Impact of Mentoring on Pre-Service Teachers’ Competence Building: A Study

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Abstract
Mentoring is a key construct in language teacher development. It plays a significant role both in capacity building as well as the psychological well-being of teachers. The article documents the impact of the mentoring programme on the pre-service teachers’ competency development as well as their sense of self as a teacher. The article is based on a 30-hour teacher training course offered to two native speaker English Teaching Assistants (ETAs) who taught in two government schools in Hyderabad, India, as part of the United States India Education Foundation’s (USIEF) Fulbright Fellowship Programme. The data was gathered from three main tools: learning logs maintained by the mentees, field notes made by the mentor during mentoring sessions and feedback sheet to assess the impact of the training submitted by the mentees. Findings revealed specific issues that trainees needed support with e.g. coping with challenges of class control, delivery of instructions, techniques for successful task execution and provision of feedback on tasks.

Keywords: mentoring, teaching competencies, learning logs, pre-service teachers

Introduction
Mentoring is a crucial aspect of pre-service teachers’ engagement with professional practice. Effective mentors draw upon personal and interpersonal skills to engage with their mentees (Bird & Hudson 2015, p. 12), guiding, scaffolding, and nurturing them in both professional and personal arenas. As summarized by West (2016), the support provided by mentors can include designing and working with existing curriculum,
reflecting on teaching, building confidence, creating enthusiasm, building and maintaining trust, navigating policies and procedures, modelling and teaching lessons, exploring teaching strategies, helping with classroom management strategies, offering assessment and evaluation of teaching, providing resources, making observations, offering feedback, facilitating problem solving, and helping the novice transition to the culture of teaching. Thus, mentoring entails a multi-dimensional skill-set on the part of the mentor.

**Review of Literature**

The following research offers a window to the quantum and quality of research in mentoring.

- O’Dowd et al. (2020) examined the role of two types of pedagogical mentoring employed in a virtual exchange project among three classes of initial English teacher education in Israel, Spain, and Sweden. Findings revealed that pedagogical mentoring that integrated students’ own online interactions into class work was more effective than pedagogical mentoring that presented and modelled online interaction strategies before the virtual exchange.

- Gardiner (2017) investigated the range of practices mentors employed, new teachers’ perceptions of the practices, and if the practices contributed to new teachers’ professional learning. Findings reveal that “inside” and “outside” mentoring practices are complementary and should be judiciously selected to promote productive changes in new teachers’ practice.

- Using a mixed methodology, Kissau & King (2014) investigated the perceived benefits of a partnership between 27 mentors in an advanced licensure second language teaching programme and 27 mentees, who had not yet completed second language teacher training. The results suggested that, when both parties shared content area expertise and worked together in a non-judgmental, supportive manner, the partnership was mutually beneficial.

- Efron et al. (2012) investigated how teachers, mentors, and school administrators perceived the process and impact of a mentoring programme designed to support teacher retention and growth. They reported the lessons learned in terms of the context and the process of mentoring and the mentor-mentee relationship.
• Mann and Tang (2012) present a case study of four novice English teachers in terms of the role that mentoring plays in their professional development, support, and socialization. Among other things, findings revealed that mentoring worked better in schools where the atmosphere was more collaborative and supportive.

• Crasbon et al. (2011) conducted an empirical study on a two-dimensional model of mentor-teacher roles in mentoring dialogues, entitled MERID—MEntor (teacher) Roles In Dialogues. Findings reveal that MERID is a useful framework to promote reflection on mentor teachers’ supervisory behaviour.

Theoretical Support

The following arguments formed the theoretical bases of the current study.

• An integrated mentoring approach which conceives mentoring as a diagnostic, a deliberative, an inquiry and a practice process is better than earlier approaches to mentoring such as the personal growth mentoring, the situated learning mentoring, core practice mentoring and critical transformative mentoring (Orland-Barack & Wang, 2021)

• A mentoring superstructure which cultivates appropriate mentee mindsets and ensures accountability for mentoring contributes to effective mentoring (Hobson & Maxwell, 2020).

• Mentors provide information and opportunities that will assist the beginning teachers to survive and thrive in their current situation. In effect, beginning teachers are learning to become teachers through their experience of the mentoring relationship (Nguyen, 2017).

