

Stakeholders' Perceptions of a New Zealand Youth Mentoring Programme Assisting High-Achieving, Underprivileged Students to Attend University

Hana Turner-Adams and Melinda Webber

Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Auckland, New Zealand

This mixed-methods research study utilised interviews and online surveys to investigate a New Zealand-based youth mentoring programme that assists academically talented students to attend university. The study explored stakeholders' perceptions of the programme's benefits and challenges through data collected from current students and alumni ($n = 144$), mentors ($n = 137$), and financial partners ($n = 49$). Most participants expressed satisfaction with the programme. A noteworthy strength was the programme's three-pronged approach of financial support with university costs, a mentor for each student, and paid work experience. Challenges with the programme included mentors' and financial partners' lack of cultural knowledge about the Māori and Pacific Island students they supported. Mentors also appeared ill-equipped to deal with communication and relationship breakdowns with their mentees.

Keywords: *Youth mentoring, first-in-family, cultural awareness, higher education, mentor training*

INTRODUCTION

Attaining a university qualification provides graduates with multiple benefits. University graduates earn more money, secure higher-level jobs, and are less likely to be unemployed than those without qualifications (Ministry of Education, 2021). Graduates also have a greater sense of purpose and life satisfaction (Universities New Zealand, 2017). In New Zealand, fewer Māori, Pacific Island, and students from low socioeconomic schools attend university than Pākehā/NZ European students and those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Education Counts, 2021). Therefore, it is essential to identify and implement strategies that support underprivileged students attending and succeeding at university.

Youth mentoring is a strategy that has been introduced into some schools and communities in New Zealand to help address educational inequities. Mentoring programmes are often offered to students who attend schools in low socioeconomic communities or those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Mentoring intends to provide students with support and access to opportunities to improve their educational outcomes and career prospects.

Formal youth mentoring began in New Zealand in the early 1990s (Farruggia et al., 2011) and is defined as "a long-term relationship between a younger, less experienced individual and an older, more experienced individual who provides guidance in a particular domain" (Evans & Ave, 2000, p. 41). Mentoring benefits young people in a range of ways. A synthesis of 55 studies on youth mentoring found that mentored young people benefitted significantly in the domains of emotional, psychological, problematic/high-risk behaviour, social competence, academic/educational, career progression, and employment (DuBois, Holloway, et al., 2002).

Successful Mentoring Programmes

A mentoring programme's success depends on a range of interacting features. Prior research has shown that recruiting mentors from caring or helping professions for their relationship-building experience is more effective than recruiting from other occupations (DuBois, Holloway, et al., 2002). Clear expectations about the level of contact between mentors and mentees, planned activities, parental involvement, and careful monitoring and evaluation also feature in successful programmes (DuBois, Holloway, et al., 2002; Dubois, Neville, et al., 2002).

Jacobi (1991) identified five components of effective mentoring: First is an achievement focus where the mentor supports the mentee to succeed in education or work. Second, the mentor provides career guidance and emotional support. Third, the relationship is reciprocal and beneficial to both the mentor and mentee. Fourth, the mentoring relationship involves regular interaction, communication, and collaboration, and finally, mentors need to have more experience, influence, and achievement within their field than their mentees.

In a New Zealand study, Dutton et al. (2018) also recognised the critical components of a quality mentoring relationship. Like Jacobi (1991), quality mentoring focused on improvement for the mentee in areas such as academic performance, self-esteem or self-efficacy. The mentor and mentee were also invested in the relationship and worked collaboratively. Other features included a mutually respectful bond between the mentor and the mentee; a shared purpose and goals; and a relationship that improved over time through learning from and about each other.

Programmes that incorporate mentoring alongside other interventions appear to be more successful at

meeting their goals than sole mentoring programmes (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2007; LoSciuto et al., 1996). For example, a study by LoSciuto et al. (1996) combined mentoring of low-income students with a life skills course and regular interactions with older people in residential care. They found that students who met regularly with their mentors were absent less often than students involved at an average or marginal level. Mentored students were also more optimistic about their future, schooling, and participation in community service. These findings from successful mentoring programmes highlight the importance of the mentoring pair committing to and nurturing a mutually beneficial and respectful relationship that leads to positive changes for the mentee.

Problems with Mentoring

Despite the benefits of youth mentoring programmes, the overall effect sizes are small (DuBois, Holloway, et al., 2002). In addition, some research has found that "the mentoring relationship can be detrimental to the mentor, the mentee or both" (Long, 1997, p. 115). In particular, ending the mentoring relationship early or relationships that last less than one year reduces the effectiveness and adversely affects students' well-being (Farruggia et al., 2011; Grossman et al., 2012).

