Mentoring Quality and Pre-Service Teacher Development during School-Based Teaching Practice: Evidence from B.Ed. Internship Programmes in Maharashtra

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ABSTRACT

The school-based teaching practice internship is the experiential centrepiece of pre-service teacher education, providing the concrete experience and active experimentation modes through which B.Ed. students develop the practitioner identity, contextual pedagogical knowledge, and reflective capacity that campus-based instruction alone cannot generate. The quality of mentoring and supervision that student teachers receive during this internship — from both school-based cooperating teachers and college-based supervisors — is theorised as the primary mediating variable between the raw experience of classroom teaching and the structured professional learning that transforms experience into competency. This study surveyed 240 B.Ed. student teachers across 12 colleges affiliated to four Maharashtra universities on the quality of mentoring received during their 20-week school-based internship, using a validated 30-item Mentoring Quality Scale (MQS) covering five dimensions: instructional feedback, emotional support, professional modelling, reflective facilitation, and collaborative planning. Mentoring quality was significantly positively associated with teaching competency across all five assessed domains, with students in high-mentoring-quality schools outperforming low-mentoring-quality peers by 14.2–21.8 percentage points across competency domains. Reflective facilitation was the mentoring dimension most strongly associated with post-internship teaching competency, while instructional feedback was the most frequently reported mentoring activity. These findings have direct implications for the quality assurance of school placement

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partnerships and cooperating teacher preparation in Maharashtra's teacher education system.

KEYWORDS: *Mentoring, Teaching practice, Supervision, Pre-service teacher education, B.Ed. internship, Teaching competency, Maharashtra, Cooperating teacher*

INTRODUCTION

The school-based teaching practice internship occupies a central and irreplaceable position in pre-service teacher education because it is the component of the teacher preparation programme that most directly provides the experiential learning conditions — concrete experience in authentic classroom settings, active experimentation with real learners, and the opportunity for reflective processing of teaching experience with expert guidance — that campus-based theoretical instruction cannot replicate (1). International and Indian teacher education research consistently identifies the quality of the teaching practice experience as the strongest predictor of pre-service teachers' pedagogical readiness at graduation, more influential than any single component of the academic programme (2). However, the teaching practice experience is not uniformly beneficial: its developmental value depends critically on the quality of mentoring and supervision that student teachers receive, which varies substantially across school placement sites and is rarely systematically assessed in Indian teacher education quality assurance frameworks (3).

Mentoring in teaching practice operates through two distinct but complementary roles: the school-based cooperating teacher, who provides day-to-day guidance, feedback on lessons, and professional modelling within the school culture; and the college-based supervisor, who provides periodic observation visits, formal lesson feedback, and the theoretical framing that connects teaching practice experience to the academic programme (4). The quality of both roles — and particularly their integration into a coherent mentoring system rather than two parallel and disconnected support streams — is a significant determinant of what student teachers learn from their teaching practice experience (5).

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LITERATURE REVIEW

The mentoring literature in teacher education has identified several dimensions of mentoring quality that together constitute the conditions for transformative professional learning during teaching practice. Feiman-Nemser (2001) distinguished between mentoring as technical support (helping student teachers manage the immediate demands of classroom work) and mentoring as educative practice (supporting student teachers in developing the analytical and reflective habits of mind that constitute professional teaching expertise), arguing that effective mentoring must accomplish both, with the educative dimension being the more professionally significant and the less commonly achieved (6). Hobson et al. (2009) reviewed the international teacher education mentoring literature and found robust evidence that quality of mentoring, rather than quantity of mentoring contact time, is the primary determinant of teaching practice learning outcomes (7).

Mentoring Quality Dimensions

Five dimensions of mentoring quality emerge consistently across the teacher education mentoring literature:

- **Instructional feedback:** the quality, specificity, and actionability of feedback on lesson delivery — distinguishing descriptive feedback that identifies what happened from evaluative-analytical feedback that explains why a teaching decision did or did not produce the intended learning effect.
- **Emotional support:** the mentor's role in providing encouragement, normalising the challenge and anxiety of early teaching experience, and maintaining the student teacher's sense of self-efficacy and professional identity through the inevitable difficulties of early classroom practice.
- **Professional modelling:** deliberate demonstration of skilled teaching practice, with explicit commentary on pedagogical decision-making, enabling student teachers to observe the thinking behind the teaching rather than only the surface behaviour.
- **Reflective facilitation:** the use of post-lesson discussion, questioning, and journal review to help student teachers analyse their teaching experience critically, identify patterns in student learning response, and generate principled pedagogical conclusions from specific classroom events.

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- **Collaborative planning:** joint development of lesson plans and unit sequences, enabling student teachers to observe and participate in the expert pedagogical planning process rather than developing lessons in isolation.