• Mentors go beyond the usual dualism of “supervisor” and “assessor” to incorporate their own professional learning as an inherent feature of their role (Allen et al., 2017)

• Good mentoring requires specific personality traits (e.g. experience, trustworthiness), relevant professional knowledge (e.g. second language acquisition and teaching methods), and interpersonal skills (e.g. communication) (Delany, 2012).

• Mentoring support encourages the mentee to reflect teaching experiences towards developing a teaching identity (Pitton, 2006).
Aim

The study aims to investigate the impact of mentoring on pre-service teachers’ competence building as well as their emerging self as a teacher. The following questions are addressed in the study:

a) What are the domains of language teaching in which competence needs to be built?

b) What kind of training inputs and mentoring strategies contribute to competence building?

c) What is the impact of mentoring on pre-service teachers’ teaching?

d) How does mentoring impact the pre-service teachers’ emerging sense of self as a teacher?

Methodology

The study is based on a 30-hour teacher training course offered to two native speaker English Teaching Assistants (ETAs) who taught in two government schools in Hyderabad, India, for nine months, as part of the United States India Education Foundation’s (USIEF) Fulbright-Nehru English Teaching Assistantship Programme (FNETAP). Both the ETAs were young females in the age group of 25-30 with no or very limited and sporadic teaching experience prior to their FNETAP. They had been teaching for two months in the schools in Hyderabad before they entered the mentoring programme. The course content of the mentoring programme comprised eight modules: four on developing language skills (LSRW-16 hours), two on teaching vocabulary and grammar (8 hours) and two on lesson planning and classroom management (6 hours). The content was offered through tasks and activities and responses to prompts. The ETAs were highly motivated and eager to learn. They shared vignettes of their everyday classroom teaching throughout the mentoring programme which contributed to finding feasible solutions to classroom issues. Using elicitation as the main training strategy, the mentor was able to facilitate the comprehension as well as the assimilation of the training inputs in a manner that enabled the ETAs to take informed decisions as classroom teachers.

Data was collected through three tools:

1) Learning logs: A learning log is a reflective diary that encourages learners to review the course inputs in order to better understand
and assimilate them. The ETAs were given a template to document their learning along the following prompts: 1) what I learnt today 2) its usefulness to me as a teacher of ESL 3) An idea that I liked most 4) an idea that I did not find interesting 5) one thing that I want to know more about/ research about and 6) comment on the overall experience of learning today. The learning logs were maintained by the ETAs throughout the mentoring programme. The logs helped to assess the efficacy of the training input offered to the ETAs (see Appendix 1 for excerpts of learning logs).

2) Field notes: The mentor maintained a journal of the training sessions offered to the ETAs. This helped to document the specific issues that the ETAs brought to the sessions from their everyday teaching. The mentor also made field notes of the lesson observation which proved valuable in detailing the strong points of the lesson as well as identifying the lacunae therein, in the post-observation conference. This helped to gauge the ability of the ETAs to apply the inputs offered during the training to real classroom scenarios (see Appendix 2 for excerpts of mentor feedback).

3) Feedback sheet: A feedback sheet was used to garner the mentee perceptions on the impact of the mentoring programme on their teaching. The feedback sheet had three parts. Part 1 elicited information on the challenges the ETAs faced in specific areas of classroom teaching (e.g. teaching reading) before the mentoring programme. Part 2 urged the ETAs to record specific instances of how mentoring contributed to effective classroom teaching. For each of the areas of the course inputs the mentees documented a) what they learnt b) how they implemented what they learnt and its impact and c) what they would like to experiment with and learn more about in their future teaching. Part 3 had several open-ended questions that focused on the overall effectiveness of the mentoring programme such as the duration of the programme, the tasks used and the readings discussed in class etc. (see Appendix 3 for the feedback sheet).

Data Presentation and Interpretation

The data collected for the study are presented and analysed in the following sections. A detailed discussion of the course content and delivery for each of the eight modules is undertaken in terms of three
aspects: a) what was offered, i.e. specific examples of the input b) what was learnt as stated in the learning logs as well as the feedback sheet and c) what was implemented in their actual teaching and what they hoped to achieve in the future as documented in the feedback sheet submitted by the mentees as well as the field notes of the lesson observation and the post-observation conference made by the mentor. An attempt is thus made to address the research questions from several angles.

Module-wise Discussion

As stated above the following sections will present examples of the course input, what the mentees learnt from the course and what they managed to implement in their classroom teaching. The discussion will include the future goals of the mentees as well as the mentor’s comments on the mentees’ competence development drawn from the field notes.

