

Perceptions of Seasoned Special Needs Education Teachers in Mentoring Novice Receiving Teachers

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Abstract

The acute lack of structured mentoring and severe "reality shock" experienced by novice receiving teachers during the start of their careers frequently leaves them feeling misdirected and unprepared in inclusive education settings. Guided by Kathy Kram's Mentor Relationship Theory (1983), this study explored how seasoned special needs education teachers describe their perceptions of mentoring novice receiving teachers. Data gathering was conducted through in-depth interviews among six purposively identified seasoned special needs education teacher-mentors of novice receiving teachers within the Province of South Cotabato. Information gathered underwent the six-step process of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, which revealed the underlying situation during the mentorship phases. The findings revealed that mentor-mentee practices undergo Early Hurdles of Mentorship Initiation, Cultivating Competence, Practice Beyond Separation, and Redefining Professional Growth, all of which are directed to emphasizing the need for structured mentoring processes for novice receiving teachers with guidance, support, and opportunities, while encouraging active engagement in continuous professional development. The findings highlighted that effective mentoring is a developmental process that begins with overcoming initial challenges, progresses through supportive mentoring strategies and authentic classroom practice, and is sustained through continuous professional development. The study underscored the importance of establishing structured mentoring programs that strengthen novice receiving teachers' competence and confidence in inclusive education settings.

Keywords: seasoned special needs education teachers; special needs education; mentoring; novice receiving teachers; South Cotabato

1. Introduction

1.1 The Problem and Its Scope

The acute lack of structured mentoring and severe "reality shock" experienced by novice receiving teachers during the start of their careers frequently leaves them feeling misdirected and unprepared in inclusive education settings (Mokoena & Tonder, 2024). I recognize that this inadequate preparation is urgent to address, as teacher attrition, often resulting from insufficient novice teacher support, directly impacts student achievement, teacher retention, curriculum implementation, and overall school environment quality (Lampert et al., 2025).

In Australia and Rwanda, absence of well-structured mentoring for novice teachers has effects on preparedness and retention. I found in my review of international literature that mentors and mentees experience communicative and organizational burdens when mentorship lacks adequate institutional support (Byth, 2024). Similarly, novice teachers need extensive support systems since mentoring and induction

structures alone are often not enough to address the complex challenges of an early stage in teaching (Diab & Green, 2024).

In the Philippines, novice teachers in inclusive and special education settings similarly experience insufficient mentoring support. The assignment of mentoring responsibilities to experienced educators often occurs without adequate institutional structures, professional development, or recognition of mentors' additional labor. Through my engagement with educational literature in the Philippine context, I recognize that structured induction and mentoring are essential because existing onboarding practices are often inconsistent and insufficiently structured, leading to variations in novice teachers' professional growth (Dy & Sumayao, 2024). I am concerned that these novice teachers in the South Cotabato and Koronadal City context may face heightened vulnerability to "reality shock" in inclusive education settings.

Even though mentorship existed in the Philippines in the forms of training and seminars, direct teacher mentorship had to be emphasized to directly pass the torch of effectiveness. Alongside this specific topic was the fact that there had been a lack of studies and articles on school teachers' mentorship. Specifically, studies that discussed the mentorship process and relationship, emphasizing the field and aspect of Special Needs Education, were lacking in references that addressed practical knowledge, pedagogies, and professional practices in the said process. There had been a noticeable scarcity of empirical studies or articles in the Philippine context, particularly within the locality of South Cotabato, that examined mentorship programs among special education teachers and receiving teachers.

This scarcity had created a gap in exploring more of the phenomenon. Given this situation, there had been a necessary need to investigate mentoring practices in Special Needs Education, particularly within the Philippine context and the localization of South Cotabato. Hence, the study aimed to examine the experiences of special education teachers who had mentored novice or receiving teachers under Special Education within the South Cotabato Division and the Koronadal City Division.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Aligned with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 and 10, under Quality Education and Reduced Inequalities, my study is essential for many of the teachers, like myself, involved in the teaching and learning process, specifically teachers and students who are in the special needs education sector.

The findings of my study may also help experienced teachers develop effective mentoring strategies while encouraging beginning teachers to grow professionally. Strengthening mentorship also requires support from school administrators to ensure effective guidance and collaboration. Ultimately, the study benefits learners, especially those with special needs, and supports inclusive education. It also aligns with the mission and vision of Holy Cross of Davao College in promoting quality education and a culture of excellence.

1.3 Research Questions

To reinforce input on understanding the mentorship process in the field of special needs education, I explored how seasoned special needs education teachers describe their perceptions of mentoring novice receiving teachers. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by the seasoned special needs education teachers in mentoring novice receiving teachers during the initiation phase of mentoring?
2. What strategies do seasoned special needs education teachers employ during the cultivation phase of mentoring among novice receiving teachers?
3. How do seasoned special needs education teachers describe their method used during the separation phase?

