

GIFTED MENTORS' VIEWS ABOUT THE USE OF FACEBOOK IN E-MENTORING PRACTICE AT EPGBU: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Young people's most used online platforms related to a social networking site, such as Facebook, mobilize educators on the use of technology for educational purposes. In Turkey, Facebook was used in the implementation of e-mentoring at the first stage of the Education Program for the Gifted Students' Bridge with University (EPGBU); which has prepared candidate science teachers as instructors in the academic year between 2013 and 2014. This study aims to investigate the opinion of candidate science teachers relating to the use of Facebook. In this qualitative study which is designed according to the pattern of the case study, many participants are determined to illustrate the method of samples. In the study, data was collected with an interview form between candidate science teachers (mentors at EPGBU).

The result of the study states that candidate science teachers agree that time spent on the Facebook group page is effective pertaining to the practice of e-mentoring, sharing experience, fast- communication/providing feedback, effective communication between mentors, ensuring EPGBU events and documents reach everyone simultaneously, providing more information about the progress of one's program, guiding new mentors, and accessing many documents easily. It is indicated that the limitations of the mentoring process via Facebook are the long-term use of the Internet, the inability to maintain face to face communication, the inability to attend discussions within a group for each mentor, the difficulty of getting detailed information on complex matters, misunderstanding, and the lack of Internet connection. It can also be emphasized that information about how to use Facebook consciously should be gathered for e-mentoring practice.

Keywords: Facebook; eMentoring; gifted student; EPGBU.

INTRODUCTION

Now, the role of teachers in education in the learning environment as facilitators is more important than the traditional understanding of the teacher's role. This situation often shows itself in higher education. In the development of the profession, mentors emerge as the most preferred strategy of education. A Mentor is described as someone who helps inexperienced employees to reach their potential (Shea, 1992; Sun, Lin, & Yu, 2008).

Mentoring when considered as a model of professional development is the most basic organizational structure and the most commonly used application (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Guskey, 2000).

The mentoring strategy is encountered in teacher education too. Mentoring, which is described as a continuous relationship between the mentor and mentee is particularly seen in the upbringing of a teacher (Podsen & Denmark, 2000; Foor, 2010).

In addition, there are those who identify mentoring as a kind of cooperation between two people (mentor-mentee) in order to improve its business performance and professional development (Allen & Poteet, 1999; Scandura, 1992).

The type of mentoring which is given through an application over the Internet is called e-mentoring. Telementoring which has emerged in recent years, is one of the names given to the mentor in the online environment. These terms or interactions are defined as e-guidance too (Nash, 2001). Such interactions are sometimes expressed as computer mediated communication (CMC) (Ensher et al., 2003; Walther, 1996). Electronic mentoring is a natural relationship in a sense that an experienced person helps an inexperienced person meet the needs of individuals through electronic communication (Single & Muller, 2001). Bierema and Merriam (2002) define e-mentoring as an encouraging relationship between the mentor and mentee with the use of a computer. The relationship between mentor and mentee is usually unlimited, equitable, and different from traditional mentoring (Griffiths and Miller 2005). E-mentoring is an expert system which is applied to improve fast and reactive learning styles (Hezlett & Gibson, 2005; Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2004).

E-mentoring has positive aspects such as it is applicable in mentoring programs and focuses on personal development goals (Leppisaari & Vainio, 2006; Fagenson-Eland & Lu, 2004). E-mentoring supportive communication is inherently less oppressive as electronic mentoring than other means of communication (Sproull & Kiesler, 1992). Therefore, if the participants who take part in the mentoring program don't monitor their email (as it is one of the most important means of communication), the program will not be able to ensure its expected success (Kasprisin, 2003). On the other hand, e-mentoring has more positive aspects compared to traditional mentoring. These positive aspects can be summarized as the ignorance of status differences, feeling comfortable with technological interaction, and by having virtual access to a mentor anywhere (Fagenson-Eland & Lu, 2004).

First, it is an important opportunity for a mentee to access the mentor in a virtual environment, where the mentee is independent from time and space compared to traditional mentoring (Culnan & Markus, 1987; Sproull & Keisler, 1986). For example, mentor shares information in a short time when they respond to their messages and read their e-mail constructed in a virtual environment.

It is said that information and communication tools and the contact points of people are now spreading across the world (Wellman & Gulia, 1999).

