

Examining Novice Teachers' Mentoring Needs Through the Eyes of Experienced Teachers: An African Perspective of Ubuntu

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ABSTRACT

A crisis of teacher retention in South Africa poses significant challenges, prompting this paper to explore the mentoring practices of SMTs towards novice teachers, and potential measures to retain effective teachers. This qualitative study employs interpretative phenomenology to investigate novice teacher mentoring from an Ubuntu perspective, which emphasizes community and interconnectedness. Through semi-structured interviews, SMT members articulated feelings of isolation on novice teachers and observed a desire for guidance from experienced mentors. The article promotes the establishment of a mentoring initiative based on Ubuntu principles, proposing that nurturing and empathetic mentorship may improve retention rates within the teaching profession and cultivate a more cooperative school micro-community.

Keywords: teacher attrition, mentoring, novice teachers, teacher retention, Ubuntu principles

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Retaining teachers is one of the biggest issues facing South Africa's educational system, which has a negative impact on learner outcomes and the quality of instruction. Over the past thirty years, a considerable number of teachers have left the field in search of other chances, which has raised concerns (Botha & Hugo, 2021; Esau & Maarman, 2021). Recognizing the close relationship between these elements and learner success, efforts have been directed toward enhancing teacher recruitment, selection, and retention (Mngomezulu, et al., 2021). Despite this, there are still problems with teacher attrition, especially for early-career teachers. Research indicates that talented workers find teaching to be unappealing (Gustafsson & Maponya, 2020; Sheperd, 2022). Strategies to draw in and keep good teachers, particularly in struggling schools, are highlighted in research assessing policies in the Free State Province (Thajane & Masitsa, 2021). The most disadvantaged learners are disproportionately affected by high turnover in urban schools with poor performance (Thajane & Masitsa, 2021; Tshabalala & Nthontho, 2024). It is also argued that school principals continue to face significant challenges in developing and implementing policies. According to other studies (Wilcoxon et al., 2020; Sydnor et al., 2023), mentorship is essential for a productive learning environment, and the shift from pre-service teaching to actual classroom instruction is complicated. According to a US study, over 25% of newly hired teachers especially those with advanced degrees leave within the first three years, which leads to more volatility and problems with learner performance (Ingersoll, et al., 2022b). An aging workforce, with a significant proportion of teachers over 50, is predicted to cause a teacher shortage in South Africa by 2030, according to recent investigations (RESEP, 2023). Budgetary restrictions impede recruitment attempts, notwithstanding the Department of Higher Education and Training's assertion that there are enough competent teachers (DHET, 2021). Furthermore, new teachers frequently experience reality shock and feel unprepared for the difficulties they encounter, which raises turnover rates (Kotze, 2025). Through the prism of the Ubuntu philosophy, which emphasizes group cooperation and support, this paper promotes a focus on mentoring assistance for new teachers. It looks at obstacles to success, the efficacy of current procedures, and the role of School Management Teams (SMTs) in mentoring. In order to address the critical need for successful mentoring practices in South African schools, the goal is to examine how Ubuntu might influence mentorship tactics and provide a friendly environment for new teachers.

Research question:

What mentoring practices, as perceived through the lens of Ubuntu, do SMT members extend to newly appointed teachers?

Theoretical framework: The Ubuntu Philosophy

The article's main focus is an Ubuntu ontology, which emphasizes community and interdependence and influences research endeavors. According to researchers (Mkosi, et al., 2023; Mthimkhulu, 2024; Olawumi, et al., 2024), Ubuntu is the idea that “a person is a person because of other people,” emphasizing fundamental principles like respect, humanity, and common objectives meant to improve communities. The study suggests that the Ubuntu mentoring theory informs data analysis by applying these Ubuntu values from a mentoring standpoint. The approach frames the mentoring of new teachers within an Ubuntu context by emphasizing the value of cooperative respect for societal development, which is embodied in the idea that “your child is my child” (Mthimkhulu, 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review examines key concepts including novice teachers, the issue of attrition among them, mentorship as a potential solution, the absence of regulation in mentoring practices, and the application of Ubuntu philosophy in supporting novice teachers.

