





# Mentoring Newly Appointed Teachers in Rural South African Schools: The Role of School Management Teams in Chris Hani East District

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores the role of School Management Teams (SMTs) in mentoring newly appointed teachers within a secondary school in the Chris Hani East District, South Africa. With a large portion of South Africa's teaching workforce approaching retirement, the successful induction and retention of novice teachers has become a national imperative. The study adopted a qualitative research approach using a phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of SMT members and newly appointed teachers. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample comprising the principal, one Head of Department, and four newly appointed teachers. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key trends in mentorship practices. Findings reveal that although SMTs are willing to support newly appointed teachers, their efforts are hindered by a lack of time, training, and resources. Informal mentoring structures dominate, often leading to inconsistent outcomes. The study is underpinned by Organisational Socialisation Theory, which frames mentorship as a structured process essential for effective role adjustment. The article recommends the formalisation of mentoring programmes, capacity building for SMTs, and clear policy guidelines from the Department of Basic Education. These measures are vital for improving teacher retention and ensuring quality education in under-resourced South African schools.

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## INTRODUCTION

The teaching profession in South Africa is undergoing a pivotal transformation, as nearly half of the country's teaching workforce is projected to retire within the next decade.<sup>1</sup> This development necessitates the urgent recruitment and integration of newly appointed teachers into the education system. However, emerging research and empirical observations consistently point to the inadequacy of pre-service training in preparing novice teachers for the realities of the classroom, especially in under-resourced and rural contexts.<sup>2</sup> Newly appointed teachers often encounter complex challenges, including classroom management, lesson planning, and navigating school culture, areas that are typically underemphasised during teacher training. As a result, the initial years of teaching are

<sup>1</sup> J. Manama, "South Africa to Lose Half of Teachers in 10 Years. News24.," <https://www.news24.com>, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Hope Larios, "Retaining Novice Teachers through Induction and the Role of Novice Teacher Induction Mentors: A Mixed-Methods Study," (Northwest Nazarene University, 2025).

characterised by stress, uncertainty, and high attrition, particularly within the first five years of employment.<sup>3</sup> Within this context, the role of School Management Teams (SMTs) becomes increasingly critical. Comprising principals, deputy principals, and heads of departments, SMTs are expected not only to manage school operations but also to lead professional development and mentoring initiatives. Research shows that structured mentoring enhances teaching quality, supports professional identity formation, and increases teacher retention. However, despite the existence of policy frameworks such as the Department of Higher Education and Training's *New Teacher Induction Guidelines*, mentoring practices across South African schools remain largely informal, inconsistent, and poorly monitored.<sup>4</sup> The problem is further exacerbated in rural and historically disadvantaged communities, where limited training, unclear policy directives, and resource constraints hinder the implementation of meaningful mentorship. These gaps contradict the National Development Plan 2030's vision of equitable, high-quality education, which emphasises teacher support and professional development as key drivers of system improvement.<sup>5</sup> This article explores the role of SMTs in mentoring newly appointed teachers within a rural secondary school in the Chris Hani East District. It aims to examine how SMTs support novice teachers, assess the effectiveness of current mentoring practices, and identify challenges impeding successful implementation. Drawing on Organisational Socialisation Theory, the study frames mentoring as a structured and continuous process that facilitates the integration of new teachers into the professional and organisational culture of schools.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The induction of newly appointed teachers remains a global concern, particularly in contexts where teacher turnover and performance disparities are high. Mentoring has emerged as a critical component of teacher support strategies, yet its implementation varies widely depending on national policies, institutional cultures, and local resources. This literature review presents international, African, and South African perspectives on the mentoring of newly appointed teachers, with specific emphasis on the role of School Management Teams (SMTs). The review is structured according to three key themes that align with the study's objectives: (1) the roles and responsibilities of SMTs in mentoring; (2) the effectiveness of mentoring programmes; and (3) challenges faced in implementation. The review is underpinned by Organisational Socialisation Theory, which frames mentoring as a structured process for integrating new members into institutional cultures.

### International Perspectives on Mentoring Newly Appointed Teachers

Globally, structured mentoring has been identified as one of the most effective strategies to support new teachers' transition into the profession. In the United States, Ingersoll and Strong in 2011 conducted a meta-analysis of over fifteen empirical studies and found that well-structured induction programmes, including mentorship, were significantly associated with increased teacher retention, improved instructional practices, and stronger student achievement outcomes.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in Australia, Flückiger, Lovett, Dempster, and Brown argue that mentoring helps novice teachers develop reflective practice, pedagogical competence, and professional identity.<sup>7</sup> However, they also note that its potential impact is significantly diminished when mentoring is poorly coordinated or overly informal. For Kearney, insufficient mentor training and a lack of time allocation frequently undermine mentoring initiatives in Australian schools.<sup>8</sup> In European contexts, mentoring is often treated as the sole

<sup>3</sup> Jane Perryman et al., "A Tipping Point in Teacher Retention and Accountability: The Case of Inspection," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 73, no. 2 (2025): 181–200.

<sup>4</sup> Amanda Hlengwa, "How Are Institutions Developing the next Generation of University Teachers?," *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning* 7, no. 1 (2019): 1–18.

<sup>5</sup> Norma Ghamrawi, "Toward Agenda 2030 in Education: Policies and Practices for Effective School Leadership," *Educational Research for Policy and Practice* 22, no. 2 (2023): 325–47.

<sup>6</sup> Jennifer M Lindemuth, "New Teacher Induction in International Christian Schools: Self-Perceptions of Administrators and New Teachers" (Regent University, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Bev Flückiger et al., "Middle Leaders: Career Pathways and Professional Learning Needs," *Leading and Managing* 21, no. 2 (2015): 60–74.

