Learning to Hear Students' Voices: Teachers' Experiences on Student Mentoring

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Abstract

In recent years, mentoring practices have become increasingly common in different disciplines. One of these disciplines is education. In this connection, mentoring at the macro level contributes to the education system, while mentoring at the micro level reduces school dropout rates, increases academic success, supports students in their career journeys and protects them against any problems and unhealthy habits. In this context, the objective of this study is to provide an in-depth examination of teachers' student mentoring experiences in the school context. To this end, phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in this study and the study was carried out with face-to-face interviews. The maximum variation sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used to select the participants. A total of 15 teachers selected from different branches formed the study group of the study. The data obtained from the study were transcribed and the thematic analysis method was used to determine the emerging themes and, in this way, a total of five themes were determined: identification, the role of the mentor, the types of mentoring used by the mentor, the mentoring strategies used by the mentor and the problems encountered during the student mentoring process.

Keywords: mentoring, student mentoring, teacher experiences

1. Introduction

Teachers have a key role in the functionality of the education system. In contemporary times, the mission, aims and objectives assigned to educational institutions which are in service of society have grown increasingly intricate. Also, the societal demands placed upon educational institutions have correspondingly increased (Ensari, 2002; Özden, 2005). However, many nations have recognized the insufficiency of educational institutions in meeting these demands and have endeavoured to make the mentoring function of schools more effective (Sergiovanni, 1995). For schools to effectively fulfil their roles in the social sphere, it is imperative that administrators and instructors enhance their individual abilities and that all stakeholders collaborate toward a shared mission aligned with the overall objectives of their respective schools (Cheong Cheng, 1996; Stephens & Crawley, 1994).

Mentoring has been recognized as an effective approach employed by educators to address challenges and obstacles that may arise within education programs owing to its inherent qualities (Kartal et al., 2017). The necessity to assist teachers in adjusting to the quick developments and changes in technology and science has led to the emergence of a novel approach to education, characterized by the incorporation of mentoring. In recent years, mentoring approaches and practices have grown increasingly prevalent in several disciplines. Education is one of these disciplines. Macro-level mentoring contributes to the education system and also micro-level mentoring benefits students by lowering dropout rates, increasing their academic success, assisting them in their career journeys and protecting them from any problems they encounter in their personal lives. Especially some studies provide evidence that mentoring practices make positive contributions to academic success, personal or career development (Bierema & Meriam, 2002; Fehérvári & Varga, 2023; Kram, 1985; Larose et al., 2020). In particular, positive results are seen in three basic aspects: academic success, social/emotional development, and health/safety (Jekielek et al., 2002, pp. 2-21). For instance, there is evidence showing a decrease in at-risk students' disciplinary problems in high school (Converse & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2009), in school dropout rates (Fehérvári & Varga, 2023) or an increase in academic success (Campbell & Campbell, 2007). In addition, students who receive mentoring services experience a decrease in absenteeism rates and, in parallel, develop a positive attitude by attributing more value and attention to school. Also, Fix et al. (2019) examined teacher beliefs and found that mentoring had a

positive impact on the student's learning experience. Finally, it can be said that mentoring positively improves academic achievement scores and indirectly increases students' grade point averages (Jekielek et al., 2002, pp. 3-21)

Upon reviewing the existing literature, it becomes evident that the majority of research on educational mentoring concentrates on the mentorship of pre-service teachers (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004; Bullough, 2005; Gaikhorst et al., 2017; Mann & Tang, 2012). In Turkey, most of the mentoring-related studies are aimed at training trainee teachers and school administrators (Yıldırım & Şerefhanoğlu, 2014; Yirci, 2009; Yirci & Kocabaş, 2012). However, despite the seeming abundance of scholarly papers on the subject of mentoring, there is a noticeable scarcity of systematic research specifically focusing on mentorship programs for students enrolled in public schools (Laco & Johnson, 2019; Larose et al., 2020).

In this context, the objective of this study is to provide an in-depth examination of teachers' student mentoring experiences in the school context. The following four research questions were developed to guide the study:

- How do teachers define student mentoring?
- How do teachers conduct the student mentorship process?
- What strategies do they use in the student mentoring process?
- What are the problems that teachers encounter during the student mentoring process?

