

Guided through the storm: novice teachers' experiences of mentoring

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ABSTRACT

Mentoring is an important part of early career teaching, as novice teachers often face workload pressure, emotional demands, and difficulties in adjusting to school life. However, limited research has examined how mentoring is actually experienced by novice teachers in daily school contexts, particularly within Program Pembangunan Guru Baharu (PPGB) 2.0 in Malaysia. This qualitative study aimed to explore how novice teachers experience PPGB 2.0 in schools in Miri District, Sarawak. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 novice teachers, and the data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings identified two main themes: external support and intrinsic support. External support consisted of affective mentor support and school community support. While intrinsic support consisted of: i) self-restorative practices; ii) regulated emotional release; iii) spirituality; and iv) perseverance. The findings show that novice teachers experienced PPGB 2.0 not only as a formal induction structure, but also as relational and personal support that contributed to professional adjustment during the early stage of teaching. The study is context-specific and offers a more grounded understanding of how mentoring is experienced in everyday school life, with useful implications for strengthening induction practices, particularly in mentor preparation and supportive school environments.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching quality remains a central determinant of educational quality because the effectiveness of an education system is closely tied to the professional competence, continuity, and well-being of its teachers. In contemporary school settings, however, this role has become more demanding, as teachers are required not only to enact the curriculum, but also to respond to evolving institutional pressures, social expectations, and emotional challenges embedded in daily practice [1]–[3]. Within this increasingly complex environment, novice teachers are often positioned in a particularly vulnerable situation. The initial stage of teaching is widely recognized as a crucial transitional period in which new teachers must negotiate unfamiliar school cultures, undertake complex pedagogical responsibilities, manage emotional demands, and construct a stable sense of professional identity [4]. A growing body of international literature has shown that this period is often characterized by uncertainty, intensified workload, and an elevated likelihood of attrition, especially

where structured support is weak or uneven [5], [6]. From this perspective, the early professional experience of novice teachers is not a marginal issue, but one that is closely related to teacher retention, instructional effectiveness, and the long-term sustainability of the teaching profession [7]–[9].

The significance of this issue becomes clearer when the nature of early-career transition is examined more closely. Although novice teachers enter the profession with formal preparation and practicum-based experience, they often encounter a substantial gap between what has been learned during pre-service training and what is required in actual school settings [10]. This gap is commonly reflected in difficulties related to classroom management, pedagogical decision-making, professional relationships, and the maintenance of emotional balance in everyday practice [11]–[13]. Furthermore, the early years of teaching are often marked by multiple pressures, including heavy workload, limited collegial and leadership support, and the expectation to develop professional confidence while already carrying the responsibilities of a full teaching role [14]–[17]. Recent studies further describe this phase as one that may involve isolation, emotional strain, and a strong need for social-emotional resources and supportive relationships in order to maintain well-being and continue functioning effectively in school settings [18]–[20]. Under such conditions, prolonged strain may gradually affect well-being, reduce perceived competence, and weaken intentions to remain in the profession, particularly when the transition process is not accompanied by sustained relational support [21], [22]. These conditions suggest that the more important issue is not only whether novice teachers face difficulties, but also how they experience, interpret, and negotiate those difficulties in the realities of school life.

Within this context, mentoring has increasingly been recognized as a structured approach to assisting novice teachers during induction and the early phase of professional adjustment. Recent studies have emphasized that mentoring serves not only to transmit pedagogical knowledge and practical expertise, but also to provide emotional reassurance, practical assistance, and relational support that can strengthen confidence, emotional balance, and professional adjustment [23]–[25]. At the same time, emerging evidence suggests that mentoring does not automatically become meaningful simply because it is formally assigned. Its value depends on relational quality, mentor preparation, and institutional conditions that enable regular, supportive interaction rather than a narrow focus on compliance [26], [27]. In the Malaysian education system, this commitment has been formalized through Program Pembangunan Guru Baharu 2.0 (PPGB 2.0), a school-based mentoring initiative introduced by the Ministry of Education Malaysia for teachers at the beginning of their service [28]–[30]. The program is organized into structured phases, namely orientation, professional development, and professional expansion, which reflect the view that successful adaptation should develop progressively through sustained support in the school setting rather than relying only on pre-service training.