**Table 1 Lesson Planning (Module 1)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Inputs</th>
<th>What the Mentees Learnt</th>
<th>What the Mentees Implemented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For me, planning a lesson is like taking a walk in a garden, walking through a forest, having a meal, visiting a dentist. Create a lesson plan template based on the checklist below.</td>
<td>● Learned to include my personal goals in the lesson plan.</td>
<td>● Created lesson plans that included better instructions and a sense of time for each activity.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Learned to create lesson plans that have clear learning goals and time frames of the lesson.</td>
<td>● Learned to teach using interesting, new activities in my lessons.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Prior to the mentoring programme, the mentees had no idea how to create a thorough lesson with specific learning goals. They needed to know how to create lessons that incorporated elements outside the textbook. The tasks in this module encouraged the mentees to think critically about planning lessons. With the help of the templates the mentees were able to design lesson plans with specific goals and with engaging activities. However, they will need more practice in designing and conducting lessons that maximize learner interaction. The future goals of the mentees include writing lessons for longer class periods and creating different lesson plans for students of different levels.
Table 2 Classroom Management (Module 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Inputs</th>
<th>What the Mentees Learnt</th>
<th>What the Mentees Implemented</th>
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</table>
| Design a class contract. Mention what you expect from students and what you will do for them. | - Learned how to create a classroom contract.  
- Learned how to use the energy of active students to be leaders and help the teacher with classroom management. | - The classroom contract was helpful in maintaining class discipline and control.  
- Consistent hand motions to alert students have made it possible for students to recognize that when the teacher is talking, they should be listening. |

The tasks in this module exposed the mentees to the critical moments in the class where the teacher has to take spontaneous decisions in real time. They are able to maintain class control to some extent. They need to focus on lesson transitions and closures. Their future goal is to learn more about rewarding good behaviour rather than punishing bad behaviour. They would like to try out a reward system that is inexpensive and encourages students to have good behaviour.

Table 3 Teaching Vocabulary (Module 3)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Examples of Inputs</th>
<th>What the Mentees Learnt</th>
<th>What the Mentees Implemented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Look at the list of words. Choose the best way to convey their meaning. Why it is the best way? | - There are several ways to present new words to students.  
- Vocabulary should be taught explicitly and not only in textbook discussion.  
- Vocabulary is necessary and is dependent on | - Each week students learn five words and are tested at the end of the week.  
- Vocabulary is taught through context. |

**Words:**
Disgusting, café, swimming, often, chase, frightened, crossroads, window sill, exploitation, stapler

**Ways to convey meaning:**
Explain the meaning (with examples); read out the dictionary definition; translate; draw a quick sketch on the board or show a flashcard or picture in a book; point to the object; tell a personal
The inputs in this module enabled the mentees to devise innovative ways of presenting new vocabulary to the students and to design engaging practice tasks. They were able to teach vocabulary explicitly and through context as well. They wish to introduce vocabulary competitions to test how many words the students actually retain. They also want to introduce vocabulary based on themed lessons.

### Table 4 Teaching Grammar (Module 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Inputs</th>
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<th>What the Mentees Implemented</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The teacher prepares some sentences using the first conditional for warnings (e.g. If you touch the dog, it'll bite you!). She cuts each sentence in half and hands out these pieces to the students. Students have to read out their half and find the matching half amongst the other students.</td>
<td>• Grammar can be taught in a communicative way.</td>
<td>• Took special care to draw students’ attention to the three aspects of grammatical items: form, meaning and use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questions</strong></td>
<td>• It is important to ensure that the learners understand the form, meaning and use of the grammatical forms.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it a presentation/ practice/ production activity? Why?</td>
<td>• Interesting activities can be designed to make grammar learning fun.</td>
<td>• Adapted textbook tasks in an interesting manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the focus on form/ meaning/ use? Why?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Is it a potentially ‘good’ or ‘bad’ activity? Why?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think of one other language item that can be taught in this way.</td>
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</table>

The theoretical inputs offered through tasks such as the ones described above contributed to not only a clear understanding of the role of grammar in language learning but also to develop the skill of designing...
tasks and activities to teach grammar in an engaging manner. The mentees state that by teaching grammar, they realized that grammar needs to be taught systematically and with a lot of practice. They became more aware of practices they took for granted. They worked on visual explanation of the different tenses. They drew grammar points from the textbook to complement the grammar lessons. Their ambition is to learn how to identify all the grammar rules and teach them in a manner that makes it easier for students to learn.

