

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Shifting Identities and Perceived Responsibilities of Language Teacher Mentors in the Multilayered Coaching and Mentorship Model Program

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Abstract

Mentoring is widely recognized as impactful professional development for teachers, yet limited attention has been devoted to the mentors, their training, experiences, or evolving roles. Addressing this gap, this qualitative bounded system case study examined the effectiveness of a program grounded in the Multilayered Coaching and Mentorship (MCaM) Model, designed for English language teaching (ELT) practitioners to become mentors of other ELT practitioners. The Model emphasizes intentional mentor preparation, ongoing support, and community building across career stages. Drawing on data from interviews, a focus group, and mentors' philosophy statements, this study examines how participation in the program influenced mentors' professional identity and perceived responsibilities. Findings highlight the importance of structured mentor training, meaningful mentor-mentee relationships, and reflective community engagement. Findings are organized into three main themes: 1) The Evolution of Mentors' Professional Identities, 2) Perceived and Shifting Responsibilities, and 3) The Role of Intersectionality and Interconnectedness. This study underscores the value of holistic mentor development in advancing the effectiveness and sustainability of ELT mentoring programs.

Keywords

coaching; ELT; MCaM model; mentoring; mentor identity; multilayered

INTRODUCTION

Mentoring plays an important role in professional growth and development, providing tailored support. Owusu-Agyeman (2024) emphasizes that mentoring not only supports career advancement, but also significantly influences professional identity development. The impact of mentoring on identity development can be profound, as it provides a supportive environment for mentees to explore and integrate different aspects of their identities, leading to greater self-awareness and professional confidence. Mentoring is important at all stages of the career lifecycle. However, research shows that more attention is given to early-career professionals, even though responsibilities increase as one advances through their careers (Day & Gu, 2010; Hobson et al., 2009). Further, although mentoring has been recognized as an effective tool, mid-career and advanced-career professionals often do not receive mentoring to help them

navigate the different complexities faced at progressive career stages (Chang & Drescher, 2023; Owusu-Agyeman, 2024).

To understand the role of mentor preparation on the effectiveness of the mentoring experiences, this qualitative bounded system case study examined the impact of participating in a program that implemented the Multilayered Coaching and Mentorship (MCaM) Model. More specifically, this inquiry explored how the participating mentors developed their professional identities and shifted their perceived responsibilities through participation in the MCaM Program. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How did the identities of the mentors who participated in the program evolve throughout the nine-month coaching and mentoring program?
2. What specific responsibilities did the mentors perceive during the program, and how did these responsibilities shift/change as the mentors interacted with their coaches and mentees?
3. In what ways did intersectional factors (i.e., gender, race, culture, and linguistic background) influence the mentors' shifting identities and perceived responsibilities?

Thus, we first define *mentoring* and *coaching*, establishing the distinctions and overlaps relevant to the Model. We then outline the conceptual framework that guided our research, followed by the methodology section, which includes the description of key components of the MCaM Model. Finally, we conclude with findings from the data analysis, followed by a broader discussion of the Model's impact and further recommendations.

MENTORING AND COACHING: CONCEPTUALIZING ROLES AND COMPETENCIES

Mentoring

Mentoring has been widely recognized across workplace and educational settings as a valuable tool for professional growth, well-being, and organizational success. For example, research highlights its positive relationship to professional commitment, job satisfaction, and personal learning (Lankau & Scandura, 2002), improved communication (Peng et al., 2019), diversity awareness (Amos & Klimoski, 2014), and decision-making (Chughtai & Buckley, 2011). Fundamentally, successful workplace mentoring programs enhance internal well-being (Nielsen & Randall, 2012), which ultimately leads to enhanced performance and work-life satisfaction.

Within teacher education research, mentoring is similarly related to numerous benefits, including improved professional development and teacher performance (Weisling & Gardiner, 2018), teacher retention (Chang & Drescher, 2023), positive cognitive and affective domains (Black et al., 2016), broadened professional self-view (Hanson & Moir, 2008), and deeper reflective practice (Livingston, 2016). Mentoring is particularly effective in fostering professional growth by offering structured guidance, feedback, and opportunities for skill development across career stages (Chang & Drescher, 2023).

While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to the design, delivery, and evaluation of mentoring programs (Koopmann et al., 2021), evidence-based, best practices have emerged. Effective programs combine formal and flexible relationship-driven frameworks (Cranwell-Ward et al., 2014). Garvey et al. (2018) recommend key elements, such as content knowledge and skills, a clear recruitment strategy, training for mentors and mentees, a transparent matching policy, and ongoing support for mentors and mentees. Reflection (Rashed & Suarez, 2025) and cultural competence (De Costa & Norton, 2017) are also critical in effective mentoring, particularly in diverse educational contexts.

Realizing these positive outcomes, whether in the general workplace setting or in educational settings, ultimately depends on the quality of mentor training (Hudson, 2013) within structured programs that equip mentors with essential skills (Borg & Parnham, 2020). Mid-career and advanced professionals are often invited to become mentors without receiving adequate preparation for these unique roles (Chang & Drescher, 2023; Owusu-Agyeman, 2024). This is a significant source of impediment toward achieving the potential strong outcomes of a mentoring program (Foliot & Chaliès, 2025). Therefore, mentor training is a significant area that demands our attention as language teacher educators and researchers.

Well-designed mentor training provides clarity on roles and responsibilities, promotes consistent mentoring practices, and builds trust and respect (Borg & Parnham, 2020; Vikaraman et al., 2017). It also encourages self-awareness and confidence (Wyatt & Dikilitaş, 2022). Structured mentoring programs ensure consistent and sustainable mentoring, leading to better outcomes for mentees (Borg & Parnham, 2020). Continuous support and development opportunities for mentors, such as workshops and online forums, help them stay updated with best practices and refine their mentoring skills (Vikaraman et al., 2017). The MCaM Model attends to the initial training of mentors during the coaching phase of the program.

