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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Impact of Online Training on Mentoring in A Teacher Education Program*

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ABSTRACT

Mentoring within the practicum phase necessitates targeted preparation and specialized training. Addressing this requirement, the present study examines the impact of an online mentor training program, specifically designed to meet the mentoring needs in a teacher education context, on mentoring practices as perceived by student teachers. An experimental group, consisting of eight mentor teachers, underwent the training, while a control group of seven mentors maintained their standard practicum practices. Pre- and post-training surveys were conducted among the student teachers of both groups to evaluate the training effect. Analysis and comparison of the student teachers' feedback revealed that the training program significantly enhanced mentors' abilities in providing professional support, conducting observations, and offering constructive feedback. The article illustrates key considerations for designing training programs for mentor teachers within an EFL context, proposing a model for context-specific online mentor training and demonstrating its efficacy. The study also underscores the critical importance of equipping mentor teachers with adequate training to better support teacher candidates.

Keywords: Mentor teachers, online training, pre-service language teacher education, EFL context

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INTRODUCTION

Practicum placements have usually been described as the essential component of teacher education program with full of invaluable classroom experiences (e.g. Ellis et al., 2020). In this process, mentor teachers are the primary resource for student teachers to enhance their knowledge of teaching techniques (Clarke et al., 2014; Izadinia, 2015). The literature has widely acknowledged the key position of mentor teachers in assisting student teachers (e.g. Torrez & Krebs, 2012). They have predominant interpersonal functions such as supporting, advising, empathizing and role modelling in pre-service teacher education (e.g. Ambrosetti, 2014).

It is widely asserted that the vitality of mentor teachers' roles requires special preparation (e.g. Baco, et al., 2023; Thornton, 2024). It is evident from international mentoring practices that mentors receive little or no training (e.g. Clarke & Mena, 2020; Wexler, 2019). The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in Turkiye outlines the responsibilities of mentor teachers in the practicum process. These responsibilities include organizing activities in conjunction with the practicum school coordinator and university supervisor to guarantee their successful execution, monitoring teacher candidates throughout the activities, and assessing their instructional effectiveness. According to the new regulations of MoNE (2018), it became compulsory for mentor teachers to attend a training. In this training, mentors are introduced to the clinical supervision model through example videos and scenarios (Bulunuz et al., 2014). The training program is offered to teachers of all subjects (science, mathematics, language etc.), without a reference to needs and approaches in different areas. With a concern to address the gap for area-specialized mentoring and teaching, this paper reports the impact of an online mentor training program specifically designed for the needs in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher education program.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Preparing mentor teachers for their multifaceted roles (Ambrosetti, 2014) becomes prominent in especially addressing the problems experienced in the practice teaching process. The incognizance of mentoring roles, a lack of pedagogical knowledge, and the student teachers' expectations for the practicum limit mentor teachers' ability to provide professional assistance to student teachers (Albakri et al., 2021). The practicum process also stores tensions that stem from the failure to form a mentoring relationship due to a problematic dialogue (Chan, 2020), the lack of supervisory support by mentor teachers (Davis & Fantozzi, 2016), the teachers' busy schedules, and the absence of training for mentoring roles (e.g. Hobson et al. 2012; Hudson, 2013).

In Turkiye, mentoring research pointed to the need for mentor teachers to improve their mentoring skills and social qualifications (e.g. Yılmaz & Bıkmaz, 2020) and accordingly to overcome problems experienced in practicum process (Akcan & Tatar, 2010; Başaran-Uysal & Savaş, 2021; Eser-Tüzel & Akcan, 2009; Rakıcıoğlu-Söylemez & Eröz-Tuğa, 2014; Yıldırım & Örsdemir, 2020). This mentoring concern was earlier addressed by Bulunuz et al. (2014) and Gürsoy et al. (2013). Bulunuz et al. (2014) suggested employing the clinical supervision model and investigated its efficacy in enhancing mentor teachers' abilities. The mentoring the model was covered in seminars to which mentor teachers from other disciplines were invited. In the project's initial phase, Gürsoy et al. (2013) investigated how well the model performed in terms of student teachers' performance when they collaborated with trained mentors and university supervisors. The researchers concluded that the parties' implementation of the model was successful and visible in the instructional strategies used by student teachers. The results of both studies informed the current mentor training practices offered by MoNE for mentor teachers in all subject teachers. However, effective mentoring is closely

associated with subject-specificity (Curran & Goldrick, 2002) since subject-specific professional training was evidenced to be more effective than generic ones (Greany et al, 2018).