Besides the mentor-mentee relationship itself, early-career adjustment may also be shaped by the wider social environment of the school. A supportive school context can reduce uncertainty in daily work, encourage help-seeking, and strengthen novice teachers' sense of belonging, especially when administrators, colleagues, and peers provide practical help as well as interpersonal support [25], [31]–[33]. This broader school-based support is important because the experience of beginning teaching is not constructed through mentoring alone, but also through everyday interactions within the professional community in which novice teachers learn, adapt, and carry out their work. In this sense, novice teachers' lived experience of induction is likely to be shaped by both formal mentoring arrangements and the wider relational climate of the school. In this sense, novice teachers' experiences of induction are likely to be shaped by both formal mentoring arrangements and the wider relational climate of the school.

In addition, early-career adjustment is influenced not only by support received from others, but also by the ways novice teachers regulate themselves internally in response to pressure. Recent studies suggest that self-directed coping, meaningful personal activities, and reflective emotional management can support daily recovery, reduce emotional fatigue, and help teachers remain functional in demanding school contexts [34]–[36]. Such findings indicate that novice teacher adjustment should not be understood only through formal support structures, but also through the internal processes by which teachers manage emotion, restore balance, and continue adapting to professional demands. Accordingly, novice teachers' experiences during the early stage of teaching may reflect an interaction between external support and personal efforts to remain emotionally steady.

Despite the increasing attention given to mentoring and novice teachers, an important gap continues to persist in the literature. Previous studies have tended to concentrate on the effectiveness of mentoring programs [37], [38], the quality of mentors [39], professional outcomes [40], [41], job satisfaction [42], [43], and retention patterns [44]–[46]. Comparatively less attention has been given to how mentoring is experienced by novice teachers in the everyday realities of school life, where formal program expectations intersect with school culture, emotional demands, and practical workplace interactions. A similar limitation can be observed in local scholarship on PPGB 2.0, where deeper understanding of how mentoring is interpreted and experienced by novice teachers in practice remains insufficient. The existence of a formal

policy framework does not automatically reveal how support is translated into everyday professional experience, particularly within the demanding realities of early-career teaching [47]–[49]. Besides that, local evidence remains limited regarding how PPGB 2.0 is encountered in actual school environments and how such experiences shape novice teachers' adjustment during the early stage of service. The gap, therefore, is not only empirical but also interpretive: there is still limited understanding of how formal mentoring under PPGB 2.0 becomes meaningful support in everyday school life. The novelty of this study lies in its explanation of PPGB 2.0 as more than a formal mentoring program. It shows how novice teachers experience mentoring as a dynamic adjustment process shaped by the interaction between school-based support and their own coping resources. By focusing on how formal support becomes meaningful in everyday school practice, this study offers a contextually grounded understanding of novice teacher mentoring within the Malaysian PPGB 2.0 context.

Conceptually, this study is informed by scholarship on early-career teacher adjustment and resilience, which views novice teacher adaptation as shaped by both relational support and personal coping resources. The study adopts an interpretivist qualitative case study approach to examine how novice teachers make sense of mentoring within the bounded context of PPGB 2.0 across schools in Miri District, Sarawak. To address this gap, the present study aims to examine the experiences of novice teachers in PPGB 2.0 in schools in Miri District, Sarawak. The study is guided by one main research question: how do novice teachers experience PPGB 2.0 across schools in Miri District, Sarawak? Instead of concentrating only on the formal design of the program, the study focuses on how mentoring is experienced, interpreted, and enacted in everyday school practice. In doing so, it extends current understanding by offering a more contextually grounded account of how formal induction support is translated into actual support through school relationships and personal coping during the early phase of teaching.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative interpretivist single-case, multi-site case study design to examine how novice teachers experienced mentoring under PPGB 2.0 in schools in Miri District, Sarawak, Malaysia. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' meanings, interpretations, and experiences within their actual school contexts [50]. The interpretivist orientation was adopted because the study focused on how novice teachers made sense of mentoring and support during the early phase of their professional transition, rather than on measuring predetermined variables or testing causal relationships.

