Mentoring for inclusion: A scoping review of the literature

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Abstract

This article explores and summarizes the characteristics and findings in Norwegian research on mentoring for inclusion, using a scoping literature review. Mentoring matches younger or less experienced individuals with non-parental mentors to provide support and promote skills, personal development, and/or attainment of specific goals, such as employment. Searches were conducted in databases and in grey literature, with 19 publications included in our final analyses. The included publications encompass various approaches to organizing mentoring: by public sector organizations such as NAV and by non-public organizations (ideal organizations, social entrepreneurships). Over half of the mentoring programs in the included publications had immigrants or individuals with minority backgrounds as target groups. Nearly all the included publications assessed program results, concluding that mentoring generally achieved its (often broadly defined) objectives and/or that participants were satisfied. Notably, a robust assessment of the effects of mentoring remains an area for future inquiry. The included studies provide valuable insights into mentoring for supporting welfare state institutions in inclusion of vulnerable groups. Mentoring represents an individualized and flexible approach with the potential to supplement public services. Based on the findings, future directions for research on mentoring in the welfare state context are discussed.

Keywords
mentoring, immigrants, NAV, inclusion, cooperation

Introduction and background

This article provides a summary and analysis of the research landscape on mentoring for vulnerable groups in Norway – those with potential barriers to education and labor market participation. This includes people with disabilities, low education, poor health, and immigrants (NAV, 2021). These individuals can lack formal and informal skills, and may have weak social networks or support. Marginalization thus remains a challenge despite efforts to facilitate inclusion and participation, and there is a need for knowledge on new approaches in this regard.

Although such challenges related to inclusion are often viewed at the individual level, they can also be analyzed at the service or systemic level. Through this lens, they are wicked problems, which are complex, have no single obvious solution, and may require cross-sec-

toral collaboration and innovative approaches or models (Head & Alford, 2013). While cooperation between welfare services can help in supporting individuals with complex needs such as individuals outside the labor market and education (Ose et al., 2014), users often meet a fragmented public sector, partially due to increased specialization at the service level (Anvik & Waldahl, 2017). Additionally, front-line workers often describe a lack of time or resources for proper social work as being a significant barrier to offering services that meet users' needs (Damsgaard & Eide, 2012).

Thus, there has been increased attention to non-public or private actors' contributions or cooperation with public actors in welfare production to address societal challenges like inclusion for vulnerable groups (Eimhjellen & Loga, 2017). For example, NAV (Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration) has a long tradition of cooperating with volunteer organizations and local businesses. Such cooperation has a basis in economic considerations and welfare state sustainability, but also regarding the development of diversity in services, strengthened user involvement, individually tailored measures, and innovation (Loga, 2018).

One example of such collaborative approaches is within the context of mentoring. Mentoring has long been used in the United States to facilitate inclusion, support skill development, and provide relational support. However, as we will show, research on mentoring for vulnerable groups is nascent in Norway. Thus, we know little about the use of mentoring for inclusion in the Norwegian welfare state context. Our aim is therefore to explore this body of research via a scoping literature review (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). We ask:

1. What are the characteristics of the empirical literature on mentoring for inclusion in Norway?
2. What are the characteristics of the mentoring programs contained in this literature regarding organization, target groups, and objectives?
3. What are the main findings (and limitations) of the included studies?

We first provide a brief discussion on mentoring, followed by a presentation of the review approach and data. In our results, we summarize characteristics of the literature and programs, and findings from the included studies. We conclude with a discussion and suggestions for future inquiry.

