

# **Roles Of Mentors As Perceived By Teachers Trainees Of The Batu Pahat Teachers Training College**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this study is to explore the extent of the importance of the roles of coach and counselor among teachers trainees. It also examined its relationship with the satisfaction level of the respective roles and its contributions to the teaching and administrative skills. A sample of 40 teachers trainees (6 months course) who had gone through the practicum program was selected. The major findings of this study revealed that the teachers trainees' perception of the importance of the coach varies significantly among gender. However, there are no significant differences among options and between years of experience for the role of the coach and no significant differences among gender, options and years of experience on the importance of the role of counselor. Furthermore, teachers trainees who perceived the roles of coach and counselor as very important are found to be very satisfied with the respective roles. The findings also revealed that the importance of the role of coach is positively and significantly related to the administrative skills and the role of counselor to teaching skills.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background**

Since 1870, the basic teacher education training system which prepares teachers for schools has been existence in Malaysia. Because schools were undergoing rapid growth and were in need for a large number of teachers, training was only restricted to teachers for primary schools. Different programs then existed for training of teachers of government schools, for government-assisted schools and even vernacular schools. Now, training programs for graduate teachers have also started to cater for the shortage of graduate teachers in the lower secondary and secondary schools. With exception, a group of graduates for the training colleges were accepted for training for a short period of 6 months to meet the urgent shortage of teachers in secondary schools. These graduate trainees, too, go through the practicum program which is to ensure that they acquire the skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that is required of every professional teacher. During the program, the teachers trainees are guided and supervised by mentor teachers selected by the principals of schools. According to Bridgehouse and Moon (1995) mentoring has an enormous potential within professional

development. Mentoring is a complex, interactive process, occurring between individuals of differing levels of experience and expertise which incorporates interpersonal or psychosocial development, career and or educational development and socialisation functions into the relationship to the extent that the parameters of mutuality and compatibility exist in the relationship, the potential outcomes of respect, professionalism, collegiality and role fulfilment will result (Carruthers, 1993). As a result mentors as teachers, coaches, trainers, role models, protectors and sponsors at some point during their relationships with novices provides opportunities for the growth of others, by identifying situations and events which contribute knowledge and experience to the life of a steward (Schein, 1978).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Mentoring is compulsory and official for all teachers training colleges during practicum. There are no proper guidelines for implementation. Each college has its own system. As a result, school mentors do not know the exact nature and scope of mentoring and that school mentors are uncertain of their roles in mentoring during practicum. Hence, the problems faced by the school mentor teachers and their mentees (teacher trainee) with regard to the mentor-mentee relationships should be studied so that various measures can be taken to improve the mentoring program. This study therefore focuses on the following aspects:

- a) the roles and functions of the mentor teachers as perceived by the mentees and
- b) the extent of the usefulness of the mentor-mentee relationship.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study attempts to study the roles and functions of the mentors as perceived by the mentees and the extent of the usefulness of the mentor-mentee relationship. More specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- a) how important are the roles of a coach and counselor played by the school mentor teacher as perceived by the mentees?
- b) to what extent are the mentees satisfied with the roles of a coach and counselor and
- c) the contributions of the roles of a coach and counselor towards the mentees' teaching profession in terms of teaching and administrative skills.

### **Significance of the Study**

The researcher hopes that the findings of this study will:

- a) provide some insight to the college administrators and the school managers on problems encountered by mentor teachers in performing their roles and
- b) also to provide policy makers the basis in making decisions on how to improve the mentoring program during practicum so that a more comprehensive, organized and systematic program could be implemented.

## **Definition of Terms**

For this study, the following definitions will be used. The terms are listed in alphabetical order for the convenience of the reader.

- a) **Mentoring:** The interaction between a mentor teacher and his/her assigned teacher trainee
- b) **Mentor Teacher:** A teacher who has demonstrated the mastery of teaching skills and subject matter, knowledge and has been selected by the principal to provide emotional and pedagogical support to an assigned student teacher
- c) **Practicum Program:** A program designed to facilitate the professional growth and personal well being of teacher trainees during the practicum period
- d) **Role:** The behavior expected from a person in a particular position, situations, in which interactions between individual repeat themselves in a regular pattern over a period of time. In this study, there is no attempt to use this term in a theoretically specialized and rigid way. The notion of 'role is loosely and flexibly used to include authority, functions, status, positions and character.
- e) **Teachers Training College:** Institution primarily involved in the training of teachers to meet both a quantitative and qualitative aspirations of the Malaysian Education System.