A case study design was selected because the study examined a contemporary educational phenomenon within its real-world setting, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and context were closely intertwined [51]. The case was bounded as the implementation and experience of mentoring under PPGB 2.0 among novice teachers in government schools in Miri District, Sarawak. The five participating schools were not treated as separate comparative cases. Instead, they functioned as multiple contextual settings within a single bounded case, allowing the study to examine how the same program was experienced across different school environments while remaining analytically focused on one case [51]. This design was therefore closely aligned with the research question, which sought to understand how novice teachers experienced PPGB 2.0 across school settings rather than to compare schools as independent units of analysis.

2.2. Study participants

This study was carried out in Miri District, Sarawak, involving five government schools, namely four secondary schools and one primary school. These schools served as the settings for examining how mentoring under PPGB 2.0 was experienced in actual school environments. In this study, novice teachers were defined, within the Malaysian context, as teachers in their first one to three years of service in government schools [29]. This definition was important because the study focused specifically on teachers who were still negotiating the transition from pre-service preparation to full professional responsibility.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who had direct experience with the phenomenon under study. This sampling technique is appropriate in qualitative inquiry because participants are selected on the basis of their ability to provide rich and relevant information related to the research focus [52]–[54]. The participants comprised 12 novice teachers who were directly involved in PPGB 2.0 in schools in Miri District, Sarawak, as the demographic information shown in Table 1. Participant selection was guided by information richness rather than numerical representativeness, as the purpose of the study was to obtain depth of understanding of mentoring experiences in context.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the participants

	Demographic profile	Number of participants (N)
Gender	Male	3
	Female	9
Types of schools	National-type primary school	1
	National-type secondary school	4
Years of teaching experience	≤1 year	7
	1-2 years	3
	2-3 years	2

The participants were selected based on several predefined criteria. First, they had to be serving in government schools in Miri District, Sarawak. Second, they were required to have between one and three years of teaching experience, as novice teachers in Malaysia are generally defined within this period [29]. Third, they had to be currently or previously involved in mentoring under PPGB 2.0 [29]. These criteria ensured that all participants had direct and relevant experience related to novice teacher adjustment within a formal school-based mentoring context. Eligible participants were identified and approached through school administrators. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms or coded identifiers were used when presenting the interview data. Data collection continued until sufficient depth was achieved and no substantial new themes emerged from subsequent interviews, consistent with the principle of saturation in qualitative research [55]–[57].

2.3. Research instrument

The main instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview protocol, and the primary data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews with novice teachers involved in PPGB 2.0 in schools in Miri District, Sarawak. This instrument was chosen because it enabled the researcher to gather detailed accounts of participants' views, experiences, and interpretations in a focused yet flexible manner [50]. The interview protocol was developed based on the study literature and the research questions, and was subsequently refined systematically using the interview protocol refinement (IPR) framework proposed by Castillo-Montoya [58], with attention to question alignment, inquiry-based conversation, and feedback on interview structure, before it was used in the actual data collection.

