

# Mentoring Experience at University Level: EFL Mentees' Perceptions and Suggestions

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## Abstract

The research paper aims to investigate EFL mentees' perceptions of mentoring experience in one of the Higher Education institutes in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the Academic years 2019 and 2020. The mentoring experience includes four domains: the mentorship program, mentors' roles and responsibilities, benefits of mentoring, and barriers to mentoring. The researcher attempted to answer two questions. The first explores the mentees' perceptions of the mentoring experience, and the second question attempts to find out the mentees' suggestions to make the mentoring experience more effective. A questionnaire of 4- Likert scale was used to collect data from thirty-three newly recruited instructors to answer the first question. The mentees were also asked to add their suggestions for the betterment of mentoring experiences as an answer to the second question. Descriptive statistics in the form of means, standard deviation, and percentages were used to analyze the collected data. The findings revealed that the mentees were satisfied with the mentoring experience. They have a positive attitude towards the mentorship program and the mentor's roles and responsibilities. However, a few mentees have certain concerns regarding some factors related to their mentoring experience. These were highlighted and discussed under each domain. In addition, the mentees had a number of suggestions that would contribute to having a more effective mentoring experience. Based on the findings, the researcher presented a number of conclusions and recommendations.

**Keywords:** mentees' perceptions, mentorship program, mentoring experience, professional development

## 1. Introduction and Theoretical Background

### 1.1 Overview of Mentoring, Teacher Education and Professional Development

In teacher education, mentoring can be seen as an effective approach for enhancing teachers' professional development as it provides valuable opportunities for teachers' professional growth (Dikilitas & Atay, 2018; G'omez & Casilla, 2014; Mena, García, Clarke & Barkatsas, 2015; Walker, Golde, Jones, Conklin, & Hutchings, 2008). It can also be seen as a process used by a more skilled and experienced mentor who helps and guides the mentee (Arnold, 2006; Hudson & Nguyen, 2008; Portner, 2008). The mentor can be an experienced colleague who supports, facilitates and challenges the learning of the mentee (Carnell, MacDonald, & Askew 2006). This entails that it is very important to provide newly recruited teachers with support and guidance to provide them with the techniques that help them teach effectively.

Wright-Harp and Cole (2008) define mentoring as "a process whereby one guides, leads, supports, teaches, and challenges other individuals to facilitate their personal, educational, and professional growth and development through mutual respect and trust (p. 8).

As an approach, mentoring helps new teachers acquire the needed competencies to meet the demands of teaching during the initial stages of the teaching practice (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). In addition, mentoring can lead to improving self-reflection and problem-solving skills (Hobson et al., 2009) as well as the benefits in the areas of career development and psychosocial enhancement (Mullen, 2011).

In the same vein, mentoring can foster the development of newly recruited teachers' self-confidence, understanding of the subject matter, and using a variety of strategies to meet students' needs (Cordingley & Buckler, 2012). It is very important to provide professional guidance and support to beginning teachers as they may face challenges when they start their professional career, so mentoring enhances their teaching skills and pedagogical knowledge (Saban,

2002; Woullard & Coats, 2004). Zimmer-Loew (2008) maintained that educational funding should support mentoring in order to facilitate new teacher training that would lead to their professional development. Hairon et al. (2019) pointed out that mentoring helps beginning teachers to develop professionally and implement curricula that prepare learners for the future economy. Accordingly, they need support from experienced teachers.

In the same direction, mentors' feedback plays an active role in enhancing teachers' professional development. In the practicum experience and teacher education programs, it is very critical to provide student teachers with constructive feedback in order to enhance their teaching skills and professional development (Hudson, 2013a; Martinez, 2016; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Wright, 2010; Ximena & Méndez, 2008). According to Lawson, Çakmak, Gündüz, & Busher, (2015), university mentors can provide support by observing the classroom teaching and giving critical feedback for teachers' development.

### *1.2 Benefits of Mentoring and Mentors' and Mentees' Relationship*

Scholars highlighted the benefits mentees can obtain out of their mentoring experience (Cosgun & Attay, 2018; Hobson et al., 2009; Johnson, 2007). Cosgun & Attay (2018) stated that mentoring helps both the pre-service and in-service teachers. Mentors assist pre-service teachers to teach independently. In-service teachers could also benefit in updating their teaching competencies, which enhances their professional development. Hobson et al. (2009) highlighted the benefits of mentoring for the mentees and the mentors. As for the mentees, the benefits include self-esteem, self-reflection, problem solving skills, confidence, classroom management, and professional development. Regarding the mentors, the benefits include satisfaction, enhanced recognition in the professional community, and increased self-worth. Hobson et al. (2009) maintained that mentoring is believed to contribute to the professional development of experienced teachers. Mentors grow by talking about teaching with their mentees, participating in mentor training, self-reflection, and learning new instructional techniques. Mentoring relationships also lead to collaboration and collegiality among mentors and mentees. Johnson (2007) also identified a variety of benefits gained from mentoring such as productivity, skill development, networking, professional confidence, satisfaction, and psychological benefits.

