
WHAT DO BEGINNING TEACHERS NEED FOR EFFECTIVE INDUCTION AND RETENTION IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION?

Darinka Kostadinova

St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo –Vratsa Branch, Republic of Bulgaria,
kostadinova_d_h@abv.bg

Larissa Gruncheva

St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo – Vratsa Branch, Republic of Bulgaria,
larissa.gruncheva@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper contains the results of a study on beginning teachers' views regarding the successful induction to the teaching profession, retention in it and the role of mentoring in this process. The study was conducted in 2018 within "The Art of Mentoring the Transition from the University to the Educational Institutions" research project of Vratsa Branch of St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of VelikoTarnovo.

The first 1-2 years of the beginning teacher's career are considered to be the most difficult and critical periods of a teacher's career. It is often described as a time of survival for any neophyte teacher. It takes much determination and perseverance from the new teacher to remain in the teaching profession, shape his/her professional identity and find their place in a community of practice. Those who are not helped to develop staying power, ultimately leave the profession and they constitute quite a high percentage. High attrition rates recognized as a global problem among the teaching community signal a worldwide need of adequate support for new teachers.

Effective induction requires high-quality mentoring and a strong supportive school environment. Knowing and understanding the needs, expectations and attitudes of the beginning teacher is the best way to overcome the hardships of the induction period and to ensure his/her successful career start.

Keywords: beginning teacher, induction, retention, needs, integration to the professional community, support, mentor.

1. INTRODUCTION

As beginning teachers start their career in the teaching profession they are positive, enthusiastic, engaged and ready to make a difference. Yet, despite this positive attitude, the first 1-3 years of the beginning teacher's career are considered to be the most difficult and critical periods of a teacher's career. It is often described as a time of survival for any neophyte teacher. For those who manage to develop staying power, it is those first years of practice that shape their professional identity. For others, unmet expectations may result in disappointment, stress, frustration and ultimately lead to leaving the profession.

High attrition rates are a global problem among the teaching community. They signal a worldwide need of adequate support that can facilitate the new teacher transition from pre-service university training into the profession. Literature on attrition suggests that attrition is at its highest among beginning teachers and unfortunately, the most talented are often the most likely to leave. Despite the lack of precise figures, the departure of qualified young teachers from educational institutions causes huge economic costs to educational authorities on replacing teachers who leave the profession, with students often being the ones who most suffer the consequences of inadequate support for teachers. Therefore, beginning teachers need such kind of support that may help them not just survive but stay and thrive in the profession and ease their transition from student teachers into teachers of students.

2. CONTEMPORARY ASPECTS OF THE ROLE OF INDUCTION AND RETENTION FOR SEAMLESS TRANSITION FROM THE UNIVERSITY TO THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

Effective transition from the university to the educational institution means not only effective support but also active engagement in their own induction as a means to assist the beginning teacher's adaptation and integration into the professional community. Beginning teachers are considered active contributors to their induction and co-responsible for their own professional development.

On international level, research proves that high quality induction has a dramatic effect on the transition from pre-service education into the teaching profession. It can further build on the skills and knowledge of early career teachers, improve job satisfaction and commitment to teaching and reduce teacher attrition in the early years. It may contribute to higher levels of determination and perseverance from the new teacher to remain in the teaching

profession, shape his/her professional identity and find their place in a community of practice. It supports early career teachers to manage their own wellbeing and career development.

Effective induction requires high-quality mentoring and a strong supportive school environment, tailored to fit the specific individual needs of each neophyte teacher. Part of the supportive school environment is the creation of proper conditions for continuing learning for teachers. Nowadays society expects teachers to be able to get their students ready for lifelong learning. To achieve this, teachers themselves need to look at themselves as professionals who have been developing throughout their careers. Continuous professional learning helps teachers to "upgrade" their knowledge, skills and competences in a way that best meets the needs of the students in our dynamically changing world. The idea that all teachers are learners underlies the type of induction and mentoring which are focused on improving professional learning.

