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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GAINS FOR MENTORS IN A MENTORING PROGRAM: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

In the most general sense, mentoring is defined as the assistance more experienced teachers give to less experienced, generally novice teachers. Teacher mentoring programs have been long believed to assist novice teachers professionally in several ways. However, not much is known about how mentors perceive their experience within mentoring in relation to their own professional development. This research, in that respect, attempts to examine the contributions mentoring processes provide mentors with; specifically elaborating on common ways these teachers believe to have grown professionally. This case study, which covers the second semester of the 2015-2016 academic year, was conducted with 17 mentors working within In-service Support program in the School of Foreign Languages at Erciyes University in Kayseri, Turkey. In order to explore the participants' professional development gains as a result of their mentoring experience, semi-structured interviews that allow open-ended responses were used in the collection of data. The interviews with the participants, 17 mentors, were audio-recorded and transcribed. The data were analyzed through content analysis. Qualitative data of the study showed that mentoring acted as a way of professional development for mentors and led towards these mentor teachers' reviewing their existing teaching beliefs and values, reflecting on their own teaching, experiencing a sense of renewal and increased enthusiasm in the profession.

Keywords: professional development, mentors, mentoring, mentees

1. Introduction

The origin of the word 'mentor' meaning 'wise and faithful advisor', or the practice of 'mentorship' can be traced back to ancient Greece. Mentoring has become increasingly important in teacher training and teacher professional development programs. It is evidenced to be one of the most effective means of backing up teachers' professional growth in many parts of the world (Hobson, Maxwell, Stevens, Doyle, & Malderez, 2015). In the most basic sense, mentoring program involves a more experienced member of a staff offering support and encouragement to a new colleague through a relationship on the basis of mutual trust, respect, and effective communication. Brock and Grady (2007) underline the fact that mentoring is quite an effective way of providing professional growth to novice teachers. When literature is reviewed, it can be seen that the professional development of novice teachers through mentoring programs is extensively mentioned (Boreen, Johnson, Niday, & Potts, 2000; Brock & Grady, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 1996; David, 2000; Holloway, 2001; Odell & Huling, 2000; Resta, Huling, White, & Matschek, 1997). Mentoring is interpreted as a progressive enterprise in which mentors assume various promotive roles to enhance their mentees' teacher professional development (Hobson & Malderez, 2013). The transition a novice teacher experiences from being novice to a professional is substantially aided by the transmission of knowledge and skills of an experienced teacher. However, one should not be under the illusion that mentoring is just the transfer of advice or insights from an experienced

teacher to a novice one. Rather than being such a linear process, it features a reciprocal nature in which the personal qualities and professional commitment of each participant affects one another in their ongoing professional development. (See Figure 1)

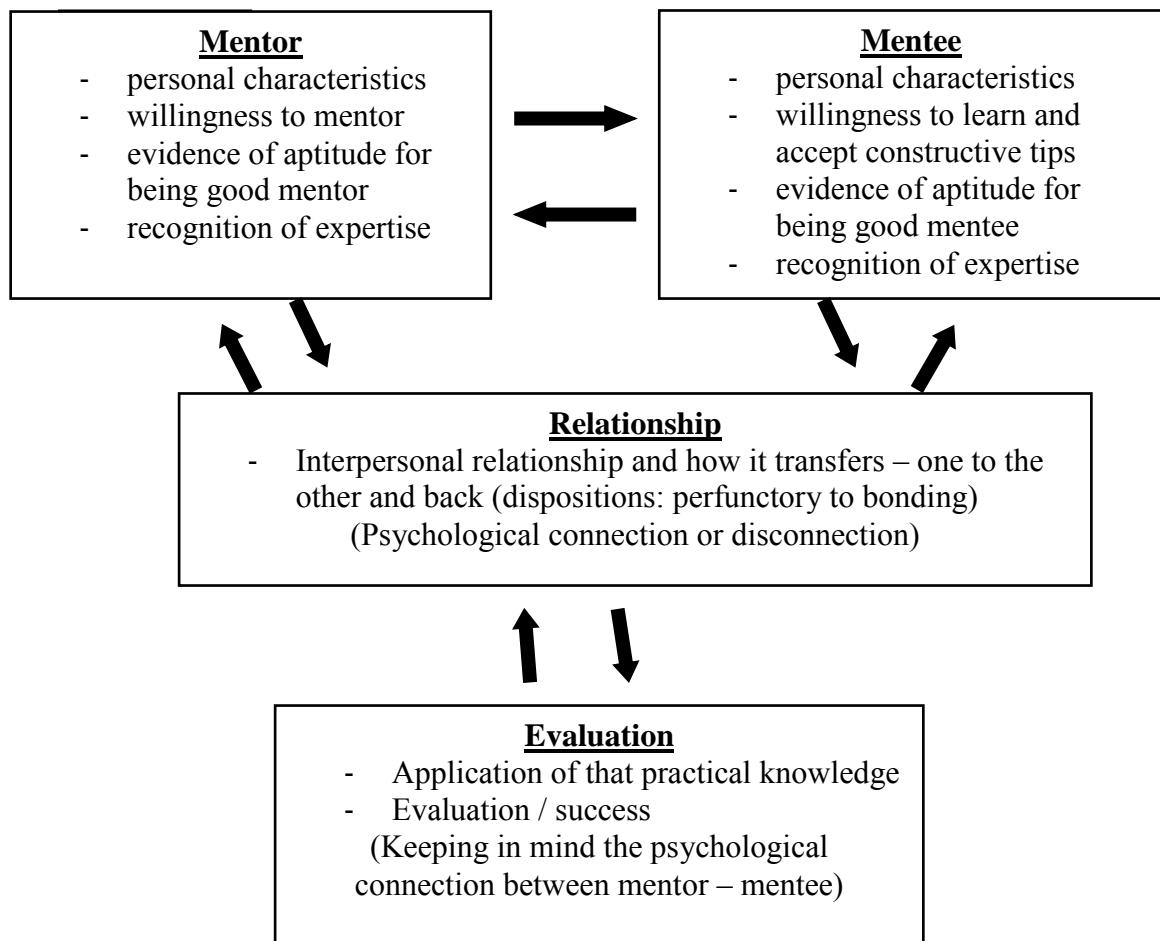


Figure 1. *Reciprocal nature of the mentoring process*

Source: Adapted from Angeliadis (2007, p. 18)

