Teacher mentors' emotional experiences in mentoring pre-service primary school teachers during a school-based teaching internship

Trinh Thi Huong[1*], Phan Nhat Hao[2], Lu Hung Minh[3], Nguyen Thi Linh[4]

[1,3,4]Faculty of Preschool and Primary Education, School of Education, Can Tho University, Vietnam.
[2]Department of English Teaching Methodology, School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University, Vietnam.

Corresponding author: Trinh Thi Huong (*Email: thihuong@ctu.edu.vn*)

Abstract

Mentoring pre-service teachers is viewed as emotionally charged. In Vietnam, most studies have focused on mentees' experiences in their teaching internship, leaving a knowledge gap in understanding mentors' emotional experiences. This research, therefore, bridges this gap by investigating Vietnamese teacher mentors' emotional experiences in mentoring pre-service primary school teachers in a school-based internship in the Mekong Delta region. A qualitative case study, drawing from complexity theory, was designated to achieve its aim. Data was collected through two rounds of structured interviews with eight teacher mentors and subsequently analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings indicated that mentoring pre-service primary school teachers was emotionally charged. Participants experienced dynamic and complex emotions during the internship, including fluid expectations towards mentees' professional practices, uncertainty in instructional feedback and problem-solving, and openness to receptiveness in educational collaboration. At the end of this internship, participants expressed a sense of equifinality with their satisfaction in witnessing their mentees' professional growth. This research generated practical implications for stakeholders to acknowledge mentoring as emotionally complex. They should move toward mentoring models that equip mentors with socio-emotional intelligence training to ensure the quality of pre-service primary school teacher education.

Keywords: Complexity Theory, Emotional Experiences, Primary Teacher Education, Teacher Mentors, Teaching Internship.

1. Introduction

The high quality of teacher education is viewed as a critical determinant of educational success, particularly where teaching competencies must align with national-level reforms and international trends [1, 2]. Recognizing this imperative, Vietnam has enacted a series of policies aimed at enhancing teacher education and training. One of these efforts is Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW, advocating for a fundamental and systematic renovation of education and training in which the shift from content-based instruction to competency-based education is practiced. In alignment with the broader reform initiatives, Circular No. 11/2021/TT-BGDĐT mandates continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers and reinforces the notion that teacher learning is a lifelong endeavor. Additionally, Circular No. 18/2018/TT-BGDĐT, which seeks to establish professional standards for teachers, explicitly outlines core values required for effective professional teaching, including mentorship, reflective practices, and professional ethics before full-time teaching practices. In general, these documents collectively establish a regulatory framework that signifies the instructional aspects of teaching competencies of experienced teacher educators in mentoring pre-service teachers through real-life teaching experiences, particularly school-based teaching internships [3].

Mentoring pre-service teachers during school-based teaching internships is perceived as a crucial yet complex endeavor [4, 5]. Traditionally, mentoring has been conceptualized as a technical facilitation process in which experienced teacher mentors provide instructional assistance, model practices, and evaluate mentees' teaching performances [6]. Nonetheless, contemporary perspectives on teacher mentoring acknowledge that the mentoring process extends beyond knowledge transmission because it is intrinsically relational, dynamic, and emotionally taxing. The effectiveness of the mentoring process is contingent not only on pedagogical expertise but also on the emotional intelligence, interpersonal sensitivity, and adaptive strategies of teacher mentors [7]. While international and national studies have shed light on the emotional complexities of teacher mentoring, empirical investigations into the emotional experiences of teacher mentors in Vietnam remain scarce. The existing literature in Vietnam primarily focuses on mentoring models, policy implementation, and institutional challenges, whereas the personal emotional experiences of teacher mentors during school-based internships are neglected. This research, therefore, grounded in complexity theory, seeks to address this gap by providing an in-depth exploration of the emotional experiences of teacher mentors as they navigate the complexities of mentoring pre-service primary school teachers in an eight-week school-based internship. In reaching its aim, this research aims to contribute to more critical and holistic insights into the roles of teacher mentors' emotions in shaping the quality of primary school teacher education in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teacher Mentors: Who are They?

The transition from pre-service teacher preparation to full-time teaching practices is marked by student teachers' significant challenges comprising classroom management-related obstacles, pedagogical uncertainties, and struggles with professional identity formation [8]. Confronted with these unpredictable difficulties, teacher mentoring emerges as a critical mechanism in aiding pre-service teachers to navigate the complexities and dynamism of teaching during their learning experiences [9]. Teacher mentors are defined as experienced teacher educators who provide structured guidance, professional assistance, and institutional socialization to pre-service teachers. Their professional role extends beyond instructional mentoring to include affective and socio-cultural dimensions. They critically serve to foster pre-service teacher resilience, reflective practices, and long-term professional commitment and trajectories [10]. Effective mentoring is a dynamic and reciprocal process that both enhances teacher mentees' pedagogical competencies and contributes to teacher mentors' professional renewal and leadership competency development [11-13].

