

## Mentor-Mentee Relationship: 12 Suggestions from English Mentors to Mentees

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**Abstract:** A wealth of research has been carried out on the effects of mentorship programs in EFL and ESL settings. Mentors have been regarded as the source of knowledge and experience to train mentees. Nearly all countries have allocated a certain amount of time and money for the betterment of English mentorship programs, so the mentees will have ample opportunity to improve their professional conduct in educational institutions. In this study, the concise suggestions of 12 English mentors who have pursued a long career in education through numerous countries were examined. This qualitative study lasted 8 weeks, and the data were collected by in-depth one-on-one interviews which were transcribed and classified through MAXQDA software program. The results demonstrated significant points to consider for less experienced teachers who want to have a promising career in education. The mentors' ideas were categorized under 12 headings to assist less experienced teachers on the way of being a professional and committed teacher. Analyzed data can have some implications for future English mentorship programs and educational institutions on a global scale.

**Keywords:** English Mentors, English Mentees, Teacher Training, EFL, ESL

### 1. Introduction

Enhancing the quality of teaching through experienced teachers has been placed much emphasis recently. Realizing this inclination, many countries have channeled funds to address it. Additionally, governing bodies of education have organized training programs which can include workshops, symposiums and conferences, so some common standards can be set as a guideline to follow the latest proven trends in education (Celik & Yildiz, 2017; Yildiz, 2017). Teachers can affect the atmosphere of a school directly, so their well-being is of paramount importance to raise the standards and set realistic goals to achieve. In this regard, mentoring programs can guide mentees to behave more responsibly and teach more professionally. Pandey and Sharma (2022) define mentoring as a process to teach student teachers how to adapt to school settings. Mentors' roles cover helping the mentees to get prepared mentally, psychologically and professionally. If one aspect has been ignored, the mentorship program cannot yield expected results. Moreover, traditional instruments to teach lessons should be complemented with online teaching resources (Daskan & Yildiz, 2020). Serin (2022) argues that a qualified teacher is the one who

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can cover lessons on campus or online according to the needs of educational institutions especially after the rise of Covid 19 cases globally. Considering these prerequisites, it is suggested that the degree of success in mentorship programs depends on the continuous communication between mentors and mentees, so mentors can pass on their valued knowledge to mentees in given categories incessantly.

Training mentees can affect their future careers directly according to the relationship between the mentors and the mentees. Mentees can be simply explained as someone who needs assistance of mentors to get more experience and self-confidence. In other words, they learn how to act and behave responsibly, so their dignity will be recognized as long as the program continues (Sardabi et al., 2018). Three types of mentorships have been adopted in educational settings which are apprenticeship, competence and reflective model (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). Apprenticeship model refers to observing the mentor to imitate. It has been criticized as it fosters one-way communication. Also, it does not encourage mentees to learn by inquiry. The master shows his teaching skills to be imitated by the apprentice. On the other hand, competence model refers to achieving some pre-defined competencies by the mentors. In this program, the mentors determine some competencies, and evaluate them by a checklist during the process. The mentee's role is obtaining these competencies at the end of the period. The last model is reflective model which adopts the inquiry-based learning model. Reflective model puts much emphasis on collaboration, exchanging ideas, improving critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Its main goal is to equip mentees with necessary skills, so they will be capable of teaching professionally.

Despite covering many lessons at universities to practice as a freshman, sophomore or junior student, no lesson can be replaced with a real classroom atmosphere as a senior student because only teacher candidates can feel the real pressure in front of real students (Langdon, 2014). Otherwise, some notions cannot be envisioned well if lessons are covered at university as if there were some students in the class. To alleviate this tension at first, many mentorship programs start by observing the mentors' classes initially before assigning mentees to cover their own lessons. Once mentees have the notion that they have necessary teaching skills, they switch their roles from being the observer to the primary teacher. Many countries have strict regulations to get approval of the mentors and other related authorities to appoint mentees as a full-time permanent teacher in the following years, so this relationship should be taken seriously in a disciplined way.

