

Leadership Support, Mentoring and Institutional Resilience in Public and Private Schools in Romania

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Abstract. *The demands of the labor market are constantly changing, and for this reason educational institutions are facing great pressures to adapt to the current economic and geopolitical challenges. Leadership techniques, mentoring and continuous professional development are important non-financial investments that support resilience within an institution and its performance. The literature on the economics of education highlights the role of leadership and organizational culture. However, empirical evidence on how these mechanisms work is limited. This paper studies the relationship between managerial support, the organization's orientation towards teachers' professional development and the perceived role of mentoring, using cross-sectional data following a questionnaire applied to 81 teachers employed in public and private schools in Romania. Ordered logistic regression models were applied to evaluate the associations between the variables of interest. The results indicate that higher levels of perceived leadership support and stronger orientations towards professional development are associated with a higher likelihood of reporting greater mentoring effectiveness. No significant differences were found between public and private institutions. A significant marginal interaction was also found between leadership support and career development orientation. Thus, leadership techniques are more effective in institutions that actively promote continuous professional development. The study contributes by conceptualizing leadership support and mentoring as internal methods complementary to financial investments and provides interesting perspectives for public policies, with the aim of strengthening organizational capacity in educational institutions.*

Keywords: leadership, educational economics, mentoring, institutional resilience, non-financial investments.

Introduction

Studies related to the economics of education emphasize the importance of internal practices within an organization for sustaining and increasing institutional efficiency and workforce sustainability. In addition to formal regulations and resource allocation, leadership style, learning and mentoring opportunities are recognized as crucial mechanisms through which educational institutions influence teachers' professional development and organizational outcomes. Although teaching has always been characterized by complexity and responsibility at high levels, these have increased

more and more and created additional pressures. Understanding how these internal organizational investments work has attracted increased attention from academia and public policy.

Numerous scientific articles highlight the importance of supporting leaders in educational institutions. School leadership influences the environment and way of working, professional cooperation and teacher involvement, thus adjusting the conditions under which learning and mentoring take place (Leithwood et al., 2020; Day et al., 2016). Effective leadership goes beyond administrative coordination and involves creating environments that support guidance, feedback, and professional development. Even if the interest in these mechanisms is rife, empirical studies on how they work within Romanian educational institutions remain limited.

Mentoring is generally studied as a mechanism that supports professional integration and skills development, especially among early career teachers. Articles suggest that structured mentoring programs are associated with higher job satisfaction, better teaching techniques, and lower dropout rates (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). However, the effectiveness of mentoring varies between institutions and seems to depend on the organizational environment, including leadership commitment and the broader professional literacy culture in which mentoring is included.

In the Romanian education system, mentoring practices are most often the informal support of colleagues with more experience in that educational institution. Thus, the mentoring of teachers at the beginning of their careers is organized in the school and coordinated by teachers with seniority or heads of curricular areas. Leadership support typically involves supporting mentoring, allocating time for collaboration, encouraging participation in activities that contribute to professional development, and recognizing mentoring activities within the school's structure. However, the extent and frequency of these practices varies between institutions.

Continuous professional development complements leadership and mentoring techniques, driving organizational aspects towards learning and skills development. Institutions that prioritize teachers' professional development tend to be more cooperative and less rigid to change (OECD, 2019). However, existing studies treat leadership, mentoring, and professional development as separate entities, without paying attention to their common functioning as interconnected organizational investments.

Comparative analyses between public and private educational institutions remain limited. However, differences in leadership structures, managerial autonomy, and accountability mechanisms suggest that leadership practices and professional development strategies may function differently depending on the institutional context (Hanushek et al., 2013). Whether such differences translate into variations in the effectiveness of mentoring remains an open question.

This study addresses these gaps. Using data collected through a questionnaire, addressed to teachers employed in public and private schools in Romania, the analysis uses ordinal modeling techniques. Focusing on teachers' perceptions, the study captures how organizational practices are experienced at the level of each school represented by the respondent teachers. Thus, the study offers relevant perspectives for the management of educational institutions and the people in charge of public education services.

