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Teachers' perceptions of cognitive coaching: impacts on self-efficacy, improvement and growth

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study explores Secondary school teachers' perceptions of how cognitive coaching enhances self-efficacy, supporting self-improvement and professional development. Research highlights a strong link between coaching and self-efficacy, with coaching fostering optimism, reflective growth, and improved teaching practices. This study examines how non-evaluative coaching observations and validation of new methods contribute to increased teacher confidence. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the study identifies key themes through coding and thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with eight secondary teachers in a school in Wales participating in a peer coaching programme. Four main themes emerged: (1) attitudes towards coaching, (2) its impact on teaching practices, (3) perceptions of self-efficacy, and (4) relationships with coach-coachees. Findings suggest that cognitive coaching enhances reflective practice, self-directed learning, and overall teacher efficacy. The study is relevant to both Primary and Secondary schools, providing insights into how a coaching model supports professional growth and enriches pedagogy. Additionally, it offers implications for leadership teams considering coaching as a sustainable, in-house professional development approach aligned with policy initiatives promoting schools as 'Learning Organisations'.

ARTICLE HISTORY



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KEYWORDS

Cognitive coaching; self-efficacy; autonomy; reflective practice; professional development

Practice points

- Schools should integrate structured coaching programmes to enhance teacher performance providing opportunities for teachers to engage in reflective practice, receive feedback, and develop their teaching strategies in a supportive environment.
- Professional learning opportunities should emphasise self-directed learning and agency, allowing teachers to experiment with new instructional approaches in a way that fosters sustainable change.
- By developing coaching skills among staff, schools cultivate a self-sustaining model of professional development, reducing dependency on external training providers.

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Introduction

A growing body of research highlights the importance of coaching programmes in an educational setting to support scholarly, behavioural, and social interventions. A few studies also demonstrate a clear link between Cognitive Coaching (CC) and teacher efficacy, which can play a pivotal role in enhancing teachers' professional practices and improving student outcomes (Abu-Shawish et al., 2022; Göker & Göker, 2021; Jolly, 2021). The connection between CC and efficacy is rooted in the principles of reflection, self-directed learning, and professional autonomy. In the context of a secondary school, where teachers often face diverse classroom dynamics and the challenge of preparing students for high-stakes examinations, these principles can help improve a teachers' instructional practices and in turn, positively impact student engagement and achievement.

Coaching is fundamentally about facilitating intentional behaviour change to achieve specific goals. It can be defined as a confidential and collaborative process where coaches and coachees work together to reflect on current practices, enhance existing skills, and develop new ones (Lofthouse & Hollweck, 2021). Cognitive Coaching (CC), developed by Arthur Costa and Robert Garmston in the 1980s, is a unique coaching model that differs from traditional mentoring and consulting (Costa & Garmston, 2015). This CC model is an evidence-based approach to professional development that aims to enhance teacher self-directedness and cognitive processes. This model, as described by Costa and Garmston (2015), is built on the belief that internal cognitive processes precede behaviour, and by improving educators' thinking, they can positively transform their instructional practices and, untimely, improve student outcomes. CC uses structured conversations to facilitate meditative questions, active listening, and paraphrasing to help the coachee become more self-aware, analytical, and reflective. Similarly, Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT), developed by Aaron Beck in the early 1960s (Costa & Garmston, 2015), focuses on identifying and modifying dysfunctional thinking patterns that influence emotions and behaviours. It rests on the idea that our thoughts shape how we feel and act. The link between the two lies in the shared belief that cognition drives behaviour and that individuals can be guided to reframe their thinking to improve outcomes, whether in mental health (CBT) or professional growth (CC). In terms of coaching, CC emphasises the internal resources and thought processes of the individuals being coached, focusing on their perceptions, cognitive strategies, and values. It is a model for professional improvement that focuses on fostering a teachers' capacity for self-reflection, problem-solving, and decision-making by using a non-judgmental coaching approach. As such, if the goal is to improve teachers' instructional practices by helping them reflect on their teaching, to what extent does efficacy contribute to this heightened awareness and sense of increased competence?

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) is a widely recognised framework in psychology for understanding human behaviour. Central to SCT is the construct of self-efficacy, which Bandura (1994) defines as an individuals' belief in their capabilities to organise and execute the actions required to manage prospective situations. These beliefs influence cognitive, motivational, emotional, and behavioural functioning, making self-efficacy a key psychological determinant of behaviour (Beauchamp et al., 2019).

Teacher self-efficacy (TSE) refers to a teacher's belief in their ability to influence student learning and outcomes, even among students who may be challenging or unmotivated. Research suggests that teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to adopt innovative teaching methods, persevere through challenges, and create a positive classroom environment, which in turn supports student achievement. A number of studies support the claim that efficacy plays a crucial role in an individual's ability to set ambitious goals, and in the efforts, they invest in accomplishing them (Abu-Shawish et al., 2022; DeMasters, 2018; Hettinger et al., 2024; Klassen et al., 2011; Potts, 2022). The level of self-efficacy could explain possible variables that regulate the quality of teachers' behaviour and classroom practices. For example, teacher efficacy beliefs are associated with a teacher's ability to make informed decisions about pedagogy, behaviour, and use of time within a lesson (Cocca & Cocca, 2022).

The core objectives of a CC model are to build and sustain trust, promote mutual learning, and foster teacher autonomy, that is achieved through a three-phase coaching cycle: planning, observation, and reflective conversations (Costa & Garmston, 2015). While this model provides a straightforward framework for deliberate dialogue and problem-solving, its deeper purpose is to cultivate teacher holonomy. This theory suggests that Holonomous teachers exist in a paradoxical state, balancing autonomy with interdependence. While they are self-directed, they remain highly attuned to the broader dynamics of the school environment (Costa & Garmston, 2015). In a teaching context, an autonomous practitioner, equipped with the maps and tools of a 'cognitive' approach to coaching, can transform professional practices and foster a greater sense of ownership. This transformation is driven by five 'states of mind', which serve as the energy sources for holonomic behaviours: self-efficacy, flexibility, craftsmanship, consciousness, and interdependence (Göker & Göker, 2021).

Furthermore, metacognitive skills are considered essential for fostering self-regulated learning that are driven by two key elements: metacognitive knowledge, which includes an individual's awareness of their own abilities, tasks, and available strategies; and metacognitive regulation, the practical ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate one's cognitive processes (Guo, 2022). In this theoretical framework, self-efficacy is regarded as the most significant state of mind and connected with being both confident and optimistic, which is central to enabling teacher changes in behaviour and practice. Yet, to what extent can regular self-evaluations lead to adjustments in teaching practices and support the development of an individual teaching repertoire? Additionally, what are the key indicators of effective coaching? These are not merely theoretical questions as they may reflect the practical concerns of educators seeking evidence that coaching is worth the investment of time, trust, and resources.