## **2. Literature Review**

Formal mentorship programs have been receiving increasing attention since 1970s. These programs have been implemented to ensure a continuous knowledge sharing between mentors and mentees. There has been an ongoing interest to emphasize significant points in mentoring through reports, books or articles. To name a few, Arnold (2006) puts forward three reasons to integrate mentorship into curriculum which are fostering overall teacher development, evaluating mentors and suggesting ways to be a better teacher in the future. He also argues that mentors should have certain qualities which are having different perspectives, following the mentee closely, being knowledgeable and offering valuable feedback to finalize the program with the highest benefit. Likewise, Fletcher (2000) states that offering valuable feedback has a pivotal role to achieve the outcomes of mentorship programs. He also postulates that professional support cannot be sufficient to cement a good relationship in mentoring, so professional support should be complemented with a personal support. Additionally, Hobson (2002) contends that the

balance between support and challenge should be balanced during mentoring. Otherwise, the disagreements between the mentor and the mentee will be inevitable. If mentors do not train mentees in advance about the challenges, mentees can feel insecure and lonely. Considering this issue, mentors can provide background information to tackle challenges wisely. Furthermore, Abdulrahman and Kara (2022) emphasize certain points in mentoring which are behaving fairly, supporting professionally and personally, organizing some social activities and having some tolerance if some minor problems arise.

Varied findings have been postulated by the researchers who conducted a study on mentoring. To name a few, Ciftci and Sener (2020) carried out a study in Turkey on teacher candidates who were studying in ELT. Teacher candidates asserted that mentoring program helped them to gain self-confidence and be more experienced. They also postulated that new techniques which were adopted by the mentor was so insightful. Additionally, Tanjung et al. (2021) conducted a study in Indonesia on pre-service English teachers which revealed that mentors noticed their weaknesses in teaching during practical sessions, so they were guided effectively by their mentors to overcome these weaknesses. These teachers asserted that their motivation and dedication towards teaching increased substantially after joining mentorship program. Likewise, Xie and Cui (2021) conducted a study in Hong Kong on pre-service English teachers in a writing class. They found that mentees learned how to improve students' writing skill step by step under the guidance of the mentors. Moreover, Hamilton et al. (2019) conducted another study in Canada on university students who were matched with mentors from the professional working in the same industry. The study uncovered that students' self-efficacy and motivation have been boosted to find a well-paid job in the industry upon graduation. They postulated that they got first-hand experience and guidance from the professionals who were so eager to pass on their knowledge to the mentees. Subsequently, Chien (2015) carried out a study in Taiwan on 35 pre-service English teachers' perceptions related to mentorship program they joined during the year. The mentees held the opinion that mentor-mentee relationship helped them to reflect their teaching skills through a real classroom atmosphere. In this case, conversations are essential to the learning process. Consequently, while mentees grapple with complex topics, mentors frequently provide illuminating pointers in the classroom. A student learns a skill by following the mentors' cues and directions, and then applying that skill to new situations (Yildiz & Celik, 2020). They also stated that they improved themselves in terms of syllabus design, time management, covering engaging lessons, integrating audio-visual materials into lessons effectively and being patient.

Although many advantages of the mentorship programs have been uncovered, some scholars gave some hints about possible drawbacks of mentoring if the whole process cannot be planned and observed closely. To name a few, Hudson and Millwater (2008) conducted a study in Australia to learn the perceptions of 24 mentors about developing effective English teaching practice. They concluded that developing a good rapport is essential to increase the efficacy of the program. They also argued that devising novel methods to keep the mentees engaged and motivated can enhance the quality of the program tremendously. They also conveyed that modeling and constructive feedback should not be underestimated to complete mentorship programs successfully. In addition, Amsalu (2021) conducted a study in Ethiopia on 16 EFL mentors and 34 EFL mentees which revealed that theoretical and practical goals of mentorship could not be realized due to following the process in an undisciplined way. She postulated that communication between mentors and mentees as well as motivational tools were so low compared to other examples which were conducted successfully thanks to planning the whole process and following it closely. Moreover,

Martinez (2016) carried out a study on EFL mentees in Spain which displayed that mentorship programs were needed to be reconsidered to offer continuous and valuable feedback. He also stated that desired outcomes could not be observed at the end of the process.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

In depth interviews were the essential instruments to gather qualitative data in this study. The researcher recorded the interview to transcribe via MAXQDA software program, so analysis could be done with ease under certain classifications.

A semi-structured interview was chosen including 1 open ended question which was elaborated to get English mentors` valuable ideas. Moreover, the interviewer expanded the topic with further questions according to the atmosphere. The primary question in the interview can be read below:

- What is your advice for less experienced teachers who want to pursue a career as an English teacher? In other words, what is the best lesson you have learned throughout your career to be a good example for less experienced English teachers?

