RESEARCH & EVALUATION BRIEF

Short-term impact: Teacher development

NEST
NOVICE EDUCATOR SUPPORT AND TRAINING

Assessing the impact of NEST's adaptive mentor training on novice teachers in Europe's disadvantaged schools: A case study of seven education systems.

Anderson-Park, Eva & Veldhuizen, Myrte & Kindlinger, Marcus & Abs, Hermann. (2024). Final Evaluation Report of the NEST Project : Implementation and Effects of an Adaptive Mentor Training Programme for Novice Teachers at Disadvantaged Schools in Seven European Education Systems.

This is a summary of the final evaluation report of the Novice Educator Support and Training (NEST) project, which aims to strengthen novice teachers retention, especially at disadvantaged shools by providing tailored mentoring adapted to the novice teachers' needs and challenges. The project was co-funded by the European Commission as an ERASMUS+ policy experiment.

The project aimed to develop and implement an adaptive mentor training program to support novice teachers. The final evaluation report assesses the effectiveness of the NEST interventions across seven education systems in Europe (Austria,Belgium [Flemish Community and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation], Bulgaria, Romania, and Spain [Catalonia and the Community of Madrid]), focusing on mentor training and mentoring outcomes.

In each participating education system, there was a Teach For All partner and at least one other collaborator from the educational sector (i.e Ministry of Education or teacher's unions).

The NEST project focuses on the development, implementation, and evaluation of a mentor training program aimed at supporting novice teachers, particularly those in disadvantaged schools. Mentoring has been identified as a critical factor in enhancing teachers' engagement, teaching practice, and student achievement. However, access to mentoring is unevenly distributed across OECD countries, with only 22% of novice teachers having an assigned mentor on average (TALIS, 2018).

Given the higher turnover rates at disadvantaged schools, the absence of mentoring can be particularly detrimental. Recognizing this need, the NEST project developed a mentor training program tailored to the specific challenges faced by novice teachers in such schools. Managed by Bulgaria, the project consortium included partners from across the seven participating education systems, each responsible for various aspects of implementation and evaluation.

→ Read the full report here

07
Education systems

05
Countries

39
Regions

450+
Mentors

1.3K+
Novice teachers

The intervention

The NEST project comprises two main interventions: the NEST mentor training program, and adaptive mentoring for novice teachers at disadvantaged schools.

The **mentor training program**, developed by Empieza por Educar in Spain, aimed to teach mentors how to implement adaptive mentoring strategies tailored to the specific needs of novice teachers in disadvantaged school settings. Mentors underwent a two-year training program, with most of the content delivered in the first year through a combination of self-study modules and trainer-led sessions.

The training focused on various mentoring techniques and included observation and feedback cycles, follow-up meetings, and metacognitive sessions to stimulate reflective practices. Adaptations were made to the training program in different education systems to suit local contexts and circumstances.

