

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study aims to highlight the issues pertaining to coaching and mentoring carried out by School Improvement Specialist Coaches in Negeri Sembilan. The scenario will be explored through the mixed method study. This chapter includes an introduction, the background of the study, the overview of the study, the problem statement, research objectives and research questions, the conceptual framework, the significance of the study, the limitations of the study, and the definitions of terms. Chapter 2 centres on the literature related to the coaching and mentoring spectrum by SISC+. Chapter 3 includes details on the methodology and procedures that were used to examine the issues including the research design, population and sample, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 4 until 6 focuses on the data analysis results and the findings of the study. Chapter 7 ends the research by providing the summary of each chapter, the summary of the research questions, implications, and contributions of the study, and then the recommendations for further studies.

1.2 Background of the study

Quality education is the mainstay of a country's development and key to growth in every society. It is widely accepted that quality education creates better citizens and helps to upgrade the general standard of living in a society (Almendarez,

2011). This is also supported by Teixeira (2002), who perceives human capital in the light of how education increases the productivity and competence of the workforce by improving their levels of cognitive skills. Therefore, in order to make a significant contribution to economic growth and development, shifting towards the enhancement of knowledge manifests itself as a substantial agenda.

In Malaysia, several efforts have been undertaken seriously to address the quality of the education system. To ensure that the quality of education in Malaysia can achieve the international standards and provide all Malaysian children with the first-class education system, the government has exerted an on-going effort to increase the access, equity and quality of education. Among the attempts made in the development of policy to transform Malaysian education are the Education Development Master Plan (2006-2010) and this is followed by the National Education Blueprint (2013-2025) which aims at raising the standards and quality of the Malaysian education (Jamil, 2014). In the context of Malaysia, all educational processes at the national level are envisioned by the National Education Policy (Al-hudawi, Lai, Fong, & Musah, 2014). Concurrently, the Ministry of Education (MOE) holds great responsibilities to develop the human capital that is comprehensive and progressive with high ethical standards. This on-going effort of education development has witnessed the launch of Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025) that aims to empower and bring the national education up to the international level as well as to provide quality education to all.

For that reason, the dimension of quality should be given immediate attention. Hence, to achieve the aims, Malaysian Education Blueprint has established 11 shifts with an intention to transform the education system, while the dimension of quality has become the central focus across all shifts. These 11 shifts represent a change in

transforming the Malaysian education system. Meanwhile, through these shifts, teachers will have the support they need to succeed, and they will have access to more school-based professional development opportunities (MOE, 2013).

Based on the international data, the education performance of Malaysia at international level has demonstrated deterioration in the standard compared to other countries in the world. One part of the data was collected through the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which is an international study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (OECD, 2015). In the 2009 examination, it is reported that participating schools from the 74 countries were graded as follows – 7% as Good, 13% as Fair, and 80% as Poor. Out of 74 countries participating in PISA 2009, Malaysia was ranked in the bottom third place for Reading, Mathematics, and Science (MOE, 2013).

Similarly, according to the 2012 PISA report, Malaysia was ranked 52nd out of 65 countries. In 2015, Malaysia was disqualified from PISA assessment because of the low level of response rate. It is clear from the recent PISA report that Malaysia's performance is declining, and it is below the OECD average. Thus, based on Malaysia's unsatisfactory performance on a global scale, it is crucial to address our declining standards in education. Therefore, the transformation in the education system at all levels is required in order to best serve students at different performance levels.

The purpose of transformation in education in the Blueprint is not only to improve the curriculum and assessment in the education system but also to achieve an expanded integration across them. If all the key players perform their roles effectively, it is possible for Malaysia to not only outperform other countries in international

education rankings but also to stand prominently as a high-income country in the near future (MOE, 2013).

As a result, the Malaysian government has taken prompt actions to guarantee and provide all Malaysian children with a high-quality education system and then achieve the international standards requirements. Among the strategies employed by the Ministry is to enhance many initiatives that have been developed as part of the transformation (Jamil, 2014). The District Transformation Programme (DTP) develops the capacity of the *Pejabat Pendidikan Daerah* (PPD) or the District Education Office to expedite school improvement through systematic and restricted programmes across all states starting in 2014. In other words, every PPD is empowered to regulate the support provided to schools such as in the form of student attendance as well as the deployment of principals and teachers (MOE, 2013). Resources can then be directed to the schools where they are most needed. New positions were also established, and these positions are named School Improvement Specialist Coaches (SISC).

