IDENTIFYING MENTOR TEACHERS' ROLES AND PERCEPTIONS IN PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' TEACHING PRACTICUM: THE USE OF A MENTORING MODEL

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ABSTRACT

Mentor teachers need to play and perform their roles constantly when mentoring pre-service teachers in teaching practicum. Despite the plentiful literature on teaching practicum in the Malaysian context, research on mentor teachers' roles played is still sparse. This research thus sets to investigate the roles played by the mentor teachers and explore their perceptions of the roles played. To investigate the roles played and explore the perceptions of roles by the mentor teachers, a sequential explanatory mixed-method design was used. A Five Factor Mentoring Model was employed and we recruited 124 mentor teachers using snowballing technique to fill in a questionnaire with seven mentor teachers to partake an interview. Findings show that the mentor teachers perceive themselves as playing their roles to a great extent and believe they have contributed greatly when mentoring pre-service teachers. While results are positive, further research is required to compare the responses between pre-service teachers and mentor teachers to determine the extent of truth on the roles played.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes and enriches the existing literature of mentoring pre-service teachers during their teaching practicum. Pre-service teachers get to experience professional development when mentoring roles are articulated and informed to mentor teachers. The study emphasized the necessity of all mentoring roles as a key to aid pre-service teachers to go through teaching practicum in the Malaysian context.

1. INTRODUCTION

As a pre-service teacher adventures into teaching practicum, albeit being a new teacher in the field of education the teacher is still regarded and treated similarly as a professional, veteran teacher in the school (Ado, 2016; Allen, Ambrosetti, & Turner, 2013; Goh & Matthews, 2011). Like any other in-service teachers, effective and sound contributions must be made by pre-service teachers in classrooms from the first day of teaching onwards (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). As pre-service teachers continue to apply their pedagogical knowledge and theories learned into authentic and real classrooms (Gan, 2013; Goh & Matthews, 2011; Melor, Harwati, Noriah, & Zamri, 2010), it is important to measure how meaningful and significant the teaching practicum is in developing the pre-service teachers' professionalism and the extent to which teachers can be boosted with the involvement of mentor teachers (Galamay-Cachola, Aduca, & Calauagan, 2018; Hudson, 2010; Hudson, 2013; Sami, Mustafa, & Mohd, 2013).

Ample literature about teaching practicum is available in Malaysia across the past decade, specifically on the challenges faced by pre-service teachers when attending teaching practicum (see (Goh & Matthews, 2011; Goh & Blake, 2015; Leong, Chew, & Suzieleez, 2015; Lokman et al., 2014; Taghreed & Mohd, 2017; Tee et al., 2015)). The challenges commonly faced by pre-service teachers are related to classroom management, school environment, and teaching pedagogy (Goh & Matthews, 2011; Leong et al., 2015; Lokman et al., 2014; Taghreed & Mohd, 2017). Due to the abundance of challenges present in the teaching practicum, Tee et al. (2015) highlight that there is an increasing and alarming rate of recent graduate teachers leaving the profession upon obtaining their verifications to teach in schools. This should not be treated lightly as fresh, graduate teachers from teacher education programs are needed to fill in the gap and replenish the teacher population in the country (Manasia, Ianos, & Chicioreanu, 2019).

What remains unknown is the role of mentor teachers in aiding the pre-service teachers to go through the challenges. There is little or no mention of these teachers in the available literature. This is supported by Marciano et al. (2019) as they claim that it is not possible to observe at all times the mentoring process that occurs in schools. The problem becomes severe as recent research that shows the involvement of mentor teachers in pre-service teachers' teaching practicum in the Malaysian context have portrayed them negatively. As mentor teachers, they are found to be excessively strict (Goh & Matthews, 2011), neglected and failed to perform their duties (Melor et al., 2010; Taghreed & Mohd, 2017) and barely initiated communications (Melor et al., 2010).

Therefore, by addressing the aforementioned problems, we aim to provide and enrich the literature on the mentoring roles in teaching practicum in the Malaysian context, in this study we investigate the mentor teachers' roles played when mentoring pre-service teachers in teaching practicum and explore the mentor teachers' perceptions of their roles played as they mentor the pre-service teachers. Deploying a previously validated and reliability tested questionnaire from Galamay-Cachola et al. (2018) has enabled us to shed light on the roles played by mentor teachers and their opinions to the roles.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

While the term 'role' is defined as a person's or thing's position and purpose in a given environment (Cambridge University Press, 2020), in the context of mentoring pre-service teachers, mentor teachers have roles to play and the term role can be understood as any activity initiated to empower and improve a pre-service teacher's competency and maturity professionally through sharing knowledge and skills (Gordon, 2019; Hudson, Hudson, Gray, & Bloxham, 2013). As for the term 'mentoring', in the teaching practicum context, it refers to an experienced, in-service teacher from the school to facilitate and provide mentoring for the new and inexperienced, pre-service teachers (Gordon, 2019; Hudson, 2013; Hudson et al., 2013).