As an example for area-specialized mentoring, Hudson (2004) proposed a research-informed five-factor mentoring model. According to this model, the factor of personal attributes defines the necessary mentoring attitudes as supportive, instilling confidence and encouraging to reflect on teaching. The second factor, system requirements consist of mentors' knowledge and articulation of curricular requirements for their mentees. The third factor, pedagogical knowledge, is about mentors' knowledge on planning teaching, implementing lesson plans, classroom management and assessment strategies. Modelling factor includes mentoring practices on modelling the pedagogical knowledge and the feedback factor focuses on the discussion of expectations from student teachers as well as written and oral feedback for their performances in the classroom. Although the model is an outcome for mathematics teacher education, the factors provided a practical and adaptable frame for the mentor roles in different subject areas and formed the basis for the present study.

Hudson's (2004) model was adopted in previous research to understand the effectiveness of mentoring practices in different contexts (e.g. Hudson et al, 2009; Örsdemir-Panpallı, 2016; Rakıcıoğlu-Söylemez, 2012; Haas et al., 2022). Among the very few inquiries into mentoring practices in EFL contexts, Örsdemir-Panpallı (2016) based her study on the model and created a four-module mentor training program. The participating teacher was required to engage with several readings and view scenario-based videos to fulfill the program requirements. Post-training analysis revealed that the teacher had enhanced her pedagogical knowledge and comprehension of effective mentoring practices. Evidence suggests that the mentor training program facilitated the mentor's deeper understanding of the reflective nature of mentoring and prompted a reevaluation of her personal theories. Additionally, it was found that student teachers attributed their growth in teaching strategies and skills to the guidance provided by their mentors.

Another recent concern in the local mentoring practices is eliminating time and space constraints in the form of online mentoring. Ersin et al. (2020) created an online course known as "e-practicum," wherein university supervisors served as virtual mentors. The study demonstrated how mentor-student teacher collaboration may be successfully achieved in online social interaction by adhering to social constructivist concepts. The goal of Ersin and Atay (2021) was also to investigate student teachers' perceptions on their experiences with online mentoring. After completing an eight-week online course on school experience, 35 student teachers participated in focus group interviews as part of a qualitative research project. The findings indicated that, for the most part, student teachers had a positive experience with online mentoring because they received adequate contextual and technological support. However, they expected more time and support from their mentors, which may have resulted from the inadequate training that MoNE currently offers. The studies provided a different perspective into the implementation of mentoring practices, calling for a specific training for the EFL teachers to be prepared for their mentoring roles. To address the gap of area-specialized mentor training in Turkish EFL context and the importance of student teachers' perceptions of their mentors' practices (Hudson, 2010), this study aimed at understanding the impact of a training program designed based on the needs and expectations in practicum studies. It seeks to determine whether the trained and untrained mentors' practices, namely practicum procedures, mentoring, observational, and feedback skills, differed significantly from the perspective of student teachers. It is expected that trained mentor teachers' practices will be more satisfactory for their student teachers based on the evidenced positive outcomes of mentor training in the literature.

METHOD

The research context and participants

In this quasi-experimental research design, the context was chosen as the language teacher education program at a state university in Istanbul, Turkiye. Student teachers complete two terms of practicum in their final year of the program. They are placed in groups under the direction of mentors and sent to schools where they become acquainted with the policies, procedures, administration, and methods of education. Engaging in structured observations aligned with theoretical and experiential considerations in EFL, student teachers prepare lesson plans and teach under mentor supervision. University supervisors evaluate these teachings. The study included student teachers and mentors chosen through convenience sampling. All mentors had 19 to 25 years of teaching experience, including three to seven years of mentoring. Data collection occurred in the 2021-2022 academic year, involving 31 student teachers. The experimental group had 16 students cooperating with eight trained mentors, while the control group had 15 students working with seven untrained mentors.

