

School-based mentors' affective commitment to the mentor role: Role clarity, self-efficacy, mentor education and mentor experience as antecedents

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Abstract

Mentors' commitment to the mentor role is assumed to affect the quality of mentoring. Although studies have examined affective commitment as a potential source of favourable outcomes in work life, not much has been written about mentors' commitment to their role as mentors. Based on social exchange theory, this article provides additional insight by exploring the statistical associations between school-based mentors' affective commitment as the dependent variable and role clarity, self-efficacy, mentor education and mentor experience as antecedents. Results indicate that role clarity and self-efficacy present the strongest associations. Mentor education is also highlighted as an interesting antecedent to affective commitment.

Keywords: mentoring, affective commitment, social exchange theory, role clarity, mentor education

Introduction

Performance is easier to control in some professions than in others. For example, the best fish-gutter is the one who guts the most fish in the least time. However, controlling the performance of mentors is not as straightforward and probably not particularly beneficial. Conditions such as mentors' personal characteristics, preferred form of communication and chosen methods are likely to affect their ability to contribute to mentees' professional development. The exact outcomes of such variables influencing mentoring are very hard to pin down. For this reason, it is considered important that mentors be affectively committed to their work as mentors. Such commitment on the part of mentors is likely to trigger efforts that go above and beyond the minimum requirements of a mentor (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988; Kanter, 1968). This is the justification for focusing this article on the affective commitment of mentors, particularly those in the role of mentoring beginning teachers.

Mentoring is related to beneficial outcomes (Hudson, 2013; Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Noe, 1988; Payne & Huffman, 2005; Rollins, Rutherford & Nickell, 2014; Viator & Scandura, 1991) and the need for beneficial mentoring for beginning teachers is considerable due to the challenges of teacher attrition. This is especially the case in Norway due to the challenges beginning teachers experience when entering the teaching profession (Caspersen & Raaen, 2014; Gjefsen, Gunnes & Stølen, 2014;

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Ministry of Education and Research, 2009; The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2013). However, some studies have shown that the assumed positive outcomes of mentoring do not necessarily occur (Eby, Butts, Lockwood & Simon, 2004; Harrison, Dymoke & Pell, 2006; Hobson, Ashby, Malderez & Tomlinson, 2009; Hobson & Malderez, 2013; Kram, 1988). Based on such contrasting results of mentoring, it is interesting to find out more about the conditions driving beneficial mentoring for beginning teachers. One underlying assumption of this work is that whether mentors are highly affectively committed to the mentor role is likely to affect the quality of the mentoring.

Outcomes of affective commitment

Researchers have found that affective commitment is related to a number of beneficial outcomes, such as better work performance (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch & Topolnytsky, 2002; Takeuchi, Wang, Marinova & Yao, 2009), strong engagement with the job (Rhoades, Eisenberger & Armeli, 2001), attendance (Meyer *et al.*, 2002), citizenship behaviour (Colquitt, Scott & LePine, 2007) and employees' exertion of effort to achieve the goals of the organisation as well as to involve themselves in the organisation's activities (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). Likewise, studies have shown that affective commitment is positively related to altruism operationalised as voluntarily being available to help others (Hartmann, Rutherford, Feinberg & Anderson, 2014). Meyer *et al.* (2002) found that affective commitment is negatively related to stress and work-family conflict, while Colquitt *et al.* (2007) demonstrated that it is inversely related to counterproductive behaviour such as making threats, disregarding safety procedures, tardiness and absenteeism.

In the context of education research, affective commitment, which is understood as a positive, affective bond between the teacher and the school, is seen as an important quality in the school staff (Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink & Hofman, 2012; Firestone, 1996; Ingersoll, Quinn, Bobbitt & Alsalam, 1997). Mentors' commitment to their work as mentors is assumed to be an important contributor to mentees' professional development (Abell, Dillon, Hopkins, McInerney & O'Brien, 1995; Clutterbuck, 2004; Wildman, Magliaro, Niles & Niles, 1992). However, committing to the mentor role has been described as challenging, as it demands that mentors move beyond their identity as teachers (Bullough, 2005). Consequently, it is important to separate the affective commitment to the mentor role from the affective commitment to the teacher role. This work aims to contribute to the field of mentoring by illuminating drivers of school-based mentors' affective commitment to their mentor role.

Mentors' affective commitment to the mentor role

Commitment to work is a multidimensional construct, and researchers have offered different classifications of commitment in the literature (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). The affective, desire-driven form of commitment is based on the preservation of shared values as well as personal involvement and identification with the work (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). Research on affective commitment has typically focused on commitment to an organisation or the workplace, not to a specific role (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer, Bobocel & Allen, 1991; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; Meyer *et al.*, 2002). However, Van Emmerik, Baugh and Euwema (2005) found that individuals who are highly committed to their organisation are no more likely to offer mentoring to other organisational members than those who are less committed. This finding indicates that a high level of general affective commitment to the workplace does not necessarily make an individual committed to mentoring.

