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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The need for Qualified School Teacher Mentors for Initial Teacher Training, Early Career Teachers and Beyond: Why Don't School Teacher Mentors Need a Qualification in Mentoring?

**Carl Wilkinson**

## ABSTRACT

**Background/purpose** – Teacher recruitment and retention is a major issue for sustaining and growing an educational system. Nurturing and supporting teachers through all stages of their career in the form of mentoring is recognized as an important factor in retaining teachers in the profession. The current English Government's "golden thread" of documentation for a teaching career stipulates a mentor for life. This study asks whether a qualification to practice mentoring should be mandated.

**Materials/methods** – This case study presents ethnographic qualitative data analyzed and interpreted through a Miles et al. (2020) display structure. Seven practicing teacher mentors were separately interviewed within their own schools. The interviews were recorded, the participants were not prompted, and their responses are presented in full.

**Results** – This study found that none of the participants hold a recognized accredited qualification in mentoring. The literature shows that other professions value further qualifications which are used as proof of expert knowledge through theoretical study and reflection.

**Conclusion** – It is suggested that application of the intent to provide all teachers with a mentor throughout their whole career through an ad hoc cottage industry of volunteer mentors is unsustainable and not commensurate with that of a professional body.

**Keywords** – mentoring, qualification, motivation, intrinsic, extrinsic

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Teacher recruitment and retention is crucial to the provision of a successful education system that is sustainable and of high value. It is recognized that a mentoring capacity for teachers at all stages of a teaching career could provide the necessary support to attract others into the teaching profession, as well as for the retention of current teaching professionals. At the Annual Conference for the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) held in the United Kingdom on November 3-4, 2020, a panel member for the Department for Education's Early Career Framework (ECF) (Department for Education [DfE], 2019a) expert advisory group introduced the DfE's proposals for National Professional Qualifications (NPQs). The ECF stipulates that "in order for the ECF to have a positive impact on early career teachers, it must be firmly and exclusively about an entitlement to additional support and training… we have committed to: fully funded mentor training" (DfE, 2019a, p. 6). However, there appears to be some divergence in the latest NPQ from the initial intent, if it can be presumed that the ECF and NPQ are deemed compatible and that the suite of NPQs are the recognized qualifications within the school education system.

NPQs are a set of prestigious professional qualifications, already widely recognized by the sector (contained in all NPQs, e.g., DfE, 2020d, p. 5). Reference within the suite of six NPQ's, "Leading Teacher Development" (DfE, 2020d), "Leading Teaching" (DfE, 2020e), "Leading Behavior and Culture" (DfE, 2020c), "Headship" (DfE, 2020b), "Executive Leadership" (DfE, 2020a), and "Senior leadership" (DfE, 2020f) includes the following singular statement, which is actually a sub-heading within the column pertaining to "Learn how to…" practice statements:

> Plan, conduct, and support colleagues to conduct, regular, expert-led conversations (which could be referred to as mentoring or coaching) about classroom practice by… (contained in all NPQs, e.g., DfE, 2020d, pp. 14-15)

It seems that mentoring and coaching have become one and the same with little or no distinction, as coaching within some of the NPQs is mentioned once again. However, it is not within the remit of the current study to define or highlight the differences between mentoring and coaching, notwithstanding that the term mentoring has been used widely within the field of teacher development. Lammert et al. (2020) drew upon an accepted understanding of the difference between coaching and mentoring, wherein coaching follows an action model and is evaluative, whereas mentoring is relational and works within a dialogic critical framework. Lammert et al.'s (2020) study concludes that coaching could be combined with mentoring through the Reflective Coaching Analysis model. Furthermore, Kraft et al. (2018) stipulated that coaches should be experts in specific skills, which would imply that a teacher trained as a coach could not be an expert in all aspects of teaching and learning. Coaching requires "fixing," due to the standards agenda for mentoring in schools being necessarily evaluative, which leads to assertive critical feedback, and which according to Bjorndal's research on trainee teachers' experiences with mentors, can initiate "face saving" attempts by the mentee, and the loss of opportunities for self-reflection (Bjørndal, 2020).

More concerning than the lack of mentoring reference within the NPQs is the move away from the concept of fully funded mentor training, as set out in the ECF, to just a brief mention within the suite of NPQs which is supposed to have the following remit:

> The NPQs provide training and support for teachers and school leaders *at all levels* [italics added for emphasis], from those who want to develop expertise in high quality

> teaching practice, such as behavior management, to those leading multiple schools across [education/school] trusts. (contained in all NPQs, e.g., DfE, 2020d, p. 5)

Indeed, in a specific slide detailing the Leading Teacher Development NPQ, the commentator at the aforementioned 2020 UCET conference, defined that a "Teacher Developer is a teacher who currently has or is aspiring to have responsibilities for leading the development of other teachers in the school." Which taken to its definition could mean any teacher or mentor, if it was agreed that a teacher mentor is helping to develop another teacher. However, when pressed, the commentator went on to describe that mentors themselves would not be considered eligible for the NPQ, only those that "manage a team of mentors or coaches." According to Betteney et al. (2018), there is a danger of a Bourdieu symbolic violence occurring through the propensity of recreation of any one field, as early career teachers need to demonstrate their functioning within the habitat. Furthermore, a conservative practice was found to have little support in Ellis et al.'s (2020) study of qualities for professional mentors, wherein only one out of 53 recommendations was for a commitment for mentors to undertake some form of formalized learning. However, mentoring teachers is a complex role which should require study of knowledge and understanding emanating from current research practice and empirical episteme, reflected upon through experience and development. This current review study aims to add further research findings in an attempt to argue for recognized qualifications to be a requirement in the practice of teacher mentoring.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