<sup>8</sup> Sean Kearney, "The Challenges of Beginning Teacher Induction: A Collective Case Study," *Teaching Education* 32, no. 2 (2021): 142–58.

responsibility of individual mentors, which limits school-wide collaboration.<sup>9</sup> In Belgium, new teachers preferred selecting their mentors from within their subject area and avoided mentorship from principals due to concerns over power dynamics.<sup>10</sup> This suggests a need for role clarity and mentor neutrality.

### African Contexts

In sub-Saharan Africa, research highlights that mentoring programmes for newly appointed teachers remain informal, underfunded, and inconsistently implemented. In Ghana, a 2020 study by Mavis Amponsem found that while heads of departments were often tasked with mentoring, many lacked formal training, resulting in fragmented and inconsistent approaches.<sup>11</sup> Similar findings were reported by Kuluchumila in Tanzania, where informal peer mentoring prevailed in the absence of structured policy support. Nonetheless, there is growing evidence of mentoring's benefits when properly implemented.<sup>12</sup> In Kenya, in his thesis, Smilak highlighted that in 2020, Muraya and Wairimu found that mentoring significantly improved lesson planning, instructional delivery, and teacher morale.<sup>13</sup> In the context of Lesotho, assigning departmental heads as official mentors with specific training is reported to have improved accountability and effectiveness.<sup>14</sup> However, across many African countries, systemic challenges persist. These include limited financial support, excessive workloads for SMTs, and unclear policy directives.<sup>15</sup> These barriers compromise the sustainability and quality of mentoring initiatives, particularly in rural and low-resourced schools.

### South African Perspectives

In the South African education system, mentoring is acknowledged in national policies but rarely implemented in a structured or sustainable manner. The Department of Higher Education and Training introduced the *New Teacher Induction Guidelines* to support novice teachers during their initial years. However, the policy lacks a clearly articulated framework for continuous mentorship, leaving SMTs without concrete guidelines or training.<sup>16</sup> Research by Lisene found that mentoring practices are highly variable across provinces and schools. In some well-resourced urban schools, structured mentorship programmes are operational, while in rural areas, mentorship often takes the form of informal peer support.<sup>17</sup> Mahome and Mphahlele argue that this inconsistency is partly due to limited professional development opportunities for SMTs, coupled with a lack of monitoring by provincial education departments.<sup>18</sup> Mhlongo and Chaane further identify inadequate training, limited time, and unclear expectations as key constraints faced by SMTs.<sup>19</sup> While SMTs are mandated to mentor new teachers under the IQMS and school leadership responsibilities, many lack the pedagogical or leadership

<sup>9</sup> Ingrid Mulà and Daniella Tilbury, "Teacher Education for Sustainable Development: Catalysing Change across the Professional Landscapes in Europe," *Environmental Education Research*, 2025, 1–28.

<sup>10</sup> Stéphane Colognesi, Catherine Van Nieuwenhoven, and Simon Beausaert, "Supporting Newly-Qualified Teachers' Professional Development and Perseverance in Secondary Education: On the Role of Informal Learning," *European Journal of Teacher Education* 43, no. 2 (2020): 258–76.

<sup>11</sup> Mavis Amponsem, "Students' experiences of Using Online Learning Materials to Support Academic Success in Higher Education: A Case of Distance Learning Teacher Education Programmes" (Institute of Distance Learning, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, 2020).

<sup>12</sup> Revocatus C Kuluchumila, "'Distributed Leadership in Tanzanian Secondary Schools,' On Leadership: An Interdisciplinary Approach 351," 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Nicole R Smilak, "'Using Applied Behavior Analysis to Strengthen Academic Engagement in a Kenyan Institutional Setting,'" *Endicott College*, 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Tebello Tlali and Ntjoetso Matete, "The Challenges Faced by Heads of Departments in Selected Lesotho High Schools," *School Leadership & Management* 41, no. 3 (May 27, 2021): 194–210, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2020.1851672>.

<sup>15</sup> D. Mensah, "'Investigating the Challenges in the Induction of Newly Appointed Teachers in Amansie West District-Copy'" (University of Education, Winneba, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Hawama Mohamed, *The Role of School Leadership in Mentoring Beginner Teachers' Transition into the Teaching Profession* (University of Johannesburg (South Africa), 2022).

<sup>17</sup> Lucia Nthooa Lisene, "Instructional Leadership Perspectives and Practices of Heads of Departments for Science in Lesotho Secondary Schools" (University of the Free State, 2024).

<sup>18</sup> Michael Moreti Mahome and Lydia Kgomotso Mphahlele, "The Effective Management of Teachers' Habitual Tardiness: Protecting Scheduled Teaching Time," *International Journal of Educational Management and Development Studies* 5, no. 4 (n.d.): 178–200.

<sup>19</sup> Asser R. Mhlongo and Tshidisegang M Chaane, "Challenges Experienced by Gauteng Foundation Phase Departmental Heads in Managing Teaching and Learning," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 15, no. 1 (2025): 1590.

training required to do so effectively. In addition, mentoring is not formally recognised as part of the SMT performance appraisal systems, reducing the incentive for sustained implementation.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Role of SMTs in Mentoring**

The literature consistently identifies SMTs, particularly principals and Heads of Department (HoDs), as central agents in teacher mentoring. Their leadership practices influence the structure, tone, and sustainability of induction and mentoring programmes.<sup>21</sup> According to Letswalo and Motseta, SMTs play a dual role as both mentors and administrators, which can be beneficial but may also result in conflicting expectations.<sup>22</sup> In some cases, novice teachers perceive SMTs more as evaluators than supporters, which can hinder open communication and trust.<sup>23</sup> In the South African context, the SMT's effectiveness in mentoring is directly tied to leadership capacity, school culture, and available resources. Mbulaheni found that SMTs often lack training in adult learning principles, coaching methods, and interpersonal mentoring skills. Without institutional support, mentorship becomes ad hoc and unsustainable.<sup>24</sup>

