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A Longitudinal Reflection on the Mentoring Experience of a Teacher of Disabled Children

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ABSTRACT

Teachers of children with special educational needs work in classrooms marked by behavioural complexity, emotional intensity and high instructional demands. Yet opportunities for sustained professional development are often limited due to workload pressures and the high cost of specialised training. Although mentoring is increasingly recognised as a practical and cost-effective alternative, existing research has largely focused on short-term outcomes or programme effectiveness, offering limited insight into teachers' lived experiences of mentoring as they unfold over time. This study reports on a qualitative longitudinal single-case study that examined the lived experience of a special-needs teacher who participated in a 12-week reflective mentoring programme. The study aims to examine how mentoring shaped the teacher's professional learning and development over time, with particular attention to emotional regulation, pedagogical judgement and professional identity formation. Data were collected from weekly reflective logs, narrative accounts and mentoring documentation across five mentoring phases. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis guided the coding process, while Schön's Reflective Practitioner Theory informed interpretation of reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action over time. The findings demonstrate a clear developmental progression from early emotional turbulence to growing clarity, adaptive judgement and strengthened professional identity. Across the mentoring phases, mentoring functioned as an emotional and cognitive anchor that supported reflective sense-making, strategic experimentation and identity reconstruction. Overall, the study highlights mentoring as a meaningful and sustainable form of support for special educational needs teachers, demonstrating its potential to foster sustained professional learning and development within emotionally demanding classroom contexts.

Keywords:

Longitudinal mentoring; reflective practice; special educational needs teachers; professional learning and development; reflective mentoring

1. Introduction

Teachers working with children who have special educational needs face demands that extend well beyond typical classroom practice [1]. As classrooms become increasingly diverse and

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behaviourally complex, these teachers are required to continually refine their professional competencies in order to respond to wide-ranging emotional, behavioural and instructional needs. Despite the clear necessity for continuous professional development, opportunities for meaningful and sustained training remain limited. Heavy teaching loads, administrative responsibilities and the high costs associated with specialised courses (e.g. fees, travel and the need for replacement staff) frequently restrict these teachers' access to ongoing learning opportunities [2]. These constraints have compelled schools and education authorities to seek more practical, accessible and cost-efficient approaches to teacher development that can be embedded within everyday professional practice.

One approach that has gained increasing attention within this context is mentoring. Existing studies suggest that mentoring can serve as a strategic and affordable form of professional development, particularly for teachers operating in complex and demanding environments [3, 4]. Beyond the transmission of knowledge, mentoring provides a relational and reflective space in which teachers can examine their experiences, process emotional responses and refine their professional identities [4]. For special educational needs teachers, whose daily work involves behavioural unpredictability, emotional labour and individualised instructional decision-making, this relational dimension is especially salient. Mentoring offers a form of support that allows teachers to feel heard and validated, while simultaneously strengthening resilience and pedagogical judgement.

Within special-needs education, mentoring therefore serves not only as an instructional support mechanism but also as a stabilising force that assists teachers in navigating the emotional and professional complexities of their work. The intersection of emotional intensity, behavioural challenges and adaptive instructional demands renders special educational needs teaching a uniquely complex professional domain. In such contexts, teachers often benefit from structured opportunities to pause, reflect and reassess their practice in a supportive environment. However, despite the growing recognition of mentoring as a valuable developmental tool, existing research remains limited in several important respects.

First, much of the mentoring literature is based on cross-sectional or short-term studies that capture teachers' perceptions at a single point in time, offering limited insight into how mentoring influences professional growth as it unfolds over longer periods. Second, many studies prioritise programme outcomes or mentor perspectives, with comparatively little emphasis on teachers' own lived experiences and reflective sense-making processes. Third, research focusing specifically on special educational needs contexts remains scarce, particularly studies that adopt a longitudinal, teacher-centred approach. As a result, there is limited empirical understanding of how mentoring supports special educational needs teachers' emotional regulation, pedagogical reasoning and professional identity development over time.

This gap is significant because special educational needs teachers operate in behaviourally intense and emotionally demanding environments where instructional decisions often require rapid interpretation, emotional self-regulation and adaptive responses. Without longitudinal, teacher-centred evidence, it remains difficult to design professional development initiatives that are both realistic and sustainable within such contexts. To address this gap, the present study examines the lived experience of a special educational needs teacher who participated in a structured 12-week reflective mentoring programme. Drawing on reflective logs, narrative accounts and mentoring documentation collected across five mentoring phases, the study explores how mentoring supported the teacher's emotional regulation, informed her behavioural and instructional decision-making, and contributed to the ongoing formation of her professional identity. By foregrounding the teacher's experience across time, the study seeks to illuminate how reflective mentoring functions as an ongoing developmental process rather than a one-off intervention. Accordingly, this study is guided

by the following research question: How does mentoring shape a special educational needs teacher's professional learning and development over time?

