

Evaluation of Peer Mentoring Program in Higher Education: Does it Support Smooth Transition of New Faculty to the Academia?

Yükseköğretimde Mentorluk Programının Değerlendirilmesi: Mentorluk Yeni Öğretim Üyelerinin Akademiye Geçiş Sürecini Kolaylaştırıyor mu?

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ABSTRACT

Faculty mentoring programs are implemented in higher education institutions to support faculty development. Within this respect, the aim of this study was to explore the views and suggestions of mentors and mentees in relation to the effectiveness of the mentoring program in a large state university in Ankara. The study had a qualitative design and semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect data. The sample included 8 mentors and 9 mentees. The qualitative data obtained through interviews were analyzed using descriptive analysis. The results showed that peer mentoring program contributed to professional development of mentees. The mentors also highlighted the benefits of mentoring program for their career. Both mentors and mentees also provided noteworthy suggestions on how to increase effectiveness of the mentoring program.

Keywords: Peer mentoring program, New faculty members, Professional development

ÖZ

Öğretim üyelerine yönelik mentorluk programı, yükseköğretim kurumlarında öğretim üyelerinin gelişimini desteklemek amacıyla uygulanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, çalışmanın amacı, Ankara'daki bir devlet üniversitesinde uygulanan mentorluk programına dâhil olan mentor ve mentee öğretim üyelerinin mentorluk programının etkililiğine yönelik görüşlerini ve önerilerini incelemektir. Çalışmada nitel araştırma deseni ve bu kapsamda veri toplamak için yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılmıştır. Örneklem, sekiz mentor ve dokuz mentee öğretim üyesini kapsamaktadır. Çalışmada elde edilen sonuçlar, akran mentorluk programının öğretim üyelerinin profesyonel gelişimine katkıda bulunduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Mentor öğretim üyeleri aynı zamanda mentorluk programının kendi kariyer gelişimleri için sağladığı katkıları da vurgulamışlardır. Son olarak, çalışmada, hem mentor hem de mentee öğretim üyeleri, mentorluk programının etkililiğini artırmak üzere önemli önerilerde bulunmuşlardır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Akran mentorluk programı, Yeni öğretim üyeleri, Profesyonel gelişim

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INTRODUCTION

The concepts of *mentor* and *mentorship* have been used and often articulated since ancient times. There are several definitions and descriptions of who the mentor is and what mentoring relationship involves. Looking at the dictionary definition, mentor is “a person who gives the younger or less experienced person help and advice over a period of time, especially at work or school” (Cambridge online dictionary, n. d.)¹. Mentors might have different roles such as teacher, counselor and sponsor. They might also provide psychological support, protection and encouragement to the mentees (Zey, 1984).

Considering the role of mentor, mentorship can be described as a process between two people; and during this process, one of the parties (mentor) supports the other (mentee) within the framework of predetermined goals (Kay & Hinds, 2009). Mentorship generally includes activities, which are carefully planned and allow mentees to overview their own job performance and career development (Garrick & Alexander, 1994). According to Johnson (2007), mentoring is a dynamic and personal relationship maintained in academic settings and, in the context of this relationship, an experienced mentor takes on the task of being a guide, role model, teacher, or sponsor for a less experienced mentee. As suggested by Kohn (2014), mentoring is a process which includes “whatever best meets the needs of a given academic institution” (p. 5).

When it is implemented effectively, mentoring is expected to provide certain benefits to mentors, mentees, and the institutions where mentoring is conducted. In the literature, these benefits for mentors, can be listed as increase in knowledge, skills, and expertise; information about new and up-to-date ideas; insight through counseling; recognition among peers; increase in job and personal satisfaction; creative synergy and professional innovation; motivation for being updated all the time; friendship and support. On the other hand, for the mentee, the common benefits are generally cited as increase in scholarly performance, development of professional skills, development of communication network, development of professional trust and identity, increase in satisfaction from department and institution, less stress and less role conflict. Other than these benefits, some other observed benefits include increase in career commitment; developing belongingness and commitment to the institution; retention in the profession for longer periods; being more effective in teaching; rapid adaptation to profession and faculty; contributions to promotion and tenure (Mathews, 2003; Schrod, Cawyer, & Sanders, 2003). Lastly, according to Douglas (1997), the benefits of the mentoring for the organization are increase in productivity and motivation, improvement in the process of recruitment, increase in corporate communication; development of successive planning; lower rates of staff turnover; increase in the organizational commitment; and strengthening the organizational culture. Moreover, mentoring programs provide information for instructional resources, and support

the development of interdisciplinary cooperation (Savage, Karp, & Logue, 2004).