Matching of Mentors and Mentees

Research has examined whether matching demographic characteristics led to better mentoring relationships. DuBois, Holloway, et al. (2002) did not find that matching mentoring pairs on attributes or interests were significant moderators of effect size. However, other studies have found that matching led to better relationships and more positive outcomes for mentored youth (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Raposa et al., 2018). A shared dislike of activities also predicted a longer youth-mentor relationship than shared interests or when interests differed. Race and ethnicity matches had a lower risk of relationship termination due to the mentor moving away or losing interest but a higher risk of termination due to conflict (Raposa et al., 2018). An ethnic mismatch between mentor and mentee may be problematic if the mentee has cultural mistrust towards people from ethnic groups with whom there is a history of colonisation, racism or discrimination. Allowing mentored youth and their parents to share their preferences for mentors before matching may alleviate these risks (Sánchez et al., 2021; Sánchez et al., 2013).

Culturally-focused Mentoring

There is limited research on culturally responsive youth mentoring, which is surprising, given that New Zealand mentoring programmes recruit significant numbers of Māori and Pacific Island youth (Farruggia, Bullen, Davidson, et al., 2011). Additionally, more than 50% of mentoring programmes, even those developed primarily for Māori, do not feature whānau (family) involvement, which suggests that programme organisers may not recognise the importance of whānau, hapū, and iwi connections (Farruggia, Bullen, Solomon, et al., 2011).

In a recent New Zealand study, Ualesi (2021) explored culturally responsive, sustaining, and safe mentoring practices. She identified seven ingredients needed to

support Māori and Pacific Island youth effectively. These include: (1) "A culturally safe space; (2) positive social identities; (3) covenant relationships; (4) culture of self-determination; (5) culture of honour; (6) culturally transformative relationships; and (7) sacred space" (p.170). Indigenous knowledge systems are often missing from Western mentoring models, but Ualesi's study highlighted the necessity of cultural centrality for mentoring programmes to benefit Māori and Pacific Island youth.

The Current Study

The current study is focused on a New Zealand youth mentoring programme that targets academically talented students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds. The programme aims to support students to achieve their academic potential through tertiary education, so they can positively influence and benefit their communities. Limited research exists about programmes that combine mentoring with other interventions and support students through the transition from school to tertiary education. Research in the New Zealand context is also scarce. Therefore, the current study aimed to investigate the efficacy of a multi-component youth mentoring programme in New Zealand from the perspective of its key stakeholders.

Students in the programme receive four years of individual mentoring from their last year of high school to the third year of their degree, university tuition fees, and paid work experience. With a focus on academically talented students, applicants need to achieve high grades in the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (see New Zealand Qualifications Authority, n.d.). The household income threshold for the scholarship and entry to the mentoring programme is NZ\$75,000 for families with one dependant and NZ\$90,000 for larger families. Priority is given to students who are the first in their families to attend university. Once students are in the programme, they must pass all university courses and maintain a B grade or higher. From the second and third years of university, students are expected to maintain a B+ average or better. In addition, they must submit all assessments and attend all examinations required for each course.

Mentors volunteer to join the programme. They complete induction training before starting mentoring and commit to supporting a student for a minimum of two years. Mentors and mentees are encouraged to meet at least once a month in addition to regular contact by phone, email, or text message. Participation in programme-organised mentoring activities and networking events is encouraged. The mentoring pair completes a quarterly progress and feedback report, and mentors have access to a support team in the programme organisation if problems arise.

Financial and work experience partners (partners) are representatives of organisations that provide financial support to students in the programme by contributing to their university course costs. Although the scholarship primarily covers course fees, the partner may allow some of the funds to be allocated to other costs, such as textbooks, transport, accommodation, and IT resources. Partner organisations also provide students with a

minimum of 4-5 weeks of paid work experience per year and employment-based mentoring and support.

Through interviews and surveys with each of the programme's stakeholders, multiple perspectives and experiences allowed cross-validation of important themes across the programme. Two research questions were central to the study: (1) What are the benefits/strengths of the mentoring programme? (2) What are the challenges associated with the mentoring programme, and how could these be addressed?

METHOD

Study design

We used a pre-experimental, post-test-only design to explore stakeholder perceptions of a multi-faceted youth-mentoring programme. Although the design lacks a control or comparison group, it is common in studies that assess the efficacy of an intervention, like that of the mentoring programme in the current study (Cervera et al., 2020).

Materials and Procedure

The research was conducted in two stages: First, in-depth interviews with current students, alumni, mentors, and partners. Each interview lasted between 30 and 50 minutes and took place face-to-face or by telephone. For stage two, an invitation to participate in an online survey was sent to all students, alumni, mentors, and partners.

The surveys comprised rating scales and open-ended questions specific to each type of stakeholder (student, alumni, mentors, and partners). For the rating scales, participants indicated agreement or disagreement with different prompts. Example prompts for students about their mentor were, 'They are a good match for me' and 'They are never too busy to meet up with me'. Examples of open-ended interview and survey questions included:

- What do you think are the benefits of having a mentor? (Students and alumni)
- Overall, what do you think are the highlights of mentoring students? (Mentors)
- Are there any issues you have experienced with your students? (Partners).

Participants

The interview participants (N = 15) were purposively sampled and included alumni (n = 3) who had completed the programme in the previous 2-4 years, current students (n = 4), mentors (n = 5), and partners (n = 3). There were 330 participants for the survey, including alumni (n = 56), students (n = 88), mentors (n = 137), and partners (n = 49).

