

I am an Instructor Now. But, Where is my Mentor? ^(*)

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Abstract: *The main purpose of this study is to investigate the novice instructors' needs in their induction process. The study was based on a qualitative research design. Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. The participants were eleven novice instructors who had professional experiences of maximum three years. The data were analysed through content analysis. The results showed that the novice instructors were mostly in need of official mentors to guide them and orientation programs to help them be accustomed to their profession and working environments. Based on these results, some possible suggestions are proposed.*

Keywords: *novice instructors, need for mentor, orientation programs*

Ben Okutman Oldum. Ama Danışmanım Nerde?

Özet: *Bu çalışmanın amacı göreve yeni başlayan okutmanların, görevlerinin ilk dönemde karşılaştıkları ihtiyaçları araştırmaktır. Çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Veri toplama için yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşme soruları kullanılmıştır. Çalışmaya en fazla üç yıl deneyime sahip olan on bir okutman katılmıştır. Veri analizi içerik analizi yöntemiyle yapılmıştır. Sonuçlar göreve yeni başlayan okutmanların kendilerini yönlendirecek resmi danışmanlar ile mesleklerine ve çalışma ortamlarına uyum sağlamaları için intibak programlarına ihtiyaç duyduklarını ortaya koymuştur. Sonuçlar göz önüne alınarak bazı önerilerde bulunulmuştur.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *deneyimsiz okutmanlar, danışman ihtiyacı, intibak programları.*

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Introduction

The initial phases in every occupation turn out to be more difficult than expected. This is also valid for teaching; in our case, teaching at tertiary level (For the purposes of this study, the teachers at tertiary level will be called 'instructors'). What makes the initial phases more different and difficult than expected is that the instructors are expected to perform the duties that are expected from those instructors who have many years of experience in the profession (Angelle, 2006). Clark (2012) comments as follows in order to express the heavy pressure on the shoulders of new teachers: "Once hired, beginning teachers face the daunting and demanding task of setting up a classroom and becoming a teacher that influences student achievement in positive ways" (p. 197). Even if they are almost totally new to teaching, to students and to their working environment, novices can be treated as veterans by not only their students but their bosses or directors as well. Regarding the difficulties in the early periods of the professional life, Tonnsen and Patterson (1992) maintain that novice teachers are subjected to a process in which they have to experience a high level of expectation from different parties in the educational community.

In their experience, which can also be considered as a journey in which novices go through a transition from being students to being teachers themselves, novices face a number of different challenges some of which they have expected to encounter while some of which they couldn't even imagine before starting their professional life. These challenges range from the responsibility of teaching, managing a classroom with many students and managing students with misbehaviours (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Huberman, 1993; Lortie, 1975; Milner & Tenore, 2010; Veenman, 1984) to dealing with administrative duties, feeling isolated and not having a mentor to get support, help and advice in the induction process (Barlow and Antoniou, 2007; Romano, 2008). Based on the possible challenges, Vennman (1984) comments that there occurs a "reality shock" (p. 143) because of the diversities between what novice teachers expected and dreamt of and the vivid reality which they have to face in the real working environment. Therefore, novice instructors definitely go through a process of adaptation to the requirements of their profession as well as their colleagues, directors and students.

Before working as real teachers, instructors at all levels take teaching practicum courses in which they partly expose to the educational environment and their potential working environment. As practice students, they are expected to conduct classes for a few hours in which they are considered as the real teachers in the classroom. However, the difference between this teaching practicum experience and being the real teacher in the classroom is that when they are pre-service teachers, the future teachers still feel the support of their mentors. Therefore, they can still happily think of their future classes and imagine themselves as ideal teachers who have good classroom management skills, who can have good rapport with their learners while doing their best in teaching. However,

when they face the reality, in other words, when they become real teachers, it becomes hard for the novices to accept and deal with the reality (Brown, 2006; He & Cooper, 2011). Being novice teachers, now they can see the realities of the actual working and teaching environments in a bitter but more objective way. It becomes difficult for them to shoulder the total responsibility of being a teacher who is expected to lead a classroom full of learners with different expectations, habits and learning styles. What is worse is that in some situations, as well as managing a classroom and providing students with the necessary knowledge, novices also face some challenges considering the paper-work and establishing good relationships with their colleagues or directors. Therefore, the novice who has begun the profession with hopes and expectations may end up with a pile of “stories to live by” or “stories to leave by” (Craig, 2014, p. 81).