*A wider perspective*

Most recognized professions induct their members into further qualificatory frameworks. For example, consider the United Kingdom's construction industry's myriad of affiliated Royal Institutes, such as the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, wherein construction employers enroll their new graduate employees to an Assessment of Professional Competence program in order that they become associate members, which would then lead to Chartered Status within the affiliated institute (for an example, see: Nickels et al., 2002), which is linked to university accreditation. In response to the English government's realization that teacher recruitment and retention poses a very real problem, a research report by the National College of Teaching and Leadership (2016) drew attention to the barriers witnessed by "lost" applicants. The Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) is a recognized certificate, accredited to Masters' level, and was found to be the main draw to university-led Higher Education Initial Teacher Education (HEI ITT), which contributes 75% of all Initial Teacher Education (ITT) in England, reasoning that there is a perceived need for recognized qualifications for future career progression and mobility. However, subsequent to the Carter Review (Carter, 2015) and the English government's response (DfE, 2015), the English government has consistently attempted to steer applicants away from this optional qualification and push Qualified teacher status (or QTS) as the essential qualification for teaching. The National College for Teaching and Leadership report (2016, Table 2.1, p. 38) found that other postgraduate professionals are more motivated than teachers to seek further qualification whilst progressing in their chosen professional career. Is this because the teaching profession is slowly being deprofessionalized, and the ability to attain further qualification is stunted or non-funded and even not desired or considered even necessary?

Additional research is therefore needed in this field before the teaching profession becomes so deregulated that it no longer stands up against other professions as a qualified standard profession. Indeed, the English government's alignment to the recommendations for the teaching profession by the Sutton Trust (2011) and through an outcomes-based analysis research conducted by Slater et al. (2009), both referenced in the recent ITT Market Review (DfE, 2021b) where it was stated that qualifications should not play a major role in delineating a teacher's career, and that qualifications have no direct effect on teacher effectiveness. During a debate in the United Kingdom's House of Lords on the proposals of the ITT Market Review, Baroness Morris stated that no other great profession has just 10 weeks of university theoretical study (Parliamentlive.tv, 2021, 16:37). The obsolescence of qualifications like this does not play a part in other professions, even when reducing effectiveness to economic and quantitative outcomes.

Indeed, the English government's own research (DfE, 2019c) concluded that because the mentoring of new teachers is crucial, the status of mentors in schools needs to be raised through accreditation which would provide recognized acknowledgement of the acquired knowledge and skills. The General Teaching Council for England (GTCE), from 1997 to 2012, saw the English government's first attempt to professionalize teachers fail since it was largely a policing agency, a Foucault panopticon, the demise of which pushed the profession from organizational to occupational professionalism, losing the similarity to self-regulated professions such as medicine and law, as described by Page (2013). The GTCE was replaced by the Teaching Agency, a disciplinary panel answering directly to the Secretary of State for Education in England and since then the teaching professional has been left with no professional body to support and develop the careers of its members in similar fashion to other professions. The Chartered College of Teaching in England was launched in 2017, with an initial GBP £5 million pumped in by the DfE, and with a claim that it supports 45,000 teachers worldwide. The College offers its members Chartered status upon completion of a 15-month course costing GBP £945, with an annual fee of GBP £89 for fellowship. On its website it claims to have awarded Chartered status to 181 graduates (Chartered College of Teaching, 2022), representing a seemingly small return on investment taking into consideration that there are approximately 500,000 teachers in England alone, according to the DfE (2021c).

*NPQ research literature: The referenced literature in the suite of NPQ*

If the training of school mentors is to be a part of a teachers' Continuous Professional Development (CPD), or Professional Development (PD) as it has been re-termed, and delivered through a school's Inservice Training (INSET), then mentor training will be dependent on the individual school's training emphasis for "best practice." Kennedy (2016) explained that PD conducted in schools is ordinarily based on procedures and is ultimately less affective on teachers and students. Kennedy's meta-study went on to claim that the coaching model tends to test procedures against set criteria and so the process becomes managed, which creates resistance. The criteria normally used for the efficacy of PD is based on state imposed tests of pupil outcome, which Lynch's meta-study revealed have but a minor impact on student achievement (Lynch et al., 2019). Furthermore, Sims and Fletcher-Wood (2020) denied that a causal relationship of impact existed at all, and that PD studies that claim to have an impact are both flawed and biased. Kraft and Papay's (2014) meta-study on efficacy of PD found that teachers working in supportive professional

environments, as in support provided by highly qualified (i.e., Masters' qualified) colleagues and based on mutual trust, have a higher and more sustained impact.

*Why have schoolteacher mentors?*

There has been recognition that early career teachers and also experienced teachers require support. Although the impetus for support and direction to achieve it changes, the fact remains that attrition, especially early on and burnout later, are taking a toll on the teaching profession. This is seen both in terms of teacher retention and recruitment beyond the Initial Teacher Training (ITT), with 20% of teachers in the United Kingdom leaving the profession within 2 years and 33% within 5 years; based on data as of 2017 (DfE, 2019d). High attrition rates of some ITT groups, such as BAME (Black, Asian, and minority ethnic), prompted a study of ITT mentoring by Connolly et al. (2021), which highlighted mentoring inexperience. Sosssick et al.'s (2019) case study of mentoring and coaching showed potential resilience building through a "third space"; shifting the CPD/PD mentoring/coaching model away from outcomes-based judgement. Space for critical thinking, evaluation, and reflection with an experienced mentor, and therefore not associated with subjective assessment, was found by Fransson (2010) to be the culmination of comments revealed in his meta-study of the Swedish Government's consultation on the assessment role of mentors.