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Mentoring in Education

Mentoring in education is a personalized form of assistance and counselling that is offered with the aim of enhancing the educational or professional development of a student (Zentgraf, 2020). Mentoring in the field of education is a pedagogical approach that is specifically employed to enhance students' academic achievements, foster the development of their learning abilities, and cultivate their professional competencies. The teachers offer personalized counseling, instruction, and support to aid students in their educational journey, fostering motivation and facilitating the attainment of their objectives (Fix et al., 2019; Larose & Tarabulsy, 2014; Spencer, 2007) Mentoring in the field of education proves to be highly advantageous, particularly for students who have learning disabilities within the academic setting (Fruiht & Wray-Lake, 2013; Laco & Johnson, 2019; Radcliffe & Bos, 2011). It is typical of the apprentice education model, where the teacher provides academic mentoring support while also providing guidance on issues (e.g., performance) and non-academic (e.g., problems) (Jacobi, 1991). Through a comprehensive grasp of students' individual learning styles and specific educational requirements, mentors can effectively teach learning strategies and approaches to facilitate their academic development. In addition, they have the capacity to assist students in identifying their own abilities and fostering the development of self-assurance.

The mentoring of students by teachers is an essential component of the educational process that has received much interest in recent times. Mentoring encompasses a diverse range of activities, including the provision of academic assistance, the provision of career advice, and the provision of emotional support to students who may be struggling with personal challenges. Mentors employ several forms of mentoring to provide assistance and guidance to their mentees. When the many forms of mentoring are considered, there is a general consensus that they may be categorized into two main groups: formal mentoring and informal mentoring but also, debate continues regarding the problem of choosing one or another of the types of formal and informal mentoring (Stan, 2021).

In recent years, in light of technological advancements and the expanding range of communication, the area of mentoring has witnessed the emergence of several forms of mentoring, including electronic mentoring (e-mentoring), peer mentoring, one-to-one mentoring, group mentoring and reverse mentoring. For example, peer mentoring is a form of mentoring in which a knowledgeable student mentor collaborates with a less experienced peer mentee. In the mentoring framework, the mentees assume a dual role as subjective participants and active contributors to their peers' educational development (Büngül, 2015). The practice of one-to-one mentoring entails the engagement of a mentor with an individual mentee. Currently, it is the most prevalent kind of classical mentorship in today's society. The practice of knowledge and experience transfer from an experienced mentor to a less experienced mentee is widely acknowledged and embraced (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Group mentoring is a form of mentorship in which a mentor collaborates with a group of mentees. Hence, it may be argued that the experience is advantageous not just for individuals but also for all members of the community (Yurtseven, 2010). E-mentoring refers to the utilization of technology as a means to enable and enhance mentoring interactions. This may encompass several modes of communication such as email, video conferencing, or other digital platforms.

E-mentoring is a computer-based procedure in which the mentee derives advantages and acquires knowledge from the mentor. This process encompasses several roles, including counselling and motivation (Bakioğlu, 2015). Reverse mentoring is a mentoring approach in which the traditional roles of mentor and mentee are reversed, with the mentor being younger and the mentee being older. Mentees engage in a structured mentorship relationship, in which they actively take part in the educational setting provided by the program in order to fulfill their academic and professional growth. This phenomenon might be referred to as a deliberate, synchronized, systematic, and focused progression in this particular trajectory (Armstrong et al., 2002; Ehrich et al., 2004; Yirci & Kocabaş, 2012). In contrast to traditional mentoring, informal mentoring entails a student assuming a more independent role in selecting his/her own mentor. The process unfolds in an unexpected manner, with the student receiving assistance from his/her mentor in the realm of professional development. Frequently, mentors and students possess comparable experiences, ideals, and attitudes (Sosik et al., 2005). Hence, it may be posited that informal mentoring fosters a deeper interaction and communication between the involved people within a genuine context. In contemporary times, younger individuals possess a greater capacity to accumulate experiential knowledge relative to their elder counterparts, mostly due to their easier access to a vast array of information sources. The utilization of the tools of IT by elderly individuals might serve as an illustrative instance of this phenomenon (Kahraman, 2012; Kuzu et al., 2012; Zachary & Fischler, 2009). Given the relative youth of the experienced individual, there is a reversal in the traditional roles of mentor and mentee (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

In summary, the practice of student mentoring is a significant component of the educational process, which has the potential to provide favorable outcomes for learners as well as teachers. Given enough assistance and resources, teachers have the capacity to offer valuable mentorship to their students, thus facilitating their attainment of both academic and personal successes.

2.2 Mentoring Process

Mentoring, a notion rooted in mythology and sometimes shown as a matrix is presently employed for many purposes, including the personal and intellectual growth of students, as well as serving as a valuable resource for teachers and school administrators (Janas, 1996). The mentorship approach in education may be divided into three distinct stages for effective implementation (Connor, 2007): The initial stage involves the identification and assessment of the prevailing circumstances, and then initiating the subsequent course of action. The mentor plays a crucial role in monitoring the student's progress (Gakonga, 2022). At the subsequent stage, the target point is established. The mentor should take into account the present circumstances and provide assistance to the learner in attaining their goals and objectives. The third stage involves the determination of activity and program plans. In this context, it is important for the mentor to provide guidance to the student in order to cultivate techniques that will enable the student to achieve his/her aspirations and progress from his/her present circumstances towards the desired outcome.