4. How do seasoned special needs education teachers facilitate the enhancement of competence among novice receiving teachers during the redefinition phase of mentoring?

1.4 Theoretical Lens

The study had been grounded in Kram's (1983) mentor relationship theory to explore the experiences of seasoned special needs educators. Through this framework, the researcher had examined how mentors had navigated two primary functions within a mentoring relationship: the career function, which had been concerned with the professional advancement of the mentee, and the psychosocial function, which had focused on developing the mentee's sense of competence, identity, and confidence. These functions had unfolded across four distinct phases: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition—which had illustrated the progression of the mentor–mentee relationship.

1.5 Paradigm

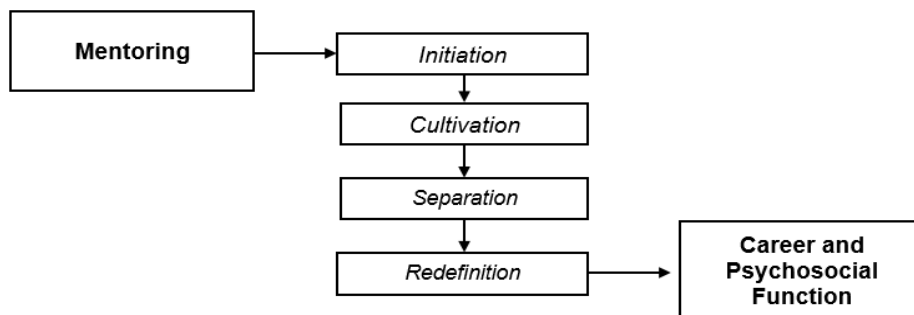


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework of Mentor Relationship Theory

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

I utilized a qualitative descriptive research design, as characterized by Sandelowski (2000), to provide a comprehensive summary of the participants' mentoring experiences. Rather than generating highly abstract renderings or deeply conceptual theories, this approach maintains low-inference interpretations by staying close to the surface of the participants' actual words, experiences, and perspectives. By adopting this design, I successfully captured rich, detailed, and context-bound information regarding how seasoned special needs education (SNED) teachers perceive and experience mentoring novice receiving teachers, presenting the findings in a clear and highly accurate descriptive format.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in South Cotabato, Philippines, specifically in schools providing inclusive and special education services. I selected this locale because South Cotabato has established special needs education programs and caters to a diverse population of learners with varying exceptionalities, making it an appropriate and relevant setting for gathering comprehensive data from seasoned special education teachers who work directly with learners with special educational needs.

2.3 Sample and Sampling

The study included six (6) seasoned special needs education (SNED) teachers who have direct mentoring experiences among novice receiving teachers as mentees. The number of participants in this qualitative descriptive study was determined through purposive sampling until sufficient data depth was achieved, as well as following an inclusion criteria. Six (6) participants were included, consistent with the recommended sample range for qualitative studies of this nature (Kaiser, 2022). Specifically, the study included two (2) male and four (4) female SNED seasoned teachers who are currently employed in S.Y. 2025-2026.

2.4 Data Gathering Technique

In this study, I utilized qualitative data gathering techniques to obtain rich, detailed descriptions of the experiences and perspectives of seasoned Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers regarding their mentoring of novice receiving teachers. Specifically, I employed the In-Depth Interview (IDI) as the primary data gathering method. Since the participants were purposively selected based on their extensive mentoring experience, this method enabled me to gather information-rich accounts that directly addressed the research objectives.

2.5 Data Analysis Technique

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis method, I analyzed my gathered data through a systematic process. First, I engaged in familiarization and transcript immersion, reading and rereading my interview transcripts to become deeply acquainted with the data. Second, I generated systematic open codes across the dataset, identifying and marking interesting features and patterns. Third, I searched for and organized initial themes by collating my codes and gathering relevant data extracts into potential theme categories. Fourth, I reviewed and refined my candidate themes, ensuring they reflected both the coded extracts and the full dataset while maintaining internal consistency. Fifth, I defined and finalized the naming of the distinct themes, developing clear theme definitions that captured the meaning of the data. Sixth and finally, I produced the final report with themes and subthemes, continuously analyzing the data as I wrote to ensure my findings addressed my research questions and preserved the authenticity of participants' experiences. Thematic analysis offers the advantage of being both flexible and methodical, enabling the organized analysis of large qualitative datasets while preserving the authenticity of participants' responses, which contributes to trustworthy and comprehensible results.