Rajuan, Beijaard, and Verloop (2007) examined student teachers' learning from mentoring relationships in the Netherlands and found that the degree to which mentors provided reflective facilitation — asking challenging questions that prompted deeper analysis of teaching episodes rather than providing direct evaluative judgements — was the strongest predictor of student teacher learning from the teaching practice experience, a finding with direct policy implications for cooperating teacher preparation programmes (8).

RESEARCH GAP

While teaching practice mentoring quality has been extensively studied in international contexts, systematic survey evidence on mentoring quality dimensions and their association with teaching competency outcomes in the Maharashtra B.Ed. teaching practice context is limited. The large-scale nature of Maharashtra's teacher education system — with hundreds of B.Ed. colleges affiliated to multiple universities and thousands of student teachers placed in schools each year — makes systematic quality assurance of teaching practice mentoring both particularly important and particularly challenging. This study provides the first systematic mentoring quality survey in this context using a validated multidimensional instrument.

OBJECTIVES

- To assess the quality of mentoring received by B.Ed. student teachers across five dimensions during their 20-week teaching practice internship in Maharashtra.
- To examine the association between mentoring quality and teaching competency across five assessed domains.
- To identify which mentoring dimension is most strongly associated with post-internship teaching competency.
- To derive implications for cooperating teacher preparation and teaching practice partnership quality assurance.

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METHODOLOGY

Sample and Setting

A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 240 B.Ed. student teachers completing their 20-week school-based teaching practice internship across 12 B.Ed. colleges affiliated to four Maharashtra universities (Savitribai Phule Pune University, Shivaji University Kolhapur, Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University, and SNDT Women's University Mumbai). Twenty student teachers per college were surveyed in the final week of their teaching practice internship. Students were placed across 96 partner schools (8 per college), providing sufficient variation in school placement quality to enable mentoring quality analysis.

Instruments

Mentoring quality was assessed using the 30-item Mentoring Quality Scale (MQS), adapted from Rajuan et al.'s (2007) instrument and validated for the Indian B.Ed. context (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$ for total scale; subscale alphas 0.74–0.82). The MQS covers six items per mentoring dimension (instructional feedback, emotional support, professional modelling, reflective facilitation, and collaborative planning), rated on a 5-point frequency scale. Student teachers were classified as receiving high-quality mentoring (MQS total score $\geq$ 70th percentile, n = 118) or low-quality mentoring ($\leq$ 30th percentile, n = 122). Teaching competency was assessed using the B.Ed. practice teaching evaluation instrument standardised across all four universities, comprising five domain scores: lesson planning, classroom management, subject knowledge application, assessment practice, and reflective practice (each scored out of 100) (6, 8).

Table 1: Survey Sample by Affiliated University

University	Colleges	Student Teachers	Schools
Savitribai Phule Pune University	3	60	24
Shivaji University Kolhapur	3	60	24

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Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University	3	60	24
SNDT Women's University Mumbai	3	60	24
Total	12	240	96

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Figure 1 presents post-internship teaching competency domain scores for high- and low-mentoring-quality groups. High-quality mentoring was associated with significantly higher scores across all five competency domains, with the largest absolute gap in reflective practice (64.2 vs 42.4, difference = 21.8 pp) and assessment practice (68.4 vs 48.6, difference = 19.8 pp), and the smallest in subject knowledge application (78.6 vs 64.8, difference = 13.8 pp).

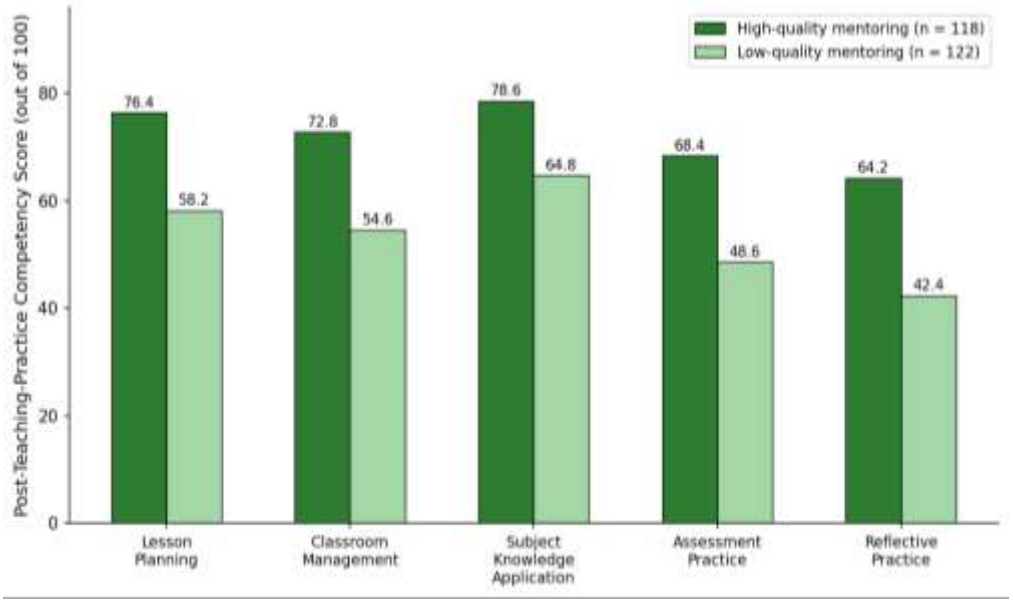


Figure 1: Teaching competency domain scores at end of teaching practice by mentoring quality level — B.Ed. interns, Maharashtra (n = 240)