2. Literature Review

Professional development for teachers has long been recognised as a cornerstone for strengthening instructional quality, enhancing reflective judgement and supporting educators as they navigate the realities of today's classrooms. These needs become even more pressing for teachers working with children who have special educational needs. Unlike mainstream settings, special educational needs classrooms often involve students with significant behavioural challenges, distinct learning profiles and complex emotional needs [5, 6, 7]. This combination requires teachers to draw on a wider repertoire of strategies, patience and emotional sensitivity. Although specialised training programmes are frequently recommended, many special educational needs teachers struggle to access them due to limited time, competing workload demands and the considerable costs associated with professional courses or arranging for substitute teachers. These practical constraints have prompted schools and education authorities to look for professional development models that are sustainable, accessible and woven into teachers' everyday practice. However, much of the existing professional development literature continues to prioritise formal training structures and short-term interventions, offering limited insight into how professional learning is experienced as an ongoing and emotionally embedded process within special educational needs contexts.

One approach that has gained traction in recent years is mentoring [3, 4]. Unlike conventional workshops that take teachers out of their classrooms, mentoring allows learning to occur within the authentic environment where challenges actually unfold [8]. Through structured dialogue, demonstration of strategies and guided reflection, mentoring provides a developmental space that teachers can rely on regularly rather than occasionally. Research suggests that this form of support can strengthen teachers' confidence, sharpen their pedagogical reasoning and help them process the emotional demands of the work [9]. For special educational needs teachers, the value of mentoring extends beyond acquiring technical skills. It also lies in having someone to walk alongside them as they manage behavioural crises and make sense of emotionally taxing situations [10]. Mentoring therefore acts both as instructional scaffolding and as a form of emotional companionship; two dimensions that are often inseparable in special educational needs contexts. Nevertheless, many mentoring studies remain cross-sectional in nature or focus primarily on programme-level outcomes, providing limited understanding of how mentoring shapes teachers' learning, emotions and professional thinking as these develop over time.

To understand how mentoring supports this kind of growth, Schön's Reflective Practitioner Theory (1983) offers a particularly useful lens [11]. Schön proposes that professionals learn not only by applying existing knowledge but by reflecting on their actions during and after real events. Reflection-on-action, which occurs after an incident has passed, allows teachers to revisit their decisions, consider different interpretations and imagine better alternatives for the future. Reflection-in-action, however, happens in the moment itself when teachers must quickly read a student's cues and adjust their approach on the spot. These two forms of reflection, when encouraged systematically, help teachers build a deeper and more responsive professional repertoire. While Schön's framework has been widely applied to studies of teacher learning, its application within longitudinal mentoring research in special educational needs settings remains comparatively underexplored.

For special educational needs teachers, this reflective dimension is central. Their work requires them to interpret subtle behavioural signals, modify routines almost instantly and balance

instructional decisions with emotional and moral judgement [12, 13]. Mentoring provides a structure in which these reflections can unfold safely and consistently. Through guided conversations, mentees analyse what triggered an incident, how they responded emotionally and what alternative strategies they might try next. Over time, these reflective cycles contribute to the development of adaptive expertise and help shape teachers' professional identities; qualities essential for sustaining long-term practice in behaviourally complex environments. However, much of the existing literature continues to privilege general teacher populations or preservice contexts, leaving the reflective lived experiences of in-service special educational needs teachers comparatively underrepresented.

