

Mentoring: A Pathway Towards Continuous Professional Development of Teachers

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Abstract

The ever-evolving scenarios in school education necessitate teachers to recognise the significance of lifelong learning for their Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Among several ways of CPD, Mentorship is one of the approaches. According to the United Nations (UN) 2020, mentoring is a collaborative learning relationship between two individuals that leads to insights, decision making, planning and action, and facilitates professional and personal development. This paper focuses on exploring the role of mentoring in the CPD of school teachers by critically examining the prevalent practices and mapping ways to develop an organic connection between mentor and mentee. This exploratory study was conducted with in-service and pre-service teachers. The study highlights two major field-based realities. Firstly, the pre-service teachers had not given any thought to the idea of CPD as this component was not discussed as part of the course syllabi, and there were few opportunities within the overall curriculum to discuss the lived experiences of a school teacher. The in-service teachers, on the other hand, shared scepticism about the need and effectiveness of a teacher mentoring another teacher. Their lack of readiness for mentoring was evidently noticeable. Firmly grounded in a meticulous understanding of the field, acquired through this study, the researchers proposed a 'VSP Model of Mentorship' which advocates designing the mentoring process based on interlinkages across the three dynamic aspects of mentorship: *Values, Skills and Process* for optimising the outcome of the programme.

Keywords: Mentoring, Continuous Professional Development (CPD), In-service Teachers, & Pre-service student-teachers.

Prelude

My diploma training course class included experienced government school teachers on deputation, postgraduate students of psychology and PhD research scholars. We were required to attend classes on campus on weekdays.

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On a cold winter morning, I arrived early in the classroom and saw a group of seven teachers and three postgraduate trainees sitting in a circle and intensely discussing something. I went closer to them and tried to understand the context of their discussion. They were discussing “Last year, we attended workshops, seminars, and capacity building programmes.” A postgraduate trainee asked, “How was your experience of attending these programmes?” They replied, “Those were helpful to some extent, but there was little scope for discussing the classroom-related challenges we faced at the individual level. These minor problems collectively become major ones and create stress.” They further added that, “Everyone has huge expectations from us- parents want good marks for their children, and principals expect excellent results”. Additionally, they shared, “Students come from different backgrounds and their pace of learning is different. It is very difficult to cater to the needs of all the students in just 40 minutes.” Every week or month, they have to attend or organise different programs or activities as required by the national or state-level educational bodies. Furthermore, the teachers discussed that some concerns from CPD programmes can be resolved, but our classroom-related problems remain unaddressed by the in-service programmes and persist over time. Meanwhile, the professor came into the classroom, and everyone returned to their seats.

This discussion reveals that school teachers face many challenges in their classrooms and schools. They experience various types of pressure that contribute to creating stress, which is challenging to manage at the individual level. The discussion also, indicates that existing practices related to CPD are insufficient to address the real-time and space challenges faced by the teachers. There are no systemic mechanisms to upskill teachers and resolve issues faced by them individually. In such a scenario, a methodically planned CPD programme for school teachers is a prerequisite.

Mentoring school teachers is one of the responsive approaches that has the potential to address the individual needs of the teachers in a specific context. Mentoring is a long-established process that provides on-site support at the individual level to school teachers for upskilling, growth and capacity building. Mentoring of teachers lies at the core of the education system, as it has immense transformative potential. It is not about passing on the torch of knowledge from the mentor to the mentee, but a belief in 'commitment to education, hope for its future, and a respect for those who enter into its community' (Shadiow, 1996).

Mentoring, School, and Teachers

The word Mentor means "adviser," because in this form it is an agent noun of *mentos* "intent, purpose, spirit, passion" from Proto-Indo-European **mon-eyo-* (source also of Sanskrit *man-tar-* "one who thinks," Latin *mon-i-tor* "one who admonishes"), causative form of root **men* "to think" (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.) Numerous studies show that the first time the concept of mentoring appeared was in the Greek mythological poem of Homer's epic "The Odyssey," approximately 3000 years ago. This poem describes the journey of Odysseus, the king and his young son Telemachus. Odysseus had to join the Trojan War for a long time, and he left his son in the care of a trusted friend who supported and nurtured him. After this, the concept of mentoring was established and was practised, and that friend was called a mentor (Sak & Ros, 2025).