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Other researchers have likewise found the distinction between commitment to an organisation and commitment to a profession to be fruitful (Sheldon, 1971). Some have highlighted that identification with a profession and the development of an occupational role identity are separate phenomena (Becker & Carper, 1956; Miksza & Berg, 2013; Molinero & Pereira, 2013). However, researchers have also found such different forms of commitment to be interrelated and overlapping (Morrow, 1983). Since the school-based mentors' primary job is to be a teacher for their own students, we argue that it is important to find out more about whether they feel committed to the mentor role specifically. In this article, based on Meyer *et al.* (1991) and Meyer *et al.* (2002), we define "affective commitment" as an emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the mentor role. We have developed an instrument to measure affective commitment to the mentor role.

The main purpose of this article is to explore how role clarity, self-efficacy, mentor education and mentor experience are associated with mentors' affective commitment to the mentor role. It is important to gain insight into the relations between these antecedents and mentors' affective commitment to their mentor role because:

1. The school leadership and school owners have little possibility of controlling the quality of the mentoring being performed. Such conditions underpin the relevance of knowledge about the variables associated with mentors' commitment to their role.
2. It is interesting for mentor educators to gain more knowledge about mentors' affective commitment in order to strengthen their priorities with regard to mentor training.
3. Policymakers need knowledge about the antecedents of mentors' affective commitment in order to facilitate conditions that promote affectively committed mentors.

Theoretical Background and Hypothesis

Social exchange theory and mentors' affective commitment

Social exchange theory is based on the idea that human interaction is about the exchange of social and material resources, and is steered by norms of reciprocity. People engage in relationships in which the benefits and the rewards are greater than the costs (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961). The social exchange framework has been found to be fruitful in attempts to gain insights into relationships between employees, and between organisations and their employees (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986; Richard, Ismail, Bhuian & Taylor, 2009). The focus of different studies based on social exchange theory has varied, but they have in common that they aimed to illuminate relationships in which individuals exchange resources and seek balance in the give-and-take of such processes (Takeuchi *et al.*, 2009). According to social exchange theory, the relationships employees experience in an organisation contribute to shaping their behaviour and attitudes towards their organisation (Richard *et al.*, 2009) and can contribute to favourable outcomes such as affective commitment (Christophersen, Elstad & Turmo, 2015; Payne & Huffman, 2005; Richard *et al.*, 2009; Shore, Tetrick, Lynch & Barksdale, 2006).

Exchange is considered essential in the mentor relationship, and social exchange theory is considered an appropriate theoretical lens for the study of such relationships (Ensher, Thomas & Murphy, 2001; Richard *et al.*, 2009). In relation to mentoring, it is essential to ask what mentors and mentees gain when involved in a mentoring relationship. Compared with non-mentored employees, mentees have reported higher levels of satisfaction, interest in helping others and better work

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performance (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz & Lima, 2004; Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng & DuBois, 2008; Evertson & Smithey, 2000; Rollins *et al.*, 2014). Mentoring has also been found to influence beginning teachers' beliefs about their future in teaching, their abilities and their management skills as well as how they interact with pupils (Dahl, 2006; Helms-Lorenz, Slof & van de Grift, 2013; Hudson, 2013; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Mentors are likely to gain positive outcomes such as personal development, a sense of self-worth, satisfaction, increased skills and reputation (Clutterbuck, 2004; Kram, 1988). The affective commitment of mentors is likely to be an important precondition for such reciprocal exchanges. In this work, mentors' affective commitment to the mentor role is assumed to be a driving force for beneficial exchange processes in mentoring. However, we further argue that the exchange in mentoring relationships and the reciprocal gains for mentors and mentees are also potential drivers for affective commitment to the school as an organisation and to the teaching profession.

Role clarity and affective commitment

Role clarity refers to the beliefs individuals have about expectations and behaviours associated with their work role (Hall, 2008; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek & Rosenthal, 1964). Two aspects of role clarity are relevant in the context of the mentor role: goal clarity, which can be described as the extent to which the outcome goals and objectives of the job are understood by the employee; and process clarity, which can be described as the extent to which the employee is certain about how to perform his or her job (Hall, 2008; Sawyer, 1992). Meyer *et al.* (2002) found role conflict, the contrast to role clarity, to be negatively related to affective commitment. Based on this, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: The level of role clarity is positively related to the level of affective commitment to the mentor role.

Self-efficacy and affective commitment

Self-efficacy describes people's beliefs about what they can do with what they have under different circumstances. Bandura (1997) stated, "Self-efficacy is an important contributor to performance accomplishments" (p. 37). It is also directly related to people's perception of success in past situations and influences how employees define their roles (Jones, 1986). Positive associations between employees' perceived competence and their level of commitment have been found by others (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer *et al.*, 2002). Those who report high self-efficacy are found to experience more satisfaction, which again fosters affective commitment (O'Neill & Mone, 1998; Tschannen-Moran, 2007). Researchers have found teachers' efficacy to be related to commitment to teaching (Coladarci, 1992; Evans & Tribble, 1986). Here we theorise that self-efficacy is linked to the affective commitment of mentors of beginning teachers. Based on such findings, we draw the following hypothesis:

H2: The level of self-efficacy is positively related to the level of affective commitment to the mentor role.

