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Mentoring EFL Learners Beyond the Formal Classroom Context

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ABSTRACT

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Mentoring beyond the formal classroom context has been a good practice for relational experience for both EFL teachers and learners around the world. As it is an emerging practice here in Nepal, this has brought an enlightenment on the relationship between teachers and students. This study displays an emerging

practice of mentoring in EFL within the Nepali context. Carrying out semi-structured interviews with five English educators and three students from different institutions, the research reveals that mentoring beyond the formal classroom context offers a significant benefit such as teacher-student rapport, enhanced motivation, improvement on the language confidence. The research also demonstrates some challenges such as limited exposure and practice, time management and lack of institutional initiatives. The B.Ed English syllabus does not sufficiently incorporate mentoring as a structured form of professional development for teacher trainers despite the fact that it prepares a large number of teacher trainees across Nepal. The research recommends for a planned relationship-based mentoring practice focusing on the enhancement for both teachers and students. This research suggests educators, stakeholders, policymakers to integrate intentional mentoring practice within the formal and beyond the formal EFL classroom context in Nepal.

Keywords: Context, EFL, formal, practice, professional, relational, transformation,

INTRODUCTION

When someone is asked to share a word that comes to mind in relation to “mentoring,” they often think of guidance, coaching, counseling, teaching, or advising. However, mentoring encompasses much more than advice and suggestions. It is a relational experience and helps someone to maximize their inner potential. It is a very deep, relational and intentional walking alongside someone on his or her journey of growth, development and transformation. This research study attempts to explore what it means to mentor English learners beyond the formal classroom context. Let’s begin with some of the definitions of mentoring as there are multiple perspectives on the definition of mentoring. Different leadership thinkers, institutions and organizations have framed mentoring in various ways. The University of Reading defines as “Mentoring is a relationship typically between two colleagues in which the mentor shares their professional knowledge and experiences to enable the mentee to achieve their goals. The mentor will share their key skills, lived experience and personal attributes to help develop the other individual.” This definition shows that there should be support and encouragement which show a posture of non-direction and an intentional journey of development. Similarly, it is also found in The University of Reading that with the open conversations, shared goals, and active listening, mentors mentor mentees to cope with the challenges, to develop skills and reach the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time bound) goals. Mentoring benefits both mentors and mentees by reflecting, expanding networks, and developing a culture of growth too (University of Reading, 2024). Similarly in the study of (Taylor University, 2019), According to Stanley and Clinton, “Mentoring is a relational process in which a mentor, who knows or has experienced something, transfers that something (resources of wisdom, information, experience, confidence, insight, relationships, status, etc.) to a mentee, at an appropriate time and manner, so that it facilitates development or empowerment.” Therefore, mentoring is a very relational experience and process in which an experienced person empowers another emerging person intentionally. It can be the reason to impart a skill, behavior, or attitude. The novice and emerging person is shaped and empowered with the good and right guidance of the experienced one. Mentoring is a relational learning activity provided by a well trained and experienced senior person. The main goal of mentoring is to support the transformative development of a less experienced and less skilled mentee with the in-depth interaction and engagement. In this process, teachers are the central figures in the improvement of teaching and learning journey. The mentoring process develops the confidence and efficiency level of teachers as well as among the students too. Teachers are mentors too.

Teachers can mentor the students in the classroom and beyond it as well. The main outcomes of the mentoring may be empathy, encouragement, positive motivation, friendship, counseling and a well facilitated learning journey (Wangdi, 2023). Teachers need continuous professional development as it shapes effective instructional practices and enhances students' learning. The workshops, regular training, seminars, peer observation and collaborations and digital learning elevate the teachers' professional development and enhance the teaching learning exposure among the teachers. The study of Bulus & Bayazit, 2024 revealed that Indonesian EFL pre-service and in-service teachers actively took part in informal digital learning of English which really impacts their teaching creativity. The study highlights the need for further study in the informal digital learning and creative teaching approaches which enhance the innovative pedagogical implications in language education (Bulus & Bayazit, 2024).