Novice teachers

There is a serious teacher retention challenge in South Africa, as many teachers quit their jobs early in their careers (Mngomezulu, et al., 2021; Monama, 2022). According to research, mentoring programs are very beneficial for young teachers, who are described as those who are in their first five years of teaching and have little to no experience (Botha & Hugo, 2021; Ingersoll, et al., 2022b). Mentoring allows experienced teachers to support novices in overcoming various challenges. In addition to enhancing the teaching skills of mentors, mentoring is crucial for retaining both novice teachers and their mentors, contributing to a more stable teaching workforce. Additionally, mentoring is vital for the well-being of novice teachers, fostering effective teaching practices and enhancing overall teacher welfare (Barak, 2021). As a result, it is advised that stakeholders invest resources in mentoring initiatives to tackle the problem of qualified teacher attrition. Research shows that resignations among novice teachers represent the largest segment of total attrition, with around 33% leaving during their early years. An analysis of extensive longitudinal studies revealed that resignations constituted an average of 49% of total teacher attrition (Mabusela, 2021; Van der Berg, et al., 2022; Hulme & Wood, 2022). These investigations have pinpointed stress management as a prevalent factor contributing to attrition across various educational levels. Educational institutions need to understand that simply filling teaching positions is not enough; often, new teachers do not have the necessary support systems for their professional development (Abitabile, 2020; Balang, 2021; Arthur & Bradley, 2023). Implementing tactics like team teaching, cooperative meetings, and thorough orientation programs is crucial to fostering team cohesion and improving the workplace in order to solve the current problem. According to Beck et al. (2020), establishing a network of support among staff members greatly enhances working conditions and motivates new teachers to stay in the field.

Provincial budget evaluations

Research studies demonstrate that financial limitations significantly affect teacher retention, as emphasized by Gustafsson & Maponya (2020) and Monama (2022). Provinces face difficulties in managing staffing while also providing essential educational resources, which frequently results in budget overruns. Historically, Donaldson (1998) observed that personnel expenses accounted for over 92% of education budgets, highlighting financial inefficiencies and the persistent educational disparities stemming from apartheid. During a meeting on October 24, 2024, with Minister of Basic Education Ms. Siviwe Gwarube, it was reported that R330 billion had been allocated to the department, with 80% designated for provinces. The Minister underscored the necessity of investing in education and safeguarding teacher positions, stating that fiscal constraints for 2024/2025 can be alleviated through better fund management. Issues discussed included high teacher-learner ratios leading to

budget cuts and regulatory difficulties in forming partnerships with the private sector (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2024). Despite high personnel expenditures, the effectiveness of teachers is diminished by inadequate resources and infrastructure (Beck, et al., 2020; Balang, 2021). For sustainable teacher retention, provincial education departments must strategically plan budgets to cover personnel costs, promotions, salary increases, and employee benefits, while avoiding overdraft facilities that exacerbate financial difficulties. Unfunded mandates and centralized wage negotiations limit provincial flexibility, with provinces historically under-budgeting for critical sectors like education, relying on national government support during financial crises (Monama, 2022). Therefore, provinces need to enhance financial management and budgeting practices to address these challenges effectively.