Mentoring

Mentoring, broadly defined, is a relationship between two unrelated people: a more unexperienced person or "mentee" and a more experienced person or "mentor," where the mentor shares their knowledge and experience, providing social and instrumental support for the mentee to develop formal and/or informal skills (Rhodes, 2005) or to achieve specific goals. Our focus is on *formal* mentoring for inclusion, which generally occurs within the context of a specific program, project, or intervention, as opposed to informal mentoring which arises organically (Rhodes, 2020). A key mechanism for change via mentoring is a supportive relationship over a sustained time (Rhodes, 2005). Ideally, the relationship also benefits the mentor, often through increased cross-cultural understanding (DuBois & Karcher, 2014). Programs can be organized in a variety of ways such as profession-based schemes, with mentoring in the context of training for a specific professional role, or community mentoring, where support is elicited from local volunteers. The formal process includes recruitment, training, matching pairs based on predetermined criteria, meetings between

pairs, group activities, support from coordinators, and match closure (*ibid*). The use of mentoring as an intervention for positive youth development has long been popular in the United States, and there is a large body of research on mentoring in this context. In Europe, mentoring has recently become more common, frequently for facilitating the integration of adult immigrants and refugees (Preston et al., 2019). A comprehensive analysis of the Norwegian research on mentoring thus adds a new perspective to this existing evidence.

Method and data

A scoping review approach is used to systematically collect and summarize literature (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The review process includes specifying broad research questions, searching for relevant literature, screening and selection, summarizing, and presenting the results (*ibid*). In collaboration with a research librarian, we developed a strategy, using Boolean operators where possible for searching in titles, abstracts, and/or keywords, comprising variations on the words *mentor* and *Norway*. For database searches we used English, and for grey literature, both English and Norwegian. Searches were conducted in December 2020 and included the following databases: *PubMed, PsycINFO, ERIC, CINAHL, Scopus, Web of Science, Sociology Collection, ASSIA, Sociological Abstracts,* and *Social Services Abstracts*. We searched in Nordic journals via idunn.no, and in OpenGrey, a grey literature database. To identify additional grey literature, we searched websites of Norwegian research institutes (Fafo, NORCE, OsloMet), on government websites (NAV, IMDi), and on mentorordninger.no, evalueringsportalen.no, and likestillingssenteret.no. A snowball approach was used, with sources added from the reference lists from included articles where they appeared relevant.

In total, 812 publications were identified in databases and 55 from other sources. After elimination of duplicates, 442 unique references remained. Thereafter, a blind screening was conducted in Rayyan, an app for reviews (Ouzzani et al., 2016). Criteria for inclusion were: studies in English or Scandinavian languages, encompassing Norway as the empirical context, which used the term "mentoring" explicitly and emphasized these relationships. The mentoring needed to focus on preventing exclusion or supporting inclusion for vulnerable groups, as defined previously. We included publications such as journal articles and research reports, while excluding non-empirical publications, protocols, books, master's theses, and experience summaries. While screening, we observed many results related to mentoring for professional training. These generally didn't meet our criteria for inclusion (i.e., they did not focus on or mention vulnerable groups specifically but focused broadly on specific profession-based mentoring for individuals studying to be or working as medical professionals or teachers). However, we coded them based on type (teaching/health) to gain an overview of the research field. In screening, 406 articles were excluded based on title/ abstract. Approximately 60 of these were focused on mentoring for student teachers, and 60 on mentoring in health-related professions. In all, 36 references were read in full-text, and 19 of these were included in our analyses. The 17 excluded references were focused on profession-based mentoring without inclusion of vulnerable groups, protocols without research results, literature reviews without specific results from Norway, or were not empirical. Several only had minimal explicit focus on mentoring, while others described professional social workers using relational principles; this distinction could be challenging to delineate. An underlying tension thus relates to the conceptual boundaries of mentoring, particularly when the public sector has program responsibility. While the distinction is clearer when volunteers act as formal mentors, we note that several of our included publi-