The protocol consisted of two main parts, namely participants' demographic background and questions related to their experiences of PPGB 2.0 in the school context. The substantive interview questions were organized around several domains aligned with the research question, including participants' experiences of mentoring, the forms of support they received, the challenges they encountered during the early phase of teaching, and the ways they understood and responded to those experiences. This structure allowed the interviews to move from general background information to deeper accounts of mentoring, support, pressure, and professional adjustment. It also ensured that the interview questions were not treated as isolated items, but as a coherent guide for eliciting participants' meaning-making within the context of PPGB 2.0. To strengthen the quality of the instrument, the protocol was reviewed by three experts with relevant expertise in resilience and educational psychology, and a pilot study was carried out to assess the clarity of the questions, the duration of the interview, and the overall flow of the interview session. Revisions following the pilot focused on improving question clarity, reducing ambiguity, and ensuring that the core questions consistently addressed the central research focus across all interviews. This refinement process was important because the study required questions that were sufficiently open to capture participants' interpretations of mentoring and support, yet sufficiently focused to remain aligned with the research question. Therefore, the final protocol supported both methodological consistency and interpretive depth during data collection.

2.4. Data collection

Data collection was conducted primarily through face-to-face interviews. The interview questions were open-ended, and follow-up questions were asked according to the flow of the interview in order to obtain clearer and more detailed responses. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and generally lasted between one and one and a half hours, with several sessions extending to two hours. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim for analysis. To maintain consistency across interviews, the same semi-structured protocol and core question domains were used with all participants, while follow-up questions were adapted to participants' responses and experiences. This enabled comparability across cases without constraining participants' own meaning-making. To reduce the risk of researcher influence, the interviewer used open-ended, non-leading questions, allowed participants sufficient space to elaborate their responses, and avoided imposing predetermined interpretations during the interview process.

Besides that, passive observation and document analysis were used as supplementary sources to support contextual understanding and data triangulation [59], [60]. Passive observation involved

non-participant observation of the school environment and relevant mentoring-related contexts during routine school activities. These observations were recorded as contextual notes and were used to enrich understanding of the setting in which mentoring and early-career adjustment took place. Document analysis focused on materials relevant to PPGB 2.0 and the school mentoring context, such as program guidelines and induction schedules. These materials were used to clarify program expectations, contextual arrangements, and implementation features related to the interview accounts. Taken together, the observation notes and documentary materials informed analytic interpretation and strengthened triangulation across data sources.

2.5. Data analysis and trustworthiness

The interview data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis [61]. First, all audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and checked repeatedly against the original recordings to ensure transcription accuracy. Second, the researcher read the transcripts several times to become familiar with the dataset and to identify segments relevant to novice teachers' experiences of mentoring under PPGB 2.0. Third, initial descriptive codes were generated inductively from the data using ATLAS.ti 25, with attention to recurring meanings, actions, responses, and forms of support described by participants. For example, segments referring to mentor reassurance, peer assistance, personal recovery practices, and prayer were initially coded at a descriptive level before being compared across participants and organized into broader categories.

Next, related codes were reviewed and clustered into preliminary categories and candidate subthemes. Fifth, these candidate themes were compared repeatedly with the coded extracts and the full dataset to assess internal coherence and conceptual distinction. Finally, the themes were refined, defined, and named in ways that accurately represented recurring patterns of meaning across the participants' accounts. This iterative movement between data extracts, codes, categories, and themes enhanced analytic transparency and ensured that the final thematic structure remained closely grounded in the dataset. ATLAS.ti 25 was used to support the organization, retrieval, coding, and management of qualitative data, while the interpretation of meaning remained the responsibility of the researcher.

Several procedures were used to enhance trustworthiness. Credibility was supported through the use of multiple data sources, namely interviews, observation notes, and documentary materials, as well as through expert review of the interview protocol, repeated comparison across participant accounts during analysis, and member checking with participants to confirm the accuracy of the interpreted meanings. Dependability was supported through a systematic analytic process, including verbatim transcription, stepwise coding, theme refinement, and the maintenance of an audit trail documenting key analytic decisions throughout the study. Confirmability was supported by grounding interpretations in verbatim data extracts and by maintaining an audit trail that enabled the analytic process to be traced clearly from raw data to the final thematic structure.

