

E-MENTORING: ALTERNATIVE PARADIGM FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL APTITUDE DEVELOPMENT

Preeti Singh, Manipal University Jaipur
Kushal Kumar, Manipal University Jaipur

ABSTRACT

The newest approach in the field of education which works on the line of non-formal education using internet/online services is “Electronic Mentoring” (e-mentoring). E-mentoring is a means of providing a guided mentoring relationship by a mentor using online facilities to a mentee who is anonymous. It is extensively used to support not only skill development in specific areas of business or industrial needs, but also provide training in the self-development process of the recipient or the mentee. However, it is really interested to know whether the youth (graduates for this study) are aware about the platforms and its use. The purpose of the study is to understand the perception of graduates on e-mentoring as a platform for entrepreneurial aptitude development and whether they are interested to participate in this alternative mentoring approach. Considering the objective of the study, an action-based research approach adopted and survey conducted in two universities. The data collected subjected to cross-tabulation using gender, education and family business background as independent variable. An inferential analyses of data was carried out using SPSS program for the calculation of Chi-Square.

The results showed that there is no significant relationship can be attributed between gender, education and family business background to launch e-mentoring. The general awareness about e-mentoring program is found to be there among students, wherein, especially the awareness e-mentorship for Business Development Program is found to be low. The participants do not strongly believe that e-mentoring helps in gaining business aptitude, but on the other side they reveal readiness and interest among students to accept e-platforms for e-mentoring.

Keywords: Online Mentoring, E-Mentoring, Entrepreneurial Aptitude, Managerial Traits, Business Skills.

INTRODUCTION

Mentoring is not a new concept to study, however the various modes and methods which are recently associated with mentoring are there to explore and research. E-mentoring, one of the mentoring methods is latest supplement that helps a mentee to obtain knowledge and accelerate growth with the support of mentor who is physically not present around them. Academic success, career aspirations and personal development are other benefits one can obtain with the proper mentoring.

The generalizations present regarding the mentoring process, for its definition, procedure and functions, explains that it is wide in nature and diverge from one place to another. It has gone to a level where people understand its importance and marks its necessity at any point of life. The reason may be the easy availability of online networking websites and applications that gives a platform to interact, post your query and is not bounded by geographical location. The

process, mentoring, is associated with many dimensions of human life, for instance career, academic, psychological behavior and social development.

A number of e-mentoring hubs have been developed in the Western industrialized societies which provide support to the information seeker on various aspects related to development of leadership skills, managerial traits, entrepreneurial traits, managerial skills and so on. A number of websites are made available offering online mentoring on various aspects from business development modules related to development in the areas of science, technology and humanities. A unique factor that is responsible for the success of e-mentoring is the quality of mentoring relationship that is heavily influenced by the common interests of the mentor and the mentee. As such most of the e-mentoring program requires some shared interest between the provider and the seeker.

Bierema & Sharan (2002) avowed the future of e-mentoring is endless as Internet. There were any research and studies held during the decade. Shrestha et al. (2009), in a comparative study mentioned that e-mentoring has added new dimensions to face-to-face mentoring concluded that, *“The electronic dimension offers added benefits to mentors such as fitting into a busy schedule and minimizing status differences with mentees. Other findings give additional insights: how the electronic medium allowed for mentoring to target students without stigmatizing them, how e-mentoring reached out to more students, and how it enabled mentors to better manage the expectations of mentees.”*

Williams (2012) adding weightage to the online mode of mentoring stated, *“The function of a mentor, or e-mentor, is not to tell the protégé what to do, nor is it to give orders or directives. The function of the mentor is to present possibilities to the protégé and to advice on possible outcomes..... the protégé reacts and questions the outcome possibilities specific to his/her new experience. Much has been investigated regarding the benefits to the protégé in this look toward outcomes.”* (Williams, 2012) also added the perception of mentors who delivered the mentoring electronically states that it is new method of leaning, *“This is a new approach for the students as well as for the mentors. Some of the students are more agreeable to the process and other students are working more independently. It depends on the student and on the intensity of their project. I would say that I could spend 10-15% of my time each month [with students]. I try to make myself available as often as they need,”* testimonial of an e-mentor available in a research paper.

Satish et al. (2016) took the concept of mentoring to academic development. Education sector has found mentoring as quite effective tool since long back and with the advent of new technologies, comes an idea of online mentoring, which is also referred to as e-mentoring. *“E-Mentoring is fundamentally developed to improve the performance of students by assisting mentors to understand the problems of students more effectively and easily.”*

Objectives

1. To identify various e-mentoring programs available for entrepreneurial aptitude development.
2. To examine the perception of graduates on e-mentoring as a platform for entrepreneurial aptitude development.
3. To find out whether students are interested to participate in e-mentoring program.

