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Professional Development Programmes for Novice Teachers in Public Junior Schools in Mukaa Sub-County, Makueni County, Kenya

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Abstract

The transition from teacher preparation to independent classroom practice requires sustained professional support, particularly during the early years of teaching. This study examined the professional development programmes implemented for novice teachers in public junior schools in Mukaa Sub-County, Makueni County, Kenya. The study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected from 78 novice teachers using questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with all 20 principals of public junior schools in the sub-county. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. Six professional development activities were examined: one-on-one mentoring by senior teachers, workshops on classroom management, peer observation and feedback, school policy and curriculum training, stress management and emotional support, and preparation of professional documents. The findings showed that one-on-one mentoring was the most consistently experienced activity. The remaining activities such as classroom-management workshops, peer observation and feedback, school policy and curriculum training, stress management and emotional support and preparation of professional documents were considerably less consistently experienced. Qualitative data indicated that school leaders reported implementing a broader range of activities, including mentoring, collaborative planning, classroom-management guidance, curriculum and policy orientation, psychosocial support and professional-document preparation. The divergence suggests that professional development was frequently embedded in informal mentoring and school-based support rather than consistently experienced as formal, identifiable programmes. The study concludes that novice-teacher professional development in Mukaa was predominantly mentoring-based, with complementary activities implemented less consistently. The study recommends strengthening the formalization, visibility, monitoring and resourcing of induction-related professional development while retaining mentoring as a central component.

Keywords: novice teachers, teacher induction, professional development, mentoring, junior schools, Kenya, Mukaa Sub-County

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1. INTRODUCTION

The first years of teaching represent an important period in teachers' professional development because newly qualified teachers must translate theoretical preparation into independent classroom practice while simultaneously learning the routines, expectations and professional culture of their schools. Teacher induction provides a mechanism through which this transition can be supported through mentoring, coaching, collaboration, professional learning and orientation to school systems. A systematic review by Courtney et al. (2023) found that teacher-induction arrangements vary considerably across education systems, but mentoring and structured support for beginning teachers are recurring features of effective induction. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Keese et al. (2023) established that formalised novice-teacher induction programmes are associated with positive teacher and student outcomes, including teacher efficacy, retention and student achievement.

Recent international evidence further underscores the importance of professional support during the early career period. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2025) reported that mentoring is increasingly incorporated into teacher-induction systems and that novice teachers with assigned mentors report higher levels of job satisfaction and well-being in a number of education systems. The same evidence indicates that induction may include both formal and informal activities and that participation in professional learning does not necessarily mean that teachers experience every component of a programme in the same way. This distinction is important when examining school-based professional development because the existence of a support activity at institutional level does not automatically establish that individual novice teachers have consistently participated in or recognised that activity as part of induction.

Mentoring is particularly prominent in the professional development of novice teachers because it provides opportunities for learning through interaction with more experienced colleagues. Ben-Amram and Davidovitch (2024) argue for a holistic approach to mentoring in which novice teachers receive support that extends beyond technical teaching skills to include professional, interpersonal and contextual dimensions of their work. OECD (2025) similarly identifies mentoring as an important mechanism through which experienced teachers can support beginning teachers with classroom management, curriculum planning, school procedures and other aspects of professional practice.

Professional learning can also occur through collaborative structures rather than individual mentor-mentee relationships. Professional learning communities, peer observation, collaborative planning and feedback can enable novice teachers to learn from colleagues and develop shared professional knowledge. In South Africa, Mabunda and McKay (2024), using a mixed-methods evaluation of a new-teacher induction programme, found that participation in professional learning communities helped newly qualified teachers navigate early-career challenges by strengthening collaboration

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and social capital. OECD (2025) likewise identifies collaboration, feedback, mentoring and professional learning as interconnected components of teacher expertise development.

