

## **Teachers' Experiences of the Probation Period of Teaching in Kenya: implications for teacher induction policies and programmes**

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**ABSTRACT** The probation period for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) in Kenya has hardly been studied. Universities have produced thousands of teachers, but it is not clear as to their experiences in schools. This study examines the experiences of graduate teachers during their probation period (first 2 years of service) in order to find out their expectations, surprises, difficulties and the extent of assistance received from mentors. Finally, teachers' suggestions for improvement of the induction process are examined. The study shows that induction of NQTs in Kenya is haphazard and informal. Teachers seldom benefit from it. Recommendations are made about how to improve the NQT induction process, particularly the content, organisation, delivery and evaluation.

### **Introduction**

Since 1963, when Kenya attained political independence, education has been regarded as the means by which the freedom can be consolidated to achieve development goals (Republic of Kenya, 1964, 1976, 1999). Curriculum reforms have been initiated to align the education system to the aspirations of the nation. Well-trained teachers have been recognised as key to the implementation of the curriculum reforms (Republic of Kenya, 1988). This has necessitated the development of an appropriate teacher education programme.

The teacher education programme consists of three phases (Department of Education and Science [DES], 1972, p. 3; Farrant, 1980, p. 5; Barber, 1995, p. 189):

- *Pre-service training*, given before the teacher begins to teach.
- *Induction*, given during the teacher's initial teaching experience.
- *In-service training*, given as the need arises throughout the teacher's career.

Although each phase contributes progressively to the development of effective teachers, there seems to be a tendency to emphasise the first phase (Indoshi, 1999). The second and third phases are given little or no attention, yet the ability of a teacher to cope with the challenges of teaching depends much on his/her ability to continue learning (Orwa, 1986). As Farrant (1980) rightly observes, there is a need to discard the long-held belief that training is something that teachers are given at the beginning of their career to last them to the end. The changing demands upon teachers make it necessary for teacher education to be a continuous process.

This article provides an overview of some graduate teachers' experiences of their initial years of professional practice in Kenya. The purpose of the study was to find out the expectations of a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) prior to their first appointment, their experiences of the reality and the extent to which the induction mentors were of assistance in alleviating the NQT difficulties. Based on the NQTs' experiences, recommendations are made on the reform of teacher induction process in Kenya.

#### *Rationale for Induction*

The first year of teaching has been recognised as a very crucial period in the professional lives of teachers because it lays the foundation for future professional development (Geva-May & Dori, 1996, p. 335). The young teacher leaves college or university with some basic teaching skills. S/he needs practice under supervision during the first year to develop those skills and to relate the theory mastered to professional practice. The mentors are expected to introduce the teacher, by example, to an understanding of professional outlook and appreciation of the school environment and functions (DES, 1972).

Induction, the process of introduction to teaching that a teacher should be exposed to on first employment, begins when a student teacher assumes the role of a full-time professional. As Zimpher & Howey (1990, p. 176) observe, the induction period involves teachers going through developmental stages of concern, starting from survival concerns, moving to strategies of coping with challenges and, finally, to learner outcomes. While induction is a learning process, the nature of its content, mode of organisation, delivery and evaluation is crucial to its effectiveness.

Since the 1980s, there has been tremendous growth of enrolment in education at all levels in Kenya. This includes the increased production of

teachers to meet the demand of teachers in educational institutions. Consequently, thousands of NQTs have been absorbed into the schools, thereby necessitating the need for well-developed teacher induction programmes. This is because NQTs often encounter many difficulties, such as inadequate resources, difficult teaching assignments, the isolation of the classroom and the harsh reality of the school environment, which can drive most of them to quit their jobs or remain, but without much productivity (Greenlee & Deugd, 2002, pp. 63-64).

#### *Induction Process in Kenya*

In Kenya, induction of NQTs is based on 2-year probationary period as specified in the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) code of regulations for teachers (Republic of Kenya, 1986). When a teacher has been appointed to the service, the first 2 years of such service are on probation. At the end of the period of probation, the TSC may confirm or terminate the appointment, or extend the period of probation for a further 1 year. On completion of such a further period of probation, the TSC may confirm or terminate the appointment.