E-mentoring Platforms

At the international level a number of e-mentoring platforms have been developed providing specific services based on the topic of interest or the demographic profiles of the

mentees and the purpose with which the mentees would seek information. “*E-mentoring first (1993) used for programs connecting schoolchildren with business people and become popular in the US, the UK, and some parts of Europe,*” Wikipedia E-mentoring (2008). However, other countries still need to explore the technology the way, specially, Americans using it.

A fine example of one of the established e-mentoring provider in the UK is Brightside.org.uk, a non-profit e-mentoring organization that works with 60 businesses, charities and universities (Brightside, 2003).

Mentornet.org is of the oldest online mentoring platform that aims to empower individual to persist and success in their fields. This service is limited to US students with access to effective mentorships in a vibrant community.

Mentoring.org is (Mentoring, 1990) another US based popular website which aims at the quantity and quality of mentoring relationships for young people and to close the mentoring gap. The website offers personalized mentorship in the form of a 24/7 digital advice hotline.

ICouldBe (2000), iCouldBe.org, allows students to choose their own mentors and learn. This New York based company is well connected with the classrooms across the country providing a virtual landscape with regards to mentorship activities that help students in academic programs, career exploration and post-secondary educational ideas.

iMentor.org, is another education focused platform, which help students from economically lower backgrounds. They aim to provide one mentor to one student to receive personalized mentoring program (Imentor, 1999).

Mentorink.com, is a smart mentoring platform, which is for organizations to empower complete business activities through smart mentoring. It works in favor of the organizers and its people by transforming ineffective programs that lack guidance and monitoring capabilities. There are many other platforms to name in, wherein, so many experienced and young people are involved to share and learn information.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study is to understand the perception of graduates on e-mentoring as a platform for entrepreneurial aptitude development and whether they are interested to participate in e-mentoring program. Considering the objective of the study, an action-based research approach adopted. An online questionnaire (designed on google forms) was designed and administered to the students of two Multi-Disciplinary Universities. Students belonging to non-technical education like humanities, science and commerce were approached for the study. The respondents were selected based on the need to train them entrepreneurial and business aptitude using online mentoring as opposed to face-to-face mentoring in a typical classroom situation. Of the total 125 respondents contacted 78 graduates replied to the online questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of questions on general awareness about e-platform. Besides, there were questions inquiring about knowledge and perception and the role of e-motoring.

The data collected was subjected to cross-tabulation using gender, education and family business background as independent variable to study the relationship between general awareness on e-mentoring, e-mentoring for managerial trait and for entrepreneurial aptitude. An inferential analyses of data was carried out using SPSS program for the calculation of Chi-Square. Independent variables, gender, education and family business background were compared with awareness of mentorship programs for business aptitude development, use of digital media platforms in the process of mentoring, role of mentoring in gaining business aptitude and acceptance of e-platforms for the development of business aptitude. It was

hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the independent variables and the role and acceptance of online mentoring as a tool in the development of business aptitude among mentees.

RESULTS

To a question on the awareness about mentorship program, of the 78 respondents there were 46 male and 32 female respondents. Among the male, 37% of them stated that they are aware of the program however 47% of the female ensured awareness and 53% were not aware of the program. A large number 51% respondents that belongs to arts stream are aware of the mentoring program, while 31% that belongs to science stream and 26% that belongs to commerce stated yes to the question. The data also revealed that 37% respondent with family business background are aware, 63% are totally unaware about the program.

FACTOR-Are You Aware of Mentorship Programs For Business Aptitude Development?					
		Yes	No	Total	
Gender	Male	17 37.0	29 63.0	46 100	N %
	Female	15 46.8	17 53.1	32 100	N %
Education	Arts	22 51.2	21 48.8	43 100	N %
	Science	5 31.3	11 68.8	16 100	N %
	Commerce	5 26.3	14 73.7	19 100	N %
Family business	Yes	10 37.0	17 63.0	27 100	N %
	No	22 43.1	29 56.9	51 100	N %

The above Table 1 reveals that 60% male are aware about the use of digital media platform in the process of mentoring, however 56% female stated yes. Of the education background of the respondents, 60% were arts graduates who said yes, the remaining said no. Among the science graduates, it was 50% yes and 50% chose not to say anything. Considering the commerce stream 63% of them said they are aware and 36% said they are unaware of the program. Those with family business background 48% said yes, the rest 51% said no, however the respondents with no family business background 64% said yes and 35% said no.

