



Perceptions of Senior Academic Staff on Novice Teacher Induction in Public Secondary Schools in Chato District, Tanzania

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Abstract: *Mentoring is widely recognised as a critical mechanism for supporting novice teachers during induction, yet its institutionalisation in Sub-Saharan African schools remains uneven. This study examined the perceptions of senior academic staff regarding their role in mentoring novice teachers during induction in six public secondary schools in Chato District, Tanzania. A qualitative case study design was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 12 senior academic staff and 2 Ward Education Officers, complemented by review of School Management Team minutes, induction records, and mentor allocation documents. The study found that senior academic staff articulated a rich, multidimensional understanding of mentoring and consistently framed it as an institutional duty. However, documentary evidence revealed that mentoring lacked formal mentor allocation systems, written induction guidelines, structured monitoring templates, and documented feedback cycles in most sampled schools. Mentoring in Chato District is therefore best characterised as discursively institutionalised but practically individualised. Drawing on Social Capital Theory and Levinson's Career Stage Theory, the study argues that the effectiveness of mentoring depends on the convergence of a supportive institutional environment and a developmentally sensitive response to novice teachers' transitional needs. The study recommends the development of operational mentoring guidelines within the MEWAKA framework, the integration of mentoring into leadership preparation and appraisal, and the strengthening of ward and district level monitoring systems.*

Keywords: *mentoring, novice teachers, induction, secondary schools, Tanzania*

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1. Introduction

The early years of teaching represent a formative and demanding phase in a teacher's professional life. During this period, novice teachers translate theoretical knowledge acquired in initial teacher education into classroom practice while adjusting to institutional norms, curricular expectations, and school culture (Admiraal et al., 2025; OECD, 2025). Evidence from the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (2024) indicates that although novice teachers report job satisfaction levels comparable to those of experienced colleagues, approximately 27% intend to leave the profession within five years, and they consistently report greater difficulty with classroom management than experienced peers (OECD, 2025). Structured mentoring during induction has therefore emerged globally as a key mechanism for reducing early career attrition,

strengthening teacher self-efficacy, and improving instructional quality (OECD, 2025).

Despite this global recognition, access to formal mentoring remains uneven. TALIS (2024) data show that only about 26% of novice teachers across OECD education systems are assigned a formal mentor, with rates ranging from 5% in Montenegro to nearly 80% in Shanghai, China (OECD, 2025). This variation underscores that policy endorsement of mentoring does not automatically translate into structured school level implementation. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the gap between policy intent and school practice is particularly pronounced. Studies conducted across the region indicate that novice teachers frequently work in schools characterised by large class sizes, limited teaching resources, and weak institutional support systems, which constrain the effective implementation of school-based mentoring (Akyeampong et al., 2023; Ampomah et al., 2024; Halawa & Salmi, 2024).

Tanzania has made notable policy strides toward institutionalising teacher professional support. The Education and Training Policy of 2014, revised in 2023, together with the National Framework for Teacher Continuous Professional Development (NF-TCPD) of 2020, popularly known as *Mafunzo Endelevu ya Walimu Kazini* (MEWAKA), formally recognise school-based mentoring, coaching, and collaborative learning as core pillars of teacher development (Todd et al., 2024; World Bank, 2024). By 2024, MEWAKA had been rolled out to more than half of Tanzania's 184 districts, with reported doubling of teacher participation in collaborative lesson planning, peer learning, and mentoring in participating districts (World Bank, 2024). Emerging evaluations, however, indicate that mentoring within MEWAKA remains unevenly implemented, and that peer facilitators and school leaders themselves require additional coaching to fulfil their roles effectively (EdTech Hub, 2026; Koomar et al., 2024). National analyses further reveal persistent discrepancies between local government mentoring plans and the resources allocated to support them (Todd et al., 2024).

