Full paper

Roles of Mentees via Virtual Mentoring

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Abstract

This paper presents a case study that highlights online mentoring among pre-service teachers and in-service teachers from three local public tertiary institutions. Specifically, it investigates the roles of mentees during virtual mentoring sessions. Four groups of pre-service teachers from three local tertiary institutions mentored by four in-service teachers from Johor Bahru participated in the study. Each group was assigned an online newsletter and required to carry out writing of the online newsletter task by discussing through Nicenet, an online forum, when carrying out the task. The data obtained from the online postings on Nicenet was analyzed using Ambrosetti and Dekkers's (2010) roles of mentees. Findings implied that the e-mentees acted as supporters, active participants, collaborators, leaders, and role models. The findings also revealed three salient themes which are: i) collaboration as an inevitable practice, ii) the need for mentees to be actively involved in mentoring practice and iii) the lack of experience and self-esteem among mentees.

Keywords: Case study; online mentoring; online collaboration; pre-service teachers; in-service teachers; mentors; mentees; roles of mentees

Abstrak

Artikel ini melaporkan kajian kes mengenai bimbingan elektronik diantara guru-guru pra-perkhidmatan dengan guru-guru sekolah. Secara spesifik, kajian kes ini mengkaji peranan pelatih semasa bimbingan elektronik dilaksanakan. Sejumlah empat kumpulan guru pra-perkhidmatan dari tiga institusi pengajian tinggi tempatan dibimbing oleh guru-guru sekolah dari Johor Bahru terlibat dalam projek ini. Setiap kumpulan dihendaki untuk menghasilkan sebuah bulletin elektonik dan membincangkan proses perlaksanaan projek melalui Nicenet, iaitu forum elektronik. Data kajian yang diperoleh dari perbualan dalam forum Nicenet dianalisa dengan menggunakan jadual peranan pelatih oleh Ambrosetti dan Dekkers (2010). Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelatih memainkan peranan sebagai penyokong, penyumbang, editor, rakan, pelajar, guru, pemimpin, dan model. Tiga tema penting juga ditemui, iaitu (i) kolaborasi sebagai praktis wajib; (ii) penglibatan pelatih sebagai kriteria penting; dan (iii) kekurangan pengalaman dan keyakinan diri di kalangan pelatih-pelatih.

Kata kunci: Kajian kes; bimbingan elektronik; kolaborasi elektronik; guru-guru pra-perkhidmatan; guru-guru sekolah; mentor; pelatih; peranan pelatih

■1.0 INTRODUCTION

The reforms of teacher education in Malaysia contribute to the dual system of teacher training (Lee, 2002). There are two main types of institutions. One of them is managed by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the other one is managed by local tertiary institutions. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the training of non-graduate teachers, while the local tertiary institutions are responsible for the training of graduate teachers. In spite of the difference, both are tailored to facilitate the professional, academic and professional development of the pre-service teachers (Lee, 1996). When the pre-service teachers are undergoing the teacher education programme, the environment is supportive as their peers and lecturers are available whenever they need help. Nevertheless, as they join the profession, there is a drastic change in the new environment where they are isolated and the professional environment is not as supportive as their academic environment. They face problems in adapting and adopting to the new environment (Herrington & Herrington, 2004). Pajares (1993, p. 323) mentions another issue faced by the pre-service teachers is that they:

…have an unrealistic optimism and a self-serving bias that account for their believing that the attributes most important for successful teaching are the ones they perceive as their own. They believe that problems faced by classroom teachers will not be faced by them, and the vast majority predicts they will be better teachers than their peers.

Therefore, there is a need for the pre-service teachers to be guided (McDaniel, 2006) as the *ideal* educational belief of pre-service teachers may affect their teaching. Also, the pre-service teachers need guidance in putting theory into practice (Norman and Feiman-Nemser, 2005). Although the pre-service teachers possess declarative knowledge, they are rather weak when it comes to dealing with real language learners (Bailey, 2006). In view of this, Feiman-Nemser (2001) suggested that universities should establish partnership with schools where the latter can become more involved in the induction process. In this way, the pre-service teachers can get more support and useful advice whenever they face difficulties.

