced teacher who can be trained as a school mentor; and a pool of qualified teachers who are willing to support student teachers. This suggests the design features of mentoring schools as comprising commitment, experience, and professionalism of the teaching personnel; as well as involvement of all teachers. Perhaps, such characteristics of the mentoring personnel were needed to maintain and enhance the quality of the mentoring services and student teachers.

(b) Staff participation in mentoring student teachers

Document analysis and observations revealed that there was one mentor per school officially appointed by the school and the Teacher Training College. Data also revealed that although the IPTE handbook emphasized on the need to involve all teachers in mentoring student teachers; only one teacher was officially appointed as a school mentor. It was also found that qualified and experienced school teachers shunned away from sharing mentoring responsibility. During the face to face interview with one the school mentors regarding support from other teachers, the remark was

> *'Experienced teachers are supposed to assist. But there is resistance because of incentives. They resist to do it freely' (SM 2)*

The results indicate a design feature which contributed to a lack of collegial or collective efforts to mentor student teachers; which clearly contradicted sharply with the criteria for mentoring schools.

(c) Participants in Quality Assurance of mentoring in schools

Data reveals dual responsibilities of the Headteacher in the mentoring programme: mentoring student teachers in professional development issues or whole school issues; and monitoring mentoring. This suggests a design feature focussed on involvement of school leadership in mentoring services. However, the study also found that members of staff did not participate in activities aimed at quality assuring the mentoring activity. That is, mentoring schools had no internal structures to monitor the quality of their mentoring services. This indicates that mentoring schools had no practices aimed at identifying and removing impediments to mentoring. This further suggests that school had no practices of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action.

(d) Workload for school mentors

Headteachers were asked to indicate the number of student teachers for a given mentor in their schools. Table 2 gives a summary of the findings.

Table 2: Ratio of school mentor (SM) to student teachers(ST)

Number Student teachers Per mentor	Frequency (n=91)	Percentage of schools
1	2	2%%
3-5	8	9%
6-8	79	87%
9-11	2	2%

It can be seen from Table 2 that the 98% of mentoring had at least three student teachers attached to one mentor. This indicates a design feature grounded in group mentoring model known as One-To-Many model (OTMM). However, the majority of the schools (87%) had a range of 3-6

student teachers. As remarked by school mentors, this design feature was problematic because the school mentors were also full time classroom teachers:

> *'I am a mentor and a teacher, ... However, mentoring without being a class teacher is better' (SM1)*
>
> *Class teacher as well as a mentor –time is a problem' (SM 2)*

And headteacher (HT1) also said that he/she had a heavy workload by combining the two responsibilities. The results suggest that mentoring schools had a design feature in which both the headteachers and school mentors had a heavy workload which had a potential to negate their involvement in reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action.

(e) Incentives, recognition or rewards in mentoring responsibilities

Document analysis and face to face interview revealed that school mentors were not recognized and rewarded by schools for the mentoring responsibilities. The study found that the only form of reward was in monetary form and paid by the external agent. This indicates a lack of a design feature to motivate school mentors to aim high in their mentoring services.

(f) Theoretical framework on mentoring

Data from Document analysis and triangulated with data from observation and face to face interviews, reveal that each mentoring school had no theory or model in which their mentoring services were grounded. The lack of mentoring model or espoused theory suggests that mentoring services were carried out haphazardly.

(g) Internal staff development of mentors

Data reveals that 99% school mentors (n=92); and 96% of headteachers received training in mentoring organised by the Teacher Training College. Perhaps the small percentage of untrained school mentors and headteachers resulted from the newly appointed headteachers at the time of the study. Three sessions of training were given to mentors each year; one training prior to the beginning of the school term (almost every three months). The results suggest a design feature of providing training to the

mentoring personnel. However, it was also found that there were no internal staff developments activities organised and facilitated by mentoring schools themselves in between the external training, whether individually or collectively. This indicates a design feature in which there were no internal efforts to improve the performance of mentors within the mentoring schools.