Concerning the mentor and mentee's relationship, a number of researchers highlighted the importance of having a relationship based on respect, trust, open and mutual communication (Boreen, Johnson, Niday, & Potts, 2009; Izadinia, 2016; Johnson, 2008; Ximena & Méndez, 2008). To elaborate on this, Boreen et al. (2009) stated that mentors and mentees should share their philosophy of teaching, classroom management competencies, and planning to teach. Through mutual understanding and dialogue, both mentors and mentees should share their points of view according to their own classroom perceptions and experiences in order to be able to analyze classroom situations in a reflective and critical way. Izadinia (2013) maintained that mentoring supports student teachers in their pedagogical practice by dialoguing, negotiating ideas and giving advice to improve mentees' teaching practices. Izadinia (2016) added that effective mentoring relationships are only fostered through encouragement, support, feedback, and open communication between mentors and mentees. In this context, Johnson (2008) pointed out that the mentor and the mentee should have regular contact in the form of visits and conversations to discuss the challenges of teaching. Ximena & Méndez (2008) concluded that the role of mentors is important in the professional preparation of student teachers in that they guide and support them to become professional teachers, which would help student teachers benefit from mentoring experiences.

### *1.3 Mentors' Roles and Responsibilities*

In teacher education, mentors play various significant roles that enhance teachers' competencies and professional development. Mentors play crucial roles in shaping and reshaping pre-service teachers' identities. (Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002; Timostsuk & Ugaste, 2010). Chinamasa (2015), cited in Dikilitas & Attay (2018) added that mentees are assigned to mentors based on the mentees' needs and interests, and mentors help mentees and share with them their expertise. In this context, mentors play various professional roles in supporting teachers. They can act as a role model, supporter, planner of teaching experiences, observer, demonstrator, advisor, and professional peer (Adlesi & Bizjak, 2010; Anderson & Shannon, 1988; Gürsoy & Damar, 2011; Hennissen, Crasborn, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2008; Hudson & Nguyen, 2008; Lacey, 1999).

To elaborate more on the mentors' responsibilities, mentors' roles include the following: helping mentees to improve their professional skills, enhancing their understanding of subject matter, enhancing the mentees' creative and critical thinking skills, and helping them build the capacity to make decisions (Arnold, 2006; Boreen et al., 2009; Johnson, 2008; Portner, 2008). Hudson and Nguyen (2008) added that mentors have important roles of motivating teachers, sharing ideas with them, counseling and supporting them. In addition, mentors have been described as educational

leaders and change agents. Aspects of leadership that mentors practice include creating collaborative communities of practice, supporting, organizing, and negotiating (Hanson, 2010; Lieberman & Friedrich, 2012).

With regard to the mentors' roles in teaching practicum, mentors are expected to play various roles such as guiding student teachers in learning how to teach (Hall, Draper, Smith, & Bullough, 2008). Besides, mentors' feedback and giving enough space for mentees' autonomy in teaching are core issues in the teaching practicum (Bullock, 2017). In addition, when mentors enhance student teachers' competencies, they can enhance their own students' learning in the near future. Mentoring practices are enhanced through this collaboration and collegiality. Mentors are expected to promote personal and professional support so that the student teachers can cope with actual cases and accomplish positive experiences in teaching (Baldauf & Nguyen, 2010). During the teaching practicum, school mentors can support student teachers in lesson planning and classroom teaching through daily communication and regular meetings (Mena et al., 2015).

#### *1.4 Barriers to Mentoring*

As discussed above, the consensus among scholars is that mentoring plays a significant role in enhancing teachers' professional development, and has various benefits for both the mentee and the mentor. Meanwhile, it is also worthwhile to shed light on the potential barriers that might hinder the implementation of mentoring.

