

The Role of Teacher-Mentors in Shaping Communicative Competence and Moral Consciousness in Esl Learners

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Abstract: This study investigates the influence of teacher-mentors on the development of communicative competence and moral consciousness among English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in three secondary schools in Enugu State. With growing concerns over declining language proficiency and moral standards in Nigerian secondary education, teacher-mentorship is examined as a dual-function pedagogical strategy. A survey design was employed, and data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to 180 senior secondary school students (SS1 and SS2) selected through a simple random sampling technique from a total senior population of 750 students across the three schools. This design was considered appropriate as structured questionnaires effectively gather students' perceptions in a consistent and quantifiable manner. Sixty students were selected from each school, comprising 30 from SS1 and 30 from SS2. The data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation, with 2.5 set as the acceptance benchmark. Findings reveal that teacher-mentors positively influence both communicative and ethical development in ESL learners, with the highest impact observed in role modeling of respectful language and moral behavior. The study recommends integrating mentorship practices into teacher training programs and ESL curricula to foster more holistic education in Nigerian secondary schools.

Keywords: Teacher-mentors, ESL learners, communicative competence, moral consciousness, mentorship, value education, language development

Introduction

The acquisition of communicative competence and moral consciousness is fundamental to shaping holistic learners in contemporary educational systems (Ogunleye, 2022). As language serves both cognitive and cultural functions, its instruction should not only enhance fluency but also foster ethical awareness and social responsibility. The ESL education in Nigeria is considered necessary to foster students' abilities to "play in the international playground". Although ESL students can often show linguistic ability, they sometimes fail to deliver in terms of moral grounding, an important failure in instructional strategies (Idowu, 2023).

As educators and mentors, the teacher-mentors are especially competent in closing the gap in ESL education. Unlike traditional instruction, which focuses on objectives, mentorship promotes the embedding of emotional, cognitive, and behavioural goals in learning. Teacher mentors show respectful communication, critical thinking, and ethical conduct to the students, supporting them to use language for purposes that are both practical and ethically informed (Eze, 2021).

There is an international movement toward experiential and values-driven language education. According to Iwuchukwu (2024), immersion of students in environments populated with mentors helps them develop language skills not only for individual use but for meaningful engagement in society. With the Nigerian society extensively

burdened by ethical dilemmas and uncertainty, secondary education provides significant setting that can be used for language learning and moral development.

Even so, English as a second language instruction at most Nigerian secondary schools continues to be heavily focused on grammar and standardized tests (Okoroafor, 2023). Not having mentorship-rich learning settings, students often run into narrow progress in language learning and minimal growth of their moral self-awareness. Without structured initiatives in mentoring, students are not able to get regular, interpersonal support to move them along in communication skills and the building of ethical character.

The study is formed to investigate the impact of teacher-mentors in improving communicative skills and developing the moral consciousness of ESL students in the chosen schools of Enugu State. Three secondary schools selected for this study are Daughters of Divine Love (DDL), Holy Rosary College, and College of the Immaculate Conception (CIC). This research explores the approaches, perspectives, and concrete outcomes from the work of teacher mentors in ESL contexts.

Knowledge of such institutions enables the research to propose methods that can be used to carry out systematic mentoring of ESL students who have excellent communication skills as well as ethical awareness.

Statement of the Problem

Although ESL education is central to Nigeria's academic framework, communicative competence among learners remains subpar, and moral erosion continues to undermine national development. The disconnection between language instruction and character formation raises concerns about the effectiveness of current pedagogical models. There is limited empirical data on how teacher-mentors influence students' language development alongside their moral reasoning. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the role of teacher-mentors in shaping communicative competence and moral consciousness in ESL learners.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the extent to which teacher-mentors influence students' communicative competence in ESL classrooms.
2. To explore how teacher-mentors contribute to the development of moral consciousness among ESL learners.
3. To propose practical strategies for embedding mentorship into ESL instruction for enhanced linguistic and ethical development.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do teacher-mentors influence communicative competence among ESL learners?
2. How do teacher-mentors contribute to shaping the moral consciousness of students in ESL classrooms?
3. What actionable strategies can be implemented to integrate mentorship into ESL teaching practices?

Literature Review

Communicative Competence in ESL Education

Communicative competence means using language effectively in different situations in society (Aliyu, 2021). However, the mastery goes beyond this and includes pragmatic, discourse, and sociolinguistic competence (Ndubuisi, 2023). Nigerian ESL students also tend to experience problems with these all-around abilities, as there is much greater focus on written exercises than there is on face-to-face interaction (Omotayo, 2022). Mentors explain language at its workings in real-life situations in real time. With mentorship, when teachers correct, guide, and model conversations, learners learn more effective communication types (Ibeh, 2024).

Although curricula for language emphasise fluency, the students rarely attain it as mentorship elements are lacking in the structure (Akinbote, 2021). Instructors should create a learning climate that allows students to interact

through peer discussions and communicative practice, as it is in the case for apprenticeship (Ikenna, 2025). This in turn makes mentorship helpful in moving from classroom learning to real communicative experiences.

Moral Consciousness and Value Education in Language Learning

Moral consciousness is the process of knowledge and realization of moral values, such as integrity, respect, and empathy (Ezeaku, 2022). Stories, dialogues, and debates are excellent tools for embedding and consolidating moral values in language education (Nwachukwu, 2023). There should be a good balance of teaching English as a second language in teaching language skills and moral judgment. What a shame that many, indeed all, language education programs fail to pay attention to the moral and ethical aspects (Olayemi, 2021).

This missing piece is provided to learners by teacher-mentors who show examples, representing ethical behavior, and introducing moral reflection into language activities (Akanbi, 2024). By means of different activities, such as role playing, ethical dilemma discussions, and literary analyses, moral reflection is developed using language by learners. Such students, whom others mentor, demonstrate a ratcheted sense of values and a way to execute them in their interactions (Mgbemena, 2025).

Teacher-Mentorship as a Pedagogical Strategy

Teacher-mentorship that involves coaching, modeling, and personal relationship in turn enhances students overall academic and ethical development (Obioma, 2021). Mentorship overboards traditional teaching practices highlighting a supportive and interactive learning milieu (Okafor, 2023). In ESL, teachers can help students by giving them writing guidance, correcting their everyday language, and explaining how interactions are made in social settings.

Through provision of individualized feedback and emotional togetherness, mentorship helps students become better at language use (Iwu, 2022). It also establishes an overriding cushion of trust and openness without which the exchange of values could not be achieved effectively. However, most teachers lack training in mentorship models (Ugochukwu, 2024), which limits their effectiveness. For mentorship to be impactful, it must be integrated into teacher education and evaluation systems.

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory (Albert Bandura)

According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory, a lot of learning is achieved through watching, imitation and learning from role models. This theory is valuable to ESL mentorship because learners can follow the teachers as examples of both language and ethics. Students learn language skills and behavioral strategies using the process of vicarious learning.

In English as a Second Language classrooms, learners see and imitate discourse styles and value-laden phrases, in addition to proper pronunciation and grammar, when mentors use language intentionally and responsibly. According to the Social Learning Theory, students manage to understand what is happening around them daily and in her classroom even. Thus, they confirm that teacher behavior is an essential aspect of language teaching. Mentorship according to Social Learning Theory is a critical mechanism for students' intellectual development as well as emotional well-being. Teacher-mentors serve as instructors of technical language as well as examples in behavior who thus shape the students' capacity to talk and make moral choices. Consequently, working with mentorship aspects informed by social learning theory can endorse holistic ESL learning results.

Highlighting modeling, reinforcement, guided practice, the theory shows that mentorship is central to good teaching rather than a peripheral add-on.

Empirical Review

A growing body of empirical literature underscores the significance of teacher mentorship in enhancing communicative competence and moral consciousness among learners. Eze (2021) applied a qualitative case study method to explore how teacher role modeling affects language competence and moral development in junior secondary students in Nsukka, Enugu State. Eight teachers were interviewed and forty students in four public secondary schools were observed in the classroom for the study. This was seen from the study that students in classrooms where teachers consciously modeled ethical communication had enhanced language competencies and moral awareness. While the study conducted by Eze was more focused on junior secondary students and employed observations, the current study further expands the scope of questioning in this inquiry on senior secondary students with a quantitative survey which extends wider generalization in ESL pedagogy.

Concurrently, Okonkwo and Nnaji (2022) conducted research on the impact of teacher mentorship on scholarship and ethical virtue in secondary students in Awka, Anambra State. Researchers used a quasi-experimental regimen to research two groups ($n = 120$) of students. The researchers concluded that the continued teacher support caused remarkable progressions in the oral English proficiency and conduct assessments of the students. In much the same way as previous research, this work draws attention to the necessity of assessing both students' communicative skills and moral development. The present study differs from earlier works methodologically, as it applies a nonexperimental survey design and focuses on the ESL educational environment in several schools from the state of Enugu.

Another study by Iwuchukwu (2024) established the relationship between teacher mentorship and communicative proficiency, which was tested in Imo State on urban and rural senior secondary schools. A correlational research design included 250 SS2 students who were collected from the administration of achievement tests and attitudinal scales. Participants in urban schools who obtained continuous mentoring had higher oral communication skills, communicative self-confidence, and ethical reasoning as compared to the participants without structured mentorship. Conversely, although Iwuchukwu's study casts geographically different aspects into relief, this work keeps its focus limited to urban secondary schools and identifies moral awareness as an important ingredient in the process, thus furthering our understanding of mentoring in an ESL setting.

Generally, the research has found that teacher mentors play an important role in achieving comprehensive development among learners of the language. This research builds on former studies to focus on senior secondary ESL students in Enugu State and uses a structured survey to measure teachers' pedagogical and ethical mentors in contemporary language classrooms.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to investigate the influence of teacher-mentors on communicative competence and moral consciousness among English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in selected secondary schools in Enugu State. The design was deemed the best as it allows the researcher to examine students' perceptions and attitudes towards teacher mentorship without controlling any variables, hence giving a true account of the current state of affairs and relationships in the natural school environment. The survey model is well-suited to achieving standardized data on a large number of participants because it would be possible to explore the trends in student perception of teacher mentorship and its pedagogical implications.

The sample population used in this study was all SS1 and SS2 students in three purposely sampled secondary schools in Enugu namely, Daughters of Divine Love (DDL), Holy Rosary College, and College of Immaculate Conception (CIC). The schools were selected purposely as they had a high focus on instruction of the English language and mentorship practices and the students in the schools were randomly chosen to guarantee unbiasedness and representativeness of the sample. The number of students in these schools in SS1 and SS2 was

about 750. A total sample size of 180 students using the simple random sampling method was chosen where 60 students were sampled with each school having 60 participants. Each school gave out 30 students who are in SS1 and 30 students who are in SS2 to give a sufficient representation of both senior levels.

The structured questionnaire was used to gather data to measure the perceptions of teacher-mentor influence on the communicative competence and moral consciousness of the students. To maintain content and face validity, the experts in the field of Educational Management and Language Education validated the instrument. A pilot test was done and the reliability of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method and the result of the test was a coefficient of 0.82, which depicts that the instrument has a high degree of internal consistency. The questionnaire was based on 21 questions that were categorized into three thematic groups that were in line with the objectives of the study; communicative competence, moral consciousness, and how to incorporate mentorship in the ESL classrooms. The respondents rated the items on a 4-point Likert scale that went between Strongly Disagree (1) and Strongly Agree (4).

To analyze the data, the standard deviation and mean were used to define the central tendency and dispersion of the answers. The acceptance threshold was set at 2.5. Any score that had a mean of 2.5 or above was considered an accepted response whereas scores that had a mean of below 2.5 were considered rejected. This approach helped the researchers to discover common trends in students' experiences and their attitudes towards teacher mentorship in teaching English as a second language.

Table 1: Influence of Teacher-Mentors on Communicative Competence of ESL Learners

S/N	Item	Mean	Std. Dev	Remark
1	My ESL teacher-mentor encourages regular speaking practice	3.1	0.62	Accepted
2	I am guided to use English appropriately in different contexts	3.0	0.59	Accepted
3	My teacher-mentor corrects my grammatical errors constructively	2.9	0.60	Accepted
4	I receive feedback that improves my confidence in communication	2.8	0.71	Accepted
5	I engage in group discussions guided by my teacher-mentor	2.7	0.69	Accepted
6	My teacher-mentor provides real-life communication scenarios	2.6	0.65	Accepted
7	My teacher-mentor rarely supports my communication improvement	2.1	0.70	Rejected

Table 2: Role of Teacher-Mentors in Fostering Moral Consciousness among ESL Learners

S/N	Item	Mean	Std. Dev	Remark
1	My ESL teacher-mentor promotes honesty and truthfulness	3.1	0.60	Accepted
2	I learn to respect others during English classes	3.0	0.64	Accepted
3	Ethical behavior is emphasized through classroom interactions	2.9	0.66	Accepted
4	My mentor shares moral lessons during language teaching	2.8	0.68	Accepted
5	I understand the consequences of unethical language use	2.7	0.67	Accepted
6	My ESL teacher-mentor ignores moral issues during lessons	2.3	0.72	Rejected
7	I have not learned any moral lessons through language mentorship	2.2	0.74	Rejected

Table 3: Strategies for Integrating Mentorship into ESL Teaching

S/N	Item	Mean	Std. Dev	Remark
1	Mentorship should be formalized in ESL lesson planning	3.1	0.59	Accepted
2	Teacher training should include mentorship principles	3.0	0.62	Accepted
3	Peer mentoring programs can support ESL instruction	2.9	0.65	Accepted
4	Moral education should be embedded in ESL learning materials	2.8	0.66	Accepted
5	Teachers should be left to teach English without mentoring roles	2.4	0.69	Rejected
6	Mentorship has no place in language instruction	2.2	0.70	Rejected
7	ESL teaching is effective without any mentorship component	2.0	0.74	Rejected

Discussion of Findings

The study examined the influence of teacher-mentors on the communicative competence and moral consciousness of ESL learners, as well as the strategies for integrating mentorship into language instruction. The findings are presented and discussed in relation to existing empirical evidence.

Table 1 results suggest that teacher-mentors are very helpful in developing the spoken English and classroom communication of students. The questionnaire had six out of seven highly agreed items with the grand mean of 2.81 and average standard deviation of 0.63 indicating that there are invariably positive perceptions among respondents. The rejected statement, which is the only one, that of “My ESL teacher-mentor rarely supports my communication improvement (Mean = 2.1 < 2.5)” only hammers the point that the majority of the students have an active mentoring experience in communication.

These results confirm that teacher-mentors are important in enhancing communicative competence in learners by providing feedback, facilitating discussions, and correcting constructively. This is in line with Eze (2021) who concluded that students who were exposed to teachers who provided ethical modeling in communication were more proficient and engaged in language. On the same note, Okonkwo and Nnaji (2022) stated that prolonged teacher mentorship resulted in significant oral English achievement and general communicative skill improvement. The fact that these findings are consistent with other previous studies is further evidence of the importance of teacher mentorship as a formative factor in the communicative development of learners in ESL environments.

The teacher-mentors were also depicted to greatly contribute towards the level of moral consciousness in students as illustrated in Table 2. It was found that five of seven questions were approved, which showed that students strongly agree that their teachers encourage truthfulness, respect, and social responsibility when teaching languages. Negative ones like My ESL teacher-mentor does not pay attention to the moral issues during the lessons were discarded (Mean = 2.3 and 2.2 respectively). The large mean of 2.74 and average standard deviation of 0.66 endorse a positive and stable attitude towards teachers as moral guides.

These findings are accurate in the assertion that moral teaching is entrenched in the English language mentorship. They come into agreement with Eze (2021), who unveiled that the students in classrooms in which the teacher intentionally displayed ethical behavior were more morally aware. Moreover, Okonkwo and Nnaji (2022) stressed the fact that teaching based on mentorship developed the ethical virtue of students in addition to academic enhancement. The current results, thus, support the twofold nature of the role of mentorship in the facilitation of linguistic competence and moral uprightness in the ESL classroom.

Results of Table 3 indicate that there is a high level of support for the application of principles of mentorship in formal ESL pedagogy. Four items were approved, and three were rejected (mainly, those that minimized the

relevance of mentorship). As an example, the ESL teaching with no mentorship aspect had a low mean of 2.0 which was an indication of high disagreement. The overall mean of 2.64 and average standard deviation of 0.66 indicate that the response to the question is generally consistent among items indicating that most people believe that the practice of mentorship in teaching should be institutionalized.

This finding is consistent with the results of Iwuchukwu (2024) who found that structured mentorship in urban and rural schools improved the communicative confidence of students, their ethical reasoning, and their overall performance. The current research builds on that information by offering the following practical strategies, which include incorporating mentorship objectives in lesson plans, teacher development courses, and policies in schools. It not only highlights the fact that mentorship is not a chance occurrence but an element that needs to be integrated into language education as a pedagogical and moral construct.

Conclusion

Across all three tables, the findings show that ESL learners in the selected schools strongly value the role of teacher-mentors in improving both communicative competence and moral consciousness. Rejected items consistently reflect negative or neglectful views about mentorship, with low mean values and higher variability. Overall, students favor structured mentorship as part of language learning.

Educational Implications

1. Mentorship should be formally recognized as a pedagogical tool in ESL classrooms, not just an incidental role.
2. Teacher-mentors significantly shape student identity, and their influence extends beyond academics to ethics and social behavior.
3. Schools must train teachers to serve as mentors, not just content deliverers, to promote holistic learning.

Recommendations

1. Integrate mentorship principles into teacher education curricula, especially for English and humanities educators.
2. Encourage mentorship-based classroom practices, such as guided dialogues, moral storytelling, and role modeling.
3. Review school policies to institutionalize mentorship roles for ESL teachers, with periodic evaluations and student feedback.
4. Design school-wide mentorship frameworks that include teacher-student partnerships, peer mentoring, and interdisciplinary collaboration for character and language development.

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