

EDU WORLD 2022**Edu World International Conference Education Facing Contemporary World Issues****QUALITY MENTORING FOR THE TEACHING CAREER**

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Abstract

The article presents the results of a study conducted within the project "Professionalization of the teaching career - PROF" (POCU / 904/6/25/146587), focused on the application of the principles of quality management in teaching mentorship. The aim of the study was to identify the opinions of mentor teachers who participated in the Prof II training program as regards the application of the principles of quality management in professional mentorship to increase the quality of teaching practice of future teachers. The conclusions of the research highlight specific ways mentor teachers utilize in order to apply the principles of quality management, starting with the focus on the future teacher, the leadership in mentorship, the result-orientation of quality mentorship, the process-based approach, the approach to management as a system. Moreover, learning, innovation, and continuous quality improvement, fact-based approach in decision-making, the involvement of future teachers in the process of their own professional training were highlighted.

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1. Introduction

The training programme for teacher's training mentors (PROF II) is limited to the project "Professionalization of the teaching career - PROF" (n.d.), which is the second systemic training programme tailored for teachers teaching in the pre-academic education system in Romania. This programme aims at meeting the needs of mentor teacher trainers, coordinators of teaching practice and / or continuous training programmes, in a mentorship system within the teacher's training bases (TTB), on curricular areas / fields.

The partnership developed within the project "Professionalization of teaching career - PROF" is led by the Ministry of Education (beneficiary of the project) and brings together four universities from Romania (Lucian Blaga University from Sibiu, Transilvania University from Braşov, Dunărea de Jos University from Galaţi, University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science and Technology George Emil Palade from Târgu Mureş) and 11 Departments of teaching staff from Romania.

The training programme "PROF II - Mentorship of teaching practice" was implemented in stages, by the four partner universities in the project, as providers of continuing education, with the help of selected training experts, teachers with recognized professional expertise in the field of educational mentoring both from academia, and pre-academic environment.

Among the objectives of the "PROF II-Mentorship of teaching practice" programme several worth mentioning. Firstly, the efficient management of teaching practice activities accomplished by utilising quality tools to acquire skills specific to the teaching profession; secondly, the facilitation of the practice of professional behaviours relevant to the teaching profession and a variety of professional and didactic roles, directly in school, by situating and utilising the activating methodology. Moreover, another objective is that of facilitating the integration process of students, who attend the teaching practice programme, in schools. This can be obtained by students' knowledge of the specific activities developed in schools, of the functionality of internal structures of schools, of school and classroom management. Additionally, other aims of the programme are related to conducting teaching practice activities in accordance with the latest psycho-pedagogical and educational reform trends, facilitating teaching practice activities in the virtual environment, highlighting, and capitalizing on the potential of online learning platforms to streamline teaching. Furthermore, the management of the teaching practice activity at combined groups, in the simultaneous education system and in the alternative education system in order to ensure that students can understand and comply with the particularities, opportunities, and specific constraints, etc represent another valuable aim of the programme.

The training of trainers and mentor teachers of teaching practice within the programme "PROF II-Mentorship of teaching practice" involved the completion of six training modules, totalling 120 hours of training, with the following topics:

- i. Mentorship of teaching practice - premise of generating quality in education;
- ii. Professionalization of the teaching career through the mentorship of teaching practice - policies and directions of action;
- iii. Mentoring the design of the teaching activity;
- iv. Management of teaching practice activities;
- v. Teaching practice portfolio;

vi. Assessment and self-assessment of teaching practice activities

The process of continuous training of teachers in the target group developed between February and June 2022 in the format of learning communities, with an emphasis on the immediate implementation of the skills acquired during training in a mentoring context.

2. Problem Statement

The problem of the quality of teaching practice activities concerns both the coordinators of teaching practice in universities and the mentor teachers in the application schools, interested in the training / development of professional and transversal skills of future teachers, as well as the promotion of best educational benchmarks relevant to the teaching profession. This justifies the need to train / develop the skills to plan, control, ensure, and improve the quality of teaching practice activities to PROF II students. Moreover, it can be accomplished by knowing and applying the principles of quality management in teaching practice, and, by acting on its functional components.

Only through a quality management of teaching practice activities can a quality mentoring be ensured and, therefore, a good training of future teachers. In this context, it is considered relevant to refer, in the mentoring process, to the basic requirements for a quality management system promoted by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO 9001) standards and the key principles of quality management, which will be discussed further and which are of interest to be applied within the teaching practice programme.