Alternatively, Parikh and Kollan (2004) suggest that the components of the mentoring process encompass organizational substance, social milieu, and professional status. The selection of mentor-student pairs should be conducted with consideration for the individual attributes of both people involved. The educational process between the consulting instructor and the student starts at the beginning stage and progresses through the cessation of engagement, ultimately leading to a friendship connection. The ramifications of this relationship have significant importance for all the involved parties. Mentoring relationships can help place students on a more positive (Werner & Woessmann, 2021). Also, some studies have found encouraging effects of formal academic mentoring (Larose et al., 2020). For example, some studies also have showed that formal academic mentoring reduces the number of disciplinary referrals in high school (Converse & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2009), and also achievement in certain subjects (Campbell & Campbell, 2007; Radcliffe & Bos, 2011).

3. Methodology

In this context, the objective of this study is to provide an in-depth examination of teachers' student mentoring experiences in the school context. For this purpose, phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in this study and the study was carried out using face-to-face interviews. Qualitative research is the ideal approach for capturing and expressing experiences in a comprehensive and authentic manner within a natural setting. The qualitative investigation places emphasis on comprehending the viewpoint of a certain individual or group inside their own setting (Jaeger, 1988). In light of this rationale, the present study aimed to refrain from making sweeping generalizations and instead sought to portray the unadulterated views and experiences of the participants. Hence, this investigation was conducted following the phenomenological research design, a qualitative research approach, in alignment with the research objectives. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2018, p. 69) assert that phenomenology is a framework centered on the examination of occurrences inside our conscious

awareness to elicit a comprehensive and nuanced comprehension. Factual research endeavours to comprehend the collective interpretation of experiences pertaining to a certain notion or phenomenon, as well as the fundamental nature of how individuals obtain such experiences (Creswell, 2016, p. 57).

The study's target population consisted of educators employed at Vocational and Technical High Schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education in the Marmara Region during the academic year of 2021-2022. In the current investigation, the utilization of maximum variation sampling, a purposeful sampling technique, was favored in the process of selecting the sample of the study. The objective was to ensure that the individuals selected for the study represent a wide range of variety in relation to the issues being investigated (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, p. 118). In order to achieve this objective, a maximum variation sampling approach was employed to select individuals from various branches, seniority levels and age groups. As a result, the study group was comprised of 15 teachers employed at Vocational and Technical High Schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education in the Marmara Region during the 2021-2022 academic year. Table 1 contains the demographic data of the chosen teachers who participated in the study, including information on their gender, age, professional experience, and education level.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Professional Experience	Branch	Education Level
P-1	Female	27	3	English	Bachelor's
P-2	Male	28	3	English	Bachelor's
P-3	Male	26	3	Physical Education	Master's
P-4	Female	26	3	Religious Culture	Master's
P-5	Female	39	3	Mechanical Design	Master's
P-6	Female	31	7	Biology	Bachelor's
P-7	Female	38	13	Literature	Bachelor's
P-8	Male	37	15	Chemistry	Master's
P-9	Male	34	6	Chemistry	Bachelor's
P-10	Male	36	8	Chemistry	Master's
P-11	Male	42	9	Chemistry	Bachelor's
P-12	Female	52	25	Chemistry	Bachelor's
P-13	Female	34	5	Chemistry	Doctoral
P-14	Female	27	3	English	Bachelor's
P-15	Female	26	1	Philosophy	Bachelor's

As it can be seen from Table 1, the study aimed to ascertain the perspectives of 15 teachers, 9 females and 6 males. The focus of the investigation was to gather insights on the topic of student mentoring inside educational institutions. As seen in Table 1, there is one teacher from each of the fields of Philosophy, Physical Education, Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge, Mechanical Design and Biology, two teachers from the field of Literature, three teachers from the field of English and five teachers from the field of Chemistry. The participants' ages range from 26 to 52 years old. Six of the participating teachers are younger than 30 years old, whilst nine of them are older than 30. When the professional experience of the participants is examined, it is seen that there is one teacher with 1 year of professional experience, one teacher with 5 years of professional experience, one teacher with 6 years of professional experience, one teacher with 7 years of professional experience, one teacher with 8 years of professional experience, one teacher with 9 years of professional experience, one teacher with 13 years of professional experience, one teacher with 15 years of professional experience and one teacher with 25 years of professional experience. On the other hand, there are six teachers with 3 years of professional experience. Finally, 9 of the participating teachers hold a bachelor's degree while 5 of them hold a master's degree and one holds a doctoral degree.