Within this context, senior school academic staff, comprising heads of schools, deputy heads, and heads of departments, occupy a strategic position in shaping how mentoring is enacted at the school level. International and regional evidence consistently shows that instructional leadership practices, including mentoring, classroom observation, and feedback, exert measurable influence on teacher development and retention (African Centre for School Leadership, 2025; Meyer et al., 2025). Yet in many Tanzanian schools, mentoring roles remain informally distributed, weakly documented, and heavily dependent on individual initiative rather than institutional design (Ally & Mabagala, 2022; Mng'ong'o, 2025; Mzelela et al., 2023).

The situation in Chato District exemplifies this tension. The district has experienced sustained growth in the number of public secondary schools and continues to recruit graduate teachers to address subject specific shortages, particularly in science and mathematics (Alagwa & Ligembe, 2022; CL4STEM, 2022). While national frameworks expect schools to implement structured induction and mentoring, previous studies in the district have concentrated on teacher retention and staffing challenges, offering limited insight into how senior academic staff conceptualise and enact mentoring roles during induction. This gap raises a central analytical question: is mentoring in Chato District secondary schools treated as an institutional responsibility embedded in leadership practice, or does it operate primarily as an individual initiative shaped by personal disposition and goodwill?

This study addresses that question by examining the perceptions of senior academic staff regarding their role in mentoring novice teachers during induction. Drawing on qualitative data from senior academic staff and Ward Education Officers, complemented by document review, the paper interrogates how mentoring is understood,

organised, and constrained at the school level. The findings contribute to ongoing scholarly and policy conversations on the institutionalisation of school-based mentoring in Sub-Saharan Africa and offer context specific evidence to inform the continuing implementation of MEWAKA and related teacher development initiatives in Tanzania.

1.2 Problem Statement

The early career phase is believed to be a critical window in which mentoring and structured induction determine whether beginning teachers develop into confident, competent, and committed professionals. Studies have confirmed that induction and mentoring programmes produce measurable improvements in teacher and student outcomes (UNESCO, 2024; Mng'ong'o, 2025). For instance, a meta-analysis of research on formalised novice teacher induction programmes between 2010 and 2019 reported statistically significant effects on teacher retention, self-efficacy, and classroom effectiveness (Zhang et al., 2023).

Studies conducted in Tanzanian regions, including Mbeya, Rukwa, Iringa, and Njombe, have indicated that mentoring can improve novice teachers' teaching confidence, pedagogical competence, and professional commitment (Ally & Mabagala, 2022; Mashauri et al., 2025; Mzelela et al., 2023). In a similar vein, Mashauri et al. (2025) study in Iringa Municipality, reported that teachers who participated in mentorship activities described significant improvements in their professional practice, particularly in instructional delivery and classroom organisation.

Previous research in Chato district has focused mainly on teacher retention and staffing challenges, leaving a gap in empirical understanding of how senior academic staff enact mentoring roles during induction. This study therefore, examined the perceptions of senior academic staff regarding their role in mentoring novice teachers during induction in six public secondary schools in Chato District, Tanzania.

2. Literature Review

The following sections reviewed both empirical and theoretical evidence related to the study.

2.1 Empirical Evidence on Senior Academic Staff and Mentoring

2.1.1 Global perspectives on school leaders as mentors

Empirical evidence from developed education systems consistently indicates that senior academic staff, particularly principals and heads of departments, are central to the mentoring of novice teachers. TALIS (2024) findings show that education systems with higher proportions of novice teachers assigned formal mentors

also report stronger self-efficacy and job satisfaction among beginning teachers (OECD, 2025). Meyer et al. (2025), drawing on a random intercept cross lagged panel analysis of German schools grounded in social capital theory, demonstrated that principals' collaborative leadership practices significantly enhance teacher collaboration and collective efficacy over time. Similarly, the New Teacher Center (2025) argues that mentoring is most effective when structured through team-based staffing models in which experienced educators provide context embedded feedback to novices. These findings converge on a common insight: mentoring produces stronger outcomes when it is organisationally embedded rather than dependent on informal goodwill.

