

Importance of Mentoring Cycle in English Language Teaching in the University

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Abstract

Mentoring cycle is a process for improving teachers' professional development. It can help new young instructors to grow their knowledge and skills of teaching. In this study two terms are used mentee (less experienced person) and mentor (more experienced person). The mentee requires the support of a mentor in making lesson plans and language teaching. He/she shares the problems and concerns with the mentors to receive the corrective feedback for solving them. This study was done in Kabul Education University that focuses on importance of mentoring cycle in language teaching classes to help new young instructors to apply it in their classrooms. It involves four parts: pre-conference, observation, post-conference and roles of mentors. The aim of this study is to demonstrate the importance of mentoring and encourage young instructors, the mentee to select an expert person, the mentor and get benefits from his/her experience, knowledge, skills and teaching. The qualitative research method was used for collecting information and data by interviewing an English language instructor, reading academic articles, books from libraries and internet to clarify the importance of mentoring in language teaching classroom.

Key words: Mentoring, Pre-conference, Observation, Post-conference and Mentor's role

1. Introduction

Mentoring cycle is one of the ways for professional development of teachers. It is clear that every instructor wants to teach a class effectively and engage students actively in teaching process. It is instructors' duties to satisfy the needs of every learner in the classes. For new unexperienced lecturers, it is difficult to answer every concern of their learners. In Afghan universities, there are less opportunities for instructors to improve their teaching skills and methods. So, it is essential for lecturers to know their teaching strengths and weaknesses. Mentoring cycle is a process in which the new instructors need the help of expert lecturers in their teaching process. In mentoring cycle two terms are mostly used such as mentee and mentor. A mentee is a new instructor that is helped or advised by more experienced person for a period of time. Mentors are instructors that have more knowledge and experience in specific fields specifically in teaching methods and approaches. A mentee who starts teaching in the new language classes does not understand about his/her teaching and running of the class. Even he/she has problems in making lesson plan, applying the lesson plan, monitoring the learners' performance, assessment, evaluation and presenting the lesson. A mentee needs to find and search best ways of teaching a language and improve the teaching skills. For a period of the time, he/ she is helped by another instructor that is called a mentor. When a mentee wants to teach a language class, he/ she should prepare the lesson plan and ask the mentor to check it. Mentoring cycle has three stages pre-conference, observation and post conference. In pre-conference, the mentor and mentee discuss friendly and get feedback on the lesson plan, the activities, the time management, the methods and approaches, ways of assessing learners and manner of presenting. In observation stages, the mentee base on the lesson plan and prior receiving feedback teach the class and the mentor is observing directly or indirectly the classroom and take note the strengths and weaknesses of teaching. The mentor does not take part in presenting the lesson but he/ she writes the notes about what is going during the teaching. In post-conference both of them discuss on the teaching and mentor gives constructive feedback to the mentee to apply them in the coming teaching classes. In this study as an English language instructor and a mentor to an English language instructor, I want to express and share my experience and procedures of mentoring the classes with details.

2. Mentoring Cycle

It is responsibility of every instructor to search and find best ways of teaching a language and share their knowledge and experiences with others. As an English language instructor in Parwan University, I have an experience of mentoring with a mentee whom is an English language instructor at English Department of Kabul Educational University. She is a new and young instructor. I chose this young instructor as my mentee to share my

knowledge and experiences with her in order to bring changes in her teaching process. What I have learned in many books and articles about teaching, I shared with my mentee in pre- and post-conferences. My mentee was willing to receive feedback in each part of her lesson plan and teaching. She found this process useful because she received feedback on how to make a lesson plan, how to give clear instruction, how to monitor students' performance and set the activities based on the objectives. My mentee did not understand how to write main goals and how to evaluate students to show that they received the objectives. My mentee understood the importance of mentoring and giving instruction in teaching process through receiving feedback and she wants to apply them in her teaching classes.

The process of mentoring was a short time process in which we had short time to concentrate on many specific aspect of lesson plan and teaching. The mentoring cycle improved my mentee's awareness that teaching every point needs some strategies to apply them. Before this conference, my mentee didn't understand the teaching main goals, set specific time for performance of an activity, monitoring from students' working during activities. Now she knows what kinds of change should bring in teaching process in order to effectively lesson take place. If I work with my mentee for long time, I will prioritize to work on teaching lesson plan. Our young instructors are having a lot of knowledge about their subject to teach but they are not familiar with order of activities that might be done in the classes. Although they try to teach their class effectively but they do not understand how manage them. In pre- conference my mentee explained her teaching process. When I suggested some changes, she said that she had not acquainted what to do. Then in observation I observed many less effective points which had not caused learners to understand the new lesson properly.