Induction is also seen as an investment in retaining teachers – an investment with high returns. Beginning teachers' retention plays a key role to the sustainable and smooth functioning of any educational system. According to the National Statistical Institute, 68598 pedagogical specialists worked in the Bulgarian system of secondary education during the 2017/2018 school year. Only 1.36% out of them are aged up to 29 years while teachers aged 60+ constitute 11.23%. Creating conditions for well-balanced age structure of staff ensures continuity among the teams of teachers, in this way providing opportunities for breaking stereotypes and archaic pedagogical formulations. Besides, it is a well-known fact that no education reforms are possible without a sustainable teaching staff.

Support for formal induction in Bulgaria has been prevalent since recent years and was implemented more formally two years ago with the acceptance of the Bulgarian standards for the teaching profession (Ordinance № 12 of 01.09.2016 on the status and professional development of teachers, directors and other pedagogical specialists). While in our country the characteristics of the "first steps in the profession" period (i.e. the first years of teaching) has become focus of scientific interest and research since not long ago, the literature on induction into the teaching profession has its roots in the 1950s and 1960s in the US but it was not until the 1980s - 1990s that teacher induction received serious attention in research and the literature.

In the past induction and induction programs were considered a means to help beginning teachers overcome the deficits they have: difficulties and problems, mainly with classroom management and instruction. Today it is also a goal of induction, although the main emphasis has shifted. The mid-1990s marked a change in the way researchers viewed beginning teachers and induction programs. Teacher induction was deemed a means to pursue high standards in teacher quality rather than overcoming deficits, i.e. researchers started to see teacher induction as a (primary) phase in the continuum of teachers' professional development ultimately leading to the new teachers' successful integration into the profession. Currently there has been another change in perspective. Teacher induction is considered part of the wider school policy with regard to teachers' professional development and the emphasis is placed on the beginning teachers' own initiatives in the induction process. Beginning teachers are viewed as valuable for the school since they bring new knowledge and visions about education and can actively contribute to the development of the school as educational institution. Thus in less than four decades the researchers' point of view on teacher induction changed. The perspective shifted from seeing beginning teachers as passive consumers of knowledge and experiences provided by others into active contributors to his/her professional growth.

However, as Kearney notes, international research on educational induction has been quite specific with regards to what induction entails but there is ambiguity with regard to the term and its specific definition. As pointed out, there is not a common understanding as to what induction is, and it is difficult to articulate a conceptualization that will satisfy the vast array of formal and informal practices currently undertaken in various educational settings (Kearney, 2014). With the recognition of induction, in recent years, as a necessary component of teacher acculturation into the profession, a number of definitions have been generated that deserve attention.

3. EFFECTIVE INDUCTION AS A NECESSARY COMPONENT OF TEACHER ACCULTURATION AND INTEGRATION INTO THE PROFESSION.

Teacher induction refers to a more or less formalized program and other support and guidance provided to beginning teachers in the early stages of their careers (usually the first 1-3 years of teaching) after their pre-service education. It is aimed at assisting early career teachers to learn, practise and master skills that are best acquired while teaching. Induction encompasses: orientation to the workplace, socialization, mentoring and guidance through the novice teacher practice.

Kearney (based on definitions from the US and Australia, and a comprehensive understanding of the international literature) defines beginning teacher induction as the primary phase in a continuum of professional development leading to the teacher's full integration into a professional community of practice and continuing professional learning throughout their career (Kearney, 2014).

What is worth mentioning is that in defining effective induction, experts on the topic emphasize the role of induction in producing quality teachers who are dedicated to continuing learning, culminating in acceptance into a professional community of practice.

In the Australian guidelines for teacher induction into the profession (2016), the term “induction” refers to a formal program and other support provided to assist early career teachers to learn, practise and refine the elements of the professional role that are best acquired while teaching. In this process beginning teachers become active participants in their profession, seeking and using collegial advice and evidence to improve their practice and communicate effectively with colleagues, parents and the community. They take responsibility for their own learning. They learn to manage both the personal and professional demands of the teaching role. In the same document, the three most significant things about induction are outlined: 1. Effectiveness of induction programs increase as the range of supports and strategies provided increase. 2. Practice-focused mentoring, by one or more expert colleagues, is a powerful tool for supporting the transition of a teacher from the pre-service education into in-service education. 3. Induction should focus on four key areas: professional practices, professional identity, wellbeing and orientation.

