

Research Paper

## Effectiveness of Peer Mentoring on University Student Retention

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### ABSTRACT

College student retention is a nagging problem everywhere. Among the many strategies designed to keep students from dropping out, none has proven more successful than peer mentoring. Drawing on studies that are current, this article shall examine why peer mentoring helps students persist and how it can be made to work in practice or why not if things turn out differently. Student dropouts are examined for the mistakes made and the findings of this research cutout best practice recommendations.

**Keywords:** *Peer Mentoring, Student Retention, University, Academic Support, And Higher Education*

University attrition rates are widely recognized as a critical performance metric for institutions of higher learning and are often the focus of both educational policy formulation and institutional improvement initiatives. Elevated student dropout rates not only jeopardize the future prospects of individual students but also tarnish the reputation of academic institutions. In recent years, many universities have witnessed persistently high dropout rates, prompting a need for robust retention strategies.

Among the strategies gaining increased attention is **peer mentoring**, a developmental relationship wherein a more experienced student (the mentor) supports a less experienced student (the mentee)—typically a first-year student—in making academic, social, and emotional adjustments to university life. Peer mentoring is seen not only as a support mechanism but also as a proactive intervention to facilitate student engagement, improve performance, and ultimately reduce attrition.

This article investigates the **effectiveness of peer mentoring** in addressing student dropout rates in universities. Specifically, it explores the methods used in peer mentoring programs, the challenges faced in their implementation, the existing research gaps in the current literature, and practical recommendations for optimizing such initiatives. The central question guiding this study is: *To what extent is peer mentoring effective in improving student retention rates at the university level?*

By addressing this question, the article seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how structured peer support mechanisms can enhance students' sense of belonging, academic

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confidence, and persistence—factors that are essential for student success and institutional excellence.

### RESEARCH QUESTION AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The central research question guiding this study is:

*"To what extent does one-to-one or peer mentoring impact university student drop-out rates, and what are the processes which contribute to its success?"*

This research question aims to explore not only the measurable impact of peer mentoring on student retention but also to delve into the qualitative processes that make peer mentoring effective. The focus is on understanding both the **quantitative outcomes** (such as reduced dropout rates) and the **qualitative dynamics** (including academic, emotional, and social support) that peer mentoring programs offer to students, particularly those in their early years of university education.

University students, especially first-year entrants, often face academic pressures, social isolation, and a lack of institutional navigation skills, which can lead to early disengagement and dropout. Peer mentoring has emerged as a potentially transformative intervention, offering personalized support from experienced peers who have successfully navigated similar challenges. Through mentorship, students gain not only academic guidance but also emotional encouragement and a stronger sense of belonging within the university environment.

The broader purpose of this study is to examine how different elements—such as mentor-mentee relationships, communication frequency, cultural compatibility, and institutional support—contribute to the success or limitations of peer mentoring. Additionally, the study seeks to map out common **plans, challenges, and lived experiences** of both mentors and mentees across various mentoring models. This will help to identify best practices and potential obstacles in program implementation.

Ultimately, the research aims to provide valuable insights that can inform the development of more **targeted, inclusive, and effective peer mentoring programs**, adaptable to diverse student populations and institutional contexts, thereby helping reduce university attrition rates in a meaningful and sustainable manner.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Mentoring has long been recognized as an effective and valuable strategy in higher education for enhancing student success, integration, and persistence. In recent years, **peer mentoring** has emerged as a particularly relevant intervention to address the increasing challenge of student retention in universities.

Gehreke et al. (2024) conducted a comprehensive systematic review examining the effectiveness of peer mentoring during the initial phase of university studies. Their findings demonstrated that peer mentoring positively impacts several critical areas of student life, including **academic and social integration, emotional well-being, development of soft skills, and sense of belonging**. Of particular interest is the insight that **digital peer mentoring**, while convenient and accessible, tends to be more effective when **combined with traditional face-to-face interactions**, highlighting the importance of interpersonal connection. The review also found **minimal gender differences** in outcomes, suggesting that peer mentoring is broadly effective across male and female student populations.

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In a longitudinal study, Ayoobzadeh (2022) explored the influence of peer mentoring on **doctoral students' motivation and retention**. The research concluded that mentored students demonstrated **greater academic perseverance** and were less inclined to seek external support, reinforcing the idea that peer networks can serve as effective buffers against stress, isolation, and attrition, particularly in highly demanding academic environments.

### GAP ANALYSIS

While existing literature underscores the value of peer mentoring in improving retention and engagement, there remain notable research gaps:

1. **Limited focus on process-oriented mechanisms** – Few studies deeply explore *how* peer mentoring works beyond outcomes, such as the role of empathy, communication style, and institutional support in shaping its effectiveness.
2. **Scarcity of data across diverse student populations** – Most studies emphasize traditional undergraduate cohorts, with limited exploration of mentoring impacts on first-generation students, minority groups, or part-time learners.
3. **Insufficient comparative studies** – There is a lack of comparative research between different mentoring models (e.g., one-to-one, group, digital) and their relative effectiveness in various institutional settings.
4. **Contextual limitations** – Much of the available research is based in Western contexts; there is a dearth of region-specific studies, particularly within developing nations or culturally diverse universities.

Addressing these gaps would contribute significantly to designing **evidence-based, inclusive, and adaptable peer mentoring frameworks** for higher education institutions globally.