2.6 Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness and ethical integrity of this study, I applied rigorous qualitative criteria while strictly adhering to Republic Act No. 10532 and the guidelines of Holy Cross of Davao College's Society for Moral Integration and Legal Ethics (HCDC-SMILE). Credibility and transferability were established through in-depth interviews, member checking, and rich contextual descriptions, while dependability and confirmability were maintained via a clear audit trail and reflexivity to minimize bias. Paralleling these methodological safeguards, strict ethical protocols were enforced: participation was entirely voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and participant anonymity was protected through secure data storage. Ultimately, assuring participants that all data would be used solely for academic purposes guaranteed that the findings ethically and authentically reflected the experiences of seasoned special needs education teachers mentoring novice receiving teachers.

3. Results

3.1 Emergent Themes from the Perceptions of Seasoned Special Needs Education Teachers in Mentoring Novice Receiving Teachers

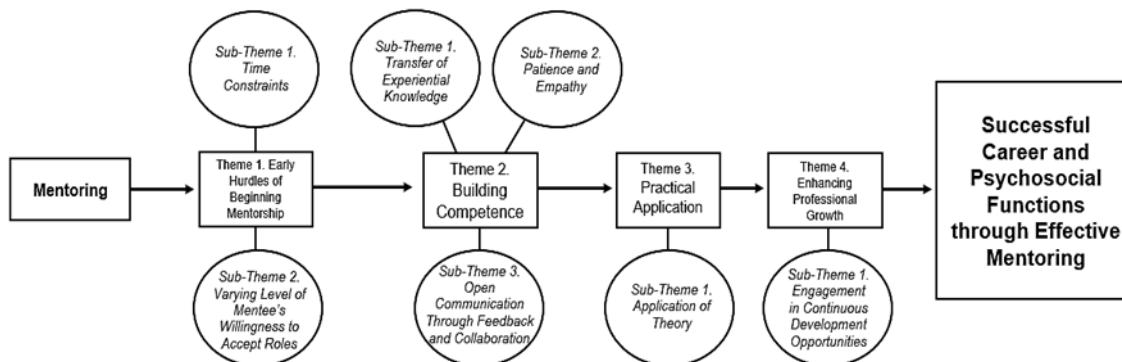


Fig. 2. Emergent Themes from the Perceptions of Seasoned Special Needs Education Teachers in Mentoring Novice Receiving Teachers

Theme 1. Early Hurdles of Beginning Initiation

Analysis of the participants' narratives revealed that the initiation phase of mentoring is characterized by two primary challenges: Time Constraints and Varying Levels of Mentees' Willingness to Accept Roles.

Sub-Theme 1.1 Time Constraints

The participants' experiences revealed that time acts as a structural element that can either facilitate or hinder the mentoring process; however, it was predominantly perceived as a significant constraint. While the seasoned mentors expressed a genuine desire to provide comprehensive support—encompassing technical skills, pedagogical strategies, and reflective dialogue—their capacity was severely restricted by heavy professional workloads. Consequently, these time constraints obstructed the development of deep, robust mentor-mentee relationships. As one participant openly shared regarding their collaborative sessions: “*Although we have time for collaborative expertise, pero, hindi siya enough gid...*” [Although we have time for collaborative expertise, it is really not enough...] (P2-L14). This underscores the reality that even dedicated, scheduled time often falls short under the pressure of daily demands.

Another participant also shared a similar sentiment, stating that time constraints challenged the delivery of mentorship among novice receiving teachers.

Ang common namon nga makita is time constraints, due to teaching load and mga, uhm, task nga ginahatag. Sometimes, hindi kami makahatag bala sang mentoring, kay mahambal na sila nga, Ay may priority pa ko...may mga report pa ko nga dapat himuon... so, by that, gina encourage lang namon nga sige, we will give you ample time para matapos mo ang imo trabaho. [The most common thing that we observe is the time constraints, due to teaching load and given tasks. Sometimes, we cannot give mentorship, because they [mentees] will say that, Ay, I have other priorities...I have reports that need to be done...] So, with that, we just encourage them and just give them ample time to finish their work.] (P5-L42)

There are moments when they want to sit down longer, to guide more deeply, and engage in

meaningful conversations, but the reality of multiple responsibilities holds the mentors back. This was expressed by another participant:

So, the most common factor that interferes with mentoring experiences really includes time constraints, sa kabusy ba sa akon. Kay may 15 ako ka learners dira sa SNED Resource Room, 9 ASD ko. May mga almost nonverbal pa gid na siya, so...wala na ko sang time nga magmentor sa iya kung kis-a. [So, the most common factor that interferes with mentoring experiences really includes time constraints, because I am very busy. I have 15 learners there in the SNED Resource Room, nine of them have ASD. Almost all of them are even nonverbal, so...I do not have enough time to mentor sometimes. (P6-L29)

Another participant affirmed this as she shared, “Then also time constraints. We cannot have enough time to mentor teachers, specifically in general education.” (P4-L15)

The experiences, specifically with time constraints, of the seasoned special needs education teachers in mentoring novice receiving teachers, were identified as one of the challenges in the effective implementation of the mentorship practice. I have observed that participants demonstrated consistent passion to mentor their mentees; however, time constraints limited their ability to fully engage.