cations were in a "grey zone" in this regard due to paid mentors anchored in professional roles in public settings. The process of identification, screening, and selection is depicted in Figure 1 (based on Page et al., 2021).
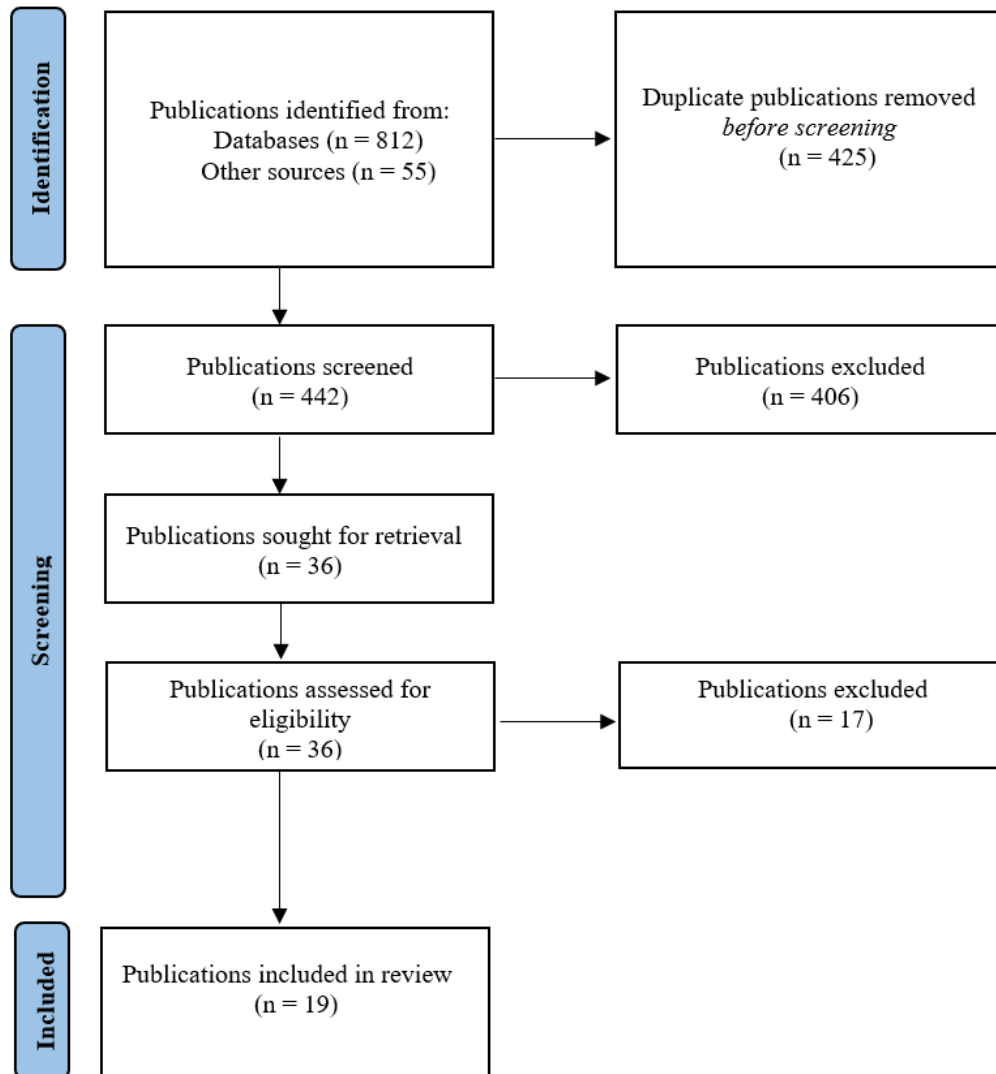

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow chart.

Results

Descriptive characteristics of the included studies are presented first, followed by a discussion of the programs and findings described therein. We use term *program* in referring to the mentoring programs, arrangements, or collaborations that form the publications' empirical basis. Many were organized as projects, while some were utilized as an employment training measure in NAV. Although various terms were used across the publications to refer to mentoring participants, we use *mentee* and *mentor* or *participant*.

Overview of literature

In this section we present an overview of the characteristics of the included literature on mentoring for inclusion. In all, 17 of the 19 included studies were published after 2010.

Only one was published in a peer-reviewed journal; the remainder were commissioned by public authorities or mentoring programs. Two publications were written in English, one used Swedish and Norwegian, and 16 used Norwegian. Ten employed mixed methods approaches (usually qualitative data supplemented by self-designed surveys), while the remainder were purely qualitative. None of the studies used randomized controlled designs (RCT). One publication included another country (Sweden) in addition to Norway. Table 1 illustrates these characteristics.

