

*Book Review***Stories of Mentoring Teacher-Research**

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Authored by Richard Smith, Seden Eraldemir, Mariana Serra, and Erzsébet Békés, this collection compiled mentoring experiences on teachers and student-teachers who aspired to conduct research in their classrooms. While every chapter in the book focuses deeply on mentoring and teachers' research in a specific country, the book, covers a surprising range of geographical regions and educational contexts. This provides significant insights into diverse realities of teaching, research, and mentoring. The authors, in this book, were invited to share their stories reflectively, describing their teaching context, issues faced, people involved, and their learning experience, which helps the reader connect more easily with the authors' experiences. My own research journey resonates strongly with these narratives. I often felt uncertain about which methodologies or research approaches would be most appropriate for my classroom context, and I frequently questioned whether I was interpreting the principles of action research correctly. Joining the IATEFL mentoring program connected me with my mentor, Erzsébet Ágnes Békés, who patiently guided me and helped me build confidence in my abilities. She helped me find my academic voice and the courage to share my ideas, which is why reading *Stories of Mentoring Teacher-Researchers* was deeply meaningful for me. The connection between a teacher's own experience and the larger mentoring community naturally invites deeper exploration of what the book offers. This volume, co-edited by Erzsébet herself, not only reflects the learning processes experienced by many teachers but also the transformative power of mentorship.

In Chapter 1, Mayamin Altae establishes a strong opening and illustrates how valuable mentoring can be, not just for learning how to conduct research but for staying emotionally strong in the face of uncertainty. Altae, a mentor from Qatar University, worked with a group of seven Iraqi teachers trying to rebuild their teaching practices after the ongoing wars and conflicts that have continued to affect their country up to the present day. Altae

describes the obstacles Iraqi teachers faced in a post-conflict zone, such as the lack of formal mentorship support, safety concerns, limited access to technology, and the pressing need for immediate teaching solutions due to the chaotic educational context in Iraq. The adaptability and commitment to empowering teachers through flexible, research-informed approaches were undoubtedly crucial components of this mentoring process. The author states in her narrative, “I was aware that conditions can change rapidly. I ensured that the teachers knew that my support was to enable them to react to difficult conditions as and when they happen, using research-based practices.” (p. 19). Despite some challenges such as working remotely via Zoom and constant power outages, unstable internet, and a lack of resources, mentees could successfully obtain positive results. For instance, her mentoring helped teachers improving teachers’ knowledge, strengthening their professional identity, and developing practical researching strategies within a highly challenging educational environment. Altae demonstrated exceptional patience and sensitivity and created a space that provided both academic and emotional support was the key element that helped her mentees conduct research. This chapter concludes by describing successful research projects that were presented at an international conference and extends a strong call for more mentoring opportunities and resources for educators in conflict-affected areas, as Iraq continues its journey toward rebuilding a stable and effective educational system. Recent qualitative studies further confirm that mentoring programs play a crucial role in developing teacher identity and supporting educators in challenging contexts, including Iraq (Shareef, 2023)

After the precedent set by the initial chapter, it becomes clear that continuing with the remaining stories is worthwhile. As the volume progresses, organizing the narratives thematically provides a clearer and more meaningful understanding of the mentoring experiences shared. Therefore, four main themes emerge: innovative mentoring strategies; mentors’ flexibility and adaptability to their mentees’ needs; and the challenges some mentees faced with Exploratory Action Research (EAR) approach, and mentoring’s role in boosting teachers’ growth and confidence.

The first theme, mentoring innovative mentoring is illustrated by Eric Ekembe in Chapter 10 and by Rubén Mazzei and Mariana Serra in Chapter 11. Eric mentored a large group of 72 teachers from various African countries. Facing the challenge of mentoring such a large group, he realized that the traditional one-on-one mentoring was not appropriate, and to work more effectively, he divided the group into small teams and assigned coordinators. This team-based method significantly improved peer support and collaboration, leading to more engaging and dynamic mentoring sessions. Recent research has also shown that team-based and co-mentoring models do contribute significantly to creating supportive social environments that foster professional growth and engagement among teachers (Dreer-Goethe, 2025; Crites et al., 2022). Moreover, the internal and external co-mentoring strategy provided mentees with a multi-layered support model that enriched the learning process and enhanced the overall mentoring experience. Mariana and Ruben also included