2.1.2 Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa

Studies conducted across Sub-Saharan Africa reinforce the value of mentoring but also expose systemic implementation weaknesses. Ampomah et al. (2024), through a document analysis study of Ghana's Supported Teaching in Schools model, concluded that mentoring supports novice teachers' pedagogical growth, but its effectiveness depends on structured programmes, mentor professional development, and clear feedback mechanisms. The VVOB (2025) supported Leaders in Teaching initiative, which extended to Tanzania in 2024, emphasises that mentoring, coaching, and experiential learning are essential ingredients of school leadership yet remain under regulated across much of Africa, where fewer than three in ten countries have dedicated school leadership policies (African Centre for School Leadership, 2025).

Similarly, Mashiane-Nkabinde and Nkambule's (2025) study in South Africa further show that heads of departments in under resourced South African schools face structural constraints that limit their capacity to lead teacher professional development, including mentoring of novices. Related evidence from Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa points to mentor preparation gaps, workload pressures, and weak monitoring as recurring obstacles (Bantwini, 2023; Odundo et al., 2022; Ssenyonga & Nakabugo, 2024).

2.1.3 Evidence from Tanzania

Within Tanzania, mentoring has become a formal component of teacher development, particularly through the MEWAKA framework. Todd et al. (2024) reported that the proportion of head teachers acting as mentors under MEWAKA rose from 18% at baseline to 76% at endline, while subject teachers acting as mentors rose from 35% to 43%. However, the same evaluation found that mentoring practice varies across local government authorities, is often loosely coordinated, and is constrained by weak monitoring and inadequate financing (Todd et al., 2024). EdTech Hub (2026) similarly reported that peer facilitators and teachers require additional mentoring and coaching to fulfil their roles effectively within Communities of Learning.

Regional Tanzanian studies confirms these gaps. Ally and Mabagala (2022) found that mentoring in Mbeya Region improved pedagogical competencies but remained inadequately coordinated. Mzelela et al. (2023), in Rukwa Region, established that mentoring in government secondary schools was loosely organised and focused on a narrow set of pedagogical issues. Mng'ong'o (2025), in Njombe demonstrated that mentoring enhanced novice teacher performance but that its effectiveness was undermined by the absence of structured institutional frameworks. Mashauri et al. (2025), studying mentorship programmes in Iringa Municipality, similarly reported significant improvements in teaching quality among teachers who participated in mentorship activities, while noting persistent structural weaknesses. Together, these studies converge on a shared conclusion: mentoring is widely valued and increasingly practised in Tanzanian schools, but its institutionalisation, particularly through the sustained engagement of senior academic staff, remains incomplete.

2.2 Theoretical Review

This study draws on two complementary theoretical perspectives, Social Capital Theory and Levinson's Career Stage Theory, to explain how mentoring by senior academic staff is conceptualised and enacted during novice teacher induction.

Social Capital Theory holds that individuals gain access to valuable resources, information, and support through their relationships within social networks (Comfort, 2024; Meyer et al., 2025). Applied to schools, social capital comprises the trust, norms, and networks that enable teachers to collaborate, share knowledge, and support one another's professional growth. Meyer et al. (2025) demonstrated that principals' leadership practices function as key mechanisms for building school based social capital, thereby fostering teacher collaboration and collective efficacy. Comfort (2024) further shows that mentoring, understood as a relational rather than transactional process, develops mentees' protective assets, including confidence, communication, and agency. In the present study, Social Capital Theory illuminates how senior academic staff act as institutional agents who mediate novice teachers' access to professional resources, pedagogical knowledge, and school culture.

Levinson's (1978) Career Stage Theory posits that individuals move through a sequence of stable and transitional periods across their careers, and those transitional periods, such as entry into a profession, are characterised by uncertainty, revaluation, and the search for guidance. Novice teachers, positioned at the beginning of their careers, occupy such a transitional stage. During this stage, they benefit substantially from mentoring relationships that offer reassurance, direction, and modelling of professional norms. Recent applications of career stage perspectives in teacher

research emphasise that early career mentoring is essential for shaping professional identity and long-term commitment to the profession (Flores & Swennen, 2022; OECD, 2025).