1.3 Overview of SISC in Malaysia

School Improvement Specialist Coach (SISC) was introduced in the year 2012 to support teachers in translating the written curriculum into classroom teaching. SISC comprise of teachers who were trained among the Masters of Excellence (*Guru Cemerlang*), and they were given training in the form of "master coachees". They were piloted in Kedah and Sabah in 2012 due to the significant challenges faced in the two states in reducing the performance gap and improving school quality (the borneopost.com, 6 October 2015). From the programme in Kedah and Sabah, it is shown that DTP has had an encouraging effect on the academic performance of

students in these two states. Furthermore, the result has not only shown improvements in the 2013 *Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah* (UPSR), *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (PMR) and *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) examinations but also displayed the largest improvement in 2013 UPSR results compared to other states. In addition, Kedah and Sabah showed an increase in the number of schools in Band 1 and Band 2 and a decline in the number of schools in Band 6 and Band 7. This improvement is proven to be the best achievement in the last ten years for the two states (MOE, 2013).

Beginning in 2015, schools are categorised into seven Bands from Band 1 (the highest) to Band 7 (the lowest). The exact scores of each school are disclosed. The assessment points for the score are produced from the grade point averages of the preceding year's national examination results, and another 30% is derived from the assessment of *Jemaah Nazir dan Kualiti* (JNJK).

The roles of SISC include the responsibilities of delivering new curriculum and assessments, coaching teachers on new pedagogical skills, and then monitoring the effectiveness of such implementation (MOE, 2013). They are expected to spend 60% of their time per week on coaching and mentoring. They need to monitor the teachers in low-performance schools three times a year so that they can identify problems faced by the school and they also need to think of an intervention or recovery programme that can be carried out at the school along with the school administrators and teachers. This is because teachers' quality is one of the most significant factors in student learning (DuFour & Mattos, 2013).

SISC are also assigned as pedagogical experts who help to improve student-centred teaching. The focus of SISC's coaching sessions is on the mastery of critical pedagogical skills in developing higher-order thinking skills, teaching children of different abilities, and assessing students effectively. Teachers are required to deliver

the existing syllabus in a manner that emphasises skills and competencies deemed critical for the 21st century (MOE, 2013). SISC do not have direct contact with students in the classroom as the coaches' clients are the teachers.

It is the mission of the Ministry that, along with the introduction of the SISC, the tiers that are involved in the curriculum and assessment delivery can be reduced and also provide first-hand training to teachers (MOE, 2012). By providing direct coaching to teachers, it is the aspiration of the Ministry that the quality of education in Malaysia will improve because the coach will provide instant feedback to the coachee. The feedback given allows teachers to define precisely which areas of their practice they want to improve (Horne, 2012). SISC's job is to provide support for the improvement of school performance in which they have direct engagement with schools regularly to coach, mentor, and monitor the performance of the school. The support given is different because each teacher will be coached personally, and it will occur in their respective schools on an individual basis. This support will be beneficial, and it is intended to ensure the success of the Malaysia Education Blueprint's goal, which is to empower the national education system and eventually help students to get the results they know they are capable of producing.

Therefore, based on the effective results of the pilot project, the Ministry has undertaken an initiative to expand the post of School Improvement Specialist Coach (SISC) to the whole nation or later known as the School Improvement Specialist Coaches+ or SISC+. The only difference between SISC and SISC+ is that the latter is located in the PPD while the former is based in schools. The relocation of these experts aims at increasing the support systems for teachers to improve the delivery of their teaching. In the beginning, the SISC+ specifically focused on three core subjects, namely Bahasa Melayu, English and Mathematics. These subjects were selected based

on the low performance of students in Trends in International Mathematics and Science (TIMSS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

1.4 Problem statement

Today, the quality of teachers is measured from students' achievements, a situation which exerts much pressure on teachers to perform their best in the classroom. Students' achievement is strongly influenced by their parental background, a range of school factors and society or culture (Desforjes & Abouchaar, 2003). The teacher has been an essential factor in influencing students' achievement (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Mincu, 2013). Therefore, students' achievement can be raised if the quality of teachers improves because effective teachers are one of the significant factors that contribute to students' achievement. This commitment and responsibility are even more overwhelming as the needs and challenges of 21st century learning are discussed. In any case, even the most prepared and suitably qualified teachers have a great deal to learn when they begin to teach (Kusanto et al. 2010). Hence, teacher mentoring is an essential issue in a steady stream of research on general teacher education (e.g., Bradbury, 2010; Orland-Barak & Hasin, 2010; Wang & Odell, 2007) because it is very important that teachers are well prepared when they begin to teach. This perspective is supported by other researchers (Harris & Sass, 2011; Rothstein, 2010; Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2005) who affirm that no doubt well prepared teachers constitute a significant school-based factor in students' development and success.