Classroom management is another important area of early-career professional development. Novice teachers frequently have to develop practical strategies for managing learner behaviour, maintaining engagement and organising classroom activities while simultaneously meeting curriculum requirements. OECD (2025) reports that classroom management remains an area in which many novice teachers identify a need for additional professional learning, while feedback from experienced teachers can contribute to improvements in managing student behaviour. Consequently, classroom-management workshops, coaching and observation may provide useful complements to mentoring.

The implementation of induction-related professional development, however, may be constrained by organisational conditions. Evidence from South Africa indicates that induction programmes may be weakened by inadequate knowledge of induction processes, insufficient time, workload pressures and limited coordination (Mkhabele et al., 2024). Such challenges are relevant to school-based professional development because activities such as peer observation, workshops and collaborative planning require time, coordination and personnel. Where these conditions are limited, professional support may become dependent on informal relationships rather than a systematic programme.

In Kenya, teacher induction has been institutionalised through the Teachers Service Commission's Teacher Induction Mentorship and Coaching (TIMEC) framework. The TSC's policy framework places emphasis on mentorship and coaching as mechanisms for supporting teachers' professional development and provides structures for documenting and monitoring mentoring activities (Teachers Service Commission [TSC], 2020). The existence of such a framework provides a policy basis for school-level professional support, but implementation remains dependent on the capacity of individual schools and leaders to organise, facilitate and monitor activities.

Despite the policy emphasis on teacher induction, evidence concerning the specific professional development activities experienced by novice teachers in Kenyan public junior schools remains limited, particularly in rural and semi-arid settings. The present study therefore focused on Mukaa Sub-County in Makueni County, where public junior schools operate within a context characterised by resource and workload constraints. The study sought to answer the research question: What professional development programmes are implemented for novice teachers in public junior schools in Mukaa Sub-County, Makueni County, Kenya?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher induction should not be understood merely as an administrative orientation conducted when a teacher joins a school. Rather, it encompasses a range of professional learning and support activities intended to facilitate the transition into teaching. Courtney et al. (2023) demonstrate that

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induction programmes vary in structure and content internationally, although mentoring, professional guidance and opportunities for supported practice are recurring elements. Keese et al. (2023), through a meta-analysis of research on formalised novice-teacher induction, similarly found positive effects associated with induction and mentoring programmes.

The professional development component of induction may include mentoring, coaching, collaborative planning, peer observation, classroom-management support, curriculum orientation, assessment guidance and psychosocial support. OECD (2025) notes that professional learning is most meaningful when teachers perceive it as having an impact on their teaching. This suggests that examining only whether a school reports having an induction programme may not adequately capture the professional development experienced by individual novice teachers.

Mentoring remains one of the most prominent mechanisms for supporting novice teachers. It allows experienced teachers to model practice, provide feedback, assist with planning and help beginning teachers interpret school expectations. Ben-Amram and Davidovitch (2024) emphasize that contemporary mentoring can extend beyond traditional technical assistance to address the broader professional and personal needs of novice teachers.

Collaborative learning provides another mechanism for professional development. Mabunda and McKay (2024) found that professional learning communities helped newly qualified teachers manage early-career challenges through collaboration and social support. Peer observation can similarly create opportunities for novice teachers to observe classroom practice, receive feedback and reflect on their own teaching. However, such approaches require deliberate organisation and protected time, which may be difficult to achieve in schools experiencing workload and resource pressures.

Although existing research establishes the importance of mentoring and collaborative professional learning, three gaps are particularly relevant to the present study. First, international evidence cannot automatically explain how induction-related professional development is implemented in Kenyan public junior schools. Second, studies frequently focus on whether induction exists rather than examining the specific activities that novice teachers actually experience. Third, principal reports of programme provision may differ from teachers' accounts of participation. OECD (2025) demonstrates the importance of distinguishing programme availability from teachers' actual participation and experience.

The present study addresses these gaps by combining novice teachers' quantitative responses with interviews with principals. This design permits comparison between activities reported as experienced by novice teachers and those reported as implemented by school leaders.