The establishment of partnership with schools such as mentoring practice not only reduces the stress and anxiety level of the in-service teachers but also helps them to coherently develop as professionals. However, in-service teachers who are assigned with various administrative tasks apart from teaching tasks may not be able to dedicate much time in guiding the pre-service teachers. With regard to this, it is suggested that the virtual environment should be used in promoting the mentorship between the pre-service teachers and the in-service teachers so that the latter can virtually mentor and collaborate with the former at each other's pace. Moreover, the pre-service teachers have the chance to interact with each other and share their problems together and even brainstorm for solutions.

■2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

As aforementioned, mentoring practice serves as a way to expose pre-service teachers towards the procedural knowledge of the teaching profession. Mentoring practice can be understood as the involvement of experienced, skillful and knowledgeable person as with the inexperienced and new person; where the former teaches, nurtures, protects, advises, and provides emotional and social support to the latter (Shea, 2002; Pillemer, *et al.,* 2003; Rose and Best, 2005).

Generally, mentoring practice can bring some advantages to pre-service teachers, which include "…increased job satisfaction, higher retention, greater effectiveness with diverse students, and better instructional problem solving," (McIntyre and Hagger, 1996). The significance of mentoring practice is apparent as Mullen and Lick (1999) mention that pre-service teachers become more prepared to be teachers after experiencing mentoring practice. Löfström and Eisenschmidt (2009) explore the Estonian novice teachers' point of view regarding relationships with mentors during their first year of teaching. The findings indicate that novice teachers experience support for personal development and professional knowledge development. As an analogy, a child needs to be guided by adults in getting to know the world better in terms of social values and conventions. Likewise, novice teachers need continuous guidance and support when they join the teaching community so that they can learn from the experienced teachers and become more confident (McIntyre and Hagger, 1996) in dealing with the workloads and difficulties.

Moreover, Speck and Knipes (2001) stress that teachers' can professionally develop through collaboration and sharing of: a) knowledge among teaching practitioners in problem-solving and action research; b) effective teaching and assessment strategies;

and c) knowledge of learning and development. There are some researches that are done on face-to-face collaborative practice among pre-service teachers. For instance, in Moran's (2007) study, she employs a case study in examining two teams of pre-service teachers collaborating in an action research. The findings indicate that the pre-service teachers have an increased awareness of the value (such as their improved professional practice) and the need to share responsibility among each other in the decision-making process. Moreover, the pre-service teachers also admit that they acquire new knowledge and skills from the collaboration. Besides, Scantlebury, Gallo-Fox, and Wassell (2008) investigate the implementation of the coteaching among pre-service teachers in a longitudinal study. They find that coteaching has the potential to prepare the pre-service teacher in their teaching and also contributes to their professional development.

There are also a few studies that are done on online mentoring. One of the studies was by Boreen and Niday (2000) which involved university students and veteran teachers, where they investigated the way in which the latter mentors the former through email and another study on the roles of e-mentors in a Collaborative Virtual Learning Environment project (Ng Siew Fong et al, 2012). Through modeling, the e-mentors share how they enjoy being around the students despite the challenges whereas through illustrating, the e-mentors give an example of activity in teaching specific topics. In terms of affirming, the e-mentors give assurance to the doubts of the mentees regarding the application of specific approaches in class. For questioning, the e-mentors sometimes show their disapproval towards the mentees' inclusion of inappropriate materials in their lesson. Lastly, for reflecting, the e-mentors reflect on their own teaching practice as they too face difficulty in dealing some problems faced by the pre-service teachers. The mentors reflect on their experience and come up with some solutions to the problems.

In another study, Hudson, *et al.,* (2005) look at online mentoring practice among pre-service teachers from nine Australian tertiary institutions and find that there are five factors that attribute to effective e-mentoring practice, which are personal attributes, pedagogical knowledge, modeling and feedback. Apart from that, Herrington *et al.* (2006) acknowledge the importance of mentoring practice and thus, attempt to establish a virtual community for pre-service teachers by creating a website. The website not only enables the teachers to practice virtual mentoring but also allows the pre-service teachers to have access to curriculum resources and provides weblogs where the pre-service teachers can reflect on their teaching.

