

THE INDUCTION PROGRAMME FRAMEWORK TO REDUCE NOVICE TEACHERS' DROP-OUT RATE

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Annotation. The induction process is a form of support for novice teachers starting their career path. The absence of state-wide induction programme leads to high teacher drop-out rate, shortage of teachers to replace expected retirements, and ineffective use of financial resources spent on educating teachers who quit working as teachers. In view of the internationalization of education in all the education cycles, many international teachers settle in different countries and start or continue their professional activities. Given that the initial integration stage is complicated even for local teachers, international teachers frequently encounter even more challenges rooted in the necessity to deal with intercultural communication issues among other problems. The aim of the research was to identify the key areas of early career support necessary to reduce novice teachers' drop-out rate. The research was conducted applying survey as the research method. The research outcomes comprised the description of the "state-of-the-art" concerning novice teachers' experience in the first years of work, the key areas of support necessary to reduce the novice teachers' drop-out rate, and recommendations aimed at teacher education institutions, school management and novice teachers with diverse cultural and professional backgrounds. The article introduces the selected results of the study focusing on the recommendations aimed at the beneficiaries within the given research perspectives. The research was conducted in the framework of the Nordplus Horizontal Project "Reducing Teacher Drop-Out Rate" (Project number NPHZ-2017/10067) and the project "Multilingual and Multicultural University: Preparation Platform for Prospective International Students" (No. 1.1.1.2/VIAA/1/16/019) co-funded by ERDF.

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching profession is both challenging and demanding. Teachers play an important role not only in students' lives, but also in the life of society. However, the road to becoming a qualified teacher and developing professionally is a life-long journey which is frequently full of challenges. Therefore, it is crucial not only to develop, elaborate and implement effective teacher education programmes at the teacher education institutions, but also provide support to newly qualified teachers during the first years of their career in order make the induction period smooth and effective, thus, reducing the overall teacher drop-out rate at an early career stage.

In view of the internationalization of education in all the education cycles, many international teachers settle in different countries and start or continue their professional activities. Given that the initial integration stage is complicated even for local teachers, international teachers frequently encounter even more challenges rooted in the necessity to deal with intercultural communication issues among other problems.

Since 2000, teacher education institutions in Latvia have been highlighting the urgent necessity to design and implement the programme for the induction period in addition to teaching practice during the studies to support novice teachers' early career stage.

The European Commission (EC), Council of the Ministers of Education invited the Member States to provide novice teachers with professional and personal support during the induction period. The European Union's (EU) "Education and Training 2020" strategy was adopted with the priorities and objectives set in the field of education where "improvement of quality and efficiency of education and training" is one the four common objectives (EC, s.d.: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework_en) to be achieved by the EU Member States by 2020. Given the afore-mentioned perspective, the adopted strategy puts emphasis on the teaching profession, as the achievement of the objectives largely depends on the performance of teachers and educators at large; accordingly, every EU Member State should have sufficient number of professional teachers.

To proceed, there is a great concern about the aging population of teachers in Europe and possible shortage of new replacements. EC Eurydice 2015 Report highlights the need for more teachers in the European schools because “at European level, two-thirds of teachers are over 40 years old and around 40% will be retiring in the next 15 years. Without policies that enhance recruitment, in some countries, the aging teaching population may lead to shortage of professionals.” (EC, Eurydice Highlights 2015: 2).

The induction programme is a form of support for novice teachers starting their career at school. An early career support during the induction period is very often a determinant factor for successful transition stage from student-teacher to the first independent steps in being a teacher. The induction period identified as a period of up to three years of teaching practice may be very challenging for novice teachers (newly qualified teachers) requiring a lot of attention and support. The problem novice teachers might face in the first years of teaching is the feeling of not being sufficiently prepared for many upcoming classroom challenges, which might be even more of the concern for international teachers having an absolutely different professional background and having dealt with a different classroom culture. Moreover, the first years of teaching may even be a “reality shock” for many novice teachers, as the idealistic picture of the teaching profession is replaced by the real school life with many challenges and difficulties faced while struggling to integrate into the school environment (Farrell, 2009). Inability of novice teachers to cope with the problems and challenges as well as the lack of appropriate support lead to novice teachers’ drop-out of the teaching profession.