During their mentoring experiences, teacher mentors hold a critical role in nurturing pre-service teachers in customizing various elements of professional teaching and learning to meet their developmental needs and expectations [11]. Furthermore, teacher mentors have to collaboratively connect with faculty supervisors from tertiary institutions to ensure the constructive alignment between theoretical knowledge and real-life application. This dynamic fosters professional growth and career enhancement for all stakeholders, particularly teacher mentors, contributing to broader frameworks of learning and continuing development [14]. Effective mentoring requires a deep-seated comprehension of mentees' learning processes, which involves intuitive and experiential knowledge. In addition, an essential component of successful mentorship is the mentors' familiarity with the institutional context in which the mentoring occurs. This helps ensure that mentoring support is significantly relevant and contextually appropriate [15, 16].

According to Parsloe [17], qualified teacher mentors possess several "golden" qualities. Interestingly, these qualities align with the attributes of successful language teachers, particularly those who exhibit strong leadership and mentoring capabilities. They include:

A) Pedagogical expertise - Teacher mentors are knowledgeable teacher educators capable of fostering pre-service teachers' independent learning and providing professional assistance without excessive intervention.

B) Inspirational guidance - Teacher mentors are strong motivators who actively support program objectives and diligently fulfill their responsibilities in guiding pre-service teachers.

C) Professional stability - Teacher mentors are experienced individuals in their professional community and demonstrate self-efficacy in specific roles without perceiving pre-service teachers as competitors or adversaries.

D) Institutional commitment - Teacher mentors acknowledge their mentoring as a fundamental responsibility in their organization and integrate it into professional practices.

E) Organizational influences - Teacher mentors' seniority enables them to collaborate with institutional structures, uphold organizational values, and improve mentees' access to needed information and knowledge.

F) Effective negotiation competencies - Teacher mentors have interpersonal and mediation-related competencies to establish effective relationships and resolve conflicts.

2.2. Teacher Mentors' Experiences during School-based Teaching internships

Professional experiences are recognized as vital cornerstones of teacher education, offering pedagogically sound approaches that integrate educational theories with transparent and real-world teaching practices. As Schön [18] stated, professional experiences create a practice-based context through which people learn via hands-on activities, although their work is likely to fall short of real-world standards. Among these experiences, school-based teaching internships stand out as one of the most important components. They facilitate pre-service teachers in familiarizing themselves with the realities of classroom teaching. Conceptualized as a designated learning period, school-based internships compel pre-service teachers to observe, engage, and reflect within their authentic teaching environment. Its ultimate objective is to bridge gaps between theory and real-life application, which may alter their conception of teaching as a profession.

During these internships, mentors are hoped to guide pre-service teachers constructively. Teacher mentors enable pre-service teachers to identify, analyze, and assess instructional behaviors and strategies, ultimately enhancing students' learning outcomes Aydın and Ok [19]. Coffey [20] characterized mentoring pre-service teachers as relations facilitating learning opportunities because as teacher mentors share their knowledge and skills, pre-service teachers, in turn, are expected to apply these insights into their professional practices. The significance of pre-service mentoring lay in its position in acclimating future teachers to the classroom environment and broader contexts, polishing their professionalism for teaching profession.

Teacher mentoring serves a crucial role in teacher education, particularly during school-based teaching internships. However, needed emphasis has not been placed on structured support for teacher mentors in mentoring pre-service teachers during school-based teaching internships [21]. Teacher mentors, despite their personal experiences in real-world teaching, learners' engagement, classroom management, and school-related administration, receive little formal training prior to being assigned to teacher mentors. This lack of preparation-in-advance makes it hard to establish a consistent mentoring approach for pre-service teachers [22]. In developing countries, school-based mentoring typically consists of brief meetings where school principals and relevant administrators discuss key aspects of the internship, such as instructional methods, supervision, assessment procedures, and evaluation criteria. However, limited systematic training programs equip mentors with the skills and competencies needed for effective mentorship. As a result, teacher mentors and pre-service teachers encounter a huge amount of challenges which affect the overall quality of mentorship [16]. Particularly, mentors struggle with excessive workload, poor coordination with tertiary supervisors, individual obstacles in guiding pre-service teachers with limited pedagogical knowledge, and, in some circumstances, resistance from pre-service teachers towards teaching responsibilities. Tensions between mentors and pre-service teachers may arise unexpectedly due to personal differences in expectations, philosophies of life, and communication barriers [23]. Moreover, some mentors find it highly challenging to keep up with contemporary teaching methodologies, limiting their ability to provide relevant and up-to-date professional help. Critically, further difficulties originate from pre-service teachers' perceptions of being overburdened with additional tasks to support their teacher mentors. The quality of feedback in mentoring sessions is another concern. Mentors receive inconsistent, vague, and even contradictory feedback from stakeholders. This drawback possibly hinders their competencies to improve mentoring-related strategies effectively [24].