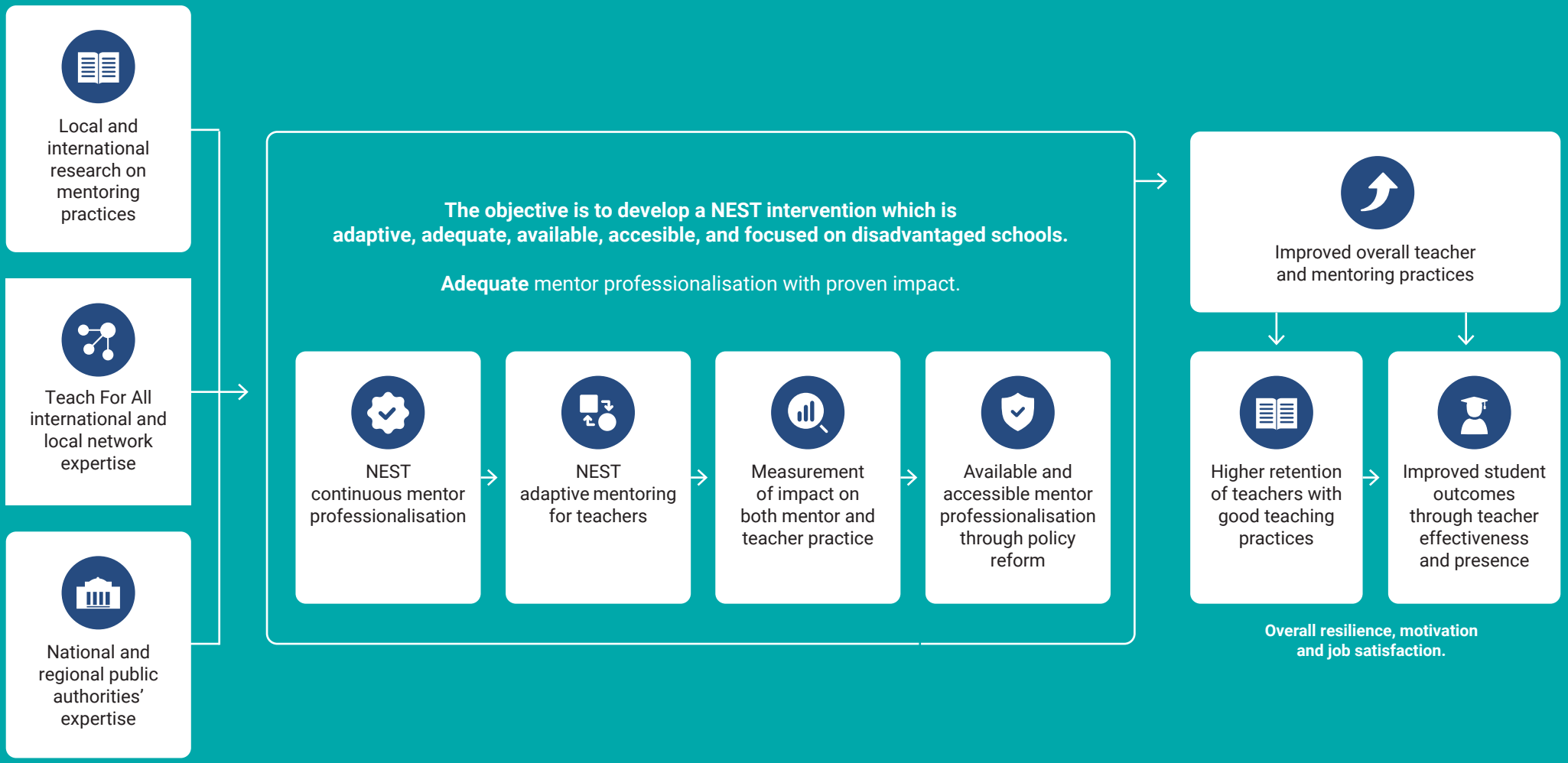
The second intervention, **adaptive mentoring for novice teachers**, involved mentors applying the skills learned during the training program to provide personalised mentoring to novice teachers in disadvantaged schools. Based on John Heron's methodology1, mentors were trained to differentiate between directive and facilitative mentoring styles.

The mentoring programme was designed to address the unique needs of less experienced educators as well as the unique difficulties associated with working in underprivileged schools.

The aim was to ensure that the mentoring offered was a suitable fit between each novice teacher's personality and their needs in order to improve the efficacy of new teachers' support in overcoming the difficulties associated with teaching in underprivileged school environments. The NEST project's theory of change, developed in collaboration with various stakeholders and based on extensive literature review and expertise, supported the rationale and expected outcomes of these interventions, emphasizing the importance of qualified mentors and personalized support in improving novice teacher retention and effectiveness.

1. Heron, J. (2001). Helping the Client. (5th ed.) Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

THEORY OF CHANGE



The evaluation

The resulting report provides an overview of the evaluation findings concerning the NEST mentor training program and the subsequent adaptive mentoring provided.

It spans two school years for NEST mentors and two cohorts of novice teachers, each followed for one school year. Online surveys were used to track the progress of mentors and novice teachers, enabling an assessment of their development. Control groups of mentors and novice teachers were surveyed as well, allowing for comparisons between those who received NEST training/mentoring and those who did not.

→ Learn more about the NEST evaluation design here

THE EVALUATION ADDRESSED THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

DOES THE NEST MENTOR TRAINING PROGRAM IMPROVE MENTORS' MENTORING SKILLS?

DO NOVICE TEACHERS WITH NEST-TRAINED MENTORS ASSESS THEIR MENTORING HIGHER THAN THOSE WITH UNTRAINED MENTORS?

DO NOVICE TEACHERS BENEFIT FROM NEST MENTORING IN TERMS OF TEACHING COMPETENCE, RESILIENCE, AND WILLINGNESS TO STAY IN THE PROFESSION?

ARE NOVICE TEACHERS MENTORED BY NEST-TRAINED MENTORS MORE SATISFIED WITH THE MENTORING THEY RECEIVE COMPARED TO A CONTROL GROUP?

