

## **EFL MENTOR TEACHERS' VOICES ON MENTORING PRACTICE: STRATEGIES, CHALLENGES, AND NEEDS**

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### **Abstract**

Mentoring is one of the important process a teacher should have since it is a key component in teacher education and professional development (Delaney, 2021). The present study is a part of a larger research project which explores student teachers' and mentor teachers' perspectives, experiences, as well as challenges encountered during the teaching practicums. This study adopted the Grounded-Theory method (Glaser, 1998) in which qualitative design is utilized. Qualitative approach was selected as the research aims to explore in-depth investigation regarding the experience of the mentor teachers during the teaching practicum. The findings of this study indicate that mentor teachers perceived their mentoring as satisfactory in several points. However, there are several aspects of the mentoring practice that they redeemed themselves as not satisfying. Future studies can be directed to discover mentors' framework and their forms of mentoring practice. Studies investigating mentors' approach and design in mentoring practice should also be conducted to understand their perception about mentoring practice.

**Keywords:** Mentors; mentoring strategies; mentor teachers; pedagogical knowledge

### **INTRODUCTION**

Mentoring is one of the important processes a teacher should have since it is a key component in teacher education and professional development (Delaney, 2012). Teachers can be considered the most essential resources of any educational organization (Middlewood & Bush, 2013). They are projected to uphold classroom practices and management, design efficiently, recognize their students and accommodate their different learning styles and needs, implement effective teaching strategies, understand how to use the different components of a curriculum in planning instruction and assessment, work collaboratively with other teachers and colleagues, and communicate effectively with parents (Gholam, 2018). With so many roles to serve, they often face numerous challenges and concerns. Therefore, teachers need to experience the teacher preparation programs that include mentoring opportunities.

Womack-Wynnee et al. (2011) explained that relating a mentoring process with an effective training process can often result in providing a period of nurturing and support for teachers who are in need of it. Mentoring is considered as an effective method for assisting teachers as it objects at nurturing a relationship of ongoing support and facilitating collaboration and the development of knowledge and skills that translate into improved teaching strategies (Cook, 2012). Mentoring is valuable for withholding teachers and certifying they stay in the field (Pogrud & Cowan, 2013). Improving teachers need effective teacher mentoring programs to support them in exploring, reflecting upon, and developing in their career. Joining in such mentoring programs can confidently affect the retention rate of beginning teachers (Grossman & Davis, 2012) and later lead to beginning teachers staying in the teaching profession (Steinke & Putnam, 2011).

A significant number of past studies on mentoring emphasized the existence of mentoring to pre-service teachers during teaching practice (Ambrosetti, 2014; Graves, 2010; Ellis, et al., 2020; Hudson & Hudson, 2017). Grudnoff (2011) argued that teaching practices also prepare the pre-service teachers to cope better with the classroom realities in the future. Mentors pay attention to how pre-service teachers' regulate their learning both cognitively and emotionally when carrying out classroom tasks and teaching under the supervision of the mentor teachers (Cheng et al., 2010). In addition, such regulation is part of pre-service teachers' orientations in learning to teach (Ginkel, 2018). Mentor teachers prefer teaching values over mentoring values and intend to intervene

quite intensely and emphasizing towards mentor teachers that their intervening should serve both pupils and student teachers might improve student teachers' learning (Mareke, 2022).

Mentoring is essential for the improvement of pre-service teachers to the demands of the school work-integrated learning environment. In spite of the advantages of mentoring to student teachers, a challenge is the inconsistency of the mentoring programmes within and across schools (Mahomed, 2019). Mentoring programs such as telementoring, mentoring by a veteran teacher, novice teacher learning communities, and peer coaching keep new teachers motivated and enthusiastic while increasing their skills and self-efficacy (Heider, 2005). Mentoring is also appraised highly by a large majority of pre-services students; however, pre-service teachers find significance in the more theoretical aspects of their education as well (Joo & Lim, 2018). Institutional-based supervisors of the practicum were perceived by pre-service teachers to provide the strongest support, alongside peers and school-based mentors (Smith, 2006).