2.3. Related Studies

Teacher mentoring during teaching internships has commonly been investigated in different educational settings around the world and in Vietnam. These studies highlight the critical aspects of teacher mentors as stakeholders and the mentoring roles during school-based teaching internships.

Research has revealed various challenges and complexities associated with mentoring practices. Firstly, Gillett-Swan and Grant-Smith [25] explored teacher mentors' well-being during a teaching internship. Their findings indicated that teacher mentors and pre-service teachers shared similar well-being concerns, including working fatigue, institutional workload burdens, and ethical-related dilemmas. Many mentors felt overlooked regarding self-care and support because the focus remained on assisting pre-service teachers and meeting institutional expectations. This study shed light on the interconnected nature of mentor and pre-service teacher well-being and called for a more holistic research approach to professional experiences. Moreover, Suhandra and Ariawan [26] investigated the experiences of five English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) student teachers regarding the roles of teacher mentors during their school-based internship. The study found that most participants perceived their teacher mentors positively due to the guidance, motivation, and feedback provided. However, participants reported a lack of adequate support and constructive feedback. Additionally, this study identified key student teachers' challenges consisting of classroom management difficulties and insufficient preparation for teaching. Li, et al. [27] adopted complexity theory to examine the internship experiences of pre-service EFL teachers through a qualitative case study. Features of the learning-to-teach process were uncovered with complexity, dynamism, and particularly self-organization. The findings contributed empirically and theoretically to teacher education and enact implications for stakeholder-mentor collaboration-based teacher education. Lately, Mpate [28] examined challenges affecting mentoring in Tanzanian secondary schools during an internship. Findings identified some key barriers consisting of inadequacy in communication and understanding of mentoring roles, ineffective mentor recruitment, the shortage of mentors' engagement, and misaligned expectations between mentors and mentees.

Within Vietnamese settings, mentoring practices have been examined in different educational contexts. Tran, et al. [29] examined teacher mentoring practices in a school-based internship and highlighted the benefits and challenges faced by EFL pre-service teachers. Despite mentoring being recognized as a vital reform in primary school-based professional experiences,

this study identified key obstacles such as a shortage of shared goals, conflicting teaching approaches between mentors and mentees, and inadequate mentor training. It called for a reconceptualization of mentoring practices within EFL internships and proposed a model focused on cultural-historical activity theory to enhance mentoring quality across different educational contexts. Additionally, Nguyen [30] extended complexity theory in pre-service teacher education by exploring the multidimensional influences shaping the internship experiences of EFL student teachers. Through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, it was found that internship experiences were shaped by complex interactions of student factors, curricular demands, resource constraints, and contextual influences. These dynamic and self-organizing learning trajectories appreciated contextual influences on pedagogical decision-making competencies.

Even though these studies have provided valuable insights into teacher mentoring practices, most existing research has focused on mentor engagement, pre-service teacher experiences, and mentoring structures. Little attention has been given to the emotional dimensions of mentoring, particularly the emotional experiences of Vietnamese teacher mentors in mentoring pre-service primary school teachers during a school-based internship. Bridging this gap is considered crucial in contributing to a more in-depth comprehension of the roles of mentors' emotions in shaping the quality of pre-service primary teacher education in Vietnam.

2.4. Theoretical Framework Underpinning This Research

Complexity theory is adapted as the theoretical framework for this research. Theoretically, it establishes structured frameworks for exploring how social phenomena emerge spontaneously and develop in interconnected systems. It regards human beings' activities as occurring at the edge of chaos, in which a certain level of disequilibrium facilitates development and learning, yet not to the extent that it leads to complete social disorder. A system emerging in this theory, defined as a complex system, includes varied interdependent components that continuously interact and alter over time in response to shifting conditions. Importantly, these systems are embedded in larger systems while simultaneously containing smaller subsystems, forming a complex network.

One of the primary principles of complexity theory is its concentration on continuous transformation instead of static states [31]. The theory goes beyond traditional behaviorist and innatist explanations of human experiences. Rather than being solely shaped by external stimuli or determined by genetic predisposition, experiences are understood as the result of intricate, dynamic, and context-specific interactions between individuals and their environment. Additionally, Waldrop [32] introduced the idea of "life at the edge of chaos" to describe the adaptability of complex systems in maintaining a balance between stability and disruption. From a systems-thinking perspective, relationships take precedence over isolated elements. The roles of connectivity and equifinality are valued in complex systems where interactions between individuals generate self-organization and give rise to higher-order structures. Even small variations in initial conditions can lead to vastly different outcomes. Seemingly minor events within classrooms can trigger novel interactions and shape future learning experiences in unexpected ways [33].