4. Ethical Concerns

Following the completion of the literature review, the researcher employed semi-structured interview questions that were developed for the study. To enhance the comprehensiveness and relevance of the interview questions, three experts in the relevant field were engaged during the development process. Their insights and comments were taken into consideration in order to refine and finalize the interview questions. In the course of the study, the internal validity was assessed by expert review, which was conducted with the participants' informed agreement. Following the acquisition of ethical permission from Istanbul 29 Mayıs University, a preliminary implementation

was conducted on two individuals through the formulation of interview questions. Subsequently, it was determined that the interview would be conducted upon completion of this initial phase.

The data for this study were obtained by using a semi-structured interview form. Using this form, the interviews were conducted face-to-face with 15 teachers in the 2021-2022 academic year and the interviews were tape-recorded. Each interview had a duration ranging from 20 to 45 minutes and during the interviews the participants provided genuine responses to the interview questions. Before each interview, the participant was informed about its content. It was explicitly explained that the identities of the individuals involved would not be disclosed in the study report, and instead, a coding system would be employed for the sake of anonymity. The participants were assigned codes (P-1 to P-15) instead of utilizing their actual names. During the data collection process, the participants completed the consent form.

To gather qualitative data, a series of interviews were performed with a sample of 15 teachers, who were selected based on several demographic criteria. Caution was taken to ensure a high level of diversity within the sample. Scheduled appointments were made to facilitate face-to-face interviews with the teachers. The participants' responses to the interview questions were tape-recorded, with explicit consent obtained. Following the conclusion of each interview question, each participant was asked to confirm the accuracy of their reflections by the researcher, and subsequently requested to complete the consent form. Furthermore, the participants were given the opportunity to make any desired additions or omissions to their responses at the concluding phase of the interview.

Furthermore, the incorporation of direct quotations from the participants was undertaken to enhance the methodological rigor of the study, while providing a means to ensure consistency in the research findings. Additionally, meticulous documentation of each stage of the research process was undertaken to bolster the external validity of the study. In order to ensure reliability and validity, many key considerations were taken into account. These include the incorporation of expert opinion, conducting pilot applications, prolonging the application process until a sufficient number of participants were reached and ensuring the inclusion of diverse data sources. To enhance the external validity of the study, the researchers made an effort to provide comprehensive explanations of all the steps included in the research process (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, p. 276). The researcher diligently ensured adherence to this procedure.

The present study employed the theme analysis methodology, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019, p. 880), to conduct the analysis. Initially, the audio recordings of the interviews were downloaded to Microsoft Office. Subsequently, the researcher meticulously examined the material many times and proceeded to decode it. Subsequently, the method was executed by adhering to a series of six phases throughout the thematic analysis phase, which involved gaining confirmation from the participants.

5. Findings

5.1 Theme-1: Identification

The study revealed that the participants categorized student mentoring into eight main categories, including "guidance", "transfer of experiences", "support", "exchange of information", "leadership", "long-term journey", "coaching" and "psychological process" (see Figure 1).
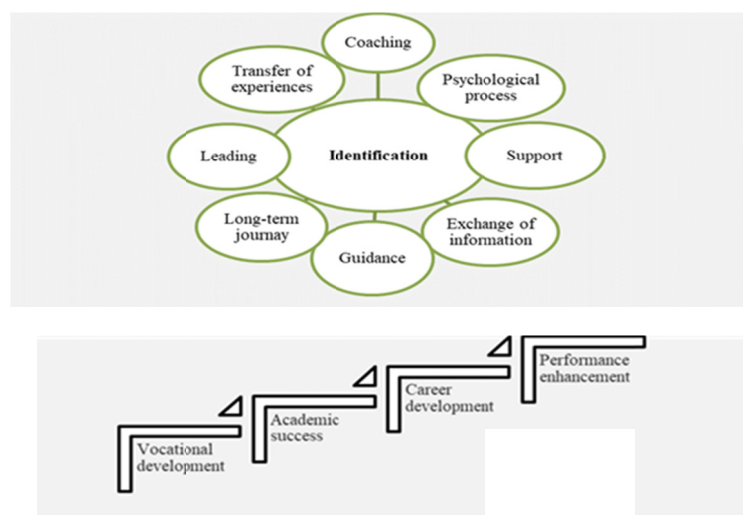

Figure 1. The categorical scheme of identification related to student mentoring

For instance, some participants defined student mentoring aimed at supporting both academic and private life under the guidance category with the following emphasis:

> *As far as I am concerned, student mentoring is the guidance activities carried out in order for the student to be self-actualized both academically and personally and to turn into a better-equipped individual. (P-14)*