### **Effectiveness of Mentoring Programmes**

Effective mentoring has been shown to improve professional competence, reduce teacher anxiety, and enhance classroom management skills.<sup>25</sup> In a review of global studies, Zheng found that mentored teachers consistently demonstrate higher levels of preparedness, confidence, and commitment.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Kotze asserts that structured mentoring significantly increases teacher retention in the first five years.<sup>27</sup> In South Africa, however, these benefits are unevenly distributed. Ndebele and Legg-Jack found that while some SMTs were proactive in mentoring, most lacked the time, training, and institutional support necessary for sustained impact.<sup>28</sup> Allan argues that mentoring programmes risk being superficial, short-lived, or tokenistic without systemic recognition and policy reinforcement.<sup>29</sup>

### **Challenges Facing SMTs**

The literature identifies numerous challenges SMTs face in implementing mentoring initiatives. These include:

- i. Time constraints
- ii. Lack of mentor preparation
- iii. Absence of incentives or recognition
- iv. Poor mentor-mentee matching

Resource limitations, staff shortages, and conflicting administrative duties in South Africa hinder mentoring efforts.<sup>30</sup> These obstacles are particularly pronounced in rural schools, where the

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<sup>20</sup> Ntombikayise Nkosi, "Unseen influencers: Deputy principals' perceptions of their roles in primary school leadership," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Education Research* 7, no. 1 (2025).

<sup>21</sup> Nonkanyiso Pamela Shabalala, "Challenges, Opportunities and Strategies of Distributed Leadership in Managing Environmental Education Curriculum in South African Secondary Schools," *Journal of Educational Management and Development Studies* 6, no. 1 (2025): 98–135.

<sup>22</sup> Valesa Moshibudi Letswalo and Lesiba Lesley Motseta, "Effective Leadership and Educational Management in the Modern Era," 2025.

<sup>23</sup> Robyn Mary Whittaker and Kathryn Susan Kure, "Exploring the Usefulness of the SchoolWeavers Tool in the Whole-School Evaluation Process in South Africa," *Journal of Professional Capital and Community* 10, no. 2 (2025): 167–89.

<sup>24</sup> Visi Muriel Mbulaheni, "Creating Sustainable Teaching and Learning Environments in Dysfunctional Secondary Schools in the Mutale Area of Vhembe District," 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Mary Achenushure Abetang, Romano Nereo Oguma, and Akpenka Pius Abetang, "Mentoring And The Difference It Makes In Teachers' work: A Literature Review," *European Journal of Education Studies* 7, no. 6 (2020).

<sup>26</sup> Yi Zheng, "The Relationship between Success in Small Business Management and the Quality of School Education," *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* 62, no. 2 (2025): 704–16.

<sup>27</sup> Christy Jean Kotze, "'I Am Because We Are': Novice Teacher Mentoring Support Needs from an Ubuntu Perspective," *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education* 14, no. 1 (2025): 54–70.

<sup>28</sup> Dagogo William Legg-Jack and Clever Ndebele, "Fostering Digital Inclusion in TVET Teacher Training: Insights from Quadruple Helix Innovation Model," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 3, no. 12 (2022): 648–64.

<sup>29</sup> Katherine A Allan, "Mentorship for New Faculty Members: A Qualitative Follow-up to Prior Canadian Research," 2023.

<sup>30</sup> Lynette Botha, "Understanding the Benefits and Barriers of School-Based Mentoring in South Africa," 2023.

pressure of administrative duties often overshadows professional development activities. Additionally, the hierarchical nature of school leadership can suppress the collaborative and developmental spirit essential for effective mentorship.<sup>31</sup>

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Organisational Socialisation Theory (OST), first conceptualised by Van Maanen and Schein in 1979, offers a valuable lens through which to understand how newly appointed teachers are integrated into the professional culture of schools.<sup>32</sup> This theory explores the processes through which individuals acquire the knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and skills necessary to become effective members of an organisation. In educational settings, OST highlights the role of formal and informal socialisation practices such as mentoring and induction in facilitating teacher adjustment, professional identity formation, and long-term retention.<sup>33</sup> Figure 1 below graphically illustrates the core phases and practical relevance of Organisational Socialisation Theory (OST), as conceptualised by Van Maanen and Schein (1979), in supporting newly appointed teachers within school environments, particularly under the mentorship of School Management Teams (SMTs). To contextualise the mentoring of newly appointed teachers, the study draws on Organisational Socialisation Theory (OST), which explains how individuals are systematically integrated into institutional cultures. Figure 1 illustrates the key phases of OST and its practical application within teacher mentorship in school environments.