The last two decades have seen a growing interest in what constitutes effective teacher professional development as teachers face a host of ongoing demands from increasing workloads, new trends that constantly evolve to meet societal needs, and shifting national and regional policy (Klassen et al., 2011). The Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (PS) in Wales are explicitly designed to set clear national expectations for excellent practice and teacher effectiveness (Welsh Government, 2017). These standards define excellent practice as teaching that integrates deep subject knowledge and pedagogical expertise with emotional intelligence, reflective professionalism, and a strong commitment to student development. Such practice is further characterised by intentional,

evidence-informed strategies that support meaningful academic, social, and emotional progress for every student. This aligns with Stronge et al.'s (2011) findings, which suggests the indicators of effective teaching are a combination of instructional clarity, classroom management, high expectations, reflective practice, and student-centred assessment, all contributing to measurable student achievement. Thus, embedding teacher effectiveness and excellent practice requires ongoing opportunities for continuous improvement, which is an integral component of the School Development Plan (SDP), that maps effective professional development strategies within the schools' improvement cycles (Welsh Government, 2018).

In response to the 2015 education reform agenda in Wales, the revised national strategy, emphasised the development of research-informed practitioners through sustained, career-long professional learning. This is formalised in Objective 4 of the updated policy, *Our National Mission – High Standards and Aspirations for All* (Welsh Government, 2023), which introduced the National Professional Learning Entitlement (NPLE). The NPLE ensures equitable access to high-quality learning, aligned with the Curriculum for Wales and a broader focus on equity and wellbeing. Traditional professional development, often limited to one-off INSET workshops, has been critiqued for overlooking teachers' individual needs (Jolly, 2021).

The NPLE emphasises transforming schools into learning organisations (SLOs) that promote inquiry and lifelong learning. The updated PS require teachers to engage in continuous development, collaboration, and innovation (OECD, 2020). However, implementation can be challenged by contextual barriers such as limited time, funding, and expertise. To address these constraints, researchers increasingly advocate for coaching models as an effective alternative. Coaching supports personalised, ongoing professional growth tailored to diverse teacher needs and career stages, helping schools meet NPLE and PS requirements more meaningfully.

Much of the current literature exploring the connection between participation in a coaching programme and teacher efficacy, asserts there are two main categories of teachers: those with high efficacy and those with low efficacy (Glackin & Hohenstein, 2017). A small number of studies emphasise that teachers with higher levels of efficacy tend to be more resilient and better able to manage confrontational classroom situations (Potts, 2022), whereas those with low levels of self-efficacy are more likely to feel less enthusiastic, experience higher levels of stress, and are more likely to abandon their profession as a result (Cocca & Cocca, 2022; Göker & Göker, 2021). However, the generalisability of some published research is limited, as assessing the effectiveness of coaching is challenging due to its diverse applications, varied participant groups, and wide-ranging contexts, making it difficult to measure and quantify. Despite the importance of teacher efficacy, there appears to be insufficient research relating to efficacy as an effective 'change-agent' to empower teachers as self-directed learners (Lofthouse, 2019). This paper considers in what ways a coaching programme can enhance this aspect, addressing the need for more focused research on the intersection of coaching and self-efficacy in professional growth.

Research indicates that CC serves as a nucleus for developing professional practices, emphasising the cognitive function of the five states of mind: (a) craftsmanship, (b) consciousness, (c) flexibility, (d) efficacy, and finally (e) interdependence (Göker & Göker, 2021). The most catalytic of these states of mind is efficacy (Costa & Garmston, 2015).

Teacher efficacy, defined as the confidence teachers have in their own abilities, is a central concept in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Klassen et al., 2011). According to Bandura, the theory of SCT identifies four components that underpin self-efficacy: mastery experience, physiological and emotional arousal, vicarious experience, and verbal persuasion (Woodcock & Tournaki, 2023). These key determinants lead to an individual's course of action and outcome expectancy.

Furthermore, the extent of one's self-efficacy can determine the quality of professional practices demonstrated in the classroom (Cocca & Cocca, 2022). Prior studies have noted the importance of teacher self-efficacy categorising those with high levels of efficacy having a greater capacity to demonstrate persistence, enthusiasm and commitment (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Existing literature also indicates a correlation between low levels of efficacy and higher levels of stress, anxiety, and fatigue (Cocca & Cocca, 2022). In reviewing the literature, limited studies were found on the interpretive qualitative research of understanding the process of developing self-efficacy through a CC cycle.

Convergence between teacher SE and CC has been noted. For example, one study explored the impact of CCSM on English Language Teachers' (ELT) SE and their reflection skills in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) (Abu-Shawish et al., 2022). Using a mixed methods approach for data collection, the researchers employed the 22-item Teacher Sense of Efficacy for Literacy Instruction (TSELI) survey, along with observations and interviews, to investigate teachers' sense of self-efficacy (SE). The findings revealed that participants held CC in high regard and believed it contributed to positive outcomes. This is consistent with data obtained in a study utilising the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) to quantitatively assess the efficacy of eight fourth-year pre-service EFL teachers in a Turkish context (Göker & Göker, 2021). This 14-week mixed-methods, single-case study examined the impact of a Cognitive Coaching (CC) programme on teacher self-efficacy using both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative analysis involved paired-sample t-tests and repeated measures ANOVA to assess changes across the three domains of the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES): student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. Data were derived from coach – coachee discussions centred on videotaped lessons, which were evaluated using an instructional skills framework that served as a behavioural checklist. These video recordings not only facilitated structured feedback cycles but also offered a degree of objective validation for changes in instructional practice over time. Paired-sample t-tests comparing pre – and post-intervention Likert-scale responses revealed a statistically significant increase in participants' overall self-efficacy ($p < .05$), suggesting a positive effect of the CC intervention. Repeated measures ANOVA indicated significant differences in gains across the three efficacy domains, with the greatest improvement observed in classroom management, followed by instructional strategies and student engagement. In addition to these quantitative findings, the study concluded that the CC programme supported the development of teachers' cognitive and reflective capacities, particularly in setting and working toward realistic professional goals.