As per the code, a person on probation is regarded as being on trial with a view to deciding his/her suitability for teaching. The commission's agents and, in particular, the principals of institutions are required to ensure that every teacher on probation is given adequate opportunities to qualify for confirmation. If, during the first year of service, the teacher exhibits tendencies that render it in any way doubtful whether he/she is likely to become suitable for permanent appointment, he/she is supposed to be warned early in writing with a copy to the TSC, and given advice and assistance to help him correct his/her faults. On completion of 2 years' probationary service, a teacher is required to apply for confirmation of appointment and issued with a certificate of confirmation.

Research on the induction phase of teacher education and training reflects an overall lack of attention to the NQT's professional development needs (Tisher & Wideen, 1990). In Kenya, universities have produced thousands of graduate teachers (Republic of Kenya, 1988), but there is little information about their experiences in the schools. There is hardly any follow-up of such graduates. In addition, the universities have been blamed (Republic of Kenya, 1988) for poor performance of graduate teachers on the wrong assumption that the initial training programme must produce a complete and super teacher.

A case in point is the Kamunge Committee (Republic of Kenya, 1988), which recommended that the duration of the BEd programme be lengthened from 4 to 5 years to give the trainees enough time to study theory and practice of teaching before graduating. This recommendation disregards the theory that initial training is only a starting point in the development of a professional teacher (Berliner, 1994).

No teacher can at the beginning of his/her career be equipped for all the responsibilities s/he is going to face (Bush, 1980; Tisher, 1980; Zimpher & Howey, 1990; Crews, 1991; Marti & Huberman, 1993; Adey, 1997; Higgins & Leat, 1997). The way the teachers are initiated into professional practice through induction courses, and the subsequent in-service education and training programmes, are even more important in teacher education. Follow-up of initial training through induction is therefore important in consolidating teacher education and setting the stage for further professional development (Farrant, 1980; Barber, 1995). A follow-up study of graduate teachers was therefore made to find out their experiences of the probation period and to define a model of teacher induction in the Kenyan context.

### **Methodology**

The method used in this study was mainly qualitative, drawing from audiotapes of a series of interviews. Data for this article consist of views of teachers captured through the structured interviews. It was the aim of this project to encourage the voice of the beginning teacher as a valued source of data for reform of the teacher induction process, from the recipients' perspective.

The study was conducted in Kisumu District, Kenya. It covered 27 Bachelor of Education graduates who were selected by purposive random sampling based on the following criteria:

- BEd graduates of the 8-4-4 System of Education.
- Recent graduates employed between 1994 and 1997 (this period was selected because it marked the most recent time when NQTs were employed; after 1997 a moratorium was placed on recruitment of teachers).

The views solicited referred to the respondents' first 2 years of teaching. The interview questions were adapted from Crews' Interview Schedule for beginning teachers (Crews, 1991). The questions dealt with teachers' expectations of teaching and their own skills prior to their first job, and the surprises that occurred during the probation period, difficulties they experienced during the probation period, the extent to which they received assistance from mentors and their views on how to manage the induction of NQTs in the Kenyan context.

The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed. These were taken back to the interviewees for comments and endorsement. The data were coded into thematic categories, and important quotations were identified and used to illustrate these themes, while affording the respondents the opportunity to speak for themselves.

## Data Analysis

### *Expectations and Surprises about Teaching*

All the teachers interviewed said that they joined teaching with very high expectations. They thought teaching was a well-paid job with a clear structure for professional development and promotion. They also expected to command respect in society just like other professionals, such as doctors, lawyers and engineers. Typical comments of the respondents on this issue were:

I thought teaching is a well paying job.

I expected to find a clear structure for professional growth and promotion.

I believed teaching was a noble, respected and enjoyable job.

I expected opportunities for further professional growth.

I wanted to have optimum workload and support resources for teaching

I thought my efforts would be adequately recognised and rewarded.

When asked to comment on their actual experiences relative to these expectations the teachers expressed disappointment and regret at joining the teaching profession. They were shocked to learn that teaching terms and conditions of service were not as good as they expected. Their comments were:

The salary was peanuts. It was not even adequate to meet my basic daily needs.

The job was very boring because the students refused to learn as efficiently as I wanted.

I was posted in a very bad school where finding a good house, electricity, water and means of transport was a nightmare. I felt isolated from the dynamic educational world.