In investing their time and energy in enhancing the competencies and knowledge of another colleague, mentors also have a chance to expand their own professional record. Developing collegiality and strong communication skills through attending to the needs and concerns of novice teachers, and gaining deeper insights into the problems of the profession are only some of the key benefits which the process provides mentoring teachers with. While sharing skills and experience with a new aspirant teacher, mentors sometimes find themselves naturally exposed to fresh ideas, different perspectives, and brand-new approaches. Likewise, due to the urge to develop their mentoring styles and coaching capabilities, mentors usually reflect on their own goals and classroom practices so that they can be formally recognized as a sort of subject matter expert. Encouraging personal and professional development of others can boost the mentor’s confidence and occupational self-efficacy.

Halford (1998) points out that “From classrooms to commission chambers, education leaders are recognizing the power of mentoring” (p. 34). According to Cooper and Miller (1998), on account of the fact that mentoring holds a great number of benefits for all stakeholders, it is becoming more and more popular for many organizations all over the world. According to Clutterbuck (1991), mentor can be characterized as a “more experienced individual willing to share their knowledge with someone less experienced in a relationship

of mutual trust” (p. 12). Hudson (2003) emphasizes the significant fact that mentoring enables a way for ingraining cost-effective professional development for teachers who are in need of keeping themselves constantly up to date with current teaching practices. As a matter of fact, mentoring is a complex activity that is profoundly linked to backing up individual learning. For a mentor teacher, mentoring can be regarded as an opportunity to make use of his/ her skills and knowledge in order to assist the progress of a new teacher who may feel out of depth in the first few years of teaching profession. For the mentee, it is a great opportunity to benefit from the broad knowledge and practices of an experienced teacher. However, it is not only mentees who truly benefit from the mentoring process. Serving as a mentor allows teachers to enhance their professional skills, review, improve and extend their teaching strategies. They also renew their interests in the professional progression by having a chance to keep up to date.

Accordingly, researchers and members within such mentoring programs are coming to recognize that not only novice teachers but also mentors derive considerable benefits from the process. Mentors are also known to improve their expertise in no small measure while they support mentees in promoting their teaching skills and pedagogical knowledge. In fact, this is not a new idea since in the mid-1980s, a number of facilitators of educational programs started to investigate this issue (Hawk, 1986, 1987). According to Feiman- Nemser (1996), educational policies from the early 1980s on have sharply placed an increasing importance on mentoring programs in reshaping teaching and teacher education. Little and Nelson (1990) maintain that experienced teachers who have served as a mentor to novice teachers gain recognition. Still, there is little literature on the gains of mentors in terms of professional development from observing and guiding new teachers in their attempts to enhance their pedagogical knowledge and capabilities (Koberg, Boss, Chappel, & Ringer, 1994; Ragin, Cottons, & Miller, 2000; Scandura, 1992). Furthermore, most of the studies have focused on the unforeseen benefits of mentoring programs for mentors themselves (Hawk, 1986, 1987), and only a few of them have considered the primary outcomes for continuing professional development for experienced educators. This research, in this respect, will attempt to examine contributions mentoring processes provide mentors with; specifically elaborating on common ways they believe to have grown professionally. This study includes interviews with mentors to explore professional development for those experienced teachers as a result of the mentoring process.

2. Methodology

This case study took place in the second semester of 2015-2016 academic year in the School of Foreign Languages, Erciyes University during the application of a mentoring program as part of In-Service Support Commission work that aimed to provide professional support to novice teachers at the institution. An interest and the need to know the program outcomes for the professional development of mentor teachers formed the basis of this study. Basically the study aimed to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How do mentors understand their roles in the mentoring program?

RQ2: How do mentors perceive the mentoring process in enhancing professional development?

2.1. Purpose of the Study

As also maintained by Halai (2006) in her research on mentoring in-service teacher, studies in the field emphasize that content knowledge, pedagogical skills, procedural competence, and teacher identity awareness are some of the most common areas of professional growth novice teachers develop themselves thanks to mentoring process.

However, not much is known about the influence of mentoring experience on mentor teachers' professional development. This research addresses the issue that the influence of mentoring program on mentors has rather been neglected when compared to the emphasis laid on broad outcomes for novice teachers. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to address the gap in literature by investigating the impact of mentoring process on the professional development of mentor teachers through a qualitative approach.

2.2. Participants

In this case study, the participants were 17 mentors assigned to the novice language instructors in the in-service support commission set up for helping novice teachers. To investigate the benefits of mentoring experience on the mentor teachers' professional development, a purposive sample of both male and female teachers who served as a mentor at the institution within the last 6 years were selected as the participants of this study. The selection of these 17 mentors, whose years of teaching experience ranged from 6 to 18, was based upon availability and their willingness to participate in this study so that the sample could provide rich data, generate a broad range of perceptions, and reflect critically on their experiences. All of the participants worked in the institution for at least 6 years and their experience as a mentor ranged from 1 to 6 years. The mentors in the School of Foreign Languages, Erciyes University were typically peers who had their own classroom to teach within the same school as mentee, and they assumed the extra responsibility of mentoring a novice teacher. These mentor teachers were not getting paid extra money for mentoring task and they were either assigned by the school administration on the basis of their educational background, and years of teaching experience, or they worked voluntarily with their own consent. Of all participants, 14 mentors reported to have been assigned by the commission to work as a mentor for new teachers in the institution while only 3 instructors volunteered for the position.