In addition, Cohen's Kappa analysis involving three experts was used to support consistency in coding and agreement on the thematic structure [62]. The obtained Kappa value was 0.99, indicating a very high level of agreement among the expert reviewers. Any discrepancies identified during the agreement process were reviewed and discussed before the final naming and confirmation of themes. Collectively, these procedures supported transparency, consistency, and methodological rigor in the development of the study findings.

3. RESULTS

The thematic analysis identified two main themes in novice teachers' experiences of PPGB 2.0 in schools in Miri District, Sarawak, namely external support and intrinsic support. For the purposes of analysis, these themes are presented separately. However, the findings suggest that they reflect related dimensions of early-career adjustment. External support refers to the relational and contextual support available to novice teachers, whereas intrinsic support refers to the personal resources and practices they drew upon in responding to the demands of the early phase of teaching.

3.1. Theme 1: external support

As shown in Table 2, external support consists of two subthemes: affective mentor support and school community support. Taken together, these subthemes indicate that support from others was experienced not only as formal program provision, but as relational support enacted through emotionally responsive mentors and a socially supportive school environment. These findings show that novice teachers received support from people around them during the early phase of teaching.

Table 2. External support

External support	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	Frequency
Affective mentor support	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	12
School community support	/	x	x	x	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	9

3.1.1. Affective mentor support

Based on Table 2, the findings show that affective mentor support was experienced by all 12 novice teachers. This subtheme refers to the emotional support received from mentors during the early phase of teaching, particularly in the form of empathy, care, acceptance, and reassurance. The interview data indicate that this support helped novice teachers manage stress and feel supported in their new professional environment. The following interview excerpts illustrate this subtheme:

“She never dismissed my feelings and reminded me that pressure is part of growth.” (P8)

“She is like my second mother here... I feel more accepted.” (P11)

“My mentor was very understanding and calmed me down... I felt relieved.” (P12)

3.1.2. School community support

The findings also show that P5 and P6 received support from the wider school community during the early stage of teaching. This support was reflected in practical help and peer assistance, which made the adjustment process easier and helped them handle everyday responsibilities. This can be seen in the following interview excerpts:

“On my first day at school, the principal asked whether I already had a house. I felt worried, but he said, it’s okay, we will look for one together.” (P5)

“I was lucky because we were posted to the same school. The seven of us became a support system for each other. If the work was heavy or someone got stuck, everyone would help.” (P6)

3.2. Theme 2: intrinsic support

As presented in Table 3, intrinsic support consists of four subthemes: i) self-restorative practices; ii) regulated emotional release; iii) spirituality; and iv) perseverance. These subthemes indicate that novice teachers were not merely recipients of support, but also active agents in managing pressure through self-regulatory practices that helped them regain emotional steadiness and maintain continuity in their work. They show that novice teachers did not rely only on support from mentors and the school community, but also drew on their own internal resources during the early phase of teaching. The findings indicate that intrinsic support helped them manage work-related pressure, regulate their emotions, maintain personal strength, and continue adapting to the demands of the profession. In addition, this theme suggests that novice teachers played an active role in sustaining their own well-being and professional adjustment through personal efforts and inner coping resources.

Table 3. Intrinsic support

Intrinsic support	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	Frequency
Self-restorative practices	/	/	x	/	x	x	/	/	/	/	x	x	7
Regulated emotional release	x	/	x	/	x	x	x	x	/	x	/	/	5
Spirituality	/	x	/	x	/	x	/	/	x	/	/	x	7
Perseverance	x	x	x	/	x	/	/	/	/	/	x	/	7

3.2.1. Self-restorative practices

The findings indicate that participants such as P1, P2, P8, P9, and P10 used personal time and preferred activities to reduce tiredness, regain energy, and restore focus after work. These practices helped them manage work-related pressure and prepare themselves for the next teaching day. This finding is reflected in the following interview excerpts:

“I usually block some time in the week for swimming. After that, I feel very fresh and have different energy in class.” (P1)

“On weekends, I like to bake cakes or bread. It makes me feel happy and helps me forget school work for a while.” (P2)

