



ISSN: 2617-6548

URL: www.ijirss.com



Sustaining pedagogical mentoring: Insights from English as a Foreign Language teachers' experiences and needs

Trinh Quoc Lap^{1*}, Phan Ngoc Tuong Vy², Le Cong Tuan³, Ngo Huynh Hong Nga⁴, Huynh Ngoc Tai⁵

^{1,2,3,4}Can Tho University, Vietnam.

⁵Tra Vinh University, Vietnam.

Corresponding author: Trinh Quoc Lap (Email: tqlap@ctu.edu.vn)

Abstract

Mentoring plays a vital role in the professional development of in-service EFL teachers in both professional and well-being aspects. While international research has investigated diverse mentoring models and their impact on teacher development, mentoring practices in Vietnam, particularly in high schools, remain underexplored. As change agents, EFL teachers should be equipped with qualified mentoring programs to exude their agency in the evolving context of English Language Teaching (ELT). This study investigated (1) in-service EFL teachers' evaluations of the quality of mentoring activities delivered by EFL trainers in the scope of an ELT innovation project in Vietnam, and (2) their expectations for sustaining the quality of mentoring activities. Conducted in the underdeveloped areas around the Mekong Delta of Vietnam, the study adopted a mixed-method approach, involving 273 survey respondents and 12 interview participants. Results indicate that teachers value mentors' professional expertise and social skills yet express the need for more practice-oriented mentoring and emotionally driven communication, especially in reverse intergenerational mentor-mentee relationships. Findings indicated the importance of refining mentoring programs to create harmony between innovative and traditional ELT methodologies. Ultimately, these findings contribute to maintaining and reinforcing the sustainability of mentoring activities in the field of ELT.

Keywords: ELT innovation project, In-service EFL teachers, Psychological mentoring support, ELT, Sustaining mentoring activities.

DOI: 10.53894/ijirss.v8i2.5135

Funding: This study received funding from the MOET of Vietnam (Grant Number B2025-TCT-17).

History: Received: 14 January 2025 / **Revised:** 13 February 2025 / **Accepted:** 20 February 2025 / **Published:** 6 March 2025

Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions: All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Transparency: The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

Publisher: Innovative Research Publishing

1. Introduction

Effective mentoring is globally recognized as a cornerstone of teacher development, offering critical career-related guidance and psychological support. Mentorship helps novice teachers navigate the complexities of classroom management

and curriculum design while enabling veteran educators to adapt to evolving educational demands [1]. These findings suggest that tailored mentoring frameworks are crucial for supporting teachers across different career stages, echoing UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which emphasizes ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. In Vietnam, mentoring in English language teaching (ELT) has received comparatively less scholarly attention, particularly in high school settings. High school education in Vietnam serves as a critical stepping stone for students entering higher education, making the refinement of mentoring practices an urgent priority. Addressing these gaps contributes to achieving SDG 4 by enhancing the capacity of educators to deliver quality education, particularly in under-resourced and socio-economically disadvantaged regions. This study aimed to explore the evaluations and expectations of in-service EFL teachers in high schools in the Mekong Delta, where socio-economic disparities and limited resources pose unique challenges. By examining mentoring quality, the research seeks to identify areas for improvement to better support teachers trained in the past but teaching in the present.

2. Literature Review

Mentoring is defined as a collaborative process among active and productive pre-service teachers and mentoring teachers to guide improvement in primary science teaching practices [2, 3]. The pre-service teachers expect to be provided with basic information on school procedures, norms, and evaluations, but also to assist those in integrating and designing a standards-based curriculum based on students' learning needs by their mentor teachers [4, 5]. Mentoring is also seen as a relationship between a faculty member and a student in order to help both individuals learn, grow, and prosper. It involves two-way communication which, when done properly, can benefit both parties involved in the process [6]. In this study, mentoring can be seen as an informal or formal relationship among experienced teachers and less experienced teachers in which experienced teachers support less experienced teachers not only in professional development but also in personal development to meet the needs of the workplace for the long term. Murray [7] identified several key qualities of effective mentors, including interpersonal skills, professional expertise, and experience, emphasizing that attitude and character are the most critical attributes. Mentors should be enthusiastic, respected by colleagues, possess strong content and pedagogical knowledge, communicate effectively, particularly when providing constructive feedback, and demonstrate excellent interpersonal skills. Therefore, to be an effective mentor, there is a need for training and practice over a long period.

Mentorship in English as a Second Language (ESL) and Foreign Language (EFL) teaching has been extensively studied, revealing diverse approaches, challenges, and benefits. Mentors' and mentees' perceptions of challenges and support evaluations, indicating that while novice ESL teachers gained useful knowledge from mentoring, they often faced inadequate support in areas such as classroom management, feelings of isolation, and administrative assistance [8]. These findings revealed the need for improved mentoring programs that prioritize practical teaching strategies. Building on this, Çapan and Bedir [9] investigated reciprocal peer mentoring during teaching practicums, revealing that peer conferences and observations effectively addressed flaws in the practicum. They recommended earlier teaching practice and periodic mentor-mentee rotations to optimize the experience. Recently, Bozak [10] introduced Instructional Reverse Mentoring (IRM), positioning less experienced teachers and students as mentors to senior counterparts, fostering professional development, communication, and solidarity, although this model was primarily conceptual and context-specific to Turkey.