Sub-Theme 1.2 Varying Level of Mentee’s Willingness to Accept Roles.

One of the participants shared, “*The first factor talaga na nakaka-affect sa pag mentor sa kanila is attitude talaga ni teacher. Their willingness to accept their responsibilities and tasks sa paghandle at pagturo ng SPED students.*” [The first factor that really affects the mentorship process for them is really the attitude of the teacher. Their willingness to accept their responsibilities and tasks.] (P1-L4)

While time constraints already make it difficult to begin the mentoring process, I also noticed that the seasoned mentors are truly affected by the attitude and willingness of their mentees, expressing that they are stuck in an endless cycle of trying to change their mindset and finding their passion deep in their hearts. As another participant supported this by stating that, “*Yung varying levels of readiness of teachers. Yung mga novice, yung mga beginning pa lang...Medyo may resistance pa, it's because for them, parang hindi pa sila ready. Parang limited pa yung kanilang experience in terms of handling.*” [The varying levels of readiness of teachers. The novice, those who are still beginning...are still having resistance, it’s because for them, they are still not ready. They still have limited experience in terms of handling.] (P2-L15)

This proves that the willingness and attitudes of the mentees play a big role in how the process unfolds. Even when the mentors try to make time and extend support, the progress of mentoring often depends on how open, receptive, and engaged the novice teachers are. A participant shared the same experience, by saying, “*Ang willingness diri abi, dapat ara gid sa ila. Kay kung wala ka willingness, di nimo ma-apply ang best para sa need sang isa ka LWD, so amo nang nakita nakon.*” [The willingness is that, it should be in them. Because if you do not have the willingness, you cannot apply what is best for the need of an LWD. So, that is what I have noticed.] (p5-L69)

The level of willingness and attitude that novice receiving teachers bring can either facilitate or hinder the mentoring process. The participants recognized that mentoring extends beyond the availability of time and requires the active commitment of both mentors and mentees to achieve meaningful professional growth.

As the participants shared their experiences, I observed a consistent commitment to improving the competence of novice receiving teachers through mentoring. Their accounts described the challenges they encountered while highlighting their persistence in providing guidance and support throughout the mentoring process.

Theme 2. Building Competence

With the continuous discussion of the participants, three strategies during the cultivation phase have been discovered: Transfer of Experiential Knowledge, Patience and Empathy, and Open Communication Through Feedback and Collaboration.

Sub-Theme 2.1. Transfer of Experiential Knowledge

The sentiments of the seasoned mentors expressed that they valued their own experiences as their training ground in becoming SNED advocates and more skilled practitioners. These experiences shaped how they taught and handled classroom challenges. Experience brought the confidence out of one participant, as she expressed, *"...because of my experience for 21 years in special education program...I am confident in mentoring my novice teachers..."* (P2-L28)

Participants consistently reflected on their own experiences as beginning teachers, using these experiences to guide their mentoring practices with novice receiving teachers. A participant shared, *"The strength I could say is... my teaching experience here, because I have been teaching for almost six years, handling deaf and mute learners... students with ADHD."* (P3-L22)

This helped them make their mentoring more practical, grounded, and responsive to real classroom situations. Grounded on their belief that experience is a strength, I have observed that they transferred their knowledge, based on the relevant years of experience that they had in the field of special education. A participant openly said, *"... one of my strengths... is...of course, my almost 20 years of experience handling learners with different disabilities, which I considered as one of my strengths in mentoring these novice teachers."* (P4-L29)

Participants consistently attributed their mentoring confidence to accumulated professional experience, which enabled them to provide practical guidance grounded in authentic classroom situations.

Sub-Theme 2.2 Patience and Empathy

As much frustration and tiredness that I noticed based on the experiences of the seasoned teachers, their patience and empathy outgrow the obstacles that they encounter. This is aligned with the statement of a participant, as he shared:

I also demonstrate patience, empathy, and commitment to their growth, ensuring that they'll be supported with gradually building confidence in handling diverse learners' needs. These strengths allow me to foster accountability and help novice teachers develop competence in special needs education. (P6-L78)

Another participant shared her used strategy of patience and empathy, by sharing, *"So dapat mahaba gid ang imo nga pasensiya. Ti kung ano kahaba ang imo nga pagpasensiya para sa mga estudyante, especially sa may mga ASD and ID, same lang na siya sa teacher."* [So, the patience must be long. If your patience is long for the benefit of the students, who especially have ASD and ID, your patience must be long too with your teacher-mentee]. (P5-L92)

Seasoned SNED teachers as mentors often emphasize the importance of patience and empathy in guiding novice SNED receiving teachers. These values help them better understand receiving teachers' struggles, especially as they are still adjusting to the demands of special education.

