The Influence of Organizational Culture, Mentor Teacher Competence, and Novice Teacher Performance in the Induction Program for New Teachers in Southern Zone Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT

The success of novice teachers in their early years is shaped by both individual mentoring support and the broader organizational culture of schools. This study examines the relationship between mentor teacher competence and novice teacher performance, as well as the influence of organizational culture on mentor competence, within the induction program (PPGB) for secondary schools in Malaysia's Southern Zone. Using an explanatory sequential mixed-method design, a pilot survey was conducted with 32 novice teachers, complemented by qualitative insights from principals. The instruments demonstrated strong reliability (α = .752–.916), and descriptive results indicated high perceptions of both mentor competence and novice teacher performance. Correlational analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between mentor competence and novice teacher performance (r = .78). In addition, organizational culture dimensions such as long-term orientation (r = .70), uncertainty avoidance (r = .65), and collectivism (r = .60) showed meaningful associations with mentor competence, while masculinity–femininity was weaker (r = .34). These findings suggest that effective induction programs require not only competent mentors but also supportive school cultures that emphasize collaboration, structured practices, and long-term professional growth. The study highlights implications for policy and practice in strengthening induction programs, while recommending larger and longitudinal studies for further validation.

Keywords: Organizational culture; Mentor teacher competence; Novice teacher performance; Teacher induction program; Secondary schools; Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The success of educational institutions largely depends on the quality and performance of their teaching staff. Novice teachers, in particular, face numerous challenges during the early stages of their careers, including adapting to school culture, managing classrooms effectively, and meeting curriculum standards. These challenges can affect their professional growth and overall performance, making structured induction programs essential for supporting new teachers. One of the key components of such programs is the mentoring system, where experienced teachers guide novice teachers to develop pedagogical skills, professional confidence, and adaptability within the school environment.

Organizational culture plays a critical role in shaping teacher behaviour and performance. Schools with strong, supportive, and collaborative cultures tend to foster positive interactions, encourage continuous professional development, and promote effective teaching practices. Conversely, weak or fragmented organizational cultures can hinder teacher motivation, collaboration, and the successful integration of new teachers. In this context, understanding how organizational culture influences mentor competence and, ultimately, the performance of novice teachers is vital for improving induction programs.

Mentor teacher competence is another significant factor in the professional development of novice teachers. Competent mentors not only possess strong subject knowledge but also demonstrate effective communication, interpersonal skills, and the ability to provide constructive feedback. Their guidance can

directly impact novice teachers' classroom performance, professional growth, and confidence in handling teaching responsibilities. Previous studies have highlighted that well-structured mentoring relationships contribute to higher teacher satisfaction, retention rates, and overall teaching quality.

The present study focuses on investigating the relationships between organizational culture, mentor teacher competence, and novice teacher performance within the induction program for secondary schools in the Southern Zone. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Examine the relationship between mentor teacher competence and novice teacher performance.

2. Identify the influence of organizational culture on mentor teacher competence.

By addressing these objectives, this study seeks to provide empirical evidence on how school culture and mentoring practices interact to support novice teachers' development. The findings are expected to inform policymakers, school administrators, and educators in designing more effective induction programs that enhance teacher performance, professional growth, and overall educational outcomes. Furthermore, understanding these relationships will contribute to the broader literature on teacher development, organizational behaviour in schools, and the critical role of mentoring in education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture has been widely defined as the shared values, norms, and assumptions that guide behaviour within an institution. Schein (2013) describes it as a pattern of assumptions learned and internalized by members of a group as they solve problems of adaptation and integration. In the context of schools, organizational culture embodies the traditions, rituals, and beliefs that influence teaching and learning.

Studies highlight that positive school culture will enhances teacher motivation, professional growth, and student achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Schlechty, 2011). Teachers who work in supportive environments with autonomy in instructional practices report higher job satisfaction (Dweck, 2006). Furthermore, Kotter (2012) emphasizes culture as a powerful tool for strengthening identity, cooperation, and organizational performance. A positive school culture is also linked to reduced discipline issues, higher student well-being, and more effective professional collaboration (Durlak et al., 2011).