Mentoring practices have benefits that are gradually recognized by many scholars in the field of teacher education over the past two decades (Hudson, Uşak, & Savran-Gencer, 2010) as the roles from mentor teachers are beneficial in bringing potential educational reforms along with catalyzing to provide a renewal of teachers in schools dedicated and confident in educating generations to come (Hudson, 2013; Hyde, 2019; Smolik, 2010). To the pre-service teachers, in particular, teaching practicum serves as the catalyst itself for these teachers to develop better pedagogical knowledge and strategies in classrooms. However, these can be boosted with the guidance from mentor teachers (Sempowicz & Hudson, 2012) as they can help bridge the pre-service teachers' knowledge and theories of teaching effectively to real, authentic classroom practices (Hudson, 2013). Gordon (2019) states that having in-service teachers from schools to act as mentor teachers can "gently nudge them [pre-service teachers] forward in their practice" (p.19). Findings from Hudson et al. (2010) even stated that pre-service teachers expressed desires to be mentored by mentor teachers as they were confident that the mentor teachers could help them in overcoming their anxiety, fears, and problems faced in teaching practicum.

In fact, during the mentoring process, the mentor teachers get to benefit from it as well (Gordon, 2019). As mentoring occurs, the process is not unidirectional but rather a reciprocal one, which simply means that while the

pre-service teachers get to benefit from the mentoring in schools, the mentor teachers who are mentoring pre-service teachers get to benefit from the process itself as well (Hudson et al., 2013; Hyde, 2019). Hyde (2019) has pointed out that the benefits mentor teachers can receive through mentoring pre-service teachers are in the following areas: "professional competency, reflective practice, renewal, elevated sense of self, appreciation of collegial interaction and leadership skills" (p.19). However, as the study looked into the roles played by mentor teachers in mentoring pre-service teachers, we did not look into the benefits that the mentor teachers experienced in pre-service teachers' teaching practicum.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

A model known as the five factor mentoring model previously conceptualized and tested rigorously on mentor teachers' roles was founded by Peter Hudson (Hudson, 2013; Hyde, 2019; Sempowicz & Hudson, 2012; Smolik, 2010). This model is developed to inform the roles needed to play by mentor teachers for effective mentoring to occur, conducting meaningful and purposeful mentoring, and benchmarking the mentoring practices in teaching practicum (Gordon, 2019; Hudson, 2013; Hyde, 2019; Smolik, 2010).

While there are many available mentoring models available in the literature of mentoring, this particular model is used as it addresses specifically to the roles of mentor teachers in pre-service teachers (Hudson, 2013; Hyde, 2019). Unlike other available mentoring models, Hudson's five factor mentoring model enables us to look and understand good mentoring practices in teaching practicum simultaneously and use this model as a foundation to the theoretical framework (Hudson, 2010; Hudson, 2013; Hudson, 2013; Smolik, 2010). In this model, it comprises five factors that assert mentor teachers should have for effective mentoring to occur in pre-service teachers' practicum (Hudson, 2013; Sempowicz & Hudson, 2012; Smolik, 2010). These five factors are described by Hudson (2010) as follows:

- **Personal Attributes**. Mentor teachers should show appropriate, proper, and suitable personal and interpersonal skills to the pre-service teachers.
- **System Requirements**. Mentor teachers should demonstrate an understanding of the country's educational policy, system, and requirements.
- **Pedagogical Knowledge**. Mentor teachers should translate effective knowledge and strategies from their reservoir to help pre-service teachers conduct lessons.
- **Modelling**. Mentor teachers should show and model their thoughts and opinions shared in discussions with pre-service teachers and give them opportunities to practice.
- **Feedback**. Mentor teachers should provide constructive and positive criticism to the pre-service teachers after conducting observations.

These factors come with their implications which greatly affect the pre-service teachers' development in teaching practicum. First, mentor teachers who portray great personal and interpersonal skills when mentoring pre-service teachers such as being attentive, encouraging, enthusiastic, responsible, supportive, and voluntary significantly increase the relationship and rapport between both parties, subsequently boosting the mentoring processes (Hudson et al., 2010; Hudson, 2013; Hyde, 2019; Smolik, 2010). When a mentor teacher informs the country and school's educational policies and systems to the pre-service teachers, they would understand how schools function and are able to conform to these policies and systems while follow the necessary procedures throughout (Hudson, 2010; Hyde, 2019).

