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Mentoring for Effective Teaching - An Analysis of Austrian Mentees' School-based Mentoring Practices

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Abstract

Practical school mentoring is very important in Austrian teacher education. This quantitative study shows feedback from student teachers (n=114) on their experiences in supporting mentors based on the five factors (personal attributes, system requirements, pedagogical knowledge, modelling, and feedback). Trained mentors accompany primary school teaching student teachers during their internships. Results show that mentees recognize that their mentors maintain a pleasant relationship (95.7), are enthusiastic (92.1%) about mentoring-practice, convey positive attitudes (87.8%), are attentive in their teaching activities (88.6%), and provide oral feedback (85.9%).

When assessing the personal attributes of the mentors, the mentees gave a percentage value higher than 69% for the six items. This indicates that the mentees have a good impression of their mentors. The article shows that in future mentoring practices should focus primarily on areas such as systemic issues, structures with planning units, assessments, questions about the feedback culture.

Keywords: school practical mentoring, mentees, reform, five factor model, internship, teacher education, effective teaching

1. Introduction

In Austria, the concept of teacher education for primary or secondary school education stipulates that student teachers go to schools during the internships period and gain practical experience. Trained mentors are available in these schools. The extent of internships varies depending on the institution and semester. The law provides for 40 ECTS-Credits for school practical (at schools) and university components within the teacher education course with 300 ECTS-Credits. In this study, student teachers provide feedback on mentoring they experienced during their internship. The student teachers are mentees, supported by trained experienced teachers known as mentors or mentor teachers.

Since the turn of the millennium, there has been a change in the way student teachers are supported during internships in Austria. The focus in practical school mentoring is on learning instead of teaching (Barr et al. 1995; Kraler et al. 2022, 280). This allows student teachers to enter a development process and enables personal development. But is it really like that? What feedback do student teachers give? What content is discussed in mentoring? How do student teachers rate their mentors' mentoring practices?

In order to answer these questions, student teachers were surveyed on various factors at the end of the internship. Hudson's Five Factor Model was used as the basis for the survey.

2. Research Design

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Hudson's Five Factor Model of Mentoring (Hudson, 2005) forms the basis of this research. It is the result of empirical studies and literature research. The five factors are: Personal Attributes, System Requirements, Pedagogical knowledge, Modelling and Feedback.

Mentees evaluate the mentor-teacher's **Personal Attributes**: supporting the mentee, guiding reflective practice, instilling a positive attitude toward teaching, demonstrating active listening, problem-solving, and building confidence for teaching. The second attribute includes the **System Requirements** for teaching. The mentee assesses whether the mentor teacher

discusses the aims, policies and curriculum relevant for teaching. The third factor **Pedagogical knowledge** has eleven practices. Mentees appreciate the exchange in the areas sharing Planning, Timetabling, Preparation, Teaching strategies, Content knowledge, Problem solving, Classroom management, Questioning skills, Lesson implementation, Assessment, and Viewpoints about teaching. Another factor considers the importance of **Modelling** practices. In the feedback, mentees indicate whether there has been an exchange on modelling Teaching, Effective Teaching, Well-designed lessons, Practical Teaching, Rapport with student teachers, Enthusiasm, Classroom management and the appropriate Language for teaching. The fifth factor considers the importance of **Feedback**. The model highlights the importance of the mentor-teacher providing the mentee with clear expectations regarding the manner of providing feedback, reviewing and discussing lesson plans, the position of planning and conducting formal observations, and the importance of oral and written feedback and Conversations on the topic of teaching evaluations. Figure 1 illustrates Hudson's five-factor mentoring model (2005; 2010).