The two theories complement each other. Social Capital Theory addresses the structural and relational conditions under which mentoring is organised within schools, while Career Stage Theory explains the developmental need for mentoring during the early years of teaching. Together, they support the analytical claim that effective mentoring during induction requires both a supportive institutional environment created by senior academic staff and a developmentally sensitive response to the transitional needs of novice teachers.

3. Methodology

The following sub-sections present the methodological approaches of the study

3.1 Research approach and design

This study adopted a qualitative approach and employed an exploratory qualitative case study design to examine senior academic staff perceptions regarding their role in mentoring novice teachers during induction. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought in depth understanding of how mentoring is conceptualised, enacted, and constrained within specific institutional contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2024; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The case study design enabled a detailed examination of mentoring as understood and reported by senior school leaders and district level education officials (Yin, 2018).

3.2 Area of the study

The study was conducted in the selected six secondary schools, namely: School A, B, C, D, E and F respectively, in Chato District, located in the Geita Region, Tanzania. Chato District was purposively selected because it has experienced substantial growth in the number of public secondary schools, continues to recruit graduate teachers to address subject shortages (Alagwa & Ligembe, 2022; CL4STEM, 2022), and is expected under national policy to strengthen school-based induction and mentoring (Todd et al., 2024).

3.3 Sampling Techniques

The study involved 14 participants, comprising 12 senior academic staff drawn from six public secondary schools and 2 Ward Education Officers responsible for supervising schools in the study area. Senior academic staff included heads of schools, deputy heads, and heads of academic departments who held formal instructional

leadership roles and were directly involved in the induction and supervision of novice teachers.

Purposive sampling was used to select both the schools and the participants. Schools were selected in consultation with the District Secondary Education Officer, based on three criteria: the school had been operating for at least ten years; the school employed both experienced senior academic staff and novice teachers; and the school was accessible for repeated data collection visits. Within each selected school, senior academic staff who held formal leadership responsibilities related to teaching, learning, and teacher supervision were included as key informants. The two Ward Education Officers were included because of their supervisory role over the selected schools and their broader knowledge of teacher induction and continuous professional development at the ward level. Purposive sampling was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to focus on information rich participants whose experiences directly addressed the study's objective (Patton, 2021).

3.4 Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Two qualitative data collection methods were employed: semi-structured interviews and document review. These methods enabled triangulation of participant accounts with institutional records, thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2024; Patton, 2021).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all 12 senior academic staff and 2 Ward Education Officers using separate interview guides tailored to each group. The interview guides explored participants' understanding of mentoring, their perceived roles, the mentoring practices they enacted or observed, and the challenges encountered in supporting novice teachers during induction. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted at the participant's workplace at a mutually agreed time. Interviews were conducted in Kiswahili or English, depending on participant preference, and were audio recorded with participants' written consent.

Document review was conducted to complement and triangulate interview data. The reviewed documents included School Management Team meeting minutes, induction records, mentor allocation lists where available, and other institutional records relating to teacher induction and professional support. Selected national policy documents, including the Education and Training Policy (United Republic of Tanzania, 2014) and the National Framework for Teacher Continuous Professional Development (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2020), were reviewed to contextualise institutional practices within the broader national policy environment. A structured document review guide was used to record evidence of formal

mentoring arrangements, planning, and follow up mechanisms.

3.5 Data analysis

Interview data were transcribed verbatim, and Kiswahili transcripts were translated into English for analysis. The transcripts and documents were analysed using thematic analysis, following the six-step procedure articulated by Braun and Clarke (2021): familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Coding was carried out inductively, with themes emerging from the data rather than being imposed from prior categories. Documents were analysed alongside interview data to identify areas of convergence and divergence between participants' accounts and institutional records. The final thematic structure was organised around five dominant themes reflecting how senior academic staff perceived and enacted mentoring during induction.

