

MINING THE TRUTH: EXAMINING NOVICE TEACHER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION POLICY LANDSCAPE

Mmalefikane Sylvia Sepeng

Department of Educational Leadership and Management, University of South Africa
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4472-169X>

Abstract

This paper investigates novice teacher development strategies within the South African education policy landscape. Despite policy commitments to improving teacher quality and retention, many novice teachers continue to experience challenges in transitioning from theory to classroom practice. Drawing on literature on professional learning, mentorship, and teacher identity formation, this paper explores how induction policies and school-based support structures influence the growth of novice teachers. It critically examines the alignment between national education policies—such as the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development—and their implementation in schools. The paper argues that effective novice teacher development requires a coherent system that integrates policy intent, institutional culture, and sustained professional support. It concludes by proposing a framework for enhancing teacher development practices that promote professional competence, resilience, and long-term teacher retention in South African schools.

Keywords: Mentoring, Induction, Novice Teacher, Integrated Quality Management System, Team Teaching, Senior Management Team, Novice Teachers' Development

Introduction and background

This paper focuses on various development strategies meant to enhance novice teachers' career potential and growth. The crux of the study manifests the alleged high level of confusion that beginner teachers encounter in their early years in the profession. Thus, even if there are plenty of development therapies, it still remains paramount to discover those that can harness desirable outcomes.

The paper stems from the theme that dealt with effective novice teachers' development (NTD) strategies in a study that was conducted in the rural Sekgosese East circuit of Mopani district in Limpopo Province. Due to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, this qualitative study that gathered data through semi-structured face-to-face interviews ensured strict compliance with all safety guidelines and protocols. Only novices played a major role in sharing their views on the subject. The study managed to reveal that NTD strategies are diverse and evolving in nature. However, the efficiency of the individual novice might be dependent on each school's personal context. These NTDs are allegedly instrumental in the development of novices' self-image and overall job satisfaction. Educators cultivate their identity through initial teacher training and perpetually refine it throughout their careers. Numerous educators at rural institutions encounter difficult circumstances while teaching (Groenewald, E., & Arnold, L, 2025).

Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of this study was to investigate existing novice teacher development (NTD) strategies. Primarily, the study sought to identify these strategies that are seen to be effective as viewed by the novices themselves. The subsequent questions provide further clarity on the study's purpose:

- What are the most preferred novice teachers' development strategies?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of these preferred strategies?
- What are the changes experienced by novices after effective NTD strategies?

The study was conducted in Sekgosese East circuit of Mopani district, about ± 120 km north-eastern side of Polokwane in Limpopo Province, South Africa. This area is predominantly rural, and almost 98.7% of parents depend on the public schooling system for their children's education. Due to low socio-economic makeup and high unemployment rate among youth, a lot of University graduates venture into the teaching profession. This situation

is further exacerbated by the exodus of Fundza Lushaka and National School Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) bursary holders who trained as teachers. When these novices enter the teaching environment, some become frustrated as they feel isolated and must fend for their own survival and remain relevant in the field, hence Maciejewski's (2007) "sink or swim mentality". This paper seeks to examine contemporary NTD strategies and investigate which ones are best, effective, and most reliable, as suggested by the novices.

Approaches

This study followed a qualitative approach. The advantages of using this approach, as outlined in De Vos, Strydom, & Fouche (2002), enable the researcher to interact with participants in a real-life setting. The participants' views and perceptions are well represented in a natural setting (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from 9 novices.

Selection of participants

In this paper, an investigation of NTD strategies in Sekgosese East circuit had a total of 9 participants. This circuit has a total of 48 schools (20 primary and 18 secondary schools). In the sample, there were 9 novices (3 males and 6 females). Participants were randomly and purposively chosen from schools that have recently employed new teachers. Only pseudonyms were used to identify these participants. Novices were identified as NOVI 01 to 09 (3 males and 6 females) by using pseudonyms.

