



Exploring perspectives of University Assessors towards mentorship of Accounting student teachers during teaching practice in secondary schools: A case study of a selected South African University

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of the university assessors about the quality of mentorship received by accounting student-teachers during teaching practice in secondary schools in South Africa. Mentorship during teaching practice is central to the professional learning of accounting student-teachers. Although mentors implement mentorship in schools, university assessors are positioned to evaluate the consistency and quality of mentorship practices in multiple placements and settings. This enquiry is guided by social learning theories. A qualitative approach was employed in accordance with the phenomenological paradigm selected for the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine university assessors involved in assessing accounting student-teachers from one selected university. The data was analysed using a thematic data analysis technique. It emerged that the quality in mentoring is uneven in participating high schools. It surfaced that some mentors provide structured support through lesson-plan checks, coaching, classroom support, and feedback, while some other mentors disengage, leaving student-teachers largely unsupported. Assessors attributed uneven mentorship quality to mentor workload and school culture, lack of formal mentor preparation, and weak subject-specific guidance and feedback. It is recommended that structured mentor preparation, stronger coordination between universities and schools and mechanisms to strengthen subject-specific mentoring and feedback in accounting teacher education are critical for quality mentorship of student-teachers.

Keywords: Accounting Education, Mentorship, Teaching Practice, University Assessors, Teacher Education Programme.

INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher education that offer teacher education programmes carry the responsibility of preparing student-teachers for effective classroom practice. In South Africa, teaching practice forms a central component of teacher education programmes, providing opportunities for student-teachers to apply theoretical knowledge acquired at university within authentic school contexts. Through teaching practice, student-teachers are exposed to the realities of classroom environments and are expected to develop professional competencies such as lesson planning, classroom management, learner engagement, and subject-specific pedagogy. However, studies in teacher education continue to

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highlight a persistent challenge in bridging the gap between theoretical preparation at universities and the practical realities of classroom teaching.¹

Mentorship is widely recognised as a critical mechanism through which student-teachers are supported during teaching practice. School-based mentors, who are usually experienced teachers, guide student-teachers by modelling effective teaching practices, providing feedback, and assisting them in navigating classroom challenges. From a sociocultural learning perspective, professional learning occurs through participation in communities of practice where novice teachers learn through interaction, observation, and guided practice in real educational environments.² Effective mentorship, therefore, plays an important role in supporting the professional growth and pedagogical development of student-teachers during teaching practice.

Within the teaching practice system, university assessors also play an important role in evaluating and supporting student-teachers. These assessors visit schools to observe teaching, assess student-teacher performance, and provide feedback on professional development. Through their interactions with both student-teachers and school-based mentors, university assessors gain insights into mentorship practices across multiple schools and teaching contexts.

Despite the recognised importance of mentorship in teacher education, much of the existing research in South Africa has focused on the experiences of student-teachers and school-based mentors. Comparatively, little attention has been paid to the perspectives of university assessors who evaluate teaching practice and observe mentorship practices across diverse school settings.³ This represents an important gap in the literature because assessors' perspectives can provide valuable insights into how mentorship practices are implemented and how they influence the professional development of student-teachers.

Against this backdrop, the objective of this study is to explore the perspectives of university assessors regarding the quality of mentorship received by Accounting student-teachers during teaching practice in secondary schools. By examining the experiences and observations, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of mentorship practices within the education of accounting teachers and to highlight factors that influence the effectiveness of mentorship in school contexts.

This study contributes to scholarship on teacher education and mentorship in three ways. First, it previews the minds of university assessors, an area with which few studies on the teaching practice mentorship have been done, mostly involving student-teachers and school-based mentors. Second, the research will include empirical evidence concerning the experience and evaluation of mentorship practices in a variety of school settings based on the observations of evaluators who will work with mentors and the student-teachers in their teaching practice. Third, the study contributes to the existing body of research on mentorship by specifically shedding light on the processes and activities of mentoring in the formation of subject-specialised knowledge of pedagogical content in a discipline that demands specialised conceptual and procedural knowledge.

The remainder of this article is organised as follows. The next section presents a review of relevant literature on mentorship in teacher education and teaching practice. This is followed by the methodology adopted for the study, the presentation and discussion of findings, and finally, the recommendations and conclusion are presented.

¹ Ruben Daniels and Lucinda Du Plooy, "Crossing Boundaries: Beginner Teachers Transitioning from University Graduates to Full Legitimate Participants in the Teaching Profession," *Perspectives in Education* 42, no. 2 (July 12, 2024): 77–92, <https://doi.org/10.38140/pie.v42i2.7339>.

² Lev S Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, vol. 86 (Harvard university press, 1978); John Seely Brown, Allan Collins, and Paul Duguid, "Situated Cognition and the Culture of Learning," *Educational Researcher* 18, no. 1 (1989): 32–42.

³ Anna Elizabeth Du Plessis and Johann Dreyer, "Reflections on Initial Teacher Education and Theoretical Framing of Applied Pedagogical Knowledge with a Context-Consciousness: An International Study," *Education Sciences* 14, no. 5 (April 24, 2024): 448, <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14050448>.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following section, factors influencing mentoring of student-teachers by mentors, the influence of mentoring in pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) development of student-teachers and best mentoring practices of mentors identified by university assessors for mentoring student-teachers are discussed.

Factors influencing the mentoring of student-teachers by mentors perceived by university assessors

It is well known that mentorship in teacher education is a vital element of pre-service teacher professional learning. Current studies tend to stress that the nature of mentoring practices is defined not only by the experience of individual mentors but also by the institutional and situational context of mentoring practice. Recent research proves that the organisational structures, institutional policies, leadership practices and professional development opportunities are jointly impactful on the way school-based mentors perform their mentoring duties.⁴ These contextual dynamics determine the quality of the mentoring relationships and affect the effectiveness of the mentoring programmes in the school context.