Besides making the transition process harder, the challenges also negatively influence the professional identity of the novices. It is naturally expected that novice teachers form their professional identities especially in the initial years of their working lives (Wong, 2004). The experiences in the early years are significant in novices’ professional lives (Flores, 2004). Some studies have shown that the initial experiences impact teachers’ future teaching performances as well as their career objectives (Darling-Hammond 2001, 2003; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). However, the challenges may decrease the motivation and desire of novices in terms of dealing with probable problems. Seeing that they do not possess the potential of dealing with the challenges in the educational process or in their working environments, novices may think that they cannot continue to be a member of the education world. Therefore they may even think of quitting their jobs.

In order to efficiently deal with the difficulties and challenges in the induction process as well as healthily forming and maintaining their professional identities, what novice instructors, or teachers in general, need is to get some help from a professional and this professional is mostly a mentor who can help the novices in their adaptation process and enable them to have a smoother and healthier transition from being a student to being a real teacher. The mentor can help the novices to adapt to the working environment and conditions in a reliable and constructive way. Moreover, mentors can also support the novices to become functional and productive members of the educational process (Murray and Male, 2005). With some professional help, it becomes more unproblematic for novices to learn the necessities of the profession and to learn the ways of conducting the procedures to accomplish their duties.

The review of relevant literature shows that the studies conducted about novice teachers have generally focused on the problems they experience in the early stage of their professional lives. However, there are fewer studies which have centred on novices’ needs, especially on their need for mentors in this critical period. Moreover, although there is a mentoring system at primary or secondary levels, there is not such a system at tertiary level in Turkey. Therefore, this study aims to raise awareness concerning the call

of novice instructors at tertiary levels for mentors who can guide them in their induction processes. The main research question of this study is: “What are the needs of novice instructors in their induction process?”. Therefore, the present study focused on the actual needs of novice instructors at tertiary level. By identifying the needs of novices at this educational level, some possible conclusions and suggestions for those novices at other levels can also be proposed based on the results of this study.

Methodology

A qualitative research design was preferred for the purposes of this study. The main reason for choosing this research design is to focus on the participants’ perspectives by obtaining their viewpoints directly. With a purpose of gaining in-depth understanding of the issue under discussion and enabling the participants to tell their stories and raise their voice related to their needs (Bogdan&Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2003), semi-structured interviews were used for data collection.

The participants of the study were 11 newly appointed instructors who started their professional lives at the School of Foreign Languages, Atatürk University. Eight of the participants were female and the rest were male instructors. The participants graduated from different English Departments (seven were graduates of English Language Teaching Department, three were graduates of English Language and Literature Department and one graduated from English Translation and Interpretation department from different universities in Turkey). The professional experiences of the participants for whom pseudonyms were used in the study were three years maximum.

Taking the data collection procedure into account, semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to provide flexibility while maintaining order. During the interviews, open-ended questions were asked to enable the participants to express themselves clearly. Moreover, the interviews were conducted in the native language of the participants to increase their levels of comfort while decreasing the possible anxiety that may occur because of sharing ideas in another language. Each interview was conducted in the offices of the participants and the interviews were recorded with a digital sound recorder.

Having completed all the interviews, the researcher underwent a process of listening each file while making transcriptions. All the files were transcribed verbatim with a purpose not to miss any participant comment which is of great value. As the interviews were conducted in the first language of the participants, they were translated into English after the transcription. The proofreading of the transcriptions was done by native speakers who were working as instructors at School of Foreign Languages.

For content analysis preferred to consider the data of the study, the procedure proposed by Creswell (2012) was adopted. Creswell (2012) regards this process as segmenting and forming labels to create descriptions out of the data to reach broader themes. First of

all, after the transcriptions were read in detail for several times, possible codes out of the transcription were identified. Then, the researcher grouped the codes into relevant categories which were also combined into broader themes. Based on this analysis, it became appropriate for the researcher to grasp the participants' points of view considering the issue under discussion.

Results and Discussion

The main purpose of this article is to find out the needs of the novice instructors in their induction process. The content analysis of the data obtained from semi-structured articles revealed that the basic need of the novices in the initial phases of their professional lives is 'mentors' who can help them adapt to the procedures as well as teaching. As they are experiencing a transition from being students to being teachers whose responsibilities dramatically increase as they enter the profession, novices are definitely in need of someone who can help them to have a smooth shift. Considering the necessity of someone to help them, some of the participants stated that when they needed some support, the veteran instructors helped them and taught them appropriate ways of conducting some procedures. However, the novices still needed someone who could always be there to give them help and advice. One example from one of the participants can be provided to illustrate this point:

“Absolutely... I have always asked my colleagues or more experienced instructors how they do this or how I should do that. Of course, I managed it in some way. But I wish I had had a mentor to help me.” (Nesrin)

