Peer Mentoring – Academic Review

* In the introduction, I would not specifically mention the Ashkelon Academic College, as the introduction should be a broad overview of the literature in the field. Instead, you can include any pertinent information about the specific research site in the method section.
* Further, when you bring up how students felt about the support center at the College, you don’t have any citations. How was this information collected? Was there a study done? If you are to include this information (about how students with disabilities feel about assistance), then you should be citing relevant research. Right now, it sounds like you informally asked students about their experiences, which is nice when you are thinking about the rationale about why you did your study, but it doesn’t belong in an academic paper. Rather, this is interesting information that you can bring up when you present your paper at a conference.
* Are there intervention centers in other colleges/universities? Have any studies been done about them? If so, you should include that information.
* On page 2, you write “students with good learning abilities…” – this sounds awkward and it makes it sound like students with learning abilities are “bad”. Given that the students with special needs are the mentors, do you have other information about what special needs those with the “good learning abilities” have? How do they get chosen? Do they need to have a specific GPA? Similarly, the students who are strong emotionally – how is that assessed?
  + \*This information belongs later in the method section, not here. You’ll see that I talk about this later on, when I suggest changes to the method section.
* You mention that there are a small number of studies that have examined the effect of peer-mentoring on the well-being of the mentors themselves, but then only cite one study. Given that these studies seem to be the most relevant background that is related to your study, you should go into detail about the number of studies, the population, and the results of all the studies.
* Your literature review has a subsection labeled “theoretical background” but since this is the only subsection, I don’t see having a subsection to be very useful. Instead, I think you should start the paper with one paragraph that gives a very brief introduction (increasing number of students with special needs in higher education; various programs exist to help them acclimate; mentoring is one such program but studies rarely examine mentors’ experience and none at all have examined it among special needs individuals; and this study will specifically examine the effects on mentors of one particular peer-mentoring program among students with special needs).
  + Then, you can start your sub-sections. I suggest something like:
    - Students with special needs in higher education
      * This can include the statistics of the number/percentage of students who are enrolling, showing the increase, and the number/percentage of students who fail and/or do not complete their studies relative to non-special needs students and reasons for why
      * I think you should also be clear which special needs you are including and the difference between different kinds of special needs and enrollment/drop-out rates
    - Current support for special needs students
      * Then you can go into the current support that students with special needs receive and the success (or not) of the current support efforts (ideally, citing academic articles or statistics from higher education resources)
      * You can then talk about mentoring as part of the support that students with special needs receive and what elements make-up that mentorship (e.g., who is providing the mentoring, the unique effects of mentoring beyond other types of more traditional support)
    - The facets and effects of peer mentoring
      * Here you can give general information about peer mentoring – what goes into it, research about its success (or not) and the different populations that it has been studied in and then focus in on peer mentoring among students and/or young adults
      * Provide any research that might exist about how mentors benefit from mentoring (in addition to the benefits that mentees receive)
      * Do what you can to tie it into special needs – for example, what literature exists that gives you the idea that students with special needs will benefit from peer mentoring in general, and from being mentors specifically
        + this can also be general – perhaps, theories of self-efficacy - think about what the mechanisms you think are at play for why students with special needs in particular will benefit from being mentors and then add in the relevant literature
        + You bring up Helper Theory, and that can be one theory you touch upon, but I think you should think about more psychological mechanisms (such as self-efficacy, or others) and see what literature exists among the special needs population that you can tie in.

In your results, you talk about self-efficacy, self-esteem, and empowerment – I think these should be included in the literature review here. Additionally, the background literature that you include in your findings/results section, belongs in these literature review sections.