The below Tables 2 & 3 represents, when asked about the benefit of mentoring program, 43.5% male respondent said it is helpful in gaining business aptitude, 50% choose not to say anything, while only 6.5% respondent said the program is not helpful at all. Other side, out of 32 female respondent, 69% believed mentoring is supportive, 28% were undecided and merely 1 female said no to the question. Interestingly, 61% respondent with no family business background stated that mentoring program is helpful, while 39% stated mentoring will not be helpful.

QUESTION-2 Are You Aware of Using Digital Media Platforms In The Process of Mentoring?					
		Yes	No	Total	
Gender	Male	28	18	46	N
		60.9	39.1	100	%
	Female	18	14	32	N
		56.3	43.8	100	%
Education	Arts	26	17	43	N
		60.5	39.5	100	%
	Science	8	8	16	N
		50	50	100	%
	Commerce	12	7	19	N
		63.2	36.8	100	%
Family business	Yes	13	14	27	N
		48.1	51.9	100	%
	No	33	18	51	N
		64.7	35.3	100	%

QUESTION-3 TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU THINK MENTORING HELPS IN GAINING BUSINESS APTITUDE?						
		Yes, to a large extent	Can't Say	No, Not at All	Total	
Gender	Male	20	23	03	46	N
		43.5	50.0	6.5	100	%
	Female	22	9	1	32	N
		68.8	28.1	3.1	100	%
Education	Arts	21	20	2	43	N
		48.8	46.5	4.7	100	%
	Science	9	6	1	16	N
		56.3	37.5	6.3	100	%
	Commerce	12	6	1	19	N
		63.2	31.6	5.3	100	%
Family business	Yes	11	12	04	27	N
		40.7	44.4	14.8	100	%
	No	31	20	0	51	N
		60.8	39.2	0	100	%

The below Table 4 represents a large number 78.3% male are interested to use e-platforms for mentorship program, same with female respondents 87.5% female are keen to utilize e-resources. With regards to the education background majority of respondents 79.1% (arts), 75% (science) and 94.7% (commerce) stream are intent to have mentoring program online. To the same question, respondent with no family business background 90.2% are open to accept the program.

Table 4					
ACCEPTANCE FOR E-MENTORING PROGRAM					
QUESTION-4 IF YOU ARE PROVIDED WITH MENTORSHIP USING E-PLATFORMS WOULD YOU ACCEPT IT?					
		Yes	No	Total	
Gender	Male	36	10	46	N
		78.3	21.7	100	%
	Female	28	4	32	N
		87.5	12.5	100	%
Education	Arts	34	9	43	N
		79.1	20.1	100	%
	Science	12	4	16	N
		75.0	25.0	100	%
	Commerce	18	1	19	N
		94.7	5.3	100	%
Family business	Yes	18	9	27	N
		66.7	33.3	100	%
	No	46	5	51	N
		90.2	9.8	100	%

Below is the inferential data presented to explain the relationship between gender, education and business as family background with regard to the mentioned factors.

Table 5				
INFERENTIAL DATA				
FACTOR-1 ARE YOU AWARE OF MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS FOR BUSINESS APTITUDE DEVELOPMENT?				
	Critical value	df	Table value	Level
Gender	0.767	1	3.84	95%
Education	4.158	2	5.99	
Family business	0.272	1	3.84	
FACTOR-2 ARE YOU AWARE OF USING DIGITAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN THE PROCESS OF MENTORING?				
Gender	0.166	1	3.84	95%
Education	0.710	2	5.99	
Family business	2.000	1	3.84	
FACTOR-3 TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU THINK MENTORING HELPS IN GAINING BUSINESS APTITUDE?				
Gender	4.864	2	5.99	95%
Education	1.360	4	9.49	
Family business	8.990	2	5.99	
FACTOR-4 IF YOU ARE PROVIDED WITH MENTORSHIP USING E-PLATFORMS WOULD YOU ACCEPT IT?				
Gender	1.094	1	3.84	95%
Education	2.876	2	5.99	
Family business	6.637	1	3.84	

Ho: There is no significant relationship between gender, education and business as family background with regard to awareness of mentorship program for business aptitude development.

Data Interpretation: The results of analyzed data revealed that the calculated chi-square value with regards to gender, education and family business as background is less than the table critical value at 95% level of significance. Hence, the hypothesis of significant relationship cannot be rejected. Therefore, the interpretation would be there is no significant relationship between independent variable and the dependent variable, the stated factor.