Another group of important contextual factors of mentoring practice are institutional policy frameworks. The policy guidelines usually act as the formal guidelines in terms of what is expected of a mentor in terms of roles, responsibilities and training needs in the teacher education systems. Although these frameworks offer structure and legitimacy to mentoring programmes, empirical data have indicated that policy expectations might equally create tensions where they fail to sufficiently mirror the realities of school settings. An example of this is given by Cronin, who cites that policy requirements often come with new mentoring tasks and, at the same time, reduce the professional discretion of mentors.⁵ On the same note, Jacobsen and Lejonberg report that high expectations set on the policy front are not supported adequately by institutions, thus limiting the effectiveness of the mentors in performing their roles.⁶ Curtis et al. also note that discrepancies in the execution of policies can help generate ambiguity about the role of mentors and generate disproportionate expectations between the mentor and the mentee.⁷ These results imply that policy frameworks are significant in organising mentoring programmes, but their efficiency is largely dependent on the contextual adjustment and the institutional support.

School leadership is also a critical factor that defines mentoring practices in schools. The leadership practices affect how resources are allocated, mentoring activities and how professional cultures are formed that facilitate collaboration and learning. Literature evidence indicates that an active role of leadership can facilitate mentoring performance through role clarification and establishing collegial relationships between teachers.⁸ Middle managers and school leaders tend to serve as a conduit between the institution's policy and classroom practice, in that the mentoring programmes will be completed successfully in schools. Nevertheless, the issue of leadership assistance does not always

⁴ Elizabeth Curtis et al., "The Positioning Tensions between Early Career Teachers' and Mentors' Perceptions of the Mentor Role," *British Educational Research Journal* 50, no. 3 (June 26, 2024): 1327–49, <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3974>; Mirela Scorțescu, Simona Lidia Sava, and Mariana Crașovan, "Mentoring in Initial Teacher Education: Practices and Needs for Continuing Professional Development of Romanian School-Based Teacher Educators," *Sage Open* 14, no. 4 (October 14, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241296912>; Macarena Salas-Aguayo, Lorena Medina-Morales, and Dany López, "La Mentoría Desde Mentores y Mentoreados. Una Revisión Sistemática de Literatura," *Profesorado, Revista de Currículum y Formación Del Profesorado* 28, no. 2 (2024): 89–111.

⁵ Sue Cronin, "Early Career Mentoring in England: A Case Study of Professional Discretion and Policy Disconnection," *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education* 12, no. 4 (October 12, 2023): 366–86, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-10-2022-0088>.

⁶ Hilde Madsø Jacobsen and Eli Lejonberg, "Organizing Mentoring and Induction Practices: Understood through the Eyes of Newly Qualified Teachers," *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning* 32, no. 4 (August 7, 2024): 395–418, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2024.2360603>.

⁷ Curtis et al., "The Positioning Tensions between Early Career Teachers' and Mentors' Perceptions of the Mentor Role."

⁸ Xingyun Fang and Jianli Wang, "The Critical Role of Middle Leaders in Schools: Cultivating a Culture of Trust and Supporting Educational Reform," *Journal of Educational Theory and Management* 8, no. 1 (March 14, 2024): 1, <https://doi.org/10.26549/jetm.v8i1.13934>; Christine Edwards-Groves et al., "Relational Coherence in Middle Leading for School-Based Professional Development," *Professional Development in Education*, January 6, 2025, 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2024.2445549>.

prove to be unanimous in the context of education. Kutsyaruba and Bezzina point out that antagonistic administrative roles can constrain the degree to which the school leaders can prioritise mentoring activities.⁹ As a result, differences in leadership interaction can have a powerful impact on the quality and sustainability of mentorships.

The other contextual aspect that has been common in the literature is associated with the workload and the organisational environment that the school-based mentors face. Mentors often have to juggle the mentoring obligations and challenging teaching and administrative tasks. Recent research shows that mentors may have limited time to support student teachers in the long run due to heavy workloads and a lack of time to do so.¹⁰ These pressures can lead to stress and ineffective mentoring, especially in schools where such roles are not formally acknowledged within workload structures. However, some researchers indicate that these challenges may be overcome through positive organisational cultures and intrinsic professional motivation. An example is Simon and Nissim, who suggest that mentoring relationships can thrive even when institutional constraints are present because positive school climates and professional commitment among mentors can facilitate this process.¹¹

Another dimension that impacts mentoring practice is mentor preparation and professional development. Current research shows the importance of highly organised training programmes that would allow mentors to gain the pedagogical and interpersonal skills needed in effective mentoring. Empirical results show that extensive preparation of mentors boosts their confidence of mentors, their role definition and dedication to any mentoring practice.¹² Professional development programmes that are well designed also facilitate reflective mentoring and reinforce collaborative relationships between mentors and their mentees. However, insofar as the role of mentor preparation is acknowledged, several studies indicate that there are ongoing gaps in the provision of training. Cronin notes that most mentors assume the responsibility of mentoring without proper preparation, and this could negatively affect the success of mentoring programmes.¹³ These results indicate that there is a need to invest in mentor development in teacher education systems in the long term.

Lastly, it is indicated in the literature that a significant role in the formation of effective mentoring relationships is the alignment between the expectations and the perceptions of mentors and the mentees. The variance in the conceptualisation of the mentoring roles can be a source of tensions, which can impede the successful interaction between the mentors and the student teachers. Salas-Aguayo et al. state that mentors use instructional guidance and professional supervision as priorities, although mentees tend to expect emotional support and the ability to collaborate in learning.¹⁴ In cases where such expectations are not well laid out, they can make the mentoring relationships strained. To resolve these discrepancies, there is a need to have the roles defined, open communication and supportive institutional frameworks that will promote mutual interaction between mentors and mentees.

Existing literature demonstrates that mentorship during teaching practice is shaped by institutional policies, leadership support, mentor preparation, and workload conditions within schools. Recent studies have examined how these factors influence the experiences of student teachers and school-based mentors in work-integrated learning contexts.¹⁵ However, much of this scholarship

⁹ Benjamin Kutsyaruba and Christopher Bezzina, "Head of School Engagement in Teacher Induction and Mentoring in Malta," *European Journal of Educational Management* volume-7-2024, no. volume-7-issue-2-june-2024 (June 15, 2024): 109–24, <https://doi.org/10.12973/eujem.7.2.109>.

