MENTORING A RESEARCH STUDENT

Dr. Monika Aggarwal*

This article reports the findings of research based upon participatory approach and findings of international research literature on mentoring a research student. Research identifies number of benefits of mentoring for mentor as well as mentees and also depicts the   problems associated with mentees and suggests the conditions for effective mentoring.

1 Introduction

The higher education in India has witnessed many fold increase in its institutional capacity since independence. During 1950 and 2008, the number of universities has increased from 20 to about 431, colleges from 500 to 20,677 and the teachers from 15,000 to nearly 5.05 lakhs respectively. Consequently, the enrolment of students has increased from a mere 1.00 lakh in 1950 to over 116.12 lakhs in 2008.

A common mission of universities is to create an educational environment that benefits the postgraduate students and research oriented faculty, post-doctoral fellows and research students to conduct high quality research programs with important scientific and social implications(Gonzalez , 2001) The emphasis on research in higher education is increasing enormously in India also due to new guidelines given by University Grants Commission (UGC).

In this article an attempt is made to examine what is currently known and not known about mentoring a research student and reviewing international evidence on mentoring   An attempt is also made to understand the mentoring process in number of ways (one such way is use of Participatory approach) which   I present here in four main sections

Firstly I have interviewed 30 researchers on the basis of unstructured interview, so that they can tell freely about their experiences while doing research and on the basis of their responses I have categorized into benefits for mentees and benefits for mentors

In the second section I have discussed the potential limitations and costs of mentoring.In last section suggestions for effective mentoring are given. Along with this   an outline has also been given what international evidence tells us about research   on

mentoring. These suggestions are based, to extent possible on the literature that exists and from the interview of researchers and the knowledge and experience of the author.

1.1 Definition on Mentoring

Mentoring refers to a developmental relationship that exist between two persons, typically a more experienced senior person and a less experienced   junior person, designed primarily to assist the development of mentee's expertise.

The mentoring relationship can also exist among peers or others within and outside an organization. Mentors primarily help in career development and psychological   support**.**

*Senior Faculty Member, Govt. P.G. College, Panchkula

2 Benefits of Mentoring

In this section an attempt is made to examine empirically about the potential benefits of mentoring to mentors, mentees and university.

2.1Benefits for Mentees

The benefits of mentoring according to research findings relate to emotional and psychological support, which helps in boosting the confidence of mentees and increasing their morale (Bullogh, 2005 , Marble & Raimondi, 2007) it has also been found that mentoring helps in developing capabilities of researchers like ability to manage their time and workloads , knowledge about research methodology, and if the mentors area of expertise is there , that knowledge and experience of mentor also helps a lot.   It helps in increased confidence, professional growth, if the mentor is hard task   master. It improves self-reflection and problem solving capacities .

2.2 Benefits for Mentors

Research findings suggests that mentoring students may have a positive impact on the professional and personal development of mentors (Hagger&Mcintyre , 2006) Mentoring helps in enhancing the knowledge of mentors and use of ICT (information and communication technology).

Research has also shown that it provides satisfaction and pride to supervise and seeing their mentors succeed and increases teacher's identity and professional status.

Finally, involvement in mentoring also helps individual teachers career planning and promotion.

3 Potential limitations and cost of mentoring

From the interviews conducted by the researcher it was found that   mentors have experienced increased workload, as a result of mentoring in addition to their normal teaching roles. It has impact on mentors work –life balance and may cause them stress. It has also been found that mentors are not getting enough remuneration for acting as mentors, which leads to lack of interest of mentors.

3.1   Disadvantages for mentees

The researcher has tried to examine the problems faced by mentees.The studies have found that mentors have failed to provide a support because of general 'unavailability' (Fisher 1999, Smith and Maclay, 2007). This was validated by my study also; they make mentees wait for long hours which leads to the wastage of time, without any fruitful discussion. It was even found out that mentors give extra personal work to the mentees, and some of them seemed to be rather 'tough on mentees. It has also been found that some mentors are comfortable in pursuing some areas of research and they impose those topics on students without caring for their interest. This may result in mentees less likely to challenge social reform and social justice agendas (Clarke &Jarvis,2005, Sundli,2007). Many mentors did not give their mentees sufficient 'freedom to innovate' (Beck and Konisk,2000).

In case of women mentees, some studies have found that there are cases of sexual harassment by mentors. Some of them will not understand the problems of working women, like dual responsibility of managing the house, looking after the kids and doing research.

Some of them may use the work of the student in their own research papers without acknowledging the students work. Another is that the restricted ranges of approaches employed by some mentors restrict the learning and development of mentees.

4 Suggestions for effective mentoring

After conducting field survey , authors own experience and knowledge and going through various research studies , the author has come to the conclusion that certain 'conditions' , may be more likely to facilitate achievement of mentoring objectives and has greater impact on the success of mentoring programmes across a variety of contexts. These relate to i) contextual support for mentors ii) mentor Selection iii) strategies for mentoring

4.1Contextual support for mentoring

Research shows that there are large number of contextual factors which influence the relationship of mentors and mentees. The most consistent finding in this area is that , other things being equal , mentoring is more successful if mentors are provided with non-contact time to prepare for undertake the mentoring role (Abelletal., 1995; Lee& Fang,2007) Some studies have also suggested that mentoring is more likely to yield positive outcomes where mentors receive financial reward or some kind of incentive or recognition for their work(Abell,1997,Simpson etal.'2007)

4.1.2. Mentor selection

Mentor selection is the most important factor in success of mentee and mentors should be selected after taking in to consideration the area of expertise of mentor and your area of research. He/ she should be good role model, a person with ethics.

Mentees must have 'professional respect' for their mentors, which means that, in the mentee's eyes mentors possess sufficient knowledge and expertise. Effective mentors must be supportive, approachable, trustworthy, nonjudgmental and committed to their work. If mentors are senior leaders than they may not be able to find sufficient time for mentoring and students tend to more inhibitive where their mentors have a higher status.

4.1.3 Mentoring strategies

Regular communication between a supervisor and student is essential, especially in the formative stages of the research project. Formal meetings and other means of communication help to maintain and monitor progress. Provision should also be made for ongoing evaluation of the frequency and success of meetings. Effective mentors make time for their mentees : they have regular meetings with them and are available for informal discussion at other times(Adey,1997, Johnson et.al.,2005). Finally, research shows that effective mentors ensure their mentees are sufficiently challenged.

The effective mentors will give guidance about the nature of research and the academic standards expected, the planning of the research program, access to literature and resources, and the avoidance of plagiarism. The Supervisor will advise the Student about developing the necessary research method skills and any other relevant training skills to complete the degree. The Supervisor will ensure that the student is made aware of inadequate progress or standards of work below that generally expected, confirming this in writing to the Student and arranging any supportive action necessary

Conclusion and Implications

It is clear from the Synthesis of research evidence presented here mentoring has great potential to produce a range of benefits for mentees and mentors which leads to enormous benefit to society in the form of good research.

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