Since it is apparent that mentoring can take place in the virtual environment, the Ministry of Education should take the initiative to implement and develop an interactive environment where the teachers can support and even collaborate with one another. In addition, with the rapid advancement of technology, there is a growing need for the teachers to integrate technology into teaching (Bansal, 2009). Furthermore, teachers have to be technology proficient so that they can communicate with their colleagues virtually, which can contribute to their professional development (Muhammad Kamarul Kabilan and Mohamed Amin Embi, 2006).

Apart from that, there are some studies that look into the perspective of the mentors. One of the examples is the study conducted by Orland-Barak and Hasin (2010). They investigated the mentor's perspective in mentoring practice by involving different people who act as mentors in a school, namely supervisors, school principals, and project leaders. The findings of the study demonstrate that in spite of the difference in terms of the contexts of practice, there is a divergent perspective towards mentoring, which is that it is influenced by educational ideologies

and envisioned roles and practices. Another example is a study conducted by Halai (2006). It is found that the mentors act as expert-coaches, subject specialists, critical friends and learners. The mentors not only provide guidance during the mentoring process but also gain from it as they enhance their knowledge of the subject matter and answer questions that never come to their mind.

Also, Strong and Baron (2004) look into the conversations between mentor (pre-service teachers) and mentee (in-service teachers). Their findings disclose that mentors make extreme efforts in avoiding the provision of direct advice as they give a lot of indirect suggestion. This can be explained by using Cognitive Coaching model. This model emphasizes on giving an opportunity to the mentee to reflect and make changes to their thinking and teaching. Hence, instead of just telling the mentees what to do, the mentees are given the option to decide either "take the advice or leave it". On the other hand, Ambrosetti and Dekkers (2010) review the literature on the roles of mentors and mentees in an online collaboration. They explicate that the mentors can act as supporter, role model, facilitator, assessor, collaborator, friend, trainer or teacher, protector, colleague, evaluator, and communicator whereas the mentees can act as active participant and observer.

Previous studies show that in virtual mentoring practice, the e-mentors are involved in modeling, illustrating, affirming, questioning, and reflecting as they mentor the e-mentees (Boreen and Niday, 2000). They model the right attitude in teaching, illustrate some activities in teaching some boring topics; affirm the mentees when they have doubts in their teaching practice; question the mentees whenever necessary; and sometimes even reflect on their own teaching practice. When conveying these messages, the e-mentors have to possess certain personal attributes such as approachable, helpful and receptive; rich pedagogical knowledge, good at modeling, and consistent in providing feedback (Hudson, *et al.*, 2005).

When discussing mentoring practice, the role of the mentees has to be taken into consideration in order for effective mentoring to take place. Mentees have to be active in asking for clarification if they had any uncertainties. They also should be receptive if their approach in class was criticized by the mentor and they had to take the criticism constructively by critically reflecting on their classroom practice. Besides, they should seek help when they are unable to manage any situation that they encounter. Most importantly, they should bear in mind that all they have to do is to learn, learn and learn (Nafziger, 2006). After undergoing mentoring, with the mentor's guidance and support, the mentees should be able to build up their confidence and experince professional and personal development.

Furthermore, Muhammad Kamarul Kabilan, Wan Fara Wan Adlina and Mohamed Amin Embi (2011) study the way in which virtual collaboration of the pre-service teachers and in-service teachers from three local universities in promoting their professional development. The findings suggest that the virtual collaboration not only facilitates the teachers' professional development but also helps them in attaining and improving skills, as well as sharing and exchanging, and socializing with each other.

This study acknowledges the importance of virtual environment as Muhammad Kamarul Kabilan and Mohamed Amin Embi (2006) stress that technology has the potential of enabling the teachers to collaborate, discuss, and share information and ideas with their colleagues, which can eventually contribute to their professional development. Also, it is the researchers' contention that mentees play critical roles in ensuring the success of mentoring practice. Therefore, this study examines the roles played by mentees during virtual mentoring sessions.