(h) Voluntary versus mandatory participation of mentoring schools

Headteachers were asked if the participation of their schools in mentoring student teachers was voluntary or mandatory. Data reveal that 87% of the mentoring schools (n=92) volunteered to serve as mentoring schools. That is, not all mentoring schools participated on voluntary basis. This design feature of mixed mode of participation for mentoring schools raises concerns over the commitment and ownership to reflect over their activities in the mentoring programme.

(i) Voluntary versus mandatory participation of school mentors

School mentors were asked to indicate if their participation in the mentoring programme was voluntary or mandatory. Data reveal, the majority (56%) of the school mentors (n=86) indicated that their participation was voluntary; while the participation of 44% of the school mentors was mandatory. This indicates a design feature of a mixed mode of participation by school mentors. The design feature of forcing mentors to participate in mentoring student teachers raises concerns over their reflection-in- action and reflection-on-practices in the mentoring programme.

(j) Challenges faced by mentoring schools

Headteachers and school mentors were asked to indicate the challenges that they encountered in mentoring student teachers. Data reveal four categories of challenges: student related; resources related; administrative related; and workload related challenges. Table 3 gives the most common elements mentioned under each of these categories.

Table 3 Challenges impinging delivery of mentoring services in mentoring schools

Category	Challenges
Student teacher related	reluctance to take advice; unpunctual to duties; conflict within peer groups; too many excuses; unruly behaviours
Resource related	inadequate stationery; incomplete mentoring documents; lack of resources for visually impaired student teachers; inadequate textbooks
Administrative related	non payment of mentorship allowances; delays in paying student allowances; very little recognition for the mentoring responsibilities
Workload related	heavy workload for headteachers and mentors; no release time for mentors and headteachers; inadequate competences in mentoring virtually impaired student teachers

It can be seen from Table 3 that there are many impediments to the provision of mentoring services in mentoring schools. It was also found that mentoring schools did not practices to identify and remove the challenges. Mentoring schools simply depended on occasions for mentor training organised by the Teacher Training College (every three months) to discuss the solutions to their challenges. Such a design feature of mentoring schools had therefore the potential to negate the quality of mentoring services.

Discussion on Findings

This study sought to answer the question ‘how reflective are mentoring schools in the 1+1 IPTE programme’ in their pursuit to maintain and

enhance the quality of their mentoring services. In particular, the study examined the design features of mentoring schools in which reflective practices were imbedded. The findings from this study reeal that mentoring schools had no espoused theory to inform their mentoring practices; had no rewards or incentives for the participation of mentors; lacked team or collegial approach to providing mentoring services; their participation was more mandatory than voluntary; never provided staff development activities to enhance competences of their mentors; were overloaded with mentoring and classroom responsibilities; had no practices for identifying and removing impediments to mentoring services. This suggests that mentoring schools were not reflecting in action and reflection on action (Schon, 1987); hence they were not reflective institutions or practitioners (Biggs, 2001). In this regard, it can further be claimed that mentoring schools were therefore marginally maintaining and enhancing the quality of mentoring. The results confirm findings from a study by Hobson et al (2009), Johnson (2002), Pinho, Coetzee and Shreuder (2005) and Long (1997) which revealed that mentoring had the dark side as well with mentoring institutions rarely reflecting on/in their practices.

Mentoring of student teachers during a teaching practicum is a critical component of a preservice teacher quality. Student teachers too attach a lot importance to the mentoring phase during their teacher education programme (Hobson, 2002) as mentoring gives student teachers an opportunity to meaningfully integrate theory and practice. However, mentoring schools need to assume the primary responsibility for mentoring student teachers (Barnet, 1994). Verkleij (2000) and Selesho (2008) echo that mentoring schools have an obligation to demonstrate their primary responsibility in managing self-evaluation and reflection. It is therefore important that mentoring schools have design features which would help them assume the primary role to maintain and enhance the quality of their mentoring services.

