

Mentoring for Growth: How Adopt A Class Enhances Employee Skills, Confidence, and Community Involvement

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The Adopt A Class Mentor impact study was initiated in response to a growing interest in understanding the benefits of corporate mentorship programs, not only for the students and communities they serve but also for the participating employees and their employers. Adopt A Class, a youth mentoring nonprofit in Cincinnati, Ohio, sought to better understand how employee involvement in mentoring youth affects employee satisfaction, organizational commitment, and broader workplace dynamics. Adopt A Class is a youth mentorship program that connects professionals from diverse sectors with underserved public-school classrooms in Greater Cincinnati. Through these partnerships, Adopt A Class fosters meaningful relationships between mentors and students, aiming to broaden students' understanding of career pathways, life skills, and personal potential. This study explored how structured, team-based mentoring relationships influence mentors' sense of purpose, community engagement, and professional development. The primary tool was a structured survey for mentors in the Adopt A Class program during the 2023/2024 academic year, evaluating job satisfaction, organizational commitment, professional growth, and community engagement. Likert scales measured responses to analyze attitude changes linked to mentorship. The study demonstrates Adopt A Class's transformative impact on mentors and their organizations. Mentors report increased job satisfaction, purpose, and leadership growth, alongside stronger community connections. Participating organizations benefit from heightened employee engagement, improved workplace culture, and enhanced reputational value. These outcomes reveal mentoring's power to drive personal, professional, and organizational growth. To expand this impact, we encourage broader investment in Adopt A Class as a catalyst for workforce development and community transformation.

Keywords: Mentoring, employee engagement, professional development, corporate social responsibility, community engagement

Introduction

As businesses and nonprofits strive to build a skilled and resilient workforce, they face challenges in ensuring that young people, particularly those from under-resourced communities, have access to the mentors, role models, and support systems needed to succeed in academic and professional environments (Lindstrom et al., 2022). This opportunity gap often results in lower career readiness (Kanno, 2018; Lindstrom et al., 2022), limited exposure to potential career pathways (Lindstrom et al., 2022; Welton & Martinez, 2014), and a lack of necessary skills among youth entering the workforce (World Economic Forum, 2022). Additionally, companies are increasingly recognizing the importance of community engagement as a core part of their corporate social responsibility (Nejati & Shafaei, 2023). Today's employees, especially younger generations, want to work for organizations that align with their values and provide opportunities to make a meaningful impact (Singh et al., 2023). Adopt A Class addresses these intersecting challenges by leveraging the power of mentorship in a unique,

school-based group mentorship model that links corporate and community leaders with students in underserved communities and under-resourced schools (Adopt A Class, n.d.-b).

Background and Context

Adopt A Class, established in 2003, is a nonprofit organization in the City of Cincinnati whose mission is to connect businesses and civic organizations with elementary and middle school-aged students in underserved communities through mentorship and relationship-building. Mentor teams, consisting of six to ten professionals from local businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies, are matched with a classroom of 20-40 students from schools located in under-resourced and underrepresented communities. Teams of volunteer mentors commit to one hour per month for eight months per academic year. Adopt A Class serves annually over 10,000 students in more than 40 schools throughout the Cincinnati region, connecting over 4,000 mentors from 200 companies and organizations. (Adopt A Class, n.d.-a)

Literature Review

Mentorship programs have long been recognized for their transformative effects, not only on the youth who receive guidance but also on the mentors who provide it (Anderson & DuBois, 2023; Herrera et al., 2011). Key features of effective youth mentoring programs include the quality of the relationship, the duration, and the consistency (Rhodes, 2005). Unfortunately, students in under-resourced communities often lack access to mentors. This gap is a result of limited professional networks, fewer school and community resources, and reduced exposure to diverse career pathways. (Boat et al., 2021; Da Costa et al., 2000; DuBois et al., 2011; Guryan et al., 2021; Hanlon et al., 2009)

Unlike programs that use a one-to-one youth mentoring model, Adopt A Class employs a many-to-many or group-based youth mentoring approach. Group-based youth mentoring programs involve one or more mentors collaborating with small groups of youth, as opposed to the conventional one-to-one mentoring model (Kuperminc & Thomason, 2014). Research has shown that group-based youth mentoring can be just as effective as one-to-one mentoring models, demonstrating improved academic achievement, reduced behavioral issues, and enhanced social-emotional development (DuBois et al., 2011; Stoeger et al., 2017).

