



# Deconstructing Mentoring for Effective Educational Leadership

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**Abstract:** *This study explores the role of mentoring in the professional development of school leaders in Uganda's secondary education system. Drawing from global literature and Uganda's national education policies, the study critically examines existing mentoring practices, highlights challenges, and proposes a context-sensitive framework to enhance leadership development. The review reveals that while mentoring is widely recognized as a strategic tool for educational leadership, its implementation in Uganda is largely informal, unstructured, and misaligned with the specific needs of novice head teachers. Most mentoring occurs without formal guidelines, mentor training, or alignment to strategic leadership competencies such as policy navigation and stakeholder engagement. Cultural and institutional factors, such as rigid hierarchies, gender dynamics, time constraints, and lack of policy support further hinder the effectiveness of mentoring. The study adopts a desk-based methodology, using thematic analysis of secondary data from academic and policy sources between 1994 and 2024. Findings emphasize the need for a structured, policy-backed mentoring framework with defined phases, trained mentors, and institutional support. The study recommends integrating mentoring into national professional development systems to ensure consistency, relevance, and sustainability. Such a framework would enhance leadership readiness and improve school performance by equipping new leaders with the skills and confidence needed to manage Uganda's dynamic education environment.*

**Keywords:** *Mentoring, Educational Leadership, Novice Head Teachers, Professional Development, Mentoring Framework, Leadership Development, Institutional Support, Policy Implementation*

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## **1. Introduction**

Globally, mentoring has emerged as a vital component of professional and organizational development, particularly

in leadership training and succession planning (Ruru et al., 2013). As leadership roles become more complex, mentorship is increasingly recognized across disciplines for its role in enhancing leadership effectiveness (Eacott, 2011). In the education sector, it is viewed as essential for developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and motivation

required for effective school leadership (Bertrand et al., 2018). Mentoring offers a structured, relational process that supports personal and professional growth, especially for novice school heads transitioning into new roles (Krasnova & Mamchits, 2021). These programs foster collaboration between experienced and novice leaders, enabling knowledge exchange and leadership development (Bazilio, 2019). Consequently, mentoring acts as a strategic tool for preparing new teachers and administrators to meet the evolving demands of education (McConnell et al., 2021).

Mentoring benefits not only mentees but also mentors, who gain deeper insights and professional growth through the process (Caena, 2021). Well-structured mentoring programs enhance role clarity, reduce isolation, and promote alignment with organizational culture (Sciarappa & Mason, 2014). They also help new administrators understand educational trends and adapt to diverse contexts (Felicello, 2014). As school leaders increasingly act as lead learners and change agents, mentoring must support reflective practice, action learning, and collaborative problem solving (Caena, 2021). Nonetheless, challenges such as inadequate training, time constraints, limited resources, and lack of standardized models hinder program effectiveness (Bertrand et al., 2018; Barnett & O'Mahony, 2009). These issues weaken institutional support and leave novice leaders underprepared. Thus, there is an urgent need to redesign mentoring frameworks to include national training, continuous support, and structured follow-up to better equip school leaders for success (Yirci & Kocabas, 2010; Bazilio, 2019).

## 1.1 Policy Framework

### 1.1.1 Policy Reforms

Uganda's education policies align with global and national goals such as the MDGs, EFA, and the Ministry of Education and Sports' (MoES) mission to promote quality, equity, and efficiency. Central among these is the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2004–2015, which guides improvements in institutional performance. Complementing this are Customized Performance Targets (CPTs) for head teachers to enhance accountability through SMART goal-setting and constructive feedback (MoES, 2012). The Education Act (2008) provides the legal framework for education delivery and mandates the development of mentoring and induction structures for professional growth (Uganda Government, 2008).

The National Teacher Policy (2019) advances mentoring as a core element of teacher induction, CPD, and leadership development. This is reinforced by the Teacher Induction Policy (2015), which offers structured mentoring support

to newly recruited teachers, easing their transition and fostering retention. The Uganda National Standards for Teacher Professional Development (UNESCO, 2017) also recognize mentoring and coaching as vital lifelong learning tools to enhance pedagogy and career growth.

