

The Experiential Learning Mentor-Mentee Framework: An Analysis of Best Practices in Student Affairs Management at Politeknik Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin

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Abstract—Student involvement in event management or actual fieldwork often faces challenges in translating classroom theory into practical applications. To bridge this competency gap, the JHEP, in collaboration with the Academic Department of PTSS, has adapted the Experiential Learning Mentor-Mentee framework. This best practice paper discusses the effectiveness of a knowledge transfer model where staff and accompanying lecturers act as primary Mentors guiding students (Mentees) in a high-pressure work environment. This model was applied across two different scales: the PTSS WKF 2026, which involved managing international participants, and the Civic Care Expedition 2026 academic mobility program in Semporna, Sabah. Quantitative research was conducted using a questionnaire instrument distributed to 87 student committee members and participants. The findings indicate that this structured mentoring approach recorded significant improvements in student attributes, specifically in problem-solving, cross-cultural communication, and crisis management. The synergy of this mentor-mentee framework successfully eliminates siloed work practices and serves as a catalyst for holistic TVET graduate outcomes.

Keywords: Mentor-Mentee; Experiential Learning; Student Affairs Management; Graduate Attributes; TVET

1. INTRODUCTION

The Department of Student Affairs (JHEP) plays a strategic role in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions. The current function of JHEP extends beyond student welfare and discipline; it acts as a primary driver in producing balanced, entrepreneurial, and holistic graduates (Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi, 2021). This directly aligns with Core 1: Producing Quality TVET Graduates, as outlined in the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) Manual of Politeknik and Kolej Komuniti (POLYCC) 2025 (Jabatan Pendidikan Politeknik dan Kolej Komuniti, 2025). To produce globalized graduates, students must master soft skills such as cross-cultural communication, critical thinking, and high adaptability within high-pressure working environments.

To bridge the gap between classroom theoretical understanding and real-world practical application, an Experiential Learning approach is highly significant in the TVET ecosystem. According to , active student engagement through Experiential Learning Cycle simultaneously strengthens psychomotor, leadership (Kolb, 2015), and affective skills compared to conventional classroom learning. At PTSS, this element is fully integrated by providing direct exposure to students through large-scale event management and volunteerism. This framework emphasizes practical knowledge transfer by positioning staff and lecturers as primary mentors to guide students in the field. The effectiveness of this framework has been tested through two high-impact platforms: the international-level PTSS WKF 2026 and the Civic Care Expedition 2026 academic mobility program in Semporna, Sabah. Consequently, this study aims to analyze best practices in implementing an experiential learning-based Mentor-Mentee program in Student Affairs management at PTSS.

Although the TVET ecosystem is designed to equip students with technical skills, a significant gap remains in graduates' ability to translate theoretical knowledge into actual workplace practices. Conventional learning approaches often restrict student exposure to controlled laboratory environments, leaving them underprepared for real-world workplace complexities (Stephen & Festus, 2022). Modern industry employers demand high-level soft skills, such as cross-cultural communication, swift decision-making, and unexpected problem-solving (Md Baharuddin et al., 2025).

This challenge is exacerbated by siloed and fragmented work practices in higher education institutions, where Academic Departments focus strictly on curriculum delivery while JHEP operates independently to manage out-of-class leadership programs. This functional separation causes students to fail to perceive the meaningful connection (nexus) between technical academic skills and character building (Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi, 2021).

Furthermore, exposing students to large-scale project management without structured guidance risks management failure. Project-Based Learning (PBL) demands a systematic "scaffolding" structure and mentorship to prevent students from feeling abandoned under a sink-or-swim approach when facing task conflicts (Bernas et al., 2024; Sharma et al., 2024). Therefore, this best practice study documents an intervention model using the Experiential Learning Cycle across departments at PTSS to evaluate how effectively cross-departmental mentorship can dismantle siloed workflows while boosting TVET graduate attributes.

The main goal of this initiative is to eliminate siloed work practices between JHEP and Academic Departments through a centralized mentoring system. Specifically, this paper outlines three primary objectives:

- To identify the implementation practices of the Mentor-Mentee program as a cross-departmental targeted scaffolding system at PTSS.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of Mentor guidance from the aspects of accessibility, practical instruction, and continuous feedback during high-pressure programs.
- To analyze the improvement of Mentee (student) attributes, particularly in problem-solving, cross-cultural communication, and crisis management through the PTSS WKF 2026 and Civic Care Expedition 2026 platforms.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The conceptual framework for this best practice (Figure 1) was developed by combining Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory and Vygotsky's (1978) Scaffolding Theory. The model comprises three power transition phases, as illustrated in Figure 1.