Sub-Theme 2.3 Open Communication Through Feedback and Collaboration

Guidance, as participants described, begins with listening. Reflecting on their early days in SNED, they recalled needing someone who would genuinely hear and understand their uncertainties rather than immediately correct them. As mentors, they carry this experience forward by listening first, ensuring that their mentees' concerns are acknowledged, understood, and addressed with empathy. This can be testified by a participant, when she shared, *"I also establish the proper process of communication... I need to gain their trust through being a good mentor, through soft and respectful communication."* (p4-L5)

One participant open-mindedly discussed the importance of being approachable in communicating and collaborating, by expressing, *"By being approachable. Kay kung hindi ka gid approachable, wala gid sang magtanggap sang bata kung i-mainstream nimo."* [Because if you are not approachable, no one will accept the student that you would mainstream.] (P5-L32)

Another participant also shared the same experience in having open communication. One participant stated, *"by showing genuine respect for their respective, listening actively to their concerns, and providing constructive feedback."* (P6-L82), which proves that listening thoroughly about their issues and concerns is a

vital part of the mentoring process. Another participant shared their experiences and insights on communication and collaboration, *"Collaboration is the key gid, in the success of inclusive education."* [Collaboration is really the key to the success of inclusive education.] (P2-L64)

For them, mentorship is not just about teaching skills. It is about creating a space where voices are heard, struggles are validated, and growth begins through understanding. The meaningful and reflective experiences of the participants signified the essence of the necessary strategies that they employed as they cultivate and build the relationship and competence of the novice receiving teachers through the art of effective mentorship. Mentoring is a woven foundation of experiential knowledge, patience and empathy, and open communication.

Theme 3. Practical Application

During the separation phase, seasoned special needs education teachers described employing a specific method: the application of theoretical knowledge to hands-on classroom practice.

Sub-Theme 3.1 Application of Theory

As the novice receiving teachers step into real classroom situations, the challenge becomes more personal and emotional. They are no longer just learning theories and concepts; they are trying to live them out with real learners who depend on their decisions. One participant shared his method on transforming theory into actual practice. He shared, *"I focus on actual practice... although, I don't really need to, really, yung sobra talaga na technical assistance, kasi meron naman silang little experience."* [I don't really need to conduct too much technical assistance, because they somehow have a little experience] (P1-L2)

Moreover, one of the participants shared her same experience, *"The way I describe mentoring experience is... they have to [do] hands-on, they have to learn according to the practice."* (P4-L4)

In these moments, theory transforms into action, and each attempt to apply what they have learned becomes part of their growth as developing educators in special needs education. A participant affirmed this, *"We are not only banking on theory, we are not only banking on textbooks, or manual. But of course, they have to [do] hands-on."* (P3-L7)

Mentors can guide, support, and share their wisdom, but there comes a point when the novice teacher must step forward alone and face the reality of the classroom. It is in that space, filled with uncertainty, effort, and even quiet fear, that lessons begin to take root.

Theory is no longer just something learned from others, and the best method is to employ hands-on and experiential learning when it comes to the separation phase of mentorship. It becomes something lived. Mistakes may happen, and challenges may feel overwhelming, but these experiences shape confidence and understanding in a deeper way. The distance from the mentor allows the mentee to slowly find their own voice as an educator, turning guidance into independence and knowledge into practice.

Theme 4. Enhancing Professional Growth

The sharing of experiences went on, prompting a single facilitation approach to enhance and redefine the competence of novice receiving teachers: Engagement in Continuous Development Opportunities.

Sub-Theme 4.1 Engagement in Continuous Development Opportunities

Through the narratives of the participants, I have understood that mentorship does not solely end, perhaps it has advantages to an even more meaningful path. And that is through professional growth commitment. This is affirmed by a participant, *"By attending workshops and seminars, especially sa special education... para at least ang mga strategies... maman-an gid namon."* [By attending workshops and seminars, especially sa special education...so that, at least, the strategies...we can really be knowledgeable.] (P5-L5)

As the participants shared a deep conviction that professional growth must always be prioritized, it was illuminated that it is a value they carry and pass on to their mentees with sincerity and care. Another participant shared the opportunities given to both mentors and mentees relevant to their professional well-being, *"Every year, ang Region or ang Division naga provide sang capacity-building sa special education program."* [Every year, the Region or the division provides capacity-building for special education program.]

(P2-L56). Trainings and seminar serve as opportunities for novice teachers to build competencies, especially in their professional careers. A participant openly shared how she facilitates the professional growth of his mentees, *“Through seminars... trainings and seminars...attending symposiums. Enhancement of self-development.”* (P1-L23)

Another participant shared the same experiences on how he strongly supports and facilitates the professional development enhancement of novice receiving teachers, *“Attending the seminars and workshops on inclusive education and participating in and joining the local and regional LAC sessions.”* (P6-L155)

For seasoned special needs education teachers, teaching is never a destination, but a continuous journey, one that requires patience with oneself, openness to change, and a willingness to keep learning despite years of experience.