Further research has examined mentor-mentee perceptions, with Aydin and Arslan [11] finding that mentees expect mentors to demonstrate expertise in modern teaching methods, lesson planning, assessment, classroom management, and online instruction. Effective mentorship also requires interpersonal skills, such as attentive listening, collaboration, and constructive feedback, alongside a positive attitude to create a supportive learning environment. Valle, et al. [12] extended these findings by showing that reverse mentoring reshaped in-service teachers' beliefs about teaching English to children, particularly in addressing misconceptions about language learning difficulties, motivation, and communicative strategies. Mentorship's role in personal and professional growth was explored by Kurti [13] who expected a five-factor mentoring model encompassing personal attributes, system requirements, pedagogical knowledge, modeling, and feedback. While mentees reported strong support for personal development, feedback was identified as a weaker area, highlighting the need for enhanced mentor training to promote professionalism and reflective practices. Similarly, Pérez, et al. [14] demonstrated that mentoring improved mentees' teaching practices and professional knowledge, fostering creativity, critical thinking, and knowledge-sharing among teachers and educational stakeholders. Collectively, these studies showcased the multifaceted role of mentorship in addressing the complex demands of language education, with a focus on aligning evaluations, refining mentoring strategies, and supporting professional growth.

Mentoring in the Vietnamese context has not received much scholarly attention, with existing studies primarily focusing on ELT practicum experiences and mentoring dynamics. Nguyen [15] highlighted that pre-service EFL teachers in Vietnam typically engage in individual planning, teaching, and evaluation, with limited opportunities for collaboration or peer support. For deeper teachers' reflections, Nguyen and Ngo [16] examined peer mentoring in a TESOL practicum and found that this model effectively facilitated reflective practices among pre-service teachers, although the study was based solely on data from group interviews. In higher education contexts, Tran [17] investigated the challenges and successes of mentoring in universities, revealing that mentees were inspired by their mentors to develop teaching identities, improve time management, and overcome initial anxiety. Mentors benefited from revising teaching methods, enhancing classroom management skills, and integrating technology but faced difficulties with mentees' immature teaching behaviors and divergent approaches. The study emphasized the necessity of clear mentoring frameworks and well-defined performance criteria to optimize outcomes for both mentors and mentees. Despite these contributions, several questions remain unaddressed. Would the results influence the use of other data collection methods instead of relying solely on individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews? How

do in-service teachers in high school contexts evaluate the ELT mentoring qualities and expectations for their mentors? From the gaps, a mixed-method study was conducted to answer three questions:

- 1 How do in-service EFL teachers evaluate the mentoring activities delivered by their trainers?
- 2 What do in-service EFL teachers expect from further career-related mentoring support?
- 3 What do in-service EFL teachers expect from psychological mentoring support?

These three research questions were underpinned by a combination of conceptual and theoretical frameworks that shape the study's design. The first research question is informed by Murray's conceptual framework on the qualities of effective mentoring, which serves to evaluate the current mentoring activities within the school context. This framework emphasizes the characteristics and practices that contribute to successful mentoring relationships, providing a lens for assessing mentors' effectiveness in fostering professional growth and development. The second and third research questions draw on Kram [18] distinguishes between career functions (sponsorship, coaching, protection, exposure, and challenging work) and psychosocial functions (role modelling, counselling, acceptance, and rapport) [19]. Career functions support mentees' professional development and institutional advancement, while psychosocial functions cultivate personal growth, self-confidence, and social integration [20].

Knowles' Andragogy, which emphasizes self-directed learning, experiential knowledge, and problem-solving, provides additional theoretical grounding for understanding how adult learners, including mentees, engage with and adapt to mentoring processes. Knowles [21] Andragogy, which focuses on the unique characteristics of adult learners, can guide the data interpretation and discussion [22]. Andragogy posits that adult learners are typically more self-directed, goal-oriented, and experiential in their learning compared to younger learners. In the context of mentoring, this framework suggests that in-service EFL teachers will approach their mentoring relationships with a desire for autonomy in their learning, seeking practical, real-world applications of teaching strategies. Andragogy will be used to unpack the EFL teachers' motivations for participating in mentoring and their self-directed strategies for learning. The key characteristics of adult learners, including their need to know, self-concept, and readiness to learn, provide a lens through which the data is interpreted. Additionally, Andragogy's life-centered focus highlights how in-service teachers' personal and professional background shape their evaluations and expectations of the mentoring process.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Participant Selection

This study utilized a divergent mixed-methods design, specifically an explanatory sequential approach with a quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase [23]. The study focused on school teachers in the Mekong Delta; these teachers participated in a professional development course in teaching and learning in response to English education innovation in Vietnam and then a mentoring program. Conducted in underdeveloped areas within this region, the research highlighted the challenges faced by teachers in rural communities, where socio-economic disparities and limited access to resources can hinder educational progress. To promote long-lasting professional development, mentoring programs have been implemented to respond to the English innovation project of Vietnam. These programs are designed to provide after-training support and foster teachers' ability to adapt training experiences to the demands of rural education. By emphasizing sustainability, the initiative aims to ensure lasting improvements in teaching quality and educational outcomes across diverse contexts in the region. The teachers had varying levels of teaching experience, ranging from less than 5 years to more than 16 years. Participants underwent in-class professional development and then school-site mentoring activities lasting between six to eight months.