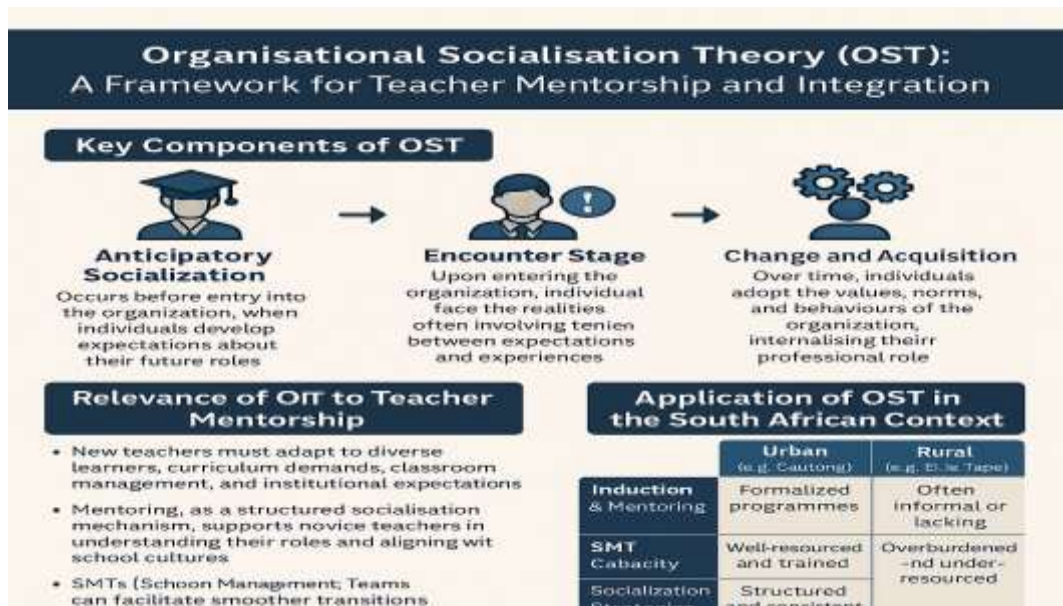


Figure 1: Visual Representation of Organisational Socialisation Theory (OST) in the Context of Teacher Mentorship.

This model outlines the sequential phases of anticipatory socialisation, encounter, and change/acquisition, highlighting how structured mentoring can support newly appointed teachers' professional adaptation within schools. This conceptualisation of OST reinforces the argument that School Management Teams (SMTs) must play a deliberate and structured role in facilitating each stage of a novice teacher's socialisation into the professional teaching environment, particularly in rural and under-resourced contexts.

<sup>31</sup> Erika Cameron, Jung H Hyun, and Mariaimeé Gonzalez, "Leadership and Administrative Roles in Counselor Education," in *A Comprehensive Guide for Counselor Education: Training Doctoral Learners and New Educators for Counselor Education and Supervision* (Springer, 2025), 397–418.

<sup>32</sup> Maddy Blazer, Greg A Chung-Yan, and Debra Gilin, "Sink or Swim: Developing an Alternative Measure of Employee Socialization," *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal* 37, no. 1 (2025): 1–28.

<sup>33</sup> K Andrew R Richards and Barrie Gordon, "Socialisation and Learning to Teach Using the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility Approach," *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education* 8, no. 1 (2017): 19–38.

## Components of OST

OST posits that newcomers to an organisation undergo a phased transition comprising several distinct stages:

- i. **Anticipatory Socialisation:** This occurs before entry into the organisation, when individuals develop expectations about their future roles based on pre-service training, societal norms, or second-hand information.<sup>34</sup>
- ii. **Encounter Stage:** Upon entering the organisation, individuals face the realities of their role. This phase often involves tension between expectations and practical experiences. Support structures such as mentoring are essential to managing this phase successfully.<sup>35</sup>
- iii. **Change and Acquisition:** Over time, individuals adopt the values, norms, and behaviours of the organisation, internalising their professional role. Successful socialisation at this stage results in role clarity, organisational commitment, and professional confidence.<sup>36</sup> Organisations typically use tactics such as orientation programmes, mentoring, feedback mechanisms, and job shadowing to support socialisation. These mechanisms can be formal (policy-driven and structured) or informal (peer-led and organic). The success of socialisation depends on how effectively these strategies are implemented.<sup>37</sup>

## Relevance of OST to Teacher Mentorship

The integration of newly appointed teachers into school environments aligns strongly with OST. New teachers must quickly adapt to a complex environment characterised by diverse learners, demanding workloads, and institutional expectations. Mentoring, as a structured socialisation mechanism, supports novice teachers in understanding their roles, aligning with school cultures, and developing professional competencies.<sup>38</sup> SMTs are strategically positioned to guide this socialisation process. By offering mentorship, modelling professional standards, and fostering supportive environments, SMTs can facilitate smoother transitions from pre-service training to in-service practice.<sup>39</sup> This includes helping new teachers understand curriculum requirements, classroom management norms, and the socio-cultural dynamics of the school community. OST is particularly pertinent in rural and under-resourced South African schools, where systemic inequities and institutional challenges can intensify the disjunction between pre-service preparation and actual teaching realities. In such settings, structured mentoring practices led by SMTs can serve as a compensatory mechanism, ensuring that new teachers do not experience professional isolation or burnout during their critical early years.

## Application of OST in the South African Context

In South Africa, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has recognised the need for induction and mentoring through documents such as the *New Teacher Induction Guidelines*. However, these initiatives often lack formal implementation at the school level, particularly in rural areas. OST provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how SMT-led mentoring can address this gap by operationalising socialisation through clearly defined roles, structured support, and feedback mechanisms. Moreover, the South African school system is marked by socio-economic disparities that

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<sup>34</sup> Carmen Mills and Julie Ballantyne, "Pre-Service Teachers' Dispositions towards Diversity: Arguing for a Developmental Hierarchy of Change," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 26, no. 3 (2010): 447–54.

<sup>35</sup> Connie Deng and Nick Turner, "Identifying Key Mentor Characteristics for Successful Workplace Mentoring Relationships and Programmes," *Personnel Review* 53, no. 2 (2024): 580–604.

<sup>36</sup> Sheila A Calko, *A Qualitative Study of Assistant Principals' Experiences and On-the-Job Socialization: How Relationship Building, Role Clarity, and Communication Influence Their Career Mobility* (University of Dayton, 2024).

<sup>37</sup> Calko, *A Qualitative Study of Assistant Principals' Experiences and On-the-Job Socialization: How Relationship Building, Role Clarity, and Communication Influence Their Career Mobility*.