The senior teachers disliked my approaches and I was isolated. It was like I had come from unknown universe to introduce strange way of doing things.

My students were weak and uninspiring. Few wanted to learn. It was like they were in school by force.

I was assigned 40 lessons per week because I was the only Biology teacher and this workload was too heavy for me to find extra time for relaxation and do personal work.

I did not feel prestigious among my people as expected because I could not afford to buy my friends drinks and give financial assistance to my relatives. They began to feel that I was mean and unfriendly.

It is clear from their responses that the NQTs' experiences were not what they expected in their first 2 years of teaching. Although this is the general feeling of anyone entering a new profession, the expectations of respondents are far above what the profession provides in Kenya. This could be explained by the fact that the majority of those who joined teaching did not take it as their first choice. They joined it after failing to gain entry to their preferred professions, most commonly medicine, architecture, law, engineering and information technology (Republic of Kenya, 1976, p. 111; Shiundu & Omulando, 1992, p. 236). There is a tendency among the NQTs to still think of the missed opportunities that the teaching profession does not seem to provide.

This problem has been compounded by the moratorium on the recruitment of teachers since 1997. Although this has been partially lifted with the recent recruitment of teachers in selected subjects, there is still a serious shortage of teachers in schools (Siringi, 2003) This has increased teachers' workload, which makes it difficult for the NQTs to find breathing space to attend to induction issues. This seems to have also impacted negatively on the conditions of service that the NQTs expected in their initial years of teaching.

#### *Expectations and Surprises about Own Skills*

The teachers interviewed also thought that their training had equipped them with skills to meet all the challenges of teaching. They joined teaching with confidence in their skills, eager to do a good job. This was captured in their expressions:

I thought I could do what others had not done, to improve the standard of education.

I knew I was well trained because I had passed my teaching practice with flying colours.

I was well grounded in handling students.

I knew I would improve language teaching.

Again, as they embarked on teaching, all the teachers interviewed experienced a wide gap between what they expected and the reality. They found that they could not realise their expectations without assistance from senior teachers. As they put it:

Some concepts which I thought were easy to teach were hard for students to grasp.

I could not easily engage students in discussion and discovery methods because it was a dull class and they expected to be given everything by the teacher.

I found that much of the academic content learned at university was not applicable at secondary school level. I had to learn afresh to survive.

My students were naughty because they perceived me as their age-mate.

The headteacher told me that he could not entrust me with senior classes because I was still very new and did not know many things.

I had problems of pronunciation and students imitated me. The students disliked my subject.

Some students were more conversant with certain concepts than I was.

Lack of resources in the school made my teaching abstract and difficult.

The NQTs entered the profession with idealism and good intentions. They wanted to make a difference in the lives of their students. Disillusionment, however, came when the beliefs of the NQTs about their skills encountered the reality of the school culture. This supports the view that the pre-service training that teachers undergo at colleges of education cannot last them throughout their career. The need for continuous instructional and emotional support is obvious (Greenlee & Deugd, 2002, p. 72).

#### *Difficulties Experienced*

The teachers were also asked to mention difficulties they experienced during their probation period as they interacted with students,

colleagues, the principal and the school environment in general. Their responses are given under the following headings.

*About students.* The following words were used by the respondents to describe their difficulties. The students were: naughty, lazy, shy, dishonest, passive, disrespectful, resistant, undisciplined, noisy and unmotivated. The NQTs also found difficulties with students' use of *sheng*, hatred of subject, lateness, absenteeism, drug abuse and poor study culture. They were young teachers who were perceived by the students as belonging to their generation or near-age mates. Therefore, controlling the students was a major challenge to the NQTs.

*About colleagues.* The respondents said that the senior teachers were: reserved, uncooperative, uncaring, discouraging, lazy and dishonest. They were also reported to lack trust in NQTs, and engaged in gossiping and rumour-mongering. The NQTs interviewed seemed largely isolated during the probation period and rarely benefited from the guidance of senior teachers. They seemed to strive to establish their own survival mechanisms, and this appeared to be frustrating and discouraging.