Although the literature portrays various benefits of mentoring, the characteristics and responsibilities of the faculty have utmost importance for the mentoring programs to reach its goals successfully. Therefore, these responsibilities and characteristics of mentors need to be clearly identified in mentoring programs in higher education institutions. Among the most important characteristics of mentors are expertise in content area, professional maturity, honesty, availability, cordiality, high motivation, being respected by peers in the field, being supportive and encouraging (Berk et al., 2005). Besides these characteristics, Berk and his colleagues (2005) also mentioned the major responsibilities of mentors as commitment to mentoring program; offering field-related resources, specialists, and materials; providing guidance and support about professional issues; encouraging mentee’s ideas and studies; providing productive feedback for mentee’s work; creating suitable environment for improving mentees’ skills and abilities; responding to mentee’s questions clearly and on time; respecting mentee’s contributions and individuality; sharing his/her own success, useful resources, and activities with mentee. Although the characteristics and responsibilities of mentors are crucial for the achievement of any mentoring programs, these are not enough for the program to be successful. Mentee has also certain roles in the process (Carnell, MacDonald, & Askew, 2006). First of all, mentees should inform mentors about their professional needs and expectations. Moreover, mentees need to do their best while specifying time for each meeting, informing mentor about the suitability of meetings, taking notes during meetings on important issues, going to meetings on time, being open and honest, protecting professional distance and confidentiality of the sessions, being realistic and not expecting from mentor to solve problems, and fulfilling a responsibility before each meeting.

As can be seen from the literature, the expected characteristics, roles, and responsibilities of mentors are widely ranging, hence it could be difficult to determine the effectiveness of the mentorship programs thoroughly. As claimed by Berk and his colleagues, “criteria are rarely reported for evaluating the effectiveness of mentoring (2005, p. 66).” In some of these institutions where the mentoring programs are applied such as Harvard University, University of Oxford, Michigan State University, University of Vermont, and University of Wisconsin, effectiveness of mentoring programs are regularly evaluated through research studies. For instance, in the University of Vermont, to evaluate the effectiveness of a mentoring program, a questionnaire was administered to both mentors and mentees about the details of the mentoring process and their suggestions for the improvement of the program. The faculty mainly mentioned the benefits and positive contributions of the programs (The University of Vermont, 2017). Similarly, Peluchette and Scandura (2000) conducted a study with 430

¹<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/tr/s/%C3%B6zl%C3%BCK/ingilizce-t%C3%BCrk%C3%A7e/mentor>

faculty members and they found that new faculty members having a mentor had significantly more career success than the ones having no mentor.

In Turkey, the issue of mentoring for new faculty and mentoring programs are very novel; therefore, the studies mainly focus on mentoring of teacher candidates or other professional groups (Rakıcıoğlu-Söylemez, 2012; Yirci, 2009). In addition, mentoring programs in higher education institutions are generally include the ones conducted for graduates and students. In such programs, the graduates of the higher education institution guide and support students already enrolled to a specific program. Some of these graduate student mentoring programs are conducted in following universities Boğaziçi, Yıldız Teknik, and Bilkent in Turkey. Moreover, in higher education context, there has also been a culture of appointing a research assistant to a professor, which can be regarded as an example of mentorship or apprenticeship relationship although this application is not a systematic program as in faculty mentorship. In such relationship, the experienced faculty members supervise assistants throughout their graduate studies and they also become role-models for graduate students as an academician, instructor, and researcher. In the national and international literature, it is possible to find studies on the evaluation of this supervisory system (Çelik, 2013; Gatfield, 2005; Le & Seale, 2007; Tonbul, 2014). These studies mostly focus on the graduate students' journey of Ph.D and their relationship and interactions with their supervisors during this journey; changing supervisory styles, and effective selection and training of doctoral students. It is suggested in most of these studies that there is a need for developing more systematic training programs in advisory and supervisory system at universities to better respond to the academic needs of graduate students, who are the future academicians. On the other hand, the focus of this study is different, which is mentoring of the new faculty through a systematic program applied at the higher education institution. As also explained above, faculty mentoring in higher education institutions is a new topic and such systematic programs are not commonly applied in Turkey.

