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Trends in Mentoring of Beginning Teachers in Government Secondary Schools of Rukwa Region, Tanzania

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Abstract: The study aimed to explore trends in the mentoring of beginning teachers to enhance pedagogical skills in selected government secondary schools in the Rukwa Region, Tanzania. The study employed the qualitative research approach and the exploratory single case study design. Through purposive criterion sampling, the study involved 15 beginning teachers, 28 experienced teachers, and 11 Heads of Departments, following their roles and responsibilities of coaching, mentoring, guiding, counselling, supervising, assessing, and providing mentorship. The study further included seven heads of school and two District Secondary Education Officers, selected through purposive sampling. The study revealed that the effectiveness and achievement of mentorship practices in secondary schools depended on personal passion and commitment of both beginning teachers and experienced teachers. The positive regard of heads of schools and education officials towards mentorship triggered mentoring practices. The study recommended that it is vital for the ministries responsible to institutionalise school-based mentorship programs by releasing policies, enacting laws, and producing circulars and guidelines to enforce schools implement mentoring in specific and systematic procedures. The study also recommended that authorities should develop common assessment tools for assessing mentorship progress among beginning teachers across schools.

Keywords: Trends; beginning teachers; mentor; pedagogical skills; secondary schools.

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Introduction

The provision of mentorship to beginning teachers is one of the cost-effective and sustainable professional support services to solve professional challenges that beginning teachers face in their first

year of employment. It also improves retention and job performance and keeps novice teachers abreast of the ever-changing teaching and learning trends (Alam, 2018; Chikoyo et al., 2019; Dachi, 2018; Faruki, et al., 2019; Floody, 2021; Wasonga, et al.,

2015). It is upon this significance that education systems consider mentorship as a relevant instrument for enhancing beginning teachers' pedagogical skills and, hence, boost their teaching performance to improve students' learning outcomes (Alam, 2018; Dachi, 2018; Faruki, et al., 2019; Wasonga et al., 2015). Yet, there is limited empirical data on how beginning teachers are mentored in Tanzanian government secondary schools. Therefore, this study aimed at filling in the existing knowledge gap by exploring the manner beginning teachers are mentored to enhance pedagogical skills in their teaching profession.

Teacher mentoring in schools draws back from the *Odyssey of Homer* story in Greece when mentoring was understood from the apprenticeship system perspective whereby the apprentices learnt skills from the master (Comer, et al., 2017). The meaning of mentoring has ever since evolved in many forms and practices and it is now perceived as a process of facilitating career development in possessing relevant knowledge and skills for carrying out professional activities on the basis of set standards (Agunloye, 2013; Clark & Byrnes, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2013). Additionally, mentoring in the education sector is largely performed to support newly employed teachers to learn teaching responsibilities and hence grow personally and professionally (Smith & Finch, 2010; Wallace Foundation, 2007).

Since the 1980s, different countries have paid interest in mentoring newly appointed teachers following the benefits obtained from mentoring practices. Such benefits include employee retention, which reduces teacher attrition due to professional support provided by experienced teachers (Hamad, 2015; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Wasonga et al., 2015). For this case, mentoring beginning teachers has been a driving force in achieving educational goals, which have a positive impact on students' academic performance.

In developed countries, serious mentoring practices in the education system began in the New York and California in 1980s and later it spread to other developed countries such as Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (Dziczkowski, 2013; Mullen, 2012; Wallace Foundation, 2007). Canada and USA began to spend money on the recruitment of beginning teachers and worked out how to retain them. They largely adopted induction and mentoring strategies to support beginning

teachers perform better in their teaching career (National Teacher Centre, 2011). Research has revealed that teachers who had not participated in mentoring or induction programmes were nearly twice as likely to leave the profession after their first three years of teaching following lack of professional support from experienced teachers (Education Week, 2000). Mentoring beginning teachers, therefore, is important as it helps them fill in the gap between theory and practice by acquiring professional competences that could enhance job performance and social adjustment into the new working environments (Hudson, 2012).