The study commenced with a quantitative phase, in which a survey was administered to uncover notable patterns and relationships in self-reported insights. The quantitative phase involved 273 participants, with the survey distributed through snowball sampling, wherein initial participants referred others meeting the study's criteria (as summarized in Table 1).

Table 1.
Questionnaire participants' demographic features.

Variables	Demographic features	Number (N=273)
Gender	Male	103 (37.7%)
	Female	170 (62.3%)
Teaching experiences [24]	Novice teachers (Less than 5 years)	65 (23.8%)
	Experienced teachers (5 years – 15 years)	93 (34.1%)
	Veteran teachers (More than 16 years)	115 (42.1%)

The qualitative phase followed, involving semi-structured interviews with participants who were purposefully selected based on the results of the quantitative analysis [25]. In the qualitative phase, 12 participants were selected for semi-structured interviews. These participants were chosen through purposive sampling, based on their demographic factors of gender and teaching experience. Participants were divided into three groups based on their years of teaching experience, including less than 5 years, 5-10 years, and more than 16 years. Four participants were selected from each group to allow for an in-depth exploration of how mentoring evaluations and strategies vary across different stages of a teacher's career (as described in Table 2).

Table 2.

Participants' demographic features for interviews.

Teacher ID	Gender	Teaching experience	
T1	Male	4 years	Novice
T2	Male	4 years	
T3	Female	3 years	
T4	Female	4 years	
T5	Male	7 years	Experienced
T6	Male	9 years	
T7	Female	12 years	
T8	Female	13 years	
T9	Male	26 years	Veteran
T10	Male	20 years	
T11	Female	17 years	
T12	Female	21 years	

3.2. Research Instruments and Data Collection

Two main instruments were employed to collect the data for this study. The questionnaire was designed to gather insights into in-service EFL teachers' evaluations of current mentoring quality activities. Subsequently, structured interviews were employed to dig deeper into teachers' expectations for ongoing mentoring, offering qualitative perspectives to complement the survey findings (see Table 3).

Table 3.

Research instruments and their aims

Instruments	Aims
(I) Questionnaire	Explore in-service EFL teachers' evaluations of mentoring quality activities.
(II) structured interviews	Explore in-service EFL teachers' expectations for career-related support and psychological support in mentoring quality activities.

(I) A questionnaire is cost-effective, quick, and anonymous for broad data collection within a thesis timeline [26]. This study's Likert-scale questionnaire included the demographic section for genders, teaching experiences and evaluations of mentors' (1) communication skills, (2) interpersonal skills and (3) professional abilities to address research question 1. Items were structured using a 5-point Likert scale for 3 clusters (1. Very Poor – 2. Poor – 3. Normal – 4. Good – 5. Very Good) (see Table 4).

Table 4.

Summary of the questionnaire

Questionnaire items	Conceptual reference
1. Communication skills	Murray [7] mentoring quality model
2. Social skills	
3. Professional skills	

(II) The structured interviews, lasting approximately 30 minutes each, were conducted to systematically explore participants' strategies for working with mentors, as guided by Kram's mentoring framework. The interview questions aligned with the study's second and third research questions, focusing on the expectations of in-service EFL teachers in mentoring relationships. The themes of the interviews were informed by Kram [18] four mentoring stages: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. In this study, however, participants worked with a mentor for a period of only six months to one year, so the research focused specifically on the initiation stage with two dimensions of career-related support and psychological support. Participants were asked to reflect on how they established mentoring relationships, including how they further expected their mentor to mutually develop a productive relationship in a short time frame. Interviews were scheduled at mutually convenient times for both the researchers and participants, taking place at the participants' workplaces for ease. All necessary ethical protocols, including informed consent and voluntary participation, were strictly followed throughout the study.

3.3. Data Analysis

The questionnaire underwent a thorough development process, including piloting and expert consultation to ensure the clarity and relevance of items. After finalization, reliability testing using SPSS 26.0 yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.973, indicating high internal consistency. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic data and participants' responses across the three clusters. To analyze group differences, one independent t-test was conducted to compare means between two gender groups, and one-way ANOVA was run to examine differences among groups with varying years of teaching experience. These statistical methods contributed to understanding whether participants' evaluations of mentoring activities varied based on demographic factors. Finally, quantitative data were interpreted through Oxford's scale for 5-point Likert scale items [27].

The qualitative data were collected through interviews conducted in Vietnamese, enabling participants to articulate their experiences fully and comfortably [28]. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English for analysis, with the original Vietnamese transcripts retained for confirmability. The interview data were analyzed thematically by Kram's mentoring initiation phase. To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, member checking, triangulation with quantitative results, and peer debriefing were implemented to validate interpretations and themes [29].

EFL teachers' evaluations of the mentoring activities they participated in the questionnaire with three clusters containing 24 items were completed by 273 in-service EFL teachers as mentees. A descriptive statistical test assessing the items for evaluating mentoring activities is displayed in Table 5.