Saban (2002) stated that time is a critical factor for the effectiveness of mentoring. Balassa, Bodoczky, & Saunders (2003) also pointed out that teachers have concerns regarding institutional and organizational aspects in the institution. According to Wang and Odell (2002), another barrier is related to mentors' skills. Without support provided to mentors to develop their skills, mentors may act more like guides who help new teachers adapt to the existing school systems, rather than as supporters to assist them in developing their teaching practices.

Other potential challenges include unbalanced power relations between mentors and mentees and their negative impact on student teachers' learning in terms of losing self-autonomy (Boz & Boz, 2006; Ong'ondo & Borg, 2011). Gursoy and Damar (2011) added that mentors' insufficient awareness of mentoring also leads to problems in the fulfillment of their roles because most mentors rarely undergo training specific to mentoring.

Student teachers also consider their mentors as a source of stress in English language teaching practicum where mentors focus upon evaluating student teachers far more than on the other responsibilities of mentoring (Merc, 2011). Paker (2011) also highlighted the point that there are gaps coming from mentors' expectations and from a lack of effective feedback provided by mentors.

#### *1.5 Study Context: Mentorship Program*

A mentorship program was conducted for the newly recruited instructors for three months to assist them with a series of activities that would facilitate their integration into the English Language Center (ELC) environment. By the end of the 12-week program, they were expected to acquire a foundation to enable them to adjust practices, adapt to ELC standards and requirements and become active members in ELC learning environment. The program included the following aspects: orientation and introduction to the teaching-learning environment and policies; curriculum and teaching courses and resources; tutorials and training on teaching methods and strategies; observation, peer coaching, progress assessment; and constructive feedback and follow up.

The mentorship program was a collaborative and reflective course that aimed to help instructors plan and develop a teaching career, implement and evaluate a curriculum that meets students' needs, and incorporates effective instructional and assessment strategies. Other aims included identifying areas of instructors' weaknesses, expanding their teaching abilities, and thus fostering their professional development.

#### *1.6 Problem Statement and Objective*

Based on the researcher's professional meetings with EFL newly recruited instructors and performance evaluation conducted to assess their needs, it has been noticed that they find it difficult to adapt to the new professional environment. They need to understand the policies that govern work and to develop their teaching competencies in areas related to classroom management, planning for teaching, teaching strategies, and assessment of learning. Identifying their needs is very important to support them in their professional career. Hence, they were requested to join a mentorship program to help them integrate into the ELC teaching-learning environment. Having undertaken the mentoring experience, they started teaching with a follow up process of observation and ongoing professional development. It is worthwhile to investigate the instructors' perceptions of the mentoring experience they have passed, including the mentorship program, mentors' roles and responsibilities, benefits of mentoring, barriers to mentoring, and instructors' suggestions for the betterment of future mentoring experiences.

### 1.7 Research Questions

This paper is an attempt to answer the following questions:

- 1- What are the EFL mentees' perceptions of the mentoring experience they have passed?
- 2- What are the mentees' suggestions to improve mentoring experiences?

### 1.8 Significance of the Study

Investigating mentees' perceptions may give insights to EFL specialists to improve mentorship programs. The findings of the present research paper will be important to EFL newly recruited instructors to benefit from a well-structured and reviewed mentorship program. The mentors may also consider the results of the paper in terms of reflecting on mentors' roles and responsibilities. In addition, the policy makers may consider the barriers to implementing the mentorship program and the instructors' suggestions for the betterment of future mentoring experiences.

## 2. Literature Review

Having reviewed the related literature on mentoring EFL teachers, some studies have found that mentoring relationships can have a positive impact on mentees' teaching experiences (Gomez & Casillas, 2014; Izadinia, 2015; Martinez, 2016; Tsui & Law, 2007). Gomez and Casillas (2014) attempted to find out what characteristics they considered important in a mentoring relationship. The study showed three different views. The first was related to having a mentor who helped them to develop technical skills, expanded their professional networks, and invited them to collaborate in their research projects. In the second view, participants needed a mentor with technical and analytical skills, who challenged them intellectually, and who provided them with feedback regarding their performance. The third perspective was related to having a mentor who could advise them or answer their questions. As shown in Izadinia (2015) study, mentors' guidance to student teachers was the factor behind their professional development. The aspects of mentoring relationships included guidance, support, mutual trust, and open communication. Martinez (2016) reported similar findings. He investigated Spanish EFL student teachers' needs and expectations from their mentors' feedback. The findings revealed a high degree of satisfaction among the student teachers concerning the quality of mentor feedback. The main strength of mentors' feedback was in the supportive and affective nature. Tsui and Law (2007) also explored how university teacher educators and school mentors formed a collaborative relationship to help student teachers develop their pedagogical reasoning as autonomous English teachers.