Table 1. Characteristics of included studies

Year of publication	
2006–2010	2
2011–2015	9
2016–2020	8
Type of publication	
Journal article	1
Report	18
Method	
Quantitative	0
Qualitative	9
Mixed methods	10
	Total (N=19)

Most of the publications (N=14) can be broadly characterized as process and/or result evaluations. Five are primarily formative, some with a secondary evaluatory component. Two of these address aspects of user-centered program design. Three focus on model development for collaboration between employers and NAV organizations, with mentoring as a key element. Table 2 summarizes characteristics of the included publications. Unless otherwise specified, target groups are adults. We also note in the findings section of Table 2 if multiple programs or interventions were evaluated in the same report; our presentation of these findings is limited to those related to mentoring, where possible.

Table 2. Overview of study characteristics

Reference	Method, Design	Mentee group	Program type, Objectives	Findings
Backe-Hansen et al., 2014	Mixed, Evaluation	Youth (14–23) at risk of dropout & who need follow-up from multiple actors/ services	Public Strengthened attachment to work/school Systematization of tailored approaches	Majority of youth were in work/school at project end; 70% had an "improved situation" Mentors (paid front-line employees) felt that there had been positive changes in the mentees' lives Systemic change requires more resources and institutional connections than what is possible in a project

Reference	Method, Design	Mentee group	Program type, Objectives	Findings
Bakketeig et al., 2011	Mixed, Evaluation	Children 8–12 with minority backgrounds	Public School completion, university Strengthen cultural sensitivity in Child Protective Services (CPS)	Mentees too young for assessment of long-term educational results Mentees improved social & language skills, although not all had a need; Good program experiences. Student mentors also benefitted Insecurity in funding is problematic, threatens continuity. Need to strengthen the organizational attachment of the program, local engagement. Program coordinators have a key role
Bjørnset & Kindt, 2019	Mixed, Evaluation	Immigrant background	Non-public Work Increased workplace diversity	Multiple programs; focus on funding scheme Assessing results challenging (vague goals, too early to report). Programs self-report success Need a match between mentors' formal qualifications & mentee skill gaps; Mentors can be "door openers" No direct impact at the workplace-level
Carlsson, 2006	Qualitative, Evaluation	Boys 14–18 with a minority background & violent behavior	Non-public Crime prevention	Criminality reduced, unclear if it is lasting Emphasis on trusting relations; paid mentors/coordinator as highly available, "meaningful others" in the lives of the youth where public institutions have had difficulty reaching
Dyrstad et al., 2014	Mixed, Evaluation	People with a decreased ability to work	Public (NAV) Support workplace/education skill development	Focus on processes and implementation Participants & coordinators reported positive experiences Mentors in businesses can lighten follow-up workload at NAV offices Mentoring in the workplace/education was used only to a limited extent, and with other services
Enehaug et al., 2019	Qualitative, Model development	NAV users with complex needs for support	Public (NAV) Development of workplace inclusion competence Work	Focus on experiences from workplace mentors & cooperation with NAV Hybrid model contributes to strengthened inclusion competence in the workplace Mentors include mentees socially, help with skill development. Cooperation with/support from NAV critical. Need long-term orientation
Falstad, 2011	Mixed, Evaluation	Highly educated immigrants	Non-public Qualify for leadership positions Increase visibility of participants for businesses	Mentoring one program component Participants felt mentoring benefitted them, 45% in leadership positions, started own company or on boards; 70% increased self-esteem Short timeframe Mentors gained insight into a new culture, felt program functioned well

