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Principals' Mentorship of New Teachers and Perceived Education Quality in Public Secondary Schools in Machakos County, Kenya

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Abstract
This study examined the relationship between principals' mentorship of new teachers and perceived education quality in public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya. Guided by mentor role theory, the study adopted a descriptive survey research design utilizing questionnaires and interview guides. The analysis was based on 178 usable responses from public secondary school principals along with qualitative insights from Sub-County Quality Assurance and Standards Officers. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation, and linear regression. The instruments were pilot-tested for clarity and suitability, and test-retest reliability coefficients for the reported variables exceeded .80. Findings indicated a statistically significant, strong positive association between principals' mentorship of new teachers and perceived education quality ($r = .743$, $p < .001$). Regression analysis demonstrated that principals' mentorship was a significant predictor of perceived education quality ($R^2 = .552$, $B = .788$, $\beta = .743$, $p < .001$), explaining 55.2% of the variance. Structured mentorship was perceived to support new teachers' competence and instructional confidence; however, the findings are limited by reliance on self-reported perceptions from principals. It is recommended that school principals, in collaboration with Boards of Management and the Ministry of Education, prioritize the allocation of adequate time and resources for structured mentorship programs targeting newly recruited teachers.

Keywords*: principals' mentorship; perceived education quality; teacher induction; instructional leadership, Kenya*

1. Introduction

Novice teachers are anticipated to adjust, adapt, and integrate into the school community, learning how to instruct diverse learners and collaborate with fellow staff and school administrators. Within this transition process, principals are expected to mentor newly recruited teachers by providing a supportive learning bond that enables the mentee to move toward greater professional independence and creates an interdependent relationship between mentor and mentee (Hayes, 2019). As mentors, principals play an essential role in explaining school policies, regulations, and procedures to new teachers, providing guidance on instructional practices, and fostering professional growth through structured support.

In the United States, mentorship programmes were introduced in the 1980s, with states adopting induction and mentoring frameworks to support beginning teachers during their first years in the profession. The goal was to ensure a smoother transition into the teaching environment and improve teaching effectiveness through guidance from veteran teachers (Sydnor et al., 2023). Mwesigwa and Nakato (2026) indicate that mentoring interventions are more effective when implemented biweekly, providing mentee teachers sufficient opportunities to interact with their mentors. These exercises positively impact the new teacher's commitment to the role, leading to successful performance and high-quality education. Finland is renowned for its high-performing education system, with mentorship programmes playing a key role in teacher development. In Finland, the focus is on collaborative learning, where experienced teachers mentor their peers, emphasizing reflective practice and continuous improvement (Ollila et al., 2026). In the

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Philippine education system, mentorship aligns with the Department of Education's commitment to raise teaching standards and improve student achievement. This is typically implemented through In-Service Trainings (INSET), Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, and individual consultations between department heads and teachers. These forms of training have shown potential to sharpen instructional competencies, refresh teachers' knowledge, and support professional development (Baldera, 2025). This approach highlights the importance of mentorship not just as a tool for new teachers, but as a vital part of ongoing professional growth for all educators, contributing to the overall success of the education system.

In Nigeria, Anyanwu and Abe (2023) revealed that one-on-one mentorship programmes were common among secondary schools and that mentoring exerted a substantial influence on newly recruited teachers' service delivery. Experienced mentors help novice teachers in lesson planning, support them in sourcing information on effective practices, observe their classes, and offer constructive feedback. Mentors are essential in facilitating the faster integration of novice teachers into the teaching profession. Jato et al. (2022) found that the role of school leaders as mentors in Zambian public secondary schools played a crucial part in shaping the performance of newly assigned teachers. Nevertheless, it was determined that effective mentorship for newly assigned teachers was constrained by inadequate resources, a deficiency of mentoring knowledge and skills in mentors, and the heavy workloads of school leaders. In Tanzania, Urio and Mwakabenga (2025) demonstrated that mentoring programs impact the quality of teaching, with teachers involved in mentorship initiatives reporting notable advancements in their teaching methods. Mentorship has been found to strengthen lesson planning abilities and improve teaching effectiveness, especially by helping teachers embrace learner-centred methods that actively involve students in the learning experience. Kenya has achieved notable advancements in incorporating mentorship programmes into teacher professional development, especially via initiatives that assist newly qualified educators (Mutwiri & Chui, 2024). Mentorship programmes in Kenya are considered a method to enhance teaching methods, lower teacher attrition, and address issues like differing levels of classroom readiness. Even with advancements, the quality and uniformity of mentorship can differ across counties, school categories, and school sizes, emphasizing the necessity for ongoing support of these programmes to guarantee their effectiveness.