Another set of studies investigated teachers' positive mentoring experiences (Chin-Wen, 2014; Hairon et al., 2019; Nguyen, 2008). Chin-Wen (2014) discussed pre-service teachers' learning from expert teachers. The findings showed that teachers had a positive attitude towards the mentoring experience. Mentoring enhanced their knowledge of classroom context, planning, and teaching strategies. Hairon et al. (2019) also studied teachers' perceptions of the impact of a mentoring package's that they took part in. The findings revealed that mentoring in the form of discussions, reflections, reading materials, and feedback and the content components had a positive impact on their classroom management competencies. Similarly, Nguyen (2008) investigated English language teachers' perceptions toward their mentoring experiences at university. The findings revealed that mentoring played a valuable role in their professional development.

More research studies were conducted to investigate the impact of mentorship programs on teachers' professional development. (Cosgun & Atay, 2018; Sakamoto & Lumi, 2014). Cosgun and Atay (2018) explored the impact of a mentoring program provided to EFL teachers. The findings showed that the program contributed to the teachers' professional and personal development. Sakamoto and Lumi (2014) investigated the impact of a mentorship program on graduate students. The findings showed that mentoring which encouraged active participation in professional activities could foster mentees' confidence and provides training for them to perform well in forums. Mentorship also provided opportunities that would develop a sense of efficacy and professional development.

Other studies explored teachers' needs to be gained from mentoring practices (Aslan & Secil, 2012; Hudson and Nguyen's, 2008; Hudson, 2013b; Orland-Barak & Hasin, 2010). Aslan and Secil (2012) investigated mentors' views on the mentoring process during a teacher development program. The study showed the importance of having more interaction between mentors and mentees. There was also the need for increasing the observation time and adding pre- and post- observation sessions. The study also stressed the need for a mentoring program for mentors. Hudson and Nguyen's (2008) investigated EFL pre-service teachers' needs. The results revealed that mentoring practices should include guidance and checking lesson plans before teaching. These teachers required a mentor who could play a role mode of teaching which includes providing them with teaching strategies, classroom management skills, motivation, and feedback. Hudson (2013b) also identified some effective mentoring strategies for teachers such as co-planning

and reflective skills. In addition, Orland-Barak and Hasin (2010) explored the mentors' perspectives of mentoring in different contexts. The findings revealed that organizational skills, interpersonal relationships, and providing mentees with challenge as well as support were very important for the mentees to develop their skills.

On the other hand, ineffective mentoring may affect teachers negatively (Boz & Boz, 2006; Ong'ondo & Borg, 2011; Özge & Ahmet, 2019; Yuan, 2016). Boz and Boz (2006) studied the potential challenges involved in mentoring. The study revealed that there was unbalanced power relations between mentors and mentees. Similarly, Ong'ondo and Borg (2011) highlighted the negative impact on student teachers' learning in terms of losing self-autonomy. In addition, Yuan (2016) explored language teachers' interactions with mentors during their teaching practicum. The findings revealed that mentoring was a negative experience in that it did not facilitate the mentees' learning to teach. Özge and Ahmet (2019) also investigated student teachers' perceptions of mentoring roles and responsibilities. The findings revealed that mentors rarely played the roles of facilitator, supporter, and feedback provider.

In conclusion, the studies reported above investigated mentoring relationships, mentoring experiences, mentoring practices, and mentorship programs in terms of the mentees' perceptions regarding the impact of mentoring on teaching experiences and enhancing teachers' professional development. However, none of the studies investigated mentees' perceptions regarding a detailed and a comprehensive view of mentees towards a mentoring experience in relation to the mentorship program, mentors' roles and responsibilities, benefits of mentoring, barriers that would hinder the implementation of effective mentoring, and potential suggestions for effective mentoring. In addition, the present study has been conducted in a context different from the studies reported. The present study seeks to investigate mentees' perceptions of their mentoring experiences at TUELC in the academic years 2019 and 2020, and to find out their suggestions for the betterment of mentoring experiences.

### **3. Method**

In this section, the researcher describes the procedures of data collection and analysis. Specifically, it identifies the population and sample; checking the instrument's validity and reliability; and the procedures followed for conducting the study and analyzing the data.

#### *3.1 Population and Sample Selection*

The population of the research study consisted of one hundred and eighty EFL instructors teaching English at the ELC in the academic years 2019 and 2020. Thirty-three newly recruited, 17 male and 16 female instructors, participated in the mentorship program. All of them responded to the questionnaire expressing their perceptions of their mentoring experience.