Training

The mentors in the study were invited for a 12-week online mentor training in fall semester of 2021-2022 academic year. Instructional design model was Morrison, et al.'s (2013) (MRK) model due to its circular structure that allows a flexible and adaptable design, with its easiness to tailor for online delivery and the emphasis put on learners' perspective rather than content. The lack of a specialized mentor training program during the practicum phase of language teacher education programs was the primary motivation that prompted the creation of the design. All three groups of practicum participants (i.e. university supervisors, mentor and student teachers) were given a questionnaire and interviews were conducted beforehand to aid in the identification of their needs (Author1, 2023), to plan an instructional intervention accordingly.

The learners in the study were mentor teachers. Two key components to take into account when designing a mentor training program were experience and motivation. It was thought that there were no motivating issues for the mentors because they had already expressed why they were motivated to participate in it. Furthermore, because the program periodically required them to consider their prior mentoring experiences, three years of experience was a criterion to attend the training. The mentors were working as adult educators and devoted a significant portion of their time to teaching. A training program description was created in accordance with Knowles, et al. (2005)'s recommendations for adult learners, outlining the objectives, anticipated time commitment, and material. It was intended for the self-paced, modular, and easily navigable learning management system (LMS) to be used to give the online training. Because investigation into their teaching environments required collaboration and interaction, the trainees worked with a subject-matter expert who gave them feedback on their assignments.

Task analysis was conducted through topic and procedural analysis (Morrison, et al., 2013). Topic analysis was completed based on the results of the previously conducted study that identified needs and expectations related to practicum in the same research context (Author1, 2023). The outline of the content is presented in Figure 1. Since mentoring is a skill that mentors can develop before performing observation and feedback skills, the program began with knowledge of mentoring and observation module was followed by feedback. The practicum procedure module was deliberately separated from the other three modules in the course sequence. Mentor trainees were asked to review this module when they needed clarification regarding the protocols, roles, or responsibilities associated with the practicum process. The primary content of the course was centered around the remaining three modules.

Figure 1. The outline for training

Practicum procedure - Introduction - Practicum courses at the department with required tasks - Roles and responsibilities
Understanding mentoring - Mentoring and mentor roles - Personal attributes - Communication strategies - Pedagogical knowledge
Observation - Classroom observation - Phases of classroom observation (Co-planning & pre-observation conference, Lesson observation)
Feedback - The role of feedback - Post-observation conference (feedback) - Reflection (feed-forward)

The three objective domains of cognitive, psychomotor, and affective learning encompassed the instructional objectives, which were dispersed across several learning stages. Because of the nature of the training and the assignments, an assessment was not necessary for this program; instead, the goal was to modify mentoring practices, which made it challenging to create objectives that could be measured using instruments. As a result, the primary goal of objectives was to cover cognitive areas that range in complexity from low level (knowledge) to high level (analysis, synthesis) (see Figure 2).

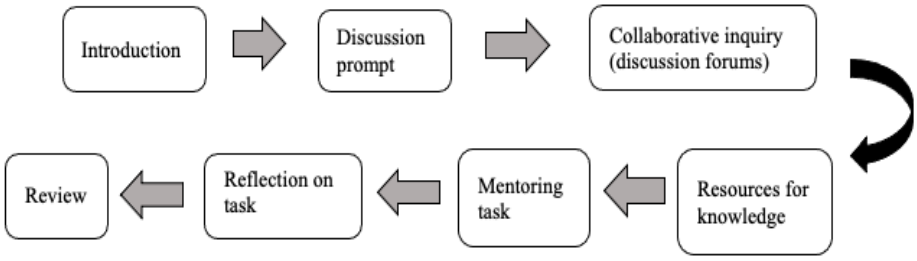
Figure 2. Learning objectives

At the end of	Mentor trainees will
Module 1: Practicum procedure	- Become familiar with the procedures of practicum studies at the department
Module 2: Understanding mentoring	- Explain what mentoring is, its elements, and its functions. - Evaluate their roles require based on their own context - Apply and reflect on different strategies (e.g. strategies such as co-planning and verbally reflecting on planning with the student teacher)
Module 3: Observation	- Describe the value of observation for professional growth and the procedures to be followed - Be familiar with how to observe student teachers in the classroom - Discuss their observations with others
Module 4: Effective feedback	- Follow the steps after observation (i.e. post-observation and reflection) - Understand the role of feedback and reflection - Reflect on receiving and providing feedback

