



## Mentoring Experiences of Pre-Service Teachers in Islamic Teacher Training Colleges in Morocco

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the mentoring experiences of pre-service teachers enrolled in Islamic teacher training colleges across Morocco, examining how mentorship shapes their professional identity development, pedagogical competencies, and readiness for classroom practice. Drawing on sociocultural learning theory and communities of practice frameworks, this research explores the unique characteristics of mentoring within Islamic educational contexts where religious values, traditional pedagogies, and contemporary teaching standards intersect. Through qualitative inquiry involving interviews and document analysis, this study identifies three critical dimensions of mentoring experiences: the integration of Islamic pedagogical principles with modern teaching methods, the role of mentor-mentee relationships in shaping professional identity, and the challenges of balancing religious instruction with secular curriculum requirements. Findings reveal that effective mentoring in these contexts requires mentors who can navigate dual responsibilities of transmitting Islamic knowledge and developing contemporary pedagogical skills. Pre-service teachers reported that successful mentoring relationships provided emotional support, practical classroom strategies, and guidance in reconciling religious commitments with professional teaching standards. However, significant challenges emerged including inconsistent mentoring quality, limited mentor preparation, and tensions between traditional authority-based teaching models and

student-centered approaches. This research contributes to understanding mentoring in Islamic educational contexts and offers recommendations for strengthening teacher preparation programs in Morocco and similar settings.

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## INTRODUCTION

Morocco's educational landscape has undergone significant transformations over recent decades as the nation seeks to balance preservation of Islamic identity with demands for educational modernization and global competitiveness. The country's education system uniquely integrates religious and secular education, with Islamic teacher training colleges playing a vital role in preparing educators who can navigate this dual mandate. These institutions, known as Centres Régionaux des Métiers de l'Éducation et de la Formation (CRMEFs) with Islamic specializations, prepare teachers to deliver both religious instruction and general education subjects while embodying Islamic values and ethics (Boutayeb, 2019). Understanding how mentoring functions within these institutions is crucial for improving teacher preparation and ensuring graduates are adequately prepared for the complex realities of contemporary Moroccan classrooms.

Mentoring represents a cornerstone of effective teacher preparation worldwide, serving as the bridge between theoretical knowledge acquired in coursework and practical application in classroom contexts. Hobson et al. (2009) define mentoring in teacher education as a structured relationship where experienced educators provide guidance, support, and feedback to novice teachers as they develop professional competencies and identities. Research consistently demonstrates that high-quality mentoring experiences enhance pre-service teachers' confidence, pedagogical skills, classroom management abilities, and retention in the profession. However, mentoring quality varies considerably depending on mentor preparation, institutional support, cultural contexts, and the clarity of mentoring roles and expectations. In contexts where mentoring is poorly structured or mentors lack adequate training, pre-service teachers may experience confusion, inadequate support, and diminished professional development.

The Moroccan context presents unique considerations for understanding mentoring in teacher preparation due to the nation's linguistic diversity, educational reforms, and the distinctive role of Islamic education. Morocco operates as a multilingual society where Arabic, French, and Berber languages coexist, creating complex linguistic challenges for education. Recent reforms through the National Education Emergency Program and Strategic Vision 2015-2030 have emphasized improving teacher quality, modernizing pedagogies, and enhancing educational outcomes while maintaining Morocco's Islamic and cultural heritage (Kingdom of Morocco, 2015). Islamic teacher training colleges operate within this reform context, tasked with preparing teachers who can implement contemporary pedagogical approaches while grounding their practice in Islamic educational philosophy and

ethics. This dual mandate creates particular challenges for mentoring as mentors must guide pre-service teachers in navigating potentially competing demands.