The **Scheme of Service for Teaching Personnel** outlines career progression, minimum qualifications, and professional expectations to raise teacher morale and performance (MoES, 2010). It defines roles, promotional ladders, and training standards critical for sustaining effective mentoring practices.

**Inspection and Supervision**, overseen by the Directorate of Education Standards (DES), ensures quality through classroom observation, document reviews, and action planning. Though inspections aim to guide instructional improvement, challenges such as inadequate follow-up and political interference limit their impact (Malunda et al., 2016).

Finally, the **Performance Management and Development System (PMDS)** integrates mentoring into education sector HR practices to support performance and leadership. The **School Leadership Development Policy** (2020) builds head teachers' capacity through coaching and mentoring, promoting innovation, collaboration, and effective school culture. Collectively, these policies embed mentoring within Uganda's education system as a tool for teacher development, leadership strengthening, and institutional accountability.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although mentoring is globally recognized as a strategic tool for professional and leadership development in education, its practice in schools especially for teachers and head teachers remains inconsistent, informal, and insufficiently theorized (McConnell et al., 2021). Despite its acknowledged role in promoting knowledge sharing and leadership readiness (Bertrand et al., 2018), many schools in developing contexts like Uganda lack structured, context-sensitive frameworks. Mentoring is often ad hoc, shaped by individual school cultures and leadership styles, with little policy or institutional support (MoES, 2024), leading to unequal professional development and inconsistent leadership outcomes (Margaret, 2016).

The absence of a national mentoring policy and formal induction for new educators contributes to challenges such as weak supervision, poor staff cohesion, and low morale (Mpaata & Mpaata, 2019; Makara, 2022). Novice teachers and leaders often lack support in navigating institutional roles or adapting to school contexts (Okumu et al., 2021),

while mentors themselves are frequently untrained and overburdened (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2009). Though global literature highlights mentorship's transformative potential (Caena, 2021), in Uganda it remains undervalued, poorly resourced, and unevaluated (Akech, 2016). This gap calls for a critical rethinking of mentoring to ensure it supports both teacher and leadership development system-wide.

### 1.3 The Purpose of the study

This study aims to examine existing mentoring practices for teachers and school leaders and identify gaps. It seeks to propose a structured framework to enhance educational leadership and inform policy and practice.

### 1.4 Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the key concepts and theoretical underpinnings of mentoring in educational leadership.
2. To explore the models and practices of mentoring used to support novice head teachers.
3. To analyze the benefits and challenges of mentoring in the professional development of school leaders.
4. To assess the influence of institutional, cultural, and policy contexts on mentoring practices in Uganda.
5. To identify gaps in existing mentoring frameworks and propose a context-sensitive model for Ugandan secondary schools.

### 1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the key concepts and theoretical foundations that define mentoring in educational leadership?
2. What models and mentoring practices are currently used to support novice head teachers in schools?
3. What are the perceived benefits and challenges of mentoring in the professional development of school leaders?
4. How do institutional, cultural, and policy contexts influence mentoring practices in Uganda's education system?
5. What gaps exist in current mentoring frameworks, and how can a context-sensitive model be developed for Ugandan secondary schools?

## 2. Literature Review

This review explores mentoring in educational leadership, particularly for novice head teachers, analyzing its concepts, theories, models, practices, benefits, and challenges. Mentoring is examined as a developmental, relational process shaped by institutional, cultural, and policy contexts. A conceptual review is appropriate for synthesizing varied perspectives and informing a context-sensitive framework for Uganda.

### 2.1 Meaning and Concept of Mentoring

Mentoring is multifaceted, shaped by context and participant roles. Gettys (2010) defines it as a developmental relationship promoting knowledge and skill growth, while Bertrand et al. (2018) emphasize guidance and leadership development. McConnell et al. (2021) highlight the importance of structure and environment. Felicello (2014) and Caena (2021) view mentoring as reciprocal and dialogic, enabling mutual learning. Eacott (2011) stresses communication and mutual respect as essential for effective partnerships.