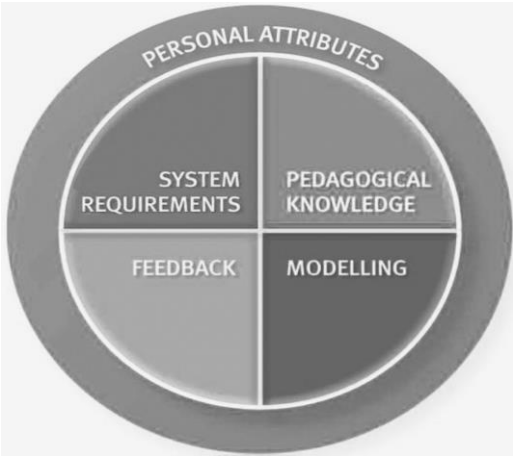

Figure 1. Hudson's Five Factor Model of Mentoring (2005, 2010)

Studies on mentee assessment of mentoring practices have already been discussed several times worldwide using the present research design (e.g., Bird et al., 2015; Carrosa et al., 2019; Day, 2020; Galamay-Cachola et al., 2018; James et al., 2020; Kaur et al., 2018; Ploj Virtič et al, 2021). This research of mentoring practices from the perspective of mentee refers to a university and its partner schools in the west of Austria. In this context, reference can be made to a study that relates to the mentors' perspective on their own mentoring. The study was published in Haas, E., Hudson, P. & Hudson, S. (2022). DOI: 10.11114/jets.v10i4.5535.

2.2 Survey Design

Mentees were asked about the practices of their mentors. How do mentors communicate with mentees and how do mentees assess different factors in the mentoring process? The background to the survey is the *Mentoring for Effective Teaching (MET)* program. First, demographic data about the mentee was collected. First, demographic data about the mentee was collected. For example, they were asked which semester the student teachers were currently in and which classes they were teaching. They were also asked whether they had a good relationship with the mentor. The questionnaire was presented to the mentee in the summer semester of 2024 after completing the internship at the University of Education. In the quantitative analysis, frequency checks were used to evaluate the questions (Bortz et al., 2006). Mentee respondents rated items using a 5-point verbal rating scale (i.e., 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Uncertain, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree). The statements on the items are presented as relative frequencies in percent of the answers. Anonymity when answering the questions can be guaranteed because neither the name of the school nor the mentor was asked. The study therefore meets the ethical guidelines for approval at the university (Hittleman et al., 2006).

The questionnaire contained 34 items on the five described factors of the MET program. The statistical processing and analysis of the collected data was carried out using the statistical program SPSS, version 27 (IBM Corporation, 2020).

2.3 Sampling Procedures

The participants were student teachers (mentees) who had just completed their internship from a teacher education university in Austria within the university subject entitled, Pedagogical Practical Studies. The internship took place in different primary schools for two weeks. The university 'Internship Office' organized the internship with schools which are partnership arrangements between the various colleges of education. The schools vary in size and are located in rural and urban areas. The focus of the internship was for the mentee to work with their mentors towards their pedagogical development. The survey was conducted at the end of the internship. n=114 student teachers took part in the online-survey.

2.4 Data Analysis

The anonymized data from the questionnaire was evaluated using the SPSS program and grouped into the five factors. The data on the student teachers' self-assessments were assigned to the tables to be able to display attributes and internships. Presented in the Tables were the percentage of responses where the student teachers (mentees) agreed or strongly agreed, the Mean and the Standard Deviation.

3. Results

3.1 Samples Demographics

For the study, the participants (n=114 mentees) are student teachers (mentees). The mentees answered the question about gender with 93.9% (n=107) female, 6.1% (n=7) male, 0% (n=0) diverse gender. 70.2% (n=80) are born between 1999 and 2002. Three courses were surveyed. This means that student teachers have different mentoring and different school-practical experiences. 57.9% (n=66) are in their second year of study, 32.5% (n=37) are in their third year of study and 9.6% (n=11) are about to finish their bachelor's degree in their fourth year of study. 57.9% (n=66) of the mentees went on an internship once a week during the semester, the rest had a fortnightly internship.

90.4% (n=103) stated that they had a good relationship with the mentor during their internship. The student teachers taught at different levels of primary school. 34 student teachers were assigned to a mentor in a team of two student teachers. Ultimately, the n=114 student teachers provide feedback to 80 mentors. The mentors (100%) have education in mentoring with a focus on supporting student teachers (15 ECTS-Credits).

3.2 Statistics and Data Analysis of the MET: The Five Factors

In the following, the five factors (i.e., personal attributes, system requirements, pedagogical knowledge, modelling, and feedback) are presented in table form indicating the mentees' responses. The Tables 1 to 5 provide descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations, associated with each item.