Coaching

Research on mentoring suggests that effective mentors should possess key competencies commonly found in the coaching profession, including a blend of key interpersonal, pedagogical, and reflective competencies, such as active listening, the ability to ask powerful questions, providing constructive feedback, facilitating reflective practice, building trust, and establishing rapport (Aguilar, 2021; Garvey et al., 2018). These competencies help create supportive, collaborative environments where mentees feel empowered to take ownership of their learning. Core coaching competencies are essential for establishing open communication and effective mentoring relationships (Aguilar, 2021). Research shows that mentor training programs that incorporate coaching elements are especially effective as they prepare mentors to offer individualized, context-specific support for mentees (Garet et al., 2001). Furthermore, developing coaching competences is not a one-time event but an ongoing process that benefits from continuous learning and reflection (Knight, 2016).

Although the terms *coaching* and *mentoring* have been used interchangeably in teacher education due to conceptual overlap (Western, 2012), the MCaM Model uses them distinctively and intentionally. The Model offers a “unique framework that integrates coaching, mentoring, and community building, and that attends holistically to the needs and concerns of TESOL [Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages] practitioners” (Rashed & Suarez, 2025, p. 11). Once accepted into the program, the would-be mentors first participate in an intensive coaching phase where they acquire knowledge, skills, and methodologies. They then engage in mentoring practice with mentees, during which they continue to receive coaching support. In the MCaM Model, *coaching* refers to the initial preparation and ongoing support provided to the mentors, while *mentoring* refers to the direct mentor-mentee experiences.

This distinction is significant, as the Model’s innovation lies in integrating coaching competencies into mentor preparation. When mentors are equipped with coaching knowledge, skills, and strategies, they are better positioned to support the professional growth of their mentees, either instructionally in the classroom or beyond, leading ultimately to improved teaching practices and student outcomes (Killion et al., 2012).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptualizing Mentor Identity Development and Perceived Responsibility

The concepts of Social Identity Theory, Situated Learning Theory, and Dialogical Self Theory influenced our study design. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits that

individuals derive a significant part of their identity from their social groups. For language teacher mentors, this means their professional identity is deeply influenced by their affiliation with their teaching and mentoring communities and their perceived roles within those communities. This sense of belonging and identification with the professional group provides a foundation for their identity as mentors. Building on Social Identity Theory, Lave and Wenger's (1991) Situated Learning Theory emphasizes that learning is inherently a social process, co-constructed within communities of practice, where knowledge is co-constructed through interactions with peers, mentees, and other stakeholders. This engagement enhances their professional skills and solidifies their identity as mentors who contribute to and learn from their community.

Hermans' Dialogical Self Theory (2001) adds depth to the discussion on identity by framing it as a dynamic interplay of multiple positions among which dialogue occurs. For language teacher mentors, this means their identity is continuously shaped and reshaped through internal and external dialogues. These dialogues involve reflecting on their experiences, integrating feedback from their mentoring relationships, and negotiating their perceived roles within the broader educational context. This ongoing dialogic process allows mentors to adapt, shift, and evolve their identities in response to challenges and opportunities.

Identity, as a social construct, is not an inherent, fixed attribute but is continuously shaped and reshaped through social interactions and cultural contexts (Zack, 2023). In language teacher education, teachers' professional identities are co-constructed through sociocultural interactions with students, colleagues, and the broader educational community (Yazan et al., 2023), which challenges the notion of a static identity, highlighting its multifaceted nature. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) further elaborate that identities are contingent, multiple, and context-dependent, varying across different situations and discourses. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) add that identity is inherently relational, emerging through the interplay of social interactions and power dynamics. This perspective underscores the importance of considering the broader context in which language teachers operate, as it significantly influences their identity construction and professional development.

Building on this, the notion of professional identity refers to how teachers see themselves and how these self-perceptions shape their professional growth (Rashed, 2017; Rashed & Suarez, 2024). For mentors, identity is fluid and influenced by interactions with mentees, colleagues, and the broader educational environment, and their self-conception and perceived responsibilities as educators and mentors. This self-perception guides their actions, decisions,

and synergy within the mentoring process (Kayi-Aydar, 2015). Together, these theoretical concepts can help us understand how language teacher mentors who participate in well-structured coaching and mentoring programs, such as the MCaM, develop their identities and understand and enact their perceived responsibilities in their new role.

Intersectionality and Mentors' Identity Development and Responsibilities

Intersectionality, first theorized by Crenshaw (1991), provides a critical lens for understanding how multiple social identities, such as race, gender, class, and nationality, interact to shape experiences of privilege and oppression. Building on this foundational work, Cho et al. (2013) expand intersectionality as both an analytical tool and a praxis that “foregrounds how power operates in the intersections of identity categories and systems of oppression” (p. 795), making it a valuable framework for examining mentors’ positionalities, responsibilities, and relationships with mentees. Collins and Bilge (2020) further emphasize that intersectionality is not solely concerned with identity but with “the complex relationships of power that shape lived experiences and institutional practices” (p. 6). When applied to mentoring, intersectionality reveals the ethical and relational dimensions of mentors’ responsibilities.

Furthermore, Blake-Beard et al. (2011) argue that identity-aware mentoring requires moving beyond simple demographic matching to deeper engagement with the social and institutional dimensions of difference. They assert that “mentoring across difference requires a heightened sense of awareness and commitment to social justice” (p. 640). This sense of responsibility, grounded in intersectionality, calls on mentors to move beyond traditional guidance roles toward advocacy and relational care. In this study, intersectionality adds dimension to our understanding of the dynamic nature of mentors’ identity development and their evolving responsibilities within mentoring relationships.

METHODOLOGY

Context of the Study

The context for this study is a statewide, volunteer coaching and mentoring program offered through a professional association for English Language Teaching (ELT) practitioners in Maryland, United States. Established in 2022, the goal of the nine-month program is to address the need for cross-sector connection among ELT practitioners at different career stages, actively encouraging collaboration, knowledge sharing, and professional growth in order to influence statewide-level professional development outcomes.