Grogan and Crow (2004) argue for informal, affinity-based mentoring, while Hernandez and Menchaca (2011) support admiration-based mentee selection. Contemporary perspectives advocate for adaptive, co-learning models (Krasnova & Mamchits, 2021; Connery & Frick, 2021). Edna (2022) emphasizes emotional support and holistic life skills, reflecting a shift from hierarchical models toward inclusive and transformative practices.

Despite conceptual richness, gaps persist. Definitions rarely address policy or institutional influences. Little focus is placed on mentor preparation or the unique needs of head teachers. Empirical grounding is limited in low-resource contexts like Uganda, where mentoring is informal and under-resourced (Akech, 2016).

### 2.2 Theoretical Review

Several theories underpin mentoring. Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory emphasizes modeling, but may overlook mentee agency (Schunk & Mullen, 2013). Knowles' Adult Learning Theory stresses self-direction and relevance (Findik, 2025; Pope, 2024), while Cognitive Apprenticeship Theory (Collins et al., 1989) highlights guided learning and scaffolding (Mees et al., 2025), though it lacks relational depth.

Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985) is most relevant, promoting vision-sharing, empowerment, and

individualized support (Bodilenyane & Mooketsane, 2019; Mbindyo et al., 2021). Although sometimes vague, it offers a holistic framework for mentoring leaders through relational, instructional, and visionary practices (Ismail, 2018).

### 2.3 Holistic Perspectives on Mentoring

Effective mentoring in educational leadership involves communication, modeling, and mutual engagement (McConnell et al., 2021; Miller-Smith, 2021). Mentees must be open to feedback and committed to growth (Mpaata, 2019). Mentoring fosters critical thinking and adaptability, vital for navigating school dynamics (Heikkinen et al., 2011; Grogan & Crow, 2004).

Mentoring can be formal (goal-oriented, structured), informal (interest-based), supervisory (linked to performance), or collaborative (group-based) (Ruru et al., 2013; Sciarappa & Mason, 2014; Williams, 2013). Variants include peer, reverse, and situational mentoring (Thornton, 2015; Miller-Smith, 2021).

Mentoring typically follows four stages: initiation, negotiation, growth, and closure (Parylo et al., 2012; Msila, 2012; Sciarappa & Mason, 2014; Thornton, 2015). It intersects with coaching, induction, supervision, and training, enhancing professional development through distinct but complementary methods (Searby, 2010; Felicello, 2014; Tickell, 2011; Krasnova & Mamchits, 2021).

### 2.4 Models and Practices of Mentoring in Education

Mentoring models vary by context. Formal models are structured and policy-driven, as seen in the UK and Singapore (Krasnova & Mamchits, 2021; Lamm et al., 2017). Informal mentoring is unstructured but fosters trust (Grogan & Crow, 2004). Other models include peer and reciprocal mentoring (Felicello, 2014).

In schools, teacher mentoring focuses on instructional skills, while leadership mentoring supports policy navigation and team management (Bertrand et al., 2018). In Uganda, mentoring is informal, lacking mentor training and differentiation between teacher and leader needs (Makara, 2022).

Across Africa, mentoring frameworks are evolving. Kenya and Tanzania have integrated mentoring into education but face challenges like inadequate training and funding (Ngara & Ngwarai, 2012). Uganda's mentoring remains ad

hoc and under-resourced (Okumu et al., 2021; Akech, 2016), though international practices offer insights for improvement.

### 2.5 Benefits of Mentoring in Educational Leadership

Mentoring improves teacher effectiveness in classroom management, planning, and student engagement (Thambekwayo, 2012; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). It enhances confidence and instructional quality (Thornton, 2015). For leaders, it strengthens decision-making, policy implementation, and stakeholder engagement (Daresh, 2004).

