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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Peer mentoring by university students teaching underprivileged youth– towards a sustainable model in India

[1]Ritu Dangwal and [2]Charu Kapoor
1. Associate Professor, NIIT University Neemrana, Rajasthan, India.
2. Chief Operations Officer, NIIT Foundation New Delhi, India.

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Manuscript Info

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Abstract

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This study is exploratory in nature and attempts to examine if undergraduate University students belonging to affluents families with good command in English can teach underprivileged youth who otherwise would be taught by trainers coming from remote backgrounds. This paper is a qualitative report of a unique program that was initiated by a university in collaboration with an organization in India. It has been observed that not-for-profit organizations face challenges when it comes to engaging quality resources. For example, in this study, getting quality trainers to train underprivileged students is a challenge as these trainers themselves come from remote areas. NIIT Foundation (NF) is a not-for-profit organization that skills underprivileged youth to become placeable for entry level jobs in various sectors. Since spoken English is considered a vital skill as a selection criterion, NIIT Foundation created a short course namely 'English for Work' to get underprivileged student to get jobs. This is the first time that the foundation got university students to teach their students. The course is a short course completely structured. After a careful selection process, the organization identified 10 students from a university studying B. Tech to teach the underprivileged students. Going forward, the 10 University students will be referred to as mentors. These mentors were assigned 10-15 students i.e., NF underprivileged students. These students come from different states of India and took the sessions (classes) online. The findings are qualitative in nature. They are more in terms of experiences shared by both mentors and students. The findings seem very positive and meaningful both for the mentors and the students. All the students got placed, which is an indicator of the success of the study. The findings can therefore be claimed as being encouraging and credible to build a case for a scalable model.

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Corresponding Author:- **Ritu Dangwal,** Associate Professor, NIIT University Neemrana, Rajasthan, India.

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Background

India Skills Report 2021 states that India's youth employability has decreased to 45.9%, with 40% of the highest employable talent falling into the 18-21 age group. In India, skill development is the need of the hour. There are large un-employed / under employed youth who seek to find employment in companies mostly MNCs. Most of these youths are migrants who come to metropolitan cities looking for better livelihood and better work opportunities. They fall into the category of underprivileged youth living in challenging environments. If not harnessed and nurtured, there is a huge possibility of them falling prey to many anti-social activities. One of the mandates of the Ministry for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship is to skill 40 crore population by 2022. A skill is one's ability, competence, proficiency, and talent to execute a given job/task successfully. One either possesses it inherently or needs to develop gradually over a period through education and training. A skill typically ranges from hard skills to soft skills. Hard skills refer to subject knowledge or expertise and soft skills refer to qualities other than domain knowledge for example, team building, communication, confidence etc. An employer seeks both hard and soft skills in his taskforce. Interestingly, the majority of companies consider soft skills are just as important as hard skills (2014).When it comes to employment readiness, students should be armed with suitable skills and prepared for work in their field (Harvey, 2001).

According to a study carried out by Patil and Charantimath (2021), skill gaps can be bridged with training, education, and short-term courses. Despite the efforts made and recognized there seems to be still a great scope in transformation of abandoned knowledge into skills. Banajawad & Mukta S. Adi (2020) found that education and skill development is an immediate and important requirement for developing countries with large youth population such as India. Acc to Swain & Swain (2020) despite laudable and commendable features of the 'Skill India Mission', the challenges of gender inequality, sectorial imbalance in skilling, training and placements persists. In other words, there is a much-needed need to skill our youth with all possibilities initiatives to be taken by government and private companies.

Peer Mentoring

Education research has not fully explored effective strategies, such as peer mentoring, that can contribute to resiliency among urban students of color. Mentoring involves an experienced individual (mentor) supporting and guiding another individual who requires guidance (mentee) in any given area. While there can be power dynamics and hierarchical dynamics at play, peer mentoring provides an equitable solution to this issue (Christie 2014). Peer mentoring is rooted within the belief that it can be beneficial for youth to receive support from their fellow peers who are similar in age, rather than from adults. Peer mentoring programs, based on the literature, have shown to be effective on youth development, particularly for urban youth mentees (Chung 2017, McLeod et al 2015 and Raphael et al, 2014).

Interestingly, there has been a growing interest in the field of peer mentoring in high schools in the U.S. [Lee 2019, Osteen 2012). Peer mentorship programs allow opportunities for mentors and mentees to build meaningful relationships and establish trust (Hudson and Hudson 2011). A well-structured and purposeful relationship may

provide mentees with social and emotional support, enhancing their confidence and motivation in academic and life goals.