Mentoring serves as a valuable form of social capital, particularly for young people who lack access to professional networks (Boat et al., 2021; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Being exposed to various career options, workplace settings, and positive adult role models can create new opportunities and help minimize employment gaps (Lindstrom et al., 2022). Programs that connect youth with professionals in corporate settings offer insights into workplace norms and expectations, fostering confidence and career awareness (Mentor & Ey, 2019).

Equally important, however, is the growing body of research demonstrating that mentors themselves experience significant personal and professional benefits through their involvement in youth mentoring programs (Anderson & DuBois, 2023; Mentor & Ey, 2019). Youth mentorship offers profound benefits to mentors, enriching their lives through high-quality mentoring relationships that provide them with opportunities to acquire new skills and deepen their self-awareness (Mao et al., 2016). Specifically, adults who mentor youth often see gains in professional, career, and academic areas (Anderson & DuBois, 2023; Mentor & Ey, 2019).

Employee participation in youth mentoring programs, as part of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, has a positive impact on organizational outcomes (Mentor & Ey, 2019). Studies have shown a positive link between CSR participation and job satisfaction, organizational identification, and organizational commitment (Du et al., 2015; Glavas, 2016; Im et al., 2016; Rodell, 2013). In general, mentorship programs involving

volunteers from large organizations can have a positive impact on the organizations themselves (Allen et al., 2004; Eby et al., 2008; Fowler et al., 2021).

Rationale

The Adopt A Class mentor impact study was conducted to explore the diverse benefits of corporate-sponsored youth mentorship programs. The study mainly aimed to assess how participating in Adopt A Class affects both the employees and the sponsoring organizations. Years of anecdotal and semi-structured programmatic assessment have shown the significant impact Adopt A Class has had on students (i.e., mentees), but previous survey data focusing on mentors has only been satisfaction-based (Adopt A Class, n.d.-a).

Methods

Participants, Statistical Significance, and Representativeness

The study collected responses from 353 mentors involved in the 2023/2024 Adopt A Class program, out of a total pool of 1,940, representing an 18.2% response rate. As participation was voluntary, there is a possibility of non-response bias, with respondents potentially differing from non-respondents in their experiences or perceptions of the program. Using standard statistical formulas for determining sample size adequacy, a sample of 353 from a population of 1,940 provides a margin of error of approximately $\pm 5\%$, with a 95% confidence level.

Respondents were a mix of genders, with 64% identifying as female, 33% as male, and 1% as non-binary. They also spanned a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds—most identified as White (77.6%), 11.6% as Black/African American, and smaller percentages represented other racial and ethnic groups. The mentors also varied in terms of career stage and experience, with a significant portion (57%) bringing over 20 years of professional experience and roles spanning from entry-level to chief-level executives.

Mentors worked in organizations of different sizes and types, with the majority coming from very large companies (52%) and predominantly affiliated with corporations or businesses (65%). Additionally, the mentors supported students across various grade levels, including 4th and 5th graders (43%) and 1st-3rd graders (33%), providing a broad range of developmental support. Many mentors had previous experience with Adopt A Class, averaging 2.5 years, and leadership roles within their Adopt A Class teams, such as team lead or scheduling coordinator, which nearly half (48%) of respondents held.

Dependent Variables

To facilitate the analyses across all dimensions of this study, six dependent variable scales were developed. To ensure the consistency of the

scales used in the study, reliability analyses were conducted using Cronbach's alpha. High-reliability values indicated that the scales were reliable.

Skill Development

This scale measured the extent to which participation in Adopt A Class has contributed to mentors' professional growth in areas such as project management, leadership, and human-essential skills. The mean score for the skill development scale was 3.69 on a 5-point scale, with moderate variability and excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$).