Since the launch of the Malaysia Education Development Plan (2013-2025), the Malaysian government has continued its efforts to improve the quality of the teaching profession by selecting highly qualified persons to enter the teaching

profession. In a Malaysian context, teacher education undergoes different changes towards improving teacher quality. It is worthy of note that the quality of teaching and learning is still not very impressive (Rozita, Mohammad & Azhar, 2016). Based on the findings of the JNJK within three years (2011 to 2013), the quality of teaching and learning still has not changed very much. One of the strategies implemented by the government is positioning SISC+ in each school which offers additional professional support in specific subjects, namely English Language, Mathematics, and Bahasa Melayu. The SISC+ have no direct contact with students in the classroom, as SISC+'s clients are teachers (Mohamad, Rashid, Yunus & Zaid, 2016). As SISC+, their tasks are on refocused instructions, on-going collaboration, and support for lesson planning and teacher set-up so that 21st century teaching and learning in the classroom becomes the focus of their teaching. Hence, it is vital to identify the roles and responsibilities of SISC+ because there is a need to have a more explicit interpretation about the description of the roles and responsibilities of a SISC+ for better performance in their profession. Since the Ministry has not given the clear cut of the roles and responsibilities of SISC+, thus this study is trying to establish the roles and responsibilities of SISC+.

Therefore, this study addresses how the SISC+ perceives and delivers their roles and responsibilities in school to help the teachers enhance their performance in their profession and eventually help to realise the hope of the Ministry to transform the education system in Malaysia.

Another significant objective that is addressed in this study is to explore the success and the challenges of SISC+ during the process of coaching and mentoring in the workplace. The success of the SISC+ is significant to study because it will provide the contextual clue to the contribution of SISC+ in the industry itself. The research

addresses the positive effects of coaching and mentoring by SISC+ through the identification of SISC+ success. It is essential to identify the success as it will provide the study with the value of the SISC+ from the eyes of the coachees themselves. On the contrary, the position of SISC+ is still at its infancy in the education industry in Malaysia. Therefore, the chances of facing challenges in their work are very high. In addition, the problem facing the coaching industry today is the lack of observed research that ropes the efficiency of coaching and mentoring in the educational setting. Grant and Zackon (2004) argued that coaching had outgrown its current proprietary knowledge-based status, and many coaches are advocating a shift towards more research that will provide theoretically grounded, evidence-based knowledge as a form of support. While this approach has been the subject of much public research, the research literature has been lacking in studies that directly link instructional coaching with improved teacher performance or student achievement over the long term and the issues derived from the coaching and mentoring among the teachers, especially in the Malaysian context. By educating teachers, it helps them to decide what they need to do in the classroom, including when challenges arise, and training teachers help them to do what is necessary for a practical, consistent and efficient manner (Medwell et al. 2017). Issues and dilemmas in the workplace can sometimes range from simple disagreement to complex issues, thus understanding the various challenges that can cause problems in the workplace will help to correct them.

Finally, this study also sheds light on the influence of coaching and mentoring by the SISC+ in teaching and learning among English Language teachers. One of the most critical challenges in the transformation of education is how they can transfer knowledge into skill and adjust themselves in the process of learning. Therefore, the principle of learning can help offer some explanation about this (Fazel, 2013).

Primarily, in the process of learning, two parties are involved - the teacher (trainer, coach, mentor, supervisor) and the student (trainee, coachee, mentee, protégé). Regardless of how a person embarks upon learning, the outcome is the vital part. There are a number of research done on the influence of coaching but there is not much study done on the influence of SISC+ towards the teaching and learning of the teachers. Thus, studying the influence of SISC+ towards the teaching and learning of the teachers are essential due to the impact on students' performance. The importance of teacher-student communication in learner's achievement is strongly emphasised in the socio-cultural educational theory, originated by Lev Vygotsky (1978). In Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, learning is described as a social process and the beginning of human intelligence in a society or culture.