The study has an exploratory character. The main objective of the analysis is to identify preliminary patterns and relationships between managerial support, organizational orientation towards professional development and the perceived effectiveness of mentoring systems in educational institutions.

Therefore, the study is guided by the following hypotheses:

H1: Management support and teacher development orientation are positively associated with the effectiveness of mentoring.

H2: The association between leadership support and mentoring effectiveness differs between public and private educational institutions.

H3: Management support and guidance for professional development show interaction effects in explaining the effectiveness of mentoring.

By testing these hypotheses, the paper contributes to the literature by formalizing leadership support, professional development orientation, and mentoring effectiveness as interconnected components of internal organizational adjustment. The results aim to inform strategies, providing evidence-based results, for shaping institutional capacity and supporting sustainable professional development within educational institutions.

Literature review

Teacher mentoring is recognized worldwide as a key factor in the way educational institutions operate, influencing teachers' motivation, involvement in didactic and methodological training courses (Vermeulen et al., 2020; Hallinger, 2011). The institution's management rather supports collaboration, mutual trust and professional guidance of the teaching staff to the detriment of direct, individual supervision. In more and more educational institutions, mentoring has become an increasingly popular tool for staff professional development (Kraft et al., 2018). Experienced teachers who actively support mentoring initiatives are more likely to build systems that their more or less experienced peers find genuinely useful (Sun & Leithwood, 2015), making the support provided by school management a significant, non-financial investment in human capital.

Mentoring was initially conceived as a means of professional integration and development of teaching skills, especially for teachers at the beginning of their careers. Effective mentoring is often associated with better classroom management, greater job satisfaction, and greater staff retention (Allen et al., 2004; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004), although results vary considerably between schools. These differences highlight the essential role of the organizational context, as mentoring is increasingly seen by researchers as an integrated process at the level of each institution, and less as an isolated or generalized intervention at a wide level (Kram, 1985; Hobson et al., 2009). The most coherent and effective results occur when mentoring is supported by the institution's management and correlated with organizational goals and values. The organizational learning environment is a factor that further supports this conception. Institutions that have an interest in continuous professional development create stronger collaborative situations and more coherent means of staff development (Desimone, 2009; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). They allow mentoring to function as a way of authentic learning, not as an exercise in conformity. The differences between public and private institutions further highlight this dynamic, especially given their different hierarchical structures and operational pressures (Lubienski, 2009). Thus, mentoring supported by the institution's management and the orientation towards professional development of teachers are better understood as interdependent mechanisms than as independent inputs (Bryk et al., 2009).

In conclusion, leadership support can be seen as an organizational branch that facilitates the process, while teacher development guidance provides the cultural foundation for continuous learning. Therefore, there are expectations that these mechanisms will work together, not independently. In conclusion, this study analyzes whether the effectiveness of coherent leadership depends on the educational culture in educational institutions on a larger scale.

Methodology

This study uses a quantitative and cross-sectional research design, based on data collected from teachers employed in public and private educational institutions in Romania. The study is an exploratory one and is based on a non-representative sample of teachers. It focuses on identifying the relationships between the organizational constructs presented, rather than conclusions at the population level. The final sample consists of 81 valid responses. Data collection was carried out by sending a questionnaire in digital format to teachers, through social media platforms and through the snowball dissemination strategy. The research proposes to identify preliminary patterns and relationships, rather than providing statistically representative or generalizable conclusions.

All basic constructs are measured using five-point Likert scales. Table 1 summarizes the variables used in the analysis, their conceptual definitions, and the construction of the measurements. The composite indicators resulted from the arithmetic mean of the elements that build that dimension, after internal validation of consistency using Cronbach's alpha.