3.2.1 Factor: Personal Attributes

In the factor: Personal Attributes, mentees rate how the mentors supported them, whether they tried to create a comfortable atmosphere for conversation, whether they were attentive, whether they conveyed self-confidence and a positive attitude and whether they assisted in reflecting. The Austrian student teachers provided feedback on six items (range: 69.3% to 88.6%). 88.6% (n=101) are convinced that their mentors are comfortable in talking about teaching practices and are attentive. According to the mentees, they feel that 87.8% (n=100) of the mentors have a positive attitude and 78.0% (n=89) instill confidence. Over two thirds believe (69.3%; n=79) that the mentors were supportive.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of "Personal Attributes" for Mentoring Teaching (n=114)

Mentoring practice	%*	*Mean*	*SD*	*MIN*	*MAX*
Supportive	69.3	3.98	1.030	1	5
Comfortable in talking	88.6	4.51	0.801	1	5
Attentive	88.6	4.48	0.823	1	5
Instilled confidence	78.0	4.11	1.222	1	5
Instilled positive attitudes	87.8	4.48	0.778	2	5
Assisted in reflecting	80.7	4.22	0.948	1	5

*% =Percentage of mentees who either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with that specific mentoring practice.

The Mean of the items to the factor "Personal Attributes" is between 3.98 and 4.51 (five-point verbal rating scale). Mentees often agree or strongly agree with the scale. The item with the highest level of approval was Comfortable in talking (M=4.51; n=114). The items Attentive and Instilled positive attitudes (M=4.48; n=114) also received a high level of approval.

3.2.2 Factor: System Requirements

The next factor shows statements to the "System Requirements" with the three items discussed aims, outlined curriculum and discussed policies. Slightly more than half namely 55.3% (n=63) state that they have discussed policies. Only 50.9% (n=58) of the mentees say that they discuss the curriculum. With a percentage of 57.9% (n=66), the mentees state that they have discussed the aims of teaching with the mentors. Table 2 gives an overview of the factor System Requirements.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of "System Requirements" for Mentoring Teaching (n=114)

Mentoring practice	%*	*Mean*	*SD*	*MIN*	*MAX*
Discussed aims	57.9	3.56	1.255	1	5
Outlined curriculum	50.9	3.32	1.454	1	5
Discussed policies	55.3	3.50	1.184	1	5

*% =Percentage of mentees who either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that specific mentoring practice.

The Mean of the items to the factor "System Requirements" is between 3.32 and 3.56 (five-point verbal rating scale). The item Outlined curriculum (M=3.32; n=114) has the lowest agreement.

3.2.3 Factor: Pedagogical Knowledge

An overview to the factor: Pedagogical Knowledge can be obtained from Table 3 (Table 3). The items to this factor contain classroom management and design of teaching and learning processes such as guided preparation, assisted with timetabling, assisted with classroom management, assisted with teaching strategies, assisted in planning, discussed implementation, discussed content knowledge, discussed questioning techniques, discussed assessment, discussed problem solving and provided viewpoints. The range of the items are between 46.5% and 77.2% for the important factor Pedagogical Knowledge. Mentees give a low level of approval when it comes to discussing about assessment (46.5%; n=53), to assisting in planning (49.2%; n=56), assisting with timetabling (51.7%; n=59) and discussing to content knowledge (57.0%; n=65). Fast indicate two-thirds (64.1%; n=73), that mentors guided preparation before teaching. The range of all others items are between 72.8% and 77.2%. Nearly three to four mentees say that the mentors assisted with classroom management (72.8%; n=83), assisted with teaching strategies (73.7%; n=84), discussed implementation (77.2%; n=88), discussed questioning techniques (76.3%; n=87), discussed problem solving strategies (73.7%; n=84) and provided viewpoints (77.2%; n=88).