* + \*This will require a decent amount of reorganization and additional literature to be added
* It’s unclear why you talk about helper theory in the contexts of low socioeconomic status – as I wrote above, you should be narrowing in on what individuals with special needs will benefit from. I think the Positive Psychology model is good but, again, I suggest you discuss specific psychological mechanisms.
  + You have one citation (Gartner & Riessman, 1993) about helper theory in the context of students mentoring other students – you should provide additional information about this study.
* “Thus, in the current project we employed the model of positive psychotherapy as well as the helper theory to create as a therapeutic tool for empowering the students who were used to be receivers of help due to their disabilities.”
  + Did you create a therapeutic tool? It seemed to me that you evaluated a program that was already in place… is this not the case? Either way, I suggest you clarify this point.
* In the method section, you start off talking about case studies, but your research study isn’t exactly a case study; rather, as you say after, you used semi-structured interviews. I suggest you take out the information you provide about case studies.
* Additionally, you should re-arrange the sections of your method section so that it follows APA style (or whichever style you choose). Here are the APA style ones:
  + Participants
    - Here, I would add the mean age and SD of your participants, which special needs they have, and what type of mentoring they engaged in – that is, what types of special needs students did they mentor? Did any mentors participate in the past as mentees or previously as mentors? A chart might even be helpful here matching mentor to mentee.
    - Also, I suggest you add how participants were recruited. Here is where you can add a brief description about the particular research site and its peer mentoring program that you set out to evaluate (rather than in the introduction).
  + Procedure and Measures (in your case, I would combine these two sections)
    - Here you can describe the pieces of the intervention program – was there a basis for how it was designed? You should include how long the mentoring took place, how often it occurred, how the mentoring was structured, how many mentees per mentor, and any other important information about the program. Basically, there should be enough information so that if your reader wanted to re-create it, they should have the information to do so.
    - Here you should include information on how you used semi-structured interviews, the length of the interviews, where they took place, and the questions asked. Additionally, at what point were the interviews conducted (right after the mentoring program, a few weeks later, while the program was still running)?
    - You should also discuss the system in which data was analyzed – what coding scheme did you use, how many researchers were involved in the thematic analysis and how themes were chosen
      * for example, you say that themes correspond with the significance that students gave to peer-mentoring, but it’s not so clear how you decided that one theme was more significant to the students than other themes – you want to provide detailed information to your reader so that they will be convinced you analyzed the data well
* All the relevant background information and theories (the sentences with citations) that you include in your findings/results section belong either in your introduction or discussion (probably both, so long as you are not too repetitive).
  + This speaks to my earlier suggestion about including the potential mechanisms (where I bring up self-efficacy)– basically, why you believe that mentors will benefit (e.g., increased self-esteem, self-efficacy, empowerment). You can move a lot of the information you present in the results/findings section up to the introduction and then reiterate the important points and citations in the discussion.
  + Results sections should not have any citations – they should only include your findings and your summary of them.
* The points you raise about the association between self-esteem and academic achievement do not appear to be relevant to your paper – unless the specific benefit you want to bring up is a higher GPA etc. among the mentors – however this is not supported by the quotes you choose and it appears you are making the case that there are psychological benefits (rather than academic or other types of benefits)
  + I suggest you make a much clearer connection between the quotes and the themes you’ve identified, as well as a clear connection back to your population of interest (special needs students).
* I am not convinced that the quotes you present for your first theme illustrate self-esteem – this is why it’s very important for you to be detailed with how you came up with the themes earlier in the method section. Either way, I suggest you think more about why you think those quotes illustrate improvements in self-esteem or think through your themes and perhaps come up with different ones (as the other two themes also don’t always have quotes that completely support the theme).
* Some of your quotes seem to have multiple themes- for example, Si’s quote in the self-efficacy paragraph. While I do agree that some parts illustrate self-efficacy (e.g., “I have all the resources to succeed”), others don’t seem to match the theme (e.g., “It taught me how to be more patient, be tolerant to others…”)
  + I suggest you be more focused in the quotes you choose to display across all 3 themes – they don’t always have to be long passages; you can also incorporate just a sentence from the quote into your text. Do be aware of the formatting rules for quotes as well – for example, in APA style, quotes under 40 words go within the text, and not separated out into a free-standing block.
* The themes of self-efficacy and empowerment seem to overlap – for example, in the empowerment section, one participant says “…it made me realize that I can make the change in my own life, to grow despite my disability” – this also sounds to me like self-efficacy. You will want to be sure that your themes are differentiated from one another or, if you have a reason for them to overlap, to discuss why the themes are separated out in the manner you chose.
* I also think it would be important to include (perhaps as a final paragraph of the findings section) the other interesting points that were brought up that might not have been common enough or a theme (e.g., increased tolerance for others), as this might be useful information when you or your readers are thinking about future studies.
* I would be careful in how you talk about changes that the program brought about. For example, you write in the results/findings section that, “Participants in the mentoring program exhibited a considerable change in their self-efficacy.”
  + I would make it clear that this is a self-reported change that was measured after the program was over - that is, as far as I can tell, you didn’t have any measures prior to the program’s start, correct? Of course, if you did, I would mention this in the paper.
* Once you edit the introduction (if you choose to incorporate the suggestions raised earlier), I suggest you have the discussion section also include some of the new points (for example, the mechanisms behind the benefits of such a program) and any other theoretical perspectives. Also, you may also move some the research and theory you bring up in the results section to the discussion section, as I noted earlier.
* Again, I mention this earlier, but it’s a very important point – I strongly suggest that you consistently bring the way you present previous findings and theory, as well as your own findings, back to the specific population you are studying. While I was reading, I often felt like the paper was just about being a mentor in general, but not about the uniqueness of being a mentor specifically as a person who has special needs. I think this point about special needs individuals needs to be at the center.
* I suggest you expand on your future research section – this should be at least a full paragraph. Some overlapping and additional ideas might include: longitudinal studies, mixed-method (qualitative and quantitative) studies, examining if there are differences by type of special need and the particular benefits, multiple research sites, larger sample sizes.
* I’m not sure what style your references are meant to be in – they look close to APA style. If that’s what you are going to use, you need to update the formatting throughout (e.g., in section headings, in the references section).