The mentoring program at the university where this study was conducted aims to facilitate the adaptation of new faculty members to the institution, inform them about the academic culture, services and offices at the university; enlarge their professional network and increase their feeling of belongingness and support their career development. The mentoring program is a part of a New Faculty Development Program (NFDP) that has been applied each year in the university since 2011. NFDP is obligatory for all newly appointed faculty members at the university. The program has ten modules to be completed in an academic year. Such as Academic Life at the University and Career Development, Education and Instruction, Community Service, Campus Life, Research and Development, Cooperation with the Industry. As an optional module of NFDP, mentoring is offered to new faculty members. The new faculty apply for mentoring using an application form that includes questions regarding their mentor preferences such as department or faculty of the mentor. Then, based on the number of applicants

and their preferences, an invitation letter is sent to senior professors. Upon responding to invitation letter positively, senior professors are matched as mentors with the mentees who were volunteered to join the program. The separate meetings are held with mentors and mentees to inform both groups of participants about the mentoring process, possible topics to be covered, roles of mentors and mentees. After the meetings both mentors and mentees participate a reception where mentees and mentors meet each other. The mentoring program includes minimum of six mentoring sessions; and the effectiveness of the program is evaluated using short evaluation form completed by mentors and mentees. However, there is a need for a more comprehensive evaluation of the programs to better understand its effectiveness and contributions to both parties. Within these regards, this study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the mentoring program conducted at the specified higher education institution so that mentors, mentees, and the institution could benefit more from the program and the program could be improved. The faculty mentoring is a very new topic in Turkey; thus the study might provide valuable information to other institutions which are planning to develop and implement such mentoring programs.

METHOD

The current study was designed as a phenomenological study, one of the qualitative study methods. In phenomenological studies, researchers collect more in-depth and detailed data about a certain phenomenon from the participants of the study mostly through interviews (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). In the current study, the views and ideas on the effectiveness of the implemented mentoring program were analyzed using one-to-one interviews with the participants.

Participants

The population of the study involved all mentors and mentees participating the mentoring program in the specified institution. Using a purposive sampling method, the information-rich and voluntary sample was selected from this population. First of all, an invitation letter via e-mail was sent to faculty members who were taking part in mentoring program either as a mentee or mentor. The invitation letter explained the purpose of the study, questions to be asked in the interview. 24 mentors and 24 mentees were contacted via email. Among all, eight mentors and nine mentees accepted the invitation to take part in the study. All mentors were professors; and all mentees were instructors or assistant professors as they were new faculty appointed to their position in the last 5 years. The demographic characteristics of mentors and mentees can be seen in Table 1 below.

Data Collection Tools

As the data collection tool, two parallel interview schedules were prepared by the researchers in line with the literature and purposes of the study. The ethical approval was also taken from university's Human Subjects Ethics Committee for the data collection tools. The Mentor and Mentee Interview Forms were composed of two sections. The first section included

Table 1: Characteristics of the Participants

Characteristics of the Participants	Mentors (n)	Mentees (n)
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	4	3
Male	5	5
<i>Area of Expertise</i>		
Social Sciences	3	5
Natural and Applied Sciences	4	3
Informatics	1	1
<i>Experience as a Faculty Member</i>		
1-3 years	-	7
3-5 years	-	2
More than 5 years	8	-
<i>Mentoring Experience Before</i>		
Yes	2	2
No	6	7

four questions inquiring the demographic characteristics of the participants; and the second section had nine open-ended questions on the mentoring program. The sample interview questions were “What do you think about the benefits of mentoring programs for mentees and mentors?” or “Would you suggest other new faculty members to take part in mentoring program in the university? Why/why not?”

Data Collection Procedures

After determining the sample of the study, an appointment for the interview was made by the researchers with each participant. The interviews were conducted in the office of the participants by the researchers and were recorded upon the permission of the interviewees. Before asking the interview questions, researchers explained the purpose of the study to the participants. Interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes.

Data Analysis

The descriptive analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data obtained through interviews, in which researchers aimed to code the data under relevant predetermined themes formulated based on the research questions. Within this respect, the collected qualitative data were firstly transcribed verbatim by the researchers and then coded under the themes. The researchers also made use of direct quotations to support findings.

RESULTS

The analysis of qualitative data was resulted in five major themes in line with the purposes of the study. These themes were as follows: perspectives of mentoring experience, process of mentoring, problems and barriers encountered, benefits of mentoring, and suggestions regarding improvement of the program. In each theme, the relevant results were described by comparing the views of both mentors and mentees.