Mentor education and affective commitment

A strategy devised by education authorities to strengthen mentoring activities has made mentor education currently available at several Norwegian universities and university colleges. The intention is that mentors will contribute to the retention and professional development of beginning teachers

(Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). This attempt to raise the quality of mentoring through formal mentor education has been described as “unique in the European and international context” (Smith & Ulvik, 2014, p. 265). Mentor education has been found to challenge mentors’ beliefs about beneficial mentoring and to contribute to a deeper understanding of the mentor role (Lejonberg, Elstad, & Christophersen, 2015; Ulvik & Sunde, 2013). Mentors who have completed training have been found to have a stronger positive effect than untrained mentors on the classroom leadership of newly qualified teachers (Evertson & Smithey, 2000). Participation in groups has been found to be related to commitment to the occupational title (Becker & Carper, 1956). Perceived support has also been shown to be positively related to affective commitment (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Rhoades *et al.*, 2001; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2009). Participation in mentor education extends one’s network with others working with mentoring and provides opportunities to discuss role-related issues with peers and course leaders (Lejonberg *et al.*, 2015; Ulvik & Sunde, 2013). Together, these assumptions lead to the following hypothesis:

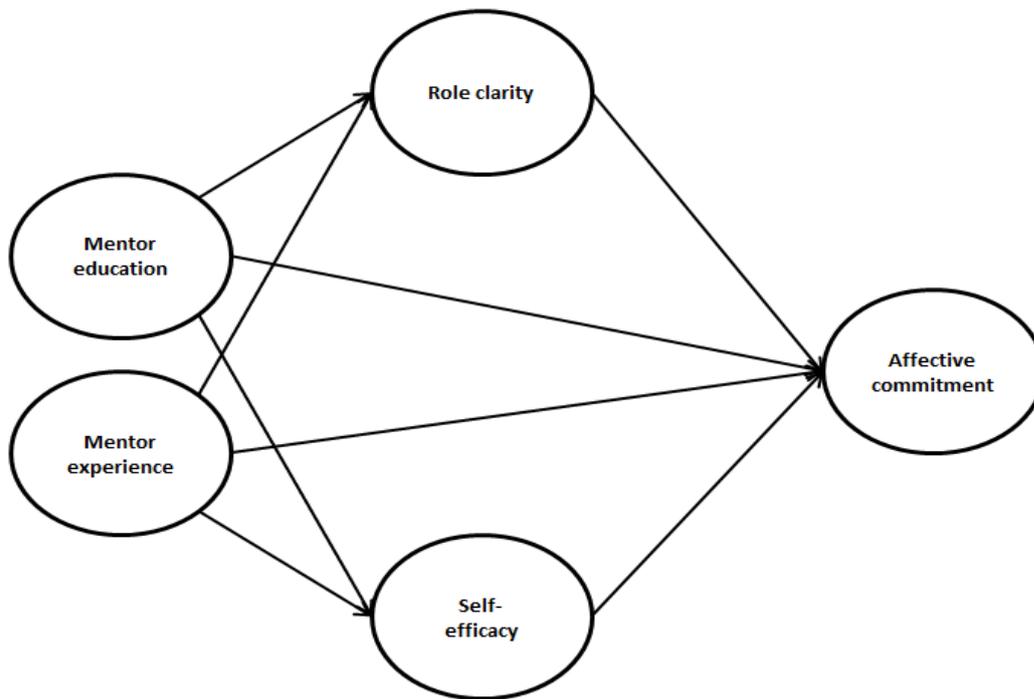
H3: Completed mentor education is positively related to the level of affective commitment to the mentor role.

Mentor experience and affective commitment

It has been shown that mastery experiences are likely to lead to self-efficacy, and further to affective commitment (Bandura, 1997; O’Neill & Mone, 1998; Rhoades *et al.*, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2007). Sheldon (1971) also found a positive relation between work experience and professional commitment. Possible positive outcomes of mentoring for mentors are well known (Clutterbuck, 2004; Hobson *et al.*, 2009; Kram, 1988). Those who work as mentors are likely to gain opportunities to reflect, to engage in intellectual challenges, to experience personal satisfaction and to enjoy increased skills and reputations (Clutterbuck, 2004). Experiences with such outcomes of the role as mentor are likely to make mentors more affectively committed to the mentor role, which leads to the following hypothesis:

H4: The level of mentor experience is positively related to the level of affective commitment to the mentor role.

We draw the following theoretical model:



Model 1: A theoretical model showing assumed relationships between role clarity, mentor education, mentor experience, self-efficacy and affective commitment.