At the outset of our initial program design, we identified limitations in existing ELT mentoring frameworks. For example, traditional models tend to focus primarily on pre- and early-career teacher preparation and instructional strategies, often overlooking the ongoing, complex professional identities of experienced educators (Wang & Fulton, 2012). Furthermore, mentoring programs frequently lack the depth and coherence needed to support mentors in developing the skills required for sustained, responsive engagement (Mann, 2005). Many existing programs emphasize instructional support while neglecting the broader personal and professional dimensions of mentoring relationships and often operate without clear frameworks, leading to inconsistencies in implementation and impact (Hudson, 2013). To address these gaps and better support the evolving needs of ELT professionals, we developed what we have termed the ‘MCaM Model,’ an innovative framework that layers various program components of coaching, mentoring, and providing wrap-around professional development support.

Recruitment Process

Recruitment of program participants is conducted through the association’s online postings and annual conference. Mentor participation is highly selective, resulting in a small, elite group of mentors and, consequently, a limited number of mentees. Application questions encourage the applicants to articulate their goals. Since the program goal is to connect educators in different contexts across Maryland, the matching of a mentor with a mentee is based on the mentee’s expressed individual goals, whether those goals are career advancement or exploration of further professional development and networking opportunities.

Mentors do not receive financial compensation. Instead, they receive a range of professional benefits, including waived conference registration and membership fees, public acknowledgment, participation in conferences, and opportunities for continued leadership involvement. These incentives have contributed to sustained mentor engagement, with some returning in subsequent program cycles and assuming leadership roles within the professional association.

This study aimed to explore the shifting identities and perceived responsibilities of the two cohorts of ELT mentors who participated in the MCaM program between 2022 and 2024. Six mentors who completed the first two years in the program were invited and agreed to participate in this study. The participants are all women with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Professionally, they have worked in different ELT settings (e.g., K-12, adult education, college,

and program administration) both in the United States and abroad, with 10-25 years of experience, and a minimum of a master's degree in TESOL.

The MCaM Model

The MCaM Model is an innovative framework designed to address gaps in traditional mentoring for language educators in different sectors and at different career stages. It offers comprehensive support for mentors and mentees by prioritizing mentor preparation and sustained, professional community engagement. The model has three conceptual layers: 1) theory (core principles and foundations), 2) framework (identity formation, professional growth, and career advancement), and 3) experiences (dynamic and interactive processes). These layers are implemented through three structural phases: 1) coaching (preparing mentors through targeted development of coaching knowledge, skills and abilities), 2) mentoring (facilitating meaningful mentor-mentee relationships), and 3) community building (sustaining a supportive professional network).

Figure 1. The Multilayered Coaching and Mentorship (MCaM) Model

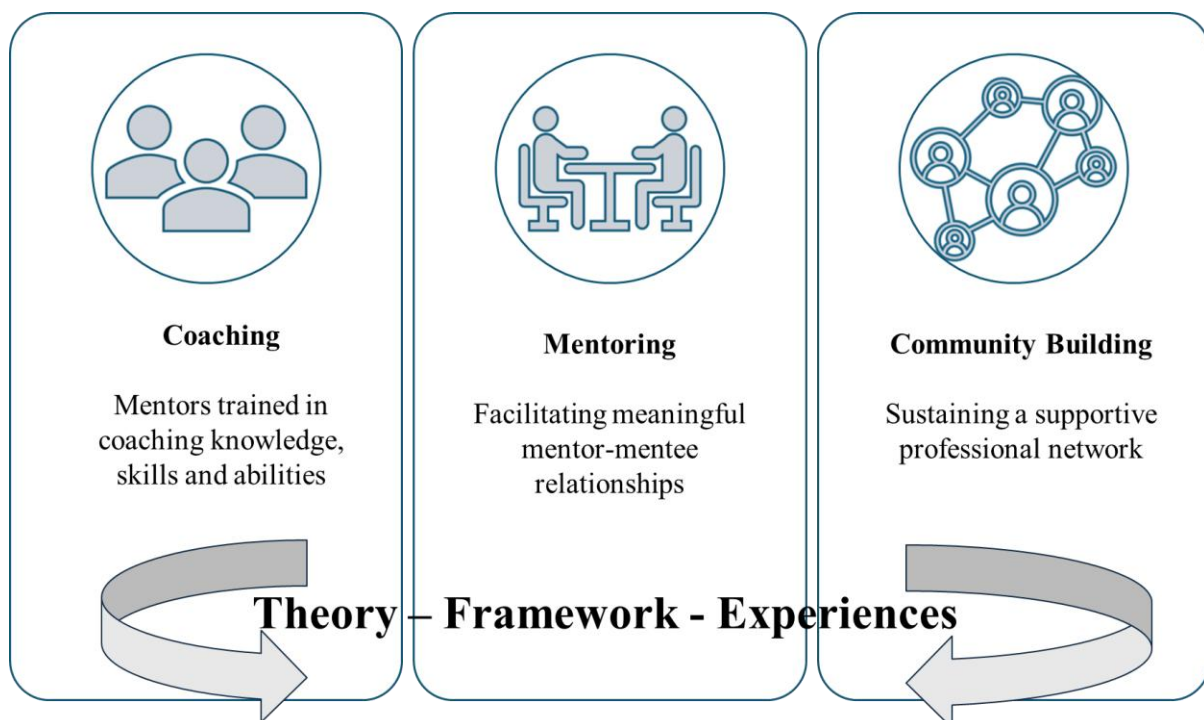


Figure 1 above shows a visual representation of the model. And we provide a description of each layer and phase of the model below.

Layer 1: Theory – Core Principles and Foundations

The Model is grounded in conceptual foundations in the interdisciplinary literature of communication studies (e.g., Cheney et al., 2008), organizational behavior (e.g., Caza et al., 2018), ethics (e.g., Ciulla, 2020), equity and inclusion (e.g., Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017), and language teacher professional development (e.g., Pennington & Richards, 2016). Informed by these theories, the core principles of the Model address the realities of mentoring within diverse educational and sociocultural contexts, for diverse professional purposes, across the career lifespan. Six interrelated principles, values, and beliefs (see Table 1 below), guide the MCaM Model and shape its design, implementation, and evaluation.

