

Mentoring SYSTEM: An Evaluation by English Mentors and Efl Student-Teachers

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Abstract: The system of mentoring has first been applied in England and is being used in Turkey's educational system, too. The aim of the study is evaluating the mentoring system of Ataturk University, School of Education, and English Language Teaching Department in training pre-service English teachers during their teaching experience at schools. Questionnaires were applied to mentors, student-teachers and supervisors. Data have been collected through questionnaires which include Lykert type items and collected data have been analyzed statistically using mean scores of the participants. The purpose of this study is to make student teachers and mentors aware of mentors' importance in teaching experience, to attract the interest of teachers who have never taken part in mentoring. The aim which is to reach mass of mentors has been achieved. However, it is essential to state that this study is a kind of starting point to develop new research in this context.

Introduction

The mentoring system has been applied in various countries and its positive results have been in the Literature. The aims of this study are to make student teachers and mentors aware of mentor's importance in teaching experience and to draw the attention of teachers' who have never taken part in mentoring. The study aims at evaluating the system of mentoring at Atatürk University, School of Education, English Language Teaching Department in training pre-service English teachers during their teaching experience at schools. Mentors are the ones we, Department of English Language Teaching, send our student-teachers to get training through working with them at primary and high schools, during teaching experience. The student-teachers interact with ELT mentors and get information and training from them both on the ways of teaching English and also on classroom management during their teaching experience in the fourth year of their education (two terms) in ELT department, School of Education, at Ataturk University. At this point the mentors are the only means of having our student-teachers apply the knowledge they have acquired to the real-life situations and finding practical solutions to them. Therefore, the mentors should be well-trained and equipped with the necessary information in order that they may guide and help our student-teachers. The mentors in this sense act as a bridge between the schools and our department back at the university, since they pass information about the skills needed in real classrooms to our student-teachers. All the information given in the department cannot go much further beyond a theoretical framework; except for the micro and macro teaching sessions during Methodology classes in the third year.

Background

Upon reviewing the Literature on mentor evaluation, there appeared a lot of research, both national and international in this field. As for the departmental scope, a handbook (Akalin, 1998) composed of feedback and comments on a three-day seminar held in ELT department at Ataturk University was first published and it has been the major source of collected data of this study. Furthermore, Hussein (2007) outlines the deficiencies of the traditional mentoring system and sets up a new approach to mentoring. Rajuana et al. (2007) focus on a group technique to bring the expectations of the participants concerning the role of the cooperating teacher to awareness and articulation. The student teacher group held more expectations for a personal relationship than the cooperating teacher group. Suggestions are given for bridging the gap in expectations between cooperating teachers and student teachers in the initial stage of the practicum program. Smith (2007) using a case study approach, examines the challenges faced by a

cooperating teacher and student-teacher during their collaborative planning conversations. The article concludes that cooperating and student-teachers could engage in more educative planning conversations if they broadened their understanding of their roles as expert and novice planners and of the definition of expertise itself. Varghese and Wilberschied (2002) explore mentee-mentor relationships, which illustrate the tensions and difficulties that arise when this simplistic dichotomy breaks down, a situation that is becoming more and more prevalent when teachers pursue secondary certifications, validations or endorsements. The study finds that the mentoring relationship was mainly coloured by the discourse used by the mentors, the specific backgrounds and goals of the mentees, as well as the different understandings each mentor and mentee had of the TESL profession and their roles in the practica. Time and opportunities need to be allowed for these factors to be discussed and negotiated. Rush et.al. (2008) examined two in-service English teachers and two preservice English teachers, who participated in a shared mentoring relationship during the student-teaching semester, shared their experiences, conflicts, and how they were resolved. The authors provided first-person narratives of all four teachers and suggestions for improving mentoring experiences for both mentor teachers and student-teachers. Friedman and Wallace (2006) document a three-year complex case study that addressed the question: What happens when English, education, and high school faculty cross borders to prepare secondary English teachers to teach in urban schools is the central concern of the article. Bullough (2005) implements a case study constructed of a secondary school teacher's struggle to move beyond her identity as a teacher to assume a mentor's identity in her year-long work with two English-teaching interns. Based on the data, the author argues for the importance of attending to identity in teacher education and the education of mentors describes conditions that would facilitate mentor identity formation. The literature amply proves that the importance of mentoring in bringing up novice teachers is not diminishing, just the opposite, it is saliently gaining a momentum requiring of the revision of every such program.

Method

This study aims at assessing the current situation so that what can be done in the next step should be known. So this study is limited to the Turkish mentors preparing student-teachers as secondary school English language teachers in the Turkish National Educational System. The subjects were chosen randomly, so, caution should be taken in making generalizations for further research.