A study on teacher self-efficacy and the use of CC^{SM1} strategies aimed to explore how pausing, paraphrasing, and meditative questioning in the classroom relate to teacher efficacy (DeMasters, 2018). The short-form Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) was administered to 44 teachers who had completed foundational training. Results indicated a moderate positive relationship in 11 of the 13 areas examined (student engagement,

instructional strategies, and classroom management), with one area showing a strong positive relationship and one a weak positive relationship.

Findings on the impact of CCSM on 14 Physical Education teachers also showed that participants in the treatment group (7 teachers) who received CCSM, showed increased teacher self-efficacy from pre- to post-test, particularly in areas related to instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement, as measured by the Physical Education Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (PETSES) (Wooten-Burnett's, 2016). This contrasted with the 7 teachers in the control group, whose self-efficacy scores did not increase significantly. Data collected from semi-structured interviews and the PETSES in a quasi-experimental design revealed that the treatment group perceived CCSM as beneficial to their personal and professional development, citing stronger relationships with coaches, increased autonomy, and improved problem-solving.

The Cognitive Coaching SM model provides a well-established framework for fostering reflective practice, professional growth, and self-directed learning among educators. Research discussed in this paper supports its effectiveness in enhancing teacher efficacy, collaboration, and instructional decision-making by focusing on the cognitive processes behind teaching rather than simply behaviours or outcomes. Even without formal adoption of the full CCSM programme, teachers can still benefit from integrating core elements of the model, such as paraphrasing, posing meditative questions, and promoting metacognition, into coaching practices. The CC model that underpins this study, aligns closely with this principle-driven approach allowing schools to cultivate a reflective culture and support teacher development while tailoring the model to local needs and resources.

This paper aims to explore teachers' perspectives on how a cognitive coaching model influences their professional practices, enhances their self-efficacy, and strengthens their capacity for self-directed growth. The paper examines changes in teaching practices resulting from CC, focusing on the degree to which teachers demonstrate autonomy in critically reflecting on and improving self-identified aspects of their work. This research seeks to evaluate how cognitive coaching enhances self-efficacy, and supports self-improvement and professional development as revealed through key themes: attitude, authenticity, autonomy, barriers, and the impact on teaching practices. Specifically, this study seeks to answer three research questions:

RQ1: What specific changes in professional practices do teachers make after participating in a CC programme?

RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions of how CC contributes to their sense of self-efficacy?

RQ3: To what extent does a CC programme add value to an individual and/or organisation?

Materials and methods

This study employed an inductive qualitative approach to capture participants' emotions, biases, to identify data patterns that suggest relationships between variables. Since this study relied on perceptual data, qualitative methods were most suitable, allowing participants to express their perceived reality without a predetermined stance. The study utilised a phenomenological research design, specifically hermeneutic phenomenology, to explore participants' personal experiences, aiming to uncover the deeper meaning

behind these experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). As the researcher, I sought to construct an understanding of the perceived lived experiences of participants by engaging with the data through a micro and macro analytical strategy. This approach facilitated a deeper understanding of the layers of human experience to find meaning in how subjective narratives influence and shape everyday choices and practices.

To obtain a representative sample of the teacher-coachee population, a non-probability purposive sampling approach was chosen in order to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences, programmes and context (Yilmaz, 2013). The sample of participants was recruited from within an English Medium 11–16 Secondary school in South Wales. As I am considered an insider-researcher (a native to the setting of the research), one advantage of selecting participants through purposive sampling was the ease of access to collect the data throughout the study period (Chammas, 2020). Participants were selected from a cross-section of coachees with diverse teaching experiences, including length of time in the profession, and from across various Areas of Learning and Experiences (AOLEs) in the school (Table 1). The coaching programme was designed to include three structured cycles (planning, observation, and reflection) across a school year, with an expectation of monthly touchpoints between coach and coachee. Variations occurred based on availability and staffing demands. Participants were full-time colleagues, with the researcher's own coachees excluded from the study in an endeavour to maintain authenticity and limit bias. My leadership role in the school enabled me to determine the most suitable remaining coachees for the sample. Eight coachees agreed to take part in the study.

Ethical procedures were then followed to gain informed consent from all participants. Ethics approval was obtained from an institutional ethics committee, which confirmed that the study met the required ethical standards for research. All participants were emailed a detailed information sheet outlining the aim of the research, their rights to anonymity and confidentiality, and the potential benefits and risks of their involvement in order to give informed consent before agreeing to take part. Participants were assured that the research data would not be made available outside of the research team. All eight participants returned a signed consent form prior to the interviews taking place.

Data were collected through a cross-sectional study to collect data at one point in time, following the second stage of the coaching model and a recent monthly touchpoint with their coach during the Spring Term through semi-structured in-person interviews. To ensure the interviews were conducted in an ethically committed manner, I emphasised my role as researcher to clarify how it differed from my formal role as a senior leader

Table 1. Demographics of participants.

Participant ID	Length of Teaching Experience	Coaching Experience	Area of Learning and Experience (AOLE)
Teacher 1	6–10	New	Science and Technology KS3 & KS4
Teacher 2	Less than 5	New	Expressive Arts KS3 & KS4
Teacher 3	6–10	New	Humanities / Health & Well-Being KS3 & KS4
Teacher 4	Less than 5	1 + years	Expressive Arts KS3 & KS4
Teacher 5	6–10	1 + years	Science and Technology KS3 & KS4
Teacher 6	11–15	1 + years	Language, Literacy & Communication KS3 & KS4
Teacher 7	6–10	New	Expressive Arts KS3 & KS4
Teacher 8	11–15	New	Health & Well-being KS3 & KS4

within the school, and that the purpose of this study was not to judge any aspect of their work or professional character (Chammas, 2020). To mitigate potential personal biases and assumptions, I endeavoured to maintain a position of neutrality, as much as possible, and reassured participants that I would strive to maintain professional awareness and intellectual judgement regarding data to advocate ethical integrity and protocols.

The interview guide was developed using Carter's (2006) 'Practical Methods for Evaluating Coaching' and included questions designed to elicit participants' perceptions of coaching as a tool for professional development. Open-ended questions were utilised to elucidate participants' experiences, incorporating their own motivation, emotions, prejudices and incidents of interpersonal cooperation and conflict. For example, participants were asked, '*Do you think validation from your coach is an important element to your own perception of self-efficacy?*' Questions were structured to consider the individual experience, as well as the programme and organisational context. As the study was concerned with the rich narratives of participants, prompts were used by me during the interviews in instances where participants struggled to talk at length or to clarify comments for further understanding (Noon, 2018). All interviews were conducted face-to-face and ranged between 40 and 50 min. Interviews were recorded on a digital audio recorder and initially transcribed with Microsoft Teams software, then manually edited for accuracy. Transcripts were stored securely; although not returned to participants, consent had been obtained for the publication of outcomes and use of anonymised quotations.