Table 1. Description of the key variables used in the analysis

Variable	Symbol	Description	Measurement
Leadership support	$LEAD_i$	This variable captures respondents' perceptions of the support received from the institution's management for mentoring activities and continuous professional development. This reflects the extent to which the actions, support and commitment undertaken by management help to guide teachers more effectively and develop human capital.	Composite indicator built as the average of 2 items measured on the Likert scale. The higher values indicate that teachers perceive strong support from management.
Professional Development Orientation	CPD_i	This variable reflects how organizational culture is related to continuous learning, skills development and professional growth of teachers. This captures respondents' perceptions of how much their institution values continuous professional development as an internal investment strategy.	Composite indicator built as an average of 7 items on the Likert scale. Higher values indicate a stronger orientation on the part of management towards continuous professional development.
Effectiveness of mentoring	$MENT_i$	This variable shows to what extent teachers perceive the mentoring process as having effective results within the institutions they come from. The dimensions addressed are professional integration, development of teaching skills and benefits throughout the career. The variable serves as a (perceived) outcome at the organizational level, reflecting the internal effectiveness of mentoring systems.	Composite indicator built from 3 elements on the Likert scale, calculated as the arithmetic mean of the items. For inferential analysis, the variable is treated as an ordinal outcome that reflects ordered levels of perceived mentoring effectiveness.

Source: The authors' own research.

Although a composite score is calculated for descriptive purposes, the effectiveness of mentoring is treated as an ordinal construct in inferential analysis, reflecting ordered qualitative assessments rather than metric distances between points on the scale. Given the orderly nature of the mentoring effectiveness measure, the empirical strategy is based on orderly logistic regression models. This approach is suitable for modeling ordered response variables and avoids the restrictive assumptions involved by linear regression when applied to Likert-scale outcomes. The ordered logit model assumes a continuous latent tendency to assess the effectiveness of more favorable mentoring, with observed responses generated by a set of ordered thresholds. The substantial

interpretation is therefore based on predicted probabilities and marginal effects, rather than on magnitudes of the coefficients. Formally, mentoring effectiveness is modeled as an unobserved latent variable, expressed as a linear function of leadership support, professional development orientation, and institutional characteristics:

$$MENT_i^* = \alpha + \beta_1 LEAD_i + \beta_2 CPD_i + \beta_3 PUBLIC_i + \varepsilon_i$$

where $PUBLIC_i$ is a binary indicator equal to 1 if the respondent is employed in a public institution and 0 otherwise. The error term ε_i follows a standard logistics distribution.

The observed outcome of mentoring effectiveness $MENT_i$ is measured on a five-point Likert scale and is linked to the latent variable through a set of ascending threshold parameters c_j :

$$MENT_i = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if } MENT_i^* \leq c_1, \\ 2, & \text{if } c_1 < MENT_i^* \leq c_2, \\ 3, & \text{if } c_2 < MENT_i^* \leq c_3, \\ 4, & \text{if } c_3 < MENT_i^* \leq c_4, \\ 5, & \text{if } MENT_i^* > c_4. \end{cases}$$

The threshold parameters are estimated together with the coefficients of the model and provide the ordinal structure of the dependent variable. According to standard practice, these limit values are not interpreted substantially.

To examine whether the association between leadership support and mentoring effectiveness differs between public and private (H2) institutions, the basic model is extended to include a term of interaction between management support and institutional type:

$$MENT_i^* = \alpha + \beta_1 LEAD_i + \beta_2 CPD_i + \beta_3 PUBLIC_i + \beta_4 (LEAD_i \times PUBLIC_i) + \varepsilon_i$$

Here, β_4 captures the differences in the effect of managerial support between institutional environments.

Finally, in order to assess whether leadership support and professional development guidance together influence the effectiveness of mentoring (H3), the following interaction pattern is estimated:

$$MENT_i^* = \alpha + \beta_1 LEAD_i + \beta_2 CPD_i + \beta_3 (LEAD_i \times CPD_i) + \beta_4 PUBLIC_i + \varepsilon_i$$

In this specification, the interaction coefficient β_3 indicates whether the effect of managerial support varies depending on the organization's orientation towards professional development, allowing the identification of complementary relationships between these organizational investments.