Demographic data were collected about students and alumni, but not for mentors and partners. The ethnicity and gender breakdown of students and alumni are presented in **Error! Reference source not found.**

Table 1. Gender and Ethnicity of Students and Alumni

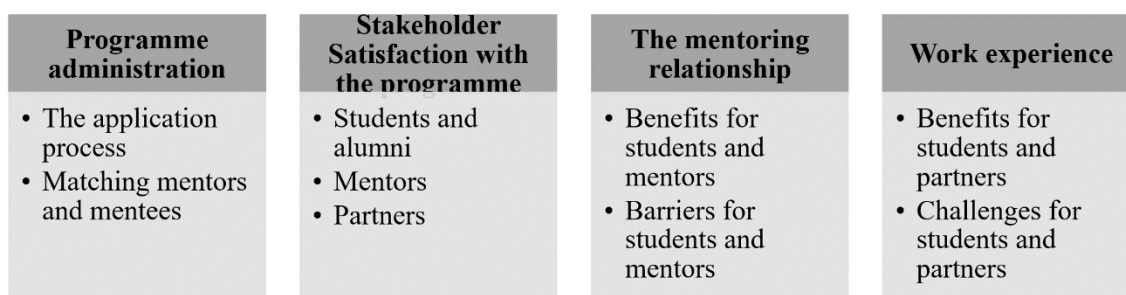
| | Students (n = 88) | Alumni (n = 56) |
|------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Gender | | |
| Female | 68 | 35 |
| Male | 20 | 21 |
| Ethnicity | | |
| Māori | 34 | 11 |
| Pākehā | 14 | 18 |
| Pacific Islands | 34 | 14 |
| Indian (incl. Fijian Indian) | 0 | 6 |
| Asian | 3 | 4 |
| Other | 3 | 3 |

Data Analysis

The interview and survey data were analysed thematically using the steps outlined in Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach for analysing qualitative data, which involves "identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Thematic analysis is a flexible method of analysing data that suits research related to people's experiences, perceptions or viewpoints. The six phases of thematic analysis are "(1) Familiarisation with the data; (2) Generating initial codes; (3) Searching for themes; (4) Reviewing the themes; (5) Defining and naming themes; (6) Producing the report" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87).

The final themes and sub-themes are displayed in **Error! Reference source not found.** The first theme, 'Programme administration', focused on the application and interview process and how mentors were matched to mentees. The second theme, 'Programme satisfaction', described stakeholders' perceptions of the overall programme. The third theme, 'The mentoring relationship', included mentors and students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges with mentoring. Finally, the fourth theme, 'Work experience', focused on student and partner-identified benefits and challenges with the work experience aspect of the programme.

Figure 1. Study Themes and Sub-themes



RESULTS

Programme Organisation and Administration

The application process: Students learned about the mentoring programme through school newsletters or friends and predominantly drove the application process themselves rather than being approached to apply. Students reported they had received sufficient information about the programme and understood the commitment and expectations. One student said, "They told us what to wear to the interview and to thoroughly prepare... They gave us a call after each interview and asked for feedback and said the wait would be a month or so...yeah, they kept us informed" (Interview).

Some students found the application process time-consuming and the interview daunting. However, the interviewers were friendly, the feedback was positive, and the process taught students valuable job application skills. One student said, "[It] was one of the hardest interviews I've ever had to do ... [but it] prepares you for future interviews..." (Interview).

The 'speed-dating' format of the entry interviews limited what some students were willing to share about themselves in front of others. One student said,

There was a bunch of us in one room, and it kind of felt like we were listening to one another; it made us compare what each other said. If it was one-to-one, we could talk more and concentrate on what we were saying with no eavesdropping (Interview).

The partners were affirming of the interviews and agreed that a stringent process was necessary to ensure students took it seriously and that the recipients they selected were deserving. One partner explained:

It is a hard process because there is a financial component... We expect students to present to us, to do a 10-minute presentation... But let's not forget that kids do this – it's their bread and butter – they already have to do this at school. But if they want \$20, they have to work for it, and they have to get up and [have the] ability to speak. I think it's a very robust process. It's a point of difference, and it's great. It gives us high-quality students (Interview).

Although students' awards and grades were of interest during the selection process, one respondent said the letter written by students which explained their reasons for wanting to be in the programme was most valuable:

They write a letter, "why I am applying", and someone writes them a reference. Those two are what we are really interested in... The letters often cover what's in the forms anyway. [A well-written letter] gives us the same information in their own voice (Interview).

Matching mentors with mentees: Overall, mentors were satisfied with the matching process and perceived it was effective. One mentor said, "My buddy and I get on so well (due to the matching), and the support from [the programme] is amazing" (Survey). Mentors who had experienced the "speed dating" interviews supported the format. One mentor said,

[The] speed-dating process to match up was good. Students had a few minutes to talk about themselves, [and] it gives the students an element of choice... Some people didn't get picked, but that's the nature of the game. It's fascinating to see people's backgrounds (Interview).