Applying Schön's theory to the mentoring of special educational needs teachers therefore offers a nuanced understanding of how professional growth unfolds. Instead of viewing mentoring merely as a means of transferring knowledge, this perspective highlights how teachers gradually learn to trust their judgement, refine their strategies and make sense of their experiences. The mentee in the present study provides a clear example of this process. Her reflections across the five mentoring phases reveal how emotional grounding, strategic experimentation and ongoing sense-making can lead to greater autonomy and professional clarity. In this way, mentoring becomes not just a developmental tool, but a deeply personal space where teachers reinterpret challenges, rebuild confidence and strengthen their identity as special educational needs educators. By foregrounding a longitudinal, teacher-centred perspective, this study directly responds to gaps in the literature concerning how mentoring shapes professional learning and development within emotionally demanding educational contexts.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experience of a special-needs teacher who participated in a structured 12-week mentoring programme. Because the study aimed to follow the teacher's reflections and professional growth as they unfolded over time, a qualitative longitudinal approach was appropriate. This allowed the researcher to observe how her emotional responses, decision-making and reflective habits shifted across the 12-week programme. Guided by Schön's Reflective Practitioner Theory, the study focused on capturing both *reflection-on-action* and *reflection-in-action* as they emerged within the mentoring relationship. The case study design enabled this process to be examined within the teacher's real classroom context, rather than through isolated, one-off observations. The single-case design was therefore intentionally selected to support an exploratory and interpretive examination of developmental processes that may be less visible in larger-sample or cross-sectional studies. Rather than seeking statistical generalisation, the study aimed to generate rich, context-sensitive insights that contribute to theoretical and analytical understanding of mentoring within special educational needs settings.

The participant was a special-needs teacher from a primary special education school who volunteered to take part in the mentoring programme as part of her ongoing professional learning. Over the 12 weeks, she documented her experiences through reflective logs, weekly reports and short narrative accounts describing classroom incidents. These written records formed the primary dataset, offering insight into her emotional state, instructional choices and reflective interpretations across the five mentoring phases. The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis [14], which involved repeated reading, coding, generating and reviewing themes, and refining them to reflect the teacher's developmental progression. Schön's theory informed data interpretation by guiding the identification and interpretation of reflective patterns, particularly the distinction between *reflection-on-action* and *reflection-in-action* as they emerged across the mentoring phases.

In this way, the theoretical framework supported a longitudinal reading of how different forms of reflection evolved throughout the mentoring process.

To ensure trustworthiness, several strategies were employed. The use of multiple data sources enabled triangulation, while the week-to-week engagement provided prolonged involvement with the participant's experiences. Reflexive memos supported transparency during analysis, and informal member checking ensured that interpretations aligned with the participant's intentions. Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, informed consent was secured and pseudonyms were used to safeguard confidentiality. Given the researcher's close engagement with the data, reflexive awareness was maintained throughout the study to critically consider how assumptions, positioning and interpretive decisions may have shaped the analytical process.

4. Findings

Guided by the research question, the findings illustrate how mentoring progressively shaped the mentee's professional learning and development over time, as reflected in her emotional regulation, reflective judgement and evolving professional identity across five mentoring phases. The findings capture how the mentee's thinking, emotions and instructional decisions shifted gradually across 12 weeks of mentoring. When viewed as a whole, the five phases reflect a journey from emotional overwhelm to growing clarity, and eventually to a more confident sense of professional identity. This developmental progression aligns closely with Schön's view of learning as a reflective process shaped by experience over time. Collectively, these phases illustrate a movement from reactive emotional coping towards more deliberate, reflective and self-directed professional judgement.

4.1 Phase 1 (Weeks 1 – 2): Beginning with emotional turbulence and opening space for reflection

The first two weeks of mentoring revealed just how emotionally stretched the mentee felt in her daily work with disabled children. She frequently described feeling nervous and exhausted, especially after episodes of shouting, refusal or sudden behavioural escalation. These experiences left her unsure whether she was coping "well enough" as a teacher. The early mentoring sessions, however, created a safe space for her to voice these feelings without judgement. Through reassurance and gentle guided reflection, she began recognising that the emotional turbulence she experienced was not a personal flaw but an expected part of navigating special-needs classrooms. As her sessions ended each week, she reported feeling calmer and more grounded, suggesting that emotional stabilisation was a necessary starting point before deeper reflective work could take place. Analytically, this phase represents a shift from self-doubt and emotional overload towards initial emotional regulation, where validation and reframing enabled the mentee to reinterpret her experiences with greater self-compassion.

4.2 Phase 2 (Weeks 3 – 4): Gaining insight into strengths while recognising structural pressures

By the third and fourth weeks, the mentee was able to shift from emotional survival toward clearer self-understanding. She identified patience, empathy, calmness and attentiveness to children's needs as strengths that supported her practice. At the same time, she became more aware of external pressures such as numerous school activities, limited preparation time and the general exhaustion that accompanies special educational needs teaching. Mentoring conversations encouraged her to organise these thoughts more systematically, helping her distinguish between what she could control and what stemmed from broader structural demands. Her reflections during

this phase often referenced gratitude and reassurance, showing that mentoring helped her regain balance while making sense of the complex realities of her work. This phase reflects a cognitive shift from internalised self-blame towards a more differentiated understanding of personal capability and contextual constraint, marking an early reframing of professional self-perception.