The gap between the theory-based practices and novice teacher attrition

Researchers from around the world claim that high rates of resignation among new teachers are linked to work satisfaction. According to Wilcoxon et al. (2020), novice teachers report higher levels of stress due to the demanding nature of the teaching profession. A significant attrition rate among new teachers before the fifth year was noted by Ingersoll et al. (2022b), a pattern that Zamarro et al. (2022) continued to record, citing high levels of stress and burnout anxiety as major contributing reasons. According to Mkhabele et al. (2024), this problem poses serious hazards to the educational system, and Mabusela and Mahlangu (2025) confirm that teacher attrition rates are high globally. Concerns about the retention of new teachers have been raised in a number of studies (Belle & Horil, 2020; Beltman, 2020; Botha & Hugo, 2021), a situation made worse by increased stress levels during the COVID-19 pandemic (Zamarro et al., 2022). Due to a chronic teacher shortage and high teacher turnover, South Africa's educational system faces significant issues that have persisted for over ten years (Monama, 2022). Concerns have been raised about the depressing effects of teacher turnover on the surviving employees, which could discourage new people from pursuing careers in teaching. Despite substantial government funding more than R441.5 billion for education and culture, the quality of education remains poor, and there is a known teacher shortage (National Treasury, 2022). According to reports, there will be a shortage of over 20,000 teachers by 2030, and estimates imply that over half of public school teachers may retire by that time (Businesstech, 2021; Monama, 2022). In order to maintain educational quality and increase retention rates, this impending crisis necessitates immediate improvements in teacher assistance. Teacher turnover has a detrimental effect on all parties involved in education and leads to a preponderance of less experienced teachers, endangering the continuity of instruction and learner assistance. Research highlights the importance of peer and school leader support and mentoring in teacher retention, emphasizing the need for strong interpersonal relationships to foster teachers' resilience and emotional well-being (Palm, 2022; Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2023).

Mentoring as a possible remedy for the attrition of new teachers

Research indicates that good mentoring has a critical role in improving retention rates, making the retention of new teachers a topic of great interest. While some academics (Botha & Hugo, 2021; Zamarro, et al., 2022; de Klerk, et al., 2023) stress that job satisfaction, which results from loyalty to the school and its administration, is crucial for extended tenures, Sahito and Vaisanen (2020) affirm that mentoring helps teachers maintain their careers. According to Sydnor et al. (2023), who conducted a thorough analysis in the United States, mentoring is one of the best methods for keeping skilled teachers on staff. According to Kutsyruba and Walker (2020), constructive mentorship fosters a sense of belonging that is consistent with Ubuntu principles, which is especially beneficial for marginalized novice teachers. The dual role of mentoring in developing critical teaching abilities and strengthening the humanistic aspects of the teacher-mentee relationship is highlighted by Burger et al. (2021). Recent significant research (Tahir, et al., 2023; Tahir, et al., 2025; Smith-Gray & Mendoza-Reis, 2025) looked at how professional development and successful mentoring affect teachers' quality and retention in urban settings. These results align with more recent research by Burger et al. (2021), which highlights the advantages of professional development programs for both mentees and mentors. For example, Smith-Gray and Mendoza-Reis (2025) advocate for official training and acknowledgment of mentoring roles to enhance employee well-being. The issue of high turnover rates has already been highlighted by Goldhaber et al. (2020), especially in schools located in urban and impoverished areas. They contend that mentoring in the workplace can lessen these difficulties. Induction and mentoring programs are essential for supporting new teachers during their formative years (Goldhaber et al., 2022). Furthermore, Goldhaber et al. (2022) claim that qualified mentors can improve

general teacher satisfaction and treat mental health disorders. A mentor's supervision is crucial for increasing a novice teacher's job satisfaction in addition to promoting positive interactions in educational settings (Beck, et al., 2020; Jansen & du Plessis, 2023; Kafele, 2023; Jeffers, et al., 2024). The presence of supportive mentors is seen to be essential for effective teacher preparation (Mngomezulu et al., 2021; Goldhaber et al., 2022) and can significantly affect how new teachers perceive themselves (Goldhaber et al., 2020). Beltman (2020) found that early in their careers, teachers who participate in structured mentorship programs are more resilient. By sharing helpful advice and resources, mentors assist first-year teachers in developing greater resilience and adaptability (Belle & Horil, 2020; Abitabile, 2020; Barak, 2021). When mentors and mentees reciprocally share their experiences, hope and motivation are further cultivated.