The concept of "third space" was explored further by Helleve and Ulvik (2018) and it was suggested that educated mentors were more likely to value educational theory and research and were therefore more able to engage in tripartite discourse while mentoring ITT. A study by Colognesi et al. (2020) concluded that a climate of trust and experienced mentors supporting newly qualified teachers (NQTs) through their first 5 years, informally away from judgement, inspired perseverance, and self-worth. Fransson's (2016) study of experienced teachers engaging with an accredited mentoring qualification reported that the space for reflection and evaluation of practical action enabled critical thinking through engagement with current thinking and research. Dube's (2019) quantitative study of ITT reflections on mentors returned mixed views, with evidence that there is unregulated quality of mentoring, which was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ersin & Atay, 2020). The Maltese regulation that all school mentors should qualify for a Postgraduate Certificate in Mentoring, accredited by the University of Malta, enables mentors to engage in research and theory leading to co-construction and reflective practices with NQTs for the purpose of support and attrition reduction (Tonna, 2019). In a study by Baartman (2020), all the mentors who took part in the challenges faced by ITT mentors had received no formal training, and were dissatisfied with CPD and the lack of a mentoring model. It seems that the process by which the head teacher selects mentors based on interpersonal skills, credibility, and the ability to identify support has not changed much since Cross (1995) reported 3 years after the English Government's 1992 legislation that all NQTs should have a mentor. Indeed, Murtagh and Dawes (2020) confirmed through their study of school-based mentors of ITT, that selection for mentoring was ad hoc and the role remained a "Cinderella" responsibility, recommending that at the very least the National Standards for school-based mentors of ITT should be used as support.

*Why should schoolteacher mentors hold a professional qualification?*

The "Recognition of Professional Qualifications" bill was formed so as to mandate equal treatment for employees applying for positions of employment anywhere in the United Kingdom (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 2020). The European Union

employs a similar recognition system in its "Recognition of Professional Qualifications in Practice" law, which enables free movement and recognition of member state professional qualifications (European Commission, n.d.), within which teachers are recognized through Directive 2005/36/EC, under "general practice." The study of 16 countries' National Qualification Framework (NQF) provision by the International Labour Organization defined accreditation of such qualifications as proof of learning, which gives assurance of training within standards of competency, with learning outcomes that are specifically skills based (Allais, 2010). This aligns directly with the English Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2021d), the ITT Core Content Framework (DfE, 2019b), the Early Career Framework (DfE, 2019a), and the suite of NPQs (DfE, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e, 2020f). All of these are in turn aligned to the Bologna Declaration (Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, 2005), with level descriptors/statements and learning outcomes at postgraduate competency, just as Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) is graduate conditioned in England. Indeed, although the Bologna Process and its subsequent follow-up conferences admit that learning outcomes emanate from the English National Qualification Framework, the learning outcomes, earned as European Credit Transfers (ECTS) stipulated in the TUNING project are similar to the teacher frameworks presently discussed, namely, "Learn that (knowledge)" and "Learn how (practice)," see Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks (2005) for details on the Bologna Process and subsequent follow-up groups.

Moving back to mentoring specifically, the meta-study of 10 formal mentoring programs by Aspors and Fransson (2015) found that mentor education influences teaching and therefore the model of contextual practice and theoretical knowledge gives the ideal blend. However, their meta-study also reported that some headteachers were resistant to outside influence that mentors try to implement after having attended their formal course (Aspors & Fransson, 2015). Indeed, Patrick (2013), in a study of preservice and mentor narratives, found that this resistance also extends to within the traditional mentoring practice of unidirectional apprenticeship. Jerome and Brook (2020) conducted a comparison of three professional national standards, namely for social work, nursing, and also teaching, and found that mentoring in schools stood out as being technicist and impoverished by comparison to the other professions where mentors are accountable for creating a professional learning environment. This reflects Lofthouse's (2018) view that mentoring is a profession within a profession and also Philpott's (2014) view that mentors in schools provide an apprenticeship of skills through the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2021d), with its processes for "learning on the job." The unique Norway Mandatory Teacher Mentor Formal Accreditation, as studied by Lejonberg et al. (2015), found that Hobson and Malderez's (2013) judge-mentoring and folk-mentoring impoverished mentoring practices were more likely to occur with unaccredited mentors.

The question arises as to what would motivate a teacher to become accredited and attend a formal course? Sobkin and Adamchuk (2015) found that most teachers in Russia attended formalized PD courses at institutions, with teachers from low-socioeconomic schools motivated extrinsically, whilst teachers from higher status schools being intrinsically motivated. In a study conducted in Norway about a mentor education course, Ulvick and Sunde (2013) found that 3 years after formalized mentor education became mandatory, only half of mentors were qualified with or without the required 15 ECTS, and their study also revealed a one-third attrition rate emanating from the less educated of the cohort of 31. Raffe (2013), in critiquing the lack of evidence of the NQFs' impact suggested that because NQFs are government driven, they are not being utilized for the purposes of planning

progression for general stakeholders, so become extrinsic passes for those who are eligible. As such, there is a barrier appearing which is halting the professional development of teachers; in this instance, the ability to qualify as a mentor through the NPQ suite, and are therefore not enabled to help them meet the required outcomes whilst practicing full-time teachers. On this, Lester (2011) suggested that a bridge needs to be built between regulated qualificatory frameworks and self-governing professional bodies.

*Emerging common features*

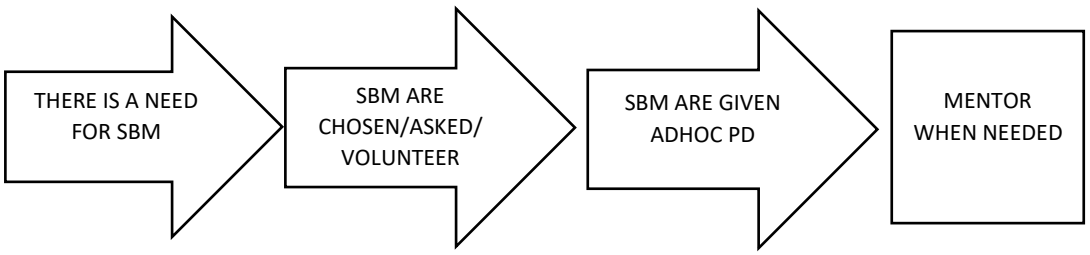


**Figure 1.** Emerging common features (SBM = School Business Manager)

The current study aims to investigate the features presented in Figure 1.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