Table 5.
Descriptive statistics (N=273)

Cluster 1: Mentors' communication skills (M_C=3.93)	Mean	SD
1. Listening skills.	3.98	0.92
2. Questioning for promoting critical thinking.	3.90	0.92
3. Constructive and detailed feedback for mentees.	3.93	0.92
4. Thoughtful responses to mentees' feedback.	3.90	0.98
5. Proper communication paces and tones.	3.97	0.96
6. Communication clarity and transparency.	3.96	0.93
7. Various communication options and channels.	3.91	0.91
8. Written and non-verbal communication skills.	3.92	0.90
Cluster 2: Mentors' social skills (M_S=4.00)		
9. Trustworthiness in professional relationships.	3.92	0.82
10. Friendliness for collaboration.	3.92	0.90
11. Relations with colleagues from other contexts.	3.99	0.92
12. Attentiveness to a dynamic teaching environment.	3.95	0.88
13. Patience in challenging situations.	4.00	0.85
14. Care for mentees' problems and needs during mentoring.	4.04	0.84
15. Accountability and punctuality.	4.12	0.81
16. Professionalism in managing conflicts.	4.06	0.78
Cluster 3: Mentors' professional skills (M_P=4.09)		
17. Sufficient training on ELT mentoring skills.	4.07	0.74
18. Qualifications and titles for their expertise in ELT.	4.03	0.78
19. Understanding of ELT content and pedagogical knowledge.	4.01	0.79
20. Management skills in EFL classrooms to support students' learning.	4.02	0.76
21. Collaboration with colleagues to enhance ELT practices.	4.14	0.70
22. Assurance and competence in ELT testing and assessments.	4.11	0.67
23. Knowledge about school policies and their implications for ELT.	4.16	0.66
24. Update on modern innovations and trends in ELT.	4.21	0.66

4. Results

The first cluster highlights mentors' communication skills, which were rated as good, with an overall mean of 3.93. Learners rated their mentors' listening skills the highest (M=3.98, SD=0.92), followed closely by their proper communication paces and tones (M=3.97, SD=0.96) and their communication clarity and transparency (M=3.96, SD=0.93). Mentors' written and non-verbal communication skills were also well appreciated (M=3.92, SD=0.90), along with their ability to provide constructive and detailed feedback (M=3.93, SD=0.92). Additionally, mentors received favorable ratings for offering various communication options and channels (M=3.91, SD=0.91) and for their skill in promoting critical thinking through questions (M=3.90, SD=0.92). Their responses to mentees' feedback were similarly rated positively (M=3.90, SD=0.98).

The second cluster focuses on mentors' social skills, which were rated highly, with an overall mean of 4.00. Mentors were seen as exceptionally accountable and punctual (M=4.12, SD=0.81) and professional in managing conflicts (M=4.06, SD=0.78). Their care for mentees' problems and needs during mentoring was rated as very good (M=4.04, SD=0.84), along with their patience in challenging situations (M=4.00, SD=0.85). Other positively rated traits included mentors' attentiveness to dynamic teaching environments (M=3.95, SD=0.88), their relations with colleagues from other contexts (M=3.99, SD=0.92), and their friendliness in collaboration (M=3.92, SD=0.90). Mentors' trustworthiness in professional relationships was also acknowledged as a key strength (M=3.92, SD=0.82).

The third cluster focuses on mentors' professional skills, which were rated highly, with an overall mean of 4.09. One item in this cluster that received a very good rating was mentors' updates on modern innovations and trends in ELT (M=4.21, SD=0.66). Mentors' knowledge about school policies and their implications for ELT (M=4.16, SD=0.66) and collaboration with colleagues to enhance ELT practices were also highly rated (M=4.14, SD=0.70), as well as their assurance and competence in ELT testing (M=4.11, SD=0.67). Other high attributes were mentors' sufficient training in ELT mentoring skills (M=4.07, SD=0.74), qualifications and expertise in ELT (M=4.03, SD=0.78), and management skills in English

language classrooms to support students' learning ($M=4.02$, $SD=0.76$). The lowest-rated item, though still within the good range, was mentors' understanding of English language content and effective teaching methodologies, which was also well-regarded ($M=4.01$, $SD=0.79$).

An independent t-test was run to compare means between two groups of genders (as shown in Table 6), and a one-way ANOVA was run to examine differences among groups with varying years of teaching experience (as shown in Table 7).

Table 6.
Independent T-test results on EFL teachers' genders

		N	Mean	F	Sig. (2-tailed)	Interpretation
M _C	Male	103	4.17	4.31	0.000 < 0.05	Male teachers' evaluations of mentors' communication and social skills are higher than female teachers' evaluations.
	Female	170	3.79			
M _S	Male	103	4.15	2.73	0.014 < 0.05	
	Female	170	3.91			
M _P	Male	103	4.06	0.13	0.531 ≥ 0.05	
	Female	170	4.11			

Table 7.
Between groups, ANOVA results on EFL teachers' teaching experiences

		N	Mean	F	Sig.	Interpretation
M _C	Novice	65	4.06	1.22	0.30	Three groups of teachers' evaluations of mentors' communication, social, and professional skills are the same.
	Experienced	93	3.84			
	Veteran	115	3.93			
M _S	Novice	65	4.10	0.88	0.42	
	Experienced	93	3.94			
	Veteran	115	4.00			
M _P	Novice	65	4.16	1.35	0.26	
	Experienced	93	4.13			
	Veteran	115	4.02			

4.1. EFL Teachers' Needs for Further Career-Related Support from Mentoring Activities

4.1.1. Suggestion For More Hands-on Practices

All the teachers, regardless of experience, found the mentoring program to be quite heavy and tiring at times. They highlighted the program's intensity, especially when the focus was on theoretical knowledge. While they recognized the importance of theory, many expressed a desire for a more balanced approach that included more practical strategies.