Methodology

We tested the hypotheses using data collected from a self-report survey of 146 mentors attending university-based mentor education programmes throughout Norway. Data were collected by administrators at lectures these mentors attended, which resulted in very close to a 100% response rate from the mentors present. The informants reported between 0 and 29 years of experience as mentors, and 91% had experience with work as a mentor. The mean mentor experience was 3.9 years. Additionally, 74% of the informants had completed 15 or more credits of university-based mentor education.

Measures

A questionnaire was constructed based on measurement instruments previously reported in the literature. Reported instruments on self-efficacy, role clarity and affective commitment were adapted to the mentoring context (Bandura, 1997; Becker & Carper, 1956; Haladyna & Rodriguez, 2013). In the survey, the mentors responded to items on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from “totally agree” to “totally disagree”. The concepts of role clarity, self-efficacy and affective commitment were measured with four items each. Using structural equation modeling, we explored empirical

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associations with affective commitment as a dependent variable and role clarity, self-efficacy, mentor education and mentor experience as independent variables.

Dependent variable

Based on Meyer, Allen and Smith (1993), we adapted our measure of affective commitment to relate to the mentor role. The original construct is among the most common measures of affective commitment (Colquitt *et al.*, 2007). The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.80 for our adapted construct is satisfactory. The items included to measure this variable were the following statements:

- The mentor job means a lot to me on a personal level.
- I am proud to be a mentor.
- I am enthusiastic about the mentor role.
- I am pleased to be able to sign up as a mentor.

Independent variables

Role clarity was measured by four items based on Hall's (2008) classification of two aspects of role clarity and adapted to the context of mentoring. The two aspects of role clarity include goal clarity, which describes the extent to which the goals and objectives of the job are clearly perceived, and process clarity, which describes the extent to which the individual is certain about how to perform his or her job (Hall, 2008; Sawyer, 1992). The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.90 for this construct is satisfactory. The items included were:

- I know how to approach the role of mentoring beginning teachers.
- I know exactly what my responsibilities are as a mentor for beginning teachers.
- I know how to make use of the time I have for mentoring in a suitable way.
- I know exactly what is expected of me as a mentor to beginning teachers.

Self-efficacy was operationalised based on items from Jones (1986) and adapted to the mentoring context in accordance with the view that "teacher efficacy scales should be linked to the various knowledge domains" (Bandura, 1997, p. 243). The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.86 for this construct is satisfactory. Self-efficacy was measured through these statements:

- I am certain I will manage to ensure that even the most uncertain beginning teachers experience good support in their first year of practice.
- I am certain that I will be able to practice good mentoring, no matter how well the beginning teachers master their job.
- I am certain I will be able to answer the beginning teachers' questions in a way that supports them in their first year of practice.

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- I am certain I will manage to help the beginning teachers master difficult situations in their work as teachers.

Mentor education was measured using a dichotomous variable that separated participants who had completed 15 or more credits in a mentor education programme from those who had not. In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate whether they had (1) no mentor education, (2) less than 15 credits in mentor education or (3) 15 or more credits in mentor education.

Experience was measured with an item asking how many years of experience respondents had working as mentors for beginning teachers. In our analyses, we made experience a dichotomous variable, separating mentors with 0 to 3 years of experience as mentors from those with more than 3 years of experience.