Drop-out of novice teachers is a significant problem, as losing well-prepared teachers, graduates of the higher education institutions expected to be successors replacing the teachers’ retirements, leads to the apparent necessity to review the current practices and find innovative solutions to resolve the problems, such as high teacher turnover rates having negative impact on the teaching quality. Overload and exceeding the acceptable number of contact hours by being forced to replace the missing teachers has negative impact on teachers’ well-being leaving less time or no time for professional development and even causing drop-out of the profession long before the retirement. It should be highlighted that the high turnover of teachers has a considerable negative impact on the school’s performance in general and makes it difficult, if not impossible, to reach the goals set by educational institutions.

Early career support to novice teachers has been one of the topics discussed for a long period in the European Union. Consequently, quite a number of the EU member states have already implemented the induction period support with a coherent induction programme, whereas, some countries are on their way to implementing it. Despite the fact that mentoring programmes are available in Latvia, still no state-wide induction programme for the first years of career has been introduced, which is one of the factors leading to high teacher drop-out rate at the early career stage.

The aim of the research was to identify the key areas of early career support necessary to reduce novice teachers’ drop-out rate.

In the research framework, the following objectives were put forward: to review theoretical literature on the induction period within the teaching career perspective and synthesize data on the support available to novice teachers; to explore the needs and early career support necessary for novice teachers to successfully integrate into the new environment; to collect the data on experience and challenges faced by novice teachers during their first 3 years of professional activities in Latvia; to develop recommendations for improving the novice teachers’ induction process with an aim to reduce the novice teachers’ drop-out rate.

The research was conducted applying survey as the research method. The research outcomes comprised the description of the “state-of-the-art” concerning novice teachers’ experience in the first years of work, the key areas of support necessary to reduce the novice teachers’ drop-out rate, and recommendations aimed at teacher education institutions, school management and novice teachers with diverse cultural and professional backgrounds.

The article introduces the selected results of the study focusing on the recommendations aimed at the beneficiaries within the research perspectives.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The term ‘novice teacher’ is comprehensively described by Fransson (2008) comparing the concepts of *new teacher*, *newly qualified teacher*, *beginning teacher*, *prospective teacher*, *pre-service teacher* etc. and coming to a conclusion that ‘novice teacher’ is used “when relating to competence, knowledge and skills” as well as “a contrast of competence” and “teachers’ short experience in schools”

(Fransson & Gustafsson, 2008: 37-38). In addition, for the purpose of clarification, the *novice teacher* “is defined as a teacher with less than five years of teaching experience” (Kim & Roth, 2011).

In the brochure of Tallinn University “On Implementation of Induction Year Programme in Educational Institutions in Estonia”, the term “novice teacher” is described as a teacher who starts their work at any educational institution (pre- school school, school or vocational school) and have registered and taking part in a compulsory induction year programme for novice teachers providing cooperation with mentors and the supervising entity in the person of university (Eisenschmid, Koster & Poom-Valickis, 2013).

It is widely acknowledged that novice teachers frequently experience many challenges and unexpected obstacles, therefore, the teacher profession is very often referred to as a profession with a high turnover as well as a considerable drop-out rate, especially high in the early career stage (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). While focus within the research on the integration of international teachers with diverse cultural and professional backgrounds has almost exclusively been on ensuring the necessary language proficiency language proficiency and general intercultural communication skills, it is high time to realize that the challenges international teachers face may be far beyond the current scope. For instance, Goodwin (2012) distinguishes among the following three most common areas of challenges faced by novice teachers: struggling with classroom management; curricular freedom; sinking in unsupportive environments.