Table 1. Core Principles of the MCaM Model

core principles of the MCaM model	description
ethical engagement	upholds confidentiality, transparency, and responsibility in all mentoring interactions
mentee-driven	recognizes the mentee as a dynamic partner and an expert. The mentor is not the expert but uses coaching techniques to position the mentee as the expert
mentor preparation	mentors must receive proper training
critical reflection	encourages deep self-inquiry into identity, professionalism, and practice, supporting transformative growth
collaboration and collective growth	cultivates communities of practice that support shared learning and professional development
empowerment and agency	supports both mentors and mentees in becoming self-directed, confident, and influential leaders in their fields

Layer 2: Framework – Identity Formation, Professional Growth, and Career Advancement

While Layer 1 provides the core principles of the MCaM Model, Layer 2 provides its framework, which packages the Model around three clear goals: mentoring as a space for identity negotiation, professional transformation, and career advancement. Through mentee-

driven conversations, personalized mentoring strategies, and leadership engagement, both mentors and mentees develop capacity for self-reflection and articulation of deeper self-awareness, and implications for professional growth, highlighting the mentoring role in identity work and professional learning (Kayi-Aydar, 2015). For example, mentors are encouraged to write “*My Mentoring Philosophy*.” They respond to reflection prompts to explore their identities as mentors: why they engage in mentoring, the values and beliefs they bring with them to the mentoring experience, and what they hope to accomplish as mentors. Mentors are also encouraged to continue revising their mentoring philosophies throughout the nine months. If they return in subsequent program years (which many of them do), they are encouraged to continue revising each year they are in the program.

In addition, the Framework identifies key coaching competencies for mentors, such as active listening, strategic questioning, and goal setting. These competencies enable mentors to center the mentee’s voice and empower mentees to define their own goals, reflect critically on their practice, and take ownership of their professional growth. Mentors are also guided in facilitating their mentees’ work in constructing clear, measurable goals, creating plans and milestones, reinforcing mutual accountability, and fostering progress through goal-driven mentoring sessions.

Layer 3: Experiences – Dynamic and Interactive Processes

The third conceptual layer of the MCaM Model emphasizes the importance of multifaceted, dynamic experiences that create, enrich, and sustain the mentoring process. Moving beyond the confines of one-directional mentoring, where the instructional mentor has the elevated status of the “expert” to the mentee’s status as “apprentice,” this Model integrates coaching knowledge, skills, and abilities so the mentor can empower the mentee in a mentee-driven relationship.

In addition, the Model uses a variety of wrap-around supports in the form of interactive and immersive experiences designed to deepen mentor and mentee engagement. Mentors’ experiences include discussing readings and case studies, demonstrating effective practices, examining hands-on applications, and engaging in reflective exercises. Mentees’ experiences include goal setting, identifying barriers, action planning, and determining self-accountability during one-on-one mentoring sessions, ultimately taking ownership of the mentoring process.

Structural Implementation Phases

The Model is implemented in three phases: Coaching, Mentoring, and Community Building. Phase 1, *Coaching*, lasts for four months, during which mentors receive targeted coaching. As described above, this phase builds foundational knowledge, including the ethics of mentoring, the respective roles of mentors and mentees, mentoring as a mentee-driven experience, and the facilitation of the broad mentoring experience, such as introspection, goal setting, action planning, and accountability.

During the second phase, *Mentoring*, the trained mentors are then matched with mentees to engage in semi-structured, goal-oriented mentoring sessions that last for five months. Mentoring sessions are both virtual and in-person. The focus is on various aspects of professional development for the whole individual. Depending on the goals set by the mentee, classroom practice may or may not be part of the mentoring experiences. During the mentoring phase, the mentors also receive ongoing feedback and support to problem-solve, enhance effectiveness, and build confidence. The experiential nature of this phase affirms the Model's commitment to continuous learning, relational depth, and the co-construction of knowledge, positioning mentors and mentees not only as participants in a program, but as active contributors to a broader, sustained culture of professional growth.

The Model aims to nurture and cultivate inclusive professional networks. Thus, the *Community Building* phase occurs simultaneously throughout the entire program. Mentors and mentees are supported through collaborative reflection, shared learning experiences, professional social gatherings, and ongoing engagement in both virtual and in-person formats that foster a sense of belonging and shared purpose.

The MCaM model is dynamic in nature. While the overall MCaM Model retained its original principles and structural foundations since its inception, it continues to evolve based on our own reflections and participant feedback. For example, the Model now includes additional discussions on culturally responsive mentoring, more case studies, and more engagement opportunities. Further, we did not anticipate that mentors would return year after year. We now welcome our returning mentors and include coaching experiences and activities that value and integrate their prior training and mentoring experiences.

Study Design

This study utilized a qualitative case study design to explore how the participating mentors developed their professional identities and shifted their perceptions of their perceived

responsibilities through participation in the MCaM Model Program. Situated within the case study design, the MCaM Model program served as the bounded system case, enabling an in-depth investigation of “a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context” (Yin, 2018, p. 15). The term *bounded system case* refers to the specific, clearly defined parameters that delineate the scope of the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting or context), allowing for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon within its real-life setting (Yin, 2018). Given the dual interest in the uniqueness and commonality of participants' experiences, the bounded system case study frame supported a holistic understanding of the program's impact.

Two analytic strategies were employed. First, narrative inquiry was used to center the participants' experiences and reconstruct their identity development journeys, recognizing that “narrative inquiry is stories lived and told” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20) and that narratives are “interpretive representations” of experience (Riessman, 2008, p. 8). Second, content analysis was applied to mentors' written Mentoring Philosophy statements to identify shifts in beliefs and perceived responsibilities over time to support the “subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). The integration of narrative inquiry and content analysis allowed for a deeper understanding of identity development by weaving together personal narratives, collective experiences, and written expressions of professional growth.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were gathered from three sources: interviews, a focus group, and mentoring philosophies. First, semi-structured interviews were used to collect detailed personal narratives from participants about their experiences in the program. This method allowed for flexible questioning while maintaining a consistent structure (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). During the interviews, the mentors were asked to reflect on their perceptions of their roles, challenges faced, and the impact on their professional identities, including any shifts they noticed before, during, and after the coaching and mentoring phases of the program.