Reference	Method, Design	Mentee group	Program type, Objectives	Findings
Gulbrandsen, 2015	Qualitative, Evaluation	Immigrant women	Non-public Pairs decide (Work, Personal development)	Mentoring one of multiple sub-projects Participants felt the relationship had been valuable, network building. Hard to ascribe employment to mentoring Continuity in staffing is important
Håpnes & Buvik, 2012	Mixed, Evaluation	Highly educated people with multicultural background	Non-public Qualify for leadership positions Increase visibility of participants for businesses	Mentoring one program component Nearly 2/3 of participants had career mobility after a short time; unclear if attributable to program Participants satisfied, strengthened network Signaling to businesses less successful Challenging to finance
Jessen et al., 2018	Mixed, Evaluation	Children 8–12 with minority backgrounds	Public Improved Norwegian, motivation, social skills School completion Strengthen CPS students' cultural sensitivity	36% mentees improved language, 52% improved social skills (mentor-reported) 80% of students report improved communication skills, better insight into mentee's living situation Program dependent on engagement of coordinators & collaborators Need proper financing, institutional anchorage so program less dependent on a few motivated individuals
Klethagen & Spjelkavik, 2018	Qualitative, Model development	NAV users with complex needs for support	Public (NAV) Development of workplace inclusion competence Work	Focus on theoretical model development in NAV, combining caseworker & job specialist models (hybrid) Need support of NAV leadership for hybrid model Funding should be flexible, based on user needs & employer capacity. Need long-term orientation
Kristiansen & Skårberg, 2010	Qualitative, Evaluation	At risk youth in transitional phases	Public Varied (Education/Work)	Mentoring one of several interventions Mentees found positive adult support meaningful Mentor outside of the system may be beneficial for mentees with previous negative experiences with public sector institutions; most important is a good relation New/better collaboration routines developed Challenges with project-oriented model; financing

Reference	Method, Design	Mentee group	Program type, Objectives	Findings
Mathisen & Harkman, 2011	Mixed, Evaluation	Highly qualified immigrants	Public Work Change in perspective among businesses	Some mentees gained employment, but not necessarily in their desired branch Mentors already open to recruiting immigrants, but can function as "door openers"
Mathisen & Lauritzen, 2011	Qualitative, Evaluation	Immigrant women	Non-public Prepared for participation in working life, Networks	Participants report positive experiences Getting a job takes time; difficult to attribute employment to mentoring How "work" is defined is not always clear
Olsen, 2013	Qualitative, Evaluation	Youth with immigrant backgrounds Previously incarcerated youth	Public (NAV) Strengthened connection to work Strengthened networks	Challenging to assess goal achievement Pairs describe relationship as positive. Supporting development, employment, practical skills Volunteers can supplement areas which are difficult for NAV to support (social network) Continuity and progress important in collaborative projects
Radlick, 2020	Mixed, Formative	Highly educated immigrants	Non-public Higher education	Target groups expressed a broad range of "needs" within the context of mentoring, gave feedback on proposed program activities Mentees satisfied with the program, taken steps toward higher education
Radlick et al., 2020	Qualitative, Formative	Youth with multicultural backgrounds	Non-public Pairs decide (Education/ Work)	Focus on participant experiences and needs for digital support in mentoring Need for connection, help with goal achievement, and security/control over personal information
Spjelkavik et al., 2020	Qualitative, Model development	Users with complex needs for support	Public (NAV) Development of workplace inclusion competence Work	Main result is a hybrid model in NAV (caseworker-job specialist mix) Promising short-term labor market results; may be due to factors not controlled for Companies, but also NAV, developed inclusion competence. Cooperation essential. Need for long-term orientation
Viblemo et al., 2018	Mixed, Evaluation	Individuals with reduced work capacity	Public (NAV) Work	Half the participants in work; overall positive experiences (feelings of mastery, skill) Mentoring often used with other NAV services Lack of knowledge & funding for mentoring, need for more NAV support to businesses with mentors

Program characteristics

This section presents characteristics of the programs in the included literature (Table 2) regarding organization, target groups, and objectives. Based on the type of actor with primary responsibility for recruitment and follow-up of participants, eight studies had non-public programs (run by ideal/volunteer organizations, foundations, or social entrepreneurships; some also cooperated with the public sector), while 11 had public programs (organized by NAV, municipalities, or educational institutions). Mentoring with NAV as a coordinating actor was the subject of six publications. Much of this was in the context of NAV's mentoring scheme, with a mentor in the workplace (or higher education). Here, businesses receive economic compensation and NAV employees support the mentoring relationships.