Mentoring and the African Ubuntu Philosophy

Ubuntu, which emphasizes humanism and connectivity and is summed up in the statement "I am because we are," is an African philosophical framework that is firmly ingrained in Bantu cultures (Olawumi, et al., 2024). Through mutual respect and interdependence, this concept guides societal growth by promoting active community involvement and service. Nevertheless, despite its significant impact, South Africa's educational systems still do not fully include the ideas of Ubuntu (Kotze, 2025). The three major tenets of Ubuntu: *interpersonal*, *intrapersonal*, and *environmental values* are outlined by Olawumi et al. (2024) and emphasize the significance of respecting oneself, other people, and the environment. The use of Ubuntu in pedagogy has enormous potential to transform educational approaches by encouraging group mentoring that transcends historical racial divides and empowers new teachers via shared values. Ubuntu essentially promotes cooperation, building solid bonds, and improving well-being in African communities (Ngubane & Makua, 2021; Mkosi, et al., 2023; Mthimkhulu, 2024; Olawumi, et al., 2024; Kotze, 2025).

Legislative framework and a lack of formal mentorship programmes

As a means of transferring information between generations, the concept of mentoring has historically been vital in educational contexts (Esau & Maarman, 2021). Mentorship is crucial in the field of teacher development at every stage of teacher education, from basic training to ongoing professional development. However, in South Africa, both public schools and higher education institutions frequently use mentorship models inconsistently and without defined criteria. Despite the government's *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development* in South Africa (2011-2025) highlighting the significance of mentorship, its thorough application remains unfulfilled (DBE, 2006). Some communities of practice, such as BRIDGE (i.e. *Bringing Real Intercultural Dialogue to Generate Engagement* in education), are actively exploring innovative mentorship approaches to address these challenges. SACE mandated in 2010 that South African educational institutions implement an Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) and a Continuous Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) program as part of their professional development initiatives. This mandate is in effect until 2024 (SACE, 2010). Nevertheless, a review of existing literature has indicated a lack of a formal mandatory framework for the training of mentor teachers or any incentives for those serving in mentorship roles. Additionally, the emphasis on mentorship programs within schools is threatened by the Department of Basic Education's (DBE) lack of a systematic mentorship program for the orientation of new staff or the induction of novice teachers (DBE, 2006). While school-based mentoring is important for new teachers, Burger et al. (2021) argue that rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach, mentoring programs should be adaptive to the particular situation. An Africanized mentoring structure that is tailored to the unique needs of new teachers is conspicuously lacking (Mthimkhulu, 2024). In order to fill this gap, this research uses an Africanized Ubuntu framework to analyze the mentoring strategies used by SMT members to assist new teachers.

METHODOLOGY

The mentorship experiences of SMT members at an urban public primary school in Johannesburg's D9 district are examined in this study using a qualitative, phenomenological approach (Burns, et al., 2022; Gamage, 2025; Bernard, 2025). Thematic analysis was used to identify important mentoring-related themes from semi-structured interviews with fifteen participants, including two deputy principals, three department heads, and ten seasoned post-level 1 teachers. Informed consent and other ethical principles were strictly adhered to. Using a descriptive case study methodology, seasoned teachers were selected from three public elementary schools in Gauteng, South

Africa, using non-probability homogeneous purposive sampling. A theme analysis was conducted after the 60-minute semi-structured interviews were recorded after school. One notable finding was that the challenges participants encountered had a substantial influence on their expectations and needs for mentorship. The study adhered to the trustworthiness criteria established by Burns et al. (2022), which were backed up by verbatim reports and strongly emphasized transferability, dependability, confirmability, and believability. Ethics concerns included participant privacy and getting ethics approval before starting data collection (Mumford et al., 2021). The results improve knowledge of the mentorship difficulties faced by new teachers in South African public primary schools, even though their generalizability is constrained by the focus on a single case study.