#### 3.2 Research Process

This study was carried out in 6 phases, all of which can be clearly seen in Figure 1 and will be explained in detail in the following sections.

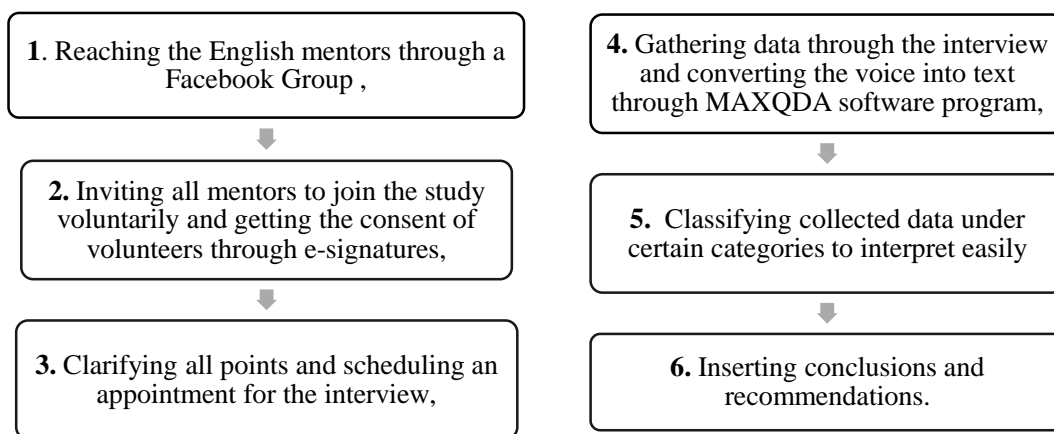


Figure 1: Stages of the study

As can be seen clearly in Figure 1, all stages of qualitative research design were implemented in an order ranging from reaching the population to adding conclusions and recommendations for future studies. Another point to emphasize was that the study was enriched with the MAXQDA software program to decipher verbal expressions and convert to transcripts, so interpretations were concluded based on the classified ideas.

### 3.3 Setting, Participants, Sampling

In this study, the researcher persuaded the mentors to be a part of this study through a Facebook mentorship group which has over 80 English mentors from 4 different nationalities. The researcher was also a member of the group for a long time, so s/he convinced them to express their opinions voluntarily in a welcoming atmosphere. Cluster sampling method was adopted to reach interviewees by granting equal chance to be chosen (Wu & Thompson, 2020). The whole population was divided into certain groups based on nationalities. Once subgroups were formed, 3 English mentors were chosen randomly to represent each group. After choosing the sample, the researcher addressed an online presentation to clarify the points and set the time for the interview accordingly. Figure 2 illustrates the nationality of each mentor respectively.

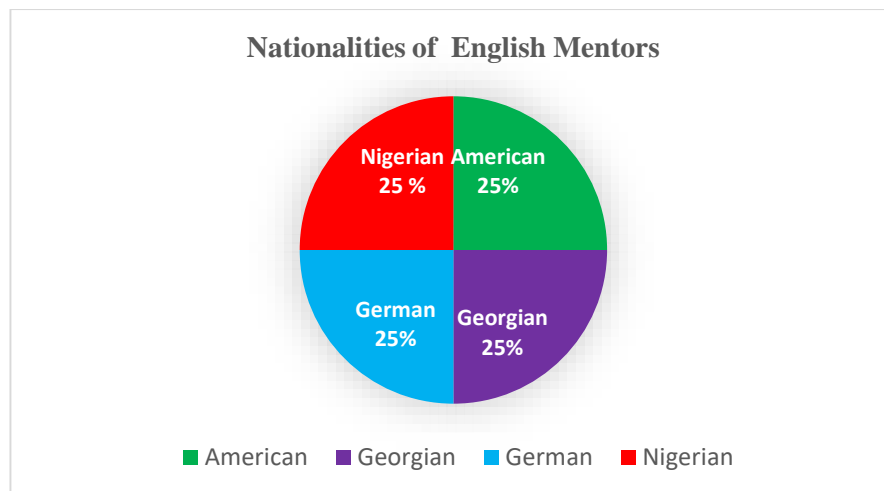


Figure 2: Nationalities of English Mentors

Figure 2 clearly represents that 4 different nationalities were included in this study with equal numbers. 3 mentors represented each nationality which accounted for 25 percent. Figure 3 depicts the number of years the mentors have worked so far.

