

What's the Use of Induction Courses? A Case Study of Three South African Universities

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ABSTRACT The provision of education for all children has resulted in huge increases in enrolment. The new staff induction can therefore help staff better understand higher education in the South African context. The aim of the study was to analyse the impact of the academic staff induction programmes in 3 Universities in South Africa. The study adopted the qualitative interpretive research methodology. Data were collected by self administered questionnaires and interviews with thirty-six lecturers. The findings revealed that academics are left on their own to work things out and only receive guidance and support very late during the course of the year. Universities are therefore encouraged to conduct induction workshops as soon as the new staff member arrives at the station.

INTRODUCTION

A new staff induction programme involves those practices used to help new and beginning lecturers become competent and effective professionals in the classroom (Chapman 2006). If new staff are to establish themselves quickly, efficiently and effectively, there is a need to provide them with guidance, support and information in a planned and considered way (Cross and Rigden 2002; Wong 2004). The benefits of a thorough induction are: staff feels welcome and valued; accelerated success and effectiveness; improved personal and professional well-being; heightened job satisfaction, greater self confidence and enhanced commitment to students, school and profession (Britton et al. 2003; Wong 2004; Chapman 2006). Induction enables new staff to: understand the culture of the university and how they can be most effective in it; become familiar with departmental practices, policies and guidelines; appreciate and understand fully the expectations of their role and understand the duties and activities of the job and to begin to perform them effectively (Hassel 1999; Breaux and Wong 2003; Chapman 2006).

It is recognised that where staff are provided

with an appropriate and well-planned induction programme they: are more highly motivated; can extend their range of skills and knowledge, enabling them to be more adaptable; are less likely to waste the University's resources and staff time, and benefit from reduced levels of stress and anxiety (Fullan 2001; Hiebert et al. 2002). New employees also need to understand the organisation's mission, vision, goals, values and philosophy; personnel practices, health and safety rules, and of course the job they are required to do, with clear methods, timescales and expectations (Johnson and Kardos 2002; Wong 2004). This can only be achieved through a well-planned induction programme.

An ineffective induction programme or no induction at all, could result in staff taking too long to reach their full effectiveness with the associated risks of making more mistakes, and become disillusioned with the job (Hassel 1999). Employees who are not properly inducted need a lot more looking after, failing to provide good induction training is therefore utterly false economy (Rothman 2002). So it is therefore vital that institutions of higher education ensure that new staff are not left on their own to work things out. It is usual for new staff to have some gaps in their skills and knowledge when they take up a new post. It is useful to identify these at an early stage and make provision for addressing any training development needs. This will help the individuals feel supported and facilitate them performing to their best ability (Allington 2003; Britton et al. 2003).

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Justification for the Study

The democratisation of higher education and the shift towards mass higher education in South Africa was noble, as it signaled an attempt to address past imbalances in the provision of education, but it was not without its set of problems. As Mabokela (2000) succinctly observes, the majority of higher education institutions in Africa experienced institutional massification but with no adequate planning and with no proportionate accompanying increase in resources to enable them to cope with the situation. These resources could range from human, financial and physical resources that support the teaching / learning trajectory. Massification is a term used to refer to the rapid increase in student enrolment in teaching and learning institutions (Moller 2005).

One of the negative outcomes of massification was the phenomenal expansion of enrolments which had a serious bearing on the overall quality of students, quality of products, resources as well as the quality of education thereof. Furthermore, with massification, the student population has become more varied, and diverse by gender and age including older and part-time students. Thus, while many universities in South Africa are struggling to cope with the challenges that result from massification, many have begun to wrestle with the implications for diversity (Cloete and Bunting 2002). Another challenge that was attendant to massification is the admission into higher education, of underprepared students.

This poses serious challenges and pressure for lecturers many of whom had never received any form of training or induction relating to how to handle large groups of mediocre students. Commenting on the situation in most South African Universities, Moller (2005) argued that quality, retention and learning achievements have been sacrificed in the quest to get as many students into higher education as possible. For instance, the quality of education is brought into question in overcrowded classes characterised by an unacceptably high dropout rate.