With regards to Bulgaria, there are no specific normative documents on national level regulating induction and mentorship where these issues are described in detail. There exist, however non-governmental documents on the topic but they do not have normative or regulatory status. The issues on induction and mentoring are included in the Standards for the teaching profession where induction is considered as the beginning teacher’s initial qualification. Induction of early career teachers in Bulgaria is aimed at knowledge acquisition and skills formation targeted at introducing them in the profession. It is purposed to help the new teachers adapt to the school environment and to provide them with methodological and organizational support to manage the whole scope of teacher role responsibilities thus ensuring the beginning teachers’ effective integration to the teaching profession. Mentoring has a key role in this process. The mentor teacher provides guidance as to how inductees may improve their teaching competencies and further motivates them for professional enhancement and career development. This initial qualification support is mandatory for novice teachers. When starting their teaching career they are assigned one formal mentor teacher to work with, by the school leader. It is required that a mentor teacher should possess the rank “Senior teacher” or “Chief teacher”. The focus of induction as seen in this normative document is on support that entails successful integration and adaptation in the teaching profession.

4. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to examine and analyze the beginning teachers’ need for effective induction and retention in the teaching profession.

In order to achieve this goal, several research tasks have been set:

1. to analyse the early career teachers’ opinion on their needs with respect to effective induction and retention in the teaching profession

2. to present and back with arguments summaries and conclusions on the process of effective adaptation, acculturation and integration in the profession.

The survey was organized as part of a project of St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo - Vratsa Branch. It was conducted in the period April - June 2018 via an online questionnaire.

The questions and statements in the questionnaire are focused on the essential aspects of beginning teachers’ views regarding the successful induction to the teaching profession, retention in it and the role of mentoring in this process. For the purposes of the study, the five-level Likert scale (in the format: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Do not have firm opinion, Agree, Strongly agree) was chosen which allows for collecting more accurate information from respondents. The open-ended questions of the questionnaire enable respondents to specify their opinions and to share ones on topics not covered by the questionnaire.

The survey respondents are 51 beginning teachers with 1 to 3-year professional experience who work in kindergartens and schools. 54% of the respondents have up to one year of work experience, 13% - up to 3 years and 23% up to 2 years. Teachers working at different stages of the educational system were anonymously and willingly involved in the survey. 53% of the respondents are school teachers, and the other 47% are kindergarten teachers.

The educational institutions which are the respondents’ working places are located in different settlements: 66% in big cities, 35% in small towns and 9% in villages.

The respondent beginning teachers hold bachelor qualification degree. They have graduated programmes with different majors. Most of them - 67% - have graduated with a major in “Pre-school and primary school education”. The rest of the majors are presented as follows: Primary school education, Pre-school education, Primary school education and foreign language, Bulgarian language and history, Psychology. These majors cover to a large extent the ones that are studied in the Vratsa branch of Veliko Tarnovo University (which suggests that the respondents are

former alumni of the branch in Vratsa). It is noteworthy that teachers predominantly continued their MA in the same major or a different one which, however, might have an upgrading role to their basic training thus ensuring best performance results. This is a good indication in terms of the sustainability of their orientation to the teaching profession.

52% of the respondents work on a permanent employment contract, 47% - on a temporary employment contract.

A contract of indefinite duration such as the permanent employment contract, gives the employee security and is a good basis for professional development. What practice shows is that when beginning teachers work on short-term temporary employment contracts (or as replacements), in short time large percentage of them make their way to another profession.

5. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS FROM THE STUDY ON THE BEGINNING TEACHERS' NEED FOR EFFECTIVE INDUCTION AND RETENTION IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION

According to the respondent beginning teachers, what is most important for effective induction is the **availability of induction programme** - a more or less formalized program that is aimed to support beginning teachers in the early career period after their pre-service education. There is no such special mandated form of teacher induction in Bulgaria. What we have is more like induction practices that do not have the form of a structured formalized program. Induction programs are extremely necessary since even the very best teacher education programs offered at university cannot prepare teachers for their job completely. 74% (44% strongly agree, 30 % agree) of the respondents think it is necessary that beginning teachers should be supported with an induction program during the first months of their employment, 12% do not have firm opinion and 14% disagree. Perhaps the third group considers that pre-service education is enough to prepare them for the job while the second group of respondents cannot decide on whether pre-service university education is enough or not.