Ellis et al. (2020) stated that what organizes good mentoring has changed over time and place. Various methods have been built (Orland-Barak & Wang, 2020) such as discussion and reflection of pre-service teachers' experiences (Schön, 1983), planning, observing, and analysing lessons (e.g., Hobson, 2002), modelling professional practice (Roehrig et al., 2008), and various forms of mentoring during teaching, such as co-teaching (e.g., Thomson & Schademan, 2019), educative mentoring (Marciano et al., 2019; Stanulis et al., 2019), mentoring inside the action of teaching (Gardiner, 2017), and mentor teachers' intervening during pre-service teachers' teaching (Jaspers et al., 2014). The latter concerns the context of the current study, in which STs teach, MTs observe, and afterwards provide feedback. In this context, at times MTs tend to intervene (Post, 2007; Wang, 2010). Although various articles on mentoring have mentioned MTs' tendency to intervene during STs' teaching, few have explicitly examined the characteristics and predictors of MTs' intervening. Schwille (2008), conceptualised a shared vision of "good mentoring", contends that mentor teachers' guidance during the pre-service teachers' lessons helps the pre-service teachers' learn to teach.

Mentor teachers have a prominent role in student teachers' learning, facilitating student teachers' interactions with students and providing feedback about those interactions (Grossman, 2010). However, not all student teaching experiences result in positive outcomes for beginner teachers (Moore, 2000). As Grossman (2010) notes, the value of mentoring experience depends seriously on the kind of coaching, supervision, and support future teachers receive as they develop their practice. In other words, the type of learning experience that mentor teachers provide is important to their pre-service teachers' growth as educators.

Traditionally, mentoring is seen as a hierarchical relationship where the mentor teacher is more experienced than the pre service teacher, or that the mentor teacher has or can provide knowledge and skills that the mentee wants or needs (McCormack & West, 2006) However, recent research has recognized that mentoring is a mutual relationship, meaning that both mentor teachers and pre service teachers have something to contribute to and gain from the relationship (Heirdsfield et al., 2008). Traditional concepts of a supervising, or mentor, teacher include someone who provides emotional support, technical assistance, copies of materials and general advice to pre-service teachers (Bradbury, 2008). On the other side, Pre-service teachers have indicated that a mentoring relationship that is equal, supportive and provides opportunities for learning is considered an ideal means for learning how to teach (Ambrosetti, 2010). Izadinia (2015) found that there was little difference between the perceptions of the mentor teacher and the pre-service teachers in mentoring. The mentor teachers' claims related the feedback component as the most important factor while student teachers presented more concern for getting emotional as well as academic provision from their mentor teachers. For most of the mentor teachers, giving support meant acquainting student teachers with the actuality of school life so that student teachers could make a learned decision whether to stay in the job or leave it. Yet for the student teachers, support was seen as persistent reinforcement and emotional back-up to build their confidence.

This study is aimed to examine the strategies, challenges, and needs shared by EFL mentor teachers during their experience in mentoring practise. The model that highlights five main components in mentoring involve personal attributes, system requirements, pedagogical knowledge, modeling, and feedback, which provides a framework for analyzing mentoring practise (Bird & Hudson, 2015). This study investigates the experiences of ten qualified secondary public school teachers regarding the nature of the mentoring practice. The research question which became the main focus of this study was: "What are the strategies, challenges, and needs faced by mentor teachers during the teaching practice?"

## **METHOD**

The present study is a part of a larger research project which explores student teachers' and mentor teachers' perspectives, experiences, as well as challenges encountered during the teaching practicums. This study adopted the Grounded-Theory method (Glaser, 1998) in which qualitative design is utilized. Qualitative approach was

selected as the research aims to explore in-depth investigation regarding the experience of the mentor teachers during the teaching practicum.

The study was conducted at the partner schools where the student teachers of a state university did the teaching practice in the first semester of academic year 2022, in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. At the time of the study 72 student teachers did the teaching practice in 25 junior or senior high schools. The student teachers did the teaching practice for 12 weeks and they were guided by mentor teachers who were English teachers in the partner schools.

For the mentoring duty, the school principal and the university would assign 1 mentor teacher to mentor 3 to 4 student teachers. The mentor teachers had to guide the student teachers to conduct the teaching in their classes. Prior to practice teaching, the mentor teachers had to arrange the student teachers to do class observation, create lesson plan, do the guided teaching and independent teaching. In addition to do mentoring, mentor teachers have to do their teaching workload and they had to fulfil other duties such as grading written and spoken homework, administering tests, marking them and participating in professional development sessions.