Sharing similar experiences and a similar point of view, another participant also commented that he could obtain the necessary support from both novice and experienced colleagues considering such issues as conducting lessons or dealing with the bureaucracy. However, the participant still made it clear that they he needed an official mentor to show the right ways to do the things and maintained the following:

“Of course, we have experienced instructors here and I have tried to get some help from them about the system here, about how to conduct lessons or which techniques to use. I have been able to get answers to my questions from both the experienced and the inexperienced ones like me in social conversations. But... I would prefer to have real mentors.” (Ahmet)

Among the desires of the participants was to have mentors so that they could observe their classes to have a general idea of conducting lessons and to broaden their perspectives in terms of different issues ranging from teaching strategies to dealing with student

behaviours. The novices also wanted to have mentors to better understand the procedures in which the institutional issues are conducted. One of the participants who referred to these points briefly commented as follows:

“Actually... there should be mentors for the beginner instructors. We may observe a few of their lessons and learn the procedure in the institution.”
(Şebnem)

In addition to their desire to be assigned official mentors, the novice instructors also wanted to have some orientation programs to enable them to get the logic of the procedures to follow in the institution. Most of the participants stated that besides mentors, they also needed some orientation programs in order to get acquainted with the staff in the institution as well as understanding the paper-work. One of the participants referred to the orientation programs at other educational levels and explained that novices need orientations because they are required to adapt not only to the working environment but also to the organizational duties. Stating that she had to start teaching as soon as she was appointed to the institution, the participant referred to the problems she experienced in the early phases of her professional life and expressed her views with the following words:

“As soon as I came here, I started to have classes. When I had some questions about the organization such as how to take attendance, I was either asking my friends or the administration. When my students had some questions, I didn't know exactly what to say or how to explain. Actually, if there had been an orientation program for the new members, it would have been easier for me. Teachers in Ministry of Education have orientation during their first year. We could also have such organizations. It doesn't have to be as long as a whole year, but it is necessary for the new ones to get used to the environment. Of course, I don't mean the academic aspect because we have enough academic knowledge; I mean the organizational issues. At this point, I experienced some problems. I was asking everyone for help but I was getting different answers for the same issues.” (Derya)

Another participant also expressed her discomfort concerning the lack of an orientation program for novices. She maintained that she did not have much information about the personnel or the procedures to follow when she began to work in the institution as a part-time lecturer. She added that those starting work after her had some chance of getting used to the working environment since they did not immediately begin to have classes. Below is the comment of the participant about the need for an orientation program:

“My situation was a bit different because I began to work here with a contract. And I started to teach without knowing the personnel, the procedure and even where my class was. I think the new instructors coming after me were luckier because they were not asked to teach as soon as they started work here. They had some period before teaching in which they had the opportunity to know the working environment. They had a kind of orientation but I didn’t. While they were informed about most of the things, I was regarded as if I had been an experienced instructor.” (Şebnem)

Among the needs of the participants were also the seminars or some organizations in which they could share their experience with their colleagues as well as learning from others’ experiences. These gatherings were regarded as opportunities of broadening perspectives and improving professional identities. One of the participants, considering such meetings as motivating, noted the following:

“We can share our ideas and we can find solutions together. In this way, I feel myself more relaxed and motivated. In order to cooperate more easily, we can have regular and more frequent meetings in the institution.” (Emel)

Upon the same point, another participant also made a similar comment. She maintained that in the course of professional lives, the levels of motivation sometimes show some decline. Therefore, she stated that they needed more seminars or meetings as the meetings increase their motivation and help them refresh themselves. The participant revealed the following to express her view:

“Our motivation sometimes decreases during the term. So, the number of the organizations or seminars can be increased to enhance our motivation because I am really affected by these programs. If there are more organizations to train us, teachers can renew and adapt themselves in a better way.” (Derya)

Taking all the above explanations and calls for needs of mentoring and orientation programs into account, it can be commented that what novice instructors at tertiary level actually want in the initial phases of their professional lives is official mentors who can be there for the novices to guide them in their hard times. Most of the studies conducted about the induction processes of novice teachers have focused on one point in common: being a student is not the same as being a real teacher. While you are a student, the only responsibility is to study to pass the lessons. However, when you become a teacher, things change in a dramatic way. Suddenly, you realize that you have a variety

of responsibilities some of which you have expected to have but some of which you have not even thought of. Your responsibilities range from the heavy obligation of teaching effectively and managing the whole classroom, the students and the physical setting, to dealing successfully with the paper-work which make a significant part of bureaucratic procedures. In order to highlight this swift and dramatic change from being a student to being a teacher, Oshrat-Fink (2014) expresses the following comment:

“The transition from mentor-supported learning to autonomous teaching faces novice teachers with the need to bridge a series of gaps that arise with the shift from the campus to the classroom.” (p. 733)