This study utilised an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach to examine how participants make sense of their personal and professional experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This approach was first articulated in the 1990s and is now a well-established qualitative method used in UK psychology research (Eatough & Smith, 2017). The goal of IPA is to closely capture participants' lived experiences, making it particularly well-suited to research questions that seek to understand subjective meaning and personal perception.

IPA's phenomenological roots can be traced to the work of Edmund Husserl, whose call to return 'to the things themselves' emphasises the careful and systematic exploration of experience as it presents itself to consciousness (Tuffour, 2017). Later phenomenologists brought attention to the situated, embodied, and interpretive nature of experience, emphasising that individuals are always embedded in a particular context and cannot be separated from their relational and historical lifeworld. Building on this, IPA is equally informed by hermeneutics; the theory and practice of interpretation. One of the main challenges of an IPA approach is having an awareness of one's own biases and subjectivity as a researcher. IPA acknowledges the dynamic and recursive nature of interpretation: researchers are not passive recorders of data but actively engage in a 'double hermeneutic', interpreting the participant's interpretation of their own experience (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

Thus, IPA rests upon a dual epistemological foundation that integrates both phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions. This framework involves a dynamic interplay between the participant's articulation of their experience and the researcher's interpretative engagement with that account. Thus, this dual focus underlines IPA's commitment to both describing the phenomenon as experienced and interpreting its meaning within broader personal, social, and theoretical contexts.

Following the IPA process for coding and interpreting the data, the Framework Method was systematically applied for a case-by-case coding of each audio recording

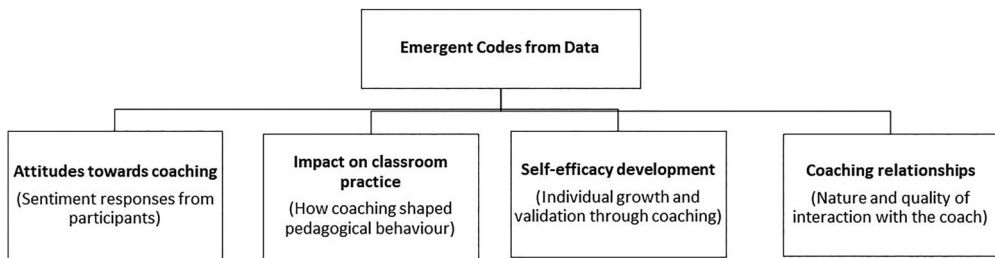


Figure 1. Refined coding to identify sentiment and thematic codes emerging from the data (see Appendix 1 for the full matrix).

(Gale et al., 2013). The data were initially manually ‘cleaned’ to correct mis-transcribed words and phrases. Transcripts of the textual data were then read and reread to begin to make-sense of the phenomenon and meanings that emerged. ‘Open coding’ was then applied to each chunk of data, to capture key ideas, actions, feelings, or concepts. NVivo™ was used to organise and categorise coded data, allowing for comparison across cases and aiding in the refinement of emergent sub-themes. This supported the development of a macro-level thematic framework that reflected commonalities in participants’ lived experiences. The original codes identified through this process enabled a coarse coding framework to be developed, which included emergent sub-themes. Themes emerging from the initial coding were further refined into main and subordinate themes, eliminating duplication and creating a more cohesive framework matrix. To enhance the credibility and transparency of the process, a second coder independently reviewed and confirmed the themes. This macro view of clustered codes, representing the group experiential themes, then facilitated my endeavour to objectively interpret the data in the final stage of organising themes and subthemes (Figure 1).

Results

Several themes emerged from the interviews, providing support for the cognitive function of the five states of mind theory. Additionally, an initial coding of the transcripts uncovered elements of Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and highlighted a connection between teacher efficacy and coaching experiences. Further analysis allowed these ‘sub-themes’ to be consolidated under four main headings: (1) attitudes and sentiments about participating in a coaching programme; (2) the impact of coaching on participants’ teaching practices; (3) participants’ subjective sense of efficacy; and (4) the relationship between participants and their coach (Figure 2).

Attitudes and sentiments about participating in a coaching programme

Attitudes refer to an individual’s general feelings, beliefs, and evaluations about participating in a coaching programme, which can be shaped by prior experiences and personal values. Participants were asked to reflect on their initial responses to being coached in an attempt to capture their perceived attitudes and sentiments upon being introduced to a new professional development model.

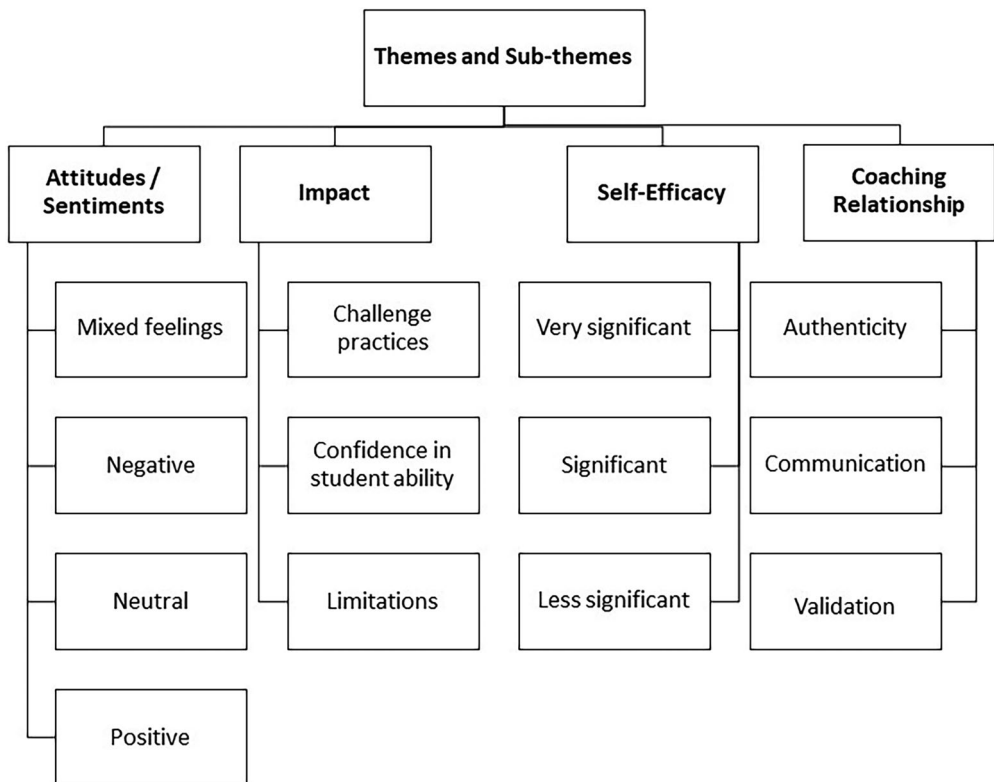


Figure 2. Themes and sub-themes related to attitudes, sentiments, self-efficacy and coaching relationships.