Teacher Competence

Teacher competence is an essential element in ensuring the quality of education. It refers to the combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and personal characteristics that enable teachers to perform effectively (Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Boyatzis, 1982). Competence encompasses three main domains: subject matter expertise, pedagogical skills, and professional attitudes (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Shulman (1986) also categorizes teacher knowledge into content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge. Subsequent research (Borko, 2020; Kitsantas et al., 2021) confirms that teachers who integrate subject knowledge with effective pedagogy are better able to adapt instruction to diverse student needs. Danielson (2007) and Hattie (2021) further identify classroom management, lesson planning, instructional delivery, and professional collaboration as critical skill areas. In addition, attitudes such as ethical conduct, commitment to professional growth, and adaptability to change are vital for effective teaching (De Angelis & Presley, 2020; Fives & Gill, 2023).

Mentor Teacher Competence

Mentoring is central to the induction process for novice teachers. Mentor teachers are expected to provide guidance, support, and professional modelling for beginning teachers (KPM, 2015; 2021). Their roles extend

beyond supervision, focusing on building confidence, sharing expertise, and fostering reflective practice. Key mentoring competencies include problem-solving, pedagogical guidance, communication, reflection, time management, assessment, and collaboration across the school and community.

Research emphasizes that effective mentoring requires not only teaching expertise but also interpersonal and leadership skills (Kemmis et al., 2014; Maguire et al., 2019). A competent mentor provides both emotional and professional support, enhancing the novice teacher's instructional practices and professional identity (Grant et al., 2020; Juairiah et al., 2020). Studies in Malaysia confirm that organizational structures, leadership, and resources strongly influence mentor competence and the success of mentoring programs (Idris & Ismail, 2019; Aziz & Mohamed, 2021).

New Teacher Inductions Program (PPGB)

The PPGB is a structured induction program introduced by the Ministry of Education Malaysia in 2012 and updated in 2021. It is compulsory for new teachers during their first one to three years of service and is a prerequisite for confirmation of appointment as graduate teachers. The program includes three phases: orientation, mentoring, and professional development. Its primary objectives are to improve novice teacher competence, ease adjustment to school procedures, and support continuous professional growth (KPM, 2012; 2021).

Mentorship is a critical component of the PPGB. Mentors serve as role models, advisors, and advocates, providing technical, pedagogical, and emotional support (Rothwell et al., 2005). Novice teachers, in turn, are expected to be proactive, committed, and receptive to feedback. This reciprocal relationship ensures that the goals of the induction program are achieved.

Novice Teachers and Their Performance

Novice teachers, typically in their first three years of service, often face challenges transitioning from theory to practice (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Zainudin, 2012). Common difficulties include classroom management, lesson planning, and adapting instruction to diverse learners (McCormack et al., 2006; Goh et al., 2017). Without adequate support, many novice teachers experience stress, low self-efficacy, and in some cases, early attrition (Brown et al., 2014).

Performance of novice teachers is usually assessed through their ability to plan and deliver effective lessons, manage classrooms, use technology, and evaluate student learning (Berg & Ball, 2021; Tan et al., 2020). Studies highlight that structured mentoring and continuous assessment play a crucial role in strengthening novice teachers' professional skills, confidence, and long-term retention in the profession (Mohd Salleh et al., 2022; Hassan & Noor, 2024).