In the South African context, massification of higher education has resulted in increased teaching loads and administrative duties of staff thus seriously affecting their contribution to research (Cloete and Bunting 2002). Further, massification has increased the need for more lecturers to cope with the realities and challenges that are attendant

to it. This has seen less academically qualified lecturers being recruited and in many cases reliance on part-time staff has risen sharply. A study by Smout (2002) has established that in previously disadvantaged black South African universities, it is common for prospective lecturers to be employed when they do not meet the requisite minimum qualification of a Masters Degree. Given this scenario, the importance of academic support and development in the form of on-the job training and continuous professional development cannot be overemphasized. This is critical if at all the quality of education and student throughput rates are to be maintained at acceptable levels.

This situation has been exacerbated by the fact that a large number of lecturers in universities do not possess professional teaching qualifications. This means that they may experience serious problems relating to general teaching methods as well as the expectations made upon lecturers in the andragogical environment. Such lecturers may benefit from workshops and continuous induction programmes offered at institutional level. Massification can become a potential threat to the quality of higher education, through the activities of underprepared students such as inability to critically think and write, lowly qualified academic staff members and academics who are not well versed with the principles and practices of higher education.

In the United Kingdom, for instance, Smout (2002) observed that new entrants to university teaching will soon be required to possess a higher education qualification before being appointed to the permanent staff of a university. While this ideal could appear rather too ambitious for South African universities at least for now, induction programmes, workshops as well as continuous training and retraining of academic staff members can prove the best option for filling the existing gap. Although developing countries have dramatically increased their participation rates in higher education through massification, on the other hand, massification has brought with it tensions and demands that need immediate attention. This complex phenomenon is the background under which this study was undertaken. The study seeks to go beyond mere descriptive account to incorporate appropriate and detailed analysis with recommendations on the key issues to be identified.

Significance and Contribution of the Study to Existing Knowledge

This study is crucial as it adds significantly to our existing insight and knowledge about academic staff induction in universities in South Africa. Judging from most participants' responses, it becomes clear that staff induction has for long been narrowly conceptualised as an event or a series of uncoordinated events during which new academics are hurriedly introduced to the general work environment in which they find themselves. This view of induction has seen many universities organising one or two days workshops in which issues deemed pertinent to the new lecturers are either simply spelt out, announced or explained.

Any serious study that seeks to understand and improve an educational practice should initially have a thorough understanding of the current situation and its possible shortcomings before it makes any firm assertions about what the ideal situation should be. This study seeks to achieve this by engaging the views of academic staff members on this issue. The study, therefore, makes an important contribution since it is premised on the firm belief that staff induction is not an event but an enduring and continuous process that should prevail throughout one's academic life. This notion of induction marks a significant departure from the narrow view of induction to a much more broader one in which induction is depicted as a process that starts when one assumes a position with a university and continues until the position is terminated. In this way, this study therefore widens and enhances our understanding of university induction processes.

The thrust of induction as it prevails in many South African Universities is confined to HR – related issues and in some cases to issues that relate to actual teaching in the lecture hall. Rarely do induction programmes focus on academic research. This study, therefore, sought to establish how induction programmes fair in terms of preparing academic staff members for their core responsibilities namely, teaching, research and administrative duties. The research aspect seems to be receiving the least attention by those whose responsibility is to induct academic staff members into their new occupational roles.

As aptly demonstrated by Scott (1995), most lecturers coming from the school system face the

twin challenges of becoming research active and developing pedagogy for teaching adults. In the same breadth, research by Msila (2008) has identified the danger of new academic members becoming “semi-academics”. This means that the academics maintain the core of their identities as that of high school teachers. This has had the negative impact that a number of academics have had problems in successfully completing their probation since research is one of the requirements for the successful completion of probation. In the case of those who eventually manage to complete their probation, they still battle or even fail to make significant inroads in the areas of research and publishing in their fields of specialisation.