The design features of mentoring schools must be such as to empower the schools not only to own the mentoring programme but also create an environment for self-reflection. Reflection in action and

reflection on action is therefore This perspective is also shared by Selesho (2008) who argues that internal self evaluation are critical pillars in assuring the quality of the services provided by organisations because it brings with it a high degree of ownership of the services. For Biggs (2001), such self evaluative institutions are known as reflective institutions. Biggs further contends that reflective institutions possess an espoused model which informs the quality mentoring practices (the Quality Model), often interpreted from the mission and vision statements. Thus, the model becomes a lens through which to interpret their practices. In addition, Ozdem (2011) argues that institutions need mission and vision statements to strengthen the culture of the organization and unity and loyalty among members, and to increase employee motivation. In this case, the mission and vision statements in mentoring would therefore be a binding element to the members of staff in the mentoring schools.

In addition, reflective institutions are characterised by built-in mechanisms for reviewing and improving current quality their practices (the Quality Enhancement). Critical Quality Enhancement practices include school based in-service training of teachers, rewards/incentives to the practitioners, support structures, peer reviews; evaluation of practices by learners and collaboration among providers. The proponents of mentor training (Ulvik and Sunde, 2013; Rajuan, Tuchin and Zukerman, 2011; Johnson, 2003) argue that effectivenss of mentors and their stability in a mentoring programme is enhanced when mentors are provided with regular training. In this regard, mentor training is a tool for both mentor and student teacher quality. Wong (2012) in his Ecology of Quality Assurance supports that effective internal quality assurance systems are grounded in quality people and resources as well rules and regulations that govern the practices. It is therefore critical that mentoring schools have the internal activities for enhancing the competences of their mentors. Perhaps, instead of individual schools being responsible for the training, a collective approach would involve the training of mentors at cluster centres.

Biggs further contends that reflective institutions engage in practices aimed at identifying and removing impediments to the quality of services they provide (Quality Feasibility). As revealed in this study,

mentoring schools experience challenges which could be detrimental to the quality of mentoring services and products. Biggs argues that mentoring schools need to shoulder the primary responsibility not only to identify the challenges but also finding solutions to the challenges. As pointed out by Selesho (2008), meaningful improvement of mentoring services starts with mentoring organisations themselves identifying and removing the weaknesses. It can be argued that a collegial culture is critical to the identification and removal of impediments to mentoring the mentoring schools. It is therefore important that the design of mentoring schools embodied an effective internal quality assurance system that would create a conducive environment for all internal stakeholders to participate in the activity.

Conclusion

This study sought to examine and understand the design features of mentoring school mentoring student teachers through the self-reflective practitioner lens. The findings have revealed that mentoring schools in the 1+1 IPTE programme were not Reflective Institutions or practitioners. In this regard it can be argued that mentoring schools did not have design features and practices aimed at maintain and enhancing the quality of their mentoring services. The lack of self reflective practices has the potential to negate the purposes for which the mentoring programme was designed. In this regard, the study recommends that mentoring schools should be redesigned to contain features of Reflective Institutions. To become Reflective Institutions, mentoring schools must be supported to develop a generic theory of mentoring (quality model) in their schools; develop a collegial culture with a particular focus on voluntary participation and staff development; and absorb the primary responsibility to identify and remove impediments to their mentoring services through the reflection in action and reflection on actions lens. This study therefore extends Biggs (2001) conceptual framework of Reflective Institution to include two additional antecedents: collegial culture in mentoring services and voluntary participation of practitioners. Whereas mentoring is pivotal to the quality of the student teachers, reflection in action and reflection on action by mentoring schools are critical ingredients to the value of mentoring. The

new design feature of mentoring schools as Reflective Institutions could have the potential to empower mentoring schools to provide mentoring services that are fit for purpose and fit of purpose.

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