Process of mentoring was a new experience for me. At the pre-conference I had thought that my mentee may not accept my feedback. When we had started our discussion and I had checked her lesson plan. I had suggested bringing changes in some parts of the lesson plan. She accepted eagerly the changes and she wanted to receive feedback in each parts of the lesson plan. When I watched her teaching in the classroom and I took notes some positive and negative points to be improved. I observed that our young instructors need more help on lesson plan. In post conference, I clarified the less effective points to bring changes in next teaching. She accepted and she wants to apply them in her coming teaching process. I felt very happy that I have learned many things based on teaching and evaluating of students in the classroom. Our discussion went well. I felt happy because my mentee asked me to come in her other classes and points out the negative points with its solution. In conclusion this mentoring cycle was an opportunities for me to understand how to be a good mentor for a mentee. Also, I became familiar with having pre-conference's discussion like how to start and how to finish them. I learned which points the mentee wanted to receive feedback in observation and what important points should be discussed in post conference. This monitoring cycle aware me how to share my knowledge and understanding with other instructors. In which manner I convince them to accept my ideas in their teaching process.

3. Pre-Conference

Pre-conference is one of the processes that mentors want to enhance mentee's growth and development through sharing his /her experiences, knowledge in teaching. In this process mentors want mentees to facilitate their professional development plan and encourage them to choose best way in their teaching (Celce-Murica, 2007). In pre-conference mentors can prepare their mentee for teaching and negotiate with them for choosing the appropriate choice in language teaching.

In this pre-conference, I was as a mentor for a mentee whom is an English instructor at English department of Kabul Education University. She wanted to teach English language for ESP (English for Specific Purpose) classes. As I met her, she was a new young instructor with having half year teaching experiences. She was graduated from English language department of KEU in 2013. After passing competition exam of ministry of higher education, she could succeed as an English teacher at English department. She is an intelligent instructor, but she has less information about new methods of teaching a language. Teaching is very exciting and challenging in the first few months and years. But as it becomes more familiar and you grow in confidence, there is a danger that things may grow older and less enjoyable. Teaching sometimes will be boring for doing the same things many times (Scrivener, 2011). She mentioned different kinds of teaching approaches but does not understand how to apply them practically in the classes. Like she said, "I want to use students centered methods, collaborative methods". But practically she could not explain its procedures. I started the pre-conference by asking questions in order that I was trained by my instructors in many learning program about her teaching goals, activities to be used and materials to apply in her classes. She explained her objectives "By the end of this session students will have learned (can and could) in sentences". Activities that she wanted to apply in the class did not assess to achieve the objectives. She wanted to use just text book as teaching materials. Asking questions about her teaching objectives, activities that she wanted to plan and use related materials are very important in teaching a second language. For performing of every activity,

she sets specific time. Time management that she set was not suitable for activities. Some of activity needed less time span and some activity needed more time to spend in order to perform it properly. Like, 15 minutes for performing warm up activity was long time. Also students' productions needed more than ten minutes to do effectively.

Also in pre-conference, I asked different kinds of question relate to teaching approaches, strategies that she wanted to apply, which shape of lesson plan might be used, in which aspect of teaching she would like to receive feedback to improve her teaching. She planned to use pair working strategies in her classes because students could easily managed and it helped her to avoid from waste of time. She did not have any information about different shapes of lesson plan, what she explained the teaching approaches, she wanted to use TTT(Test, Teach, Test) shape of lesson plan(Harmer, 2005). First she wanted to test her students' knowledge then teach them then test them whether they learn the new lesson or not. There were many questions in pre-conference relate to the teaching that I didn't ask her. Such as providing feedback on students' class interaction, reason for choosing such strategy. These questions were important to ask my mentee.

Overall our pre-conference went well. My mentee explained her teaching process but did not step by step. I gave her feedback and suggested some changes in her lesson plan in order to take place effectively and every individual actively engage in class activities. My mentee understood to bring change in her lesson plan. I asked her to briefly retell my feedback and which kinds of changing you will bring. For instance, I told her to decrease time of warm up activity from fifteen minutes to ten or five minutes. My mentee with eager accepted my suggestion, feedback and changes. She also suggested that she is a new instructor. She would like to receive feedback to each aspect of lesson plan, teaching process, giving instruction, and monitoring. As a mentor, I understood what activities that she may use in the ESP classes. The warm up activity will be starting by writing two question on the boards and ask students to compare them. Then teacher will explain the rules of using 'can and could' in the sentences. After students will receive fill the blank activity and finally students should write at least five sentences as evaluation. As a conclusion, in our pre-conference, I observed that young instructors have knowledge and ability to teach language classes effectively, if they are trained. My mentee was also a new young instructor that has lot of knowledge in mind but practically could not apply them in her classes. In this pre-conference, as a mentor, I aware her for having specific goals for teaching a lesson, every activity should relate to each other and evaluation activity should demonstrate for achieving goals.