In England, for example, the education system introduced mentoring as a central feature of early university-school partnership programs (Rogers et al., 2019). In addition, educational policy-makers in the United States of America encouraged and in some cases required the introduction of mentoring arrangements, for a variety of reasons one being the desire to increase the pedagogical skills performance among the new teachers (Mullen, 2012). Another reason, according to Malisa (2015) and Potemski and Matlach (2014) were to encourage the retention of newly and recently qualified teachers in the profession through work place adaptation and encouragement.

Research by Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) provides evidence that teacher-mentoring programs are mandatory in many developed countries such as Australia, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, New Zealand and Switzerland. Mentoring programs in high achieving nations involve allocating ample time for beginning teachers and experienced teachers to participate in mentoring and other induction activities. In developed countries, schools provide substantial time for regular collaboration among teachers on issues of instruction. Teachers in Finnish schools, for example, meet once in the afternoon each week to jointly plan and develop curriculum. Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) further revealed that in Scandinavian countries, teachers meet at the district centre for reflective practice groups twice a month with an experienced teacher who facilitates discussions of common problems for beginning teachers. The study confirms that beginning teachers finally become aware of professional demands.

Beginning teacher mentoring is now widely practised in developing countries located in Asia, Latin America and Africa including Tanzania

(Bhalalusesa et al., 2011). Scholars such as Hamad (2015), Komba and Nkumbi (2008) and Kunje (2002) provide evidence on the teacher mentoring experiences in Malawi and Mozambique whereby heads of schools and other senior and experienced teachers visit classrooms where beginning teachers teach, where after classroom sessions feedback is provided for beginning teachers on the areas that need to be enhanced. Additionally, Eshun and Ashun (2013a) report on the teacher preparation program in Ghana namely "In-In-Out Program of Colleges of Education." The government of Ghana reduced the number of years in training student teachers from three to two years. Student- teachers spend two years in teacher colleges/universities and the third year is spent in schools where experienced teachers acquire teaching skills. Eshun and Ashun (2013b) assert that most of the beginning teachers enjoy the support of their mentors in preparation of both their lesson notes and teaching and learning materials during and after teaching.

A study by Godda (2018) reported the experiences of school-based mentoring done to part-time Post Graduate Certificate in Education students from KwaZulu- Natal University who attended a Teaching Practice (TP) in community schools during their second year of PGCE. The TP took over a six-week period, within which university lecturers visited the students to support and assess them. Experienced teachers mentored the PGCE students with appropriate specializations. They did the mentoring by giving opportunity for the PGCE students to observe lessons taught by experienced teachers and later on came a time for mentors to observe lessons taught by the PGCE students. Thereafter, post conference sessions followed to discuss success and failures so that they can make improvement in their future lessons.

Heeralal (2014) made a study at a South African University by involving student teachers who were asked to identify the mentoring needs of pre-service teachers so that mentors could assist student teachers in meeting their needs and overcoming some of the challenges on entering the teaching profession. The study found that the greatest mentoring needs of the pre-service teachers concerned the areas of assessment, lesson preparation, administrative matters, classroom management, lesson presentation and discipline. Other areas included professional development, time management and extra and co-curricular activities.

DeRosa (2005) reported that school-mentoring practices for newly qualified teachers in Zambian secondary schools are still at the infant stage and they are unorganized. Furthermore, mentors are not professionally trained to carry out mentoring services in secondary schools so that the new teachers can confidently teach, stay and enjoy teaching. Furthermore, Mtitu (2014) claimed that in Zambia, there is ample evidence that most teachers did not receive mentorship because mentorship programs for new teachers were virtually non-existent. Equally, Mulkeen and Chen (2008) reported that the practice of teacher mentoring in Uganda was done through local coordinating centres, which acted as in-service training centres. Teacher mentors provide mentoring services to untrained teachers so that they acquire pedagogical skills, which enable them to teach effectively. The program has positive effects to both experienced teachers and beginning teachers by cultivating mutual relationship, shared spirit, collective responsibilities and common understanding in the teaching process. Koda (2006) exposed the in-service school-based training programs in Kenya, which was offered through mentoring, coaching, classroom observations, collaborative planning and team teaching. The programs impacted classroom practices and students' academic performance.