Professional Careers of English Mentors

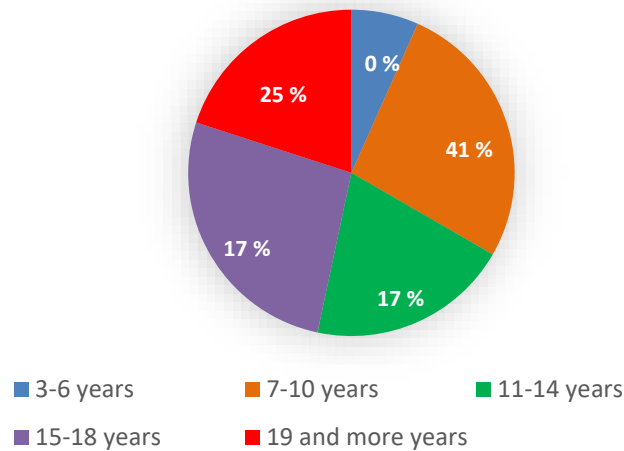


Figure 3: Professional Careers of English Mentors

As can be noticed clearly in Figure 3, all teachers had a solid experience to work at least 7 years in their professional careers. 7- 10 years accounted for the highest percentage in this study, whereas 3-6 years was represented with 0 %.

Figure 4 depicts the number of countries the mentors have worked so far.

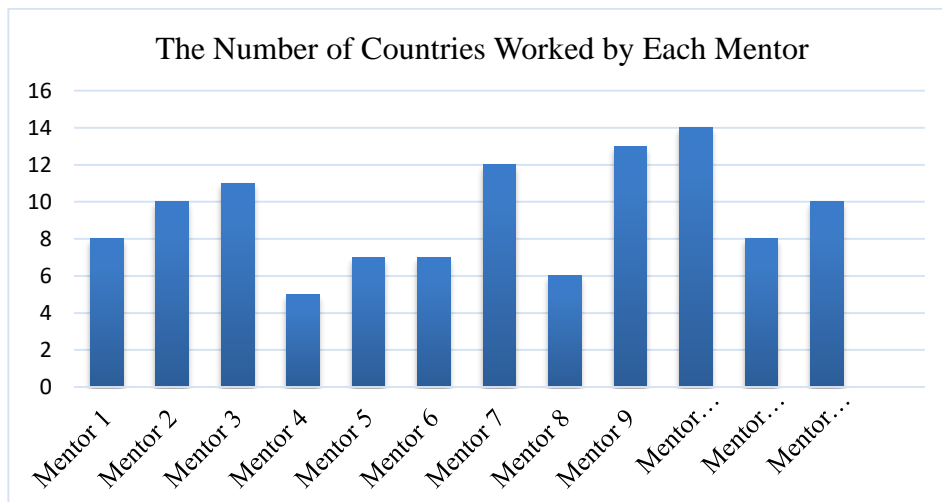


Figure 4: The Number of Countries Worked by Each Mentor

Once the number of countries worked by each mentor was investigated in detail through Figure 4, it was observed that mentor 10 visited more countries than any other mentors in the study. On the other hand, mentor 4 visited less countries than other mentors in this study.

### **3.4 Data Collection Procedure**

The researcher planned the study in minute detail as he was the member of the same group. The interview with 12 mentors lasted between 30 minutes and 45 minutes considering the ideas of each mentor. Meanwhile, a second meeting was held with 10 mentors because they wanted to elaborate their opinions. The study lasted 8 weeks to collect the data by extending time. Also, the researcher and the interviewees wanted to increase the number of valuable ideas in the interview by setting aside a specific time. Once the meeting was scheduled, the interview was held at the given time. Also, extending time helped the mentors to compose their ideas more elaborately because they needed to check their logs, annual reports, individual analysis related to their previous experience in mentorship programs. Collected data were analyzed in detail under 12 headings in findings section.

## **4. Findings**

In this study, 12 mentors who have worked overseas were interviewed. Based on their genuine opinions, 12 categories were set and explained in detail below.