> *I think of what we call mentoring as transferring information from more knowledgeable, more experienced individuals to less knowledgeable or experienced individuals. In this sense, student mentoring is to guide students on the way to their goals in accordance with their interests and abilities. (P-1)*

Unlike other participants, one participant explained student mentoring in connection with leading, guidance, and coaching:

> *In other words, as far as we know and as much as we practice, we can also say leading and guiding students, in other words, a kind of coaching (P-6).*

5.2 Theme-2: The Role of Mentor

When the participants' views on the role of the student mentor were examined, six categories were found to formed under this theme; "empathy", "support", "adviser", "bridge to access information", "creating networks that will be an inspiration", "giving a vision to the student" (Figure 2).
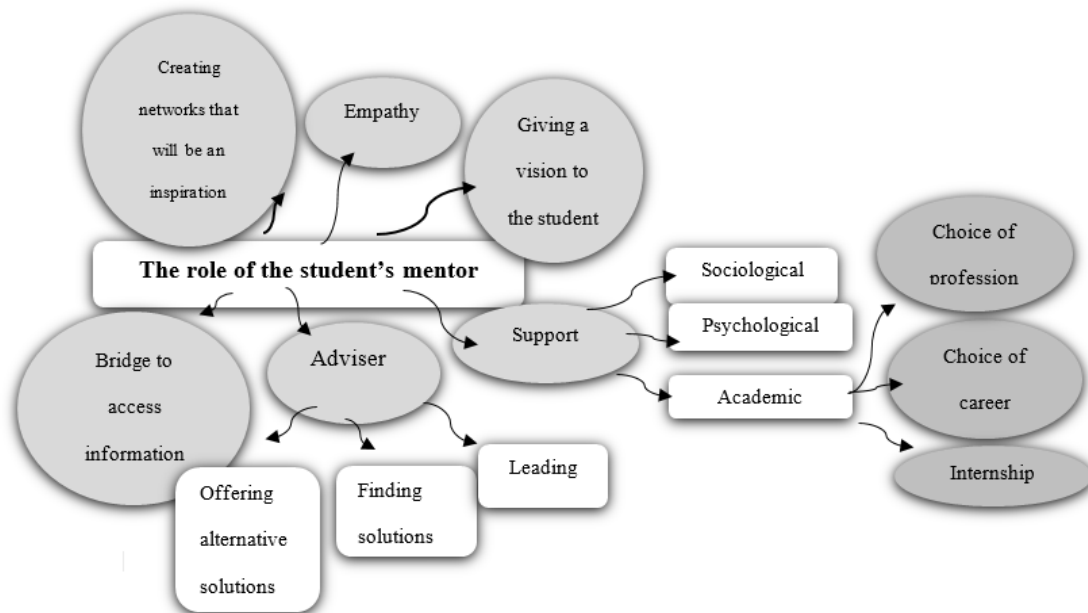

Figure 2. The categorical scheme of the mentor's role

For example, some participants explained the role of the mentor under the theme of support in connection with sociological, academic, or psychological support. The thoughts of participant P-12 are as follows:

> *From my experience, I try to be very supportive as a person. There are many students with whom I speak privately. Besides, of course, as a profession, that is, you know, they do internships, and because they do internships, we try to help with the internship issue, that is, in everything. So, of course, we are helping as human beings. We care about them. We ensure that they benefit from our knowledge and experience. (P-12)*

On the other hand, other participants underline that their role requires them to empathize, be open to communication and to produce solutions:

> *... First of all, I think a mentor should have empathy skills in any field. Unless we can put ourselves in the other person's shoes, we may not be able to give the help they want. And, do we complete our mission properly when we give advice or help? Or are we dealing with issues superficially? Completing the mission properly is important too. Along with this, of course, if we are in a mentoring business, communication skills are required. We should look into his/her eyes, can feel his/her heart in those eyes.... (P-4)*

5.3 Theme-3: Types of Mentoring

When the views of the participants on the models used by the student mentor were examined, a total of seven categories were found to be defined by the teachers: "e-mentoring", "peer mentoring", "group mentoring", "one-to-one", "informal", "formal" and "reverse mentoring" (Figure 3).
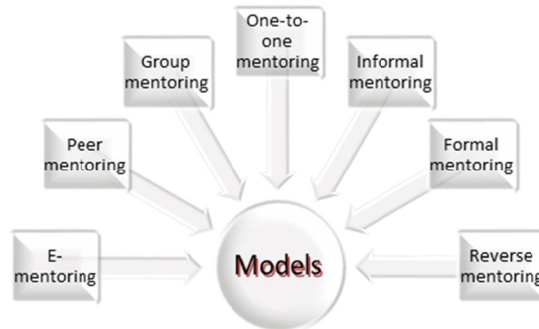
Figure 3. Categorical chart of mentorship types used by a mentor