Perspectives of Mentoring Experience

The mentors and mentees were asked to find a metaphor to describe their mentoring experience in the study. The mentees used the following descriptions and metaphors: giving directions to a person who got lost, scaffolding, modeling, being a voluntary guide, master-apprenticeship relationship, teaching a bird how to fly, learning to dance, and supervising process. The common view mentoring among mentees was learning from an experienced faculty. One of the mentees stated that: “It is the process of describing a direction to a confused person and to help him or her to find a way.” Similarly, two mentees defined the mentor as a guide and one of them used the metaphor of “brotherly relationship but at a certain distance.”

Another mentee stated:

Most of the time, I, felt like a bird trying to learn something. The mentor here tells how to fly verbally.... But you have to do what is needed. In other words, I have to fly as a bird, but I have some concerns and worries at that point about my profession. Still, I thought that this is something I need to do alone.

One of the mentees described mentoring relationship as follows:

You are learning a new type of dance and the teacher is showing you....you are trying to imitate him/her as much as you can see and understand....when I compare with the ideal mentoring, my experiences in this process was like watching the show of the mentor. There was an impression like “the lights are on me” and I was in the shadow just watching from the background of the show. It was like teaching by showing off.

The mentee using the metaphor of “scaffolding” defined it as supporting the mentees considering their needs and without limiting their abilities. Lastly, another mentee used the metaphor of “master-apprentice relationship” for the mentoring experience. The mentee also added that masters’ role is to teach new things, but apprentices needed to first understand what the mastery is.

On the other hand, mentors described the mentoring experience as a two-way intergenerational knowledge transfer, master-apprentice relationship, mutual development, being a model, sharing experiences, brotherhood, and gardening of a young sapling (mentor as a gardener).

About the mentoring experience, one of the mentors stated:

At first, it comes to my mind that it is an apprenticeship, but it is not. Because this is something different. In apprenticeship, master is more knowledgeable and the apprentice is the one who will develop competency. Here, there is a mutual learning....it is like a balanced apprenticeship, knowledge sharing, mutual development.

Another mentor explained: “we can call the mentor as “a model.” In another word, guide. The successful person shares his/her experiences on how to succeed. A pathfinder.”

The mentor using the metaphor of “gardening a young sapling” made the following explanation:

I would liken the new faculty to a sapling, because it would be difficult to stand and to take root for a young sapling. But when it learns the earth, when it is watered properly, it grows and greens. The start could be challenging but then it roots fast and strongly.... I see the mentoring as fastening the process of rooting, helping the sapling cope with the difficulties, watering it, supporting the adaptation period and protecting.

As seen from the mentors' and mentees descriptions and metaphors mentioned above, they shared both common and differing views on mentoring. Although the participants described their perspectives on mentoring based on their own gains and experiences, they mostly agreed on that mentoring is the process of mutual learning and sharing relationship between the experienced faculty and the new faculty.

Process of Mentoring and Issues Discussed

In the study, the participants were also asked to mention the process of mentoring, including the number, length, structure, and topics shared. First of all, the mentors and mentees met approximately five times during the mentoring program. These meetings were mostly done by having an appointment beforehand and the pairs met at lunch or at their offices. In some cases, the mentees let the mentors determine what to talk about during the meetings.

The mentors and mentees reported the topics discussed mostly during this process as teaching and research. Under the heading of teaching, instructional methods and techniques, student assessment and grading, teaching large classes, course syllabi, designing a course together, getting prepared for lessons, and student participation were discussed. The research related topics included project development, funding opportunities and budgets, publishing in journals, attending scientific meetings, research collaborations.

Apart from teaching and research, they talked about other topics such as requirements of being tenured, dynamics and culture of the institute/department, administrative duties, career opportunities, academic standards and ethics, time management, interdisciplinary studies, co-supervising theses, academic loneliness and psychological support, lack of support in the department, problems of adaptation and belongingness, and housing needs.

In relation to the above discussed issues, one of the mentors stated that they mostly talked about academic issues as expected, however, personal problems were also discussed considering the needs of the mentee. About the whole process, one of the mentor's explained:

We generally met during the lunch time... our conversation developed naturally. I shared and he/she shared certain issues. We did not determine an issue beforehand. However, I mostly shared my experiences and he/she did not ask much.