Key results

The key findings that emerged from this study are:

IMPACT ON MENTORS

1.
NEST mentor training positively impacted mentors' ability to adapt their approach to novice teachers' needs.

2.
NEST mentors showed higher enthusiasm and self-assessed competence compared to control group mentors.

IMPACT ON TEACHERS

3.
Novice teachers with NEST mentors reported better focus and fit of mentoring and higher mentor competence.

4.
Some novice teachers with NEST mentors demonstrated increased teaching competence, professional resilience and willingness to stay in the profession.

IMPACT ON MENTORS

The results for mentors, based on mentor data, encompass all seven education systems. However, due to small sample sizes, statistical testing was not feasible, and only descriptive statistics were provided.

1.
NEST mentor training positively impacted mentor's ability to adapt their approach to novice teachers' needs.

The findings indicate that the NEST mentor training positively impacted mentor's competence and effectiveness, ultimately benefiting novice teachers, particularly in challenging school environments. NEST-trained mentors exhibited improved skills in mentoring, focusing more on specific challenges and adapting practices to classroom situations. They were able to provide constructive feedback and actively listen to the novice teachers they were mentoring. Overall, the NEST training positively influenced mentoring quality, with mentors effectively supporting novice teachers across different systems. While the extent of impact varied, the training consistently contributed to enhancing mentoring practices and supporting the professional growth of both mentors andnovice teachers.

2.
NEST mentors showed higher enthusiasm and self-assessed competence compared to control group mentors.

Across systems, NEST mentors displayed a greater willingness to continue mentoring, particularly in systems where mentorship was voluntary. Despite variations across systems, NEST mentors consistently maintained high levels of enthusiasm and demonstrated increased competence over time, with notable improvements observed in systems like Bulgaria and Catalonia. This suggests the effectiveness of the NEST mentor training in enhancing mentor enthusiasm and perceived competence.

IMPACT ON TEACHERS

Results concerning novice teachers and those regarding NEST mentors from the perspective of novice teachers were based on the four education systems with sufficiently large sample sizes (of novice teachers) for statistical analysis (Bulgaria, Romania, Wallonia-Brussels Federation, Catalonia, and the Community of Madrid).

3.
Novice teachers with NEST mentors reported better focus and fit of mentoring and higher mentor competence.

Novice teachers in the intervention group perceive their NEST mentors as dedicating significantly more quality time to mentoring compared to the control group, with consistent significance across multiple assessments. Additionally, they rate their mentors' competence significantly higher than those in the control group. Furthermore, novice teachers in the intervention group reported a significantly stronger focus on addressing school challenges in their mentoring experience compared to the control group and perceived a better fit between the mentoring practices of their NEST mentors and their own needs. Overall, across education systems, the majority of results are positive regarding the impact of NEST mentoring, with some systems reporting exclusively positive outcomes.

4.
Some novice teachers with NEST mentors demonstrated increased teaching competence, professional resilience and willingness to stay in the profession.

Despite the variation across the four education systems used in this sample (Bulgaria, Romania, Wallonia-Brussels Federation, Catalonia, and the Community of Madrid), novice teachers in the intervention group consistently showed positive outcomes on teaching competence, emotional resilience, job satisfaction, and retention. They exhibited enhanced teaching competence, particularly in student interactions and parent engagement, and reported significantly higher satisfaction with their school as a workplace. They also expressed a greater willingness to stay longer in the teaching profession compared to the control group. Nonetheless, considering the variations across different systems, these findings underscore the positive impact of NEST mentorship on novice teacher outcomes.

Study limitations and future considerations

The evaluation of the NEST project underscores the need for cautious interpretation due to the complex interplay of linguistic, cultural, and structural differences across the seven European education systems involved. Although efforts were made to compare intervention and control groups within each system, variations between systems posed challenges in drawing definitive conclusions. Sample sizes and survey dropout rates varied, with some systems facing recruitment difficulties exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The project's design, including successive cohorts of novice teachers was effective in reducing dropout rates.. However, this design also made it difficult to detect effects that only become visible over a longer period of time, such as an increase in competences or a reduction in work related stress.

Overall, positive effects of the NEST mentor training were observed across systems, suggesting adaptability and potential scalability. However, the success of scaling-up initiatives hinges on factors such as existing mentoring structures and legalities within each education system, emphasizing the importance of context-specific considerations in future implementations.

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