2.3. Data Collection

This study required qualitative instrument that could deeply explore the research questions. Interviewing is one of the most important techniques in terms of finding out participants' experience, attitude, views, and comments (Karasar, 2005). Hence, semi-structured face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions were conducted to collect the study data. The first part of the interview used in the study aims to answer the first research question; "How do mentors understand their roles in the mentoring program?" while the second part aims to generate answers to address second research question, that is "How do mentors perceive the mentoring process in enhancing professional development?" (See Appendix). All the interviews were conducted in English face-to face and audio taped for transcription purposes. Semi-structured interviews helped the researcher understand the phenomenon of mentoring program from participants' own perspectives with the assumption that the significant reality and the essential value lies in what participants perceive it to be. In addition, open-ended questions made it possible for the researcher to explore the research questions more deeply, elicit information, and generate answers. Along the same line, face-to-face interviewing enabled to comprehend interviewee's verbal responses via nonverbal cues.

2.4. Data Analysis

All the interviews were conducted in English, face-to face and audio taped for transcription purposes. To elicit in-depth answers, the interviewer allowed the interviews to move in an interactive way. The interviews took from 15 minutes to 30 minutes, with an average of 20 minutes. Each interview consisted of two main parts. In the first part, the

questions addressed participants' perceptions of their roles in the mentoring program focusing on the skills and qualities of a good mentor. In the second part, the questions addressed how participants perceive their mentoring experiences as beneficial to professional development.

In order to analyze the qualitative data, the interviews were first transcribed and then multiple copies of the transcripts were made. The transcripts were read for topic and the information was analyzed to determine common themes that were linked to the original research questions of the study. A second reading was conducted to identify the explicit and implicit categories that emerge within each theme. A third reading for content helped identify quotes that were aligned with each category within the themes. The quotes were labeled according to the categories they represented.

2.5. Research Quality

As the reliability of methods in qualitative research is concerned with dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), all participants were provided with the same questions that were carefully worded. Firstly, all interviews were recorded for accurate interpretations, and notes were taken during participants' discussions. Then, all research procedures including recordings, transcripts, drafts and final reviews of data were documented. Although the subjective nature of this study was acknowledged at the outset, it was meticulously attempted to present accurate, complete, detailed, and bias-free accounts of the participants' views, beliefs, and perceptions as they were revealed. The research context, the participants, the data collection procedure and analysis were clearly explained to relate the significance of this study for other researches (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In this way, it was aimed to increase the reliability of this qualitative study.

The content validity of this study was achieved through considering the features of teacher professional development and the place of mentoring programs in the related literature. Accordingly, the interview questions were first formed by the researcher and then they were checked and compared by an expert in the field to be refined. Lastly, semi-structure interview questions in two parts each including four questions were put into final form.

2.6. Findings

In this section, individual interview data were analyzed under each research question. The participants' answers to each question were examined in order to find common patterns. After the main ideas mentioned by each participant were summarized, they were organized into similar categories. Findings appeared thematically under the research questions and were illustrated by quotations from interviewees. To illustrate the number of interviewees who held similar views, individual interviewees were grouped together. Whole sample percentages for the interview used an N of 17. The study revealed some significant results.

2.6.1. Teachers' perceptions of their roles as mentors

Responses to the questions in the first part of the interview that addressed the first research question, 'How do mentors perceive their roles in the mentoring program?', resulted in a variety of views which were grouped in 4 main themes as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Teachers' perceptions of their roles as mentors*

Perception of mentorship	Number
Guiding	13
Monitoring & giving feedback	6
Encouraging	8
Orienting	4

The common thread to all these themes was that mentorship for most mentors involved some form of assistance to new teachers within in the institution. This might include monitoring the mentees' professional performance and giving feedback to enhance their professional development, and orienting those mentees both to their new working environment and the teaching profession. Providing guidance and encouraging mentees to excel at their own teaching emerged as the two most frequently argued perceptions of mentorship.

2.6.1.1. Guiding

In the first place, a majority of the participants perceived mentoring as providing guidance to mentees on teaching issues raised throughout the process. This theme consisted of two sub-themes: passing on knowledge and experience, and asking the right questions. Many interviewees underscored that guidance is not something as simply telling the mentee what to do; rather, it entails listening carefully, asking the right questions and being supportive through non-judgmental support. As an example, one participant narrated:

In my opinion a mentor is someone who is a guide on the side not a sage on the stage. Listening carefully and asking questions are the main elements of an effective mentoring process. A mentor is supposed to act as an expert, so s/he should have knowledge of the subject on which s/he is advising. However, knowledge of subject matter may not be enough to be an effective mentor. A mentor should know how to direct his/her mentee and know what to focus during this process. (T8)

Another participant interviewed:

A mentor is, in a way, somebody who shows the way and someone who lets other people use his knowledge and experience. I think a good mentor should have or know about different ways of teaching. (T2)

A mentor has to be like a master or an artisan first of all because he or she has to know most of the subjects, topics or responsibilities of the teacher. And the most important things for him or her must be observing, and giving a kind of detailed information about the things the apprentice is doing or would be doing. (T11)

2.6.1.2. Encouraging

Most teachers indicated that another main role of the mentor is to encourage mentees during their mentoring process. The following quotations exemplified the theme:

Your mission should be encouraging rather than demotivating or being someone who is searching for mistakes to criticize. Instead, you, as a mentor, should consider the points to comment positively on. Motivating and encouraging new teachers in the institution is a great responsibility of a mentor. (T10)

The participants in the study mentioned that if mentors wanted to inspire mentees to achieve all they could, they needed to acknowledge the mentees in their efforts to accomplish tasks, value the efforts they made and the development they achieved. The feedback given by the mentors should be constructive in nature if it was for the benefit of the mentees.

You must give your time, you must give your ideas, your education, your personal experience to other people. You must be telling not getting the information from the other person. And you shouldn't be so much criticizing to other people. We must just say this was good, this was going well, it should be better but the bad sides must be kept for ourselves. Bad sides or the negative sides of the teacher must be shared only with the administration not with the person we have observed. (T11)

A mentor should always encourage her mentees to continuously improve their professional competencies. (T7)

2.6.1.3. Monitoring & giving feedback

The next frequently expressed perception of mentorship was monitoring and giving feedback, as is evident from the quotations from the interviewees below:

Giving feedback is the prerequisite of the mentoring process. (T17)

And the most important things for him or her must be observing, and giving a kind of detailed information about the things the apprentice is doing or would be doing. The most important thing to be done by the mentor must be in my opinion just observation – nothing else. (T11)

The participants acknowledged the need to provide constructive and effective feedback in a mutually trusted environment to be helpful to the mentees in their efforts to identify and learn the skills, knowledge and strategies for successful teaching.

