

Implementing Contextual Interventions to Improve Teaching Quality: Reflections From a Three-Year School Mentoring Program

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Abstract

This study explores how contextual mentoring interventions can improve teaching quality and leadership in a low-cost private junior high school in rural Indonesia. Over three years, the program accompanied teachers and school leaders through cycles of reflection, planning, and collective action to rebuild post-pandemic stability and instructional confidence. Instead of relying on prescriptive models, the mentoring process followed the 5C Reflective Framework—Characterized Relationship, Comprehensive Concept, Constructive Continuity, Challenging Choices, and Community Context—adapted from the 5M leadership values introduced by Najelaa Shihab, founder of the Guru Belajar Foundation. This framework emphasizes humanizing relationships, conceptual clarity, sustained progress, purposeful challenges, and community empowerment. Data were drawn from classroom observations, reflection logs, and mentoring documentation. Results showed consistent teacher growth (average reflection scores 8.9–9.0 / 10), increased collaboration, stronger leadership identity, and a redesigned school governance system that improved teacher wellbeing and student enrollment. Findings highlight that contextual mentoring grounded in reflective values can generate sustainable, system-level change even in resource-limited school communities.

Keywords: school, mentoring, reflective practice, post-pandemic recovery, teaching quality

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Introduction

In recent years, many schools have been required to navigate rapid changes while recovering from the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. For schools operating in resource-constrained contexts, these changes often expose deeper challenges related to instructional leadership, teacher confidence, and the sustainability of improvement efforts. While numerous school improvement programs focus on introducing new structures or external interventions, fewer studies document how change unfolds when it is grounded in everyday school practices and local realities.

This paper presents reflections from a three-year school mentoring program implemented in a low-fee private junior secondary school in Indonesia. Rather than applying a standardized reform model, the mentoring process emphasized contextual and reflective approaches that supported school leaders and teachers in making sense of change together. The program focused on rebuilding instructional trust, strengthening collaborative practices, and gradually embedding routines of reflection, planning, and collective action within the school.

Drawing on qualitative data from observations, reflective logs, and school documents, this study explores how contextual mentoring contributed to the development of teacher professionalism and instructional leadership over time. By situating the findings within local leadership values and broader system-level perspectives on school improvement, this paper aims to offer modest but grounded insights into how sustainable change can emerge from within schools, even in settings with limited resources.

Literature Review

Research on school improvement increasingly suggests that sustainable change is shaped less by isolated programs and more by how schools build shared meaning, professional trust, and continuity in everyday practice. Studies on education reform indicate that improvement efforts are more likely to succeed when interventions are aligned with a school's stage of development and adapted to its local context, rather than applied as uniform solutions across settings (Mourshed et al., 2010).

McKinsey's analysis of improving school systems emphasizes that educational change is fundamentally "a system thing, not a single thing." Schools that demonstrate sustained improvement tend to implement coherent sets of mutually reinforcing practices, including instructional leadership, professional learning, data-informed reflection, and collaborative routines. The study also highlights the importance of contextualizing reform—balancing direction and autonomy—so that changes are perceived as credible and workable by educators (Mourshed et al., 2010).

In the Indonesian context, the **5M framework** proposed by Najelaa Shihab offers a practice-oriented lens for understanding educational change. The framework emphasizes leading change through human relationships, shared conceptual understanding, meaningful challenges, continuity, and empowerment of local context. From this perspective, change is viewed as a collective learning process that grows through reflection and dialogue rather than top-down enforcement (Shihab, 2025).

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that contextual and reflective mentoring can support instructional leadership and teacher development in meaningful ways. Rather than positioning

mentoring as a corrective mechanism, the literature points to its role as a facilitative process that helps schools make sense of change and gradually embed sustainable practices within their own realities (Mourshed et al., 2010; Shihab, 2025).

Mentoring Program Overview

This study is situated within a three-year mentoring program conducted in a low-fee private junior secondary school in Indonesia. The mentoring was designed as long-term, school-based accompaniment rather than a one-off training intervention. Across the three years, mentoring activities evolved in response to the school's readiness and were informed by the **5M leadership framework** as a guiding input for reflection and decision-making.

Phase 1 – Building Foundations (Year 1)

- *Focus*: establishing trust, shared understanding, and instructional direction.
- *Mentoring activities*: school visits, leadership dialogues, and guided reflection sessions with school leaders and teachers.
- *5M input*: Memanusiakan Hubungan and Memahami Konsep, emphasizing relational trust and shared meaning around teaching and learning

Phase 2 – Strengthening Practice (Year 2)

- *Focus*: developing collaborative instructional practices and reflective routines.
- *Mentoring activities*: joint planning, classroom observation, reflective discussions, and documentation of emerging practices.
- *5M input*: Memilih Tantangan and Memberdayakan Konteks, supporting teachers and leaders to engage with context-relevant challenges and local resources.

Phase 3 – Consolidating Continuity (Year 3)

- *Focus*: embedding practices into more stable routines and shared leadership processes.
- *Mentoring activities*: refinement of reflection cycles, assessment discussions, and leadership role distribution.
- *5M input*: Membangun Keberlanjutan, focusing on continuity beyond individual mentoring activities.