The questionnaires have been applied to the mentors, the student-teachers and the supervisors. But supervisors were reluctant to respond the questionnaire. (Only three supervisors have responded). Therefore the supervisors have been left out of the evaluation. The following research questions were generated to guide the research:

- 1- What role do the mentors have in preparing the student-teachers for their future career?
- 2- How do the mentors, supervisors and student teachers perceive the mentors?
- 3- Are there problems hindering the mentors from being better mentors? What are they?

A total of 32 English mentors and 142 EFL student-teachers participated in the present study. The student-teacher participants have to attend school experience and training program two semesters at local state schools under the guidance of mentors of English who are the subject matter of this study as well. The senior students have been charged with attending different high schools in Erzurum. In the schools, since the number of the mentors is high, each mentor becomes responsible of 12 students. That is why, the number of the mentor participants may be argued to be low in contrast to student-teacher participants.

A questionnaire was applied at different 9 state high schools In May, 2007, the questionnaire consisting of 37 items was conducted on both mentors and EFL student-teachers in which the mentors evaluated themselves and the student-teachers evaluated the mentors. The answers were taken in the form of Likert Scale (from 1= never to 5= always). In preparing the questionnaire the author has carried out seminars (1998) with the same local English mentors and school administrators and published a guide book (1999) underlying the qualities of the mentors.

Data Analysis

In both groups (mentors& student-teachers), the participants completed evaluation forms. These forms have been prepared both for mentors and student-teachers separately but both of the questionnaires aimed at evaluating the mentors. The questions in both questionnaires can be grouped as follows:

Question#1 is about the process of observation. Questions# 2, 3, 4, 5, 19, 20 and 21 ask about how much self-evaluation opportunities and feedback the mentor gives to the student-teachers. Questions# 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 investigate what problems mentors face when dealing with the student-teachers. Questions# 12, 13 and 14 discuss about the duties of the mentors. Questions# 22, 23, 24, 26, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36 and 37 try to get information about the level of interaction and communication between the student-teachers and the mentors. Question# 25 asks how much reinforcement the mentors give to the student-teachers. Questions# 15, 16, 17, 18, 27, 28, 29, 35 ask the mentors about how they find themselves as mentors, and the same questions in the student-teachers' questionnaires ask the student-teachers how they find mentors.

Written comments by student-teachers:

One of the student-teachers comments on his mentor: "A very good model for me."

Another one says: "He is a perfect teacher in both teaching and communicating."

Next comments go: "I like her. She is professional in her job."

"I am glad with her."

One last general comment: "I think it is necessary for us to experience in the schools and it is efficient and will be efficient."

Written comments by mentors:

One of the mentors' comments: "Students-teachers should be taught that this is one of the university lessons, and they should care for it as much as their university lessons. Moreover they should attend the lessons, and be more eager to teaching." One other mentor points out the student-teacher's responsibility to make English lessons more enjoyable by saying: "English lesson should be fun for the student-teacher." Another one says: "The schools should be introduced to the student-teacher before they begin their apprenticeship. The education payment which is paid to the student-teacher should be increased." One last mentor is dissatisfied with their own payment, for he says: "It's urgent that the mentor is to be paid regularly and highly."

Findings and Results

This study has achieved its objectives. It is inevitable to get some fake results but they indicate that evaluation of mentors should be revised more deeply. It might be seen as a mirror which reflects reality in that case. It has gained success and made participants of the questionnaire think about their professions, process of learning and teaching with a peaceful atmosphere.

The questionnaire is the central collector of the results. It was applied to the mentors in more than 9 schools in Erzurum and student-teachers at English Language Teaching Department of Ataturk University. In that questionnaire, thirty seven questions were asked to student-teachers. Moreover, thirty seven different questions were asked to mentors. The questions are all related to teacher training system, its tiring process with all its difficulties and benefits. Within this process, both student teachers and mentors might have faced with many problems or inadequate communication between each other. So, thanks to this study they try to convey their feelings, ideas and experiences in an unbiased observation. It is the main objective of this study to construct an unbiased platform for all professions in teaching language and teacher training programs. So, they can give what they have faced or experienced within this whole term period. In order to get the best results, this study lasts not in limited time but enough time to observe. Because participants have their own responsibilities apart from teacher training program so they need enough time to think and write down objective explanations.