About the process of mentoring, one of the mentees said that they did not determine a structured program for their meetings. He continued that they met whenever they were available especially when there was a need to talk to his/her mentor. On the issues they talked about, one of the mentees pointed out:

I talked about everything about my career. I especially asked about the system of getting tenure and official documents to be prepared as I am about to apply for tenure position. He told me the system and the types of questions that could be asked in the oral exam. He shared his experiences as he is taking part in such exams.

The responses of the participating mentors and mentees generally revealed that they met when they needed and talked about the issues on which they need support from an experienced faculty. Therefore, the process and content were shaped by each pair with the guidance of mentors.

Problems and Barriers Encountered During the Mentoring Program

The mentors and mentees were all asked about the problems and barriers they experienced during the mentoring program. Among all mentees, five of them mentioned that they had no problems or barriers during the process. As the reasons for not having any problem, they pointed out knowing the mentor in advance and working together beforehand, not feeling the generation gap, and the mentor's attentiveness and communication skills. One of the mentees stated that: "We had no problem, as we did not have a generation gap...He/she was a responsive person." Similarly, another mentee said: "There was really no problem. She/he called me to meet....She/he was very attentive and contacted me....there was no felt generation gap."

The other four mentees mainly reported the following barriers and problems in mentoring relationship: time difficulties (mentors' being too busy to meet), gaps between the mentee and mentor (generation, gender, social status), and not feeling comfortable with the mentor (formal relationship). One of them claimed that they had difficulties to find time to meet and the first meeting was a bit worrying for her. She also mentioned having a generation gap together with the differences in relation to gender and social status. She continued: "He/she called me with my name. Although I am not a very formal person, I would prefer to be called as "professor." He/she saw me as his/her student." The mentee also pointed out that their conditions were very different with the mentor. She was a new mother and had different responsibilities besides the academic ones, however, the mentor was very professional and experienced.

On the other hand, when the mentors' responses regarding problems and barriers encountered during the mentoring relationship were examined, it was seen that three of them reported that there was no problem in the process. The main problem was expressed as finding a common time to meet with the mentee due to busy schedules of both parties. About the problem, one of the mentors explained:

There was a time problem. We were both busy. Actually, this is a dilemma, because the experienced person can be busier and, of course, the new faculty, too. However, the other person (mentee) did not request to meet, either. I think he/she should do it.

On the same problem, another mentor made the following comment, which could also imply the importance of motivation for handling the possible problems and barriers.

...the problem of getting together, planning the time for both of us. However, we still completed the program, since our motivation was high. If the motivation of the faculty (mentors and mentees) is low, then it could be more difficult meet and arrange the time. Therefore, the motivation and the desire to help should be high.

Benefits of the Program as Perceived by the Faculty

Besides the barriers and problems, benefits of the mentoring program for mentors and mentees were also asked to the participants in the study. The findings indicated that all of the respondents believed in the necessity of the program and they articulated the overall usefulness of mentoring for mentors and mentees. Each of the interviewees listed certain benefits of the program for mentors and mentees considering his/her experience. The both groups generally referred to the benefits of the program for mentors as opportunity to meet and learn about a new generation, learn new things from others (new perspectives, ideas, applications, etc.) and share his/her own ideas and experiences. A mentee explained the benefit as follows: "The mentor could have a chance to look from the perspective of a new faculty. An opportunity to know the new faculty. I think the program could also be useful for providing professional satisfaction." On the other hand, for the same issue, one of the mentors emphasized the significance of working together with a mentee and learning from him/her. The mentor stated: "for me it was a great learning opportunity" and added that they both learned from each other. Only two of the mentees thought that the program would not provide any benefit to the mentor.

Having an opportunity to learn from an experienced faculty, being able to ask the questions in mind, getting support and help on professional and personal issues, getting social support, developing and increasing belongingness to the institution, having a chance to develop joint projects and enhance professional network were regarded as the benefits of the program by mentors and mentees. One of the mentees who had a mentor from his department stated that:

I, now, have a person whom I can consult anytime in the department. I know to whom I should go before taking an important decision. Firstly, I consult him and if he can't help then directs me to another person. As my mentor and other people whom I got connected with through my mentor have been working at this institution for such a longer period of time and they have more opportunities at hand. For instance, they invite me to different settings. My mentor has many projects and, so when he gets a new project offer and he thinks that he is overloaded he offers me that project. This is good for me, since I want to be included in such things (projects, settings). We work together, we write articles.

