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**ROLE OF MENTORING IN NOVICE TEACHERS  
ADAPTATION**

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*Abstract*

Teacher education has gained crucial importance in today's multicultural environment. It is no longer connected only with the methodology of teaching subjects and basics of upbringing, it is about young teachers' ability to quickly join the process of disseminate knowledge. Young teachers' readiness to accommodate both the academic and psychological needs of learners is connected to the timeframe of their own adaptation period.

Taking into consideration the importance of novice teachers' adaptation, the authors of the article developed and implemented a mentoring program. The program involved 32 novice teachers of ESP and 20 mentors providing professional help and consultations on the basis of their own experience. The main objective of the program was to assist novice teachers to overcome difficulties associated with the early stages of a teaching career and thus minimizes the possible damage to the educational process.

The study is concerned with the comparison and interpretation of the results obtained from the two stage survey of young teachers, who have started their teaching career at Kazan Federal University, as Business English teachers. The data obtained demonstrated the effectiveness of the developed mentoring program. On the basis of the performed work the authors have come to the conclusion that the mentoring program fulfills its objective to assist young teachers in adaptation, gaining confidence, establishing positive rapport with colleagues and students, overcoming first-year career challenges.

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**Keywords:** Teacher-training education, mentoring, adaption, collaboration, novice teacher.



## 1. Introduction

Teacher education has recently gained crucial importance due to the global issues connected with financial crisis, migration, cultural clashes, floods of information coming from mass media, etc. Nowadays teachers are no longer expected to provide only academic knowledge in the subject they teach, they are supposed to accommodate to psychological needs of their learners, be able to adapt to diverse groups of learners, communicate with parents, collaborate with colleagues, be involved in scientific research. All these could be quite challenging to the novice teachers. So, there should be ways to ease the transition from studying to the real working process.

The quality of teaching has always been an important issue in Russia and worldwide. The role of a teacher has expanded its traditional framework, taking into consideration the peculiarities of underage individual development, the necessity to integrate into the lifelong learning environment and the urgency to satisfy community needs.

The Russian government have identified the current problems of teacher education and introduced the program for teacher education modernization for 2014-2017. This program aims to increase the economic potential of teacher education as well as to elevate the social status of the teaching profession along with improving teachers' working conditions, career prospects, staff retaining options, overcoming career adaptation difficulties and many others.

The global shift to the professional competences paradigm (Ismagilova, Polyakova, 2014) in which meeting only the minimum of requirement is not sufficient anymore highlighted the fact that there is the gap between the real level of freshly qualified teachers' competence and the expectations they have to meet during their first year of professional work.

Careful attention is given to the real classroom experience practice as the abstract nature of created teaching conditions provided at the university cannot enable future teachers get an immersion into the process of teaching. The lack of experience later results in a prolonged adaptation period. Novice teachers would also have to adapt to the emotional, psychological and intellectual differences of students, their level of motivation, learning abilities.

The way to help novice teachers overcome the problems of professional adaptation is seen in mentoring programs that could be introduced by the employers. A mentoring program is intended to provide support and organize proper guidance for young teachers who are not yet confident in delivering teaching. It also builds 'self-esteem, directing, managing and instructing'. (Fletcher, 2000, 2012) The specific aim this paper has is to investigate the opportunities offered by mentoring program launched at foreign languages department for economics, business and finance, Kazan Federal University which assists novice teachers to overcome difficulties associated with the beginning of a new career and thus to minimize the possible damage to the educational process.

## 2. Problem Statement

In a Business dictionary mentoring is defined as an 'employee training system under which a senior or more experienced individual (the mentor) is assigned to act as an advisor, counsellor, or guide to a junior or trainee. The mentor is responsible for providing support to, and feedback on, the individual in his or her charge' (Business dictionary). The aim of mentoring is exactly the same in all spheres of life, no

matter if it is organized in business or education, first of all, to gain confidence and become an active doer of the required duties.