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of "Pedagogical Knowledge" for Mentoring Teaching (n=114)

Mentoring practice	%	*Mean*	*SD*	*MIN*	*MAX*
Guided preparation	64.1	3.89	1.132	1	5
Assisted with timetabling	51.7	3.46	1.256	1	5
Assisted with classroom management	72.8	4.03	1.109	1	5
Assisted with teaching strategies	73.7	4.03	1.117	1	5
Assisted in planning	49.2	3.42	1.240	1	5
Discussed implementation	77.2	4.16	1.126	1	5
Discussed content knowledge	57.0	3.61	1.186	1	5
Discussed questioning techniques	76.3	4.05	1.071	1	5
Discussed assessment	46.5	3.36	1.351	1	5
Discussed problem solving	73.7	4.04	1.163	1	5
Provided viewpoints	77.2	4.09	1.085	1	5

*% =Percentage of mentees who either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that specific mentoring practice.

The Mean of the items to the factor "Pedagogical Knowledge" is between 3.36 and 4.16 (five-point verbal rating scale). The item Discussed assessment (M=3.36; n=114) received the lowest agreement and the item Discussed implementation (M=4.16; n=114) received the highest agreement.

3.2.4 Factor: Modelling

The factor "Modelling" describes statements about the items such as modelled rapport with student teachers, displayed enthusiasm, modelled a well-designed lesson, modelled teaching, modelled classroom management, modelled effective teaching, demonstrated hands-on and used syllabus language. The percentage values range between 83.4% and 95.7% except the item modelled teaching. The value is here 64.1% (n=73). With the high percentage of 95.7% (n=109) the mentees indicate that the mentors modelled rapport with the student teachers.

In factor "Modelling" mentee receive support from mentors. This is particularly reflected in the high level of agreement with the items displayed enthusiasm (92.1%; n=105), modelled a well-designed lesson (83.4%; n=95), modelled classroom management (85.0%; n=97), modelled effective teaching (89.5%; n=102), demonstrating hands-on materials for teaching (84.2%; n=96) and using syllabus language (90.3%; n=103).

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of "Modelling" Teaching (n=114)

Mentoring practice	%	*Mean*	*SD*	*MIN*	*MAX*
Modelled rapport with student teachers	95.7	4.67	0.559	3	5
Displayed enthusiasm	92.1	4.54	0.668	2	5
Modelled a well-designed lesson	83.4	4.29	0.880	1	5
Modelled teaching	64.1	3.75	1.094	1	5
Modelled classroom management	85.0	4.38	0.935	1	5
Modelled effective teaching	89.5	4.39	0.759	1	5
Demonstrated hands-on	84.2	4.34	0.850	2	5
Used syllabus language	90.3	4.42	0.715	2	5

*% =Percentage of mentees who either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that specific mentoring practice.

The Mean of the items to the factor "Modelling" is between 3.75 and 4.67 (five-point verbal rating scale). The item Modelled rapport with student teachers (M=4.67; n=114) has the highest agreement of all items to this survey. The item Modelled teaching (M=3.75; n=114) received the lowest agreement to this factor.

3.2.5 Factor: Feedback

The factor "Feedback" documents statements about the items observed teaching for feedback, provided oral feedback, reviewed lesson plans, provided evaluation on teaching, provided written feedback and articulated expectations. During the last field experience for mentoring mentees mention that they get more oral feedback (85.9%; n=98) than written feedback (42.1%; n=48) from their mentors. Also, fast indicate three-fourths, that the mentors articulated expectations (75.5%; n=86). In factor "Feedback" mentees mention that mentors observed teaching for feedback (82.4%; n=94), provided evaluation on teaching (76.3%; n=87) and reviewed lesson plans (58.8%; n=67). Table 5 provides an overview.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of "Feedback" on Teaching (n=114)

Mentoring practice	%*	*Mean*	*SD*	*MIN*	*MAX*
Observed teaching for feedback	82.4	4.34	0.994	1	5
Provided oral feedback	85.9	4.46	0.864	1	5
Reviewed lesson plans	58.8	3.62	1.333	1	5
Provided evaluation on teaching	76.3	4.13	1.085	1	5
Provided written feedback	42.1	2.96	1.596	1	5
Articulated expectations	75.5	4.01	1.077	1	5

* % =Percentage of mentees who either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that specific mentoring practice.

The mean of the factor "Feedback" ranges between 2.96 and 4.46 (five-point verbal rating scale). The item Provided written feedback (M=2.96; n=114) has the lowest agreement and the item Provided oral feedback (M=4.46; n=114) the highest agreement.

In the following section, the items are analysed according to the severity of the evaluations.