4.3 Phase 3 (Weeks 5 – 8): Experimenting with strategies and developing reflective judgement

Weeks 5 to 8 marked a noticeable shift as the mentee began experimenting actively with different strategies. She tried prioritisation techniques such as “working smart,” used Individual Behaviour Plans, introduced visual schedules and refined her communication with students through softer cues, de-escalation techniques and positive reinforcement. Her reflective notes indicate that she was becoming more aware of the need to tailor interventions to individual students rather than expecting uniform responses. She observed that what worked well for one child sometimes had little effect on another. This ability to adjust in real time signals the emergence of Schön’s “reflection-in-action.” The mentoring sessions during these weeks helped her connect these day-to-day adjustments with broader patterns, reinforcing her sense of agency in making thoughtful instructional decisions. Here, reflective activity extended beyond emotional processing towards purposeful pedagogical experimentation, indicating growing confidence in exercising professional judgement within real-time classroom conditions.

4.4 Phase 4 (Weeks 9 – 10): Applying and evaluating strategies in real classroom conditions

In Weeks 9 and 10, the mentee put a token reward system into practice to support self-regulation and task engagement. Although the initial response from students was encouraging, the effects faded quickly with children becoming restless after several minutes. Instead of interpreting this as a failure, the mentee evaluated the strategy with honesty and maturity, noting where it worked and where it fell short. She rated it as moderately effective and acknowledged the need to refine or diversify her approaches. Her reflections suggest a growing comfort with analysing limitations rather than feeling discouraged by them. The mentoring sessions gave her affirmation and motivation to keep testing and adjusting strategies, reinforcing the understanding that meaningful behavioural change often requires repeated iterations. This phase indicates a further cognitive and emotional shift, as the mentee demonstrated increased tolerance for uncertainty and adopted a more evaluative, less self-critical stance towards instructional outcomes.

4.5 Phase 5 (Weeks 11 – 12): Integrating Learning and Reconstructing Professional Identity

The final two weeks showed how the various strands of emotional regulation, strategic experimentation and reflective sense-making began to converge. The mentee reported feeling more confident in handling behavioural incidents and more emotionally steady in her day-to-day interactions with students. She also felt better equipped to choose and adapt strategies based on the needs of each child. Importantly, she also expressed a desire for more frequent mentoring sessions, signalling that she recognised mentoring not only as guidance but as a form of emotional and professional anchoring. This final phase highlights the strengthening of her professional identity as a reflective and resilient special educational needs teacher. Analytically, this phase represents identity consolidation, where the mentee began to view herself not merely as coping with challenges, but as a capable professional able to navigate complexity with confidence and reflective intent.

Across the twelve weeks, the mentee moved from a place of uncertainty toward one of increasing clarity and confidence. Her journey reflects a coherent pattern: emotional grounding (Weeks 1–2), clearer self-understanding (Weeks 3–4), strategic experimentation (Weeks 5–8), practical evaluation (Weeks 9–10), and identity consolidation (Weeks 11–12). Mentoring played a central role in supporting this development by providing space for reflection, emotional recalibration and deeper pedagogical insight. Taken together, the findings underscore mentoring as a meaningful and contextually grounded form of professional development for teachers of disabled children. Taken together, the findings underscore mentoring as a meaningful and contextually grounded form of professional development for teachers of disabled children, illustrating how mentoring supports sustained professional learning and development rather than isolated or short-term improvement.

5. Discussions

The findings of this study reveal a clear developmental journey in which the mentee gradually strengthened her emotional stability, pedagogical judgement and professional identity over the course of twelve weeks. Her progression closely mirrors Schön's Reflective Practitioner Theory, where learning is shaped through repeated cycles of thinking back on one's actions and making sense of challenges as they unfold in real time [11]. Specifically, the interpretation of the findings was guided by examining how the mentee engaged in reflection-on-action when revisiting classroom incidents and reflection-in-action when adapting strategies during ongoing teaching situations. When viewed longitudinally, the mentee's experience shows how sustained reflection can help teachers reinterpret difficulties, refine their strategies and slowly rebuild confidence in their professional capability. In relation to the research question, these findings illustrate how mentoring shaped the mentee's professional learning and development as an evolving process rather than a fixed outcome, unfolding progressively through interconnected emotional, cognitive and identity-related changes over time.