Second, a focus group with five mentors was conducted to facilitate discussions about shared experiences and insights. This collaborative setting, alongside interviews, leveraged group dynamics to uncover common themes and differences in mentoring practices and identity development (Morgan, 1997). Third, data were collected from the six mentors' updated *My*

Mentoring Philosophy, in which they articulated their beliefs, values, and approaches to mentoring. Analysis of these philosophies provided insights into the self-identified guiding principles of the mentors' practices and how these principles evolved over time.

The triangulation of data sources provided multiple perspectives, thereby strengthening our understanding of the mentors' identity development and shift in perceived responsibilities. Interviews offered individual insights into mentors' professional journeys, while the focus group captured collective experiences and shared understandings during social interactions (Kayi-Aydar, 2015). Mentoring philosophy statements added a reflective dimension of identity development as a dynamic, socially constructed process (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

Data analysis proceeded in three steps. First, open coding for all three data sources captured key ideas, phrases, and experiences related to identity development, and shifting and perceived responsibilities. All interview transcripts, the focus group transcript, and mentoring philosophy statements were read multiple times. Recurring concepts, values, and beliefs in the mentoring philosophy statements and key concepts in the mentors' stories were identified and grouped systematically (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Second, these initial codes were clustered into broader categories and were supported with evidence from the data sources. Third, overarching themes were identified across categories, then integrated to produce a comprehensive portrayal of identity development within the bounded case of the MCaM Model program.

FINDINGS

The Evolution of Mentors' Professional Identities

The first major category, the evolution of mentors' identities, captures how participants' self-perceptions as mentors shifted throughout their engagement in the program. As they progressed through coaching and mentoring experiences, mentors began to redefine their roles, both as reflective professionals undergoing growth themselves, and as more impactful professionals extending to a much wider range of influence. The data reveals a process of becoming; marked by increased self-awareness, confidence, and a rearticulation of what it means to be a mentor within a dynamic and reciprocal professional relationship. Themes within this category have been grouped into: Reflective Practice and Identity Development, Commitment to Mentoring, Commitment to Mutual Growth, and Embracing Leadership.

Reflective Practice and Identity Development

The program included multiple opportunities for reflection, including holding periodic collaborative, group reflective discussions, and writing individual mentoring philosophies. These structured opportunities for reflection are important for mentors' learning, helping them refine their identities through participatory learning in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Mentors intentionally focused on how to develop their own processes and tools to be better guides for their mentees, showing self-awareness of what it means to be a mentor. On many occasions, the participants noted:

Reflection on what we're doing with the mentee is a huge part of growing and learning to be a good mentor. (Interview)

I have started to do a lot of reflections about how I do react to things or how I really give feedback or have I really worked together with my mentee to set those goals (Focus Group)

Continuous guided reflection allowed mentors to better understand their roles, refine their approaches, support their mentees more effectively, and articulate their professional growth. Mentors derive part of their identity and associated responsibilities from their belonging to professional communities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Further, the internal adjustment signaled a dialogical process of navigating conflicting roles (Hermans, 2001), as mentors continuously negotiate and reshape their professional selves.

Commitment to Mentoring

As teachers themselves, the mentors already possessed established values and commitment to teaching, such as a deep sense of service, empathy, humility, responsibility, generosity, and the value of teaching and giving to others. As one mentor aptly expressed, "I believe that knowledge and experience should not be kept to oneself only. We should use our assets to benefit others, who will in turn use his/hers to benefit more people." (Mentoring Philosophy). Similarly, one mentor quipped, "Basically, I am optimistic, a life-long learner and live by the golden rule of 'do unto others what you do unto yourself.'" (Mentoring Philosophy).

As mentors completed their training and practiced their newfound knowledge, skills, and strategies, they strengthened their commitment to mentoring and helping others. This commitment extended to their willingness to assume a mentee-driven approach, and their adaptability in meeting mentees' needs, as one participant stated, "This program has really strengthened my capacity to want to serve" (Focus Group). This evolution shows the mentors'

move from a top-down role to a co-learner and underscores the transformative learning within communities of practice in the mentoring context (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The motivation and commitment to become a mentor were also driven by personal experiences of support or lack thereof in the mentors' own careers.

I'm sure that being especially elementary, of course, is female-dominated and feeling that lack of support in the specific ways that I did. That's what motivated me to be a mentor... Having experienced that myself, that's why I wanted to be a mentor. (Interview)

Mentors derive part of their identity and commitment from their affiliation with the mentoring community and their social experiences; such affiliation reinforces self-conception and role adherence through shared social experiences (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Here, the mentor role becomes a valued identity tied to belonging, especially in relation to past experiences.

Commitment to Mutual Growth

With the emphasis on a mentee-driven experience and the shift from “mentor as expert” to “mentor as facilitator and guide”, co-constructing the mentoring experience, the mentors began to view mentoring as a mutually beneficial, reciprocal process within communities of practice. This highlights the collaborative nature of identity development within communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As one mentor mused on the reciprocal nature, “I contribute to the development of another person, and value the impact on myself” (Interview). Another mentor, a self-described lifelong learner who is highly motivated to affect transformational change, now prioritizes her own professional development, so she can better serve her mentee: “I must constantly grow to help my mentee grow” (Mentoring Philosophy).

Another mentor describes commitment to mutual growth in terms of mutual accountability and responsibility:

As mentors, we can provide tools, insights, and encouragement, but mentees must be the ones to implement these. I believe accountability also extends to mentors, as we must hold ourselves accountable to be fully present, to actively listen, and to provide the best possible guidance (Mentoring Philosophy).