Islamic educational philosophy offers distinct perspectives on teaching, learning, and the teacher-student relationship that shape mentoring practices within these institutions (Muhsyanur, 2024). Traditional Islamic pedagogy emphasizes the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student, respect for authority and tradition, memorization and recitation of sacred texts, and the integration of moral and spiritual development with intellectual learning. El-Amine (2016) explains that the Islamic concept of *ta'lim* encompasses not merely instruction but also moral refinement and character development, positioning the teacher as both educator and moral exemplar. Contemporary Islamic educators grapple with integrating these traditional principles with modern educational approaches emphasizing critical thinking, student-centered learning, and constructivist pedagogies. Mentors in Islamic teacher training colleges must therefore help pre-service teachers synthesize traditional Islamic educational values with contemporary pedagogical practices.

Research on teacher mentoring in Islamic educational contexts remains limited, with most scholarship focusing on Western contexts where secular education systems predominate (Ibrahim, 2020). This gap in literature leaves educators in Islamic teacher training institutions with limited evidence-based guidance for structuring effective mentoring programs that honor religious and cultural contexts while developing contemporary teaching competencies. Existing studies of Islamic education in Morocco have primarily examined curriculum content, language policies, and educational outcomes rather than the processes of teacher preparation and mentoring (Boutayeb, 2019). Understanding pre-service teachers' actual experiences with mentoring—including what they find helpful, what challenges they encounter, and how mentoring shapes their professional development—can inform improvements to teacher preparation programs throughout Morocco and similar contexts.

The structure and organization of mentoring in Moroccan Islamic teacher training colleges reflects both international best practices in teacher education and local cultural considerations. Pre-service teachers typically engage in practicum experiences where they are paired with experienced mentor teachers in schools, observing classroom practice, gradually assuming teaching responsibilities, and receiving feedback on their performance. Mentors are expected to model effective teaching, provide emotional and professional support, facilitate reflection on practice, and assess pre-service teachers' readiness for independent practice. However, the actual implementation of mentoring varies considerably across institutions and individual mentor-mentee pairs, with quality depending on factors such as mentor selection criteria, preparation programs, time allocation for mentoring activities, and institutional cultures that either support or hinder meaningful mentoring relationships.

Theoretical frameworks for understanding mentoring in Islamic teacher training contexts must integrate both universal principles of adult learning and

culturally specific considerations. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes learning as a socially mediated process occurring through interaction with more experienced practitioners, provides a foundation for understanding mentoring as situated learning within communities of practice. Lave and Wenger (1991) conceptualized learning as legitimate peripheral participation, where novices gradually move from observation to full participation through guided engagement with experienced community members. In Islamic educational contexts, this framework must be enriched with understanding of how religious identity, values, and practices shape the communities of practice within which pre-service teachers develop. The integration of Islamic epistemology—which emphasizes divine revelation alongside human reason as sources of knowledge—creates distinctive dynamics in mentor-mentee relationships where spiritual and professional development intertwine.

This study addresses the critical need for research examining mentoring experiences in Islamic teacher training contexts by focusing specifically on pre-service teachers' perspectives, challenges, and outcomes in Moroccan institutions. By centering pre-service teachers' voices and experiences, this research illuminates how mentoring actually functions within these distinctive educational contexts rather than relying solely on policy documents or mentor perspectives. The findings contribute to both theoretical understanding of culturally situated mentoring practices and practical improvements in teacher preparation programs. As Morocco continues educational reforms aimed at improving teacher quality while preserving Islamic identity, insights into effective mentoring practices become increasingly vital for ensuring that new generations of teachers are adequately prepared for the complex demands of contemporary Moroccan classrooms.

## **METHODE**

This study employed a qualitative research design utilizing phenomenological inquiry to explore the lived experiences of pre-service teachers engaged in mentoring relationships within Islamic teacher training colleges in Morocco. Phenomenology, as described by Creswell and Poth (2018), seeks to understand the essence of experiences by examining how individuals make meaning of particular phenomena through their subjective perceptions and interpretations. This methodological approach was particularly appropriate for investigating mentoring experiences because it prioritizes participants' own understandings, emotions, and sense-making processes rather than imposing predetermined categories or external judgments. The phenomenological orientation enabled the researcher to capture the nuanced, contextually embedded nature of mentoring relationships and how these relationships shaped pre-service teachers' professional development within the specific cultural and religious context of Moroccan Islamic teacher training.