I have noticed that participants emphasized that professional growth is greatly shaped through interactions with peers and other experts. Through these shared experiences and collaborations, they are able to stay updated and broaden their understanding of Special Needs Education. Mentors do not end their mission; instead, they facilitate the professional development of their mentees by engaging them in opportunities to develop themselves professionally in the field of special education.

The entire narrative of experiences shows the ability of the participants to implement mentorship, which starts from scratch, to experiencing challenges in the early phase, to applying strategies to build the relationship and competence, to let the novice receiving teachers practice the learned theories and methods, up until the continuity of their professional development. This process was never a shortcut, nor the easiest way out, but definitely a worthy amount of effort that has advantages to the mentors, mentees, and most especially, the learners in the spectrum of special needs education.

3.2 Summary of Findings

Seasoned special needs education teachers perceive time constraints and varying levels of willingness to accept roles of the novice receiving teachers as challenges encountered in the early stages or initiation phase of mentoring, which highlights that effective mentoring depends not only on the availability of time but also on the willingness of the novice receiving teacher to actively participate in their tasks and roles.

The years of experience of seasoned special needs education teachers in special education allow novice receiving teachers to navigate classroom challenges more effectively. Moreover, patience and empathy are emphasized, as the ultimate strategy of the seasoned special needs education teachers in recognizing that beginning teachers require understanding, encouragement, and continuous support as they develop confidence and competence in handling learners with diverse needs. Furthermore, mentors fostered growth through open communication, constructive feedback, active listening, and collaboration, creating a trusting and supportive environment where novice teachers felt heard, valued, and empowered. Together, these strategies strengthened both the mentor-mentee relationship and the professional development of novice receiving teachers.

The seasoned special needs education teachers focus on the novice receiving teachers' transition into real classroom settings, they are encouraged to apply methods that transform theoretical knowledge into hands-on experience, where learning becomes more meaningful through actual engagement with learners. And while limited technical assistance may still be provided, emphasis is placed on experiential learning method, allowing mentees to actively practice teaching strategies and manage classroom realities on their own. This phase marks a critical point where theory is fully integrated into practice, enabling novice teachers to develop confidence, independence, and deeper professional understanding through real-world experience.

The seasoned teachers extend beyond initial guidance and become a sustained commitment to facilitating professional growth through workshops, seminars, symposiums, and capacity-building activities provided by regions and divisions. Both mentors and mentees are actively involved in these opportunities, which help them update their strategies, strengthen their skills, and broaden their understanding of inclusive

education.

The findings demonstrate how seasoned special needs education teachers establish mentoring relationships, just like how it is presented in Kathy Kram's Mentor Relationship Theory (1983), despite initial challenges, provide continuous guidance and support to help novice teachers develop their skills and confidence, gradually encourage greater independence in managing classroom responsibilities, and maintain professional connections through ongoing collaboration and development opportunities. This progression reflects the evolving nature of mentoring, where support shifts from direct guidance to empowerment and sustained professional growth.

Collectively, the findings illustrate mentoring as a developmental process that progresses from addressing initial barriers, strengthening mentor-mentee relationships through supportive strategies, promoting independent classroom practice, and sustaining professional growth through continuous learning opportunities. This progression closely reflects the developmental stages proposed by Kram's Mentor Relationship Theory.

4. Discussions

Early Hurdles in Beginning Mentorship

The findings suggest that challenges in mentorship are not merely logistical barriers but structural limitations that reduce opportunities for meaningful mentor-mentee interaction during the initiation phase. The findings indicate that successful mentoring during the initiation phase depends on both structural and interpersonal conditions. Although mentoring begins with assigning roles and responsibilities, meaningful professional relationships cannot develop when mentors have insufficient time to establish regular interaction with novice teachers. Likewise, varying levels of willingness among novice receiving teachers influence the quality of engagement during the early stages of mentoring. These findings suggest that effective mentoring requires both institutional support and active participation from mentors and mentees.

Within Kram's Mentor Relationship Theory, the initiation phase requires sufficient interaction to establish trust, expectations, and professional rapport. When mentoring time is constrained, the development of both career and psychosocial functions becomes limited. This explains why participants consistently viewed time as a critical challenge before effective mentoring relationships could fully develop.

Effective mentoring in special needs education settings confronts two interconnected systemic challenges: temporal scarcity and mentee readiness. The current study confirms Al-Aqueel & Alhumaid's (2024) finding that insufficient time represents a primary barrier to mentoring implementation. However, the findings extend this research by revealing a secondary, equally significant constraint: mentee receptiveness and willingness to engage fully in the mentorship process.

