



Enhancing Self-Efficacy of Beginner Teachers in the Use of E-Portfolio: The Role of a Mentor Teacher

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ABSTRACT

The term “beginning teacher” describes those individuals who have less than one to three post qualification years in a teaching profession and or individuals who are entering the teaching profession directly from university. A need exists for a beginner teacher in their first year of teaching to have a mentor teacher that will assist them to improve their self-efficacy so that they can be able to achieve quality teaching and learning in any learning environment. Recent studies have shown that there is growing concern with beginner teachers’ self-efficacy on how to deal with and manage the realities of teaching in modern classrooms. A mentor teacher is a teacher who has a wealth of knowledge, learned from experience and is willing to share. The aim of this study was to investigate how the use of e-portfolio may enhance beginner teacher’s self-efficacy with support from their mentor teachers. The beginner teachers are faced with challenges in their first years of teaching; hence they need mentoring, support to improve their self-efficacy. An e-portfolio might be a means which can assist in monitoring and evaluating the professional activity of the beginner teachers, their achievements and develop them. E-portfolio provides openness and transparency when mentoring the teachers. Qualitative data were collected through focus group discussions with fifty-six (56) randomly selected Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students at a university of technology and thematic analysis was employed. Findings of this study indicated that beginner teachers needed guidance and support from their mentor teachers for beginner teachers to transform and build their self-efficacy positively and improve in their use of e-portfolio. The study recommends that induction support be used as an approach to improve novice teachers’ teaching performance and self-efficacy in the use of e-portfolio.

KEYWORDS

Self-efficacy; mentor teacher; beginner teacher; e-portfolio.

INTRODUCTION

Beginner teachers' personal beliefs are driven by their ambitions and behaviours about school. Ellis (2017) indicated that e-portfolio has become an increasingly e-portfolios are used by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as a tool to assess student's learning (Pegrum and Oakley, 2017). These portfolios enable students to showcase their potential to employer's Self- efficacy is a personal judgment of how well or poorly a person can cope with a given self-efficacy situation based on the skills they have and the circumstances they face (Bandura ,1986). The approach has two key determinants of behaviour are perceive self-efficacy and outcome expectancies. The approach also refers to how an individual perceived his or her positive and negative consequences of performing the behaviour. A beginner teacher's transition evolves from a teaching practice as a student teacher into a professional teacher into a teaching profession. When the teachers enter the world of teaching profession, certain changes bring shift into their lives, from the world of knowing about teaching through formal study to knowing how to teach and confront daily challenges and dealing with diverse learners in a multicultural setting.

Learning is becoming more adaptable, collaborating, and personalized. The educational system should have an open structure and practice-oriented content. Some authors have alluded that, e-portfolios are gaining position particularly in teacher education globally (Totter and Wyss, 2019; Boulton, 2014). e-portfolio is a means that covers the evidence from different sources, such as syllabus, student work samples, research reports, self-reflection, pedagogical skills, and creativity teaching and teacher development. An e-portfolio is becoming an important part of evaluating a beginner teacher's professional activity. Each of these teachers' beginner and veteran teachers, have their own way of delivering a subject content.

Mentoring is a crucial aspect of support for beginner teachers and has become the main form of teacher induction, it is the process of helping a new teacher in the workplace, through mutual support and trust. According to Crutcher and Naseem (2016) mentoring serves as an effective means in developing teaching efficacy for as well as professional pedagogical skills for future teachers. Qadhi, et al 2020 assert that unfavourable feeling of anxiety and isolation as well as lack of self-efficacy in beginner teachers is a result of lack of mentorship and induction. Crutcher and Naseem (2016) emphasised that, mentor teachers can improve their craft of teaching through self-reflection and reviewing their teaching to effectively assist the student teachers.

Purpose of the study

Each year, the beginner teachers are put into a classroom with different dynamics and challenges. At times they are not supported in their classrooms, so that they can familiarise themselves with these challenges. The first year of teaching is considered as one of the most difficult years in teaching, but the most important part. A novice-teacher, after graduating from a university, enters the world of professional teaching with the same responsibilities of more experienced teachers in the school. This study aimed to investigate how the use of e-portfolio may enhance self-efficacy of beginner teachers with the support of their mentor teachers.

Objectives of the study

The following are the objectives of this study:

- To establish how the mentor teacher assists beginner teachers to enhance their self-efficacy in the use of e-portfolio.
- To determine the role of the mentor teacher in supporting the beginner teacher.