The early phases of the professional life welcome the novices with a variety of difficulties. The novices in this study made it clear that they were not pleased to be left alone in the process of learning the procedures and getting used to the working environment. Instead, they needed someone who could really help them overcome the difficulties and challenges in the early periods as real teachers. Considering the significance of having a mentor or a colleague with experience in the profession, Nolan and Hoover (2008) commented that mentors can help novices be aware of what happens around either in the classroom or in the working environment and can offer perspectives to consider some necessary points and take the required action:

“Given the complexity of their work environment, teachers benefit tremendously from having a skilled colleague who can act as another set of eyes or ears to capture classroom events and then talk with the teacher to help make sense of what is happening in the classroom and what impact it is having on individual learners.” (p. 9)

What is clear from this quotation is that a skilled guide can make the transition period easier and can help the novice to be better engaged in the process and adapt to the requirements of the profession.

What is significant concerning the induction process is that even if it consists of a bunch of challenges that may decrease the motivation and desire of the novice to continue the profession, this process should be considered as a potential way of learning from the mistakes and difficulties (Poom-Valickis & Mathews, 2013). What is essential is that novices should be provided the necessary guidance and support to increase their willingness to develop their professional identities to become successful teachers. Therefore, mentoring is one of the best ways of supporting novices. The significance of mentoring for the novice teachers is also conveyed thoroughly by Fletcher (2000). The researcher maintains that mentoring enables novices to achieve their full professional potentials as well as developing their personal abilities to deal with the challenges of the

professional life and be better teachers as they have desired to be. Wanzare (2007) notes that mentoring in induction programs with systemic bases improves teacher quality while increasing their competencies. It is also made clear in literature that mentors who are expected to help novices in the induction process should be competent in guiding them (Catapano&Huisman, 2013).

Mentors are also expected to guide novices in their effort to go through a process of inquiry concerning their own teaching practices and reflect on their performances as real teachers (Wang & Odell, 2002). Therefore, if they feel that they are able to analyze their own developmental processes as teachers shouldering the responsibility of the tough job of teaching, novices can make criticisms concerning themselves. Besides supervising and guiding, mentors can offer novices an atmosphere of learning from their own actions and applications (Olsher& Kantor, 2012). Considering these roles of mentors, it can be stated that novices can get the best help if they can reflect on their own practices and can evaluate their performances. This can be considered as teaching to fish instead of directly giving the fish. The more novices can rely on themselves for their professional development, the easier it becomes for them to deal with different challenges that they are possibly to encounter in their professional lives. They may not always be able to get professional help or guidance; there may be times when they will be left alone to cope with the difficulties and find solutions to the problems. Hence, instead of directly offering solutions to novices, mentors should help them to improve their perspectives towards the profession.

Besides their need for mentors, the participants also made it clear that orientation and induction programs are essential for their adaptation as well as their professional development. Helms-Lorenz, van de Grift and Maulana (2015) regard the orientation and induction programs as beneficial to increase novices' commitment and desire to be continuous members in the profession. Donne and Fan-Yu (2013) maintain that success in teaching and professional life is the result of good mentoring, collaboration and orientation programs. Induction programs are essential since they enable the novice to go through a process of enculturation regarding their working environment and profession (Florez, Hernández, García&Claeys, 2011). Induction activities which are of good quality can increase the retention rate of the teachers in the profession, especially the retention of novices. Successfully adapting to their new identities as teachers is significant for teachers to have the motive to continue their professional lives. Novices should get the necessary support from their mentors in well-designed induction and orientation programs. Otherwise, their confidence in themselves does not reach the desired levels (Grudnodd, 2012). This inevitably puts an enormous challenge for the professional development in a field to train the future members of societies.

Conclusion

This study was conducted with a basic purpose of identifying the needs of novice instructors in their induction processes. A qualitative research design was adopted for the purposes of this study. The data were collected with semi-structured interviews conducted with 11 participants who were new to the professional life and had maximum three years of experience. The results revealed that what the participants needed most were official mentors to guide them and orientation programs to help them learn the official procedures and get accustomed to the working environment.

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that having good experiences in the initial phases of the professional life is of great importance for novices as it influences their future careers (Brody&Hadar, 2015). Therefore, novices should not be left alone; instead it should be considered that it is the responsibility of all the members in the educational setting to help and guide novices in their hard times (Caspersen&Raaen, 2014).Bell-Robertson (2014) suggests the adoption of multiple forms of support from which novices can benefit. Novices should be assisted by mentors and they should be provided with chances of adapting to their professional lives and working settings with comprehensive orientation programs.

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