After obtaining permission letters from the Provincial Department of Education and the circuit office, respectively, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with these novices. All relevant ethics, as highlighted by McMillan & Schumacher (2003), de Vos (2002), and Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011), were followed, including principles of Informed consent and voluntary participation, as well as anonymity and confidentiality, among others. The following tables (1 to 3) represent participants' details:

TABLE 01 (NOVICE TEACHERS)

GENDER	Male	03
	Female	06
AGE GROUP	20 – 25	04
	26- 30	04
	31 & above	01
PHASE TAUGHT	Foundation	03
	Intersen	03
	Senior/FET	03
TEACHERS' QUALIFICATIONS	4 year degree	
TEACHING EXPERIENCE	0 – 12 months	02
	13 - 24 months	07
PSEUDONYMS	NOVI -01 to NOVI 09	

Literature review

Contemporary literature discusses varied NTD strategies that can be effective and efficient and uncovers the best in novice teachers. Dishena & Mokoena (2016) highlighted the value of engaging novices in induction programmes. This should be carried out within their first 2 years in the profession with the support of veteran teachers. New teachers need to be familiarized with all the programmes, activities, and stakeholders that are found in a school. Hudson & Hudson (2016) investigated the roles that mentoring can play in the early years of teaching. The two authors emphasise the value of using goal setting as an effective ploy in ensuring novices' efficiency. When specific goals are established for novices, effective mentor-mentee relationships are maintained, smart objectives are set, and the mentoring process yields results. Valickis (2014) further stressed the argument above and indicated that when the mentoring process is smartly undertaken, novices will experience changes in their professional skills and self-esteem. Reciprocally, when their self-esteem is desirably higher, this improves their professional skills. In this research, we are not concerned with all the actions taken by the teacher, only her agentic actions that are relevant for her to achieve a particular outcome or goal (Groenewald, E., & Arnold, L, 2025).

Team teaching is another strategy that is most applied among novices to encourage knowledge sharing. According to Carspersen (2013), reciprocal support and knowledge sharing among novices are pivotal in ensuring that the required level of professionalism among novices is accomplished. Beginning teachers learn best when they share and collaborate with each other. Conducting team teaching activities ensures that the required skills are evaluated. Novice teachers are sometimes visited in their classrooms, teaching, or their lesson activities are recorded by their fellows or seniors. Recordings are discussed in groups, whilst these talk sittings are also recorded. During discussions, novices will provide propositions and comments towards enhancing their teaching expertise.

IQMS (Integrated Quality Management System) forms part of continuing teacher development programmes. It was enacted by collective agreement 8 of 2003 as a strategy to improve the general management quality among teachers in public schooling institutions. It is an existing strategy meant to assess teachers' (including novices) competencies, their strengths and weaknesses, among others. It is rendered annually through the use of identified performance standards (PSs). Teachers are clustered into 3 (teacher, peer, and senior) to form a development support group (DSG). They evaluate one another against identified performance standards. In summary, each teacher is developed in line with the PSs. Subsequently, a school improvement plan (SIP), which outlines all teachers' weaknesses, is formed.

The aforesaid literature provided introductory views on the discussion surrounding current NTD strategies. They best provided a synopsis of the questions that the study sought to pursue:

- What are the most preferred novice teachers' development strategies?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of these preferred strategies?
- What are the notable changes experienced by novices after effective NTD strategies? As this paper was

meant to explore the breadth and depth of existing NTD strategies by interviewing novices, it further assisted in unearthing the strengths and weaknesses of those strategies where applicable.

Research Gap

Contemporary literature puts greater emphasis on novice teachers' transition from university to real school practice (Bhargava & Pathy, 2020) and little on how these novices are socialized to a new environment through effective NTD programmes. In essence, NTD programmes are meant to enhance these novices' teachers' abilities to be highly competent, self-reliant, and ultimately improve their learners' performance (Jason, 2020). This paper seeks to highlight critical stages in the lifespan of a novice teacher and that requires a professional agency that refers to a teacher's capacity to leverage available opportunities to exert influence to achieve a specific objective. Teacher agency differs among people, shaped by their diverse histories, personal values, objectives, and subject expertise. The phrase 'identity-agency' is employed to highlight the connection between agency and a teacher's professional identity. Teachers' monitoring and positioning about certain perspectives, together with their decisions on exercising control, significantly influence their professional identities (Groenewald, E., & Arnold, L, 2025).

