

Theoretical article

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**TEACHER MENTORING AS A CATALYST
FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT¹**

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Abstract. This research article examines the role of structured teacher mentoring in the development of educational leadership within the Asia-Pacific region. Drawing upon a comprehensive analysis of investigated career trajectory models for school leaders across seven Asia-Pacific economies, this study synthesizes findings on mentoring frameworks, policies, and practices. The theoretical analysis explores mentoring within the contexts of adult learning theory, transformative leadership, and career development models. Practical cases from Singapore, China, Japan, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Indonesia are presented to illustrate diverse approaches to mentorship, from formal state-led programs to school-based, communal learning. The analysis reveals that high-performing systems integrate mentoring into a coherent career architecture, linking it to certification, performance evaluation, and succession planning. The conclusions highlight the critical success factors for effective mentoring systems, including systemic alignment, cultural responsiveness, and the balance between structure and professional autonomy. The article culminates in a summary of transferable principles for policymakers seeking to strengthen organizational and methodological support for the career growth of educational leaders through mentorship.

Keywords: teacher mentoring, educational leadership, career trajectories, Asia-Pacific region, professional development, school leadership, comparative education

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НАСТАВНИЧЕСТВО ПЕДАГОГОВ КАК КАТАЛИЗАТОР РАЗВИТИЯ ЛИДЕРСКИХ КАЧЕСТВ В ОБРАЗОВАНИИ

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Аннотация. В статье рассматривается роль структурированного наставничества педагогических кадров в развитии лидерских качеств в образовании. Основываясь на всестороннем анализе моделей карьерных траекторий руководителей образовательных организаций зарубежных стран, исследование обобщает имеющийся опыт по данной проблеме в области политики и практики наставничества. Теоретический анализ рассматривает наставничество в контексте теории обучения взрослых, трансформационного лидерства и моделей развития карьеры. Представлены примеры практик наставничества Сингапура, Китая, Японии, Таиланда, Малайзии, Вьетнама и Индонезии, иллюстрирующие различные подходы к наставничеству — от формальных государственных программ до коллективного обучения. Анализ показывает, что высокоэффективные системы интегрируют наставничество в целостную карьерную архитектуру, связывая его с сертификацией, оценкой эффективности и планированием преемственности. В выводах подчеркиваются критически важные факторы успеха эффективных систем наставничества, включая системную согласованность, культурную восприимчивость и баланс между структурой и профессиональной автономией. Статья завершается перечнем принципов, основанных на анализе, которые разработаны для органов исполнительной власти в области образования с целью повышения эффективности организационной и методологической поддержки карьерного роста руководителей образовательных учреждений посредством наставничества.

Ключевые слова: наставничество учителей, лидерские качества, карьерные траектории, Азиатско-Тихоокеанский регион, профессиональное развитие, школьное лидерство, сравнительное образование

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Introduction

The global educational landscape is undergoing a profound transformation, driven by technological advancements, socio-economic shifts, and evolving pedagogical paradigms. In this context, the quality of leadership within educational organizations has emerged as a paramount determinant of system resilience, innovation capacity, and student outcomes (Hallinger, 2016). The Southeast Asian countries (SA), characterized by immense economic and cultural diversity, presents a unique laboratory for examining how different systems cultivate their educational leaders. A foundational strategy common to many successful systems is the intentional, structured mentoring of teachers and aspiring leaders (Schleicher, 2012; Vachkova, Salakhova, & Mysina, 2025).

This article is grounded in the findings analysis of the experience of The Southeast Asian countries in building career trajectories for pedagogical staff in educational organizations. The project undertook a four-stage, mixed-methods analysis of at least seven SA countries — stratified by income level (e.g., Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia) — to dissect the mechanisms, factors, and models of pedagogical career development. A core component of this analysis was the examination of mentorship and collegial support structures. The primary aim of this article is to distill and analyze the role of teacher and leadership mentoring. It moves beyond the report's broader focus on career trajectories to zoom in on mentorship as a critical lever within those trajectories. The research questions guiding this analysis are:

- 1) What theoretical frameworks underpin mentoring practices in SA countries educational systems?
- 2) How are mentoring programs structured and implemented in selected high-performing and developing SA countries contexts?
- 3) What common principles and contextual variations define effective mentoring ecosystems for future leaders?