Educational quality in public secondary schools remains a subject of ongoing concern among educational stakeholders in Kenya, including within Machakos County. While effective teacher induction and structured professional support are widely recognized as vital for building instructional competence and sustaining school standards, the degree to which principals systematically mentor newly recruited teachers varies considerably. Although research on mentorship has grown in Kenya, existing studies have primarily focused on specific, individual-level outcomes. For example, Okello, Kombo, and Mandela (2023) examined the influence of mentoring newly employed teachers on individual teacher performance in Kiambu County; Obura (2019) investigated perceptions toward principals' mentoring roles in teacher professional development in Kisumu; and Ndiso, Kalai, and Mugambi (2023) assessed the influence of principals' mentorship practices on female teachers' progression into management positions in Kajiado County. Consequently, there is an empirical gap regarding how principal-led mentorship of new teachers relates to overall perceived education quality at the school level, particularly within public secondary schools in Machakos County. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between principals' mentorship of new teachers and perceived education quality in public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between principals' mentorship of new teachers and perceived education quality in public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya. It sought to determine the relationship between principals' mentorship of new teachers and perceived education quality in public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya. And answer the question: What is the relationship between principals' mentorship of new teachers and perceived education quality in public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya?

It is hypothesized that:
H_0: There is no statistically significant relationship between principals' mentorship of new teachers and perceived education quality in public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya.
H_1: There is a statistically significant relationship between principals' mentorship of new teachers and perceived education quality in public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya.

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This study was guided by Kram's Mentor Role Theory (Kram, 2018). The theory posits that mentoring is a developmental relationship that enhances an individual's professional and personal growth through two core categories of mentoring functions: career functions and psychosocial functions. Career functions, comprising sponsorship, exposure and visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments, focus on facilitating professional skill acquisition and organizational navigation (Kram, 2018). Psychosocial functions, encompassing acceptance, counselling, friendship, and role modelling, address interpersonal development, strengthening the mentee's sense of competence, identity, and professional efficacy (Kram, 2018).

In the context of this study, Kram's Mentor Role Theory provides a framework for understanding how mentorship practices are operationalized in public secondary schools. Career mentoring functions correspond directly to indicators such as practical instructional guidance, coaching, constructive feedback, and structured opportunities for new teachers to contribute their views on promoting educational quality. Psychosocial functions align with indicators including professional support, encouragement, and role modelling, which collectively foster the confidence and instructional competence of newly recruited teachers. School principals may provide this mentorship directly or coordinate support through relevant school personnel. Consequently, Kram's framework guides the conceptualization and interpretation of the association between principals' mentorship of new teachers and perceived education quality at the school level without asserting direct causation.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework outlines the relationship between the study variables as follows:

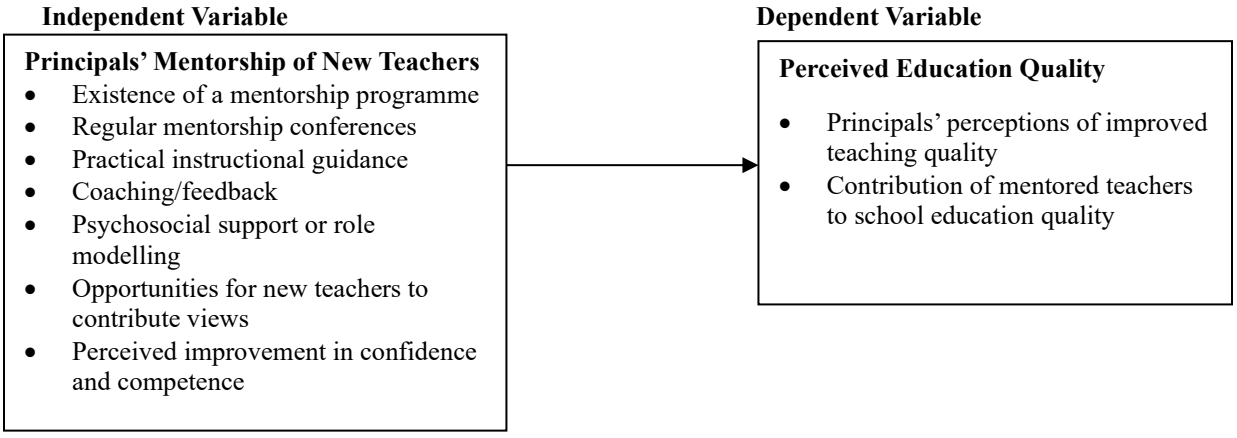

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Variables

The study does not test an intervening variable, so none is shown in the framework. In accordance with the descriptive survey design of this research, the conceptual framework proposes an association between principals' mentorship of new teachers and perceived education quality rather than a direct causal pathway.

2. Methodology

The study adopted a positivist philosophical framework and employed a descriptive survey research design to examine the relationship between principals' mentorship of new teachers and perceived education quality in public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya. Because the design is cross-sectional and relies on self-reported survey data, it permits the examination of statistical associations and predictive relationships within the sample, but it does not establish causal influence.

The target population comprised 370 principals of public secondary schools in Machakos County and nine Sub-County Quality Assurance and Standards Officers. Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error was applied to determine an intended sample size of 192 principals. A total of 178 usable questionnaires were returned by principals and included in the analyses, representing a response rate of 92.7% of the sampled principals. A census approach was utilized to target all nine Sub-County Quality Assurance and Standards Officers in the county.

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Data were collected using questionnaires for school principals and interview guides for Sub-County Quality Assurance and Standards Officers. The dependent variable analyzed in the empirical findings was perceived education quality as measured through respondents' questionnaire assessments, rather than verified Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examination records or student transition figures.

Content validity was evaluated through expert judgment by subject matter specialists and university supervisors, who reviewed item clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. A pilot study was conducted across five public secondary schools in Machakos County that were excluded from the main study. Five secondary school principals completed the questionnaires to assess the clarity, accuracy, and suitability of the items, and identified shortcomings were rectified. To evaluate instrument reliability, a test-retest procedure was administered during the pilot phase, with questionnaires completed twice over a two-week period in two schools excluded from the final sample. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to determine consistency over time. The resulting reliability coefficients were $r = .808$ (9 items) for principals' mentorship of new teachers, and $r = .816$ (9 items) for quality of education. Because all coefficients exceeded the .80 threshold, the research instruments were established as reliable.

Research authorization was granted through an introductory letter from the Department of Educational Management, Policy and Curriculum Studies at the Faculty of Education, University of Nairobi, alongside a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Administrative clearance and consent were obtained from the Machakos County Commissioner and the County Director of Education. The researcher arranged scheduled meetings with school principals and Sub-County Quality Assurance and Standards Officers to administer questionnaires and conduct interviews. Ethical safeguards were maintained through informed consent, guaranteed confidentiality, participant anonymity to mitigate victimization risks, and adherence to academic integrity and citation standards.

Completed instruments were subjected to data cleaning to verify completeness and relevance, followed by encoding, tabulation, and computation in SPSS Version 28. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were calculated to summarize questionnaire responses. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was used to assess bivariate relationships, and linear regression analysis was performed to test the research hypotheses. Prior to inferential testing, diagnostic tests for normality and multicollinearity were conducted. Qualitative responses from interviews and open-ended questionnaire items were analyzed thematically using content analysis. While the design evaluates statistical associations and predictive relationships within the sample, reliance on cross-sectional, self-reported survey responses from principals means the findings reflect perceived relationships rather than proven causal effects.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive Findings for Mentorship Practices