Mentoring is a process in which the more experienced personnel in the organisation guide the less experienced employees and help them solve various performance and development-related issues (Anthony, 2020). A mentor helps the mentee gain knowledge and develop the required skills and attitude to achieve the mutually agreed goals. Primarily, people associate experience with age, but it is essential to understand that a mentor requires both experience and competency, which are not necessarily associated with age or the length of service. A mentor must have skill sets, values, and work experience. For instance, an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) professional with the necessary knowledge, relevant skill sets, and practical hands-on experience can mentor a teacher who has been teaching in schools for many years. Upon reviewing various definitions of mentoring, researchers found that the mentoring process lacks a clear definition that captures its true essence. There is no universal definition of mentoring; earlier research also shows the same issues that no definition fully encapsulates all the nuances of the depth of the mentoring concept (Riforgiate, 2025, et al.). For conceptualising the mentoring, we meticulously analysed various available definitions in literature, explored the field of related practices of mentoring, historical & contemporary, and conducted rigorous brainstorming sessions. Based on this, Mentoring is described as a process in which one competent expert professional of their field, with the help of purpose-based, formal & structured interaction, leads to enhanced contextual expertise and the development of essential skills to facilitate another person's professional growth.

Literature highlighted that mentoring contributes positively to teachers' professional growth and equips them to navigate their day-to-day complex problems by providing on-site support at the individual level. Mentoring for school teachers has been implemented in various developed countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Asian and Scandinavian countries. Other than this, mentoring induction programs are ongoing in Canada, Russia, Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa, Norway, Finland, Israel and Singapore. The impact of mentoring is positive in addressing concerns of the teachers at the individual level. It contributes to improving their professional competency, leadership skills, problem-solving skills, bolsters their reflection skills, provides emotional support, increases their pedagogical knowledge, enhances self-esteem, increases classroom management abilities, classroom instructions become better, and improves teaching effectiveness and teacher collaboration, leading to their career advancement (Gontur et al., 2024). Through mentoring, teachers get equipped to manage their stress and burnout, caused by the pressure created due to ineffectual management of other school-related activities. Ultimately, mentoring contributes to the growth of teachers and to a better learning environment for students. Literature also supports this argument and demonstrates that effective mentorship leads to a range of positive outcomes, not only for teachers and schools, but also for the broader educational ecosystem (Mwesigwa & Nakato, 2026).

Mentoring Leads to Continuous Professional Development

Recent empirical research reveals that structured mentorship programs not only enhance teachers' pedagogical knowledge but also foster Continuous Professional Development by providing contextual individual support (Sadeghi & Richard, 2021). Mentoring is a basic pathway to facilitate sustainable, Continuous Professional Development. School is a dynamic space where learning scenarios change periodically across an academic year. This changing scenario requires teachers to continuously update their knowledge and upskill themselves to fulfil the demands of the teaching profession. The systemic approach to pre-service and in-service professional learning has a profound influence on the quality of teaching in its classrooms. Moreover, pre- and in-service professional learning are increasingly seen as an interconnected continuum. (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2025). The foundation of continuous professional learning needs to be developed at the pre-service

level, which further evolves at the in-service level. The Indian education system has aptly recognised this necessity and has established platforms to facilitate CPD for in-service teachers. Among these are DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing), NISHTHA (National Initiative for School Heads and Teachers Holistic Development), SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active-Learning for young aspiring Minds), PM e-Vidya channels, and alike. Many programs are organised in the form of workshops, seminars, webinars, online lecture series, conferences or other forms of capacity-building programmes for professional growth and development of the school teachers. However, these efforts are only addressing the common group concerns of the teachers. These programs fall short due to the complex interplay of contextual and systemic factors influencing educational quality (Asiyah et al., 2021). Therefore, CPD programs requires to plan how to include professional development within teachers' schooling hours. According to the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) report of 2024-25, the total number of schools is 1471473, and the total number of teachers is 10122420. For such a large number of school teachers, a systematic mechanism is required in Indian schools for continuous growth and professional development at the individual level. The existing in-service programs are based on the system's expectation, so these are planned in groups for overall mobility. But to strengthen the system, the individual teachers need to be the focus. Mentoring is an appropriate mechanism to address this need and create an ecology wherein individual teachers are empowered to raise the learning curve of students in the school.