Another mentee indicated that the getting benefit from the program to large extent depends on the mentee, and stated:

"I determined the benefits. I thought how I could get benefit from this program and requested from my mentor. Therefore, I learnt from him. ." She mentioned learning about the mission, vision, culture and strategies of the institution besides the departmental problems from the mentor. This mentee also explained that the mentor is more knowledgeable and experienced about the internal dynamics, culture, and mission of the institution, which were important to share with the new faculty. Moreover, they worked together on designing a doctorate program and they contacted and collaborated easily during this process.

One of the mentors described the importance of mentoring for a mentee as following:

The new faculty learns how to fight during the fight, and some of them give up and flee. Mentoring can prevent such escapes. It can provide useful information in relation to the traditions and the system.

Suggestions of the Faculty on the Mentoring Program

The suggestions of the faculty for the mentoring program were grouped under two headings: suggestions on the development of mentoring program itself and suggestions for the new faculty and mentors. When the suggestions of the mentors for the program were examined, it was seen that they mostly suggested the following points to improve the program: determining certain criteria for the selection of the mentors for mentoring (voluntary, motivated, open-minded, experienced, having universal standards), extending the time for mentoring (longer time period and increasing the number of meetings), making the program more flexible and informal, providing monitoring and sending reminders to mentors and mentees during the process, emphasizing the mission and culture of the institution more in mentoring meetings, systematic evaluation of the program, and including voluntary retired faculty to the program as mentors.

About the necessity of using reminders and monitoring system during the mentoring, the other mentor explained:

According to me, there should be a tracking system and there should be certain deadlines. For instance, there can be reminders with certain intervals. From time to time, we lose our contact and we forget. In such cases, an e-mail as a reminder can be sent to both parties. With an appropriate language, some questions can be asked: When did you do your last meeting? When is your next meeting? Or mentors and mentees can enter this information to an online form in a website. This information can be stored, so these disconnections can be prevented. The program could be more controlled then.

About the selection of mentors, most of the mentors suggested including voluntary and motivated faculty to the program to increase its success. One of the mentors even suggested removing the disinterested and unmotivated mentors from the system. Another mentor claimed: "I think the matching of mentors and mentees is very important and volunteerism should be critical. The age gap is also important but personality is more important."

For the program, the suggestions of the mentees were similar to the mentors' suggestions. Most of the mentors mentioned the importance of mentor selection for the success of the mentoring program. Some of the mentee mentioned the significance of mentors' personality characteristics. A mentee offered to use a form for mentor selection and continued:

Mentor selection is very critical, so a form should be developed, a mentor selection form. The requests and preferences of people should be regarded. More criteria need to be determined for selection. For instance, associate professors can also be included into the program, since this point (associate professorship) is what mentees want to reach. But there is a long way to professorship.

Other than mentor selection and characteristics of mentors, most of the mentees, as a suggestion, focused upon having a more structured, systematic, and controlled mentoring program in which the duties and responsibilities of both groups can be tracked by the institution. In order for monitoring the process and having a more comprehensive and structured program, one of the mentees proposed the use of an official document including these dimensions of the academia: teaching, research, administrative duties, and community service. In this form, details of meetings, reflections, things to do and to be done could be written by mentees and mentors separately. She also suggested making the program compulsory for every new faculty in the institution. Lastly, the mentees participating in the study recommended distributing information packet (a guide), having meetings including all mentors and mentees from time to time, providing a chance to change the mentors when not satisfied or not matched as desired.

Most of the mentors and mentees suggested this program to both new and experienced faculty so that they can learn and develop together, which contributes to the development of the institution as well. However, one of the mentors suggested the program to others but reminded the possible personal differences and preferences that need to be taken into consideration:

I am not sure if everybody wants to do it, since it takes much to participate such a program. You need to take it seriously and devote yourself to it. Some of the people are really prone to do it. But you need to be prone to work together as well. Some can be more successful when they are alone. So, there can be personal differences but still I suggest this program. A person should be included into the program if she/he is the right person.

Besides, a mentee suggested the mentoring program to all new faculty members and recommended that the mentees should make efforts to contact with the mentors and be demanding as much as possible. Another mentee added:

I suggest the program, otherwise you need to spend much more time to learn all these things: Would it be better for me if I do this? Where should I go for this? I guess it would have been more difficult to find answers to these questions by myself. When you have a person (a mentor) who experienced all these

processes, then you can ask him/her. This is time saving for the person.