<sup>38</sup> Thabang Donald Mokoena and Gideon Petrus van Tonder, "Influencing Beginner Teachers' Autonomy: The Impact of Mentorship in Fostering Self-Directed Learning," *International Journal of Educational Management* 38, no.5(2024): 1265–88.

<sup>39</sup> Cemil Gökhan Karacan and Ferhat Karanfil, "Exploring Newly-Qualified English Teachers' Experiences of a Mentorship Program through a Situational Mentoring Framework," *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning* 33, no. 3 (2025): 366–88.

affect teacher experiences. The encounter stage for a new teacher in a rural Eastern Cape school, for example, may be vastly different from that of a teacher in a well-resourced Gauteng institution. OST allows for an exploration of how socialisation processes must be context-responsive to meet the unique needs of schools and communities.<sup>40</sup> The framework also highlights the importance of SMTs in mediating institutional culture, thereby either facilitating or obstructing teacher development.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research approach using a phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of School Management Team (SMT) members and newly appointed teachers regarding mentorship practices.<sup>41</sup> Qualitative research is well-suited for examining social phenomena in their natural settings and understanding participants' perspectives in depth. Phenomenology allows the researcher to explore how individuals make meaning of their experiences, which in this case, relates to the mentoring processes within a rural secondary school context. The study was conducted in a public secondary school located in the Chris Hani East District of the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. This school was purposefully selected due to its rural setting and the challenges it faces in terms of induction and professional support for newly appointed teachers.<sup>42</sup> The population comprised SMT members, principally the school principal and heads of department, and newly appointed teachers who had been in the teaching profession for less than three years.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select six participants: one principal, one head of department, and four newly appointed teachers. Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method, as they provided the flexibility to probe deeper into participants' experiences while maintaining a consistent focus on the study objectives. Interviews were conducted in English, lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, and were recorded with participants' consent for accurate transcription and analysis. Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke, was employed to interpret the interview data.<sup>43</sup> This method facilitated the identification of recurring patterns and themes, which were then aligned with the research objectives.

The data analysis process involved familiarising the transcripts, coding, theme generation, and interpretation. To ensure the rigour and trustworthiness of the study, measures such as member checking, detailed documentation of the research process, and peer debriefing were employed. Ethical clearance was obtained from Walter Sisulu University's Research Ethics Committee, and the relevant district education authorities secured formal permission to conduct the study. All participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their involvement.<sup>44</sup> The study acknowledges its limitation in that it is based on a single school case study, which restricts generalisability, yet the depth of insight it offers contributes meaningfully to understanding mentoring practices in under-resourced, rural South African schools. The phenomenological approach proved particularly valuable in uncovering the nuanced ways SMTs perceive and implement mentorship, and how new teachers experience support during their professional transition.

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study are based on thematic analysis of data collected through semi-structured interviews with six participants, comprising one school principal, one Head of Department (HoD), and four newly appointed teachers, at a rural secondary school in the Chris Hani East District, Eastern Cape, South Africa. The analysis yielded three central themes that align with the study's objectives: (1) the roles and responsibilities of SMTs in mentoring, (2) the effectiveness of mentoring practices, and (3)

<sup>40</sup> Cisca de Kock, "Examining Collaborative Mentoring to Improve the Professional Learning of a Pre-Service Teacher During Work Integrated Learning Practicum Experience: A Case Study of Practice," in *Educators' Work Integrated Learning Experiences: Stories from the Trenches* (Springer, 2024), 169–82.

<sup>41</sup> Adetayo Olaniyi Adeniran and Oluwadamisi Tayo-Ladega, "Critical Analysis of Phenomenological Research Design in a Qualitative Research Method," *Management Analytics and Social Insights* 1, no. 2 (2024): 186–96.

<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Bayuo et al., "Phenomenography: An Emerging Qualitative Research Design for Nursing," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 80, no. 2 (2024): 821–34.

<sup>43</sup> Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Thematic analysis," in *Encyclopedia of quality of life and well-being research* (Springer, 2024).

<sup>44</sup> Steven Michael et al., "Patients' Perceptions and Understanding of Preoperative Informed Consent: A Qualitative Thematic Analysis from Tanzania," *SAGE Open Medicine* 13 (2025): 20503121251331120.

the challenges faced in implementing mentoring programmes. These themes reflect the realities of how mentoring is experienced and operationalised within a school context marked by limited resources, high teacher turnover, and systemic inequities. Figure 2 presents the key themes that emerged from a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with one principal, one Head of Department (HoD), and four newly appointed teachers at a rural secondary school in the Chris Hani East District, Eastern Cape. The findings from the semi-structured interviews were categorised into key themes that reflect the lived realities of School Management Teams (SMTs) and newly appointed teachers. These themes capture the dynamics of mentorship practices in a rural school context marked by systemic constraints and resource limitations, as visually summarised in Figure 2.