Mentoring: The Process and The Practice

The literature review indicates that mentoring is an institutionalised practice in many countries across the globe. Western countries like the United States, for the last two decades, have had high attention towards mentoring to address challenges faced by teachers, which contribute to the improvement of their educational system (Chawla, 2021). However, the school systems in India do not have mentoring as an accepted pursuit. At the very few places where mentoring was experimented with as an institutional practice, it met with resistance owing to the overall unpreparedness of both, the mentors and the mentees. This field needs to be meticulously explored in India, as it requires an in-depth understanding of the field complexity.

Practices of Mentoring: Traces from The History

India has a lived tradition and rich culture of mentoring. From ancient times, mentoring has been established as an effective process to nurture the potential of the mentee. An investigation of the historical document highlights the famous anecdote from the history of Chanakya-Chandragupta, which demonstrates the presence of mentoring in ancient India. The Mauryan Empire was established by Chandragupta Maurya and became one of the finest empires of India, instituting a strong, efficient model of governance. He accomplished all this under the mentorship of Chanakya, who, with his appropriate strategy, was the strength behind Chandragupta's early achievements and rise to power. Chanakya unfolded the latent potential of Chandragupta and nurtured his abilities with persistent focus and wisdom. There is no doubt that Chandragupta had amazing executive abilities; it was the wisdom of Chanakya that enabled the king to use his skills to the maximum (Prahallada, M.A., 2020). From the recent past, Hardy-Ramanujan is yet another significant instance of mentoring. Indian Mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan Aiyangar, a high ability mathematician, without any formal education in mathematics, has made an unprecedented contribution to the world of mathematics. He was the 2nd Indian elected as a fellow of the Royal Society. Ramanujan was mentored by G.H Hardy at Trinity College, Cambridge University, in 1914. Hardy didn't take much time in identifying that Ramanujan was an exceptional mathematician with innate raw potential that needed to be channelised and directed. He understood that Ramanujan's algorithms needed to be explained in the prevalent language of mathematics to be understood by the community at large. The two men collaborated and, through consistent work together, revolutionised the field of number theory. Hardy worked instrumentally in putting forward the genius work of Ramanujan in front of the world (Kanigel, 1991). These cases demonstrate how mentorship helps in bringing excellence and contributes to mentees' growth and achievements. In both examples, the mentors identified the potential of their mentees at an early stage and nurtured the raw innate potential of their mentees by consistently and collaboratively working together.

Traces of Mentoring in Contemporary India

Likewise, in contemporary times, the Literature highlights that in different countries, formal mentoring is practised in the educational system. For the last decade, the schools in India have made some efforts in this direction. In 2007-2009, a research project was conducted on "Mentoring in Delhi Schools (MINDS)". This project was conducted under the aegis of the UK-

India Education as a Research Initiative. The Open University, UK, and the Department of Education, University of Delhi, collaborated on this project. The project aimed at working out a feasible system that would work and facilitate the process of Continuous Professional Development. This project tried to design a mentoring scheme that provided opportunities for practising teachers to become reflective practitioners in a critical but supportive and collaborative setup in the school. In 2016, the Department of Education in Delhi launched a mentoring programme across public schools in Delhi. A critical examination of the programme revealed systemic unskillfulness as a key hindrance in the successful implementation of the programme.

The visionary National Education Policy 2020 also recognises the significance of Mentoring for the CPD of teachers in paragraph number 15.11 *“A National Mission for Mentoring shall be established, with a large pool of outstanding senior/retired faculty – including those with the ability to teach in Indian languages – who would be willing to provide short and long-term mentoring/professional support to university/college teachers.”* It recommends establishing a National Mission for Mentoring (NMM) to provide professional support to faculty/teachers. It advocates for establishing a nationwide system of mentoring as an integral part of CPD for school teachers. Rooted in the vision of NEP 2020, the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) has designed a robust system of mentoring as the National Mission for Mentoring at Pan India level. This programme is gradually flourishing across different parts of India.