Job Satisfaction

The job satisfaction scale assessed the positive impact of participating in Adopt A Class on mentors' overall work fulfillment and motivation. The mean score for the job satisfaction scale was 3.81 on a 5-point scale, with moderate variability and good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$).

Career Enhancement

The career enhancement scale evaluated the extent to which participation in Adopt A Class contributed to mentors' career growth. The mean score for the career enhancement scale was 3.42 on a 5-point scale, with somewhat greater variability than the other scales and good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$).

Self-Efficacy and Professional Confidence

The self-efficacy and professional confidence scale measured the extent to which mentors felt more confident and assured in their professional abilities due to their participation in Adopt A Class. The mean score for the self-efficacy and professional confidence scale was 3.58 on a 5-point scale, with moderate variability and excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$).

Sense of Meaning and Accomplishment

The sense of meaning and accomplishment scale measured the extent to which mentors felt a heightened sense of purpose, fulfillment, and pride in their professional lives as a result of participating in Adopt A Class. The mean score for the sense of meaning and accomplishment scale was 4.18 on a 5-point scale, with relatively low variability and excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$).

Organizational Commitment

This scale measured mentors' loyalty, pride, and alignment with their organization's mission and values as influenced by their participation in Adopt A Class. The mean score for the organizational commitment scale was 3.96 on a 5-point scale, with moderate variability and excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$).

Analysis Techniques

This study utilized a range of statistical methods to analyze the impact of Adopt A Class on mentors' professional growth, organizational commitment, and community engagement. Data analysis was conducted in several stages, employing both descriptive and inferential statistics to examine relationships between participation in Adopt A Class and various outcomes. Descriptive analyses summarize the basic features of the data, including means, standard deviations, and frequencies. Pearson's correlation coefficients were used to explore associations between continuous variables and assess the strength and direction of relationships between mentors' levels of engagement (e.g., frequency of mentoring visits, number of students interacted with) and their perceptions of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and skill development. For categorical independent variables, t-tests and one-way ANOVA analyses were used to compare means across different groups. Tests confirmed that the assumptions of normality (Shapiro-Wilk) and homogeneity of variances (Levene's test) were met before conducting these analyses.

Findings

The findings are presented in four sections, each corresponding to one of four research questions explored in this study.

Research Question 01: Does participation in Adopt A Class lead to significant improvements in mentors' professional growth, including enhanced skill development, job satisfaction, and career enhancement?

Three scales were used to address this question, including skill development, job satisfaction, and career enhancement. These dependent variables were analyzed in conjunction with several independent variables, including the number of times a mentor visited the classroom during the school year, the number of students they interacted with, how often they mentored the same students, and the depth of the relationship they were able to build with their mentees. Other factors included how long a mentor has served in Adopt A Class, their leadership roles within Adopt A Class (team lead, field trip coordinator, etc.), and whether they attended various Adopt A Class-sponsored events (training, breakfasts, symposia, etc.).

Key Findings: Research Question 01

Skill Development. Mentors reported moderate improvement in skill development due to Adopt A Class, particularly in skill acquisition, leadership, and communication. The strongest predictor of skill development was the level of relationships built with students, $r(351) = .40, p < .001$, indicating that mentors who built deeper, more meaningful connections with students reported greater growth in their professional skills. Formal roles within

Adopt A Class ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.64$; $t(351) = 2.47$, $p = .01$, $d = 0.02$) and attendance at additional Adopt A class events ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.64$; $t(351) = 2.23$, $p = .03$, $d = 0.01$) also contributed to enhanced skill development, likely due to the increased responsibilities and interactions these activities entail.

Job Satisfaction

Adopt A Class participation significantly improved job satisfaction, reflected in higher scores in job fulfillment and a positive work environment. Relationship-building with students was the most impactful factor for job satisfaction, $r(351) = .38$, $p < .001$, suggesting that meaningful mentoring experiences translate into increased satisfaction in mentors' professional lives. Formal roles ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.64$; $t(351) = 2.64$, $p = .009$, $d = 0.02$) and event attendance ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.61$; $t(351) = 2.00$, $p = .05$, $d = 0.01$) also correlated with higher job satisfaction, showing that deeper engagement in Adopt A Class reinforces mentors' sense of fulfillment and connection at work.