Besides evaluating the mentors, this study has tried to reply how one becomes a good and well qualified teacher, because to become a good teacher is as important as training a student teacher. Teacher's awareness of methods, techniques which are used in classroom activities should be taken into consideration. Hence, mentors are asked about their teaching background, field knowledge and their own value system oriented to what they teach in classroom. Whether they receive accurate feedback or they encourage student teachers to build self-esteem and their value system. Self-evaluation for both student-teachers and mentors is necessary. It can be inferred from the results that they do not have enough knowledge about self-evaluation. Thanks to this study, it is tried to make them conscious.

This study gives some heavy burdens for mentors. It is argued that the syllabus is not appropriate for all instruction contexts. It consists of limited time and lots of subjects should be taught in this limited time. It is regarded as an inevitable situation for teachers. It brings heavy workload for both mentors and student teachers. Hence, the time devoted to student teachers is not enough to build reciprocal training and experience.

A question may be asked: "Is there a good relation between the supervisor at the university and the mentor?" It is important to interact effectively in order to observe student-teachers objectively. The

results indicate that most of the mentors go and meet supervisors about the recent developments, student-teachers' attendance to training (whether regular or not). And also supervisors visit schools to monitor student-teacher's performance in the light of some criteria. During these observations, supervisors generally contact with school administrations. Some mentors prefer sending the recent report or message via student-teachers going back to the department. This study also examines mentors' methods they are using in the classroom. It is asked to student-teachers to discover this reality, of whether student centered instruction or teacher centered instruction is dominant. But less than half of the mentors use different approaches for their class and students. They use either a course book or series of the book. They rarely benefit from different language resources apart from course books, teacher's book and audio cassettes. Most mentors depend on group teaching rather than individual learning. Mentors are inclined to provide comfortable school atmosphere and condition for student teachers. Thanks to school administration, student teachers can use teachers' room for conferencing sessions with mentors.

Briefly, this study has achieved its overall objectives. Its aims are making student-teachers and the mentors be aware of mentors' importance in teaching experience; attracting the interest of teachers who have never taken part in mentoring. The aim which is to reach mass of mentors is achieved. However, it is inevitable to tell that this study is a kind of starting point to develop new research in this context. Further study would require the restructuring of the whole system to represent the voices and experiences of the student-teachers. Towards this end, a new mentoring framework that potentially encourages student-teachers to become critical practitioners should be offered. The model proposed should emphasize the professional agency of the student-teacher. Such a model holds the position that to transform their views of teaching and learning, student-teachers as well as their trainers should be empowered to seek justice and emancipation from the traditional model of evaluation. Finally, it should attempt to leave readers with the impression that if we prefer our zone of comfort at the expense of our student-teacher's growth we must know that we are jeopardizing the fate of teacher education.

Given the ANOVA analysis, the fourth question examining the frequency and quality of getting feedback from the mentors to the student-teachers, the finding (sig. 0.030) shows that there is a significant difference between the answers of mentors and student-teachers at the level of $p < 0.005$. While the mean of mentors is 2.91, the mean of the student-teachers is 2.35. The means suggest that mentors do not sufficiently give feedback to the students. As for the question 7, a significant difference about mentor's language proficiency (sig. 0.022) at the level of $p < 0.05$ is seen. It seems that student teachers do not see their mentors successful about language proficiency as much as their mentors consider. Question 19 examines the mentors' approach towards self evaluation. However, both groups gave significantly different answers. While the mean of the mentors is 3.79, the mean of the student teachers is 2.80.

Considering mentors' achievement about reinforcement, there also seems to be a significant difference between the responses of the mentors and student-teachers (sig. 0.031) on question 25. While the mean of student-teachers was 2.886, the mean of the mentors was 3.54. In fact, it displays that mentors appear to reinforce their student though it is not seen sufficient by the student-teachers. Question 29 also indicates a significant difference between the responses of the mentors and student-teachers as to the perception of the mentor in terms of supportive aspects. While the mean of the student-teachers was 3.170, on the other hand for the mentors, mean turned out 4.17. For the question 32, it can be argued that mentors consider themselves adequate about their affective and communicative functions ($f = 9.299$, sig. 0.003); however student-teachers are not certain of getting affective support. As to the interaction between the mentors and student-teachers (question 33), student-teachers pointed out that mentors do not consider student teachers' ideas adequately in contrast to the mentors' responses. There appears a significant difference at the level of $p < 0.005$ ($f = 15.452$, sig. .000). While the mean of mentors is 4.04, the mean of the student-teachers is 2.99. Likewise, question 34 suggests the same argument given the mean of student-teachers (3.37), the mean of the mentors (4.12). The findings show that there is a significant difference between the two parties about communicative situation ($f = 7.892$, sig. 0.006). Question 35 has examined the mentors' function as a scaffolder; regarding the former findings this item suggests the same result. As to the sufficient pedagogical support to the student-teachers by the mentors, while the mean of the mentors is 3.79, the mean of the student-teachers is 2.80. This again states that the mentors and the student-teachers are not in a common opinion about mentor's support.