3.6 Ethical considerations

The study adhered to accepted ethical principles in educational research. Ethical clearance was obtained from St John's University of Tanzania through the Directorate of Research and Innovation. Permission was sought from Chato District authorities and from the heads of the selected public secondary schools, and Ward Education Officers were informed about the study. Written informed consent was obtained before data collection. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured through the use of codes or pseudonyms instead of real names and through secure storage of all research records.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study on the perceptions of senior academic staff regarding their role in mentoring novice teachers during induction in six public secondary schools in Chato District, Tanzania. The discussion integrates the participants' direct quotations, the study's guiding theories (Social Capital Theory and Levinson's Career Stage Theory), and empirical literature. The findings reveal a striking tension between how mentoring is conceptualised and how it is institutionalised. Senior academic staff and Ward Education Officers articulated a rich, multidimensional understanding of mentoring encompassing professional guidance, socialisation, emotional support, and institutional responsibility, yet the documentary evidence pointed to weak structural arrangements for enacting these conceptualisations in everyday school practice.

4.1 Mentoring as professional guidance and capacity building

Senior academic staff described mentoring primarily as a structured process of professional guidance aimed at strengthening pedagogical competence among novice teachers. Participants reported that mentoring provided opportunities for novice teachers to learn effective classroom management, lesson planning, and assessment strategies through guidance from more experienced colleagues. One senior staff member from School A explained:

Mentoring is essentially professional guidance. When new teachers arrive, they often have theoretical knowledge from university but limited practical classroom experience. Through mentoring, we help them refine their teaching approaches, improve lesson delivery, and correct mistakes early before they become habitual. (Senior Staff, School A, 13 February 2026)

Another senior staff member from School C elaborated on the practical value of mentoring:

In my experience, mentoring helps novice teachers develop confidence in teaching. We observe their lessons, give constructive feedback, and guide them on how to manage learners effectively. Without such guidance, some teachers struggle to translate theory into practice. (Senior Staff, School C, 20 February 2026)

Ward Education Officers echoed this framing, positioning mentoring within the broader continuous professional development mandate. One Ward Education Officer stated:

Mentoring should be seen as part of continuous professional development within schools. It allows experienced teachers to transfer knowledge and professional skills to new teachers so that teaching quality improves across the school. (Ward Education Officer 1, 26 February 2026)

Documents analysis partly corroborated these accounts. School Management Team minutes from four of the six schools contained references to mentoring discussions linked to professional development activities and classroom supervision for novice teachers, although the level of detail varied across schools. The finding that senior academic staff view mentoring as a mechanism for professional guidance and capacity building aligns with a substantial body of international literature. TALIS (2024) results demonstrate that mentoring is most effective when embedded in structured pedagogical support, including lesson observation, feedback, and modelling (OECD, 2025). It could therefore be argued

that mentoring produces stronger outcomes when it is context embedded, enabling novice teachers to translate theoretical knowledge into classroom practice.

The Chato District findings both confirm and extends this literature. Senior academic staff clearly recognised the pedagogical function of mentoring and framed it as essential for closing the gap between initial teacher education and classroom realities, a concern echoed by Ampomah et al. (2024) in the Ghanaian context. However, unlike accounts from high performing systems such as Singapore or Shanghai (OECD, 2025), participants rarely described mentoring as a technically specified practice with defined observation protocols, feedback cycles, or evaluation criteria. This absence suggests that while the language of professional guidance is present, the technical infrastructure that operationalises it remains underdeveloped, echoing findings by Todd et al. (2024) that reported wide variation in mentoring practice across local government authorities implementing MEWAKA.

4.2 Mentoring as socialisation into school culture

Participants described mentoring as a mechanism for socialising novice teachers into the culture, norms, and expectations of the school environment. Senior academic staff emphasised that new teachers required time to internalise institutional practices, administrative procedures, and professional conduct within the school community.