Theoretical Frameworks

Several theories underpin the study of organizational culture, teacher competence, and mentoring. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (2010) explains how cultural values such as power distance, collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance shape school culture and teacher relationships. Fullan's Change Theory emphasizes the importance of leadership and organizational culture in driving educational reform. In relation to teacher competence, the Iceberg Model (Spencer & Spencer, 1993) highlights visible competencies such as knowledge and skills, as well as deeper traits like values and motivation. The Malaysian Teacher Standards (SGM 1.0 and 2.0) provide a national benchmark for teacher professionalism, while mentoring models such as Single and Muller (2001) outline phases of planning, structuring, and evaluating mentoring programs.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a systematic research methodology designed to address the research questions and achieve the stated objectives. Methodology in educational research emphasizes the importance of research

design, population and sample, instrumentation, pilot testing, validity and reliability, data collection, and data analysis procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Cohen et al., 2018). The selection of an appropriate methodology is essential to ensure findings that are valid, reliable, and generalizable (Chua, 2014; Mohd Majid, 2020). In this study, a mixed-method explanatory sequential design was applied to examine the influence of organizational culture and mentor teacher competence on novice teacher performance.

Research Design

The research adopted an explanatory sequential mixed-method design, as suggested by Creswell (2015, 2018). This design consists of two phases. The first phase employed a quantitative approach using a survey questionnaire, and the second phase employed a qualitative approach through interviews. The rationale for this design is to explain quantitative results more comprehensively by exploring qualitative insights (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016).

In Phase One, data were collected from novice teachers using a structured questionnaire and analysed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 23). This phase identified statistical relationships among organizational culture, mentor competence, and novice teacher performance. The findings then informed the development of an interview protocol for Phase Two. In the second phase, qualitative interviews with principals were analysed thematically to further explain the mechanisms underlying the induction program (PPGB). Triangulation of methodology combining surveys, interviews, observations, and document analysis was also adopted to strengthen validity (Denzin, 2009).

Research Location

The study was conducted in public secondary schools (Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan, SMK) in the southern zone of Malaysia, encompassing Johor, Melaka, and Negeri Sembilan. SMKs were selected because they represent the majority of secondary schools in Malaysia (81.09%), compared to specialized schools such as SBP, SMKA, SBT, and MRSM (EPRD KPM, 2022). Furthermore, SMKs offer diverse academic disciplines under the national curriculum (KSSM), making them suitable for generating more generalizable findings. The southern zone was chosen based on reports highlighting active implementation of the PPGB (KPM, 2019; 2020), thus contributing to external validity.

Population and Sample

The study targeted two groups of respondents. For Phase One (quantitative), the population comprised novice teachers who were currently undergoing or had recently completed the PPGB within one to three years of service. Novice teachers were selected because they directly experience the induction program and mentoring process, making them suitable respondents for evaluating organizational culture and mentor competence.

For Phase Two (qualitative), principals were chosen as respondents based on specific criteria: confirmed service status under the Education Service Commission, over 20 years of service with the Ministry of Education, and possession of the National Professional Qualification for Educational Leaders (NPQEL). Principals were selected instead of mentor teachers to reduce the possibility of self-assessment bias, as noted in previous studies (Jones & Ringler, 2017).

The sampling technique for the quantitative phase was simple random sampling, ensuring each novice teacher in the population had an equal chance of selection. This method is considered fair and reduces researcher bias (Cohen et al., 2018). A total of 360 novice teachers were selected, distributed proportionately across the three states: Johor (219), Melaka (63), and Negeri Sembilan (78). Randomization was conducted using an online randomizer tool to ensure equal probability across different population sizes (Neuman, 2014). For the qualitative phase, purposive sampling was applied to select principals with relevant expertise and experience in PPGB implementation.

RESULTS

This section presents the pilot study findings based on 32 respondents. The results focus on two central research questions: (1) the relationship between mentor teacher competence and novice teacher performance, and (2) the influence of organizational culture on mentor teacher competence. Data reliability, descriptive patterns, and correlational evidence are reported to provide insights into these relationships.