Further, with pedagogical knowledge translated and informed to the pre-service teachers, they are able to expand their pedagogical reservoir, conduct effective lessons and activities (Hudson, 2010; Hudson, 2013; Hyde, 2019; Smolik, 2010). From these pedagogical knowledge, as a mentor teacher models good behaviours and practices, pre-service teachers get to observe and put these behaviours and practices into classroom teaching as well (Hudson, 2010; Hudson... 2013; Hyde, 2019). Finally, after pre-service teachers conduct lessons, feedback from the mentor

teachers enables pre-service teachers to be more confident in their teaching practices and engage in reflective teaching to improve their existing teaching proficiency (Hudson, 2010; Hyde, 2019; Sempowicz & Hudson, 2012).

We see this model as an important model to help enrich the literature in mentoring pre-service teachers in the Malaysian context. Such model comes with a great significance where it helps determine how mentoring has impacted the pre-service teachers in teacher education programs enrolled and understand the experiences these pre-service teachers have gone through (Smolik, 2010). By putting this model in studying mentor teachers' roles in teaching practicum, we are enlightened by educational parties such as higher education institutes and schools to be aware of the state of mentoring and provide necessary help to overcome the problems or shortcomings faced in pre-service teachers' teaching practicum (Hudson et al., 2010; Hudson, 2013). Finally, through this model, we get to understand the quality of the mentoring presented in the teaching practicum, which can be presented to relevant authorities to take further actions in improving the current state of mentoring quality (Sempowicz & Hudson, 2012).

3. METHODOLOGY

A sequential explanatory mixed-method research design was employed in this study. Such research design involves conducting a quantitative inquiry first and is then followed by a qualitative inquiry, which is used to help explain the quantitative findings (Bullock, 2017). Based on the research objectives established, in the quantitative inquiry, it served to investigate the roles played by mentor teachers using an adapted questionnaire, the qualitative inquiry was then followed through the use of telephone interviews which were then transcribed for analyses.

3.1. Sampling Methods

The snowball sampling method was used to recruit mentor teachers in achieving the study. As a widely used sampling method in various fields such as behavioral, biomedical, and social fields, it involves recruiting participants with one referring the other that belongs to the population interested by the researcher (Johnson, 2014). As this method involves referring to participants that best meet the criteria of a study (Johnson, 2014), it is arguably suitable amidst the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure minimum interaction between us and the mentor teachers. We had contacted a few teachers from schools and identified them as mentor teachers, which served as the inclusion criteria. Then, they received the questionnaire and were asked to distribute the questionnaire to other mentor teachers that they knew. The inclusion criteria ensured that the participants recruited possessed the necessary key features, were consistent, and able to provide sound findings to the research (Garg, 2016; Patino & Ferreira, 2018). This was to further strengthen the quality of the sampling method as it did not involve any teachers to participate in the research. Only a specific group of teachers were recruited.

3.2. Research Instruments

A questionnaire adapted from Galamay-Cachola et al. (2018) was used with permission. It comprised 24 questions on roles constructed, based on Hudson's Five Factor Mentoring Model with a previously recorded reliability of .956. Galamay-Cachola et al. (2018) had previously constructed two versions of the questionnaire addressing two different parties: Mentor teachers and pre-service teachers respectively with pronouns in the Philippine context. In the adapted questionnaire, the roles of the mentor teachers were tested using a 4-point Likert scale, with 1 as Strongly Disagree and 4 Strongly Agree. The questionnaire was distributed using Google Forms, a part of online survey tool that provided convenience, cost-effective usage, and flexibility and generated massive data in exploring and investigating human behavior (Ball, 2019; Wieters, 2016). In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it was decided that online survey tools would be the best tool in overcoming the barrier to gather data (Arafat, Alradie-Mohamed, Kar, Sharma, & Kabir, 2020). The data collection process was similar to Zhang and Ma

(2020) where they had recruited China participants to study the quality of life amidst the pandemic using snowballing and an online survey tool.

Telephone interviews were conducted to gather the mentor teachers' perceptions of their roles played when mentoring the pre-service teachers. While interviews could be conducted on various online platforms, telephone interviews in qualitative research come with its advantages. They are often time and cost-effective, dynamic relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is achievable, and the interviewees are much more honest with the responses as their identities can be remained anonymous (Drabble, Trocki, Salcedo, Walker, & Korcha, 2015).

3.3. Pilot Study

A pilot study was carried out to determine the validity and reliability of the constructs of the questionnaire adapted. The pilot test was conducted based on 30 mentor teachers' responses in the questionnaire distributed. A total of 30 respondents were needed as it would be sufficient in determining the validity and reliability of a research instrument (In, 2017). In determining the validity of the questionnaire, the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used with an oblique rotation. EFA is a statistical technique used for data reduction and dimension identification by summarizing essential information based on the reduction of many variables available into sets of underlying factors (Hadi, Abdullah, & Sentosa, 2016; Yu & Richardson, 2015; Zulkepli, Sipan, & Jibril, 2017).