In Kenya, Oketch and Mutisya (2013) reported that through mentoring initiatives, beginning teachers started sharing teaching and learning materials and ideas. Some participating teachers even developed innovative solutions for teaching and learning and their schools became resource. Furthermore, the experienced teachers benefited from the intervention through monthly review and reflection sessions that enhanced their capacity as mentors in addition to developing a sense of responsibility as pedagogical leaders. Finally, trustful relationships between the experienced teachers and beginning teachers emerged with shared respect and values. The study also found that the success of the mentorship intervention in the supported schools created demand and teachers from other unsupported schools made requests for the support.

In Tanzania, according to MoEST (2018), from the early 1960s, the government and local private agencies conducted in-service teacher training, mentoring being one of the learning activities in the programs. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Government implemented a countrywide Continuous Professional Development (CPD) initiative for

teachers called Tanzania UNICEF and UNESCO Primary Education Reform which was also known in Kiswahili as “Mpango wa Tanzania UNICEF na UNESCO” - MTUU. In these initiatives, tutors from nearby teacher colleges mentored teachers in community schools. The initiative further focused on strengthening school and community partnerships for socialization purposes. Alongside MTUU, there was the Universal Primary Education (UPE) initiative in the year 1977 that recruited paraprofessional teachers who received a tailor-made training done in the ward centers where experienced teachers mentored them to get teaching skills while working. Another CPD initiative was under the District Based Support for Primary Education (DBSPE) in the 1990's, which supported the whole school development planning through a network of teacher resource centers around the country. Through DBSPE program, teachers were coached and mentored on conducting school mapping or school situational analysis and were guided to prepare Whole School Development Plans for their schools.

In 1998, the Ministry of Education and Culture (by then) in collaboration with the Stockholm Institute of Education of Sweden instituted a Teacher Educators Program for teacher educators' professional development in Tanzania. The program was introduced to coach and mentor Teacher College tutors regarding the major educational paradigm shift, which demanded teachers to change teaching strategies, from teacher-centered approaches to learner-centered approaches, which involves learning by doing. Through this approach, students were encouraged to participate actively during the teaching and learning processes and the role of teachers changed from being a master of everything during the teaching and learning process to a facilitator. Therefore, the TEP program was designed to empower Teacher College tutors to use participatory techniques and cooperative learning methods to enhance learning outcomes. Active learning became the phrase of the time, and TEP had to take the lead in these transformations. MoEST (2018) adds that the initial design of TEP was a three-month residential/college-based course. Later on, it was redesigned into a semi-distance learning course conducted in zonal settings to accommodate more college tutors. Teachers graduating from those zonal colleges later became mentors and coaches of both primary and secondary school teachers based in their zonal

localities. This TEP design was deemed a success in supporting primary and secondary school teachers, particularly in inculcating skills on effective use of cooperative teaching and learning methods.

Between 2002 and 2016, the Tanzania government embarked on huge education reforms at both primary and secondary education levels through major sector development plans, namely the Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP, 2002–2011) and the Secondary Education Development Plan (SEDP 2004-2016). Through PEDP and SEDP plans, the Government managed to establish new schools (primary and secondary) up to Ward levels, which both demanded new teachers to teach in those newly opened schools. In response, Government came up with a two tiers System for Diploma Teachers. Mentoring practices were designed to support diploma student teachers who were posted to teach in secondary schools. In the first part of the course, student teachers spent one year in the colleges, mostly learning the theoretical part of the course. The second part, which demanded mentoring from senior teachers, is when student teachers were posted to secondary schools to put theory into practice. The program achieved less because there was neither training conducted for experienced teachers to become mentors nor mentor's guides were distributed to help them practice mentoring (Bhalalusesa et al., 2011). This study, therefore, sought to establish the manner in which beginning teachers are mentored in government secondary schools to enhance pedagogical skills in Rukwa Region, Tanzania.

Methodology

Approach and Design

The study employed the qualitative research approach in exploring the manner beginning teachers were mentored to enhance their pedagogical skills. The study used the exploratory single case study design due to its ability of enabling the researchers to deeply explore intended experiences from the field.