Mixed feelings

Mixed feelings can be understood as the emotional responses or feelings towards the idea of being part of a coaching programme. The data indicated that participants expressing mixed feelings were often torn between recognising the value of coaching and feeling unsure or sceptical about certain aspects. For example, *Teacher 2* stated,

'It was a mixture of excitement because I love the challenge of pushing myself as a teacher and exploring avenues of my practice. Mostly I was excited for it and a little bit apprehensive'.

While limited in quantity, these mixed responses are valuable for identifying areas of ambiguity or conflict.

Negative

Negative feelings about participating in a coaching programme refer to adverse emotional responses, attitudes, or perceptions. Sentiment coding indicated that a few participants exclaimed how anxious, or reluctant they felt upon learning of the new approach to professional development. For example, *Teacher 6* stated,

'If I'm totally honest, I thought, oh no, not another programme, not another initiative! It was that idea of somebody else coming into the classroom'.

Though fewer in number, these negative sentiments are impactful as they signal barriers to implementation.

Neutral

This refers to participants being in a state of indifference toward the experience, neither fully embracing or rejecting the coaching, but being ‘happy to go along with it’. Neutrality suggests participants may require more time or information to engage meaningfully. While not resistant, this group suggests a ‘wait and see’ phase, evaluating its benefits before forming an opinion.

Positive

Having a positive attitude towards the coaching programme can be defined as the emotional and cognitive responses of a participant’s sense of confidence, enthusiasm, and even excitement about engaging with the programme. This category contains the most references and files, indicating that a substantial number of participants expressed a favourable response to the coaching programme. Their comments reflected openness, curiosity, and appreciation for the support and structure provided. Words and phrases like ‘refreshing’, ‘a fantastic thing’, and ‘a really good thing’ captured their initial reactions.

The impact of coaching on participants’ teaching practices

The **impact of coaching on participants’ teaching practices** refers to the measurable or observable changes in how they approached, implemented, and refined their teaching strategies, and behaviours as a result of engaging in coaching. Some participants reported that the coaching programme provided valuable opportunities for constructive feedback from their coach, prompting them to rethink assumptions about certain practices and even their teaching philosophy.

Challenging practices

This can be defined as teaching practices identified during the coaching process as areas for development. Participants acknowledged that coaching served as a catalyst for re-evaluating and, in some cases, overhauling their pedagogical approaches. The ‘Challenge’ theme captures the value of coaching in pushing teachers out of their comfort zones. For example, *Teacher 7* stated,

‘I am maybe more proactive and more innovative. I think it’s quite easy for us to just do the same thing that we do all the time. So, I think having a coach made me think more of the things that I could be doing to take that risk and challenge my teaching’.

Teacher 3 also recognised how they are more cognitively aware of implementing pedagogical toolkits available to them:

'I'm more aware of the WalkThru's that I've covered so far. I've implemented 'pitch it up', effective questioning techniques, and modelling. I suppose they are fresher in my mind, and with feedback from my coach, I am consciously thinking about my teaching'.

The relatively high number of files (7) with fewer references suggests broad recognition but less elaboration per instance.

Confidence in student ability

This refers to participants becoming more self-aware of a positive change in the level of confidence they have in their students' capabilities as a direct result of coaching. Participants described feeling more assured in experimenting with techniques and addressing diverse learning needs. For example, *Teacher 5* stated,

'I am 100% more confident in pupil ability because of coaching. For example, in Science with a 6-mark question, if I have a WAGOLL [what a good one looks like] answer to show the pupils, I'm confident they know what the end goal is. I feel more confident that they've got a better understanding of what they're trying to achieve, and I can lead tasks up to that end goal ... I can see their confidence more because the WAGOLL has been embedded'.

Teacher 4 also stated,

'I've also broadcasted it to other staff to come and have a look at their [student] work, which has really built their confidence ... and their independence has definitely come along too, because of the way I taught and changed how I've delivered the lessons'.

Although not as heavily cited as 'Challenge', its presence across six files underscores a moderate but meaningful benefit.

Limited impact

Limited impact refers to participants who highlighted limitations that hindered the full potential of coaching. These included inconsistent implementation, lack of time, and external pressures such as curriculum demands or leadership turnover.

For example, *Teacher 8* commented,

'For example, we were looking at modelling at one stage and, I suppose I could have seen it as an opportunity to really show off the work we do in PE, but at the same time, I felt like it was an area of our practice in PE where, and certainly of my practice in my teaching that didn't really require too much development in my lessons'.

Teacher 4 also commented,

'I like the idea of coaching and mentoring ... but I think the process needs to be simplified and more manageable like maybe just ticking a few boxes with a few brief comments, rather than a lot of written material. There's already so much going on and it can be hard to find the time to do everything ... that said, I've appreciated the opportunity to work with different people, to have the freedom to observe others and be observed myself, and I think that approach is a little bit more fluid and flexible, but, while I like the idea of coaching, and I want to grow and help others develop, it's about finding the right balance between time, communication and all the other demands we face which I suppose makes it difficult to engage with coaching fully'.

Participants' subjective sense of efficacy

The responses gathered from the data reflect the impact of participating in the coaching programme on individuals' sense of efficacy. These responses were grouped into three categories: very significant, significant, and less significant.

Very significant

This refers to the perceived significant high levels of self-efficacy participants felt as a result of their coaching experience. *Teacher 2* reported,

'I think in terms of my personal achievement, I feel like definitely it seems to have grown massively, and my self-worth being able to actually feel confident as a teacher and having the theory to underpin it all as well. I'm thinking more about my teaching'.

