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What is the perceived value of a voluntary mentoring scheme as a form of professional development for English language teachers at a teaching centre of an international organisation?

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What is the perceived value of a voluntary mentoring scheme as a form of professional development for English language teachers at a teaching centre of an international organisation?

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ii Abstract

This qualitative study explores the value of mentoring as a form of professional development for English language teachers in an international organisation. The mentoring scheme at the heart of this case study is voluntary to the participants and supports their professional needs without being aligned to performance management. Insights are collated from a sample of teachers with varied levels of experience from both within and outside the mentoring scheme.

The findings reveal a considerable number of benefits, particularly those of a psychosocial nature, for both the mentors of teachers as well as their mentees. Other benefits include opportunities for career progression and the development of mentoring skills. Although the findings demonstrate the value of voluntary rather than mandated mentoring, with considerable appreciation expressed for the nature of the mentoring dialogue and relationship, they also reveal the need for greater understanding of the mentoring process for those outside the scheme.

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Chapter One – Introducing the mentoring scheme

1.1. Chapter introduction

This first chapter introduces this research study which explores the perceived value of a voluntary mentoring scheme for English language teachers at a teaching centre of an international organisation. It begins by outlining the aims and rationale which govern the study, together with an account of the researcher's positioning before going on to provide details of the organisational context in which it is conducted. The chapter continues with an explanation of the different dimensions which define the scheme and the related research questions which guide this inquiry.

1.2. Teacher learning and professional development

Commentators on the process of continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers have long argued for the need to shift away from pedagogical and content focused training courses and seminars to a more autonomous approach to self-directed learning (Day, 1999; Putnam and Borko, 2000). Since the 1980s these needs have partly been addressed in many educational contexts by mentoring schemes. Although originally conceived as providing a means by which teachers entering the profession could learn from a more experienced member of the teaching staff, in recent years mentoring schemes have been made available to a wider variety of teachers, assuming a more complex role in an increasingly rapidly changing educational landscape.

1.3. Research aim and researcher positioning

This research study aims to explore the perceived value of one particular scheme in the context of an international organisation, providing English as a foreign language teaching. The research is conducted by a member of the organisation's teacher training

staff who has not only benefited as a mentee during the many stages of their teaching career but has also assumed, in recent years, the role of mentor themselves. At the time of the study, the researcher had no supervisory or coordinator responsibilities in the organisation and was not well known to all members of the teaching staff. Furthermore, they were not a participating mentor in the scheme in question but played an advisory role in the stages leading up to its implementation.

The researcher is also an active and volunteer member of the European Mentoring and Coaching Council and, pursuing their interest through studies at a Master's degree level, sought further insights into mentoring in the context in which they work to further inform not only their own practice as a mentor but also the design of mentoring programmes. By developing research skills the researcher hoped to engage more reflexively with their professional role (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995) and to adopt a more critically informed approach to future research studies. However, as the researcher's intrinsic interest in mentoring is no secret to the teaching staff and the organisation, the research is sensitive to covert enthusiasm and possible bias.

1.4. Research rationale

The findings of this research study may be of value for a number of reasons. To begin with, the very nature of the mentoring scheme in question, which is explained in greater detail later in this chapter, may conceal unexpected advantages or challenges which might benefit from being exposed. The findings could therefore serve to inform any changes that need to be implemented to the scheme. Not all teaching centres in the organisation in other parts of the world employ mentoring schemes although there is considerable interest in them. Insights from this research study may therefore even encourage other centres to adopt one.

Furthermore, mentoring schemes in EFL contexts are not well documented, a phenomenon which may be explained by the fact that formal mentoring programmes are infrequently implemented, as there is evidence to suggest in Asia (Hudson and Nyguen, 2008) and in Latin America (Encinas and Sanchez-Hernandez, 2015) or because little research has been conducted and published on those that are. Either case would suggest a need for more research evidence to contribute to this field.

1.5. Introducing the international organisation

Having discussed the aims and rationale of this research study, the profile of the organisation will now be outlined in order to define the context in which the mentoring scheme is implemented. The organisation at the heart of this study delivers English language courses via its 83 teaching centres in over 50 countries throughout the world. The specific teaching centre at the heart of this study provides a wide range of English language courses for adults as well as Early Years students (4-5 years) and Young Learners (6-18). It also offers Business Training Services, examination preparation courses and teaching methodology courses for primary and secondary school teachers as well as those in Higher Education. These courses take place not only at its main premises but also in 3 satellite centres in the large city where it has been based for 70 years.

1.5.1. The teaching staff

At the time of this research study 75 teachers were employed to deliver the above mentioned language and training courses. To meet the needs of the organisation and to accommodate the professional preferences of certain members of its staff, teachers are employed according to three different types of contract as shown in Table 1. All the locally engaged full time staff report to one of five line managers, known as senior teachers, while teachers employed with an annualised yearly contract, report to one of six supervisors who have a coordinator role.

Table 1 Contractual status of the teaching staff

Contractual status of the teaching staff	No. of teachers
Locally engaged full time contract	25
Locally engaged annualised hourly contract	22
Freelance contract	28

1.5.2. Professional development

Teachers joining the organisation are required to hold a degree in addition to a certified English language teaching qualification. However, teacher professional development needs, such as mastering and integrating IT skills, adopting inclusive practices such as recognising and valuing diversity as well as promoting twenty first century learning skills, increasingly extend beyond the traditional language teaching methodological concerns covered on these courses. To meet these needs a number of professional development opportunities are made available by the organisation, the most important of which is an online learning portal and performance management system for teachers who are locally engaged. These teachers are also required to attend dedicated training days and two monthly training sessions and their lessons are observed twice a year.

1.5.3. The teaching centre mentoring scheme

To complement these development opportunities, a voluntary mentoring scheme was introduced in October 2014. For the purposes of this study it is important to underline the formal aspect of the mentoring programme, as it is initiated, recognised and sponsored by the organisation (Allen, Eby and Lentz, 2008). The relationship, however, between the mentors and the mentees is considered informal as it is equally owned by the mentor and the mentee, who both volunteer to take part. The mentoring process is equally informal as it is not aligned to performance management. The mentoring scheme is offered to all members of the teaching staff.

The organisation defines mentoring as being 'where one more experienced individual gives time to help the development of a less experienced colleague' which aims 'to enable the mentee to explore a range of ideas with their mentor and take action that will help them to develop and to progress in the organisation' (organisation Intranet, 2017). However, conceptualising the scheme in terms of its relational, developmental and contextual dimensions (Lai, 2010) using the guidelines taken from the mentoring pages of the organisation's Intranet as shown in Figure 1, affords a more precise understanding of its exact nature.

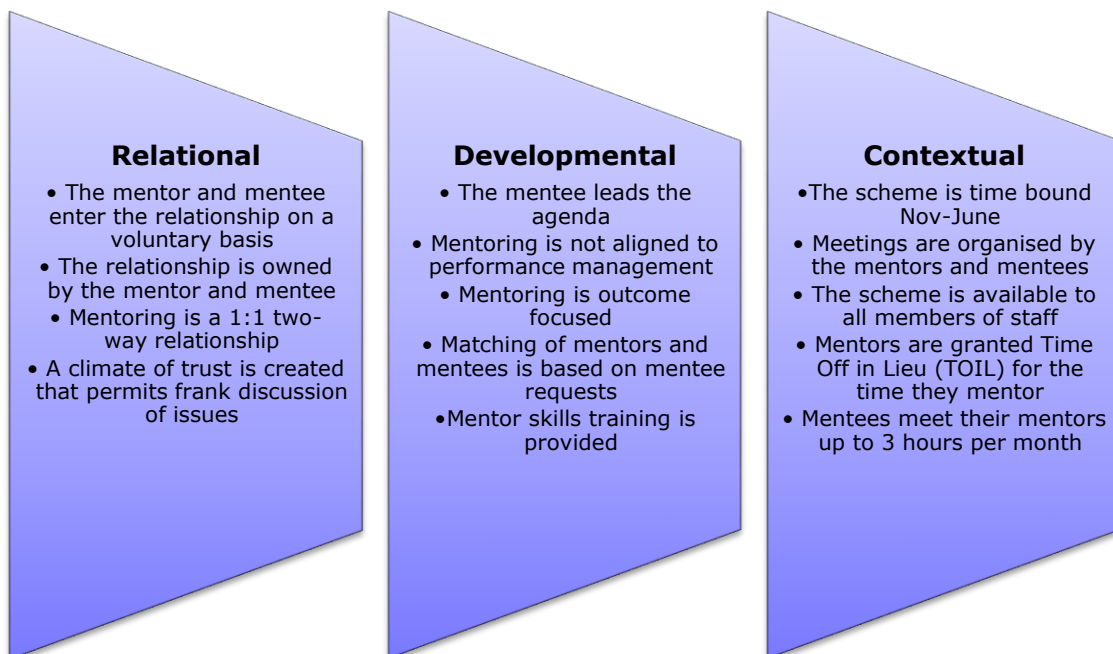


Fig.1 Conceptualisation of the mentoring scheme

Given these contextual, relational and developmental dimensions of the mentoring scheme, this research study will be guided by the following three research questions:

1. What are the benefits of a voluntary mentoring scheme which is not linked to performance management?
2. What are the benefits of mentoring as a form of professional development for teachers both as mentors and mentees?

3. Who can benefit from the scheme?

1.5.4. The call for mentors and mentees

To participate in the mentoring scheme, a senior teacher responsible for teacher development, invited volunteers by email to act as mentors and mentees from among the 75 teachers, regardless of their contractual status. The scheme was described in the email as being 'a place where you can take risks, experiment and develop' (senior teacher, 2014). Prospective mentees each year were asked to submit a 200 word expression of interest outlining the skills and areas in which they felt they needed to develop and were subsequently matched with mentors according to their needs. To prepare the mentors for their mentoring role, as is highly recommended (Delaney, 2012; Barrera, Braley and Slate, 2010; Lord, Atkinson and Mitchell, 2008) training was provided by the senior teacher, using the organisation's 15 hour Mentoring Skills Course, an in-service course designed both for teachers with no previous mentoring experience as well as for teachers wishing to update and develop their skills.

1.6. Chapter summary

Having explained the profile of the international organisation and the nature of the mentoring scheme in question, the following chapter will discuss the first stage of this research study, namely the investigation of the existing body of knowledge available on mentoring to provide the researcher with valuable insights to complement their own personal experience (Cain, 2009).

Chapter Two – Literature review

2.1. Chapter introduction

This chapter begins by outlining the aims and methodological approach to the literature review including an account of the related ethical concerns. This is followed by a discussion of the findings of the review which are collated in three main thematic areas. The chapter ends by summarising the implications of the literature review for the design stage of this research study.

2.2. Aims of the literature review

This search not only aimed at informing the researcher of the benefits of mentoring in similar contexts but also sought to expose any apparent contentious issues and identify any gaps in the existing body of studies which this research may contribute to filling. Together with providing a theoretical framework it also served to inform the philosophical rationale underpinning the research design, the choice of data collection methods as illustrated in Chapter Three, the analysis and discussion of the findings in Chapters Four and Five and their dissemination in Chapter Six (Harwell, 2010).

2.3. Literature review methodology

The literature review initially focused on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English Language Teaching (ELT) studies, but given the relative paucity of evidence available in these fields, as mentioned in Chapter One, it was subsequently extended to the mentoring of teachers in a variety of international educational settings. Several studies from other organisational contexts were also included following the recommendations of Hobson and Malderez (2013) and Rhodes and Beneicke (2002), who claim that research

in other fields may inform mentoring in education. The studies reviewed included both literature reviews and empirical studies written exclusively in English, as can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2 Literature review sources

	Mentoring context	Author
Literature review	Mentoring in various organisational contexts	Haggard, Dougherty, Turban and Wilbanks (2011); Allen, Eby and Lentz (2008); Hansford, Ehrich and Tennent (2004); Roberts (2000); Feldman (1999); Long (1997)
	Mentoring pre-service and beginner teachers of languages	Delaney (2012)
	Mentoring beginner teachers	Ingersoll and Strong (2011); Hobson, Ashby, Malderez and Tomlinson (2009)
	Mentoring pre-service EFL teachers	Nynguyen (2017); Hudson and Nynguyen (2008)
	Teacher education, professional development	Tomlinson, Hobson and Malderez (2010); Rhodes and Beneicke (2002); Little (1990)
Empirical studies	Mentoring in service teachers undertaking initial teacher training on a distance education programme	Lai (2010)
	Mentors of preservice teachers	Hudson (2013)
	Mentoring headteachers, teachers, trainee teachers, social care professionals	Lord, Atkinson and Mitchell (2008)
	Mentors from different organisational contexts	Allen, Poteet and Burroughs (1997)
	Mentoring preservice and beginner teachers	Aderibigbe, Colucci-Gray and Gray (2014)
	Mentors and mentees from a Healthcare Trust	Jones (2012)
	Mentoring beginner teachers	Aspfors and Fransson (2015); Hobson and Malderez (2013); Barrera, Braley and Slate (2010); Beutel and Spooner-Lane (2009)
	Mentoring student teachers	Street (2004)
	Mentoring experienced teachers	Fabian and Simpson (2002)

The search was conducted primarily through the use of online databases such as ERIC, Google Scholar, ResearchGate and ScienceDirect (Elsevier) together with the University of Nottingham online library. Studies were sought using the key words 'mentoring in

EFL', 'mentoring language teachers' and 'mentoring in education' as well as 'mentor' and 'mentee' given the dyadic nature of the mentoring relationship. In addition, terms such as 'voluntary', 'formal' and 'informal mentoring' were also used to find contexts similar to that of the international organisation in question, together with studies involving 'experienced' teachers to counterbalance the plethora of literature regarding beginner and in-service teachers.