A senior staff member from School E explained:

When new teachers join a school, they often need time to understand the culture and routines of the institution. Mentoring helps them adjust quickly because experienced teachers guide them on how things are done in the school. (Senior Staff, School E, 25 February 2026)

Another participant from School B extended this view beyond classroom instruction:

Mentoring is not only about teaching methods. It also helps new teachers understand staff relationships, communication channels, and professional expectations. Without that guidance, they may feel lost or disconnected from the school system. (Senior Staff, School B, 14 February 2026)

Ward Education Officers offered similar observations. One officer reported:

Many new teachers misunderstand school procedures if they are not

guided properly. Mentoring helps them learn how to prepare reports, follow administrative processes, and interact professionally with colleagues and students. (Ward Education Officer 2, 26 February 2026)

Documents' analysis from Schools C and E supported this theme. School Management Team minutes recorded orientation sessions organised for newly appointed teachers, covering school rules, staff responsibilities, and professional conduct. However, similar records were not consistently maintained in the other schools.

The finding that mentoring functions as a mechanism for socialising novice teachers into school culture resonates strongly with Social Capital Theory. Meyer et al. (2025) demonstrated that principals' collaborative leadership practices create the relational conditions under which teachers access professional resources and collective efficacy. Comfort (2024) similarly reframed mentoring as a relational rather than transactional process that develops mentees' protective assets, including confidence and agency.

Senior academic staff in Chato District described mentoring as helping novice teachers navigate staff relationships, communication channels, and administrative procedures, activities that constitute the everyday work of building school based social capital. From this perspective, senior academic staff can be understood as institutional agents who mediate novice teachers' access to the networks, norms, and knowledge that enable professional integration. Where such mediation is deliberate and sustained, novice teachers acquire richer social capital. Where it is left to chance, novice teachers must build these networks through their own initiative, producing uneven induction experiences across the six sampled schools. This interpretation is consistent with Ally and Mabagala's (2022) observation that mentoring outcomes depend heavily on individual school initiative rather than systematic institutional design.

4.3 Mentoring as emotional and psychological support

A recurring theme in the interviews was the perception of mentoring as a source of emotional and psychological support for novice teachers, particularly during the early stages of their careers. Participants highlighted that beginning teachers often experienced stress, anxiety, and uncertainty as they adjusted to professional responsibilities.

A senior staff member from School B observed:

Most novice teachers arrive at school feeling anxious and unsure about their abilities. They worry about classroom management, lesson preparation, and

whether they are meeting expectations. Mentoring helps reassure them and gives them confidence to perform their duties effectively. (Senior Staff, School B, 13 February 2026)

Ward Education Officer 1 similarly emphasised the emotional dimension of induction:

If novice teachers do not receive support during their early years, they may become frustrated or lose motivation. Mentoring helps them overcome challenges and remain committed to the teaching profession. (Ward Education Officer 1, 26 February 2026)

Documentary records did not directly capture the emotional dimensions of mentoring, but School Management Team minutes from three schools referenced discussions on supporting new teachers to settle in and assisting newly posted staff to adjust, suggesting general recognition of the affective aspects of induction.

The finding that mentoring provides emotional and psychological support during a demanding transition period speaks directly to Levinson's (1978) Career Stage Theory. Novice teachers in Chato District were described by participants as anxious about classroom management, lesson delivery, and meeting institutional expectations, a portrait consistent with TALIS 2024 findings that 27% of novice teachers globally intend to leave the profession within five years (OECD, 2025) and with Admiraal et al.'s (2025) analysis of attrition risk among early career teachers.

The developmental case for mentoring is therefore not merely instructional but existential: without emotional and relational support during the transition phase, novice teachers risk disengagement from the profession. The Chato District findings suggest that senior academic staff understand this developmental need in principle, but the absence of structured mechanisms for delivering emotional support means that the burden of reassurance falls disproportionately on individual mentors' goodwill. This finding aligns with Mng'ong'o's (2025) observation that mentoring enhances performance and morale but its effectiveness is limited by the absence of institutional frameworks that formally recognise emotional and relational support as legitimate mentoring work.

4.4 Mentoring as institutional responsibility

Participants widely framed mentoring as an institutional responsibility of experienced teachers and school leadership rather than as an optional or informal activity.