The critical understanding of the need and significance of mentoring derived through literature review and field exploration provided direction to this research study. The CPD is an approach to capacity building that essentially includes both pre-service and in-service components of the program. With this basic understanding, the research was conceptualised into two phases, where phase one focused on the in-service segment and phase two focused on the pre-service component of CPD. The Phase two of the study with pre-service student-teachers was designed on the basis of gaps located in phase one.

Research Design: A Two-Phase Design

This study was conducted to explore the impact of field-based processes and real-time practices of mentoring. For this purpose, a qualitative research approach was used as it provided opportunities for conducting a context-specific, descriptive and exploratory study. Pre-service

and in-service professional learning are increasingly seen as an interconnected continuum. The foundation of continuous professional learning is expected to be instilled at the pre-service level, which evolves gradually at the in-service level. That is why two phases are strategically structured to gather comprehensive data from both in-service and preservice teachers. Hence, the study was conducted in two phases, involving both in-service and pre-service student-teachers.

Phase 1: In-Service Teachers

The Delhi Mentoring programme was an opportunity to understand the field-based in-service school teachers' experiences towards mentoring, identifying related challenges and drawing inferences for better planning of the mentoring process for the teachers. In this, a non-probability sampling technique was used. Data was collected through the purposive sampling method from different schools across Delhi. For this study, the researchers have used a self-prepared, expert-validated, semi-structured interview schedule for data collection. This tool was administered across the existing three levels, that is, Primary teachers (PRTs), Trained Graduate Teachers (TGTs), and Post Graduate Teachers (PGTs). As this study was qualitative, thematic analysis was done on the collected data.

Phase 2: Pre-service teachers

To further explore the other edge of the continuum, the field of pre-service student-teachers was investigated. Since pre-service teacher education is a precursor to the in-service teachers, teaching practices at the in-service level are a consequence of learnings from pre-service teacher preparation programme. This part of the study was aimed at identifying the learning opportunities about CPD during the programme. An analysis of the curriculum of teacher preparation programme was also done. A non-probability sampling technique was used to select the sample. Since the focus was on assessing the understanding of the pre-service teachers about the mentoring process, the purposive sampling was found appropriate. So, the data was collected through the purposive sampling method from seventy pre-service student-teachers who were in the final stage of the programme after completing a school internship. A semi-structured questionnaire was employed for the purpose. After the collection of the data, thematic analysis was done. This part of the study contributed to understanding whether or not the pre-service teachers felt the need for CPD, onsite support, and mentoring.

Findings

As discussed earlier, the study was conducted in a phased manner to develop an in-depth understanding of the key aspects of mentoring in the Indian education system. A comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the data is presented herein, as findings of this study for further deliberations.

Findings of Phase 1: In-Service Teachers

The Delhi Directorate of Education recognises the significance of mentoring for the professional growth of school teachers and has built in the mentoring programme as part of the system. The documentation of the experiential journey of various school teachers provided deeper insights into the strengths, challenges and gaps in optimising the outcome of this programme. Findings revealed that mentors were getting rigorous training, but no such training or orientation was organised for the mentees. Since this process involves the mentor and the mentee as collaborators, the training of both is equally important for enhancing the overall efficacy of mentoring programme. This created a significant gap in the implementation of the programme. Findings also revealed that the mentee teachers have a negative attitude toward mentoring. Teachers' readiness, motivation and acceptance for mentoring were missing. Mostly, teachers said, "We are teachers, who can mentor us." This kind of attitude towards the mentoring process is very challenging. The mentee has raised the question about the entire process of mentoring. The need, utility, and significance of the mentoring programme were questioned. The training sessions for mentee teachers would have addressed these queries, as such a negative attitude hinders the successful implementation of the Programme. Previous researches have also shown that the negative consequences of this kind of attitude, such as disrespect and lack of trust, were major negative attitudes that militated against the success of teachers' mentoring in these schools (Ebunoluwa, 2018).