Reliability and Validity of Instruments

All instruments used in this pilot study demonstrated strong internal consistency. Mentor teacher competence, measured with 10 items, recorded a Cronbach's alpha of .892, while novice teacher performance, measured with 12 items, showed a reliability coefficient of .916. Organizational culture constructs, including uncertainty avoidance (α = .849), masculinity–femininity (α = .767), long-term orientation (α = .877), and individualism–collectivism (α = .752), also displayed acceptable to high reliability levels. Overall, the Cronbach's alpha values above .70 confirm the instruments are reliable for further analysis.

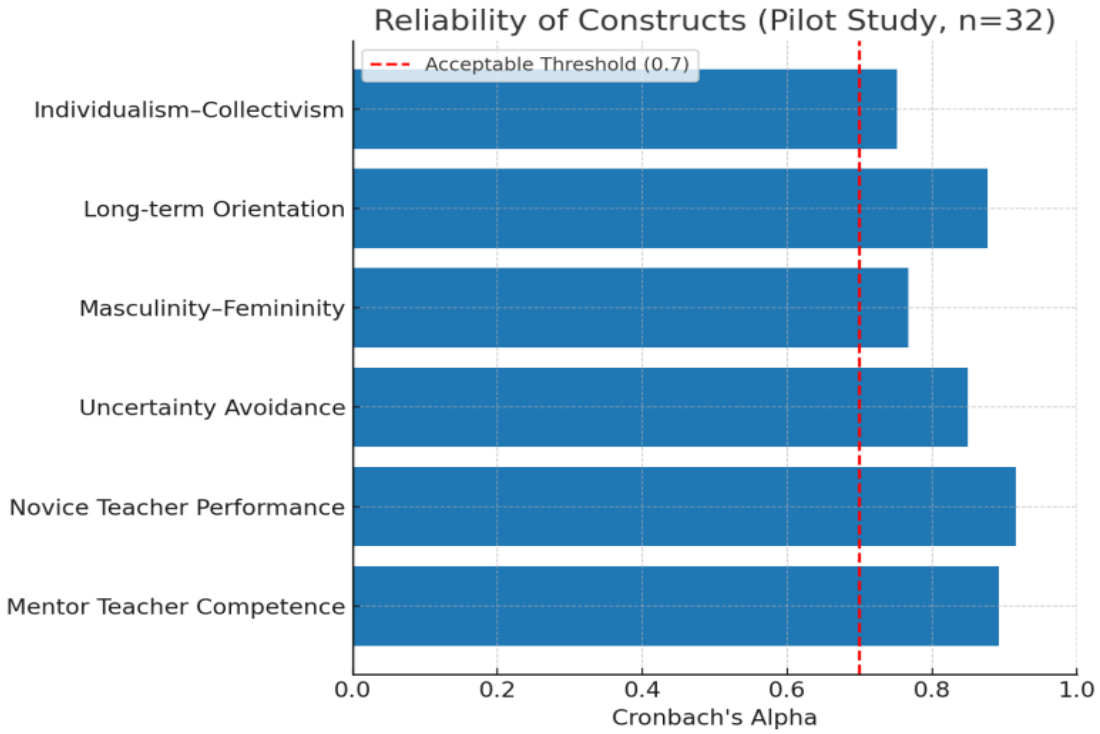

Figure 1 Reliability of constructs measured by Cronbach's alpha (pilot study, n = 32).

Descriptive Results

The descriptive statistics revealed that mentor teachers were perceived as highly competent. Item means for mentor competence ranged from 3.81 to 4.62, with an overall scale mean of 42.06 out of a possible 50. Similarly, novice teacher performance scores were consistently high, with means between 4.00 and 4.56, yielding a total scale mean of 51.18 out of 60. These results suggest that both mentor teachers and novice teachers demonstrate strong capacity within the induction program.