The coefficients in the ordered logistic regression models do not have a direct marginal interpretation, the conclusions are based on predicted probabilities and mean marginal effects. These measures indicate how changes in management support and the focus on professional development affect the likelihood of reporting higher levels of mentoring effectiveness, with a particular focus on the higher outcome category. Leadership support and professional development orientation are included as centered continuous predictors, while institutional type (public versus private) is modeled as a categorical control variable, with private institutions being the reference category. Institutional heterogeneity and interaction mechanisms are examined by extending the basic model in terms of interaction between management support and institutional type, as well as between management support and professional development guidance. Robust standard errors have been used to explain the potential heteroskedasticity.

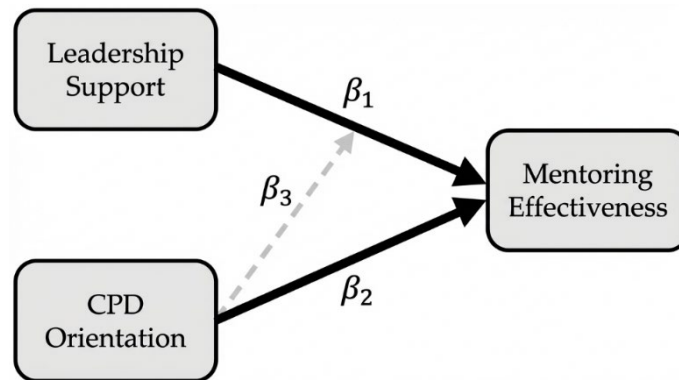


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of leadership support, guidance for PWDs, and mentoring effectiveness

Source: The authors' own research.

The methodological approach is based on ordered logistic regression, suitable for modeling ordered response variables, such as the five-point Likert scale used here. Thus, the restrictive assumptions of linear regression are avoided. The model captures effectiveness through a latent trend, where the estimated thresholds mark the transitions between the levels of results observed.

Before inferentially analyzing the established problem, descriptive statistics and bar graphs were used to examine the distribution of the dependent variable. Non-parametric chi-square tests were applied, providing additional information on the relationship between the effectiveness of mentoring and the institutional type. Given the cross-sectional design and perceptual measurement of the main constructions, the analysis focuses on identifying associations rather than establishing causal relationships. Due to the small sample size, the empirical specification was deliberately kept parsimonious to avoid overparameterization. Although additional individual characteristics such as age, gender and housing environment were available, they were not included due to insufficient variability within the sample.

The diagnosis of multicollinearity based on inflation of variance (VIF) does not indicate any evidence of problematic correlations between independent variables (mean VIF = 1.11). As a further test of robustness, a generalized specification of the ordered logit was estimated to examine potential deviations from the proportional odds hypothesis. However, given the small sample size and the concentration of responses in the higher outcome categories, the data provided limited information for estimating the threshold-specific coefficients and the generalised model did not converge. The ordered logistics specification was thus kept as the most stable and suitable model for analysis. All statistical analyses were performed using Stata Software version 19.5.

Results and discussions

The distribution of the ordinal dependent variable was examined using bar graphs to assess the frequency of responses between categories, shown in Figure 2. The results indicate that the effectiveness of mentoring is mainly assessed at the upper end of the scale, with the majority of respondents reporting 'High' or 'Very High' levels. At the same time, all response categories are

represented, ensuring sufficient variability for ordinal modeling and supporting the use of an ordered response framework. In addition, a chi-square association test indicates a statistically significant relationship between mentoring effectiveness categories and institutional type ($\chi^2(4) = 5.81, p = 0.213$), providing descriptive support for regression results.