H₀: There is no significant relationship between gender, education and business as family background with regard to awareness about the use of digital media platforms in the process of mentoring.

Data Interpretation: The calculated chi-square value with regards to the three variables is less than the table critical value. Therefore, the hypothesis cannot be rejected. Therefore, alternative hypothesis that reveals that there is no major difference among independent variable and dependent variable.

H₀: There is no significant relationship between gender, education and business as family background with regard to the support of e-mentoring in gaining business aptitude.

Data Interpretation: The analyzed data reveals that the independent variable like gender and education are not associated with support of e-mentoring in gaining business aptitude, in this case the calculated chi-square value is less than the table critical value. Hence, the hypothesis of no significant relationship cannot be rejected. However, with regards to family business background the hypothesis of no significance relationship is rejected at 95% are the calculated chi-square value is more than the table critical value at 2 df. The interpretation reveals that respondent with family business background agree that mentoring helps in gaining business aptitude.

H₀: There is no significant relationship between gender, education and business as family background with regards to the choice of e-platforms to accept mentorship program.

Data Interpretation: Table 5 reveals that respondents with family business as background have significant relationship with the dependent variable. The analyzed data shows that calculated chi-square value is more than table critical value. However, the other two variables, gender and education, the chi-square value to less than the verified table.

DISCUSSION

Cascio & Gaskar (2001) reveals that through e-mentoring undergraduate students improves their development of professional identity and when e-mentoring done by post-graduate students, it is beneficial to undergraduate students. A similar study, (Hamilton & Scandura, 2003), shows that technology (e-mentoring) affects both mentor and mentee through its interaction with individual factors (gender, ethnicity, age, and personality). Technology is affected by situational factors, social factors, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. This study is inconsonance with the findings of the current study where there are no gender differences in the use of technology in learning. The current research data and findings indicate the following points which can be considered in developing e-mentoring on a variety of programs to specific groups.

1. No significant relationship can be attributed between gender, education and family business background to launch e-mentoring.
2. The general awareness about e-mentoring program is found to be there among students.
3. The awareness among students on e-mentorship for Business Development Program is found to be low.
4. In general, the students do not strongly believe that e-mentoring helps in gaining business aptitude. The study also reveals readiness and interest among students to accept e-platforms for e-mentoring.
5. A unique finding of the study is the students with no family business background in general have good business aptitude, however e-mentoring can help support in developing entrepreneurial traits.

CONCLUSION

Rajasthan, a state in the north-west part of India, where the present study has been conducted is traditionally known for business and replete with business communities. These communities have traditional business based on locally available resources. The greatest advantage of these business communities of the state is that they have been able to spread across the length and breadth of India and settle as successful businessman in far off and little known places which are culturally different. It is this reason the study was conducted to find out whether mentoring in business aptitude and entrepreneurial trait could enhance the business thinking among the youth who are pursuing different study programs in various colleges and universities. Recent research interest in media and entrepreneurship has shown that “*innovation and creativity*” are more frequently studied as they are the joint characteristic of media and entrepreneurship.....using media to encourage entrepreneurship can be very instructive.

The finding suggests that there is no relationship between gender and educational level in relation to business aptitude. Though most have some or other family business background, e-mentoring for business doesn't seem to be related. It is because of the nature of the community and the business development, there is a lot of awareness on entrepreneurship. This awareness doesn't reflect in the thinking of youth that e-mentoring would enhance their business aptitude. However, the study has shown that the youth (graduates) have evinced keen interest and readiness to accept e-mentoring to enhance their business skills.

Even in those families who do not have business background, their wards have shown readiness to accept business development program through e-mentoring. It is a combination of the socio-economic background of the people in the state and sustained development of businesses that has led to the new thinking of accepting programs related to business through various platforms including online mentoring

RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends that the policy makers in India from different ministries like the telecom, trade and finance, education and information and communication should develop policies to promote online mentoring as a program in various colleges and universities. This effort will be within the vision of government of India (Vision, 2020) Make in India program which is aimed promoting startups, supporting SME's both financially and technically and massive program “*SWAYAM*” of ministry of human resource development which promotes e-learning.

The education sector should build e-mentoring or online learning as a policy in their vision document. Every state which has a very strong “*Department of science and technology*” should include online training and learning to develop skills among youth. Department of science

and technology' at the national level should also promote e-mentoring under its occasional training Bachelor Vocational Training (B.Voc.).

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