The above scenario impacts adversely not only on the quality of scholarship that universities produce, but most importantly, on the quality of education that is ultimately dispensed to students and ultimately the caliber of students churned out by universities. This is not surprising given the fact that research and teaching are inseparable activities that mutually influence and inform each other. This research is therefore pertinent as it helps us to gauge the capacity of university induction programmes in equipping academic staff members during their transition from the professional world of school teaching to the professional world of the academics. Although the two systems obviously have some common elements, they have differences in terms of rules, purposes, language and orientation. Once the gaps that characterise the current induction programmes in South African universities are unravelled, it is hoped that this will prompt further interrogations and investigations on how induction programmes can be improved and strengthened. In our view, this is critical as it is an essential step towards the strategic repositioning of academics and universities in terms of the national, regional and global knowledge economy imperatives.

The research, thus, presents an argument which gives some potential direction to all those interested in improving the practice of professional learning in higher education in South Africa and beyond. There is therefore need to critically review the structures and processes within universities in order to ensure that all new academics who join contribute fully to human development and knowledge production through sound teaching, research and community engagement.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative interpretive methodology because it allowed the researcher to get the data directly from the subjects themselves by interacting with the respondents and hearing their views, voices, perceptions and expectations in detail. This strategy contends that knowledge is subjective and ideographic, and truth is context-dependant and can only be obtained after entry into participants' reality. The researchers recognised several nuances of attitude and behavior that could not have been noticed if other methods were used. This study adopted a case study research design. A case study is described as a form of descriptor research that gathers a large amount of information about one or a few participants and thus investigates a few cases in considerable depth (Thomas and Nelson 2001).

Purposive convenience sampling was adopted in the selection of participants for this study. This type of non-probability sampling method seeks information-rich cases which can be studied in depth (Patton 1990). A sample of thirty-six lecturers from three universities in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa constituted the study sample. Data for the study was collected through questionnaires and face-to-face interviews with the respondents.

Data Analysis

In this study, data analysis was approached by treating each theme on its own and then cross case analysis followed. The researchers arranged the question numbers on each research question answered. The raw data from interviews was coded so as to come up with the data sets. Responses were treated according to the research questions they were responding to and, in the process, came up with data sets X and Y. The researchers then came up with inductive themes related to each question.

FINDINGS

This study revealed that new academic staff members joining universities face a lot of challenges to adapt to their new occupational environment and roles. From the general direction of the responses, it was quite evident that lecturers entering universities are not given clear guidance

on their responsibilities and procedures. From the responses, it became clear that induction workshops conducted by Learning and Teaching Centres played an integral role in this regard although there was a general feeling that the frequency and timing need improvement.

How Lecturers are Welcomed and Initiated into Their Respective Departments

It emerged that when lecturers join universities, they are not given clearly defined procedures outlining their responsibilities and how they relate with other members of the departments or the broader university system. 89 percent of the respondents reported that when they joined the university, they were taken to the office of the Head of Department or Director of school where they were given time-tables, stationery and other stuff that relate to the subjects they are supposed to teach. When asked how long the session between a new lecturer and the head of department usually lasts, most participants indicated that it would not last more than 30 minutes at most. It emerged that not much induction could be covered within such a short period.

Seventy-five percent of the respondents reported that head of departments appeared to be in very much of a hurry and in most cases they promise lecturers that all other concerns that they had would be dealt with in due course. As a result, lecturers learned or acquired most of the issues that relate to their work through trial and error or through own intuition. Commenting on how they were initiated into their departments in particular and university at large, two participant lecturers stated: *"Everything was just not clear. I was only given my teaching load and asked to teach. I didn't know the procedure to be followed as this was my first time to teach."* *"I was given instructions but they were not very clear. As a result, I had many questions unanswered. Most of the things I learnt as I went along. Half way through my second year, I was assigned a mentor. This would have been more useful if it was done when I started."*

It is clear from these responses that there are no clear and structured programmes of initiating new members of staff into universities. This shows how critical induction workshops conducted by Learning and Teaching Centres are in this regard.

Assessment

On this aspect, the majority of the respondents (80 percent) indicated that the induction programme helped them to understand issues related to assessment. The respondents reported that prior to the induction exercise they were experiencing numerous problems in coming to terms with the purpose and the administration of different assessment procedures. Teacher X gave the following remark: *"The induction helped me to understand the different assessment strategies and the utilisation of assessment results to evaluate and assess own teaching and teaching methodologies."* A related remark was also given by another respondent who said:

The induction programme made me aware of the merits and demerits of a variety of assessment measures thereby enabling me to make a good choice of assessment measures in my class.