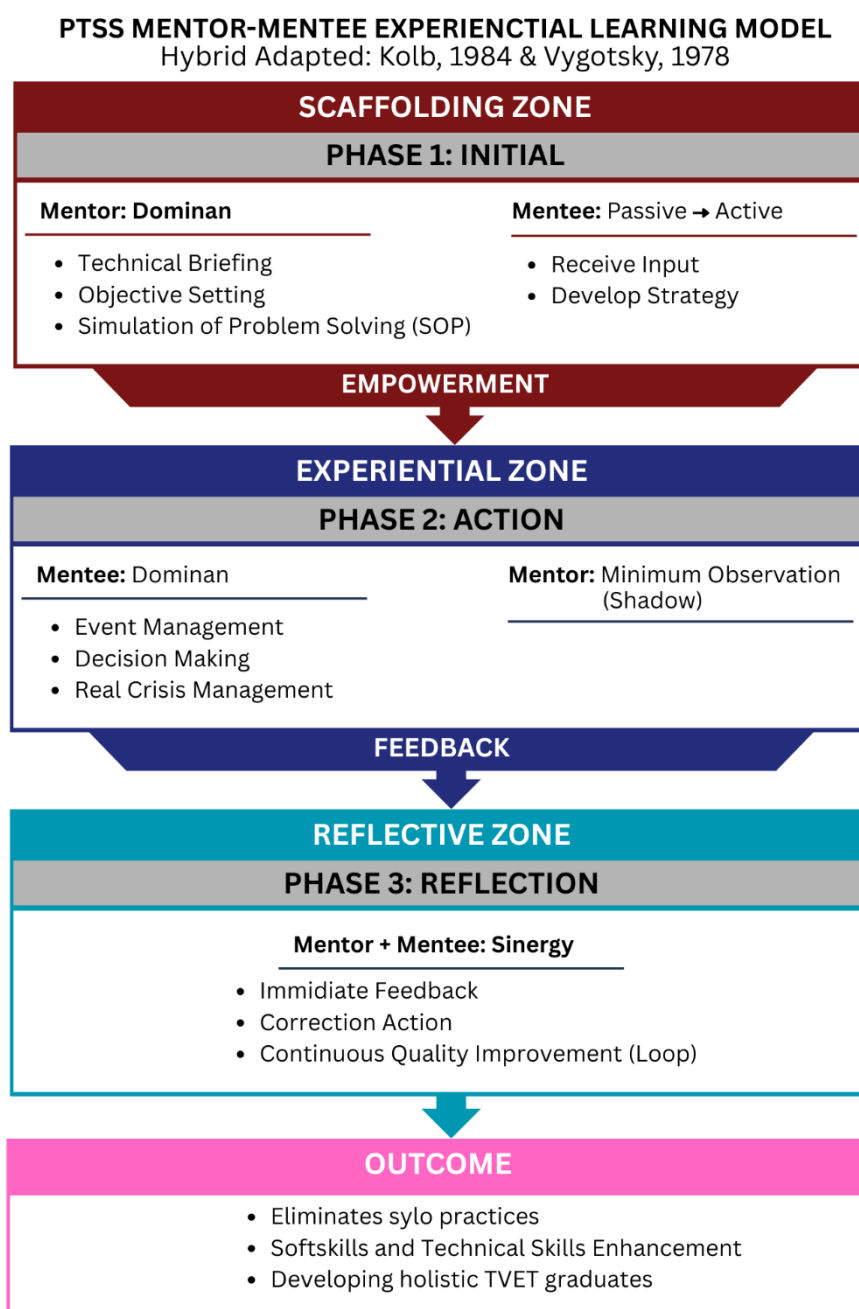


Figure 1. PTSS Mentor-Mentee Experiential Learning Model

2.1 Framework of the PTSS Mentor-Mentee Guidance Model

- Initiation Phase (Preparation) - Mentors brief mentees on task functions, directions, program objectives, and basic risk management protocols.
- Execution Phase (Guided Practical) - Students are granted autonomy (empowerment) to execute event management and logistics tasks, while mentors act as active shadow observers.
- Reflection Phase (Immediate Feedback) - A critical element where mentors provide constructive critique and real-time solutions directly in the field (on-the-spot feedback loop) without waiting for post-mortem sessions.

2.2 Application in PTSS WKF 2026 and Civic Care Expedition 2026

The PTSS World Kite Festival 2026 served as a large-scale international "living lab". Students from the Department of Tourism and Hospitality (JPH) were mentored in international protocol and hospitality, while technology students coordinated real-time automation and multimedia systems. To prove the framework's versatility, it was also adapted for a niche field scale during the Civic Care Expedition 2026 in Semporna, Sabah. This academic mobility program involved Tourism Management Diploma (DUP4A) students who were mentored through off-campus logistical hurdles, community tourism surveys, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects.