It is very important to monitor your mentee's progress carefully. And monitoring is much more than going into a class and observing what is going on. You need to be in constant touch with your mentee, hold regular meetings to discuss his or her improvement, or review his or her teaching to touch upon the general concerns and so on. The feedback you give should not be demotivating, or offensive to that particular teacher. The other way around, I mean, hmm, you should help that mentee to discover his or her abilities, skills, and strong points as a teacher and a learner, of course. (T17)

2.6.1.4. Orienting

Less frequently mentioned responsibility of a mentor was to provide new teachers at the institution with an orientation which required initial and on-going support regarding the teaching environment and expectations of the institution. Mentors argued that acclimating mentees to the school and giving individual attention tailored to mentees' specific needs and unique backgrounds was another part of their responsibility as a mentor teacher. The following interviewees elaborated:

The mentees, newcomers, always need help because everything is new for these people. They don't know anything about the institution, about the rules, about the classes, about classroom management, about many other things. (T3)

Mentors usually help the new teachers to adapt to the institution and to see how things are going on, and to help them make the connection between theory and new practice, and help their socialization, maybe. (T5)

According to the following participant, institutions needed to have mentoring systems in order to ensure that all parts work together to make the whole system operate smoothly:

So a mentor is like a guide trying to, how can I say, make this teacher more adapted to the situation in the institution. Because teaching may be viewed similar in a way but teaching at different institutions is different. In different schools, it is different. So mentor is needed to provide that adaptation [...] in my institution once there were lots of new teachers and they created lots of problems in because in our school we have this partner system and they created lots of problems because they didn't know. It was not their fault actually because they didn't

know many things related to how the institution works so they kind of created problems and that's why I personally believe that we should have this mentor system. (T4)

2.6.2. Teachers' views on skills / qualities of a good mentor

The following part of the study addressed mentors' views on required qualities and skills of a good mentor, linked with the main responsibilities of mentors as mentioned in detail above as an answer to the first research question, "How do mentors understand their roles in the mentoring program?" These were grouped under different categories and illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. *Interviewees' views on qualities / skills of a good mentor*

Qualities / skills of a good mentor	Number (N)
Good communication skills	8
Good personal relationships	6
Good observational skills	6
Knowledgeable	5
Experienced	5
Enthusiastic	5
Friendly	5
Inspiring	2
Patient	2
Collaborative	2
Sincere	2
Objective	2
Open-minded	2

All participants indicated that it was vital for mentors to have the right skills and qualities to make the relationship between mentors and mentees work. The first thing all participants indicated as the most important skill a good mentor needed to possess was communication and appropriate feedback language.

As a mentor, it is really difficult to tell the person the thing we are trying to touch upon is not the person himself or herself or the personality but the behavior, teaching behavior that person shows in the classroom. And at that point you need to be really extra extra extra careful because at the end of the day that person will take what you say into consideration in order to judge himself because people are even harsher when they are criticizing themselves so what you say will affect that person maybe for life. So feedback language seems to be the most challenging thing. Sometimes you don't know how to put things into words but you know at that time body language, intonation, your gestures, back channeling, all those things come into play and if you are a good communicator, if you are a good-hearted person, you find some way to soften your feedback language. (T9)

For the interviewees, good communication included good listening skills, and appropriate feedback language. What that meant for mentor teachers was to be able to listen actively and carefully without interrupting so that they could listen and reflect back upon what the mentees were saying.

If you listen carefully, you can talk carefully. You can find what to insert into the conversation. (T9)

Most of the mentor teachers that participated in the study underlined that if mentors had excellent communication skills and as long as they were able to understand the opinions and feelings of their mentees, effective communication between mentors and mentees could easily take place. In most cases, the relationship between a mentor and a mentee was not

naturally or equally balanced. Due to official titles or years of experience and knowledge of subject, mentors had more control over their relationship with mentees.

You need to have good communication skills because being a mentor is not something like being a colleague. And also you need to be able to express yourself clearly, you know, your points, because sometimes the things you say to your mentees may be taken personally. (T6)

Personally, I believe that feedback language is the most challenging thing in a mentoring process. There are times in which you do not know exactly how to articulate your thoughts in a way that the other person will not be offended or take a word in the wrong sense. I mean, when there is a sort of evaluation, it is not very easy to talk to people like “You did this right, you did this wrong”. You have to be very careful and this is quite stressful for the mentor. (T17)

It was also pointed out that building effective communication was a key to make the whole process a success. For this reason, mentees needed to be direct and open with their mentors while mentors listened carefully and provided constructive feedback within the boundaries of a cordial and productive relationship.

I believe that I am polite enough while talking to the mentee... I cannot say that “my mentee is like my friend” but I handle the mentor-mentee relationship in a friendly atmosphere. (T8)

Interviews revealed that focusing on observable skills of mentees rather than personality traits was a very crucial role for mentors to make their mentees comfortable enough to get feedback on their performance from their mentors or colleagues. The following interviewee elaborated on this point:

The most important thing is good communication skills and how to have this good relationship in which this person is not threatened by you but believes that your comments will help him or your comments are in his or her advantage. I remember the most difficult thing for me was how to formulate the things I needed to, wanted to, say in a way that will not offend the teacher. It was really really difficult. (T4)

I am a calm person and I try to be friendly with people. And even if I criticize someone, I try to do it in a soft way. I think that’s an advantage. When you set up that personal relationship between you and your mentee, the rest comes more easily. (T1)

Another interviewee highlighted the necessity for having good communication skills:

How to express yourself is very important. You shouldn’t be rude. Of course we don’t think that we are rude but sometimes the comments may be a bit offensive in a way. The underlying in your speech might be a bit offensive so you should always try to think the mentees in a different way I think. This is the main job of a mentor. So instead of saying directly, suggesting directly or showing directly, you should just present them a new page and make the mentees think in a different way and this needs communicative skills. (T12)