¹⁰ Jo Lampert et al., "The Hidden Work of Incidental Mentoring in the Hardest-to-Staff Schools," *Education Sciences* 15, no. 7 (2025): 809; Johan Bäcklund et al., "We Are Mentoring More Often: Experiences of Being a Mentor in a Training School Project," *Education Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (2024): 203–26.

¹¹ Eitan Simon and Yonit Nissim, "The Role and Motivation of Pre-Service Teacher (PST) Mentors from pro-Social to Cognitive-Effective Perspectives," *Education Sciences* 13, no. 9 (2023): 930.

¹² Scortescu, Sava, and Craşovan, "Mentoring in Initial Teacher Education: Practices and Needs for Continuing Professional Development of Romanian School-Based Teacher Educators"; Kate Thornton, "Mentoring Preparation in Educational Contexts: A Review of the Literature," *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education* 13, no. 4 (2024): 441–56.

¹³ Cronin, "Early Career Mentoring in England: A Case Study of Professional Discretion and Policy Disconnection."

¹⁴ Salas-Aguayo, Medina-Morales, and López, "La Mentoría Desde Mentores y Mentoreados. Una Revisión Sistemática de Literatura."

¹⁵ Clever Ndebele and Dagogo William Legg-Jack, "The Impact of Mentoring in the Development of Pre-Service Teachers from a University in South Africa," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 21, no. 3 (2022): 88–105; Sicelo Ziphozonke Ntshangase and Zinhle P Nkosi, "Effective Mentoring: Understanding Factors Affecting the Holistic Development of Pre-Service Teachers during Teaching Practice," *South African Journal of Education* 42, no. 4 (November 30, 2022): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v42n4a2062>; Yaw Owusu-Agyeman, "Using Multilevel Mentoring as a Situated Learning Approach

focuses primarily on the perspectives of student teachers and mentors, with limited attention given to the role of university assessors. University assessors occupy a strategic position as mediators between universities and schools and are directly involved in evaluating teaching practice. However, their perspectives on the quality of mentorship received by student teachers remain underexplored, particularly in discipline-specific contexts such as accounting education. Therefore, this study investigates university perspectives of assessors on mentorship during teaching practice.

Influence of mentoring in pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) development of student-teachers

Mentorship has been known to be a very important mechanism for strengthening PCK of student-teachers through the gap between theoretical knowledge obtained in the university and the realities of classroom instruction. PCK is defined as the expert knowledge, which is specialised in nature and combines subject matter knowledge and teaching methods used to effectively teach a particular content. Recent research has shown that mentorship makes a major contribution in this integration as it allows reflective conversation where the mentor models instruction practices and guides the mentees' participation in real classroom settings. According to research carried out by scholars, mentoring relationships help student-teachers to come up with instructional strategies, skills in classroom management, and confidence in presenting the concepts of complex subjects.¹⁶

The literature also highlights that effective mentorship leads to the growth of PCK in the context of shared reflection and professional discourse between the mentors and the student-teachers. As Tiainen and Lutovac emphasise, reflective interactions in the teaching practice allow student-teachers to examine their instructional choices critically and perfect their pedagogical practices.¹⁷ Similarly, Kurti states that participation in mentoring processes with structured feedback and reflective interaction should be viewed as a way of developing pedagogical reasoning and professional judgement.¹⁸ Such mentoring relations would help student-teachers to tailor the instructional strategies to various classroom situations and learner requirements, which would reinforce the utilisation of pedagogical knowledge in practice.

The other important dimension that has arisen due to current literature is the combination of mentoring with practicum experiences and professional learning practice. Research points out that mentoring, which is integrated into instructional practice, lesson study cycles, and reflective practice, offers real experiences of student-teachers to practice and test pedagogical knowledge in actual classroom contexts. In particular, Kadroon, Lertdechapat and Faikhamta evidence that mutual mentoring practices foster the idea of reflective analysis of lessons and professional discourse that improve the pedagogical knowledge of student-teachers.¹⁹ Besides this, Mwesigwa and Nakato affirm that robust links between universities and schools enhance mentorship practices through aligning the theoretical coursework and learning experiences that occur in the classroom.²⁰

to Enhance the Professional Development of Teachers in Higher Education," *Journal of Professional Capital and Community* 9, no. 1 (January 2, 2024): 19–36, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPC-03-2023-0016>; Hlamulo Wiseman Mbhiza, Thabisile Nkambule, and Alfred Masinire, "Student Teachers' Mentorship Experiences during Teaching Practice: A Comparison of Mentor-Student Dynamics in Rural and Urban Schools," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Education Research* 6 (February 24, 2024): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.38140/ijer-2024.vol6.05>.

¹⁶ Rose Atieno Opiyo, "Teacher Education Students' Pedagogical Content Knowledge: Retooling the Mentorship Process within Schools of Education in Kenya," *African Journal of Teacher Education* 11, no. 1 (2022): 27–55; Moses Abdullai Abukari et al., "Pedagogical Content Knowledge of Science Tutors and Its Influence on Their Trainees," *Contemporary Mathematics and Science Education* 3, no. 1 (2022): ep22008; Dizem Can-Kucuk, Sinem Gencer, and Huseyin Akkus, "Development of Pre-Service Chemistry Teachers' Pedagogical Content Knowledge through Mentoring," *Chemistry Education Research and Practice* 23, no. 3 (2022): 599–615.

¹⁷ Outi Tiainen, Sonja Lutovac, and Riitta-Liisa Korkeamäki, "Rethinking Approaches to Reflection in Initial Teacher Education," *Educational Research* 66, no. 3 (2024): 245–62.