The participants of the study were chosen through convenience sampling, namely, by choosing nine mentor teachers who were available for study. The nine mentor teachers of English, were investigated in terms of their experiences as relevant to the study's objectives in order to gain a better understanding of and "for the benefit of a broader group of cases" (Tavakoli, 2012, p. 47), that is, current and future mentors of English. The detailed information about the nine mentor teachers was obtained from the first section of the interview, which served as the primary instrument in this study. To maintain confidentiality, those nine mentor teachers were designated as A, B,C etc from 1 through 9. Five mentor teachers are currently teaching in senior high schools, while the others are in junior high schools. Five of them received their bachelor's degrees, while four of them obtained their master degree in English Language Teaching. The research participants were assigned to be mentors teachers more than three times and five of them attended workshop in Mentoring, while four of them never participated in a mentoring workshop.

In collecting the data, semi-structured interviews were employed as the instrument to collect the data. According to Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2007), semi-structured interviews allow the researchers to both be in full control of the interview, as well as having the flexibility in gathering the information required. The interview consisted of open-ended questions regarding mentoring practice, challenges and mentor teachers' needs.

Further, from the data collected, we transcribed the data from the interview and thoroughly reviewed the transcript to provide an overall sense of information such as general thoughts expressed by the participants. We then analyzed the data to generate numerous ideas and themes. The data was analyzed using qualitative coding. Cope (2010) defines coding in qualitative research as having three main purposes: data reduction, organization and the creation of finding aids, and analysis. To begin, coding was used to reduce the amount of data. The data was condensed by dividing it into smaller packages based on the topic, participant characteristics, or other aspects of the research content. As a result of reducing the data, we were able to better manage the data and focus on the content. Second, coding is useful for creating an organized and searchable framework. This method, on the other hand, made it easier for us to locate specific information. Last but not least, coding was completed for analysis. Coding began with basic codes derived from the research question, background literature, and categories, and as time passed, the codes became more interpretive in nature, resulting in patterns and correlations.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This part elaborates the result of the study regarding the strategies, challenges, as well as needs encountered.

### **Strategies**

The findings of this study strengthened other research results in the past few years. From the data resulted, it showed that most mentor teachers used more than one strategy in mentoring the pre-service teachers.

Mentor teachers have been integrating pedagogical knowledge, contents, as well as classroom management strategies that they learnt through years of teaching, which they are able to pass down to pre-service teachers (Hashweh, 2013). Several strategies found in this study, such as having easy access to the mentor teacher, were also investigated by Rikard and Banville (2010), which proved as an excellent mentoring strategy for both pre-service teachers and mentor teachers. A study in Busan, conducted by Jung (2016) reported that pre-service teachers were fond of face-to-face consultations rather than sending text messages via mobile. This was also approved by a statement of the respondent in this research. However, phone calls and messaging applications enable both parties to communicate with one another regardless of the time and place, which is also an advantage, especially during pandemic situations such as the COVID-19 (Ersin et al., 2020)

Regular communication enhances the performance of the teaching practice. Liu et al. (2015) stated that given the mentor teacher's hectic schedule, she had to create separate time for the pre-service teachers' consultation. Otherwise, aligned with the statements by the respondents of this study, their work would be left behind and piled up with other responsibilities, as Conway (2012) also added.

In this research, one of the strategies often mentioned was the use of pre-post-while teaching. Quite a few studies also highlighted the use of this strategy to enhance the teaching practice experience (Ulmer et al., 2013; Antoni, 2010; McCormack & O'Flaherty, 2010; Mozzer & Justi, 2012). During pre-teaching, mentor teachers practiced modelling experience while being observed by the pre-service teachers. Bannister-Tyrrell, et al. (2018) confirmed that this strategy helped pre-service teachers in gaining initial knowledge on teaching in the classroom.

Discussion between pre-service teachers and mentor teachers was also one of the strategies underlined in this study. Mentor teachers and pre-service teachers discussed the curriculum, lesson plan, as well as the pedagogy contents incorporated in the learning and teaching, which proved to create effective interaction among them both (Hudson & Hudson, 2018). Additionally, it provided opportunities for pre-service teachers to share their experiences as well as self-reflection (Hamel & Jaasko-Fisher, 2011).