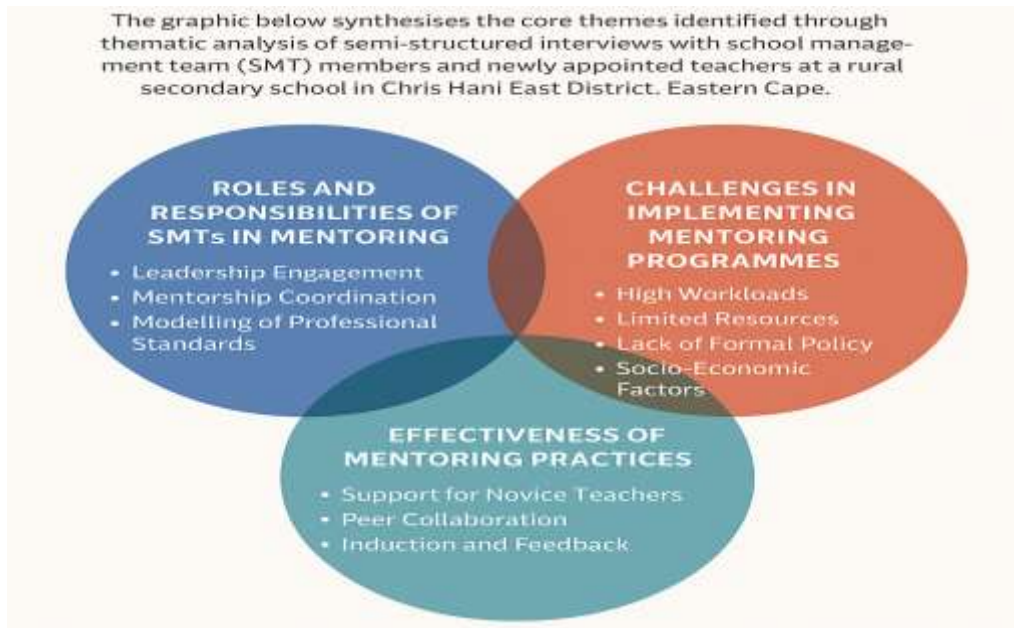


Figure 2: Thematic Representation of Mentoring Practices and Challenges in a Rural South African Secondary School

The figure synthesises three dominant themes identified in the study: (1) the roles and responsibilities of SMTs, (2) the effectiveness of mentorship practices, and (3) the challenges encountered in implementing structured mentorship. The interconnectedness of these themes illustrates the complexity of sustaining effective mentoring in under-resourced environments. These interconnected themes provide insight into the multifaceted role of SMTs in mentoring, the practical efficacy of mentorship strategies, and the systemic challenges that influence the implementation of effective support for novice teachers in resource-constrained educational environments.

### Roles and Responsibilities of SMTs in Mentoring

The first theme that emerged from the data is that SMT members recognise their responsibility to mentor newly appointed teachers, though their understanding of mentorship varies. The principal and HoD acknowledged that mentoring is an integral part of their leadership role, including orienting new teachers to the school's expectations, offering classroom support, and monitoring professional conduct. The principal said,

*“as a leader, I must ensure that new teachers are not left alone; they need guidance to adjust to our school culture.”*

However, the findings indicate that this role is often informally executed and lacks a structured framework. While the SMT members attempted to support new teachers through regular check-ins and curriculum guidance, these efforts were not based on formalised mentorship policies or departmental mandates. Newly appointed teachers reported that they were often assigned a HoD or experienced

colleague to assist them. Still, no programme, timelines, or benchmarks were outlined to guide this process. Moreover, the mentoring relationship was largely dependent on the interpersonal initiative of SMT members and the disposition of the new teacher. One teacher noted,

*“It depends on who is helping you. If the HoD is supportive, you learn faster. If not, you are on your own.”*

This finding underscores the absence of standardised mentorship procedures and raises concerns about equity and consistency. Nonetheless, participants acknowledged that where mentoring did occur, it contributed positively to their adjustment. The SMT’s role was perceived as crucial in setting professional norms, modelling expected behaviours, and creating a climate conducive to teaching and learning. However, the lack of formal induction protocols constrained the SMT’s ability to execute its mentoring function effectively.

### **Effectiveness of Mentoring Practices**

The second theme relates to the perceived effectiveness of the mentorship provided. Both SMT members and newly appointed teachers acknowledged that mentorship, even when informal, had significant benefits. Teachers who received regular support described their transition into the teaching profession as manageable and confidence-building. One teacher reflected,

*“My mentor helped me plan my lessons, manage learners, and understand the assessment policy. Without that help, I would have struggled more.”*

This suggests that mentoring, when present and sustained, contributes meaningfully to professional growth, role clarity, and improved instructional practices. However, the effectiveness of these mentoring efforts was often constrained by the lack of structure and sustainability. None of the participants reported the existence of a documented mentoring programme or induction manual at the school. The absence of scheduled mentorship meetings, formal reporting structures, and assessment tools meant that mentorship outcomes were neither monitored nor evaluated. Additionally, the process was found to lack alignment with broader departmental policies, such as the DHET’s *New Teacher Induction Guidelines*, which call for formalised orientation and ongoing professional support. The findings also revealed that mentoring was inconsistently implemented, often ending after the first term or limited to sporadic interactions. This reduced its long-term impact and left some teachers feeling unsupported as they progressed through their initial years of service. Despite these limitations, SMT members and new teachers believed mentoring was essential and should be strengthened. Participants recommended that schools adopt a formal induction policy that includes regular mentoring sessions, assigned mentors, and time allocation for professional dialogue. They also highlighted the importance of mentor training, noting that effective mentorship requires experience and skills in adult learning, feedback, and interpersonal communication.

### **Challenges in Implementing Mentorship Programmes**

The third theme highlights the systemic and contextual challenges that impede the implementation of effective mentorship programmes. One of the most prominent issues raised by SMT members was time constraints. The principal noted that administrative workloads and teaching responsibilities leave little time for structured mentoring, stating,

*“We have to prioritise curriculum delivery, and sometimes mentoring becomes an afterthought.”*

Heads of Department echoed similar sentiments, adding that while they were willing to mentor, the lack of dedicated time in the school timetable limited their capacity to provide sustained support. Another significant challenge was the lack of training for mentors. Neither the principal nor the HoD reported receiving formal training on mentorship practices. As a result, mentoring was based on intuition and experience rather than structured pedagogical guidance. This limitation was acknowledged by one HoD who stated,

*“We try our best, but we were never trained on how to mentor someone properly.”*