Teacher 5 stated,

'I think my self-efficacy would probably be a 7 or 8 out of 10. I feel like I'm more confident and it's allowed me to kind of prioritise certain areas of my teaching that maybe I wouldn't have had the opportunity to'.

The number of references and the strength of sentiment suggest that for these individuals, coaching was highly impactful.

Significant

This includes responses that indicate moderate levels of self-efficacy. They described receiving encouragement and support from their coach, which helped them feel more competent or confident in specific areas.

For example, *Teacher 3* stated,

'... this year I'm also teaching History, which is something I'm really not confident with it all, but even something like looking at my questioning through coaching, I can take that into a History lesson and get more out of the pupils because I'm using this effective questioning approach, which wouldn't have come into my head otherwise'.

This group reflects a steady, positive, but not overwhelming effect.

Less significant

This group of responses reflects participants who felt CC had little or no impact on their sense of self-efficacy. Despite engaging in the coaching process, they reported that support from their coach did not translate into meaningful personal growth or enhanced confidence.

Teacher 4 indicated,

'I would rate my efficacy as a 4 or 5 just because it's not consistent enough for anything to be working properly. I found the goals are not set or clear enough'.

Teacher 8 stated,

'I still draw on other things more to determine my level of self-efficacy. Just my own evaluations of how I feel I'm doing, and maybe that's just a sense of my personality, but I take more from that than from the coaching'.

This code appears less frequently, suggesting that for a minority of participants, coaching had a minimal impact on their self-efficacy. These voices highlight important variation and help ensure a balanced interpretation of overall impact.

The relationship between participants and their coach

The coach-coachee relationship is intended to be one of mutual trust, where both parties in the relationship trust in each other and in the process (Costa & Garmston, 2015). The relationship theme showed a substantial presence in the data. Participants emphasised how trust, open communication, and the perceived authenticity of their coach contributed to feelings of being understood and supported.

Authenticity

Authenticity in terms of a coaching relationship can be used to indicate a genuine, open and non-judgemental interaction. When coaching felt meaningful and aligned with personal values, participants reported a stronger sense of empowerment to 'be themselves', without feeling pressured.

Teacher 6 asserted,

'It's a relaxed atmosphere as well. There's no real pressure, I can just carry on with my teaching. Having my coach in my lesson doesn't make me feel pressured. I can just be myself'.

Communication

This refers to the dialogue and interactions between coach and coachee. This code tracked the regularity and quality of coaching conversations, not only during monthly structured sessions. Participants often linked the consistency of dialogue with sustained reflection and reinforcement of goals.

For example, *Teacher 1* stated,

'I think we have a good relationship. It's been ... a professional friendship ... we bounce things back and forth and sometimes just have a chat'.

Teacher 2 also expressed,

'It has been a great opportunity to network and to share good practice with my colleagues. Developing my relationship with my coach and being able to touch base ... I felt I could always go to see them, which is really important'.

7 out of 8 participants responded favourably when describing their relationship with their coach. Only *Teacher 4* specifically remarked about the lack of support they received from their coach during the programme,

'It hasn't been consistent throughout the year and we've met just now and then ... I have not had a great deal of contact with my coach. We've had some nice conversations and talked about what's been going on a bit, but other than that, there's not been a lot of support'.

Validation

In a coaching relationship, validation can refer to the process of affirming the coachee's feelings and experiences, without judgement. Avoiding criticism and reinforcing the coachee's endeavours can be a powerful means to foster growth, self-awareness and efficacy. An increase in confidence was conveyed by several participants who valued encouragement, and affirmation from their coach during the programme. *Teacher 3* stated,

'I think everybody needs that little bit of boost sometimes to hear you are doing a good job. I am personally someone who likes praise if I've done something well. I appreciate somebody saying well done you did a good job with that. So, I suppose the coach coming to see part of my lesson and giving feedback that I did a good job is important to me'.

Teacher 1 also remarked,

'Everyone likes to know they're doing things well. Everyone likes to know what works well for them and what they're seeing as an improvement. So, I think that validation from my coach gives me almost like a little pat on the back, for lack of a better word, and saying actually, I can see the progress that these pupils have made, which has been really nice'.

Summary

Results suggest the majority of participants in this study expressed sentiments of optimism, eagerness, satisfaction and commitment towards participating in a coaching programme. The study demonstrates a correlation between the positive coaching experiences of participants, with improved pedagogical practices, and benefitted from an increased efficacious perspective of themselves and their students' capabilities. The data further suggests that in an educational context, self-efficacy derived through CC is understood to have a direct influence on a teacher's willingness to implement new strategies, adapt to new reforms, and are more likely to develop as self-directed professionals.

Discussion

The analysis of results identified several key themes. These included:

- (1) Attitudes and perceptions toward participation in the coaching programme, with sub-themes encompassing general feelings and emotional responses to the programme's introduction. The strongest impact was made by the Positive sentiment group, both in volume and tone, indicating a generally favourable reception of the cognitive coaching programme. However, the presence of Mixed, Negative, and Neutral sentiments highlights the complexity of participant experiences. Addressing these concerns could improve uptake and integrity of the programme.

- (2) The impact of coaching on teaching practices, categorised into sub-themes such as challenging existing practices, increased confidence in students' ability, and perceived limitations associated with the coaching experience. The findings suggest that coaching has a predominantly positive influence on teaching practice, particularly in terms of direct impact and constructive challenge. While it also contributes to increased teacher confidence, the presence of systemic limitations highlights the need for thoughtful implementation and support structures to maximise coaching efficacy.
- (3) Participants' sense of self-efficacy, classified into sub-themes reflecting varying levels of significance: very significant, significant, and less significant. The distribution of responses reveals that while experiences varied, a substantial number of participants found coaching to have at least a moderate to positive influence on their self-efficacy.
- (4) The dynamics of the participant-coach relationship, which emphasised the sub-themes of authenticity, communication and validation. The nuanced impact of 'Authenticity' and 'Validation' points to the complex, layered nature of self-efficacy development through coaching.

RQ1: What specific changes in professional practices do teachers make after participating in a CC programme?

The first research question in this study aimed to explore the changes in professional practices that teachers implement after participating in a CC programme. The findings reveal a multifaceted impact of the CC programme on participants' professional practices, characterised by shifts in pedagogical strategies, enhanced self-awareness, and variable levels of implementation. The most prominent outcome lies in the transformative effect of coaching on participants' teaching behaviours, particularly in prompting reflective practice and re-evaluation of instructional methods. These findings highlight that greater teacher autonomy is associated with increased commitment, engagement, and performance. A recurring theme among participants was the way coaching served as a structured provocation for reassessing established routines and pedagogical assumptions. These participants reported becoming more mindful of strategic metacognitive teaching approaches, moving away from habitual comfort zones. As a result of the coaching programme, they reported feeling refreshed in their instructional strategies, with greater mental clarity and capacity for innovation.