¹⁸ Elmedina Nikoceviq Kurti, "Exploring the Contribution of the Five-Factor Mentoring Model in Advancing the Pre-Service Teachers' Personal and Professional Growth," *International Journal of Instruction* 16, no. 1 (2023): 469–88.

¹⁹ Thanya Kadroon, "Using Coaching and Mentoring Supervision of Lesson Study to Enhance Classroom Research Competencies: A Multi-Case Study," *International Journal for Lesson & Learning Studies* 12, no. 4 (2023): 330–42; Kornkanok Lertdechapat and Chatree Faikhamta, "Student Teachers' Pedagogical Content Knowledge, Beliefs, and Practices Within the Context of Lesson Study," *Journal of Science Teacher Education* 36, no. 7 (2025): 857–72.

²⁰ Felix Mwesigwa and Nalukenge Nakato, "Mentorship in Teacher Education Programs: A Review of Practices, Outcomes, and Challenges," *Acta Pedagogica Asiana* 5, no. 1 (2026): 15–29.

Although every researcher agrees that mentorship is beneficial in developing PCK, a number of studies emphasise contextual and structural issues that can limit the effectiveness of mentoring. The most common barriers that are reported to hinder the quality of mentorship that has been given to the student-teachers are time limitations, lack of proper preparation of the mentors, and poor definition of the mentoring functions.²¹ Moreover, the unequal distribution of school resources and institutional support may affect the character of the mentoring experience that the student-teachers may have. The research also indicates some variation in mentoring results based on the knowledge of the mentor, the quality of feedback, and the academic maturity of the student-teachers.²²

Despite the present literature confirming the significance of mentorship in developing pedagogical content knowledge among the student-teachers, most of the research was conducted on general teacher education or the fields of Science and Mathematics. Therefore, little empirical interest has been directed towards mentorship practices in accounting teacher education. This gap presupposes additional research that explores the role of mentorship in school settings in terms of the development of accounting-specific pedagogical content knowledge. The current research thus attempts to examine the lived experiences of assessors in higher educational institutions with respect to the mentorship that accounting student-teachers receive during their teaching experience, thus adding to the enhanced comprehension of the impact that mentoring can have on shaping disciplinary pedagogical knowledge in accounting educational programs.

Best mentoring practices of mentors identified by university assessors for mentoring student-teachers

Modern research demonstrates that active model mentors, whose instructional practices and feedback are constructive and reflective conversations, are essential in enhancing the competence of student-teachers professionally. Indicatively, Nash et al. indicate that collaborative mentoring relationships enable the mentor and student-teacher to jointly construct pedagogical knowledge and experience valuable professional learning.²³ In line with this, Kızıldağ shows that open and non-judgmental mentoring discussions help to facilitate the development of professional identity and facilitate critical consideration of teaching practice.²⁴

Coach feedback and mentoring reflection are always found to be the key aspects of effective mentoring. It has been shown that mentors who take student-teachers through a reflective discussion after lesson observations find themselves able to analyse their instructional choices and improve their teaching methods. Hudson et al. state that questioning methods and professional talks assist in taking classroom experiences into deeper consideration, whereas Grigg et al. reveal that coaching-oriented mentoring allows mentors to deliver real-time feedback that will enhance pedagogical knowledge.²⁵ Such practices will help the student-teachers relate theoretical information to the teaching experiences and gain more confidence in classroom teaching.

Another issue that the literature brings to the fore is the relevance of school-university partnerships in enhancing mentoring activities. Research has indicated that mentoring programmes integrated in effective collaboration among the schools and universities provide conducive professional

²¹ Hlamulo Wiseman Mbhiza, "Behind the Love and Stories: Rural Learners' Reasons and Motivations for Learning Mathematics," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Social Studies* 4 (May 28, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.38140/ijss-2024.vol4.08>; Heather R Nesbitt and Debra M Barry, "Does the Mentorship of Cooperating Teachers Meet the Needs of Their Student Teachers?: A Mixed-Methods Exploration," *Journal of Agricultural Education* 65, no. 4 (2024): 1–19.

²² Can-Kucuk, Gencer, and Akkus, "Development of Pre-Service Chemistry Teachers' Pedagogical Content Knowledge through Mentoring."

²³ Melanie Nash et al., "Leveraging a School–University Partnership Model through the Process of Co-Design: A Case Study of One Australian School–University Partnership and Its Developmental Stages," in *Creating, Sustaining, and Enhancing Purposeful School–University Partnerships: Building Connections Across Diverse Educational Systems* (Springer, 2024), 259–77.

²⁴ Ayşe Kızıldağ, "Mentoring for Professional Identity Construction in EFL Pre-Service Teacher Education," in *Mentoring and Reflective Teachers in ESOL and Bilingual Education*, ed. M. E. Cevik and Y. K. Kiymazarslan (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2023), 95–119, <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-8380-0.ch005>.

²⁵ Suzanne Hudson et al., "Refining Mentor Teachers' Feedback towards Improving Preservice Teachers' Practice," in *Re-Imagining Teaching Improvement: From Early Childhood to University* (Springer, 2024), 207–22; Russell Grigg et al., "Rethinking Student Teachers' Professional Learning in Wales: Promoting Reflection-in-action," *The Curriculum Journal* 35, no. 4 (November 19, 2024): 690–705, <https://doi.org/10.1002/curj.271>.

learning and instructional development. As it is observed by Reichenberg, Gallagher and Dudkowski, structured mentoring academies help to improve the communication and feedback abilities of mentors, whereas it is shown by Abdullah et al. that an integrated mentoring model that combines clinical supervision with reflective learning and digital assistance can make mentoring more effective.²⁶ In addition to this, the quality of mentoring is also affected by the quality of mentor preparation and professional development. According to Mutlu-Gülbak and Akcan, mentor training programmes enhance supervisory competencies and observation and feedback strategies of mentors.²⁷