This theory conformed well to the current research on teacher mentors' emotional experiences in mentoring pre-service primary school teachers during a school-based teaching internship. Mentoring is seen as not a straightforward and linear process but rather a complex endeavor shaped by dynamic interactions between teacher mentors, pre-service teachers, stakeholders, and the broader school environment. The mentoring process operates at the "edge of chaos," where uncertainty and challenges create opportunities for professional and emotional growth. Furthermore, emotional experiences in mentoring align with complexity theory's focus on interconnectedness and emergent processes. Viewing mentoring through the lens of complexity theory allows for an in-depth exploration of how mentors' emotional experiences evolve, how their relationships with pre-service teachers develop unpredictably, and how their mentoring process is influenced by broader systemic forces within the school environment.

Taking a holistic perspective of complexity theory into consideration, the current research tries to answer: What are the complex characteristics of teacher mentors' emotional experiences in mentoring pre-service primary school teachers during a school-based teaching internship?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

Qualitative approach was considered the most suitable option used for the current research because its objective was to investigate the emotional experiences of teacher mentors in mentoring pre-service primary school teachers during a school-based teaching internship. Creswell [34] asserted that qualitative research aims to comprehend social settings as experienced by research participants. Similarly, Fraenkel, et al. [35] argued that qualitative research is a contextualized process positioning the researcher within the real world. It involves a range of interpretive and tangible practices that bring social phenomena to light. These methods reshape the way the world is perceived by transforming it into various forms of representation.

In the current research, a qualitative case study was implemented to shed light on mentors' emotional experiences. According to Yin [36], a case study refers to a research design that serves to capture the nature of a current phenomenon within its original settings, even as the distinction between the phenomenon and its settings is not clearly conceptualized. Building on this concept, Creswell [34] viewed a case study as an investigation of a specific issue examined via one or multiple cases within a bounded framework. In this research, a case study serves to explore the multifaceted nature of human beings' emotional experiences. Additionally, mentoring is regarded as a social process, making it essential to preserve the holistic aspects of teacher mentors' real-life experiences and emphasize the natural contexts in which mentoring occurs.

3.2. Research Context and Participant

The current study occurred at three primary schools in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam. These schools served as internship institutions where pre-service teachers from a public university completed their eight-week teaching internship. During this internship, Vietnamese pre-service primary school teachers held accountability for various tasks. They were expected to prepare lesson plans, observe classes, demonstrate their teaching, grade assignments, and assist in extracurricular activities. They supported their internship subject department by attending regular meetings, sharing teaching-related materials, and contributing to lesson planning. At the school-wide level, they participated in school events, handled administrative tasks, and followed institutional regulations. In this study, the focus was exclusively on teaching-in-class-related aspects of the internship, excluding administrative tasks, extracurricular activities, or school-wide duties. Prior to the internship, each teacher mentor was assigned to supervise a group of student teachers by providing pedagogical knowledge and guidance, along with social, emotional, and behavioral support.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit research participants. This technique is commonly implemented in qualitative studies to gain more profound insights into a specific phenomenon and individuals with specific characteristics [35]. Furthermore, in case study research, the purposive sampling facilitates a focused examination of selected instances and serves to obtain information about a particular educational context. Participants in this research comprised of eight teacher mentors who directly mentored pre-service teachers in a school-based teaching internship. They were carefully selected based on three criteria. Firstly, participants had at least five years of teaching experience in the internship institution. Secondly, they had prior professional experiences in mentoring pre-service teachers during this internship. Finally, they voluntarily agreed to take part in this research and shared their emotional experiences regarding the supervision of pre-service teachers. Table 1 introduces the demographic-related information and differences of the recruited participants.

Table 1.
Participants' demographic-related backgrounds.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Years of teaching	Years of mentoring	Subject of mentoring
Participant 1	Female	27	4	2	Science
Participant 2	Female	35	13	7	Vietnamese
Participant 3	Female	39	15	10	Geography
Participant 4	Female	36	14	3	Vietnamese
Participant 5	Female	30	7	4	Maths
Participant 6	Male	35	13	7	History
Participant 7	Male	32	9	6	Science
Participant 8	Female	29	6	4	Geography

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The needed data for the current research was qualitatively collected from two rounds of structured interviews. The first round of interviews was conducted in the middle of the internship, and the second round took place at the end of the internship. All interviews were conducted at participants' respective workplaces to ensure a comfortable and familiar working setting, which facilitated open discussions among the interviewer and interviewees.

The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese with each individual participant, recorded with their consent, and subsequently transcribed to ensure accuracy and confirmability. Each interview lasted from 45 minutes to 55 minutes. The provided information was subsequently translated into English and securely stored on a password-protected personal computer to establish confidentiality and integrity.

Qualitative data from two rounds of interviews was analyzed via a thematic analysis process [37]. Round one allowed teachers to share their overall evaluation of their mentees' performances, while round two allowed them to reflect on the emotional aspects of their mentor-mentee relationship.