4. Observation

It is necessary for every instructor to understand the strengths and weaknesses points in his/her teaching process. This process happens through observation. Observation is one of the ways to collect information from mentee in the classes to enhance teaching process for the future. Observation is a useful approach to collect information and data on direct observation of the construct of interest and behavior. If you can observe it, you can find some way of measuring (Beins, 2002). I was a mentor of an instructor who taught English language in ESP class. I observed her teaching and I took some notes to give feedback to bring changes in her class teaching. In this observation, I observed and took notes many positive and less negative points during her teaching. Such as, mentee's giving instruction, having eyes contact with students, monitoring, actively students' participation, and clarification of topics. Mentee started her lesson through greeting, checking home works, and warm up in which two sentences were written on the board and asked students to compare its meaning and forms sentences with their partners. Then students wrote one sentence and shared with other students. After, students read the passages which included usage of 'can and could' and finally used them in blank spaces. When I observed the teaching, I understood the importance of giving clear instruction, monitor students' performance. I saw many students they were not on right way to do the activities.

In pre- conference, I suggested her to bring changes in her lesson plan such as to decrease time of warm up activity and write two sentences on the board and elicit them with students whether they are familiar with this grammatical points or not. Then give chance for every individual to read the reading text individually and focus on usage of the 'can and could'. After, asks individual student to fill the blanks with 'can and could' then share with their partners. Finally, ask students to write at least four sentences with 'can and could' as evaluation parts. As I watched the teaching process, I took some points which were important to concentrate on teaching process. I shared these points with her at the post conference. My mentee was standing in front of the class explained and translated the lesson. She controlled the class from front zone of the class without moving to the back zone. She also did not give clear instruction to check understanding of students. Most of the activity is done by her, it was better to engaged all students to participate and contribute with each other. Most of the time she gave opportunities to the volunteer students to share their performance with other. Some students did not participate to share their ideas with whole class at all. My mentee had control on teaching but her behaviors are a little strict with students. From her

teaching, I have learned if we stand in front zone, the back zone students do not do their duties and they may chat on the phone. It is important to move around the class and monitor the students.

Teaching Materials that my mentee used in her lesson plan was a text book. Text book includes integrated skills such as grammar, reading with speaking, listening with writing. The last activity was many sentences with blank spaces that students should use 'can and could' in appropriate sentences. Students did well and every one could write four sentences as assessment to show whether they understand the lesson or not. This activity proves that students receive the objectives. Students at the end of the session understood the lesson. In summary, the observation process is very important for a mentor to know better about choice of teaching approaches in the class. Besides, they can understand what went well and what needs improvement. So I understood the importance of some parts of teaching to appropriately deal with them and not ignore them.

5. The Post -Conference

Post conference is the third steps to improve professional development. The first step was pre-conference in which the mentor chose the effective ways for mentee to have active classes. The next step was observation that mentee want to practically apply the way which has selected by mentors. In this step the mentor come up with some positive and negative points to aware the mentee in future performance. In Post conference, the mentor gives constructive feedback to the mentee in order to bring positive changes in his/her future carrier. The article of Bailey (2006) clarified that post conference is predicated on a concept in which teacher can develop through receiving feedback. The feedback can increase the awareness and bring changing in behavior of teachers. Through feedback teacher can note the effective and less effective ways of teaching to develop positive changes. I do agree with Bailey through feedback we can aware our teachers or mentees about the positive and less effective ways of their choices. Post conference can be applicable in Afghan society easily. Young instructor as a mentee can choose an experience and expert teachers as mentors to clarify their weaknesses and strengths aspect of teaching in order to improve their profession.

Also Bailey (2006) pointed out, if an observer in teaching process may not see the result of teaching directly. There are some reasons that learners may not learn something like student will be mastered in some material covered, students will learn but not directly observe them. In such case the observer should consider the possible improvement of a mentee in teaching effects. Sometimes when observer comes to the class, students will not dare to share their new knowledge with others. Sometimes, the mentee come under pressure and cannot run the class as well. It does not mean that pre conference doesn't work. I do agree that observer should realize the development of teaching effect of mentee.