## **General Assumptions (Theoretical)**

The teachers trainees understand the questionnaire items and would answer the questionnaires truthfully and carefully. The instrument can measure validly, salient features of the roles of mentors and could elicit reliable data. Teachers trainees are in a better position to perceive roles and characteristics of their immediate mentor teachers. In addition, they are better positioned to indicate their opinions on what should be the roles and responsibilities of mentor teachers. The Educational Planning and Research Division and the Teachers Training Division of the Ministry of Education would co-operate by permitting the researcher to administer the questionnaire to teachers trainees from the Batu Pahat Teachers Training College. The Principal of the Batu Pahat Teachers Training College would co-operate by helping to administer the questionnaire and then collect and return them to the researcher.

## **Limitations of the Study**

One of the main problems in this study is the paucity, at the local level or in the Malaysian context, of related literature and research on this subject. Consequently, there are very few guidelines to give direction to this study. Whatever guidelines used were drawn from studies elsewhere and from research done overseas. The main limitations of the study were the respondents are confined to the graduate trainees undergoing the 6 months program (July intake: 2001). The exclusion of officials from the Teachers Training Division of the Ministry of Education, college supervisors, school mentor teachers and parents and community, may mean neglect of other patterns or trends in the perceptions of the roles of mentors. The use of questionnaires was the main instrument of data collection. The problem of 'response set' is traditionally recognised as limiting the questionnaire approach. 'The response set' is the enduring disposition that helps determine a subject's answers to a questionnaire. However, the subject's response is different from and may usually be irrelevant to the kinds of traits or

characteristics the questionnaire may be constructed to measure. Most important of these 'response sets' are the problems of 'acquiescence' and 'social desirability'. It is uncertain to what extent the responses of teachers trainees may be highly determined or influenced by the above 'response sets'. They may want to consciously or unconsciously assert their professionalism and give responses which are socially desirable responses. Few people answering questionnaires are immune to such secondary conflicting motives. However, some people may be more prone to such 'response sets'. Therefore, while the effects of 'response sets' may be widespread, it may not be uniform. This therefore makes it more difficult to cope with the problem of 'response sets'. In this study, no attempt is made to analyse the phenomenon of 'response sets'. Generalizations made are based on the data collected through the questionnaires can only be extended to the Batu Pahat Teachers Training College where the research was undertaken. Moreover, the respondents were chosen as they were the only ones who had just gone through the practicum program during that period the research was undertaken.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Mentoring is an important mode of professional development in many countries, including Australia, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States (Bolam R. et al, 1994). The notion of mentoring is similar in these different societies and incorporates the dual concepts of support and professional development. It is a formal process within an organization that promotes the career development of the proteges to the benefit of the organization and the individual (Zeg, 1984). According to Anderson (1987), mentoring is a nurturing process in which a more skilled or more experienced person, serving as a role model, teachers, sponsors, encourages, counsels and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional and or personal development. Its' functions are carried out within the context of an ongoing, caring relationship between the mentor and the protégé. Klotz and Harrison (1981) stated that mentors are competent people who serve as teachers, advisors, counselors and sponsors for an associate, who may be younger and of the same or different sex. Atkinson (1993) emphasised the responsibilities of mentors as the supervision of teaching practice, observation of lessons and feedback, the tutoring of teachers trainees, guidance as to methods, requirements of the curricular and syllabuses, advice on procedures, the assessment of teaching competence of students....Glover and Mardle (1995) stated that guidance and counseling skills were identified as having good interpersonal skills, being supportive and accessible at most times. In his study "My Views on Mentoring (Chai, 1995) found that from a professional angle, teachers trainees supported and sought mentors who showed a professional attitude, was well-trained and showed competency in his/her field of work. Some felt that having something in common with their mentor increased the rapport between the two parties, but most important, the ability to converse and discuss school issues. There is no one model to mentoring. The role of the mentor and the whole meaning of the mentoring process is definite and unlimited (Chai, 1995). Whatever the conception of mentoring mentors work within, they must have a clear understanding of that role and its associated functions and have access to a range of strategies and a professional language for teaching and training if they are to support the mentees effectively.

