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Education, Reflection, Development**LEADERSHIP AND QUALITY IN THE MENTORSHIP OF  
TEACHING PRACTICE**

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**Abstract**

The article presents the results of a study conducted within the project "Professionalization of teaching career - PROF" (POCU / 904/6/25/146587), focused on leadership and the application of quality management principles in teaching career mentorship. The study aimed at pinpointing the opinions of mentor teachers who had participated in the study, trainees in the Prof II programme, regarding the application of leadership model in mentorship and the principles of quality management in mentorship, in order to increase the quality of teaching practice for future teachers. The conclusions of the article highlighted specific methods utilised by mentor teachers in the application of quality management principles in their mentoring activities such as the focus on the future teacher, leadership in mentorship, result-oriented quality mentorship, process-based approach, approach of management as a system, learning, innovation and continuous quality improvement, fact-based approach in decision-making process, involvement of future teachers in the process of their own professional training. Leadership and quality principles applied in the management of mentoring activities contribute significantly to the development of the skills mentor teachers need to acquire and to providing higher quality in teaching practice programmes.

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## 1. Introduction

The general objective of the project entitled "Professionalization of teaching career - PROF" (POCU / 904/6/25/146587) is that of providing professional mentorship throughout the teaching career, in the pre-university education system by establishing a coherent and reliable national system of vocational training and development of teaching competence, as psychological and pedagogical training. This is necessary for future teachers in order to occupy and exercise a teaching position as well as obtaining pedagogical performance in pre-university education system in Romania, in teaching / training and in the educational management activity, in the context of the global process of digitization of education systems. (<https://www.edu.ro/PROF>).

PROF project is based on a strong partnership between the Ministry of Education (beneficiary of the project) and 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.

Two continuous training programmes have been carried out within the PROF project that is PROF I - Teaching Career Mentorship and PROF II - Mentorship of Teaching Practice, which responded to the needs of mentor teacher trainers to develop training activities in the field of teaching career mentorship and teaching practice. The PROF II programme was structured on six thematic units:

- i. Mentorship of teaching practice - leading to improved quality in education;
- ii. Professionalization of the teaching career throughout the mentorship of teaching practice programme - policies and directions to be utilised;
- iii. Mentoring in the design of teaching activities;
- iv. Management of activities throughout the teaching practice programme;
- v. Teaching practice portfolio;
- vi. Assessment and self-assessment activities throughout the teaching practice programme

The fourth thematic unit entitled Management of activities throughout the teaching practice programme aimed at provided the students with the following specific skills:

- i. Competences to apply managerial processes to ensure the quality of teaching practice in order to effectively train and develop the professional behaviours of students-future teachers.
- ii. Competences to apply professionally basic principles and strategies of mentorship and educational coaching in the management of teaching practice activities;
- iii. Abilities to utilise appropriately criteria, methodologies, and tools specific to the management of teaching practice activities in the mentorship of teaching practice;
- iv. Abilities to lead efficiently the design, implementation, and self-evaluation / evaluation activities carried out by the students-future teachers in the teaching practice programme, by aligning the projective-conceptual activity with the practical-applicative activity.

The training experts supported students in the process of acquiring the set of specific competencies within each thematic unit. Moreover, they promoted the leadership competence in teaching practice mentorship under the assumption that mentor teachers, as managers of teaching practice activities, are factors of change in the mentoring team in their position of transformational leaders. This means that

training experts are able to mobilize the teaching and psychological resources of students-future teachers towards their participation in quality standards and their full involvement in the process of self-training and self-development.

## 2. Problem Statement

The concept of leadership is analysed in the literature compared to the concept of management (Table 1). It refers to influence rather than authority and is supported by most definitions of leadership (which) reflect the hypothesis that it involves a process of social influence including an intentional dimension exerted by a single individual or group on other individuals or groups, in order to structure the activities and relationships of a group or organisation.

This means that, unlike management, leadership is exercised as an influence, which the leader manifests in an intentional manner both at the group level and at the individual level. The notion of influence is neutral in the sense that it does not refer to goals or actions that should be considered by the leader.

