



Vertical Peer Mentoring in Teacher Education: Narratives of Growth, Reflection and Leadership

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Abstract:

As teacher education in India evolves, peer-led support systems within practice teaching offer an effective way to enhance student teachers' professional growth. This study examines vertical mentoring—where student teachers guide their classmates—among 44 second-year B.Ed. students (5 males) at G.H. Sanghavi Shikshan Mahavidhyalaya, Bhavnagar. Using qualitative data gathered from interviews, group discussions, and reflective journals, the paper explores how peer mentoring contributes to classroom readiness, emotional resilience, and leadership emergence within teacher trainees. The findings reveal that structured vertical mentorship not only reduces novice anxiety but also cultivates collaborative learning, reflective practice, and a strong professional identity among future educators.

Keywords: Vertical Peer Mentoring, Practice teaching, Teacher Education, Narratives of Growth, Reflection and Leadership

1. Introduction

Teacher training demands more than curriculum knowledge; it requires students to navigate real classroom challenges while developing their professional identities. Vertical mentoring, wherein student teachers support their peers, stands out as a nuanced strategy to address these needs by providing relatable guidance and mutual encouragement. This relational approach complements formal faculty mentoring by filling crucial gaps related to day-to-day teaching realities, emotional support, and practical advice in the Indian education context (Dickson et al.)

While faculty mentors play a pivotal role in assessing pedagogical progress, peers often serve as accessible companions who understand the lived experiences of practice teaching. Through peer-to-peer mentorship, the learning environment becomes more democratic, experiential, and inclusive—allowing trainees to develop both competence and confidence in teaching diverse learners.

2. Objectives of the Study

The present study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To explore how vertical peer mentoring influences the professional development and emotional confidence of student teachers.
2. To analyze how peer-led mentoring contributes to leadership, collaboration, and a sense of professional belonging among B.Ed. trainees.
3. To identify challenges and potential strategies for effectively embedding vertical mentoring within teacher education programs.

3. Methodology

Participants included 44 second-year B.Ed. students from G.H.Sanghavi Shikshan Mahavidhyalaya,

Bhavangar, with five male trainees and 39 females, all engaged in extended practice teaching placements. Data collection combined semi-structured interviews, group discussions, and a series of reflective journal entries. A thematic analysis approach was undertaken to identify recurrent patterns and perceptions across learners' narratives. The credibility of the data was strengthened through triangulation of sources and member-checking procedures.

4. Findings

4.1 Emotional Support and Gaining Confidence

Novice teachers frequently expressed how receiving reassurance from peers eased their apprehensions about teaching.

"Entering a classroom alone was intimidating at first. But my mentor's words, 'just keep going,' really kept me going," said one trainee.

Another noted, "Hearing from peers that they are also struggling helped me feel I'm not alone in this."

Beyond reassurance, mentees emphasized the empathetic nature of peer mentors, who understood their struggles more intuitively than faculty did. Such connections created a culture of psychological safety that encouraged open communication and self-expression.

4.2 Sharing Practical Teaching Wisdom

Mentees valued their mentors' hands-on advice regarding lesson planning, interactive activities suited for local students, and managing classroom behaviors.

"My mentor shared simple but effective lesson ideas adapted to our schools, which made planning lessons less stressful," reflected a student.

A male participant remarked, "Watching my mentor calmly handle disruptions made me understand how to keep patience and stay composed."

The study found that peer mentors acted as think tanks of putting the concept practically. They demonstrated micro-skills—like voice modulation, body language, and classroom management—often overlooked in textbooks. This practical wisdom strengthened mentees' readiness for real classrooms and supported adaptive teaching strategies suited to diverse learners.

Fostering a Sense of Community and Belonging

Many participants reported that mentoring groups created safe spaces for discussing problems and successes, cultivating a shared professional identity.

"Our mentor group became a place where we openly talked about teaching struggles and successes, which made this journey feel less boring."

"Being one of the few males, it helped to discuss classroom management issues with peer mentors who understood my perspective," shared a participant.

4.3 Reflection and Self-Awareness

Reflective journals, coupled with mentor feedback, encouraged trainees to critically examine their teaching actions and attitudes.

"Writing reflections after teaching and sharing them with my mentor helped me see things more clearly and scientifically."

Such reflective dialogues turned isolated experiences into shared learning. Mentees reported an increased ability to self-assess, accept constructive criticism, and view mistakes as growth opportunities—an essential attribute for lifelong learning in teaching.

4.4 Leadership and Future Aspirations

Several students expressed motivation to continue the cycle of peer support through leadership roles in mentoring future batches.

“Being part of this supportive system gives me confidence to take initiative in my future school.”

This indicates how vertical mentoring nurtures leadership and self-efficacy. It promotes sustainability and continuity in teacher preparation programs.

5. Discussion

The narratives reveal peer mentoring as a multifaceted support system that complements formal faculty guidance by addressing emotional, practical, and professional development needs of student teachers. The scenario of vertical mentoring offers unique advantages in the Indian teacher education landscape, where classroom realities vary widely across socio-economic and linguistic contexts.

Moreover, the study uncovered that vertical mentoring develops reciprocal accountability: mentees felt responsible not only for learning but for upholding the mentoring culture. The process created a micro-community of practice, mirroring Wenger's (1998) concept, where knowledge was co-constructed through dialogue, observation, and reflection.

6. Analysis

The thematic patterns suggest that vertical peer mentoring operates across three interrelated dimensions—emotional scaffolding, professional skill development, and identity formation.

1. Emotional Scaffolding

Mentoring relationships provided affective safety and confidence to student teachers. Through empathy, peers helped normalize the initial stress of teaching, redefining difficulties as universal challenges, which bolstered emotional resilience and continued effort.

2. Professional Skill Development

Practical experience, rather than just theory, enhanced teaching competence. Mentors illustrated crucial real-world skills such as spontaneous teaching adjustments, managing a classroom effectively, and modifying available resources.

3. Identity Formation and Leadership

Through mentorship, individuals developed their professional identity via feelings of connection and empowerment. As mentees evolved into mentors, they internalized leadership qualities, reflective thinking, and a sense of contribution to the teaching community.

However, analysis also highlighted certain constraints—limited time for mentoring sessions, inconsistent mentor preparation, and lack of institutional recognition. Despite these, the organic nature of peer mentoring allowed flexible adaptation, suggesting its scalability in similar educational settings.

7. Conclusion

Vertical peer mentoring holds notable promise as a sustainable, low-cost, and effective practice within India's teacher training programs. When formal structures fell short, the genuine connection and adaptability of peers carried the program. This proves the value of a flexible, human-centered support system that can be easily shared and implemented in various learning environments.

Incorporating structured peer mentoring into B.Ed. curricula can enrich professional growth, reduce

isolation, and empower emerging educators towards reflective practice and leadership.

8. Recommendations

- Embed vertical mentoring systematically in teacher education programs with clear mentor roles.
- Encourage regular mentor-mentee meetings and reflective journaling exercises.
- Provide mentor training workshops emphasizing communication, feedback, and emotional intelligence.
- Foster inclusivity by pairing mentors and mentees across gender and background.
- Recognize and reward mentoring contributions as part of professional evaluation.

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