Although these practices of effective mentoring have been identified, the literature has also shown some differences in the quality and consistency of mentoring in various school settings. The disparities in the preparation of mentors, support in the institution, and demands of work could affect the mentoring practices in teaching practice. Although numerous studies focus on mentoring as perceived by the mentors or student-teachers, few studies have been conducted to find out how the university assessors understand the mentoring practice of school-based mentors. Sealing this gap is relevant to explaining the most effective practices of mentoring that are regarded as helpful in the professional learning process of student-teachers. Therefore, the current paper looks into the most effective mentoring practices reported by the university assessors in mentoring accounting student-teachers in teaching practice.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an interpretivist research paradigm to explore the subjective perceptions of university assessors regarding the quality of mentorship received by Accounting student-teachers during teaching practice. The interpretivist paradigm is appropriate for studies that seek to understand how individuals interpret and make meaning of their experiences within specific social contexts.²⁸ Within this paradigm, a phenomenological research design was used to examine the lived experiences and perceptions of university assessors involved in teaching practice assessment. Phenomenology is suitable for exploring human experiences and understanding how participants interpret phenomena within their natural settings.²⁹ The study was carried out using a qualitative research approach, which allowed for an in-depth exploration of the perceptions and experiences related to mentorship practices during teaching practice.

The population for this study consisted of university lecturers who were responsible for assessing Accounting student-teachers during teaching practice. A purposive sampling method was used to select participants who were directly involved in assessing student-teachers in secondary schools. Nine university assessors from one selected South African university participated in the study. These assessors were selected because their teaching practice assessment responsibilities positioned them to observe the mentorship provided to Accounting student-teachers by school-based mentors.

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the nine selected university assessors. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to explore participants' perspectives in depth while maintaining flexibility during the interview process.³⁰ Interviews were conducted through face-to-face interactions during teaching practice visits and were complemented by electronic responses collected through Google Forms to ensure that participants' reflections were captured accurately. The use of both verbal interviews and electronic responses facilitated a comprehensive documentation of the perspectives of participants on mentorship practices during teaching practice.

²⁶ Jennifer Sharples Reichenberg, Michelle Gallagher, and Gina Dudkowski, "Co-Creating a Mentor Academy within a School–University Partnership: Continuity in Effective Mentoring of Teacher Candidates, Novice Teachers and Beyond," *PDS Partners: Bridging Research to Practice* 20, no. 2 (2025): 90–102; M. H. Abdullah et al., "A Comprehensive Supervision Framework for Pre-Service Teacher Development: Integrating Clinical and Developmental Approaches, Reflective Practices, and Technology," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* 8, no. 3 (2024): 5649–5660.

²⁷ Gizem Mutlu-Gülbak and Sumru Akcan, "Empowering Mentor Teachers for Supervision through an Online Mentor Training Program," *TESOL Journal* 15, no. 3 (2024): e812.

²⁸ Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion, and Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education* (routledge, 2002).

²⁹ Sharai B Merriam and E J Tisdell, "Dealing with Validity, Reliability, and Ethics," *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 2009, 209–35.

³⁰ R Burke Johnson and Larry B Christensen, *Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches* (Sage publications, 2024).

The data collected were analysed using thematic analysis. This process involved repeated reading of interview transcripts, coding meaningful statements, and grouping similar codes into themes and subthemes related to mentorship practices and factors influencing mentorship effectiveness. Thematic analysis allowed the identification and interpretation of recurring patterns within the qualitative data.

Ethical principles were observed throughout the research process. Participants provided their informed consent before participating in the study and were assured that their responses would remain confidential. To protect the identities of the participants, pseudonyms were used, and assessors were identified as A1 to A9 in the presentation of findings.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The following section presents the qualitative data collected from university assessors who were assigned to teach practice assessment of accounting student-teachers, from schools in the OR Tambo inland education district. Before the data presentation, their demographic details are presented. The university assessors' gender, experience in teaching practice assessment and total number of accounting student-teachers whom they assessed in the 2025 teaching practice period are presented below in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographics of University Assessors

Participant No.	Gender	Assessment Experience	Number of students assessed
A1	Female	2	
A2	Female	14	35
A3	Female	2	47
A4	Male	25 YEARS	10
A5	Male	4	29
A6	Female	21 years	83
A7	Male	4	89
A8	Female	10 years	30
A9	Male		47

Gender Distribution of University Assessors

The gender distribution of university assessors who participated in this study is presented in the table above. Of the nine participants, five were females, and four were males. This indicates that both genders were adequately and almost equally represented in the sample, though female assessors slightly outnumbered males. The presence of male and female assessors in the study contributes to a balanced understanding of the mentorship and student-teacher assessment processes of Accounting student-teachers, as gender diversity may influence communication styles, expectations, and interpersonal relations during assessment school visits.

Assessment Experience of University Assessors

The experience levels of the assessors had various levels of experience, including between two and twenty-five years of teaching practice assessment experience. To ensure a range of perspectives, both experienced assessors (A4 and A6, over 20 years' experience) and relatively new assessors (A1 and A3, 2 years' experience) were included. Experienced assessors are likely to have developed a deep understanding of the challenges and best practices of mentoring and assessment of accounting students-teachers, while newer assessors could be able to contribute more recent institutional views on changes in SBE procedures and university-school collaboration. Assessor A9 did not provide information about the assessment experience during the interview.

Number of Accounting student-teachers assessed

The number of accounting student-teachers measured by the participants in the year 2025 teaching practice period was also significantly different. The data shows that some of the assessors (A6 and A7)

had assessed a relatively large number of students (above 80 each), whilst some of the assessors (A4 and A5) had assessed a few student-teachers (10 and 29 respectively). This variation can be explained by geographical distribution, school concentration, or logistics. Importantly, assessors who rated large numbers of students were able to give an overview of typical issues with student-teachers and mentors across many different schools, whilst those who rated smaller numbers of students were able to give more detailed explanations about individual mentoring experiences. It is also important to note that A1 did not indicate the number of students assessed.