Research questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

- How does the mentor teacher assist the beginner teachers to enhance their self-efficacy in the use of e-portfolio?
- What is the role of the mentor teacher in supporting the beginner teacher?

THE REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Mentor teachers have a significant role in developing the skills and abilities of others by engaging in an effective and positive relationship. Mathipa and Matlabe (2016) indicated that, motivation is a “key to the mentoring process” (2016). The need for mentor teachers in any school is very imperative because their role is to assist the beginner teachers in building their self-efficacy. Sayeski and Paulsen, (2012) assert that the beginner teachers often find it difficult to transfer pre-service knowledge to the workplace, needing somebody to answer their questions, feeling inadequately trained, and requiring emotional support and direction for their career. All these challenges are the cause of low efficacy and high turnover for beginner teachers. Qadhi, et al (2020) assert that lack of induction and mentorship also leads to lack of self-efficacy and anxiety on the part of novice teachers. Belgard (2013) and Garrett (2011) identified the following as some of the advantages related to the use of e-portfolios in teacher education programmes: reflective teaching skills, enhancement of lifelong learning, positive attitudes, and an increase in pedagogical and technical content knowledge, beliefs, and values.

Rhodes (2011, p. 7) define e-portfolios as “the biggest thing in technology innovation on campus. The author also stated that, e-portfolios have a greater potential to modify the higher education at its very core than any other technology application we have known thus far.” Joys, Gray, and Hartnell-Young (2008) as well as Garrett (2011) refer to the e-portfolio as creation made by the learner (beginner teacher), which comprises an assortment of digital items articulating experiences, achievements, and learning, ideas, evidence, reflections, feedback, etc., which is characteristic of a particular classroom (Garrett, 2011)

The Role of The Mentor Teacher in Mentoring the Beginner Teacher

As indicated below, the role of the mentor is considered more diverse and is located within diverse conceptual paradigms. Ragins and Kram (2007) note that, mentorship is a multifaceted and complex process. Mathipa and Matlabe (2016) posit that mentor’s relationship with mentee based amongst others on trust, mutual respect and understanding offer extrinsic motivation which ignites the mentee’s interest as well as intrinsic motivation. Some scholars indicated that, successful mentors display certain attributes to the mentees (Botha & Hugo, 2021; Janković, et

al., 2016; Tsoetsi & Mile, 2021). Such qualities that a mentor need to display include to be sincere friend, discrete adviser, emphatic, a person who gives energy, a guide, mediator, and someone to rely on. A mentor teacher is an inspiring person who is ready to assist the beginner teachers and always a discrete trustful person. Mentors can assist beginner teachers in various ways, they need to assist beginner teachers to adapt to the school culture, school climate and on how to deliver a content subject in a multicultural classroom, teaching strategies and communication skills.

Having a mentor teacher implies that, there is someone who will supervise, support you and your work also guide you in terms of curriculum, and assist on improving your teaching skills. A mentor teacher is required to provide more effective school-based support for beginning teachers, they need to understand the needs and challenges of the beginner teachers they will encounter in their classroom in their first year of teaching. Research also revealed that ongoing dialogical opportunities, electronic forums, and collaboration among the student teachers often results in good classroom relationships. (Engin 2013; Arslam 2014; Groom & Maunonen-Eskelinen 2006; Xu 2003).

The Role of The Mentor Teacher in Supporting the Beginner Teacher

DeAngelis et al (2013) assert that a comprehensive support and mentoring provided to beginner teachers assists in mitigating a desire to leave teaching after the first year. Whereas Radford (2017) emphasised that the role of a mentor “need to be reflective practitioners, know how to facilitate adult learning, as well as observe and provide feedback”, some mentors seem not to be clear about the role they are expected to play. Hanna (2020) asserted that attrition can be dropped to 28% if there is a consistent mentor who supports, inducts beginner teachers in the same subject area with regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers on instructional issues. The more positive contact time spent per month with mentors the more likelihood that beginner teachers would return the following year to teach in the same school compared to those who did not receive similar support (Parker, 2010). Mentoring according to Ingersoll and Strong (2011) is the personal direction provided, usually by experienced persons, to novice teachers in schools. Faucette and Nugent (2017) state that mentors can assist novice teachers to develop their essential skills and confidence in their abilities. Zachary (2012) indicated that the mentoring process need to include the “mentor and mentee to work together to achieve specific, mutually defined goals that focus on developing the mentee’s skills, abilities, knowledge, and thinking, it is in every way a learning partnership”.

Enhancing Self-Efficacy of Beginner Teacher Using E-Portfolio.