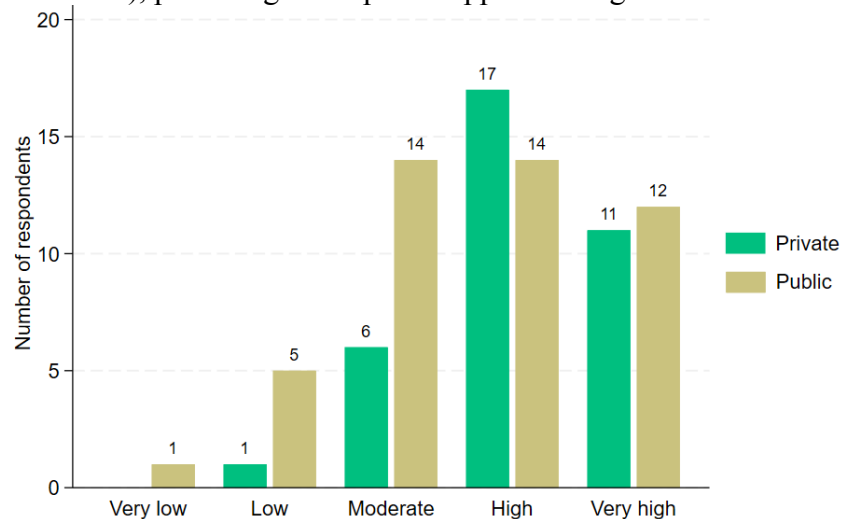


Figure 2. Distribution of mentoring effectiveness by institution type (public vs. private)

Source: The authors' own research.

Based on this descriptive assessment, an orderly logistic regression model was estimated to examine the relationship between management support, professional development orientation and mentoring effectiveness. This basic specification serves as a reference point for further analyses exploring institutional heterogeneity and interaction effects. Leadership support and professional development guidance were included as centered continuous predictors, while institutional type (public versus private) was modeled as a categorical control variable, with private institutions being the reference category.

Ordered logit estimates indicate that management support significantly increases the latent tendency to report greater mentoring efficiency ($\beta = 0.77, p = 0.004$). The corresponding estimates of ordered logistic regression are presented in Table 2. The orientation towards professional development has an even stronger effect ($\beta = 1.30, p < 0.001$), which means that the organisational commitment to lifelong learning plays a central role in shaping favourable mentorship evaluations.

Table 2. Ordered logistic regression estimates for mentoring effectiveness (baseline model)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (β)</i>	<i>Robust STD error</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Leadership Support (LEAD)	0.767	0.268	2.87	0.004
Professional Development Guides (PCD)	1.296	0.333	3.89	< 0.001
Public institution (ref.: Private)	0.041	0.483	0.09	0.932

Notes: Ordered logistic regression estimates with robust standard errors. The dependent variable is the effectiveness of mentoring, measured on a five-point ordinal scale. Leadership support and career development orientation are continuously centered variables. The institutional type is coded as a binary variable, with private institutions being the reference category.

Source: The authors' own research.

By contrast, the institutional type is not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.04, p = 0.932$), indicating that differences in mentoring effectiveness are mainly determined by internal organizational practices, rather than whether the institutions are public or private.

Average marginal effects were calculated for higher outcome categories. These were used to interpret logit ordered estimates in substantial terms. Higher levels of leadership support increase the likelihood of reporting very high mentoring effectiveness by about 12 percentage points ($AME = 0.121, p = 0.002$), while the professional development orientation produces an even higher increase of about 20 percentage points ($AME = 0.204, p < 0.001$). No statistically significant effects are observed for the adjacent 'High' category. This indicates that improvements in management support and the focus on professional development mainly change responses to the highest level of assessment, rather than producing gradual changes in the intermediate categories (Figures 3 and 4).