"The program can be overwhelming at times. It feels like there's a lot of information to absorb, and I could really use more concrete, practical strategies to apply in my teaching" (T5).

Three veteran teachers went a step further in specifying that the theoretical aspects were particularly challenging for them. While they acknowledged the value of understanding teaching principles, they emphasized that, given their extensive experience, they would benefit more from practical guidance.

"Theoretical content is useful, but at this stage in my career, I find it harder to digest. I need more hands-on practices to directly apply in my English lessons" (T9).

"The theories are important, but within a year of mentoring, I would prefer more chances to practice so that I can see the positive results and change my beliefs" (T10).

These comments reflect that even at the earliest stage of their careers, in-service teachers, especially veteran teachers, demonstrated a preference for a more practice-oriented approach that aligns with their traditional teaching experience. In addition, seven teachers, regardless of experience, expressed the desire for mentors to be more actively involved in their teaching process. They hoped for more than just observation and theory-based discussions, emphasizing that mentors should engage in co-teaching, co-designing lessons, and offering direct feedback in real classroom situations.

"I think it would be much more useful if the mentor could spend more time with me in the classroom, helping me with lesson planning and providing feedback while I teach. Just observing isn't enough" (T2).

"Having my mentor more involved would help me feel supported in applying what I learn. I expect my mentor to be hands-on, helping me adapt materials and strategies for my students" (T6).

This indicates that all teachers expect their mentors to be more integrated into the classroom, offering real-time allocation and meaningful discussion to help them enhance their English language teaching skills.

4.1.2. Suggestion For More Guidance on Adapting and Designing ELT Materials

One novice teacher shared a positive experience from their mentor regarding the use of corpora linguistics in designing reading tasks.

"I've learned how to use corpora to design reading tasks that are more authentic and aligned with real-world language use. It's a skill that has helped me make my reading materials more relevant and engaging for students" (T2).

Ten teachers expressed the need for more focused mentorship on adapting and designing ELT materials. Many teachers noted that the current program activities did not offer enough practical guidance on this topic. They emphasized the importance of tailoring materials to meet the specific needs of their students, including their varying proficiency levels and learning styles.

"I would have appreciated more detailed guidance on how to adapt English textbooks and supplementary resources to make them more engaging and accessible for my students" (T9).

These comments indicate that teachers across all experience levels would benefit from more support in adapting and designing ELT materials, ensuring that materials can meet the learners' evolving needs and preferences and enhance the ultimate outcomes.

Two novice teachers expressed a desire for greater autonomy in developing and designing teaching materials. They wanted to learn how to create their own materials or adapt existing ones so they could take more control over the resources used in their classrooms.

"It would be great if I could have more opportunities to learn how to create my own materials or adapt existing ones to make lessons more engaging. Having that skill would give me more confidence and flexibility in my teaching" (T3).

"I am eager to know how to conduct my own lesson materials, not just a list of exercises like a test but a real handout. I want to try to sequence the activities" (T4).

As for experienced and veteran teachers, while also seeking guidance on material design, they emphasized the importance of collaborative skills to manage their workload.

"It would be helpful if my mentor could show me how to adapt available materials for my classes. Sometimes managing all the resources on my own is overwhelming, and learning how to collaborate with others would make the process smoother" (T10).

"Learning the skills to collaborate on material design with others, whether it's colleagues or mentors, would help me save time and ensure that the materials I use are both effective and inclusive" (T12).

4.1.3. Suggestion for More Support in Interdisciplinary Approaches In ELT

Eight teachers expressed the need for mentoring support to deepen their understanding of interdisciplinary approaches in ELT, particularly in areas like sequencing activities and assessing learners' outcomes. Five teachers emphasized the value of peer observations, where mentors could guide teachers in visiting each other's classrooms to exchange experiences and learn effective strategies. Mentoring sessions are expected to help them adapt to cross-subject teaching with gradual and consistent progress.

"I've heard about CLIL and other methods for teaching science through English. The mentoring sessions gave me a lot of good principles, but I still need to know how to harmonize traditional teaching with CLIL because my students' language skills aren't strong enough to switch to that model just yet" (T9).

All four novice teachers and two early experienced teachers emphasized the need for mentoring support in both accessing relevant teaching resources and effectively utilizing technology to enhance interdisciplinary teaching. They expressed a desire for mentors to help them find and archive interdisciplinary materials that are better suited to their specific classroom contexts, particularly materials that could engage students across different subjects. Additionally, they noted the importance of mentors guiding them in integrating technology into their lessons, such as using digital assessment tools that can more effectively measure student progress in interdisciplinary tasks. They mentioned that mentors could support the use of demonstration videos, which would help make lesson delivery more engaging and accessible for students. Mentors were also expected to assist in-service teachers with self-study in updating reliable digital content for an interdisciplinary approach. These supports in both resources and technology were seen as crucial for improving the quality of interdisciplinary English Language Teaching (ELT) to foster a dynamic student-centered learning environment.