### **4.1 Choosing Supplementary Listening Materials by Considering Students` Levels**

I have worked in 8 countries so far including the Netherlands, Ireland and Peru, so I have had ample opportunity to be more experienced in teaching by working in varied countries. My suggestion is about choosing supplementary listening materials by considering students` levels, so students` enthusiasm will not fade towards listening skills. Once I was teaching English at an international high school. Although the book presented the listening materials in a graded way from simple to advanced level, I wanted to add more variety to my lessons by adding extra listening materials which were available on the internet. Later, I figured out that they were beyond their current levels, so many students could not manage to understand the content clearly. Additionally, a colleague of mine observed my listening lesson, and he noted that supplementary materials on listening were too difficult to grasp details. Although it was a challenge for me to admit it, I heard the same remarks from my other colleagues in different occasions. As a result, I removed these materials from my agenda and downloaded extra listening materials of the same textbook in which all materials were within their scope to comprehend easily. After that day, I learned the value of welcoming my colleagues` ideas before integrating extra materials into my lessons. (Mentor 1)

### **4.2 Avoiding Direct Criticism towards Students` Pronunciation Mistakes in Front of Their Classmates**

I have had a solid teaching experience in 10 different countries including Austria, Finland, Switzerland and Canada. My advice will be about avoiding direct criticism towards a student in front of their classmates. I was teaching at a primary school a few years ago. During that time, I was so strict about students` pronunciation mistakes. I was criticizing them harshly due to not studying well to improve their pronunciation. After a while, I noticed that some of my students were unwilling to express their ideas in the class. I called the representative of the class to my room, and he said that they had not spoken because they were afraid of making mistakes while speaking. I realized that I undermined their self-confidence. Starting that day, I have changed my attitudes, and I have started learning about different techniques to correct their pronunciation mistakes. I have learned that there have been many proven techniques to correct

students' pronunciation mistakes such as repetition, reformulation, body language, note-taking, self and peer correction. These techniques helped me to regain my respect in class and restore students' self-confidence. (Mentor 2)

### **4.3 Breaking a Monotonous Teaching Style**

I have worked in 11 different countries so far including Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and France. My suggestion is about the breaking a monotonous teaching style. Once I was very adamant to stick to all the activities in the textbooks while covering lessons in a high school, so there was no place to add some educational games, or videos into my lessons. To illustrate it, my students could know what I would teach three days later. Subsequently, some students expressed their dissatisfaction about my lessons. They asked me to break the monotony by educational videos, games or puzzles. It was a very shocking moment for me because I had thought that the best teacher was the one who was teaching all the activities in the textbook in an order without distracting the attention to different materials. I examined many websites on the internet about integrating different materials into my lessons which included Kahoot, Padlet, Pinterest, ESL Printables. Now I have learned how to combine my textbook activities with different materials through the popular websites. My students' motivation has been boosted considerably since I have integrated such materials into my lessons. (Mentor 3)

### **4.4 Making Real-World Connections**

I have worked in more than 5 countries so far including South Korea, Japan, Malaysia and Czech Republic. My suggestion is about making real world connections. Once I was teaching at a secondary school in a lecturing style traditionally. There were some topics about making pizza, cooking desserts, travelling to different places or pros and cons of internet. I realized that lecturing was not so helpful to capture students' attention, so I tried to devise some novel ways to touch my students better. While I was watching a video about inspiring educators around the world, I saw that a teacher was inviting some parents to school for a demonstration. I wanted to try it in my class. I called some parents whether they could spare time to make a presentation about their professions. Fortunately, 3 parents who were a chef, a tourist guide and a software engineer accepted my offer, so they addressed a speech to introduce their professions by making connections to our topics in the book. As a result, the students' success and learning rate increased substantially. In the following year, the school administration wanted to spread this cycle to the whole school to make lessons more engaging. I am quite happy that I have made a difference in my school by merging real life with traditional classroom experience. (Mentor 4)

### **4.5 Using Notice Board and Official E-School System Simultaneously for Official Announcements**

I have worked in 7 countries so far including Turkey, Azerbaijan, Nigeria and Congo. My suggestion is about using notice board and official e-school system simultaneously for official announcements. I was working at a secondary school around 5 years ago. As a matter of fact, it was my routine to inform my students about upcoming quizzes or exams at least a week ago through the notice board and school's online learning management system. During an exam period, I informed my students verbally in class and virtually on the e-learning platform, but I forgot to inform them through the notice board. When the exam day struck, some of my students claimed that they did not know about the time because their families



could not remember log in details for the e-learning system. They also claimed that they did not notice what I was telling in class about the upcoming exam. As a result, I had no choice but to postpone the exam date because it was mandatory to inform the students through the notice board and e-learning system before the exams. The school administration urges that one type of announcement cannot replace the other, so teachers must use both means simultaneously to inform the students. It was a bitter experience for me to learn some valuable lessons. (Mentor 5)

