

A Comparative Analysis of 2 Mentoring Approaches at the Dyslexia Association of Singapore



DYSLEXIA ASSOCIATION OF SINGAPORE
HELPING DYSLEXIC PEOPLE ACHIEVE

Sujatha Nair, Assistant Director (Quality Assurance); Sumathi D/O Krishna Kumar, Senior Educational Therapist; Hani Zohra Muhamad, Lead Educational Therapist

Dyslexia Association of Singapore (DAS)

DAS is a non-profit organisation providing specialist remediation services to students with dyslexia and other co-morbidities, aged 6 - 16 years old. Teachers at the DAS are specially trained in the Orton-Gilligham programme to provide quality teaching to help students cope with their learning disorder.

Abstract

Mentoring is significant in the life of any new teacher. A mentoring programme aims to provide new teachers with support in the practical aspect of teaching.

At the Dyslexia Association of Singapore (DAS), formal mentoring takes place over a period of six months. New teachers are paired with experienced teachers who guide them on lesson planning and delivery, as well as classroom and student behaviour management.

This study examines the strengths of two types of mentoring approach currently adopted at the DAS - (a) mentoring concurrently when formal teaching begins and (b) mentoring after formal teaching begins.

These findings will inform of the preferred mentoring approach and help to identify specific challenges, benefits and the impact either of these approaches had on teachers' performances.

Keyword: mentoring, formal teaching, challenges, teacher's performance

Introduction

Mentoring has been increasingly prominent in teacher preparation and widely accepted as the best way to support new teachers professionally after undergoing teacher training.

Clark and Byrnes (2012) cited Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory (1978) which posits that the accumulation of knowledge is not an isolated experience. Vygotsky stated that knowledge is not merely transmitted from one person to another, but rather is socially constructed through interaction with other individuals.

Most mentoring programmes constitute support in areas such as classroom management and lesson execution as well as assistance in dealing with parents to adhere to organisational culture and practices.

The objective of this mentoring programme is to improve a mentee's professional growth. For this purpose, mentoring is defined as one-to-one support of a new teacher (mentee) by a more experienced practitioner (mentor). Besides one-to-one mentoring, "group mentoring", is also provided weekly in the form of 3-hour lectures on topics relevant to teaching such as pedagogy and classroom management.

The aim of this research is to evaluate which of the 2 mentoring approaches conducted at the DAS is more helpful to new teachers.

- I. New teachers start teaching before formal mentoring begins supported by Supervising Teachers (ST) and Cooperating Teachers (CT)
- II. New teachers start teaching concurrently with formal mentoring, supported by mentors

Methods

A mixed-method approach, comprising of surveys and face-to-face interviews, was used in this study. The survey questionnaire utilises a 5-point Likert scale and consisted of 10 statements whereas the face-to-face interview consisted of 4 questions. The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What is the perception of teachers about the mentoring programme that they underwent?
2. What are the specific challenges teachers faced under both the mentoring approaches?
3. Which mentoring approach is more effective or should a new mentoring approach be implemented?

Participants comprised of 28 new trainee teachers who had gone through a rigorous training programme prior to teaching. 14 teachers received formal mentoring after they began teaching while 14 other teachers received theirs concurrent with teaching.