Participants' narratives indicate that even when mentors allocate time and cultivate supportive relationships, the progress of mentorship fundamentally depends on the mentee's openness to guidance, acceptance of their developing role, and commitment to professional growth. These dual constraints—structural (time) and dispositional (mentee readiness)—interact to shape mentoring efficacy in ways that existing literature has not yet fully theorized. This study contributes an understanding of how mentorship effectiveness is jointly determined by institutional supports and individual mentor-mentee alignment.

The findings of this study strongly affirm contemporary literature, which underscores that navigating varying levels of engagement and logistical hurdles is a natural, manageable part of successful mentorship. The observed dynamics align with Goncalves et al. (2025), who noted that mentees naturally demonstrate diverse levels of engagement and participation, meaning that benefits are optimized when tailored to individual willingness and involvement. Aligned with this, the practical challenges identified in this study, such as the limited time available for observation, feedback, and collaboration, parallel the findings of Pesina (2025), which stated that limited time for mentoring activities emerged as a significant challenge with both mentors and mentees struggling to find time for observation, feedback, and collaboration, parallel the findings of Pesina (2025).

Crucially, rather than viewing these time constraints as insurmountable barriers, the participants validated the literature by reframing them as manageable conditions. This shared perspective affirms that proactive, deliberate mentoring strategies effectively navigate these inevitable operational bumps, ultimately ensuring the resilience and success of the mentorship initiative. Although participants acknowledged these challenges, they did not perceive them as preventing successful mentoring. This partially supports the findings of Mwesiga and Nakato (2026), who argued that effective mentoring can still produce meaningful outcomes despite existing constraints.

Building Competence

Seasoned special needs education teachers' years of experience in special education allow novice receiving teachers to navigate classroom challenges more effectively. Moreover, patience and empathy are emphasized, as the ultimate strategy of the seasoned special needs education teachers in recognizing that beginning teachers require understanding, encouragement, and continuous support as they develop confidence and competence in handling learners with diverse needs. Furthermore, mentors fostered growth through open communication, constructive feedback, active listening, and collaboration, creating a trusting and supportive environment where novice teachers felt heard, valued, and empowered. Together, these strategies strengthened both the mentor-mentee relationship and the professional development of novice receiving teachers.

These findings suggest that effective mentoring extends beyond transferring technical knowledge. Participants viewed mentoring as a relationship that combines instructional guidance with psychosocial support, allowing novice teachers to gradually build confidence while learning to address the complex demands of Special Needs Education. This balance between professional guidance and emotional support appears to strengthen both the mentoring relationship and novice teachers' professional development. The findings align with the Rodriguez-Oramas et al., (2021), who emphasized that sustainable dialogical teacher education improves the teachers and the school. According to them, dialogue, which includes open communication and feedback, significantly contributes to the improvement of learning opportunities of all students, especially those with special needs. Similarly, this supports the claim of Ben-David & Berkovich (2021) that traditional mentoring focuses on enhancing the mentees career development and by providing psychosocial support, which includes patience and empathy. With these, patience, empathy, and understanding are significantly integrated into mentoring strategies to make the process more effective and bearable for both the mentors and mentees, which is aligned with the finding of my study. Moreover, my findings agree with the claim of Lewis & Wagner (2023), which states that learning how to teach is an emotional and overwhelming process for novice teachers, hence, mentors must consider both emotional and professional support for their mentees.

The present findings differ from those of Jin et al. (2024), who argued that psychosocial support alone may be insufficient to improve instructional practice. In this study, however, participants consistently described psychosocial support as being integrated with professional guidance rather than functioning independently, suggesting that both dimensions complement one another during mentoring.

Practical Application

Seasoned special education teachers focus heavily on guiding novice teachers through their transition into live classroom settings. In this phase, novices are encouraged to apply methods that transform theoretical knowledge into hands-on experience, rendering learning more meaningful through direct engagement with students. While mentors may still provide limited technical assistance, the primary emphasis shifts to experiential learning, allowing mentees to actively practice teaching strategies and navigate classroom realities independently. This phase marks a critical juncture where theory is fully integrated into practice, enabling novice teachers to develop confidence, autonomy, and a deeper professional understanding through real-world application.

These findings suggest that mentoring eventually reaches a developmental stage where novice teachers are expected to exercise greater professional autonomy. Rather than relying solely on direct mentor

supervision, participants emphasized the value of learning through authentic classroom experiences. This gradual transition allows novice teachers to merge theoretical knowledge with practical decision-making, while still benefiting from targeted mentor guidance when necessary.