innovative strategies in their mentoring process; to record their mentees' thoughts, reflections, and difficulties, they encouraged their mentees to create a shared journal document where they could express themselves freely. Although initial contributions were limited, this resulted in an enriching peer-learning process where they could learn from each other's experiences. This level of organization and creative initiative in dealing with challenges reveals the mentor's true desire to help their peers and contribute to their community of practice. While Eric's peer-to-peer mentoring approach created a cooperative learning environment in which mentees could share their experiences and viewpoints, Mariana and Ruben's co-mentoring helped teachers expand their mentoring experience and create a diverse place for professional development. The collective efforts narrated in these chapters vividly illustrate the impact of mentoring on not just the individual teachers but also on the broader educational community.

The second recurring theme across many narratives is the mentor's flexibility and adaptability towards their mentees' needs and real-life demands and time constraints, which are often cited as a major barrier to teachers' professional development (Niez, 2024; Vakili et al., 2024). In response to these realities, some mentors felt the need to adapt their mentoring strategies. Tasnima Aktar's story in chapter 13 is a vivid example. Facing the challenge of living abroad, coordinating communications across different time zones, and dealing with connectivity inconsistencies with her mentees, she created a routine of regular meetings, gentle reminders, and a supportive atmosphere to encourage participation and track progress. Despite initial doubts about the project's feasibility and fluctuations in motivation among mentees, this strategy enabled her to keep track of her mentees' participation and growth. Consequently, six mentees presented their findings in the IATEFL Research SIG Teachers Research! conference and one successfully published her action research findings in a journal. Another noteworthy example of flexibility and adaptability is demonstrated by Vanita Chopra and Gyanu Dahal, in chapter 9, who developed their mentorship during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led them to adjust the communication channels and platforms, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Zoom, Google Docs, etc. to promote communication and provide support to their mentees. Through their narratives, the authors highlight the importance of regularly checking in with their mentees to understand their issues and demonstrating a willingness to modify expectations and deadlines as needed. Such strategies align with the research mentoring and adaptability practices. Finally, Ravinarayan Chakrakodi in chapter 4 shares some challenges he faced during his mentoring practices, citing his mentees inconsistent follow-through on their action plans after the exploratory phase of their teacher-research projects due to various conflicts and pressures. Therefore, he decided to adopt an enhancement approach that emphasized success rather than solely focusing on the problems. Thus, he strategically reduced their workload, demonstrating his willingness to adapt his mentoring style to the individual needs of his mentees, which ultimately resulted in higher engagement and completion rates within the group. Connecting this to my personal experience as a mentee,

I recall how my mentor adapted our meetings to suit my workload, which not only reduced the pressure but also made the process more engaging. My mentor's adaptability, like that of Tasnima and others in this collection, was crucial in helping to make the mentoring process seem achievable, significant, and inspiring.

A third theme that emerges from the narratives is the difficulty some mentees encountered in understanding Exploratory Action Research (EAR). While flexibility and adaptability were often highlighted as essential for facilitating teachers' development, several stories indicate that fully comprehending EAR demands significant time, ongoing mentoring, and a clear understanding of its fundamental concepts. Speaking from personal experience as a teacher who initially faced similar confusion when learning about research, I find these accounts deeply relatable. Three stories particularly stood out to me due to the patience and practical support demonstrated through their plan of action. The first narrative, written by Fauzia Shamim and Richard Smith in chapter 16, examines the difficulties in providing mentorship to educators conducting EAR. They noted that initially, mentors struggled to completely understand how the implications and methodologies in EAR differ from the more traditional research implications. Smith and Shamim explained, "I stressed that EAR is a practitioner research model and doesn't necessarily follow the norms of the more academic research or more positivistic research" (p. 117). For example, the mentors requested to include graphs even for very small sets of qualitative data, and they were unsure about the fact of their using their reflection as valid data, which is possible in EAR. Through these experiences, the mentors obtained valuable insights into the mental barriers that teachers face when embracing what may seem like the 'simpler' EAR model. María Marta Mora (Chapter 18) and Suchita Mahorkar (Chapter 3) provide further examples of challenges when understanding EAR methodology, which particularly came when formulating effective exploratory questions and selecting appropriate data that adhere to EAR methods. According to Mora, her mentees initially struggled to create clear exploratory questions and find appropriate data collection methods, which is a common issue in exploratory research that lacks formal frameworks and demands adaptability from both mentors and mentees. On the other hand, Suchita Mahorkar's experience mentoring teachers in Maharashtra, India, illustrates the initial challenges that many mentees encountered when navigating the EAR process. Many people rushed into action plans before fully engaging in the exploratory phase, leading to incomplete research outcomes, which is a frequent error in exploratory research when the foundational step is missed. Together, these stories demonstrate that, while EAR provides flexibility and the possibility of meaningful professional development, it also requires a thorough comprehension of its exploratory core. Effective mentorship with regular meetings, defined by patience, collaboration, and practical support, is critical in assisting teachers to overcome these difficulties and reap the full benefits of exploratory action research.