Mentoring activities varied across programs and pairs, with the focus generally on development of skills while also building a supportive relationship. CV writing, skill building or jobseeker courses, and goal planning were common, as were group activities like networking meetings and seminars, or for participants to meet as a group and share experiences. Pairs in some programs engaged in informal social activities like café visits or physical exercise, which enable building trust in a casual setting, while also acting as an arena for practicing language or social skills.

In all, 17 of the programs had adults or youth as target groups. Two focused on children under 13 years old (Bakketeig et al., 2011; Jessen et al., 2018). All non-public programs targeted individuals with immigrant backgrounds. These could be broadly defined, or with specific sub-groups such as refugee women. Public-anchored programs had more varied target groups, also encompassing individuals with complex needs for support or at-risk youth. In non-public programs, mentors were generally adult volunteers, some explicitly with leadership positions. In public programs, mentors' backgrounds varied: social work students, paid adults with various organizational attachments (schools, NAV, youth outreach services), or employees in businesses.

Nearly all the programs in the included publications were oriented broadly towards *labor market inclusion*, in the form of preparation for or obtaining/maintaining employment, and/or *education*, in the form of school retention, preparation for, or enrollment in secondary or higher education. These program objectives varied in their operationalization and concreteness. Several aimed to benefit mentors as well, by strengthening cultural sensitivity and multicultural competence for Child Protective Services (CPS) students (Bakketeig et al., 2011; Jessen et al., 2018), or increasing cross-cultural insights and understanding (Radlick, 2020; Radlick et al., 2020). Two programs allowed mentees to develop their own goals, which were generally work or education oriented (Gulbrandsen, 2015; Radlick et al., 2020). Others focused on preventing youth criminality (Carlsson, 2006), or immigrants obtaining leadership positions (Falstad, 2011; Håpnes & Buvik, 2012). Systemic change, often with a basis in cooperation between mentors/programs and external actors, was also a secondary objective for some programs.

Findings of the included studies

This section summarizes findings from the included studies regarding two key themes identified in the literature: program results and cooperation between mentors/programs and other actors. We also briefly synthesize the main limitations of the studies.

Program results

In all, 17 publications assessed program results, reporting broadly positive short-term results for participants (see Table 2); for example, that programs functioned as intended or that mentees had made *progress* towards or were *in* work or education. Nearly all the publications assessed user experiences with mentoring, overwhelmingly concluding that participants were satisfied with the programs and reported positive benefits of their own participation. Many publications also found qualitative benefits specifically for *mentors*, such as increased cultural awareness or a new understanding of mentee challenges in gaining access to the labor market.

A high-quality, trusting relationship between pairs was highlighted as an important foundation for goal achievement and positive experiences. The connection between mentoring and inclusion was discussed in multiple publications regarding trust, networks, and social capital (Mathisen & Harkman, 2011; Håpnes & Buvik, 2012; Gulbrandsen, 2015; Radlick, 2020). For example, in a formative study, youths' needs in the context of digital support for mentoring were analyzed in light of social capital, regarding strengthening networks, peer reciprocity, and trust (Radlick et al., 2020). As Bjørnset & Kindt (2019) describe in their analysis of multiple programs with immigrant target groups, face-to-face meetings support trust building, informal strengthening of language skills, and better understanding of cultural norms. Mentors with relevant professional backgrounds to the mentee can also identify skill gaps related to formal and informal qualifications, providing individualized support based on their sector-specific understanding of the labor market context (*ibid*). Mentoring relationships are described here as an institutionalization of weak ties; these are looser social relationships and connections that are beneficial when seeking employment (*ibid*, p. 11).

Cooperation and the systemic level

Multiple publications assessed results beyond the individual participant level, looking at *cooperation* between mentors/programs and external actors and assessing organizational or *systemic level processes or changes*; here, there was mixed "success" (Table 2).