NeoLMS was selected as the delivery strategy because it offered flexibility for training, taking into account the learners' attributes such as age and work experience. For two key reasons, the learning was intended to occur asynchronously within the NeoLMS system. First, it was estimated that the training program would run for roughly twelve weeks, and finding mentors for the program at the same time proved to be challenging. Second, there were assignments throughout the training that mentor teachers had to finish, including observing a student teacher, which calls for additional scheduling in the school calendar. In terms of instructional strategy, the learning objectives were achieved through the design of the modules, which followed a predefined structure. Mentor teachers were given activities that mirrored the reading material and required them to write comments in response to pre-provided

questions in order to apply the new information. To make sure mentor teachers developed their reflective abilities, reflections and expert feedback for their reflections were incorporated. The flow in the modules is elaborated in Figure 3.

Figure 3. The content of modules



Formative, summative, and end-of-module assessments were created for the study. Experts in the field were consulted to make a formative evaluation of the course material, and two mentor teachers were contacted to verify comprehensibility before training. Pre- and post-surveys were given to student teachers to gauge the program impact from the student teachers' point of view. Teachers also expressed their thoughts on their learning by responding to the questions at the end of each module in a self-evaluation format.

Survey

The survey utilized in this study was adapted from the Mentoring for English as a Foreign Language Teaching Scale, which focuses on characterizing current mentoring practices in EFL instruction, particularly in teaching English writing (Hudson et al., 2009). The original survey comprised 34 items based on Hudson's (2004) five-factor model of mentoring—personal attributes, system requirements, pedagogical expertise, modeling, and feedback—and was validated for reliability and accuracy. Respondents are required to rate each item using a 5-point Likert scale. Rakıcıoğlu-Söylemez (2012) further adapted and validated the scale for the Turkish EFL context. Items related to personal attributes, pedagogical knowledge, and feedback were retained in the survey to align with the program's content, while those not accurately reflecting the content were removed. Additionally, items concerning observation and practicum procedures were incorporated to ensure the survey comprehensively covered all aspects of the training content.

Consequently, the survey was refined to include 31 items and reviewed by a subject matter expert. Following minor wording modifications and the inclusion of a "no answer" option, the survey was administered to 36 student teachers within the department for piloting purposes, and reliability analysis was conducted using SPSS 27.0. The pilot study indicated that the survey demonstrated high overall reliability ($\alpha = .96$). Item analysis showed that all items were significantly correlated with the overall survey score, with correlations exceeding .30. After obtaining ethical approval from the institutional review board, 16 student teachers in the experimental group completed the survey both before and after their mentors underwent training. Similarly, 15 student teachers in the control group, whose mentors did not participate in any training intervention, completed the survey at the same intervals. To determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the groups, the Mann-Whitney U test was employed to compare survey responses.

RESULTS

The responses from the student teachers were examined both before and after their mentors attended the training to see whether it led to any statistically significant changes in their mentors' practices. The first four items in the practicum procedures category of the surveys given to student teachers were included (see Table 1).

Table 1. Results for practicum procedure

	Before the training					After the training				
	CG		EG			CG		EG		
Items	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***p****	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***p****
My mentor										
1. is aware of their own roles and responsibilities as a mentor.	4.4	.63	4.4	.88	.80	3.8	1.26	4.0	.68	.86
2. is aware of my roles and responsibilities as a student teacher.	4.7	.59	4.4	.61	.11	4.7	.59	4.7	.60	.83
3. is aware of university supervisors' roles and responsibilities.	4.7	.62	3.9	1.4	.10	4.1	.91	4.2	.68	.83
4. is aware of the procedures to follow.	4.4	.63	4.3	.87	.98	4.3	.72	4.0	.73	.25

*$p \leq .05$, CG: Control group of student teachers, EG: Experimental group of student teachers

Before and after the training, there was no significant difference in the participants' responses to the practicum process items between the two groups. The majority of respondents tended to agree with the items, showing that the mentors knew practicum procedures as perceived by their student teachers. This included knowledge about the types of practicum courses offered, the hours of observation, the assignments for observation, and other details. Following the training, participants rated the practicum processes higher, with no significant difference between the two groups.