According to Coller and Kuo (2014), involving and engaging urban youth in their communities through peer mentoring allows them to develop leadership skills and improve their academic ability. While the benefits of peer mentoring on mentees is well-established in the literature, there is limited evidence to show the benefit of mentoring for mentors themselves. A few studies that examined the impact of peer mentoring on mentors showed that mentoring programs provided students who were mentors with leadership skills and a sense of responsibility (Sealey & Greene 2014). In another study conducted among Indigenous high school youth, researchers found that being a peer mentor provided benefit to them to increase their own self-esteem and self-worth due to being a mentor (Coyne et.al 2019). There seems to be limited research exploring whether peer mentors in urban, under resourced communities have similar positive benefits as peer mentees. While research on urban youth is often portrayed through a deficit lens, it is essential for researchers to highlight the strengths of youth that are working in under resourced environments and schools and are still able to thrive (Opara et. Al 2022).

Introduction

NIIT Foundation (NF) is a not-for-profit education society (NGO) set up by the promoters of NIIT Ltd. Its mission is to positively impact the underprivileged of the country through educational initiatives and skill development programs. It has set up skill development and vocational training centers in urban and rural areas that offer placement support to all eligible students. The large population of underprivileged youth residing in urban slums lack or possess negligible vocational skills. This prevents them from taking advantage of the vast employment opportunities in the cities of India. Therefore, many youths living in urban communities remain unemployed or under-employed. Skills training is one of the most powerful tools for making a lasting impact on the lives of these young people and their families. NIIT Foundation has various models through which skill training is provided to our beneficiaries. NIIT Foundation recognizes the need for skilling to go beyond technical skills. It has set up centers for three tier towns. These centers offer courses including personality development, communication skills and impart work-etiquettes in the students. The courses are both long term and short term. These centers target students in the age of 16-30 years. The average yearly income of the families of these youths' range between Rs 15000 to Rs 3,00,000/- per annum.

Current Scenario

One such initiative launched by NIIT Foundation is 'English for Work'. This is a short program that focuses on developing English speaking skills in students who come for vocational skilling courses and are preparing to take jobs. Students who enroll for this program are extremely challenged in English as a language. They struggle with basic conversations and find it extremely difficult to talk in English. As is known, learning a language comes with practice and needs an immersive environment. "English for work" is a structured program that is taught by NF facilitators who get intensive training. These facilitators typically belong to lower socio-economic stratum. They adhere to a structured program. The expected outcome of the program is placement for students.

The attempt of this study is to collaborate with an NGO (NIIT Foundation) and the academia i.e., an Indian University (NIIT University, in this case) by getting university students to take the role of facilitators in teaching the underprivileged students and preparing them for jobs. There is indeed a huge need to build an ecosystem that encourages organizations/corporate to engage with academia and vice versa. Nurturing a framework of this kind allows in creating a pool of knowledge between the two entities. It is imperative that industry and academia are on the same page and co-exist together. If this does not happen, then there is a huge possibility of a mismatch between skills and knowledge required by industry and those produced by universities.

A sudden transition of young adults from school to university and university to the world of work can be a challenging life situation. First-year students need to organize their own learning, manage their new study schedules, build new social networks and friendships, and adjust to the requirements of university styles of learning and teaching (Pascarella &Terenzini, 2005). They have to get to know the so-called hidden curriculum of studying at a university beyond the formal curriculum of their course of study (Bergenhenegouwen, 1987). Lowe & Cook (2003), Pancer, Hunsberger, Pratt, &Alisat, (2000) stated that some students fail to make this transition to a university because of incorrect expectations about university life and its requirements and finally drop out of their course of study. In order to smoothen this transition, universities are offering support programs to assist first-year students in adapting from school to university culture. In general, a positive effect of such support programs is that study success is increased and drop-out rates among participating students are decreased (Robbins, Oh, Le, & Button, 2009). Crisp & Cruz (2009), Jacobi (1991), Pascarella &Terenzini, (2005), found that mentoring programs are effective in supporting first-year students. Similarly, mentoring programs have shown positive effects including academic performance, reduced drop-out rates and better social integration (Allen, McManus, & Russell, 1999; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Leidenfrost et al., 2011). Research thus suggests that being a mentee improves academic performance.