Another important aspect of effective induction and retention in the profession is the provision of support. Beginning teachers **need support for their innovative ideas**. They consider themselves to be a source of new knowledge and new vision for education and they think that their ideas deserve support - 64% strongly agree and 22% agree with this perception (diagram 1). This is in compliance with contemporary views which value beginning teachers as active contributors to the development of the educational institutions. Respondents consider not only their mentor teacher, but also the school management and their colleagues as very important part of the supportive environment that can help him/her to implement new ideas.

New teachers are characteristically very open to new and progressive ideas, full of enthusiasm and determined to make difference. When considering traditional and modern educational practices, 4% of the respondents strongly disagree and 60% disagree that traditional education is to be preferred. Only 10% prefer traditional education practices. 26% have no firm opinion which is not strange for a beginner who has not shaped his/her professional identity yet and therefore is in a process of experimenting and deciding on what is best in terms of teaching practices (diagram 1).

Apart from this, early career teachers **need support in overcoming difficulties and problems** (this has to do with problem solving skills and decision making) during the induction period. High percentage (96%) of the respondents is ready and willing to accept advice on how to cope with children with problem behaviour. They disagree (44% disagree and 16% strongly disagree) that when they face a problems they should solve them alone (diagram 2). This indicates a very positive trend – respondents are not afraid to ask for help when they need it. It means they have realized that there have been smart teachers before them and neophytes can benefit and learn much from those wise teachers' experiences.

Mentor teachers are support-providers smoothing the initial transition into teaching. Their role is well recognized by respondents. Beginning teachers think of mentors as actively engaged participants in their adaptation to the profession. Thus, 60 % point out that the high level of personal professional competence allows mentor teacher to engage effectively in the adaptation process and ease the integration into the community of practice. 20% of the respondents have no firm opinion on the role of mentor teachers for successful adaptation and 14% disagree on this role (diagram 3). A possible explanation of the figures might be the fact that in some cases mentor teachers do not know how to effectively help new teacher. This leads to the need of specialized professional development for mentor teachers. According to the respondents the role of mentor teachers requires special training that allows them to be effective support and guidance providers for beginning teachers – 54% strongly agree and 24% agree (diagram 3). This is indicative of the beginning teachers' **need of well-trained mentors for effective induction**.

In the respondents' point of view, motivation for continuing professional development and growth is another important feature of effective induction which entails retention in the teaching profession. It is evident from the results that beginning teachers need conditions for continuous professional enhancement and development. They

enjoy learning about new teaching practices and improving their teaching performance – 74% strongly agree and 20% agree. Also, 90% of them declare that they are motivated to participate in various professional qualification forms (diagram 4). Undertaking professional development in Bulgaria is regulated within the Standards for the teaching profession.

An open-ended question of the questionnaire is about the **conditions** for successful adaptation and effective integration in the profession. The opinions of the respondents are summed and grouped to form the three most important ones: 1. good theoretical knowledge and preparation – it plays a key role for effective induction, successful adaptation and retention in the profession. Most respondents (78%) point out that they are able to find specific information in the specialized literature. apply knowledge in teaching diverse groups/classes, yet 28 % disagree on this statement and 14% do not have firm opinion which is a signal that beginning teacher need assistance and guidance on the issue of diversity in the classroom. 2. Good work climate and supportive school environment. 3. Love for teaching, combined with a lot of hard work, patience, perseverance and optimism.