A senior staff member from School D stated:

As experienced teachers, we have a duty to support new teachers when they join the school. Mentoring is not optional; it is part of our responsibility to ensure that teaching standards are maintained. (Senior Staff, School D, 23 February 2026)

Another participant from School A elaborated:

If senior teachers do not take responsibility for mentoring, novice teachers may struggle alone. School leadership must ensure that experienced teachers actively guide and support them. (Senior Staff, School A, 13 February 2026)

Ward Education Officer 2 reinforced this institutional dimension:

Schools should have clear systems where experienced teachers are assigned to mentor new teachers. This ensures accountability and consistent professional support. (Ward Education Officer 2, 26 February 2026)

Document review, however, revealed inconsistencies between this institutional framing and actual documented practice. Schools A, C, and E had partial written evidence of induction activities and mentor allocations, while Schools B and F had no documented mentor assignment lists. Across all six schools, no formal induction manual, written mentoring guidelines, mentor agreement forms, or structured monitoring templates were consistently in use.

Perhaps the most analytically important finding is the divergence between how mentoring is framed and how it is organised. Participants unanimously described mentoring as an institutional responsibility, not an optional or informal activity. Yet documentary evidence revealed that in five of the six sampled schools, mentoring lacked formal mentor allocation lists, written induction guidelines, structured monitoring templates, or documented feedback cycles. Where induction was recorded, it was typically embedded within broader administrative supervision rather than treated as a distinct professional development programme.

This institutional responsibility and practice gap directly answer the question posed in the introduction. The findings suggest that mentoring is discursively institutionalised but practically individualised. Senior academic staff speak the language of institutional duty while enacting mentoring through informal, personal, and often invisible practices.

This finding sits within a wider Sub-Saharan African pattern. Mashiane-Nkabinde and Nkambule (2025) documented similar constraints among heads of departments in South Africa, while VVOB (2025) and the African Centre for School Leadership (2025) noted that fewer than three in ten African countries have dedicated school leadership policies. In Tanzania specifically, Todd et al. (2024) reported that headteacher engagement in mentoring under MEWAKA has increased dramatically, from 18% to 76%, yet mentoring practices remain unevenly coordinated and inadequately financed at the local government level. The Chato District evidence therefore illustrates, at the school level, what national evaluations show at the system level: policy adoption has outpaced institutional infrastructure.

4.5 Constraints affecting mentoring effectiveness

While participants generally expressed positive perceptions of mentoring, they also identified several constraints that affected its effective implementation. The three most frequently mentioned constraints were heavy workloads, absence of formal mentor training, and lack of structured mentoring guidelines and monitoring.

A senior staff member from School F illustrated the workload constraint:

We strongly believe in mentoring, but the workload is often too heavy. Teachers have many classes and administrative duties, so mentoring sometimes happens informally rather than through structured sessions.
(Senior Staff, School F, 25 February 2026)

Ward Education Officer 2 acknowledged the absence of formal monitoring at the ward level:

At the ward level, there is currently no formal monitoring system for mentoring programmes. Schools are expected to support novice teachers, but there is limited follow up to ensure mentoring is implemented effectively.
(Ward Education Officer 2, 26 February 2026)

Documentary evidence further reflected these constraints. Analysis of School Management Team minutes and departmental reports showed that where induction was mentioned in Schools A, C, and E, the records rarely included detailed action plans, assigned responsibilities, timelines, or monitoring tools. In Schools B and F, mentoring appeared mainly in general discussions on supporting new teachers or assisting newly posted staff, without evidence of structured schedules. School D contained evidence of administrative orientation, but the records did not

indicate systematic pedagogical follow up through observation and feedback.

Across all six schools, no consistent institutional documents such as an induction manual, written mentoring guidelines, mentor agreement forms, or monitoring templates were available. Where induction activities were documented, they were typically embedded within broader administrative or academic supervision matters rather than presented as a distinct professional development programme.

The constraints identified in this study, namely heavy workload, absence of mentor training, lack of structured guidelines, and weak monitoring, mirror those reported globally. TALIS 2024 identified time constraints as the most frequently reported barrier to teacher professional learning across OECD systems, with between 67% and 75% of teachers citing competing responsibilities (OECD, 2025). Similar constraints have been reported in Kenyan (Odundo et al., 2022), South African (Bantwini, 2023), and Ugandan (Ssenyonga & Nakabugo, 2024) studies.