The interviewees acknowledged that besides possessing good communicative skills, having good personal relations also played a key role in maintaining strong mentoring qualities. The following quotation from a participant illustrated this theme:

My strengths as a mentor are the same as my strengths as a teacher and my strengths as a person, as a friend, as a wife, as a mother. It is all interpersonal and of course intrapersonal. (T9)

These people are just inexperienced teachers and sometimes they are oversensitive. So you have to be careful about your manner. This is the most challenging point I think. I mean it is not good to be proud of yourself and if people think that you are forcing them to do something, it is not a good idea about mentoring. You should be careful about your manners and attitudes towards your mentees. (T3)

Some of the participants reported that having keen observational skills was another key component of the effective mentoring. Good mentors knew how to keep an eye on the mentees' needs and their professional growth. The development of effective observational skills was very much needed for mentors since they were assigned with the task of helping mentees stimulate and develop new practice, maintain good practices, and ensure professional quality.

We are not comparing one teacher, or one apprentice to another one. We are just observing one person and we must see this one person – not a comparison to others. I guess my kind of gift of observation and seeing the details was the most important skill for myself while I was mentoring the other people. (T11)

A mentor needs to be a good observer. He needs to have a wide way of looking at the things. If a mentor is biased, I mean, if you are focused on teaching one way, let's say, if you have a grammar-translation method of teaching, then your way of observing lacks something. (T2)

He or she should know about how to observe somebody in a good way I mean. Just going into a class and watching is not an observation. He or she should be aware of this fact. (T3)

A few of the interviewees maintained that it was a must for mentors to have appropriate subject matter knowledge and teaching skills to provide relevant guidance to the mentees besides substantial years of teaching experience. The interviewees repeatedly mentioned the significance of being 'knowledgeable' and 'experienced'. The following quotations from the participants exemplified the theme:

Having taught for many years in different contexts to different groups of students, experienced teachers can make a good mentor. I mean, I am not trying to say this is the only conditional but you know it is still a very important factor. If you have good pedagogical knowledge, technical knowledge in a way, or many years of teaching experience, and maybe even a mentoring experience, you can guide and help the personal and professional development of your mentee. This is my idea as a mentor with no little experience. (T17)

A mentor is supposed to act as an expert, so s/he should have knowledge of the subject on which s/he is advising. (T8)

Mentoring also requires knowledge. I mean if you do not possess anything to transmit, of course your personality traits, I mean the other things would not work. You would not be able to help the other person. I mean all the elements come together to make the whole, we could say. They are like the array of colors. Just think about a rainbow. (T9)

We have the experience; they don't have the experience. We must transmit this experience and my suggestion is you must be giving. You must give your time; you must give your ideas, your education, and your personal experience to other people. You must be telling, not getting the information from the other person. (T22)

If a mentor is enough, I mean, if that person is well-equipped in terms of field knowledge – maybe he or she is doing MA, PhD, or taking courses like CELTA, DELTA, and experienced in teaching English, I think most things will be OK. If a mentor knows, she can teach. If experienced, again she can share and lead. (T17)

Five of the participants indicated being enthusiastic and friendly was a plus for mentors. In order to set up a good mentor-mentee relationship, mentors and mentees should be approachable to each other so that they could collaborate more easily. Enthusiastic mentors who were passionate and willing to impart their professional insights would make excellent role-models for their colleagues.

I cannot say that "my mentee is like my friend" but I handle the mentor-mentee relationship in a friendly atmosphere. (T8).

I think it won't be wrong to say that mentors are rightfully expected to be enthusiastic. I mean, if we want to be of any use to others, we need to show enthusiasm for the job we are doing – as a teacher, as a mentor, as a colleague, as a learner, whatever that task is. It is a critical component of being a good mentor, I suppose. If you lack enough eagerness or excitement for the process, how can you expect your mentees to get involved, right? (T15)

Two of the mentor teachers in research also underlined the advantage of being inspiring, patient, collaborative, sincere, objective and open-minded to have an effective mentor-mentee relationship. They argued that being patient was an essential quality to let mentees reach conclusions at their own pace. In other words, mentors should abstain from imposing their views or suggestions to mentees. Instead, being able to assist a mentee to go back to what they had experienced and evaluate it to recognize what could have been done differently or what some of the alternatives might be the next time the same issue appeared.

I tried to provide a fresh perspective to my mentees and I always acknowledge and appreciate their achievements and progress. But I was being extra careful not to act as if I have a big ego, or, hmm, as if I am someone threatening. I think mentors should help mentees to look at the situation from a different perspective because doing this alone is not easy for new teachers. (T14)

Dealing with mentees' inexperience in the field, building their self-confidence, giving positive feedback and making right evaluations altogether is a matter of patience. Remaining patient can be difficult sometimes. But all mentors need to have this ability. (T13)

While the participants acknowledged the importance of mentors' sharing experiences with their mentees, they also noted that being aware of not being too directive or imposing while trying to provide the mentees with different options was a significant factor. Mentors should avoid making assumptions or taking decisions in the name of mentees but instead they should be open-minded.

It is of great significance for a mentor to act as a good model for the mentees. A mentor, I mean, needs to value the opinions of the mentees, and motivate others by setting a good example as well. (T13)

Some interviewees indicated the importance of being objective in their relationships with mentees to help their professional growth. The interviews with the mentor teachers in the study revealed that the common belief among mentors was that having good observations would not mean much if teachers could not develop candid ways to be unbiased.

Objectivity and fairness were among the most significant things during my mentorship. I tried to be open to my mentees and it was sometimes difficult because I had to talk about negative things. But I had to tell. I had to explain the things that were not going well. I tried to balance this by mentioning the good points regularly and appreciating their success. (T15)

I mean you just need to be sincere enough and also you have to be direct enough to tell the truth. (T3)

The participants' understandings of what mentorship among language teachers meant, along with the traits and skills expected of a good mentor matched up with those qualities they expressed either as their strengths as a mentor or the areas they needed to improve further to become even more effective mentors than they were.