“I need my own ‘me-time’... going out alone, going to the library, or to the beach. That is how I recharge and gather my energy again.” (P8)

“When I am free, I like to sit alone by the river. It makes the tiredness go away, and then it is easier to think of teaching ideas.” (P9)

“I make sure I have time for myself every weekend, at least for jogging to reflect and calm my mind.” (P10)

3.2.2. Regulated emotional release

In addition, the findings show that several participants (P2, P4, P9, and P12) managed emotional pressure through personal and controlled ways of release. Instead of keeping stress for too long, they used simple strategies such as crying, sleeping, listening to music, and writing to ease emotional tension. These practices helped them feel lighter, regain emotional balance, and continue their work more calmly. This finding can be observed in the following interview excerpts:

“After crying, I feel lighter, and I get my strength back to continue working.” (P2)

“When I am stressed, I play sad songs and let myself cry. After that, I feel relieved and have energy again.” (P4)

“When I am stressed, I write simple poems... it feels like the burden comes out, and my heart feels lighter.” (P9)

“Whenever I feel pressured, I think it is better to sleep first and let my mind rest.” (P12)

3.2.3. Spirituality

The findings also show that several participants, namely P3, P8, and P10, turned to spirituality when they felt pressured during the early phase of teaching. In their experiences, spirituality functioned as a personal source of comfort and strength, especially when they felt overwhelmed, uncertain, or far from familiar support. Prayer and related practices were not described only as religious routines, but also as ways to regain calmness, restore confidence, and continue facing work demands with a more stable mind. This is evident in the following interview excerpts:

“When I do not know who to ask for help, I turn to God first.” (P3)

“Prayer has become my support. Being far from family and in a new place full of challenges, prayer is what keeps me strong.” (P8)

“When I feel pressured, I take time to calm down and pray... it makes me feel stronger and more confident that every challenge has meaning.” (P10)

3.2.4. Perseverance

P7, P10, and P12 relied on perseverance when they faced difficulties during the early stage of teaching. Their responses suggest that perseverance was reflected in their effort to continue despite stress, tiredness, and disappointment. Instead of viewing these challenges as a reason to stop, they saw them as part of the learning and adjustment process in the profession. This is shown in the following interview excerpts:

“I feel tired and sometimes feel like I cannot go on, but I tell myself not to stop. I chose this path, so I have to continue, even if slowly.” (P7)

“I was very stressed and even felt like stopping. But when I thought again, I had come this far... it would be a waste to give up because of temporary stress.” (P10)

“I always see myself as still in the learning process... all this is part of the journey. If I feel like a failure too quickly, I do not give myself the chance to grow.” (P12)

Overall, the findings indicate that novice teachers experienced PPGB 2.0 as a process shaped by the interaction between school-based support and personal coping resources. External support, particularly through mentor care and school community assistance, provided reassurance, practical help, and a sense of belonging during the early phase of teaching. At the same time, intrinsic support enabled novice teachers to manage pressure, restore emotional balance, draw on inner strength, and sustain their commitment to the profession. From this perspective, adjustment during the early stage of teaching did not depend solely on the formal structure of mentoring, but on how relational support and self-regulatory coping worked together in everyday school practice. This suggests that PPGB 2.0 became meaningful when formal mentoring was translated into supportive relationships and when novice teachers were able to interpret challenges as part of their professional growth. Thus, the experience of PPGB 2.0 can be understood as a dynamic adjustment process in which external support and intrinsic resources jointly contributed to novice teachers' capacity to continue adapting within the profession.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that novice teachers experienced PPGB 2.0 not merely as a formal induction program, but as a support ecology enacted through everyday relationships and personal coping practices. Although external support and intrinsic support are presented as separate themes for analytic clarity, participants' accounts indicate that they were closely interconnected in practice. External support appeared to reduce uncertainty, legitimize help-seeking, and provide emotional reassurance, whereas intrinsic support enabled novice teachers to regulate emotion, recover from daily strain, and continue engaging with professional demands. Read through the lens of early-career adjustment and resilience, this pattern suggests that novice teacher adaptation is shaped not only by formal induction structures, but also by the interaction between contextual support and self-regulatory processes. More specifically, external support appeared to reduce immediate emotional load and legitimize help-seeking, while intrinsic coping enabled novice teachers to remain receptive to mentoring and collegial support in everyday practice.