This lack of capacity affects the quality of mentorship and diminishes the confidence of SMT members in fulfilling this role effectively. Resource constraints were also frequently mentioned. Inadequate infrastructure, large class sizes, and shortages of teaching materials made it difficult to create environments conducive to mentorship. New teachers felt overwhelmed by the classroom demands and reported that limited access to teaching aids and curriculum guides compounded their stress. These challenges were exacerbated by the absence of institutional policy on mentoring at the school level. While national frameworks advocate for teacher induction and development, these are seldom translated into actionable plans within schools, leaving SMTs without clear guidelines or support mechanisms. The findings suggest that the success of mentoring is contingent not only on the commitment of individual SMT members but also on systemic enablers such as time allocation, resource provision, and training. Mentoring risks becoming informal and unsustainable without this support, despite its recognised value.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of School Management Teams (SMTs) in mentoring newly appointed teachers in a secondary school situated in the Chris Hani East District of South Africa. The findings revealed three critical insights: (1) SMTs play a central but informal role in teacher mentorship; (2) mentoring efforts, although valued, are inconsistently and unsystematically implemented; and (3) various systemic, contextual, and institutional barriers hinder the effectiveness of mentoring programmes. These findings are discussed in relation to the theoretical lens of Organisational Socialisation Theory (OST), relevant empirical literature, and the context of national education policy.

### Informal Mentorship Practices and Role Ambiguity

The study found that SMTs, particularly principals and Heads of Department, acknowledged their responsibility in mentoring newly appointed teachers, but their efforts were largely unstructured and dependent on personal initiative. This reflects a key feature of what Michael et al describe as informal socialisation tactics, processes that lack standardisation and leave newcomers to navigate professional expectations through observation, informal support, and self-adjustment.<sup>45</sup> While this approach may foster some autonomy, it increases the risk of variability in induction quality, leaving some new teachers better supported than others. The absence of formalised induction frameworks aligns with research by Bush and Glover, who argue that mentoring practices in South Africa are fragmented and largely dependent on school-level leadership practices rather than coherent provincial or national policy implementation.<sup>46</sup> These informal systems lack sustainability and reduce accountability for professional development outcomes. In terms of OST, the encounter stage, where new teachers confront the realities of the profession, becomes a period marked by uncertainty and inconsistency, thereby undermining role clarity and organisational alignment.<sup>47</sup>

### Mentorship as a Mechanism for Professional Integration

Despite the informal mentorship, the study demonstrated that where SMT members provided consistent support, newly appointed teachers experienced increased confidence, improved classroom practice, and greater professional belonging. This aligns with OST's change and acquisition phase, wherein effective mentoring enables newcomers to internalise organisational norms and adopt expected behaviours. Participants reported that lesson planning, assessment, and learner management support were particularly valuable in facilitating their adaptation to school culture and expectations. These findings echo international literature highlighting the critical role of mentoring in novice teacher development.

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<sup>45</sup> Michael et al., “Patients’ Perceptions and Understanding of Preoperative Informed Consent: A Qualitative Thematic Analysis from Tanzania.”

<sup>46</sup> Tony Bush and Derek Glover, “Research on School Leadership in South Africa: A Systematic Review,” *Systematic Reviews of Research in Basic Education in South Africa*, 2021, 115.

<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Wolfe Morrison, “Information Seeking within Organizations,” *Human Communication Research* 28, no. 2 (2002): 229–42.

In his review of induction studies, Koop found that mentored teachers demonstrate improved pedagogical practices and remain in the profession longer than their unmentored counterparts.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Sebata emphasises that mentorship enhances teacher agency, reduces professional isolation, and cultivates reflective practice, which is essential for long-term professional resilience.<sup>49</sup> However, the study also revealed that the lack of formal training for mentors, a theme noted by SMT members themselves, diminishes the potential impact of mentorship. This is consistent with the work of Jacobsen and Gunnulfson, who argue that the absence of structured preparation for mentors leads to role confusion and inconsistent guidance.<sup>50</sup> Within the OST framework, this impedes effective socialisation, as mentors may not be equipped to transform new teachers into fully integrated, contributing members of the organisation.

### Systemic and Contextual Constraints

A significant theme emerging from the data was the challenge posed by structural and contextual constraints. SMTs cited time limitations, heavy workloads, and the lack of dedicated mentorship resources as major impediments to implementing sustained mentorship programmes. These conditions are emblematic of broader systemic challenges within the South African education landscape, particularly in rural schools. Research by Chea confirms that professional development activities such as mentoring are often sacrificed in favour of immediate administrative or curriculum delivery needs in under-resourced contexts. The failure to institutionalise mentoring within the school timetable, appraisal systems, or school improvement plans further entrenches its marginal status. In terms of OST, this undermines organisational capacity to enact institutionalised socialisation tactics, which are crucial for consistent onboarding and cultural alignment.<sup>51</sup> <sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the absence of a formal mentorship policy at the school level contradicts the intentions of national policy frameworks such as the *New Teacher Induction Guidelines* which stress the importance of structured support during the early years of teaching.<sup>53</sup> The findings also suggest that while SMTs are willing to provide mentorship, their efforts are not adequately supported by systemic enablers such as professional development, policy clarity, and incentives. As a result, mentoring is experienced as an additional responsibility rather than a core leadership function. This reflects what Flückiger et al. (2015) describe as the misalignment between policy rhetoric and school-level realities, which ultimately undermines professional support for novice teachers.