Moreover, leadership is increasingly associated with values. Expectations are for leaders to base their actions on clear personal and professional values (Bush, 2015, p. 18)

**Table 1.** Management - leadership comparative analysis (according to Bush, Leadership and educational management. Current theories and practices, 2015)

Factors	Management	Leadership
Principal focus	Implementation and efficiency	Values and goals
Strengths	Authority of position	Influence
Structure	Hierarchy	Fluid
Processes	Technical and rational	Open and fluid
Responsibility	Vertical	Multidirectional
Tasks	Delegation	Distribution
Relations	Transactional	Transformational

A third perspective on teacher's leadership competence pinpoints aspects of development, transformation, and consolidation of skills. The field of educational leadership highlights characteristics and qualities among which the vision and plan, action and perseverance and the fact that leaders inspire the people around them may prevail. Maxwell (2019) considers that flexibility is another quality of leaders. From the perspective of mentorship, the leadership practiced by the mentor teacher in teaching practice is distributed (Harris, 2013) in the sense that the mentor actively mediates, facilitates, and supports students' leadership, being the result of a collaborative mentor-student work.

Moreover, leadership is about the power of emotions. "True leaders impress us. They awaken our passions and stimulate all that is best in us. If we try to explain why they are so efficient, we are talking about strategy, vision or percussive ideas" (Goleman, 2018, p. 27).

Grant (2006) provides a leadership model for teachers, which needs to be promoted: leadership in the classroom, leadership outside the classroom with other teachers, leadership for the development of the whole school, leadership outside the school and in the community. From the perspective of mentorship, to achieve this type of leadership, three preconditions are required: culture in the school environment, a

participatory decision-making process, and a common vision. Simultaneously, the mentor makes the transition from leadership training focused on "... ensuring quality in teaching to leadership for the benefit of learning, which incorporates a wider range of leadership actions to support learning and learning outcomes" (Bush, 2015, p. 30).

Quality mentorship was associated in the Prof II project with the adoption of the core principles of the management of quality. Within the training programme for teaching practice mentors, the principles of the ISO 9001: 2015 management of quality system were promoted, the content of which was significant so as to ensure their good applicability in the management of teaching practice activities. We briefly present some of the meanings subscribed to the eight principles:

The principle of focusing on the student throughout the mentorship of teaching practice. The quality of teaching practice is seen in a fluid approach, in which the assessment of the quality is performed with the co-participation of the student as the recipient of the practice activities. This approach involves the concern to obtain student's satisfaction in relation to the suggestions of hands-on learning (Knouse et al., 2009). The student-orientation approach requires attention to the knowledge and integration of specific characteristics, training needs, and interests as well as the orientation of hands-on learning efforts towards both professional and personal development, towards the training of professional skills and of several transversal skills. Moreover, from the perspective of this principle, teaching practice can be viewed as a project developed and redrafted permanently, with the direct participation of recipients and by integrating their feedback.

The principle of leadership in the mentorship of teaching practice. The leadership in the mentorship of teaching practice involves mentor's effort to manage teaching practice by promoting a coherent vision through which the mentor can justify the strategies adopted to achieve the objectives of the teaching practice, the relationship and the communication strategies, the climate of practice and the manner of direct and constant involvement, respectively of valorisation of the recipients.

The principle of involving student-practitioners in the process of their own professional training implies that the mentor teacher builds professional development contexts in which the practice proposals represent the outcome of a permanent dialogue with the students as its recipients.

The principle of teaching practice as a process and as a system. The principle involves focusing equally on the learning processes and their support as well as on obtaining some products throughout the teaching practice programme. This approach requires designing and conducting the practice by practicing a variety of professional and transversal skills as well as making optimisation decisions by integrating monitoring data and student-practitioners' knowledge. The systemic approach to teaching practice involves strategic decisions on key moments and activities in which resources will be invested, essentially ensuring the experiences and professional evolution of student-practitioners.

The principle of learning, innovation, and continuous improvement of quality in the mentorship of teaching practice. The principle invites both learners and students to valorise learning as a permanent approach in order to accumulate, recalibrate, and optimise the quality of teaching services, setting development objectives and capitalizing on training opportunities.

The principle of making decisions based on evidence / facts in the teaching practice activity compels a high level of responsibility of all actors involved in the hands-on learning and professional

training activity. Responsible decisions in teaching practice can be based on a variety of data regarding the quality and impact of student-practitioners' learning and development, the focus not only on student-practitioners' performance, but also on reactions and learning, the balanced consumption of resources in order to achieve future goals.