According to Bailey (2006) successful conference is that in which both mentor and mentee have discussion that rarely happens in the post conference. Some of the mentors want to dominate the conference and do not give the chance to mentee to express his/ her idea. This point interested me. I do agree that post conference should be like discussion and both should have equal time to focus on points. When I was a mentor to an English instructor, we had a good discussion to what happened in the classroom in teaching process. Also Bailey (2006) pointed out for successful conference the mentor should give opportunities for mentee to talk about their work in friendly condition. Mentee in free condition can express his/her ideas and can share each kind of concerns they have. The mentor should give feedback in collaborative manner not in evaluative. I do agree with this point, in Afghan context it is applicable. Mentees are eager to help them and demonstrate the effective ways of teaching than to criticize. If a mentor criticizes a mentee, he/ she become defensive. The conference doesn't result on positive changes. In conclusion I can say that post conference is very essential for giving and receiving feedback. The conference should be followed by mentor and mentee's discussion. Provide the chance for mentee to talk about what happened in the class. Also the giving feedback should be comprehensible and collaborative rather than evaluative.

Post conference is a process in which every mentor discusses with mentee about effective and less effective parts of the lesson. It is responsibility of mentors to watch mentee's classes and clarify the points which need to change. In this step, mentor is coming up with a plenty of notes that observed in the classroom interaction. As a mentor, I took notes some aspects of the teaching especially the parts that my mentee is willing to receive constructive feedback in order to bring some changes in next teaching process. As a mentor, I asked some effective questions that I trained in my own classes in order about teaching process. Like, how do you feel that session went? How do you know that students receive the objectives? How do you feel that your teaching strategies engage learners in learning? Did you have any other goals for teaching this class? If you teach this class once again, would you like to bring some changes or not? Would you like to improve your teaching, in which aspects you like to

receive feedback? She answered these questions very patiently and she loved to receive feedback in each parts of her lesson plan, teaching instructions, monitoring the process of activities.

There were lots of questions to be asked from my mentee but I couldn't. Such as, why did not engage every individual in some activities? Why did not check assignment of students properly? Why most of the activities were done by the instructor than learners? Why did not give opportunities for learners to share their ideas with each other in their groups? While having listening activity, a few students were asked to share their performance with whole group? Why did give the chance to those student who raise their hand? These questions were fundamental to ask from my mentee but lack of time caused not to ask her. Post conference is started by greeting with each other. I as a mentor gave chance to my mentee to express her ideas about teaching process. She freely expressed her ideas and points out some positive and less effective parts of teaching. Then, I as a good friend started to clarify her positive points such as having complete preparation for presenting grammatical points, praise students after performance. After, I pointed out some less effective parts of activity such as not giving clear instruction, not monitoring and not giving chance to each individual to participate. These problems happened because she did not understand how to treat with these things. On pre-conference, we did not focus on these parts of teaching, this cause to happen in the classroom. I suggested some solutions for these parts of the teaching. She accepted my feedback and wants to apply them in coming teaching process. The post conference went well and we enjoyed for having such kinds of post conference. In post conference, I have learned and it interested me, if we give chance to mentee to express their idea first then point out the negative parts of the teaching. They can easily accept your ideas and feedback.

My mentee wanted to receive feedback on each part of lesson plan and what might be happened in the classroom. Feedback is information that is given to the learners about his or her performance of a learning task for improvement of the performance. It should be specific and clear in written and oral ways (Richards and Rodgers, 1985). She prioritized the feedback on giving instruction while introducing the activity. I have taken some notes while she introducing new activity in the class and gave instruction for students. In post conference, I suggested some changes. I gave constructive feedback on giving instruction when you give oral instruction ask one of the learners to repeat it as double check. The instruction should be simple and use simple words. For understanding of students, it is better to use board and write one example as a model. Besides I told her to move around the class while students doing the tasks in pairs or in groups. Students need more clarification during the performances. Some students may not understand what to do. It is our responsibly to help them.

At end of the discussion, I asked my mentee to tell by her own words what changes will she bring in coming teaching. She could tell me while giving instruction, she will ask one student to repeat instruction and she will write one sentence as a model on the board. During activity she will move around the class and monitor her students' performance, set appropriate time for each activity and announce them for students, she will give chance to each individual to share their ideas with whole classes, activity should relate to the objectives. In conclusion, I have learned how to start post conference. Giving chance to the mentee to express his/ her ideas and feeling about teaching process. It is good to know the positive and less effective parts of the teaching from speech of mentee. Then as a mentor we can point our take notes and suggest for better changing.