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with 24 pre-service teachers enrolled in their final year of study at three different Islamic teacher training colleges across Morocco, representing urban and semi-urban settings.

Participants were purposively selected to ensure diversity in gender, subject specializations, and geographical backgrounds, enhancing the richness and transferability of findings. Interview protocols were developed based on existing mentoring literature but adapted to the Moroccan Islamic educational context, exploring topics including mentor-mentee relationship quality, specific mentoring activities and supports, integration of Islamic pedagogical principles, challenges encountered, and perceived impacts on professional readiness. Interviews were conducted in Arabic or French according to participant preference, lasted 60-90 minutes, and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Additionally, document analysis of institutional mentoring guidelines, practicum handbooks, and mentor evaluation criteria provided contextual understanding of formal mentoring structures and expectations within these institutions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to thematic analysis, involving familiarization with data through repeated reading of transcripts, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and refining themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final analysis. The researcher engaged in iterative coding processes that moved between inductive analysis—allowing themes to emerge from participants' accounts—and deductive analysis—drawing on existing theoretical frameworks about mentoring and professional identity development. Three major thematic categories emerged: integration of Islamic and contemporary pedagogies, relational dimensions of mentoring, and systemic challenges affecting mentoring quality. Throughout the analysis, attention was paid to both convergent patterns across participants and divergent cases that offered alternative perspectives. Trustworthiness was enhanced through member checking, where preliminary findings were shared with select participants for validation, and through maintaining reflexive journals documenting the researcher's interpretive decisions and potential biases as someone familiar with Moroccan educational contexts.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Integration of Islamic Pedagogical Principles with Contemporary Teaching Methods**

Pre-service teachers consistently identified the integration of Islamic educational philosophy with modern pedagogical approaches as a central aspect of their mentoring experiences, though this integration manifested with varying degrees of success and coherence. Participants described how their mentors attempted to model teaching that honored traditional Islamic values such as respect, humility, pursuit of knowledge for moral improvement, and recognition of teaching as a sacred trust, while simultaneously incorporating contemporary methods including collaborative learning, technology integration, and differentiated instruction. One participant explained that her mentor emphasized beginning each lesson with Islamic greetings and reminders of learning as worship, but then structured activities using inquiry-based approaches that encouraged student

questioning and exploration. This synthesis reflected what El-Amine (2016) describes as the challenge of preserving Islamic educational ethos while adapting to contemporary pedagogical innovations that sometimes challenge traditional authority structures.

However, many pre-service teachers reported experiencing confusion or tension when mentors presented Islamic and contemporary approaches as competing rather than complementary frameworks. Several participants described mentors who maintained highly teacher-centered, transmission-oriented instruction while verbally endorsing student-centered methods discussed in college coursework, creating contradictions between espoused theory and theory-in-use. This disconnect left pre-service teachers uncertain about how to authentically integrate the approaches, often defaulting to replicating their mentors' traditional practices during independent teaching despite having learned alternative methods. Korthagen (2010) emphasizes that modeling represents the most powerful form of teacher education; when mentors' practices contradict contemporary pedagogical principles, pre-service teachers receive implicit messages that traditional methods remain superior regardless of curriculum innovations. The lack of explicit discussion about how to thoughtfully synthesize Islamic values with diverse pedagogical tools resulted in missed learning opportunities for developing sophisticated, contextually appropriate teaching approaches.