Table 2. Results for mentoring skills- personal attributes

	Before the training					After the training				
	CG		EG			CG		EG		
Items	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***p****	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***p****
My mentor										
5. is supportive of me for teaching.	3.1	2.28	4.2	1.38	.21	4.3	1.29	4.6	.51	.98
6. seems comfortable in talking with me about teaching.	4.4	.63	4.1	1.69	.74	4.7	.59	4.6	.73	.59
7. instills positive attitudes in me towards teaching.	4.0	.92	3.8	1.38	.95	4.8	.56	4.4	.73	.42
8. assists me to reflect on improving my teaching practices.	2.9	2.21	3.6	1.75	.54	4.0	1.41	4.4	.51	.68
9. makes me feel more confident as a teacher.	2.9	2.37	4.0	1.26	.63	4.3	1.33	4.3	.70	.54
10. listens to me attentively on teaching matters.	4.6	.83	4.5	.51	.09	4.6	.82	4.5	.52	.35

*$p \leq .05$, CG: Control group of student teachers, EG: Experimental group of student teachers

As indicated in Table 2, the second category included personal and pedagogical skills. Prior to the training, the

student teacher participants gave favorable ratings for the mentors' support for teaching, their conversations about teaching, and their instillation of a positive teaching attitude. Regarding items 8 and 9, it was discovered that they were unsure of the support provided by their mentors for teaching reflection and fostering teacher confidence in the student teachers. The experimental group, however, were contented with their mentors' assistance in reflection and increasing self-confidence. For item 10, both groups showed some degree of agreement with the item, indicating that their mentors paid close attention to what they had to say about teaching.

Following the training, the student teachers' evaluations above demonstrated a greater level of agreement with the personal qualities of their mentors. The findings showed that the student teachers reported that their mentors were comfortable and helpful while discussing teaching, that they fostered a positive attitude towards teaching, that they helped them reflect on how to improve their practices, and that they gave them confidence in their ability to teach. All participants gave item 10 a higher degree of agreement, despite the fact that in the initial administration of the survey, perceptions of this item differed significantly in favor of the control group.

Table 3. Results for mentoring skills- pedagogical knowledge

	Before the training					After the training				
	CG		EG			CG		EG		
Items	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***p****	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***p****
My mentor										
11. assists me with timetabling my lessons.	2.3	2.15	3.1	1.61	.36	2.9	1.77	4.1	1.06	.02*
12. develops my strategies for teaching.	3.3	1.72	2.8	1.68	.28	3.0	1.58	3.8	1.47	.29
13. gives me clear guidance for planning to teach.	3.0	1.60	2.9	1.91	.89	3.2	1.47	4.2	.83	.06*
14. guides me with lesson preparation.	2.1	2.25	2.7	1.70	.49	3.3	1.54	3.9	1.31	.29
15. discusses with me classroom management strategies.	3.8	1.01	3.3	1.49	.34	3.8	1.26	4.2	1.11	.40
16. assists me towards implementing teaching strategies.	3.6	1.12	2.9	2.01	.63	3.6	1.24	3.9	1.20	.57
17. discusses with me questioning skills (i.e. what type of questions teacher could employ) for effective teaching.	3.4	1.45	3.7	1.44	.52	3.1	1.44	3.5	1.63	.31
18. discusses with me the content knowledge I need for teaching.	3.5	1.36	3.2	1.94	.95	3.1	1.49	3.6	1.45	.33
19. provides strategies for me to solve my problems for teaching.	3.7	1.16	3.5	1.75	.95	3.4	1.50	4.1	.80	.23
20. gives me new viewpoints on teaching to students.	3.6	1.18	3.7	1.49	.74	3.3	1.49	3.8	1.27	.32
21. shows me how to assess students' learning.	2.5	2.10	3.2	1.83	.40	3.1	1.77	3.2	1.29	.77

*$p \leq .05$, CG: Control group of student teachers, EG: Experimental group of student teachers

Regarding pedagogical knowledge, the responses in general did not differ much, according to a review of their ratings prior to the training. A closer look at the ratings in Table 3 revealed that the experimental group was not sure about their mentors' support with timetabling, while the control group disagreed with this assistance. When it came to the mentors' planning and development of teaching strategies, the roles were reversed. All student teachers gave item 14 lower ratings, indicating that they disapproved of the lesson planning assistance from their mentors. The groups

generally tended to agree with the mentors' discussion of content understanding, questioning techniques for effective teaching, and classroom management strategies. In a similar vein, the student teachers' evaluations of items 19 and 20 demonstrated their agreement with the mentors' provision of fresh perspectives and problem-solving techniques. The student teachers expressed a lack of agreement or uncertainty regarding the mentors' modelling of student assessment.