#### *3.2 Study Instrument*

Having reviewed related literature, the researcher adopted items used by Nguyen (2008). These include items 2, 3, and 5 of the second domain related to mentors' roles and responsibilities; the third domain of benefits of mentoring; and the fourth domain of barriers to mentoring. The first domain of mentorship program and items 1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 of the second domain were developed by the researcher himself on the basis of his professional contact with EFL instructors. The questionnaire includes two parts. Part A is a scale of four descriptive criteria 1= strongly agree; 2= agree; 3= disagree; 4= strongly disagree. In part B of the questionnaire, instructors were asked to write their suggestions for the betterment of their mentoring experiences (Appendix A).

#### *3.3 Instrument Validity and Reliability*

Five EFL specialists were kindly requested to check the instrument validity in terms of having the items clear and relevant to the domain and context. They suggested deleting recurring items that may confuse the participants. Cronbach alpha was used to check reliability. It was found 0.88, which is convenient.

#### *3.4 Study Procedures*

Having gained the formal approval to carry out the research study, the researcher developed the study tool to use for gathering data from the participants who took part in the mentorship program. The researcher then checked the validity and reliability of the questionnaire and distributed it to the participants who responded to it expressing their perceptions of the mentoring experience they have passed. The researcher collected the participants' responses and processed the results using the appropriate statistical methods. Based on the study results, the researcher has drawn a number of conclusions and recommendations for further action and research.

#### *3.5 Statistical Analysis*

The researcher used descriptive statistical analysis including means, standard deviation and percentages to answer the

first question meant to investigate the instructors' perceptions of their mentoring experience. In order to come up with the instructors' suggestions, the researcher analyzed and synthesized the instructors' responses to come up with suggestions to make mentoring experiences more effective.

#### 4. Results

To answer the first question on the mentees' perceptions of the mentoring experience, Table 1 shows means, standard deviation and percentages of their perceptions towards the first domain related to the mentorship program.

Key: 1= Strongly agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly disagree

Table 1. Means, standard deviation and percentages of instructors' perceptions towards the mentorship program

No.	Domain 1 Mentorship program	Mean	Std. Deviation	Percentages			
				1	2	3	4
1	I have attended a defined mentoring program at my working place.	1.33	0.54	69.7	27.3	3.0	00.0
2	The mentoring program has clear objectives.	1.48	0.75	63.6	27.3	6.1	3.0
3	The mentoring program focuses on specific tasks.	1.87	0.85	36.4	45.5	12.1	6.1
4	The mentoring program has engaged me into the teaching environment.	1.48	0.71	60.6	33.3	3.0	3.0

It is clear from Table 1 above that the mentees were satisfied with the mentorship program. The means are all below 2, which indicates that the satisfaction level was either "strongly agree" or "agree". The highest percentages supported this satisfaction as well. However, in item number three above, the calculation of the percentages of those who disagreed or strongly disagreed is 18.2%. Though this percentage is low, it gives an indication that some of the mentees perceived the program as not focusing on specific tasks. This item can be reconsidered when it comes to the annual review of the mentorship program.

Regarding the second domain of the mentees' perceptions of the mentors' roles and responsibilities, Table 2 shows means, standard deviation and percentages of their perceptions.

Table 2. Means, standard deviation and percentages of instructors' perceptions towards mentors' roles and responsibilities

No.	Domain 2 Mentors' roles and responsibilities	Mean	Std. Deviation	Percentages			
				1	2	3	4
1	My mentor assisted me in developing my skills in planning.	1.72	0.83	45.5	42.4	6.1	6.1
2	My mentor modeled effective teaching strategies.	1.57	0.66	51.5	39.4	9.1	0.0
3	My mentor worked in a collaborative manner.	1.63	0.74	51.5	33.3	15.2	0.0
4	My mentor observed my classes as planned.	1.51	0.75	63.6	21.2	15.2	0.0
5	My mentor managed time for mentoring effectively.	1.42	0.70	66.7	27.3	3.0	3.0
6	My mentor gave me assignments or tasks that enhance my professional development.	2.00	0.93	36.4	33.3	24.2	6.1
7	My mentor encouraged me to try new methods of teaching.	1.72	0.67	39.4	48.5	12.1	0.0
8	My mentor encouraged me to talk openly about anxieties and fears that detract me from my work.	1.81	0.88	45.5	30.3	21.2	3.0
9	My mentor shared openly my personal feelings and opinions about the teaching situation.	1.72	0.80	45.5	39.4	12.1	3.0
10	My mentor provided me with positive feedback regarding my performance.	1.48	0.71	60.6	33.3	3.0	3.0
11	Before giving feedback, my mentor asked me to self-assess first.	2.06	1.08	42.4	21.2	24.2	12.1
12	When giving me feedback, my mentor first praised me.	1.60	0.82	54.5	36.4	3.0	6.1