4. Discussion and Interpretation

Trained mentors who had all completed a mentoring qualification program of 15 or 30 ECTS-Credits supervised the student teachers. Studies such as Ophardt et al. (2020, 14) show that student teachers rate their further development of reflection strategies more highly when they have trained mentors. In this study, all mentors have training and it can therefore be assumed that they are focused on the mentee's learning needs and that high-quality discussion units are maintained. Mentoring helps mentee to grow, it can identify challenges and shows possibilities to act in different situations (Ingersoll et al., 2011; Nyanjom, 2020, Schatz-Oppenheimer et al., 2023). The study investigated how mentees assess their mentors' mentoring practices. The percentage values are between 46.1 and 95.7 (*% =Percentage

of mentees who either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that specific mentoring practice).

How do mentees rate the mentoring-practices on average? The mean value for each factor was generated and is documented in the following figure (Figure 2).

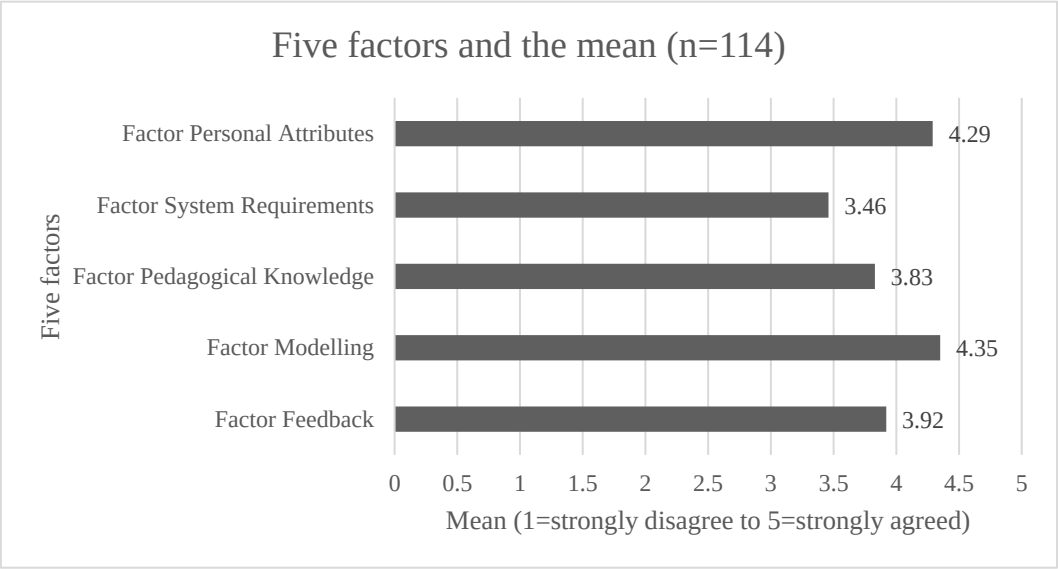

Figure 1. Mean of the five factors

Mentees rate their mentors very highly in terms of Personal Attributes (M=4.29) and Modelling (M=4.35). The factor Feedback (M=3.92) and Pedagogical Knowledge (M=3.83) is also highly valued. The least rated is the factor system Requirements (M=3.46). In order to interpret the mean values, an interpretation scale was established (0-1.25=Very low agreement; 1.26-2.5=Low agreement; 2.51-3.75=Moderate agreement; 3.76-5=High agreement). Table 6 shows the introduction.

Table 6. Mean and the interpretation

Factor	Mean*	*Interpretation*
Personal Attributes	4.29	High agreement
System Requirements	3.46	Moderate agreement
Pedagogical Knowledge	3.83	High agreement
Modelling	4.35	High agreement
Feedback	3.92	High agreement

*5-point verbal rating scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Uncertain, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree)

Mentees rate the factors Personal Attributes (M=4.29), Modelling (M=4.35), Feedback (M=3.92) and Pedagogical Knowledge (M=3.83) with a high level of approval. It can be stated that mentees recognize that their mentors respect a pleasant culture of conversation, pay attention to them and convey positive attitudes. According to the mentee, mentors discuss different points of view, discuss necessary introductions, assist with classroom management and teaching strategies, and seek solutions to strategies. Mentee report as well that their mentors show enthusiasm, use syllabus language and support them in teaching assignments. The mentees also pointed out that mentors often give oral rather than written feedback and observe lessons in order to engage in a reflection exchange.