Findings from a report where workplace mentoring was combined with other approaches concluded that mentors assisted NAV in providing close follow-up to people with various vulnerabilities participating in "ordinary" work (Dyrstad et al., 2014). This alleviated the burden on NAV offices which might otherwise struggle to provide good support to users with complex needs. For example, workplace mentors supported young people with mental health problems in the transition to working life, enabling them to understand unspoken social codes and norms in the workplace, providing motivation as well as job-related support (*ibid*). Several newer research publications on NAV-supported workplace mentoring suggest that collaboration and co-creation strengthen businesses' inclusion competence (Spjelkavik et al., 2020). This expertise was found to have been strengthened in NAV as well, with advisors gaining greater insight into inclusion challenges, different user needs for support, and factors to consider in placement and follow up (*ibid*). Hybrid types of organization (for example, where workplace mentors were responsible for follow-up related to work tasks and social support in the workplace, while NAV advisors were responsible for formal activities related to rules and contact with other public actors like doctors) were viewed positively as innovations that contributed to this mutual inclusion competence (Enehaug et al., 2019). However, good support from NAV to the mentors and businesses was deemed as being critical for success (*ibid*).

Findings on cooperation between mentors/programs and public institutions also highlighted challenges regarding disagreements about target groups, measures, goals, and

approaches. One example is the tension between public institutions' objectives of quick labor market integration of immigrants and mentoring participants' desire to find a job which matches the mentee's skills, something which takes time (Bjørnset & Kindt, 2019). The limitations of working in a project format were also discussed in the publications' findings, often in relation to systemic change. For example, short timeframes, limited or unpredictable resources (financing, staffing), or a weak connection to higher level decision-making structures (Backe-Hansen et al., 2014) could act as barriers to continuity and longer-term perspectives, as well as institutionalization of the mentoring initiatives (Jessen et al., 2018).

Methodological limitations

Overall, methodological challenges related to project or study designs, as well as unclear program goals, made it difficult to assess goal achievement, limitations which are acknowledged in many of the publications. For example, although participants may be in work/education when mentoring ends, it was uncertain if this was directly attributable to mentoring. Additionally, mentees might gain employment, but not in their desired field (Bjørnset & Kindt, 2019). There were also temporal challenges due to short programs or evaluation timepoints. It takes time for people to build language skills or find a job and programs assessed immediately after conclusion may not show positive results (*ibid*). Teasing out the contribution of mentoring can be difficult if multiple interventions are used, or if several programs are evaluated simultaneously. Selection bias is also a challenge when there are small numbers of participants, when mentees self-select to participate, or if there is "creaming", where those who are most likely to succeed are selected for participation (Spjelkavik et al., 2020). Although mentors describe benefitting from participation, they may be positive towards target groups at the outset. Additionally, strong personal engagement, particularly from mentoring coordinators, can drive better outcomes than what might be seen under everyday contexts (*ibid*).

Discussion

This article's contribution lies in a mapping of the Norwegian research field of mentoring for inclusion with regards to characteristics of the literature and the programs, main findings related to program results, cooperation between mentors/programs and other actors, and a summary of limitations. As context can shape the way in which programs are developed and implemented (Preston et al., 2019), our inquiry complements an extensive body of American mentoring research and more recent European research by concentrating on mentoring for inclusion in the Norwegian welfare state context. Our review finds that mentoring research in Norway has overwhelmingly focused on mentoring for teaching or nursing professionals. However, there has been an increase over time in research on mentoring for inclusion of vulnerable groups. Programs in our sample of 19 publications focused mostly youth or adults rather than children. This is unsurprising considering the broad focus on education or labor market inclusion. As common with Continental European mentoring programs (*ibid*), many in our sample targeted immigrants. Overall, the included publications found positive short-term program results, suggesting that mentoring programs often achieve their broad objectives, and/or are experienced positively by both mentee and mentor participants. This coincides with several American meta-analyses (for example Raposa et al., 2019) that find youth mentoring contributes to a broad range of positive outcomes, although with modest effect sizes.