Another common theme across many of the mentoring stories is the significant and positive impact that mentoring has on the teachers' professional growth, especially through

the opportunities to participate in academic conferences or publish their first paper in EFL journals. Notably, through these experiences, teachers not only assist mentees' growth as researchers but also help them gain more recognition and confidence in their teaching careers. For example, in Chapter 6, Chang Liu describes how, through her mentorship, in which she used a participant-centered approach, a group of Chinese EFL university teachers successfully engaged in Exploratory Action Research. Her mentoring growth plan enabled her mentees to present their findings at academic conferences and submit papers to peer-reviewed journals. Liu reflects on this journey as a novice mentor, noting that "...witnessing the mentees' achievements was likewise rewarding[...], their unwavering commitment and enthusiasm for the 15-month EAR journey were palpable." (p.51) This example highlights how effective mentoring can empower teachers to develop valuable research skills while simultaneously boosting their professional confidence and visibility. Following the same line, Meifang Zhuo in Chapter 7 and Vinayadhar Raju in Chapter 8 show how mentors can foster a supportive environment that allows mentees to demonstrate their capacity to engage in collaborative research projects and eventually participate in educational conferences to present their findings. For instance, one of Zhuo's seven mentees attempted to write up their classroom research for publication and two others have already published an article on their classroom research in an internationally acknowledged journal. On the other hand, Raju stated that under his guidance, teachers embarked on their own research journeys, gaining confidence and developing new skills along the way. With such results, mentoring has been shown to strengthen teachers' academic achievements, increase their sense of autonomy, and empower them. Studies confirm that mentoring relationships play a crucial role in fostering teachers' professional identity and academic success, especially by providing greater access to research experiences and involvement in academic events (Goodnough & Schiavone, 2021; Wang & Zang, 2024). These stories highlight the crucial role of mentoring in enabling teachers not only to enhance their research capacity but also to gain visibility and confidence within the academic community and resonate with me because during my experience as a mentee I could witness from my own experience that, with the help of the advice and support I was given, I was able to achieve success in my work for the first time, which increased my self-confidence and made me sense that I was connected in the academic world.

While these stories are both motivating and illustrative, they also highlight opportunities for the book to broaden its scope. The book offers a broad analysis of diverse geographical and educational contexts, certain locations and sociocultural realities, especially those from under-resourced or under-represented environments deserve deeper exploration. The chapters on European and East Asian educational environments are notably detailed; however, comparable perspectives from African or remote Latin American contexts are less thoroughly covered. Including these voices would have enhanced the book's overall understanding of mentoring practices across diverse cultural and systemic frameworks.

To sum up, the mentoring stories in this book reveal both the challenges and the powerful positive impact that mentorship can have in different educational settings. They show how mentoring helps teacher-researchers grow, especially when working with complex approaches like Exploratory Action Research (EAR). With patience, understanding, and ongoing support, mentors help teachers gain confidence, find their academic voice, and take important steps forward in their careers. These accounts demonstrate that with empathy, adaptability, and continuous guidance, mentors can empower researchers to gain confidence, strengthen their scholarly expression, and progress professionally. This volume will be especially useful for educators and researchers interested in how mentoring can support growth and development. Its key offers real-life examples from diverse contexts that illustrate the integration of emotional and academic help offered by mentoring. Future study may expand upon this foundation by investigating mentoring in underrepresented regions and examining its longer-term effects on teacher-researchers. Overall, this volume serves as both a valuable academic resource and a source of personal inspiration, reminding us of the power of human connection in education and the lasting effects of meaningful mentorship.

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