The principle of focusing on the student-practitioner attending the mentorship of teaching practice programme. The student-centred orientation within the teaching practice is a trend consistent with the more general concerns of considering quality assurance as a process of obtaining the recipient's satisfaction and trust (Knouse et al., 2009; Reeves et al., 2022).

The principle requires the mentoring team to demonstrate abilities of becoming acquainted and networking with the student. Such skills should be utilised deliberately in the design, development, and evaluation of the teaching practice activities to identify the needs and interests as regards the teaching practice training and professional development of the group of student-practitioners and of each student-practitioner. Moreover, other abilities relate to the abiding concern to meet the expectations of the students regarding the teaching practice programme, the preoccupation of global development of the students, with emphasis on the refinement and practical exercise of professional knowledge and personal development and non-cognitive acquisitions (professional motivation, self-efficacy, empathy, sense of belonging, etc.).

Moreover, the principle requires the direct involvement of student-practitioners in the design, monitoring, and regulation of the practice programme, in an exercise of co-creating an optimized programme. In this context, it is essential that the mentor should focus on the development of the mentoring relationship and on testing the recipients' satisfaction regarding the quality of the programme. Of equal importance is the approach of the assessment by ensuring degrees of flexibility and personalization of teaching practice products that are the object of the formative and summative assessment.

The principle of leadership in teaching practice mentorship. The leadership in educational mentorship is the process by which the mentor or the teaching practice coordinator exerts influence on the student-practitioners, in order to motivate and involve the free consent of the students to achieve the goals of the teaching practice programme. The leader position of the mentor and of the coordinator, in the internships of teaching practice employs their ability to mobilize, motivate, organize, and lead the group of student-practitioners towards setting and achieving the objectives of teaching practice. Within the teaching practice programme, the idea of practicing transformational leadership focused on the needs of the group of student-practitioners to ensure their co-participation in achieving common goals and to encourage their wellbeing can be developed (Lasater et al., 2021).

In applying the principle of leadership, the mentor adopts a proactive attitude and offers herself or himself as a personal example to student-practitioners, constantly considers students' needs and takes into account the requirements of the internship provider (the university), has a clear vision of the teaching practice adopting effective strategies for achieving the objectives of the teaching practice programme. Moreover, the mentor ensures a climate of trust and mutual respect during the teaching practice programme, ensures the freedom of initiative for student-practitioners as well as access to valuable teaching resources for the success of activities with pupils, encourages and recognises the contribution of her or his students to the teaching practice programme, promotes an open and honest communication etc.

The principle of involving student-practitioners in their own vocational training involves creating a supportive environment for their mentors to take responsibility for their training as future teachers, facilitating the active involvement of students in the mentoring process, and building confidence in their own learning skills. Moreover, it involves students' professional development by highlighting the skills and experience acquired before. Additionally, it may consist of sharing teaching experiences between student-practitioners, identifying opportunities to improve professional behaviours, obtaining professional satisfaction, etc. Therefore, the mentor will be concerned with creating a quality-based professional development environment during the teaching practice programme and fully motivating the student-practitioners to achieve performance and skills.

The principle of approaching the teaching practice as a process and as a system. The approach based on the practical learning process and not only on obtaining teaching practice products involves the design and development of the practice on conditions that provide opportunities for student-practitioners to practice a wide range of professional and transversal skills, process regulation by integrating monitoring data of student-practitioners' activity and behaviour. The process is an approach that involves putting together selected resources effectively to achieve the pre-defined goals in the most appropriate way. In the case of the teaching practice, this involves evaluating and selecting start-up resources so that the professionals in the programme have the expertise and level of responsibility needed tailored to the group of practitioners at a given time, assessing the course and assessing the impact of the programme, risks and consequences for student, the mentor, and the application school.

Therefore, according to this principle, it is recommended to direct resources on the key moments of the mentoring process (Nițu, 2016), moments that essentially ensure the experiences and professional evolution of student-practitioners (distribution to a classroom, selection of mock teaching lessons, analysis of assisted lessons, etc.).

