

# REDEFINING THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY EDUCATOR: A SHIFT TOWARD MENTORSHIP IN COMPETENCY-BASED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

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**Abstract:** As higher education shifts toward competency-based and experiential models, the traditional role of the university educator is being redefined. No longer solely a transmitter of knowledge, the educator is increasingly expected to serve as a mentor, coach, and facilitator. This thesis investigates how mentorship-based pedagogical models impact student engagement, critical thinking, and real-world readiness in higher education. Primary research was conducted through a structured survey of 100+ students at Webster University Tashkent and in-depth interviews with participants of the YouLP leadership development program organized by Mahorat and Management and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Uzbekistan. Results show strong student preference for mentorship approaches, especially those involving personalized feedback, collaborative projects, and leadership reflection.

The thesis argues for a paradigm shift in university faculty development, recommending mandatory training in design-based teaching, mentorship literacy, and assessment for learning. It concludes that in the 21st-century university, success will increasingly depend not on the delivery of content, but on the ability of educators to activate and guide students through complex, evolving learning journeys.

## Introduction

The global labor market is demanding more than subject-specific expertise from university graduates; it requires critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, collaboration, and adaptability (OECD, 2023). As a result, higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly adopting competency-based learning models, which prioritize what students can do with knowledge over what they simply know. In this new paradigm, the traditional lecturer role is no longer sufficient. Educators must become facilitators of learning, guiding students through inquiry, practice, and reflection.

## Problem Statement

Despite international shifts toward student-centered, mentorship-driven teaching models, many Uzbek universities still operate under outdated pedagogical assumptions. This results in disengaged students and a skills gap between academic outcomes and labor market demands (ADB, 2023). Furthermore, classroom dynamics remain heavily lecture-driven, with limited opportunities for student agency, inquiry, or project-based collaboration. Institutional cultures often reward content coverage over learning impact, leaving little room for mentorship practices to evolve. As a consequence, many students graduate with limited real-world readiness and low confidence in applying their academic knowledge beyond exams.

## Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach based on primary data collected through two core sources. First, a structured survey was conducted with over 100 undergraduate students enrolled in the Global Education course at Webster University Tashkent, where the researcher directly taught and implemented mentorship-based learning interventions. Second, in-depth

interviews and focus group discussions were held with participants of the YouLP (Young Leadership Program), a national youth capacity-building program conducted by Mahorat and Management in partnership with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Uzbekistan. The program engaged more than 80 emerging young leaders from diverse regions, offering insights into mentorship experiences within non-formal educational ecosystems.

### **Findings and Analysis**

The survey conducted at Webster University Tashkent revealed that over 70% of students perceived mentorship-based approaches, such as personalized guidance and feedback loops, to be more effective than traditional lectures in developing real-world competencies. Students who engaged in peer-to-peer mentoring or received structured mentorship from instructors reported higher confidence in applying knowledge to interdisciplinary tasks. Meanwhile, qualitative interviews from the YouLP capacity-building program emphasized the role of mentors in shaping leadership identity, critical thinking, and civic engagement. Participants attributed their personal growth to access to relatable mentors, structured reflection activities, and collaborative projects that bridged theory and practice.

### **Discussion**

The findings affirm that mentorship enhances learner engagement, promotes applied learning, and nurtures autonomy, aligning with global best practices in competency-based education. However, in the Uzbek higher education context, the widespread adoption of such models remains limited by structural challenges such as overloaded faculty schedules, lack of mentorship training, and institutional rigidity. Examples demonstrate that integrating mentorship into the academic ecosystem is both feasible and impactful when supported by organizational will and targeted faculty development.

### **Recommendations:**

Develop and mandate structured training modules on mentorship strategies, design-based learning, and student-centered facilitation. Such programs should be delivered through national teacher training institutions or in partnership with international organizations.

Encourage departments to redesign course syllabi by embedding interdisciplinary student-led research projects that require ongoing mentorship, rather than isolated final assessments.

Recognize and reward mentorship efforts by including mentorship quality and student outcomes as formal indicators in faculty evaluation, promotion, and tenure decisions.

Universities should establish mentorship offices or centers responsible for facilitating extracurricular mentorship initiatives such as peer mentoring, leadership coaching, and capstone supervision, aligned with academic programs.

Adopt digital tools to connect students with internal and external mentors, track progress, and provide asynchronous support, especially in large-enrollment courses or across regional branches. Establish institutional support systems for co-curricular mentoring programs.

### **Conclusion**

The transformation of educators into mentors is not merely a pedagogical trend, it is a necessity for preparing future-ready graduates. This study provides evidence that mentorship-centered approaches, when embedded within both academic and co-curricular structures, lead to higher student engagement and applied learning outcomes. For Uzbekistan's higher education system to meet the demands of a dynamic, innovation-driven world, institutions

must invest in faculty development, policy reforms, and systemic changes that embed mentorship as a core educational strategy. Embracing mentorship will help universities move from content delivery hubs to catalysts of personal and professional growth.

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