The theme of external support indicates that what made PPGB 2.0 meaningful for participants was not merely the formal assignment of a mentor, but the relational quality through which mentoring was enacted. As several previous studies [23]–[25] similarly observed, early-career mentoring becomes more meaningful when it includes emotional reassurance, practical assistance, and conditions that support trust and regular interaction. In the present study, affective mentor support, reflected in empathy, reassurance, acceptance, and calm guidance, appeared to transform mentoring from procedural oversight into emotionally credible support. In addition, the findings suggest that support was not confined to the mentor-mentee dyad. Administrative concern and peer assistance also formed part of the wider support environment, indicating that in the PPGB 2.0 context, mentoring may function as a broader school-based support arrangement rather than as a solely individual relationship. This interpretation is also consistent with the wider school-based support patterns [31]–[33], [63].

This point is important because some studies have described early-career induction as shaped by isolation or by compliance-oriented mentoring when institutional requirements overshadow relational support. Briscoe and Robinson [20] emphasized the emotional strain of early-career teaching, whereas other studies [26], [27] showed that mentoring quality depends heavily on institutional conditions and mentor preparation. The present study suggests a somewhat different pattern. In these school settings, formal program expectations did not appear to displace relational care. Rather, mentoring seemed to become meaningful when program structure and interpersonal responsiveness were present together. This does not suggest that PPGB 2.0 will operate in the same way across all schools. Instead, it indicates that the value of a formal induction program may depend on how school actors enact it as supportive everyday practice. In this regard, the findings contribute to mentoring research by suggesting that the effectiveness of formal induction may be mediated by the relational climate of the school in which the program is implemented.

The theme of intrinsic support further shows that novice teachers were not passive recipients of support. Personal recovery practices, regulated emotional release, spirituality, and perseverance functioned as self-regulatory resources through which participants restored balance and sustained professional continuity. This interpretation is consistent with work showing that emotional regulation, self-care, and reflective routines can help teachers manage professional demands and remain engaged in their work. For example, previous studies [34]–[36] emphasized the role of emotional management and well-being practices in sustaining teachers' functioning. Besides that, some of the reflective and restorative practices described by participants resonate with the structured reflective approach discussed by Lee and Chae [64] and the contemplative professional practices described by McCaw [65]. In the present study, however, these practices did not appear as detached private responses to stress. Rather, they seemed to serve a professional function by helping novice teachers regain the emotional steadiness needed to continue teaching, thereby reflecting forms of everyday resilience rather than withdrawal from professional demands. This reading is also broadly consistent with several studies [66], [67], whose work likewise indicates that early-career resilience is often sustained through the management of everyday emotional challenge.

For some participants, spirituality appeared to provide meaning, continuity, and direction when pressures could not be resolved immediately. In this study, it functioned as a form of meaning-oriented coping within a broader self-regulatory process. This interpretation is also compatible with Schwalm *et al.* [68] who suggest that spirituality or religiosity can function as a resilience-related resource and can support meaning-making in the face of difficulty. Perseverance, in turn, was sustained not only by endurance, but also by a sense that present difficulty formed part of a longer process of professional growth. In this respect, work on teacher buoyancy, persistence, and grit provides a relevant interpretive frame for understanding how novice teachers continue functioning under pressure. Tang *et al.* [66] linked buoyancy to teachers' capacity to remain steady amid everyday challenge, while DiNapoli [69] and Solhi *et al.* [70] highlighted the importance of persistence, inner commitment, and grit-related resources for maintaining professional continuity under pressure. In the present study, these resources did not replace external support. Instead, they

appeared to work alongside it, enabling novice teachers to draw on available support while also managing the emotional residue of early-career demands.