From the results, the KMO value was found to be at .69 which was higher than the recommended threshold, .05 (Hadi et al., 2016; Yu & Richardson, 2015) and Bartlett's test of sphericity had a value of 931.9 with a significant value of .00, which meant that the factor analysis was suitable, and variables had a strong relationship where no identity matrix occurred (Hadi et al., 2016). All five factors identified which were the system requirements, pedagogical knowledge, modelling, and feedback were used to determine the pattern of the personal attributes factor.

A reliability test on the questionnaire was conducted by determining its Cronbach alpha in SPSS, in which values that were accepted as reliable must lie between .70 and .90 (Valim, Marziale, Hayashida, Rocha, & Santos, 2015). Based on the Cronbach alpha calculated in SPSS, the value was .82, clearly indicating the questionnaire was reliable as previously validated by Galamay-Cachola et al. (2018). Along with the confirmation of validity performed using EFA, the questionnaire was sound and suitable for the research.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

A group of in-service teachers were identified from three schools across Malaysia, summing up to 546 in-service teachers. They were invited to partake in a questionnaire administered with their consent. They were encouraged to share the questionnaire with other colleagues who must be mentor teachers. All responses obtained were recorded in Google Spreadsheets, which were downloaded and further recorded in SPSS ver. 25. Descriptive analysis was conducted to determine the extent of roles played by the mentor teachers, and 4-point Likert scale was used for data interpretationGalamay-Cachola et al. (2018) . The interpretation was as follows: Not at all (1.00-1.49), little extent (1.50-2.49), moderate extent (2.50-3.49), and great extent (3.50-4.00).

Before conducting the interview, we had contacted schools to obtain the contacts of the mentor teachers. The interviews conducted were recorded using the **Mobizen Screen Recorder**, an application available in Google Play after consent was sought from the mentor teachers. The recorded interviews were **transcribed in Microsoft Word** and coding was used to analyze the transcriptions. In qualitative research, coding refers to the conceptualization of data to generate incidences that help to achieve the objectives (Kaiser & Presmeg, 2019). During the coding process, various functions such as highlighting, drawing lines, and numbering were used to generate the respective themes.

4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

From the 546 in-service teachers invited from three schools to participate in the questionnaire, only 202 responses were recorded in the Google Spreadsheets. n Among these responses, some were rejected for not providing their consent or that they were not mentor teachers. The final total of 124 mentor teachers' responses were recorded in Google Spreadsheets. The responses were then keyed into SPSS for descriptive analysis. Table 1 shows the years of teaching experiences and years of mentoring pre-service teachers among the responses analyzed.

Table-1. Years of Teaching and Mentoring Experiences.

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Years of Teaching	3	40	17.39
Years of Mentoring	1	13	4.14

Among the mentor teachers' responses, the minimum years of teaching experience recorded were at least three years and at least one mentor teacher had a teaching experience of 40 years; there was at least one year of experience in mentoring pre-service teachers and the highest number of pre-service teachers mentored by a mentor teacher was 13. All the mentor teachers had at least mentored one pre-service teacher in their teaching career.

To determine the extent of roles played, the questionnaire was analysed based on the five factors, personal attributes, system requirements, pedagogical knowledge, modelling, and feedback respectively. The means for each factor were generated and interpretation based on the interpretation provided by Galamay-Cachola et al. (2018). Table 2 displays the mean and the interpretation of each factor.

Table-2. Mean and the Extent of Roles Played in each Factor.

Factor	Mean	Interpretation
Personal Attributes	3.57	Great extent
System Requirements	3.17	Moderate extent
Pedagogical Knowledge	3.36	Moderate extent
Modelling	3.47	Moderate extent
Feedback	3.58	Great extent

The roles that were played to a great extent were the personal attributes (3.57) and feedback factor (3.58) having the highest mean. The remaining factors were interpreted as roles played to a moderate extent only as all three of them had means lower than 3.50, with the lowest mean recorded was for the system requirements factor (3.17). However, when compared to the findings obtained from Galamay-Cachola et al. (2018) study on the extent of roles mentor teachers played, there was some obvious difference in the means. Table 3 shows the comparison of means between the present study and that of Galamay-Cachola et al. (2018) and the corresponding differences.

Table-3. Comparison of Means between Both Studies.