With two opportunities for sharing, participants had ample time to elaborate on how they felt about their mentoring process in a more detailed manner. After that, data analysis included six steps that systematically identified and interpreted specific patterns within the qualitative data (see Figure 1). Firstly, researchers familiarized themselves with the data by carefully reading and making preliminary notes.

Then, codes were generated by labeling significant data segments. These codes were then categorized into potential themes, which were subsequently reviewed for coherence to ensure that they accurately represented the qualitative data. After that, potential themes were refined and named to clearly define and annotate their meaning. Finally, researchers produced the report and presented the findings in a structured and meaningful way.
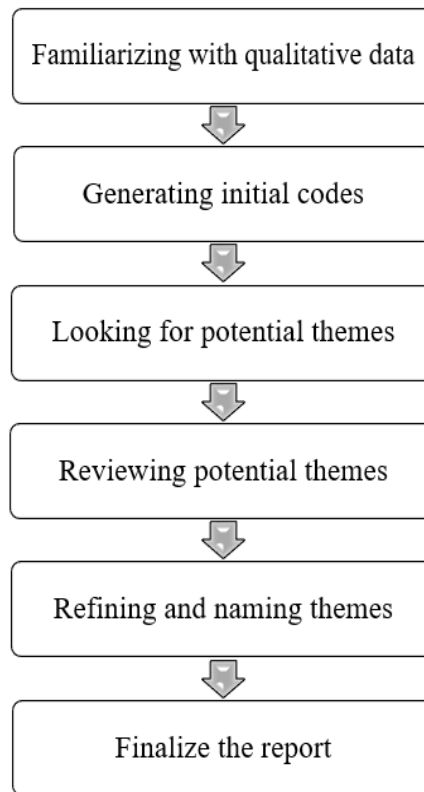
Figure 1.
The thematic analysis process implemented in this research.

To further enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the current research, the member-checking technique was employed, wherein interview transcripts were returned to all participants for their personal follow-up feedback and clarification. Furthermore, written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the data collection and analysis process to ensure adherence to ethical research standards throughout the entire research process. In addition, to establish the transferability of this research, a well-explained research methodology was provided for readers' reference. Subsequently, to avoid biases and ensure objectivity, direct quotes were carefully cited as themes and sub-themes were stated.

4. Results

Based on qualitative data collected from structured interviews and analyzed through thematic analysis, the findings revealed complex characteristics of participants' emotional experiences in mentoring pre-service primary school teachers during a school-based teaching internship. These features were associated with the pedagogical mentoring activities they delivered.

4.1. Fluid Expectations Towards Mentees' Professional Practices

Firstly, participants experienced a dynamic range of emotions during their mentoring process, impacted by mentees' professional progress, receptiveness to feedback, and general challenges of balancing multiple teaching-related responsibilities. Initially, one of the happiest aspects was witnessing mentees' transformation from inexperienced pre-service teachers to more confident and capable primary school teachers. Participant 1 mentioned,

> *"One of the most rewarding moments in my mentoring process during this year's teaching internship so far was that my mentees developed their confidence in teaching. At first, they seemed hesitant in some ways as they struggled with lesson planning and classroom management. After weeks of my feedback, they started handling lessons with ease, engaging students naturally. I felt very happy and excited seeing my students make step-by-step progress." (Participant 1, round-one interview)*

In addition to happiness and excitement, participants reported moments of their deep-seated pride as their mentees demonstrated excellent improvement in their practiced classroom. These moments occurred as mentees efficiently handled real-life classroom challenges and applied professional strategies learned during the mentoring process to teach better. Participant 4 shared a gratifying experience,

> *"Nothing can beat the feeling of seeing someone you have mentored crush it in a tough situation. Let me remember! I recall one mentee who had a hard time getting the kids engaged. Lessons felt dull as the kids' participation was almost nonexistent. As they tweaked their teaching style and tried out new strategies, they ended up running a lively class. More kids were involved. Watching these shifts happen made me beyond proud as a teacher mentor!" (Participant 4, round-one interview)*

Despite rewarding moments, some participants expressed their strong frustration and disappointment as some of their mentees showed a lack of individual engagement and willingness to improve themselves professionally. A key source of

disappointment stems from circumstances in which participants felt their guidance was disregarded, contributing to personal doubts about their impact. Participant 7 talked,

> *"It was frustrating sometimes as my mentees did not take feedback seriously. I invested much of my time in guiding them and offering constructive criticism; yet, sometimes, they seemed disengaged and even unwilling to change. I did not see their improvement. I started questioning whether my efforts were helpful or if they were just going through this internship without a real commitment to teaching." (Participant 7, round-one interview)*

Even though mentoring was rewarding for them, participants reported experiencing exhaustion due to their need to balance their own teaching-related responsibilities with the additional demands of guiding mentees. The heavy teaching workload, coupled with the pressure of ensuring mentees receive adequate assistance, contributed to feelings of being overwhelmed. Participant 8 noted down,