The results of this study point towards the fact that many lecturers in universities do not hold professional teaching qualifications. This is thought to be the strongest reason why many lecturers battle with teaching and learning issues.

In this study only 20 percent of the respondents reported that they were already aware of assessment issues even before they had attended the induction programme. Many of these indicated that they were coming from a teaching background mostly in the high schools and a few respondents (5 percent) having worked in other universities before. However, it is important to point out that even those who had a prior teaching background indicated that the induction programme enhanced their understanding of assessment particularly at university level. The following remarks bear testimony to the above: *"Coming from a teaching background, I already had a clear understanding of assessment except for self and peer assessment which were not used in the high schools."* A number of lecturers interviewed expressed grave concern over their capacity to assess using level descriptors. 60 percent indicated that they still experience serious problems when it comes to describing achievement at a particular level of the NQF. The general concern was that induction programmes either ignore this aspect or do not address it in sufficient detail. As a result, lecturers feel incompetent as far as this aspect is concerned.

20 of the participants expressed a lot of understanding of how assessment methods and

tasks should be aligned to the learning outcomes. Most participants from the three institutions that participated in the study indicated that this aspect was well covered in the induction programme. As a result, they felt empowered and capacitated to align assessment methods and tasks with learning outcomes. However, the general feeling from all participants was that the induction programme should be well timed if it is to bring about the desired impact. All the participants, (100 percent) felt that the induction programme came very late when they have already assumed their duties and experimented with unsound practices and procedures. There is therefore need to induct new members during their first few months of assuming duty.

Impact of Induction on Lecturers' Understanding of Self, Peer, Group and Portfolio Assessments

Participants were asked to give their views on the usefulness of self, peer, group and portfolio assessments. The objective was to assess the perceived impact of the induction programme on lecturers understanding of these different methods of assessment. The general feeling was that while all lecturers were aware of such assessment methods, they did not attach a lot of significance to them. For instance, a number of lecturers seem not to appreciate the immense value and contribution of self and peer assessment to overall success in teaching and learning.

As regards to portfolio assessment, all lecturers (100 percent) were fully aware of how important it is. They indicated that portfolio assessments were critical requirements when it comes to issues of their promotions. The following statements were representative: *"I did not know what a portfolio was and to make matters worse, how to compile it. Now, because of the induction programme, I have already started building one. The induction programme assisted me a lot."* Clearly, the induction programme seems to have capacitated new lecturers very much as far as portfolio development is concerned.

Teaching Strategies

About 90 percent of the respondents indicated that the induction programme held at their universities enhanced their teaching strategies

and instructional methods. 78 percent of the lecturers who participated in this study were from high schools and in a few cases from primary schools. These lecturers reported that they had no idea of the nature of teaching and learning in higher education. On teaching methodology, a number of lecturers reported that they had to rely on teaching styles that they learned from college. Many of the lecturers with high school backgrounds indicated that they used the teaching methodologies and styles acquired at high school. While it can be argued that principles and theories of teaching and learning are generally the same across the different levels of learning, it is critically important to realise that there is a fundamental difference in the way adults (university students) learn and the way children (primary or high school students) learn. These responses go a long way in showing the inadequacies of the induction programmes that they are exposed to, on joining university. Thus, lecturer induction at university level should reflect a gradual shift of emphasis from pedagogics towards andragogics.

Other participants remarked that prior to participating in the induction workshops, their only preferred mode of teaching and presentation was lecturing. Thus, most lecturers praised the teaching development consultants from their respective universities for mounting the induction workshops in which various teaching strategies, methods and theories of learning were demonstrated. When asked to mention specific aspects of teaching and learning that they benefited by participating in induction workshops, 65 percent of the lecturers cited the following: Co-operative learning; active learner engagement; learning through constructivism; humanism and accelerated learning techniques.