Another mentor who had not participated in speed dating and had just been given students to mentor said, "As with anything, it's tough. Some people won't click, but I don't know if anything will improve the odds" (Interview).

Stakeholder Satisfaction with the Programme

Alumni and students: Alumni (96%) and students (78%) agreed that the mentoring programme had met or exceeded their expectations, with only a few who said it had failed. The youth mentoring programme in the current study was unlike other scholarships available to students because of the work experience and mentoring provided. Several students had not previously held jobs. They perceived that the work experience aspect of the mentoring programme advantaged them over other job applicants, gave them an increased sense of self-direction, and enabled them to develop skills in the workforce. However, as students had not previously received mentoring, they were initially unsure of its potential benefits.

Overall, most current students (61%) and alumni (41%) identified that all three aspects of the programme (i.e., work experience, mentor, and financial assistance) were most valuable. However, the remaining alumni chose work experience (24%) as most valuable, which was slightly higher than financial aid (22%). Mentoring was of least value to alumni (10%). For the remaining current students, financial support was the main attraction (17%) as it reduced the need for a student loan. Their mentor (14%) rated more highly than the work experience (8%). Students new to the programme were not likely to have spent as much time doing work experience as alumni. Without the benefit of time to reflect, they may not have fully realised its value.

Mentors: Mentors were primarily part of the programme to give back to the community, as some had received mentoring themselves, and others wanted to help those less fortunate in life. A quarter of mentors surveyed (25%) reported a positive experience with the programme, and 16% found the organisation supportive and helpful. Several mentors described the programme as inspiring and hopeful and referred to its high success rate, which they perceived was due to the financial, pastoral, and employment support. One mentor said, "...All three points of the triangle are essential to get the students through what they need. The success rate is very high because of this, particularly compared to other scholarship schemes" (Interview).

Mentors liked that the programme targeted talented, driven students and offered a 'hand up', not a 'hand-out' to help them reach their potential. One mentor said, "I appreciated what they were doing in terms of taking people who didn't have university role models. It wasn't just throwing money at people; they have mentors that can assist, that can provide that extra assistance" (Interview).

Partners: Partners also had a high level of satisfaction with the programme (80% rated the programme as 4 or 5, where five is *very well* and zero is *very poor*). They identified several reasons for being involved: (1) to enable talented students to realise their leadership potential; (2) to give back to the community; (3) to provide a hand-up, not a hand-out; (4) the wrap-around approach of the programme; and (5) the opportunity for their company to gain perspectives from a younger generation. More than just corporate social responsibility, partners viewed the programme as holistically assisting promising young people to increase their chances of success. The 'hand up' philosophy also resonated strongly with partners who relished the opportunity to support talented students to reach their potential.

The Mentoring Relationship

Student-identified benefits: The most frequently mentioned benefit for students was mentors' advice about personal matters, careers, schoolwork, and work experience. One student said, "It's good having someone who I can ask for help when I get stuck on assignments..." (Survey). Another student appreciated emotional support. S/he said, "I consider her more of a friend. I feel comfortable enough to discuss anything with her, even personal problems, and she has great advice..." (Survey). Some students had underestimated the value of the mentoring relationship at the beginning of the programme. However, by the end of the programme, many viewed the relationship positively. Students referred to their mentor as "a friend", "my second grandmother", "amazing", or "part of the family" (Interviews).

Students identified critical components in effective mentoring relationships. First, the student and mentor were both satisfied with the frequency and type of contact and support. Appropriate communication and support differed amongst the students. Some preferred face-to-face meetings or fun activities with their mentors, whereas others were happy with texts or phone calls. Equally, some students needed a significant level of support, whereas other more self-sufficient students required less. Second, the mentoring relationship involved academic/work advice and a personal connection. For example, mentors and students met each other's families. Finally, the mentoring relationship provided the student with connections, networks or expertise that directly helped the student. For example, a recruitment manager helped students with their curriculum vitae, and a lecturer advised them on appropriate university courses.

Mentor-identified benefits: Most mentors found mentoring highly rewarding. They enjoyed contributing to their student's life and felt pride and satisfaction as they saw them grow in confidence. One mentor appreciated "the satisfaction of seeing someone flourish... [I] went to the Māori presentation with [student name] and was blown away with how included they made me feel" (Survey). Student graduation was also a momentous occasion. For example, "Seeing a student graduate [was] a huge moment" (Survey).

Some mentors saw their students as friends, family members, or like their own children. One mentor said, "[I am] very proud of where my first girl has ended up, but she did it all on her own" (Survey). Students gave mentors

a new understanding of the younger generation, someone from a different culture, and an insight into the hardships some experienced.