> *"There were times when it felt overwhelming. Managing my own teaching responsibilities in my school along with supporting many mentees was exhausting, especially on days when they required extra guidance. Balancing everything was not easy. I felt drained. I did not know how to cope with this circumstance in the most effective way and help mentees learn pedagogies better." (Participant 8, round-two interview)*

4.2. Uncertainty In Instructional Feedback and Problem-Solving

Along with their fluid expectations, participants' emotions were characterized by a profound sense of uncertainty throughout the mentoring process. One of the most disorienting aspects was the inconsistency in mentees' teaching and reactions to feedback. When their mentees demonstrated varying levels of progress, they sometimes showed great improvement, only to struggle the next day with the same challenges. Participant 6 described,

> *"On a day, my mentee surprised me with a lesson so well-structured that I momentarily forgot that they were still in training. They managed the class confidently, responded to kids' questions, and even improvised when things didn't go exactly as planned. It gave me hope that they were truly ready for this profession. But surprisingly, the very next day, they stood in front of the class, struggling to find the right words, unable to maintain kids' attention, and looking at me with quiet desperation. I never knew which version of them I would meet each morning." (Participant 6, round-two interview)*

In addition to fluctuating mentee performance, some participants encountered sudden and unpredictable classroom situations that required their immediate intervention. These moments, regarded as beyond their mentees' control, challenged participants to rethink their role, which was not just as mentors but as problem solvers in primary education environments. Participant 7 shared,

> *"I walked into the classroom expecting to observe a routine lesson, just like the ones we had carefully planned and rehearsed. Within the first five minutes, my mentee froze mid-sentence, overwhelmed by the sudden noise of the kids. Before I could intervene, a child burst into tears over a missing pencil, causing a chain reaction of distractions. Just when I thought things couldn't get more chaotic, the principal walked along the corridor for an observation. My mentee could not do anything more because he was so scared. At that time, I had to intervene." (Participant 7, round-two interview)*

Beyond the classroom, participants reported unanticipated emotional challenges in their relationships with mentees. Some mentees responded positively to their feedback, whereas others were too defensive to alter. This unpredictability in mentees' receptiveness created an emotional strain for mentors and difficulties in gauging their own effectiveness. Participant 2 reflected,

> *"I spent weeks getting my mentee ready for the ups and downs of managing a classroom, like keeping kids engaged and dealing with disruptions. They were doing fine, or so I thought until a whole new problem popped up with the form teacher. At first, it was just little disagreements over teaching styles, but before long, it turned into frustration over classroom rules. One day, after a tough lesson where a group of first graders ignored their instructions and ran wild, my mentee came to me in tears as she felt unappreciated. I hadn't wished to mentor them through not just classroom management but also handling tricky relationships." (Participant 2, round-two interview)*

Despite these challenges, some participants learned to enact uncertainty as an essential aspect of their mentoring process. Whereas it initially led to frustration and emotional fatigue, many claimed that navigating the unexpected ultimately strengthened their adaptability and mentoring resilience. Participant 8 wrote,

> *"My mentee had spent hours perfecting a geography-related lesson. I was excited to see it unfold. At first, everything seemed to be going well. As my mentee reached the climax of their demonstration, one naughty kid stood up, climbed onto a table, and started screaming loudly. The class erupted into laughter, and my mentee looked lost. I sat there, torn between stepping in or letting them handle it. I understood that mentoring roles did not involve having all the answers, but being ready for anything. Even in that process, mentors may feel emotionally satisfied or exhausted." (Participant 8, round-two interview)*

4.3. Openness to Receptiveness in Educational Collaboration

At the end of the internship, participants expressed a sense of acceptance as the most dramatic characteristic of their emotional experiences. Despite starting from divergent educational backgrounds, working with different mentees, and encountering various teaching environments, participants arrived at convergent emotional and professional realizations. Every participant had their own unique struggles, yet all eventually reached a stage of individual satisfaction in their own way. Participant 7 described,

"I have mentored different mentees over the past few years, and each one had a different starting point. Some were naturally confident in front of the class but lacked structure in their lessons. Others were well-prepared but too nervous to engage the kids. No matter where they started, they found their own way to become competent teachers. And, of course, I experienced different emotions with them all, but the same emotions of satisfaction at the end." (Participant 7, round-two interview)

In addition to individual differences among mentees, participants faced diverse challenges that, despite their differences, led them to similar emotional reflections. Some mentors navigated institutional constraints and struggled with balancing their own teaching responsibilities alongside mentoring. However, at the end of the internship, many realized that mentoring was truly a journey of emotional growth for both parties, mentors and mentees. Participant 5 reflected,

"Before the internship, I thought my role was simply to instruct and correct. But as time passed, I realized that mentoring was just as much about my own growth as it was about my mentee's. I started out thinking I was leading them, but in the end, we were both learning, adapting, overcoming challenges, and developing confidence together. No matter the struggles, we always arrived at the same realization: teaching is a continuous process of learning." (Participant 5, round-two interview)