This makes the community sharing their thoughts on the web more available (Zimmer, 1997). This tool of communication in stills a satisfactory feeling for mentors and mentee because of their ability to instant message each other. One of the instruments that provide communication between the mentor and the mentee in the e-mentoring application in the online environment is a chat room. In the chat room, the communication between mentor and mentee is organized in a type of synchronous conversation and the mentor conveys a problem in a synchronized way. Thus, it eliminates geographic location and time, or the limitations of physical space (Ensher et al., 2003; Fagenson-Eland & Lu, 2004; Bierema & Hill, 2005).

A second advantage of e-mentoring is it's cost effective. Distance learning or online training reduces students' travel costs and is more economical compared to normal education in the same environment because of providing more opportunities for students (Kiser, 1999; Fagenson-Eland & Lu, 2004).

According to some studies in Europe some learning management systems such as Moodle and Docebo are preferred as e-mentoring platform software. Today, e-mentoring social media applications such as Facebook can be used as an alternative to e-mentoring platforms.

Social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter are currently a part of many people's lives (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). Facebook is the most commonly used and well-known social networking site. Such a social network and Web 2.0 technologies for the acknowledgement of social networking sites are beneficial for students to make them active and encourage their collaborative work performance (Maloney 2007). However, the use of Facebook as an educational tool is very low (Hew, 2011). The use of this tool is available for academic studies in higher education. However, there are some opinions proposed by students on the use of Facebook as a "special area" rather than an educational tool (Connell 2009). Students in higher education are interested in creating collaborative work groups with access to online links (Donlan, 2014). The use of Facebook for educational purposes, especially working in teams, in higher education increases the achievement of students. This situation indicates that Facebook is an appropriate tool for educational purposes.

In particular, the increase of Facebook groups for educational purposes is inevitable (O'Bannon, Beard & Britt, 2013; Woodley & Meredith, 2012). In Turkey, there are no restrictions about the use of Facebook. In Turkey, there are approximately 30 million Facebook users (Aydin, 2012). Therefore, models related to the educational purposes of this social networking site are very important. As a Facebook application, examples at the university level including the use of this application have been seen recently. One of these examples was applied between the University of Adelaide and Penn State University in 2009 and 2011. In many respects (academic performance and active participation), a positive effect was observed by students (McCarthy, 2012).

EPGBU created by Tortop (2013, 2015) is a program which aims to develop gifted students as scientists in the academic field. The program consists of three stages and it has been carried out at the University of Bulent Ecevit since 2013.

EPGBU is based on the concept of mentor and mentoring perspectives. Those who will serve as mentors in EPGBU may also be receiving mentor training in their faculty (Tortop, 2013, 2015).

In the first stage of EPGBU teacher candidates or mentors organize activities at the university and within the student's homes in order to implement self-regulation skills for science learning.

It contributes to teacher candidates' education in terms of both their professional development and by gaining some experience. EPGBU opens a new platform on Facebook in order to discuss issues faced by teacher candidates during gifted students' education.

This Facebook group page facilitates an environment where the mentor (coordinator of EPGBU) and mentees (candidate science teachers) can share information about the education of the gifted students enrolled in EPGBU.

This study aimed to investigate the views of mentors (science teacher candidates) about their developments and activities based on a Facebook group page mentoring service and some research sub-problems are as follows:

- What are the views on the benefits of mentoring process on a Facebook group page?
- What are the views on the limitations of a mentoring process on a Facebook group page?
- What are the recommendations for the use of a mentoring process on a Facebook group page?

METHOD

Case study design was selected as the research method. Case study is one of the qualitative research methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yildirim & Simsek, 2003).

Participants

The purposeful sampling method was used to determine the selection of the participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yildirim & Simsek, 2003). The objective of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases, because it will clarify the research questions.

In addition, criterion sampling technique was implemented, whereby all cases have to meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2002). The criteria for the selection of the seven participants (candidate teachers) were as follows: they had enrolled in the course "Gifted Students and Their Education" in the current academic term. In this respect, seven volunteering science candidate teachers (mentors' EPGBU), who took part in first stage of EPGBU in the academic year of 2013-2014, were determined as the participants in this study.

The demographic data regarding the participants in the study is presented in Table 1.