Barriers to the Mentoring Relationship

Student-identified barriers: Infrequent contact and communication were barriers to developing mentoring relationships for some students. One said, "I think we could keep in contact more" (Survey). Another student said, "We should try to find other ways to catch up, such as phone/video call, social media, etc." (Survey). Often, busy schedules prevented students and mentors from connecting. One student reported, "We find it really hard to meet up during the week as our timetables clash, or something comes up" (Survey). Some students were reticent to contact mentors who appeared very busy. One said, "I feel like I'm the one who always instigates when to meet up..." but she also added, "I understand that she is busy" (Survey). Other students' mentors were in a different town/city, which meant limited opportunities for face-to-face contact.

Personality clashes were another barrier that led to some students needing to change mentors. One student who had encountered problems with her mentor reported that she had not informed programme organisers about the issues because she did not want to appear ungrateful. As she had not experienced mentoring previously, she was unsure what to expect. Comparatively, mentors identified a significantly higher number of barriers with the mentoring relationship.

Mentor-identified barriers: The obstacles that mentors encountered as part of the mentoring relationship included cultural differences, expectations, frequency and form of contact, and managing serious issues.

Cultural differences: Several mentors reported cultural differences between them and their students. These appeared to stem, in some cases, from the mentor's limited cultural knowledge. One mentor suggested that a 'Polynesian' student should have boundaries with his parents. The mentor said,

Some of the issues of expectations on students, in the case of my current students, comes from a Polynesian family who had enormous expectations placed on them. Perhaps some support to help the student put boundaries around those...not to take on too much [and] dealing with issues of fear and wanting to please the parents (Interview).

This quote indicated that the mentor might not have fully understood parents' and children's roles and responsibilities within a Pacific Island or Māori family. Other mentors referred to family access to the money that students received. Some comments implied that money should be kept separately or withheld to prevent parents from accessing it. For example, one mentor said,

Would be a better idea to be more controlling of the finances...The firm could pay [the programme], and [the programme] could put away savings for that child and then release 50% back to the child, which can then put it into the family coffers (Survey).

In contrast, one mentor recognised that cultural differences could be a barrier in the mentoring relationship

and suggested recruitment of more Māori and Pasifika mentors:

It would be great to find more PI [Pacific Islands] and Māori mentors because it's old-fashioned that it's the white middle-class people teaching the ethnic minorities. [The programme] needs to make sure they are advertising in their communities because it would be a big help (Interview).

Differences in expectations. Mentors' expectations differed regarding the role they should have in a student's life, as some needed a lot of support, whereas others were more independent. Some mentors were unsure how often communication should occur and the best form of contact. Although two-thirds of mentors surveyed (27%) responded that they would continue to support the programme, the most reported barrier (47% of mentors) was the required level of commitment. Some mentors expressed guilt at the lack of time available to commit to their students or about juggling other obligations when their students needed them. One mentor said, "My current student is in the process of dropping out of the programme. I wonder what I could have done differently... Could I have taken a different approach?" (Survey). However, it appeared that mentees were a low priority for some mentors. One mentor said, "[The] only low point is just fitting it into your life. I'm feeling guilty because I haven't caught up with my student for her birthday, but I've been swamped with work" (Survey).

Communication issues: Some mentors reported problems with communicating or establishing a connection with their students. One mentor explained her student had been difficult to contact. "We had a few hitches in that department – my student never had any phone credit...and it can be quite hard to get hold of her, but I alerted [the programme] when I was worried..." (Survey). Other mentors wanted further training. For example, one said, "[learning] how to engage with the student via social media...the best apps to use to communicate (e.g. Snapchat)" as one way that could enhance communication between mentors and students.

Serious issues: When problems arose in the students' lives, mentors dealt with difficulties ranging from relationship breakups to mental illness. Some mentors experienced the same disappointment and hurt that they imagined a parent might feel. For example, "When something sh**y goes on in their life, you feel it with them" (Survey).

Work Experience

Benefits of work experience for students and partners: Current students reported that flexible work hours, a good team, and increased confidence were positive aspects of their work experience. However, although alumni were optimistic about the benefits of exposure to working life, only around 50% of those surveyed were positive about the connections they had made or the impact of work experience on their career decisions.

Interviewed students all reported excellent relationships with their partners. They appreciated the work experience and perceived it gave them an advantage over other job applicants. One student stated, "If I do my part well enough, then I could possibly continue working

with them" (Interview). Some students highlighted that their role aligned with their studies, and they viewed the work experience as "a connection and pathway into a potential career" (Interview).

Several students enjoyed experiencing something completely different. Work experience provided opportunities to "work somewhere you may not otherwise have worked, and thus getting to meet people you may not otherwise have met" (Interview). Although jobs were often low-skilled tasks such as packing, filing, and working on reception, their responsibilities increased as students became more familiar with the company.

Partners reported that their staff benefitted from the students being in the company. For example, some staff members had taken on internal coaching/management, which was valuable for new graduates who might not otherwise have had this opportunity. Like mentors, some partners reported that the experience of working with students had opened their eyes to the hardships that some people encountered in their everyday lives. Additionally, partners benefitted from having access to intelligent, driven young people, which enabled the organisation to keep in touch with a younger generation who brought new perspectives. One partner said, "We get fantastic skills, bright intellectuals, leadership skills, extracurricular interests, fresh ideas, and thinking" (Interview).