In summary, the demographic information of the university assessors shows that it is fairly balanced in gender, with varying levels of assessment experience and a wide range of exposure to student-teacher evaluations. This diversity increases the dependability and completeness of the qualitative data gathered from the assessors and creates a more detailed and credible understanding of mentorship practices in the OR Tambo Inland education district.

Data presentation of university assessors

The university assessors were requested to share their views on the quality of mentorship received by accounting student-teachers during teaching practice. The responses of the assessors were focusing on the following three themes, as detailed below. Assessors found positive mentorship evidence during their visits to secondary schools. However, the prevalence of mentoring of accounting student-teachers is not uniform across the different schools. Overall, the feedback of the assessors shows that the mentors practice effective mentoring strategies such as structured lesson planning, lesson observation, feedback, and reflection are practiced by mentors.

What are the factors influencing the effectiveness of Accounting student-teacher mentoring?

In response to the above question, university assessors commented that mentorship of accounting student-teachers is hindered by multiple factors in the secondary schools. They also reflected on the challenges faced by mentors in executing their mentorship duties. The comments of assessors A4, A1, A2 and A6 remarked that mentorship of accounting student-teachers is influenced by limited time and attention on student-teachers by mentors, workload pressures of mentors, lack of mentorship training, as well as non-cooperation or ill-discipline from the mentees. Furthermore, the lack of subject-specific guidance and feedback from mentors also slowed down the PCK development of accounting student-teachers. The following excerpts support these views.

A4 stated,

“Limited time and attention from mentors due to workload. Lack of subject-specific guidance; mentorship can be too generic. Feedback is either too critical or insufficient to promote growth.”

A1 commented,

“There is also absenteeism of student-teachers and failure to comply.”

A6 observed,

“The effectiveness of mentorship depends on the mentor’s workload and school culture. Students who are closely monitored perform better, but some mentors are overwhelmed by teaching and administrative duties.”

A4 agreed and noted,

“Some mentors have not received formal training in mentorship, and they have a limited understanding of how to develop Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK).”

A1 further emphasised,

“Before sending student teachers to schools, mentors need to be trained as to what is expected of them when it comes to SBE, and this should be done by the university.”

A2 added,

“I do not remember any formal preparation for mentors so far, but I believe there are plans.”

The accounts of university assessors also addressed the obstacles for mentors not to offer quality and in-depth mentorship to Accounting student-teachers during their teaching practice. Limited time, workload pressures, lack of mentorship training, and induction were also highlighted as key challenges. Additionally, there was confirmation from assessors about the attitude, discipline and preparedness of student-teachers as also playing a major role in this regard. Assessors confirm that the effectiveness of mentorship is influenced by several interconnected factors, particularly mentor workload, limited training, institutional gaps between schools and universities, and the varying levels of preparedness and professionalism among student-teachers.

How does mentorship influence the PCK development of Accounting student-teachers?

The responses to this question by assessors uncovered a mixture of multiple expressions regarding the influence of mentorship on PCK development of accounting student-teachers. Assessors indicated that there is evidence of growth in the PCK of Accounting student-teachers due to the positive influence of mentors at schools. Mentorship has boosted the confidence levels of student-teachers in their observation, but there are also odds. The assertions of five assessors are presented in the following in response to this question.

A6 noted,

“Students who are provided support in lesson development and are monitored demonstrate strong PCK.”

A5 agreed,

“Some mentors provide feedback to student teachers and support them when they go to their classes. This is a positive mentorship.”

However, A4, expressed concern,

“Mentorship is often too generic and lacks subject-specific (Accounting) guidance. Feedback is either too critical or insufficient to promote growth.”

A7 shared a similar sentiment, saying,

“Subject teachers do not care about mentoring student-teachers. The feedback is minimal, and students are often left on their own.”

A1 reflected on a contrasting observation,

“Responsible mentors supported student-teachers in tough topics and provided them with necessary materials to assist in their teaching.”

These remarks demonstrate that in schools where mentorship is strong and intensive, Accounting student-teachers exhibit growth in their PCK. However, inconsistent or minimal supervision could hinder the integration of content knowledge and teaching skills that define effective PCK. Hence, the researcher is inclined to conclude that one of the drivers of PCK development in student-teachers is the influence of strong mentorship that they receive during their teaching practice, in addition to the strong foundation of theoretical and conceptual knowledge received in the classrooms.

Collectively, these findings suggest that mentorship plays an important mediating role between theoretical preparation and classroom competence. The assessors recognised that where mentors take an active role in modelling effective accounting pedagogy and/or engage in sustained dialogue with student-teachers, there is tangible growth in PCK. However, a lack of subject-specific, directed and coordinated mentorship hinders the professional development of student-teachers and compromises the goal of work-integrated learning.

What are the best practices used by mentors for mentoring Accounting student-teachers?

In response to this question, the assessors recognised some exemplary mentorship behaviours among mentors, namely collaborative practices, constructive feedback, open communication and role modelling. These have emerged as typical examples of positive mentorship that promotes PCK development in student-teachers. Four such assertions are listed below out of the nine assessors who were interviewed.

A5 observed,

“Some mentors provide consistent feedback to student-teachers and support them when they go to their classes. This is positive mentorship because it helps them gain confidence.”

A6 supported this, stating,

“Students who are monitored regularly, given constructive feedback, and encouraged to reflect show a strong understanding of both content and teaching methods.”

A4 further noted,

“Where mentorship works well, it involves open communication, coaching techniques, and feedback that guides student-teachers to grow professionally. Training on these skills can make a big difference.”

A1 added,

“Responsible mentors help student-teachers with tough topics and provide the materials and guidance they need to teach better. They take mentoring seriously.”

A6 further remarked,

“Mentorship varies from school to school. Students who are provided support in lesson development and are monitored demonstrate strong PCK.”

The mentorship strategies outlined in the participant responses above can be universalised through structured mentorship training and recognition of the good work of mentors through certificates and honorariums, as well as enhanced and continued collaboration between universities offering teacher education and partnering schools in their catchment areas, as asserted by the following three assessors in their responses:

A3 stated,

“There should be a formal agreement between mentors and the university. This will help ensure consistency and recognition of mentors’ work.”