Opting for a mentoring program at higher educational establishments (HEE) stakeholders could reach at least two major goals - to enhance prestige of the HEE, and, secondly, to attract potential employees (young teachers) as they would feel more socially secure having the ability to master their background skills. Speaking about mentoring in education we should refer to Hobson, Ashby, Malderez & Tomlinson, who speak about 'the one-to-one support of a novice or less experienced practitioner by a more experienced practitioner, designed primarily to assist the development of the mentee's expertise and to facilitate their introduction into the culture of the profession and into the specific local context (Hobson et al., 2007).

Some authors define the period of induction as the transition from student-teacher to self-direction professional and compare this time with the reality shock. It can lead to unnecessary tension and failures among novice teachers to fulfil their duties properly (Vonk, 1993).

There are five signals described by Müller-Fohrbrodt, Cloetta, and Dann that distinguish the reality shock (Müller-Fohrbrodt et al., 1978):

- Perceptions of problems: This category includes subjectively experienced problems and pressures, complaints about workload, stress, and psychological and physical complaints.
- Changes of behaviour: Implied are changes in teaching behaviour contrary to one's own beliefs because of external pressures.
- Changes of attitudes. Implied are changes in belief systems.
- Changes of personality: This category refers to changes in the emotional domain and self-concept.
- Leaving the teaching position: The disillusion may be so great, that the novice teacher leaves the profession early.

Not all entry-level teachers feel ready to manage all requirements they face at a new workplace. Organizing classroom activities is only one and the smallest part of the whole pool of tasks teachers do every day. These include classroom management, syllabus design, maintaining discipline, organizing extra curriculum activities, collaborating with colleagues, to name but a few. Novice teachers feel frustrated and some even fail. Finally, it results in high employee turnover.

Induction Programs and Provisions or Mentoring Programs can help to tackle the problems of the reality-shock novice teachers face during their first year at work if organized adequately and systematically. To avoid "trial and error" approach among novice teachers we suggest mentoring programs to be introduced as an integral part of any institution of higher education if it pursues to guarantee high level of training and low level of conflicts and staff turnover.

We agree with The National Foundation for the Improvement of Education that 'ideally mentoring helps to ensure that new teachers have access to the accumulated instructional knowledge and expertise of their colleagues in ways that contribute to students' success'. (The National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, 1999, No.1) So, we may conclude that mentoring has deeper sense and it is to make teaching instructions of beginner teachers the ones that could allow students to get high quality of subjects studied.

Assuming that mentoring is not just the transfer of existing 'craft' knowledge and skills to a novice (Brown & McIntyre, 1988) but rather helping the novice teacher to become flexible, reflective and self-developing professionals we reckon the mentor knowledge base to be crucial one to fulfill this role. A good mentor must have the following personal qualities: open-mindedness, reflectiveness, flexibility, listening skills, empathy, creativity and a helping attitude (Vonk, 1993). In the long run, all parties connected with mentoring, in their own way, will get benefits from the program. The main advantages for novice teachers are seen in: getting help in 'translating academic knowledge into meaningful instructions' (The National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, 1999, No.1, p.3); providing easier adaptation to new roles (teacher, tutor, colleague, collaborator); assisting for future growth and promotion; avoiding disillusion about chosen profession; social security. HEEs also get benefits like - staff retention; possibility to renew teaching personnel; enhancing prestige of HEE by acting both as an establishment providing high quality of teaching and as a caring, reliable stakeholder; an authority increase of HEE's executives. Students being the "customers" of the educational service will get experienced, highly motivated teachers; enjoy positive, productive atmosphere in the classroom; be proud of their own success due to high quality teaching. Speaking about large-scale benefit we should mention the government of the country. For it the advantages are observed in getting competitive workforce; stable employability in educational sector; transforming teacher training education into economically effective sphere.

### **3. Research Questions**

The authors of the study set two main research questions to be answered:

- 3.1. Is there a practical need for a mentoring program with the aim to aid novice teachers to start their academic career productively avoiding the anxiety of first career trial period?
- 3.2. What are the effects of the mentoring program on the novice teacher adaptation to the new career challenges?

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

The purpose of the study is to identify the effectiveness of a mentoring program aiming at providing easier adaptation of novice teachers to new roles, increasing their motivation for productive, well-structured professional activity. To estimate the effectiveness of the procedure it is needed to investigate novice teachers' vision on the importance of a mentoring program and to later present the analysis of the tools used throughout the completion of it. Basing on the obtained results it would be possible to conclude about the well functioning of the mentoring program or to detect the gaps for future usage.