2.4. Ethical concerns safeguarding the literature review

Although journals such as the International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching provided invaluable and insightful evidence, caution was exercised to safeguard against potential bias by using terms such as 'dark' and 'toxic mentoring' to access less favourable accounts of mentoring (Long, 1997; Feldman, 1999) among the wealth of literature extolling its virtues (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez and Tomlinson, 2009; Hudson, 2013).

2.5. Literature review findings

The findings of the literature review, which will now be discussed, were subsequently collated according to three major themes which emerged from the various studies: psychosocial benefits, personal growth and the development of professional skills. In addition, insights regarding the value of voluntary mentoring schemes which are not aligned to performance management were also investigated.

2.5.1. The psychological benefits of mentoring for mentees

The first of these three themes concerns the supposed psychological and social benefits of mentoring. According to Hansford, Ehrich and Tennent's (2004) study of formal mentoring programs in a variety of professional contexts, moral support, empathy, encouragement and friendship are the most commonly claimed benefits of mentoring. In

educational settings, emotional support is a benefit of particular value to in-service teacher trainees (Lai, 2010) while an increased level of confidence and self-esteem are yet more benefits that have been identified by a number of authors (Roberts, 2000; Lord et al., 2008; Tomlinson, Hobson and Malderez, 2010). It is also suggested that these benefits are particularly valued by early career teachers (Hobson et al., 2009), who are arguably more vulnerable and in greater need of psychological support in the initial stages of their profession compared to those with more experience.

However, the ability to provide emotional support for their mentees requires aptitudes, skills and an empathetic disposition which not all mentors may possess, despite training (Long, 1997). Even effective, proficient teachers may not necessarily develop into empathetic mentors who readily understand their mentees' personal needs. On the contrary, in cases where mentors impose their ideas on their mentees, the mentoring process can even prove detrimental to beginning teachers' wellbeing and self-esteem (Hobson and Malderez, 2013). Although mentee teachers might value emotional support, claims can also be found to suggest that, over time, mentoring may create dependency and even inhibit subsequent learner autonomy (Long 1997; Feldman, 1999).

2.5.2. The psychological benefits of mentoring for mentors

Evidence can also be found in the literature that mentors also enjoy certain psychological benefits from the mentoring process. Imparting knowledge, witnessing their mentees' growth and feeling instrumental in their development can prove rejuvenating, fulfilling and energising for mentors from a number of professional contexts (Allen, Poteet and Burroughs, 1997) including teaching (Tomlinson et al., 2010). Mentors can be found to enjoy and profit from the enthusiasm and energy typical of mentee beginner teachers. The resulting 'self satisfaction and altruistic value' (Roberts, 2000, p.162.) of the mentoring process for mentors can therefore lead to heightened self-esteem and greater generativity (Allen et al., 1997), as well as enhanced psychological happiness (Lord et

al., 2008), especially where 'career plateaued' mentors are concerned (Allen, 2003, p.135). Mentoring is also linked to renewed job satisfaction and a rekindling of a mentor's enthusiasm and commitment to teaching (Beutel and Spooner-Lane, 2009).

Not all accounts in the literature, however, portray the positive impact of mentoring on mentors' wellbeing. Accommodating mentoring meetings, especially when imposed, into a mentor's busy work schedule can prove to be burdensome and can lead to mentor exhaustion (Tomlinson et al., 2010). Furthermore, disloyalty and disappointment with a mentee's failure can undermine rather than increase mentor confidence (Allen et al., 1997). It must also be recognised that most of the claims made in the literature that mentoring leads to greater confidence relate to the mentoring of beginning or pre-service teachers (Hobson et al., 2009). There is much less evidence to support a similar impact on mentors of experienced, less motivated teachers whose enthusiasm for teaching may have dwindled and where the skills gap between mentor and mentee might be less evident.

2.5.3. Enhanced collaboration and socialisation as a result of mentoring

Together with the psychological benefits of mentoring are the benefits of a social nature which both mentors and mentees are claimed to enjoy. The facilitation through mentoring of induction and acculturation into a new teaching context is appreciated by teachers at any stage of their career (Lai, 2010; Ingersoll and Strong, 2011; Delaney, 2012) resulting in 'reduced feelings of isolation' (Hobson et al., 2009, p.209).

Furthermore, the collaborative spirit which is nurtured in the mentoring relationship can promote a culture of greater collegiality for both the mentor and the mentee with other teachers in the teaching context (Rhodes and Beneickie, 2002; Lord et al., 2008; Delaney, 2012). To support their claims, several authors cite the socio-constructivist Vygotskian theory that learning is intrinsically a collaborative, social activity which does not take place in isolation (Street, 2004; Aderibigbe, Colucci-Gray and Gray, 2014;

Nyguyen, 2017). This is particularly the case for student teachers and beginner teachers for whom a mentor can provide the necessary scaffolding to ease their mentees into the profession (Hobson and Malderez, 2013). Furthermore, as teacher learning is situated in a community of practice, it is argued that mentors can provide the gateway to such through 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, cited in Street, 2004, p.10).

2.5.4. Mentee and mentor personal growth through reflection

Together with the psychosocial benefits, mentoring is also perceived in the literature to nurture personal growth. Thanks to the dialogic nature of the mentoring process, which allows teachers to exchange ideas, discuss problematic issues and seek guidance from their mentor, mentee teachers report improved problem solving skills, self-management and self-learning skills as well as greater self-awareness of their own abilities (Lord et al., 2008). The dialogic nature of the mentoring process is cited by Hansford et al. (2004) as one of the most highly reported beneficial outcomes of the mentoring process. Engaging in reflective activities and questioning their mentors, is highly valued both by novice teachers (Street, 2004; Hobson et al., 2009) and in-service trainee teachers (Lai, 2010) as well as experienced teachers (Fabian and Simpson, 2002). This is attributed by some authors (Hobson and Malderez, 2013; Aderibigbe et al., 2014; Nyguyen, 2017) to the process of reflecting 'on-action' and developing an intuitive capacity for spontaneous, constructive reflection 'in-action' as espoused by Schön (1983).

Engaging in reflection with their mentees also provides a valuable opportunity for mentors to engage in critical self-reflection on their own practice and beliefs (Beutel and Spooner-Lane, 2009; Delaney, 2012; Hobson and Malderez, 2013). This is an aspect of mentoring which Hansford et al. (2004) found to be peculiar to the teaching profession and also valued by mentors to a much greater extent than their mentees. As mentors face the challenge of making their own tacit knowledge visible through dialogue with

their mentee, they adopt more 'co-constructivist approaches' (Aspfors and Fransson, 2015, p.76) which enhance the mentor's ability to analyse their own teaching. This is true for mentors of both newly qualified teachers and those with more experience (Fabian and Simpson, 2002).

2.5.5. Professional skills development through lesson observations

The third theme emerging from the literature concerns the development of professional skills for both mentors and mentees. In the case of teacher mentees, appreciation of the access to their mentor's knowledge and expertise with regards lesson planning and the selection of materials, use of resources and different classroom strategies can all be found in the literature (Hansford et al., 2004; Lord et al., 2008; Lai, 2010; Delaney, 2012). Furthermore, lesson observations are perceived as a meaningful vehicle for accessing this expertise. In their review of studies of beginner teachers, Hobson et al. (2009) report that observing and being observed was one of the most highly valued aspects of the mentoring process. Mentee teachers' appreciation of the opportunity to be observed to improve their time and class management skills is found in the literature regarding both early career and experienced teachers (Fabian and Simpson, 2002; Hudson and Nyguyen, 2008; Lai, 2010; Delaney, 2012). By observing their mentors, it is claimed that teachers gain direct access to their mentor's craftsmanship and knowledge (Hobson and Malderez, 2013).

Tension around the question of lesson observations, however, both for mentees and mentors can also be found in the literature. The perceived value for a mentee of being observed, it is argued, is conditional on the nature of the ensuing feedback from their mentor and the manner in which it is interpreted (Little, 1990). 'Constructive criticism' or 'positive reinforcement' is found to be beneficial by Hansford et al. (2004, p.10) while being frequently subjected to 'judgementoring', with mentors 'revealing their judgement of mentee's work but also focusing almost exclusively in their interactions with mentees

on negative judgements' (Hobson and Malderez 2013, p.94), can have devastating effects on newly qualified teachers' morale. Furthermore, in a study of in-service trainee teachers (Lai, 2010), although the mentee teachers expressed their appreciation of lesson observations, in reality this practice was rarely ever implemented. Mentors may also experience discomfort with the presence of other teachers in their class (Bullough, 2005) resulting in feelings of insecurity and vulnerability (Rhodes and Beneicke, 2002). In addition, evidence to support how precisely a mentee improves their teaching from observing their mentor is lacking in the literature together with data to support the necessary frequency of observations for them to be effective.

2.5.6. Professional skills development from mentor training and mentees

Developing the skills to manage lesson observations and provide constructive criticism, however, is one of the learning opportunities appreciated by mentors (Beutel and Spooner-Lane, 2009; Lai, 2010; Hudson, 2013) which can in turn be found to facilitate career progression (Hansford et al., 2004; Hobson et al., 2009). Other leadership skills such as problem solving and advanced communication skills, due partly to the nature of the reflective dialogue, are also reported to be additional by-products of the mentoring process (Lord et al., 2008; Hudson, 2013). However, to develop these mentoring skills effectively, the prevailing evidence suggests that training for the mentoring role is essential (Lord et al., 2008; Barrera, Braley and Slate, 2010; Aspors and Fransson, 2015). While this is often not the case, those mentors who do receive training clearly appreciate learning, implementing and developing crucial skills such as active listening, providing non-judgmental feedback and non-directive questioning (Lord et al., 2008).

A further learning opportunity which is valued by mentors is access to their mentees' newly acquired up to date professional skills. This is particularly the case for mentors of beginner or trainee teachers from whom mentors can gain access to the latest teaching styles (Hobson et al., 2009) and even acquire new skills particularly in the field of

Information Technology (Allen, 1997; Lai, 2010; Hudson, 2013). As these teachers are often in their early twenties they can also be providers of contemporary insights into youth culture (Aspfors and Fransson, 2015). Little or no evidence, however, can be found in the literature to suggest what mentors learn in terms of professional skills from experienced teachers.

2.5.7. The value of a voluntary mentoring scheme that is not aligned to performance management

To complete the literature review concerning the value of mentoring for both mentors and mentees, was the search for evidence regarding schemes which are not aligned to performance management and those in which both the mentor and mentee volunteer to participate. A distinction is made in the literature between formal and informal mentoring programmes, indicating that the relationship in the latter is of a purely voluntary nature. Many of the studies, however, fail to make this distinction (Allen et al., 2008) and those which do, neglect to identify whether or not participation was voluntary for the mentee, the mentor or both. Roberts (2000) claims that while mentors in organisations are often invited to volunteer, mentees are usually assigned to them, as is often the case with newly qualified teachers. Furthermore, clarification is also often lacking as to whether the mentoring schemes are aligned to performance management or supervision (Haggard, Dougherty, Turban and Wilbanks, 2011) and the subsequent role of evaluation which supervision invariably implies.

Discussions regarding the impact of a non supervisory form of mentoring are prevalent in the literature and tend to focus on the nature of the mentoring relationship. A number of authors question the likelihood of a trusting, reciprocal relationship 'involving mutuality of social exchange' (Haggard et al., 2011, p.292) should the mentor have a line manager role involving assessment (Ngyuyen, 2017). The mentoring relationship, it is suggested, risks degenerating into one of 'contrived collegiality' (Long, 1997, p.120) or at worse one

in which the mentee is perceived to be in need of supervision (Rhodes and Beneicke, 2002). Voluntary participation for both mentor and mentee and its implied willingness to learn appears to be advantageous (Hobson et al., 2016). To support this view Jones (2012, p.59) draws on Emerson's social exchange theory whereby 'individuals develop, maintain and exit relationships depending on the perceived benefits or otherwise to them'. Long (1997), however, cautions that a desire to mentor does not automatically imply suitability for the role and therefore volunteer mentors may not necessarily guarantee the best results.