Mentoring also improves morale and retention (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Supportive relationships reduce stress and isolation, fostering job satisfaction and stability (Ruru et al., 2013). Both mentors and mentees gain leadership skills and reflective insights (Miller-Smith, 2021). It supports institutional development by sustaining leadership succession and innovation (McGill & Brockbank, 2012; Connery & Frick, 2021).

### 2.6 Challenges in Implementing Mentoring Programs

Challenges in Uganda include lack of mentor training and the assumption that seniority equates to mentoring ability (Hobson et al., 2009; Barnett et al., 2009; Thambekwayo, 2012). Time constraints and resource shortages make mentoring irregular and superficial (Lamm et al., 2017; Fletcher & Mullen, 2012; Bazilio, 2019). Ministries rarely prioritize mentoring (McConnell et al., 2021).

Cultural hierarchies discourage open dialogue, especially across gender or authority lines (Mpaata, 2019; Mphojane, 2019). Informality and lack of needs assessment make mentoring generic and ineffective (Miller-Smith, 2021; Connery & Frick, 2021).

Policy support is weak. Uganda lacks a national mentoring policy, and existing induction programs are shallow and ceremonial (Okumu et al., 2021; Benson, 2011). Poor mentor selection further undermines effectiveness (Thambekwayo, 2012; Parylo et al., 2012). Relationship issues like mismatched expectations and lack of rapport hinder success (Felicello, 2014; Hackmann & Malin, 2019).

## 2.7 Institutional, Cultural, and Policy Influences

Uganda's institutional weaknesses—such as lack of formal structures and time for mentoring—create inconsistency (Okumu et al., 2021). Culturally, hierarchical norms limit trust and openness in mentoring (Mpaata, 2019). Gender dynamics further complicate interactions, particularly for female mentees (Mphojane, 2019).

Policy-wise, Uganda lacks standardized mentoring guidelines or national strategy (Akech, 2016; Margaret, 2016). Most programs are school-led, underfunded, and unmonitored, leading to unsustainable outcomes.

## 2.8 Gaps in Existing Frameworks and the Need for a Context-Sensitive Model

Most mentoring frameworks assume long-term, structured engagement (Msila, 2012), but Uganda relies on informal, short-term models lacking continuity. There is limited practical exposure and feedback (Eacott, 2011), with little use of advanced tools or retired mentors (Marshall, 2021). Institutional support, mentor training, and planning are weak (Munir & Amin, 2020).

Phases such as initiation, reflection, and evaluation are often skipped, with no documentation or tracking (Akech, 2016; Nthenya, 2012). A responsive model must embed mentoring into school culture, allocate time, and provide rigorous mentor training. It should blend one-on-one, peer, and group approaches, involve retired mentors, and be underpinned by national policy frameworks.

## 2.9 Gaps in Literature

Conceptually, most studies overlook the unique needs of school leaders and the organizational factors affecting mentoring. Empirically, data is skewed toward developed countries, ignoring Sub-Saharan Africa and private schools. There are few longitudinal studies or gender-sensitive analyses.

Under-researched areas include the role of school culture, differentiated mentoring, and mentor/mentee demographic variables. A revised, context-sensitive framework must incorporate school culture, institutional systems, and diverse mentee needs. It should address low-resource realities and support culturally relevant, sustainable mentoring strategies that inform both practice and policy.

## 3. Methodology

This study employed a desk-based research approach, relying entirely on secondary data drawn from existing literature (Guerin et al., 2018). Sources included journal articles, books, theses, institutional reports, and policy documents relevant to educational leadership and mentoring. These materials were critically analyzed to explore both theoretical and practical perspectives on mentoring in the context of head teacher development.

Data were obtained through structured online searches across databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus, Semantic Scholar, and Research Rabbit (Gusenbauer & Haddaway, 2020). Key terms included “Head teacher mentorship,” “Education leadership,” and “Effective leadership.” Although the primary focus was on literature from 1994 to 2024, earlier foundational works were included for conceptual depth and historical context.