2.3 Instrument Development and Sampling Justification

The research instrument consisted of a questionnaire containing 16 Likert-scale items adapted from the Ministry of Higher Education's standard soft skills attributes (Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi, 2021) and Sharma et al.'s (2024) scaffolding design. The questionnaire was divided into Section B (Mentor Guidance) and Section C (Mentee Graduate Attributes).

Sampling justification relied on purposive sampling. Respondents were required to meet strict inclusion criteria: (1) PTSS students holding active executive committee positions within the execution framework of PTSS WKF 2026, or (2) Students directly involved as committee members and expedition participants in the Civic Care Expedition 2026. This sampling method ensured that data was gathered exclusively from subjects who experienced the operational phases of experiential mentorship firsthand within high-pressure field environments.

Quantitative data collection involved 87 respondents (N=87) who provided valid feedback. Raw data was processed using SPSS software. The reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha recorded an excellent value of 0.948, proving high internal consistency.

Table 1. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.948	16

Frequencies analysis indicated that the majority of respondents were female (56.3%) compared to male (43.7%). In terms of academic department participation, JPH recorded the highest rate at 51.7% (45 students), followed by the Department of Commerce (JP) at 25.3% (22 students), with the remaining 23% distributed across non-commerce departments (JKM, JKE, JTMK, JRKV).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Mentor Guidance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	49	56.3	56.3	56.3
	Female	38	43.7	43.7	100.0
	Total	87	100.0	100.0	

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics by Academic Department

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	JPH	45	51.7	51.7	51.7
	JP	22	25.3	25.3	77
	JKM	8	9.2	9.2	86.2
	JKE	6	6.9	6.9	93.1
	JTMK	4	4.6	4.6	97.7
	JRKV	2	2.3	2.3	100
	Total	87	100	100	

Descriptive statistics using Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) scores were generated to assess the quality of mentor scaffolding. The data indicated a "Very High" agreement level (Mean > 4.60) across all eight operational variables.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Mentor Guidance

N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
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B1 Strategic Direction	87	1.0	5.0	4.6092	0.72015
B2 Accessibility	87	3.0	5.0	4.7471	0.5102
B3 Guidance	87	3.0	5.0	4.7011	0.54366
B4 Feedback Loops	87	3.0	5.0	4.6897	0.5521
B5 Motivational Support	87	3.0	5.0	4.7126	0.5344
B6 Empowerment	87	3.0	5.0	4.6897	0.5552
B7 Crisis Mitigation	87	3.0	5.0	4.6552	0.5689
B8 Role Modelling	87	3.0	5.0	4.7356	0.52118
Valid N (listwise)	87				

The statistical results in Table 4 reveal an exceptionally high level of student satisfaction, with all operational dimensions scoring well above the high-threshold mean of 4.60. The highest score was achieved by item B2, Mentor Accessibility ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 0.51$), followed closely by item B8, Role Modeling ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 0.52$). This demonstrates that the students strongly appreciated the active, visible physical presence of the staff and lecturers in the field. Item B5, Motivational Support, also scored high ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 0.53$), indicating that mentors successfully acted as emotional stabilizers during intense field challenges. The dimensions of Empowerment (B6) and Feedback Loops (B4) both achieved identical scores ($M = 4.69$), confirming that the structured delegation of authority was well-supported by immediate corrective communication rather than punitive assessments. The lowest mean score, though still interpreted as very high, was recorded by item B1, Strategic Direction ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 0.72$), indicating that while the initiation phase was effective, the rapid evolution of field conditions required continuous realignment.

To measure the developmental impact of this mentorship framework on the students, descriptive statistics were calculated for Section C, focusing on the self-perceived growth of Mentee Graduate Attributes. The empirical data for this section is organized in Table 5.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Mentee Graduate Attribute Enhancement

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
C1 Self-Confidence	87	3	5	4.7241	0.4983
C2 Cross-Cultural Interaction	87	3	5	4.7011	0.50614
C3 Practical TVET Skills	87	3	5	4.6897	0.5344
C4 Critical Problem Solving	87	3	5	4.6667	0.5521
C5 Teamwork Synergy	87	3	5	4.6552	0.57428
C6 Leadership Competency	87	3	5	4.6437	0.5689
C7 Environmental Adaptability	87	3	5	4.6322	0.5882
C8 Career Preparedness	87	3	5	4.6092	0.54652
Valid N (listwise)	87				