As regards the question of evaluation, Long (1995, p.135) claims that mentoring has 'an intrinsically non judgmental value' which, when mandated, 'loses its spontaneity' and there is strong evidence in the literature to support the claim that mentoring is more effective as an off-line activity (Roberts, 2000; Barrera et al., 2010; Hobson and Malderez, 2013). In the case of beginning teachers Hobson and Malderez (2013) question the feasibility and effectiveness of developing beginner teachers professionally by empowering them to take ownership of their own learning and evaluating them at the same time. Furthermore, assessed mentoring may be conditioned by agendas and goals which are not determined by the mentee (Tomlinson et al., 2010).

2.6. Implications from the literature review informing the research design

Together with the insights regarding the value of a voluntary mentoring scheme for mentor and mentee teachers together, a number of conclusions can be drawn from the literature review. The first of these relates to the dyadic nature of the relationship. The literature review confirms the need for research studies to include insights from both a mentor and mentee perspective which some authors deem lacking (Allen et al., 2008; Hobson et al., 2009; Jones, 2012). A further conclusion concerns the fact that many of the accounts of mentoring schemes, frequently tinged with a rose-tinted lens, arise from sources of direct experience from the mentors and mentees themselves (Allen et al.,

2008; Hobson et al., 2009). Insights from teachers who do not form part of mentoring schemes would therefore complement these accounts from a more objective standpoint.

A further imbalance which is emerges concerns the concentration of studies relating to newly qualified teachers (Barrera et al., 2010; Fletcher and Mullen, 2012) with much less evidence of mentoring schemes involving more experienced teachers. Studies reporting findings from purely voluntary mentoring schemes are also difficult to locate. A final consideration concerns the methodological concerns of research design and the predominance of quantitative studies in the mentoring literature, with Allen et al. (2008), claiming that only 18.2% of the studies they examined collated data from more than one source.

2.7. Chapter conclusion

Together with these implications for the research design, this chapter has identified and explored three distinctive thematic areas from the mentoring literature concerning the perceived value of mentoring from both a mentor and mentee perspective. Informed by these findings, the following chapter will now go on to detail the methodological concerns which determine the design of this research study.

Chapter Three – Research design

3.1. Chapter introduction

Having discussed the findings from the literature review in the previous chapter, this chapter examines the different concerns relating to the design of this research project. The chapter begins by explaining the philosophical considerations which were taken into account before going on to outline the rationale determining the adoption of a case study approach. This is followed by a description of the research methods which were chosen to collect data, as well as an account of the research procedure. The chapter ends with an explanation of the nature and purpose of triangulation as a research strategy.

3.2. Philosophical considerations underpinning the research design

3.2.1. Ethical considerations

The most important concerns governing the design of this research project, which involved the participation of teachers, were ethical considerations (Denscombe, 2014). To begin with, permission was sought from the Director of the teaching centre for the research to be conducted on its premises, in compliance with the organisation's professional code of practice. To ensure 'respect for persons' (Bassey, 1999, p.76), all the participants who were invited to take part were approached personally and confidentially by the researcher on the organisation's premises during work time. Great care was taken to accommodate the participants' work schedule and time was allowed for discussion and clarification in total privacy to respect their needs and interests. The research was also conducted respecting the guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (2011) which meant that the participants' consent was sought, an example of which is given in Appendix A, having been informed of their anonymous and voluntary involvement in the research, by means of a University of Nottingham headed participant

information sheet (Appendix B) and being reassured of their right to withdraw at any time. Data has only been stored on the researcher's own computer and will automatically be destroyed after seven years (BERA, 2011).

As any given context will generate its own particular ethical concerns (Sikes, 2013), particular attention in this research study was paid to the choice of research methods which respect the confidential nature of the mentoring scheme. For this reason observations were excluded, as well as group discussions with mentors and mentees. The researcher remained unaware of how the mentors and mentees had been paired and the trust based relationship established between them was safeguarded by communicating with each one singularly. Information regarding the contractual status of the participants, which, as highlighted in Chapter One, is of considerable significance to this research, was also kept confidential. Further ethical concerns regarding each research method chosen will be discussed later in this chapter. Those concerning the subsequent analysis and writing stages of the research will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

3.2.2. Ontological position

Having outlined the ethical concerns it is also essential to clarify the ontological position and epistemological approach which underpin this research (Crotty, 1998; Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995) in order to understand the nature of the understandings to be generated. This is an aspect of small scale research which, there is evidence to suggest, is often overlooked (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2010). To begin with, the research was approached from an constructivist, ontological position which holds that the 'social phenomena making up our social world are only real in the sense that they are constructed ideas which are continually being reviewed and reworked by those involved in them' and that 'there is no *social* reality apart from the meaning of the social phenomenon for the participants' (Matthews and Ross, 2010, p.25). Those taking part in the research process, therefore, were regarded as 'participants' to convey the active,

constructive role which they played, rather than 'research subjects' or 'units of analysis' which would denote a passive role (Seidman, 2006). Being an integral part of the participants' social world, the researcher, too, acknowledged their own contribution to this constructive process of generating understandings. This extended from the evidence informed approach to the research design through to the deliberate selection, analysis and dissemination of the findings (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2013).

3.2.3. A phenomenological approach

Together with this ontological position, the research adopted a phenomenological interpretivist approach which sought to understand the participants' world rather than measure it quantitatively, validate it scientifically or substantiate it objectively. Phenomenology investigates this world through the perspectives of the participants themselves, in this instance the teachers at their teaching centre, thus placing their thoughts and ideas at the very heart of the research (Denscombe, 2014). However, unlike traditional phenomenological research which detaches the researcher from the phenomenon with bracketing, this research project followed the Heidegger approach of hermeneutic phenomenology, which acknowledges the need for the researcher to be fully engaged within the phenomenon and to be accepting of the beliefs and understandings that they brought to the research, seeking to interpret rather than solely describe (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Tufford and Newman, 2010). To meet this aim, the researcher recognised the need to interrelate and empathise with the participants (Morrison, 2012), in preference to viewing them as objects of inquiry (Harwell, 2011).

3.3. A Case study

Taking into account these philosophical considerations and theoretical understandings, an embedded single case study approach, which focuses on one particular instance of a phenomenon to be investigated (Denscombe, 2014), was considered to be the most

appropriate for the purpose of this research project. The 'case' in question concerned the English language teaching staff at one particular teaching centre of an international organisation, who were offered the opportunity of participating in a mentoring scheme, regardless of their contractual status, from November 2014 to June 2017. More specifically, the 'case' incorporated three sub units of participants: teachers who had never participated in the mentoring scheme, mentors and mentees who took part in the scheme from 2014 to 2016 and the mentors and mentees in the scheme at the time of the research, as shown in Figure 2. The phenomenon in question was the voluntary mentoring scheme which was offered to the English language teachers as a form of professional development, as conceptualised in Fig. 1 in Chapter One.

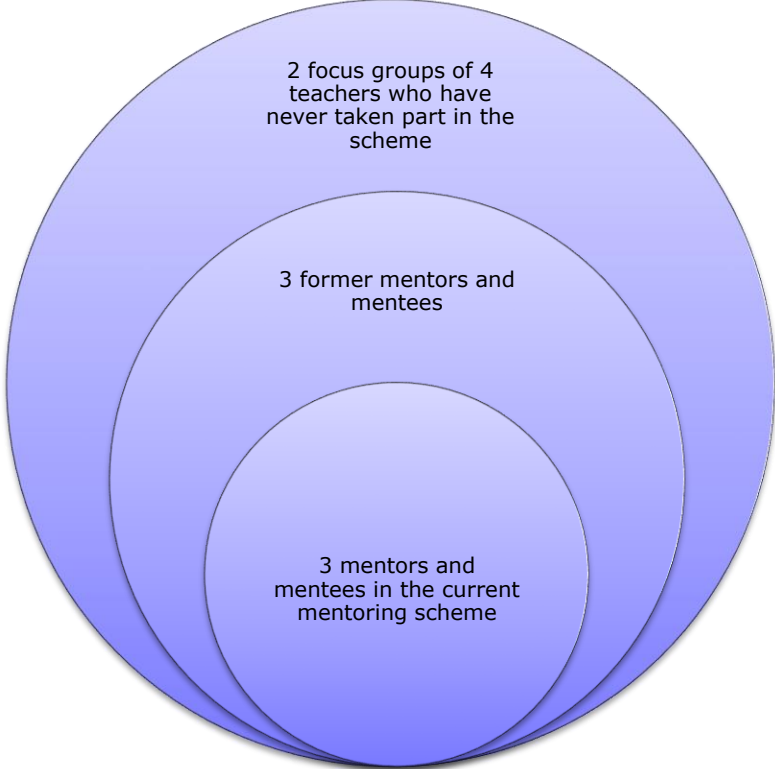


Fig.2 Case study participants

This embedded single case study approach was adopted for a number of reasons. Most importantly, case studies are considered to be of significant value with regard to research which aims at improving practice (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995) and are particularly suitable for small-case research (Denscombe, 2014). As outlined in Chapter One, the

findings of this research project are not only intended to enrich the researcher's understanding of mentoring but may also inform any changes which need to be implemented to the mentoring scheme. Furthermore, as a case study provides a realistic representation of people in a natural context, its findings may be more accessible and palatable than theoretical concepts or abstract theories when disseminated to colleagues, teachers in other teaching centres in the organisation, readers through publication or an audience at a teaching conference (Cohen et al., 2013).

Another advantage of the case study approach is that, rather than examining an artificially created environment for research purposes, it takes an in-depth, holistic approach to exploring a social phenomenon in its pre-existing naturally occurring setting (Willig, 2013). This allows the researcher to investigate the interrelationship between the participants, the teachers, and the phenomenon, the mentoring scheme, which is the focus of phenomenological research (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). Given the confidential nature of mentoring, which greatly restricts the extent to which it can be observed, the case study approach also allows the researcher, and subsequent readers of its findings, intimate access to mentor and mentee experiences (Cain, 2009). Moreover, this approach not only accommodates but also invites the use of a variety of research methods (Denscombe, 2014) which allow the researcher to explore different relationships from different perspectives.

3.4. Qualitative research methods

In light of the ontological position and the hermeneutic phenomenological approach to this research as discussed above, the research methods chosen for this project were those which best allowed the participants to communicate their perceptions, understandings and insights with the researcher (Seidman, 2006). Three particular qualitative research methods were therefore chosen: focus group discussions, a written questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. These were also methods which

accommodated the researcher’s intrinsic interest in listening and relating to others (Seidman, 2006) and allowed them to be more closely acquainted with previously unknown colleagues, thus promoting a greater feeling of collegiality. Many years of oral examining experience, mentoring and teacher training meant that the researcher also felt confident with research tools that were highly communicative in nature (Blaxter et al., 2010). A fourth research tool, a research journal, was also used throughout all stages of the research as shown in Figure 3. A more detailed rationale governing the choice of each research method will now be discussed whereas the limitations of these tools will be examined in Chapter Five.

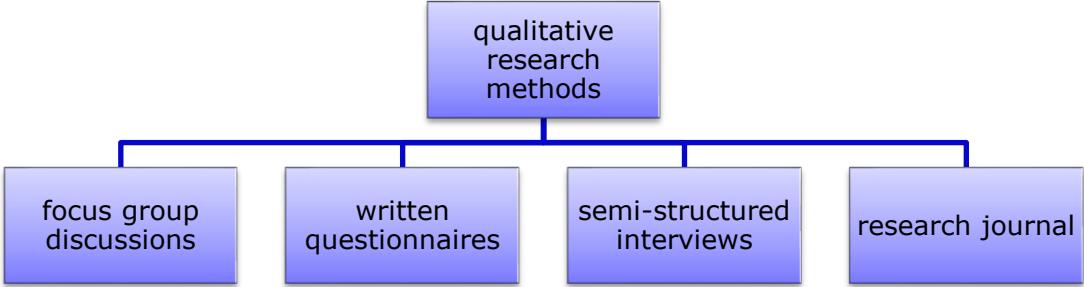


Fig. 3 Qualitative research methods adopted

3.4.1. Focus group discussions

The first of these tools were two focus group discussions which were considered the most appropriate method to hear the views of those who had never participated in the scheme for a number of reasons. To begin with, this method allows the participants to explore their understandings in relation to others, constructing meaning collectively by interacting with one another’s contributions. This in turn fosters more dynamic interaction than that afforded by interviews as the participants could change their views in the evolving process of the development of ideas (Willig, 2013). Although it may be argued that focus groups do not guarantee the same privacy as an interview or a questionnaire, participants in a group setting, evidence suggests, may feel more willing to be candid, perceiving a certain safety in numbers (Kitzenger, 1994). Permission to

record the discussion was sought from the participants and the meetings took place in one of the teaching centre classrooms where the dialogue was unlikely to be heard.