Informal digital learning of English (IDLE) has become a great way of learning English recently. There are positive perceptions and valuable opportunities for EFL teachers to improve English language teachers' teaching skills. The study shared that EFL teachers are ready and efficient for extending their influence beyond the traditional classroom boundaries as IDLE activities that are not limited only to the educational fields but also actively facilitated by the teachers themselves. This was a great impactful in the Iranian context where the formal context is prevalent and informal exposure is less prioritized. The study was limited in the EFL context of Iran, and the study focused on creating an IDLE scale for the EFL teachers' development. Therefore, the intertwinement of informal digital learning with formal teachers training merits exploration and this could offer valuable perspectives on enriching professional development of teachers (Rezai, 2024). Mentoring has been a great educational development practice which leads to academic and professional growth and success. Established scholars' support and facilitation could be the turning points for the achievement of the new emerging scholars or academic practitioners. Mentoring plays a significant role in the higher educational practices and career development and academic success of the academic practitioners. The effective mentorship supports to cascade new knowledge and ideas through the mentors to mentees. The knowledge sharing, collaborative efforts and cultivation of the flourishing of the academic community are the significant factors in the mentorship journey. Therefore, mentoring is a most important relational practice among academic practitioners (Atenas, Nerantzi, & Bussu, 2023). Huizing (2012) further explains that mentoring provides the capacity to learn wisdom and experience from a well trained and experienced person. It has been recognized today as both personal and professional development and benefits. There is a lot of research or study

on the topic of mentoring and different types of mentoring can be seen as practical such as collaborative mentoring, group mentor, group mentoring, mentoring circles, mentoring communities, multiple mentors, multiple mentoring, one to many mentoring, peer group mentoring, small group mentoring, and team mentoring. Mentoring has become an effective strategy in higher education for the development among the students from one-on-one relational experiences between a more experienced mentor and a less experienced mentee. Universities also apply the formal mentoring program for the development of the workforce. There is not much study on the student career development mentoring practice. It has been found that the current evidence of the effectiveness of mentoring is mixed, likely due to variations in program structure, delivery methods, and target populations. There has been little study that helps to explore how different types of mentoring approaches are concerned with the diverse career outcomes among the students. Mentoring is the key support for professional networking, role modeling, and guidance. It has been a great strategy to get a better job or foster the employability of the students (Nabi, Walmsley, Mir, & Osman, 2024).

Research Gap

Mentoring practice is really a new term and practice here in Nepal. The researcher asked about 25 teachers about the practice of mentoring and usefulness, only 5 teachers answered about this with good illustration and experiences. This really shows that the mentoring practice in Nepali institutions should be well established and practiced even mentored by the experienced institutions and experienced and well-trained mentors here in Nepal. There is not even a specific literal translation of mentoring in Nepali language. This shows that it should be termed as correctly as possible. The researcher himself tried to see the English-Nepali dictionary and the word mentoring was not found and he googled and found the meaning of mentoring in Nepal as “मेन्टरिङ्ग , Mēṅṅariṅga.” This shows that the word is not even translated into Nepali context, and it is not well practiced here in Nepal. The practice of mentoring from international and some national organizations and institutions has elevated than before which shows a good possibility to flourish in the days to come. The practice of intentional mentoring is very important for an educator among the majority groups centered on the exams and assessment. Mentoring changes the life of the novice teachers, the students and new employees. The step-by-step process of mentoring focused on faithfulness and lifelong learning lessons can be practiced regularly.

Research Questions

- What is the meaning and importance of Mentoring?
- What are the practices of mentoring in the context of Nepal?
- What are the challenges and opportunities for mentoring beyond the formal classroom activities?

Statement of the Problem

Mentoring is called one of the best educational practices among the educators for interaction and professional development beyond the classroom instruction. A good teacher not only serves as an educator but also serves as a life coach and life mentor beyond the formal context. Many teachers are focused on the metrics and exam results but very few cover the faithfulness and life change process results process of the learners. However, to understand and get the broader perspectives on the change of the learners, a good educator needs a clear understanding of mentoring and its practices. Learning is always an intentional and transformative process as many educators do not incorporate mentoring practices and its values within the classroom and outside of this too. In the context of Nepal, a good practice of mentoring remains largely absent. While few who are familiar with the international dimension in learning have started this practice within their own context. Some of the organizations have started this practice among the workers within their own settings. Unfortunately, systematic mentoring practices are still scarce in the institutions of Nepal. This research study will explore the importance of mentoring highlighting a significant area for development and research.