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics for Principals' Mentorship Items*

Item	*N*	*M*	*SD*
There is a mentorship program for new teachers in the school	178	3.590	0.537
I regularly organize mentorship conferences specifically for newly recruited teachers	178	2.152	0.853
Mentorship enables a new teacher to improve on teaching skills	178	3.438	0.646
The school allocates sufficient time and resources for mentorship conferences	178	2.185	-
Mentorship makes a new teacher to give their views on how to promote quality education	178	3.309	0.620
Teachers who are mentored help in uplifting the quality of education in the school	178	3.646	0.614
Mentorship sessions include practical guidance tailored to the challenges faced by new teachers	178	3.506	0.666

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New teachers demonstrate improved confidence and competence after attending mentorship conferences	178	3.438	0.498
Quality of teaching has improved due to structured mentorship of new teachers	178	3.618	0.620

As shown in Table 1, principals reported that mentorship programmes exist (M = 3.590, SD = 0.537) and that mentorship sessions provide practical guidance tailored to challenges faced by new teachers (M = 3.506, SD = 0.666). Mentorship was also viewed positively in relation to enabling new teachers to improve their teaching skills (M = 3.438, SD = 0.646), boosting new teachers' confidence and competence (M = 3.438, SD = 0.498), and providing opportunities for new teachers to contribute views on promoting quality education (M = 3.309, SD = 0.620). In contrast, respondents reported lower ratings for regularly organizing mentorship conferences specifically for newly recruited teachers (M = 2.152, SD = 0.853) and allocating sufficient time and resources for mentorship conferences (M = 2.185, SD not reported).

3.2 Item Differentiation and Potential Construct Overlap

Two items in Table 1 explicitly evaluate perceived educational quality outcomes rather than mentorship practices directly: "Teachers who are mentored help in uplifting the quality of education in the school" (M = 3.646, SD = 0.614) and "Quality of teaching has improved due to structured mentorship of new teachers" (M = 3.618, SD = 0.620). Because these statements capture outcome perceptions, analyzing them alongside implementation practices without distinguishing items creates a potential overlap between the independent and dependent constructs. The study records do not specify which individual items formed the predictor composite versus the dependent variable composite, meaning potential construct overlap cannot be ruled out.

3.3 Correlation Analysis

A Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the bivariate relationship between principals' mentorship of new teachers and perceived education quality. The analysis indicated a statistically significant, strong positive association between principals' mentorship of new teachers and perceived education quality, $r(176) = .743$, $p < .001$. On the basis of this statistically significant positive relationship, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis (H_1).

3.4 Regression Analysis

A linear regression analysis was conducted to assess the extent to which principals' mentorship of new teachers predicted perceived education quality. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 176) = 217.081$, $p < .001$, and accounted for 55.2% of the variance in perceived education quality within the sample ($R^2 = .552$, adjusted $R^2 = .550$, standard error of the estimate = .2065). Principals' mentorship was a significant positive statistical predictor of perceived education quality ($B = .788$, $\beta = .743$, $p < .001$; constant $B = .781$, $p = .001$).

4. Discussion

The empirical findings show a strong, statistically significant positive association between principals' mentorship of new teachers and perceived education quality. Interpreted through Kram's Mentor Role Theory, the career functions of mentorship; including practical instructional guidance, skill development, and coaching (M = 3.438 to 3.506); and psychosocial functions; such as boosting instructional confidence and encouraging teacher input (M = 3.309 to 3.438); provide structured avenues through which new teachers develop professional competence.

These patterns align with prior literature highlighting the positive role of principal-led mentorship in secondary schools. In the Kenyan context, Okello et al. (2023) and Obura (2019) similarly noted positive associations between mentoring newly recruited teachers and their professional development and task performance.

However, the descriptive findings also highlight structural constraints, notably lower ratings for the regular scheduling of mentorship conferences (M = 2.152) and the allocation of adequate time and resources (M = 2.185). This corresponds with observations by Jato et al. (2022), who found that while headteachers' mentorship roles are critical, effective implementation is frequently constrained by heavy administrative workloads and limited school resources.