Findings from these two groups were considered important to provide an external perspective of the mentoring scheme. As previously stated in the literature review in Chapter Two, Hobson et al. (2009) highlight the fact that very few studies compare data both from participants and non participants in mentoring schemes. Rather than relying on data gathered from just one group, two parallel groups were interviewed to identify common themes in teachers' perceptions and to add depth to the findings (Kitzinger, 1994; Krueger, 2014). It is important to add that data generated by these two groups were considered group data in the analysis and discussion of the findings in Chapter Four and Five, rather than individual findings from four different participants (Mathews and Ross, 2010).

3.4.2. Two written questionnaires to three former mentors and mentees

The second research method consisted of two written questionnaires which were chosen as an opportune tool to collate insights from three former mentors and mentees primarily for the practical nature of written data which does not need to be transcribed, saving the researcher considerable time. This research method also offers a number of other advantages. Firstly, it is essentially communicative and therefore meets the aims of the research project in allowing the participants a means to express their perceptions and understandings. Although the answers provided are not as natural as those given in an interview, a questionnaire has the advantage that it can be edited and reviewed by the participant over a period of time to allow for greater clarity and a reworking of ideas. Completed alone, in an environment chosen by the participants it cannot be influenced by the researcher or other participants, which, it is hoped, will promote greater sincerity and openness.

The questionnaires were piloted beforehand with two colleagues with considerable mentoring experience, as recommended in the literature (Cohen et al., 2013; Robson, 2011). Mindful of the effort required to formulate written replies, the researcher faced the challenge of determining an appropriate number of questions to generate sufficient data while avoiding making excessive demands of the participants' time. Measures were also taken in the formulation of the questions in the questionnaires to prevent the disclosure of the content of mentoring conversations (BPS, 2000), with only the mentees having the option of discussing the nature of their meetings. The time required to complete the questionnaire was also agreed individually with the participants to accommodate their work schedule.

3.4.3. Semi-structured interviews with the mentors and mentees

Understandings were collated from the three mentors and mentees of the mentoring scheme at the time of the research, by means of semi-structured interviews. This semi-structured approach accommodated the needs of the researcher to add depth to the data generated from the focus group discussions and the questionnaires. At the same time it allowed the participants the space to freely express themselves on particular aspects of interest (Morrison, 2012). This form of direct and more personal, intimate communication with the mentors and mentees is of particular interest to the phenomenological researcher as it allows them access to the 'lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience' (Seidman, 2006, p.9).

Although this research method demands particular skills such as formulating non-directive questions, active listening and the ability to empathise, the researcher welcomed the opportunity to hone these skills as part of the research process. The participants all agreed to the interviews being recorded and the time-consuming process of transcribing them was assisted by the use of the add-on speech recognition tool in

Google Docs. The interviews took place in a reserved area of the organisation's premises where they were guaranteed privacy and the participants were invited to view the transcriptions at the end of the process.

3.4.4. The research journal

Together with the three research tools mentioned above, the researcher also kept a research journal throughout all stages of the research process. The primary purpose of this tool was to provide a means for producing 'reflexive data' (Mathews and Ross, 2010, p.54) to ensure a self critical approach to the whole research project (Blaxter et al., 2010), from determining the purpose and value of the research questions at the beginning of the project through to approaching the literature review, designing the research and analysing, interpreting, and disseminating its findings. Just as the researcher recognises the influence they may have on the participants, they also accept that the research impacts on the researcher themselves (Morrison, 2012). This journal therefore, provided not only evidence of the desire and commitment of the researcher to challenging their own beliefs and understandings (Tufford and Newman, 2010) but also a platform to reflect on the meaning of the research experience for them and their understanding of what has been learnt from it, aspects of which will be discussed later in Chapter Five. The journal also acted as a private, personal space to address any ethical concerns as they arose at the different phases of the research (Bassey, 1999; Cohen et al., 2013). The findings from this journal will be discussed in Chapter Five.

3.5. The three phases of the data collection process

Using these research tools, data was subsequently collected from the participants in three different stages as shown in Figure 4.

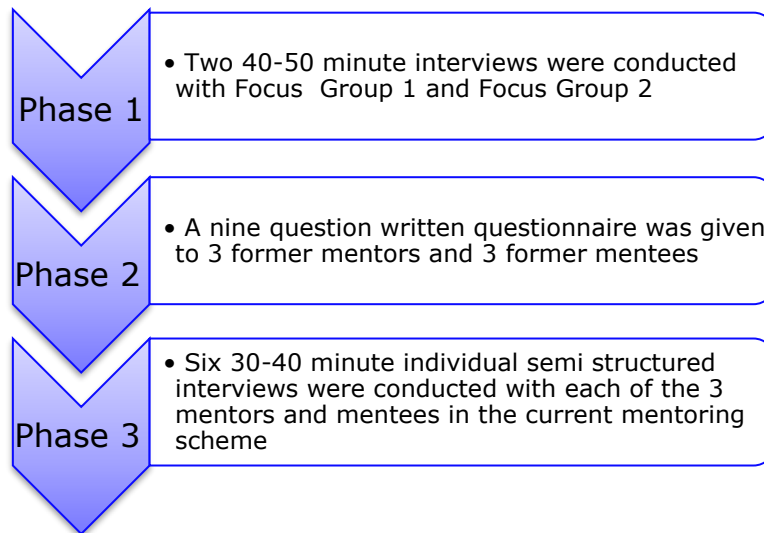


Fig.4 The different phases of the data collection process

In the first phase of the data collection process discussions were held with two separate focus groups, each comprising four teachers of different contractual status who had never taken part in the mentoring scheme. These discussions were structured in the same fashion and acting as facilitator, the researcher intervened only to offer clarification, to invite illustrative examples or to redirect the participants when the discussion strayed from the point. The discussions centred on the following four questions:

1. In what ways can teachers, both as mentors and mentees, benefit from the mentoring scheme?
2. How does mentoring differ from other forms of professional development?
3. Who can benefit from the mentoring scheme?
4. In a voluntary scheme where mentoring is not aligned with performance management, how does dialogue with a mentor differ from dialogue with a line manager?

In the second phase of the data collection process two written questionnaires, informed by the findings of the focus group discussions, were completed by three mentors and three mentees who had participated in the mentoring scheme from November 2014 to

June 2016. The questionnaires consisted of nine open questions, including the four posed to the focus groups.

The final phase involved six semi-structured, recorded interviews, one with each of the three mentors and the three mentees who took part in the mentoring scheme at the time of the research. These face to face interviews were conducted singularly at a time when data had been collected from the other two phases of the research and at one which coincided with the natural end of the mentoring scheme. The interviews were structured around the nine questions posed to the former mentors and mentees, informed by the findings of the literature review, the voluntary nature of the scheme and the researcher's own personal experience, as shown in Table 3, allowing for follow up questions of a non-directive nature, mirroring the technique adopted with the focus group participants.

Table 3 Interview questions

Literature review	Psychosocial support	How has how you feel about yourself as a teacher changed as a result of the mentoring?
		Do you see yourself any differently as a result of the mentoring?
	Personal growth	How has how you see yourself progressing as a teacher changed as a result of the mentoring?
		What did you value about the dialogue with your mentor/mentee?
		What were your expectations of the mentoring scheme?
	Professional skills development	What role do you think lesson observations play in the mentoring scheme?
		How does mentoring differ from other forms of professional development?
		What skills have you learnt as a result of the mentoring process/mentor training?
	Context	The experience and contractual status of the teaching staff
A mentoring scheme which is not aligned to performance management		How would you compare the dialogue you had with your mentor with the dialogue you have with your line manager?
		What is the value of a voluntary scheme?
Researcher's personal experience	Relationship	What did you value about your relationship with your mentor/mentee?
	Experience	How likely are you to become a mentor/to continue mentoring in the future?
		What did you value overall from your mentoring experience?

3.6. Triangulation as a research strategy

Collecting data from different participants, offering diverse perspectives through the various methods outlined above, afforded the researcher triangulation, a research strategy which is claimed to be highly desirable for any form of research (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995; Burton and Bartlett, 2004). Adapting the four types of triangulation suggested by Denzin (1978, cited in Mathison, 1988, p.13), this research design provided:

a) Three forms of **participant triangulation**. The first of these involved bringing together different perspectives of the mentoring scheme from teachers who had never participated to teachers who have acted as mentors and those who have been mentored. The second of these concerned the participation of teachers of different contractual status as outlined in Chapter One. The third form included teachers with varying degrees of experience. The profiles of these participants are shown in Tables 4, 5 and 6.

Table 4 Focus groups participant profiles

Focus Group Participants			
Contractual status	No of participants	Years of teaching experience	No of participants
Freelance	1	0-5 years	1
Locally engaged full time	5	5-10 years	1
Locally engaged annualised hourly contract	2	more than 10 years	6

Table 5 Mentor participant profiles

Mentor Participants			
Contractual status	No of participants	Years of teaching experience	No of participants
Freelance		0-5 years	
Locally engaged full time	5	5-10 years	
Locally engaged annualised hourly contract		more than 10 years	5

Table 6 Mentee participant profiles

Mentee Profiles			
Contractual status	No of participants	Years of teaching experience	No of participants
Freelance	1	0-5 years	-
Locally engaged	1	5-10 years	2
Locally engaged annualised hourly contract	4	more than 10 years	4

B) **Data triangulation** from different temporal perspectives (Mathison, 1988). These included insights from teachers who have never taken part in the scheme but have formulated ideas as they may do in the future. It also takes into account teachers who had had time to reflect on their past mentoring experience as well as teachers who were taking part in the scheme at the time of the research and whose ideas were very much located in the present.

c) **Method triangulation** through the use of three different methods of inquiry. These included group discussions, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. These three forms of triangulation are illustrated in Figure 5.

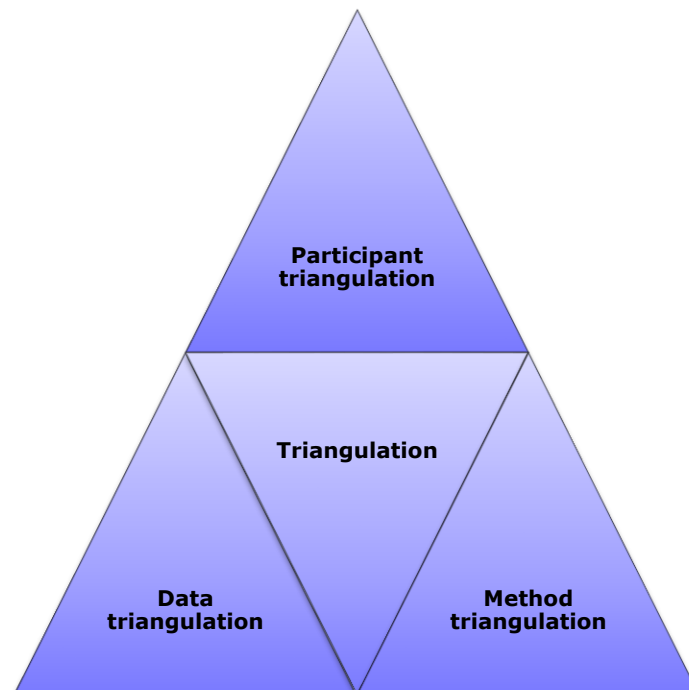


Fig.5 Triangulation

The purpose of the triangulation must be made clear, given the diverse views in the literature regarding its use. Rather than providing a means 'to strengthen confidence in a statement' (Basse, 1999, p.76) or a method of 'improving validity by checking data' (Coleman and Briggs, 2012, p.98), for the purpose of this phenomenological research, triangulation was desired to provide 'a rich and complex picture of some social phenomenon' as opposed to a 'clear path of a singular view of what is the case' (Mathison, 1988, p.15). This research strategy was also adopted as a means of ensuring trustworthiness which will be discussed further in Chapter Five. Having outlined the research design, the following chapter will now discuss the findings generated from these research tools.

Chapter Four - Presentation of research findings

4.1. Chapter introduction

Having conducted the research using the data collection methods detailed in Chapter Three, this chapter begins by describing the procedure that was adopted to analyse the findings they generated respecting the ethical concerns that arose. The chapter then goes on to present these findings according to the themes that emerged in relation to the three research questions which were outlined in Chapter One.

4.2. Ethical considerations regarding the research findings

The first stage of the data management procedure consisted of tending to ethical concerns. Each interview was carefully transcribed to facilitate analysis and in the interests of anonymity, all the mentors were assigned the code MOR and the mentees MEE, followed by the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 as shown in Table 7, which are used in the analysis and discussion of the findings. One of the mentors decided to no longer participate in the research at this stage and respecting their right to withdraw, no explanation was sought.