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METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analysed separately and integrated during interpretation. The quantitative component used a descriptive survey of novice teachers, while the qualitative component involved interviews with school principals. The design was appropriate because the research question required both measurement of the prevalence of professional development activities and an understanding of how school leaders described their implementation.

The study was conducted in public junior schools in Mukaa Sub-County, Makueni County, Kenya. The target population comprised novice teachers with less than three years of full-time teaching experience and school principals responsible for implementing induction programmes.

A questionnaire was administered to novice teachers, with 78 usable responses obtained, representing an 85% response rate. All 20 principals of public junior schools in the sub-county participated in semi-structured interviews. The use of all principals provided qualitative evidence from the school leaders responsible for organising and supporting induction activities.

The quantitative instrument contained items measuring novice teachers' experiences of six professional development activities. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Descriptive statistics comprising frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were used to summarise responses.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals. Interview data were analysed thematically to identify reported professional development practices, their implementation approaches and areas of convergence or divergence with novice teachers' responses. The two datasets were subsequently integrated to provide a more comprehensive interpretation of professional development provision.

RESULTS

Professional Development Activities Experienced by Novice Teachers

Six professional development activities were examined. The results are presented in Table 1.

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Table 1

Professional Development Programmes Experienced by Novice Teachers (n = 78)

Professional development activity	SA n (%)	A n (%)	N n (%)	D n (%)	SD n (%)	M	SD
One-on-one mentoring by senior teachers	16 (21)	37 (47)	6 (8)	14 (18)	5 (6)	2.42	1.19
Workshops on classroom management	2 (3)	7 (9)	9 (12)	51 (65)	9 (12)	3.74	0.87
Peer observation and feedback	1 (1)	1 (1)	26 (33)	40 (51)	10 (13)	3.73	0.75
School policy and curriculum training	2 (3)	10 (13)	18 (23)	33 (42)	15 (19)	3.63	1.02
Stress management and emotional support	2 (3)	5 (6)	17 (22)	44 (56)	10 (13)	3.71	0.87
Preparation of professional documents	1 (1)	10 (13)	4 (5)	39 (50)	24 (31)	3.96	1.00

Note. SA = strongly agree; A = agree; N = neutral; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree. Source: Field data (2026).

One-on-one mentoring was the most consistently experienced professional development activity. Fifty-three teachers (68%) either strongly agreed or agreed that they received one-on-one mentoring from senior teachers. The mean score of 2.42 (SD = 1.19) was the lowest among the six activities, indicating comparatively stronger agreement with the provision of mentoring.

The remaining activities recorded substantially lower levels of agreement. Only 9 teachers (12%) agreed or strongly agreed that they received workshops on classroom management, while 50 (64%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Peer observation and feedback was the least reported activity, with only 2 teachers (3%) agreeing or strongly agreeing that they participated in such sessions. Forty-nine teachers (64%) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

School policy and curriculum training was reported by 12 teachers (15%), while 48 (62%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Similarly, only 7 teachers (9%) agreed or strongly agreed that they received stress management and emotional support, compared with 54 (69%) who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Preparation of professional documents was also weakly reported. Eleven teachers (14%) agreed or strongly agreed that they received this form of professional development, while 63 (81%)

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disagreed or strongly disagreed. It recorded the highest mean score (M = 3.96, SD = 1.00), indicating the lowest level of agreement among the six activities.

Overall, the quantitative findings indicate that professional development under the induction programme was predominantly experienced through individual mentoring. The other activities were either implemented less consistently, experienced informally, or were not sufficiently visible to novice teachers as distinct components of the induction programme.

Principal Perspectives on Professional Development Provision

The interviews with the 20 principals presented a broader picture of professional development provision. Principals reported that mentoring was commonly organised through mentor-mentee relationships, regular consultations and collaborative planning. Some principals described experienced teachers assisting novice teachers with lesson preparation, instructional strategies, classroom challenges and professional adjustment.