Results and Findings

Novice teachers' perceptions

Beginner teachers' findings revealed that induction, mentoring, and team teaching are the preferred strategies by the novice teachers. There is further indication by this group of participants of high-intensity induction workshops. These entail benefitting novices in the acquisition of skills in classroom management practices, learner behaviour, learner assessment administration, and school finances, among others. Using these strategies appropriately provides a positive impact on novices' classroom management practices. Lastly, novices' discoveries further emphasized the importance of NTD strategies on the development of self-esteem and job satisfaction. Further revelations show a lack of relevance of University studies to matters that address school matters in detail, hence the need to be provided with induction and mentoring. Novices' responses varied as outlined hereunder:

(NOVI-08): "Because we are still fresh, we need to learn to resolve challenges as a team rather than as individuals. The spirit of collaboration is created, and we either win or lose together. I strongly support the team-teaching approach".

(NOVI-02) "When you arrive at a school, you need support from the experienced personnel. The provision of induction is really important when new teachers arrive at school. It is better to experience things on your own, where you can make deadly mistakes".

(NOVI-01) "Mentoring is very important when it is used together with intensive induction".

(NOVI-07) "My mentor in English played a major role in upgrading my competence in grammar and literature teaching. I concur with writings that support the use of mentoring because it makes valuable contributions to the development of a novice teacher".

(NOVI-06) "There are areas where we need to be developed without any compromise, especially in administration, school finances, and general classroom management".

Researcher: So, you would highly require intensive workshops that address all school areas?

(NOVI-06) "Absolutely, because as new teachers, we all aspire to become leaders and managers of schools. Learning all areas can be helpful. We need to be inducted on how the SGB functions, office work, and communication with role-players like circuits and the district".

When analysing novices' findings, priority, as preferred by novices, should be given to induction. Mentoring also plays a critical role, as it creates a necessary learning experience because novices teach while learning from their seniors.

Benefits of using these preferred NTD strategies

Novices were unequivocal in agreement that induction, mentoring, and the use of highly intensive workshops create beneficial ground for novices on their career path. Induction enables novices to get a grasp on all school functionaries. As explained by:

(NOVI-04) "Induction is needed because it provides us with the chance to finally understand school activities and programmes to a greater extent.

(NOVI-09) Through mentoring, a new teacher cannot be left stuck alone. Support from our HODs makes us grow, and we are best suited to solve an emerging challenge:".

Shortcomings when using these preferred NTD strategies

When the aforementioned NTD strategies are in use, there might be some disadvantages, as lamented by the novices below:

Researcher: According to you, what are the shortcomings of using these NTD strategies?

(NOVI-06): "Using high-intensity NTD strategies consumes a lot of time, resources, and preparation. The duration of the workshops is often longer. It requires a significant amount of resources because it encompasses a wide range of areas. It can sometimes encounter challenges, especially when it is facilitated by a person with general knowledge".

(NOVI-04) "Focusing on team teaching can create problems, especially if one novice teacher starts dominating discussions. Further arguments might remain unresolved because we are of the same age group and have similar experiences. Much emphasis should be placed on involving seniors to mentor us".

(NOVI-03) "Mentoring and induction sometimes create over-reliance on the seniors for all teaching and learning activities without promoting initiatives on the part of the novices".

(NOVI-07) "The most notable disadvantage of using mentoring can be a lack of individualism and autonomy on the novices' side. They can sometimes be formal in nature and restrict novices".

(NOVI-09) "I feel that using team teaching can lead to frustration if it is not monitored by seniors. Teams can often create unnecessary arguments".