Interestingly, NIIT University, a private university situated in Neemrana, Rajasthan, India has recognized the need for nurturing soft skills such as empathy, listening, communication, etc. One of its four pillars is 'seamlessness' which means it attempts to integrate inter-disciplinary programs to enrich students and engage them meaningfully, apart from preparing them for jobs. Among many such program(s) NIIT University offers a community connect program(s) for all its first year students. The University believes in building values of sustainable human behavior of social responsibility in every individual while the students are young. Peer mentoring is one such program that the University offers to its students. Clawson (1996), considers peer mentoring a valuable social development phenomenon which is critical to the development of individuals in the new age. The present study is another attempt by the University to engage their students in a meaningful peer mentoring program.

Purpose of the study

This study aims to explore a perceived benefit of peer mentoring underprivileged youth by privileged youth studying in a private university. In the present study, the mentors are NIIT University students who will gain an understanding of the challenges of underserved communities. While, the mentees are NF skilling students, who will be mentored by youth of similar age group and thereby possibly learn more effectively.

Youth peer mentoring model offers dual learning for both mentors and mentees, especially for the marginalized youth.

Methodology

Context: This study is conducted in a University in Neemrana, Rajasthan. It's a residential university wherein undergraduate students are pursuing their technology and management programs. They come from privileged backgrounds and have studied in private schools where English is the primary language.

About the Program: English for Work has 15 sessions of which 10 sessions are mandatory & 5 sessions are optional. They cover 6 generic topics from day-to-day life and 9 career specific topics (with mock interview practice drills and career tips). The duration of each session is 2 hours. These sessions are conducted online. Resources used in the course are Audio Aids, Visual Aids, Picture descriptions, Role play, Puzzles and riddles and Reflections &Conversations

The most important and critical factor in the entire methodology was to identify the 'right' candidates to teach/mentor. There were 3 important pre-requisites for selection:

·   Good command over English language

·   Passion for teaching and mentoring students from underserved backgrounds

·   A helpful attitude to support a student in his journey towards earning a livelihood.

Sample

Out of the 100 University students who had volunteered, only 10 were shortlisted for mentorship. These students were given training and assigned to various centers of NIIT Foundation. These center locations are both urban and rural slum areas. These centers cater to youth(s) who have dropped out of schools, have limited opportunities for higher studies or are attending colleges /open study mode and have very weak foundation with respect to communication and soft skills (refer to table 1.0).

Process

1. University students were briefed about the program F2F

2. They were then mailed a google form to be filled.

3. Students were shortlisted based on their answers.

4. Interviews held over zoom (online platform)

5. Selected volunteers were given an orientation program with a detailed session plan on how to conduct each session.

6. Each Mentor was assigned a batch of 15 students each, with whom s/he had a engage with on a regular basis for the next 2.5 months for live classes.

7. Mentors were connected to respective Centre Heads who were responsible for the various centres.

The entire process for the mentors was to engage with NF students in live interactive sessions, motivate the students to attend classes, guide them in interview preparations, encourage them to go for the placement drives and ultimately get them placed. As an incentive and acknowledgment of the work done by the mentors, they were to receive a certificate from NIIT Foundation.

Table 1.0: Demography of the centers and mentees

Center Name	Background
Gurgaon Centre	Students are pursuing their graduation from government colleges. They belong to very poor family backgrounds; parents are mostly daily wage workers and construction workers. They have joined this course so that they can get jobs as tele-callers and can help contribute to their family's incomes.
Brahmpuri Centre	Students are pursuing graduation from government colleges. They belong to an extremely poor family background. There have been a few dropouts in this batch as these students could not continue with their course due to family circumstances. They have joined this course to learn a skill that will help them get good jobs in good companies.
Begampur Centre	These students came from varied backgrounds, one student's father is a tailor, another student's father has a provisional store, others are children of vegetable sellers, construction workers etc. Students enrolled in this course are 12th pass from government schools, a few were pursuing their graduation in government colleges. The students are mostly from the nearby areas, some also from far off areas but took classes online.
Civil Lines Centre	Students in this batch come from extremely poor backgrounds. Their parents are either daily wage workers or have low managerial jobs like helper at shops, peons etc. Most of them are 12th pass from government schools, some are pursuing their graduation from government colleges. They joined the course so that they can get a decent job unlike their parents and contribute to the household incomes.

Palam Centre	The students in this batch are mostly graduates from private & government colleges and joined the course to get decent jobs in the IT sector. They want financial independence.
Banghel Centre	Students of this batch are mostly children of migrant labor. They are 12th pass from the government. They joined this course so that they can enhance their skills and get a job in the private sector. They want a dignified life and financial independence for themselves.
Paharganj Centre	Students of this batch are 12th pass from government schools. Their parents have extremely low incomes as some of them are rickshaw pullers, street sweepers. A lot of them are contractual workers in bag making factories nearby. The students want to also join the private sector but want a regular source of income unlike their parents.
Mokhada Centre	Most students of this batch have finished their graduation, some have to take their 3rd year examinations. They aspire to get government jobs as teachers, accountants in the banking sector etc. Their parents are farmers.
Mokhada Centre	Most students of this batch had finished their graduation from private & government colleges, some will have to take their 3rd year examinations. They aspire to get government jobs as teachers, accountants, in the banking sector etc. Their parents are farmers.
Chhindwara Centre	All students of this batch are graduates from either private or government colleges; their parents are mostly farmers. They want to get jobs in the technical & financial sector as they are either B.Sc or BCA graduates. They are open to jobs from other cities as well.

Findings

Part (A):

i)   **Mentor Observation:** All the 10 mentors were asked to write a daily diary on their sessions. Below is a sample of their observations. This paper does not include all mentor diaries.

Mentor 1: In October 2022, I started taking sessions with Chhindwara center and ever since then it has been an overwhelming experience. These sessions take place every Wednesday from 4pm to 6pm. It has always been my dream to teach someone at least once in my life.

- '*Role of English*' (1st session): I was glad to see 13 out of 15 students attending the session and participating actively. Students sent me voice messages on my personal WhatsApp expressing their gratitude and how well they enjoyed the session. The feeling I got teaching students of my age is indescribable. Volunteering gave me an opportunity to learn and understand the difficulties faced by the 'not-so' privileged students. It motivated me to give my 100%. I eagerly waited for Wednesday(s) so that I can interact with my batch and hear their views and thoughts.

- '*Happiness and gratitude*' (2nd session): I explained how important it is to be happy and how important it is to express gratitude. Many students were conscious of their surroundings, so they were not able to turn on their camera and mic. It took them a lot of time to open up, so I had to make them feel secure and confident to share their inhibitions.

- "*Childhood memories*"(3rd session): This was the most interesting topic of them all. Everyone was eager to share their memories. Reliving our childhood memories is always special. They even shared their favourite sports. Towards the end, a few students asked me about my favourite childhood memory. Overall, it was a fun interactive session.

- "*On Grooming and Hygiene*" (4th session). I shared with students the importance of maintaining hygiene and how they can practice conducting themselves in the workspace. As always it was a great learning session. I even learnt many new things. Towards the end, I gave them the post session activity and most of the students responded to it.

- "*Being Positive and Mock Interview Tips*" (5th session). Everyone was excited and optimistic about the session. I always feel motivated seeing that at least 85% of the students attend the sessions. The session went smoothly. Many students cleared the various doubts they had which gave me great satisfaction.

- "*Strengths and Weaknesses*" (6th session). The strength of the class was comparatively low as there were some technical issues. But everyone attending the session responded well, barring 2-3 students. These 2-3 students were silent spectators. It became a challenging task for me to find out what the problem was as I was taking the classes online. I tried calling out their names but to no avail. Except that, the overall session was fun and interactive. One student was keen on volunteering and gave answers to all questions, which made me happy.

- "*Effective Communication Skills*" (7th session). The attendance was poor as compared to the previous sessions, but I made sure that every student participated in the interaction. There are 2-3 students who participate in every session enthusiastically. Listening to their reflections and thoughts amazes me all the time. There are a few students who do not unmute but simply write on the chat box so I always tell them to try and speak as it would only help them boost their confidence and that they should speak without any hesitation. This advice of mine worked as one student followed it and started speaking instead of being a silent spectator.

- "*Discipline, Focus and Goals*" (8th & 9th session): This session was a fruitful session. Before the start of the sessions, I asked the students on WhatsApp to attend this session without fail as it would help them in their workplace. Many enjoyed the session activity which was to speak "ladoo" in place of multiple of 5 while counting. At the end of 8th session, one student told me that he eagerly waits for my class every week and my class is his favourite which lightened up my mood and motivated me. In the 9th session, everyone talked about their goals and aspirations. Almost every student communicated with me except one. There was some network issue on my side and barring that the session went smoothly. They asked me questions regarding types of goals. Few students were even ready to clear the doubts of others.

- "*Time Management*" (10th session). It was a bit emotional for me as this was the last time I was interacting with the students. Few students shared how much they had changed while going through these sessions. It was a proud moment for me as well as for the students. 13 out of 15 students showed up for this session and even students who did not speak much participated. At the end, they shared their experience and showed their gratitude. I told them that they could contact me anytime and get in touch with me if they faced any problems. We then clicked on a group photo which I will cherish for a long time. We bid farewell and that marked the end of a fruitful journey in teaching and helping the NF students in their placements. I wish them all the very best and hope they achieve everything they aim for in their life.

  There were not many challenges that I faced during the sessions, some network issues, sometimes a few students were not participating. I also created a broadcast group on WhatsApp where I shared daily reminders about the homework that I gave them.

There are few students who are always ready to answer in every session and seeing and listening to them gave me immense pleasure. Not only were the students learning something new, but I too seemed to have improved my time management, leadership and communication skills. Being a volunteer, I felt l like I had the power to give wings to their dreams. Knowing that I can make a difference in their lives encouraged me a lot. I always looked forward to the sessions.

Mentor 2

- *1st Session:* Being the first session, I was a bit nervous, and I was doubting myself whether I will be able to convey today's topics. Many students were nervous as well, but I was able to tackle the situation and encourage them to express themselves. Over a period of 30 to 45 mins I was successful in helping them understand the necessity for English and understanding the barriers that were facing in terms of answering the questions in the sessions. Mostly I believe that phonetics is an effective way to improve their pronunciation. I hope they understood the topics I covered.

- *2nd Session*: There was a sharp dip in the attendance which was concerning. Many students were not able to attend. However, I was surprised to see that the activeness in the class was better than before which motivated me to continue with the discussion. There was a heated discussion on the importance of English with a new student which I was able to tackle and make her understand. I motivated them to speak more in English. In the end I gave them a few assignments to understand where they were lacking.

- *3rd Session*: Today's section was a bit dull and chaotic despite all being present, many of them remained muted. However, I continued to encourage and hand-picked most of the students who were not answering. I was running out of time and options that made me answer most of the questions. I even tried giving them the liberty to type and then read the messages that would help them understand better and even corrected a few sentences. Some of them had read directly from the line to try evading the concept behind the topic which disturbed me a little. One of the students read the comprehension about Rahul very well and that surprised me. The other one was slightly arrogant about herself and confirmed with her friend while boasting that she might be correct which was not. Some students still have some trouble with phonetics.

They believe they will be needing a separate extra class to understand and develop themselves as I find them lacking in confidence. I hope I can bridge the gaps that I have observed and help them be better.

- *4th Session***:** The session was better than last time; the students were at par with the topic, and they were able to understand the basic concept. They were getting the hang of it. This time I kept a faculty in loop to encourage them to keep the cameras on for some time and answer the questions. As usual I made sure that everybody answered. At least 45 % of the students were eager to answer the questions that were posed in the class. I hope one day that 45% of the students become 100% because the journey will be getting harder as the sessions proceed.

- *5th Session***:** Many students interacted, the session was better than last time, the students were at par with the topic, and they were able to understand the basic concept. They were getting the hang of it. This time I was able to encourage them to keep the cameras on for some time and answer the questions. As usual I made sure that everybody answered. They are growing faster than I imagined. Hopefully they will start to interact more in English. However, I will only start believing that they are doing well once they start asking me more questions.

- *6th Session***:** Half of the students were present and were active. As usual I made sure that everybody answered. They requested discussion on tenses to improve their effective communication. I plan on finishing the basics of the session faster now and adding more inputs to their tenses.

- *7th Session*: The discussion was about focus and determination; I discussed the practical importance of bringing focus. Its importance and how it can be developed. I am regularly encouraging the students to speak in English if they are not able to say, write it and read it. The students were present and active, the students were at par with the topic, and they were able to understand the basic concept. Movie references were being used to keep them active and engaged. I encouraged them to ask questions and help them to solve it. Homework is regularly given to help them improve their soft skills.

- *8th Session (final session)*: Today was my last session. Many students were excited to go home after the announcement of my last session. I had a recap of previous sessions which was on focus and determination. Today, the grand finale session was about setting goals. Out of 13 physically present students, 5 were presently active. One of the students was a bit lost in terms of setting up a goal, so I asked her passion and what makes her happy, which was travel, nature, photography, and make-up, so I gave her a few options that she can work on dealing with wildlife photography and photography for fashion magazines. Then I asked them to take screenshots of mockup interviews and practice. Before leaving the student. One of the active students asked me basic tips for interviews. I told them not to fold their arms, not to be too relaxed and finally if they are not able to answer a question take some time, drink some water and then answer the question asked. I have developed some amount of confidence in the students. I hope they have a bright future and a rich life filled with happiness.

ii) **Mentor Feedback**: We asked a few mentors to share their experience(s) basis a few questions. Below is feedback from 1 Mentor. Likewise, all mentors shared simpler observations.

"I would like to thank NIIT Foundation for giving me this opportunity. This was the first time I was in charge of teaching and the experience was absolutely amazing. It was the first time that I was involved in an endeavor that could have a life-changing impact on someone. All the sessions went well, and I was able to communicate with the students successfully".

Q1) A quality that you didn't know existed in you that you observed because of this engagement.

Response: After completing the volunteering, I realised that I am a good motivator. The students in my batch just needed the extra push in confidence and I think I have been successful in motivating them and instilling confidence in them.

Q2) What did you think you were doing right while you were engaged in this volunteering activity?

Response: When I took the sessions, I made sure that everyone spoke. I wouldn't move to the next slide unless everyone spoke. I also think that when I took the sessions, I was able to relate with the students by using examples from movies. We did bond over the sessions when we sang songs together.

Q3) What could you do better in case you are given the opportunity to do this again?

Response: If I'm given the opportunity again then I would like to have offline interaction with the students rather than online. Moreover, I would want to be more flexible in my approach. I would like to focus more on the post session activities if I take this endeavour again. This time due to my schedule with my projects and classes I couldn't do that whole heartedly.

Q4) What did you like the most about the methodology of conducting the sessions?

Response: I felt that the session plan was very flexible. The sessions did cater to everyone, and students were able to connect with the topics. The methodology is good as it helped in smooth transition. It helped the students also to be more open and they could speak their mind. It involved deep reflection and expression. There was trustful environment, so sharing was very comfortable.

Q5) Names of 2-3 students who were greatly benefited from your involvement as a faculty.

Response: I can say with honesty that the students were benefitted, the students sent we their homework and during the end of the classes at times complemented me. I felt happy when that happened because it gave me a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction.

Part (B) – Mentees Observations: As mentioned earlier, all the students who participated in the program come from centers PAN India (refer to table 1.0). They were asked to share their observations with their center heads, and this is what they said.

- **Brahampuri Centre**
- Student Name: Sapna Rathore

   Sapna felt that it was easier to connect and build trust with the mentor as he was of the same age. He explained things very well. His good command of the language helped her a lot in her own vocabulary. He would explain things in the local language for better understanding but would also let them know how the same had to be spoken in English. He narrated incidents from his own personal life - like eating his tiffin while the teacher was teaching, which she could relate to, as she too had done it. He explained things in a fun way and motivated everyone to speak.

   Overall analysis: Being in the same age group, mentors were able to relate to real life situations with empathy and displayed a lot of patience.

   - Begampur Centre
   - Student Name: Arpita Silswal

   She felt that teachers are more experienced but sometimes because of the age difference one is hesitant to ask questions because of the fear of being scolded. Also, it takes time to open- up to a teacher. On the other hand, learning from a person from the same age group is easier as one can connect with them. They understand the pain areas better, so it's easier to open-up to them. They are going through the exact same life experiences as the NF students. Also, it's like learning from a friend. Anyone older than the current volunteer age group again would be perceived like a teacher. There was no judgement and trust helped her to learn better.

- **Civil Lines Centre**
- Student Name: Vaishnavi Singh

   She felt that her mentor was a good teacher as his English was very good. He used to emphasize a lot on reading and learning new words.

   Overall Analysis: Being of the same age, they could relate to each other.

 - **Palam Centre**
 - Student Name: Abhishek Aswal

   He felt that he could ask his mentor all his doubts without any hesitation. He was able to clear all his doubts even if he asked many times. Teachers however come with a lot of experience, but the course being taught needs the teacher to have a good command in English and a lot of patience which his mentor had. There were some instances where his mentor was so relatable as too was experiencing the exact same things as Abhishek. Tips shared by his mentor to learn faster were helpful.

   Overall analysis: It was easy for Abhishek to open-up and learn in a fun way. Trust is built over time, but Abhishek found it easier to build that with his mentor as compared to the teacher.

- **Bhangel Centre**
- Student Name: Madhuri Yadav

  Madhuri felt that she could relate to her mentor better as she felt that she could ask her doubts without any hesitation. There is a certain level of formality and hesitation with a teacher. She felt that the mentor was like a friend so building trust was easier. Age plays an important role but also the nature of the person. She could relate to her mentor better and hence could learn without any apprehensions.

- **Paharganj Centre**
- Student Name: Mansi

  She feels that she can trust a teacher more as a teacher is more experienced and knowledgeable. It is also good to learn from the same age group as there are lesser inhibitions. Mansi, however, would prefer to learn from a teacher.

- **Mokhada Centre**
- Student Name: Krishna Valavi

  It was easier to trust her mentor as he was more like a friend as he was of the same age. Krishna could learn from his mentor's experiences and could share openly without hesitation. The class was fun and interactive. Enjoyed attending the class. Did not feel like attending a regular lecture by a teacher.

- **Mokhada Centre**
- Student Name: Yuvraj

  It was easier to connect with the NU volunteer as he was of the same age group. Student life experiences were the same so more relatable. He felt more comfortable and could easily trust him. Though, he can open up to a teacher also with ease as she has more experience and there is a level of respect for him. Srachet was more like a friend.

- **Chhindwara Centre**
- Student Name: Manshi Tiwari

  Manshi found it easier to connect with her mentor as her mentor was a student, too. Her mentor explained the concepts well and also shared her journey as a student from time to time. It was easier to trust and open up with her mentor as there were no inhibitions.

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier the aim of this study was two-fold. To get NF students placed and second to attempt in creating a model wherein University students coming from affluent backgrounds could mentor underprivileged students who were looking to get placed after the course. The methodology used here was Peer mentoring, in other words student-to-student mentoring. Peer mentoring describes a relationship where a more experienced student helps a less

experienced student improve overall academic performance and provides advice, support, and knowledge to the mentee (Colvin & Ashman 2010). Unlike hierarchical mentoring, peer mentoring matches mentors and mentees who are roughly equal in age and power for task and psychosocial support (Angelique, Kyle, & Taylor, 2002; Terrion & Leonard, 2007). Peer mentors and mentees are more likely to share the same perspective with regards to how they understand and enact the college student role than participants in hierarchical mentoring relationships (Collier, 2017).

In the present study, there were undoubtedly challenges in getting trainers from similar backgrounds to teach, as the trainers themselves have to work hard to improve their English communication skills. Also, to create a funnel whereby there is a constant flow of ready teachers to mentor/teach students from challenging backgrounds. Using Universities students to teach underprivileged children is building a sustainable model. NGOs are often challenged by limited resources both in terms of money and people. Thus, this model of leveraging existing students is one such option that can be utilized.

It was also observed the peer mentoring was very effective in this case where both the mentors and mentee were of the same age group. There was trust because of open sharing and hence no judgement. The life experiences and their fears were similar. This helped the youth from the underprivileged communities to open-up and share freely. They were not scared to make mistakes because of any fear of judgement. There was cross sharing of experiences and situations which built their confidence. Peer mentors of similar age groups have a better acceptance compared to teachers who have an age gap. The teachers being in the "telling" mode get less acceptance and are not able to strike an effective and trustful relationship as compared to the peer mentors who are more in the "allowing" and "acceptance" mode.

It can be concluded that learning in peer mentoring mode can bring great opportunity to learn through each other's experiences, demonstrates more ownership to learn since its internalized, due to trust there is more confidence and can challenge to pursue learning goals in a fun way with less stress.

Limitation

As this was the first of its kind, a lot of effort went into conceptualization, coordinating and implementing the study both by NIIT Foundation and NIIT University. A lot of training and handholding was done by the University to get 1st year students to understand the course that they had to teach along with their own studies. As these students themselves were students they had a hectic work schedule. There were times when their sessions had to be re-scheduled, as they had impromptu classes or fell sick. To keep their motivation high, there were meetings scheduled between the Program coordinator and University students.

However, despite these challenges, the Mentors who themselves were students learnt a lot because of the program. Mentees on the other hand could relate better and get placed. The next steps would be to scale this entire initiative and get more University students to participate in programs such as this.

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