■3.0 THE STUDY

The data collection took 14 weeks, which is also equivalent to one semester. Convenience sampling was deployed in selecting the participants of the study. The participants, four Johor Bahru in-service teachers and 48 pre-service teachers (12 TESL students in each group from three local tertiary institutions), were asked of their willingness to be a part of the study. They were later explained of the needs and details of the study; which include its duration, the need to involve in an online mentoring project, the need to use the Internet to carry out the project, and the instructions needed in completing the project. They were placed in groups of four. Each group was led by an in-service teacher who acted as the e-mentors to twelve pre-service teachers (four students from each tertiary institution). The e-mentor had to mentor the e-mentees via an online forum platform called Nicenet to create an online newsletter. The online discussion was sustained when users gave feedback to the others' postings. Since the participants are from three different institutions, their only means of communication is the online forum.

Virtual observation was performed on the online postings as the researchers virtually observed the participants' interaction via Nicenet. Prior to data analysis, pseudonyms were used to label the participants so that their identity can be concealed. Content analysis was deployed in analyzing the online postings because it is able to reveal answers to communicative studies, which are "Who says what, to whom, why, how, and with what effect?" (Babbie, 2010: p. 333). Consistent with the present study, the impact of the e-mentees' postings indicated by the types of roles played is the emphasis of the study. When carrying out content analysis, the researcher categorized the data (Waltz, Strickland, and Lenz, 2010) by referring to Ambrosetti and Dekkers's (2010) table of mentees' roles and associated actions (refer to Table 1).

In order to produce the table, they reviewed previous studies on mentoring by focusing on the roles played by mentees. From there, they listed the roles of the mentees with the descriptions. The roles listed include active participants, supporters, role models, and collaborators. However, it was also expected that the findings would indicate the presence of other roles that are not listed in the table. In elaborating the findings, the terms e-mentees and mentees are used interchangeably.

For the present study in which qualitative approach was adopted, the validity and reliability aspects were considered. According to Johnson and Christensen (2010), the validity of a qualitative research is fulfilled when it is generalizable. In other words, the research is generalizable when the method can be applied to other studies. As mentioned previously, in the present study, virtual observation was performed on the interaction of the mentors and mentees via an online forum. The same method can be applied in future research as well. In terms of reliability, it is explicated that a qualitative research can be regarded as reliable when it is authentic and predictable (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007). Correspondingly, the present study virtually observed the participants' interaction on online forum. Since it is the only communicative platform for them, their virtual interaction can be regarded as authentic or real. Furthermore, the findings are predictable because data analysis was guided by the table of mentoring roles and associated actions by Ambrosetti and Dekkers. In other words, the roles of mentors, which the present study foregrounds, are predictable as the roles are listed in Ambrosetti and Dekkers's table, which the researcher closely referred to.

Table 1 Mentoring roles and associated actions (Ambrosetti and Dekkers, 2010)

Roles	Descriptions
Active participants	• Takes opportunities to develop professional skills and knowledge • Initiates tasks to complete • Volunteers for performance tasks • Creates opportunities to participate (Walkington, 2005)
Supporters	• Assists in mentee's personal and professional development (Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2005) • Inclusion and acceptance of the mentee (Maynard, 2000) • Outlines expectations (Kilcullen, 2007) • Gives honest, critical feedback (Hall *et al.,* 2008) • Provides advice during task performance (Maynard, 2000) • Provides protection from unpleasant situations (Hill, Del Favero & Ropers-Huilman, 2005) • Advocates for the mentee (Hall, *et al.,* 2008; Hill *et al.,* 2005)
Role Models	• Assists the mentee by example (Greene & Puetzer, 2002) • Demonstrates the behaviours of the profession (Maynard, 2000; Kilcullen, 2007) • Demonstrates tasks (Kilcullen, 2007) • Sets and maintains standards (Bray & Nettleton, 2006) • Integrates theory and practice for mentee (Kilcullen, 2007)
Collaborators	• Uses a team like approach (Hall et al., 2008) • Provides a safe environment for the mentee (Fairbanks, Freedman & Kahn, 2000; Webb, *el al.*, 2007) • Share and reflect with mentees (Webb *et. al.,* 2007) • Give assistance to mentees (Webb *et. al.,* 2007) • Identify needs with the mentee (Webb *et. al.,* 2007)