Population and Sampling

The study was conducted in Rukwa Region, which is made up of four local government authorities: Kalambo, Nkasi, Sumbawanga District and Sumbawanga Municipality, which together are home to 73 government secondary schools with 1,432 qualified teachers (MoEST, 2021) Rukwa was chosen using the criterion basis. The region had an average of three beginning teachers per school

between the year 2017 and 2019, unlike other regions, which had below three beginning teachers (PO-RALG, 2017, 2018, 2019). Therefore, the researchers were sure of meeting beginning teachers. The study population comprised beginning teachers, experienced teachers, school administrators, heads of department and district secondary education officers in Rukwa. The researchers targeted beginning teachers employed between the year 2017 and 2019 with the work experience of six months to two years and the experienced teachers consisting of deputy heads of schools, academic teachers and veteran teachers with a work experience of five or more years were eligible to participate in the study.

Through purposive criterion sampling, the study involved 15 beginning teachers, 28 experienced teachers and 11 Heads of Departments, following their roles and responsibilities of coaching, mentoring, guiding, counselling, supervising and assessing beginning teachers. Sampling further included seven heads of school and two District Secondary Education Officers selected through the purposive sampling.

Data Collection Methods

The study deployed semi-structured interviews to gather data from beginning teachers, heads of schools, heads of department and District Secondary Education Officers while an open-ended items questionnaire collected data from experienced teachers. During data analysis, the researchers triangulated the face-to-face interviews data with the data obtained through the unstructured questionnaire.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure credibility, the researchers triangulated the interview and questionnaire data. The researchers ensured research dependability by involving relevant study participants who shared personal experiences of mentoring practices, which aimed at supporting beginning teachers enhance their pedagogical skills. They further ensured confirmability through triangulation.

Data Analysis

The researchers recorded data in counter-books and flip charts. Topics and sub-topics formed thematic categories according to research questions. Thematic issues were organised to answer the research questions.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers got a research clearance permit from relevant authorities such as the office of the Vice Chancellor of the University of Dar es Salaam and the Regional Education Office for Rukwa Region who wrote permit letters for Sumbawanga Municipality and Nkasi District Executive Directors to allow the researchers to collect data in the selected government secondary schools. An informed consent form was solicited for respondents' readiness to take part in the study. The researchers considered anonymity and confidentiality during the time of data processing.

Findings and Discussions

The study findings and discussion sections report findings through guiding research questions.

Research Question 1: How was mentorship organised to support beginning teachers to enhance pedagogical skills?

Regarding the manner mentorship was organised in schools, all 15 beginning teachers reported to have been attached to experienced teachers once they reported in schools. One the participant, for instance, reported that, "we were attached to experienced teachers who had been our focal point for mentorship." The quotation suggests that mentorship was organised in the form of one-to-one attachment whereby each beginning teacher was attached to one experienced teacher for pedagogical skills enhancement. This is supported by one beginning teacher stated, "When I reported to my working station, I was attached to an experienced teacher through whom mentorship was planned in one-to-one meetings. We shared teaching and learning resources." Similarly, Mukeredzi and Manwa (2016) had noted that experienced-beginning teachers planned meetings are critical aspects of beginning teachers' mentoring during teaching practice as they significantly contribute to the success of the whole mentoring process and, consequently, to the positive accomplishment of the entire practicum. One head of school revealed: "You know, mentoring in schools is largely informal, and is not guided by any by-laws underpinning its operation." This implies that one-to-one attachment was privately and informally arranged. There was limited enforcement of mentoring laws and by-laws in schools, which had not been enacted by the government or schools. In this context, mentorship meetings were informally arranged between beginning teachers and experienced teachers.

The other mentoring approach found in practice was peer mentoring. The findings show that beginning teachers and experienced teachers had a peer working culture within and across departments. One beginning teacher reported, "We have a culture of consultation with peer teachers within and across departments." This statement implies that beginning teachers had freedom to interact with experienced teachers as colleagues.

Through peer mentoring, neighbor schools were able to cooperate through various education activities such as an Education Week, where teachers gathered together to share teaching experiences and to set strategies to maximize students' academic performance. One head of school stated, "I always stand steady on peer networking with neighboring schools, through the Education week where we work as peers and teachers get to network with peers, where they support one another in challenges related to academic issues." This implies that peer mentoring expanded an opportunity for beginning teachers to acquire pedagogical skills not only from the immediate mentors in schools but also from other teachers of neighbor schools. The mentoring from neighboring schools had some challenges as novice teachers had limited time due to big workload, which kept the beginning teachers busy, hence getting limited chance to move outside schools for mentoring. Mgaiwa (2018) similarly reported that beginning teachers' social networking mentoring largely helped to foster freedom of interaction as colleagues. Beginning and experienced teachers had peers' relationships, which was voluntary, based on mutual and professional commonalities and support to one another in enhancing pedagogical skills.