Barriers of work experience for students and partners.

Communication and staff awareness: Poor communication and staff awareness was a barrier for 24% of students who responded that the contact at their work experience placement appeared to be unaware of the programme. One student said, "It would be nice if the main person of contact were fully aware of the requirements so that both parties don't slack off on certain commitments" (Survey). Another student said that her colleagues at the work experience placement had no idea why she was there, and the only task she did at work experience was driving a forklift. She said,

Forklift driving was pretty exciting...but, unfortunately, this is all I have been doing... I haven't been given a chance to explore other aspects of the workplace...I assume they are not fully aware of my purpose there as I explain myself over and over again [as to] why I'm there... (Survey).

Partners also commented about the importance of effective communication, staff being well informed about the students' role(s) in the company, and how the work experience aligned with other support provided to students. One partner said, "We needed to work hard at profiling them so that the rest of the company remember they are a part of the team" (Interview).

Work availability: Some students reported that staff changes at their work experience placements reduced work availability. One student, who had been at two different companies, reported that no one at either place appeared to want the responsibility for organising her work. She said,

I have been with two workplaces...It was going well with my first placement until the boss, who signed up for [the programme] left, and the new

boss neglected me to the point I couldn't get any work at all... History has begun to repeat itself...The boss who signed me up [in the second workplace] has left, and I'm beginning to be neglected once again (Survey).

Although the financial contribution students received from working was valued and appreciated, students reported that the work given was often unrelated to their field of study (e.g. packing crates when studying psychology and criminology). Students also said that work was not always available, and occasionally, there were shifts where there was nothing for them to do.

Partners reported that work availability was reliant on student communication, and some students did not recognise the importance of advising their work experience placement in advance about their availability. One partner said, "Communication has been a minor issue. We encourage our students to keep us in the loop regarding their work commitments with us" (Interview). Another said there was a "lack of urgency to organise holiday work, leaving it until late in the year to request preferred locations, making work difficult to find" (Interview). The comments from students and partners indicated that communication needed to improve to ensure the work experience process worked smoothly for all parties.

Maintaining a work-study balance: Some students reported difficulties managing their partner's expectations around work and study. Partners did not always seem to understand that they were full-time university students. For example, one student said, "Management should remember that this is work experience" (Survey). Furthermore, partners needed to ensure students had enough time to keep on top of their university studies and not expect them to work too many hours.

Partners were aware that some students had difficulty balancing work and study, and consequently, they spent too much time working. One partner said they needed to "[Keep] them on track with their own commitments" and ensure that students were not "over-committing themselves to work when they should be studying" (Interview). Some partners reported that students who were having problems at university avoided studying and instead increased their work hours. One partner said, "When students find their degree far more challenging than they anticipated, they find full-time work more appealing than their study or they over-commit to their work experience" (Interview).

Financial issues: Several of the work experience placements were in a corporate environment, and some students did not have business wear and could not afford to buy new clothes. Partners also commented about students' financial difficulties and noted that students needed assistance with transport (e.g. providing students with a bus card) or obtaining clothes to 'fit in'. One partner said, "...we have had our eyes opened to the situations that some of these students are coming from...They come from deprived homes; for example, struggling to get a wardrobe together" (Interview).

Some partners had similar views to mentors about students' finances, which demonstrated limited knowledge of or disagreement with the concept of income sharing, which is common in collectivist cultures. One

partner had "...cultural challenges around funding responsibilities" and expressed concern about a student who could not always afford to take the bus to work because their earnings were used to support the entire family (Survey).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to investigate the perceptions of students, mentors and partners who were involved in a multi-component youth mentoring programme. The programme provided academically talented students with mentoring, paid work experience, and financial support to cover their university fees. This section discusses the main findings alongside the existing literature, the study limitations, and suggestions for further research. Finally, recommendations are made for stakeholders involved in youth mentoring programmes.

Cultural understanding and matching of mentor pairs

Some mentors and partners demonstrated limited knowledge about their mentees' ethnic/cultural backgrounds. For example, they suggested that students' scholarship funds or earnings were being 'misused' when students shared the money they earned with their families. In collectivist cultures, it is common for income earned by individual family members to be pooled or shared. Contributing financially to the family is also how Pacific Islands children fulfil obligations to their parents (Benseman et al., 2006).

In another situation, a mentor referred to a 'Polynesian' student needing to set boundaries with their parents. An important Pacific Island (and Māori) value is to respect parents and elders. For a mentor to suggest that students set limits with their parents appears to disrespect cultural values that differ from their own (Fletcher et al., 2009). Both comments demonstrated the paternalistic attitudes of some mentors and partners towards students from non-dominant ethnic groups. Existing research supports matching mentors with mentees from the same race or ethnicity (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Raposa et al., 2018), which may alleviate some cultural misunderstandings. However, most mentors are from white/middle-class backgrounds (Evans & Ave, 2000), which could delay matching students with a mentor from the same culture. Therefore, it would be beneficial for mentoring organisations to provide cultural competency training to help mentors better understand and support their mentees (Ptak et al., 1995). Additionally, as part of building a respectful and reciprocal mentoring relationship, mentors must learn about and know their mentees and vice versa (Dutton, 2018). It would appear that a mentor learning about a mentee's culture is crucial to understanding who they are.