As can be seen in Table 2 above, the mentees were satisfied with the mentors' roles and responsibilities. Almost all the means are below 2, which implies that the mentees either strongly agree or agree with the mentors' roles and responsibilities. However, in items number six and eleven, the means were 2.00 and 2.06 respectively, which means that almost half of the mentees were not satisfied with the mentors' roles in terms of giving the mentees assignments and tasks that would enhance their professional development, and asking the mentees to self-assess before giving them feedback. These two items can be highlighted when it comes to conducting professional development sessions for the mentors.

In response to the third domain addressing the mentees' perceptions regarding the benefits of mentoring, Table 3 shows means, standard deviation and percentages of their perceptions.

Table 3. Means, standard deviation and percentages of instructors' perceptions towards the benefits of mentoring

No.	Domain 3 Benefits of mentoring	Mean	Std. Deviation	Percentages			
				1	2	3	4
1	Mentoring helps me feel more confident about my professional competence.	1.36	0.69	72.7	21.2	3.0	3.0
2	Mentoring helps me acquire more teaching knowledge.	1.39	0.70	69.7	24.2	3.0	3.0
3	Mentoring helps me acquire more teaching skills.	1.45	0.71	63.6	30.3	3.0	3.0
4	Mentoring helps me gain more teaching experience.	1.42	0.61	63.6	30.3	6.1	0.0
5	Mentoring helps me improve my teaching practices.	1.27	0.45	72.7	27.3	0.0	0.0
6	Mentoring helps me increase my teaching efficacy.	1.42	0.56	60.6	36.4	3.0	0.0
7	Mentoring increases my job satisfaction.	1.51	0.71	57.6	36.4	3.0	3.0
8	Mentoring establishes a foundation for my career-long profession.	1.63	0.69	48.5	39.4	12.1	0.0

It is evident from Table 3 above that the mentees had a very positive attitude towards their mentoring experience. All the means are below 2, which indicates that the mentees either agree or strongly agree with the benefits of mentoring. In addition, it is clear from the percentages that mentoring had a positive impact in improving their teaching practices and professional development.

To investigate the mentees' perceptions towards the fourth domain related to the barriers that might hinder the implementation of effective mentoring, Table 4 shows means, standard deviation and percentages of their perceptions.

Table 4. Means, standard deviation and percentages of instructors' perceptions towards the barriers to mentoring

No.	Domain 4 Barriers to mentoring	Mean	Std. Deviation	Percentages			
				1	2	3	4
1	Lack of awareness of the role of mentoring	2.87	0.85	6.1	24.2	45.5	24.2
2	Mentors' poor skills in mentoring	3.15	0.79	6.1	6.1	54.5	33.3
3	Limited time for mentoring	2.81	1.10	15.2	24.2	24.2	36.4
4	Poor planning of the mentoring process	3.06	0.93	12.1	3.0	51.5	33.3
5	Lack of understanding about the mentoring process	2.96	0.95	9.1	18.2	39.4	33.3
6	Lack of access to mentors	3.30	0.88	6.1	9.1	33.3	51.5
7	Lack of resources associated with mentoring	2.75	1.06	18.2	15.2	39.4	27.3
8	Lack of administrative support	3.15	0.93	9.1	9.1	39.4	42.4

As shown in Table 4 above, most of the mentees did not encounter the barriers displayed above. All the means are more than 2, which indicates that the mentees either disagree or strongly disagree with these barriers. This is clear from the percentages in that the highest percentages lie under "disagree" and "strongly disagree". However, the calculation of

percentages coming under "agree" and "strongly agree" for items 1, 3, 5, and 7 is (30.3%, 39.4%, 27.3%, and 33.4%) respectively, indicating a certain level of agreement with the barriers. These items addressed the lack of a number of factors that may hinder the implementation of effective mentoring such as the lack of mentees' awareness of the role of mentoring, limited time for mentoring, lack of understanding about the mentoring process, and lack of resources associated with mentoring. These factors lie under the responsibility of the institution as organizational factors that could be addressed to facilitate future mentoring experiences.