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Although principals perceived mentorship as valuable for professional growth, the low ratings for time and resources suggest that structured mentorship conferences are not systematically institutionalized in all schools.

4.1 Limitations

Several methodological limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings:

1. **Cross-Sectional and Self-Reported Design:** The study relies on cross-sectional survey responses from school principals, which limits the findings to statistical associations and sample-level predictions rather than demonstrated causal relationships.
2. **Measurement of Education Quality:** The dependent variable was assessed through survey perceptions rather than verified administrative data, such as Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examination records or documented college and university transition figures.
3. **Scope of the Evidence:** The findings are based primarily on principals' questionnaire responses. Although interview guides were used with Sub-County Quality Assurance and Standards Officers, the reported inferential results concern the questionnaire data and perceived education quality rather than independently verified educational outcomes.

5. Conclusions

The study concludes that principals' mentorship of new teachers was strongly and positively associated with perceived education quality in public secondary schools in Machakos County ($r = .743$, $p < .001$). The linear regression model accounted for 55.2% of the variance in perceived education quality within the sample ($R^2 = .552$). Based on these statistically significant inferential findings, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis (H_1).

These conclusions specifically reflect perceived education quality as measured through self-reported questionnaire responses from secondary school principals, rather than verified administrative records such as Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examination outcomes or documented tertiary transition figures. While principals reported positive perceptions regarding the existence of mentorship programmes, practical instructional guidance, and perceived improvements in new teachers' instructional skills and confidence, the descriptive findings also revealed that regular mentorship conferences and the allocation of sufficient time and resources received lower ratings. The study therefore concludes that while mentorship is viewed favourably by school administrators, its implementation remains constrained by institutional time and resource limitations.

In terms of theoretical and practical contributions, the study cautiously applies Kram's Mentor Role Theory within the context of Kenyan public secondary schools, illustrating how career and psychosocial mentoring functions can be conceptualized in relation to school-level perceptions of education quality. Practically, the study highlights the divergence between positive perceptions of mentorship value and the operational constraints that hinder its regular practice in secondary schools.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Recommendations for Practice and Policy

Based on the empirical findings and documented implementation constraints, the following recommendations are offered:

1. **Institutional Resource Allocation and Planning:** Because principals rated the allocation of time and resources for mentorship low, school principals and Boards of Management (BOM) should incorporate mentorship programmes into institutional school planning and consider providing dedicated institutional resources. At the national and county policy levels, the Ministry of Education and the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) should provide policy guidance and support resource prioritization for teacher induction and mentorship within their respective mandates.
2. **Scheduling of Structured Mentorship Sessions:** Because the regular organization of mentorship conferences was rated low, school principals should establish clear, recurring mentorship schedules suited to their school context. Where administrative workloads constrain direct engagement by the principal, mentorship activities should be coordinated through designated senior teachers or heads of department.
3. **Mentor Capacity-Building and Coordination Support:** Because literature and administrative contexts identify mentor preparedness and workload as notable implementation challenges, the Ministry of Education,

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Teachers Service Commission, and Sub-County Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (SCQASOs) should support mentor capacity-building, coordination frameworks, and implementation guidance where applicable. This is recommended as a practical measure to strengthen school-level mentoring capacity.

6.2 Recommendations for Further Research

To address the limitations of the current study, future research should pursue the following directions:

1. **Multi-Stakeholder Perspectives:** Future studies should collect data directly from newly recruited teachers, senior teacher mentors, and quality assurance officers to gain a multi-perspective understanding of mentorship practices.
2. **Objective Performance Metrics:** Subsequent research should analyze the relationship between teacher mentorship and objective academic outcomes, such as verified KCSE examination results and documented student transition rates.
3. **Longitudinal and Comparative Designs:** Longitudinal or multilevel designs should be conducted to track the long-term instructional and developmental effects of mentorship, alongside comparative studies across diverse counties and school categories in Kenya.
4. **Supportive Professional Supervision:** School principals and instructional leaders should maintain regular, supportive monitoring of teachers' professional records (such as schemes of work, lesson plans, and records of work covered) to reinforce instructional standards and curriculum adherence.

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