Throughout the program, mentoring emphasized adaptation to the school's context rather than the application of standardized solutions. The phased approach allowed practices to develop gradually, supporting the school in making sense of change over time.

Method

This study adopts a **qualitative, practice-based inquiry** approach to explore how contextual mentoring supported instructional leadership and teacher development over time. The research is grounded in a three-year mentoring program conducted in a low-fee private junior secondary school in Indonesia, where the author was directly involved as a mentor–facilitator.

Data were collected through multiple sources to capture changes in practice and meaning-making processes within the school. These sources included classroom and school-level observations, reflective journals and logs written by teachers and school leaders, as well as school documents such as instructional plans, assessment records, and mentoring notes. Rather than treating these data as isolated evidence, they were read holistically to understand patterns of growth, challenges, and adaptation across the mentoring period.

Data analysis was conducted through iterative reflective reading, focusing on recurring themes related to instructional leadership, professional collaboration, and reflective practice. The analysis was guided by the principles of contextual mentoring and informed by the 5M leadership framework, allowing themes to emerge from practice rather than being imposed a priori. To enhance credibility, findings were triangulated across data sources and discussed through ongoing reflection with school leaders during the mentoring process.

This study does not aim to generalize findings to all school contexts. Instead, it seeks to provide a grounded account of how change unfolded within a specific school setting, offering insights that may be transferable to similar contexts facing comparable challenges.

Instrument

This study employed **qualitative, practice-based instruments** designed to support reflection and documentation during the mentoring process rather than to measure performance quantitatively. The instruments were integrated into routine mentoring activities and evolved gradually across the three-year period.

The primary instruments included:

- **Reflective logs and journals**, used by school leaders and teachers to document reflections on instructional practices, leadership decisions, and challenges encountered during the mentoring process.
- **Observation notes**, recorded during classroom observations, school visits, and mentoring sessions to capture instructional practices, interactions, and emerging patterns of collaboration.
- **School documents**, such as instructional plans, assessment records, reflection summaries, and mentoring notes, which provided contextual evidence of how practices developed over time.

In addition, the mentoring process was guided by the **5M framework**, which functioned as a reflective lens rather than a measurement tool. The framework informed the design of reflection prompts and mentoring conversations, supporting participants in making sense of change through relational, conceptual, contextual, and continuity-oriented perspectives.

These instruments were not treated as standalone tools but as complementary sources that enabled triangulation and supported a holistic understanding of the mentoring process within the school context.

Findings

The findings are presented as descriptive patterns that emerged from the three-year mentoring process. Quantitative indicators are included to support qualitative observations and documented records.

Theme 1: Growth in Reflective Teaching Practice

Over the mentoring period, teachers' engagement in reflective practice increased and became more consistent. Based on mentoring records, teachers' reflection scores across the five dimensions of the **5C framework** ranged between **8.9 and 9.0 out of 10**, indicating a high level of perceived relevance and usefulness of the mentoring process. Teachers reported feeling

better understood in their professional needs (*Characterized Relationship*), more confident in grasping essential pedagogical concepts (*Comprehensive Concept*), and supported through feedback that encouraged growth (*Constructive Continuity*). Autonomy in choosing learning challenges (*Challenging Choices*) and the application of learning within the school context (*Community Context*) were also consistently rated at similar levels.

In addition to reflection quality, the number of teachers actively documenting reflective practice increased from **2 teachers at the beginning of the program to 6 teachers by the third year**, suggesting a broader participation in reflective routines.

Theme 2: Strengthening Instructional Leadership and School Systems

Alongside changes in teaching practice, school-level systems gradually developed during the mentoring period. Mentoring documentation indicates that the school introduced a new **curriculum structure** and began implementing a more transparent **remuneration system**, reflecting efforts to align instructional goals with governance and leadership practices. These developments were discussed and refined through mentoring sessions rather than imposed as standalone reforms.

Leadership practices also shifted toward more reflective and facilitative roles, with school leaders increasingly using mentoring conversations to guide instructional discussions and decision-making.

Theme 3: Indicators of School Growth and Continuity

School records show changes that suggest increased institutional stability over time. Student enrollment increased from **6 students at the beginning of the mentoring period to 80 students after three years**. While multiple factors may have contributed to this growth, the increase coincided with the gradual strengthening of teaching practices, leadership routines, and school systems documented throughout the mentoring process.

Taken together, these findings illustrate how contextual, reflection-based mentoring was associated with strengthened professional practice, emerging leadership capacity, and indicators of school continuity over time.

Conclusion

This study concludes that contextual, reflection-based mentoring can support gradual improvements in teaching practice, instructional leadership, and school continuity when sustained over time. Rather than producing rapid transformation, the mentoring process contributed to the normalization of reflective routines, collaborative practice, and emerging system alignment within the school. While the findings are drawn from a single case and are not intended to be generalized, they offer practice-based insights into how mentoring grounded in local context may support sustainable change in resource-constrained school settings. Future studies may explore similar approaches across multiple schools or examine how such mentoring models can be adapted at scale.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author used ChatGPT (OpenAI) as an AI-assisted tool to support language refinement, structure organization, and proofreading of the manuscript. The AI tool was used to improve clarity and coherence of the text. All substantive content, data interpretation, and conclusions remain the responsibility of the author.

Reference

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