Findings of Phase 2: Pre-Service Teachers

This segment of the study provided evidence for comprehending the assimilated learning about CPD from different components of the pre-service programme. The Curriculum analysis of the pre-service teacher training programme revealed that the content related with the need and importance of CPD and mentoring in a teacher's professional life was not part of any course

offered as part of the programme. Even in the practicum part themes related with CPD were not found. Data collected from pre-service teachers communicates that they do not feel the need for support during various challenging situations as they have theoretically learnt all the know-how and will be able to manage learning in their classrooms. Also, they didn't think that consistent hand-holding is required in real school situations. During this journey of preparing them as school teachers, the need and significance of CPD is not evidently discussed with them. Additionally, they had never been oriented to the need to attend workshops, seminars, webinars, capacity enrichment programmes, etc.

The findings highlighted that both CPD and mentoring are missing in the curriculum, and it impacted pre-service teachers' understanding towards the importance of professional growth and development at the in-service level. Research conducted in South Korea also highlighted a similar concern of including content on CPD in the curriculum of pre-service teachers' training Programs (Santos, 2019).

Discussion

For effective implementation, school teachers must understand its significance, have awareness about mentoring and contribute to their continuous professional development. Findings highlighted the major gaps that exist in the teacher education field, which are bound to create challenges in the successful implementation of mentoring if not addressed in time. This research establishes that at the pre-service level, the understanding of CPD and Mentoring is missing. Findings at the in-service level highlighted that readiness, acceptance and motivation for mentoring are also missing. It interrelates the learning gaps during the pre-service programme with recognising its significance as a regular school teacher. It is a major missing link hindering the process of effective implementation of mentoring. It is important that the pre-service level curriculum include content on CPD and different ways of working towards it. At the in-service level, before implementing any mentoring programme, a specific focus on developing teachers' readiness, acceptance and motivation is required. When teachers will start understanding the significance of CPD in their professional life and understand mentoring as a valuable approach to their development, the acceptance towards mentoring will eventually grow.

Educational Implications

For the successful implementation of mentoring, in-depth, rigorous explorations and reflections about all these experiences raise the need to address the explored gaps. To address the classroom and school-related problems faced by teachers, it is important to provide on-site support at the individual level through mentoring. This study recommends including the content or specific units on CPD and Mentoring into the Teacher Training curriculum, which helps in understanding the importance of CPD in their professional life. The study emphasises that, along with planning and organising the mentoring programme, the training and orientation of both the mentor and mentee are essential for the successful implementation of the programme. The goals located in the existing practices can be addressed by recognising the need for intrinsic motivation and inculcating a firm belief in the process of mentoring as an effective form of CPD for school teachers. Building on this foundation, the study proposes the “VSP Model of Mentorship” as a way forward. This is an all-inclusive approach to mentoring firmly rooted in the premise that the successful implementation of mentoring requires radical changes in the way this process is conceptualised and designed.

A VSP (Values, Skills, and Process) model of Mentorship

This Model consists of three dynamic aspects of Mentorship: Process, Skills, and Values and their sub-aspects necessary for mentoring. All these aspects are interlinked and influence each other. Values are visualised as the ground and the skills as the tools. It is proposed that the processes should be meticulously cultivated through these values and skills by both the mentee and the mentor. If the process of mentoring lacks anyone aspect, then it will impact the overall outcome. For example, if the value aspects are missing, then the foundation of mentoring will be very weak and hinder the development of essential skills. Similarly, if the skill aspect is deficient, for instance, time management is weak, then from the process aspect, goal achievement will be compromised. This model addresses the individual needs and can be adapted or adopted as per the needs of mentees. This mentorship model is universal, as it can be effective on a global scale. While time, context and field may change, foundational principles remain the same and equally effective in this Model.