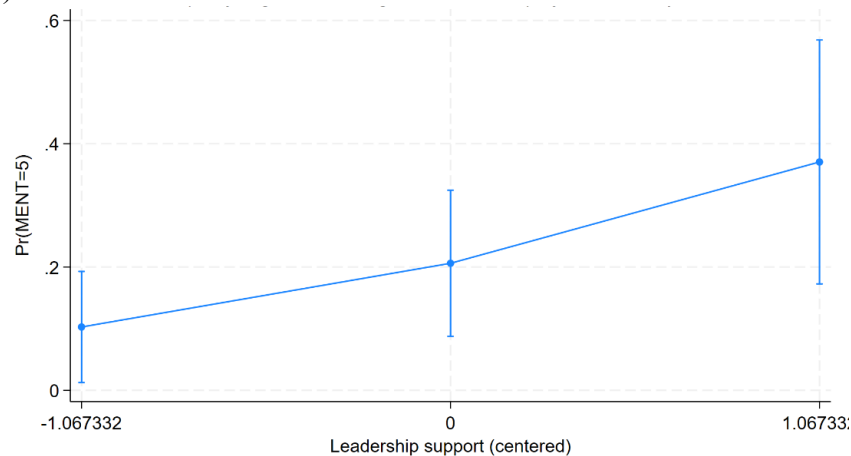


Figure 3. The predicted likelihood of reporting very high mentoring effectiveness at all levels of managerial support was assessed at SD on average ± 1

Source: The authors' own research.

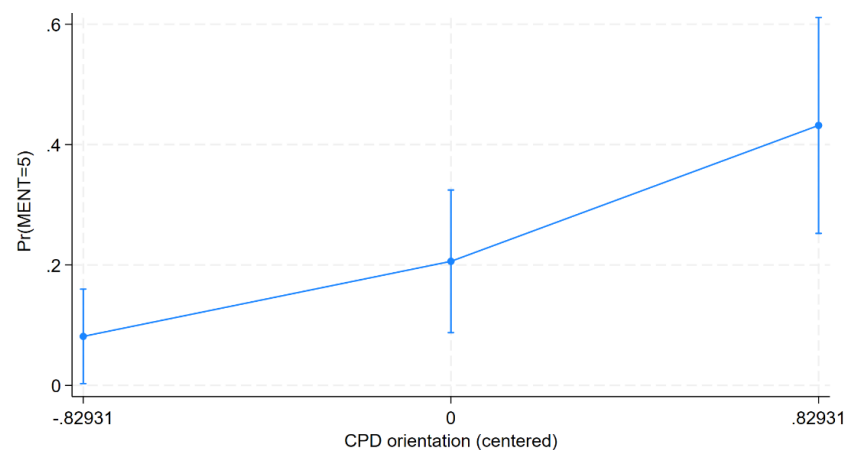


Figure 4. Predicted likelihood of reporting very high mentoring effectiveness at professional development guidance levels, assessed on average at SD ± 1

Source: The authors' own research.

In line with H1, the core results highlight leadership support and professional development orientation as key factors in the perception of mentoring effectiveness. To examine whether this relationship varies between institutional (H2) contexts, the model was extended to include an

interaction between management support and institutional type. The term interaction is not statistically significant, indicating that the positive effect of managerial support on the effectiveness of mentoring does not systematically differ between public and private institutions.

For ease of interpretation, the predicted probabilities of reporting very high effectiveness in mentoring were calculated separately at different levels of managerial support for public and private institutions (Figure 5). The results show a similar upward trajectory in both contexts. Although the slope appears slightly steeper for public institutions with higher levels of managerial support, the confidence intervals overlap substantially across the entire predictor range, suggesting that these differences are not statistically significant.