Analysis

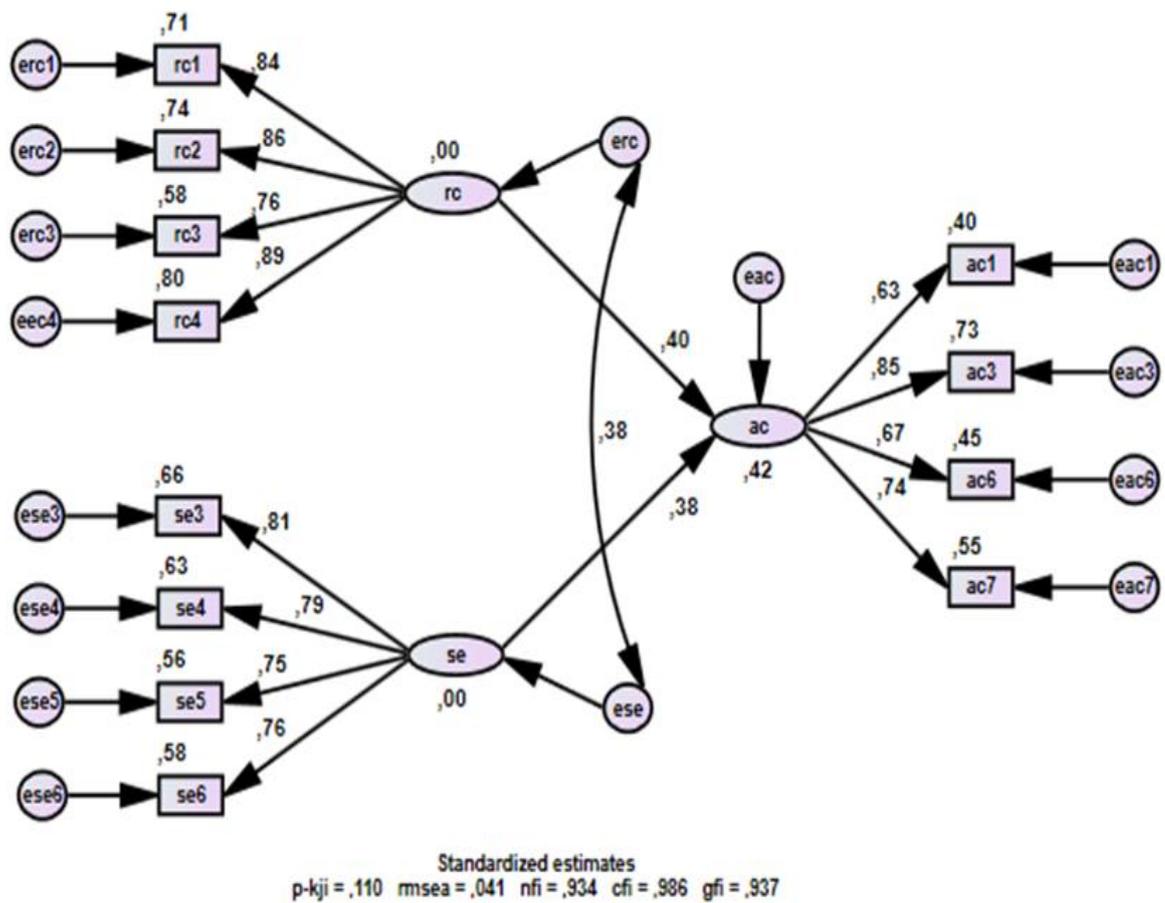
We used structural equation modeling to analyse the relationships between the variables in two models. Assessments of fit between models and data are based on the following indices: p-chi, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), normed fit index (NFI), comparative fit index (CFI) and goodness-of-fit index (GFI). A good fit is indicated by p-chi > 0.05, RMSEA < 0.05 and NFI, GFI and CFI > 0.95, and acceptable fit is indicated by RMSEA < 0.08 and NFI, GFI and CFI > 0.90 (Byrne, 2010; Kline, 2005). The measurement and structural models were estimated with IBM SPSS Amos 22. For Model 2, the values of p-chi = 0.110, RMSEA = 0.041, NFI = 0.934, CFI = 0.986 and GFI = 0.937 indicate that the first model has acceptable fit. For Model 3, the values of p-chi = 0.101, RMSEA = 0.039, NFI = 0.918, CFI = 0.984 and GFI = 0.927 show that the extended model also has acceptable fit.

Analytical models

In the following, we present two analytical models. Model 2 is an estimated structural model with only two independent variables. Model 3 is the extended estimated structural model, with four independent variables. Both models have affective commitment as the dependent variable. Ellipses represent the latent variables, circles represent measurement errors and rectangles represent the observed items. The structural model consists of terms with paths (arrows) between them. The path arrows indicate theoretically justified causal relationships and the numbers (standardised regression coefficients) reflect the estimated strength of the relationships. The strength increases together with the numerical value.