Taken together, the study advances understanding of mentoring in teacher development by suggesting that the significance of PPGB 2.0 lies not only in its formal mentoring structure, but in how that structure becomes meaningful through the interaction between relational support and personal coping. The contribution of the study is therefore not simply the identification of two themes, but the indication that novice teacher adjustment may be better understood as a dynamic process in which institutional arrangements, school relationships, and self-regulatory practices mutually reinforce one another. Compared with prior studies that often examine mentoring as a dyadic relationship or a formal induction feature, the present study suggests that mentoring under PPGB 2.0 is better understood as a school-mediated support process that operates together with novice teachers' self-regulatory coping.

For practice, this suggests that strengthening induction requires attention not only to mentor appointment, but also to mentor preparation, collegial inclusion, and school-level conditions that make support accessible in everyday work. This implication resonates with recent school-based wellbeing implementation research, which shows that teachers' confidence in engaging with wellbeing related responsibilities is strengthened when support is scaffolded through accessible resources, collaborative networks, and evidence-based guidance [71]. In the present study, this point is reflected in the way affective mentor support, collegial assistance, and personal coping practices worked together to help novice teachers remain emotionally steady while adapting to professional demands. This implies that the value of mentoring lies not only in assigning a mentor, but in creating school conditions under which relational support and personal coping can reinforce one another in daily practice. It also points to the value of reflective and restorative spaces that help novice teachers manage emotional strain while sustaining professional commitment. These implications should, however, be read as contextually situated, as the study is grounded in one district and draws primarily on self-reported accounts. Future research could use longitudinal qualitative designs to examine how external and intrinsic forms of support evolve over time and how their interaction may differ across school settings.

5. CONCLUSION

Mentoring remains an important part of early career teaching, yet understanding of how it is experienced in everyday school settings remains limited, particularly in relation to PPGB 2.0. This study examined how novice teachers experience PPGB 2.0 in schools in Miri District, Sarawak. The findings suggest that the significance of mentoring in the early phase of teaching lies not only in formal program arrangements, but also in the way support is experienced through external support, such as mentor relationships and the wider school environment, as well as intrinsic support, reflected in personal efforts to remain steady under pressure. Taken together, these findings indicate that novice teacher adjustment under PPGB 2.0 is shaped through the interaction between relational support and personal coping, rather than through formal mentoring structures alone.

This study contributes to current understanding by showing that mentoring under PPGB 2.0 may be better understood not only as a formal induction feature or dyadic mentor-mentee relationship, but also as a school-mediated support process that works together with novice teachers' self-regulatory coping during early-career adjustment. In practical terms, the study indicates that induction programs should not focus only on mentor appointment and procedural implementation. Greater attention should be given to mentor preparation in listening, emotional support, and relational sensitivity, as well as to school-level conditions that support collegial inclusion, practical assistance, and accessible day-to-day support for novice teachers. These implications are also relevant at policy level because they suggest that the effectiveness of induction depends not only on program design, but also on the quality of support enacted in daily school life.

At the same time, the study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. It is grounded in one district and relies primarily on self-reported accounts from novice teachers. The findings should therefore be interpreted as contextually situated rather than broadly generalizable. Future research could extend this work through longitudinal qualitative designs, comparative studies across districts or school types, and studies that include mentors and school leaders more explicitly. Such research would provide a fuller understanding of how mentoring relationships, school-based support processes, and personal coping resources develop over time during the early phase of the teaching profession.

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This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

The authors have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The study has received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee Sultan Idris Education University with reference number UPSI/PPI/PYK/ETIKA(M)/Jld.18 (437).

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author [MMMZ]. The data, which contain information that could compromise the privacy of research participants, are not publicly available due to certain restrictions.

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