To understand social interaction, researchers need to follow a set pattern in order for the results of a study to be taken seriously (Cohen et al., 2000). The qualitative data offered in this ethnographic case study were gathered from interviewing seven mathematics teachers acting as mentors. Each were interviewed individually by the researcher at their respective schools, with researcher notes taken to accompany the recorded interviews providing the ethnographic data. The case study justification is drawn from Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013) in which they state that case study offers an alternative to quantitative data capture and plays an important role in educational research. Yin (2009) described case study as exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory, and which can offer an answer or explanation as to how or why a certain issue is occurring. Merriam (1998) described this as a case or a bounded unit which can provide both increased heuristic understanding and new meaning, extending the readers' experience, as well as confirming what is known about particular ethnographic groups. Extending this, Stake (1995) went on to claim that case study provides an opportunity for others to discover what they have yet to see or experience for themselves. This approach gives practitioners the opportunity through their own research to gain an understanding of the complexities of the issues being studied (Pollard & Filer, 1996). Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013) concluded that through intensive interview interactions with the world surrounding a certain location can provide a rich form of data. Stake (1995) separated case study into intrinsic vs. instrumental, where the latter is a case study of an aspect, concern, or issue which has professional relevance.

Ethics were fully considered in the current study, with the researcher's university in the North of England having approved the research prior to the data being gathered, and the participants given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any point. Risk assessment was considered, with each participant provided with an outline of the research intent, a risk assessment form plus details of where to find health-related support following the interview

process. The individual recordings and the transcriptions were sent to each participant subsequent to their interview in order to seek their approval and to confirm its accuracy. The recordings were captured using a Yamaha Pocketrack audio recorder.

The participants of the study each have a wide range of experience of mentoring ITT, some for a couple of years and some for much longer, and taught in mainly mixed-gender comprehensive/academies in the North of England. The findings are offered as qualitative data and the instrumentation was open-ended questioning, repeated to each participant within separate one-to-one interview events. Although the cohort is small, Leslie (1972) predicted that this would be acceptable because if a population is homogenous, bias is insubstantial if the questions are group-related issues. In this case, all of the participants were mathematics teachers working in similar educational environments.

## 4. RESULTS

To analyze the qualitative interview-based data, there will be substantial facilitation to the work of Miles et al. (2020), and an attempt made to display the results in order to derive a plausible answer to the study's research question of "Why don't school mentors need a qualification in mentoring?" in the understanding that interpretist knowledge is socially constructed in seeking out patterns or regularities to enable links to be drawn.

The conceptual framework of the study is based on local phenomena, and during the interviews a total of eight open-ended questions were posed to each participant, one of which was the following:

*Q1. Have you undertaken training as a mentor?*

This question was put to the participants without any explanation and in the absence of any prompting by the researcher-interviewer. A simple "yes" or "no" response would have been sufficient, but the participants each felt the need to explain their training, and in some cases defend their training, as a means to backing up the answer they offered to the question.

It was anticipated that if a mentor held a qualification in mentoring, then their response would have been a clear statement of the qualification title. Similarly, any training undertaken could have been clarified as a statement of the training type. However, the mentors felt the need to think and talk through their training experiences which is shown to be conducive to recognized high-class mentor training programs.

**Table 1.** Have you undertaken mentor training? In vivo coding

| *No mentor training* | *Received mentor training (no qualification)* | *Received mentor training (uncredited qualification)* |
|---|---|---|
| *Mentor A*<br>Confused response, defended, leading to procedural in-house/provider grading etc. | | |

| *No mentor training* | *Received mentor training (no qualification)* | *Received mentor training (uncredited qualification)* |
|---|---|---|
| | Mentor B<br>In-house standardization and provider grading systems | |
| | Mentor C<br>In-house, 60 mins duration | |
| Mentor D<br>Not recent, defended | | |
| | Mentor E<br>Reading, defended through extracurricular coaching | |
| | Mentor F<br>External PD with other mentors, fuzzy recall | |
| | | Mentor G<br>Provider-led mentor starter training, recognition certificate, confused defense leading to realization it was not formal training |

The DfE's guidance for teacher professional development (PD) stipulates that standalone activities are less effective than programs of study lasting more than two terms/semesters (DfE, 2016b) and yet training for mentoring practice in schools so often mirrors the former. Qualitative data are actions that lead to consequences and the participants, through the researcher's interpretation of their responses, had not actually undertaken formalized mentor training, hence their responses had been somewhat confused and defended:

*Participant A*

> No official training, I've had in the past, when universities and colleges, whoever trainees we take on, they've, I guess certain elements of training, just to kind of like, fall into their guidelines. You know how to grade students and I guess within that kind of information that we were fed with. We did discuss what makes a good mentor, just to get the idea of the positives and negatives that can come about and how to deal with certain situations as you're mentoring. I won't say, I've not had an official course, but, you know, kind of, training through the university and stuff, yes.

According to Participant A, because the assessment of students is common practice for teachers, then this could be transferred to the assessment of ITT. This was noted as a defensive response to the outline statement of "no official training."

*Participant B*

> Yes, I did some training at my first school, which was in-house, just trying to make sure that all the mentors in different subjects were sort of standardized. So, it wasn't sort of official mentor training, it was in-house. I have been to several different providers' training sessions. So, training on their different systems, Bluesky, that you use and the different requirements for the courses. They've had elements of mentor training in them, but I haven't done any specific, concentrated mentor training, if that makes sense.

*Participant C*

> Just a brief one, just before I started, but it was only for an hour and it was in school.

*Participant D*

> Not within the last 2 years, no, but prior to that I was a senior leader in a school for 16 years and I was the NQT mentor in a school since then. So, during that time, yes, I did undertake training as a mentor, but not in the last 2 years.

Participant D stated, "not within the last 2 years" and then went on to defend this by saying "but"; the fact that the mentor claimed to have been a senior leader in a previous school should be sufficient without the need for training accordingly.