Table 7 Participant coding

Participant	Code
Focus Group	FG 1, 2
Former Mentor	MOR
Current Mentor	1,2,3,4,5
Former Mentee	MEE
Current Mentee	1,2,3,4,5,6

After careful scrutiny of both the written responses and the transcripts, potentially sensitive data pertaining to the content of the mentoring meetings or the identification of the participants was highlighted in red to prevent their inclusion. Proper names were eliminated and the personal pronoun 'they' was employed to substitute the gender

specific 'he' and 'she'. The participants of the interviews were then offered the opportunity to inspect the transcripts and confirm their accuracy.

4.3. Data analysis procedure

In the second stage the written responses and transcripts were scrutinised and read repeatedly. Adopting an inductive approach (Seidman, 2006; Thomas, 2006) and guided by the research questions and the findings from the literature review, segments of text were subsequently identified, highlighted and coded. An example of this process is shown in the screenshot of the transcript of the interview with MOR1 in Figure 6.

The screenshot displays an interview transcript with several segments highlighted in blue. To the right of the transcript, a vertical list of ten blue comment boxes is shown, each connected to a specific segment of the transcript by a dashed blue line. The comments are as follows:

- Comment [J1]: Self awareness
- Comment [J2]: socialisation
- Comment [J3]: empathy
- Comment [J4]: peer relationship
- Comment [J5]: psychological wellbeing
- Comment [J6]: personal growth
- Comment [J7]: voluntary not mandated
- Comment [J8]: skills necessary to mentor
- Comment [J9]: sensitivity towards others
- Comment [J10]: awareness of mentoring scheme

Fig.6 Screenshot of MOR1 transcript showing segment identification

These segments were subsequently collated and grouped according to a number of emerging themes related to each research question which are shown in italics in Figure 7. The themes relating to the second research question were organised according to the

three thematic areas (shown in bold in Figure 7) which arose from the literature review. The findings for each theme will now be discussed.

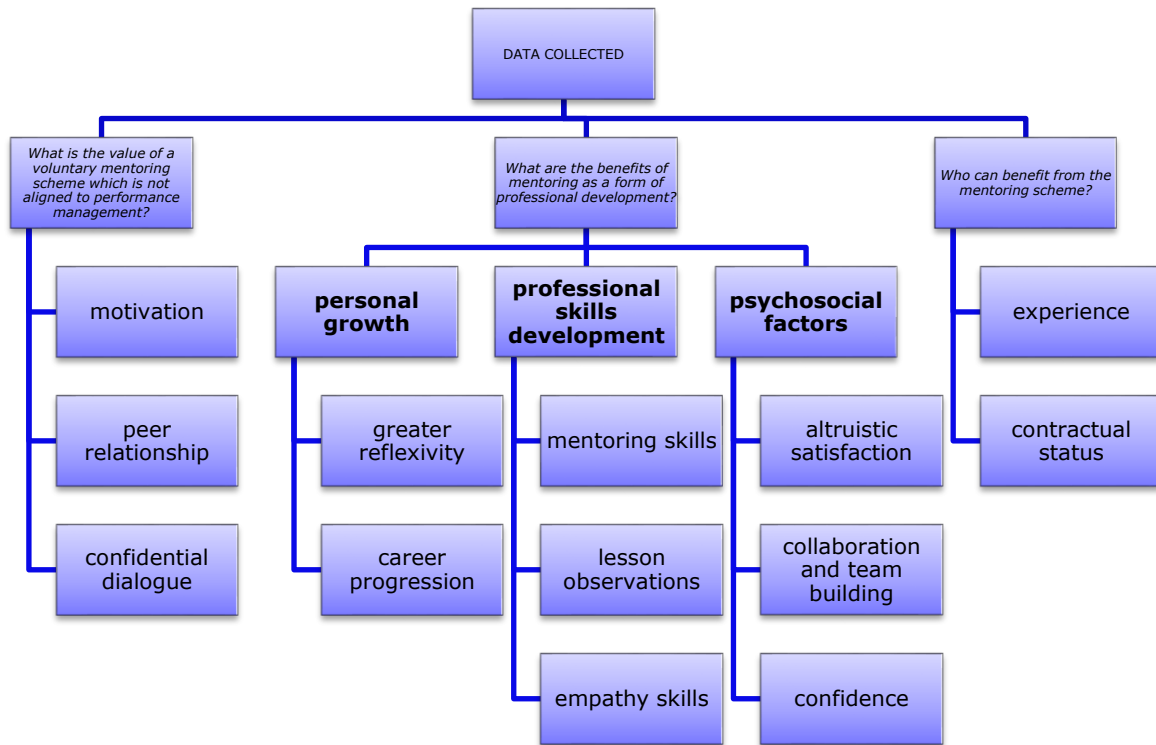


Fig. 7 Thematic analysis and coding of research findings

4.4. Presentation of the findings

4.4.1. The value of a voluntary mentoring scheme which is not aligned to performance management

4.4.1.1 Motivation

This presentation of the findings begins with the data relating to the first research question regarding the perceived value of the voluntary nature of the mentoring scheme which is not aligned to performance management. The findings clearly demonstrated that both focus groups and the majority of mentors and mentees strongly favoured voluntary over mandated mentoring for a number of reasons. The focus groups (FG1 and FG2) underlined the significance of motivation, alluding to social exchange theory which had

been identified by Jones (2012). 'A mentor wants to be a mentor. They've chosen to do it so you know in the dialogue that they're happy to talk about these things' argued FG1 while FG2 extended their view to include the mentee, 'both want to be there so there's probably a lot more interest on both sides'. An advantage of this for FG1 was that the mentoring conversations could be less structured as 'a mentor is not encumbered with box ticking' and 'wouldn't have any kind of agenda'. Both focus groups also saw value in the freedom and flexibility of the dialogue, one which was not 'pecked to the learning aims' (FG1) or 'not just about your learning aims' (FG2) with no 'hidden agendas' (FG2).

The mentors too endorsed the fact that those who volunteer are highly motivated. MOR3 claimed that 'the people who choose to are genuinely interested in their own development' and MOR2 'when you mentor, it means that you really want to work with someone else and you want to help or want to be helped.' MOR1 even insisted that the mentoring scheme for the mentors 'needs to be voluntary' and MOR3 warned that the mentoring scheme 'would change completely if it wasn't voluntary. It would change the whole dynamics, and not for the better, I think. Well, I don't think it would be mentoring at least as, in my understanding of it' (MOR3). The mentors also questioned the extent to which a mentee would be motivated if their mentoring 'had been a top down decision' and MOR1 feared the scheme 'risks becoming a kind of supporting people who are in difficulty because we've had complaints.....and I think that therefore would turn it into something it shouldn't be'. A possible impact of this, according to MOR2, would be that 'some mentees may get offended because they think they need help'.

These potentially negative consequences, as had been identified by Rhodes and Beneicke (2002) were also endorsed by the mentees. 'Some people would resent it' claimed MEE1 while MEE2 feared it could 'feel a little patronising or belittling' and 'not necessarily productive'. MEE3 felt that their initial reaction would have been 'why do they think I need to be mentored?'. The mentees also questioned motivational factors if the mentoring were mandated. 'How much effort are you going to put into it if you don't

want to be there?’ asked MEE1, whereas MEE3 felt reassured that ‘if it’s purely voluntary it’s about intrinsic motivation isn’t it? So it’s something that I inherently feel is valuable if it’s voluntary, it makes it seem equitable’ (MEE3). MEE2 appreciated the fact that the scheme was not ‘institutionalised’ which allowed it to be ‘developmental’. They felt that it would not be beneficial ‘if it involved filling in forms’ (MEE2). The only evidence casting doubt on the clearly perceived value of a voluntary mentoring scheme, as summarised in Figure 8, came from FG2 who warned that ‘there’s nothing to stop people just going for a cup of coffee and getting TOIL’. In addition MOR1 reminded the researcher that ‘the only people that volunteer are self aware’ and that not all mentors have the necessary mentoring skills, as claimed by Long (1997), ‘the skills to deal with other people’ (MOR1), to ensure successful mentoring.

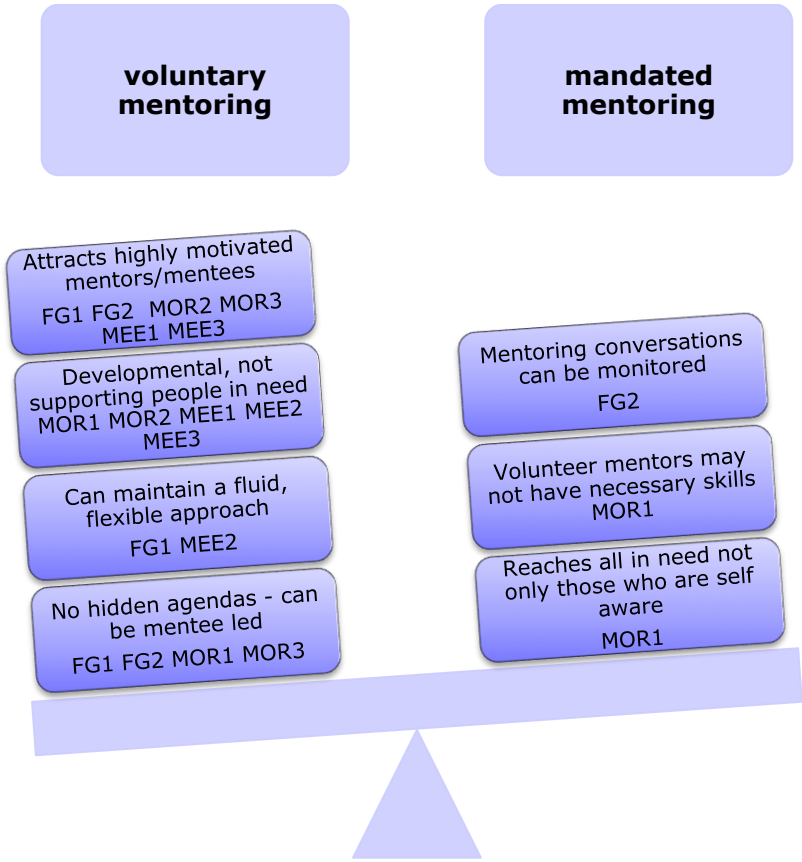


Fig.8 Synthesis of the perceived value of voluntary mentoring

4.4.1.2. Peer relationship

The voluntary nature of the mentoring scheme, it was also perceived, impacted favourably on the nature of the mentoring relationship and the dialogue which took place within it. Both focus groups saw value in the reciprocity of the peer relationship in which 'the mentor always learns from the mentee, it's a two way process' (FG2). MOR1, MOR2 and MOR3 all enjoyed the process of developing an ongoing relationship with their mentee in which MOR2 felt 'you don't really need to be best friends, you have to trust each other' whereas MOR3 was thankful for 'a unique relationship' which afforded 'an insight into a colleague's mind that I wouldn't otherwise have'. MOR1 believed that the mentor and mentee enjoyed 'a very natural, reciprocal, respectful relationship' (MOR1) which not only 'makes it so much more, I think rewarding on a human level' but also one which 'makes everybody feel good'. For this to happen, however, MOR5 underlined the importance of the mentor mentee matching. 'I do believe that much of this depends on the personality of both people involved and of how the two 'gel' together' (MOR5).

The mentoring relationship was also highly valued by the mentees, particularly by MEE4 and MEE5 who identified it as the attribute of the scheme that they valued overall, MEE4 because it was a 'peer relationship with a highly qualified colleague' and MEE5 because it was a 'truthful and friendly relationship' which offered them support as a newcomer. Both focus groups, together with MEE3, however, recognised that similar relationships were also possible with line managers, depending on the manager involved. Other mentees alluded to a sense of psychological well being with their mentor. MEE6 enjoyed feeling 'comfortable and at ease' which meant that 'I didn't feel I had to pretend to be someone different' while MEE2 agreed that the relationship could provide 'a form of emotional support'. MEE2 also confided that the relationship 'gave me the opportunity to feel happy about what I was doing and the ideas I had'.

4.4.1.3. The confidential nature of the mentoring dialogue

Together with the mentoring relationship, nearly all the mentees and the focus groups valued the confidential nature of the mentoring conversations which are not aligned to performance management, 'with mentoring it's very much confidential' (MEE1).

Confidentiality allowed for freedom of expression, according to MEE5, 'I could speak more freely as I knew it was confidential' and the freedom to be themselves for MEE6, 'I didn't feel I had to pretend to be someone different'. MEE4 was reassured that 'I knew I could be completely honest with my mentors, I could express my doubts and fears openly', while MEE3 declared being more open to 'confessing you don't know something' with a mentor and MEE2 identified the exchange as the aspect of mentoring that they valued most.