6. The Role of Teacher as Mentor

In Zachary (2002), I have learned role of teacher as a mentor, process of mentoring and mentoring journey which are new for me. Mentoring is described as a reciprocal and collaborative learning relationship between two or more individuals that share their responsibilities and accountability for helping of mentee's working and mutually defines goals. For example, a mentee wants from a mentor to come in the classroom and give feedback on 'giving instruction' during activities. The mentor gives feedback to the mentee and learns some points from mentee's teaching. Mentors can increase, improve students' growth and development and also help learners to reach the maximum teaching experience and development. A Mentee needs for more helping that how to teach a class, the mentor can share experiences and train mentees that causes improvement. Mentors report what they have learned and improve coaching and listening skills, find work more meaningfully and satisfying. Teachers mentor mentee for many reasons; for instance, to improve mentees' educational achievement, to facilitate personal development and make mentee to choose wisely the methods in her/his teaching. It means, the mentor wants to give feedback to the mentee in order to improve mentee's knowledge relate to education and help them to choose wisely when faces with problems. I do agree through mentoring mentee can find the weakness points and fill them. For example, a mentee does not understand what kinds of problem does he/ she have, just mentor can find the gaps and fill them. Conversation between a mentor and a mentee can improve listening and speaking skills as well. Mentoring process can be applied in our classes easily.

I learned in Zachary (2002) mentoring journey that has four phases, such as preparing, negotiating, enabling and coming to closure. In preparing phase, mentoring involves meeting right teacher and right students and prepares him/ her with mentoring relationship. In this phase mentor should answer such kinds of question. Why do I want to be a mentor? Is mentoring right for me? Am I ready for a mentoring relationship? According Zachary (2002) Negotiating is business or contracting phase of relationship. In this phase the partners reach in agreement on learning goals on content and process. At end on negotiation, these questions should be answered. What is the learners' goal? What are the learners needs? Is there mutual understanding of rules? What are our criteria for success? Based on Zachary (2002) Enabling is longer phase of mentoring in which learning between mentoring partners take place. In this phase, the role of mentor is to nurture mentee growth by having open encouraging climate of learning, asking right question at right time, and provide constructive feedback on time. For example, if mentee makes something less effectively in teaching process, mentor should tell him/ her at the end of the class in their office to bring changes in that parts of teaching. Mentor should not interrupt the lesson and say this is right or wrong. The last phase is come to closure in which partners have understanding about their partners and be aware about the needs and interest of each other and have better position to plan collaboratively. I can apply mentoring process in my university. For example, I want one of experienced instructor of English language department to come in my class and point out my weakness points in my teaching. I also tell the advantage of mentoring to other English instructors who do not have enough experiences in teaching, I talk with them and I become the mentor of them. I try hard to give constructive feedback for my mentee.

7. Conclusion

Mentoring cycle is a process that is used to improve professional competences. Mostly, new young language lecturers apply it to know the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching. It is difficult for unexperienced instructors to choose effective methods for teaching languages in the classroom. There are numerous teaching methods to use them in teaching but selecting appropriate method for a specific theme is not an easy work. Expert teachers can decide easily which methods are best to select. In mentoring cycle, the mentee needs for more experienced person (the mentor) to see and check the overall process of teaching. They have three sessions pre-conference, observation and post-conference to get constructive feedback on every stage of teaching. Every stage has its procedures and benefits to work practically.

In pre-conference, the mentee makes the lesson plans and shares all the concerns with the mentor to receive feedback. The mentor checks them in friendly manner and suggests some changes. In observation, the mentor observes the class directly or indirectly and take notes the process of teaching in the classroom. In this stage the mentor does not interrupt the teaching process but he/she takes notes what is going well and what is needed for improvement. In post-conference, the mentor and mentee have a session and discuss on whole process of teaching that took place effectively and unproductively. The mentee explains his/her view about the teaching and determine the positive and negative points. There should be enough time for the mentee to express his/her idea about the performance. The mentor must listen carefully to the view points of the mentee. Then, the mentor gives the feedback on every activity that has been done in the class.

The feedback should be constructive not evaluative to apply it in the coming teaching language classes. The session must be constructive and the mentee accepts the feedback with pleasure and joyful manner, not to defense from his/her performances. The roles of the mentor is to cooperate and improve the weaknesses of the mentee for better changes in coming teaching hours. Mentoring cycle is very important for language instructors to be aware about the teaching and bring changes in every stage of the presenting the lesson. It is essential for every instructor especially young instructors to select mentors for their teaching and get benefits from the experience of other in their academic life to know the weak points and improve them continuously.

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