The participants related their training to being an ITT provider, school procedures, and the standardizing of mentoring in their school. Previous studies have indicated that mentor training as part of PD follows a procedural program to train mentors in the operating procedures of the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) program.

The other three participants believed that they had undertaken formalized mentor training, but their recall of the training was unsure.

*Participant E*

> I did do a little bit of training when I initially took on the role, but it was more about reading about the mentoring position. I also do coaching for sports and I think that some of the training that I've done as a sports coach has actually helped in the mentoring training. I did, in my previous role, in a previous occupation as a line manager for teams of IT developers and in those roles, it was very much a mentoring type role. The developers had more skills than me, in the activities that they were conducting. It was more about, sort of, guiding them rather than telling them what they had to do, because they knew a little bit more about the IT part than I might do.

Participant E claimed to have conducted self-directed training through "reading about the mentoring position," and then went on to defend this to claim that sports coaching and line managing while employed in industry had "helped in the mentor training."

*Participant F*

> I have undertaken training, yes. When I was at another school, I was offered a CPD program provided by an external source. Unfortunately, I can't remember who that source was, but it was a proper affiliated course, as I understand, and it lasted over a number of months. It involved sessions with other mentors, discussing how we would go about mentoring trainees. There was role playing, we did a little bit of research. We were directed to particular sources of reading and we were required to put together a

> sort of an essay, I presume, an assignment on our experiences, what we'd done as mentors. Particular examples and how we would improve, or how we could improve on things that we had improved during our time as mentors. Unfortunately, I can't remember what that qualification was or if I have got any certification for it, but I was told I'd passed that qualification.

*Participant G*

> Yes, just recently we did some training involving your [the researcher's] university and we were doing a sort of starterish mentor training program. I think it's something that they are sort of setting up. I'm actually going tomorrow night to get a little recognition certificate for it so, yes. And we've done sort of little bits in the past, discussing with, we have sort of a lead person in the school who runs the training side across the MAT [Multi-Academy Trust] and the Alliance and things like that. So, you know, you can always go and ask her stuff and she will help you out with things and talk to you about what's happening and how to manage things. And so, if you need help on anything in particular, quite often go and see her, or also talk to like, you know, like the head of department and people like that. Or people that have mentored others before in school, but all of it is informal, not like a formal mentor training process. Quite informal, which I quite like really, because I don't, I haven't kind of gone into it to become some sort of academic mentor or whatever. Just like, I just like sharing things with people and I think it's kind of just like another, different side of teaching for me. It's not really a great big, sort of, I don't know, a mentor. You know what I mean? It's sort of, it's like sharing and learning and I usually find that I can learn as much from people I mentor, as what they learn from me, I think. Whether it's good stuff, or not good stuff.

Participant G started off by claiming to have completed some training with a provider, became reflective on this claim and changed the claim to "informal" training which was then defended by stating that "I haven't gone into it to become an academic mentor." Interpreting this statement would imply that in-house informal training is sufficient and that it in some way relinquished the need to study mentoring "academically," which is the crux of attending an accredited program of study.

The three mentors that reflected on participating in some form of mentor training described practices that would be contained in accredited mentoring qualification; however, their "qualification" or "certification" seems to have been uncredited. It is interesting though that their descriptions, in comparison to the other four participants, were that much more informative. They described reading and assignments, knowledge development, and also reflection. One of the participants related their coaching skills as informing their mentoring practice as they guide their mentees. However, it is still evident that the courses undertaken were not accredited and therefore unable to be validated. One of the mentors stated that their intent within mentoring was not to become an academic, but just to be able to share in mutual learning. This may be a crucial reason why mentors do not enter into programs that offer an accredited qualification, as they perceive them as being academic and remote from real-world classroom practices.

This first cycle of in vivo coding highlighted the following; that there is a distinction between those claiming training within house, little and not recent, and those claiming that their mentor training involved reading and study. However, it remains the case that all of the participants had received no accredited qualification in mentor training. It follows that the

literature could offer some reasoning for this finding by highlighting potential barriers to the training and investigation of the motivation of candidate participants.

A theoretical framework can therefore be developed which highlights the barriers that could be blocking school-based mentors from seeking formalized qualification in mentoring so far in their career, based on a synthesis of the literature reviewed and the primary data collected in the current study:

**Table 2.** Barriers to qualification

| *Barrier* | *Potential effect* | *Outcome* |
|---|---|---|
| Undefined difference between coaching and mentoring | Causes confusion | Negative<br>Are SBM coaches or mentors, if so why are they called mentors? If the title cannot be fixed then no point gaining a qualification. |
| | Coaching is evaluatory | Negative<br>A coach is an expert developing perfect practice, but who then evaluates the perfection? Becoming a qualified coach will mean assessing and evaluating colleagues. |
| DfE "golden thread" (i.e., ITT Core Content Framework (CCF), ECF, suite of NPQs) documentation contradictory | Causes confusion through lack of clarity | Negative<br>Transposing of coaching/mentoring and who is eligible for NPQs, all mentors or just mentors who lead mentors? Qualification not open to non-leading mentors. |
| PD | Creates self-fulfilling acceptance | Negative<br>In-house and MAT unlikely to involve external higher-level study. Internal training sufficient to mentor, no need for qualification. |
| Unregulated PD | Creates a spectrum of efficacy | Negative<br>Higher level qualifications are verified, internal PD is not. Employed as mentor without need for qualification. |

| *Barrier* | *Potential effect* | *Outcome* |
|---|---|---|
| Acceptance of unqualified practice | Lack of knowledge and study results in procedural practice | Negative<br>Mentoring by intuition, employed as a mentor, so no need for qualification. |
| Selection is ad hoc | "Cinderella" responsibility | Negative<br>Employment dependent on head teacher's selection from internal pool. Mentors change as the pool changes, affecting continuity and importance. Employed as a mentor so no need to gain qualification. |
| Brexit<br>(withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union on January 31, 2020) | Divergence from recognition of member state qualifications | Negative<br>Deregulation, employed as an unqualified mentor so no need to gain qualification. |
| Head teacher resistant to outside influence | Unidirectional practice | Negative<br>Hierarchical management structures limit individual's ability to influence practice, even when gaining higher level qualification. Qualifications not valued. |
| Professional direction and association purpose | Teaching profession is government controlled which leads to technicist profession | Negative<br>Teaching does not have professional associations such as in medicine, law, and construction. Little incentive to gain higher qualifications. |
| Qualification associated with NQF | Mandatory and changes motivation from intrinsic to extrinsic | Negative<br>Extrinsic motivation is less effective than intrinsic. |