## METHODOLOGY

This study uses a questionnaire survey method. To test the hypotheses, information and data were collected in the following areas: a) the demographic characteristics of the teachers trainees b) the perceptions of the teachers trainees on the importance of the two roles of coach and counselor c) the relationship of the importance of the two roles with the satisfaction level of the respective roles and d) the contributions of the roles of coach and counselor to the teaching and the administrative skills of the teachers trainees. Various statistical techniques were used to analyse the data and information collected. The data was computed with the aid of the Statistical Package For Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics was used for the analysis of data like the demographic variables of the sample. Inferential statistics such as Pearson correlation, One-way Anova tests and Linear Regression Analysis were used to analyse the data concerned.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

### Analysis of Respondent's Characteristics

A total of 40 questionnaires were distributed to the Batu Pahat Teachers Trainees and only 27 teachers trainees responded to the questionnaire (67.5 percent). The teachers trainees were from two options like the Science and Living Skills. The table below shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents according to gender, options and number of years of teaching experience.

### Psychometric Characteristics

Using the factor analysis, the validity of the measurement scales in the study was assessed. According to Nunnally (1978), factor analysis could be used to analyze the interrelationships among a large number of variables. So as to uncover the underlying factor structure and also to assess the validity of the questionnaire, all the twenty-eight items were factor analyzed using the principal component extraction with an orthogonal (varimax) rotation. Visual observation of the scree plot in deciding on the number of factors to be extracted and latent roots criterion (eigenvalues greater than one) were also used (Hair, et.al, 1992). This resulted in two factors which explain the 62.2 percent overall variance. Items having high loadings (0.3 or greater) on a single factor were considered significant. To enhance convergent and discriminant validity, items with low loadings were deleted. The reliability of the scales was measured using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha based on internal consistency of the items in each scale. Based on Nunnally's (1978) guidelines, a scale reliability of 0.70 and above is preferred.

## **Roles of Coach and Counselor**

Factor 1 was labelled coach and consisted of one item which is my mentor teacher is able to give me feedback at the right time and for the right reasons.

The reliability of this scale as measured by the Cronbach's coefficient alpha is 0.78 with a high loading of 0.64.

Factor 2 was labelled counselor and consisted of three items which is my school mentor provides methods of teaching to improve my performance with a high factor loading of 0.74, helps me understand the school's and the college's goals and its values (high factor loading of 0.76 and demonstrates his/her competency in his/her subject area with a factor loading of 0.44. The coefficient alpha for the scale is 0.76.

## **Contribution of the Roles of Coach and Counselor to Teaching and Administrative Skill**

The reliability of the scales were measured using the Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha.

Factor 1 was labeled as contribution to the teaching skills of the subject and consist of five items (e. g. my mentor teacher assists me in the control and discipline of pupils and advises me to try out new ideas, helps me to understand. However, the school's policy like how to assess, record and to write reports and goes through with me the school calendar to pick up events and meetings that are relevant to attend. The coefficient alpha is 0.94. Factor 2 was labeled as contribution to the administrative skills and consists of one item (e. g. my school mentor assists me in journal writing). The coefficient alpha is 11.0

## **Hypothesis Tests**

Using the one-way Anova test, the tests revealed that there are significant differences between gender ( $F=7.47$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.05$ ) for the importance of the role of coach. In other words, teachers trainees between females and males showed significant differences in perceiving the importance of the roles of coach. The probable reason could be that teachers trainees would place different importance of the role of coach if there are either males or females. However, there are no significant differences between options in perceiving the importance of the role of a coach ( $F=2.64$ ,  $p\text{-value}>0.05$ ) and years of experience ( $F=2.48$ ,  $p\text{-value}>0.05$ ). Probably the reason is that the role of a coach is perceived as important for all options and years of experience.

In addition the tests also revealed that there are no significant differences between gender ( $F=1.08$ ,  $p\text{-value}>0.05$ ) and between options ( $F=0.46$ ,  $p\text{-value}>0.05$ ) and years of experience ( $F=0.37$ ,  $p\text{-value}>0.05$ ) in perceiving the importance of the role of a counselor. This could probably be due to the reason that teachers trainees regardless of the number of years of experience or with none, gender and even options perceived that the role of the counselor is as important.

### **Importance of the Roles of Coach and Counselor**

The results indicated that the importance of the roles of coach and counselor had significant positive relationships with the satisfaction level of the respective roles as perceived by the teachers trainees. In other words, teachers trainees' perception of the role of coach and counselor as important is significantly related to the satisfaction level of the respective roles ( $r=0.57$ ,  $p=0.01$ ,  $r=0.35$ ,  $p=0.01$ ).