### **5. Research Methods**

To assess the effectiveness of the mentoring program incorporated by the Department authorities and to make amendments that will enhance its efficiency in the future two-stage survey was conducted. The survey data was gathered from 32 novice teachers during the period of first year working practice for the foreign languages department in economics, business and finance of KFU (Institute of Management,

Economics and Finances). The age of the participants ranged from 25 to 28 (27 female and 2 male) either with no previous teaching experience or just a year with the school. The findings are based on responses of novice teachers who completed questionnaires.

The combination of quantitative systematic observations from the novice teachers' perspective and general qualitative observations enabled to design methodology adapted to the purpose of the study.

The first stage objective was to identify challenges novice teachers suffer in order to alter the program and adjust mentoring policy to the need of the novice teachers. The dichotomous questions: the first one on stating the fact of experiencing challenges and the second one designed to designate their attitude toward mentoring. The checkbox question furthered specified the types of experienced challenges.

The second stage questionnaires provided the data for feedback analysis. Dichotomous questions: the first one on defining the opinion on effectiveness of the proposed mentoring model; the second one was devoted to facilitating power of the model. The multiple-choice question, the third, allowed defining the adaptation period for the new career. The checkbox question, the fourth, was generated to establish activities each mentor undertook. Question number five was the rating scale question made to get 5-point scale assessment of the model. The open-ended questions: the sixth and seventh were asked to determine positive and negative aspects of the model; the eighth one collected the propositions to further improvement and development of the model. The results obtained at this stage evidenced the effectiveness of implemented mentoring model for adapting novice teacher to new career and making them cope with challenges accompanying this process.

## **6. Findings**

### **6.1. Mentoring program model**

Obviously, there are no mentoring programs that are unified and could be addressed to the needs of concrete HEEs. Mentoring as an effective tool to induce novice teacher into the career has been used at the Department of foreign languages for economics, business and finance, Institute of Management, Economics and Finance for decades. In 2014 the issue gained crucial importance due to the large-scale recruitment option. The department was required to renovate existed mentoring program. Thirty two novice teachers, former graduates were supposed to start working as full-time teachers of English at the department and 75% agreed that they need a mentor to start their career in a due manner. All recruits were surveyed with the purpose to identify possible problems with the start of teaching career as three-thirds thought to have them. We grouped the questions according to the scope of issues that may occur: IT literacy; subject methodology issue; subject content issue; pedagogical and psychological issues; self-management; environmental issues; university rules and regulations (Table 01).

**Table 01.** Adaptation challenges

<b>Types of challenges</b>	<b>Issues and responds</b>
IT literacy	Technology negligence-19%
Subject methodology issues	Teaching methods issues- 16%

Subject content issues	Business and Business English negligence – 41%
Pedagogical issues	Inability to contact with students-16%
Psychological issues	Building rapport with colleagues-13% Adaptation to new career – 3% Self-doubt – 6%
Self-management	Time-management – 13%
Environmental issues	Poor information flow – 22% Information overload-31%
University rules and regulations	Scope of teaching duties – 25% Organizational frustration-19%

Thus the novice teachers reported insufficiency of business knowledge to become adequate Business English teachers (41%) which means that poor awareness of some Business English terms and business realities prevented them from proper execution of their work, however, around a third were experiencing information overload. Along with that 25% complained about scope of teaching duties, as they didn't expect their job to cover such aspect as administration, science, out-of-class activities together with remedial work, counseling, dealing with slow-learners issues. Approximately a fifth revealed IT, organization and communication breakdown obstacles to hurdle their natural lifework. Social and psychological problems were encountered by around a tenth of all respondents that evidence the majority to find teaching profession suitable for their personality.

Hence the results allowed highlighting key areas mentoring program would level off and designed deliberately to tackle challenges mentees pointed out (Figure 01).