Successful integration appeared most evident when mentors possessed deep understanding of both Islamic educational philosophy and contemporary pedagogy, enabling them to articulate clear rationales for their instructional choices. One pre-service teacher described a mentor who explained how collaborative learning reflected Islamic principles of shura (consultation) and ta'awun (cooperation), thus grounding modern group work in Islamic values rather than presenting it as a Western import. Another mentor reportedly helped her mentee understand student-centered approaches as consistent with the Prophet Muhammad's teaching methods, which included questioning, storytelling, and adapting messages to audience needs. These examples illustrate what Halstead (2004) identifies as the capacity to demonstrate continuities between Islamic educational heritage and contemporary practices, helping pre-service teachers see innovations as evolutionary developments rather than departures from tradition. When mentors provided such conceptual bridges, pre-service teachers gained confidence in implementing diverse strategies while maintaining Islamic educational identity.

#### Framework for Integrating Islamic and Contemporary Pedagogies:

Islamic Educational Principle	Contemporary Pedagogical Application	Mentoring Strategy
Tawhid (Unity of knowledge)	Interdisciplinary teaching, holistic learning	Model connections across subjects; discuss learning as unified pursuit

Islamic Educational Principle	Contemporary Pedagogical Application	Mentoring Strategy
Ihsan (Excellence and care)	Differentiated instruction, inclusive practice	Demonstrate attention to individual student needs and abilities
Shura (Consultation)	Collaborative learning, democratic classrooms	Facilitate group work while teaching Islamic cooperation ethics
Tafakkur (Reflection)	Reflective practice, critical thinking	Engage in joint reflection on teaching experiences and decisions
Tazkiyah (Character development)	Social-emotional learning, values education	Explicitly address moral dimensions of teaching and learning
Adab (Proper conduct)	Classroom management through relationships	Model respectful authority that honors student dignity

This framework, emerging from participant descriptions of effective mentoring, demonstrates that integration requires explicit articulation of connections between Islamic principles and pedagogical practices rather than assuming compatibility or treating them as separate domains.

### **Relational Dimensions of Mentoring: Trust, Support, and Professional Identity**

The quality of mentor-mentee relationships emerged as a critical factor shaping pre-service teachers' experiences and professional development outcomes. Participants consistently emphasized that effective mentoring extended beyond technical skill development to encompass emotional support, encouragement, and genuine care for their growth as both teachers and individuals. Pre-service teachers who described strong mentoring relationships used language reflecting deep appreciation and often characterized their mentors using familial metaphors such as "like a mother" or "like an older sister," indicating relationships transcending purely professional boundaries. These relational dimensions align with research by Hobson et al. (2009) demonstrating that effective mentoring relationships combine instrumental support (providing practical teaching strategies) with psychosocial support (offering emotional encouragement and affirming professional identity). In the Moroccan Islamic context, such relationships reflected cultural values emphasizing interpersonal warmth, collective orientation, and the importance of human relationships in all professional endeavors.

Trust emerged as the foundational element enabling productive mentoring relationships, with pre-service teachers reporting that they felt comfortable taking risks, admitting uncertainties, and seeking guidance only when they trusted their mentors' intentions and discretion. Several participants contrasted supportive mentors who normalized struggle and framed mistakes as learning opportunities

with evaluative mentors who emphasized judgment and criticism, creating anxiety that inhibited experimentation and honest reflection. One pre-service teacher explained that her mentor's willingness to share his own early teaching challenges and ongoing learning created a safe space for vulnerability, whereas another described feeling constantly monitored and judged, leading her to present a facade of competence rather than genuinely engaging with developmental feedback. These contrasting experiences reflect what Ambrosetti and Dekkers (2010) identify as mentoring relationships existing along a continuum from hierarchical and evaluative to collaborative and developmental, with the latter more conducive to authentic learning and professional growth.

The religious and cultural context of Islamic teacher training added distinctive dimensions to mentor-mentee relationships, particularly regarding shared identity and values as sources of connection. Many participants expressed that sharing Islamic faith and values with their mentors created immediate rapport and mutual understanding that facilitated their relationships. Mentors who incorporated Islamic advice, references to prophetic traditions about teaching, and discussions of teaching as a form of worship resonated deeply with pre-service teachers' own motivations for entering the profession. One participant described how his mentor's reminder that "the best among you are those who teach others beneficial knowledge" from the hadith renewed his commitment during challenging moments in his practicum. This integration of religious identity with professional identity reflects what Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) describe as the complex, multifaceted nature of teacher identity formation, wherein personal, cultural, and professional dimensions interweave. In Islamic educational contexts, religious identity often serves as a core organizing principle around which other identity elements cohere.