Variables		Sum of squares	DF	Mean	F	Sig.
How often do you give feedback in written form as well as verbally?	Between Group	6.543	1	6.543	4.786	.030
	Within Groups	224.228	164	1.367		
How often do you face problems with your own English language proficiency/field knowledge?	Between Group	8.293	1	8.293	5.334	.022
	Within Groups	254.984	164	1.555		
How often do you give the student-teacher the chance to self-evaluate himself/herself orally?	Between Group	16.127	1	16.127	9.251	.003
	Within Groups	284.140	163	1.743		
How often do you give student-teacher the chance to self-evaluate himself/herself in written form?	Between Group	17.790	1	17.790	12.495	.001
	Within Groups	230.649	162	1.424		
How often do you give reinforcement to the student-teachers?	Between Group	8.803	1	8.803	4.749	.031
	Within Groups	302.143	163	1.854		
How often do you think a mentor is a reflective friend?	Between Group	19.921	1	19.921	13.160	.000
	Within Groups	245.219	162	1.514		
Is there a two-way interaction rather than a directive attitude of the mentor in these sessions?	Between Group	15.328	1	15.328	14.655	.000
	Within Groups	168.390	161	1.046		
Is there a communicative atmosphere characterized by openness and caring?	Within Groups	12.097	1	12.097	9.299	.003
	Within Groups	213.331	164	1.301		
How often do you seek student-teachers' ideas as well which could be discussed and enriched if needed?	Between Group	22.558	1	22.558	15.452	.000
	Within Groups	237.951	163	1.460		
How often do you encourage and support the student-teachers so as to build up their confidence in planning and teaching English?	Between Group	11.509	1	11.509	7.892	.006
	Within Groups	237.703	163	1.458		
How often do you believe you can give dynamic service by using other resources and methods and do you go step by step by having the student-teachers begin from what they can manage, for example group-teaching, with a trial-error learning approach?	Between Group	19.859	1	19.859	13.646	.000
	Within Groups	235.751	162	1.455		

Table 1. Mentors and Mentees' Responses

Variables		Mean	Standard Deviation
How often does the mentor follow the process of pre-observation, observation and post-observation?	Student teacher	3,0219	1,1972
	Mentor teacher	3,5000	,78019
How often does the mentor provide feedback to the student-teachers as a mentor?	Student teacher	3,2887	1,15826
	Mentor teacher	3,7500	,89685
<i>Is his/her feedback sufficient in depth</i>	Student teacher	3,2214	1,18788
	Mentor teacher	3,5417	,93153
<i>How often does the mentor give feedback in written form as well as verbally?</i>	Student teacher	2,3521	1,16203
	Mentor teacher	2,9167	1,21285
How often does the mentor give feedback immediately after the observation?	Student teacher	3,1773	1,22056
	Mentor teacher	3,2917	1,12208
<i>How often does the mentor face problems with time constraints when providing feedback ?</i>	Student teacher	2,5357	1,14685
	Mentor teacher	2,3750	,96965
<i>How often does the mentor face problems with his own English language proficiency/field knowledge?</i>	Student teacher	2,2606	1,30835
	Mentor teacher	1,6250	,76967
<i>How often does the mentor face problems related with inadequate/no training given to the mentor?</i>	Student teacher	2,1786	1,16463
	Mentor teacher	1,7391	,68870
<i>How often does the mentor face problems with school management?</i>	Student teacher	1,6929	1,03114
	Mentor teacher	1,9167	1,10007
<i>How often does the mentor face problems with heavy workload for mentors?</i>	Student teacher	2,0073	1,01094
	Mentor teacher	2,0870	,90015

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Both Groups

Conclusions and Implications

Based on these data, the results show that it would be essential to train the mentors once again 10 years later the first training seminar in 1998(Akalın). It has been found out that a revision of the system is a Must. It seems also necessary to encourage the supervisors back in the department to be more attentive to the issue. Whenever necessary, mentors should be able to easily reach the department and get utmost support in their decisions. It is also highly recommended that mentors should be encouraged to give more feedback to the student-teachers. They should also be supported about getting more help from the department in upgrading their level of language proficiency. The mentors should be more willing to do self evaluation and they should be encouraged to use more reinforcement on student-teachers. The results also indicate that mentors should use a revised, less authoritative and more communicative approach in dealing with student-teachers' needs and they should be more supportive of the student-teachers' new approaches to teaching.

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