Significance of the Study

This research study will be beneficial for both established and emerging educators, offering them ample opportunities to observe and learn effective mentoring practices. The mentoring practices can be implemented through the four progressive steps: Observing the experienced educators (I do you watch), becoming involved in the activities (I do you help), initiating and serving with experienced (you do I help), and finally applying the strategies solely or independently (you do I see). Here 'I' represents the established educator, and 'you' denotes the emerging educator. This structured approach will assist novice educators to build the confidence, character and commitment in their teaching and learning journey. Additionally, these practices can provide meaningful insights for concerned policy makers and institutions. Overall, the result of the study contributes significantly to improving English language teaching and learning across the institutions here in Nepal.

Limitation of the Study

The study is based on the interviews with a small group of educators and students which may not fully represent the various educational contexts across Nepal. Second, the focus is primarily on English education and its applicability will be limited to other subject areas. Mentoring practices may not be applicable in all settings too.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

To collect in-depth perspectives on the mentoring and its practice with their own students, interviews were conducted with 5 teachers affiliated with reputed national and international institutions. These semi-structured interviews brought key insights and experiences to those who were involved in teaching English. The respondents were chosen based on purposive sampling as they are familiar with mentoring. The educators included Ram from Minnesota State University, who has mentored English teaching fellows, as well as Anmol from Mount Tops Kids Zone, and Anish and Chandra from Nilgiri. Additional insights were contributed by Pradip from Goodwill School, along with Ajay and Ramesh from Bright International. Other student participants included Aawash, Tika, and Pampha who provided valuable perspectives on this mentoring. The names are pseudonyms. The interviews revealed a rich qualitative data on the challenges and successes of English teachers while mentoring the learners beyond the formal context. The findings reveal some of the challenges and key insights on mentoring practice beyond the formal classroom environment in English language teaching.

RESULTS

- Mentoring has been practised by some teachers and students. There are some common challenges which were found out while carrying out a research work by the researcher. These common challenges in the mentoring journey are as follows:
- Limited exposure and resources: Many English teachers are not much trained to mentoring the students here in Nepal. Some of the challenges might appear because of the limited exposure. Even teachers do not have a lot of resources for mentoring skills and resources to mentor the learners too.
- Time constraints: Some teachers do not have time to allocate the time for the students' progress beyond the formal context. Teaching takes place for lifelong movement and transformation. English teachers had better talk in English for the student's progress intentionally and build a rapport with the students beyond the formal context. Many

teachers might think that school time is only the responsible time for the students. In fact, teachers' each moment is a good witness for the students and their improvement in their learning journey. All English teachers need to be accountable and responsible for the growth of the students' English language skill.

- Balancing personal and professional life: Some teachers do not have much idea for the personal and professional life. They cannot allocate sufficient time for the students who really want to grow in learning English. A teacher might reject the mentoring proposal because of not balancing the workload at school time and beyond.
- One of the great challenges of mentoring is not being able to engage the groups but it is a very intentional and more personal strategy. Person to person mentoring takes place and the number of people might be left behind from this opportunity beyond the formal context (school setting).
- Similarly, it is not easy to adapt the strategies which incorporate the mentee's level and needs. A good mentor should be creative and aware of the emotional, physical and mental level of the mentees. Mentees' needs and expectations may be different from learning English. Being focused on learning English could be challenging for this mentoring English beyond the formal context. Sometimes it may be just formality, not intentional and practical because of lack of focus on the right purpose.
- The B.Ed. course syllabus does not properly mention the concept of the Mentoring for the professional development of teachers. There are different approaches to teacher development such as Workshops/ Seminars, Self-Monitoring, Teacher Support groups, keeping a teaching journal, Peer observation and peer coaching, teaching portfolios, Analyzing critical incidents and case analysis, Team Teaching and Action Research. But the absence of mentoring shows the incomplete syllabus for teacher development.