Table 2 shows variables that could be disincentivizing to teachers' motivation to engage in accredited qualifications pertaining to mentoring. The variables appear to exist because either teachers lack intrinsic motivation to proceed with higher level qualification, or extrinsic factors such as school hierarchy, inclusive of government at macro level and leadership at micro level do not value qualifications for teachers lower on the career scale. The participant school mentors interviewed in the current study all stated that they do not hold an accredited qualification in mentoring and that their prior experience has not

required them to either; so, why does such an important role not require a qualification to practice?

A hypothesis, assertion, and proposition can now be put forward, as presented in Figure 2:

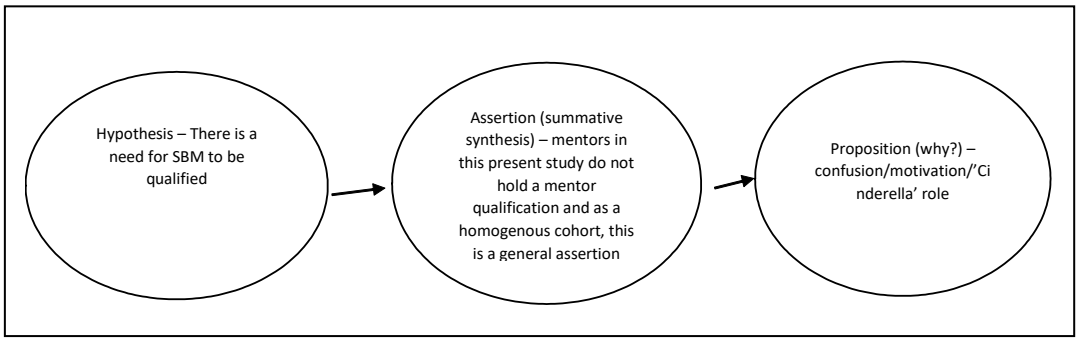


**Figure 2.** Hypothesis, assertion and proposition

The current practice can be represented as shown in Figure 3, and the major themes presented thematically as shown in Figure 4.

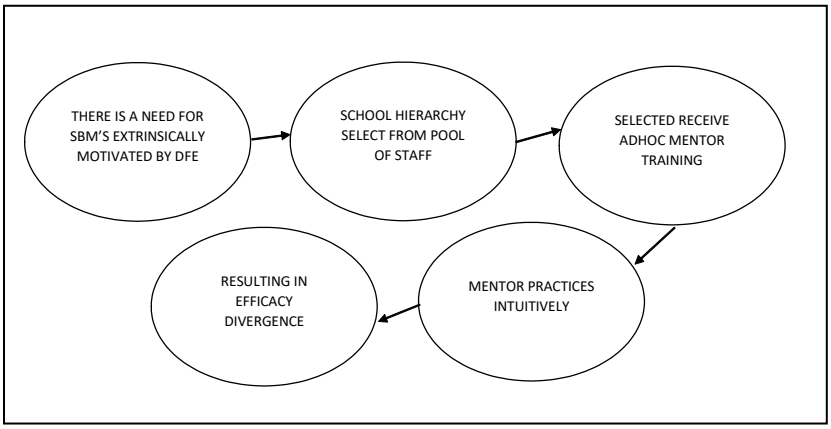


**Figure 3.** Present practice in graphic form

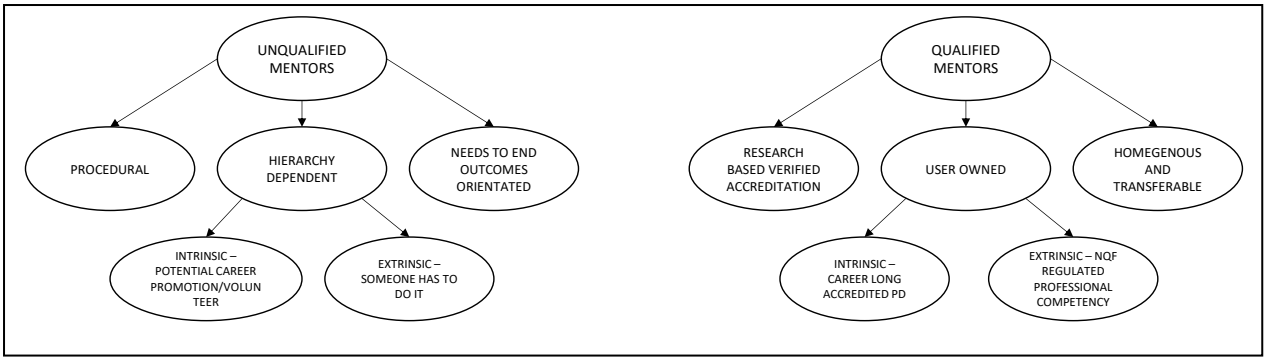


**Figure 4.** Thematic array of the major themes arising

Interpreting the literature and the participants' comments as mentors in the current study, the major themes can be demonstrated thematically as follows:

Two models are emerging. What appears to be happening in the field is that unqualified SBMs are needed to satisfy school performance systems, which is both ad hoc and

unpredictable, whereas a fully regulated system could alleviate the pressure that the former practice is building.