2.6.3. Professional development (PD) outcomes for the mentors

The following part of the study was based upon responses to the questions in the second part of the interview that addressed the second research question, 'How do mentors perceive the mentoring process in enhancing professional development?', and discussed findings related to the professional development of mentors.

Based on the analyzed responses, the participants in the present study reported that they developed professionally in various ways thanks to their mentoring roles within the program. These outcomes were grouped under four categories and illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. *PD outcomes for the mentors*

PD area	Number (N)
Reflective teaching	7
Reviewing existing teaching beliefs and values	6
A sense of renewal and increased enthusiasm in teaching	5
Increased recognition from peers and the institution	3

From these analyses, it appeared that each mentor had slightly different experiences. The top professional development benefit the interviewees expressed to have gained touched upon reflective teaching as a way of exploring own classroom practices, as exemplified by the quotation below:

Mentors benefit from the program as they can improve their reflective teaching skills. After being a mentor, I have started to examine my teaching critically. (T8)

Observing another teacher's classes to prepare written reports which were to be shared by the administration, and taking notes to discuss relevant points in detail with teachers whose classes had been observed entailed keeping themselves up to date in terms of pedagogical knowledge, skills, strategies and teaching philosophies. Their work of mentoring as an ongoing process of observing, discussing, suggesting, having mentees reflect on their teaching, and documenting all these encouraged mentors to be a reflective teacher. Namely, majority of the participants perceived that in order to be able to offer novice teacher all those essential ways to learn how to develop reflective teaching, mentors needed to reflect deeply on their own teaching. One of those self-awakening moments for the mentors in the study was that they realized having relevant teaching experience, though it was an essential component of being a strong mentor, would never ever be enough.

When you observe a class, you can't help thinking about your own classes, your own lessons so I reconsidered some of my applications in classroom. I questioned myself. Do I bore students? Are my classes also that boring? Am I repeating some things too much? I questioned myself on some issues of course. (T1)

I observed their classes and I kind of sat with the students and saw how a teacher is seen at the back of the class in students' eyes. And I had a chance to reflect on my own teaching, also because I thought sometimes I do this, and sitting here and watching this, it is not a good thing. Or maybe if I was him or her, I would do it this way, I think it would create a better classroom atmosphere or it would teach them better so while watching them I was constantly thinking what I would do. So it really really helped my teaching skills, and profession in that sense. (T4)

I looked at my teaching from a different perspective. For example, I had some applications that I hadn't done before and during this period I did activities like peer observation or self-observation, recording my classes or just considering my teaching in terms of my background etc. It helped me a lot. I realized that sometimes I was missing some points and sometimes I realized that although I hadn't given a name to what I had been doing, when I learned that it was in the literature and it was a process of PD, I was very happy myself because I found it out on my own so it made me happy. (T12)

Closely associated with the previous teacher professional development outcome mentioned above, meeting new colleagues with unique backgrounds and expanding professional circles exposed mentors to new, fresh ideas which in turn opened up an opportunity to review their existing teaching beliefs and values. Some participants stated that they came to see the missing points in their teaching thanks to their mentoring tasks such as observing new teachers' classes and providing constructive feedback to those people to them improve their teaching, to enhance student achievement, and to maintain the school quality. While some teachers came to renovate their beliefs about successful language teaching or experienced a change in their attitude towards using certain techniques and strategies, especially that of integrating technology into teaching, some others experienced a sense of empowerment of the existing beliefs about teaching. In other words, mentoring through creating several conditions in which pre-existing beliefs and attitudes might face challenge enabled those teachers to regularly confront and revise some of their beliefs that did not serve to their students. These mentors mostly reported themselves to have gained fresh perspectives through their interaction with younger, enthusiastic colleagues.

When you are a mentor, you question your theory again; you question your belief again. When I was observing a new teacher, I also asked questions about my own teaching and I don't know it changed my practice but it influenced my beliefs, my understandings. I hope to put them in practice. (T5)

I think so because you know it gives you an insight, first of all. And it keeps you alert. It keeps you fresh all the time because sometimes you know how to do things but you may forget to put them into practice. But as being a mentor, you always need to keep things in mind. (T6)

Mentors learn new perspectives, fresh ideas which can help them in their working environment. I think this is very important for their professional development. (T13)

Development means constant change and growth, especially for language teachers who want to keep themselves updated to deal with the needs of their students with unique backgrounds and abilities. Rossner (1992) narrates that "much of TD is seen as relating to new experiences, new challenges and the opportunity [...] to broaden their repertoire and take on new responsibilities and challenges" (p. 4) In fact, even if teacher would like to make time to get together with other teachers and develop professionally, it may not often be possible due to their busy schedules. Some of the participants in this study expressed their appreciation for professional development opportunities made available to them through observing colleagues:

When I was a mentor, I was working for this school for like 6 or 7 years and you know we don't normally observe other people's classes. That year, I stopped working for the testing office and I said this might be a good challenge for me, another challenge for me and I worked as a mentor. (T4)

Being a mentor was a good challenge for me in a couple of ways. First, I had to develop some of my skills. You know, how to cooperate, how to communicate with others. And of course, to provide information, I did more reading and learnt many new things. I think I am a good teacher, and being a good mentor was another challenge I enjoyed facing. (T13)

The third most frequently expressed professional development gain of mentors addressed their motivation and a sense of revitalization through engagement with mentoring program. Some of the participants argued that mentoring experience provided opportunities to keep them motivated and interested in their jobs, and it also prevented teachers from experiencing teacher burnout. This outcome as part of professional development for the mentors encompassed maintaining enthusiasm for teaching profession. Participants mentioned this enthusiasm as a key factor which determined pretty much of the satisfaction they got from

their job as well as the effort they put in their work. Working on the same things for a long period of time, doing the same tasks as if on autopilot might become dull for some teachers. Especially more senior teachers talked about their decreasing fulfillment and loss of spirit in the workplace, among their colleagues or students, and worse still towards teaching year after year. In order to increase commitment and interest, some teachers found mentoring experience as a good opportunity to help them reconnect with their passion for teaching. Hence, according to the following interviewees, mentors most often felt that being in touch with current up to date practices through classroom observations, touching the lives of new teachers and helping shape their future career gave them the energy they in person needed to refresh themselves.