The principle of learning, innovation, and continuous quality improvement in teaching practice mentorship. The mentor and the student-practitioners are both aware and concerned with lifelong-learning, innovation in education and the manner in which young people should be raised to become innovative (European Commission, 2018; Wagner, 2014). Moreover, they should focus on the continuous enhancement of the quality of teaching services, the continuous improvement of the quality of the teaching practice programme to increase students' performance levels, the adoption of appropriate professional behaviours in the classroom, the positive reactions and changes that may occur at some point during the teaching practice, and the opportunities for professional development (McEwen & Foss, 2022).

Improvement is the engine of the whole activity as it identifies, based on previous experience, weaknesses and measures to apply for improvement. In support of the application of this principle to the teaching practice programme, the mentor can opt for the Kaizen strategy (Arsyad et al., 2021). Or the Deming cycle as effective tools for quality management. The mentors and the students will set their objectives regarding the improvement of the quality of the teaching practice activities as well as the necessary measures for their accomplishment.

The principle of evidence / fact - based decision-making in the teaching practice activity is consistent with the existing tendency in human resource management to act at a high level of responsibility. It is both about self-responsibility and the request to have a pertinent justification for the use of resources (accountability). The application of the principle in the mentorship of teaching practice implies an increased level of mentor's accountability. Moreover, the mentor should exercise her or his ability to design, deliver, and evaluate the internship programme from the point of view of collecting and utilising evidence and arguments on which mentoring decisions are made. Additionally, this entails a favourable attitude of the mentor towards the idea of the permanent efficiency of the offer of the teaching practice programme as well as towards the flexible, differentiated, and even individualized approach of the student-practitioners.

The concern for optimizing the curriculum based on evidence of learning quality and its impact can be reflected in a particular focus on problems, causes, and contexts in which student-practitioners' behaviours manifest. Adapting the practice programme through a flexible and differentiated approach involves increased attention to reactions and behaviours, direct measures to gather information and evidence, concern for making evidence accessible to the entire mentoring team, actions of analysis and interpretation of evidence within the team, finalized by informed and mutually agreed decisions. However, special attention must be paid to ensuring a balance in basing decisions on evidence but also on the experience and intuition of the expert, the teaching practice mentor.

Moreover, balance is required between making decisions that lead to the satisfaction of the student-practitioner as a recipient, but also the school and the university, as programme providers (CISEO, n.d.). In addition, it becomes very relevant to ensure the effectiveness of decisions for the purposes of the correct management of the resources involved in the decisions made, so that the objectives of the teaching practice programme are achieved with a balanced consumption of resources.

The principle of mutually beneficial relationships in the mentoring team emphasises the mentoring team's concern to develop relationships that lead to mutual professional benefits. Moreover, this aspect is demonstrated by the mentoring plan, which is a product of a joint effort of teaching practice managers

and their recipients, which involves a permanent flow of information, professional experiences, and useful resources.

The principle of results-oriented learning based on hands-on learning. Effective achieving of hands-on learning outcomes with the group of students is an important goal for the mentor during the internships of teaching practice programme. The mentor must define the expected results based on hands-on learning in terms of skills and at the same time create hands-on learning situations for the acquisition / practice of professional behaviours and the skills development of student-practitioners.

3. Research Questions

The present research has emerged from the following enquiries: What makes a good mentor? As mentor teachers / teaching practice coordinators, how do we provide quality mentoring? How can we improve the mentoring process within the teaching practice programme? How can we prepare the future teachers for quality teaching?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study was to identify the perceptions of trainees in the "PROF II-Mentorship of teaching practice" training program within the project "Professionalization of teaching career - PROF" (POCU / 904/6/25/146587) regarding the application of the principles of quality management in the mentoring activity to increase the quality of the practical training of the future teachers.

To ensure a coherent picture of participants' options regarding the application of the principles of quality to a certain extent, the eight principles were grouped, into two categories:

- i. Principles regarding the focus on the student-practitioner as a recipient. These are the principles that highlight the need for the mentoring relationship to focus on supporting the student-practitioners in the development process, by deliberately focusing on meeting their training needs and interests, respectively by valuing the process and evolution of learning and not only the teaching practice products, on the direct involvement of the student-practitioners in leading this process and by basing the decisions on empirical evidence, collected in actions of monitoring students' activity and behaviour. The principles P1, P3 P6, P8 were included in this category.
- ii. The principles related to the management of the mentoring process are statements that highlight mentor's effort to develop and lead the teaching practice mentorship activities in terms of leadership and focus towards process optimization. This category of principles is focused on the mentor's central role as a programme provider and as a guarantor of its good quality. This category includes P2, P4, P5, and P7.