Table 2 Roles played and frequency of occurrence

Mentees' Roles	Descriptions	Example of Utterance	Occurrence	
			Frequency	Total
Supporters	Encourage others	"…I know it is not easy to manage your studies and your child all by yourself. Well, hang in there and be strong physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually…"	2	4
	Assure others	"Be calm. Let's be proactive..."	2	
Collaborators	Share ideas	"…I think language camps is an excellent avenue to enhance participants' communicative skills,language competence (like vocabulary and grammar among a few),enhance their creativity, boost their confidence…"	148	148
Leaders	Lead the group	"… let's set a deadline as to when we should hand in our articles. i suggest we do this from the 4th to 7th of September? (please voice your opinion on this.)"	8	8
Active participants	Offer themselves to perform tasks	"…So, what I suggest is for Mentee 3 and myself to create the layout or framework for the online newsletter and you guys focus on getting the content. Of course, we are not excluded from such task (content)…"	1	42
	Initiate tasks	"…I already in the process of implementing commenting system on the esl.cikgu.info, where all of our members or guest can give their comments to the article..."	10	
	Create opportunities for others to participate	"…why not have a "to the editor column.…What say you friend? Feedback wanted!"	31	

Role models	Demonstrate tasks	"…I have posted some sample photographs which I took a few years ago at Semporna Sabah. The idea is that for you project, you can snap pictures and then have them display as photo gallery with caption…"	7	12
	Guide others by using examples	"I guess you may find citing Ken Willing's book a bit difficult. Here is how I think it should be cited…"	2	
	Relate theory and practice	"According to Rebecca Oxford, learning strategies are divided into two which are direct and indirect strategies… Therefore as an English teacher, we should apply these strategies to our pupils, …"	3	

■4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this section, the roles played by mentees will be elaborated after analysis was performed on the online postings and online newsletters.

4.1 Findings: Roles Played by the Mentees

Table 2 shows the roles played by the mentees in the online interaction, which include as supporters, active participants, collaborators, leaders, and role models. All the roles displayed are part of Ambrosetti and Dekkers's (2010) list of mentees' roles, except the roles as leaders.

Table 2 shows that the mentees were most frequent in acting as collaborators as they actively shared ideas with each other (Rose and Best, 2005; Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2004), where the role was played for 148 times. For example, Mentee B3 shared her ideas on activities that can be conducted in language camp, which include "…sketch (shakespear night, fairy tales, etc.), choral speaking, jazz chant, win, loose, or draw, eastern dikir, shadow play, treasure hunt, business maker, poetry night, create english song, …" Mentee C3 added that other viable activities also comprise "…speeling bees, srabble, treasure hunt, singing contest, writing essay contest and public speaking…"

The second frequent roles acted by the mentees were being active participants, which occurred 42 times. As active participants, they mostly created opportunities for others to participate (Walkington, 2005). Some mentees such as Mentee B1 and Mentee D2 created opportunities for others to participate as both of them initiated a topic and respectively concluded with "What do u think about it? please respond!" and "What say you friend? Feedback wanted!"

The moderate frequent roles played are as role models, which occurred 12 times. When the mentees acted as role models, they demonstrated tasks, related theory and practice (Kilcullen, 2007), and guided others by using examples (Greene and Puetzer, 2002). In demonstrating tasks, Mentee D2 posted that, "…I have posted sample photographs which I took a few years ago at Semporna Sabah. The idea is that for you project, you can snap pictures and then have them display as photo gallery with caption…" He demonstrated the way to perform the task, by including some pictures in the gallery. Besides, the mentees also attempted to relate theory and practice when Mentee D5 cited Rebecca Oxford that "learning strategies are divided into two which are direct and indirect strategies… Therefore as an English teacher, we should apply these strategies to our pupils," In terms of guiding others by using

examples, Mentee C5 illuminated the task by giving a specific example of the way to cite Ken Willing's book.