Individuals form a sense of self through affiliation with social roles and/or groups. Here, mentors derive purpose from being recognized as nurturing, supportive, and professional figures in their community. Their identities as leaders and mentors become part of their social self-definition (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The mentors' evolving view, balancing compassion with professionalism, illustrates the dialogical negotiation between, sometimes, competing self-positions (Hermans, 2001). As one mentor expressed: “I am a resource but a co-learner. A

co-learner rather than that of an expert, because I am and will always be setting goals to improve as an ESOL educator.” (Mentoring Philosophy). This evolution shows a deepening understanding of their role, growth, and adaptation in their mentor identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Embracing Leadership

Mentors gained confidence and competence through active participation in a community of practice and engagement in structured mentoring experiences within the program. Their identities evolve as they reflect on moments of perceived success through both internal dialogue and external validation. Mentors’ reflections illustrate the dialogical self in motion, where internal perceptions shift in response to affirming social feedback, leading to new professional self-positions such as ‘leader’ and ‘change agent’ (Hermans, 2001). Participants expressed gratitude for the program's positive impact on their professional and leadership capacity. This particular participant described her experience during the interview and focus group:

I would definitely say that this program really helped strengthen my confidence in terms of my mentoring abilities....I feel like the leadership in my building has taken notice of the strengths that, you know, how I've improved in my leadership skills...There was probably like one thing I said that was really worth their time...that gave me so much more confidence. (Interview)

I began to gain more confidence and being able to step outside of just being a mentor to ESL individuals in the building but maybe being able to help other teachers. (Focus Group)

The mentor’s growing confidence and leadership capacity in the mentoring community highlight the situated, practice-based nature of identity formation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As mentors transitioned into leadership roles, their growth was influenced by affirmation from peers, participation in a learning community, and internal dialogue, resulting in growing moments of confidence and the emergence of professional leadership identities.

Mentoring is one important way for me to develop leadership and management skills. I will learn how to keep my mentees focused on their goals and find effective strategies to help them reach their goals within an efficient timeframe. In the meantime, I will improve my communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. I am eager to learn and grow from the mentoring experience. (Mentoring Philosophy)

I’ve recently taken on a leadership position at my job where I will be a female assisting three males and they voted for me to lead the team. This program really helped me develop the confidence that they were all like, “Oh, yeah, we want you to lead our team.” (Interview)

Mentors' emerging leadership roles demonstrate how mentors shift from identifying solely as ESL mentors to embracing broader professional identities, such as leaders and peer collaborators. Being part of a broader professional leadership network strengthens their sense of competence and recognition.

Perceived and Shifting Responsibilities

The mentors' perceived responsibilities shifted significantly throughout the program. The integration of coaching knowledge, skills and abilities and the dynamic nature of the mentoring relationship requires mentors to adapt and grow alongside their mentees, leading to a more holistic and effective experience. Initially focused on instructional guidance, their perceptions of their responsibilities expanded to include personal support, cultural sensitivity, flexibility, adaptability, and continuous self-improvement.

Whereas at the beginning of the program, mentors might have had preconceived and divergent perceptions of their responsibilities, the MCaM Model challenged these assumptions, leading to critical self-reflection and a reorientation of their responsibilities. These participants noted:

I just had like an idea of what I was supposed to be doing, but my ideas weren't right in some ways ... the specificity of what I was being asked to do that I didn't know how to do...It actually was a lot harder than I expected. And that was interesting... I felt the responsibility of it a little bit more seriously than I think I would have before the training. (Interview)

If I do add to their plate in the process of individualizing the mentoring experience, then it will be my goal to help them take something else off their plate. (Mentoring Philosophy)

As mentors increasingly identified with the professional mentoring community (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), they began to internalize values such as empathy, inclusivity, and accountability, resulting in a shift in their identity from a task-based orientation to a relational and equity-minded role.

It ended up not being that structured because what she wound up needing was a time and place where she could feel that she had someone to talk to. (Interview)

I'm meeting with different personalities and meeting with different professionals, so I have to adjust, to adapt. (Interview)

I mentored somebody whose goal was very much the classroom and someone else whose goal was more in regard to curriculum. And I thought, okay, well, it turns out, you know, maybe I do know something about that. (Focus Group)

The mentors' growth further illustrates learning-by-doing, where new responsibilities and identities emerge through ongoing interaction and community participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In addition, reflection had a significant impact on shifting the mentors' perception of their responsibilities, solidifying their understanding of their roles and improving the effectiveness of their mentoring practices.

Listening to someone's life goals was really like an aha moment... it helped me kind of think about, reflect on my own in a sense. (Interview)

It clarified my thinking about what I had done in the past and really helped me prepare for what I was expecting to be doing. (Interview)

I didn't think it was going to be that much work. But it was... I need to be on top of things. I cannot let the week go by without reaching out. (Interview)

Perhaps the most powerful shift in perceived responsibilities is the movement from seeing their work as focused solely on instructional guidance to also including professional guidance. This shift, in turn, caused mentors to develop strongly asserted beliefs that what they are doing matters on a larger scale of influence. They moved from describing their work at the micro-level of impact on individual teachers to the macro-level of broader impact in the field. One mentor sees her mentoring work as contributing to the professionalization of teaching itself:

I believe teaching should be elevated to the same level of professionalism as a doctor and lawyer. My goal is to shift the conversation in America from how to evaluate teachers to the best ways to increase student learning. Actually, they go hand in hand. (Mentoring Philosophy)

Another mentor extended her perception of the value of her work from just one mentee teacher to impact on the state of Maryland: "The broader impact I want to have is to increase teacher satisfaction and retention in the state of Maryland by supporting, encouraging, and empowering one teacher at a time." (Mentoring Philosophy). Similarly, another mentor described her responsibility as growing beyond the one mentee, beyond the one experience:

By instilling the importance of compassion and kindness, I want to create a ripple effect of goodwill, where my mentees learn to treat others with empathy and support, thus contributing to a more compassionate world. (Mentoring Philosophy)

Across all mentors, each expressed, in their own way, how the magnitude of their perception of their mentoring work grew to a broader and more impactful responsibility, as one mentor aptly described: "I believe that ordinary people can do extraordinary things." (Mentoring Philosophy). These reflections illustrate the dialogical self in motion and highlight moments of internal re-evaluation, where mentors negotiate between initial self-positions and emerging identities through reflective dialogue and external affirmation (Hermans, 2001).

The MCaM Model fosters holistic mentor development by integrating coaching and mentoring practices to support mentors' professional and personal growth. The data show that mentors' perceptions of the value and impact of their work extend beyond the individual mentee and the classroom to having an impact upon teacher retention, and a kinder and more compassionate world. This combined approach enhances mentors' confidence and deepens their understanding of mentoring as distinct from other professional roles, which would promise to, in turn, impact the mentors' sense of identity development and commitment to their roles as mentors.