4.2. In-Service EFL Teachers' Needs of Psychological Support from Mentoring Activities

4.2.1. Expectations For Navigating Generational Gap in Mentor-Mentee Relationships

In addition to the pressure of competition, novice and early-career teachers, as mentees, expressed expectations for more open, peer-like interactions that foster collaboration rather than comparison. They hoped their mentors, though close in age, would emphasize mutual learning and shared growth rather than focusing on who is more skilled or experienced.

"I expect my mentor to make me feel like we're both growing together, instead of feeling like I'm being judged or measured against them" (T3).

In addition to the generational gap in teaching philosophies, younger teachers also expressed a desire for older mentors to acknowledge the rapid changes in educational practices and be more flexible in their approach. Younger mentees expressed a desire for older mentors to share their wealth of practical experience while remaining open to new ideas and blending traditional methods with innovative practices. Younger mentees expressed a desire for their mentors to provide opportunities for trial and error, allowing them to experiment with new teaching methods without the fear of excessive "gatekeeping."

"I expect my mentor to show me how they use their experience while also making room for fresh ideas. This way, I can learn both the tried-and-true methods and the new techniques that can work in real classroom situations" (T2).

They hoped their mentors would create a safe space where they could make acceptable mistakes and learn from them.

"I would appreciate if my mentor could let me try new ideas and methods, even if they're not perfect. It's important for me to learn by doing, without constantly worrying about being disrespectful towards my mentors' advice" (T4).

Two veteran teachers shared their unique experiences of reverse generational mentoring, where they worked with younger mentors. They expressed their expectations that these mentors could help them enhance their English language skills, particularly in pronunciation, in a constructive and encouraging manner.

"My veteran colleagues and I have worked with an early 30s mentor in 2022. She provided us with an application that can check and correct English pronunciation immediately and conveniently. I look forward to future younger mentors in helping old teachers like us improve our English competences in a supportive, positive manner that builds our confidence" (T11).

They also mention the value of effective communication, as it fosters a nurturing and empowering learning environment for both mentor and mentee.

"It's important for my younger mentor to have good communication skills so they can provide clear and respectful feedback. I also want to learn from them, and I believe their approach is motivating and full of energy" (T12)

4.2.2. Expectations For Emotional Support in the Face of Stress

Eight teachers expressed a need for emotional support in the face of stress, emphasizing the importance of having a mentor who listens empathetically and provides encouragement during difficult times.

"I need my mentor to provide emotional support when I feel overwhelmed by work and personal responsibilities" (T7).

"It's reassuring to have someone who understands the stress I'm going through and can help me stay focused" (T8).

Similarly, three teachers also recognized the value of emotional support, although their focus was further focused on more practical strategies rather than encouragement.

"I need practical ways to know how to better manage my time and improve my teaching techniques when I'm feeling not efficient enough" (T10).

"I appreciate support with honest feedback to what I was bad at. It saved time and directly addressed my weakness" (T1).

Two teachers highlighted the importance of emotional support through transparency and a balanced division of work. They expressed that when tasks were aligned with their interests and presented in a motivating way, they felt more capable of managing stress and fully committing to their roles. For these teachers, emotional support was not only about encouragement but also about creating a work environment where tasks were meaningful and manageable, helping them stay motivated and resilient in the face of stress.

"When my mentor is transparent about the expectations and helps divide tasks according to my strengths, it makes the work feel more manageable and I'm more motivated to take it on" (T5). "Having a clear understanding of what needs to be done, with support to match my interests, helps me stay focused and overcome the pressure" (T12).

5. Discussion

The findings of this study offer an understanding of in-service high school teachers' evaluations and expectations for mentoring qualities and activities. Overall, 273 participants gave a good rating for their current mentoring activities. The highest evaluation of mentors' professional skills shows that mentees in this study highly valued their mentors' expertise. Noticeably, the results from the independent t-test revealed gendered differences in the evaluation of mentors, with female teachers rating communication and interpersonal skills lower than their male counterparts. This suggests that female teachers may adopt stricter criteria in their evaluations, potentially due to a higher emphasis on non-academic competencies such as emotional and psychological support. Female participants articulated a stronger need for mentors who offer empathetic listening and emotional support, emphasizing the relational and affective dimensions of mentoring. This aligns with Knowles' principle that adult learning is influenced by stimulating factors and the learner's readiness to learn [30], where emotional support creates a safe space for mentees to address their vulnerabilities, fostering trust and openness. This finding was further corroborated by interview data, where female participants expressed a stronger desire for empathetic listening and emotional support in their mentoring relationships. Male participants, on the other hand, emphasized a preference for practical guidance and direct feedback. While these differences should not be overgeneralized, they emphasize the necessity for mentors to balance emotional intelligence with practical expertise, ensuring their support effectively addresses both the relational and professional dimensions of mentoring. This balance is not solely influenced by gender but also by differing characteristics and styles of each mentee. Such diversity requires mentors to possess a strong understanding of psychology and to make concerted efforts to build meaningful connections by getting to know their mentees on an individual level.