The least frequent roles that were played are as supporters and leaders where there were only eight occurrences respectively. As supporters, the mentees provided inclusion, assured others or in suggesting ways to perform a task (Maynard, 2000), and encouraged others. The roles as leaders were played as the mentees attempted to lead the group when carrying out the tasks assigned to them.

4.2 Discussions: Themes Emerged from the Roles Played

From the findings, three salient themes emerged, which include collaboration as an inevitable practice, the need for mentees to be actively involved in the virtual mentoring practice, and the lack of experience and self-esteem among mentees.

1) *Collaboration as an inevitable practice*: As aforementioned, the roles as collaborators were most frequently carried out by the mentees. Collaboration ought to take place in a mentoring relationship (Hall, *et al*., 2008) to ensure that mentees' creative thinking and critical thinking can be cultivated. The mentees are not expected to "take" everything from the mentor's comments but they have to express their ideas and views after critically and creatively contemplating the comments. Besides, Webb, *et al.* (2007) expound that collaboration enables the mentees to gain new insights to the problems and thus, apply their new insights or their own ideas in solving the problems. After that, they can share their experience in managing the problems and other mentees can benefit from the experience sharing. Also, through collaboration, mentees' personal and professional growth can be nurtured (Bland, *et al.*, 2009; Masters, 2009) because instead of being treated as inferiors, mentees need to take on the roles as team players in collaborating with the mentors and other mentees. In this way, the voice of the mentees can be heard and this can also enable the mentors to reflect on the mentor-mentees relationship and from there, make some necessary improvements as they guide the mentees. Additionally, by acting as collaborators and role models, the mentees can also decrease the mentors' burden in contributing to the mentoring relationship which enables collaboration to take place. There are a lot of advantages of online collaborative practice, which include increasing the pre-service teachers' motivation, encouraging acquaintance with the in-service teachers and enhancing tacit understanding and development

(Yeh, 2010). Additionally, online collaborative practice also enables the pre-service teachers to familiarize themselves with technology by using it in a meaningful way. This also provides opportunities for the pre-service teachers to use the technology to solve problems, and socialize with people of different cultures (Karpova, Correia, and Baran, 2009).

2) *Mentees' need to be actively involved in virtual mentoring practice*: Goodman, Flexner, and Bloomberg (2008) elucidate that being active participants, mentees are able to "…offer affective support, and provide insights to their mentors" in order to ensure that mentor-mentee relationship can be reciprocal instead of merely having the mentors giving feedback and advice all the time. In encouraging the mentees to be active participants, the mentors might need to practice Cognitive Coaching model (Strong and Baron, 2004). When practicing this model, the mentors need to avoid providing direct advice. Instead, he mentors should give a lot of indirect suggestion so that the mentee can critically reflect on their belief and practice. At times, mentors have to be tactful, which is that they have to take the backseat and allow the mentees to become active participants. For instance, mentees are encouraged to solve the problems on their own before asking for the mentors' help. After that, the mentors can reflect on the solution taken together with the mentees. In doing so, the mentees will be able to learn to solve problems independently, learn the need to reflect on their own actions and assume responsibility of their problems (Rombeau, 2010). Also, the mentors sometimes have to display their openness and receptiveness when interacting with the mentees so that the latter will not feel intimidated to actively participating or interacting with the mentors or other mentees. Moreover, the mentors need to be attentive to their mentees. Despite having some mentees being very responsive, some mentees might take on the passive role and remain inactive during the online exchange. Thus, the mentors need to be aware of each mentees' responsibility and once in a while, trigger the inactive mentees' responses by asking for their progress or provide some suggestions or alternative ways in managing their responsibility. In this way, the inactive mentees will not feel neglected and this also indirectly shows that the mentors' attention is "fairly distributed" among the mentees.