#### **4.6 Keeping Unit Tests in USB Flash Drives in Case Technical Problems Occur**

I have worked in 7 countries so far including Nigeria, Spain, Brazil and Portugal. My suggestion is related to having alternative plans in a lesson. Once I was teaching in a high school. We were analyzing a thorough unit test online through Google Docs when the internet was down abruptly for an hour. The problem was that the smart board could not connect to the internet by Wi-Fi, so we could not activate the internet through the Hotspot. Additionally, I did not have the downloaded version of the exam. Subsequently, I analyzed the test by reading on the paper without displaying on the smartboard. As a result, it was not an engaging or fruitful lesson neither for my students nor for me. The lesson to be learned in this lesson was that having a copy of unit tests in a USB flash drive can be a wise solution to minimize the effects of technical issues. (Mentor 6)

#### **4.7 Improving Students` Time Management Skills**

I have worked in 12 countries so far including Iraq, Turkey, Jordan and New Zealand. My suggestion is about improving students` time management skills. During my early years of teaching career, I used to be more flexible about answering reading questions by granting extension to students. My priority was answering questions accurately rather than completing the exam on time. On the other hand, my students were racing against time in the related national exams which would affect their future careers directly. When they took the national university exam, most of my students could not see all reading passages in the exam due to answering questions in a slow manner. As a result, my students overall English score fell sharply in the exam. Later, they blamed me for not sharpening their time management skills in the exam. It was the most troublesome day in my teaching career because I did not train them according to their needs in the exams. Now I train my students to race against time so that they can have the privilege to see all questions in the national university entrance exams. (Mentor 7)

#### **4.8 Scheduling Homework Check on a Regular Basis**

I have worked in 6 countries so far including Peru, Argentina and Egypt. My suggestion is about setting aside time for homework check on a regular basis. Once I was teaching at a high school where my classrooms had around 30 students. I was checking their homework regularly at first, but later I started checking them once in two weeks. Although I assigned homework on a daily basis, I checked them only once in two weeks. After a while, I lost the track, and I could not remember the details of the assignments which culminated in checking the assignments superficially. One day, I understood that they did not pay much attention to my homework. I asked some of my students about the reason. They told me that my feedbacks were not comprehensive enough anymore for their improvement, so they stopped doing them in a well-planned way. This day has changed my teaching career forever. I have started assigning less

homework to give valuable feedback for each one. Otherwise, quantity does not ensure that students' success will increase tremendously. Quality outweighs quantity in terms of learning outcomes. (Mentor 8)

#### **4.9 Integrating Automated Multiple-Choice Questions into the Exams**

I have worked in 13 countries so far including Ethiopia, Turkmenistan, the USA and Albania. My suggestion is about integrating automated multiple-choice questions into the exams. I had been asking all my questions as open ended to get students' opinions while I was teaching at a secondary school. On the other hand, I had around 400 students to teach in total. It was a major issue for me to prepare and grade on time. Most of the time, I submitted the exams later than expected time. An experienced teacher was hired at my school after a while. He was a versatile teacher to integrate an automated exam application called Zip Grade which grades all multiple-choice questions within seconds. He also told me that we could get detailed analysis about each question to see their common mistakes, means and medians. He instructed me on how to prepare, conduct and finalize grading within 2 days. In the upcoming exam period, I merged open ended questions with Zip Grade ones successfully. The exam was held, and I completed grading on the same day. Zip Grade was a real time saver for me. Now, I know how to take advantage of technology for educational purposes. (Mentor 9)

#### **4.10 Initiating the Lesson with a Bell Work**

I have worked in 14 countries so far including the UK, the USA and France. Once I was teaching in a secondary school. I had to carry out some official duties such as taking the attendance, signing the lessons plans and checking their homework within the first 5 minutes of each lesson. Later, I researched the internet about designing some activities to keep students learning at that time. After a while, I realized that bell work fits perfectly for my needs. Bell work is the short assignment to be completed within 5 minutes of each lesson. It is a great means to revise previous units and measure students' learning. Additionally, I turned some bell work activities into an online format. While I was completing official tasks, they were taking online bell work activity which would be graded within seconds automatically. Student also enjoyed joining such bell work activities as they had the opportunity to test their learning rate and learn from their own mistakes. (Mentor 10)