Working hypothesis: We anticipate that the principles of quality according to which the mentor adopts personalised strategies, focused on the evolution and needs of the student-practitioner, will give a greater weight to application in the case of teachers who have mentoring experience.

5. Research Methods

The research data was collected by the questionnaire-based survey method, and their statistical processing was performed using the SPSS-Crosstabs programme. In order to achieve the purpose of the research, a questionnaire with 14 questions was constructed which surveyed the trainees' perceptions regarding the application of the principles of quality management in their teaching practice activity. In the present study, the sample of participating subjects is of 85 teachers, trainees in the training program "PROF II - Mentorship for teaching practice".

6. Findings

The following important variables such as age, seniority in education, seniority and experience in mentoring were assessed. It is highlighted the fact that 97.6% of the participants are between 46-65 years old (tables 1-3), which demonstrates biological and professional maturity.

Table 1. Age of participants

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Between 31-45	37	43,5	43,5	43,5
	Between 46-65	46	54,1	54,1	97,6
	Under 30	2	2,4	2,4	100,0
	Total	85	100,0	100,0	

Table 2. Participants' seniority in education

N	Valid	85
	Missing	0
	Mean	23,40
	Minimum	7
	Maximum	40

Table 3. Participant's seniority and experience in mentoring

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Without/no experience	15	17,6	17,6	17,6
	With experience in mentoring	70	82,4	82,4	100,0
	Total	85	100,0	100,0	

People with experience in mentoring, respectively 82.4% of the group of participants, have an important share and their opinions are valuable from the perspective of professionalization of teaching career in general and of the mentorship of teaching practice in particular and are in accordance with the principles of quality management in the mentoring activity. In the statistical correlation achieved, the average is 9.74, and the deviation is 6,773.

The data processing of the questionnaire was performed in the SPSS-Crosstabs programme, grouping the opinions of participants in the study into two categories: students with seniority and experience in mentoring and teachers without seniority and experience in mentoring activity. Each

category of respondents correlates with the specific indicators, subsumed under the principles of quality management in the mentoring activity, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Correlation of principles of quality management with respondents' seniority and mentoring experience - Principles regarding the focus on the student-practitioner as recipient

P1. The principle of focusing on the student-practitioner in the mentorship of teaching practice		To a very small extend	To a certain extend	To a large extend	To a very large extend
P1.1. Seniority and experience in mentoring	Without / no experience	1	1	5	8
	With experience	0	5	18	47
	Total	1	6	23	55
P1.2. Seniority and experience in mentoring	Without / no experience	1	2	3	9
	With experience	0	4	21	45
	Total	1	6	24	54
P1.3. Seniority and experience in mentoring	Without / no experience	1	2	4	8
	With experience	0	11	17	42
	Total	1	13	21	50
P1.4. Seniority and experience in mentoring	Without / no experience	1	1	5	8
	With experience	0	6	19	45
	Total	1	7	24	53
P1.5. Seniority and experience in mentoring	Without / no experience	1	1	5	8
	With experience	0	8	17	45
	Total	1	9	22	53
P.3.1. Seniority and experience in mentoring	Without / no experience	1	1	4	9
	With experience	0	6	16	48
	Total	1	7	20	57
P.3.2. Seniority and experience in mentoring	Without / no experience	1	1	7	6
	With experience	0	2	33	35
	Total	1	3	40	41
P.3.3. Seniority and experience in mentoring	Without / no experience	1	1	3	10
	With experience	0	4	13	53
	Total	1	5	16	63
P.3.4. Seniority and experience in mentoring	Without / no experience	1	1	3	10
	With experience	0	3	10	57
	Total	1	4	13	67

In the analysis of the results we can identify a categorical delimitation between teachers with seniority and experience in mentoring, which value to a very large extent (45-47 mentors) principles 1 and 3, respectively:

P.1. The principle of focusing on the student-practitioner in teaching practice mentorship with specific manifestations such as:

- i. The mentor applies a mentoring plan that reflects the needs and interests of the student-practitioner; adopts a flexible approach to the mentoring plan, to take into account the evolution and needs of each individual student-practitioner; adopts customised strategies; is concerned with the professional and personal development of student-practitioners; collaborates with the student-practitioner in designing the mentoring plan.