Beyond continuing professional development, participants recognized that success in mentoring was not indicated by a single path but by the mentee's competencies to develop independence in teaching. Some mentees required constant reassurance, while others preferred a hands-off approach. Regardless of the mentoring styles implemented, participants saw their mentees transition into more self-sufficient and adaptable teachers. Participant 9 shared,

"I used to believe that there was a "best way" to mentor as a structured method that would work for everyone. Now, I realize that each mentee needs something different. One mentee needed constant guidance and asked questions at every step. Others preferred to figure things out on their own and sought advice only if needed. In the end, I felt the same sense of satisfaction with both of them as they grew into confident teachers. There exists no one-size-fits-all path to success, but the destination is worth it." (Participant 9, round-two interview)

Despite the diversity in mentees' learning processes of mentoring, participants also eventually arrived at a deep sense of fulfillment as they acknowledged that mentoring was not just about imparting knowledge but about shaping the next generations of teachers. They reflected that whereas the journey was dynamic and unpredictable, the outcome was both individually and socially significant. Participant 2 encapsulated,

"There were some times I wondered if all my effort was actually making an impact, and if my mentees were really getting what I was trying to teach them. By the end of the eighth week, I saw something progressive. They were running their lessons as I had expected. I mentored them in different ways, but I eventually came to one realization: they were ready. At that moment, every one of my struggles during the internship felt completely worth it." (Participant 2, round-two interview)

5. Discussion

This research illuminated the complex nature of teacher mentors' emotional experiences in mentoring pre-service primary school teachers during a school-based teaching internship. Their emotions were negotiated with the interconnections between participants and mentees. Three emerging themes deduced from their responses were associated with fluid expectations towards mentees' professional practices, uncertainty in instructional feedback and problem-solving, and openness to receptiveness in educational collaboration, showing how mentoring was regarded as an emotionally charged endeavor. As a result, it significantly impacted participants' emotional resilience, pedagogical philosophies, and the quality of primary school teacher education in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam.

Firstly, one of the most striking emotions is the dynamism of emotions that participants experienced throughout the internship. As the complexity theory assumes, dynamism refers to the ever-changing nature of a complex system in which multiple interacting elements continuously adapt to many contextual influences [32]. As experienced by participants, mentoring pre-service teachers was marked by continuous emotional flux, moving from happiness and pride to frustration and emotional depletion. Seeing mentees develop from hesitant novices into more competent teachers was regarded as one of the most fulfilling aspects of mentoring experiences. Along with these positive states, participants encountered disillusionment because their guidance was met with indifference. This emotional strain was compounded by demanding tasks, culminating in mental fatigue and emotional exhaustion. These findings reinforce that mentoring entails emotional labor, necessitating emotional resilience and sustained motivation for mentoring [8, 25, 28, 29].

Beyond the fluidity of emotions, participants reported a pervasive sense of uncertainty in instructional feedback and problem-solving throughout their mentoring journey. The erratic progress of mentees was a key challenge because some demonstrated commendable growth one day but regressed the next, making it more challenging for participants to anticipate and tailor their support accordingly. This finding resonates with complexity theory in the way that uncertainty stems from intricate interconnections within the system. This means that even with complete knowledge of its components, precise forecasting of upcoming states remains highly challenging, and small alterations can possibly lead to disproportionately large effects [33]. This finding also resonates with previous research stating that mentoring inculcates adaptability, crisis management, and professionalism-driven composure [8, 24]. Although uncertainty initially induced stress and anxiety, participants reported that over many cycles of teaching internships in which they were assigned as mentors, they reframed emotional uncertainty as a normal component of their mentoring. By enhancing emotion regulation to navigate the unforeseen, they cultivated their emotional resilience and pedagogical dexterity, which served to boost their mentoring competencies.

The most dramatic emotional characteristic of participants was openness to receptiveness in educational collaboration. This characteristic affirms that complex systems may reach identical final outcomes via multiple distinct pathways, regardless of starting conditions [31, 33]. This was linked to the recognition that whereas each participant embarked on a very different mentoring trajectory, they attained a shared emotional experience. With divergent emotional journeys, participants shared a common emotion at the end, which was their satisfaction with their mentees' teaching progress. Interestingly, participants described an unexpected transformation in their professional identity concerning the reciprocal nature of mentorship. These experiences fostered mutual learning by leaving participants with a renewed perspective on philosophies and mentoring roles. This finding is in line with previous research emphasizing that stakeholders, though encountering different ups and downs, shared the same sense of satisfaction at the end of each internship [12, 25, 30].