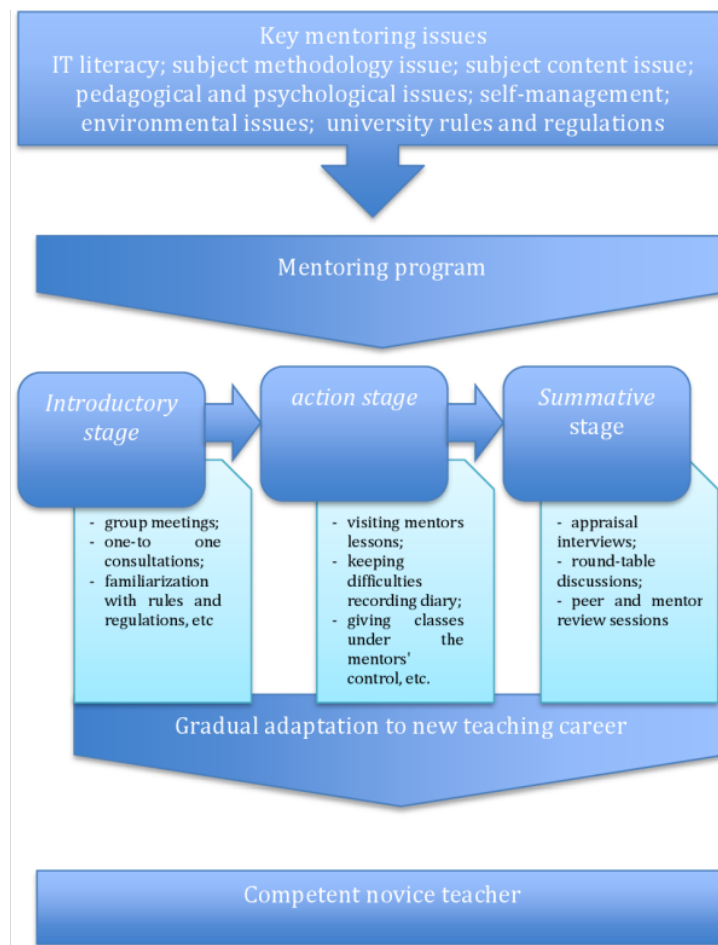
Mentoring program model included three main stages: introductory, action stage and summative stage.

Introductory stage included group meetings and one-to one consultations with mentees, where they were presented all teaching materials, visual aids, laboratories, computer rooms, apps used at the lessons. They also watched introductory video about the university, its structure, details connected with syllabus, assessment criteria, teaching strategies.

On action stage mentees visited mentors lessons grasping classroom management techniques, methodology peculiarities, special teaching gimmicks. Simultaneously, they held their own lessons recording the difficulties they faced during the lessons in special diaries to later discuss them with the mentor. Mentors started visiting mentees lesson after two months the program started.

Summative stage included appraisal interviews, round-table discussions to share the experience novice teachers got during first six months of real teaching practice; peer and mentor review sessions.

Mentors were assigned on the basis of their experience, degrees held, involvement into progressive scientific environment and met the requirements concerning expertise in the subject matter and methodology along with appropriate personal qualities.