Thematic analysis was used to categorize the literature into nine key areas: the meaning of mentoring, mentor skills, forms and stages of mentoring, mentor-mentee relationships, mentoring theories, legal implications, challenges, and improvement strategies (Hee et al., 2020). This approach helped identify dominant viewpoints, recurring themes, and gaps in current knowledge, thereby deepening understanding of mentoring's role in educational leadership.

## 4. Results and Discussion

Findings show that mentoring is globally recognized as essential to leadership development in education. It enhances the professional capacity of novice head teachers, promoting role clarity, confidence, and alignment with institutional culture. Well-structured mentoring fosters smoother transitions into leadership and facilitates reciprocal learning between mentors and mentees, contributing to long-term leadership succession.

However, several challenges hinder effective mentoring, particularly in Uganda. These include the absence of structured policies, lack of mentor training, insufficient time allocation, and rigid hierarchical cultures. Mentoring often remains informal and inconsistent, limiting its institutional impact. Without formal recognition and investment, programs are fragmented and fail to produce sustainable outcomes.

Successful mentoring, according to international practice, requires clear policy support, strategic planning, and adaptable delivery models. Structured induction programs,

group mentoring, and the engagement of experienced or retired leaders as mentors have proven effective elsewhere. Uganda, however, lacks a national mentoring framework, and most mentoring efforts are uncoordinated, resulting in underprepared school leaders.

The review also highlights the need for a context-sensitive mentoring model tailored to Uganda's educational environment. Such a model should include defined phases, mentor training, monitoring tools, and sustainable funding. Emphasizing school culture, differentiated mentoring, and collaborative learning would increase relevance and promote long-term success in leadership development.

## 4. 1 Discussion

Although mentoring is widely valued for its role in educational leadership, its application in Uganda is inconsistent and lacks structure. Most mentoring relationships are informal, with no standardized procedures or shared expectations. This leads to variable outcomes largely dependent on interpersonal dynamics rather than institutional design.

Mentoring practices rarely align with the strategic leadership needs of novice head teachers. Instead of targeted support in areas like planning, stakeholder engagement, and policy execution, mentoring often centers on general administrative advice. While helpful, this falls short of equipping leaders with the competencies required to navigate complex school systems.

Cultural and institutional contexts also shape mentoring outcomes. Hierarchical norms and authority structures restrict open communication, especially where age, gender, or seniority differences exist. Mentees may hesitate to share challenges, while mentors feel constrained by workload and lack of formal recognition. High demands, limited training, and inadequate time allocation further weaken mentoring's potential as a leadership tool.

These findings underscore the need for a structured, policy-backed mentoring framework tailored to Uganda's context. Respondents emphasized mentor training, defined mentoring phases, and integration into national professional development programs. Blended models—combining formal structure with flexibility—would enhance relevance and sustainability. Institutional commitment, resources, and supportive culture are essential to elevate mentoring from a peripheral activity to a central leadership development strategy.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that:

Mentoring in Uganda's secondary schools is largely informal, with inconsistent application and limited institutional support, hindering leadership development.

Existing mentoring practices do not adequately meet the developmental needs of novice head teachers, particularly in areas requiring strategic and instructional leadership.

Institutional and cultural barriers—such as hierarchical structures, lack of mentor training, and time constraints—further undermine mentoring effectiveness.

There is an urgent need for a context-sensitive mentoring framework supported by national policy, clear procedures, mentor preparation, and school-level implementation.

### 5.2 Recommendations

1. The Ministry of Education and school leadership should establish formal mentoring programs with clear objectives, defined phases, and documentation processes to support novice head teachers.
2. Mentoring programs should specifically address the leadership needs of new head teachers, including strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, policy interpretation, and instructional leadership.
3. Institutions should provide mentor training and allocate dedicated time for mentoring activities to overcome cultural barriers and enhance mentoring relationships.
4. A national mentoring policy should be developed and implemented. This policy must be context-specific, offering guidance on mentor selection, training, monitoring, funding, and institutional integration, aligned with Uganda's education system realities.

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