Literature shows that the use of the e-portfolio stimulates self-efficacy on the part of beginning teachers. Bergil and Sariçoban, (2017) assert that “students who use e-portfolios tend to present higher levels of self-efficacy and that there is an overlap between student’s self-reported competence in the portfolio and self-efficacy”. E-portfolios are evidence-based approach and making documents as “lived learning experiences” by beginner teachers enrolled in teacher education programmes (Quinlan, 2002; Wang, 2009). Through E-portfolios, beginner teachers

can assess their progress regarding academic achievement and personal growth (Arslam ;2014). According to van Schalkwyk, Leibowitz, Herman, and Farmer (2015) in case study research at eight South African higher education institutions (HEIs) that e-portfolio is used as an enabling means in teacher education programmes, and as a reflection tool to improve the professional learning of academics as teachers. Boulton (2014) indicates that the e-portfolio is an evidence-based strategy presently in use at most teacher education programmes at HEIs around the world. In these HEIs, e-portfolio is used as an alternative assessment means for beginner teacher empowerment.

METHOD

This is an exploratory case study. The theoretical framework that supported this study is the Social Cognitive Theory and adaptive leadership theory. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) stipulates that the environment and people influence each other through behaviour also that an environment provides models for behavior. Bandura (1997) enlarged the understanding of social cognitive theory by acknowledging the importance of self-efficacy. The scholar asserts that individuals with self –efficacy have a belief in their ability to succeed in their goals. Bandura (1997) further states that learning occurs in a social context with reciprocal interaction of the person, dynamic environment, and behavior. SCT, used in education, communication and psychology is directly related to observing social interactions and experiences of others outside media influences of others. This approach enabled the researchers to investigate how the use of e-portfolio could enhance beginner teacher’s self-efficacy as well as the role played by mentor teachers in the process. Participants were fifty-six (56) randomly selected PGCE students enrolled at a university of technology comprised of 26 males and 30 females, ranging from 26 to 35 years of age. Data were collected through focus group discussions and participation was voluntary. A focus group schedule was used to guide the discussions. All participants were informed that confidentiality will be maintained about the collected information and that their names will not be mentioned. The researchers each participant an alphabet instead of a name.

FINDINGS

Pre-service teachers shared their thought regarding the support they receive from their mentor teachers, for them to improve their self- efficacy, competency, and professional growth, in University Technology. Participants reported their understanding about the mentor and mentee relationship. Two research questions guided this study, and themes emerged from the data analysis.

Research Question 1: How does a mentor teacher assist the beginner teacher to enhance their self- efficacy in the use of e-portfolio?

A mentor is a wise and knowledgeable teacher who guides a beginner teacher / a novice teacher on a journey into a certain profession. But the most important role of a mentor is to build a professional relationship that encourages continuous support a professional identity of their mentees. The research question was answered through the analysis of qualitative data gathered

through a focus group interview with the PGCE student teachers. Themes that emerged from this research question included Personal growth, teaching skills and communication skills.

Professional growth, teaching skills and communication skills

The PGCE students hold their mentor teachers highly and being valuable. Their responses affirm that, the assistance they received from their mentor teachers is very essential to them.

Student B stated that, *“some students indicated that, they have grown personal, because they were able to manage their classrooms better with the support of their mentors”*.

Student E indicated that, *“we had no clue on how to compile a lesson plan, until we have this mentor who advised us on how to compile our lesson, to compile a class activity with a memo for our learners.”*

Student G further noted that, *“I initially had no clue on what to include in my e-portfolio, I thought that having to include what I did during teaching practice, was the waste of time. It was until my mentor explained to me as to why I need an e-portfolio that it made sense”*.

Mentoring is a complex, process that include two or more people who have different levels of expertise as well as experience, where the mentor gives support to enable the mentee to be more competent in their work. Carmin, 1988, as cited in Hester and Setzer (2013) states that the goal of mentoring process is professional development and career advancement. The participants further noted that, with their mentor teachers assist them on how to handle their students and to communicate with them.

Therefore, mentor teachers are of important in supporting and assisting the beginner teachers to improve their self-efficacy, skills in managing the classroom and improve their professional development in the use of e-portfolio and in their teaching profession. Eyron and Gambino (2017) also point out that when implemented correctly, the use of e-portfolio can benefit the students in numerous ways.

Research Question 2: What is the role of the mentor teacher in supporting the beginner teacher?