What distinguishes the Chato District case is the compounding effect of these constraints in a context where MEWAKA is still being rolled out and where senior academic staff receive no dedicated preparation for the mentoring role. EdTech Hub (2026) noted that peer facilitators and school leaders themselves require additional coaching within the MEWAKA framework, a finding the Chato District evidence corroborates. Without mentor preparation and structured institutional support, even well intentioned senior academic staff cannot consistently translate their positive perceptions of mentoring into sustained mentoring practice

4.6 Theoretical integration and contribution

Read through the combined lens of Social Capital Theory and Career Stage Theory, the findings illuminate two complementary explanations for the observed pattern. From a Social Capital perspective, the weak institutionalisation of mentoring restricts novice teachers' access to school based professional networks, forcing them to depend on informal relationships that may or may not develop. From a Career Stage perspective, the transitional needs of novice teachers require deliberate developmental support during a specific and time bounded phase of their careers. When that support is inconsistent, novice teachers are left to negotiate the transition through personal resilience rather than institutional scaffolding.

The Chato District findings therefore suggest that mentoring effectiveness depends on the convergence of two conditions: a supportive institutional environment created by senior academic staff and a developmentally sensitive response to the transitional needs of novice teachers.

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it provides context specific evidence from a district that has been under researched despite its policy relevance. Second, it demonstrates empirically how the policy and practice gap noted in national MEWAKA evaluations (Todd et al., 2024) manifests at the school level. Third, it applies Social Capital and Career Stage theories in combination to explain not only the outcomes of mentoring but also the institutional conditions that produce or constrain those outcomes.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The following sections concludes the study and provides recommendations based on policy, practice and further studies.

5.1 Conclusion

The findings show that senior academic staff and Ward Education Officers hold a rich, multidimensional understanding of mentoring, framing it simultaneously as professional guidance, socialisation into school culture, emotional support, and institutional responsibility. This conceptual richness suggests that mentoring is widely valued at the school level and is recognised as central to the successful induction of novice teachers. However, the study also reveals a substantial gap between how mentoring is conceptualised and how it is institutionally organised. Mentoring in Chato District secondary schools is best characterised as discursively institutionalised but practically individualised. This pattern is shaped by a combination of structural constraints, including heavy workloads, absence of mentor preparation, lack of clear mentoring guidelines, and weak monitoring at both school and ward levels. Strengthening mentoring in Chato District, and by extension in comparable Tanzanian settings, requires deliberate institutional design rather than reliance on the goodwill of individual senior staff members.

5.2 Recommendations

From the study, three sets of recommendations are proposed.

5.2.1 Recommendations for policy

The study recommends the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to develop clear operational guidelines for school-based mentoring within the MEWAKA framework, specifying the roles of senior academic staff, minimum contact hours between mentors and novice teachers, and expected mentoring outputs. Mentoring should be formally integrated into the leadership preparation and appraisal of senior academic staff, and monitoring mechanisms should be

strengthened at ward and district levels through supervision tools and regular follow up visits.

5.2.2 Recommendations for practice

This study recommends the schools to establish formal mentor allocation systems supported by written induction plans, mentoring schedules, and documented feedback cycles. School Management Teams should distribute mentoring responsibilities deliberately across senior academic staff, drawing on subject expertise and instructional strengths, and should institutionalise brief but regular reflective mentoring meetings that combine pedagogical guidance, socialisation support, and emotional check ins.

5.2.3 Recommendations for further study

For further research, longitudinal studies are needed to examine how mentoring practices evolve as MEWAKA implementation matures in secondary schools. Comparative research across districts with different levels of resource endowment and leadership capacity would help identify the institutional conditions that most strongly support effective enactment of mentoring. Finally, future studies should include novice teachers' perspectives on the mentoring roles enacted by senior academic staff, in order to examine potential asymmetries between how senior staff describe their mentoring roles and how those roles are experienced.

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