Problem resolution within the mentoring relationship: When mentors and students in this study encountered problems in the mentoring relationship, they were not always aware of the resolution process. In one scenario, a student had personality clashes with her mentor but did not initially speak up. According to the Youth Mentoring Network (2016), an organisation created to provide a hub for mentors and mentoring providers in New Zealand, programmes need to assist mentor pairs with problems related to any aspect of mentoring. Although some

mentors and mentees had a contact person within the programme organisation, others were unsure who to contact. The New Zealand Youth Mentoring Network (2016) also recommends that programmes have a clear and accessible complaints resolution process. In the current study, it did not appear that mentors or students had access to or were aware of a complaints process which, if needed, may help reduce the risk of a mentoring relationship ending early.

Frequency of contact: The main barrier for students was the lack of regular contact with their mentors. Irregular contact with mentors made some students feel like they were a low priority. Rhodes et al., 1994, cited in Evans and Ave (2000), noted that students who had previous experience of natural mentoring relationships, such as those with older siblings or grandparents were often quicker to develop relationships with mentors than students with no prior mentor experiences. Other students who formed relationships had mentors who kept showing up and who persevered with the relationship, even when the mentee exhibited an apparent lack of interest. Regular communication and interaction are essential for a successful mentoring relationship (Jacobi, 1991). Consequently, mentoring programmes need to recruit mentors willing to meet regularly with and support their mentees.

Work experience

A unique feature of the mentoring programme explored in this study was the inclusion of 4-5 weeks of paid work experience per year. The work experience allowed students to earn additional income and obtain work-related skills. As many employers expect graduates to be 'work-ready', paid work experience during studying increases employability and provides financial benefits (Evans, 2021). However, having a part-time job while completing full-time study has been shown to have adverse effects on students' academic outcomes (Callender, 2008). Although students in the current study appreciated the work experience, they were also conscious that their studies needed to be prioritised. Therefore, work experience within a mentoring programme needs to work alongside students' studies, contribute to increased knowledge of their subject area (where possible), and provide financial assistance.

Limitations of this Study and Suggestions for Further Research

The research design in this study was a pre-experimental, post-test-only design. A limitation of this design is that it lacks a control or comparison group. Including a control group of unsuccessful applicants could have shown the differences in outcomes between mentored and unmentored students. Additionally, the data collection from stakeholders occurred once they had joined the programme. Adding a pre-test to the design may have emphasised further benefits of the programme. Future research could include a longitudinal control group study that tracks participants' perceptions before, during, and after the mentoring programme intervention. Tracking students from their last year of high school to the

end of their university degrees would demonstrate whether mentored students' perceptions and outcomes differed from their non-mentored peers.

Conclusion

This study focused on stakeholders' perspectives of a multi-component youth mentoring programme. It highlighted a range of benefits and challenges for mentors, student mentees and partners involved in these types of programmes. Based on the findings of this research, several recommendations for youth mentoring programmes and practitioners were apparent. As the more experienced adult in the relationship, it is recommended that mentors take the lead in contacting their mentees and arranging regular meeting times. A minimum meeting of once a month is suggested, but research shows that more frequent interactions are associated with positive, enduring mentoring relationships (LoSciuto et al., 1996). Mentoring pairs are also encouraged to call, email, or text between the pre-arranged meeting times.

A common concern for mentors was a breakdown in communication when problems arose. A problem-solving process is needed that is easily accessible and that students and mentors can follow if problems occur within the mentoring relationship. Both parties should know the steps to take if they cannot contact their mentoring partner or if one partner wants to end the relationship or withdraw from the programme. Additionally, each mentoring pair needs a designated staff member within the programme organisation who makes regular contact, and access to a general inquiry line if their usual staff member is unavailable.

A recommendation for mentoring programme organisers is to train mentors in relationship-building, effective communication, cultural competency and cross-cultural understanding to help alleviate some of the issues raised about financial and familial expectations. Partners would also benefit from training and induction in these areas to better support the students working in their organisations.

A further recommendation for partners and mentors relates to work experience placements and the importance of not imposing unreasonable expectations or demands on young school leavers. If support with business wear is needed, mentors could advise about work clothes or help students access charities that supply clothing for low-income individuals entering the workforce. Partners could provide uniforms for students (where appropriate), or donate clothes for students to wear if they are in public-facing roles. Providing transport, parking, or assisting with public transport costs would also benefit students.

This research adds to the small number of studies that focus on multi-component youth mentoring programmes. The findings from the research highlighted that a wrap-around programme of mentoring, work experience, and financial aid, when implemented effectively, enables talented, high-achieving young people from underprivileged backgrounds to access university education.