It emerged that 95 percent of the participants did not have professional teaching qualifications. These expressed a lot of appreciation of the induction programmes conducted by their respective Teaching and Learning Centres. The following statements from two participants bear testimony to the above:

The induction programme was useful. I now know a number of teaching and learning styles. I now know the different assessment techniques. I am able to create a conducive learning environment. I can now adjust my teaching style to suit my learners' varied backgrounds." "I feel the Teaching and Learning Centre had a significant contribution during the whole induction and it

was highly professional. However, induction should take place immediately after appointment"

Students' Varied Learning Styles

It turned out that 85 percent of the participants had a vague idea about the theory of multiple-intelligences. In particular, most lecturers confessed ignorance about the different learning styles by which students learn. Most lecturers expressed concern about challenges faced when handling huge university classes. When asked about survival strategies that they employ in order to cope with huge classes, most lecturers simply said they did not know what to do on this issue. Three lecturers reported that they concentrated on those students who were attentive and ignored those who were inattentive, and sometimes reporting them to the head of department. Most lecturers were therefore unanimous that the induction programme should act as an enabler in this regard.

Does Induction Strike a Balance Between Purely Academic Matters and Social Matters?

On this aspect, 60 percent of the respondents reported that the induction programme they attended did not strike a balance on coverage of issues. The general feeling was that most induction programmes laid an emphasis on academic matters at the expense of non-academic but important social issues that affected the overall working culture of the lecturers in particular, and the university at large. Most lecturers were unanimous that induction programmes they attended revolved around purely academic issues such as portfolio building, assessment methods (examinations, moderations, marking), teaching styles and university policies. While the lecturers agreed that these were essentially important issues that relate to the co-functions of a lecturer, they also felt some social and interpersonal issues are also crucial to the total well-being and proper functioning of a lecturer.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study showed that new academic staff members joining universities do not get adequate support that is crucial for proper adaptation and adjustment to their working environments. The induction of new lecturers is

meant to equip and capacitate lecturers with adaptive and operational skills which are a prerequisite for the efficient and effective discharge of official duties among other things. This is not only important for the overall well-being of the lecturers, but is also a precondition for overall student pass rates as well as throughput rates. The relationship between a lecturer's general well-being or stability and student performance has been repeatedly demonstrated by several studies on motivation and performance. This confirms Allington's (2003) postulation that effective lecturers produce better results.

In addition, Wong (2004) asserts that the teachers hired today are the teachers for the next generation. Their success will determine the success of an entire generation of students. Their success can therefore be ensured by providing them with a comprehensive, coherent professional development programme. Viewed in this light, induction thus ceases to be a luxury but assumes the status of being an organisational and professional imperative. This is particularly relevant at this point in time when the battle to achieve and improve student-achievement outcomes is still far from being won in the South African higher education landscape, particularly in previously disadvantaged universities.

From the findings, it is seen that most departments or faculties where lecturers are deployed appear not to have clearly laid out programmes of welcoming, orienting and initiating new lecturers to enable them find their feet in their respective roles in the university system. As a direct consequence, induction/initiation activities at departmental level is not only *ad hoc* unplanned and unsystematic but also superficial in that there is no standard format of doing it. This tendency has another undesirable effect that lecturers in the same department end up not receiving a standard system of induction. This study thus raises concern about the consistency, quality and nature of induction provision in universities.

Since university departments are not measuring up to the expected ideal, this means that new lecturers approach their work poorly equipped for the challenges they are likely to face in higher education teaching. The prevailing scenario in South African universities is that the issue of poor student performance and level of unpreparedness has reached unproportionate levels. This largely finds manifestation in disadvantaged institutions and in the context of the current

study; this appears to have been exacerbated by the merging of previously disadvantaged universities with other previously disadvantaged universities or technikons. This study therefore argues strongly that if the induction programme is to make a niche in addressing this problem, it (induction programme) must be well-structured, systematic and meaningful. As posited by Deventer and Kruger (2005) an effective induction system should be a systematic and gradual integration of the new lecturer into the university, its activities and its aims, by means of guidance and support.

The finding that induction programmes organised by the Teaching and Learning Centres (TLC) of various universities were mistimed has far reaching implications on the learning of the students. As reported in the findings, induction programmes are conducted late when some members have already assumed duties. This, in simple terms, implies that lecturers learn and acquire their work ethic through trial and error and may not have anything to fall back on in the wake of challenges. Logically and as alluded to by Hiebert et al. (2002), this has a big impact on personal effectiveness, job satisfaction and service delivery, particularly on the quality of education that is dispensed to the students. Generally, this tends to compromise the quality of education and student performance.