To sum up, although the mentors and mentees experienced certain problems during the mentoring process, they claimed to get multiple benefits from this program and all of them believed in the importance of such a program especially for the development and adaptation of the new faculty.

CONCLUSIONS and DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the views and suggestions of mentors and mentees with respect to the effectiveness of mentoring program conducted in one of the higher education institutions in Turkey. The mentors and mentees taking voluntary part in the study were interviewed individually to explore their views and suggestions about the program. As mentioned before, it is believed that the study is significant, as it evaluated a faculty mentoring program in a higher education institution in Turkey, where such systematic mentoring of the new faculty as part of academic development programs are not commonplace. Moreover, as mentoring programs are becoming more and more popular recently at universities in other countries, the study could provide an international perspective and a model for other institutions as well. This qualitative study was resulted with critical findings. The participants of the study, the mentors and mentees, expressed their views in relation to their perspectives on mentoring experience, process of mentoring and issues discussed, problems and barriers, benefits, and suggestions pertaining to the program.

To start with, both mentors and mentees viewed their mentoring experience as "a learning and sharing process" in which an experienced faculty guide the new faculty. Although the role of mentees was resembled to an apprentice by some mentees, both the mentors and mentees also underlined the mutual learning that took place during the process. This finding showed that the program served for its major goals. As cited in the literature, mentoring might be "a life-altering relationship that inspires mutual growth, learning and development" (Bean, Lucas, & Hyers, 2014, p. 57). However, it was also seen that, in a few cases, mentors might have been more dominant in the relationship, only telling their own story, deeds, and what are needed to succeed in academic life. Some of the metaphors mentees used to describe the mentoring experience such as "a bird learning to fly alone" or "learning to dance by just looking at the dancer" underlined how mentees perceived their role in the process. Mullen and Schunk (2010) also mentioned the threat that peer mentoring can be hierarchical and limiting for protégés. It is suggested that the mentors should not only be role models for the new faculty but also be encouraging, supportive and provide space for the other party. As pointed out by Cawyer, Simonds and Davis (2002), it should be remembered that "through mentoring, a new faculty member may become a vital and productive member of the professoriate (p. 239)" or they might be discouraged and lose their confidence. Therefore, the experienced faculty need to regard the new ones as their colleagues who are just at the beginning of their career and need inspiration and motivation to walk on

the way with autonomy and self-confidence. In relation to this, Lechuga (2014) suggests “approaching mentoring process with the intention of creating autonomy supported environments” so that the junior faculty might feel more efficacious and capable (p. 924).

It was also found in the study that each pair followed different structure in terms of organizing meetings. The issues discussed during these meetings changed, in accordance with the needs and interests of the mentees. The mentors and mentees mostly discussed about teaching and research. Slightly different from the findings of this study, Feldman, Arian, Marshall, Lovett, and O’Sullivan (2010) found that the mentees most frequently discussed about obtaining funding; only some of them talked about teaching. This shows that needs can change from institution to institution and person to person.

Another finding of this study on the mentoring process is that mentors generally guided the process and determined what to discuss, however, in some cases, when the mentees openly expressed their needs and asked the questions in mind, the mentors answered the questions and shared their opinions. It was found that the meetings unfolded naturally in time. As a result, some of the mentors and mentees could not find time to meet and could not complete the program, which was also asserted as one of the problems in the program.

The finding common time to meet was reported by both mentors and mentees as a main problem. This might be the result of how the mentoring program is formed. In the institution where the study is conducted the mentoring program is based on volunteerism, only sets minimum number of meetings to be held, is lack of formal monitoring system during the process. Flexibility is something that should be a part of such programs, however, some of the participants recommended a more structured program. At the beginning of the program, a presentation was done, a written guide was provided to the participants, and a cocktail was held to inform the mentors and mentees in relation to the program. Nevertheless, the findings of the study suggested that there is also a need to follow and monitor both parties during the process to prevent any disconnections and motivate them to continue the program. In academia, busy working schedules might hinder meetings, especially when the program is not obligatory in the institution. Considering this, it can be suggested that a third party –for instance the teaching and learning center at the university- should monitor the progress of mentoring program and contact with mentors and mentees from time to time to learn about the progress and provide the needed support if any. Lumpkin (2011) also proposes “formative evaluations of mentoring programs” to be done at regular basis by the coordinator to see how things are going each mentor and mentee (p. 361). A practical solution might be the collection of written feedback, which can be entered to an online system at regular intervals. The necessity of monitoring system was also mentioned by some of the mentors and mentees in the study.