Principals also reported providing classroom-management guidance. Such support included orientation to classroom routines, learner engagement, behaviour management, transitions and positive reinforcement. However, these reports differed from novice teachers' responses, in which only 12% agreed or strongly agreed that classroom-management workshops had been provided.

Similarly, principals described peer observation and feedback as part of professional support. They reported classroom observation, feedback and reflective practice. The quantitative responses, however, indicated that only 3% of novice teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they participated in peer-observation and feedback sessions.

Principals also reported orientation on school policies and curriculum matters. Such orientation included school vision and mission, professional conduct, learner behaviour, assessment, reporting and aspects of the Competency-Based Curriculum. Again, the novice-teacher responses indicated considerably lower levels of formalised experience of this activity.

The interviews further indicated that some principals recognised the importance of teacher well-being and described activities related to stress management, self-care, resilience and emotional support. These reports contrasted with the quantitative finding that only 9% of novice teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they received stress-management and emotional-support activities.

Professional-document preparation was also reported by principals as an important aspect of induction. Principals described guidance on lesson plans, schemes of work, assessment tools and record keeping. Nevertheless, only 14% of novice teachers agreed or strongly agreed that this form of professional development was provided.

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Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The integration of the two datasets revealed convergence as well as divergence. The strongest convergence concerned one-on-one mentoring. Both novice teachers and principals identified mentoring as an important and relatively established component of induction.

The greatest divergence occurred in relation to classroom-management workshops, peer observation, school policy and curriculum training, stress management and emotional support, and preparation of professional documents. Principals generally described these activities as being implemented, whereas novice teachers reported substantially lower levels of exposure.

The divergence should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence that either group provided inaccurate information. Rather, the findings suggest that some activities may have been delivered informally through mentoring, departmental guidance, individual consultations or occasional school-based sessions. Activities may also have differed in frequency, visibility and degree of formalisation across schools. The distinction is important because a professional development activity can exist at school level without being consistently experienced by all novice teachers.

DISCUSSION

The finding that one-on-one mentoring was the most consistently experienced professional development activity is consistent with the wider literature on teacher induction. Keese et al. (2023) found that formalised induction and mentoring programmes are associated with positive outcomes for novice teachers and students. Similarly, OECD (2025) identifies mentoring as one of the most prominent forms of induction and reports positive associations between assigned mentoring and several professional outcomes. The present study therefore reinforces the central role of mentoring in supporting teachers during the early stages of their careers.

The prominence of mentoring can also be understood through the sociocultural nature of professional learning. Novice teachers acquire professional knowledge not only through formal training but also through interaction with more experienced colleagues. Mentoring provides opportunities for modelling, explanation, feedback and guided participation. The finding that mentoring was more frequently experienced than workshops and other activities therefore suggests that professional learning in the participating schools was strongly embedded in interpersonal relationships.

The low level of reported classroom-management workshops is noteworthy. Only 12% of novice teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they received such workshops. This contrasts with OECD (2025), which identifies classroom management as an important area of professional learning for novice teachers. The finding does not necessarily indicate that novice teachers received no classroom-management assistance. Principal interviews suggested that classroom-management

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support occurred, but it may have been incorporated into mentoring and day-to-day guidance rather than organised as standalone workshops.

The particularly low level of peer observation and feedback is also significant. Only 3% of novice teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they participated in peer-observation sessions. This contrasts with approaches that emphasise collaborative professional learning and communities of practice. Mabunda and McKay (2024) demonstrate how professional learning communities can provide social and professional support to newly qualified teachers. The weak reporting of peer observation in the present study suggests that collaborative observation and feedback had not become a consistently experienced component of professional development.