Table 5 Developing Listening (Module 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Inputs</th>
<th>What the Mentees Learnt</th>
<th>What the Mentees Implemented</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laura: I told the students they would hear the tape twice, but they found it quite difficult and hadn’t really understood, so I ended up playing it three times. Was Laura right to tell her students how many times they were going to listen? Was she right to change her plan?</td>
<td>• Learned that listening can be taught via music and other authentic materials. • Learned that listening once is not enough.</td>
<td>• I purchased a speaker to play music and have the students fill in the blanks. • I told stories and had the students listen carefully for the answers to the questions.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The mentees thought that the listening skill was in place by default. Through the theoretical inputs offered in the mentoring programme, mentees realized that listening can cause considerable anxiety to learners and hence needs special attention. They experimented with different genres and task types in class as mentioned above.

Table 6 Developing Speaking (Module 6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Inputs</th>
<th>What the Mentees Learnt</th>
<th>What the Mentees Implemented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you agree with the following statements? All speaking lessons should be conducted in open class situations—with the teacher addressing the whole class or one student addressing the class.</td>
<td>• Pair and group work is important in developing speaking skills.</td>
<td>• Designed many tasks for speaking. Refrain from interrupting/correcting learners when they are speaking.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pair and group work will only lead to students learning the mistakes of their colleagues. All mistakes should be corrected.

The teacher should create equal opportunity to participate for learners. Encourage learners to self-correct and peer-correct errors.

The inputs offered helped the mentees reconsider several of their assumptions about teaching speaking. They were also exposed to a plethora of task types that could achieve a variety of sub-skills (e.g. offering and declining help). They were able to conduct speaking activities well in class. Their future goal is to try activities that involve more public speaking and speaking to larger audiences. They wish to research if speaking various languages at once is beneficial or detrimental to the learner.

Table 7 Developing Reading (Module 7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Inputs</th>
<th>What the Mentees Learnt</th>
<th>What the Mentees Implemented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steven decides to use his classified advertisements in a lesson. He gives the learners a list of people who all want to buy specified things. The students must try to find what they need in the classified ads Steven has provided. Later Steven’s friend, Alice asks to borrow the ads for her lesson. However, before giving out the ads she asks students what sort of things may be advertised. She then asks them if they have ever bought or sold anything in this way. She allows students to chat about this for a few minutes before completing the same task as Steven used. Whose lesson is likely to be better and why?</td>
<td>Reading can be taught from both authentic and non-authentic materials. Teaching reading comprehension is part of teaching reading and information processing.</td>
<td>I stopped asking students to read out loud for the class because it did not benefit anyone except the reader if I would correct them. I introduced authentic materials for the students to read.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
The module on reading focused on exploiting a variety of genres and task types to facilitate comprehension. Mentees developed a clear understanding of the different stages of a reading lesson and also learnt to frame questions that test comprehension at different levels—factual, inferential, evaluative, etc. Mentees need further training in exploiting the full potential of a coursebook lesson. As a future goal mentees wish to start a book club at school to encourage students to read more.

**Table 8 Developing Writing (Module 8)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Inputs</th>
<th>What the Mentees Learnt</th>
<th>What the Mentees Implemented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jon: I wanted the students to write about environmental problems, so we started by discussing the problems and what could be done about them.</td>
<td>• I learned that writing is different from speaking because it allows for preparation.</td>
<td>• I assigned different writing assignments that allowed for the students to be creative and individualized their writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alison: I wanted the learners to do some writing practice, so we started by reading a letter and they had to respond to the letter.</td>
<td>• Writing is a very important skill that needs to be taught slowly and effectively for students to become good writers.</td>
<td>• I taught both format and content before beginning the writing activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What aspects of the process of writing are in focus?</td>
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</table>

The mentees were able to perceive how challenging writing can be for learners; they developed strategies to break a writing task into smaller steps ensuring task success and a sense of achievement for the learners. However, they need more support with designing tasks related to product-based writing which are engaging for the learners. Their future goal is to teach essay writing and provide more space for creative writing in their lesson plans.

The discussion above clearly documents the learning that was made possible for the mentees through the mentoring programme.