Students' Relational Experiences

The students(mentees) expressed some of the key insights based on their experiences in learning English. The teachers who practice and help the students to maximize the potential beyond the formal classroom context seems very motivating and encouraging. The students were asked to share with some of the insights based on their experiences provided the guidance by English teachers even after the school hours and in the time of vacation. A student shared"

"I feel really loved, cared for and developed while I talk to my English teacher. He is so intentional and supportive. He really blessed me with his own knowledge and some of his care and motivations are beyond my expectations. While talking to my English

teacher with MOMO at a restaurant, he guided me to learn and practice English and we spoke in conversational English.” (Tika, a student)

The student feels very valued or genuinely supported in their relationship or rapport with the concerned English Teacher. The teachers’ positive and intentional support make the students feel loved, cared and encouraged not just academically but personally. The students get encouraged more in learning and sharing. The moment having MOMO together indicates how the teacher took time to offer the practical mentoring and guidance on learning and practicing English language. This indicates that beyond the formal setting, informal and meaningful interaction also engages them in conversational English and makes the learning experience both effective and enjoyable. This shows how a teacher beyond a formal context can also help to build the students’ confidence in English language learning. Similarly, another student has expressed his happiness on the rapport and journey with the English teacher beyond the formal classroom. He mentioned:

“Coffee with English teachers and developing conversation skills were really really effective strategies. I really enjoyed spending time with my English teacher in Park, playing games, having coffee together and sharing the difficulties about English language speaking skills. It was the most memorable learning journey.” (Aawash, a student).

Finally, another student expressed about the practice of mentoring as:

“I really love the way of the teacher who intentionally helped me learn English academic vocabulary and language functions. The resources provided by teachers were very helpful and effective in my learning. The bonus materials and resources provided by my English teacher are very motivating and interesting for me. After I get any resources and learning tools from my English teacher (Mentor), I explore it and I feel very enriched on my learning journey.”

This shows that one of the best and memorable strategies in learning English is also informal context. Students feel motivated and encouraged journeying with the respective English teachers. Having coffee together, practicing conversation skills with teachers. The regular meet up with English teachers, playing in the park, some language games and discussion on the learning struggles openly really matter in learning English. These practices not only improve the speaking and conversation skills but also build the confidence among the students. Finally, the resources provided by my trusted mentor could be very motivating and effective for learners.

Analysis of the ELT syllabus of B.Ed 3rd Year

There is a topic in unit 8, the teachers' professional development (United Mission College, n.d.). Under this topic, the researcher found different approaches to teacher development. The course description, general objectives and the list of the approaches to professional development of English teachers are mentioned below. The writer himself analyzed it and described the gaps on the syllabus.

• Course Description

This course has been designed for the students of B. Ed. third year majoring English as a specialized subject. It provides students with knowledge of planning and managing classes in terms of content, time and resources. In addition, it offers students various insights into understanding the nature of language teaching, teaching methods and teaching materials, along with the modern technology for facilitating successful learning. While focusing on various aspects of language such as vocabulary, grammar, functions, etc. and different basic skills including listening, speaking, reading and writing, the course further aims at helping students develop practical aspects and skills of English language teaching. As language teaching also involves language assessment, the students will also learn about basic principles and procedures of language assessment in this course. Furthermore, this course also engages students in understanding the concepts and processes of teacher development in English language teaching.

• General Objectives

This course has following objectives:

- To acquaint the students with various aspects of language learners, teachers and teaching learning activities.
- To familiarize the students with the fundamental concepts and principles of classroom management and teaching plans.
- To provide students with insights into understanding the approaches and methods of English language teaching.
- To prepare the students for teaching various aspects of the English language.
- To equip the students with the strategies for teaching language skills.
- To prepare the students in the use of various instructional materials and modern technology in the classroom.
- To enable the students to design the tools for language assessment.

- To familiarize the students with the concepts and approaches to English language teacher development.

Specific Objectives	Contents
Explain various strategies and expertise of teacher learning	Unit VIII: Language Teacher Development(30) 8.1 The nature of teacher development/education
Explain various approaches to teacher development	8.1.1 Teacher training and teacher development 8.1.2 Understanding teacher learning 8.1.3 Novices and Experts 8.1.4 Individual and Institutional Perspective 8.1.5 Collaborative and self-directed learning 8.2 Approaches to teacher development 8.2.1 Workshops/ Seminars 8.2.2 Self-Monitoring 8.2.3 Teacher Support groups 8.2.4 Keeping a teaching journal 8.2.5 Peer observation and peer coaching 8.2.6 Teaching portfolios 8.2.7 Analyzing critical incidents and case analysis 8.2.8 Team Teaching and Action Research

While observing the textbooks written by some Nepali writers, the researcher found a small introduction of mentoring under peer coaching. Only one quote said by Regarding Richards and Farrell (2010) has been mentioned as “Mentoring is a particular form of peer coaching. It is a process whereby an experienced teacher works with a novice teacher, giving guidance and feedback. Mentor teachers often receive special training and support for their roles as the mentor. They have usually been drawn from veteran teachers within a school who help beginners learn the philosophy, cultural values and established sets of behaviors expected by the school employing them.”