### 1. Theoretical Framework

Based on Tinto's Theory of Student Integration (1993), peer mentoring is effective because an integrated academic and social environment leads to students who stay in school. When students feel connected to their peers as well as the institution, they will more likely continue in post-secondary studies. Academic guidance, emotional support, and social connectedness are all parts of the integration of peer mentoring offers (Tinto 1993). Also, Vygotsky's Social Development Theory find the importance of social interaction in cognitive development. This suggests that peer learning can enhance understanding and involvement.

### 2. Benefits of Peer Mentoring on Retention

- **Academic Support:** Mentors assist mentees with study strategies, time management, finding resources at the university and understanding course material. It is this academic scaffolding that helps mentees to navigate challenges and to seek more satisfactory academic progress. According to Colvin and Ashman (2010), in structured peer mentoring programs, mentees reported higher confidence in their academic abilities and showed improvement in GPA scores over non-participants.
- **Social Integration:** In the university, new learners especially need peer mentoring most. They face social isolation, an inability to adapt to a sudden change in their formless lives, etc. Social networks are established, and campus activities are carried

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out together. Peer mentoring enables all its members to feel included. Rahenbrant et al (2014) made a similar corroboration that students were more likely to stay at university if they felt they belonged. This feeling of belonging and its causality on retention rates was also directly linked to an increase in student engagement while participating in peer mentoring activities.

- **Emotional and Psychological Support:** To alleviate tension on campus, where students are often stressed out and emotionally troubled, scholars have now also turned their attention. Problems like these are particularly likely to crop up for students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds or who are the first in their families to study for a degree. The peer mentors help with empathy and listening, and they go through some of the same things, so many people come for emotional support from them. Terrion and Leonard (2007) stressed the importance of emotional connectedness in the mentoring relationship and found that mentees who experienced this felt greater resilience and expressed less of a desire to withdraw from their studies.
- **Implementation Strategy:** All well-run peer mentoring programs are characterised by rigorous recruitment, training and ongoing support for mentors. Programs should be broadly publicised and aligned with institutional goals. Practices that work include matching mentors with mentees from similar academic majors or interests, promoting regular meetings with their mentor and integrating feedback channels. And also, mentor training should cover communication skills, cultural sensitivity, mental health awareness and ethical issues (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). To make mentorship happen through digital literacy, platforms can form a basis for virtual mentoring, which should be more convenient than traditional face-to-face community meetings. Especially on the post-pandemic college campus after 2024 (Gehreke et al.).

### 3. Mentoring Programs' Challenges

How much beneficial it can be, there are often impediments to be surmounted in providing for peer mentoring:

- **Mismatch Between Mentor and Mentee:** If individuals do not have good conversation companions, they will neither achieve professional help nor can they support each other in their deep emotional passages together.
- **Inconsistent Participation:** The programs are voluntary; they can be hit or miss. There might be a big gap between times of high or low participation.
- **Resource Constraints:** Good mentoring requires a supportive administration, funding, and oversight staff - all of which may be lacking in resources for institutions where space was already tight anyway.
- **Training Deficiencies:** Without sufficient training, mentors could easily pass along false information to their mentees or fail to pay enough attention in crucial areas (Colvin & Ashman, 2010).

Overcoming these challenges requires efforts in program development, adequate funding, and ongoing evaluation processes.

### CASE STUDIES

- Colvin and Ashman (2010) studied a peer mentoring system at a U.S. university and found an absolute improving improvement for participating first-year students. A not insignificant catalyst in this transformation is simply to ask others for help.
- Ward, Thomas, and Disch (2009) conducted a comparative case study analysing traditional versus hybrid peer mentoring models in higher education. Their empirical findings showed that hybrid peer mentoring — combining face-to-face and online support — resulted in significantly higher student retention rates than either of the other two means. Both methods of mentoring can be equally successful for goal attainment.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

#### 1. Embed peer mentoring within a more extensive retention framework:

Peer mentoring has great value, but it must not happen in isolation. Universities must be committed to peer mentoring as part of a greater retention action plan that includes academic advising, mental health counselling, and career counselling. Peer mentoring can bridge students to these services; however, mentors will need to be trained to identify the signs of an issue and connect students effectively (Collier, 2015).

#### 2. Employ data-informed program design and ongoing evaluation:

Universities should collect data to frame the impact of mentoring over time using retention data, GPA data, engagement metrics, and qualitative measures. Institutions must also go beyond the surface level to examine what student population might take the most from their service by using predictive analytics, allowing institutions to engage in interventions for specific groups of students instead of interventions that serve all students haphazardly (Jacobi, 1991).

#### 3. Increase the diversity of mentors and cultural competency:

Mentors should represent the diversity of the students with whom they work. Program administrators should prioritise and recruit mentors in various cultures, languages, socio-economic status and levels of academic preparedness. Additionally, administering cultural competency training should be a requirement to ensure that mentors can support underrepresented students free of bias or preconceived notions (Tinto, 1993).

### CONCLUSION

For students in peer-assisted therapy, not only does it help them to perform better academically and socially, but it also gives emotional support and helps them gain a feeling of belonging. Transitional justice programs are difficult to implement, but with good structure and strong supervision, this method can lower dropout rates significantly while improving the overall student experience. Mentoring by peers is cost-effective and helpful. It also benefits both mentor and mentee. At the same time, higher education is wrestling with the crisis of student retention. As a solution grounded in evidence, peer mentoring appears not only inexpensive but also beneficial for all parties involved. Future research on mentoring should consider longer-term effects of the process and how technology can help.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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