

Reflection

Introduction

My research focuses on the media mentorship ecosystem in the East London boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest, and Hackney. As an international student who has lived in East London for a year, I've come to appreciate the vibrant, creative environment. East London is different from the stereotypical image of London's grand, historic architecture—it's more youthful, dynamic, and open to creative possibilities. This unique environment inspired my project.

Process and Experience

At first, I was frustrated because there wasn't much secondary data or academic literature available to support my research. My supervisor, Dr. Anne Preston, suggested that I gather first-hand data through interviews, which turned out to be a turning point. I started contacting media mentorship program coordinators, and this led me to discover the complexity of the ecosystem. It's not just a simple relationship between mentors and mentees—there are multiple stakeholders involved, including government bodies, educational institutions, media companies, and community interest companies (CICs).

Finding the right people to interview was challenging. I initially sent over 40 emails to various programs, but many did not respond. Then, I turned to LinkedIn, where I could find individuals' backgrounds very detailed who were directly involved in the programs I was interesting. This method worked better, though I still faced challenges during the interviews. Sometimes the respondents shared interesting but irrelevant stories, so I had to learn to guide the conversation effectively. Each interview taught me something new, and by the end, I had gained more confidence in steering discussions toward meaningful insights.

Key Insights and Findings

One major challenge I encountered was balancing structured questions with the open-ended nature of the interviews. In my early interviews, I stuck rigidly to my prepared questions, which led to some awkward pauses and forced answers. However, as I progressed, I started to focus on key themes like inclusivity and challenges, allowing the conversation to flow more naturally. This approach led to richer insights. For example, one of my most meaningful interviews was with a representative from Waltham Forest Council, who shared how they mentored a transgender individual facing both professional and personal struggles. The support they provided went beyond just technical skills—it included psychological support, which led to the mentee successfully entering the theatre industry. More than that, the mentee went on to mentor others in the transgender community, showing the ripple effect of effective mentorship.

This experience showed me that mentorship programs can be transformative, not only for skill-building but also for breaking down social barriers. I began to see how mentorship programs could be more inclusive and how they contribute to building stronger communities.

Impact and Application

I realised that my research shouldn't be limited to an academic report. After discussions with Dr. Anne Preston, I decided to create a website where East London's young media talent could explore various mentorship programs. The website I created can provide practical information about free and inclusive programs designed for disadvantaged individuals who may not have traditional access to the media industry. I hope the website will serve as a useful tool for young creatives looking for opportunities to break into the media world and find their path.

Conclusion

This project has taught me the importance of mentorship not only in building professional skills but also in shaping personal growth and community connections. Moving forward, I would like to expand the website's reach, including more programs and stories. Mentorship in the media industry is essential for fostering diversity and helping young talent overcome barriers to success.