Table: 1
The demographic background of the
candidate science teachers (EPGBU' Mentors*)

	Gender	Age	Class
EPGBU' Mentor 1	Male	20	2nd
EPGBU' Mentor 2	Female	20	2nd
EPGBU' Mentor 3	Female	20	2nd
EPGBU' Mentor 4	Female	20	2nd
EPGBU' Mentor 5	Female	19	2nd
EPGBU' Mentor 6	Female	22	3rd
EPGBU' Mentor 7	Female	21	3rd
EPGBU' Mentor 8	Female	22	3rd
EPGBU' Mentor 9	Female	22	3rd
EPGBU' Mentor 10	Female	22	3rd

* EPGBU' mentors are candidate teachers. Their mentor roles is related gifted students at EPGBU. At the same time, they are mentees in terms of training of gifted teacher at EPGBU.

Table 1 demonstrates the profile of the study group. One of the candidate science teachers was male, and eight of them were female. All of them were between ages 19 and 22. Five of the candidate science teachers were enrolled in 2nd year, and five of them were enrolled in 3rd year at the Faculty of Education.

Data Tools

In this research, an interview form and written journals of mentors were used as data collection tools. On the interview form, the following questions were asked: What are the views on the benefits of mentoring process on a Facebook group page (e.g. space, time)? What are the limitations of mentoring in your mentoring application (e.g. space, time)? Do you have suggestions on how to use a mentoring application for gifted people on Facebook in order to become more efficient? What are they?

Data Analysis

In this research, content analysis consisting of coding to analyze qualitative data, identification of themes, and the classification of the data according to the code and themes, was used (McMillan, 2000; Miles & Huberman 1994).

In the analysis of the data obtained from the interview form, inductive descriptive analysis which is one of the qualitative data analysis methods was used.

In data analysis, each interview was coded by three researchers. For a rigorous description of the opinions, while coding, participants' concepts were paid close attention; after codes were categorized according to their similarities and differences, categories were compared to each other; by putting forward the similarities and differences of views, themes were revealed.

In order to verify coding was conducted by two researchers, the interceder reliability was calculated at 88% with the formulation of Miles & Huberman (1994).

Procedure

First stage of EPGBU was applied in Bulent Ecevit University Center for Special Education Research & Application in the academic year 2013-2014. In this program, the academic staff of Bulent Ecevit University, within the framework of themes in their fields, trained 16 gifted primary students at grades 2nd, 3th and 4th at the Faculty of Education Campus between 10:00-18:00 on a Saturday. Candidate science teachers (mentors of EPGBU) had done self-regulation skills activities at gifted students' families' homes. During the first stage of EPGBU, these activities were coordinated by Assoc Prof Hasan Said Tortop.

This EPGBU coordinator had been mentoring the candidate science teachers (mentors of EPGBU) for 12 weeks on the Facebook group page application. Their questions gave ideas about activities, problems about families and children.

RESULTS

The data obtained from the interview forms that was used to determine the participants' views on EPGBU, was subjected to content analysis. Content analysis was direct quotes from the views' of participants in the tables below.

Table: 2

The content analysis of candidate science teachers' (mentors of EPGBU) views about the benefits of Facebook on mentoring application for their own improvement

Theme 1 The benefits of mentoring on Facebook application (EPGBU)	Frequency
Efficient use of time	4
Sharing of experience	2
Fast communication / feedback	10
Current pursuit	5
Communication between mentors	3
EPGBU activities for reaching everyone simultaneously	6
Having information about the flow of program	4
Being helpful for new mentors	1
Easy Access to documents	4

Some quotations of students' opinions about EPGBU are as follows;

"We are able to keep up to date on Facebook (Teacher Candidate Mentee 2)".

"The use of Facebook gave us great convenience during our conversations with our mentor in EPGBU (Teacher Candidate Mentee 3).

"This application is a great platform which has shared information about our mission in some programs and provided activities as to how to organize. Our mentor has sent information via our Facebook group when we do not know about some subjects (Teacher Candidate Mentee 1).

"Our Facebook group has an important role as a new guiding tool for our new friends (Teacher Candidate Mentee 1). "Our platform is beneficial in terms of saving time (Teacher Candidate Mentee 1)."

"We are able to receive a response immediately on Facebook when we have urgent questions to our mentor (Dr. Hasan Said Tortop). It can be said that the speed of communication is fast. When we do not go to school and we need his advice about some matters or EPGBU, we can get the answer on Facebook (Teacher Candidate Mentee 2)."

"We are able to give feedback quickly (Teacher Candidate Mentee 2)".

"You do not have to share information one by one individually." "In our discussion with the mentor, the use of Facebook provided great convenience to us (Teacher Candidate Mentee 3)."