Here is a sample of the mentees' quotes on their positive perceptions of their mentoring experience. These support their high satisfaction level towards the mentorship program, mentors' roles and responsibilities, and the benefits they gained from participating in the mentoring experience.

..... "It was a very useful experience for me. I learned a lot from it. The mentoring experience provided me with many guidelines to better improve my teaching. I'd like to thank everyone who helped me enhance my teaching skills and teaching methods".

..... "It was very inspirational for me to reflect on my teaching and adopt new ideas. It was also good to see how time can be managed and how policies are implemented".

..... "The mentorship program was amazingly beneficial. It helped me improve in many areas".

..... "The mentoring program proved to be very helpful in putting me on the right track to become a teacher. I have learned so much as it provided me with guidelines and insights on how to teach effectively".

In order to answer the second question related to the instructors' suggestions to make mentoring experiences more effective, Table 5 shows the frequencies and percentages of the instructors' suggestions.

Table 5. Frequency and percentage of instructors' suggestions

No.	Instructors' suggestions	Frequency	Percentage
1	Planning, organization and sustained commitment to guide the mentees through the mentoring process	4	19.04
2	Providing mentees with constructive feedback is very important as it supports their teaching practices.	4	19.04
3	Mentoring experience should have more concentration on assessing language skills and test construction	3	14.28
4	Mentoring experience should have more focus on improving the mentees' teaching skills	3	14.28
5	Mentors should conduct more classroom peer observations	2	9.52
6	Mentors should be more experienced and more qualified in teaching and mentoring	1	4.76
7	Establishing an online platform where mentees share knowledge and experience and mentors to provide mentees with advice and constant support	1	4.76
8	Conducting an end of program meeting where mentors and mentees discuss success stories and lessons learnt	1	4.76
9	Training the mentees on how to use Cambridge Learning Management System and the Blackboard technology	1	4.76
10	Novice teachers should have an orientation week before starting classes, especially if they have little or no experience at all.	1	4.76

It is clear from Table 5 above that the instructors had certain concerns and suggestions that would improve mentoring experiences, which would enhance the mentees' teaching practices and have a positive impact on their professional development. The suggestions that received the highest frequencies were related to having mentorship programs that consider mentors' thoughtful planning, organization and sustained commitment to guide the mentees through the mentoring process, and providing mentees with constructive feedback as it supports their teaching practices. Next to these two suggestions in frequency came the suggestions of having a mentoring experience with more concentration on

assessing language skills and test construction, and improving the mentees' teaching skills during the mentoring process.

Here is a sample of the mentees' quotes suggested to make mentoring experiences function better:

..... "Mentoring programs don't just happen. They should be built through mentors' thoughtful planning, organization and sustained commitment to guide participants through the mentoring process while continually improving the program".

..... "Feedback is important to support the teaching process. This program can be more helpful when it helps teachers how they manage their classes and guide them to teach more effectively. There should be more focus on improving teaching skills".

..... "There should be some sort of online platform for teachers to help and support each other, and also for mentors' to give advice and provide teachers with constant feedback".

..... "Novice teachers must be provided with special sessions in which certain tasks are explained and elaborated. For example, they should learn more on how to construct exams, how to use Cambridge Learning Management System, and how to use Blackboard technology". They must also have orientation before starting their own classes, especially if they have little or no experience at all".

..... "One way of taking this wonderful experience further is to allow for a meeting with different mentors talking about their experience and giving advice to new teachers on how to deal with different students' levels and ways to enhance students' learning. I feel there is wealth of knowledge which mentors can share with us".

## 5. Discussion

It is evident from the results that the mentees were satisfied with their mentoring experience. This has been obvious in the mentees' positive perceptions towards the mentorship program which can be due to the point that the program has been developed to meet the mentees' needs in the context they were recruited. The program can be claimed to be comprehensive in that it covers a variety of topics that a newly recruited instructor needs. These topics include orientation and introduction to the teaching-learning environment and policies, curriculum and teaching courses and resources; tutorials and training on teaching methods and strategies, observation, peer coaching, progress assessment, and constructive feedback and follow up. In addition, the mentees were satisfied with the mentors' roles and responsibilities which can be explained on the ground that the mentors have been selected according to a defined set of criteria indicating their professional and personal attributes. Accordingly, the mentees benefited from the mentoring experience in developing their teaching practices. This finding goes with the results revealed by (Orland-Barak & Hasin, 2010; Aslan & Secil, 2012; Chin, 2014; Özge & Ahmet, 2019; Hairon et al., 2019).