Findings

Ubuntu, an African philosophy highlighting compassion and humanity, informs principals' actions. In line with the Ethics of Care (Noddings, 2005), SMT members demonstrate consideration, compassion, understanding, and empathy towards teachers. Participant 15 remarked as follows:

"I think we possess an additional aspect, a gentler side, where our human nature is evident. I believe this contributes to our effectiveness as managers."

Participant 14 elaborated on the complexities of being a woman in a leadership position, noting that the inherent motherly instinct often surfaces when others require assistance. She articulated her views on the principles of Ubuntu in the following manner:

"Ehhh, as a woman, I believe I am employing my maternal instincts in leading people. I regard my teachers as my children, particularly since some of them are quite young. When they encounter difficulties, I can easily sense it as a mother would, because I am familiar with them. I do not see myself as a boss lady; rather, I consider myself a mother and a caregiver, which allows them to feel at ease. It is essential to learn to empathise with their situations, and that is the approach women tend to adopt."

She additionally noted her sensitivity to the needs of others and the intricacies of specific relationships. Consequently, from this viewpoint, moral reasoning is understood to encompass empathy and concern, highlighting the importance of responsiveness and accountability in interactions with others. She expressed that:

"As a leader, I believe you embody leadership while simultaneously becoming part of their community. I am very nurturing and highly attuned to emotions; when I engage with an individual, I do so as if I were their own mother. Regardless of how gentle I may appear, I embrace them, particularly the younger individuals, treating them as if they were my own. I guide them with a deep understanding of the educational challenges, especially in urban settings. Teachers are tasked with educating a diverse group of learners, and parents frequently voice their concerns, yet often teachers find themselves without adequate protection."

This study's finding corroborates earlier research regarding teacher job satisfaction and the importance of caring for teachers (Gilligan, 1982). SMT members, as leaders, who embody civilised behaviour, would implement the principles of Ubuntu. Participant 7 expressed her perceptions as follows:

"I exercise patience with teachers and lead by the tenets of Ubuntu, even when they may exploit this generosity. I maintain sincerity and honesty in my interactions. I am truthful, sharing all information openly without concealing any secrets."

The study's conclusions show that some school principals and SMT members heavily integrate the Ubuntu principles into their leadership approaches when dealing with teachers, managing school operations, and handling both personal and professional issues (Burger, et al., 2021). In addition to cultivating qualities like humility, compassion, integrity, and self-control, effective leaders also work to show empathy by paying close attention to the feelings of others. SMT employ sophisticated social skills in their interactions, which involve directing people toward their goals via efficient communication. Teachers feel valued when they are treated with understanding, sympathy, and compassion in line with the Ubuntu ideals. They feel more secure and content overall because of this sense of gratitude (Botha & Hugo, 2021; Gimbert & Kapa, 2022; Bryant, et al., 2023).

DISCUSSION OF STUDY FINDINGS

Important findings from interviews that examine categories and subjects related to Ubuntu philosophy are presented in the study. Important details regarding the mentoring requirements of new teachers were revealed by the study's findings. It advocates for the creation of schools as micro-communities where the tenets of Ubuntu, including mutual respect, learning, and shared objectives, are fundamental to the educational experience. This approach addresses classroom discipline challenges, mitigates feelings of isolation among novice teachers, aids in managing the burdensome administrative and extracurricular responsibilities, and supports the implementation of a formal mentoring program. Within this paradigm, all educational participants, encompassing both experienced and novice teachers, are interconnected and collaborate to enhance classroom learning and decrease novice teacher turnover. Seasoned teachers provide mentorship to novices, promoting reciprocal development and nurturing a supportive atmosphere that acknowledges individual contributions to the community. Ultimately, the research underscores the necessity of enhancing novice experiences through effective mentoring, in alignment with Ubuntu's core philosophy that an individual's identity is shaped through interactions with others.