Factors	Present Study	Galamay-Cachola et al.	Difference of Means
Personal Attributes	3.57 (Great extent)	3.83 (Great extent)	0.26
System Requirements	3.17 (Moderate extent)	3.47 (Moderate extent)	0.30
Pedagogical Knowledge	3.36 (Moderate extent)	3.69 (Great extent)	0.33
Modelling	3.47 (Moderate extent)	3.84 (Great extent)	0.37
Feedback	3.58 (Great extent)	3.74 (Great extent)	0.16

Unlike the present study which had two factors interpreted as roles played to a great extent (personal attributes and feedback), findings from Galamay-Cachola et al. (2018) showed that except the system requirements factor, the remaining factors, totaling up to four factors had means interpreted as a great extent. Additionally, the means were significantly different when both studies were compared, with the least difference of .16 from the feedback factor and the biggest difference of .37 in the modelling factor. As the roles of personal attributes were interpreted to a great extent in this study, it matches with Hudson (2010) explanation where he emphasized that mentor teachers' personal attributes are an important factor in developing a good relationship between them and the pre-service teachers. This leads to better mentoring processes and, as Hyde (2019) points out, an effective mentoring will occur. Smolik (2010) has added that mentor teachers' personal attributes enable pre-service teachers to develop their confidence. It thus can be inferred that such results could be because mentor teachers played their personal attributes' roles to a great extent.

The feedback factor has been interpreted as a great extent as well, which can be further interpreted to infer that mentor teachers are playing their roles to help the pre-service teachers to improve their pedagogical practices in schools. Regardless of written or oral feedback, mentor teachers' feedback is meant to articulate critical and useful comments on the observations conducted on pre-service teachers (Smolik, 2010). The pre-service teachers are simultaneously allowed to reflect on their teaching practices and have their practices improved over time (Sempowicz & Hudson, 2012).

A total of seven mentor teachers were recruited for the interview sessions to explore their perceptions about the roles played in mentoring pre-service teachers. These mentor teachers were assigned corresponding pseudonyms to ensure the ethical concern is addressed. At the end of the interview sessions, seven transcriptions were made using Microsoft Word and open coding was done to categorize and compare the data which Kaiser & Presmeg, (2019) explained that such processes should be followed to achieve the research objectives. Content analysis was conducted to review, revise, and finalize the connections made during the open coding to generate themes (Drabble, Trocki, Salcedo, Walker, & Korcha, 2015; Kaiser & Presmeg, 2019). At the end of the content analysis, saturation of data occurred and a total of five themes were obtained. While it remains debatable the extent of saturation, there was currently no clear cut definition of saturation in interviews (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Conventionally, a saturation of data is achieved when there are no identifiable, new themes that can be located during the coding process occurred (Saunders et al., 2018). In this case, no further themes were identified when the researchers come to a consensus (Drabble, Trocki, Salcedo, Walker, & Korcha, 2015). The five themes were discussed in the following as the interview responses helped in explaining the quantitative findings that occurred.

4.1. A Good Relationship with the Pre-Service Teachers

All seven mentor teachers expressed the relationship between themselves and the pre-service teachers as good, ("good" (bold and italicized) is repeatedly used in their responses. However, their definition of good is further interpreted through their justifications.

> I believe our relationship has been a ***good*** one. We tend to share our teaching experiences together and I see myself as an approachable mentor [teacher], at least from my point of view. So, I believe [I] have established a good relationship with her [pre-service teacher] (TM1, lines 16-23).

TM1 believes her relationship with her pre-service teacher is good as she sees herself as an approachable person and they often interact by sharing their teaching experiences.

> In my first interaction with the pre-service teacher, I would try to establish a good relationship with him [pre-service teacher] where we will talk together for a while [at] first. This is where we get to know each other, understand which university he is [pre-service teacher] from. That way, he feels comfortable when we get to interact because our relationship will affect us for the next few weeks. So I believe my last experience with him [pre-service teacher] is a ***good*** one (TM5, lines 11-7).

TM5 approaches the pre-service teacher by talking to establish a good relationship, he takes a much more personal approach by having both sides to understand each other in terms of their background.

> I think our relationship is **good** actually. I am friend with them but at the same time, I'm also [a] stern person. I believe that the relationship between us should not [be] only one way but rather a two-way communication, because I think some [pre-service teachers] might be afraid of us mentors [mentor teachers] so I try to be friendly with them. They still need to count on us to help them throughout (TM4, lines 20-24).

From her point of view, TM4 believes a good relationship would occur if there is two-way communication between herself and the pre-service teacher. To her, the extent of good relationship involves her being friendly and stern at the same time and she acknowledges that pre-service teachers may be afraid of interacting with the mentor teachers.

The three responses have shown that the mentor teachers interact the pre-service teachers with their methods, as TM1 interacts by sharing her teaching experiences, TM4 believes in two-way communication while being friendly and stern at the same time, and TM5 tries to have each other understand some personal background. Concerning the literature, interestingly, TM4's acknowledgement of pre-service teachers being afraid to communicate with mentor teachers is a reflection and an agreement of Goh and Matthews (2011) findings as they found that pre-service teachers were anxious to communicate with their mentor teachers because they perceived these mentor teachers as strict figures.