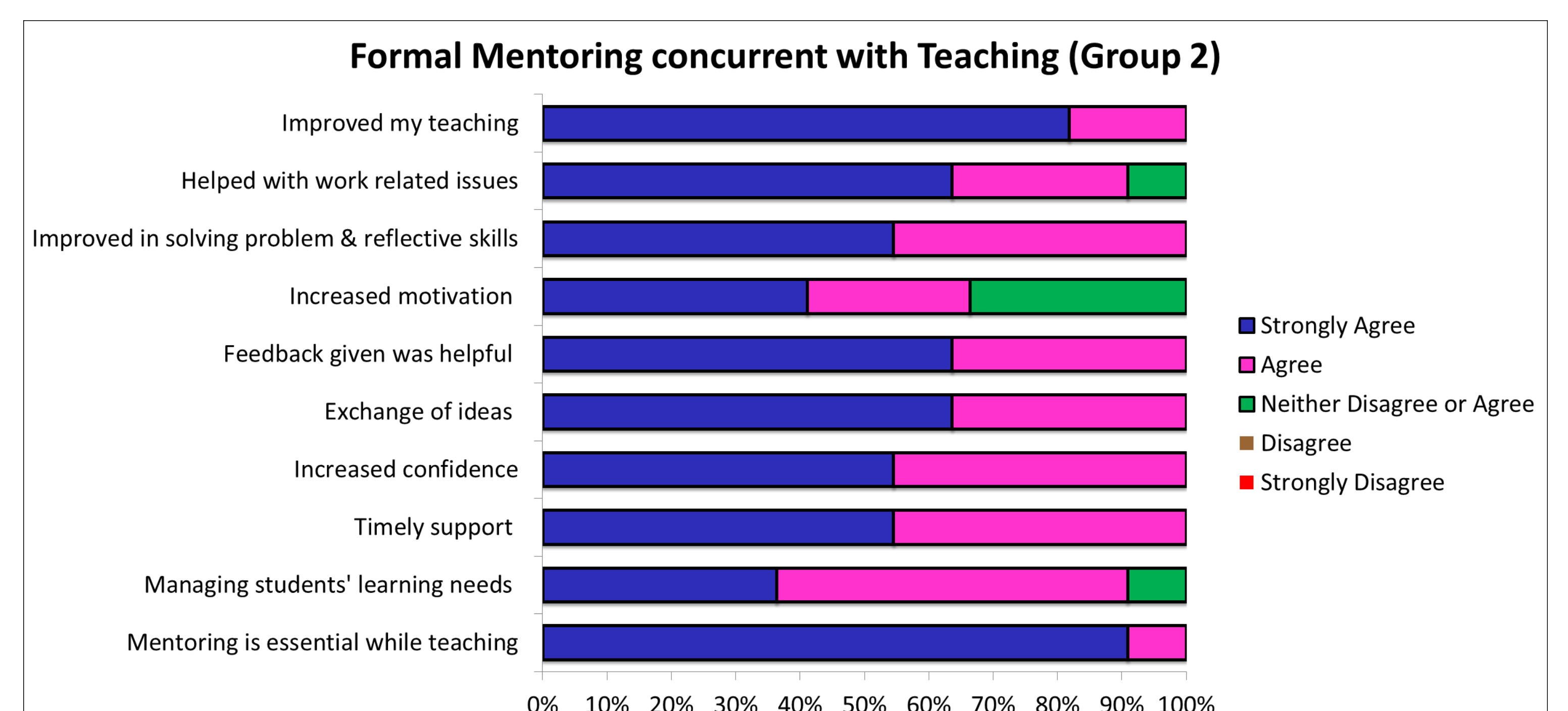
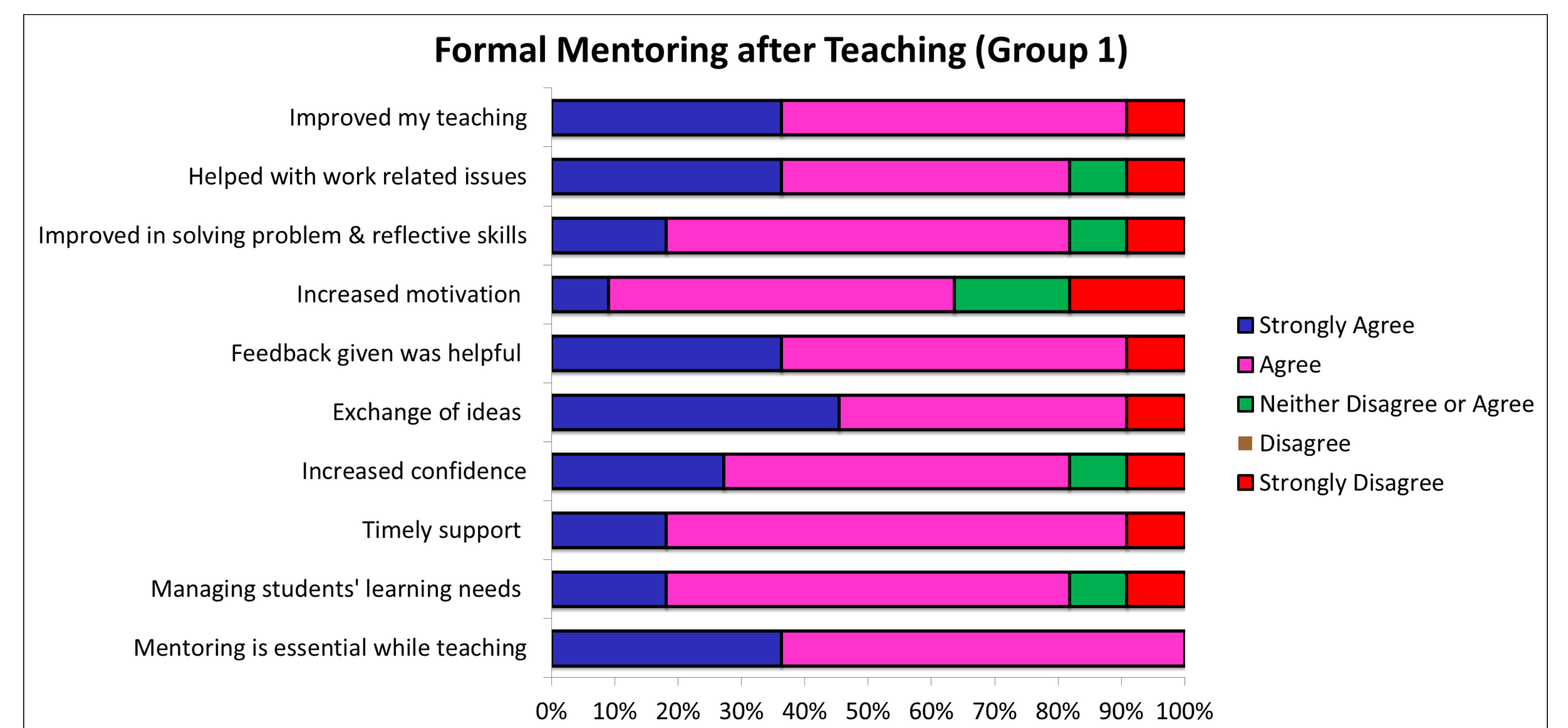
Survey Statements