In the early part of the programme, mentoring served as an emotional anchor. The mentee entered the process carrying considerable stress and uncertainty, largely due to the unpredictable behaviours she navigated daily in her special-needs classroom. At the same time, engaging in mentoring was not without emotional difficulty, as revisiting challenging incidents occasionally intensified emotional discomfort before greater clarity and confidence emerged. Having a structured space to talk openly about these experiences helped stabilise her initial turbulence. During this phase, the mentor positioned herself primarily as a facilitative presence, offering attentive listening, emotional reassurance and non-directive prompts that encouraged the mentee to articulate and make sense of her experiences. This emotional grounding was further supported by spiritual coping, which the mentee drew upon to regulate stress and find meaning in difficult classroom situations. Such grounding enabled her to approach reflection more calmly and constructively. Consistent with the literature, this phase highlights how special educational needs teachers often experience high emotional labour and benefit from relational forms of support that validates both professional and emotional experiences [15, 16]. As her comfort with the mentoring process grew, she began to gain clearer insight into her own strengths, particularly her patience, empathy and sensitivity towards students, while also recognising the pressures imposed by school routines and workload expectations. This ability to distinguish personal qualities from external constraints reflects Schön's idea of reframing, where teachers start viewing situations from new, more constructive angles that restore a sense of agency. Importantly, this phase suggests that emotional regulation functions not merely as an outcome of mentoring, but a foundational condition that enables deeper reflective learning in emotionally demanding special educational needs contexts.

As the weeks progressed, the mentee began experimenting more actively with different behavioural and instructional strategies. This middle phase of the programme offered strong evidence of reflection-in-action, as she adjusted her approaches on the spot based on students' responses. Her acknowledgement that a technique effective for one child might not work for another signals an important shift towards flexible and context-sensitive practice; an emphasis well supported in special educational needs literature. Mentoring played a central role here by offering space to look back on these classroom moments, identify patterns and refine her decision-making [17]. Rather than prescribing specific solutions, the mentor adopted an interactional style centred on reflective questioning, prompting the mentee to analyse incidents, consider alternative responses and evaluate the reasoning behind her instructional choices. Rather than feeling at the mercy of challenging behaviours, she became increasingly confident in evaluating what worked, what did not and why. This stage illustrates how mentoring facilitates a transition from reactive classroom management towards more deliberate and adaptive pedagogical judgement, a key dimension of professional learning highlighted in the research question.

Towards the later weeks, the mentee's reflections demonstrated growing maturity in how she assessed her own practice. She was able to recognise partial successes and acknowledge limitations without viewing them as personal failings. This more balanced, less self-critical way of thinking indicates a deepening reflective stance. It also echoes existing research showing that mentoring helps teachers reframe setbacks as part of the learning process rather than as markers of inadequacy [18, 19, 20]. By the end of the programme, the mentee expressed stronger confidence, steadier emotional regulation and a clearer sense of who she was becoming as a teacher. This shift suggests that mentoring contributed not only to strategy development, but also to a more profound transformation of her professional identity. Rather than conceptualising identity development as a static outcome, the findings highlight identity reconstruction as a gradual, reflective process shaped by repeated sense-making across time.

Novelty and Contribution of the Study

This study contributes new insight to the mentoring literature by foregrounding the longitudinal depth of reflective mentoring within a special educational needs context. While existing studies often examine mentoring outcomes at discrete points or emphasise programme effectiveness, this research illuminates the developmental trajectory through which emotional regulation, reflective judgement and professional identity are progressively reshaped over time. By tracing how these dimensions interact across five mentoring phases, the study extends understanding of reflective practice beyond momentary reflection to sustained professional learning embedded in everyday classroom realities. In doing so, it offers empirical support for conceptualising mentoring as a process-oriented and emotionally grounded form of professional development for special educational needs teachers.

Taken together, the study underscores mentoring as a meaningful and contextually grounded form of professional development for special educational needs teachers. When built on reflective principles, mentoring provides the emotional reassurance, cognitive space and practical support necessary for teachers to navigate the behavioural and emotional complexities of their work. In this sense, mentoring becomes more than a skill-building exercise; it becomes a sustained partnership that helps teachers adapt, grow and maintain a resilient sense of purpose in demanding educational environments. However, it is important to acknowledge that the changes observed cannot be attributed solely to mentoring. Factors such as mentee's prior experience, personal motivation, workplace context and ongoing classroom exposure may also have contributed to her professional

growth over time. These considerations reinforce the value of interpreting the findings as analytically generalisable rather than statistically representative, consistent with the exploratory and longitudinal aims of the study.