A5 echoed A3’s response as follows,

“Continuous communication, workshops, and recognition of mentors through certificates can motivate mentors to maintain secondary standards of mentorship.”

Similarly, A7 proposed,

“Mentors should be trained by the university and recognised as honorary lecturers for their contribution.”

These revelations strongly resonate with a culture of accountability and reflective practice between mentors and Accounting student-teachers. To conclude, the perspectives of university assessors confirm that the best practices of mentorship for Accounting student-teachers include collaborative planning and lesson delivery, observation and constructive feedback, role modelling, mentor professionalism and open communication. However, these best practices are inconsistently applied across schools due to the absence of formal structures, recognition, and mentorship training. Therefore, there is a need for policy-driven frameworks that formalise mentorship standards and

strengthen collaboration between universities and schools. To overcome this situation, continued and structured collaboration between universities and schools is recommended.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the perceptions of university assessors about the quality of mentorship received by accounting student-teachers during teaching practice in secondary schools. The findings reveal that mentorship practices vary considerably across school contexts, with important implications for the professional development and PCK of accounting student-teachers. The discussion below integrates the four key themes with the relevant literature to interpret these findings within broader teacher education scholarship.

Factors influencing the effectiveness of mentorship

Among the main results of this research, it is possible to note that the contextual and institutional conditions in schools influence the effectiveness of mentorship. According to university assessors, the workload of the mentor, time, absence of formal mentor training, inadequate subject-specific instruction, and student-teacher professionalism differences had a massive impact on the mentoring. These conclusions are in line with the recent studies that show that mentoring is institutionalised and situational and not defined by the competence of a single mentor. Curtis et al. and Scortescu et al. demonstrate that institutional frameworks, leadership approaches, and school-level policy systems have a great impact on the implementation of mentoring tasks in schools.³¹ In addition, Lampert et al. indicate that in most instances, mentors are constrained in their ability to offer protracted professional assistance to student-teachers due to heavy teaching demands.³²

Another important issue brought up in the findings is the significance of mentor preparation. The assessors noted that a large number of mentors are faced with the task of mentoring without training and a clear conception of what is expected in mentoring, especially the way pedagogical content knowledge should be developed. This fact confirms the research that suggests that formal mentor training increases confidence, role clarity, and effectiveness of mentoring in mentors.³³ The mentoring practices will not have such preparation, thus making it informal and inconsistent, which will limit the developmental value of the practice to the student-teachers.

The other significant result is the role of student-teacher professionalism in the development of mentoring relationships. The assessors have observed that the quality of mentoring interactions depended on the student-teachers commitment and discipline. This implies that mentorship is more of a two-way professional relationship than a one-way process. Salas-Aguayo et al. also adopt the same arguments in that effective mentoring rests on the correspondence between mentor and mentee expectations.³⁴ The issue of mentoring efficacy also depends not solely on the mentor's expertise but on the inquiry and professional character of the student-teachers.

Influence of mentorship on PCK development

A second significant conclusion is that mentorship is very significant in the development of pedagogical content knowledge in student-teachers in the field of accounting. According to the reports of the assessors, students-teachers who enjoyed strong confidence and more aptitude to combine accounting information with appropriate teaching approaches showed improvement in classroom observation, lesson planning, and feedback when the mentors were active in supporting their activities. These results confirm the recent studies, which have found mentorship to be one of the main processes of connecting classroom practice with theoretical knowledge. Opiyo, Abukari et al., and Can-Kucuk et al. demonstrate

³¹ Curtis et al., "The Positioning Tensions between Early Career Teachers' and Mentors' Perceptions of the Mentor Role"; Scortescu, Sava, and Craşovan, "Mentoring in Initial Teacher Education: Practices and Needs for Continuing Professional Development of Romanian School-Based Teacher Educators."

³² Lampert et al., "The Hidden Work of Incidental Mentoring in the Hardest-to-Staff Schools."

³³ Thornton, "Mentoring Preparation in Educational Contexts: A Review of the Literature"; Scortescu, Sava, and Craşovan, "Mentoring in Initial Teacher Education: Practices and Needs for Continuing Professional Development of Romanian School-Based Teacher Educators."

³⁴ Salas-Aguayo, Medina-Morales, and López, "La Mentoría Desde Mentores y Mentoreados. Una Revisión Sistemática de Literatura."

that mentoring relations contribute to an overarching enhancement of instructional competence, classroom management expertise, and pedagogical rationale among student-teachers.³⁵

The reflective dialogue and feedback were identified as especially relevant mechanisms to enhance the development of PCK. Assessors noted that student-teachers with high-quality feedback were more coherent in their lesson and had better integration of accounting concepts in teaching.

Nevertheless, the results also indicate that the practice of mentorship was generic and not subject-specific. According to the assessors, the common focus of mentoring was general classroom management and instructional behaviours and not the disciplinary nature of accounting studies. This shortcoming has significant consequences for the development of PCK since the particular mentoring of a subject is required to support the process of transferring disciplinary knowledge into effective pedagogic practice among student-teachers. This tendency toward generic mentoring may be helped by structural factors like lack of preparation of mentors and workload burdens, which were also found by the recent research on the mentoring situation in teacher education settings.³⁶

Best practices in mentoring accounting student-teachers

The results also point to several mentoring practices according to which successful professional learning was linked in the case of accounting student-teachers. Assessors identified organized aid in lesson planning, classroom observation, coaching and positive feedback as some of the practices that enhanced student-teacher development. The practices reflect well-known principles of effective mentoring in teacher education. Nash et al. note that collaborative mentoring partnerships help mentors and student-teachers to develop pedagogical knowledge collectively by means of dialogue and reflective interactions.³⁷ Equally, Kizildag demonstrates that positive mentoring dialogue is linked to professional identity and reflective professional learning.³⁸

The assessors put great emphasis on reflective dialogue and feedback as effective mentoring strategies. As Hudson et al. demonstrate, questioning strategies and professional conversations encourage more in-depth consideration of the teaching practice, whereas Grigg et al. found that coaching-focused mentoring enables mentors to offer prompt feedback that enhances instructional decision-making.³⁹ Such results support the essence of mentoring procedures that make reflective practice and facilitated professional learning possible.