Despite not participating in the scheme both focus groups were also highly sensitive to the benefits of the confidential mentoring dialogue. FG2 considered the exchange to be one in which 'you can ask just about anything'. FG1 felt that, conversing with their mentor, teachers would be 'more open about problems' and less 'concerned with looking unprofessional or not up to the task'. Both focus groups felt confident that mentees could be 'open' 'honest' and 'candid' underlying the value of the liberating, safe environment afforded by the undocumented mentoring discussions. 'You would probably be more relaxed, freer to think out loud without fear of it being held against you' declared FG2. This would allow teachers to ask their mentors 'lots of questions that you might think you should already know the answer to' (FG1), while feeling 'uninhibited' (FG2). FG2, however subsequently counterbalanced its views with a more cautious note, with the warning that open dialogue could compromise a mentee at a later date as, 'you're revealing quite a lot of your, not insecurities, but it's the more vulnerable side of you, to somebody who, in the future, may be your line manager' (FG2).

4.4.2. The benefits of mentoring as a form of professional development

4.4.2.1. Greater reflexivity as a result of the mentoring conversations

The second research question concerned the value of mentoring for teachers, both as mentors and mentees, as a form of professional development. Reflection had been identified in the literature, especially in educational contexts (Hansford et al., 2004), as one of the principal benefits of mentoring and most of the mentors and mentees endorsed this value. MOR2 viewed the activity as a means of providing different perspectives for problem solving, 'it makes me reflect as well, while I try to see the problem from different angles for the mentee' and as 'a welcome break from the cycle of teaching' (MOR2). MOR1 on the other hand felt that reflection facilitated the retrieval of aspects of their teaching which they felt had been neglected and MOR3 described this process as bringing 'certain things to the forefront'. Conversations with their mentee, MOR3 claimed 'set me off thinking... so what do I do in my own class?'. MOR1 described mentoring more specifically as 'a really nice way to think again and verbalise what has just become an interior conversation of mine about the way I plan my lessons and what I do in my lessons'. MOR1 also felt that these conversations challenged their thinking as to 'why we do things the way we do and sort of understanding the choices we make and methodologies and justifying why we make choices in our lessons'. This in turn for MOR1 helped to develop self awareness seeing mentoring as a 'beneficial way of thinking about your own strengths and weaknesses'. MOR4 also claimed that 'reflecting with another person invites you to reflect on your own life...I certainly still have things to learn'.

The opportunity to reflect was also valued by four of the mentees. MEE6 appreciated the fact that they could find their own solutions through reflection 'my mentor asked the right questions to help me reflect on what to do next' rather than depend on their mentor to provide them and valued this overall, claiming they had become 'a more reflective practitioner'. MEE2 valued answering their mentor's questions as a means of clarifying

their thoughts 'because as you're saying things, you're thinking about what you're saying' so 'there's a great help in that, in the dialogue aspect of the thing'. MEE3 claimed that mentoring opened new doors and 'helped me reflect on new ways to approach things'. MEE1 also appreciated the quality of their reflection which they felt was genuine and not 'for show' as in other professional situations, 'it was actually, to really reflect on what I'd done and the impact that my choices had made on the learners' (MEE1).

4.4.2.2. Development of mentoring skills for mentors

To facilitate this reflection the mentors appreciated the listening and non-directive questioning skills that they had developed on their mentor training course, as identified by Lord et al. (2008). MOR1 claimed that 'the whole questioning side of the course was extremely valuable'. Questioning skills were important, explained MOR2, as they allowed them to lead their mentee's learning 'to the right point', 'instead of me telling you what the problem is'. MOR3 also valued the opportunity to develop 'my use of questions to hopefully get (the mentee) to arrive at their own conclusions'. MOR5 claimed that the training had helped them to 'find a balance between the amount of support and guidance to give a mentee'. Listening was also identified as an equally important skill which enabled MOR1 'to really listen to a person who's basically laying themselves out there, baring their souls on a professional level'. This, they admitted was 'extremely difficult to do' (MOR1) as it challenged them to 'think before I respond, and also to think about how I'm going to respond, and if I need to respond'. MOR3 hoped that, as a result of the course, they were 'a better listener...., giving (the mentee) the physical time and space to answer'.

4.4.2.3. Lesson observations

Together with reflection, lesson observations had been cited in the literature as a valuable aspect of mentoring in educational contexts (Hobson et al., 2009) and the two

focus groups echoed this enthusiasm, providing clear insights into its potential benefits. FG1 envisaged 'informal observations' with a mentor as being 'developmental' as opposed to the 'special performance' official observations which are 'development evaluative'. Being observed by a mentor would invariably affect the type of class teachers would choose to have observed and would allow a teacher to be 'a bit more experimental... to try something new without fear' (FG2) as opposed to an observation going on record when 'you play it safe, you don't push yourself or challenge yourself' (FG2). Furthermore, FG1 added, observations would be of particular benefit to freelance teachers in the organisation, whose lessons are not seen by their line manager.

The findings relating to the value of lesson observations from those within the mentoring scheme, however, did not support these views. According to MEE3, observations did not play a role in the mentoring scheme as they considered them to be aligned with 'quality assurance' although they agreed that observing their mentor teach 'could be helpful'. MEE2 expressed appreciation of seeing their mentor teach but only suggested that being observed 'might be useful' while remaining sensitive to the potential predictability of their mentor's feedback 'because the relationship is such that you start knowing what the other person thinks' (MEE2). However, rather than dismissing the value of lesson observations, timetabling incompatibilities, 'logistic reasons' (MOR2) and organisational issues, such as teaching on different sites, were cited as obstacles. MEE1 also expressed their concern that their presence might prove 'distracting' for their mentor's students.

Of the mentors, only one had experienced the 'hands-on, practical learning on the job' (MOR5) benefit of lesson observations. A tone of caution and uneasiness however, pervaded the other mentors' responses, highlighting certain sensitivity to this practice. MOR3 conceded that observations 'could be a useful tool' providing 'another sort of window into seeing the teacher' to gain access to those 'unplanned moments' but also cautioned that both the mentor and mentee would have to 'be comfortable with it'. This condition was also emphasised by MOR1 who referred to the 'delicate role' of seeing their

mentee's lessons. A further concern expressed by MOR1 was a mentor's ability to demonstrate an openness to 'self-reflection and self-critique' to avoid setting themselves up as an 'expert figure' (MOR1). This caution was endorsed by MOR2 who added that given the peer level nature of the relationship, the mentor could not afford to appear 'patronising or bossy' and that mentoring should be about 'sharing experiences' and should not at all be 'judgemental' (MOR2), raising the spectre of 'judgementoring' as highlighted by Hobson and Malderez (2013, p.94).

4.4.2.4. Heightened empathy skills

The concern that the mentors showed their mentees was clearly evidence of the empathic skills that the mentors had developed and valued by three of them. MOR2 felt that in order to help their mentee, mentoring had promoted 'greater mental flexibility, seeing things from different perspectives' to have a 'bigger picture of a person'. MOR1 was sensitive to the 'care that develops for the other person' as a result of mentoring while MOR2 declared a heightened sensitivity to others' needs, resulting from the complexity of 'gauging what teachers are ready for, being very tactful, trying to cooperate and not to impose your ideas'. MOR3 also underlined the importance of recognising with their mentee that 'like in any job, there'll be ups and downs' and that 'sometimes it is tough teaching'. FG2 also saw mentoring as an opportunity for mentors to develop different levels of 'sensitivity and empathy' which they felt were necessary 'to remember what it's like at different stages of your career' (FG2).

4.4.2.5. An opportunity for career progression

Career awareness was also evident in the findings and both focus groups and almost all the mentors identified career advantages for the mentors as a result of the mentoring scheme. FG1 believed that mentoring afforded 'a sense of career progression' whereas FG2 declared the scheme as a 'great opportunity for people for their curriculum',

particularly if 'you want to go on to be a coordinator or a senior teacher' (FG2). FG2 also believed that aspiring future coordinators and senior teachers would be equipped with the necessary experience which would be otherwise difficult to obtain, as mentoring 'gives you experience of the observation and performance management processes'. This view was confirmed by MOR4 who savoured mentoring as 'a taste of managing teachers' and found it useful 'to be seen as a source of knowledge'. MOR1 confirmed that mentoring had been instrumental in progressing from teaching to training, particularly where giving feedback and talking about lessons was concerned. MOR3 added that 'using these (mentoring) skills on a regular basis' for teacher training purposes had helped their career progression and MOR2 felt they were 'more skilled in giving professional support'. MOR4 also felt 'more confident in giving advice' although this was also partly attributed to other contributing factors.

Together with the mentors, half of the mentees responded positively to the question relating to how they saw themselves progressing. MEE2 in particular believed that the difference that mentoring had made to their teaching was 'day and night'. They claimed that 'very important progress' had been made (MEE2), MEE6 declared themselves as being 'more active in terms of professional development' and MEE4 felt that the scheme had motivated them to 'explore the area of mentoring' themselves. These views were counterbalanced, however, by MEE1's sceptical comment 'maybe I'm more aware now that you can't teach an old dog new tricks' and MEE5 who felt that the scheme had been designed for 'less experienced teachers'.

4.4.2.6. Altruistic satisfaction from seeing others develop

Although the mentors appreciated mentoring to enhance their careers, more striking for the researcher, however, was the evidence from the mentors of the considerable altruistic satisfaction they derived from helping others. When questioned as to what they valued overall of the mentoring scheme, they all unanimously agreed that it was the

opportunity to contribute to another's growth, as shown in Figure 9. This benefit as had been claimed in the literature (Roberts, 2000) was also anticipated by FG2 who suggested that mentoring 'can make you feel good as you can share what you know'.

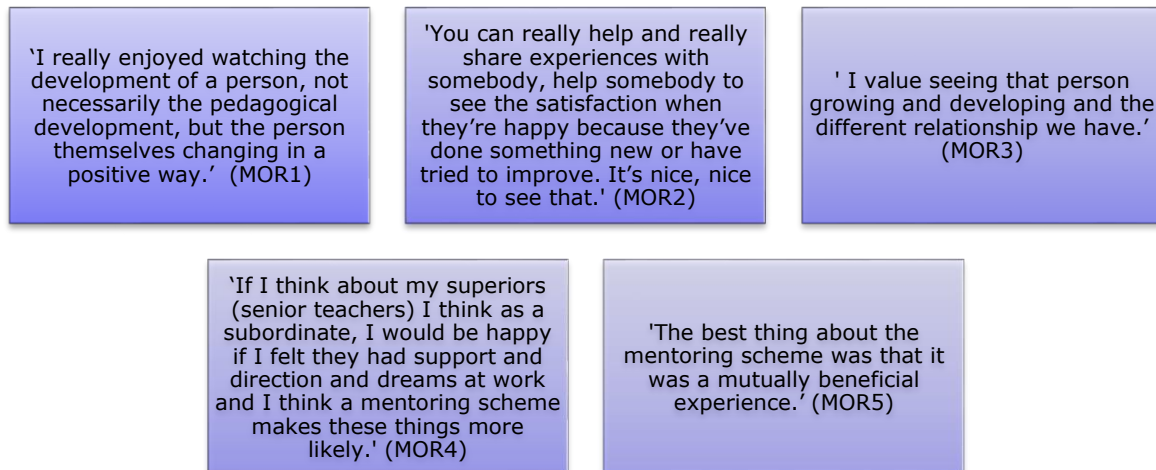


Fig. 9 Responses showing what mentors value overall from the mentoring scheme

4.4.2.7. Growth in confidence for both mentees and mentors

Further evidence to support the positive psychological benefits of mentoring for both mentors and mentees came from all the groups of participants in the form of a perceived growth in confidence and self-esteem. Three mentees, MEE6, MEE4, and MEE2 professed to having become more confident as a result of the mentoring scheme and MEE1 found the experience 'reassuring...from an emotional point of view'. MEE2 also confided that they not only felt 'less stressed' but also 'more comfortable' and that they even respected themselves more. Increased confidence was also perceived by the mentors, too. MOR5 and MOR1 claimed to have greater faith in their ability to give advice and MOR1 claimed that 'being instrumental in a person's personal and professional development gives you confidence'. FG1 also acknowledged the positive psychological charge of mentoring 'you would become more confident' as it would be 'a bit of a boost emotionally'. This was of

particular importance as confidence, FG1 was keen to point out, 'is possibly the most important thing in any job'.

4.4.2.8. Collaboration and team building

Together with the psychological benefits, evidence also emerged of the collaborative spirit that mentoring was perceived to promote with specific references made to its team building potential, '(it) makes teachers feel more like a team and it's a way to create teams' (FG1). MEE1 felt that mentoring reinforced feeling 'part of a community' and MEE3 'part of a group'. MOR4 even extended the application of this value to the five senior teachers who were not included in the research 'while a mentor might not generate team spirit directly, I think it (mentoring) would motivate a group that can probably feel abandoned'. Not only was the mentoring scheme a good way to 'meet a new staff member and form a bond which might otherwise have taken much longer' (MOR5) but it was also felt to contribute to the 'feeling of being a group of people who support each other and work together' (MOR1).