In addition, mentor teachers are prohibited from intervening in any procedures in the classroom when pre-service teachers are in charge, with limitations such as intense mistakes made as the barrier. According to Jaspers et al. (2014), it could affect the pre-service teachers' confidence and self-esteem. Pre-service teachers should be facilitated with the chance to manage their class on their own (McGarr, 2021).

Ambrosetti and Dekkers (2010) stated that mentor teachers' feedback is an important aspect to pre-service teachers' development during teaching practice. Aligned with this statement, Izadinia (2018) believed that feedback is the practical value which can support pre-service teachers professionally and psychologically in order to form their teaching professionalism. In Izadinia's prior study (2015), it was firmly stated that mentor teachers' feedback hold a critical role in shaping pre-service teachers' professional identity.

## Challenges

Various challenges were encountered by the mentor teachers in this study. Likewise, researchers explored cases in which the teaching practices were affected by numerous reasons (Jaspers et al., 2014; Vikaraman et al., 2017; Hedin & Conderman, 2015). Brownlee et al. (2016). stated that pre-service teachers' personal traits greatly impact the process of learning and teaching. They discovered that pre-service teachers' inability to manage personal issues might trouble classroom activities as they were incapable of staying professional and keeping their feelings out of the classroom. Furthermore, Chong, et al. (2011) added that the professional development of pre-service teachers also contribute to the progress of the teaching practicum.

Other obstacles found in this research include the school facilities. This was aligned with the research conducted by Siwatu (2011), in which the quality of the school facilities and educational resources available determined the quality of the mentoring teaching practicum. The mentor teachers claimed that delivering materials with limited resources and facilities disturbed the pre-service teachers as they could not practise their best when teaching. Ogunlade et al. (2015) agreed with this statement as in the case in Nigeria, the mentor teachers could hardly communicate well with the pre-service teachers who were located at a remote area and had to conduct distance learning.

Another point made was regarding the time limitations. The pre-service teachers and mentor teachers had difficulty in meeting one another as the tight schedules of the mentor teachers limited both parties from meeting and consulting, as well as having proper observation of the mentor teacher when the pre-service teacher was teaching. A similar finding was elaborated by Inel Ekici (2018), in which problems arose from time limitations during the practice teaching. Butlet et al. (2016), as well as Baltaci and Tanis (2018), also agreed with this finding as time limitations presented another problem for both the pre-service teachers and the mentor teachers.

In realization found in this study, pre-service teachers today were not very capable of integrating technology in the classroom. Regardless of being more updated with the latest development in the technicalities, studies also found similar findings (Farjon et al., 2019 ; Wang et al., 2018 ; Schmid et al., 2021 ; Scherer et al., 2018 ; Tondeur et al., 2020 ). This was a very unfortunate event as both mentor teachers and pre-service teachers should acquire TPACK, as Nasri et al. (2020)Nasri, et al. (2020) confirmed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Spiteri and Rundgren (2020) suggested training pre-service teachers and mentor teachers should be able to solve problems with technology and ensuring better-skilled educators in the future.

This study also discovered that mentor teachers and pre-service teachers tended to have different perceptions and views of the English contents, pedagogical knowledge, as well as teaching methods. Ismail and Jarrah (2019) investigated the views of both prospective teachers and mentor teachers, in which the results found similar findings. They stated that different perceptions on pedagogical preferences, teaching competence, as well as motivation encompasses both positive and negative experiences for both parties. When communicated properly,

Izadinia (2018) argued, various ideas and viewpoints on mentoring practice can expand the pre-service teachers' and mentor teachers' understandings of one another.

The last aspect which became a challenge for the mentor teachers during the teaching practice was the moral values and the respect of the pre-service teachers. As one of the mentor teachers elaborated, he was deeply disappointed with his pre-service teachers' attitude. Maxwell et al. (2016) elaborated how ethics and values should be taken into account seriously as the pre-service teachers were future teachers, too. Additionally, Schwamberger and Curtner-Smith (2018) also believed that pre-service teachers should behave well in the teaching practice school, as they were looked up to by their students there, and carefully observed by other academic staff. They added that teaching practice should not be underestimated, as it would reflect their actual teaching later on.