**Findings and Implications**

The findings of the study are discussed in relation to the research questions addressed:
What are the domains of language teaching in which competence of pre-service teachers needs to be built?

Classroom teaching is a complex enterprise. Teachers are expected to possess a host of skills in a plethora of domains. Since the primary aim of language teaching is to enable the learners to perform functions in real life contexts using language (e.g. giving and following directions or filling in an unfamiliar form), the ETAs found the inputs on teaching language skills and elements extremely useful. Inputs on lesson planning and classroom management too proved useful in offering effective lessons to their students in the classroom. The ETAs expressed the need for exposure to and training in other seminal aspects such as materials selection, maximizing the potential of coursebook content, assessment of language skills, etc. However, in view of the limited duration of the mentoring programme, these issues were dealt with only in a peripheral manner.

What kind of training inputs and mentoring strategies contribute to competence building?

As evidenced from the data presented and interpreted above, training inputs that consist of vignettes from real classrooms trigger critical thinking and enable informed decision-making on the part of the mentees (for example, see the task in Section 5 on teaching-listening). It is important to make the mentees understand that teachers are required to take decisions in real time and that a number of options are available for any given scenario. As for mentoring strategies, if the mentor is able to select cognitively challenging tasks and implement these in an emotionally satisfying manner, the mentees will demonstrate the courage to experiment with their teaching and push their boundaries.

What is the impact of mentoring on pre-service teachers’ teaching?

Mentoring has an enormous impact on the teaching of pre-service teachers. Through appropriate theoretical inputs, it builds knowledge and skills. It not only strengthens the subject matter knowledge, i.e. content but also enhances the pedagogic content knowledge (PCK), i.e. the knowledge of how to deliver the content. The mentees in the study have been able to identify specific areas where the mentoring programme was extremely useful in not only teaching LSRW, grammar and vocabulary but also in dealing with issues related to classroom dynamics and ecology. For example, one of the mentees shares that she
learned how to use the energy of active students to be leaders and help the teacher with classroom management.

**How does mentoring impact the emerging sense of self as a teacher?**

Mentoring is a scholarly and valuable engagement with the pre-service teachers’ ideologies of teaching. It can play a pivotal role in shaping the mentees’ sense of self as teacher provided it is offered in a mutually respectful and trusting manner. When they enter the mentoring programme, pre-service teachers/student-teachers bring with them their beliefs and assumptions about what constitutes effective teaching. When they enter the classroom to teach real students, some of these beliefs may need to be altered while some may even be rendered invalid. Mentors who are sensitive and empathetic can sensitize the pre-service teachers to the invariable conflict between teacher beliefs and teacher behaviours/actions and help them resolve these. This will go a long way in shaping the mentees’ emerging sense of self as teachers.

**Limitations**

- The duration of the mentoring programme was only 30 hours. Therefore, theoretical inputs on only eight domains were included, although informal meetings with the mentees were often held. If the programme had a longer duration, more substantial inputs could have been offered to the mentees which would have enhanced the depth and breadth of mentoring.

- The mentor had the opportunity to observe only two lessons taught by the mentees; one in the middle and one towards the end of the mentoring programme. If more lessons were observed, it would perhaps have been possible to offer more constructive help to the mentees in conducting lessons.

- The tools designed for the study expected a certain level of cognitive capability, reflective ability and verbal agility from the mentees. Used with participants of lower ability, the tools may not yield rich data.

**Further Research**

- Teacher identity is an interesting area of research in language teaching. Further research can explore how mentoring programmes can contribute to the identity formation of pre-service and in-service teachers.
A longitudinal study on the pedagogic gains of a staggered mentoring programme for in-service teachers with specific issues with their teaching practice (e.g. reducing teacher talk time and enhancing teacher talk quality) can be engaging.

A study can be undertaken to investigate the implications of post lesson conferences for enhancing and fine-tuning the supervisory skills of mentors.

Conclusion

Mentoring is agony and ecstasy at the same time for the mentor. For the mentees, the process of knowledge construction and competence building is both painful and joyful involving risk taking and reward winning. Mentoring offers as much learning and unlearning for the mentor as it does for the mentees as both charter their paths towards professional development.

References


**Appendices**

https://docs.google.com/document/d/17iLo0grj1lr4clVG0zRpRuykI6ogL4XeGLYgxzuE6U8/edit?usp=sharing

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