I believe that I always learn something new from my mentees. Sharing their enthusiasm is the best thing that I learn from them. (T8)

I got personal satisfaction and fulfillment from my mentoring relationships. Mentoring gave me a boost. (T14)

Helping new teachers as your new teaching partners is a pricelessly rewarding experience. It makes you feel useful and gives you a sense of satisfaction. When you see that the help you provide to your mentee serve well both for that person and the school on the whole, you do your job with great enthusiasm. (T15)

Lastly, the opportunity to provide guidance to new or less-experienced colleagues, apparently increased mentors' self-confidence and own satisfaction in the workplace. Some mentors underlined the fact that they felt pretty contented in helping a colleague grow professionally and personally. Since mentors had or acquired the ability to manage people with different background, educational beliefs and attitudes, and personality types, they also helped the institution bridge the gap between people that were different than each other but were required to work collaboratively towards a common goal. For that very reason, some mentors felt that their efforts were appreciated by the administration and they were seen as the trusted ones by the school staff.

Having a value, I guess because sometime you are being ignored by other people and people do not know what you are doing in your classroom. And you wanna sometimes show yourself in a place "I am here". So I was seen "Yes, you are here. And we know you. You are doing something good. Maybe you can help us." The institution needed my help. It was a good thing. I would show myself "I could do this, I could do that." Not only teaching, I could do many things. I have seen that I am not ignored. (T11)

For my self-professional needs, it was honorable and satisfactory. (T16)

Another point was that even if a mentee left the school, the mentor and the mentee could still keep in touch and maintain their professional connection. This, in turn, might increase the mentor's professional reputation outside the institution, making him or her inspiring role-model for many.

Another thing is our relationship with the other two, it was not confined to the classroom observations. I talked to them during some other times, during break times, and they asked me about the other things in the school not directly related to the classes. So I think we built a good relationship with them and they felt comfortable talking to me, asking for my opinion. We still keep in touch, they don't work here anymore but we still keep in touch so I think what they tell me is that they saw me as a good model. They told me so, I don't know. So we still have a good relationship. I was available to them whenever they needed. We became friends and this was good, I think. (T4)

In order to evaluate the participants' attitude and perceptions about the effects of mentoring experience on their professional development more deeply, they were asked about

their opinions regarding who they thought benefits most from the mentoring process; mentors or mentees. Table 4 below illustrated the findings:

Table 4. *Mentors vs mentees*

Beneficiary	Number (N)
Mentors	3
Mentees	4
Both equally	9
Other	4

Most of the mentors underlined that they believed both mentors and mentees benefited, and they benefited equally from the mentoring process although the areas they developed themselves professionally may vary. The following interviewee elaborated:

The mentees, newcomers, always need help because everything is new for these people. They don't know anything about the institution, about the rules, about the classes, about classroom management, about many other things. Of course they are taking lots of courses when they are students but it is not enough to be a good teacher. You need lots of practice so they always need help about many points. And mentors, especially if they are working for a long time, may forget some important points in their career so in order to improve themselves, in order to have a better point, they need to refresh their background knowledge. And both mentees and mentors benefit from the program. (T3)

In four of the seventeen responses, mentors argued that it was mentees, as new teachers, who had the biggest gains from mentoring program as indicated by the quotation from an interviewee:

Mentees benefit more because we have already had a lot of experiences. They are new to teaching, to the institution, to students. I mean, they do not know how to handle everything easily in their first few years of career. (T7)

I believe mentees benefit more from the program since they are usually newly graduated teachers with lack of experience so they have a lot to gain. They are not ready to accept their weaknesses and not aware of the needs to improve themselves for their career. (T16)

Some other participants asserted that mentors had more solid benefits as long as their awareness was raised on the value of their job:

I guess mostly the mentors because mentors are generally chosen from group of teachers that are seen to be or thought to be experienced and mentor-like teachers. And but they didn't know or they had no kind of idea how another teacher would be. And he or she, the new coming teacher, doesn't know what you know or what you don't know. He or she is just trembling and trying to do his or her best. But you learn a lot in fact- not the other person. The mentor learns more. This is the beneficial part. And you, especially for our organization here, you can choose the person to work with in fact. With your report, with your observation, with your ideas about that person. You can put a kind of stamp on that: he/she can work or he/she cannot work here. Because these are the good sides and bad sides he or she has shown to the administration and they understand. It is a good side for the mentor that you are trusted by other people. You are put in a state that many teachers are not in so you understand you have a value here. I can understand this. Oh, why me? You start thinking thinking, Oh, OK I have something I guess. So the biggest beneficiary is the mentor I guess. The mentees do not understand what is going on there. Their eyes are some kind of blind. They can't see at that moment. After the observation they don't remember what they have done. I remember everything. (T11)

Some participants, while acknowledging the apparent benefits of mentoring program both for the mentors and the mentees, indicated that it was the institution and students who had the greatest advantages:

While they are being useful to themselves, the bonus is helping the others, the institution, the world and helping our students. That is the most important thing because professionally and personally developed teachers mean professionally and personally developed students. Whatever you do, in the end it must and must affect the student for the better. (T9)

I think not mentor or the mentees. The institution, I think and the students, maybe. Because it is good for the whole situation, whole context. (T5)

Though the answers regarding the group of top beneficiary of the mentoring process varied among the interviewees, all mentors placed a particular importance on making such programs a part of school culture in every institution to increase quality teaching and school prestige by promoting professional development among language teachers. When asked for their opinion, some of the participants pointed out that the conditions for mentoring program should be improved in such ways as providing training to mentors or having a more permanent group of expert mentors.