Intersectionality and Interconnectedness

The dynamic interplay of gender, race, culture, and linguistic background prompts mentors to continually reflect on their identities and responsibilities. Data analysis highlighted two key areas shaped by intersectionality: cultural and linguistic awareness, and gender dynamics.

Cultural and Linguistic Awareness

Understanding and appreciating cultural differences were essential in building strong mentor-mentee relationships, as mentors navigate cultural and linguistic differences to provide relevant support to their mentees.

I learned a lot about how her culture kind of impacted the way that she saw education... she was from a different culture. (Interview)

He was from a different culture, a different culture of professional training. And so, I think our match was good. (Interview)

One mentee had had... intercultural experience... her husband... at least a Spanish speaker... that would come up in terms of her knowledge of Spanish. (Interview)

I think she [mentor's supervisor] had in her mind...is your county superior to mine or is my county superior to your kind of thing? (Interview)

One mentor hinted at the intersectionality with her own experience as an immigrant and language learner:

As an adult education professional in public service with an immigrant background, my aspirations aim to leave a legacy of empowerment. My purpose in mentoring extends to creating space that recognizes the immense value of cultural sensitivity [SIC], with our students at the heart of it. (Mentoring Philosophy)

As they build relational trust with their mentees and negotiate between internal positions, such as confidence, vulnerability, and empathy, mentors engage in internal dialogue in

response to linguistic or cultural dynamics (Hermans, 2001). In those dialogues, mentors come to understand mentoring as a process deeply shaped by cultural frameworks (Cho et al., 2013), where mentoring becomes a site of both learning and navigating differences.

One mentor shared her own experience with linguistic differences as a native speaker of a language other than English and how she feared being judged or less valued based solely on her accent. She noted,

I really didn't want to do that (i.e., speak on the phone at the beginning) because I think my hesitation was, oh, she's going to hear my accent, and I don't know. Sometimes people hear people's accents, and they try to shortchange people. (Interview).

However, after meeting in person and interacting with her mentee, the mentor became more confident. Mentors' sense of belonging to culturally or professionally familiar communities reinforces their social identities as mentors and advocates, aligning with Social Identity Theory's emphasis on group-based role affiliation and its impact on self-perception and responsibility (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Further mentors shared how their diverse educational backgrounds and experiences contributed to their mentoring effectiveness.

I had my other master's in applied behavioral sciences, which I've never really used. But it was something that I thought about that it comes into play in addition to my knowledge about ESL teaching. (Focus Group)

We [mentor and mentee] had some kind of familiarity with that, and maybe that gave us a little bit of a link that we were able to communicate because he knew where I was from, and I knew where he was from... I shared with him my pathway from what I was doing to where I am today. (Interview)

These reflections emphasize the intersection of linguistic identity, perceived legitimacy, and professional credibility in diverse cultural contexts, reminding us that intersectionality also includes how language and accent intersect with race and culture to influence access and power (Collins & Bilge, 2020). They demonstrate intersectionality as praxis—not just an idea but a way of understanding how to act responsibly and equitably as a mentor (Cho et al., 2013).

Gender Dynamics

As mentioned earlier, six female mentors participated in the study. All but one mentored female mentees. In that particular case, the male mentee was a Fulbright scholar in the United States. We matched him with the mentor with the most overseas experience. It is also worth noting that the program did not receive any other mentor applications from males.

When gender dynamics were discussed during the interviews and focus group, the participants noted that they did not view gender as significantly impacting their mentoring relationships.

I think it's hard to imagine. I just don't think I would know until I was in it. (Focus Group)

I feel like more males may, I feel more comfortable mentoring males and they feel more comfortable with me giving them feedback. ... Now I just feel like they're just like any other mentee. You know, I just look at the whole process as the same. (Focus Group)

It seems that mentors' professionalism and commitment to their roles guide their practices without impact from gender dynamics. The one mentor who worked with the male mentee noted that age and cultural awareness was more influential in their relationship than gender.

I don't think the fact that we were of different genders sort of interfered with our relationship. Maybe because I was older than him. I don't know if that age difference made a difference...I think the fact that he had this very close relationship with his mother... maybe he saw me somewhat of a, you know, in that kind of role. (Interview)

However, the discussion highlighted differing perceptions and experiences with male and female supervisors. One mentor emphasized the linear and formal approach she observed with her supervisors.

I think I had a great luck with male supervisors. And maybe it is what [another mentor's name] said how they are so linear...they really maybe see the work and then you do the work.

Another mentor echoed the same idea, "I think I felt like my work was appreciated more with the male supervisor than the female supervisor" (Focus Group). Mentors also reflected on the nurturing versus supportive leadership styles they experienced and the differences in management styles between male and female supervisors.

I think I felt like my work was appreciated more with the male supervisor than the female supervisor. (Focus Group)

I think how I felt was...there was not much of a drama with the male supervisor. Like you do the work and then you take it from there. (Focus Group)

While gender dynamics did not play a direct role for most mentors, nonetheless, as can be seen in the quote below, mentors are aware of the gender dynamics in the education field as a whole:

I have been saying for a long time that the way we solve the teacher shortage is to treat teaching as if it were a male-dominated profession and start offering salaries as if it were a male-dominated profession. (Focus Group)

Gender differences did not appear to significantly influence mentors' sense of responsibility; however, an awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity among mentees enabled mentors to foster deeper connections and build more inclusive mentoring communities.

FINAL DISCUSSION

Returning to the focus points of this study's research questions (i.e., identity evolution, shift in perceived responsibility, and the intersection of both with other factors), the data show that the mentors' experiences in the nine-month MCaM program highlight key priorities for designing effective coaching and mentoring programs for language professionals at different career stages. The program fostered transformative growth in mentors' professional identities, adaptability, perceived responsibilities, confidence, sense of professional impact, and leadership, highlighting the value of a structured, reflective, and supportive mentoring environment. Through this program, mentors experienced dynamic and evolving roles, professional growth, and an expanded sense of professional impact, as interconnected with other contextual factors.