School policy and curriculum training was similarly weak from the perspective of novice teachers. Only 15% agreed or strongly agreed that they received such training. This is important because induction involves more than classroom teaching; beginning teachers must also learn the institutional expectations, professional procedures and curriculum requirements governing their work. OECD (2025) identifies curriculum planning and understanding school procedures among areas in which experienced teachers can support novice colleagues. The principal interviews indicated that such orientation was reportedly undertaken, suggesting that some schools provided this support but that its timing, form or visibility may have varied.

The finding concerning stress management and emotional support deserves particular attention. Only 9% of novice teachers reported receiving this form of professional development, despite principals' recognition of its importance. OECD (2025) reports that teacher well-being and work-related stress remain significant professional concerns and that support mechanisms are relevant to teachers' professional experiences. The divergence in the present study suggests that psychosocial support may have been addressed informally within mentoring relationships rather than through identifiable professional-development activities.

Preparation of professional documents was the least consistently experienced activity, with 81% of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that it was provided. This finding contrasts with principal reports of assistance with lesson plans, schemes of work, assessment tools and records. One possible explanation is that such assistance occurred through routine correction and supervision rather than through a formal training session. The distinction is important because teachers may receive practical assistance without necessarily conceptualizing that assistance as an induction programme.

The broader pattern is therefore one of mentoring dominance and limited formalisation of complementary activities. This finding aligns with recent international evidence that induction may consist of both formal and informal forms of professional learning (OECD, 2025). It also resonates with evidence from South Africa, where Mkhabele et al. (2024) found challenges in the implementation of novice-teacher induction associated with knowledge, time and workload constraints.

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The study's mixed-methods evidence provides an important contribution because it demonstrates that implementation should be examined from both provider and beneficiary perspectives. Principal reports indicated that schools were attempting to provide a broad range of support, whereas novice teachers' responses showed that only mentoring was consistently experienced. This difference points to an implementation issue concerning the visibility, regularity and formalisation of professional development rather than simply the presence or absence of activities.

CONCLUSION

The study established that professional development for novice teachers in public junior schools in Mukaa Sub-County was predominantly centred on one-on-one mentoring by senior teachers. Mentoring was reported by 68% of novice teachers and represented the most consistently experienced form of professional development.

The other five activities—classroom-management workshops, peer observation and feedback, school policy and curriculum training, stress management and emotional support, and professional-document preparation—were considerably less consistently experienced. Although principals reported implementing a wider range of activities, novice teachers did not consistently recognise or experience them as formal professional-development components.

The findings therefore suggest that professional development during induction was present but unevenly formalised. Mentoring constituted the principal mechanism through which professional learning occurred, while other potentially important forms of support appeared to be less regular, less visible or embedded informally within everyday school practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

First, public junior schools should retain one-on-one mentoring as a central component of novice-teacher induction while strengthening its structure through clearly assigned mentors, scheduled meetings, documented objectives and systematic follow-up.

Second, schools should broaden induction-related professional development beyond mentoring by incorporating regular classroom-management sessions, peer observation, collaborative lesson planning, curriculum and policy orientation, professional-document preparation, and psychosocial support. A broader approach would be consistent with evidence that induction encompasses multiple forms of professional learning rather than mentoring alone (Courtney et al., 2023; OECD, 2025).

Third, the Teachers Service Commission should strengthen implementation support for school-based induction by providing standardised professional-development materials, mentor preparation and monitoring mechanisms. The TSC's mentorship and coaching framework provides

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a policy foundation upon which more systematic school-level implementation can be built (TSC, 2020).

Fourth, school leaders should make professional development activities sufficiently visible and regular for novice teachers to recognise them as components of induction. Where activities are delivered informally through mentoring or departmental guidance, schools should document them as part of the induction process so that participation can be monitored.

Finally, future research should examine the relationship between specific professional-development activities and novice teachers' professional adaptation using longitudinal designs. Such research could determine whether particular combinations of mentoring, peer learning, classroom-management support, curriculum orientation and psychosocial support are associated with stronger professional outcomes.

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