Our included literature overwhelmingly utilizes qualitative interview studies, sometimes supplemented by quantitative data. This allows an in-depth assessment of participants' experiences in mentoring programs, and sometimes descriptive quantitative results. However, one main challenge relates to programs' (lack of) clearly operationalized program objectives and specific quantitative targets for program results. This makes it impossible to identify causal effects of mentoring, also due to the often small number of program participants, as in many of our included publications. These issues are not unique to the Norwegian research field. The small-n problem is highlighted as a main limitation of program evaluations in the United States, in addition to programs focusing on diverse/diffuse outcomes, and a lack of "evidence based" programs (Rhodes, 2020). Regarding this last point, our analyses also suggest that there is room for programs to have a stronger connection to the significant existing evidence base of good practices for mentoring (for example, Crijns & De Cuyper, 2022 for mentoring for immigrants in Europe; Garringer et al., 2015 for youth mentoring in the American context).

Overall, our review does not allow us to conclude that mentoring has positive *effects*. Nevertheless, it shows *promise* for facilitating inclusion in the Norwegian context. Mentors are described as "door openers", providing mentees access to their resources, knowledge, and sometimes other contacts in their network in the context of a trusting relationship over time. This assists mentee transition to or retainment in work or education, in line with what de Cuyper and colleagues (2019) postulate. In some cases, mentoring also provides insight into cultural norms or workplace culture (*ibid*). Additionally, mentors perceive benefits from their own participation, as suggested by DuBois & Karcher (2014). Cooperation between programs/mentors and public actors like NAV may promote inclusion of vulnerable groups with high needs for support, while providing more individualized attention. However, system-level changes appear to be more diffuse.

Implications: Nordic welfare state institutions and cooperation

Our results indicate that mentoring may supplement or support public welfare services. This is in line with broader trends of civil society supporting welfare state goals of inclusion (Loga, 2018). The mentoring in our studies generally encompasses *supplementary* tasks, helpful to achieving welfare state goals. Some of these tasks, such as a supportive person who encourages skill development, feelings of inclusion, building self-esteem or social capital are not formally delegated to welfare state actors. These can be facilitated by non-public actors, such as mentors, who take a starting point in building a trusting relationship. Our review points to mentoring as being promising for groups with complex needs or who may have low levels of institutional trust and who may benefit from relational support or cross-sectoral coordination (for example Ose et al., 2014). However, in the literature findings we also identify barriers to cooperation including differing goals and limited or uncertain time and financing, similar to what others have also found (Pedersen, 2021). Challenges related to the "project" format were also a point for discussion in the publications. This coincides with broader conclusions related to projectification, which suggest that the potential flexibility and innovation facilitated by time-limited projects can also result in a lack of continuity or long-term anchoring of promising interventions (Söderberg, 2020). These are factors which might be considered by practitioners or public authorities contemplating the use of mentoring interventions, particularly those relying on cooperation between multiple actors.

Limitations of this review

This article has provided an overview on the Norwegian research on mentoring for inclusion, but with some limitations. We believe our process for collecting peer-reviewed journal articles was thorough. However, ensuring that we have identified all relevant grey literature is more challenging. This is an inherent limitation in any review that includes grey literature, as each individual publication must be identified and collected manually. Overall, our grey literature search was robust and encompassed a variety of relevant sources and we expect few omissions. The review was limited to publications that have a basis in and specifically use the term "mentoring". This resulted in exclusion of several reports which had thematic commonalities but which were not grounded in mentoring research, although some grey areas existed (as described previously). Furthermore, as per a scoping review approach, we did not undertake a comprehensive assessment of the "quality" of the studies.

Future research

Results from our analyses point to numerous directions for future research on mentoring in Norway; we limit our suggestions in this regard. Clearly, quantitative effects studies, preferably using a RCT design if possible, would be useful, as none of the included studies provided a robust analysis of program effects. Several studies appeared to have a "professionalization" of the mentor role or tasks; this may represent a shift in the conceptualization or definition of mentoring and could interesting to explore. A systematic analysis of program best practices in the Norwegian context could also be a valuable contribution. Ultimately, while this review has provided insights into research on mentoring for inclusion of vulnerable groups, there remain numerous gaps in knowledge. These suggest many areas for future inquiry.

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