The significance of this inquiry lies in its evidence-based, comparative approach. For Russian educational practice, which strives to occupy a leading position on the international stage, understanding how and why successful mentoring models work is crucial. This article contributes to the global discourse on educational leadership by providing a synthesized, cross-national perspective on mentorship, drawn from a rich, data-driven source.

Theoretical analysis

Mentoring within Career Development Frameworks

In the Russian education system positions mentoring not as an isolated activity but as an integral element within a larger ecosystem of professional growth and career architecture. This perspective aligns with contemporary theoretical understandings of mentoring in education.

1. Mentoring as Adult Learning and Professional Socialization.

Effective mentoring for leadership transcends simple advice-giving; it is a process of professional socialization and situated learning (Lave, & Wenger, 1991). The authors emphasize that the transition from teacher to leader as a shift in identity, requiring the acquisition of not only new skills but also new norms, values, and strategic perspectives. Mentoring facilitates this by providing “access to the craft knowledge” of experienced practitioners (Cope, & Stephen, 2001). In systems like SA countries, mentoring is deeply embedded in daily practice — through lesson study or structured interactions in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) — thereby grounding leadership development in authentic contexts (Diamond, Parr, & Bulfin, 2017).

2. Mentoring within Transformational Leadership and Distributed Leadership Models.

The concept of transformational leadership (TL) is of crucial importance for education in the 21st century. Mentoring is a key tool for fostering transformational qualities—such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation — in aspiring leaders. A mentor models these behaviors and creates opportunities for mentees to experiment with them. Furthermore, of equal importance are practices that are consistent with the theory of distributed leadership, where leadership is a function distributed throughout the organization. Mentoring in such systems often focuses on empowering teachers to lead initiatives, building a pipeline of leadership capacity rather than funneling individuals toward a single, hierarchical position (Spillane, 2005; Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2014).

3. Mentoring as a Structural Component of Career Ladders and Succession Planning.

Theoretically, mentoring bridges the gap between individual agency and systemic structure. In Southeast Asian countries, the development of “career spaces” and “administrative organizations” is of particular importance, ensuring that mentoring systems are linked to career development in a highly effective manner. For instance, completion of a mentoring relationship or serving as a mentor may be a prerequisite for promotion or certification (e.g., Thailand’s promotion requirements, Indonesia’s Leaders in Education Programme). This structural integration ensures mentoring is valued, resourced, and quality-assured. It represents a systemic investment in leadership succession, mitigating the risk of ad-hoc or personality-dependent development.

4. *The Dual Contour Framework: External and Internal Influences.*

The outer contour. Countries with high-stakes accountability and global competitiveness agendas (e.g., Thailand, Malaysia) design mentoring programs with clear outcomes tied to system goals. *The internal contour* (career space, legal norms, performance indicators) determines the mentoring mechanics. This framework helps explain why a mentorship model from a high-income, centralized system may not transplant directly to a middle-income, decentralized one without significant adaptation.

Practical Cases: Mentoring Models Across Southeast Asian countries

Thailand and Malaysia: Developing Formal Frameworks.

The Thailand and Malaysia are actively building more structured leadership development systems. Thailand's "SQP2RS" strategy for teacher development incorporates elements of peer mentoring and coaching. Malaysia has introduced the National Professional Qualification for Educational Leaders (NPQEL), which includes a mentoring component. In these contexts, challenges often relate to scale, consistency of mentor quality, and integration with existing bureaucratic structures. The mentoring models here represent a conscious policy move to systematize what was often informal, adapting international concepts to local administrative realities (Ulla, & Winitkun, 2018; Jafar et al., 2021).

Vietnam and Indonesia: Navigating Resource Constraints and Decentralization.

In lower-middle-income Southeast Asian countries like Vietnam and Indonesia, suggests mentoring is more variable. Promising practices exist, such as Vietnam's use of master teachers in the renovation of its curriculum (as seen in the VNEN program analysis), which involves peer coaching. However, systemic, large-scale formal mentoring for leadership is less entrenched. Efforts may be project-based, supported by international development partners, or dependent on individual institutional initiative. The context highlights the importance of cost-effective, scalable models and the potential of leveraging professional learning networks and ICT for virtual mentoring (Parandekar et al., 2017).

Conclusions: Synthesis and Critical Success Factors

1. Systemic Alignment is Non-Negotiable.

The most impactful mentoring programs are not standalone initiatives but are intricately woven into the fabric of the education system. They are aligned with

a) Career Ladders: Clearly defined pathways where mentoring is a recognized developmental stage.

b) Standards and Certification: Competency frameworks that define what mentors should develop and provide criteria for assessment.

c) Resource Allocation: Dedicated time, funding for mentor training, and reduced teaching loads for both parties.

2. Cultural Context Shapes Form and Function.

The mentoring models must resonate with local cultural and administrative norms. A collectivist culture like Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia thrives on group-based, implicit mentoring (*lesson study*), while more hierarchical systems like Vietnam successfully employ expert-novice, formal dyads. Importing a model without adapting it to local power dynamics, communication styles, and concepts of authority is likely to fail.

3. The Mentor's Role Requires Training and Status.

Effective mentors are not just experienced leaders; they are skilled coaches and facilitators. An analysis of mentoring practices in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam shows that systems that invest in mentor training—equipping them with skills in observational feedback, reflective questioning, and emotional support—reap greater returns. Furthermore, formally recognizing the mentor role (through certification, stipends, or career credit) enhances its status and attracts high-caliber candidates.

4. Balance Structure with Flexibility.

While structure ensures equity and quality, excessive rigidity can stifle the authentic relationship at the heart of mentoring. Successful programs (e.g., parts of Thailand's and Vietnam's approaches) provide a clear framework — goals, meeting schedules, outcome indicators — while allowing mentors and mentees to tailor the focus to the mentee's specific needs, school context, and leadership challenges.

5. Focus on Leadership Identity and Ethical Practice.

Beyond managerial skills, in Southeast Asian countries mentoring programs increasingly focus on developing a leader's ethical compass, resilience, and capacity to drive equitable improvement. Mentors help mentees navigate complex dilemmas, model ethical decision-making, and foster a commitment to social justice within the school community.

Summary and Implications

This article has synthesized evidence from a comprehensive study of in Southeast Asian countries to articulate the central role of mentoring in cultivating educational leaders. The theoretical analysis positioned mentorship as a process of adult learning, professional socialization, and a structural pillar of career architecture. The practical cases demonstrated a continuum of models, from highly centralized, state-managed pipelines to decentralized, practice-embedded communities, with developing systems actively constructing their own hybrid frameworks.

For policymakers and practitioners in the Russian education system seeking to improve their support systems, three key conclusions can be drawn:

1. Design Coherently, Not in Isolation: Mentoring initiatives must be conceived as part of an integrated leadership development strategy, linked to standards, career progression, and performance evaluation.

2. Adapt, Do Not Adopt: Benchmarking against Southeast Asian countries best practices is valuable, but successful implementation requires careful contextualization. The “internal contour” of the receiving system — Its governance, culture, and existing teacher development structures — must be the primary design filter.

3. Invest in the Human Infrastructure: The quality of mentoring hinges on the quality of mentors. Sustained investment in recruiting, training, and rewarding mentors is the single most critical operational factor.

The future of education demands leaders who are not only managers but also visionaries, mentors, and systems thinkers. As the Southeast Asian countries experience shows, intentional, well-designed mentoring is a powerful catalyst for developing such leadership, ensuring that schools are led by professionals who are continually growing, supported, and prepared to guide their learning communities through a complex and evolving world.

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