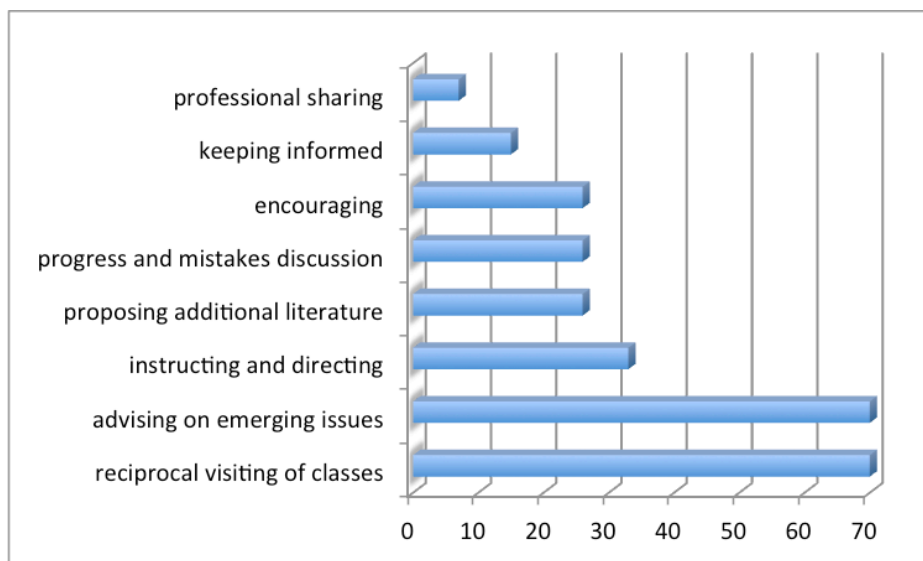
**Figure 01.** Mentoring Program Model

The proposed model of the program combined various techniques, methods and procedures to foster novice teachers' adaptation motivating their self-development, forming their professional identity and leading to work satisfaction.

## 6.2. Practical outcome of the mentoring program model

The effectiveness of the mentoring program model was assessed by the second stage of the survey searching the mentees attitude toward the procedures, activities and measures undertaken as well as their opinions on the performance of their mentors.

According to the responses the successful accomplishment of all stages with due execution of mentors' duties contracted the adaptation period of novice teachers to 3-5 months and simplifies their the transition to the new career (89%). Most of the novice teachers envisaged mentoring as an effective instrument for inducing novice teachers into teaching profession. The 5-point rating demonstrated that the majority (69%) granted the proposed model by rating it '5'; 25% found it deserving a '4', but 6% were dissatisfied as they rated the program '2' and '3'. Consequently the taken considerable efforts were quite sufficient to introduce to the unknown working environment, overcome the occurred challenges and make confident in the teaching prospects.



**Figure 02.** Mentors' assistance. Novice teachers' view

Regarding the mentors' assistance the most encountered activities were displayed in Figure 02. Mutual class visits and advising were popular tools used by the mentors in the process of instructions, remedial work and progress discussions. However, motivation work, literature and professional sharing were not ample to satisfy the needs of novice teachers. Professional sharing and informing were mentioned a few times which implies that problems concerning cooperation stayed unsolved for some mentees.

As for the benefits of the program the majority appraises techniques and activities organize. The following were mentioned most frequently: variety of mentoring techniques, individualized approach, sharing best teaching practices, opportunity to build novice teachers' community and seeding confidence in teaching. Still the mentor was the main issue of the majority responses concerning the drawbacks. The respondents discussed not enough time and no rapport with the mentor, the fact that mentors were appointed not chosen, no mentor rotation, overwhelmed control from mentor. All the comments made us reconsider the selection of candidates for the mentoring program.

In relation to the new employees' suggestions on the improvement of the existing program model we concluded that they were seeking for more collaborative work such as joint research, teaching projects and grant projects. They would increase the hours devoted to the use of audio labs and other teaching equipment as well as take classes on the basics of economics.

Summarizing the feedback from the novice teachers we could say that even when initial teacher education does not prepare student teachers to all future problematic situations they can still develop strong teaching competences by engaging in an effective mentoring program.

## 7. Conclusion

On the basis of the empirical research conducted by the authors we can confirm that the majority of novice teachers found the mentoring program effective and helpful to overcome the difficulties of the first year at work. Two main concerns that were identified while working with novice teachers could be indicated as the main hurdles to prevent smooth transition to the new role. Teaching English for Specific



Purpose was more demanding and complex than novice teachers thought it would be and the information overload was quite a stress to them. New teachers being submerged by the amount of responsibilities they are expected to fulfil are put under pressure, which they sometimes cannot bear.

The deliberately developed and rationally embodied mentoring program can ease the confrontation with the unexpected complexity of teaching. It also reduces the barriers in communication with senior staff and fosters professional growth if mentors provide adequate feedback. The mentoring program launched at the Foreign Languages Department for Economics, Business and Finance requires some alterations due to insufficient amount of time devoted to collaborative activities and lack of joint research and teaching projects that would enhance the novice teachers' motivation to stay and to get deeper sense of achievement and greater job satisfaction.

The study proves the importance of having mentoring programs at the HEE for successful realization of the curricular and even for stronger brand identity due to crucial role of a teacher in the education process. Only high quality teachers guarantee effective teaching and learning. So the University authorities should organize an adequate support and supervision to encourage teachers to stay and to support their further professional growth.

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