The principle of mutually beneficial relationships within the mentoring team emphasizes the need to valorise the mentoring team as a decision-making and development environment based on interaction and mutual regulation. The implementation plan of the mentoring activity should reflect not only the responsibilities of those involved, but also a certain dynamic of the team, the sharing of professional roles, the exchange of resources, the evaluation, and mutual regulation.

The principle of orientation towards obtaining results based on hands-on learning. Along with the principle of approaching teaching practice as a process, the orientation towards results is a guarantee of the efficiency of hands-on learning. The application of this principle involves ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of practice activities, through the proper management of the resources involved, in order to obtain significant learning outcomes for the training of future teachers.

### **3. Research Questions**

The research problem was based on the questions: To what extent do mentor teachers promote the principles of leadership in specific mentoring activities?; What are the actions through which the mentors manifest their role of leaders in the management of teaching practice activities?; What is the relationship between leadership in the mentorship of teaching practice and seniority, respectively experience in mentorship?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of trainees in the training programme entitled "PROF II- Mentorship of Teaching Practice" within the project "Professionalization of teaching career - PROF" (POCU / 904/6/25/146587) regarding the application of the leadership model to utilise in mentorship and the principles of quality management in mentorship in order to increase the quality of practical training for future teachers.

In accordance with the quality principles of the general standard ISO 9000, updated and optimized by the standards ISO 9001: 2015, the principles of quality management in the mentorship of teaching practice were grouped in two categories:

1. Principles regarding the focus on the student-practitioner as a recipient;
- 2.-Principles regarding the management of the mentoring process.

In a previous study, the results of the first survey based on a questionnaire applied to mentor teachers of teaching practice, trainees in the PROF project, regarding the application of the following principles of quality management in teaching practice were presented: the principle of focusing on the student-practitioner, the principle of involving student-practitioners in the process of their own professional training, the principle of decision-making based on proofs / facts in the teaching practice activity and the principle of orientation towards obtaining results based on hands-on learning.

In the current study, we will present other principles of the management of quality that highlight the role of mentors of teaching practice from the perspective of leadership and orientation towards optimising the mentorship process. These principles are limited to the second category: principles related to the management of the mentorship process. They focus on the central role of the mentor as a programme proponent and guarantor of the quality of teaching practice activities. This category includes the following principles: the principle of leadership in the mentorship of teaching practice, the principle of teaching practice as a process and as a system, the principle of learning, innovation, and continuous quality improvement in the mentorship of teaching practice, the principle of mutually beneficial relationships in the mentoring team.

## 5. Research Methods and Number of Participants

The research data were collected by the questionnaire-based survey method, and their statistical processing was performed using the SPSS-Crosstab programme. To achieve the purpose of the research, a 14 question - questionnaire was constructed. It surveyed trainees' perceptions regarding leadership and the application of quality management principles in their teaching practice activity.

## 6. Findings

In the present study, on the sample of participating subjects of 85 teachers, trainees in the training programme "PROF II - Mentorship of teaching practice" we assessed the following variables as important: age, seniority in education, seniority and experience in mentorship. We are highlighting the fact that 97.6% of the participants are between 46-65 years old (tables 2-4), which demonstrates biological and professional maturity.