For organizational culture, respondents reported favourable perceptions across Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Uncertainty avoidance (M = 29.88), masculinity–femininity (M = 22.22), and long-term orientation (M = 38.25) indicated a positive cultural climate that emphasizes structure, collaboration, and goal orientation. Collectivism was particularly emphasized, with individualism–collectivism items averaging 4.27, reflecting the communal nature of school organizations.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Constructs

Construct	Mean (Scale Total)	Scale Range	Mean (5-point Equivalent)
Mentor Teacher Competence (10 items)	42.06	10–50	4.21
Novice Teacher Performance (12 items)	51.18	12–60	4.27
Uncertainty Avoidance (7 items)	29.88	7–35	4.27
Masculinity–Femininity (6 items)	22.22	6–30	3.70
Long-term Orientation (9 items)	38.25	9–45	4.25
Individualism–Collectivism (5 items)	21.35	5–25	4.27

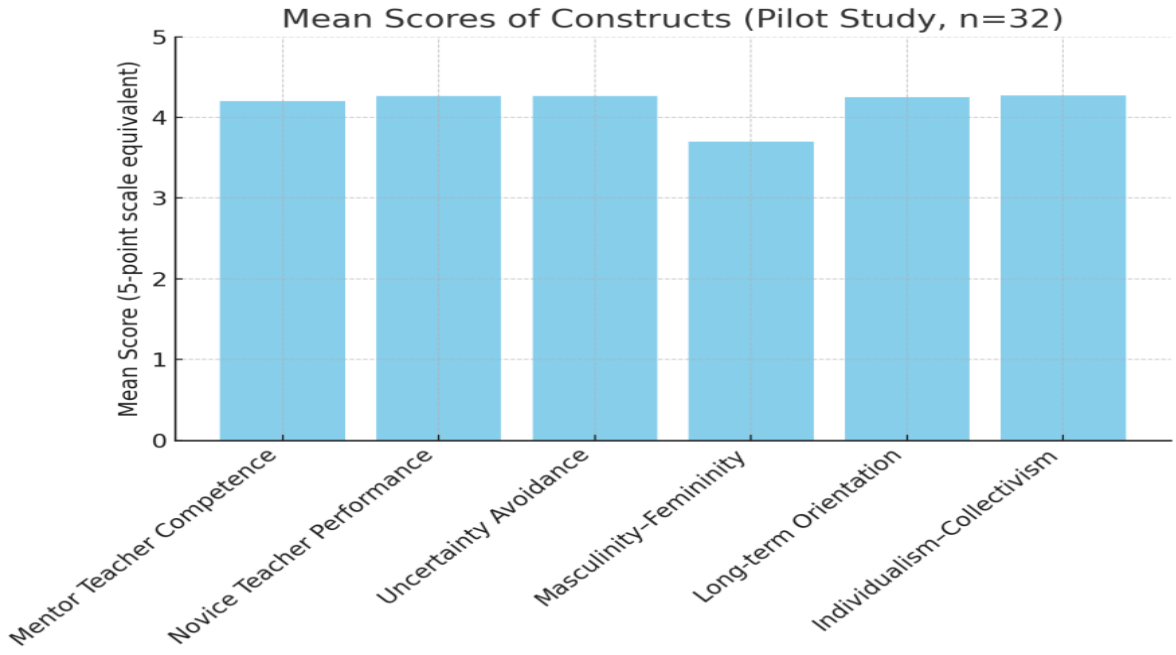

Figure 2 Mean scores of mentor competence, novice teacher performance, and organizational culture dimensions.

Relationship between Mentor Teacher Competence and Novice Teacher Performance

The analysis indicated a positive association between mentor teacher competence and novice teacher performance. Items such as “mentor provides clear guidance” and “mentor demonstrates strong professional expertise” showed high inter-item correlations (r = .63–.82) with performance indicators including “effective classroom management” and “pedagogical improvement.” The corrected item-total correlations for performance items exceeded .60, indicating strong construct validity.