The main highlight is on the active position of the learner, which is essential for the development of the cognition. Vygotsky believed that learning takes place at two levels - firstly, through the interaction with others, and then combined into the individual's mental structure. A second feature of Vygotsky's theory is the idea that the potential for cognitive development is limited to a 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD). Vygotsky described the ZPD as the distance between what a learner can do independently and what he or she is capable of completing with expert assistance (Gebhard, 2008). Until the learner can demonstrate his or her ability to work independently, this process is referred to as scaffolding, which is how an adult helps the child learner to move from the inability to perform a task to be able to do so through guidance, interaction and questions (Vygotsky, 1982). Thus, coaching, mentoring or counselling serve as a very useful tool in the application of ZPD that catapults to the concept of professional development.

Studying the issues about SISC+ roles and responsibilities, successes and challenges, as well as their influences towards the teachers will strengthen the field of knowledge about coaching and mentoring. Through this study, their roles and responsibilities, their success and challenges during the process of coaching and mentoring in the workplace as well as how far they influence the teaching and learning of the teachers are worth discussing in this study. In conclusion, this research is significant to be carried out to enable relevant parties to study the overall issues pertaining to the coaching and mentoring done by the SISC+. In the next section, the researcher will proceed with the research questions that lead to the overall aims of the research.

1.5 Research objectives

This research has outlined three objectives as follows: -

- i. To identify how SISC+ perceive and deliver their roles and responsibilities.
- ii. To explore into the success and challenges of SISC+ during the process of coaching and mentoring in the workplace.
- iii. To examine the influence of coaching and mentoring by the SISC+ towards the teaching and learning of the teachers.

1.6 Research questions

The questions for the research are as follows: -

- i. How does the SISC+ perceive and deliver their roles and responsibilities?
- ii. What are the success and challenges faced by SISC+ during the process of coaching and mentoring in the workplace?
- iii. How does coaching and mentoring by the SISC+ influence the teaching and learning of the teachers?

1.7 Conceptual framework

Based on the objectives of the study, the researcher finds three relevant frameworks to be used in the study. The framework in this study is based on Biggs' (1996) 3Ps model and Vygotsky's theory on scaffolding. The 3Ps model is representative of an educative process in a closed system. It highlights an approach to teaching which changes and evolves in response to the learning needs of a student group with diverse backgrounds. The Presage stage refers to the individual states of being that foreshadow the educative process, for instance the prior knowledge, abilities, preferred approaches to learning, values, expectations, and competence in the language of instruction. Following the Presage stage in the 3P model, we have the Process stage. Process stage refers to the way students handle the task, which is determined by their perceptions of the teaching context, motives, tendencies and their decisions for immediate action. The last stage, Product is the outcome of the whole process (Biggs, 1996).

In the presage stage, the state of being for the learners are not clearly shown. Concurrently in this study, the process stage is where the coaching and mentoring by the SISC+ took place, and here the process is equivalent to the Zone of Proximal Development introduced by Vygotsky. In Vygotsky's theory, scaffolding is seen as the most effective way to achieve success in an activity that they are not able to do alone previously. However, the support must be matched to the needs of the learners. The interactions between these dimensions are conceptualised as a process, then transformed in the context of the activity, and finally externalised in ways that others may adopt. At this stage, the process of scaffolding is the practice of coaching and mentoring by SISC+ and The Grow Model by Whitmore (1992) is used to complete their task as coaches. After going through the process of scaffolding, this stage will

continue with the Product stage or the outcomes of the learning process. It may be in terms of correcting relevant answers, abstract thinking, and elegant conceptualisation of problems in the case of high-level outcomes (Biggs, 1996, p. 52). Consistent with both Biggs and Vygotsky's theories, as well as The Grow Model, the researcher connects these learning processes to the process of coaching and mentoring to highlight the role of the SISC+. Figure 1.1 explains the conceptual framework proposed in this study.