Struggling with the classroom management has been reported by many novice teachers as the most challenging issue, firstly, because of the lack of required practical skills and secondly, because difficult students have a negative impact on the overall atmosphere in the classroom "student in my classroom is having a significant impact on my interaction with the remainder of the class ... As a first-year teacher, I don't have the professional skills to deal with this extreme behavior" (McCormack, Gore, & Thomas, 2006; Goodwin, 2012). In the case of an international teachers, classroom management may lead to additional challenges rooted in the inability to assess whether the problems faced are the result of the lack of professional skills or these are the cultural peculiarities which have to be addressed through the exploration and analysis of the intercultural issues relevant to resolve the situation.

Curricular freedom is pointed out as another challenge because of the lack of sufficient teaching materials and assistance in lesson planning. International teachers may need more time and contribution from the more experienced colleagues to get used to new teaching methodologies and lesson frameworks applicable in the respective environment. The lack of supportive environment in the first year, namely, the lack of collegiality, difficult relationships with administration, mentors as well as fellow and senior teachers may be a significant demotivator for pursuing the teaching profession (Goodwin, 2012).

It is wrong to assume that “newly graduated teachers are finished products” because they have already completed the initial academic studying phase; novice teachers not only have to develop their professional skills but also practice teaching finding approaches to teaching as well as adopt to a new context and school environment (Poom-Valickis, 2007). The transition from being a novice to becoming an independent professional teacher is a difficult road with many obstacles to overcome, therefore, it is essential not only to provide effective teachers’ education and continuous professional development but also support at the start of their career in order to retain teachers in the profession reducing the overall drop-out rate (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015).

Eurydice report (2018) clarifies the term “induction” as “a structured support phase provided either for teachers new to the profession or for prospective teachers” containing “important formative and supportive components” providing additional training, advice and help, a phase during which novice teachers perform the teaching tasks fully or partially and are entitled to remuneration (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018: 51).

Bjerkholt and Hedegaard (2008) state that the term “induction” has derived from the Anglo-Saxon language meaning “support to new teachers”, “professional competence development for beginners”, “supporting novice teachers’ adjustment to school as an organization and to the teaching profession”.

In the majority of European countries, novice teachers have access to induction programmes. According to Bjerkholt and Hedegaard (2008), two main types of induction programmes are as follows: high intensity programmes and low intensity programmes, where high intensity induction programmes last from several months to one to two years but low intensity induction programmes cover initial introduction to the school or provide “organised buddy support” (Bjerkholt & Hedegaard, 2008).

An induction phase for novice teachers is currently made compulsory in 26 education systems in Europe. The duration of the induction process varies from 3 months to the maximum of 36 months. For example, in the Netherlands, the framework for induction is set by social partners in collective labour agreements providing that schools are responsible for early career support; in Germany a remunerated

preparatory service at school is compulsory and the duration of the period ranges from 12 to 24 months. In Ireland, there are two types of induction available: 1) National Induction Programme Workshops where novice teachers must participate in 20 hours workshops and 2) a school-based system where induction is combined with after graduation qualification. Novice teachers have to complete one of the induction models in a period of 36 months (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018).

The induction programmes in primary and secondary general education usually include the following types of support in Europe, 2016/2017 (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018): mentoring; scheduled meetings with the school principle, administration and other colleagues to discuss progress or problems; assistance with planning and assessment of lessons; professional development activities (courses/seminars); peer review; diaries/journals; self-reflection; participation in teachers' class activities and/or class observation; team teaching; networking/virtual communities; collaboration with other schools.

Out of the three Baltic States, Estonia is the only country which implements the induction programme providing support to about 150-250 novice teachers annually at two major universities: Tallinn University and the University of Tartu. Mentoring is an integral part of the induction programme in Estonia (Induction Year Brochure, 2017). In Latvia there is no state-wide induction programme, however, Latvia has profound experience in mentoring, for instance, in the framework of the University of Latvia and ESF project "Innovative and practice-based teacher education and professional development of mentors" No. 2010/0096/1DP/1.2.1.2.3./09/IPIA/VIAA/001, UL No. ESS2010/95, more than 1000 mentors were equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to support novice teachers Grigule, L. (ed.) (2013).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of the research was to identify the key areas of early career support necessary to reduce novice teachers' drop-out rate.