Career Enhancement

The impact of Adopt A Class on career enhancement was somewhat more nuanced. While mentors perceived moderate benefits in career advancement and recognition, this dimension was less influenced by the frequency of mentoring activities and more by the quality of relationships, $r(351) = .30$, $p < .001$, and roles within the program. Formal Adopt A Class roles ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.75$; $t(351) = 2.94$, $p = .004$, $d = 0.02$) were associated with the greatest gains in career enhancement.

Research Question 02: Does participation in Adopt A Class lead to a significant increase in employee (mentor) self-efficacy and confidence in their professional roles?

One scale was used to address this question, specifically the self-efficacy and professional confidence scale. These analyses used the same independent variables as those in the previous research question.

Key Findings: Research Question 02

Building strong relationships with students is the most important factor associated with higher self-efficacy, $r(350) = .44$, $p < .001$. Mentors who form deeper connections with their mentees experience the greatest confidence boost in their professional roles. Increased participation, such as a higher number of mentor visits, $r(350) = .14$, $p = .008$, and interactions with more students, $r(350) = .14$, $p = .009$, also positively correlated with self-efficacy, though to a lesser extent than relationship-building. Formal roles in Adopt A class (e.g., team lead, field trip coordinator) have a moderate effect ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.63$; $t(350) = 3.07$, $p = .03$, $d = 0.03$). Mentors in these roles

report significantly higher self-efficacy, indicating that leadership roles offer opportunities for further growth and confidence. Event attendance has a positive, albeit smaller, effect on self-efficacy ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.61$; $t(350) = 2.01$, $p = .01$, $d = 0.01$), suggesting that engaging in the program beyond mentoring sessions somewhat enhances mentors' professional confidence.

Research Question 03: Do mentors experience a sense of meaning and accomplishment in their working lives due to their involvement in Adopt A Class?

One scale was used to address this question, specifically the sense of meaning and accomplishment scale. These analyses used the same independent variables as those in the previous research question.

Key Findings: Research Question 03

Building strong relationships with students is the most influential factor in fostering a sense of purpose and accomplishment for mentors, $r(350) = .44$, $p < .001$. Mentors who feel they have established meaningful connections with students report the highest levels of fulfillment.

Consistency in mentoring the same students, $r(350) = .15$, $p = .006$, and event participation, $r(350) = .15$, $p < .006$, also contributes positively to mentors' sense of meaning, underscoring the value of continuity and involvement beyond mentoring sessions. Formal roles within Adopt A Class (such as team lead) have a moderate impact on fulfillment ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.57$; $t(350) = 2.96$, $p = .003$, $d = 0.02$), suggesting that mentors who take on additional responsibilities in the program tend to experience more purpose and accomplishment, but it is not as prevalent.

Research Question 04: Does participation in Adopt A Class lead to improvements in teamwork, employee engagement, and organizational commitment among the sponsoring organization's employees?

Two scales were used to address this question, including the job satisfaction scale and the organizational commitment scale. To gain a comprehensive understanding of how participation in Adopt A Class affects mentors' job satisfaction and organizational commitment, a range of variables representing both engagement in the program and employment-related factors were examined. These variables included mentors' motivations for joining Adopt A Class, such as making a positive impact or developing relationships with colleagues, as well as their level of interaction with students and colleagues, measured by metrics like the number of visits and the depth of relationships built with students.

Key Findings: Research Question 04

Job Satisfaction

The analysis revealed that mentors report increased job satisfaction. Positive correlations were observed between job satisfaction and factors such as frequently mentoring the same students, $r(351) = .12$, $p = .03$, the number of students interacted with, $r(351) = .17$, $p = .002$, and the level of relationships built with students, $r(351) = .38$, $p < .001$. The effect sizes from t-tests show significant increases in job satisfaction for mentors who are motivated by making a positive impact ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.59$; $t(351) = 3.86$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.04$), developing relationships with colleagues ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.50$; $t(351) = 6.09$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.10$), and enhancing the company's reputation ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.58$; $t(351) = 2.75$, $p = .006$, $d = 0.02$).