Dynamic and Evolving Roles

Mentors' identities are actively reshaped through relationships, experiences, and reflection. Mentors perceive their roles as dynamic and evolving, adapting their responsibilities to better support their mentees. While they start with a structured approach, mentors often shift to more flexible and relational styles. This evolution reflects a redefinition of their mentor identity, from fixed roles to flexible professionals, shaped through relational and situational demands (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

This strongly suggests that mentors learn not only through formal preparation but also through active engagement with diverse mentees, where mutual learning and appreciation of diverse contributions occur. Mentors develop their identities through participation, adaptation, and co-relational engagement in communities of mentoring practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Mentors inspire, guide, and support mentees—boosting motivation, spotting opportunities, navigating relationships, and offering counsel—while adapting to their evolving goals. This flexibility underscores the dialogical nature of identity construction, as mentors reconcile multiple self-positions—supporter, guide, coach, advocate—within an evolving relational space (Hermans, 2001).

This dynamic evolution in mentors' perceived responsibilities exemplifies a multilayered identity development process, where community membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), experiential learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), reflective dialogue (Hermans, 2001), and intersectional life experiences (Crenshaw, 1991) collectively inform mentors' growth as they navigate their dynamic roles.

Transformative Professional Growth, Responsibility, and Professional Impact

The integration of coaching and mentoring created accessible and meaningful experiences for both mentors and mentees, transforming and expanding their sense of professional growth, responsibility, and professional impact. Aligning the selection process with mentees' goals improved mentor-mentee matching. Structured feedback and check-ins supported engagement and progress. Mentors experienced significant changes in their professional identities through structured training and reflective practice. A clear framework and supportive environment deepened role understanding, confidence, and growth (Borg & Parnham, 2020). Interacting with diverse mentees further enhanced mentors' cultural awareness and inclusivity, highlighting the importance of understanding and cultural sensitivity in mentoring practices (Owusu-Agyeman, 2024). Core values such as compassion, kindness, accountability, generosity, humility, and inclusivity further shaped mentors' identities, perceived responsibilities, and mentoring philosophy.

Mentors' responsibilities evolved significantly throughout the program. Initially focused on instructional guidance, mentors came to embrace a broader, more holistic role, focusing on professional growth, personal support, and continuous improvement (Chang & Drescher, 2023). As they engaged with mentees, mentors shifted from fixed expectations to more flexible and responsive approaches. This evolution mirrors identity work as mentors continue to adapt their roles to align with mentees' needs (Owusu-Agyeman, 2024). This adaptability is crucial in addressing unexpected challenges and fostering effective mentoring relationships (Borg & Parnham, 2020).

Accountability, ensuring that mentees understand their responsibility for their own progress, is evidence that mentors understand that the responsibility to achieve progress should be mutual. This shift indicates a more nuanced understanding of their roles, moving from general support to more specific guidance and goal setting. Through self-reflection, mentors refined their approaches, developed holistic support strategies, and embraced the distinctive responsibilities of mentoring, repositioning their work as mentors from other professional

roles. Mentors show growth through greater cultural awareness, adaptability, commitment to ongoing development, and an expanded sense of their ability to influence the field.

Ultimately, mentors perceive their roles as dynamic and evolving, continuously evaluating the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship and adjusting their responsibilities as needed. Further, mentors articulated a greater sense of purpose for their work as a catalyst for wider educational change. This dynamic approach enables mentors to provide comprehensive support, helping mentees with professional development and personal growth, making a significant impact on their mentees' lives and the broader educational community.

Interconnectedness and Shared Knowledge

Guided by their professional identity, mentors recognize the interconnectedness of diverse factors and the importance of learning from diverse mentors and mentees. This awareness goes beyond obvious views of diversity to include everyone's unique contributions to mentoring. Mentors focus on creating a safe environment for shared experiences, utilizing clear communication and empathy, and fostering mutual respect.

Intersectional factors such as gender, race, culture, and linguistic background play a crucial role in shaping mentors' perceived roles and responsibilities. These factors require mentors to engage in continuous self-reflection and develop a deeper understanding of their own identities and responsibilities. The dynamic nature of inclusivity necessitates that mentors adapt their approaches to provide culturally sensitive and personalized support.

Understanding and appreciating cultural differences are essential in building strong mentor-mentee relationships. Mentors acknowledge how intersectional factors influence their identities and responsibilities, learning to navigate cultural and linguistic differences to better support their mentees. Mentors' own experiences with linguistic and cultural diversity further enhance their ability to connect with and support their mentees effectively. Structured mentor preparation can help mentors understand their new roles and responsibilities and create mutual respect, which are crucial for effective mentoring relationships (Borg & Parnham, 2020; Vikaraman et al., 2017; Wyatt & Dikilitaş, 2022). In conclusion, the mentors' experiences in the nine-month MCaM program highlight key priorities for designing and implementing successful and effective coaching and mentoring programs for language professionals at different career stages.

While this study offers valuable insights into mentors' identity development and perceived responsibilities, several limitations should be noted. First, findings rely heavily on self-reported data. Second, the relatively short duration of the mentoring program and follow-up period may not fully capture the long-term evolution of mentors' identities and perceived responsibilities. Finally, the small number of study participants constrained our ability to compare qualitative findings with potential quantitative measures.

CONSIDERATIONS

Findings from the study support the need for structured coaching and mentoring programs for language teacher mentors prior to their assuming a mentoring role. Effective programs should include comprehensive training drawn from the literature in coaching pedagogy and practice to equip mentors with the specific knowledge, skills, and competencies that distinguish mentoring from other professional roles. At the same time, mentoring should move away from rigidly hierarchical structures and embrace more mentee-driven approaches that allow mentors to tailor their support to the unique needs of mentees while maintaining the purpose and goals of the experience.

Framing mentoring as a process of mutual growth further strengthens its impact, as it not only supports mentees but also provides opportunities for mentors' personal and professional development. Finally, continued research is needed to advance understanding of how mentors learn and generate knowledge in practice., as well as to examine the broader impact of models such as the MCaM on mentee's outcomes and program sustainability.

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