The emphasis on feedback and deliberate pedagogical experimentation aligns with literature on instructional coaching, which identifies dialogue and observation as critical levers for teacher development (Knight, 2019). The sub-theme of 'Challenge Practices' thus encapsulates the dynamic between external prompting and internal growth, with coaching operating as a reflective catalyst rather than a prescriptive model.

A second notable shift in practice was an increased confidence in student ability, which emerged as a meaningful though moderately represented theme. Participants indicated that coaching did not only change how they viewed their teaching but also recalibrated their expectations of learners. Teacher 5's articulation of using exemplars (e.g., WAGOLs) illustrates how coaching supports the development of more intentional scaffolding practices, which in turn reinforces student understanding and confidence. Likewise, Teacher 4's remarks suggest that such changes in instructional delivery were not only beneficial

for student outcomes but also had a ripple effect on peer engagement. This theme suggests that as teachers gained more clarity about instructional objectives and became more strategic in their approaches, their belief in students' potential strengthened. Such shifts reflect an important dimension of professional growth, where pedagogical change is accompanied by an attitudinal shift toward learner agency and capability. In conclusion, trust-based CC strengthened teacher confidence and encouraged pedagogical innovation, highlighting its potential as a sustainable model for in-house professional learning.

Despite the largely positive outcomes, the findings also acknowledge the limited impact experienced by a minority of participants. Teacher 8's account highlights how subjective subject specificity, perceived developmental priorities, and time constraints intersect to moderate the influence of coaching. Although fewer participants mentioned limited impact, it's important to include this perspective to fully understand the coaching programme's effectiveness. It highlights how coaching experiences vary across subjects and schools, shaped by individual attitudes and the support available within each organisation.

RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions of how CC contributes to their sense of self-efficacy?

The study found that most participants believed CC positively influenced their sense of self-efficacy. Participants in the 'Very Significant' group, such as Teacher 2 and Teacher 5 described a marked increase in confidence and personal validation as educators. Their testimonies reflect a shift not only in practical capabilities but also in identity and mindset. For example, Teacher 2's mention of 'self-worth' and confidence grounded in pedagogical theory underscores the powerful interplay between emotional and cognitive dimensions of self-efficacy. Participants also described being less self-critical on difficult days, focusing on solutions rather than feeling defeated. These findings support the notion that CC can be a valuable developmental tool, particularly when it includes affirming feedback and fosters self-awareness and regulation. Notably, their sense of efficacy stemmed from student engagement and learning, rather than academic outcomes alone, aligning with other studies showing higher efficacy in student engagement, classroom management, and instructional strategies among EFL teachers after participating in CC (Göker & Göker, 2021).

For participants like Teacher 3, coaching provided meaningful yet more targeted support. The influence of coaching was tied to specific teaching strategies (e.g., questioning techniques) that enhanced competence in less familiar subject areas. This indicates that coaching can have domain-specific benefits, building contextual self-efficacy without necessarily transforming the broader professional self-concept. This group reflects a more 'task-specific efficacy' (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) described as confidence that develops in discrete instructional areas but may not generalise across the teaching role.

A small subset of participants reported limited gains in self-efficacy from the coaching programme, citing factors such as unclear goals, inconsistent implementation, or a preference for internal self-assessment. For instance, Teachers 4 and 8 noted that structural issues and personal dispositions reduced the programme's effectiveness for them. One participant attributed their moderate efficacy gains to missing a session and a lack of communication from their coach, which led to feelings of embarrassment and frustration.

These experiences underscore the influence of contextual factors on coaching outcomes, such as programme fidelity, communication, and individual engagement. The variation in responses highlights the non-uniform nature of professional learning and supports the need for a more differentiated, responsive approach to coaching.

A strong correlation also emerged between a participants' perceived sense of self-efficacy and the feedback received from their coaching sessions in terms of validation of improved performance. Responses indicated that positive feedback from the coach who commented on features of good practice, seemed to increase their trust in the coaching process, reassure them in their performance, thus acting as a new source of efficacy. Furthermore, participants who expressed comfortability and confidence in the coaching relationship felt a strong sense of rapport, empathy, and compatibility with a coach they perceived as committed to the role. Open communication and authenticity were also key components of the ease of interaction between participants and their coach.

RQ3: To what extent does a CC programme add value to an individual and organisation?

The findings of this study underscore the multifaceted value that a Cognitive Coaching programme can offer both at the individual and organisational levels. On an individual level, the data reveals a strong correlation between participants' positive attitudes toward coaching and their increased sense of autonomy over goal-setting. This intrinsic motivation, facilitated by the non-judgmental and developmental ethos of the CC model, contributed to a deeper emotional investment in professional growth. The language used by participants, marked by optimism, hope, and relief, suggests that the programme fostered a psychologically safe environment, encouraging authentic reflection and self-directed learning. Even those initially sceptical reported that their experience surpassed that of previous evaluative models, evidencing a shift in mindset and an enhancement of professional efficacy.

Furthermore, the preference for a low-accountability, feedback-rich model over traditional Senior Leadership Team (SLT) led observations indicates a cultural shift towards a more empowering, teacher-led approach to professional development. This suggests that CC may function not merely as a tool for performance enhancement, but as a catalyst for how professional identity is also constructed. Such value manifests not only in improved teaching practices but also in the sustained commitment to growth, which is essential for long-term individual development.

At the organisational level, the study highlights the programme's contribution to building a culture of collaborative professionalism. Participants noted the emergence of shared values and authentic professional dialogue, which fostered collegial trust and interdependence. The increased willingness to seek peer support and engage in honest discourse during group coaching sessions points to the development of a collaborative learning environment, an essential condition for schools functioning as learning organisations. These findings imply that CC programmes can strengthen the social capital within a school by reinforcing relationships and distributing leadership more equitably across staff.

In conclusion, this study provides compelling evidence that cognitive coaching significantly strengthens teacher self-efficacy while cultivating a collaborative, reflective culture

focused on continuous improvement. These findings highlight cognitive coaching as not only an effective method for individual professional growth but also as a strategic, long-term investment as a valuable component of any professional development framework.