6. Conclusions

This study explored the lived experience of a special-needs teacher engaged in a 12-week reflective mentoring programme, revealing how her emotional steadiness, pedagogical reasoning and sense of professional identity gradually strengthened over time. What began as a journey marked by uncertainty, stress, and self-doubt slowly unfolded into one of clearer judgement, more confident strategy use and renewed purpose. Using Schön's Reflective Practitioner Theory as the analytical lens, the findings show how structured, empathetic mentoring conversations, combined with opportunities to test and revise classroom strategies can help special-needs teachers make sense of their challenges and regain a sense of control in behaviourally complex environments. In doing so, the study offers a clear response to the research question by demonstrating how mentoring shapes professional learning and development as a dynamic and evolving process rather than a static outcome.

Theoretically, the study contributes to Schön's work by showing how reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action operate in the highly emotional, fast-moving context of special-needs teaching. While existing studies on reflective practice have highlighted its role in supporting teachers in emotionally challenging environments, much of this work focuses on general teacher stress, short-term reflective activities or non-mentoring contexts. By contrast, this study offers a longitudinal, mentoring-based perspective that illustrates how reflective cycles unfold over time alongside emotional regulation, pedagogical adaptation and identity development. In doing so, the study refines, rather than broadly extends Schön's framework by demonstrating how reflective practice is experienced and sustained within special educational needs settings. This longitudinal perspective adds depth to existing reflective practice literature by illuminating how emotional regulation, reflective judgement and identity reconstruction interact sequentially across time.

Methodologically, the study highlights the value of drawing on reflective logs and mentoring documentation as primary data sources. The week-by-week reflections allowed developmental changes to be seen with unusual clarity, demonstrating the strength of longitudinal qualitative approaches in capturing subtle shifts in teachers' confidence, decision-making and professional identity. This methodological approach offers a useful model for future studies seeking to examine how teachers grow over time rather than at isolated moments. Rather than aiming for statistical representativeness, this approach supports analytic and theoretical generalisation by offering in-depth insight into developmental processes that may be transferable to similar educational contexts.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that mentoring is more than a platform for sharing techniques. It is a meaningful form of emotional and professional support for teachers navigating difficult classroom realities. For special-needs teachers, whose work often involves intense patience, emotional sensitivity and rapid problem-solving, mentoring offers a safe space to process frustration, celebrate progress and build resilience. Schools and policymakers may therefore see value in integrating reflective mentoring into professional development frameworks, not only as a cost-efficient alternative to formal courses but as a long-term strategy to strengthen teacher well-being, classroom management capacity and retention in special-needs education. Viewed in this way, mentoring functions as an embedded and sustainable support mechanism rather than an episodic professional development intervention.

Despite its contributions, several limitations must be acknowledged. This study focused on a single teacher in one school, which naturally limits the extent to which the findings can be generalised. The reflections were self-reported and may have been shaped by selective memory or a desire to present oneself positively. In addition, the study did not include classroom observations or mentor interviews that might provide fuller triangulation of the data. Finally, the role of spiritual coping, which was prominent in this teacher's reflections may not translate directly to settings where cultural or religious practices differ. Moreover, the developmental changes observed in this study should not be attributed solely to mentoring, as individual characteristics, workplace context and ongoing classroom experience may also have influenced the teacher's growth over the twelve-week period. These limitations reinforce the importance of interpreting the findings as contextually situated insights rather than universal claims about mentoring effectiveness.

Future research should prioritise examining mentoring experiences across multiple special educational needs teachers and school contexts, as this would address the most critical limitation of the present single-case design and allow for comparative insights into mentoring trajectories. Building on this, longitudinal mixed-methods studies incorporating classroom observations, video-based reflection or mentor perspectives would offer a more comprehensive understanding of how reflective practice develops over time. Further research may also explore longer-term outcomes such as teacher resilience, retention and instructional quality in special educational needs settings. Given the role of spiritual grounding observed in this study, future work could additionally examine how culturally situated coping strategies intersect with mentoring and emotional labour in diverse educational contexts. Such work would further strengthen understanding of how mentoring can be designed to support sustained professional learning and development in emotionally demanding educational environments.

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