With the exception of the two items, the mentors' pedagogical knowledge was rated similarly after the training. Regardless of attendance in training, mentors were reported to listen intently to the student teachers' concerns about teaching, assist in developing lesson plans, talk about classroom management techniques, help put the strategies into practice, and explore new perspectives, problem-solving techniques, content knowledge, and assessment of student learning. Item 11 was rated substantially differently in favor of the experimental group. Furthermore, Item 13 significance value was closer to the *p* value, supporting the hypothesis that the mentors in the experimental group offered more advice when it came to lesson planning.

Table 4. *Results for observation in practicum*

	Before the training					After the training				
	CG		EG			CG		EG		
Items	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***p****	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***p****
My mentor										
22. is aware of the importance of observation in professional development as a teacher.	4.4	1.12	4.3	.95	.65	4.5	1.19	4.4	.81	.35
23. organizes a meeting to discuss my plans before observing my teaching.	1.9	1.79	3.0	1.97	.19	2.1	1.88	4.0	1.26	.01*
24. holds professional dialogues with me about my observation of their teaching.	2.3	2.15	3.7	1.61	.08	3.2	1.69	4.2	1.12	.10
25. uses an observation procedure (i.e. checklist. seating chart. fieldnotes) to observe me teaching.	1.1	1.84	2.3	2.02	.15	3.3	1.54	4.3	1.26	.00*

*$p \leq .05$, CG: Control group of student teachers, EG: Experimental group of student teachers

The results for the third category, observing student teachers, is displayed in Table 4. The consensus from all participants with means greater than the median was reached on the first item, which discussed the importance of observation. The participants were nearly disagreed with their mentors' pre-observation conferences, as evidenced by the lower ratings for item 23. Based on their reports, it was assumed that the student teachers in the groups were unclear about item 24. For item 25, there was disagreement among the participants over how their mentors used the observation process.

Regardless of participation in the training, the mentors held professional dialogues and recognized the value of observation in the practicum category after the training. However, the significant scores between items 23 and 25 were in favor of the experimental group, indicating that the mentors who attended the training were seen by the student teachers as having better planned meetings prior to observation and using observation techniques.

Table 5. Results for feedback in practicum

	Before the training					After the training				
	CG		EG			CG		EG		
Items	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***p****	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***p****
My mentor										
26. is aware of the role of feedback in professional development as a teacher.	3.5	1.36	4.2	.93	.19	3.5	1.55	4.6	.51	.16
27. discusses the evaluation of my teaching.	1.8	2.11	2.6	1.96	.36	3.3	1.75	4.6	.50	.02*
28. provides oral feedback on my teaching.	1.7	2.05	2.7	2.14	.19	3.5	1.69	4.8	.40	.01*
29. provides me with written feedback on my teaching.	1.1	1.85	1.7	1.92	.47	2.3	2.02	4.0	1.46	.01*
30. clearly articulates what I needed to do to improve my teaching.	1.7	2.06	2.9	1.93	.13	3.4	1.80	4.4	.50	.24
31. promotes reflection with their questions after observing me teaching.	1.6	2.03	2.7	2.05	.19	3.4	1.80	4.1	.62	.49

*$p \leq .05$, CG: Control group of student teachers, EG: Experimental group of student teachers

The final group of statements, those pertaining to providing feedback, is displayed in Table 5. Because they gave item 26 a higher rating than the median, both groups of student teachers believed that their mentors understood the importance of feedback. Nevertheless, the means of the remaining items in this category were all lower than the median. This demonstrated that the student teachers tended to disagree with the mentors' discussions regarding the assessment of their instruction, giving written and verbal feedback, outlining areas in which they needed to improve, and encouraging reflection.

In this group, the student teachers said that following the training, their mentors were conscious of the value of the practicum feedback and provided clear instructions on how to use reflective questions to help the student teachers improve their instruction. Nevertheless, the analysis of items 27, 28, and 29 revealed a substantial difference in the groups' evaluations, with the experimental group's perceptions being more favorable. It revealed that the trained mentors were thought to be carrying out mentoring activities, such as talking about the student teachers' assessments of their instruction and giving both written and oral feedback.