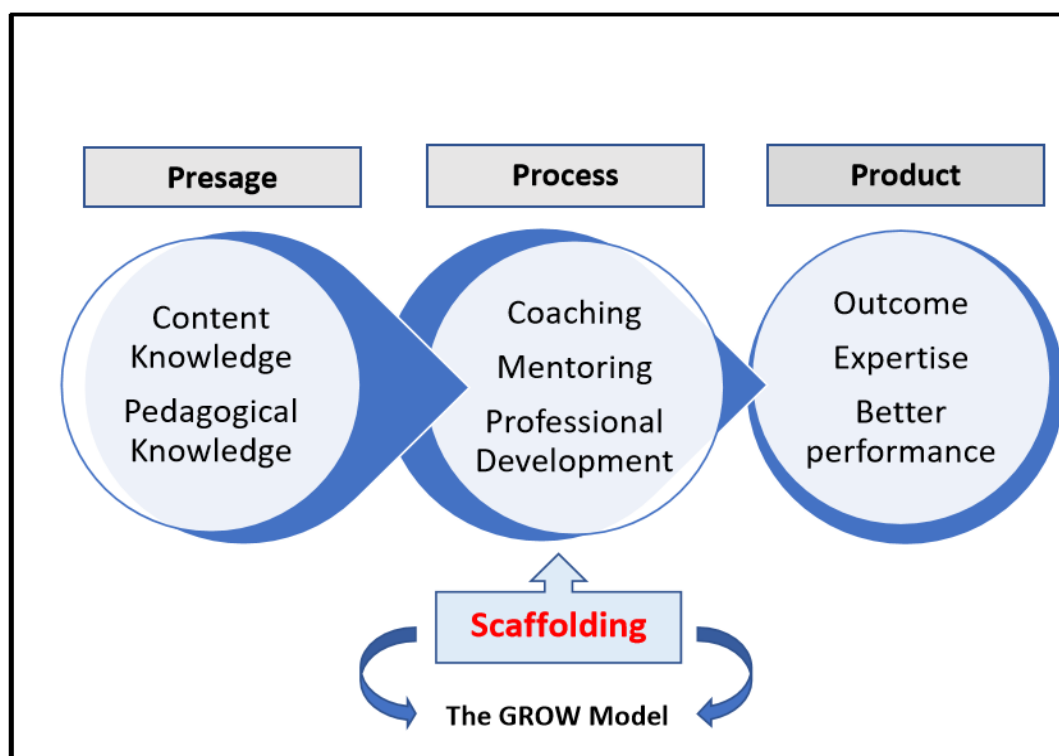


Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework (Adaptation of Biggs' 3Ps Model and Vygotsky's Scaffolding)

In conclusion, this conceptual framework describes the role of the SISC+ to provide support to the teachers with their needs and to complete their job these SISC+ utilised The Grow Model by Whitmore (1992). The support given by the SISC+ to the teachers or to their coachees are highlighted in the process stage- coaching, mentoring

and professional development and it is hoped that in the product stage the teachers will be better in their performance. The Grow Model is essential in this stage because the process is not about giving advice but to maximise the potential of the teachers and this leads to the transformation in education discussed in this study.

1.8 Significance of the study

This study is significant as it supports the main agenda of the country in terms of educational development, as stated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint. The identification of roles and responsibilities of the coaches is highly significant because they will provide an insight into the transformation of the national education system. A proper standard of the roles and responsibilities of SISC+ will be a helpful instrument to achieve the aim of the Ministry in the Malaysian Education Blueprint as far as the implementation of SISC+ in Malaysia is concerned. This study is hoped to help MOE to outline the roles and characteristics of SISC+ so that the DTP can function well. Other than that, this study is also important in emphasising on the importance of understanding the issues of coaching and mentoring, especially the success and the challenges met by the coaches during the process. It will be an exposure with respect to the importance of coaches and their influence on the students in specific, also the schools and the country in general.

Therefore, it might change the view towards the transformation of the education system. It is hoped that the result of this study will become an effective tool to develop an understanding towards coaching and mentoring as well as to boost the level of confidence among the coaches. It is essential for the Ministry to have vast knowledge on the effect of transformation in education so that actions can be done in implementing the appropriate methodology and adequate measures to the school for

the benefit of the coaches, teachers and students. They should have a deeper understanding of the intervention so that they can manipulate their knowledge creatively in order for the transformation to take place. Thus, in turn, this may lead to the preparation of a more integrated programme that could well lead to the construction of practice modules that meet the needs of these coaches and teachers. This is because of the limited school subjects that have been involved with SISC+ since 2013. Thus, more subjects are expected to be involved in the future. Since the key component for school improvement is coaching and mentoring, understanding the issues surrounding coaching and mentoring among the coaches is one of the significant elements.