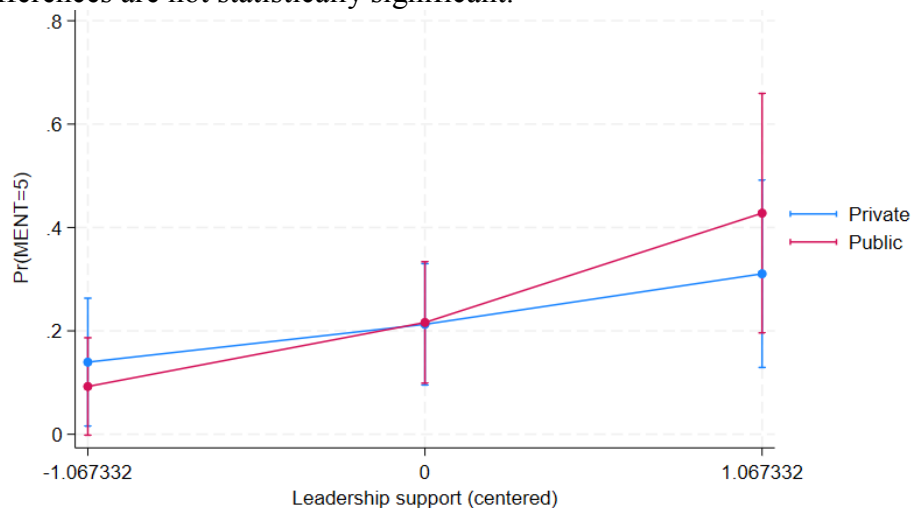


Figure 5. The predicted probability of a very high efficiency in mentoring, depending on the managerial support and the type of institution

Source: Authors' own research.

These results do not support H2. They indicate a pattern of functional similarity between public and private institutions, whereby leadership support functions as a key organizational investment with comparable returns in both public and private educational environments. This result suggests that internal leadership practices may play a more central role in shaping mentoring effectiveness than formal institutional characteristics.

Although the institutional context does not seem to moderate the relationship between leadership support and mentoring effectiveness, the effectiveness of leadership practices may still depend on their joint implementation with other organizational investments. Consequently, the following analysis examines whether leadership support and professional development guidance interact in shaping mentoring effectiveness (H3).

To have a comparative interpretation, the predicted probabilities of reporting a very high mentoring effectiveness were calculated at levels of managerial support, low, medium and high level of professional development orientation (Figure 6). Leadership support is positively associated with the effectiveness of mentoring at all levels of the professional development orientation. However, the magnitude of this association (slopes) increases as the organizational orientation towards professional development becomes stronger.

When the focus on professional development is high, increased leadership support is associated with substantial increases in the likelihood of reporting very high mentoring effectiveness, reaching odds above 0.70 at high levels of leadership support. By contrast, when exposure to professional development is low, the corresponding increases in predicted probabilities remain

modest. These patterns indicate that managerial support brings the highest returns in organizational environments that diligently value and promote uninterrupted professional development.

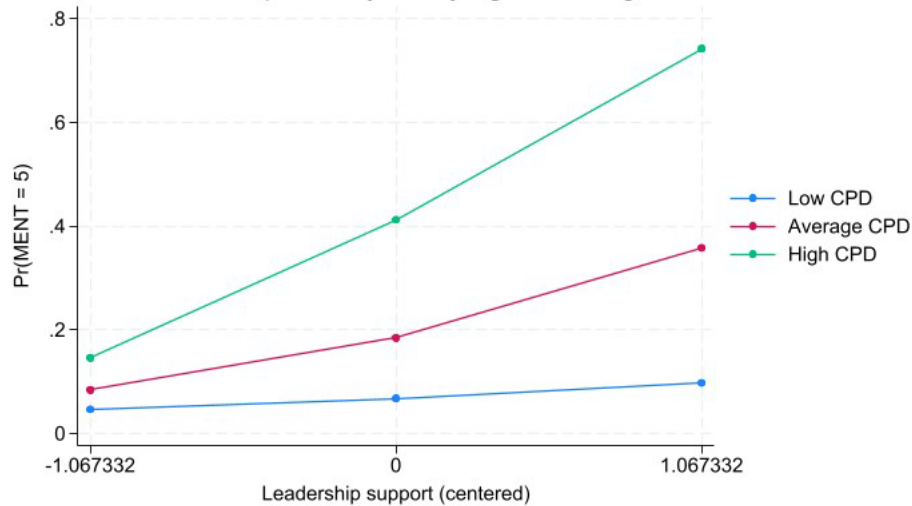


Figure 6. Predicted probability of a very high effectiveness of mentoring through managerial support and professional development orientation

Source: Authors' own research.