Divergent expectations among younger and older mentees reflect the varying levels of autonomy and dependence rooted in their professional contexts. Younger mentees demonstrated a hope for mentoring that fosters autonomy, creativity, and innovation. These values are consistent with Knowles' andragogical view that adults are motivated to learn when they perceive control over their learning journey. Younger participants sought opportunities to experiment, make mistakes, and refine their teaching methods in a supportive environment, expressing a need for mentors who encourage out-of-the-box thinking without being warning and hampering. As for veteran mentees, they emphasized the importance of maintaining professional competence and adapting to evolving educational demands. Their expectations for younger mentors to support their development in areas like pronunciation and pedagogical updates underscore the principle that adult learners build on prior experiences but require new stimuli to stay relevant. This is particularly significant in the Vietnamese context, where veteran EFL teachers were traditionally trained in teacher-centered approaches [31]. As the increasing need to adapt technology and intercultural competency into teaching methodology requires gradual cognitive and behavioral shifts [32, 33], reverse mentoring can facilitate this by introducing fresh perspectives and strategies. The phenomenon of reverse-generational mentoring, where younger mentors guide veteran mentees, introduces unique challenges in Vietnam's collectivist, high power distance culture. Knowles' andragogical model suggests that adult learners are motivated by internal drives rather than external pressures, making it essential for younger mentors to establish rapport and trust with veteran

teachers. Effective mentoring in this context requires mentors to respect the extensive experience of their mentees while delicately introducing newer practices. Mentoring is most effective when it is constructive, humble, and collaborative, enabling mentees to feel valued and motivated to engage in the learning process [34, 35]. The findings suggest the importance of interpersonal and communication skills in navigating generational and hierarchical gaps. Younger mentors must be equipped with cultural sensitivity and the ability to facilitate respectful dialogue, ensuring that feedback and guidance are perceived as collaborative rather than directive and imperative.

6. Conclusion

A noticeable group of EFL teachers trained in the past, now teaching in the present, requires mentorship that bridges generational gaps and integrates modern methodologies, enabling them to adapt to the evolving demands of education. To enhance mentoring programs, training programs should prioritize tailored mentor-mentee pairing by allocating mentors who are well-suited to the specific needs of mentees at different stages of their careers. However, while appropriate pairing is essential, it is equally critical to train young mentors comprehensively, ensuring they are prepared to support even veteran mentees. Young mentors must develop a strong sense of agency and readiness to guide older colleagues, fostering collaborative relationships that respect the experience of veteran teachers while introducing innovative strategies. Furthermore, it is crucial to empower experienced mentees who have contributed many years to the field. Recognizing their dedication and providing avenues for professional growth can sustain their commitment and encourage their continued contributions to education without the fear of being weeded out [36]. Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that must be acknowledged. The reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of response bias, and the cross-sectional design limits the ability to capture the dynamic nature of educational relationships over time [37]. Future research should employ longitudinal methods to explore how mentoring evolves and its sustained impacts on teacher development. Additionally, expanding the study to include observational data or input from multiple stakeholders, such as students and school administrators, could provide a more holistic understanding of mentoring effectiveness. By addressing these considerations, future studies can build on this research to develop more robust mentoring frameworks. Such efforts will enhance the professional capacities of in-service teachers and contribute to the broader goal of improving the quality of English language education in Vietnamese rural areas, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

References

- [1] D. McNamara, "The influence of student teachers' tutors and mentors upon their classroom practice: An exploratory study," *Teaching and Teacher Education*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 51-61, 1995. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0742-051X\(94\)00014-W](https://doi.org/10.1016/0742-051X(94)00014-W)
- [2] P. Hudson, K. Skamp, and L. Brooks, "Development of an instrument: Mentoring for effective primary science teaching," *Science Education*, vol. 89, no. 4, pp. 657-674, 2005. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sce.20025>
- [3] C. Wilcoxon, R. Newman, and M. Wulff, "Coaching & mentoring tool anchors support and collaboration," *Educational Process: International Journal*, vol. 14, no. 1, p. e2025001, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2025.14.1>
- [4] S. Aderibigbe, L. Colucci-Gray, and D. S. Gray, "Conceptions and expectations of mentoring relationships in a teacher education reform context," *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 8-29, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2016.1163636>
- [5] L. D. Hobson, D. Harris, K. Buckner-Manley, and P. Smith, "The importance of mentoring novice and pre-service teachers: Findings from a HBCU student teaching program," *Educational Foundations*, vol. 26, pp. 67-80, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.32873/unl.dc.ne002>
- [6] J. Wang and S. J. Odell, "An alternative conception of mentor–novice relationships: Learning to teach in reform-minded ways as a context," *Teaching and Teacher Education*, vol. 23, no. 4, pp. 473-489, 2007. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2006.12.010>
- [7] J. Murray, *Designing and implementing effective professional learning*. United States: Corwin Press, 2013.
- [8] K. M. Kastelan-Sikora, *Mentoring beginning second language teachers: Perceptions of challenges and expectations of support*. Canada: University of Alberta, 2013.
- [9] S. A. Çapan and H. Bedir, "Pre-service teachers' perceptions of practicum through reciprocal peer mentoring and traditional mentoring," *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 953-971, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.17263/jlls.631539>
- [10] A. Bozak, "Instructional reverse mentoring: A practice proposal for teachers' understanding the "Z" and "Alpha" generations' learning perspectives," *Online Submission*, vol. 12, no. 43, pp. 114-142, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.35826/ijoess.2877>
- [11] D. Aydin and S. Arslan, "Teacher Mentoring: Definitions, Expectations and Experiences from International EFL Teachers," *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 181-197, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v7i1.1272>
- [12] L. Valle, D. Lorduy-Arellano, and N. Porras-González, "Using reverse mentoring to transform in-service teachers' beliefs about how to teach english," *Profile Issues in TeachersProfessional Development*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 63-76, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v24n1.93061>
- [13] E. N. Kurti, "Exploring the contribution of the five-factor mentoring model in advancing the pre-service teachers' personal and professional growth," *International Journal of Instruction*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 1-20, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2023.16126a>
- [14] B. M. Pérez, L. Payaslian, A. Sauer Rosas, B. García, and A. La Porta, "The impact of mentoring on English language teachers: A case from Argentina," *Profile Issues in TeachersProfessional Development*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 49-64, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v25n1.101711>
- [15] H. T. M. Nguyen, "Peer mentoring: A way forward for supporting preservice EFL teachers psychosocially during the practicum," *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, vol. 38, no. 7, pp. 31-44, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2013v38n7.3>
- [16] H. T. M. Nguyen and N. T. H. Ngo, "Learning to reflect through peer mentoring in a TESOL practicum," *ELT Journal*, vol. 72, no. 2, pp. 187-198, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccx053>
- [17] H. Q. Tran, *EFL faculty mentorship programs at HEIs in Vietnam*. Canada: University of Alberta, 2020.
- [18] K. E. Kram, *Mentoring at work: Developmental relationships in organizational life*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman & Co, 1986.