Only with this definition, the mentoring ideas are generated. This shows that the book author has not paid much attention to the procedures, implementations of the classroom practices, the nature of mentoring, purpose and benefits of mentoring. The details are not described in the textbook which show the lack of the full ideas on mentoring for the students of Bed level. This is a very important stage for the teachers who are trained after completing the level. If the policymakers do not cover the content and insights on mentoring in the syllabus, it shows a lack of the important approach for the professional development of teachers. Teachers

should develop professional skills by coaching and mentoring others. Regarding professional development of teachers, the four steps are very important, for example “I do, you watch, I do you help, you do, I help, and you do I watch”. If an experienced teacher mentors following this strategy, the process of mentoring seems very effective and successful. The pathways shown by the experienced ones for the novice ones will be interactive and effective. The power of learning is a very horizontal and powerful process.

This indicates that the policymakers, textbook writers, curriculum designers should include all the procedures, steps, explanation of benefits and purposes of mentoring. It is a very practical and applicable approach to professional development for both new and experienced teachers. Moreover, while the syllabus for the B.Ed English course covers a range of teacher development approaches and strategies such as peer observation, peer coaching, self-monitoring etc., it noticeably lacks the focus on the mentoring as an approach for the professional development for English teachers. Mentoring process provides a confidence among the learners. Therefore, the mentoring practice within the classroom intentionally and beyond the classroom by English teachers to the students is not well practiced. This shows that the educators need to explore and practice mentoring approaches for the professional development for themselves and for enhancing the students within and beyond the formal classroom setting.

DISCUSSION

While mentoring it becomes effective to see the personalized support via different media. Touching and growing the students intentionally brings a good outcome on the mentorship. Likewise, the mentees become encouraged on the learning journey. Similarly, the mentoring practice improves emotional and academic insights. An experienced mentor shares the ideas and mentees can learn and apply in the real context. Mentoring improves the confidence level of both participants and speaking skill elevates. Mentoring can take place in both settings; formal and informal. The mentees can develop the English language aspects like pronunciation, vocabulary items and language functions as they happen during the mentoring journey. While mentors and mentees share the feelings, complexities of learning and the whole process of development, there happens a life-long impact through this deep connection. A deep connection brings both joy and learning outcomes on both sides. Through mentoring, a good leadership skill, active listening, collaboration and partnership, critical thinking skill, creativity, confidence and generosity flourish on them. Therefore, mentoring is the prime

approach to teacher development. Teacher development is an ongoing process. Mentoring practice should be encouraged for both novice and experienced English teachers. Finally it should be included in the syllabus of B.Ed Major English subject in depth too.

Action Plan: Practising Mentoring

Have you ever experienced a mentoring practice? If not so, you are behind the learning and professional development journey. There are some of the steps you can follow to practice it in real life professional development. The steps are as follows:

- Find out the possible mentors who can be your potential support for the professional development, ask to steward the time and gifts in the mentoring journey.
- Start the conversation. Invite to the person and mention the purpose of conversation and open the discussion for the alignment of journey
- Make an agreement regarding time, frequency of the meetings, confidentiality and align with the purpose of this journey. You observe, then you learn, after that you do and then you demonstrate the learning outcomes
- Continue the conversation with time and meeting management tools for example google calendar invites.
- Reflect and evaluate the learning journey asking the questions own self as how it went well, what were the challenges and what next?

CONCLUSION

Mentoring English learners beyond the formal context is a new and innovative idea for both teachers and learners. It is one of the best approaches for teacher development. Both teachers and learners take part and reflect about the mentoring journey. It really transforms teachers into life coaches and learners into future leaders. It is not about giving directions and instructing the learners but maximizing the potentialities of English learners. It is a journey journeying together with humility, sympathy, love, commitment, and vision. This study really sheds light who are in the social sectors and change the making process in the institutions. Therefore, a good English teacher mentors beyond the lessons, beyond the formality, beyond the exams, and beyond the expectations.

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