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Table 2: Teaching Competency Domain Scores by Mentoring Quality Group

Competency Domain	High-Quality Mentoring (n=118)	Low-Quality Mentoring (n=122)	Difference (pp)	p-value
Lesson Planning	76.4 ± 11.2	58.2 ± 13.4	+18.2	< 0.001
Classroom Management	72.8 ± 12.4	54.6 ± 14.8	+18.2	< 0.001
Subject Knowledge Application	78.6 ± 10.8	64.8 ± 12.6	+13.8	< 0.001
Assessment Practice	68.4 ± 13.6	48.6 ± 15.2	+19.8	< 0.001
Reflective Practice	64.2 ± 14.8	42.4 ± 16.4	+21.8	< 0.001

Table 3: Correlation between MQS Dimension Scores and Post-Internship Teaching Competency Composite

MQS Dimension	Pearson r	p-value	Most Strongly Associated Competency Domain
Reflective Facilitation	0.64	< 0.001	Reflective Practice (r = 0.72)
Instructional Feedback	0.58	< 0.001	Lesson Planning (r = 0.62)
Collaborative Planning	0.54	< 0.001	Lesson Planning (r = 0.60)

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Professional Modelling	0.49	< 0.001	Classroom Management (r = 0.56)
Emotional Support	0.42	< 0.001	Reflective Practice (r = 0.48)

DISCUSSION

The large and consistent teaching competency advantages associated with high-quality mentoring across all five assessed domains confirm that mentoring quality is a highly significant determinant of what student teachers develop during teaching practice, beyond the raw experience of classroom exposure that all student teachers share regardless of mentoring quality (2, 5). The particularly large mentoring quality effect on reflective practice competency (+21.8 pp) and assessment practice (+19.8 pp) — both domains requiring the kind of analytical, self-evaluative capacity that develops most directly through guided reflective facilitation — and the relatively smaller effect on subject knowledge application (+13.8 pp, a domain less dependent on mentoring guidance) is consistent with Feiman-Nemser's (2001) argument that the most educationally significant mentoring contribution is to reflective and analytical professional development rather than technical task support (6).

The finding that reflective facilitation is the MQS dimension most strongly correlated with post-internship teaching competency (r = 0.64) — despite instructional feedback being the most frequently reported mentoring activity — directly replicates Rajuan et al.'s (2007) finding and carries a clear implication for cooperating teacher preparation: programmes that develop cooperating teachers' capacity for reflective facilitation — the asking of analytical questions that prompt the student teacher's own reasoning rather than the provision of evaluative judgements — will generate stronger teaching practice learning outcomes than programmes focused primarily on instructional feedback techniques (8). The observation that instructional feedback is both the most common mentoring activity and the second-strongest competency predictor (r = 0.58) suggests it remains important but is not sufficient without reflective facilitation alongside it (7).

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LIMITATIONS

- Cross-sectional survey design; causal attribution of competency differences to mentoring quality requires longitudinal or experimental data.
- Student teacher self-report of mentoring quality may be influenced by teaching competency self-perception (reverse causality cannot be excluded).
- The competency assessment instrument, while standardised across four universities, uses supervisor ratings which may themselves be influenced by knowledge of the placement context.
- The study did not separately analyse cooperating teacher versus college supervisor contributions to mentoring quality.

FUTURE SCOPE

- Longitudinal study tracking whether mentoring quality effects on teaching practice competency persist into the first year of in-service teaching.
- Cooperating teacher preparation intervention study assessing whether structured reflective facilitation training improves both mentoring quality ratings and student teacher outcomes.
- Observational study comparing self-reported MQS scores with observer-rated mentoring quality from recorded mentor-student teacher conferences.
- Multi-state comparative study examining whether the mentoring quality-competency associations identified in Maharashtra replicate across other large teacher education systems.

CONCLUSION

Mentoring quality during teaching practice is a highly significant predictor of B.Ed. student teacher competency development across all five assessed domains, with high-quality mentoring associated with advantages of 13.8–21.8 percentage points over low-quality mentoring across the competency profile. Reflective facilitation is the mentoring dimension most strongly associated with post-internship competency, despite instructional feedback being the most frequently practised mentoring behaviour. Cooperating teacher preparation programmes in Maharashtra should prioritise the development of reflective facilitation

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capacity as the highest-leverage mentoring skill for improving teaching practice outcomes.

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