- [19] T. D. Allen and L. M. Finkelstein, "Beyond mentoring: Alternative sources and functions of developmental support," *The Career Development Quarterly*, vol. 51, no. 4, pp. 346-355, 2003. <https://doi.org/10.1002/J.2161-0045.2003.TB00615.X>
- [20] R. Ghosh and T. G. Reio Jr, "Career benefits associated with mentoring for mentors: A meta-analysis," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, vol. 83, no. 1, pp. 106-116, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2013.03.011>
- [21] M. Knowles, *The modern practice of adult education: Andragogy versus pedagogy*. United States: Association Press, 1970.
- [22] M. Knowles, E. Holton, R. Swanson, and P. Robinson, *Andragogy. In the Adult Learner*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429299612-3>, 2020, pp. 3–17.
- [23] J. W. Creswell and C. N. Poth, *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*, 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2016.
- [24] M. Huberman, *Professional careers and professional development: Some intersections*. TR Guskey & M. Huberman (Eds.), *Professional development in education: New*. New York: Teachers College Press., 1995.
- [25] A. Tashakkori, R. B. Johnson, and C. Teddlie, *Foundations of mixed methods research: Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social and behavioral sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2020.
- [26] G. Marshall, "The purpose, design and administration of a questionnaire for data collection," *Radiography*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 131-136, 2005. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.RADI.2004.09.002>
- [27] R. L. Oxford, *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. New York: Newbury House Publishers, 2001.
- [28] J. Datko, "Semi-structured interview in language pedagogy research," *Journal of Language and Cultural Education*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 142-156, 2015.
- [29] V. N. Anney, "Ensuring the quality of the findings of qualitative research: Looking at trustworthiness criteria," *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 272-281, 2014.
- [30] T. C. Clapper, "Beyond Knowles: What those conducting simulation need to know about adult learning theory," *Clinical Simulation in Nursing*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. e7-e14, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.ECNS.2009.07.003>
- [31] N. T. T. Phan, "Effective EFL Instruction in the Vietnamese Context: From Beliefs to Actual Classroom Practices," *International Journal of Instruction*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 403-418, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.12973/IJI.2018.11328A>
- [32] S. Ghory and H. Ghafory, "The impact of modern technology in the teaching and learning process," *International Journal of Innovative Research and Scientific Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 168-173, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.53894/ijirss.v4i3.73>
- [33] V. U. T. Huynh, Y. Ma, T. H. O. Thieu, and Q. L. Trinh, "Practice of Vietnamese tertiary learners' intercultural competence: An influential factor affecting entrepreneurial capabilities," *Heliyon*, vol. 10, no. 4, p. e26240, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e26240>
- [34] C. Pfund, A. Byars-Winston, J. Branchaw, S. Hurtado, and K. Eagan, "Defining attributes and metrics of effective research mentoring relationships," *AIDS and Behavior*, vol. 20, pp. 238-248, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-016-1384-z>
- [35] R. Mittal, J. Singh, V. Malik, A. Mittal, V. Rattan, and S. V. Singh, "Forecasting E-Mentoring Effectiveness using Data Mining Approach," in *2022 5th International Conference on Contemporary Computing and Informatics (IC3I)*, 2022: IEEE, pp. 931-934.
- [36] L. Q. Trinh, P. N. T. Vy, and N. H. H. Ngo, "Second-career EFL teachers' experiences of adaptability and sustainability in English language teaching," *Educational Process: International Journal*, vol. 14, no. 1, p. 46, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2025.14.46>
- [37] D. Tempelaar, B. Rienties, and Q. Nguyen, "Subjective data, objective data and the role of bias in predictive modelling: Lessons from a dispositional learning analytics application," *PloS One*, vol. 15, no. 6, p. e0233977, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0233977>