A holistic practice model could look like:

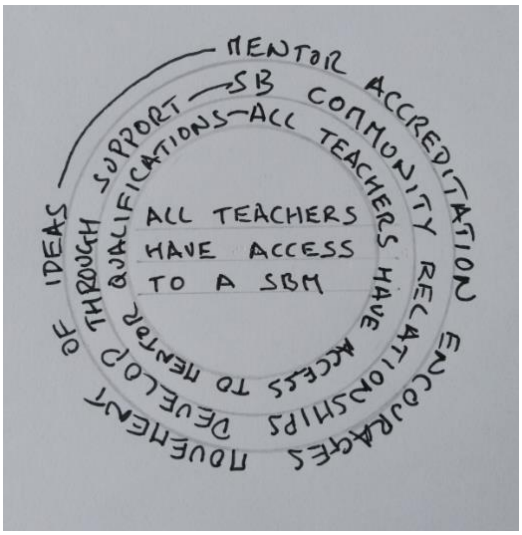


**Figure 5.** Community holistic qualified mentor model

Figure 5 shows the accepted premise that all teachers, wherever they are on their respective career path, should have access to a SBM. However, it differs from the present situation wherein every teacher should have access to an accredited mentor qualification, which would equalize efficacy, engage teachers in current thinking and research, and encourage nationwide communication amongst teaching professionals.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The current study aimed to identify the competences developed by preservice teachers during teaching practicum for bachelor degrees in Early Childhood Education and Primary Education, considering the perspective of school mentors as assessors.

The current research confirms that the participant mentor teachers' reasoning was intrinsic, that mentoring was valued by the participants, and that it was a role that they enjoy and which had been deliberately chosen by each of them. The suite of NPQs, which require a financial investment to complete, are not open to all teachers and remain at the discretion of the head teacher to fund. Mentoring teachers at all stages of their professional career has been recognized as crucial by the English government, but the government has not yet committed to providing accredited qualifications in mentoring. The English Advisory Group for ITT has recommended fully-funded access to the NPQ in Leading Teacher Development Framework for one lead mentor in every ITT participating school, or two if the school is part of an "intensive practice" (DfE, 2021b). However, this qualification is not mentoring specific; indeed, the expectation is that ITT providers will also supplement this program's content through further mentor training (DfE, 2021b, Annex B).

This is a disabler that creates a barrier to accredited professional development, and in order for the teaching profession to revert back in line with other professions there needs to be a true professional teaching organization, with chartered recognition, which holds the status and accreditation of teacher members. As such it would be self-regulated and funded by the industry itself, inclusive of all educational stakeholders, and on a par with other

professions, which is not the same as the intended Institute of Teaching, which coordinates the national frameworks in the United Kingdom (DfE, 2021b).

The English government has recognized that some schools face significant problems in teacher recruitment and retention, with barriers to entering the teaching profession including a "perceived lack of development opportunities" and for those that have left, the third most important issue was "feeling undervalued" (DfE, 2017). The literature highlights that mentoring is at the discretion of head teachers, not only as a form of support for early career teaching professionals, but as a means of aiding teachers' career progression. This is in contrast to that seen in other professions, whereby from the outset of the chosen career, career progression, further qualification, and professional recognition play explicitly important roles in the recruitment and retention of individuals (e.g., see construction publications such as Construction Industry Training Board (n.d.). In a study regarding the forming of professional habits pertaining to teacher efficacy, Hobbiss et al. (2021) proposed that teachers need repeated practice through instructional coaching in order to break from automaticity which limits their professional growth. However, this is harking back to the provision of PD by Local Education Authorities, where experts from the Authority deliver government mantra known as National Strategies to teachers across the borough (or MAT as in the current case), which is hardly conducive to reflective practitioners with agency and autonomy worthy of professionals.

The antecedal conditions, mediating variables, and outcomes that can be determined from the current study are therefore as presented in Figure 6:

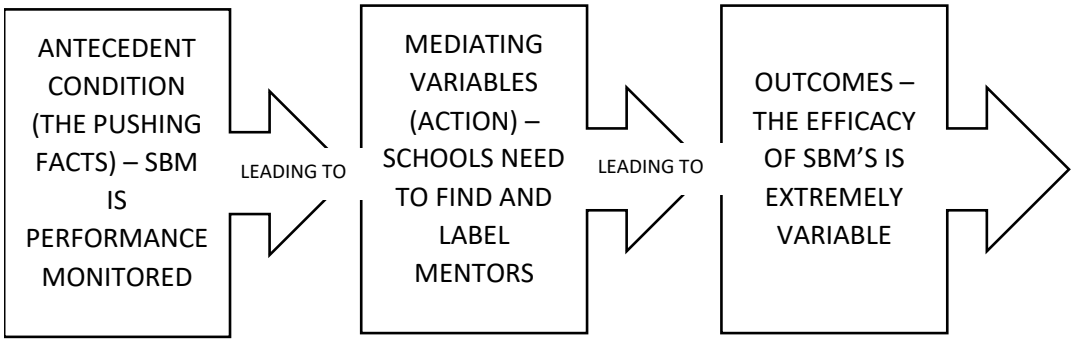


**Figure 6.** Antecedent conditions, mediating variables, and outcomes

Figure 6 implies that the cause, reason, and motive for SBMs are a kneejerk reaction to the government's assertion that there should be SBMs in place. The findings of the current study would suggest there is little desire or motivation in teachers to seek further qualification through formal study. In consequence, the Office for Standards in Education (known generally as OFSTED) (2020) in the United Kingdom reported that some mentors do not have the capacity for the role and lack the requisite knowledge and skill to support ITT. Further research of NQTs by the English government (DfE, 2019b) found that the introduction to educational theory and research scored the lowest rating from the questionnaire, while at the same time guidance on identifying CPD also scored low. This would suggest that new teachers do not want to engage in educational theory and research, but prefer to be shown and told how to develop their teaching and learning; see previous discussion on CPD being prescriptive. The phenomenon of "spoon feeding" was investigated in Wilkinson (2017), wherein PGCE ITE students specializing in Computer Science when given a live problem to solve, immediately sought guidance from their tutor. Further research is

therefore needed to investigate this issue, because rather than the English government's desire to have a teaching workforce who are engaged in practitioner research, the National Curriculum seems to be producing individuals who have a preference for being "spoon fed" throughout school and into training for the teaching profession, and then expect the same in the workplace too. See Wilkinson (2018) for a discussion on assessing ITT through student progress and data.