For example, some participants, while explaining the types of mentoring they use in student mentoring, emphasize that they use e-mentoring effectively during the pandemic process as follows:

> *...During the pandemic period, I preferred e-mentoring to provide academic, social, or psychological assistance to my students. At first, of course, this necessarily proceeded in this way. I tried to provide this support from Zoom or WhatsApp within the planned processes...(P-5)*

Most of the other participants stated that they use informal and formal mentoring and sometimes one-to-one mentoring, peer mentoring and group mentoring models according to their needs. One of the participants expressed his/her opinions as follows:

> *In fact, this situation is shaped according to the needs of the students. But mostly informal mentoring is among the most used types because we do not have a systematic mentoring program. In addition, since only one of our teachers is a trained teacher about mentoring, the process only proceeds in this way. (P-8)*

Unlike others, one participant stated that he preferred the reverse mentoring model. He emphasizes that he learned reverse mentoring in a training program he received and used this process in student mentoring and explains its benefits as follows:

> *From time to time, when I do student mentoring, I use the reverse mentoring model. I can say that this model is a model that works especially well when there is a great difference between generations. In this way, the problems arising from age differences can be overcome. Thus, it creates an opportunity to better understand each other. (P-7)*

5.4 Theme-4: The Mentoring Strategies

The categories found under the theme of mentoring strategies include "guidance and psychological counseling", "spiritual counselling", "evaluation," "coaching," "recognition," and "building a good relationship" (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Mentoring strategies used by the student mentor

For example, some participants explained the strategies they use in student mentoring by emphasizing that their priority is to follow an academic and career-oriented strategy under the category of "guidance and psychological counseling" as follows:

> *... While mentoring, I focus more on the academic side, i.e., career. Because they are very ignorant about this, they are very weak. To this day, they have not been able to benefit from the guidance service until this age in their previous schools, etc. That's why I'm trying to help with this as much as possible. Apart from that, of course, there are international projects, language training, etc., or here I also give an idea about certificates. So, as I said, since I haven't been trained in this subject, I honestly don't know any method or technique at all. I mean, I explained it. The methods I use are more about transferring experience... (P-10)*

Some participants, on the other hand, state that knowing student "recognition techniques" is an important strategy as follows:

> *... I observe first. I am fully analyzing. Afterward, I try to confirm the result of this observation and analysis with the question-and-answer technique... Already during the process, I can realize the positive and negative aspects of this, the missing aspects. This is how I start and create a list of needs. What should be done, how much time do we have, and what do we want to do... In this way, I am trying to create a list, a calendar. Here, I am confirming whether we have been able to do these in 1-1.5-month periods. According to this situation, I start again or continue. This is how I'm moving forward ... (P-15)*

Unlike others, some participants express how they manage this process while focusing strategically on the "spiritual counselling" dimension as follows:

> *As a requirement of our branch, of course, when it comes to religious culture and moral knowledge, we talk more about spiritual aspects, about university anxieties, for example, about success during the exam with the last-grade students. They talk about family relationships with us, how they have dialogues with their families, here they talk about their communication with their parents or their troubles. And also, if some of them feel close to us, some of our students are telling us about their personal lives, their love affairs. We have students who say that they have hesitations about belief in their subjects, that they are questioning and researching something. We try to mention them more, but apart from that for example, they are not very hopeful for the future. They have too many worries about the future. They're so fed up. We are trying to provide more promising and exciting support. (P-4)*

For example, some participants seem to support many issues such as exam anxieties, adolescence problems, and family problems, in the process of providing psychological and sociological support to the student under the theme of "spiritual counselling". In this regard, one participant expressed his/her opinions as follows:

> *...The student may have family problems, questions, or problems that may arise due to being in adolescence. At this stage, we use some kind of spiritual counseling strategies… There may be peer bullying in the classroom, so the child may be pacified. It may be peer bullying, or it may be any domestic situation, the child may be experiencing any harm from the father, the mother, or primary relatives, the child may be under pressure, and the child may become introverted on this issue. If they come up with this topic, it may also be that the student, the mentor teacher, you know, their spiritual feelings should also be a little high at that time. Because at that time, the student may also be questioning religious issues and may be in search. Because when you accept the concrete, it is a little difficult to believe in abstract things at that time. Exactly it is a transition phase. That's why the child can make such a request at that time… (P-8)*

5.5 Theme-5: Problems Encountered During the Mentoring Process.

When the problems faced by the participants during the mentoring process were examined, the following categories were identified; "academic", "sociological", "economic", "technological", and "expectations". For example, a participant explained one of the problems she/he encountered during the mentoring process in connection with family expectations as follows:

> *...In fact, something happened recently, there was one student. We call it Y. Y got 140 points on the exam, then of course this grade wasn't an acceptable score, his mother asked me "my teacher, Y got 140 points, but can't you talk to the university and place him." I mean, I was shocked that day. (P-12).*

> *Another participant explains that psychological problems and spiritual problems arising from the student can sometimes cause great difficulties in the student's mentoring process and that they should be integrated into the process within a systematic program by the Ministry of National Education:*

> *... A trouble like this may break out, which is a big risk; for example, the student has a personal problem.*

> *He/she reflects this problem to the mentor first; the mentor can tell the student that he/she will provide confidentiality about the subject. The student's problem becomes more serious every day…You are doing a kind of mentoring to the student... (P-8)*

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the opinions of teachers on student mentorship inside educational institutions. As a result of this investigation, five fundamental primary findings were obtained.

How teachers define student mentoring: When analyzing the participants' perspectives on the definition of student mentoring, it was observed that they categorized it into eight main themes: "guidance", "transfer of experiences", "support", "exchange of information", "leadership", "long-term journey", "coaching" and "psychological process". Upon reviewing previous studies, it becomes evident that there are congruent perspectives between the literature and the following aspects: the sharing of experience (Kuzu et al., 2012), the role of coaching and guiding (Mullen, 1998; Starcevich, 1997), and the provision of support or assistance (Goff & Torrance, 1999). These findings align with the existing definition associated with the concept under examination.

The role of mentor: According to Cantimer (2008), the mentoring process is founded upon principles of mutual trust, understanding, and empathy. Upon analyzing the viewpoints expressed by the participants with regard to the role of the student mentor, it was observed that six distinct categories emerged "empathy", "support", "adviser", "bridge to access information", "creating networks that will be an inspiration", and "giving a vision to the student". It might be argued that there is consensus about the need of trust and empathy in the role of a student mentor. This study has revealed that individuals in mentoring roles exhibit characteristics of support, encouragement, advice, and guidance. In other words, the research outcomes indicate that mentors employ a mentoring approach that effectively caters to the individual requirements of students. According to Portwood and Ayers (2005), the majority of instructors possess the potential to serve as very effective mentors for students. This assertion is further substantiated by the research undertaken by Chambers and Huggins (2014). Furthermore, Malecki and Demaray (2003) found a clear correlation between social support provided by instructors and higher levels of academic accomplishment. According to Portwood and Ayers (2005), students have the ability to see their professors as role models or exemplars for the sake of learning. The ease with which students seek guidance from their professors and establish informal mentoring relationships can be attributed to their viewpoint and the close proximity between teachers and students (Dubois & Silverthorn, 2005). In our study, during the mentoring process, the participants were provided with several opportunities to engage in reflective practices, enabling them to introspect and evaluate their experiences. The individuals expressed that this particular method presents a valuable chance for their own personal growth and development. This discovery aligns with the outcomes of several other investigations (Gilles & Wilson, 2004; Mackie & Bates, 2019). Furthermore, akin to the findings of mentors in the study conducted by Andersson et al. (2005), the mentors in the present study expressed that their prior experiences with comparable incidents and the subsequent guidance they provided had a crucial role in enhancing their level of awareness.

Types of mentoring: The researchers observed that the participants described the mentoring approaches employed by the student mentor as "e-mentoring," "peer counseling", "group counseling", "one-to-one", "informal", "formal" and "reverse mentoring". Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002) propose a categorization of mentoring that has three distinct forms of mentoring: formal, informal, and semi-informal. In the current study, the types of formal and informal mentoring were also identified. In another study, Crisp and Cruz (2009) delineate the many forms of mentoring, including one-to-one mentoring, peer mentoring, group mentoring, and reverse mentoring. This study exhibits a degree of overlap with the aforementioned study in relation to the concepts of "one-to-one, group, and reverse mentoring". Unlike others, several participants expressed a preference for e-mentoring, particularly in light of the ongoing epidemic. Upon reviewing the literature, it becomes apparent that Bierema and Merriam (2002) have a comparable viewpoint about the definition of e-mentoring. Peer mentoring is another form of mentoring that is favored by the participants. One participant expressed that he/she occasionally pursues such a course of action in order to address the comparable demands of students. According to Zachary (2005), the peer-mentored group assumes the responsibility of overseeing and facilitating one another's learning endeavors as they strive to acquire practical knowledge in this particular undertaking (p.9). Reverse mentoring is another sort of mentoring that is highly favored. An individual expressed a preference for reverse mentorship due to their possession of technical expertise and enrolment in a vocational high school. Another notable aspect was the participants' apparent inclination towards establishing a more structured and intellectually grounded approach to student mentoring. The cognitive mentoring model, as described by Strong and Baron (2004), might be considered as a potential framework for inclusion in the student mentoring process.