In a broader perspective, participants' emotional experiences exerted a profound yet often underestimated influence on the quality of primary school teacher education and training. Whereas mentoring in this school-based internship was intended to cultivate pre-service teachers' teaching competencies and professionalism, significant emotional burdens placed on teacher mentors raised critical concerns about the sustainability of current Vietnamese mentoring models. Without well-structured emotional scaffolding, participants were left vulnerable to burnout and disillusionment, which, in turn, compromised the overall quality of school-based internships and pre-service teacher education and training. More urgently, these emotional dynamics shaped and reshaped how participants guided their mentees, possibly leading to inconsistencies in mentoring approaches. As participants navigated their own emotional challenges, their mentoring styles fluctuated. This resulted in fragmented and uneven learning experiences for pre-service primary school teachers. Moreover, their openness to receptiveness in educational collaboration suggested that effective mentorship should not be predicated on predefined mentoring strategies but on pedagogical adaptability and socio-emotional intelligence. Neglecting these emotional complexities risked perpetuating disparities in mentoring practices, hindering the sustainable development of pedagogically competent primary school teachers.

6. Conclusion

This research generated in-depth knowledge regarding the emotional complexities experienced by Vietnamese teacher mentors in mentoring pre-service primary school teachers during an eight-week school-based teaching internship in the Mekong Delta region. These characteristics, in relation to fluid expectations towards mentees' professional practices, uncertainty in instructional feedback and problem-solving, and openness to receptiveness in educational collaboration, exemplified participants' navigation of their complex emotional landscapes. Despite emotional challenges, the research signified the transformative purposefulness of mentoring, not only for pre-service teachers as mentees but also for the teacher mentors themselves. The emotional highs and lows throughout this internship were conceived as a critical catalyst for teacher mentors' professional development, adaptive expertise, and more holistic self-reflections in order to ultimately ensure the quality of primary school teacher education within Vietnamese educational contexts.

These findings hold significant pedagogical implications for stakeholders. First and foremost, educational internship institutions and teacher education institutions should acknowledge that mentoring is an emotionally taxing and dynamic process. Given that mentors experience fluctuating emotions, well-structured support mechanisms should be established to aid them in navigating emotional labor more efficiently. Secondly, the inherent uncertainty of mentoring contributes to the necessity for more responsive training paradigms. Instead of adhering to available standardized mentoring models, internship institutions should train mentors with adaptability-driven approaches. These approaches may involve scaffolded mentoring techniques, situational problem-solving competencies, and training in socio-emotional intelligence to help teacher mentors respond better to the dynamic emotional challenges posed by mentees and even relevant stakeholders. Last but not least, rather than assuming that pre-service teachers are in need of identical professional assistance, mentors should be encouraged to tailor their mentoring strategies to accommodate each pre-service teacher's individual learning styles, professional aspirations, and pedagogical needs. Significantly, primary school teacher education programs should incorporate training modules that concentrate on mentorship differentiation and equip teacher mentors with pedagogical tools to assess mentees' progress holistically and cope with suitable levels of help, autonomy, and feedback. These proposed initiatives are intended to uphold excellence and drive continuous improvement in primary school teacher education in Vietnam.

7. Limitations and Suggestions

Despite this research providing some critical insights, some limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, this research's short-lasting time frame restricted its ability to capture the transformation of teacher mentors' emotions over a longer duration. Secondly, it did not account for the broader contextual influences, including institutional policies, national educational frameworks, and socio-cultural expectations, which possibly shaped teacher mentors' emotional responses. Additionally, whereas this research uncovered the emotional experiences of Vietnamese teacher mentors, it did not examine the reciprocal impacts of mentoring roles on their professional identity negotiation extensively. Finally, the effectiveness of existing mentor training programs in supporting emotional regulation and adaptive mentoring strategies was not taken into account.

The research proposes several suggestions for future research to enhance the understanding of mentorship-based dynamics in primary school teacher education. Firstly, longitudinal studies are needed to explore how teacher mentors' emotional resilience and pedagogical strategies stand out over multiple teaching internship cycles in primary internship institutions. These endeavors are more likely to provide insights into effective long-term mentoring practices and the sustainability of mentor engagement in pre-service primary school teacher training programs. Secondly, future research should examine the contextual influences on teacher mentors' emotional experiences. Because emotional responses to

mentoring possibly vary depending on institutional expectations, national educational policies, and socio-cultural norms, comparative empirical studies across demographic-related differences can enlighten how mentorship practices are impacted by broader socio-educational influences. In addition, future research should explore the reciprocal impacts of mentoring on teacher mentors' professional identity formation and negotiation. Comprehending negotiated professional identities through mentoring can assist primary school institutions in designing incentives to encourage experienced teachers to remain continually engaged in mentoring roles. Finally, intervention-based research should be carried out to investigate the effectiveness of mentor training programs that specifically address emotional regulation, pressure management, and even adaptive mentoring strategies. Furthermore, future research should provide evidence-based recommendations on how to optimize mentor preparation to ameliorate both mentors' and mentees' emotional experiences.

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