Collaborating was important to MEE1 as 'building a collaborative thing' that you have with a mentor 'leads to more development and more profound change'. MEE2 echoed this sentiment claiming that when you feel more comfortable about your job you socialise 'at a higher level' implying 'you socialise on ideas and not just on laughs'. Collaboration was facilitated by mentoring, according to MEE2 as 'the close relationship that you have with a mentor gives you the confidence to have closer relationships with others. It blossoms out into something more than coming to your mentoring sessions'. This evidence, however, was tempered by references to the pre-existing strong collaborative culture among the teaching staff, an attribute of the teaching centre which was endorsed in the previous year's staff survey report. FG1 referred to the 'informal mentor mentee relationships which are popping up all the time' and MEE2 added that 'I think it

(collaboration) already happens in a way, I think colleagues are always talking to each other and sharing opinions or materials’.

4.4.3. The perceived beneficiaries of the mentoring scheme

The findings to the third research question, as synthesised in Figure 10, concerned which of the staff might benefit from the mentoring scheme, taking into consideration their experience and the three different means by which they are employed, as outlined in Chapter One. To begin with, both focus groups and two mentors felt that freelance teachers could benefit most for a number of reasons. Firstly, freelancers are not line managed and not required to be observed (FG1; FG2) and working in different sites (FG1) this group is more likely to feel ‘cut off’ (MOR3) or more ‘lost’ (MOR4). MEE1, MEE4 and MOR3 on the other hand felt that a new colleague would benefit from the scheme, a view shared by both focus groups who lamented the apparent lack of an effective induction programme. Furthermore, as teachers in this particular teaching centre are required to teach a range of different skills as well as students of different ages, MOR2, MOR3 and MEE3 identified teachers who have to acquire new skills as possible beneficiaries of the mentoring scheme. This view was supported by both focus groups who cited the need to teach Business English as an example.

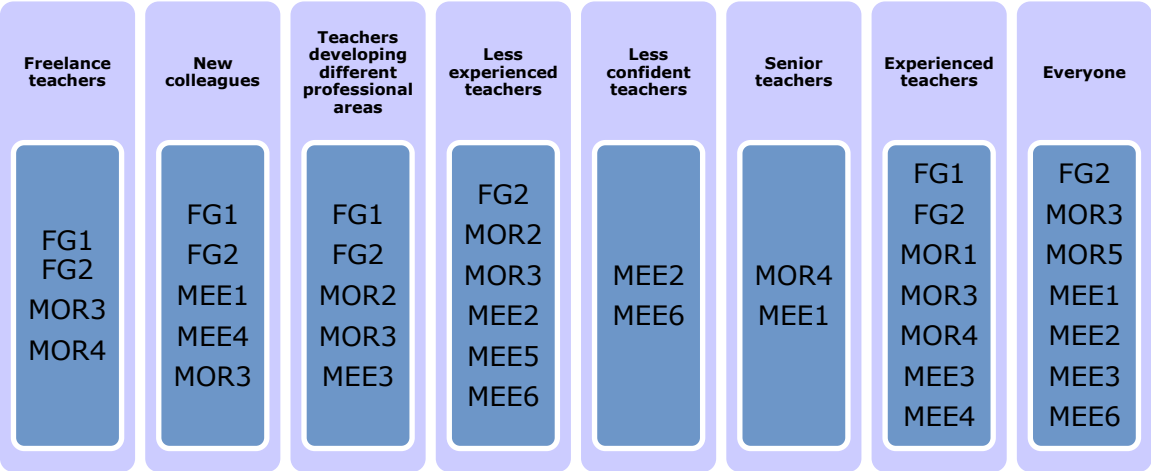


Fig. 10 Perceived beneficiaries of the mentoring scheme

Two further groups of teachers emerged from the findings, as MEE2 and MEE6 felt that less confident teachers could benefit while MOR4 and MEE1 considered the scheme to be of value to senior teachers with MOR4 alluding to group mentoring for a group who 'can probably feel abandoned'. The most substantial evidence, however, supported the views that everyone as well as experienced teachers might benefit from the scheme. Although three of the mentees, two mentors and one focus group felt that less experienced teachers could benefit, there was more evidence to support the case for experienced teachers (FG1; MOR3; MOR5; MEE1; MEE2; MEE3; MEE6). For these teachers being a mentee could be useful 'to update' (FG1), 'to challenge their beliefs' (FG2) or 'to develop different professional areas' (MEE4). As a mentor, on the other hand, mentoring could provide 'a development opportunity' (MOR1), 're-spark an interest in their career' (MOR3) or serve as a guide where no 'obvious career path is open to them' (MOR4). Similarly, more than half the participants felt that there was value in the mentoring scheme for everyone, including office staff (MOR3), management and the organisation as a whole (FG2; MOR5).

4.5. Chapter conclusion

Having presented the findings in this chapter in relation to each of the three research questions, the following chapter will go on to discuss the implications of these as well as provide insights from the researcher's diary before concluding the study in Chapter Six.

Chapter Five - Discussion of research findings

5.1. Introduction

This chapter begins by examining how the research findings presented in Chapter Four compare with those of the literature review which were explored in Chapter Two. This is followed by a discussion from the researcher's perspective, highlighting insights from the researcher journal. The chapter ends with the researcher's claim to the trustworthiness of this research study by demonstrating the transparent, credible and dependable approach that has been adopted.

5.2. Discussion of findings

5.2.1. Related findings with the literature review

As can be seen from the presentation of the findings in Chapter Four, this research study supported a number of the claims made in the literature review. Increased collaboration with colleagues (Rhodes and Beneickie, 2002; Lord et al., 2008; Delaney, 2012), greater confidence (Roberts, 2000; Lord et al., 2008; Tomlinson et al., 2010) and heightened reflexivity (Hobson et al., 2009; Street, 2004) had all been identified as aspects of mentoring which were valued by both mentors and mentees in the studies examined. Although all of the views in these studies were expressed by the mentors and mentees themselves, the responses from the two focus groups, despite being external to the mentoring scheme, also support this evidence.

5.2.2. Emerging differences from the literature review

A number of differences emerge, however, which are of considerable interest to the researcher. To begin with, the distinct views relating to the confidential dialogue and the

peer relationship attribute of the mentoring process, which were not so evident to the researcher when investigating the empirical studies and literature reviews in Chapter Two, provide two important dimensions to the value of the voluntary nature of the scheme, which is not aligned to performance management, for all the participants. Secondly, despite the strong evidence to support the value of lesson observations in the literature (Hansford et al., 2004; Lord et al., 2008; j Lai, 2010; Delaney, 2012) and views which were endorsed by both focus groups, the same appreciation was not to be found among the findings from the mentors and mentees in this particular study. Although this may be due to impracticalities, as outlined in Chapter Four, it nevertheless presents an avenue to be explored with the participants on future mentoring schemes. These differences can be seen in the synthesis of the findings in Figure 11.

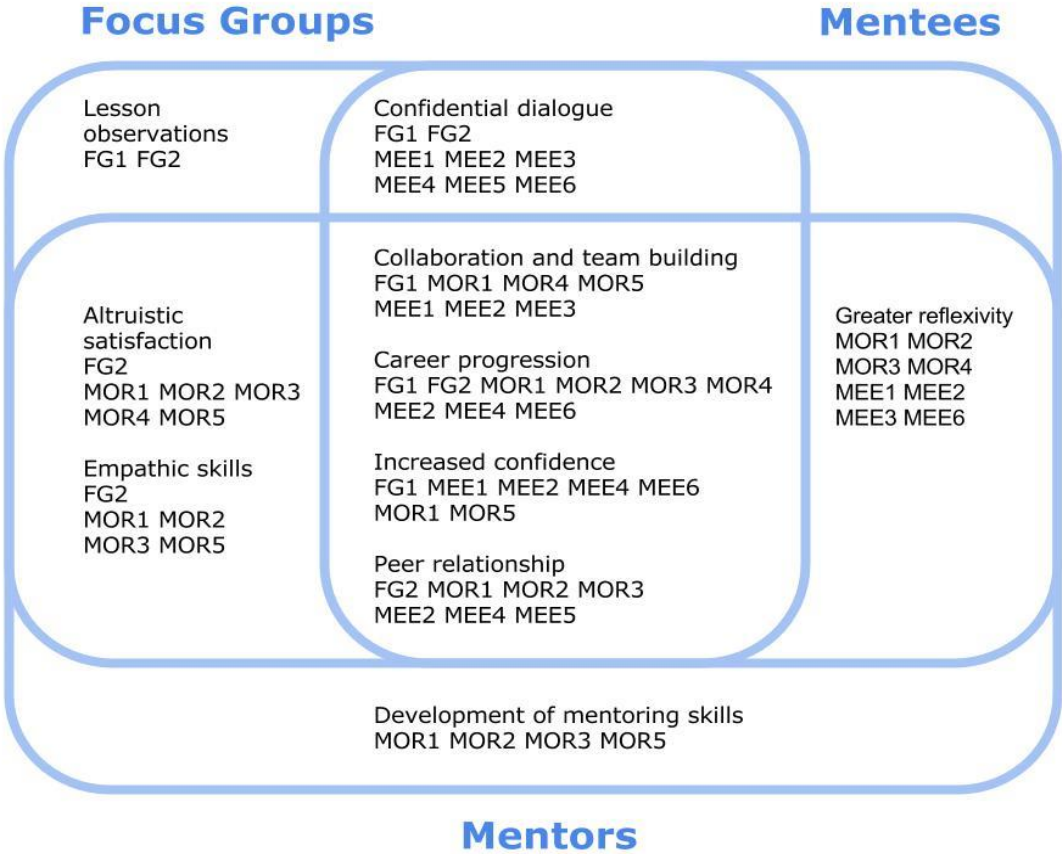


Fig. 11 Synthesis of findings showing the value of the voluntary mentoring scheme which is not aligned to performance management

5.3. Sources of intrigue for the researcher

Together with the similarities and differences with the literature review, the findings also intrigued the researcher in a number of ways.

5.3.1. The external perspective of the focus groups

Firstly, the two focus groups of teachers who had never participated in the scheme, and who had been included for their objective standpoint (Hobson et al. 2009), offered very distinct perceptions of the value of mentoring, reflecting the evidence found in the literature, particularly with regard to lesson observations, career progression and the benefits of the confidential dialogue. Previous experience in other mentoring schemes or an intimate relationship with a mentoring scheme participant may account for these insights. The researcher, when inviting volunteers, might also have unwittingly attracted participants who were already knowledgeable and enthusiastic about mentoring or those who harboured a sub-conscious desire to please the researcher (Harwell, 2010; Denscombe, 2014). These groups may have perceived the research opportunity to theorise (Kreuger, 2014) or to present themselves in a favourable light (Hobson and Townsend, 2010). Their views, however, are of significant value as representatives of the teaching staff to whom the scheme was made available.

The researcher was also intrigued by the number of questions from both focus groups, seeking clarification of the different dimensions of the mentoring scheme as illustrated in the conceptualisation in Fig. 1 in Chapter One. These perplexities led the researcher to question the extent of the teachers' awareness of the exact nature of the mentoring process. Of significant importance is the fact that when both focus groups were duly informed, they demonstrated a much keener interest in participating in future schemes to the extent that FG1 wanted 'to become a mentor or a mentee after this conversation' and FG2 even suggested the researcher become their future mentor.

Of greater concern to the researcher, however, was the fact that no reference was made from either focus group as to the value of the reflexive nature of the mentoring dialogue. Reflexivity was highly valued by the mentors and mentees and identified by Hansford et al. (2004) as one of the most appreciated aspects of the mentoring dialogue. Reflexivity, in the literature, is associated with problem solving (Moon, 1999), making tacit knowledge visible (Hargreaves, 1999; Aspors and Fransson, 2015) and facilitating the reappraisal of underlying ideas and beliefs (Hansford et al., 2004) both for mentors and mentees, which in turn can lead to transformational learning (Brockbank and McGill, 2006). The surprise expressed by FG1 when informed that the mentors had received training also confirmed this lack of understanding as to the purpose of the mentoring process, including what is expected of a mentee. A greater awareness of mentoring skills and competences is therefore essential especially in light of claims in the literature that mentoring can be considered a profession within a profession (Aspors and Fransson, 2015).

5.3.2. The value of the mentoring scheme for the mentors

A further source of intrigue for the researcher concerned the perceived benefits of the scheme for the mentors in particular. Although there is evidence in the literature to suggest that mentoring is more likely to lead to positive outcomes where mentors receive financial recognition for their work (Tomlinson et al., 2010), none of the mentors made any reference to the benefit of Time Off In Lieu which they enjoy for every hour they mentor. Furthermore, despite claims that research emphasises the benefits of mentoring for mentees rather than mentors (Haggard et al., 2011), of the ten themes summarised in Figure 11, the mentors valued eight of the emerging themes as opposed to the six valued by mentees, suggesting that the mentoring scheme was more greatly appreciated by the mentors.