"If necessary, our mentor allows us to access to information easily by sending some links about our activities. It enabled the cooperation with mentors. Namely, it was effective in our communication and activities which are made by students at the same time (Teacher Candidate Mentee 3).

"The biggest advantage was that we can get in touch quickly (Teacher Candidate Mentee 3)." "When we did not have a chance to communicate with our mentor, we were able to make a conversation easily thanks to Facebook. We could access his shared documents quickly (Teacher Candidate Mentee 3)."

"We could reach our mentor whenever we needed on Facebook. Our mentor supported us with his quick answers. We did not only get information about ÜYÜKEP (EPGBU), but also received knowledge about general issues (Teacher Candidate Mentee 4)."

"In my opinion, Facebook is sufficiently useful in this are because, we can get answers to our questions at any time (Teacher Candidate Mentee 5)."

"It is useful in terms of accessibility (Teacher Candidate Mentee 6)." "We can easily reach the necessary documents with convenience. We can get feedback easily on Facebook (Teacher Candidate Mentee 7)."

"It is useful when we want to contact our mentor (Teacher Candidate Mentee 8)."

"When there is a problem, you can get fast feedback (Teacher Candidate Mentee 8)" "It has effective shares (Teacher Candidate Mentee 9)."

"Whenever you have a question or problem, it is resolved quickly (Teacher Candidate Mentee 10)."

Table: 2
The content analysis of candidate science teachers' (mentors' EPGBU)
views about the limitations on Facebook for their own development
in the mentoring practice

Theme 2. The limitations of Facebook in EPGBU mentoring practices	frequency
The use of the Internet for a long time	5
Not effective like face to face communication	6
Mentor's inability to participate synchronically in discussions within each group	1
The difficulty of getting detailed information on complex issues	2
Misunderstanding	2
The lack of the Internet	1
Incapability of sharing documents	1

Some quotations of students' opinions about EPGBU as follows;

For all of the mentors, the sequence of contact time has to be determined and shares can be made at a set time so that everyone can communicate easily (Teacher Candidate Mentee 1).

"It would be better if everyone exchanges their ideas in a group on Facebook (Teacher Candidate Mentee 1).

"You can find solutions to our problems through Facebook but sometimes it is not enough. It can be much more difficult to talk about some subjects in a detailed way, especially on the subject of complex issues about a student (Teacher Candidate Mentee 2)."

"In addition to the positive aspects of Facebook, it causes people to stay in front of the computer for a long time (internet addiction). Of course, this prevents the student from spending her time effectively (Teacher Candidate Mentee 3)."

"It is not as effective as face to face communication. Some ideas may lead to misunderstandings (Teacher Candidate Mentee 3)."

"Each mentor will not able to participate in discussions at the same time (Teacher Candidate Mentee 3)."

"When there is no Internet, it can be difficult to access or view the documents (Teacher Candidate Mentee 7)."

"When we discuss about an issue or talk about something, it can lead to misinterpretation even if we do not notice it (Teacher Candidate Mentee 8)."

"In this case, face to face communication can be more effective (Teacher Candidate Mentee 8)."

"It has limitations compared to face to face conversation (Teacher Candidate Mentee 9)."

"It can be time-consuming (Teacher Candidate Mentee 10)."

Table: 3
The content analysis of candidate science teachers' (mentors' EPGBU) views about recommendations related to the use of Facebook for their own development in mentoring practice

Theme 3. The recommendations on the use of Facebook for the education of gifted students in mentoring practice	frequency
Open a group page including only students.	3
It can be informed about the use of Facebook consciously.	6
Announcements may be in specific days and times.	2
Shares in the group can be enhanced and improved.	4
Specific time can be organized actively among mentors.	2
Question and answer can be used more effectively in terms of generating ideas.	1

Some quotations of students' opinions about EPGBU as follows;

"It can be one group of gifted students. Parents will definitely be excluded from the group. Thus, students may share information among themselves. This method is a type of peer education. Student's educational shortcomings can be made up for easily (Teacher Candidate Mentee 2)."

"There can be a course on the effective use of Facebook in order to make Facebook mentoring more effective (Teacher Candidate Mentee 3)."

"Announcements should be done at a specific time and day so that every mentor can participate in the discussions (Teacher Candidate Mentee 3)."

"Therefore, we have to learn to use Facebook consciously (Teacher Candidate Mentee 4)."