### Theoretical Synthesis and Broader Implications

Framed through OST, the study illustrates that effective mentorship must be viewed as a process of structured socialisation, requiring sustained support mechanisms, role clarity, and context-specific adaptation. The socialisation of new teachers should not be left to chance or the goodwill of individual SMT members. Instead, it should be institutionalised through clearly defined policies, dedicated time allocations, and ongoing professional development for mentors. Such a shift would enable schools to transition from ad hoc mentoring practices to a more strategic, school-wide induction culture. The findings further underscore the critical role of SMTs in shaping the professional trajectory of newly appointed teachers. As gatekeepers of school culture and curriculum implementation, SMTs are uniquely positioned to lead induction efforts, aligning with organisational expectations and teacher development goals. However, for SMTs to fulfil this role effectively, they must be capacitated through formal mentorship training, policy support, and resource allocation. Without these enablers, mentoring risks remaining a rhetorical ideal rather than a practical reality.

<sup>48</sup> Sbonelo Gift Ndlovu et al., "Contextualising Entrepreneurship as a Panacea to Youth Unemployment in South Africa," *Prizren Social Science Journal* 8, no. 1 (April 30, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.32936/pssj.v8i1.430>.

<sup>49</sup> Dennis Sebata, "The Empowering Educators: Reflective Practice and Mentorship for Enhanced Teacher Education," *Journal Of Teacher Education And Research* 19, no. 02 (2024): 7–13.

<sup>50</sup> Chanponna Chea, "Mentorship's Role in Shaping Professional Identity: Insights from Cambodian Teaching Practicums," *Cogent Education* 11, no. 1 (2024): 2419710.

<sup>51</sup> Gretchen Bauer and Akosua K Darkwah, "'The President's Prerogative'? The Cabinet Appointment Process in Ghana and the Implications for Gender Parity," *Politics & Gender* 18, no. 2 (2022): 546–73.

<sup>52</sup> Catherine L Tackett, "New faculty integration: An organizational socialization approach" (Morehead State University, 2024).

<sup>53</sup> DHET, *The Charter for the Humanities and Social Sciences Report* (Pretoria: DHET, 2011).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and discussion, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of mentoring newly appointed teachers through the structured involvement of School Management Teams (SMTs) in rural South African schools.

### a. Institutionalise Formal Mentorship Programmes

There is a clear need to develop and implement structured mentorship programmes at the school level. These programmes should include formal induction schedules, clearly defined roles for mentors and mentees, regular feedback sessions, and documented mentoring outcomes. Schools should be supported in creating internal policies or adapting existing provincial guidelines, such as the *New Teacher Induction Guidelines*, to suit their local context. Formalisation will promote consistency, accountability, and sustainability in mentorship practices.

### b. Provide Mentorship Training for SMT Members

The Department of Basic Education, in collaboration with Provincial Education Departments and teacher development institutes, should prioritise the professional development of SMT members in the area of mentorship. Training should equip SMTs with skills in adult learning principles, effective coaching techniques, communication, emotional intelligence, and constructive feedback. Such training would professionalise the role of mentors and strengthen their capacity to support newly appointed teachers meaningfully.

### c. Allocate Time and Resources for Mentoring

Mentorship responsibilities should be officially incorporated into SMT members' workload and time allocations. Schools should be encouraged to dedicate time within the school timetable for mentorship activities, such as one-on-one coaching, lesson observation, and collaborative planning. Moreover, schools should receive additional human and material resources to support mentoring, particularly in rural and under-resourced contexts. These may include teaching relief time, professional development resources, and access to online mentoring platforms.

### d. Enhance Policy Implementation and Monitoring

While South African policy frameworks acknowledge the importance of teacher induction and mentoring, there is often a disconnect between policy intent and school-level execution. Provincial and district education offices must strengthen oversight and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that induction and mentoring are implemented and evaluated for impact. This includes embedding mentorship outcomes within performance management systems for SMTs and recognising schools that demonstrate effective mentoring practices.

### e. Foster a Whole-School Culture of Mentorship

Beyond assigning mentoring duties to SMTs, schools should be encouraged to promote a collaborative, inclusive culture where all experienced teachers contribute to developing newly appointed colleagues. Peer mentoring, professional learning communities, and team-teaching strategies can complement SMT-led efforts and foster a supportive environment for professional growth. Cultivating such a culture aligns with collegiality and collective responsibility values that underpin effective school leadership.

### f. Support Context-Responsive Research and Innovation

Further research should be conducted to explore mentorship models that are responsive to the unique conditions of rural, under-resourced, and historically disadvantaged schools. Innovation in mentoring approaches, such as blended learning mentorship, remote coaching, or community-based induction, should be piloted and evaluated for scalability. This will help create a body of evidence that informs practice and policy in diverse educational contexts.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the role of School Management Teams (SMTs) in mentoring newly appointed teachers in a secondary school located in the Chris Hani East District of South Africa. Drawing on Organisational Socialisation Theory, the research examined how SMT-led mentoring practices facilitate the professional integration of novice teachers, the effectiveness of these practices, and the contextual challenges that influence their implementation. The study employed a qualitative, phenomenological design, enabling the exploration of the lived experiences of both SMT members and newly appointed teachers within a rural school setting. The findings affirm that SMTs play a pivotal role in the mentorship process; however, this role is often enacted informally and inconsistently due to the absence of structured mentoring frameworks and institutional policy guidance. While some SMTs offer mentorship support based on personal initiative, the lack of formal training, time allocation, and systemic resources undermines the sustainability and effectiveness of these efforts. Mentorship, when practised with regularity and intention, was shown to positively influence the professional confidence, role clarity, and instructional competence of newly appointed teachers. However, its impact is constrained by organisational and systemic challenges, including limited time, resource deficits, and the absence of performance accountability for mentorship activities. The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on teacher induction by highlighting the gap between national policy aspirations and school-level practice. It underscores the need for a more structured, institutionalised approach to mentoring that empowers SMTs to fulfil their developmental role effectively. By advancing contextually grounded insights into mentorship in under-resourced schools, the study provides a foundation for reimagining mentorship not as a peripheral responsibility but as a central pillar of professional development and teacher retention within the South African education system.

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