However, relationship quality varied considerably, with approximately one-third of participants describing mentoring relationships as distant, minimally supportive, or even detrimental to their development. These pre-service teachers reported mentors who were frequently absent, provided only cursory feedback, showed little interest in their mentees' growth, or actively discouraged innovation and questioning. The reasons for poor mentoring relationships appeared multifaceted, including systemic factors such as mentors' heavy workloads, lack of preparation for mentoring roles, and absence of institutional recognition or compensation for mentoring efforts. Some participants also identified personality mismatches or philosophical differences as contributing to relationship difficulties. The prevalence of inconsistent mentoring quality highlights what Bradbury (2010) identifies as a persistent challenge in teacher education: the assumption that experienced teachers automatically possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to mentor effectively without specialized preparation. When mentoring relationships functioned poorly, pre-service teachers reported feeling isolated, doubting their career choices, and developing negative attitudes toward the profession—underscoring the high stakes of mentoring quality for teacher preparation outcomes.

### **Systemic Challenges and Structural Barriers to Effective Mentoring**

Pre-service teachers identified numerous systemic challenges within Islamic teacher training colleges and placement schools that constrained the quality and effectiveness of their mentoring experiences. Time emerged as the most frequently cited constraint, with participants reporting that their mentors often lacked sufficient time to observe their teaching, provide detailed feedback, or engage in meaningful dialogue about practice due to their own teaching responsibilities, administrative duties, and personal obligations. Many pre-service teachers described receiving only brief, surface-level feedback such as "that was good" or "try to speak louder" rather than substantive analysis of their pedagogical decisions, student engagement, or alignment with learning objectives. This pattern reflects what Feiman-Nemser (2001) identifies as the tendency for mentoring to focus on immediate survival concerns and technical aspects of teaching rather than developing deeper pedagogical reasoning and adaptive expertise. Without protected time for mentoring activities, even well-intentioned mentors struggled to provide the intensive support necessary for meaningful professional development.

Inconsistency in mentor preparation and understanding of their roles created substantial variation in mentoring quality across placement sites. Participants reported that some mentors approached their roles with clear understanding of developmental supervision, providing scaffolded opportunities for gradually increasing teaching responsibility, structured observation protocols, and regular feedback sessions. Other mentors appeared uncertain about expectations, either abdicating responsibility by immediately leaving pre-service teachers alone with classes or micromanaging every aspect of their practice without allowing independent decision-making. Several pre-service teachers expressed frustration that their mentors had received no apparent training in mentoring or supervision, relying instead on intuition or replicating how they themselves had been mentored decades earlier. Hudson (2013) emphasizes that effective mentoring requires specific competencies distinct from effective teaching, including skills in observation, feedback delivery, reflective dialogue facilitation, and assessment of teaching performance. The absence of systematic mentor preparation programs in Moroccan Islamic teacher training colleges left mentoring quality largely dependent on individual mentors' intuitions and prior experiences.

Structural disconnections between teacher training colleges and placement schools created additional barriers to coherent, effective mentoring experiences. Pre-service teachers described tensions between pedagogical approaches emphasized in their college coursework and the traditional teaching methods they observed and were expected to replicate in placement schools. Several participants noted that their mentors explicitly dismissed college-taught methods as impractical or inappropriate for actual classroom contexts, creating confusion about which approaches to value and adopt. This theory-practice divide, extensively documented in teacher education literature, reflects what Zeichner (2010) terms the "two-world pitfall" where the teacher education program and school contexts function as separate, disconnected

worlds with conflicting norms, expectations, and practices. In the Moroccan context, this divide was sometimes compounded by differences in how Islamic educational philosophy should inform practice, with some mentors embracing traditional authority-based models while college instructors advocated for more participatory approaches grounded in Islamic ethics of consultation and respect for learners.