Apart from time as a shared barrier for both groups, other problems were mentioned by the mentees. These problems

were the felt gaps between the mentor and mentee such as generation, gender, or social status, formal relationships, and not being comfortable to talk. These problems might signify the importance of mentor selection and careful matching, which were proposed by the participants in the study as well. At this point, the suggestions of the faculty on the improvement of the program should be highlighted, as these suggestions might offer good solutions for preventing the problems identified in the study. The recommendations of the faculty are thought to be valuable for increasing the effectiveness of the upcoming mentoring programs. As mentioned, the mentees’ suggestions highlighted the need for creating a system for matching the mentees with mentors and for mentor selection in the most fitting and responsive way. As researchers, it is also proposed that the needs, interests, expectations, and gender of the participants should be considered more carefully and the choices of both groups should be paid enough attention. While including the mentors in the program, their motivation, personal characteristics, positive attitude towards new faculty need to be well understood besides their academic success and experience.

In conjunction with the suggestions of the mentees, the mentors also referred to mentor selection as one of the critical issues for an effective implementation of mentoring. At this point, it should also be noted that all parties in the mentoring program –mentors, mentees, and the university administration- should have a “clear understanding and agreement” upon mentoring before starting the program (Kohn, 2014). Other than these, the participants suggested using a systematic monitoring and follow-up system with reminders, extending the time for the program, making it more structured and comprehensive by also allowing certain flexibility. To prevent the possible problems pertaining to dyadic mentoring, different mentoring models –such as group peer mentoring and community of practice model- are also suggested and studied by researchers in the literature (Pololi & Evans, 2015; Skaniakos, Penttinen, & Lairio, 2014; Smith, Calderwood, Dohm, & Gill Lopez, 2013). Moreover, Lumpkin (2011) defines several approaches to mentoring such as formal, informal, peer, consortia, intra-departmental, inter-departmental, or research mentoring. The pros and cons of these approaches are also reported based on a review of literature. These models and approaches might be examined carefully for the upcoming mentoring programs.

On the other hand, all of the participants suggested the current mentoring program to other colleagues. This finding is consistent with the literature. In one of the recent studies, Bean, Lucas, and Hyers (2014) also found that the mentors and mentees participating in the mentoring program in West Chester University recommended the program to other faculty. Moreover, the mentors and mentees pointed out the overall usefulness of the program and listed the shared benefits such as opportunity to meet a new person and learn from him/her. Specifically, the mentors acknowledged the contributions of the program to their understanding and empathizing the new generation. On the other side, the program helped the mentees reach valuable information and support in a relatively

short time. Other benefits were reported by the mentees as the opportunities for developing joint projects, expanding the network (meeting new faculty with the help of the mentor), and increasing belongingness to the institution. The literature also cites a number of benefits including the above-mentioned ones (Carnell, MacDonald, & Askew, 2006; Johnson, 2007; Kay & Hinds, 2009; Lechuga, 2014; Mathews, 2003; Schrodt, Cawyer, & Sanders, 2006). In one of these, the researchers surveyed all new faculty as mentees in their institution to see whether they benefited from mentoring or not (Feldman et al., 2010). They found that the mentees who had mentors were more satisfied with being at work and they obtained higher academic self-efficacy. In a more recent study, Lechuga (2014) interviewed the faculty on mentoring process; and she found that all participants found mentoring beneficial. As also proposed by McLaughlin (2010) mentoring contributes much to the faculty career development.

As the findings of the current study and the literature emphasized, faculty mentoring has valuable gains and benefits for higher education institutions. Follow-up studies are needed to better understand the long-term benefits and contributions of the faculty mentoring program. As recommended by Zellers, Howard, and Barcic (2008), the impacts of such mentoring programs should be thoroughly examined by the program implementers and developers so that it can be understood whether these programs meet the needs of the faculty having different characteristics, aspirations, and expectations. Therefore, long-term contributions of the program should also be investigated. As faculty mentoring is a very recent issue in Turkish universities, the study might contribute not only to the institution where this study was conducted but also it might provide an insight and example for an effective mentoring program for other institutions while developing such mentoring programs. Moreover, the study is thought to contribute to the national and international literature on faculty development in higher education.

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