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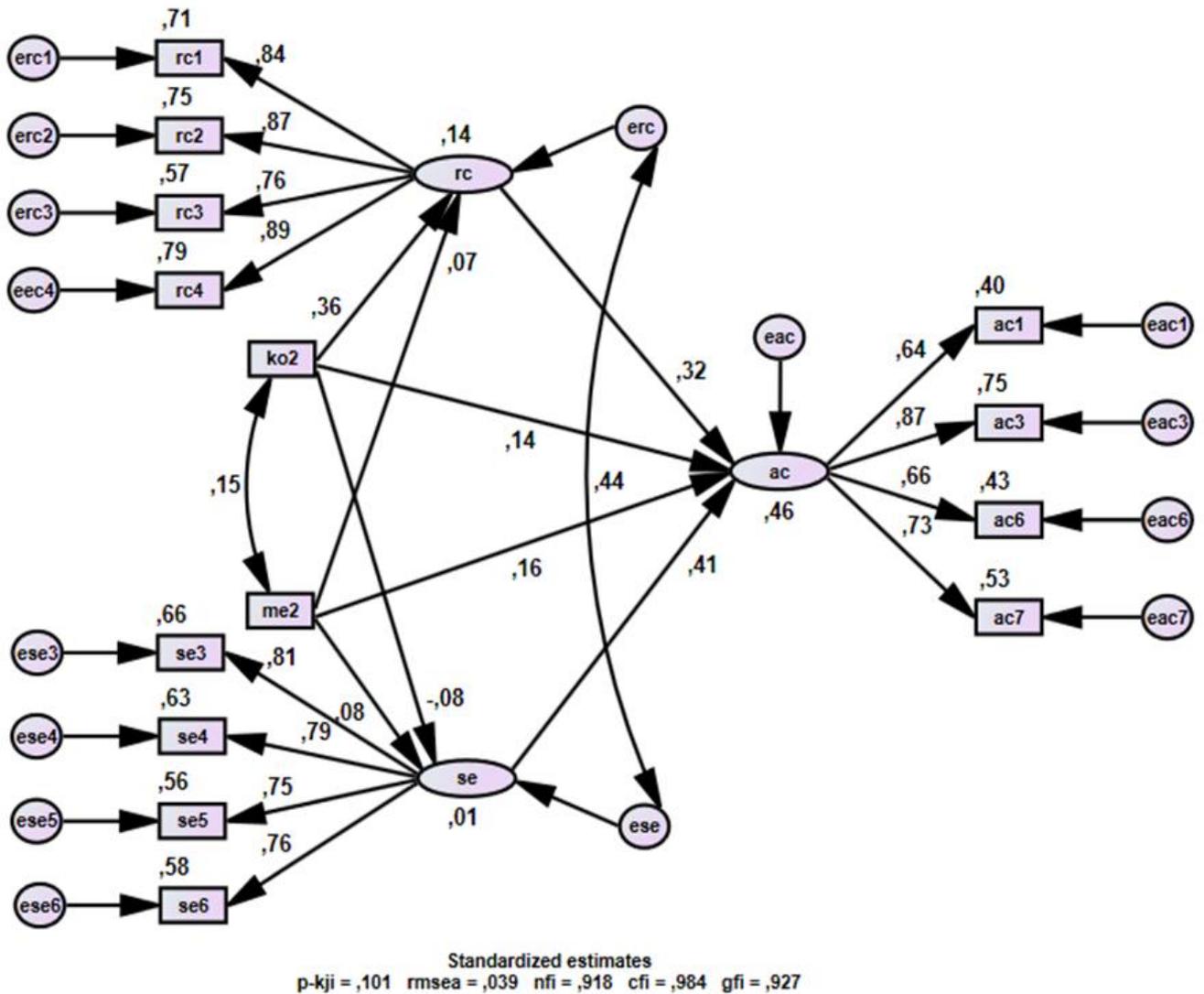
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Model 2: An estimated parsimonious model. Abbreviations: ac = affective commitment towards the mentor role, rc = role clarity in the mentor role and se = self-efficacy in the mentor role.

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Model 3: An estimated extended model. Abbreviations: ac = affective commitment towards the mentor role, rc = role clarity in the mentor role, ko2 = mentoring education, me2 = mentoring experience and se = self-efficacy in the mentor role.

Results

The structural equation models show which factors are statistically associated with affective commitment to the mentor role. Role clarity is positively related to affective commitment ($b_{(RC \rightarrow AC)} = 0.40$ in Model 2). When mentor education is added to the model, the estimated effect from role clarity is weakened ($b_{(RC \rightarrow AC)} = 0.32$ in Model 3), indicating that mentor education has an estimated direct

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effect on affective commitment, and also an estimated indirect effect through role clarity ($b_{(KO2 \rightarrow RC)} = 0.36$ and $b_{(KO2 \rightarrow AC)} = 0.14$ in Model 3). Also, self-efficacy is positively related to affective commitment ($b_{(SE \rightarrow AC)} = 0.38$ in Model 2 and 0.41 in Model 3). Mentor experience is likewise positively related to affective commitment; however, this estimated effect is quite low ($b_{(ME2 \rightarrow AC)} = 0.16$ in Model 3). It is also interesting that the level of role clarity is positively related to the level of self-efficacy ($r_{(RC \leftrightarrow SE)} = 0.38$ in Model 2 and 0.44 in Model 3). Table 1 indicates the relation of these findings to our hypotheses.

Number	Wording	Result
H1	The level of role clarity is positively related to the level of affective commitment to the mentor role.	Supported
H2	The level of self-efficacy is positively related to the level of affective commitment to the mentor role.	Supported
H3	Completed mentor education is positively related to the level of affective commitment to the mentor role.	Supported
H4	The level of mentor experience is positively related to the level of affective commitment to the mentor role.	Weakly supported

Table 1. Overview of hypotheses

Discussion and implications

Social exchange theory provides a beneficial framework for understanding the nature of mentoring relationships (Ensher *et al.*, 2001; Richard *et al.*, 2009). The idea that reciprocity drives social exchange theory implies that people engage in a relationship if the outcome of such engagement is greater than their effort. Due to the clear asymmetry in mentoring relationships, the extent to which reciprocity is realistic is an open question. Because our data is gathered from the mentors themselves, this study contributes insights into the mentors' role in the exchange processes in mentoring. However, when we highlight mentors' affective commitment to the mentor role as important for beneficial exchange processes in mentoring to happen, we are in danger of underestimating mentees' responsibility in beneficial exchange processes. Since mentoring is seen as a reciprocal exchange relationship, we acknowledge the importance of mentees' affective commitment and call for more research on this. Likewise, the exchange processes in a mentoring relationship are likely to drive affective commitment to the school as an organisation and to the teaching profession for both mentors and mentees.