Resource limitations and infrastructural challenges further constrained mentoring effectiveness, particularly in rural or under-resourced placement schools. Pre-service teachers assigned to such contexts reported that their mentors struggled to model contemporary pedagogical approaches discussed in college coursework due to lack of basic resources such as textbooks, technology, or even adequate classroom furniture. One participant described a placement school where classes of 50+ students sat on floors in a room without electricity, making it impossible to implement many strategies she had learned about differentiated instruction or technology integration. Mentors in such contexts understandably focused on fundamental classroom management and content delivery rather than pedagogical innovation, leaving pre-service teachers with limited exposure to the full range of teaching competencies emphasized in their preparation program. These disparities in placement contexts resulted in inequitable preparation experiences, with some pre-service teachers receiving rich mentoring in well-resourced schools while others struggled in challenging contexts with minimal support. Addressing such systemic inequities requires policy interventions at national and institutional levels rather than merely improving individual mentoring relationships.

## CONCLUSION

This investigation of mentoring experiences among pre-service teachers in Moroccan Islamic teacher training colleges reveals the complex interplay of religious identity, cultural contexts, pedagogical traditions, and contemporary educational reforms that shape teacher preparation in Islamic educational settings. The findings demonstrate that mentoring in these contexts cannot be adequately understood through frameworks developed in secular Western educational systems, as the integration of Islamic values, epistemologies, and pedagogical principles creates distinctive dynamics requiring culturally situated analysis. Effective mentoring in Islamic teacher training contexts demands that mentors possess not only pedagogical expertise but also sophisticated understanding of how Islamic educational philosophy can inform and enrich contemporary teaching practices rather than conflicting with them. When mentors successfully articulated connections between Islamic principles and modern pedagogical approaches, pre-service teachers developed more confident, coherent professional identities integrating religious and professional commitments.

The relational dimensions of mentoring emerged as equally important as technical aspects of pedagogical skill development, with trust, emotional support, and genuine care fundamentally shaping pre-service teachers' experiences and outcomes.

Participants' accounts consistently emphasized that feeling valued, supported, and understood by mentors enabled them to take risks, acknowledge uncertainties, and engage in authentic reflection necessary for professional growth. However, the substantial variation in mentoring quality—ranging from transformative relationships characterized by deep engagement and mutual respect to superficial or even harmful relationships marked by absence, criticism, or dismissiveness—indicates urgent need for systemic improvements. The current approach of assigning mentoring responsibilities to experienced teachers without adequate preparation, time allocation, recognition, or accountability produces inequitable preparation experiences that leave many pre-service teachers insufficiently supported during this critical developmental period.

Addressing the systemic challenges identified in this study requires multi-level interventions encompassing policy reforms, institutional restructuring, and professional development initiatives. Islamic teacher training colleges must develop comprehensive mentor preparation programs that equip experienced teachers with specific competencies for effective mentoring, including observation and feedback skills, reflective dialogue facilitation, and understanding of how to support integration of Islamic and contemporary pedagogical approaches. Institutions should establish structures providing dedicated time for mentoring activities, create clearer role expectations and accountability mechanisms, and offer recognition and compensation acknowledging the substantial work mentoring entails (Muhsyanur et al., 2022). Stronger partnerships between teacher training colleges and placement schools could reduce theory-practice divides by ensuring alignment of expectations, creating opportunities for college faculty to work directly in schools, and involving practicing teachers in curriculum development. Future research should examine mentoring from multiple stakeholder perspectives including mentors and college faculty, investigate the long-term impacts of mentoring quality on teacher effectiveness and retention, and explore innovative mentoring models adapted to resource-constrained contexts. By strengthening mentoring systems, Morocco can enhance teacher preparation quality while honoring the Islamic educational values that remain central to the nation's educational identity.

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