The paper has also shown the significance of the cooperation between Universities and Schools in enhancing mentorship practices. According to Reichenberg et al. and Abdullah et al., structured school-university partnerships provide conditions of mentoring and professional learning.⁴⁰ But the difference in mentoring practices as experienced by assessors implies that this type of collaboration is not always institutionalised in contexts of teaching practice.

On the whole, the results suggest that the context of mentorship of the accounting student-teachers is a factor, along with the preparation of the mentors, and the institutional cooperation between the school and university. Although good mentoring practices are present in certain schools, mentorship is still imbalanced and structurally limited in other schools. The views of university assessors offer significant information regarding the role of mentoring practices on the formation of the pedagogical content knowledge, and the necessity of better institutional support, systematized preparation of

³⁵ Opiyo, "Teacher Education Students' Pedagogical Content Knowledge: Retooling the Mentorship Process within Schools of Education in Kenya"; Abukari et al., "Pedagogical Content Knowledge of Science Tutors and Its Influence on Their Trainees"; Can-Kucuk, Gencer, and Akkus, "Development of Pre-Service Chemistry Teachers' Pedagogical Content Knowledge through Mentoring."

³⁶ Mbhiza, Nkambule, and Masinire, "Student Teachers' Mentorship Experiences during Teaching Practice: A Comparison of Mentor-Student Dynamics in Rural and Urban Schools."

³⁷ Nash et al., "Leveraging a School-University Partnership Model through the Process of Co-Design: A Case Study of One Australian School-University Partnership and Its Developmental Stages."

³⁸ Kizıldag, "Mentoring for Professional Identity Construction in EFL Pre-Service Teacher Education."

³⁹ Hudson et al., "Refining Mentor Teachers' Feedback towards Improving Preservice Teachers' Practice"; Grigg et al., "Rethinking Student Teachers' Professional Learning in Wales: Promoting Reflection-in-action."

⁴⁰ Reichenberg, Gallagher, and Dudkowski, "Co-Creating a Mentor Academy within a School-University Partnership: Continuity in Effective Mentoring of Teacher Candidates, Novice Teachers and Beyond"; Abdullah et al., "A Comprehensive Supervision Framework for Pre-Service Teacher Development: Integrating Clinical and Developmental Approaches, Reflective Practices, and Technology."

mentors, and better coordination between universities and schools in order to provide consistent and subject-specific mentoring practices in accounting teacher education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Research has made several recommendations based on its findings to improve the quality of mentorship received by accounting student-teachers during teaching practice. First of all, there is an urgent need for structured and formalised mentor training programmes. School-based mentors should receive targeted training that clarifies their mentoring role, differentiates between formative support and summative assessment, and equips them with strategies for providing constructive, subject-specific feedback. This preparation is particularly important in accounting education, where effective mentorship requires both disciplinary expertise and pedagogical skills.

Second, a stronger and more sustained collaboration between universities and partner schools is recommended. Formal agreements that clearly articulate mentorship expectations, roles, and responsibilities may contribute to greater consistency in mentoring practices in schools. Regular communication between university assessors and school-based mentors could also strengthen alignment between university curricula and classroom practice, ensuring that mentorship supports the development of pedagogical content knowledge rather than focusing solely on generic teaching competencies.

Third, institutional recognition of mentorship responsibilities should be strengthened. The findings suggest that mentors often undertake mentoring duties alongside heavy teaching workloads without formal acknowledgment or incentive. Recognising mentors through certificates, professional development credits, or honorary academic status may improve motivation and accountability, thus improving mentorship quality.

Fourth, assessment frameworks used during teaching practice should more explicitly highlight subject-specific pedagogical development. Although lesson delivery and classroom management remain important, mentorship evaluation in accounting education should also focus on how student-teachers explain complex accounting concepts, address learner misconceptions, and integrate curriculum requirements into meaningful learning experiences. Incorporating these dimensions into assessment criteria may encourage more focused subject-specific mentoring.

Finally, universities should consider ways to strengthen the formative dimension of teaching practice assessment. Given the structural constraints on assessor visits, alternative mechanisms such as enhanced use of reflective journals, mentor-assessor dialogue, and structured documentation of mentorship activities may provide richer evidence of mentorship quality and student-teacher development. Such approaches could support more holistic and contextually informed evaluation of teaching practice experiences.

CONCLUSION

This paper assessed the views of university assessors regarding the quality of mentoring that accounting student-teachers received during their teaching practice in secondary schools that were partnered with a university in South Africa. The results indicate that mentorship continues to be a very important but unequal part of the teaching practice, and the level of support school-based mentors offer in various school situations differs significantly. Other mentors provide support with all the lesson planning, classroom observation, constructive feedback and developmental role modelling, which involve the mentor in structured and developmental mentoring for the student-teachers, whereas other mentors do not offer mentorship at all or offer it minimally or inconsistently at a critical phase in the professional learning of the student-teachers.

The paper also demonstrates that interacting contextual factors such as mentor workload, lack of time, formal preparation of mentors, school culture, and the professional disposition of the student-teachers influence the quality of mentorship. In structured and subject-focused mentorship, the assessors found higher confidence in student-teachers, better lesson coherence and the ability to combine accounting material with the proper use of pedagogical strategies. Weak or generic mentorship, on the other hand, limits meaningful pedagogical development.

Through the presupposition of university assessor opinions, the research adds a less researched perspective on teacher education research and emphasises the necessity of conceptualising mentorship as a professionally supported and organised part of the teaching practice. To enhance mentorship, better preparation of mentors, the collaboration between the university and schools, and the institutional support for the development of the subject-specific pedagogical elements in accounting teacher education are necessary.

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