DISCUSSION

The study proposed an online mentor training program and investigated its impact on mentoring. It demonstrated how the student teachers' experiences varied with respect to every aspect of the training. It was found that the student teachers' ideas for their mentors' knowledge of practicum procedures did not change throughout the semester. Both groups of student teachers stated that their mentors were cognizant of the practicum procedures. Though the procedural knowledge was listed among the needs investigated earlier, the training did not change the participants' answers. This result may be due to the fact that the participants did not focus on this component very carefully compared to the other components, as the other components had a different design.

Certain abilities that fall under two categories—personal attributes and pedagogical knowledge—are necessary for mentoring (Hudson, 2004). According to the untrained mentors' student teachers, the mentors' communication skills was demonstrated by their easy conversation about teaching, inculcation of a positive teaching attitude, and attentive listening to them discuss teaching-related topics. Additionally, it was shown that the value of effective communication was truly matched by a range of encouraging mentor attitudes that served as inspiration for the student instructors.

The trained mentors' student teachers reported that this experience increased their confidence, helped reflect more on how to improve their teaching methods, and supported more (e.g. Hudson, et al., 2009). One possible explanation for the student teachers' positive response to their mentors' communication could be their inclination to value the mentors' personal qualities. This is supported by an earlier study by Yıldırım and Örsdemir (2020), which found that student teachers prioritized personal qualities over pedagogical expertise or feedback when asked to provide their opinions on mentoring. Despite this, student teachers critiqued their mentors' communication skills, even though this personal attribute has consistently been identified as an obstacle to the success of the practicum (e.g., Chan, 2020; Başaran-Uysal & Savaş, 2021). Furthermore, feedback from the student teachers whose mentors received training indicated that the mentors' practice of attentively listening to the student teachers on teaching-related matters was notably influenced by the training program. The student teachers' responses provided valuable insights into the nature of mentoring within an interdependent relationship (Izadinia, 2015).

Regarding pedagogical knowledge and skills, the student teachers of both trained and untrained mentors consistently provided low means that indicated the mentors' infrequent application of pedagogical practices including helping with lesson preparation, assessment, and timetabling. They appeared to concur, however, that their mentors demonstrated behaviors such as talking about classroom management techniques, challenging material knowledge and teaching methods, and offering fresh perspectives and problem-solving techniques. The student teachers' reluctant answers indicated that there weren't many chances to observe different applications of instructional expertise. Following the training, however, the mentors' practices were reported to be improved in the experimental group. Specifically, they were more helpful in scheduling the lessons and offered more direction in lesson planning, demonstrating that the trained mentors could apply the new knowledge in their practices. This discovery offered an explanation for the previous result that that the mentors neglect to demonstrate and impart their pedagogical expertise (Davis & Fantozzi, 2016), and it may lead to numerous opportunities for the student teachers to acquire knowledge relevant to their future careers. Given that mentor teachers play a major role in helping student teachers improve their use of English in the classroom, it can also be argued that the training provided invaluable assistance for the mentor teachers' sharing of content knowledge. For example, Tüzel Başyurt and Akcan (2009) conducted a study in an EFL context that examines the target language proficiency of the student teachers in an English Language Teaching Program. The mentor teachers indicated that the student teachers would improve in-class English language use with a conscious effort to advance their language skills. Providing a training for mentors increase their awareness of the difficulties that student teachers face while using English in the class, as suggested by the authors. Moreover, the student teachers' responses demonstrated the effect of training on their mentors' observation acts. The student teachers in the experimental group believed that following training, their mentors had more pre-observation discussions and that professional conversations and the use of an observation technique had improved. In this way, mentor teachers' crucial role in the process was enhanced via training (e.g. Clarke et al., 2014; Thornton, 2024; Torrez & Krebs, 2012).

According to related research, mentors can improve their conferencing and feedback skills by receiving formal training that teaches them how to observe classrooms (Baco, et al., 2023; Hobson et al., 2012). In line with this hypothesis, the current study discovered that, as a result of their training, mentors were able to provide more insightful feedback, as seen by the variations in the reports from the two groups of student teachers. Student teachers with untrained mentors expressed uncertainty about their mentors' attitudes toward feedback during the practicum semester. In contrast, the experimental group reported that their mentors' ability to evaluate teaching improved

following their participation in the training program. Consequently, the online mentor training program was designed to enhance mentors' feedback practices, addressing a key need identified by student teachers (e.g., Albakri et al., 2021). Furthermore, Tüzel Başyurt and Akcan (2009) noted that providing diverse sources of feedback, both oral and written, can significantly enrich the learning experiences of student teachers in EFL contexts.