Organizational Commitment

Mentors also demonstrate a high level of organizational commitment, with the strength of this commitment linked to their motivations for joining Adopt a Class and the quality of relationships they develop with students, $r(351) = .32$, $p < .001$. Significant increases in organizational commitment were found among mentors who joined Adopt A Class to make a positive impact ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.57$; $t(351) = 3.98$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.04$), support youth development ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.56$; $t(351) = 3.23$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.03$), and build relationships with colleagues ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.52$; $t(351) = 4.75$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.06$). The consistency in these findings across different motivations and relational factors suggests that Adopt A Class participation is a valuable driver of employee loyalty and organizational pride.

Discussion

Impact on Mentors

The findings from this study highlight the value that Adopt A Class brings to mentors' personal and professional lives. Mentors consistently reported increased job satisfaction as a direct result of their participation in Adopt A Class, with many noting that their involvement in the program fostered a stronger sense of purpose and fulfillment in their work. This sense of meaning is amplified by the relationships mentors build with their mentees as they experience the rewarding impact of supporting youth development and making a positive contribution to the community. Mentors who engage in the program often find themselves developing essential workplace skills, such as leadership, communication, and problem-solving, which are transferable to their professional roles. Additionally, those who hold formal roles within Adopt A Class, such as team leads or coordinators, experience enhanced leadership skills and visibility within their organizations, often contributing to career advancement and recognition.

Benefits for Sponsoring Organizations

One of the most significant impacts observed is an increase in employee engagement. Mentors participating in the program report feeling more connected to their colleagues and the organizational mission, which, in turn, fosters a stronger sense of belonging and loyalty. By enabling employees to engage in meaningful work outside of their traditional roles, organizations create an environment where employees feel valued, inspired, and more committed to the company's broader social responsibility goals.

Additionally, participation in Adopt A Class contributes to a positive organizational culture. Employees involved in the program experience heightened job satisfaction, stemming from the fulfillment they derive from mentoring and contributing to youth development. This positive outlook and enhanced sense of purpose often permeate the workplace, resulting in a more motivated and cohesive workforce. Employees who mentor through Adopt A Class bring their sense of purpose and enthusiasm back to the office, creating a ripple effect that can improve morale and encourage a culture of empathy and teamwork across the organization.

Moreover, supporting employees' engagement in programs like Adopt A Class can strengthen the organization's reputation both internally and externally. Companies that prioritize social responsibility initiatives are perceived more favorably by employees and the public. This not only boosts the company's image but also enhances its ability to attract and retain talent who value purpose-driven work environments. Overall, sponsoring Adopt A Class helps organizations foster a more engaged, motivated, and socially aware workforce, positioning them as leaders in corporate social responsibility and positive workplace culture.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. The study did not examine student outcomes nor compare them to mentor outcomes; although anecdotal data from students were available, they were not analyzed here. Survey participation was voluntary, which could introduce self-selection bias. Since all data were self-reported and collected at a single point in time, the findings may be affected by recall or social desirability bias and cannot determine causality. Additionally, the results are specific to the Adopt A Class program in the Greater Cincinnati area and may not apply to other contexts or mentoring models.

Conclusion

Adopt A Class has proven to be a transformative program, delivering substantial benefits for mentors, organizations, and the broader community. Mentors experience personal and professional growth, deepened community engagement, and a profound sense of purpose, while sponsoring organizations enjoy increased

employee satisfaction, enhanced teamwork, and a strengthened commitment to corporate social responsibility. Beyond individual and organizational gains, the program fosters meaningful community impact, inspiring mentors to advocate for social issues and invest in local initiatives. To further this positive influence, it is recommended that funding committees, state agencies, and corporate partners continue to support the expansion of Adopt A Class and to consider engaging in Adopt A Class by becoming mentors as well.

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