Consequently, these results align with Thinh (2025), who argued that effective mentorship during the transition from theory to practice relies on mentor insights that directly impact a mentee's professional growth. Furthermore, this study corroborates the assertion by Yazici and Uzuner (2024) that practical classroom experience is essential for transforming pedagogical knowledge into effective teaching outcomes. These dynamics reinforce the importance of balancing professional expertise with supportive interpersonal relationships throughout the mentoring process. This perspective is further affirmed by Tveitnes and Hvalby (2023), whose study highlighted that beginning teachers highly value professional discussions tied directly to real classroom practice—particularly when given the opportunity to apply learned theories and strategies within inclusive education settings.

Conversely, the current findings diverge from the study by Donna & Roehrig (2024), which indicated that novice teachers often remain dependent and face significant difficulties during early practice, wherein it was argued that persistent, intensive guidance is necessary because overwhelming classroom realities can frequently hinder independent progress.

Enhancing Professional Growth

The seasoned teachers extend beyond initial guidance and become a sustained commitment to enhancing professional growth through workshops, seminars, symposiums, and capacity-building activities provided by regions and divisions. Both mentors and mentees are actively involved in these opportunities, which help them update their strategies, strengthen their skills, and broaden their understanding of inclusive education. This ongoing development, facilitated and assisted by the seasoned teachers, reflects the belief that teaching in special education is a continuous journey, where learning does not end but is consistently enriched through collaboration, reflection, and shared professional experiences, ultimately benefiting both educators and learners.

The findings of this study strongly assert that professional development in inclusive education is a continuous, collaborative, and contextualized process that extends beyond traditional trainings, seminars, and workshops, validating the framework proposed by Donath et al. (2023). This study further affirms the perspective of Narido and Quinto (2026), novice teachers benefit from structured training sessions, peer collaboration, and educational research engagements to enhance their instructional practices. Hence, these alignments reinforce the principle that mentoring becomes more meaningful when seasoned mentors actively engage novice teachers in opportunities designed to sustain professional competence. Furthermore, the results echo the conclusions of Akiri and Dori (2022), who found that novice teachers experience optimal professional growth when mentorship is paired with targeted workshops, seminars, and collaborative expertise, ultimately contributing to teacher retention and improved classroom practice.

In contrast, the findings of this study diverge from the outcomes reported by Washington (2022) who highlighted that some novice teachers make limited progress and experience challenges despite mentorship, suggesting that mentorship does not invariably lead to desired professional growth.

While mentors encounter challenges such as limited time and varying mentee readiness, effective mentoring is sustained through experiential knowledge, empathy, collaborative communication, authentic classroom practice, and continuous professional development. These findings reinforce Kram's Mentor Relationship Theory by illustrating how mentoring evolves across the initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition phases within inclusive education settings.

4.1 Implications for Teaching Practices

The findings of this study have practical implications for educational stakeholders involved in mentoring novice receiving teachers in Special Needs Education.

For educational policymakers and school administrators, the finding that time constraints emerged as

a major challenge during the initiation phase of mentoring suggests the need to institutionalize structured mentoring programs by allocating protected mentoring time within teachers' official workload. Providing designated mentoring hours may strengthen mentor-mentee interactions and promote more consistent guidance throughout the mentoring process.

For seasoned Special Needs Education teachers serving as mentors, the findings emphasize that patience, empathy, open communication, constructive feedback, and the sharing of professional experience are essential mentoring strategies during the cultivation phase. Mentors may therefore continuously strengthen these interpersonal and instructional competencies to foster trusting relationships and effectively support novice receiving teachers' professional development.

For novice receiving teachers, the findings indicate that active participation, willingness to learn, and engagement in authentic classroom practice contribute to successful mentoring experiences. Developing a receptive attitude toward feedback, reflective practice, and continuous learning may facilitate a smoother transition from theoretical preparation to independent teaching responsibilities.

For curriculum developers and teacher education institutions, the finding that experiential learning and continuous professional development enhanced mentoring effectiveness highlights the need to design mentoring programs that integrate classroom observation, guided teaching practice, reflective conferences, collaborative learning communities, and professional development activities specific to inclusive education. Such initiatives may better prepare novice teachers for the realities of Special Needs Education classrooms.

4.2 Future Directions

Future The findings of this study provide several opportunities for future research.

First, because this study explored only the perspectives of seasoned Special Needs Education teachers, future qualitative studies may investigate the experiences of novice receiving teachers to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mentoring relationship and determine how mentoring practices are perceived from the mentees' perspective.

Second, the four major themes identified in this study may serve as the basis for the development and validation of a mentoring assessment instrument for Special Needs Education. Future researchers may employ Exploratory Factor Analysis and subsequent validation procedures to establish a reliable instrument for evaluating mentoring practices in inclusive education settings.

Finally, future quantitative studies may examine the relationships among the mentoring dimensions identified in this study and selected professional outcomes, such as instructional competence, teaching self-efficacy, professional confidence, and teacher retention, using larger samples across multiple school divisions. Such studies may provide empirical evidence regarding the predictive influence of mentoring practices on novice teacher development.

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