TM5's beliefs in two-way communication help reassure pre-service teachers that she is a friendly person, which reduces their concerns. In the current state of mentoring pre-service teachers, Hyde (2019) states that mentoring is no longer a unidirectional type but rather, a reciprocal one involving continuous interaction from both sides. Hudson (2010) and Gordon (2019) have also stated that one such part of mentor teachers' personal attributes is to be friendly, it will boost the relationship between both parties in the mentoring process. If a mentor teacher chooses to approach the pre-service teachers using good personal attributes, it will directly affect the relationship for both sides (Hyde, 2019).

TM1's response on sharing teaching experiences is an agreement to Smolik (2010) claim, as Smolik believes when mentor teachers and pre-service teachers share their teaching experiences, it enables an intellectual activity in teaching pedagogy to occur, subsequently enabling the pre-service teachers to inquire for more pedagogical knowledge and build on their existing one, which is beneficial for the pre-service teachers throughout teaching practicum. TM1's response can also be considered as a part of playing her role in the pedagogical knowledge factor, as sharing teaching experience is one such way to inform accurate, professional, pedagogical experiences that are useful for the pre-service teachers to learn (Hudson, 2010; Hudson, et al., 2013; Hyde, 2019).

4.2. Informing the School System to the Pre-Service Teachers

From the interviews transcribed, it is found that mentor teachers possess a good knowledge of the system requirements, in particular the practices related to the school that pre-service teachers need to follow in teaching practicum.

> In SMJK [Sekolah Menengah Jenis Kebangsaan or National-type Secondary Schools], the school system might be lenient with the dressing of the teachers but in SMK [Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan or National Secondary Schools], the system is much more particular with the dressing, the school's culture and the environment, which might result in the mentee [pre-service teacher] to experience culture shock. So I need to inform them of the proper dressing as they come to the school for the [teaching] practicum (TM1, lines 50-55).

TM1 sees the need to inform the pre-service teacher on proper dressing. Even though she did not justify the differences in terms of school system between SMJK and SMK, she believes that SMK is much more particular on the dress code, and she believes there is a need to make it clear to the pre-service teacher.

> The first thing I [would] inform the mentees [pre-service teachers] is to let them know about the job environment. I would let them know [on] the job scope and responsibility on [the] duties. If not, they will feel lost throughout the [teaching practicum] (TM3, lines 34-37).

TM3 believes that there is a need to inform how the school's environment is like to be for the pre-service teachers, specifically she would inform the job scope and responsibility of the pre-service teachers when having teaching practicum in the school. By informing these, the pre-service teachers would not feel lost as they go through the teaching practicum.

> I would inform them the normal stuff, [such as] the vision of the school, the expectations of the school, and if I put you [pre-service teacher] in my class, what are the expectations do I have on you [pre-service teacher] because you [pre-service teachers] should be aware of the expectations. That way, they will have an idea and not just simply go in and teach the students (TM4, lines 74-79).

TM4 informs two kinds of system requirements-related knowledge, which is the vision and expectations of the school. She divides the expectations into two, the school's expectations and her expectations to the pre-service teacher especially if the pre-service teacher is teaching her class. Her responses fit with Hudson (2013) statement, as pre-service teachers would engage interacting with schools in a more purposeful manner if the expectations of the schools and teachers are articulated clearly.

> I will tell them [pre-service teachers] about the scheme of work as we already have the yearly teaching plan for schools. I have to make sure that they [pre-service teachers] to follow the yearly [teaching] plan when they conduct lessons. If they don't follow it, we [in-service teachers] will have a problem (TM7, lines 45-48).

TM7 informs the yearly teaching plan to the pre-service teachers and he makes sure that the pre-service teachers are following the plan given. However, as he states that the teachers will have a problem if the pre-service teachers do not follow it, it presumably suggests that he is much more concerned on completing the school's demands than the pre-service teachers' teaching in classes.

These mentor teachers have informed the pre-service teachers the various kinds of system requirements-related knowledge, involving proper dressing, execute the yearly teaching plan, vision and expectations of the school, and the job scope and responsibility of the pre-service teachers when having their teaching practicum. While they may have performed their roles in the system requirements factor, they only informed school-related policies and functions to the pre-service teachers. Expanding the five-factor mentoring model, system requirements involve mentor teachers informing three different kinds of policy requirements to the pre-service teachers, which are national requirements, educational requirements, and school policy requirements (Hudson 2010; Hyde, 2019). The absence of informing the national and education policy requirements accompanied with a lack of coherence in the mentor teachers' responses show that mentor teachers might not possess the necessary knowledge on the system requirements that they need to inform the pre-service teachers, which this possibly explains the factor having the lowest mean albeit interpreted as a moderate extent of mentoring with the other factors in the quantitative questionnaire findings.