3) *Mentees' lack of experience and self-esteem:* As mentioned before, the mentees constitute pre-service teachers, who are still undergoing training in becoming teachers. There are times where they might find themselves caught in situations where they have to function as a member of the teaching field. However, due to insufficient experience (Freeman, 2008), they might not be able to handle the situations appropriately. Their lack of experience may be the reason why the mentees rarely acted as supporters. Moreover, the existence of mentors may suggest that the authority is in the hand of the mentors and ergo, mentees take on the passive roles. As they involve in the mentoring activity, the mentees are well aware of their deficiency, which is the lack of experience in the field. This may lower the mentees' self-esteem and thus they avoid being supporters and leaders for fear of making mistakes. The lack of self-esteem among mentees can also justify why the roles of leaders is not mentioned in Ambrosetti and Dekkers's table of mentees' roles and associated actions

■5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study investigates the roles played by the mentees in the online forum. The findings imply that the mentees acted as supporters, active participants, collaborators, leaders, and role models. The frequency of the roles played suggests that in mentoring, collaboration serves as an inevitable practice; the need for the mentees to play an active role, and the lack of experience and self-esteem among mentees. Also, the present study derived a few crucial implications. First of all, the present study promotes the use of asynchronous means of communication for the teachers to collaborate with one another, mainly the use of online forum. Teachers' networking is not just limited within the school as they may meet teachers from other schools when they attend some courses or seminars. The networking can be maintained through the use of asynchronous computer-mediated communication (ACMC) where the teachers can interact with each other without being restricted by time and distance. This also makes it possible for the teachers to be involved in collaboration between schools in producing some projects that can benefit the students such as in inter-school language camp, English language week or English language campaign.

Apart from that, the mentoring practice among the in-service teachers can assist the pre-service teachers in gaining some exposure in the profession. Pre-service teachers become more prepared to be teachers after experiencing mentoring practice (Mullen and Lick, 1999) as they have the chance to learn from the experienced teachers and become more confident (McIntyre and Hagger, 1996) in managing the workloads and difficulties. Although this is not the regular mentoring practice that pre-service teachers go through, this could be the beginning of mentoring that they can learn from before going through the real mentoring during their teaching practicum. Put differently, this type of mentoring practice serves as a good experience to the pre-service teachers so that they will be able to function more effectively during their teaching practicum's mentoring practice. In this way, they will be able to optimize their learning insofar as they are experienced in terms of reflecting, critical thinking and creative thinking, taking ownership of their learning process and problems, as well as self-expression.

Apart from that, the present study shows that there are actually a great deal benefits from collaboration, which are that idea and information can be shared, the burden of the assigned project can be lessen, and all these contribute to the teachers' personal and professional development, which are proven in previous studies (Crandall, 2001; Liou, 2001; Nicholls, 2001). Nicholls elucidates that through collaboration, pre-service teachers learn to reflect on their learning. From there, the teachers can be aware of their strengths and weaknesses and hence consolidate their strengths and improve on their weaknesses. Speck and Knipes (2001) stress that teachers can professionally develop through collaboration and sharing of: a) knowledge among teaching practitioners in problem-solving and action research; b) effective teaching and assessment strategies; and c) knowledge of learning and development.

Moreover, it is believed that the collaboration between the pre-service teachers and in-service teachers can provide team-working experience to the teachers. Team working is seldom being practiced among teachers as they believe that they are able to carry out things on their own and most importantly, they could not see the benefit of collaborating with one another. Moran (2007) also found that pre-service teachers who are involved in collaborative practice have an increased awareness of the value and need to share responsibility among each other in the decision-making process. Moreover, the pre-service

teachers also admit that they acquire new knowledge and skills from the collaboration.

In sum, the present study serves as the cornerstone on the use of online forum in enabling virtual mentoring among the in-service and pre-service teachers. Therefore, it is hoped that more studies can be conducted in this area so that the potential of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in facilitating virtual mentoring can be extensively explored.

Acknowledgement

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