Leadership support and professional development orientation function as complementary organizational investments. Leadership practices are most effective when they are introduced into an institutional culture that prioritizes continuous learning and skills development. They emphasize the importance of internal strategies for strengthening mentoring systems.

These results support previous research, showing the role of supportive leadership in developing effective mentoring environments (Vermeulen et al., 2020; Sun and Leithwood, 2015). I also expand on this literature by adding that leadership effectiveness depends on broader organizational learning guidelines. Unlike studies that treat leadership and professional development as independent organizational inputs, current results suggest that joint implementation has a higher perceived effectiveness of mentoring, especially at the higher end of the assessment scale.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationships at the organizational level between leadership support, professional development orientation, and the perception of the effectiveness of mentoring systems in some Romanian educational institutions. Using survey data collected from teachers employed in public and private schools, the analysis used an orderly logistic regression method. Focusing only on the teachers' point of view, the study captured how internal organizational practices are experienced in a teacher's daily work, providing relevant insights for institutional management and public service leadership.

The results support the acceptance of the first research hypothesis. Both leadership support and organisational orientation towards professional development are positively and statistically significantly associated with a perception of greater mentoring effectiveness. This suggests that mentoring systems are perceived as effective in institutions where management actively supports professional growth and where continuous development is implemented in the organizational culture.

The results also indicate that these associations are not visible in all categories of results, but are mainly manifested by increasing the likelihood of reporting very high levels of mentoring effectiveness.

The second hypothesis looked for differences between public and private educational institutions and received limited empirical support. Baseline regression results and nonparametric association tests did not indicate statistically significant differences in mentoring effectiveness between institutional types. This underlines a convergence in the functioning of leadership and mentoring mechanisms between public and private institutions.

For the third hypothesis, the interaction analysis indicated that leadership support and professional development orientation should be viewed as a combined term for organizational contributions. The results provide evidence that the effect of managerial support varies depending on the organization's orientation towards professional development, highlighting the importance of joint implementation. Instead of producing uniform effects, managerial support seems to have higher returns in institutional contexts characterized by strong orientations in professional learning.

The results show that mentoring in leadership and PD changes responses to the "Very High" level of perceived mentoring effectiveness. This suggests a "turning point" mechanism in which leadership practices produce the strongest results in organizations that value continuous professional development. From a policy and managerial perspective, strengthening mentoring outcomes requires coordinated attention to leadership practices and institutional learning cultures, rather than independent initiatives. School leaders should prioritize non-financial investments in the organizational climate to increase institutional resilience. Strengthening mentoring outcomes also requires a coordinated focus on leadership practices and institutional learning cultures, rather than independent mentoring initiatives.

Methodologically, this article shows the value of the ordinal models applied, from the Likert-based analyses performed. Our main interest has been focused on moving towards extreme categories of outcome, rather than average differences. The study contributes by presenting leadership and mentoring as adjustment mechanisms in educational organizations. His exploratory perspective shows that internal investment, such as collaboration between management support and professional development, is more important than the formal institutional type, such as public or private status.

The work has some limitations. The cross-sectional design and the use of perceptual measures are not suitable for causal interpretation. The sample size is relatively small and statistically unrepresentative for the Romanian teacher population, so generalizability is limited. In this context, the results should be interpreted as context-specific and exploratory. For further study, use longitudinal motifs, add new objective organizational indicators, and examine how mentoring influences subsequent outcomes, such as teacher retention or the quality of education. Despite these limitations, the study provides practical evidence and provides a new framework for understanding mentoring as part of institutional adjustment mechanisms within educational organizations.

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