Novices' perceptions of learners' behavior on their classroom management practices

In order to provide answers to the three questions that distinguish effective NTD strategies in this paper, novices unveiled how learners' conduct has a negative bearing on their general classroom management tasks. There are indications by novices of learners' behavioural challenges. Learners' behaviours underscore novice teachers' performances in classroom management practice, as alluded to below:

(NOVI-02) "Sometimes, it is difficult to teach in classrooms that are overcrowded, where learners misbehave. Some learners bunk classes and fail to write assessment tasks. As a new teacher, I often call upon my seniors to assist in controlling this deviant behaviour. Eventually, my classroom control is compromised".

(NOVI-01) "There is a group of boys who often come to school late. When they enter the class, they disturb my class activities because I have to stop and concentrate on them".

The above revelations weigh heavily on the efforts put in by these novices in creating a favourable teaching and learning environment. Due to these learners' poor conduct, there is a need to empower novices in areas of classroom management and learner discipline.

Self-esteem versus job satisfaction

As alluded to in Barghava & Pathy (2020), new teachers' self-efficacy and job satisfaction are reciprocal; novices' findings transparently showed this assertion. Interestingly, 2 novices said:

(NOVI-03) "Ever since I received assistance from my seniors regarding classroom management, administration, and extracurricular activities, my self-esteem has improved drastically".

Researcher: How? May you please clarify more on these improvements?

(NOVI-03) "I am now able to enforce the right balance of mind among learners, ensuring that they complete assessment activities on time. Thanks to the role played by my HOD. Subsequently, my level of confidence has improved".

Researcher: What was the cause of your low self-esteem?

(NOVI-03) "I suppose it is because you are not sure of your story. Learners can notice that and sometimes take advantage of this situation. There are learners who were unable to write assessment tasks. This undermined my authority greatly".

(NOVI-04) "When I first arrived here at school, I had many challenges, like a lack of discipline management, poor classroom management, and a lack of knowledge on assessment techniques. This had a great bearing on my self-esteem. My job performance also took a knock. Thanks to my seniors' intervention, I was able to improve my performance. It was a blessing to be surrounded by unselfish veteran teachers who are prepared to provide assistance".

Novices' comments above indisputably applaud the support given by their seniors. The impetus of NTD strategies like induction, mentoring, and team teaching is strongly instrumental in developing novices' self-esteem, and ultimately, job satisfaction becomes evident.

Summary and Recommendations

Novice teachers' perceptions of NTD strategies revealed that their classroom competencies are dependent on how they are socialized in the work environment from their tertiary institutions. It remains incumbent upon the senior management teams in schools to ensure that the beginners perform at their best. From interactions with novice participants, there is considerable consensus that novices' entry into the profession should be preceded by an induction phase of at least 2 years. In addition, veteran teachers should be assigned the responsibilities to monitor, support, and nurture these new teachers in a planned and structured manner. Novices suggest that school management should encourage these new teachers to work as a team when addressing school matters. When all these preferred NTD strategies are in use, they should encompass high-intensity skills geared toward developing novices in ICT, finance, administration, and extracurricular activities, as well as general classroom management. Empirical evidence from novices' interactions concluded that:

- The most preferred strategies are induction, mentoring, and team teaching.
- High-intensity NTD workshops and not low-intensity workshops remain the lifeblood of novices' teaching lifespan.
- Self-esteem is high when job performance is high.
- Novices' high job performance often leads to effective learner performance.

Conclusions

Against the background of suggestions made by novice participants concerning current NTD strategies, the following recommendations can provide assistance:

- For maximum professional novice teacher development, effective NTD strategies should be utilised.
- Well-structured, high-intensity NTD programmes rather than low-intensity programmes should be engaged to empower novices.
- Novices' self-efficacy develops when effective NTD strategies are used.
- Novices' improved self-esteem is instrumental in learners' better academic performance.
- The use of IQMS in its current form as an NTD strategy is unappreciated by novices.
- Whilst acknowledging the Department of Education's contributions.

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