The research was conducted applying survey as the research method. The research outcomes comprised the description of the "state-of-the-art" concerning novice teachers' experience in the first years of work, the key areas of support necessary to reduce the novice teachers' drop-out rate, and recommendations aimed at teacher education institutions, school management and novice teachers with diverse cultural and professional backgrounds.

The research sample comprises novice teachers - newcomers to the teaching profession having less than 5 years of working experience (Kim & Roth, 2011). The initial research sample comprised 55 novice teachers in Latvia aged from 19 to 43 years. In September - November, 2018, the research sample was expanded to explore the needs and challenges of international teachers settled in Latvia. Nine international teachers aged 21-52 participated in the research and stated their views on the challenges related to the induction period for teachers with diverse cultural and professional backgrounds.

The data collection was carried out in the period from November, 2017 till November, 2018. The methods of data collection comprised questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, workshops, direct observations and literature review.

The data obtained in the research framework provided the basis for the elaboration of recommendations for the development of the induction programme aimed at novice teachers to reduce novice teachers' drop-out rate.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Recommendations for development of the induction programme have been developed based on the theoretical and practical research findings which comprise the key elements of the support necessary for novice teachers and the analysis of best practices.

Recommendations Aimed at Teacher Education Institutions:

- Develop guidelines for school leaders on the implementation of the in-school novice teachers' support programme;
- Organize seminars and informative training sessions for school leaders/administration in Latvia to promote the necessity to introduce a coherent induction support programme for novice teachers;
- Invite the experienced school leaders and individual practitioners to exchange experience in the practices in the development and implementation of induction programme;

- Introduce creative initiatives in supporting novice teachers (e.g. “Novice Teacher/ Teacher-Friendly School” award);
- Provide support to novice teachers after graduation from teacher education institutions through organizing regular workshops and supervisions, as well as introducing career consultancy opportunities;
- Develop the toolkit for online and classroom use providing support in methodology application and most recent research data to update novice teachers on the most relevant and up-to-date issues in their professional area;
- Highlight the necessity for in-depth research among the experienced researchers and novice teachers continuing their formal education (e.g. in the framework of Master and Doctoral Study Programmes) aimed at finding innovative solutions to the problem identified;
- Develop guidelines for the introduction of intercultural issues into school environment at different levels in view of internationalization of education in all the education cycles.

Recommendations Aimed at School Management:

- Consider establishing a welcome brochure for a novice teacher comprising the most important data, contacts, instructions and the summary of key facts related to school culture;
- Organize a welcome meeting between the administration (key personnel), a mentor and a novice or a group of novices at the beginning of the school year in order to introduce all the parties to each other and establish good contact eliminating unnecessary anxiety;
- Organize an adaptation week for novice teachers aiming to assist the novice teacher in both regular professional activities and social issues relevant for functioning of the educational institution;
- Establish collaborative school culture by encouraging networking/socializing events (e.g. school excursions, study groups, etc.);
- Carefully select a mentor for a novice teacher taking into consideration the personality match of both. Consider changing a mentor if the previous match was not successful, avoid formal mentoring in order to receive the best outcome of their cooperation;
- Involve a novice teacher in planning future development of the school to foster the feeling of belonging to the school community and socialization of a novice teacher;
- Encourage novices to share their ideas and allow the novices to contribute to the school environment - fresh look at ordinary things may be of great value;
- Pay specific attention to organizing the physical environment in the staff room (e.g. make it welcoming, easily accessible, comfortable and personified);
- Consider offering reduced workload to novice teachers during the first year of career.

Recommendations Aimed at Novice Teachers:

- Keep diaries or portfolios for self-assessment and reflection on the professional development;
- Ask for support when necessary, do not leave the problem undisclosed (look for support from peers and teacher education institutions), find a “buddy” in the working place;
- Participate in school community activities;
- Look for support from peers and teacher education institutions;
- Do action research focusing on the professional activities, participate in professional development events and join professional networks to exchange experience and gain information necessary to successfully function in the professional sphere.

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