4.3. Sharing Pedagogical Knowledge in a Variable Time Frame

In the interview question related to how often mentor teachers share their pedagogical knowledge to the pre-service teachers, the responses are rather surprising as these mentor teachers used the word "depends," "depending" or other word choices that infer a similar meaning.

Usually, I would share with anything them at any time but ***depending*** [on it] too. Kadang-kadang [sometimes] when they are facing some troubles, they will come and meet me. I will share the knowledge with them (TM3, lines 83-85).

TM3 thinks that she would share the knowledge with the pre-service teachers at any time but when these pre-service teachers have problems and consult her, then only she would share the knowledge with them. A similar response to TM3 is also observed in TM1's response:

It ***depends*** on the situation and the mentee [pre-service teacher] as some of them [pre-service teachers] need a lot of guidance or they [pre-service teachers] are unsure about the problems they faced. That is only at that time I share my knowledge with them [pre-service teachers] (TM1, 61-64).

TM6's responses are much more straightforward, as he informs clearly that he will share the knowledge only when the pre-service teacher consults him.

[It] ***depends*** on how often they come and see me to gain the knowledge because I think it is their [pre-service teachers] responsibility. They [pre-service teachers] must have the responsibility. If you [pre-service teacher] want to know something then you are supposed to come and see me. I don't know what they [pre-service teachers] want, isn't it? (TM6, lines 72-76).

TM5's responses point at the pre-service teacher for being a proactive character, thus not needing his knowledge often as seen in the quotation below:

It ***depends*** actually since he [pre-service teacher] is a proactive teacher when [doing] his [teaching] practicum here. Sometimes he [pre-service teacher] didn't even ask me and if he has questions, he would just take the initiative and ask me for it. If I remember something in my mind, then I would go over to his [pre-service teacher] seat and share this to him too (TM5, lines 67-72).

While these mentor teachers claimed to have shared pedagogical knowledge to the pre-service teachers. Their responses become questionable as the extent of sharing the pedagogical knowledge has no clear-cut line. A common point given by these mentor teachers is that the sharing of pedagogical knowledge occurs if the pre-service teachers choose to meet them: TM1 and TM3 share their pedagogical knowledge if pre-service teachers have problems; TM5 regards the pre-service teacher as a proactive one and he will share the knowledge to him if he asks; TM6 believes it is the pre-service teachers' responsibility to consult him for knowledge.

From these responses, the extent of sharing pedagogical knowledge is greatly affected as mentor teachers perceive sharing is needed if pre-service teachers consult them, which is possibly an occurrence of the moderate extent of mentoring in the quantitative questionnaire findings. It is further questionable that if pre-service teachers do not consult the mentor teachers, will the mentor teachers assume that they do not have any problems in their teaching practicum? Mentor teachers' sharing of pedagogical knowledge should be conducted often as this knowledge would effectively contribute to shaping good teaching practices of the pre-service teachers in classrooms (Hudson, 2010; Hyde, 2019; Smolik, 2010).

4.4. Rejection of being observed by Pre-Service Teachers

Ironically, even though Hudson (2010); Hudson et al. (2013) and Hyde (2019) have mentioned that mentor teachers should model the proper pedagogical and teaching practices in classrooms for the pre-service teachers to enable them to have a better understanding in executing pedagogical knowledge, the interview responses from the mentor teachers contradicted this claim completely as all of them overtly rejected to be observed by the pre-service teachers.

It is a big no for me. In fact, not all teachers [in-service teachers] will allow their trainees [pre-service teachers] to observe them especially those that are older. They will never like it (TM1, lines 73-75).

TM1 stated that most teachers do not like being observed, particularly the elder teachers. Like TM1's response, TM2 also responded with a "no" along with her justification.

No, I do not like it and it's not comfortable. I'm always scared of observations because I do not know what my mentee [pre-service teacher] has in her mind. You have to remember that we are all humans and our performance might be just at an average. I'm also concerned with her [pre-service teacher] expectations on me as well (TM2, lines 67-71).

According to TM2, she feels uncomfortable and afraid of being observed as she is concerned about her pre-service teacher's expectations on her. Just like TM2's response, TM5 also stated the same thing.

No, I don't. If he does observe me, maybe once in a while when [he] passed by my class [and] he would have seen me doing the teaching. But I'm sure you know too that it is really uncomfortable being observed by others because they [pre-service teachers] surely have some sort of expectations. So usually I don't (TM5, lines 81-84).