Firestone and Rosenblum (1988) distinguished between different forms of commitment and denoted commitment to teaching as a commitment to "receiving fulfilment from exercising craft skill" and teachers' commitment to students as "a strong emotional bond, [...] often a personal caring" (p. 288). Likewise, we assume that affective commitment to the mentor role can consist of commitment to contributing to a mentee by exercising mentor skills and also commitment as personal care for the wellbeing of the mentee. Such nuances are likely to affect the exchange processes. We can imagine that mentors who are mainly concerned with how they perform their mentor role are in danger of hampering the potential positive outcomes of the exchange by being too technical or seeming to have no interest in the mentee as an individual. On the other hand, mentors who are mainly committed to

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their mentees' personal wellbeing are in danger of hampering the potential positive gains of the exchange processes if they fail to challenge the mentee or to provide useful feedback. Such distinctions are useful to illuminate mentoring as a balancing act where mentors need to make a variety of thoughtful decisions in the exchange processes to provide gains in the form of professional development for mentees.

Based on the assumption that affective commitment is important for the mentoring relationship to result in exchanges and gains, we contribute to the field of mentoring with more knowledge about the affective commitment of school-based mentors. We also contribute to more knowledge about mentors' dedication to their mentor role by adapting and using an instrument to measure affective commitment to the mentor role. Our results indicate that mentors' commitment to their mentor role is related to their self-efficacy and to whether they have a clear perception of their role. Mentor education also seems to play an interesting role, especially by contributing to affective commitment through role clarity.

Mentor education and role clarity as antecedents

Our first hypothesis is supported by the statistical association between role clarity and affective commitment (0.40 in Model 2), indicating that mentors who report high levels of self-efficacy also report high levels of affective commitment. The estimated direct effect of role clarity (0.32 in Model 3) indicates that mentor education has an indirect effect on affective commitment through role clarity. The direct estimated effect of mentor education on affective commitment (0.14 in Model 3) together with the estimated effect of mentor education on role clarity (0.36 in Model 3) indicates that the total estimated effect of mentor education on affective commitment in the model is moderate. These findings support our first and third hypotheses. It should be noted that although affective commitment was included as a dependent variable and mentor education as an independent variable, the potential causality could go in both directions. It is possible that participation in a mentor education programme is a result of a positive selection of teachers with high affective commitment to their mentoring challenges. More research is needed to find out more about why we have found an estimated effect between mentor education and affective commitment. In particular, studies comparing different forms of mentor education would be of interest.

Although some sort of training of school-based mentors is common internationally, the university-based mentor education in Norway is quite extensive (Smith & Ulvik, 2014). Norwegian authorities have emphasised education for school-based mentors (Ministry of Education and Research, 2009). Our findings can be seen as support for such efforts, as mentor education is positively related to mentors' perceived role clarity and mentors' affective commitment. These associations indicate that education contributes to mentors' awareness of what is involved in the mentor role. The terms "mentor" and "mentoring" could be described as vague terms that have positive associations and are therefore often used by people in organisations or by policymakers to show decisiveness and intent to contribute to quality in education (Lejonberg & Elstad, 2014). Such conditions indicate that relevant schooling is necessary for mentors to become aware of what is expected of them so they can feel committed to their mentor role.

Wildman *et al.* (1992) stated that "mentoring, like good teaching, should be defined by those who will carry it out" (p. 212). Mentor education can contribute to mentors' awareness of how to contribute to gains in the exchange processes of mentoring, introduce mentors to different approaches to mentoring, and also encourage mentors to draw their own conclusions based on the insights they

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achieve in the education process (Lejonberg *et al.*, 2015; Smith & Ulvik, 2014). We must consider the possibility that the arrows might move in the opposite direction; that is, that the estimated relationships can be considered in reverse, as is always the case with the used method. It could be that those mentors who feel more strongly committed to the mentor role in the first place are also those who seek and complete mentor education. However, Van Emmerik *et al.* (2005) did not find support for their assumption about a positive relationship between affective commitment and propensity to mentor, which supports the direction of the arrows in our model.

Organisational support is found to be strongly related (0.64) to affective commitment (Meyer *et al.*, 2002). This relation is also claimed by Wayne, Shore and Liden (1997): “In exchange for organizational support, employees become affectively committed to their organizations and less likely to leave, but in exchange for high-quality relationships with their superiors, they perform well” (p. 107). It could be that findings regarding the relevance of perceived support could contribute to our interpretation of the findings related to mentor education in our material. When involved in mentor education programmes, mentors gain a network with other mentors as well as opportunities to discuss challenges and work-related experiences connected to their mentor role. Contents such as group work and writing of papers throughout the education period call for joint reflection upon mentoring practise. Such content and the methods used in mentor education are intended to support mentors in their professional development and might illuminate the relation between mentor education, perceived role clarity and mentors’ affective commitment (Lejonberg *et al.*, 2015; Smith & Ulvik, 2014; Ulvik & Sunde, 2013). Further investigation of the relevance of support related to mentor education is needed to corroborate such assumptions.