Which items have the most or the lowest agreement? The next figure shows details (Figure 2):

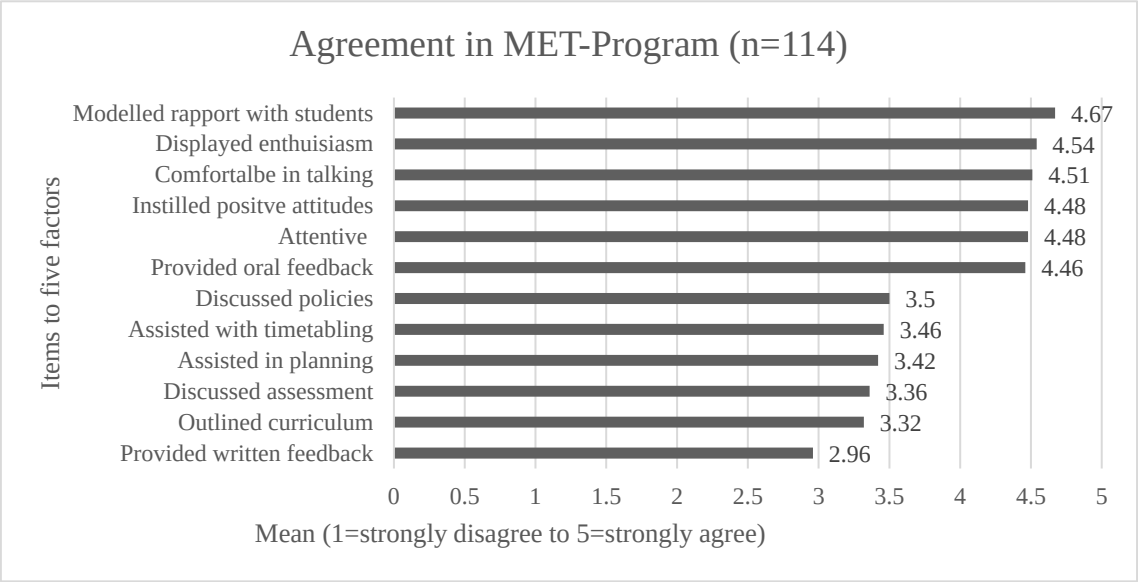

Figure 2. Agreement to the items of the MET-Program (n=114)

The item with the highest level of agreement was modelled rapport with student teachers (Factor Modelling; M=4.67), followed by displayed enthusiasm (Factor Modelling; M=4.54), and comfortable talking (Factor Personal Attribute; M=4.51). Mentees also recognise that mentors communicate a positive attitude (Factor Personal Attribute; M=4.48), are very attentive (Factor Personal Attribute; M=4.48) and provide oral feedback (Factor Feedback; M=4.46).

The following items received only moderate agreement: Discussed policies (Factor System Requirements; M=3.5), Assisted with timetabling (Factor Pedagogical Knowledge; M=3.46), Assisted in planning (Factor Pedagogical Knowledge; M=3.42), Discusses assessment (Factor Pedagogical Knowledge; M=3.36), Outlined curriculum (Factor System Requirements; M=3.32), and Provided written feedback (Factor Feedback; M=2.96).

5. Conclusion

Mentoring is an integral part of teacher education in Austria. The training programmes for mentors emphasise the importance of specialist knowledge, consulting competence, an understanding of profession and reflection as well as a self-critical reflexivity and attitudes.

Student teachers in the second, third and fourth years of study were asked about the mentoring practices of their mentors in this study. The aim of the study was to determine which aspects within the five factors are increasingly used and how mentee evaluate mentoring practice. Mentees (n=114) were very satisfied with their mentors (n=80) and rated the factor Personal Attributes very highly. In particular, the study also shows which areas need to be addressed more intensively in the mentoring programs, since mentees indicate in the self-assessment instrument which areas are addressed more and less intensively. Above all, systemic issues are rarely addressed, even though they often require a deeper understanding.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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