P3. The principle of involving student-practitioners in the process of their own professional training with specific manifestations such as:

- ii. The mentor is concerned with knowing and valuing the qualities of student-practitioners; ensures a degree of accountability and autonomy of the student-practitioner in the implementation of the mentoring plan; encourages student-practitioners' self-assessment; facilitates the identification, constructive discussion and improvement of problems / difficulties that arise during the teaching practice with the contribution of student-practitioners.

For each of these principles, teachers without experience in mentoring give low scores on the Likert scale. We notice a similar attitude of mentors with experience in teaching practice, which values the set of principles of quality management, focused on involving student-practitioners in the training process, as shown in the table above (Table 5). Each principle is scored by to a large extend and a very large extend by mentor teachers whilst inexperienced teachers have a linear dispersion of options, specified on the Likert scale.

Table 5. Correlating the principles of quality management with respondents' seniority and experience in mentoring - Principles regarding the focus on the student-practitioner as a recipient

		To a very small extend	To a certain extend	To a large extend	To a very large extend
P6. The principle according to which the mentor's decisions are based on evidence / facts in the teaching practice activity					
P8. The principle of results-oriented learning based on hands-on learning					
P.36.1. Seniority and experience in mentoring	Without / no experience	0	0	9	6
	With experience	1	6	23	40
Total			6	32	46
P.6.2. Seniority and experience in mentoring	Without / no experience	0	1	8	6
	With experience	0	4	25	41
Total		0	5	33	47
P.6.3. Seniority and experience in mentoring	Without / no experience	0	1	8	6
	With experience	0	8	24	38
Total		0	9	32	44
P.6.4. Seniority and experience in mentoring	Without / no experience	0	1	7	7
	With experience	0	5	19	46
Total		0	6	26	53
P.8.1. Seniority and experience in mentoring	Without / no experience	0	0	6	9
	With experience	0	1	13	56
Total		0	1	19	65
P.8.2. Seniority and experience in mentoring	Without / no experience	0	1	4	10
	With experience	0	5	21	44

	With experience		0	6	25	54
	Total					
P.8.3. Seniority and experience in mentoring	Without / no	experience	0	0	5	10
	With experience		0	2	10	58
	Total		0	2	15	68

In relation to the principle according to which the mentor's decisions are based on evidence / facts in the teaching practice activity (P6) and with the principle of orientation towards obtaining results based on hand-on learning (P8) mentors with experience in teaching practice are concerned with identifying evidence of the student-practitioner's evolution. Mentors utilise the evidence of the student-practitioner's performance quality to regulate the mentoring relationship along the way and continuously assess the student-practitioners' performance, collecting evidence to certify their competencies. Simultaneously, it is highlighted the role of principles of quality in the design and implementation of the mentoring plan aimed at developing the skills necessary for the teaching profession. Within the teaching practice activity, the mentor integrates the latest trends and policies in terms of teacher training and applies, in the teaching practice, the cycle of quality: plan / act / check / act.

7. Conclusions

This study proposes, in order to ensure a coherent image of the participants' options, the grouping into two categories of principles of quality: principles regarding the focus on the student-practitioner as a recipient and principles regarding the management of the mentoring process. These dimensions are in line with the aim of identifying trainees' perceptions of the application of principles of quality management in mentoring, in order to increase the quality of practical training of future teachers.

Following the presentation of the results of the study, from the perspective of the principles regarding the focus on the student-practitioner as a recipient - as a first dimension, it led to the conclusion that the working hypothesis is confirmed. Teachers with experience in mentoring adopt personalized strategies, focused on the needs and support of the student-practitioner's development, through firm and highly favorable options for this category of principles of quality.

Simultaneously, the second proposed dimension, referring to the management principles of mentoring process, will be addressed in a future study, by formulating a new hypothesis in accordance with the relevant principles, due to the limitation of the allocated for the article, which cannot be exceeded. It is important to highlight, in the following stages of analyzing the investigated opinions, the mentor's effort to develop and lead practice-mentoring activities in terms of leadership and process optimization and focus on the central role of the mentor as program provider and guarantor of its good quality.

These approaches highlight openings and new innovative perspectives of the mentoring activity based on the principles of quality management, in accordance with the latest trends and policies in terms of teacher development / training.

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