"At the same time, I believe that Facebook will be useful for gifted students' education as a result of preliminary information (Teacher Candidate Mentee 4)."

"I want people to use it carefully and orderly (Teacher Candidate Mentee 7)."

"The method of question and answer in the education of gifted students can be used more effectively in terms of generating ideas. Then, one group can be organized according to it (Teacher Candidate Mentee 8)."

"I think it will be helpful to keep the page active in order to be effective (Teacher Candidate Mentee 9)." ***"It can be more actively used (Teacher Candidate Mentee 10)."***

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

EPGBU is one of the few programs which was implemented in Turkey for gifted students' education. Mentors are divided into two categories as a mentor (teacher candidate) and e-mentor (distinguished) scientists in certain fields of science.

These mentors as teacher candidates have the Scientific Research Mentorship course in addition to the "Gifted Students and Education" selective course.

EPGBU organizes some group activities at the weekend in the first stage, then self-regulation skills activities on weekdays in the home of the gifted students' (Tortop, 2013, 2015). Mentors are carrying out their work as a mentoring program coordinator. A Facebook group has been created for sharing their experience. In this group, mentors share weekly events and communicate with the coordinator of the mentoring program.

In this study, teacher candidate mentors give their opinion about the e-mentoring strategy and the contribution of their development. Teacher candidate mentors state that the use of Facebook as a mentoring practice can be useful as time efficient, communication/feedback, providing communication between mentors, up-to-date pursuit, EPGBU documents which is accessible to everyone, having more information about the progress of program, and guiding new mentors.

As noted by researchers, e-mentoring programs remove the geographical and organizational obstacles in front of traditional mentoring (O'Neill, et al., 1996; 1997; Lewis, 2002), group mentoring (Single & Single, 2005; Packard, 2003), and offers great flexibility in communication. In this aspect, Facebook is quite useful in e-mentoring practice. Sharing information and a collaborative learning environment make the Facebook platform provide similar benefits to other e-mentoring practices (Price & Chen, 2003).

The case of the limitations on the use of Facebook causes negative results such as long- term use of the Internet, the lack of communication, the inability to participate in communication synchronously, the difficulty of providing detailed information, misunderstandings, and the lack of Internet connection. It is said that the use of Facebook in e-mentoring practice is not as effective as face to face communication (Bierema & Merriam, 2002). E-mentoring practices can be implemented for educational purposes and supported by face to face mentoring E-mentoring has some requirements for effective development. These include computer literacy, appropriate computer hardware, internet access, effective communication skills, the arrangements of interviews, ensuring the confidentiality of the message, and the lack of feedback. In addition, open and honest views can be considered as an intimate platform (Clutterbuck & Lane, 2004).

Mentors can come across some problems in the selection and the continuity of e-mentoring process. Therefore, an e-monitoring program can also be applied as a complementary support in some mentoring programs (Watson, 2006).

While practicing mentoring on Facebook, a student-only group can be opened and provide information on the use of Facebook as well as give announcements on specific days and times. Shares may be enriched and improved in groups and a specific date and time can be arranged among mentors. Questions and answers can found to be a creative and efficient method in forming an opinion. E-mentoring practices are seen as a shallow framework in the education of gifted students (Siegel, 2003; Siegel et al., 2005). The applicability of expectations about e-mentoring practice is very important in order to be successful. The awareness of participants will be fruitful on empowering the use of Facebook in mentoring practice. Besides the ability to use the Internet technology, mentor and mentee have an impact on the frequency of interaction and initial motivation (DiRenzo, Linnehan, Shao & Rosenberg, 2010). In this case, the purpose of the mentoring practice and the function of Facebook can be explained to participants.

Moreover, teacher candidate mentors have some proposals for the use of Facebook in the education of gifted students. EPGBU, has a higher social validity and a positive opinion from gifted students in the academic field, as a program for gifted education (Tortop, 2014). Recently, it is possible to come across e-mentoring practice in the education of gifted students (Mammadov & Topcu, 2014).

This E-mentoring application which used both education of the gifted teachers and the education of the gifted students (who lived in rural areas especially) should be increased. Facebook and other social networking sites should be closely examined in terms of being an educational tool at gifted education program. At this study, there are some limitations, such as views of e-mentoring practice with facebook has been obtained very small sample, but this study is a qualitative study, so this results not need to generalize, just it has been described this case. Therefore, in the further research, researchers may investigate views of educators about e-mentoring practice with facebook, not only their views, but also many facets of e-mentoring practice.

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