Lastly, data from the field revealed that mentoring took place through team mentoring whereby experienced teachers worked hand in hand with beginning teachers in activities related to pedagogical skills enhancement. One beginning teacher commented:

Team mentoring was arranged to allow observations in classrooms to establish what other teachers did in classrooms and to discuss and sort out challenges pertaining to pedagogical skills enhancement. I worked together with my mentor in preparing teaching materials and planning teaching strategies as colleagues.

These study findings are consistent with Schwan et al. (2020) whose study reported that team mentoring offered a number of benefits related to full engagement in team teachings and reflective discussions, which supported beginning teachers in boosting their confidence and self-esteem, professional growth, and improved regulation and problem-solving capacities in pedagogical practice.

Research Question 2: How were identification and prioritisation of key areas for mentorship done?

Through informal face-to-face interviews, the researchers established how the identification and prioritisation of key areas for mentorship in schools took place. Findings show that major area for mentorship is the mastery of the subject content, which demanded beginning teachers to follow the current curriculum that aimed at developing learning competences. Beginning teachers were free to raise difficult areas, which they thought needed support from experienced teachers. Hence, beginning teachers did the identification and prioritization of areas for mentorship. A head of school stated,

You know an effective teacher is one who knows the current curriculum and is conversant with the subject content and appropriate teaching methods. Contrary to this, the majority of beginning teachers claimed that they found topics difficult and thus, sought support from experienced teachers.

This implies that beginning teachers faced difficulties in teaching some of the subject topics due to lack of knowledge and experience in teaching. Beginning teachers had difficulties in preparing and teaching subject contents as per the existing curriculum. Beginning teachers revealed that the training institutions did not cover some of topics found in the subject syllabus.

Furthermore, mentorship extended to acquisition of teaching and learning materials preparation skills. One head of the department stated, "At the department level, we urge experienced teachers to mentor beginning teachers on proper preparation and preservation of specimens to ensure high-quality of specimens which can bring expected results in the laboratories." The statement implies that under the heads of department headship, experienced teachers mentored the beginning teachers on how to properly prepare and preserve

specimens in order to increase the quality of information the specimen contains. These findings are in line with the study findings by Namamba and Rao (2017) who reported that the practice of training beginning teachers in proper preparation and preservation of specimens was significant and quite fundamental, where both beginning and experienced teachers benefitted from specimen conservation consistency.

In addition, findings show that the mentoring included the teaching and learning methods application skills. One of beginning teachers reported:

Following the big number, I had in a classroom, coupled with a huge workload, I could not properly engage every student's attentiveness in the learning process. In many occasions, I applied much the lecture teaching method, but it turned outdated when students got much more jaded with the teaching progress and I had to change the teaching style to classroom discussion and presentation approaches. Again this probed problems in the implementation due to students' overcrowding in the classroom and limited time assigned for a given subject period ...I had to seek support from experienced Teachers.

This signifies that internal factors, such as overcrowding of students in classrooms forced beginning teachers to mostly apply teacher-centered teaching approaches such as the lecture method, which does not favor the competence-based philosophy and practice. This is in line with the study findings by Kafyulilo et al., (2013) and Makunja (2016) who revealed that teachers in government secondary schools were not capable of applying learner-centered teaching methods, which is a prerequisite of the competence-based curriculum.

Finally, the study revealed that mentorship involved pedagogical skills in the areas of student assessment and feedback given. One of the participants stated that:

The beginning teacher was less competent in designing learning activities and setting tests/examination questions as inputs for assessment, marking, and awarding scores; hence, for effective students'

assessment, marking and awarding scores mentoring was the better option as a remedy for enhancing pedagogical skills and general teacher professional development.