## Needs

Needs which are related to the pre-service teachers, in the perspective of mentor teachers, vary from different aspects as elaborated in this research. In line with the findings by Mouza, et al. (2014), pre-service teachers required a deeper understanding of the interactions among technology, content knowledge, and pedagogical aspects to be able to deliver materials well in the classroom. Pre-service teachers also need to have longer experience in teaching practice (Mergler & Spooner-Lane, 2012) in order to be effective in teaching education. The finding that pre-service teachers were inexperienced in their practice also increased their anxiety, as elaborated by Tum (2015), which resulted in problems in the classroom activities. Jaipal and Figg (2010) emphasized the importance of making backup plans for pre-service teachers, which was one of the needs mentioned in the findings of this research.

Needs which are related to the mentor teachers themselves, in this study, mainly revolved around the idea that the mentor teachers also need extra preparation and support from the academic institutions as well. Similarly, studies explored by Karanfil and Atay (2020), Alabas and Yilmaz (2018), and Lillo (2018) found that mentor teachers wished to have workshops and seminars to be able to enhance their pedagogical skills and technology abilities. Shah et al. (2021) stated that 60% of prospective teachers did not attend any seminars related to mentoring teaching, which led the teaching practice to be confusing for both the mentor teachers and the pre-service teachers. They explained that teaching practice includes all sorts of experience for pre-service teachers, such as applying theory into the classroom, incorporating teaching methods they studied, comprehending different students' characteristics, and putting classroom management as well as teaching skills into action. When mentor teachers are not updated and prepared with the most recent knowledge, the pre-service teachers also become clueless during the teaching practice.

The national curriculum, which was recently revised by the Minister of Education and Culture, Kurikulum Merdeka, is used to recover from the educational crisis. However, the implementation of this curriculum is not yet fully implemented, and many teachers are still unsure with the regulations that will take place, as the findings in this research also suggested (Rizki & Fahrunisa, 2022). Ananda et al. (2022) encouraged institutions to conduct as many workshops as possible to facilitate a place to exchange ideas between academic enthusiasts for the betterment of the curriculum implementation. Furthermore, Sumarsih et al. (2022) added that the cooperation and teamwork of teachers all around the nation can help shape the curriculum better as a stronger foundation. Thus, mentor teachers, who hold critical roles in mentoring teaching practice, also required seminars and workshops, as well as motivational support to be able to guide pre-service teachers in cultivating their professional development in teaching practice.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that mentor teachers perceived their mentoring as satisfactory in several points. However, there are several aspects of the mentoring practice that they redeemed themselves as not satisfying. In certain aspects, the mentor teachers perceived themselves needing further improvements. These aspects require attention particularly in terms of TPACK and pedagogical knowledge. These two factors are important factors in mentoring practice that mentor teachers need to improve and contribute a great impact on the quality of their mentoring program. The records also discovered that several challenges need to be addressed in the mentoring practice as the pre-service teachers start the mentoring program at schools with minimum information of pedagogical knowledge, lack of experience, and shallow understanding of related theories. Mentors require support in guiding pre-service teachers in comprehending the densities of the organizational contexts that also have an influence on classroom teaching and learning.

Evidently, the outcomes of this study provide several understandings on school-based mentoring practice conducted by mentor teachers. However, this study was conducted with ten mentor teachers from different schools

who taught in several junior and senior high schools in Malang. Hence, the data could not be generalized to represent the insight and understandings of all mentor teachers. Therefore, the findings are limited to the participants and context of this study. Future studies can be directed to discover mentors' framework and their forms of mentoring practice. Studies investigating mentors' approach and design in mentoring practice should also be conducted to understand their perception about mentoring practice.

Generally, the findings of this study are significantly valuable to all educators who are concerned in increasing the quality of teachers in the future. Mentor teachers benefit from this as a useful insight into their present mentoring practices in order to improve their own practices. Data from the findings also showed that mentor teachers need to be provided with guidance and training in mentoring pre-service teachers. Organized preparation for mentor teachers needs to be delivered to teachers who have been nominated to become mentors. They have to recognize their parts, and they are also required to be competent on how to transfer their knowledge and how to direct the pre-service teachers. Given the fact that the qualified teachers are prepared with knowledge in pedagogy, classroom management, and school management, it is also significant to arm them with tutoring skills and understanding in order to support them in implementing their mentoring duties effectively.

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