Our practical experiences as practitioners in higher education in South Africa has shown that induction is not only one key result area of a university's teaching and learning centre. Other key result areas that TLCs focus on include production of learning materials, assisting in courses/programmes accreditation, facilitation of learning and assessment and so forth. This, in actual fact means that the TLCs have many areas that are competing for attention and there is no guarantee that they will prioritise induction activities. This view seems the most probable reason why induction programmes are often held long after the lecturers have assumed their duties.

Clearly, no single induction workshop can do justice to a wide range of issues that relate to lecturing such as assessment, teaching strategies, portfolio building and so forth. If it claims to do so, then this evokes the debate on the depth of coverage of such issues as to impact positively on instructional delivery and student performance. This is particularly critical when viewed against the background that in the current study

about ninety-five percent of the participants did not have professional teaching qualifications. We are therefore tempted to think that it is because of this that most lecturers in this study reported having serious problems with issues that relate to assessment, teaching strategies, and catering for student varied learning styles.

The argument is that if lecturers are incapable of describing learner achievement in terms of particular levels of the National Qualification Framework (NQF) as evidenced by the findings of this study, it is doubtful that their teaching can influence student performance in the desired direction. This study hypothesises that this sort of incompetence can be explained in part by the twin effects of the poorly structured induction programmes and lecturers having no formal training in educational theory and methodology. It should also be pointed out that all efforts on induction will be put to waste if monitoring mechanisms are not put in place to ascertain the degree to which ideas conveyed/acquired during induction are translated into action. This confirms the research of Hiebert et al. (2002) that consistently supports the need for systematic induction of new lecturers and the ongoing professional development of all lecturers.

It emerged that the type of induction conducted in universities are too theoretical. It is, therefore, most unlikely that new lecturers without teaching backgrounds will benefit in any meaningful way from such inductions. The study therefore suggests that as part of the induction and initiation exercise, new lecturers be attached to experienced lecturers within their departments for a period ranging from one semester or two or even a year depending on the particular circumstances prevailing in each case. The attachment of new lecturers to seasoned lecturers presupposes that new staff members do not have homogeneous needs with the result that individualised integration programmes are justified.

During this period the new lecturer will be encouraged to observe various aspects of teaching from the experienced lecturer who will provide mentoring and coaching services to the new lecturer who is the mentee. Mentors can actually help new lecturers learn and understand teaching practice as well as giving them self-assurance of their teaching competences. This view finds support from Moller (2005) who argues that mentoring has become an internationally acclaimed practice that is consistent with good

teaching and its benefits on student throughput rates is well documented in the literature. In the same vein, Steyn and Nikerk (2002) assert that the hallmark of induction is to have experienced and new teachers working together, continuously improving their practice and becoming part of a community of learners.

CONCLUSION

The view that induction programmes can act as enablers to teaching and learning at university can hardly be disputed. Induction has the potential to boost lecturer effectiveness and ultimately, student performance and throughput rates. Universities therefore, have a mandate to integrate each new staff member into his/her new work environment as quickly as possible so that a productive contribution can be made as soon as possible. However, university systems appear to lack solid and well-functioning induction programmes. Consequently, lecturers entering universities are not adequately inducted to empower them with the required professional stamina that enables them to face their occupational exigencies and challenges. There is, therefore, need to rethink and revisit the current manner in which induction is conducted if at all the vision of achieving excellence in student performance in the South African context is to become a reality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the above discussion, this study recommends that:

1. Induction programmes be conducted timely, particularly soon after an individual lecturer assumes duty.
2. Departments should take an active role in the orientation and induction of their new members since individual lecturers spend most of their time working in particular departments. The crux of the issue is that departments should not wait or leave the induction of their new members to the teaching and learning centers.
3. Induction of new lecturers should be two-fold. Firstly, each department should provide department specific type of induction/orientation to a new member while the TLC will organise and come up with a broader and general induction that cuts across different departments (university-wide induction).

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