The mentoring strategies used by the mentor: Upon analyzing the viewpoints of the participants about the models employed by the mentor of the student, it was ascertained that six overarching categories emerged, namely "guidance and psychological counseling", "spiritual counselling", "evaluation," "coaching," "recognition," and "building a good relationship". For instance, several participants elucidated the methodologies they employ in student mentoring, underscoring their commitment to a scholarly and vocationally driven approach rooted on guiding and direction. According to some participants, an essential stage and strategy is to establish a connection with the student, which may be successfully facilitated by the integration of student recognition techniques and other spatial tactics. Certain individuals, however, appear to consider a wide range of topics including exam-related anxiety, challenges faced throughout adolescence, and familial issues while offering psychological and sociological assistance to students. Several participants expressed the view that possessing knowledge about student recognition strategies is a crucial tactic. In contrast to other participants, several participants articulated their approach to navigating this process by intentionally prioritizing the spiritual counseling aspect (Allen & Coy, 2004). Another noteworthy point in this study is the utilization of a strategy whereby certain individuals amalgamate their experiential insights and cognitive expertise with diverse methodologies. Especially throughout this process, it was discovered that male mentors generally focus on the job area, while female mentors give assistance on psycho-social concerns (Eby & Allen, 2002).

Problems encountered during the mentoring process: Upon analyzing the challenges encountered by the participants in the mentoring process, it was seen that they categorized these difficulties into distinct categories of "academic", "sociological", "economic", "technological", and "expectations". One of the challenges encountered by educators throughout the process of mentoring students is the issue they encounter in their interactions with parents, a topic extensively discussed in the existing literature (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004; Gaikhorst et al., 2017). This study also showed that parent-related problems are at the root of the difficulties encountered in student mentoring.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that student mentoring fosters a mutually advantageous experience for all the involved parties. It is well acknowledged that those who engage in the role of mentoring students do so with a strong sense of motivation and commitment, actively facilitating the mentoring process. In the process, the individual in question assumes a personalized approach to the interaction, which is characterized by a dual link (Johnson, 2013). This study unveiled that teachers who assumed the role of mentors for students were found to make valuable contributions to their professional development. The crucial role played by experienced instructors in the profession and their mentoring attitude is evident in the assistance they offer, which significantly contributes to students' pleasant experiences and facilitates a more successful journey through the educational process. However, the informal nature in which instructors facilitate this process hinders its potential for successful planning and implementation. Hence, it is evident that there is a requirement for enhanced professional development in this context, namely through in-service training aimed at facilitating student mentorship. Also, the mentoring program serves as a conduit between pre-service training and in-service training to facilitate the professional development of educators (Kemmis et al., 2014). Karaferye (2018) supports the idea that for mentoring to be effective, mentors must be trained, and mentors must be supported.

7. Limitations of the Research

Several limitations need to be considered when assessing the conclusions of this study. Firstly, a significant constraint of this study is the limited sample size, which comprises just a small number of teachers. To enhance the generalizability of the research findings, it is imperative to expand the scope of the investigation to encompass the entire nation or certain regions within the country. Hence, the research must be substantiated by more comprehensive investigations including diverse cohorts.

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the opinions of teachers on student mentorship inside educational institutions. In the context of Turkey, the investigation of the concept of student mentoring has predominantly been seen in studies pertaining to career-focused or instructional practices for trainees. Insufficient research has been conducted on the specific nature of mentoring within the field of education. Nevertheless, it is important that individuals get guidance and mentorship not just in their professional endeavors, but also throughout their educational journey until they embark on their entrepreneurial pursuits. To enhance the educational standards and welfare in Turkey, it is imperative to introduce persons to the school system at an earlier stage, ensuring that every student has equal access to this chance. Another constraint is associated with the demographic characteristics of the participants. The participants in the present study were chosen exclusively from a single district. Hence, the present study lacked a mentor specifically assigned to guide vocational high school students. As previously stated, the existing body of research on mentoring in the context of in-service teachers predominantly centers around those who are employed on a full-time basis. Hence, more investigation is required.

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Note

Note 1. This study was produced from the first author's master thesis and a part of the study was presented as an oral presentation at the EJER congress in 2022.

Authors contributions

TURGUT, was responsible for study design and revising. TURGUT was responsible for data collection. TURGUT drafted the manuscript and Assoc. Dr. TAŞÇI revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. Also, this study was produced from the first author's master thesis and a part of the study was presented as an oral presentation at the EJER congress in 2022.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Canadian Center of Science and Education.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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