Survey of Mentorship Model in Teaching Practicum of Student Teachers in Primary School Teacher Education Program: A Mixed Method Study

Ji-lin ZOU1,a, Cheng-yan YANG1,b,* and Cui-cui ZHANG1,c

1School of Education, Linyi University, Linyi, Shandong, China

a zoujl@lyu.edu.cn, b yangchengyan@lyu.edu.cn, c 1975837431@qq.com

*Corresponding author

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Abstract. Recently, Ministry of Education of China issued a serial of teacher education policies, including Opinions on Implementation of Excellent Teacher Training Plan and Opinions on Implementation of Excellent Teacher Training Plan 2.0, both of which clearly require the implementation of mentorship model supported by university mentors and school supervisors cooperatively. So, what is the advance and current situation of implementation of this mentorship model? Our study took student teachers majoring in primary education and their mentors and supervisors in Linyi University in 2016 as a case, and used mixed methods to survey 102 samples and in-depth interviewed 19 samples, involving 44 teachers and 63 students, in order to comprehensively explore current situation and existing problems of this mentorship model during teaching practicum period. Survey results showed that this mentorship model has not achieved ideal effect in some aspects, for example, frequencies and communication of mentoring. Interview results further indicated that there are still some problems in the implementation process of this mentorship model, such as insufficient number of mentors, imperfect evaluation mechanism for mentors, and poor communication between university mentors and school supervisors. Based on this analysis, we provided some specific advices in future, including: focusing on selection of mentors in universities and supervisors in primary schools; improving working mechanism of supervision, evaluation and reward and punishment; strengthening communication between mentors and supervisors.

1. Introduction

Teaching practicum is the key step to train excellent teachers and improve the quality of student teachers’ learning. The quality of teaching practicum directly affects the overall quality of student teachers. On August 18, 2014, Ministry of Education, China issued Opinions on Implementation of Excellent Teacher Training Plan, which explicitly required: “To carry out standardized practical teaching... To implement the mentorship model supported by university mentors and school supervisors cooperatively.” Moreover, on September 17, 2018, Ministry of Education, China issued Opinions on the Implementation of Excellent Teacher Training Plan 2.0, requiring that “Fully implementing the mentorship model supported by university mentors and excellent primary and secondary school teachers who jointly supervise student teachers’ teaching practicum, and providing all-round, timely and effective guidance for student teachers.” In recent years, through the gradual exploration, primary school teacher education program in Linyi University has been fully implemented the “Mentor-Supervisor” mentorship model supported by university mentors and excellent primary school supervisors to jointly guide teaching practicum of student teachers.
Construction and implementation of “Mentor-Supervisor” mentorship model is the core component of the educational policy aiming to cooperatively prepare pre-service teachers supported by “whole body” consisted of government, university and primary schools. In teacher education, “Mentor-Supervisor” mentorship model received a lot of attention all over the country. After reviewing the advance of this research area, we can find that there are more theoretical innovations, but less empirical researches. And there are some factors affecting the implementation effect of the mentorship, for example, unclear responsibility of mentors and supervisors, lack of effective communication between mentors and supervisors, insufficient guidance, poor management, and so on. Then, does “Mentor-Supervisor” mentorship model in Linyi University also like most other universities, not have ideal effect? What are the main problems in the implementation process? What is the causes of these problems? All the above questions are worthy to explore deeply. Our survey is helpful to promote the standardization and normalization of “Mentor-Supervisor” mentorship model, so as to put forward some solutions to overcome the existing major difficulties in mechanisms of “Mentor-Supervisor” mentorship model involving selection, communication, evaluation, reward and punishment.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

Mixed-method design of quantitative and qualitative approaches was used. We take Linyi University as a case, to investigate the implementation effect of “Mentor-Supervisor” mentorship model during teaching practicum period. We used SPSS 21.0 for quantitative analysis the implementation effect of “Mentor-Supervisor” mentorship model, and used NVivo10 for qualitative analysis interview of mentors, supervisors, and student teachers for exploring the deep-seated reasons for ineffective implementation of this mentorship model through text analysis.

2.2. Participants

This study conducted a survey in the samples consisted of 69 student teachers, 6 university mentors, 38 primary school supervisors. There are a total of 102 participants of valid data, who are all stakeholders of “Mentor-Supervisor” mentorship model. Based on the preliminary analysis of survey results, we selected 19 participants, including 3 leaders, 6 university mentors, and 10 student teachers to engage in face-to-face or telephone interview.