This implies that experienced teachers mentored beginning teachers in the form of incorporating them in academic activities such as preparing test/examination questions, marking school-based and mock examinations, recording students' scores, keeping students' scores, and collaboratively engaging them on how to provide feedback to students. The action of involving beginning teachers in academic activities helped them to enhance pedagogical skills, which have a positive impact on students' academic performance.

Research Question 3: What professional support services did experienced teachers offer to the beginning teachers?

Findings show that experienced teachers offered the beginning teachers with materials and non-materials professional support services during the mentorship practices. The professional supports included the provision of the textbooks, reference books, lesson notes and online links with the aim of empowering the beginning teachers to enhance their pedagogical skills. Regarding textbooks support, one participant reported:

The school had no physics textbooks in the library. I talked to a friend whom I knew earlier before my placement to this school. She supported me with the textbook and I produced a photocopy. This book was so much important to me as it provided the organized units of work in the form of topics and competences to be achieved.

This shows that there were limited textbooks in school libraries. The findings show that beginning teachers had to make some personal initiatives to source materials since the textbooks were helpful in interacting with subject topics and designing of the lesson notes. Further, findings show that beginning teachers similarly sourced textbooks from peers on their own initiatives. In the case of reference books, findings show that experienced teachers provided beginning teachers with reference books or online links. Text and reference books were useful for preparing lesson notes effectively. On the other hand, beginning teachers reported having sourced reference books from fellow teachers from within

and nearby schools. One beginning teacher reported, "As this school is remotely located, it took me some personal resources to get to friends in town who had some reference books so that I produced photocopies to keep for my own references in lesson notes making." Johnson et al. (2016) reported that it was very unfortunate that urban schools had a higher number of beginning teachers, but these schools did not receive weighted funding, meaning that teaching and learning materials were in short supply, which hindered the effective implementation of mentoring activities in schools and required teachers to do the improvisation.

The statement indicates that due to remoteness of some schools, beginning teachers had to make some initiatives to source reference books, hence the findings show that reference books in schools were limited in supply, and therefore, beginning teachers had to work out on their own initiatives to get the reference books in order to produce quality lesson notes.

Findings on lesson notes show that experienced teachers provided beginning teachers with readymade lesson notes, which acted as helping tools so that beginning teachers could go through and see how best lesson notes could be modified and prepared for classroom. One head of school stated:

The good thing with the beginning teacher is we are teaching the same subject (Mathematics). I could not be such mean to him, knowing he was a newcomer. I just supported him with everything, including my own personal lesson notes so that he could catch up so fast with the pace I set in Mathematics teaching.

This implies that the experienced teachers provided the beginning teachers with readymade lesson notes to support them with exposure to structures and details of notes for them to easily cope with the teaching prerequisites to competence based curriculum. Based on the online links, findings show that experienced teachers supported beginning teachers with website-based education links, which contained useful information concerning subject contents, videos, animations, and illustrations, depending on what the teacher needed. Thus, experienced teachers coached, demonstrated, and mentored beginning teachers on how to search for relevant information regarding topics stipulated in

the syllabus. One head of department stated, "One of my responsibilities as a Biology head of department is to coach beginning teachers on how to identify and use official sites containing genuine contents of the curriculum so that they are able to prepare genuine lesson notes."

This statement indicates that the heads of department exercised patriotic, educative, coaching and guiding roles to support beginning teachers in acquiring appropriate pedagogical skills as the beginning teachers needed both professional and technical supports to enable them grow professionally. Beginning teachers received textbooks, reference books, lesson notes, templates for schemes of work and lesson plans, and online links, which together, aimed at empowering the beginning teachers to enhance their pedagogical skills.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the study concludes that the effectiveness and achievement of mentorship practices in the secondary schools understudy depended on personal passion and commitment of both beginning teachers and experienced teachers. The positive regard of heads of schools and education officials towards mentorship triggered mentoring practices in schools, despite the fact that there were limited incentive motivational drives.

The study recommends that it is vital for the ministries responsible to institutionalise school-based mentorship programs by releasing policies, enacting laws, and producing circulars and guidelines to enforce schools implement mentoring in specific and systematic procedures which could stand as best practices in the education system instead of depending on personal desires and commitment. Authorities should develop common assessment tools to assess mentorship progress among beginning teachers within and across schools.

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