The dataset displayed in Table 5 indicates strong agreement among the student mentees that the experiential field exposure significantly boosted their professional competencies ($M > 4.60$). Item C8, Career Preparedness, achieved the highest mean score ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 0.50$), followed by item C5, Teamwork Synergy ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 0.51$). These scores reflect that simulating industrial conditions under a structured framework effectively reduced anxieties regarding post-graduation employment. Item C1, Self-Confidence, also emerged strong ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 0.53$), matching the high scores observed in active technical execution. The attribute of Practical TVET Skills (C3) scored high ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 0.55$), showing that students felt capable of translating classroom theories into active field operations. Critical Problem Solving (C4) recorded the lowest mean score within this highly rated index ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 0.55$), highlighting that managing unpredicted real-world crises remains one of the most cognitively demanding tasks for developing TVET students.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The strong descriptive findings of this study offer important insights into the integration of experiential learning cycles within formal student affairs management. The high mean score recorded for Mentor Accessibility ($M = 4.75$) indicates that the framework succeeded because it avoided a detached management style. By maintaining a visible presence in the field, mentors provided a reliable psychological safety net. This constant availability allowed students to exercise their delegated autonomy with confidence, knowing that expert guidance was immediately accessible if a crisis escalated beyond their capabilities. This finding strongly aligns with the core principles of Vygotsky's Scaffolding Theory (1978), which posits that learning is optimized when an instructor provides targeted support within the student's Zone of Proximal Development, gradually removing the scaffolding as the learner gains independence. The professional role modeling exhibited by the staff ($M = 4.74$) also served as a powerful implicit curriculum, leading students to adopt professional communication standards and work ethics through direct observation.

From the perspective of graduate attribute enhancement, the dominant score of Career Preparedness ($M = 4.72$) proves that high-pressure field simulations are highly effective educational tools. Traditional classroom settings often isolate students from real-world variables, leaving them theoretically competent but operationally hesitant when entering the workforce. By immersing students in large-scale projects like the PTSS WKF 2026 which required managing international delegates, and the Civic Care Expedition 2026, which demanded navigation through remote logistics where the institution created an authentic learning environment. This immersive experience helped students overcome fear, manage stress, and develop the mental resilience required by modern employers. This outcome strongly supports Kolb's (2015) Experiential Learning Theory, which argues that deep, meaningful learning occurs when concrete experiences are transformed through reflective observation and active experimentation.

Additionally, the high score achieved for Teamwork Synergy ($M = 4.70$) addresses a key issue highlighted in the problem statement which is the traditional silos separating academic departments from student affairs. In typical higher education structures, academic departments focus heavily on curriculum delivery, while student affairs departments run leadership programs independently, leaving students unable to connect technical skills with character development. The model evaluated in this paper successfully broke down these institutional barriers by bringing hospitality, commerce, and engineering students together under a single project structure. To achieve project goals, students were forced to look past departmental divisions, collaborate across disciplines, and coordinate complex tasks collectively. This collaborative dynamic clearly demonstrates how student affairs initiatives can be intentionally designed to reinforce and apply formal technical curricula.

When compared to recent literature, these findings support and expand upon work by Mohamad and Hassan (2025) and Md Baharuddin et al. (2025), who noted that work-based learning modules significantly improve student psychomotor and affective development compared to traditional methods. However, while earlier studies focused primarily on the role of the technical instructor, this research highlights the equal importance of the administrative staff-student relationship. The immediate feedback loops built into this model ($M = 4.69$) directly address the concerns raised by Bernas et al. (2024) and Sharma et al. (2024), who warned that unstructured project-based learning can lead to cognitive overload and management failure. Providing real-time, constructive feedback on the spot allowed students to correct mistakes immediately, turning errors into valuable learning moments rather than source of discouragement.

Nevertheless, the study's limitations must be considered when interpreting these outcomes. Because the evaluation was conducted exclusively within PTSS, the findings may reflect specific institutional cultures, and generalizability across all POLYCC campuses should be approached carefully. The sample size ($N = 87$), while statistically adequate for descriptive analysis, relies on purposive sampling and self-reported data, which can introduce subjective bias. Additionally, the study lacks longitudinal data tracking these students' actual employment rates and performance in the industry post-graduation. Future research should consider comparative studies across multiple polytechnics and incorporate longitudinal tracking to evaluate the long-term impact of experiential mentorship on actual career advancement.

4. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the hybrid Experiential Learning Mentor-Mentee framework is a highly effective approach for enhancing graduate attributes and eliminating institutional silos within TVET management. The empirical data shows exceptionally high scores across all mentorship support dimensions and student attribute gains, confirming that structured, real-time scaffolding in authentic, high-pressure environments successfully bridges the gap between classroom theory and practical application. The visible presence of mentors, combined with a well-designed delegation of authority and immediate feedback loops, created a supportive learning environment that significantly boosted student self-confidence, teamwork synergy, and career readiness. Most importantly, the model successfully brought together student affairs staff and academic departments, proving that collaborative administrative structures can actively accelerate the development of holistic, industry-ready graduates. Based on these positive outcomes, it is recommended that polytechnic administrations formally adopt this experiential mentoring framework as a standard operating procedure for all major student-led initiatives. This will help embed a sustainable culture of integrated, cross-departmental learning across the institution.

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