2.3. Survey and Interview

Survey questionnaire for student teachers is mainly divided into four dimensions: communication with mentors and supervisors, guidance from mentors and supervisors, satisfaction with mentors and supervisors, exchanges and cooperation between mentors and supervisors. Survey questionnaire for primary school supervisors is mainly divided into two dimensions: communication with student teachers and university mentor respectively. Survey questionnaire for university mentors is mainly divided into two dimensions: communication with student teachers and school supervisors respectively. The internal consistency reliabilities of three questionnaires are relatively high, whose Cronbach’s Alpha= 0.889, 0.786, 0.883 respectively.

Interview outline is prepared based on Guo Xiaona’s master degree thesis and our research aims. Some open-ended questions were asked, for example, “What effect do you think the implementation of “Mentor-Supervisor” mentorship model in Linyi University have?”, “How to stimulate the enthusiasm of university mentors and primary school supervisors who guide you?”
2.4. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics was made via SPSS 21.0 aiming to analyze the implementation effect of “Mentor-Supervisor” mentorship model, guidance of mentor and supervisor, communication between mentor and supervisor, communication between student teachers and mentors.

Text analysis was performed via NVivo10 with 19 interview recording texts with a total words of 20643 words and a total interview time of 263 minutes in which a bottom-up three-level coding method from the original data was used.

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1. Implementation Effect of Mentorship Model

Student teachers who participated in teaching practicum felt that the overall effect of the “Mentor-Supervisor” mentorship model was average. Most of student teacher (52, 82.5% of the total) think “Mentor-Supervisor” mentorship model have been implemented. But only 11 of them thought mentorship model get good effect, accounting for 17.5% of the total. Meanwhile, 12 of them agreed with poor effect, accounting for 19% of the total. And 29 of them agreed with average effect, accounting for 46% of the total. Surprisingly, there are 11 student teachers thought mentorship model have not been implemented, accounting for 17.5% of the total. This results are consist with the interviews findings from university mentors, who said that most of student teachers would grow up after mentoring, but the effect is only average.

3.2. Frequencies of Mentoring

The average frequencies of mentoring from university mentor in a month is about 3.31, meanwhile surprisingly, few of student teachers did not receive any mentoring (See Table 1 in details). But there is a significant correlation between frequencies of mentoring from university mentors and student teachers’ satisfaction with mentors, \( r = .379, p = .002 \), indicating that the more exchanges between mentors and students teachers, the higher satisfaction with mentors.

In one month, the average frequencies of mentoring from school supervisor is about 2.66. That is, the average number of lesson evaluation guidance from primary school supervisor was less than 3 times. Even there was not any lesson evaluation guidance.

| Table 1. Descriptive statistics of frequencies of mentoring. |
|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|             | N    | Min  | Max  | Mean | SD    |
| frequencies of mentoring from university mentors | 62   | 0    | 15   | 3.31 | 3.065 |
| frequencies of mentoring from school supervisors  | 62   | 0    | 20   | 2.66 | 2.953 |

3.3. Communication between University Mentor and School Supervisor

There is few communications and exchanges between the university mentor and primary school supervisor. Even 19.4% of the total has not any communication, and 32.3% agreed with relatively few or very few communications. Only 16.1% of the mentors communicate with each other. There
is a lack of effective communication between mentors and supervisors. One of the possible reasons is that mentors and supervisors are busy with their own teaching work respectively, and they do not have enough opportunities and enough time to know each other and communicate on the topic about student teachers’ teaching practicum.