**Table 2.** Age of the 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	

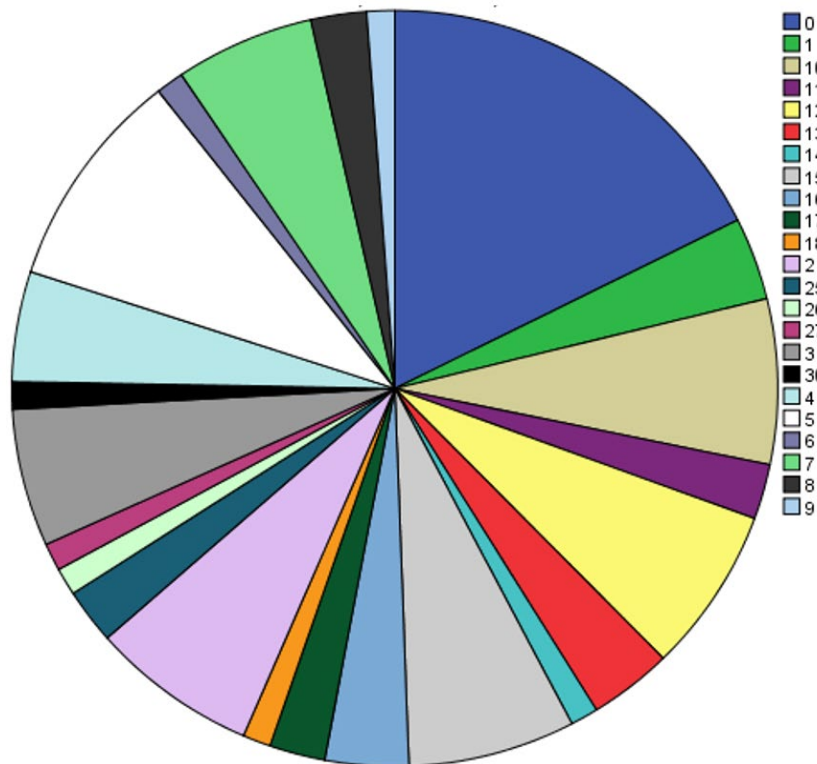
**Table 3.** Participants' seniority in education

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

**Table 4.** Participant's seniority and experience in mentorship

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	no experience	15	17,6	17,6	17,6
	With experience in mentorship	70	82,4	82,4	100,0
	Total	85	100,0	100,0	

**Figure 1. Seniority and experience in mentorship (no. of years)**



**Figure 1.** Seniority and experience in mentorship

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

The processing of the questionnaire data was performed in the SPSS-Crosstabs programme, grouping the opinions of the participants in the study into two categories: trainees with seniority and experience in mentorship and teachers without seniority and experience in mentorship. Each category of respondents correlates with the specific indicators subsumed under the principles of quality management in the mentoring activity, the subcategory of principles related to the management of the mentorship process, as presented in tables 5 and 6.

**Table 5.** Correlating the principles of quality management with respondents' seniority and experience in mentorship - Principles regarding the management of the mentorship process

P2. The principle of leadership in the mentorship of teaching practice		To a very small extend	To a certain extend	To a large extend	To a very large extend
P4. The principle of involving student-practitioners in the process of their own professional training					
P2.1. Seniority and experience in mentorship	No experience	1	1	2	10
	With experience in mentorship	1	8	27	35

	Total	2	9	29	45
P2.2. Seniority and experience	no experience	1	0	5	20
in	with experience in mentorship	1	6	17	35
mentorship	Total	2	6	22	55
P.2.3. Seniority and experience	no experience	1	0	5	15
in	with experience in the mentorship	1	5	25	33
mentorship	Total	2	5	30	48
P.2.4. Seniority and experience	no experience	1	0	2	9
in	with experience in mentorship	0	4	14	55
mentorship	Total	1	4	16	64
P.2.5. Seniority and experience	no experience	1	0	2	9
in	with experience in mentorship	0	5	17	51
mentorship	Total	1	5	19	60
P.2.6. Seniority and experience	no experience	1	0	2	8
in	with experience in mentorship	0	5	15	54
mentorship	Total	1	5	17	62
P.4.1. Seniority and experience	no experience	0	1	2	12
in	with experience in mentorship	0	7	15	48
mentorship	Total	0	8	17	60
P.4.2. Seniority and experience	no experience	0	1	2	12
in	with experience in mentorship	1	6	19	44
mentorship	Total	1	7	21	56
P.4.3. Seniority and experience	no experience	0	1	3	11
in	with experience in mentorship	1	5	12	52
mentorship	Total	1	6	15	63
P.4.4. Seniority and experience	no experience	0	1	4	10
in	with experience in mentorship	1	9	13	47
mentorship	Total	1	10	17	57

We have discovered a responsible, mature attitude of the mentors with experience in teaching practice, which valorise the set of quality management principles, focused on actions aimed at leadership in the mentorship of teaching (P2), materialised in adopting a comprehensive vision on teaching practice activities (P.2.1), which promotes an objective-centred management of teaching practice (P.2.2). The values of the school environment in the teaching practice activity (P.2.3) are formulated clearly in order to cultivate mutual trust within the mentoring relationship (P.2.4), and the recognition of mentoring team members' contributions (students, teaching practice coordinator, headmaster, mentorship inspector), respectively (P.2.5), is concerned with the continuous development of practitioners, offering them opportunities, in this regard (P.2.6).