1.9 Definition of terms

Below is the operational definition of terms that are used repeatedly in this research. The following definitions of terms include words and phrases pertinent to the understanding of the common language in this inquiry.

1.9.1 Coaching

Coaching is the main component of a successful professional development that will become a form of support to reveal a person's potential to maximise their own performance. Coaching offers support for the learners' ability to transfer their learning to succeed in sophisticated and independent performances. According to Lord et al. (2008), coaching is an enabling process that aims at enhancing learning and development with the intention of improving the performance in a specific aspect of the practice (Lord et al., 2008). Therefore, in this study coaching is defined as the ability of a coach to offer additional professional support in helping the coachees to

exploit and increase their performance in certain subjects, namely Mathematics, Bahasa Melayu and English Language. The emphasis will be on continuous collaboration, support for lesson planning and teacher placement so that the 21st century teaching and learning in the classroom can become the focal point of their teaching.

1.9.2 Mentoring

Mentoring refers to a process of serving as a mentor, or someone who facilitates and assists another person's development. The process of mentoring includes modelling because the mentor must be able to model the messages and suggestions being taught to the beginning teacher (Gay, 1995). With regard to this study, mentoring is a process where the SISC+ or the coaches demonstrate a range of cognitive coaching competencies, such as posing carefully constructed questions to stimulate reflection, paraphrasing, and using data to improve teaching and learning.

1.9.3 Transformation

Generally, the word transformation can be described as a process of the adaptation of innovation with the aim to improve the outcomes. Transformation is a proclamation that our actions today create for our future tomorrow (McGoff, 2019). Transformation is a process of learning to understand the whole new subject matters or issues. Through transformation, students' achievement can be improved in this continually changing and highly-demanding environment. Thus, in this research context, transformation is a process of improving the teaching and learning in the classroom as well as the content and pedagogical knowledge because the increased

complexities of the world today present new challenges and, at the same time, require new demands on our education system.

1.9.4 SISC+

SISC+ is the acronym for School Improvement Specialist Coaches – a new post created by the Ministry of Education. The SISC+ job is to improve the quality of teaching and learning among the teachers under its control towards enhancing proficiency and ensuring students' achievement. The teachers supervised and guided are expected to reach a predetermined standard and also to make sure that the policies and programmes are carried out in schools. The SISC+ will also plan and coordinate the implementation of training for teachers in their respective areas.

1.9.5 Teachers

Teacher is a profession with a job scope to teach students through each pivotal stage of development. As teachers, they are one of the most influential people in students' lives. Children will first learn from their parents, then only school teacher, who will guide students, inform them, expand their awareness as well as develop their performance ability. Thus, in this study, the teachers refer to the educators who receive personal coaching and mentoring from the SISC+ or the coach. The coach establishes clear performance goals and then supervises the development of skills and knowledge through on-going opportunities to perform, accompanied by specific feedback and modelling. This support by the SISC+ is intended to ensure the success of the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025) which seeks to empower the national education system and eventually helps students to get their potential results.

The teachers and coachees refer to the same participants. Therefore, the terms might be used interchangeably.

1.9.6 Coaches

Coach usually refers to a person who is responsible to help, assist and provide support to the people who are under his or her supervision. The coach is an important individual with the responsibility of bringing evidence-based practices into classrooms by working with teachers and other school leaders. In DTP, the coach works one to one with the teachers in the school. In this research, coach and SISC+ are the same, therefore both terms are used interchangeably.

1.9.7 Coachees

A coachee is a person who receives training from a coach, especially in education, business or office practice. The word coachee is similar to the word 'trainee' and 'mentee' in which these people receive coaching, training or mentoring from their coach, trainer or mentor. In this research, coachee refers to the teachers who are coached by the SISC+, thus the word 'coachee' and the word 'teacher' will be used interchangeably.

1.10 Concluding remarks for Chapter 1

In this chapter, the researcher has presented an introduction to the study. The researcher carried out the study to analyse the overall perplexing issues concerning SISC+. This current work also introduces the practices of coaching and mentoring among the SISC+ and the potential value of coaching and mentoring as a useful tool for the professional development of teachers. This chapter has attempted to make a

case for the need for additional research that focuses on a new post created by the Ministry. The following chapter provides a description of the literature review of this study.