Diagram 1

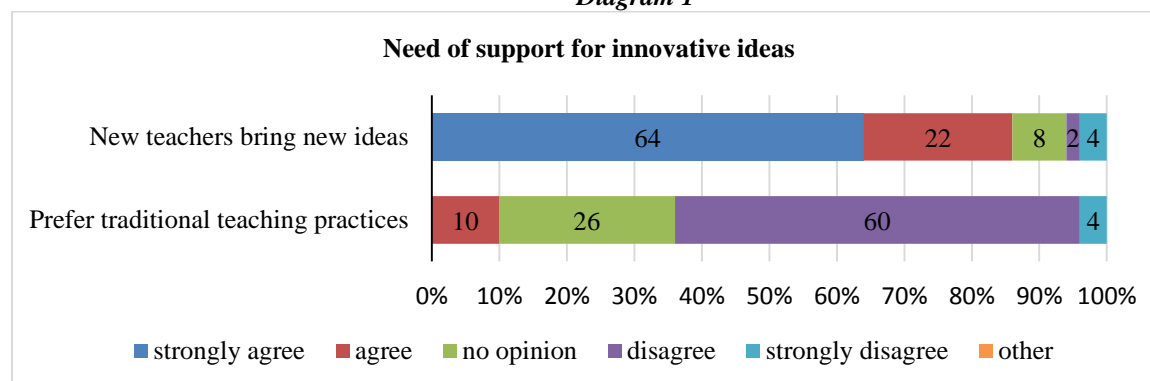


Diagram 2

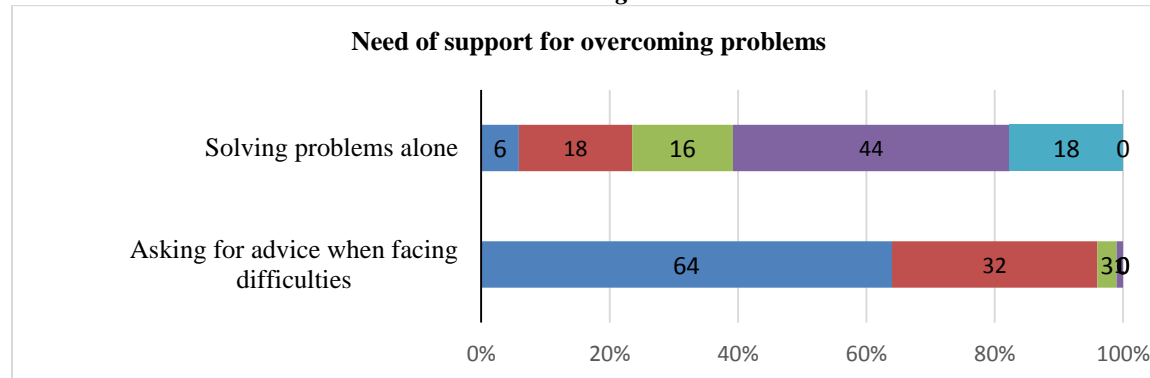


Diagram 3

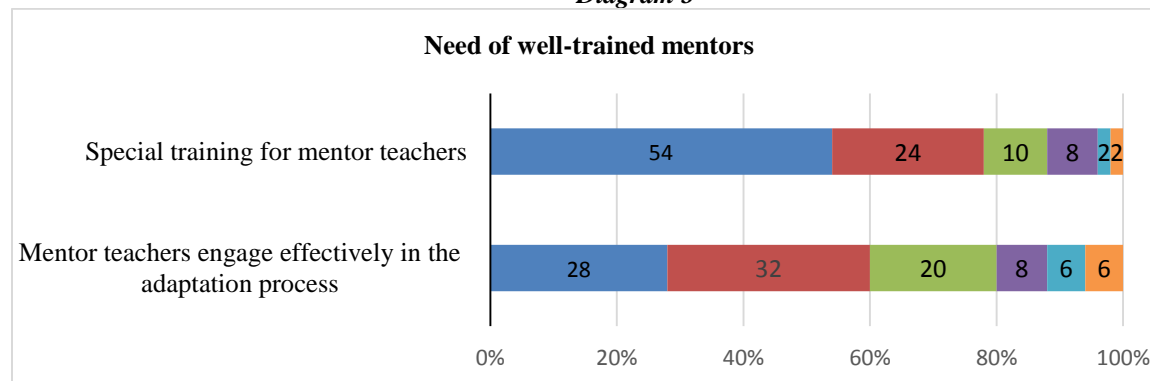
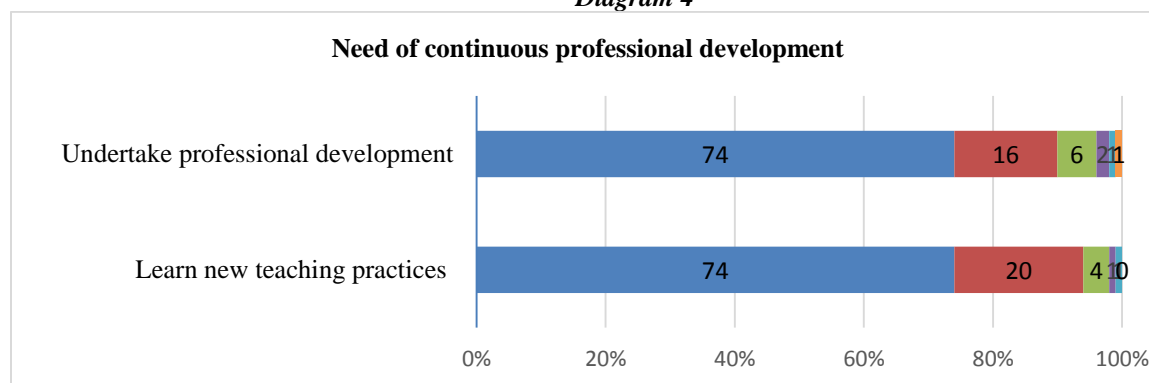