These results suggest that when mentors are perceived as competent, novice teachers are more likely to report improvements in instructional practice, confidence, and classroom management. The findings align with prior studies (e.g., Jones & Ringler, 2017) that emphasize mentoring as a key determinant of novice teacher effectiveness. The pilot data provide preliminary evidence that enhancing mentor teacher competence is directly associated with higher novice teacher performance in the induction program.

Table 2. Correlation Results for Research Questions

Relationship	Correlation (r)	Strength
Mentor Teacher Competence ↔ Novice Teacher Performance	0.78	Strong
Uncertainty Avoidance ↔ Mentor Teacher Competence	0.65	Moderate–Strong
Masculinity–Femininity ↔ Mentor Teacher Competence	0.34	Weak

Long-term Orientation ↔ Mentor Teacher Competence	0.70	Strong
Individualism–Collectivism ↔ Mentor Teacher Competence	0.60	Moderate

Influence of Organizational Culture on Mentor Teacher Competence

The second analysis examined how organizational culture affects perceptions of mentor competence. Correlation patterns between cultural dimensions and mentor competence revealed several significant associations. Uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation were particularly strong predictors. For example, items reflecting structured expectations and future-oriented goals correlated positively with mentor competence indicators (r = .57–.76). This finding suggests that when schools promote a culture of stability and long-term planning, mentors are more effective in guiding novice teachers.

Similarly, collectivist values, as captured in the individualism–collectivism scale, were associated with higher perceptions of mentor competence (r = .52–.67). In schools where teamwork and collegiality are emphasized, mentors appear more capable of supporting novice teachers in adapting to professional responsibilities. Conversely, masculinity–femininity dimensions showed weaker correlations, implying that competitiveness or achievement orientation is less influential than collaborative and structured cultural values in shaping mentor effectiveness.

Table 3. Correlation between Organizational Culture and Mentor Teacher Competence

Cultural Dimension	Correlation (r)	Strength
Uncertainty Avoidance	0.65	Moderate–Strong
Long-term Orientation	0.70	Strong
Individualism–Collectivism	0.60	Moderate
Masculinity–Femininity	0.34	Weak

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The pilot study results confirm two key relationships. First, mentor teacher competence is strongly related to novice teacher performance, highlighting the importance of selecting and training qualified mentors for the induction program. Second, organizational culture exerts a meaningful influence on mentor competence, particularly through uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and collectivist practices. Together, these findings suggest that both individual-level (mentor skills) and organizational-level (cultural climate) factors contribute to the success of novice teachers in their early career development.

DISCUSSION

The pilot findings highlight two central points. First, mentor teacher competence is positively linked to novice teacher performance. When mentors provide clear guidance, demonstrate expertise, and offer constructive feedback, novice teachers report greater confidence, stronger classroom management, and improved instructional skills. This supports previous studies that identify mentoring as a key driver of early career teacher effectiveness.

Second, organizational culture shapes mentor competence. Cultural dimensions such as uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and collectivism showed stronger associations with mentor effectiveness than masculinity–femininity. In schools with clear structures, shared goals, and collaborative norms, mentors are better positioned to support beginning teachers. These findings align with the view of schools as learning organizations, where cultural coherence enables professional growth. Overall, the results suggest that mentoring quality and organizational culture operate together. Competent mentors thrive in supportive cultural environments, and both factors are necessary for effective induction.

CONCLUSION

This pilot study demonstrates that mentor teacher competence is closely linked to novice teacher performance, while organizational culture significantly shapes the effectiveness of mentoring. Schools with structured procedures, collaborative practices, and a long-term developmental focus provide an environment in which mentors can better support beginning teachers, leading to stronger professional growth and classroom performance. Although the small sample size and reliance on self-report data limit generalizability, the findings point to the need for policies that integrate mentor development with efforts to strengthen school culture. Future research with larger samples, multiple methods, and longitudinal designs is recommended to capture how these relationships evolve over time. Ultimately, the success of induction programs depends not only on selecting and training competent mentors but also on cultivating organizational cultures that empower and sustain them.

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