#### **4.11 Knowing the Limits While Joking**

I have worked in 8 countries so far including Iraq, Indonesia and China. My suggestion is about knowing the limits while joking. I was teaching in a high school 4 years ago. I was showing the students' writing works to emphasize their strengths and weaknesses. Once a student could not write well, and I told him/her that you were very creative today. You wrote as if you had been the author. Later, I learned that the students' uncle had passed away due to a tragic life accident a few days ago. When the student visited me in my office, she was so devastated by this humiliating remarks. I apologized her for my wrongdoing. Since this day, I have thought three times before making a joke. (Mentor 11)

#### **4.12 Taking Students` Phones without Informing the Parents**

I have worked in 10 countries so far including Latvia, Spain and Egypt. My suggestion is about being cautious while seizing students` mobile phones if they are not allowed to use them in classes. Once I seized a student`s phone after warning him several times to put away it. I kept it in my locker for a day without informing the head of the disciplinary committee and the principal of the school. The next day, his parents visited us and talked to us angrily on grounds that the student used the mobile phone to call his parents once needed. Also, the student told his family that I did not take action while other students were using their mobile phones in a class which was totally false. It took much time to calm them down and clarify the points. Additionally, the administrator of the school issued a warning letter for me about keeping this serious issue as a secret. Since that day, I have informed all related sides whenever I seize a student`s mobile phone, so I will have a peace of mind on future cases. (Mentor 12)

#### **5. Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations**

This qualitative study explored experienced English mentors` ideas in general to facilitate recently graduated English teachers` adaptations to the educational institutions.

According to the uncovered data, some interpretations can be made for reflections. The mentors have reiterated that extra listening materials should not be beyond students` understanding (Bingol et al., 2014). Otherwise, students` enthusiasm can fade day by day. Additionally, they have emphasized that pronunciation mistakes cannot be eliminated by criticizing students for each mistake as expressed by Mirza (2015). Other proven techniques should be employed to minimize pronunciation mistakes. Furthermore, they have held the opinion that monotonous teaching style can reduce the quality of the lessons, so educational websites can be integrated into lessons as suggested by Stanley and Porter (2002). After that, they have postulated that inviting some professionals can be helpful to attract students` attention in class, so they can have a chance to learn by doing and observing as stated by Salleh and Omar (2013). In addition, they have conceded that it is better to activate all possible official platforms on upcoming exams. If one of them is missing, teachers can be held accountable for the problem arisen. After that, teachers should have alternative plans in case some technical problems arise. They should have different plans to activate in these situations as postulated by Rajabboyevna (2020). Another point to be emphasized by the mentors is that students should learn to race against time as suggested by Uzir et al. (2020). Otherwise, they cannot complete the exams on time which can cause the failure ultimately. Furthermore, the mentors have postulated that homework check should be on a regular basis to develop good habits about taking responsibility as stated by Xu and Yuan (2003). Additionally, mentors have appreciated the value of using automated grading systems as postulated by Wagstaff et al. (2019). Traditional grading systems can be time consuming and ineffective to get detailed analysis for each student in seconds. Additionally, mentors have stated that bell work activities can be quite helpful to revise previous lessons while the teacher is completing official procedures in the first 5 minutes of the lesson as demonstrated by Palmer (2011). Afterwards, some comments can have adverse effects, so utmost care should be given before expressing them in class as argued by Muchmore et al. (2016). Finally, mentors have emphasized that parents should be informed about the case when the teacher take their mobile phones for using in class as postulated by Musial (2014). Otherwise, some conflicts can arise if the student informs his parents by exaggerating.

Considering this study, some recommendations can be made for the stakeholders of education and future studies. In this study, English mentors who are from 4 different nationalities were chosen as the sample. The mentors whose majors are varied can be chosen as the sample in future studies. Additionally, only 4 nationalities were included in this study. A comprehensive study which requires to welcome more nationalities can be helpful to get more valuable results. Furthermore, only 12 mentors were interviewed in this study. Increasing the number of mentors can uncover more insightful points in future studies. Finally, converting the data collection process from virtual to traditional format can eliminate the problems encountered during online interviews.

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