Diagram 4



6. CONCLUSION

The survey conducted and the analysis of the results show that effective induction and retention in the profession constitute a component part of the beginning teacher's adaptation, acculturation and integration in the teaching profession. Beginning teachers are co-responsible for their professional development and not just passive consumers of knowledge. They can also be active contributors to the development of educational institutions. New teachers at the start of their career are positive, enthusiastic, engaged and they appreciate and trust all kinds of support they get from all stakeholders in the system of education. As a society we all owe them the attempt to keep their enthusiasm, optimism and active engagement from the initial stage throughout the other stages of their career. Effective induction can bridge the transition from the university to the educational institutions, from pre-service education into the teaching career, from enthusiasm to professional achievements. In Bulgaria, induction practices have deep roots but on national level they do not have the form of a more or less formalized program. Induction programs are necessary since even most comprehensive teacher education programs cannot prepare teachers completely for all the elements of the professional role - some these elements are best acquired while teaching. Getting a university degree in education is the end of pre-service education and the beginning of learning in the profession.

REFERENCES

- [1] Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. (2016). Graduate to Proficient: Australian guidelines for teacher induction into the profession ISBN 978-1-925192-40-7
- [2] Наредба № 12/01.09.2016 г. за статута и професионално развитие на учителите, директорите и другите педагогически специалисти
- [3] Kearney, S. (2014). Understanding beginning teacher induction: A contextualized examination of best practice. *Cogent Education*, 1(1), 967477. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2014.967477>
- [4] Halford, J. (1998). Easing the way for new teachers. *Educational Leadership*, 55(5), 33-36.
- [5] Harfitt, G. (2015). From attrition to retention: a narrative inquiry of why beginning teachers leave and then rejoin the profession. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(1), 22-35. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2014.932333>
- [6] Grossman, P., Davis, E. (2012). Mentoring that fits. *Educational Leadership*, 69(8), 54-57.
- [7] Hewitt, P. (2009). Hold on to your new teachers. *Leadership*, 38(5), 12-14
- [8] Ingersol, R., Merrill, L., May, H. (2012). Retaining teachers, *Educational leadership*, 69(8), 30-34.
- [9] Kostadinova, D., Gruncheva, L. (2018). Induction into the teaching profession from the point of view of beginning teachers. *KNOWLEDGE – International Journal Scientific papers*, 26(2), 527-533. ISSN 1857-923X (for e-version) ISSN 2545-4439 (for printed version)
- [10] Topolska, E., Angelova S. (2018). Study on student teachers' educational and professional attitudes and expectations concerning their practical training. *KNOWLEDGE – International Journal Scientific papers*, 26(2), 467-474. ISSN 1857-923X (for e-version) ISSN 2545-4439 (for printed version)