### **Importance of the Roles of Coach and Counselor to the Teaching and Administrative Skills**

The results show that there are significant positive relationships between the importance of the two roles with teaching and administrative skills. The importance of the role of coach is significantly and positively related with teaching skills ( $r=0.54$ ,  $p=0.01$ ). In other words, the importance of the role of coach contributes to teaching skills like assisting the teachers trainees on the control and discipline of pupils, shows the teachers trainees on how to use the right teaching aids/materials for a particular topic, checks on questioning techniques, goes through the school calendar to pick out events and meetings that are relevant to attend. Importance of coach, too contributes to administrative skills ( $r=0.52$ ,  $p\text{-value}=0.01$ )

On the other hand, the importance of the role of counselor also contributes to teaching skills ( $r=0.35$ ,  $p=0.01$ ) and administrative skills ( $r=0.31$ ,  $p=0.01$ ). Generally, the importance of the roles of coach and counselor is significantly and positively related to mainly teaching skills and administrative skills. This therefore shows that the importance of the role of coach is explained by 54 percent in its contribution to teaching skills whereas the importance of the role of counselor is explained by 35 percent in its contribution to teaching skills.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study highlighted the importance of the desirable and feasible role of mentoring and shows that schools are probably the place where teachers trainees are actually going to learn more about what it is like to be a teacher, what responsibilities and the implications which they would realize when they have a bigger role to play. In conclusion, the crux of the matter is the liaison between the school and the training institution. Both parties must work together to create an overall program of training where theory and practice mean and complement each other, where roles and teaching areas are both negotiated and where the notions of professional development and clearly defined targets are to the fore.

### **Implications**

The findings of this exploratory study should be of significance and interest to both the policy makers, academicians and practitioners. Mentor teachers need to be flexible. Sometimes teachers trainees want practical advice about specific problems and mentors should be ready to respond appropriately. Thus, for successful mentoring, designing schemes and associated training courses and materials should be taken into account. Concerted attention should be directed at developing, refining and mastering mentor process skills. According to Daresh & Playko (1991), process skills should include problem finding,

problem solving and reflection should be introduced during training. Assisting mentors in how to form reflective questions, clarify and probe mentees responses and ask questions non-judgmentally and activities associated with peer-assisted leadership should be introduced.

The on-going involvement of senior management would give credibility to training and offers a shared accountability. If there are mentors who have not only good classroom practice but also an understanding of the problems of the broader issues of management and can relate these problems to what has to go on in the classroom, then there would be a better teacher trainee.

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### Appendix

#### Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Subject	Frequency	Percentage
Gender: Male	5	19%
Female	22	81%
No of years of experience		
a) None	9	33%
b) 1 year	18	67%

#### Demographic Characteristics and the Importance of the Roles of Coach and Counselor

Demo.Char.	Roles	N	Mean	Std.Dev.	F-value
Gender	Coach	5	3.20	0.44	7.47
Male		22	3.95	0.58	
Female					
Male	Counselor	5	3.00	0.71	1.08
Female		22	3.46	0.91	
Option	Coach	18	3.88	0.58	2.64
Pengajian Sains		9	3.43	0.53	
Pengajian KH					
Pengajian Sains	Counselor	18	3.22	0.97	0.37
Pengajian KH		9	3.44	0.86	
Pengalaman Mengajar	Coach	9	3.56	0.52	2.47
Tiada		18	3.94	0.64	
< 1 tahun					
1-5 tahun					
6-10 tahun					
Pengalaman Mengajar	Counselor	9	3.22	0.97	0.37
Tiada		18	3.44	0.86	
< 1 tahun					
1-5 tahun					
6-10 tahun					

Correlation of the Importance of the Roles of Coach and Counselor with the Satisfaction Level of the Perceived Roles

Roles	N	Mean	Std.Dev.	R
Importance of Coach Satisfaction Level	27	3.98	0.63	0.57**
	27	3.81	0.62	
Importance of Counselor Satisfaction Level	27	3.41	0.90	0.35**
	27	3.54	0.82	

\*\*significant at p-value = 0.01 level (2 tailed)

Roles	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	R
Importance of Coach Contribution to Teaching Skills Contribution to Administrative Skills	27	3.98	0.63	0.54 0.52**
	27	3.24	0.92	
	27	2.96	1.09	
Importance of Counselor Contribution to Teaching Skills Contribution to Administrative Skills	27	3.41	0.90	0.35** 0.31
	27	3.23	0.92	
	27	2.96	1.09	

\*\*significant at the p=0.01 level (2-tailed)