The principle of teaching practice as a process and as a system (P4) is rated *to a large extent* and *to a very large extent* in terms of the mentor offering models for the good use of teaching resources (P.4.3) and in terms of the mentor being concerned with the teaching practice, which is a training process that involves continuous monitoring and optimisation (P.4.1.), followed by prioritising development opportunities for the practitioners (P.4.2) and evaluating the initial competencies of the practitioner (P.4.4). Therefore, the mentor is concerned with practitioners' continuous development, offering them



development opportunities as shown in the table presented above (table 5). Each principle is rated *to a large extend* and *to a very large extend* by mentor teachers, whilst inexperienced teachers have a linear dispersion of options specified on the Likert scale.

**Table 6.** Correlating the principles of quality management with respondents' seniority and experience in mentorship - Principles regarding the management of the mentorship process

P5. The principle of learning, innovation, and continuous improvement of quality in the mentorship of teaching practice		To a very small extend	To a certain extend	To a large extend	To a very large extend
P7. The principle of mutually beneficial relationships within the mentoring team					
P5.1. Seniority and experience in mentorship	no experience	0	0	8	7
	with experience in mentorship	0	4	24	42
	Total	0	6	4	32
P5.2. Seniority and experience in mentorship	no experience	0	0	7	8
	with experience in mentorship	0	4	15	51
	Total	0	4	22	59
P.5.3. Seniority and experience in mentorship	no experience	0	0	4	11
	with experience in mentorship	0	2	9	59
	Total	0	2	13	70
P.7.1. Seniority and experience in mentorship	no experience	0	1	4	10
	with experience in mentorship	0	6	16	48
	Total	0	7	20	58
P.7.2. Seniority and experience in mentorship	no experience	0	1	5	9
	with experience in mentorship	1	5	23	41
	Total	1	6	28	50
P.7.3. Seniority and experience in mentorship	no experience	0	2	3	10
	with experience in mentorship	0	5	17	48
	Total	0	7	20	58

The principle of learning, innovation and continuous quality improvement in the mentorship of teaching practice (P5) and the principle of mutually beneficial relationships within the mentoring team could be materialized by the following actions: (P7) mentors with experience in teaching practice are concerned to a large extend /and to a very large extent with valuable actions regarding the approach of the practice in an innovative manner, by adopting original practices (P.5.1); mentors are open to continuous learning in response to the challenges in teaching practice (P.5.3) and, especially, to utilise tools to continuously improve the quality of teaching practice activities. (P.5.2).

In the current context of approaching the management of the mentorship process, we have emphasized the concern of experienced mentors to develop relationships that lead to mutual professional benefits (P.7.1), characterised by a permanent flow of information, professional experiences, and useful resources needed within the mentoring team (P.7.3). All these steps and actions are harmonized in the content of the mentoring plan, as a product of a joint effort of teaching practice managers and their recipients (P.7.2).

## 7. Conclusions

The results of the study highlighted the role of mentor teachers of teaching practice as leaders in the mentoring activity focused on quality principles. The leadership and quality principles applied in the management of mentoring activities made a significant contribution to the development of mentor teachers' skills and to increasing the quality of teachers' training programme for future teachers.

The research problem focused on centralising the respondents' opinions regarding the following dimensions: the influence of the mentor as a leader in the formation / development of professional behaviours in teaching practice; the actions through which the mentors manifest their role as leaders in the management of teaching practice activities; the relationship between leadership in the mentorship of teaching practice and the quality of future teachers' practice training.

An important conclusion is the focus on the central role of the mentor as programme proponent and guarantor of the quality of teaching practice activities by applying the following categories of principles: the principle of leadership in the mentorship of teaching practice, the principle of teaching practice as a process and as a system, the principle of learning, innovation and continuous quality improvement in the mentorship of teaching practice, the principle of mutually beneficial relationships within the mentoring team. Moreover, each of these sets of principles details concrete actions and behaviours as examples of benchmarks in the mentorship of teaching practice. Additionally, the increase of the quality of the practical training for future teachers is determined by the application of the leadership model in mentorship and of the principles of quality management.

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