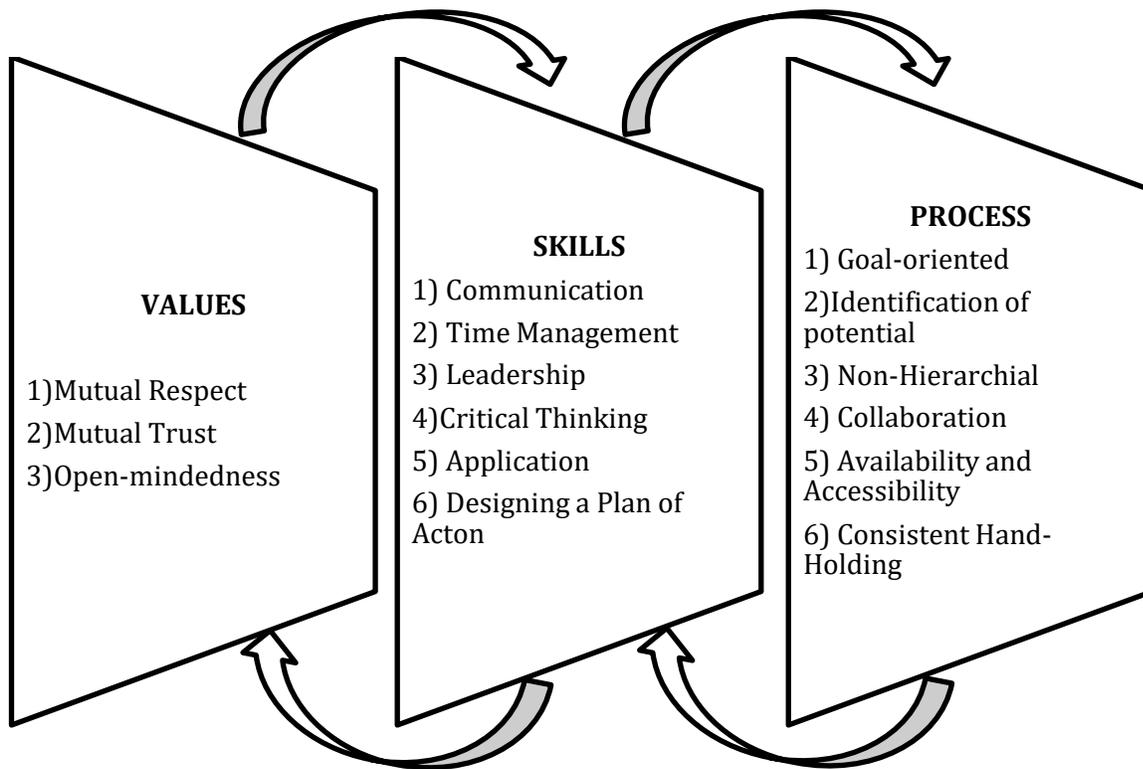


Figure 1. VSP Model of Mentorship

The first aspect of this model is values; these are the foundations of impactful mentorship. Its basic sub-aspects are mutual trust, mutual respect and open-mindedness; they are crucial for developing a strong mentor-mentee relationship.

The Second aspect is skills, which consists of communication, time management, leadership, critical thinking, application and developing a plan of action. These are the tools crucial for fulfilling the purpose of the process.

The third aspect is process, and its sub-aspects are Goal-oriented, Identification of potential, Non-Hierarchical, Collaboration, Availability & Accessibility and Consistent Hand-Holding. These need to be meticulously cultivated through the first two aspects, values and skills, by both mentor and mentee in the mentorship.

All these aspects and their sub-aspects are required for designing and implementing an effective mentoring process for school teachers across different levels of school education.

Conclusion

The last five years have witnessed many unprecedented changes in the field of school education due to the implementation of NEP 2020. It is, therefore, critical to mention that this study was conducted in 2022-24. Subsequently, the NMM programme has been launched by NCTE. It is an extremely significant move towards nurturing the learning experiences of each student in the school by providing continued prospects for enhancing the skills and competencies of teachers. Alongside, the fresh approach to teacher education with programmes like the Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) is set to change the scenarios in school education. This programme includes CPD and mentoring as an integral part of the curricular structure. To conclude summarily, the positive impact of mentoring on CPD of the school teachers is well established, and a meticulously planned programme rooted in requisite values, advanced skills and well-developed processes is paramount to successfully transform schools as a learning community.

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