The concept of informed clinical practice was reviewed by Burn and Mutton (2015), wherein clinical practice implies duplicity with training for medicine. This professional training engages in reasoning, clinical judgement, decision making, interpretation, and creativity through hypothesis testing and problem solving, all of which require involvement from higher education and practicing researchers, and is therefore not merely research informed. However, qualitative research of practicing teachers conducted by the Standing Committee for the Education and Training of Teachers (Shaw, 2008) reported that 89% of teachers lack the same standing as lawyers and doctors, 76% believe that their pay should be comparable with lawyers and doctors, 91% believe that they should be recognized as professionals, 72% believe their professionalism is diminishing, whilst 48% believe that the GTCE has made them more professional. The research suggested that 90% felt that teachers want to be recognized as professionals, but that qualitative evidence indicated that professionalism was used as a stick with which to admonish teachers. The dichotomy of professionalism is raised once again, wherein a professional title is sought, but the accountability through accreditation is not.

Indeed, the English government's alignment to the Deans for Impact (2017) teacher training framework suggested a skills development model in the following sequence, modeling, practice, feedback, and alignment; notably without mention of educational theory or research. The English government says that it follows good quality scientific evidence for its educational philosophy, but the evidence drawn upon is not positive science, it is behavioral science and therefore is open to interpretation and dependent on context. The further removed from positive science it is, the more vulnerable to ideological interpretation and political influence it becomes. For instance, the Deans for Impact (2017) ITT framework, is referenced in the recent ITT Market Review (DfE, 2021a) and Cognitive Load Theory and Systematic phonetic phonics, which are both referenced in the English Governments ITT CCF (DfE, 2019b). By making these "research proofs" mandatory empirical evidence that cannot be questioned, the English government is providing prescriptive instructions for teaching and learning and moving further away from generating teachers who are independent, autonomous research practitioners who are able to question and interpret research. Today's reality is that teaching in schools has become a technical occupation, where the government's interpretation of research is inspected by its monitors, OFSTED. Writing in 1927, Dewey would describe this as an oligarchy managed by the few, relying on their own experts (Dewey, 1991/1927). Indeed, the inquiry into the role of research in teacher education by the British Education Research Association (BERA) in association with the Royal Society for the Arts (RSA) (2014), delineated this as a craft view to a narrow technical view and went on to recommend that all teachers should be involved in inquiry research through accredited PD (at the Masters' level) in order to re-professionalize teaching.

The performativity concept of Ball (2003) is very much at large and as Howard-Jones et al. (2020) disclosed in their study of Science-of-Learning PD, performativity beliefs of teaching and learning, based on behaviorism, are difficult to shake, especially for less experienced teachers. Perry et al. (2019), in their consideration of the ITT curriculum also

analyzed the literature, and stated that ITT has become politicized, and placement focuses on practicalities in transmission/apprenticeship within a professional setting. Considering that postgraduate routes into teaching have become predominant, unlike other professions whose applicants are drawn from specific subject area graduations, the ITT is the first engagement into teaching and learning and potentially the first opportunity for participants to engage in theory and research through higher level study and accreditation. In 2009, the English government launched a Master's Degree in Teaching and Learning (MTL), in an attempt to emulate Scandinavian teaching qualification requirements. The initiative led university teacher training providers to re-accredit PGCE ITE courses to the Masters' level. However, the incoming government subsequently abandoned the MTL and ceased its funding as from 2010. These missed opportunities for higher study could be to the detriment of future engagement, which could then pose dire consequences to a profession seeking equality of with other professions.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The inductive hypothesis from the current study would suggest that there is a recurrent phenomenon of intrinsic motivation to offer oneself as a SBM, which is juxtaposed with a deductive hypothesis that this is happening because the government is mandating that there should be SBMs in schools, providing the extrinsic push. Hobson and Malderez (2013) concluded that mentoring needed accredited qualification; whilst the current research asked whether practicing teacher mentors had undertaken any formal training in mentoring. However, for further research is needed in order to understand why mentors presently do not hold a qualification in mentoring, and if it became mandatory to be qualified in mentoring would motivation then become extrinsic? Following which, what effect would this have on the desire of teachers to become mentors? The current study therefore offers the following predictions:

- What is possible (what might happen) – SBM label is a fad and will lose trajectory.
- What is plausible (what could happen) – SBMs will continue to offer their services intrinsically to fulfill a benefactor role, but is this sustainable?
- What is preferable (what should happen) – All SBMs become accredited mentors and engage in professional communities of practice.

## 7. SUGGESTIONS

It could be suggested that the participant teacher-mentors in the current study were merely offering their perspective on their own experiences as to whether or not they had undertaken mentor training. However, they were not asked to justify their answers and therefore the interpretation of their comments has led to the conclusion that mentors lack accredited qualification in mentoring, but justified their practice through the experiences and ad hoc training they have accumulated. There could be a situation where a longstanding mentor provides mentorship for multiple teachers over time, which could address the typical shortcomings of being ad hoc and unpredictable. Over time, this person could even develop intrinsic motivation to encourage mentees to engage in current thinking and research. They just would not be accredited or available to every new teacher. However, this would be by chance, rather than design, which leads to the conclusion that current practice is an unknown and fragile, which is not conducive to a professional body.

## DECLARATIONS

**Author Contributions:** Dr. Carl Wilkinson is sole author. The author has read and approved the publishing on the final version of the article.

**Conflicts of Interest:** No conflict of interest.

**Funding:** None.

**Ethical Approval :**The research was approved by Leeds Beckett University's Research Ethics Committee.

**Data Availability Statement:** All of the data collected for this paper's question is published in this piece.

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