The participants cited the role of a mentor teacher through the following themes from this research questions, they ally their fears, positive reinforcement and they improve their self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy

Learning to teach is developmental process that a new teacher must go through to be equipped for the teaching profession Okeke et al (2016). The students noted that they receive valuable support from their mentor teachers.

Student A quoted verbatim indicated that *“from my first day of their teaching practice, it was so hard for me not knowing what to expect but my mentor teacher was so supportive and inducting me to all the classes I needed to go to and on how to improve our teaching skills”*.

According to Student D: *“It was difficult for initially as I did not know what to expect but my mentor was so supportive, from induction to classroom management”*.

Student H indicated that: “*the support from my mentor made me improve my confidence while standing in front of the learners, because as a teacher without confidence teaching and learning won’t be productive*”.

With all the support from the mentor teachers concerned, thus arises also data’s indication that student teachers need support, so that they can improve their competencies in using e-portfolio, to manage the classroom and to possess good communication skills.

Student A indicated that “*the mentor teachers can display the same attitude of assisting and supporting us in our first year of teaching, so that we can be good and gain knowledge in what we do, build a good relationship with their mentee, surely teaching and learning will improve.*”

The support that the student teachers receive from their mentor teachers gives them the sense of belonging and adapting easy in the culture of the school. Their self-efficacy and their fears are allayed and promote positive reinforcement. And most importantly, they assist them with the learning material and preparing their lesson plan for their teaching and learning. Human accomplishment and personal well-being are usually promoted through a strong sense of self-efficacy. As a result, a person with high self-efficacy often views challenges as opportunities rather than threats to avoid. Challenging and threatening situations are perceived and believed by such a person to be controllable. Self- efficacy has four sources, and they are social persuasion, performance accomplishments, indirect experience, and physiological and emotional states.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the self-efficacy of beginner teachers in the use of e-portfolio and the role of the mentor teachers in supporting the beginner teachers to accomplish their competencies in the teaching profession. The focus was to identify mentor teachers’ contribution in improving the beginner teachers’ self-efficacy.

The results of this study revealed that the e-portfolio for beginner teachers demonstrate their knowledge, skills and attitude when compiling specific artefacts for a portfolio. The participants indicated that e-portfolios assists them in terms of developing skills and on how to reflect on their work as also to check whether they have achieved their intended objectives in their teaching and learning. In cases where objectives are not achieved, they indicated that there a need to reflect and bring in new strategies. Arslam (2014) asserts that e-Portfolios are critical tools in overseeing each student’s academic progress. They also assist to manage progress as well as performance of an education system.

The results also indicated that the e-portfolio is an integrated part of personal growth, so that the beginner teachers can be able to achieve objectives, to mention a few, improving and acknowledging measurable standards, developing personal growth plans; as well as developing self-efficacy. Professional growth will assist the beginner teacher, in terms of their well-being, knowledge, skills, instructional practices. There are numerous advantages associated with the use of ePortfolios in teacher education programmes, such as enhancing

lifelong learning, reflective teaching skills and increasing technical and pedagogical content knowledge, beliefs, values, and positive attitudes (Belgard, 2013; Boulton, 2014 and Oakley, Pegrum and Johnson, 2014).

Participants were unanimous in how the support, motivation and encouragement from their mentor teachers enabled them to navigate during teaching practice. The mentor teacher's overall role is to nurture the development of the beginner teacher; to ensure the beginner teacher provides a solid advancement of student learning in the classroom. According to Radford (2017) a mentor needs to facilitate learning, reflect, observe and be able to provide feedback. Participants indicated that the mentor teachers who were assigned to them at schools during teaching practice assisted them to familiarize themselves within the school context, they also inducted and gave them support in terms of content delivery and classroom management. They also highlighted and shared some experiences they encountered such as handling a disruptive classroom like expert teachers, as well as teaching a diverse classroom.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that, the beginner teachers need to be mentored to improve their self -efficacy. With the support and guidance of their mentor teachers, the beginner teachers might improve their self-efficacy and be able to use their e-portfolio appropriately. As an alternative assessment strategy in student teacher enablement, ePortfolios may be used as a pedagogy and integrated technology and approach. The HEIs and teacher education faculties should employ the worth of the inclusion of ePortfolios as part of the teaching practice/ Work integrated Learning (WiL) requirement.

Recommendations

The mentor teacher should at least be assigned to the beginner teacher for a period of two years, to induct, guide and evaluate the progress of the beginner teacher. They need to understand their importance of being a mentor to the beginner teacher, their importance is to build a solid bond with their mentees, to enable them to grow in the field of teaching profession.

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