References

- Benseman, J., Coxon, E., Anderson, H., & Anae, M. (2006). Retaining non-traditional students: lessons learnt from Pasifika students in New Zealand. *Higher Education Research & Development, 25*(2), 147–162.
- Callender, C. (2008). The impact of term-time employment on higher education students' academic attainment and achievement. *Journal of Education Policy, 23*(4), 359–377.
- Cervera, N., Diago, P. D., Orcos, L., & Yáñez, D. F. (2020). The acquisition of computational thinking through mentoring: An exploratory study. *Education Sciences, 10*(8), 1–11.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10080202>
- DuBois, D. L., Holloway, B., Valentine, J., & Cooper, H. (2002). Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth: A meta-analytic review. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 30*(2), 157–197.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1014628810714>
- Dubois, D. L., Neville, H. A., Parra, G. R., & Pugh-Lilly, A. (2002). Testing a new model of mentoring. *New Directions for Youth Development, 2002*(93), 21–57.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.23320029305>
- Dutton, H., Bullen, P., & Deane, K. (2018). Getting to the heart of it: understanding mentoring relationship quality from the perspective of program supervisors. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 26*(4), 400–419.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2018.1530132>
- Education Counts. (2021). *Tertiary Participation*.
<https://www.educationcounts.gov.nz/statistics/tertiary-participation>
- Ensher, E. A., & Murphy, S. E. (1997). Effects of race, gender, perceived similarity, and contact on mentor relationships. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 50*(3), 460–481.
- Evans, C. (2021). Exploiting students' part-time work to enhance learning, teaching and assessment. *Industry and Higher Education, 35*(1), 10–13.
- Evans, I. M., & Ave, K. T. (2000). Mentoring children and youth: Principles, issues, and policy implications for community programmes in New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology, 29*(1), 41–49.
- Farruggia, S. P., Bullen, P., Davidson, J., Dunphy, A., Solomon, F., & Collins, E. (2011). The effectiveness of youth mentoring programmes in New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology 40*(3), 52–70.
- Fletcher, J., Parkhill, F., Fa'aoi, A., & O'Regan, B. (2009). Pasifika students: Teachers and parents voice their perceptions of what provides supports and barriers to Pasifika students' achievement in literacy and learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education 25*(1), 24–33.
- Grossman, J. B., Chan, C. S., Schwartz, S. E., & Rhodes, J. E. (2012). The test of time in school-based mentoring: The role of relationship duration and re-matching on academic outcomes. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 49*(1), 43–54.
- Jacobi, M. (1991). Mentoring and undergraduate academic success: A literature review. *Review of Educational Research, 61*(4), 505–532.
- Jolliffe, D., & Farrington, D. P. (2007). *A rapid evidence assessment of the impact of mentoring on re-offending: A summary*. Home Office.
- Long, J. (1997). The dark side of mentoring. *The Australian Educational Researcher, 24*(2), 115–133.
- LoSciuto, L., Rajala, A. K., Townsend, T. N., & Taylor, A. S. (1996). An outcome evaluation of Across Ages: An intergenerational mentoring approach to drug prevention. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 11*(1), 116–129.
- Ministry of Education. (2021). *Education, income and earnings - with updates for 2020*.
https://www.educationcounts.gov.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/208268/Education-income-and-earnings-2020-Report.pdf
- New Zealand Qualifications Authority. (n.d.). *How NCEA Works*. New Zealand Government.
<https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/understanding-ncea/how-ncea-works/>
- New Zealand Youth Mentoring Network. (2016). *Guide to effective and safe practice in youth mentoring* (2nd ed.). Author.
- Ptak, C. L., Cooper, J., & Brislin, R. (1995). Cross cultural training programs: Advice and insights from experienced trainers. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 19*(3), 425–453.
- Raposa, E. B., Ben-Eliyahu, A., Olsho, L. E., & Rhodes, J. (2018). Birds of a feather: Is matching based on shared interests and characteristics associated with longer youth mentoring relationships? *Journal of Community Psychology, 47*(2), 1–13.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22127>
- Sánchez, B., Anderson, A. J., Weiston-Serdan, T., & Catlett, B. S. (2021). *Anti-Racism education and training for adult mentors who work with BIPOC adolescents* (Vol. 36). SAGE Publications.
- Sánchez, B., Colón-Torres, Y., Feuer, R., Roundfield, K. E., & Berardi, L. (2013). Race, ethnicity and culture in mentoring relationships. In D. L. DuBois & M. J. Karcher (Eds.), *Handbook of youth mentoring* (Second ed., pp. 145–158). SAGE Publications.
- Ualesi, Y. M. (2021). *Culturally Responsive, Sustaining and Safe Youth Mentoring Practice in Aotearoa New Zealand - A Va Relational Approach* [Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Auckland].
- Universities New Zealand. (2017). *A degree is a smart investment*. <https://www.universitiesnz.ac.nz/latest-news-and-publications/degree-smart-investment-0>

Corresponding Author

Hana Turner-Adams
Email: h.turner@auckland.ac.nz

Acknowledgements

Data for this study were collected and disseminated by The Perceptive Group, Auckland. www.perceptive.co.nz