The Ubuntu spirit is established by micro-communities.

The Ubuntu ideals, which emphasize respect for one another, shared learning, and shared goals, bind members of the proposed educational micro-community together (Ngubane & Makua, 2021). This community promotes collaboration among all its members, encompassing both novice and seasoned teachers, who partake in mentoring that improves the retention of novice teachers and enhances classroom learning (Mthimkhulu, 2024). The authors contend that successful mentoring within this Ubuntu-centered framework is essential for realizing shared educational goals.

Helping with classroom discipline

Managing learner conduct in the classroom is recognized by participants as the largest challenge, which negatively impacts effective learning. SMT members reported witnessing new teachers having physical tiredness and a sense of tension, which stands in stark contrast to the Ubuntu worldview, which emphasizes community and connection (Kotze, 2025). According to these SMT members, while some novice teachers spoke in a distant manner, others shown genuine concern for the learning environments of their peers. The Ubuntu framework emphasizes the detrimental effects of insufficient discipline on common learning goals and the value of a supportive mentoring strategy to improve classroom management (Mkosi, et al., 2023). Furthermore, the study's participants expressed emotions of loneliness and overwhelm, underscoring the need for cooperative mentorship initiatives to foster growth and enhance classroom management (Mngomezulu, et al., 2021; Ngubane & Makua, 2021).

Mitigating the sense of isolation experienced amidst an overwhelming workload

Once more, a gap between inexperienced and experienced teachers surfaced as novices referred to mentor teachers as "them," indicating a lack of unity. Even in the presence of seasoned teachers dedicated to providing high-quality instruction, this separation may result from beginners' fear of being judged. In her study, Kotze (2025) underscore the importance of mentor teachers providing support to novices as peers to improve their emotional health. The Ubuntu philosophy advocates for community collaboration for the collective benefit, yet novices frequently feel burdened by classroom management and administrative responsibilities. In another study, Mkosi et al. (2025) advocates for the establishment of a respectful mentor-mentee relationship as a strategy to cultivate a sense of belonging and openness, thereby enriching the learning experience.

Helping with enormous administrative and extra-curricular work overload

Improving learner support through experienced mentorship facilitates the Ubuntu principle of *co-existence*, fostering a collaborative school environment. By adopting a "your child is my child" mentality, teachers are encouraged to share resources and invest time in supporting learners outside the classroom. Research indicates that mentees sharing experiences with mentors enhances motivation amidst teaching challenges (Mkosi, et al., 2023; Nogobo, et al., 2025). However, participants reported some novice teachers have shown feelings of

isolation and fear in seeking advice from experienced teachers, highlighting the necessity for formal mentoring systems within schools.

Establishment of a formal mentorship programme

According to Mngomezulu et al. (2021), establishing a structured mentorship relationship can greatly increase the confidence of new teachers by providing them with a dependable platform to discuss their issues. By designating mentors and promoting frequent interactions, educational institutions create a supportive mentoring environment that helps new teachers integrate into the school community and increases their sense of collegiality and belonging. Furthermore, according to Zhang et al. (2022), Mthimkhulu (2024), and Olawumi et al. (2024), structured mentorship programs enable mentors to act as both friends and professional advisors, enhancing the general experiences and emotional health of new teachers during their early teaching years.

CONCLUSION

This study looked at how SMT members regarded the challenges faced by new teachers in their first few years of teaching. It draws attention to problems including isolation, excessive workloads, and classroom discipline. The conversation emphasizes the value of mentoring based on the Ubuntu values of respect for one another, shared learning, and group goals. An organized mentorship program that pairs experienced mentors with inexperienced teachers is recommended to increase support and effectiveness within the school community.

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Competing interests

The author declares that he possesses no financial or personal relationships that might have influenced the content of this paper.

Authors' contributions

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