Limitations and future research

Limitations to successful coaching experiences were also identified within the data. Participants frequently cited insufficient time for implementing new practices, which may hinder the full realisation of coaching's potential. Interestingly, several participants reported that they would welcome more frequent lesson drop-ins/observations from their coach, in addition to feedback that was not constrained to the formalities of the CC cycle. As an insider-researcher, my existing professional relationships may have positively influenced the openness of responses, though they may also have introduced subtle pressures for participants to present themselves favourably. However, it is important to note that participation in the study was entirely voluntary, with all participants informed of their right to withdraw at any time. They were also assured that both interview transcripts and any quotations used in the study would be anonymised to protect their identities.

The absence of student voice, in particular, leaves a gap in understanding the downstream impact of teacher development on learner experience and efficacy. Future research should include student perspectives to explore how changes in teacher efficacy and instructional strategies, as influenced by coaching, are perceived and experienced by learners. This would provide a more holistic view of coaching impact across the teaching-learning continuum.

Nevertheless, the results point to a strong foundational argument for the CC programme's contribution to both personal and organisational development. The programme's alignment with principles of adult learning (Cox, 2006), psychological safety, and collaborative enquiry suggests that, when effectively implemented, it can serve as a strategic lever for cultural and instructional transformation within schools. Future research that broadens the scope of participants and includes longitudinal data will be key to establishing the sustained organisational impact of CC. Additionally, employing mixed-methods approaches that triangulate findings with student outcome data will be essential in determining whether the benefits of CC extend beyond individual teacher efficacy to contribute to systemic school improvement.

Practical implications

Three critical areas emerge from the synthesis of [Figure 3](#) and the associated text that warrant careful consideration in the implementation of coaching-based professional development model. First, from a theoretical standpoint, the introduction of a CC programme would allow for a more personally attuned approach that addresses the feelings and attitudes of coachees to enhance teacher self-efficacy and reflective practice. Clearly communicating expectations and benefits by integrating Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory with the States of Mind framework also provides a strong foundation for supporting teacher autonomy.

Second, the research highlights the necessity of incorporating multi-stakeholder perspectives, particularly those of students and nominated coaches, into evaluative and

Implication Area	Key Insight	Actionable Recommendation
Theory	Self-efficacy linked to CC and autonomy	Apply Bandura's SCT and States of Mind to PD design. The <i>Self-Efficacy</i> theme and <i>Challenge Practices</i> sub-theme provide evidence of addressing cognitive, motivational and emotional factors in professional development models.
Research	Need to include student voice and coach perspectives	Broaden qualitative studies to multi-stakeholder views; Explore student and coach experiences. The <i>Attitudes and Sentiment</i> theme, and <i>Confidence in Student Ability</i> sub-theme support the case for multi-stakeholder views.
Practice	Teacher trust and time crucial for success	Embed CC in school culture with realistic timeframes. The <i>Validation</i> and <i>Authenticity</i> sub-themes justify the call for deliberate trust-building.

Figure 3. Practical implications summary.

developmental processes. Expanding qualitative inquiry to capture these voices provides a more nuanced understanding of the coaching experience and its contextual effectiveness.

Finally, from a practical perspective, the successful enactment of CC initiatives is contingent upon the coach-coachee relationship and crucial to facilitating a meaningful and sustainable programme. Strategic coach-coachee pairing is key to cultivating a culture of trust and collaboration.

The objective of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy as a result of participating in a Cognitive Coaching programme. Qualitative analysis revealed diverse emotions and attitudes as participants navigated professional development and adopted new behaviours (Costa et al., 2022). Exercising autonomous integrity enhanced their sense of efficacy, even when existing practices were challenged. Empowering teachers to self-direct growth was found crucial for sustaining new pedagogical practices. The study highlights the importance of authenticity, open dialogue, and validation in strengthening coach-coachee relationships. Findings in the present study are consistent with findings in the literature, indicating that higher levels of self-efficacy directly affect a teacher's willingness to adapt teaching strategies, having stronger influence on commitment to self-improvement (Cocca & Cocca, 2022). Additionally, practical implications for school leaders, and recommendations for future research are also provided.

Note

1. Cognitive Coaching in this study refers to the model of coaching and not specifically to CCSM, a mentoring tool, which is a copyrighted certified programme.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Ethical approval

Cardiff School of Education of Social Policy Ethics Committee. Reference code: CSESPPGT-123.

Data availability statement

Data not available due to ethical restrictions and lack of participant consent.

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Appendix 1

Code Name	Description	Files	References
Attitude	Coding to group together thoughts and feelings of participants in response to being coached.	7	23
Mixed	Sentiment coding to identify participants' mixed feelings towards the cognitive coaching programme.	1	4
Negative	Sentiment coding to identify participants' negative feelings towards the cognitive coaching programme.	2	3
Neutral	Sentiment coding to identify participants' reluctance or hesitation towards the cognitive coaching programme.	2	3
Positive	Sentiment coding to identify participants' positive attitude towards the cognitive coaching programme.	5	12
Impact	Coding to identify emergent themes in how coaching impacts on classroom practices	8	54
Challenge	Impact of coaching in terms of challenging existing practices to explore new pedagogies	7	15
Confidence	Increased confidence in student ability as a direct result of engaging with coaching	6	12
Limitations	Barriers to hinder or limit successful outcomes including external variables and coaching inconsistencies	2	4
Self-Efficacy	Impact of coaching on individual experiences, possibly the result of validation from the coach, with a correlation to resilience, confidence, and ability to self-regulate.	8	37
Less Significant	Coding to represent the lowest sentiments expressed for how coaching has had little impact on the participants self-efficacy, including expressing feelings of how little impact validation from their coach has had on their sense of efficacy.	3	6
Significant	Coding to represent moderate sentiments expressed for the positive impact that coaching has had on the participants self-efficacy, including the expression of how they felt receiving some degree of validation from their coach.	8	13
Very Significant	Coding to represent strong sentiments expressed for the positive impact that coaching has had on the participants self-efficacy, including the expression of how they felt receiving positive validation from their coach.	6	18
Relationships	Wide ranging aspects of the relationship between coach and coachee, including levels of communication, authenticity and , and overall encouragement from the coach.	8	77
Authenticity	Coding to determine authentic and meaningful experiences of coaching	5	11
Communication	Reference to frequency of coaching conversations at monthly touchpoint sessions	8	15
Validation	Coding to capture experiences of validation where coachee felt encouraged and supported by their coach	5	5

Figure A1. Refined coding to identify sentiment and thematic codes emerging from the data.