As for the barriers to effective mentoring, it was obvious that most of the mentees did not encounter any of the barriers under study. Only few of them had institutional and organizational concerns such as time limitations and lack of resources, which goes with the results of (Saban, 2002; Balassa et al., 2003).

In conclusion, the mentoring experience was beneficial in terms of helping the mentees overcome challenges related to their adaptation to the new professional environment, understanding the policies that govern work, and developing their teaching competencies. This supports the importance of conducting mentoring to newly recruited instructors as this may have a positive impact on their professional progress and achievement.

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The present paper aimed to investigate EFL mentees' perceptions of the mentoring experience they have passed at university. Specifically, the paper sought to find out the mentees' points of view regarding the mentorship program they have undertaken, the mentors' roles and responsibilities, mentoring benefits, and barriers to mentoring. Thirty-three newly recruited instructors attended a mentorship program for three months. The researcher then assessed their perceptions of the mentoring experience and sought their suggestions for the betterment of future mentoring experiences. The results revealed that the mentees had a positive attitude towards their mentoring experience in relation to the mentorship program and mentor's roles and responsibilities. They have benefited from the mentoring experience as it helped improve their teaching practices and professional development. However, a few mentees have raised some concerns towards their mentoring experience as discussed under each domain of the research paper. In addition, the mentees had a number of suggestions for a better implementation of effective mentoring. The policy makers at institutional level are recommended to consider the mentees' concerns discussed and highlighted under each domain, and the suggestions presented for the betterment of future mentoring experiences.

## 7. Implications for Future Research

The results of this research paper have implications for the EFL policy makers at institutional level and EFL practitioners as well. The research would be beneficial in terms of considering the mentees' concerns and suggestions regarding the mentorship program, mentor' roles and responsibilities, and barriers that might hinder the implementation of effective mentoring. It is also worthwhile to conduct professional development sessions where the mentors and mentees share lessons learned and success stories, and plan for and organize more effective mentoring experiences.

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## Appendix A

### Dear instructors,

The researcher will carry out a study to evaluate your mentoring experience at Taif University English Language Center. This includes the mentorship program, mentors' roles and responsibilities, program benefits, and barriers of implementation. For this purpose, the researcher seeks your points of view by filling in the questionnaire below.

Please note that your contribution will be used for research purposes only.

**Key:** 1= strongly agree      2= agree      3= disagree      4= strongly disagree

**A= Write (√) indicating your level of agreement to the following items:**

SN	Domain	1 SA	2 A	3 D	4 SD
<b>1- Mentorship program</b>					
1	I have attended a defined mentoring program at my working place.				
2	The mentoring program has clear objectives.				
3	The mentoring program focuses on specific tasks.				
4	The mentoring program has engaged me into the teaching environment.				
<b>2- Mentors' roles and responsibilities</b>					
1	My mentor assisted me in developing my skills in planning.				
2	My mentor modeled effective teaching strategies.				
3	My mentor worked in a collaborative manner.				
4	My mentor observed my classes as planned.				
5	My mentor managed time for mentoring effectively.				
6	My mentor gave me assignments or tasks that enhance my professional development.				
7	My mentor encouraged me to try new methods of teaching.				
8	My mentor encouraged me to talk openly about anxieties and fears that detract me from my work.				
9	My mentor shared openly my personal feelings and opinions about the teaching situation.				
10	My mentor provided me with positive feedback regarding my performance.				
11	Before giving feedback, my mentor asked me to self-assess first.				
12	When giving me feedback, my mentor first praised me.				
<b>3- Benefits of mentoring</b>					
1	Mentoring helps me feel more confident about my professional competence.				
2	Mentoring helps me acquire more teaching knowledge.				
3	Mentoring helps me acquire more teaching skills.				
4	Mentoring helps me gain more teaching experience.				
5	Mentoring helps me improve my teaching practices.				
6	Mentoring helps me increase my teaching efficacy.				
7	Mentoring increases my job satisfaction.				
8	Mentoring establishes a foundation for my career-long profession.				

4- Barriers to mentoring					
1	Lack of awareness of the role of mentoring				
2	Mentors' poor skills in mentoring				
3	Limited time for mentoring				
4	Poor planning of the mentoring process				
5	Lack of understanding about the mentoring process				
6	Lack of access to mentors				
7	Lack of resources associated with mentoring				
8	Lack of administrative support				

**B- What suggestions do you have to make a mentoring experience functions better?**

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