



POLICY BRIEF

ENHANCING IN-SERVICE TEACHER MENTORSHIP AND SUPPORT IN ZAMBIA

Preamble

In the rapidly evolving educational landscape of Zambia, the empowerment and continuous development of its educators are paramount. This intensive baseline study dives deep into the multifaceted world of in-service teacher mentorship and professional development models in the nation. The findings provide a revealing lens into the dichotomy between existing structures and the evolving needs of educators. This brief not only delineates the core findings but also serves as a clarion call for policy architects to redesign and reinvigorate the teacher mentorship framework, ensuring it is contemporaneous, inclusive, and truly transformative.

Introduction

As the cornerstone of any nation's future, education has long been recognised as both a right and a requisite. However, the efficacy of an educational system lies not just in its curriculum, infrastructure, or student demographics, it is deeply rooted in the capabilities and support systems available to its educators and teacher mentorship and support is one of such services. Even though the "use of mentoring within teacher education has become more common in recent years, there still seems to be a lack of research about formal group mentorship models as a pedagogical process" (Eriksson, 2013). In Zambia, as teachers strive to mould the next generation, there is an urgent need to understand and strengthen the structures that support their own professional growth. This study emerges from this critical moment, seeking to unveil the successes and shortcomings of the current mentoring and support frameworks, and charting a path forward for a brighter educational future.

Methodology

Using a mixed-method approach, data was derived from primary and secondary sources, comprising interviews, online questionnaires, and FGDs, to ensure a holistic view of the prevailing systems and their effectiveness. The respondent included district educational leaders, secondary school headteachers, and teachers.

Findings and Discussion

A diversity of mentorship and support mechanisms exists within Zambia's educational landscape. However, the effectiveness and reception of these programmes are uneven, suggesting disparities in their intent, design, and perceived outcomes. The study reviewed the following themes in relation to the forms of teacher mentorship in Zambian secondary schools:

Formalised CPD

In its infancy, the CPD programme enjoyed significant traction among educators, primarily driven by the perception of its link to promotions. However, over time, momentum waned. Teachers felt that CPD's benefits in terms of promotions were overstated, and its repetitive content diminished its appeal. The disillusionment with CPD arose from a perceived bait-and-switch, the promise of promotion points that never materialised.

There is a clear need to revisit and reformulate CPD's objectives and content. Engaging educators in the creation of CPD content and the clear communication of its long-term benefits, including its role in promotions, could reignite interest.

Spontaneous-Funded Programmes

Initiated from the top, these programmes often failed to resonate with the realities and needs of educators on the ground. Often, a select few, typically Head of Departments (HoDs), were chosen for these programmes, with the expectation that knowledge would be cascaded down. This design overlooks the diverse needs of teachers and assumes a one-size-fits-all approach.

Such initiatives can benefit from a more democratic and inclusive design, involving teachers at all levels in the planning and execution stages to ensure that content is tailored to genuine needs.

Long-Term Fixed Intervention

Although programmes like IPEC and ZEEP are significant in terms of scope, they suffer from a perception issue. Many educators perceive them as top-driven initiatives, more concerned with monetary benefits than genuine mentorship and support. Such large-scale interventions, when not communicated effectively or tailored to the needs of the ground, can become alienated from their intended audience.

A dual approach of enhancing transparency and actively involving educators in the design and implementation of these programmes could bridge the current gap.

Self-Initiated Need-Driven Initiatives

Mostly observed in mission schools, these initiatives are marked by their response to immediate teaching challenges. They have found considerable success because of their grassroots nature and direct relevance. There is a strong case for identifying best practises from these grassroots initiatives and scaling them, providing similar benefits to a larger educator base.

Study Circle/ Supervised Prep/Support Associations

Existing in certain schools, these models harness the collective knowledge and expertise of peers. Through mutual aid and collaborative learning, they address teaching challenges. Peer-driven models inherently foster a culture of sharing, collaboration, and continuous learning. They are self-sustaining, drawing from the ever-evolving collective expertise. Recognising the value of these models, there is a compelling need to institutionalise and promote peer-driven learning mechanisms across schools, ensuring a more organic and continuous growth path for educators.

In summary, while there are a large number of mentoring and support mechanisms, their design, execution, and perception vary widely. There is a clear need for reforms that are more inclusive, transparent, and directly relevant to the teachers' ever-evolving needs.

Conclusions

As Zambia ventures into the ever-evolving educational landscape, it becomes imperative to realise that teachers, the pillars of this educational edifice, require robust mentorship and support systems. Our study has shed light on the various mechanisms in place, revealing both their strengths and the gaps in their design and implementation. For the nation to realise its educational aspirations, it is crucial to align these mechanisms with the actual needs and expectations of its educators.

Key Policy Strategies

- i. Reengineering CPD Programmes: Revitalising the CPD initiative by redefining its objectives and aligning them with the current needs of educators. Active participation of teachers in content curation, coupled with transparent communication regarding the benefits linked to the programme, will be vital.
- ii. Democratic Engagement in Spontaneous-Funded Programmes: Ensuring a more democratic approach that accommodates the diversified needs and inputs of all teachers in spontaneous funded programmes, discarding the one-size-fits-all approach.
- iii. Transparent and Collaborative Fixed Interventions: Embark on a transparency drive for long-term fixed interventions such as IPEC and ZEEP, promote inclusive participation, and adapt to the genuine needs and aspirations of the teaching community.
- iv. Scaling Grassroots Initiatives: Identifying and scaling the best practises of self-initiated, need-driven initiatives, leveraging their grassroots insight and direct relevance to shape a responsive mentorship framework.
- v. Promotion of Peer-Driven Learning Models: Institutionalising and promoting collaborative learning through study circles, support associations, and supervised preps, transforming schools into hubs of organic, peer-driven professional development.

Policy Implementation Enablers

- i. Stakeholder Engagement: Foster deep stakeholder engagement to ensure a bottom-up approach in the conceptualisation and implementation of policies, creating structures that are inherently democratic and responsive to the genuine needs of educators.
- ii. Communication and Transparency: Establish channels for clear and transparent communication that outline the objectives, processes, and benefits of mentorship programmes, dispelling myths, and fostering trust among educators.
- iii. Capacity Building: Enhancing the capacity of educators through regular training and workshops to ensure that they can take full advantage of mentoring and support initiatives.
- iv. Monitoring and Evaluation: Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation system that allows periodic evaluation of policies, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and responsiveness to emerging needs and challenges.
- v. Resource Allocation: Ensuring adequate resource allocation, including financial and human resources, to support the implementation and scaling of successful mentorship initiatives.

Bibliography

Eriksson, A. (2013). Positive and Negative Facets of Formal Group Mentoring: Preservice Teacher Perspectives. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 21(3), 272–291. Retrieved 10 20, 2023, from <https://tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13611267.2013.827834>

For more information on this brief please contact:

Mr. Davies Phiri

Email: davies.phiri@unza.zm

Mobile: +260 976 8773382

The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of IDRC or its Board of Governors



Canada 