About the system I think it is a very good and necessary system every school should have this type of activities in their program. And but you see, as I told you, we do it like how we feel doing it, it must be more professional, there must be more professional, solid, maybe more stable unit in which the mentors are dedicated to this program. (T4)

Well, actually it's great and every institution should have that just a commission but a department. Not only for new teachers but for all staff, for the faculty working for the institution. But I think we are not there yet. Maybe one day. (T1)

It must be a component, integral part of our professional goals, but not whole of it. Sometimes people need it. It is good in some ways, I mean. And it must be a part of our profession. (T2)

3. Discussion

Within extensive literature on mentoring programs, mentoring is offered as one of the most valuable professional development opportunities for the mentees who get the chance to have the supervision, encouragement, assistance and confidence of an experienced mentor with a large spectrum of knowledge and insight (Odell & Huling, 2000). Accordingly, mentees are believed to develop their strengths and overcome their weakness by means of that professional guidance enabling opportunities to develop new skills, knowledge and competence in their line of work. Mentees not only develop professionally due to exposure to different ways of thinking and new ideas from experienced colleagues but also gain recognition at workplace. However, mentoring cannot be oversimplified as simply the transfer of knowledge and expertise from the experienced to the inexperienced. There is much more than that as the mentoring relationship which is based upon mutual trust, respect and communication offers two-way advantages to both parties meeting on a regular basis to discuss ideas, share knowledge and awareness, and to further professional development. Viewing mentoring as a professional development tool for mentor teachers, Smith & Nadelson (2016) draw attention to the fact that putting teachers in a mentoring role has profound advantages for these mentor teachers, such as increasing knowledge and reflection on own teaching, better student engagement, and in some instances, shifts in teaching practice.

In a similar vein, the present study was an attempt to investigate the university preparatory school mentors' perceptions of mentoring and their benefits from that mentoring

experience in terms of professional development. In order to find an answer, the following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. How do mentors understand their roles in the mentoring program?
2. How do mentors perceive the mentoring process in enhancing professional development?

Regarding the first research question, the findings showed that mentoring in mentors' eyes is understood in four ways: guiding, observing & giving feedback, encouraging, and orienting. Mentors realize that they bear tremendous responsibility for acclimating mentees to the workplace, and encouraging them to excel at their career. They list certain qualities and skills needed which they believe wholeheartedly will make a good mentor. Most specific of these include being good at communication, having good personal relationships and strong observational skills. Having substantial knowledge about the subject matter besides being experienced is also overemphasized by the mentors in the study. Part of the job of a mentor is to help mentees become enthusiastic about teaching, and to develop positive attitudes towards students, colleagues and the profession itself. Most mentors are of the opinion that they need to be an inspiration to their mentees by showing eagerness in what they do. They also lay great emphasis on creating a non-threatening, friendly, and sincere environment for mentees and mentors to be able to work collaboratively. To do this, mentors need to guide their mentees with patience, empathy, objectivity, and open-mindedness. Listening attentively with the purpose of reflecting is a distinguishing trait of an effective mentor. As a matter of course, not all mentors possess all these qualities inherently; some of them can be acquired and developed over time. That is what makes mentoring a challenging endeavor for many teachers. Successful mentoring is much of a "give and take" relationship between mentors and mentees. Therefore, the reciprocal nature of the process avails mentors in no small measure in terms of their professional development. After all, they feel the need to exercise due care with their mentoring task which lays a big burden on them as a guiding teacher, a supporting colleague, an encouraging facilitator, and a knowledgeable consultant to an inexperienced or a relatively new teacher.

In the same way, the findings for the second research question revealed that teachers' experiences as a mentor have had certain tangible and intangible effects on their professional growth. Some of the primary benefits for mentors in this study include personal satisfaction of sharing their accumulated experience and fund of knowledge with a new, eager colleague ready to develop professionally. This sense of satisfaction is further enhanced by the recognition of mentors as an expert on the subject matter by their peers and the institution. Being in touch with many different mentees with unique skills and attitudes, mentors also gain new perspectives by exposing themselves to fresh, brand-new ideas. Hence, this prompts mentors to go through their own approaches and beliefs, and to reflect critically on their own practices. Eventually, mentors develop a culture of professional development with a sense of renewal and a deeper insight into their profession. In line with the findings of the present study and the related studies (Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Hawk, 1986, 1987; Wollman-Bonilla, 1997; Yosha, 1991), the following conclusions can be made on how the experience of mentoring novice teachers helps mentors' professional development:

1. Through their interaction with mentees, some of whom are well-equipped with most recent approaches and innovations in their field, mentors take a great opportunity to update themselves on current issues in teaching as they happen.
2. While making a series of classroom observations, mentors also gain better self-awareness and deeper insights into teaching, which ends up with their reflecting on own practices. On one hand they revise or completely give up some strategies or

beliefs about teaching that do not serve to the needs and interests of their students. On the other hand, they improve and sustain their best practices which seem to have worked well.

3. Having developed professional relationships and expanding their social and professional circles, mentors boost their peer recognition. They also feel valued and respected by the school administration thanks to their demanding task of mentoring.
4. They achieve higher fulfillment in the workplace through helping others by means of providing advice and guidance, assisting them with problem-solving, and supporting their professional development. Discussing several issues with mentees help mentors renew their social skills needed for an effective mentoring relationship. They practice and improve their interpersonal and communication skills.

4. Conclusion

All in all, at some point in their career, some language teachers might have considered becoming a mentor but gave up on the idea by thinking that it would not worth the time, energy, or self-devotion to be invested into the process and it is only the mentees that benefit from it. However, it should be kept in mind that it is a real win-win path in which both parties have their own benefits. As this study has revealed, a great deal of mentoring experience gives mentors several opportunities to develop their skills as a teacher, to keep themselves updated, to develop a more respected and wanted image within the institution, and last but not least to revitalize their teaching energy. The examination of benefits of mentoring experience for mentors in terms of their professional development in this study will hopefully contribute to the body of knowledge in the existing literature.

Considering the nature and scope of the present study to explore the effects of mentoring process on the professional development of mentor teachers, the following areas could be explored by other researchers in further studies. First of all, the study was carried out in a preparatory school at university level; there is a need for further research to be carried out in different educational contexts to see how mentors view their roles and what benefits they have from it in terms of their professional growth. In addition to that, it would be interesting to take different variables such as age, gender, or years of experience into consideration in shaping their perceptions of mentorship, and in affecting their professional development gains.

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