1. It is essential for trainee teachers to have formal mentoring concurrent with classroom teaching.	2. The feedback given by my mentors when I started teaching was helpful.
3. It was harder to manage the learning needs of students with learning differences without mentors.	4. I was more motivated to produce quality work when I had a mentor.
5. The timely support helped me to identify strategies to overcome my difficulties.	6. More emphasis was placed on problem-solving and reflection by my mentors that aided me to better myself as a teacher.
7. My confidence in teaching improved with formal mentoring support.	8. It was more helpful to have mentors providing guidance on work-related issues.
9. More ideas were exchanged during the formal mentoring period.	10. The support given by my mentors during the formal mentoring period helped improve my teaching.

Interview Questions

	Formal Mentoring After Teaching	Formal Mentoring Concurrent with Teaching
• What is your perception on receiving mentoring support after teaching?	• "Would have preferred it earlier...to reduce the struggle.."	• "A good practice... experienced sharing occurred on real time."
• What is your perception on receiving mentoring support concurrent with teaching?	• "Better if it started at the start...." • "A big help.."	• "Very important as it concretises concepts taught during teaching."
• What are the specific challenges teachers faced under both the mentoring approaches?	• "...kept going to my buddy... preferred to have structured 1 to 1 mentoring sessions."	• "Challenging with handling kids with co-morbidities."
• What are the advantages that teachers received from the mentoring programme?	• "...knowledge-different skills and strategies." • "Behavioural teaching strategies..."	• "...how to do differentiation." • "...seeing the different styles of teaching."

Results



Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate which of the two mentoring approaches new teachers at the DAS find most favourable. It was conducted to better understand which approach better equip new teachers with teaching skills and classroom management, and therefore should be maintained by the DAS when supporting new teachers.

The results derived from Group 2 provided a stronger positive correlation between mentoring and factors such as increased confidence, improved teaching, problem solving and reflective skills as well as better management of students' learning needs as compared to Group 1. Although mentoring was provided after teaching for Group 1, 91% of the teachers indicated that mentoring had helped them improve in every aspect of teaching.

On the other hand, the face-to-face interviews revealed that new teachers welcomed ideas and suggestions shared during mentoring when guidance and assistance was needed, but prompt support would have been appreciated. While this was possible for those who received mentoring concurrent with teaching, it was not possible for those teachers who received mentoring after teaching. Nevertheless, it was evident that both groups of teachers found mentoring to be valuable to their growth as a teacher.

Limitations and Implications

It is evident from the study that providing mentoring concurrent with teaching has been found to be more favourable between the two. However, the approach adopted will be dependent on the organisational needs such as when recruitment is done. This has implications on whether new teachers can be supported simultaneously with formal teaching.



Conclusion

The results clearly indicated that almost all the new teachers found mentoring to be valuable to their teaching practices, whether they are supported concurrently with teaching or otherwise. On the other hand, it is also clear that there are new teachers who did not regard the mentoring support positively.

Nevertheless, mentoring certainly has given new teachers tools for continuous growth. Additionally, the results informed that teachers would prefer to receive mentoring concurrent with teaching as it provided them with timely guidance and assistance with regards to teaching and addressing students' needs, managing classroom and student behaviour, exchanging of ideas between mentors and mentees, and being more confident in teaching.

Hence, it is recommended that this approach be considered when a mentoring programme is designed.



References

- Certo, J. (2005). Support and challenge in mentoring: A case study of beginning elementary teachers and their mentors. *Journal of Early Childhood and Teacher Education*, 26, 395-421.
- Clark, S. K., & Byrnes, D. (2012). Through the eyes of the novice teacher: Perceptions of mentoring support. *Teacher Development*, 16 (1), 43-54.
- Hall, K. M., Draper, R. J., Smith, L. K., & Bullough Jr, R. V. (2008). More than a place to teach: Exploring the perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of mentor teachers. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 16(3), 328-345.
- Hobson, A. J., Ashby, P., Malderez, A., & Tomlinson, P. D., (2009). Mentoring beginning teachers: What we know and what we don't. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25, 207-216.
- Isreal, M., Kamman, L. M., McCray, E. D., & Sindelar, P. T. (2014). Mentoring in action: The interplay among professional assistance, emotional support, and evaluation. *Exceptional Children*, 81 (1), 45-63.