3.4. Communication between Student Teacher and University Mentor, School Supervisor

Survey results from communication between student teachers and university mentors indicated that 14.5% are actively communicating. However, 38.7% of total student teachers were actively communicating with school supervisors (See Table 2 in details). These results suggested that fewer of student teachers actively take the initiative to communicate with university mentor than school supervisors. Perhaps the reason is student teachers tend to do not trouble university mentor when communication is not convenient, otherwise ask help from school supervisor. So student teachers have more communication with school supervisor. In fact, this phenomenon is harmful to cooperative mentoring, suggesting it is necessary to develop real-time internet-based online teacher education platform to solve this problem of poor communication during teaching practicum period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication between student teacher and university mentor</th>
<th>active</th>
<th>relatively active</th>
<th>general</th>
<th>less active</th>
<th>not active</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication between student teacher and school supervisor</th>
<th>active</th>
<th>relatively active</th>
<th>general</th>
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<th>not active</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>41.9%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
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3.5. Existing Problems in Implementation Process of Mentorship Model

It can be seen from the three-level coding table that the main problem existing in the implementation process of “Mentor-Supervisor” mentorship model is “the evaluation mechanism for university teachers is not perfect”. There are 4 reference points, and the frequency is 0.308.

This result is consistent with interview data of Dean Ma, who agree that there were some problems such as insufficient incentives and imperfect evaluation mechanism for university mentors and school supervisors. It shows that “Mentor-Supervisor” mentorship model did not play the role it should have.

4. Advices and Solutions in Future

4.1. Focusing on Selection of Mentors in University and Supervisors in Primary Schools

There is a huge gap in the number of mentors and student teachers in university, with more students and fewer teachers, and even one university mentor up to 15 student teachers. In this case, the quality of mentoring is very important, so it is necessary to strictly regulate the selection mechanism of university mentors. In addition, in order to solve the contradiction between supply (too many students) and demand (too few mentors), universities with many resources can also recruit some outstanding graduate assistants to assist university mentors to do some communication and
supervision work, so as to relatively reduce the workload of university mentors and make them focus on guiding the teaching practice of student teachers.

As for primary school supervisors, there is also no standard for selection of primary school supervisors. Schools and universities should jointly cooperate in formulating a higher level of selection criteria in order to select excellent supervisors with more responsibility, richer teaching experience and higher level of mentoring abilities. In addition, primary school supervisors should be trained to make their responsibilities more clear, so as to ensure more effective mentoring for student teachers. In fact, teaching and learning benefit each other. School supervisors can help student teachers train their teaching skills, meanwhile, supervisors will also reflect on their own teaching and improve themselves through reflection.

4.2. Improving Working Mechanism of Supervision, Evaluation, Reward and Punishment

Survey results showed that frequencies of mentoring are not ideal. To address this problem, on the one hand, university should change the previous version of evaluation mechanism of “emphasizing scientific research while neglecting teaching practices”, and moreover incorporate mentoring student teachers’ teaching practicum into teacher evaluation index.

On the other hand, university should develop supervision and incentive mechanism for mentoring. The leaders of university should conduct supervision and inspections from time to time and require mentors to submit a certain number of mentoring records. There are different kinds of mentoring record, including written diaries, photos or videos. In addition, supervision telephone hotlines can also be set up to supervise mentors through feedback from student teachers and primary schools. The diligent mentors should be rewarded with spiritual and material rewards, such as incorporating mentoring time into their class hours and giving money bonuses; the mentors with bad performance will be punished through cutting annual bonus and criticism in public. As for school supervisors, student teachers’ feedback will be used to evaluate their mentoring job. Moreover, local educational administration will also be involved in reward these primary school supervisors, such as giving money bonuses and opportunities to gain professional titles.

4.3. Strengthening Communication between University Mentor and School Supervisor

Survey results indicated that there is less communication between mentor and supervisor. However, the quality of communication directly affects the growth of student teachers. University mentors and primary school supervisors have their own advantages and shortcomings in mentoring and guidance, that is, university mentors are rich in theories of teaching, and primary school supervisors are rich in practical experience teaching. Therefore, both need to communicate and exchange closely each other and they can obtain the information about teaching practicum of student teachers in the mutual communication through strengthening close cooperation.

University mentors get the latest news of student teachers’ performance from school supervisors, which is helpful to mentoring student teachers. In addition, mentors can also understand and investigate the current situation of first-line teaching in primary schools, and obtain the most vivid data through interviewing with school supervisors, which can enlighten mentors to appropriately adjust training plan timely. Meanwhile, primary school supervisors can know something about student teachers’ personal characteristics and achievement of theoretical course from university mentors, thus make targeted and specific mentoring effort. As a result, supervisors can walk out of the limitations of their own personal experience, reflect on their own teaching practices, and learn
more and more advanced theory about teaching and education through communication closely with university mentors.

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