Self-efficacy and mentor experience as antecedents

Self-efficacy is positively associated with affective commitment in our material, indicating that those who are confident they will master their mentor role also are likely to feel more affectively committed to the mentor role (0.38 in Model 2 and 0.41 in Model 3). This association is relatively strong in our material and supports our second hypothesis. Favourable outcomes of self-efficacy are widely reported in the literature, indicating that mentors who perceive beneficial exchanges and gains for both parties through mentoring are likely to feel affectively committed. However, findings indicating that less proficient teachers tend to overestimate their own abilities (Roehrig, Bohn, Turner & Pressley, 2008; Tschannen-Moran, 2007) can also be relevant with respect to mentors. Mentors reporting high levels of self-efficacy and high levels of affective commitment will probably experience gains from being mentors. However, the perceived gains from exchanges in mentoring as perceived by mentors might not necessarily conform to those perceived by mentees.

In relation to our fourth hypothesis, the results show that mentor experience is positively related to affective commitment, but quite weakly (0.16). Mastery experiences are acknowledged to be a potent source of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran, 2007). In our study, the association between mentor experience and self-efficacy is positive, as we would expect based on such findings, but the estimated effect is very weak and is not significant (0.08). The mentoring relationships and the potential exchanges that set the mentoring contexts have been described as highly complex (Hawkey, 1998). To contribute to gains for mentees through exchanges with mentors is challenging and our findings indicate that not all experiences with a role as multi-faceted as the mentor role leads to more confidence. More insight into the sources of mentors’ self-efficacy would be interesting, since our data show that self-efficacy is statistically associated with affective commitment, but also since mentor education and mentor experience do not appear to be important antecedents of mentors’ self-efficacy

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in our material. More specifically, our results indicate that mentor education contributes to lower levels of self-efficacy (-0.08). This finding could be the object of further investigation into the effects of mentor education. Also, keeping in mind that the direction of the arrow might be reversed, which would indicate that those who are more committed are also more likely to gain higher self-confidence related to their mentor role, we acknowledge the need for more research to illuminate the relation between self-efficacy and affective commitment among mentors.

Limitations

As with related studies, this study has clear limitations from a methodological (e.g. cross-sectional) standpoint, as well as from a conceptual perspective. We acknowledge these limitations and argue that they can serve as the foundation for future studies.

It is assumed in this work that affective commitment to the mentor role is important to accomplish mentoring conditions under which beneficial exchange is likely to happen. To find out if this assumption is true, experiments with some mentees with committed mentors and some with uncommitted mentors could be of interest; however, such experiments would be difficult and ethically problematic to carry out. Nevertheless, experimental research designs on mentoring have demonstrated great potential related to, for instance, outcomes for students (Evertson & Smithey, 2000). In our work, we have tested only a limited number of factors that are likely to affect mentors' affective commitment. Variables other than those included here can be relevant to investigate affective commitment among school-based mentors. Other studies have shown that organisational factors such as the perception of goal-oriented leadership among teachers and relational trust between teachers and leaders are associated with teachers' affective commitment (Christophersen *et al.*, 2015). Still others have found relationships among teacher colleges to be an important antecedent of teachers' affective commitment (Canrinus *et al.*, 2012).

Another question is whether mentors' affective commitment to the mentor role is dependent on whether they have practiced as mentors. In our material, we have, as described, teachers with between 0 and 29 years of experience as mentors. Including mentors with no experience in the data can be seen as a parallel to studying affective commitment towards the teaching profession among student teachers. Whether the nature of affective commitment among new and experienced mentors differs significantly is an empirical question that is relevant for further research. Further, it is an open question whether the findings in this study, which are based on responses from school-based mentors, are relevant for mentors working in other contexts. In sum, these limitations provide some direction for future research.

Concluding remarks

Despite its limitations, this study contributes to our understanding of the antecedents of school-based mentors' affective commitment to their work as mentors. We consider affective commitment a highly relevant foundation for beneficial exchanges in mentoring, which, again, is likely to be related to potential positive outcomes for students. Mentors' collaboration with other mentors is important for their professional development and affective commitment is a significant factor in teachers' interest in collaboration (Brandmo, Tiplic, & Elstad, forthcoming; Ulvik & Sunde, 2013). The results from this study indicate that mentor education contributes to mentors' affective commitment directly and through increased role clarity. Role clarity and self-efficacy are the most potent antecedents of mentors' affective commitment in this investigation. Mentor education does not increase mentors'

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self-efficacy, underlining that more knowledge about the antecedents of mentors' self-efficacy is needed. Mentor experience does not seem to have a great impact on role clarity, self-efficacy or affective commitment. Although causal processes may go in several directions, our findings underpin the importance of mentors' completing mentor education and also highlight that factors contributing to role clarity and self-efficacy among mentors should gain attention from policymakers and mentor educators.

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