5.4. Findings from the researcher journal

5.4.1 Challenges encountered by the researcher

The findings that have been discussed so far have been those that were generated from the focus group discussions, written questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. This research study, however, was also supported by a researcher journal, as mentioned in Chapter Three, the principal aim of which was to provide evidence of a self critical approach, an essential aspect of qualitative research (Carcary, 2009). From this journal the researcher is open to acknowledge a number of challenges that the different stages of the research presented. To begin with, adopting and maintaining an objective standpoint against the tide of enthusiasm when conducting the literature review proved demanding, given the overwhelming majority of favourable accounts. A further preoccupation concerned the research design and the heavy reliance on interviews with their resulting unavoidable bias (Briggs, 2012; Bell, 2014). Listening repeatedly to the recordings for evidence of leading questions or overly enthusiastic responses which belied impartiality was a means of reducing this bias in subsequent interviews.

A further concern was the analysis of the findings and the complex nature of this task which the researcher confesses to having initially underestimated (Thomas, 2006). Excerpts, they found, did not always neatly correspond to one theme or another but overlapped, occasionally resulting in lapses of confidence for the researcher in their ability to analyse (Seidman, 2006) but remedied by constant rereading of the responses. Deciding which segments to exclude to accommodate the constraints of the study also proved challenging given the unexpected volume of evidence generated (Cohen et al. 2013). Finding the right balance between including enough evidence to persuade the reader of the worthiness of the research without overwhelming them was a further challenge faced by the researcher (Bassey p76). Furthermore, initial impressions from

the interviews could not always be substantiated by the evidence available, underlying the need to scrupulously re-examine the findings before making claims.

5.4.2. Ethical concerns

The journal also served to record a number of ethical concerns, some of which have already been outlined in Chapters Two, Three and Four. Faithfully reporting the views of the participants and accommodating a language appropriate to a research study, proved a pressing concern (Morrison, 2012) for the researcher. Having sought permission from the participants in the consent form (Appendix A), as many direct quotations as the conventions of the report permit, were therefore included, respecting the context in which they originally appeared. By rereading the written responses and transcripts with regard to the presentation of the findings, the researcher was reassured that they had fairly represented the participants.

5.5. Recognition of the limitations of the research

In keeping with this self critical approach to the research project, the researcher also recognises that it is not without its limitations, despite the scrupulous attention paid to the different stages of its design and implementation. To begin with, the number of participants with freelance contracts was significantly low given that they represented more than a third of the teaching staff. Although many more were invited to participate and were keen to do so, work commitments prevented them from taking part. Furthermore, despite the fact that approximately a third of the teaching staff is male, very few of them have ever participated in the mentoring scheme. Even taking the focus groups into account, only a significantly small proportion of the participants in this case study were not female. Perceptions from a greater number of males may have shed a different light on the research findings. A further limitation regards the reporting of the

focus groups findings as a group and not as four separate individuals (Matthews and Ross, 2010). The views expressed might not have been representative of the group as some participants may have felt uncomfortable disagreeing with the others. The heavy reliance on interviews also assumes an ability to conduct them consistently and fairly, mindful of the bias from the position of the researcher.

5.6. Transparency and trustworthiness

By demonstrating reflexivity through the research journal and recognising the study's limitations, the researcher intends to ensure a significant degree of transparency (Hobson and Townsend, 2010) which in turn contributes to the trustworthiness and persuasiveness of this research study. Transparency is also guaranteed in relation to the 'data', 'analysis', and 'production dimensions' of the study (Moravcsik, 2014, p.48). Firstly, although the researcher cannot allow access to the empirical data, precise and accurate referencing to the studies cited in Chapter Two affords a strong degree of data transparency together with the fact that the focus groups and participants who were interviewed were also offered the opportunity to scrutinise the transcripts of their recordings. Secondly, the sections detailing the philosophical considerations underpinning the research design methodology together with the rationale governing the choice of data collection methods in Chapter Three allow for analytic transparency (Crotty, 1998). Finally, the account in Chapter Four outlining the data analysis procedure is intended to provide production transparency.

This transparency, it is hoped will support the researcher's claim to trustworthiness as opposed to objectivity, in keeping with the epistemological approach to this research study (Bassegy, 1999). To begin with, by conducting this case study in its own natural setting rather than creating an artificial environment, the findings may be considered genuine and credible (Bassegy, 1999). The researcher can also guarantee that the data

are reliable having recorded and carefully transcribed all the interviews rather than relying on notes and memory with the guarantee that this data will be kept for seven years. The dissemination of the findings, which will be discussed in Chapter Six, will also offer the participants and other members of the teaching staff a forum to share their views and if necessary challenge the researcher. The research may also be considered dependable as the findings were generated from different participant perspectives using three different data collection tools. Finally, the researcher trusts that their account of the findings is sufficiently persuasive given the detail and range of the comments provided.

5.7. Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed how the findings of this research study relate to those of the literature review and those of the researcher's journal. Following these observations the following chapter will now outline a number of recommendations that should be made as well as explain how the findings will be disseminated.

Chapter Six - Research conclusion

6.1. Chapter introduction

Following the presentation and discussion of the findings in Chapters Four and Five this chapter concludes this study by detailing a number of recommendations which the researcher would like to make as a result of this research. The chapter continues with a description of how the research will be disseminated and an account of the implications of the study for future research.

6.2. Recommendations

This study sought to provide useful insights into the value of a voluntary mentoring scheme which is not aligned to performance management, for both mentor and mentee English language teachers in an international organisation. In light of the findings a number of recommendations can now be made.

6.2.1. Clearer perspectives of the nature of the mentoring scheme

Firstly, a clearer understanding of the nature of the mentoring process in terms of its contextual, relational and developmental dimensions, as outlined in Chapter One, needs to be ensured for all the members of the teaching staff. The doubts expressed by the two focus groups, as identified in Chapter Five indicate that those outside the scheme might not have a clear perspective of what mentoring involves or may have a limited awareness of the developmental opportunities that mentoring can offer. Future mentees need to be informed of what is expected of them in terms of reflexivity (Hobson, Astanheira, Doyle, Csigás and Clutterbuck, 2016), a concern also raised by MOR3, in order to reap the benefits of the mentoring process. Future voluntary mentors must be sensitive to the skills that need to be developed for 'judgementoring' (Hobson and

Malderez, 2013, p.94) to be prevented. The management and those responsible for implementing the scheme also need to be aware of the value of the peer relationship and the confidential nature of the dialogue to safeguard the voluntary nature of the scheme.

6.2.2. Raising awareness of the perceived value of the scheme

A greater awareness of the precise benefits of mentoring as a form of professional development needs to be raised among all members of staff (Lord et al., 2008) with particular regard to the value of the reflexive dialogue within the confines of a confidential relationship. The teaching staff also need to understand that the scheme does not only benefit inexperienced staff or those new to the organisation but also those with many more years of teaching experience, those who are less confident in their profession and freelance teachers who may appreciate the collaborative nature of the mentoring scheme. The enthusiasm perceived by the researcher among the participants during the focus group discussions may spread to other members of the teaching staff.

6.2.3. Re-evaluation of lesson observations

The question of lesson observations should also be reconsidered as they may represent a missed developmental opportunity for both mentors and mentees given the evidence from the literature review and the insights from the focus groups. Sharing the findings from the literature review with the mentors will help to inform their practice as well as lead to further discussions around the value of seeing their mentees teach as well as actively sharing their own expertise.

6.2.4. Provision of future mentor training

In view of the value that the mentors attached to developing mentoring skills, and as requested by MOR2, the need for further training must also be recognised to support the

initial fifteen hours that the mentors received. Mentor education in the literature is seen as essential (Lord et al., 2008; Barrera et al., 2010; Delaney, 2012) and the value of these skills should also be extended to all members of the teaching staff in the interests of promoting a reflective mentoring culture which extends beyond the mentoring scheme (Hobson and Malderez, 2013). As mentor education, according to Aspfors and Fransson (2015) should embrace theoretical understandings in parallel with practical experience, the researcher should also share the findings of the literature review and provide further theoretical support for the mentors.

6.3. Dissemination of the findings

To facilitate the implementation of these recommendations the researcher intends to disseminate the findings in a number of ways. To begin with, the director of the teaching centre, as sponsor of the mentoring scheme will be informed of the research findings, together with the senior teacher responsible for the scheme's implementation. This will provide an opportunity to discuss the recommendations as suggested above, particularly the suggestion that senior teachers may also benefit from the scheme. Management support and recognition of the value of mentoring is instrumental, according to Jones (2012) to maintain mentors' voluntary engagement with the scheme. Secondly, other teaching centres in the organisation will be notified through the organisation's Middle Managers' Forum. As mentioned in Chapter One, mentoring is not implemented in all of the organisation's teaching centres in other parts of the world and in some cases mentoring is mandated, forming an integral part of performance management. An understanding of the value of a voluntary scheme may therefore serve to inform other schemes or motivate other centres to implement one.

Furthermore, a seminar on one of the centre's Training Days will provide the forum to disseminate the findings to the teaching staff, supported and facilitated by the graphic organisers included in this study, which have been designed with this purpose in mind.

This meeting will also provide the opportunity for teachers to question the researcher and for the participants to have access to the summary of the findings. It is also hoped that the outcomes of this seminar reach freelance teachers who are not obliged to attend these meetings. Sharing how exactly the research was conceived, designed, conducted and analysed with the teaching staff may also inspire the researcher's colleagues to conduct their own research.

An application will also be made to present this research study at the 53rd Annual Conference of the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL), which will be held in Liverpool in April 2019. As mentioned in Chapter One, research pertaining to mentoring schemes in the field of English as a Foreign Language is not widely documented so the conference would provide a means of reaching out to teachers from other teaching contexts across the globe through this highly influential Association.

6.4. Implications for future research

Together with these recommendations this concluding charter also identifies a number of implications for future research. To begin with, despite the challenges identified in Chapter Five, the entire process of planning, designing, conducting and presenting the finding of this research study has proved to be immensely rewarding for the researcher, leaving them sufficiently inspired and motivated to continue in the future. Following the advice of Hobson and Malderez (2013) the researcher now intends to extend their own theoretical knowledge by further investigating existing research from other organisational contexts. The mentors might also be encouraged to carry out action research in relation to an aspect of their mentoring. This particular research study has explored the insights of teachers as to the perceived value of mentoring. It must also be recognised, however, that the teachers form part of a wider context and so investigating the perceived value of

mentoring at an organisational level would therefore add greater insights into the value of mentoring in the institution as a whole.

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Appendix A
CURRENT MENTOR/MENTEE PARTICIPANT

CONSENT FORM Semi-structured interview

Project title: *What is the perceived value of a voluntary mentoring scheme as a form of professional development for English language teachers at a teaching centre of an international organisation?*

Researcher's name: Jane Hoatson

Supervisor's name: Dr Edward Sellman

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that information gained during the study may be published. Any comments I make during the interview may be cited directly by the researcher but my identity will be protected and I will remain anonymous at all times.
- I understand that I must not disclose the content of the interview with the other research participants (all the members of the teaching staff) until the research project has been concluded. I will be notified by the researcher when this is the case.
- I understand that I will be audio recorded during the interview and I will be reminded of this before the start of the interview.
- I understand that data will be stored by the researcher both electronically and in the form of written notes taken during the interview. The researcher will be the only person who has access to this information and it will be stored on the researcher's own personal computer. Access by any other member of the organisation will only be granted with the permission of the participant. This data will be destroyed after a period of seven years.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

Signed (research participant)

Print name **Date**

Contact details

Researcher: Jane Hoatson
Supervisor: Dr Edward Sellman
School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator



Appendix B

MASTERS DISSERTATION RESEARCH PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET – Mentors and mentees of the current mentoring scheme

- The aim of this research project is to examine the perceived value, for all the members of the teaching staff, of the voluntary mentoring scheme, as a form of professional development.
- Participation in this research project is completely voluntary and the participants are at liberty to withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences. Non-participation will not affect your rights or impact on your performance appraisal.
- This research project will involve the entire teaching staff to include teachers who have never been involved in the mentoring scheme as well as those who have. The research will be conducted from February to June 2017 at the teaching centre.
- Although information gained during the study may be published, each participant will not be identified and anonymity will be assured at all times. All data will be stored by the researcher both electronically and in the form of written notes. The researcher will be the only person who has access to this information and it will be stored on the researcher's own personal computer. Access to any data by any member of the organisation will only be granted with the permission of the participant. This data will be destroyed after a period of seven years.
- As a mentors or mentee of the current mentoring scheme you will be invited to take part in an interview lasting approximately 30 minutes. This interview will be recorded. You will be asked to not disclose the content of the interview with the other research participants (all the members of the teaching staff) until the research project has been concluded. You will be notified by the researcher when this is the case.
- You may contact the researcher or supervisor if you require further information about the research, and you may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if you wish to make a complaint relating to the research.

Contact details

Researcher: *Jane Hoatson*

Supervisor: *Dr Edward Sellman*

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator