

A Helping Hand: Faculty's Perceptions of Coaching and Mentoring in Pakistani HEIs

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ABSTRACT

In an era of innovative technology and demand for students to be exemplary candidates for employment, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) face the challenge of preparing their students academically, psychosocially, and professionally for the labour market. As a result, the faculty stands as the main source of guidance towards achieving the required level of holistic development. This study explores the perception of coaching and mentoring in Pakistani HEIs from the perspective of faculty, specifically, the current state of coaching and mentoring in Pakistani HEIs, how faculty provide coaching and mentoring, the challenges they face, and the recommendations they would provide. A sample of 4 faculty members from HEIs in Islamabad from the STEAM fields was selected through purposive sampling. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data and were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. The findings revealed that while faculty are always available to coach and mentor their students, they face challenges that prevent them from guiding their students to their full potential. Based on the findings, the study also proposes recommendations to enable faculty to engage in these practices more meaningfully.

Keywords: Coaching, Mentoring, Higher Education Institutions, Academic Support, Qualitative Study

INTRODUCTION

Student support systems in higher education institutions (HEIs) are becoming more of a necessity than an optional service as universities respond to the increasingly complex academic, personal, and professional challenges faced by students (Hitches et al., 2025; Mireku et al., 2024). Similarly, beyond having access to a plethora of knowledge, students require a consistent source of academic and emotional support, along with timely access to institutional resources to smoothly navigate the challenges associated with tertiary education and transition into professional life (Barnes et al., 2024; Perez & Sabato, 2023; Qureshi, 2018). Additionally, research consistently demonstrates that comprehensive student support mechanisms enhance engagement, confidence, and academic success, particularly for students from underrepresented or non-traditional backgrounds (Prananto et al., 2025; Stamou et al., 2024). In response, HEIs are increasingly prioritizing integrated support models that combine academic assistance with psychosocial and career development (Kirk et al., 2025; Lesunyane et al., 2025).

Similarly, in university settings, mentoring contributes to students' academic progress, emotional adjustment, and professional growth, fostering greater engagement, persistence, and a sense of belonging (Niazi et al., 2024; Nuis et al., 2023). Coaching, by contrast, emphasizes structured and goal-driven interactions that support students in developing self-regulation, confidence, and practical academic skills, particularly during periods of transition (Campbell & Mogashana, 2025; Donaldson et al., 2025). Faculty members play a pivotal role in both practices due to their sustained academic and advisory relationships with students using collaborative communication (Hagler et al., 2024; Qureshi & Ünlü., 2024).

Despite their importance, coaching and mentoring in Pakistani HEIs remain insufficiently formalized, often depending on individual faculty initiative rather than institutional systems (Haider et al., 2023; Wahid, 2025). Similarly, faculty support is frequently shaped by contextual constraints such as limited resources, high teaching loads, and the absence of clear policy guidance, resulting in inconsistent student access to support (Niazi et al.,

2024; Rehman et al., 2024). Moreover, while global scholarship on coaching and mentoring is growing, empirical work from Pakistan, particularly research foregrounding faculty perspectives, remains limited (Rehman et al., 2025). This study explores faculty engagement with coaching and mentoring in Pakistani HEIs, focusing on their practices, challenges, and recommendations. In doing so, it highlights the role of faculty-led support in promoting student resilience, self-efficacy, professional readiness, and holistic development, while offering contextually relevant insights for strengthening institutional support structures (Guo et al., 2025; Yao & Wu, 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globally, mentorship is most prevalently defined as a process where a more experienced individual, known as the mentor, facilitates the personal and professional growth of a less experienced individual, i.e., mentee; this extends to academic, career, and psychosocial support (Abdelmannan et al., 2025; Chea, 2024). In the context of higher education, a mentor is an experienced individual who engages in a developmental relationship with a less experienced individual, i.e., student, offering academic, career-related, and psychosocial support to facilitate the mentee's learning, competence and development (Azpeitia et al., 2025; Martins & Faciola, 2025). The relationship may be formal or informal in nature; the primary purpose is to provide guidance and support the mentee's overall growth (Habbash et al., 2024; Wu & Olagunju, 2024).

Faculty mentors support students academically by showing interest in their progress, offering individualized feedback, and guiding research and study strategies through tailored resources and meetings beyond classroom time, thereby enhancing understanding and performance (Alonso García et al., 2026; Huang & Wang, 2023; Miao et al., 2025; Qureshi & Ünlü, 2025). Moreover, through collaborative commination faculty mentors, while drawing on their professional experience, to guide students on career pathways, networking, and access to relevant internships, research opportunities, and professional contacts aligned with their aspirations in an AI integrated world (Mughal & Qureshi, 2025; Nabi et al., 2025; Nuis et al., 2024; Qureshi et al., 2024).

Conversely, coaching is commonly defined as a structured, short-term, goal-focused process that aids individuals in the improvement of specific academic or behavioral skills (Atkinson et al., 2022; Richardson et al., 2023). In higher education, coaching is a goal-oriented, structured partnership that empowers students to build strengths and develop academic and personal skills, distinguished by its action-focused approach (Donaldson et al., 2025; Seemann et al., 2024; Villa et al., 2024). Similarly, faculty coaching involves a structured, action-focused process that supports students in achieving academic, personal, or professional goals through goal setting, action planning, progress monitoring, and reflective adjustment, fostering skills such as self-regulation, time management, and problem-solving, and leading to enhanced self-efficacy and critical thinking (Burtson et al., 2025; Campbell & Mogashana, 2025; Santiesteban et al., 2022; Sipondo & Terblanche, 2024).

Despite their significance, mentoring and coaching initiatives in Pakistani institutions often rely on the personal interest of faculty members rather than institutional frameworks; as a result, faculty often provide academic, emotional and career-related support, considering it a personal responsibility (Wimberly et al., 2023). This approach, while well-intentioned, introduces variability, as some students receive extensive support while others lack access due to inconsistent practices and limited availability (Kraft et al., 2023; Law et al., 2020). In summary, this study contributes to the discussion of the need for coaching and mentoring in Pakistani HEIs as well as the support required by the faculty members by offering context-specific insights grounded in real experiences of the faculty members as mentors and coaches.

METHODOLOGY

The provision of mentoring and coaching is an incredibly personalized and relationship-based process; therefore, qualitative inquiry offers a richer understanding of how faculty approach these dynamic processes (Toh et al., 2022). For this purpose, the following central question was curated: How do faculty perceive mentoring and coaching in Higher Education Institutes in Pakistan? The research employed a qualitative research design to explore the perceptions of coaching and mentoring amongst faculty members who are one of the primary stakeholders in Pakistani HEIs. Four semi-structured interviews were conducted with faculty members actively teaching in different STEAM fields to explore their experiences with coaching and mentoring, the challenges

faced and recommendations for the improvement of coaching and mentoring in HEIs in Pakistan (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Qureshi, 2019).

This approach allowed the collection of rich, detailed narratives with the aim of capturing how HEI faculty formally or informally mentor their students, as well as detailed insight into institutional gaps and support required by faculty in order to be better coaches and mentors to their students. Areas such as challenges faced by students, coaching and mentoring strategies and the impact of mentoring students on mentors were addressed. The interviews were audio-recorded with permission and then transcribed verbatim for accuracy and nonverbal expressions, e.g., pauses and hesitations were noted where relevant.

Table 1 Demographic Information

Gender	Number of Participants	Academic Discipline
Female	2	STEAM/STEM
Male	2	STEAM/STEAM

The data was collected using the purposive sampling technique with an inclusion criteria of faculty members from Pakistani HEIs with a teaching experience of over five years and who have experience in mentoring and coaching (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A bifold method was designed to ensure credibility of the study using a theoretical saturation tool (Ünlü & Qureshi, 2023), and Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria for qualitative rigor through repeated transcript review, member checking to confirm authenticity, and rich descriptions to support transferability to other Pakistani HEIs.

Furthermore, a clear methodological process was followed, with documentation of each step from data collection to analysis. In addition, coding and theme development followed a systematic and replicable approach based on Braun and Clarke (2019), establishing dependability. Moreover, for confirmability, direct quotations were used to support interpretations, ensuring that themes came directly from the data rather than assumptions. The review evaluated the mentoring practices based on commonly recognized qualities of effective academic mentoring, such as the mentor’s reliability and availability, clarity and openness in communication and the ability to offer emotional understanding and support.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This involves a systematic, recursive six-phase process: Familiarizing with the dataset, generating initial codes, generating initial themes, developing and reviewing themes, refining, defining and naming themes, and writing up. In the familiarization phase, the transcripts were read multiple times to extract key insights related to mentoring and coaching styles, student concerns, faculty perspective, and the emotional climate of the mentoring relationship. During the generation of initial codes, statements reflecting experiences, challenges, needs, and perceptions of coaching and mentoring were coded. Examples of codes included “informal mentoring,” “student challenges,” “preferred mentoring style,” “institutional gaps,” and “need for structured mentoring.”

Following Reflexive Thematic Analysis, the codes were constantly reviewed, after which they were grouped to form initial themes, capturing meaningful patterns. For example, codes related to faculty perspective, perceived approachability, and mentorship techniques were combined under a specific theme. The themes were then refined by ensuring that they accurately represented the coded data and aligned with the research questions. Overlapping themes were merged, and unclear ones were redefined. After the completion of the five phases, the process of writing up was initiated and completed, ensuring the synthesis of the themes resulted in a cohesive, well-written narrative.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Finding 1: The findings of this study highlight the challenges students bring to their faculty in their search for coaching, mentoring, and guidance. The implication being, students potentially view their faculty as facilitators who could support them through the challenges they face. To support this, participant 3, when asked about issues brought to him by students, stated, “*The common issues include academic stress, career confusion, low*

confidence, studying abroad issues, family pressures, and sometimes even mental health struggles. In mental health struggles, you can include anxiety and academic burnout. As a matter of fact, we can say that engineering students face enormous performance pressures, which results in anxiety and academic burnout” (Interview#3, line 47 – 51).

Similarly, another participant added, “There are many examples, in each semester there is an example, where I go to students, I try to mentor and solve the problem. Most of the concerns are family problems or personal concerns as most of students they move from the, what can I say, from the underdeveloped cities to Islamabad to seek education. They face problems like financial problems are one of the key problems they face.” (Interview#2, line 84 – 91). The findings suggest that faculty members facilitate their students throughout the university experience, shedding light on how guidance is crucial throughout multiple walks of life.

Finding 2: The findings showcase that, regardless of prior training, faculty members employ their own strategies and processes to mentor and coach students. When asked about whether she believed her strategies imparted to the students were effective, the participant responded with, “Many higher education students think they don’t need to write. I tell them to keep writing. Writing helped me a lot. Whatever you write stays in your mind. One student told me later that because of me, he started writing after years, and he passed with flying colors. That’s when I knew it helped” (Interview#1, line 65 – 68).

Additionally, another participant, in response to the question of what steps he employs, stated, “Actually, when someone comes with a problem and if it is in my capacity. For example if the problem is related to registration or some academic problem so as a teacher and part of the university I try to solve as early as possible I connect with the HoD and the Dean and even with the campus head if that problem can be solved through them so I try to solve it and regarding their financial problems there are few pockets from where we can get funding or scholarships so I try to get students in touch with those agencies... and I try to get those scholarship for the students who are deserving and if there are no scholarships we do manage from our own pockets that is not much but as much as we can. We faculty members contribute few amount that is not enough but somehow useful” (Interview#2, line 93 – 101). All in all, these findings shed light on current coaching and mentoring practices carried out by faculty in Pakistani HEIs and set a base for what can be worked on to further improve practice.

Finding 3: The findings of the study highlight the challenges faced by mentors as they navigate facilitating their students. As stated by participant 1, “Institutes have time constraints. Students have back-to-back classes. There should be proper time slots. Cultural pressure exists too, especially for female teachers. People judge when I speak to male students. My family understands but society doesn’t always. I worked in a male-dominated environment too; colleagues also judged. I don’t justify myself to everyone. These are cultural pressures” (Interview#1, line 102 – 106).

Similarly, participant 3 stated, “I personally think that I don't have enough time to mentor students in a way that it should be that they should be mentored. So, you can say that time shortage is the biggest challenge. And then, because we have got usually classes comprising of maybe 50 students. So large class sizes are another issue. And then as a member, we have got certain administrative responsibilities assigned to us, so consequently, it is not possible for us to give ample time for personal individualized mentoring” (Interview#3, line 122-128). The verbatim of the participants highlights how time constraints and lack of allotted time hinder their ability to truly facilitate their students in a manner they desire, suggesting the need for a more formal structure to allow adequate facilitation for students.

Finding 4: The findings of the study further affirm that while coaching and mentoring structures do exist, there is room for improvement in the structure and resources invested in the systems. Participant 1, imploring for institutional support, stated, “Institutions should arrange workshops, flexible schedules, allocated mentorship time. Even hire teachers specifically for mentoring. Teaching is not just coursework, mentorship needs time” (Interview#1, line 128 – 130). Similarly, while additionally highlighting the gaps existing in the current system, stating, “First gap: time flexibility for students and teachers. Second: connection with families. Like parent-teacher meetings. Higher education also needs some link with families. Even a small glimpse of their background helps understand student behavior” (Interview#1, line 132 – 134).

In addition, another participant suggests, *“I think that former training for faculty in mentoring skills can enhance the effectiveness of the mentoring session because the faculty would be highly trained in that case to conduct those sessions... as I also mentioned before, it stands for student advisory system, where we mentor a small group of students in dedicated mentoring hours weekly. And just in case, if we feel that some students need extra coaching or mentoring, then we can refer those students”* (Interview#3, line 118 – 124). These findings call for a more cohesive system with a focus on not only having an existing structure, but also on the facilitation of training for the faculty to provide more need-focused services, improving the quality of coaching and mentorship.

Finding 5: The findings of the study indicate that, when reflecting on the impact of mentoring students, faculty members shared positive experiences. For instance, one of the participants stated, *“It was incredible. Excellent. I learned a lot myself. When you coach someone, you coach yourself. It becomes counselling for me too. Students' problems resemble my own sometimes. I relate. I stand in others' shoes. I practice empathy strictly. This experience helped build me”* (Interview#1, lines 50 – 53). Additionally, another participant added, *“...It is one of the most gratifying aspects of my profession because when a student succeeds through my guidance, it gives me immense personal satisfaction, which is more than academic satisfaction”* (Interview#3, line 136 – 138). The responses provided by the participants indicate the reciprocity of coaching and mentoring, highlighting how these processes not only benefit the mentee but have a significantly positive influence on the mentor as well.

DISCUSSION

Students in HEIs, in the face of an ever-evolving employability climate, require more than just traditional education (Bhardwaj et al., 2025; Sanguino et al., 2025). In addition to academic instruction, they require guidance in terms of making informed academic decisions, mentoring and coaching to support career development, as well as encouragement to engage in co-curricular opportunities (Miao et al., 2025; Nabi et al., 2025; Riba, 2025).

Many students also benefit from emotional support, inclusive learning environments, and timely acquisition of institutional resources when facing personal challenges (Geister et al., 2025; Jumaa et al., 2025). This support is often provided by faculty members, whose roles encompass pastoral care alongside teaching (Pinto et al., 2025; Richardson & Stepniak, 2025). Through ensuring sustained engagement, open communication, and supportive relationships both inside and outside the classroom, faculty members contribute significantly to students' sense of belonging, motivation, and overall success in higher education (Feng et al., 2024; Osafo et al., 2025). Additionally, the holistic support provides the students with the required edge to make them labour market ready (Jahan, et al. 2023; Jiang & Wang, 2025; Nuis et al., 2025).

This can be better understood using Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as a theoretical lens (Vygotsky, 1978). Given that learning is a socially mediated process in which individuals develop through interaction with more knowledgeable others, in higher education institutions (HEIs), faculty mentors play a key role by scaffolding students' academic and personal development through dialogue, feedback, and guided participation. This fosters meaning-making, identity formation, and the internalization of academic norms (Chea, 2024; Krishna et al., 2024). Vygotsky's theory enables the interpretation that faculty coaching and mentoring are not merely individual support; they can be seen as a dynamic, relational process that shapes students' development within the higher education environment. Overall, this study highlighted how faculty are ready to support students to the best of their abilities; however, in order to do so, they require support from the institution in the form of training and flexibility.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined faculty perceptions of coaching and mentoring in higher education institutions in Pakistan. It highlights that improving the quality and accessibility of coaching requires institutional policies and resources for faculty training. Participants emphasized the need for proper training and time allocation to support students effectively. Institutional action is necessary to introduce changes that address time constraints while accommodating all stakeholders. Similarly, recognizing coaching and mentoring as vital for student development could allow for adjustments in class timings to facilitate these processes.

Additionally, effective dissemination of information requires faculty members to demonstrate empathy and

support students in a non-judgmental manner. One reason students avoid engaging with advisory systems is due to feelings of fear, judgment, and a lack of relatability. In addition, such practical steps may foster greater student engagement, emotional stability, and career clarity, while also strengthening the faculty-student relationship. The findings of this study should be interpreted considering certain limitations, including data collection from a limited geographical context and a small sample size, which may restrict transferability and the representation of diverse faculty experiences. Accordingly, future research is encouraged to employ longitudinal mixed-methods designs that integrate multi-stakeholder perspectives across Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

This exploration of coaching and mentoring in Pakistani HEIs from the faculty perspective reveals that faculty members in various STEAM fields actively support their students while navigating challenges. It emphasizes the need for sustainable improvements in formal advisory systems, including dedicated time and resources for coaching and mentoring. The goal is to enhance student autonomy, ensuring they graduate not only with technical skills but also with the capability to make independent life choices. Institutional reforms are necessary to achieve these aims in higher education.

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