Modelling is needed because it is an opportunity for the mentor teachers to translate their pedagogical knowledge into real practices and form expectations to the pre-service teachers, enabling them to strive and achieve these expectations, ultimately resulting in positive development as teachers (Hudson, 2010; Hudson, 2013; Sempowicz & Hudson, 2012). Since the mentor teachers refuse to be observed by the pre-service teachers, it thus explains the occurrence of only a moderate extent of mentoring occurred in the quantitative findings.

4.5. Addressing Various Aspects when Providing Feedback

All seven mentor teachers interviewed stated that they provided feedback to the pre-service teachers. When they are asked on how they provide the feedback, their responses vary from one another.

Normally, I would provide feedback related to the classroom. Things like class control, students' participation and all those. I would remind them [pre-service teacher] that there are mixed-abilities students too, that is why they [pre-service teachers] have to cater it [lesson] to meet each and every need of the students (TM2, 79-82).

According to TM2, she believes that there is a need to provide feedback that is related to classroom matters and remind the pre-service teacher on planning suitable lessons that cater to the students' needs.

I would write about them [feedback] out what the mentee should improve on and the things that they are lacking actually. Then I would give them the ways that they can be better in the next lesson, something like [a] reminder. I would also talk more about their professionalism too (TM1, lines 83-86).

TM1 looks into the aspects that the pre-service teacher is lacking and provides suggestions for the pre-service teacher to improve for the next lesson. She would also look into the pre-service teacher's professionalism and provide feedback about it.

Every time, when I enter the class to observe, I would look at if he [pre-service teacher] is conducting the lessons on the right or wrong track because he needs to know the strengths and weaknesses of his teachings in classrooms. From there, I would give him comments and some suggestions to improve his teachings before the next [observation] (TM7, lines 91-95).

Similar to TM1's response, TM7 looks into the strengths and weaknesses of the pre-service teacher's teaching in classrooms and provides feedback. He further determines if the pre-service teacher's teaching is on the right track or not based on the observations conducted.

Providing feedback is arguably one of the most important roles mentor teachers must play in improving the pre-service teachers' teaching practices (Sempowicz & Hudson, 2012). This is because it is an opportunity for the pre-service teachers to be informed clearly on the quality of the teaching observed by their mentor teachers and reflect on the aspects and issues highlighted during the discussion after observation (Hudson, 2010; Hyde, 2019; Sempowicz & Hudson, 2012; Smolik, 2010).

Findings and discussion made the following as evident: Mentor teachers do play their role when mentoring the pre-service teachers in teaching practicum. With the evidence taken from the interview transcriptions, these actions

from the mentor teachers inferred that they are contributing to the pre-service teachers' development as real teachers in schools, further empowering them to grow proficiently and competently as will-to-be educators (Gordon, 2019; Hudson et al., 2013). The personal attributes and feedback factors play their role to a great extent because mentor teachers perceive to approach the pre-service teachers in various, comfortable ways simultaneously giving them feedback for them to improve. However, it should be criticized that mentor teachers do not allow pre-service teachers to observe them, nor do they provide sufficient pedagogical knowledge to the pre-service teachers. Their responses claim to share only if these teachers consult them as skeptical because there may be no sharing of pedagogical knowledge occurring throughout the teaching practicum. Hudson (2010) has stated clearly that all roles are necessary because these will affect the pre-service teachers greatly in their teaching practicum.

5. CONCLUSION

Pre-service teacher training is not to be treated lightly especially when they are assigned to schools to conduct teaching practicum. It is a valuable platform and opportunity for these teachers to sharpen their pedagogical skills and develop teaching professionalism as future teachers ready to contribute to the country. Mentor teachers' roles are thus important in sharpening the pre-service teachers' pedagogical skills and developing their teaching professionalism. With a great extent of roles played in particularly the personal attributes and feedback as found in this research conducted, mentoring pre-service teachers becomes significant and these pre-service teachers should have experienced growth meaningfully. Mentor teachers' roles are thus important and should not be neglected in the field of teacher education. Regardless, the occurrence of a moderate extent of mentoring in the remaining three factors must be addressed as such extent of mentoring is not sufficient in aiding the pre-service teachers.

This research, however, was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic which the Ministry of Health Malaysia. (2020) had announced and implemented the movement control order (MCO) to limit the people's movement. Conducting the research was greatly restricted. Further, the use of snowball sampling method comes with disadvantages as reaching the intended number of participants for research, receiving the participants referred that meet the criteria, and difficulty in controlling the participants received (Johnson, 2014). Future research could conduct a full-scale quantitative study using appropriate quantitative, probability sampling methods to strengthen the results; a comparative study can be made by comparing the roles played based on the responses obtained between mentor teachers and pre-service teachers to determine the extent of the truth.

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