The student teachers' comments suggest that the mentors' reflective practices and feedback were enhanced by the new insights gained from the mentor training program. The present study found that, although participants in the training program more frequently employed reflective questions and both written and oral comments, they did not utilize reflective questions as extensively as expected. This finding aligns with previous studies, which have demonstrated that trained mentors are more skilled at engaging in reflective practice (Baco et al., 2023; Ellis et al., 2020). Moreover, this shift in the mentors' reflective practices, which offers student teachers a broader range of perspectives on teaching and learning, may contribute positively to their professional development. In examining how the training addresses gaps in English language teacher education programs, Akcan and Tatar (2010) conducted a study to analyze the content of feedback provided by mentor teachers to student teachers in an EFL context. Although the feedback was perceived as useful by the student teachers, it was often directive or prescriptive, limiting opportunities for student teachers to reflect on or critically engage with their practice. There was no evidence of an interactive or engaging environment during post-lesson conferences between student teachers and mentors. Mentor teachers themselves expressed a need for further training on how to effectively communicate feedback during the mentoring process. The study showed that the proposed training significantly enhanced mentoring practices, particularly in terms of improving professional support, observing student teaching, and providing feedback to refine teaching skills. It highlighted the evidence-based necessity for mentor training (e.g., Bulunuz et al., 2014; Ellis et al., 2020), specifically training that addresses needs within the practicum process.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Given that mentor teachers often receive minimal or no formal training (e.g., Clarke & Mena, 2020; Wexler, 2019), the observed improvement in mentoring practices in this study highlights the necessity of prioritizing mentor training programs. One potential approach for delivering such training is through online platforms, which offer flexibility and cost-effectiveness. Additionally, online delivery has the potential to foster a sense of community both among teachers and across different teacher communities. To implement these training programs effectively, comprehensive practicum calendar planning is essential, emphasizing stronger connections between mentors, supervisors, and student teachers, as well as between schools and universities. Practicum calendars could be structured to include online reading and discussion assignments for mentors before the start of the school year. As student teachers begin their classroom experience, these could be supplemented with real-world practice sessions, followed by weekly online asynchronous and synchronous discussions with university supervisors.

To ensure that mentors are well-equipped to fulfill their mentoring responsibilities, a set of objective criteria should be established for their selection. One potential requirement could be participation in mentoring training programs for at least one practicum year. Such professional development programs might not be viewed as burdensome if the time spent mentoring student teachers is recognized as part of the mentor's professional duties.

This study could serve as an initial step toward supporting mentors' ongoing professional learning and development. For mentors working within teacher education programs, the proposed training could serve as a model, with tasks adapted and examples expanded to cover a range of subject areas. Additionally, developing a broader online

network with mentors from diverse fields would be highly beneficial for the exchange of professional ideas and strategies, thereby enriching the development of future teachers.

In evaluating the effects of a systematically designed online mentor training program, the study provided valuable insights into the development of such programs for English language teacher education and demonstrated the advantages of mentor training. However, the study is not without its limitations. Primarily, it is constrained by its focus on a specific teacher education program with a limited sample size. Future research involving a larger cohort could yield more comprehensive conclusions regarding the efficacy of online mentor training. The COVID-19 pandemic precluded on-site observations, necessitating reliance on student teachers' feedback for data, which omitted the potential benefits of direct mentor feedback on the perceived effectiveness of the training program. To gain a more nuanced understanding of the training's impact, subsequent research should include on-site observation of mentoring practices. Additionally, the study did not address the long-term implications of the training program, focusing solely on its immediate effects. Future investigations should aim to explore the sustained impact of the training through longitudinal evaluation methods. Moreover, the training program consisted of only four modules addressing the most critical needs and expectations identified. It did not encompass other pertinent aspects such as the evaluation of student teachers' performance, motivation and attitudes in mentoring, mentor-supervisor communication, and mentor collaboration. A more comprehensive training program that incorporates these additional themes may influence mentoring practices differently.

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