*About the principal.* The teachers interviewed reported the following difficulties: asking others about themselves, not open, uncooperative, withdrawn, uncaring, not interested in academic excellence, poor public relations, cunning, unconcerned, 'witch hunting', suspicious and meddling in personal issues. There seemed to be a lack of well-structured framework for the principal-NQTs relationship that could enhance mutual trust and fruitful coexistence through supportive monitoring and team building.

*About the school in general.* The teachers reported poor working conditions, including a hostile community, remoteness, lack of resources, lack of clear mission, hostile climate and uncooperative parents. This suggests that NQTs would be better off if posted to areas where they can easily access expert advice and resources for teaching.

Drawing from the above experiences of teachers in their relationship with students, colleagues, the principal and the school in general, it is clear that a culture of isolation is prevalent in the schools. The NQTs largely worked in isolation or became isolated. This situation created stress and difficulties in relationship between NQTs and their experienced colleagues, and NQTs and their students. Consequently, many teachers found their expectation of being a beneficial presence in schools eroded by the cold reception and unresolved tensions. The culture of the school may have to shift to support professional dialogue, collaborative planning



and peer coaching, rather than what appears to be 'closed doors and solitary practice' (Greenlee & Deugd, 2002).

#### *Assistance Received and Extent of Usefulness*

The respondents were asked to indicate whether they received any assistance from senior teachers, head teachers, school inspectors, and teachers' centres to solve their difficulties during the probation period. Their responses are given in Tables I and II.

Source	Response	
	Yes	No
Senior teachers	22	5
Head teachers	20	7
School inspectors	14	13
Teachers' centres	7	20

Table I. Sources of assistance for probation teachers ( $n = 27$ ).

Source	Usefulness		
	Very useful	Useful	Not useful
Senior teachers	9	11	7
Head teachers	4	15	8
School inspectors	1	8	18
Teachers' centres	0	4	23

Table II. Usefulness of assistance to probation teachers from various sources ( $n = 27$ ).

From Table I, it is clear that teachers largely received help from senior teachers, head teachers and school inspectors. They received hardly any help from teachers' centres or resource units. However, whether the assistance received was useful to the teachers in solving their problems was a different matter. Teachers' responses on this issue (Table II) shows that, although they received some assistance in addressing the problems experienced, the assistance was not very useful. This was blamed on the manner in which the induction process was organised and delivered.

It emerged from the discussions with the respondents on this issue that the induction process during the probation period was informal and ad hoc, without a clear programme of activities and evaluation. The induction did not accurately tackle teachers' needs for classroom teaching and interpersonal relationships. Being ad hoc and informal, it was difficult to follow-up on the progress of teachers. The arrangement in place was that any NQTs in need were supposed to approach senior teachers and head teachers, and their deputies for help. However, the NQTs interviewed seemed reluctant to ask for help because it might be

perceived as a sign of weakness. The induction process had not been well established in the schools visited. There appeared to be no well-drawn programme of induction for the NQTs and there was nobody directly responsible for monitoring the progress of the NQTs. Although the head teachers were supposed to recommend the teachers for confirmation in the teaching service at the end of the 2 years, they did not work directly with the NQT on a daily basis. Therefore, their evaluation reports on the NQTs on completion of the probation period was perceived by the respondents as hypothetical. As one NQT said:

The headteacher never inquired about my progress as a newcomer. The head of department was not bothered about how I taught so long as I was seen to go to class. What seemed to matter was whether or not one was busy.

In addition, some of the respondents reported that the approaches used by the school inspectors while interacting with NQTs was patronising. As one NQT put it;

The inspectors came to impose ideas on me regardless of my teaching circumstances. They did not want to take time to understand my point of view. There was one guy who just prescribed to me how to plan and teach. He never bothered to observe my own teaching in practice. His suggestions could not work in my class ...

Opportunities for teachers to visit and use resource units were rare. Where teachers attended refresher courses in the resource centres, the assistance received by the NQTs was minimal on account of the facilitators' lack of understanding of the teaching conditions of participants. Resource units or teachers centres for secondary school teachers in the district were also reported to be scarce and poorly equipped.

#### *Teachers' Suggestions on Management of NQT Induction*

The respondents were asked to give suggestions about how to improve the induction of NQTs based on their own experiences. They gave their suggestions on content, organisation, mode of delivery and evaluation of induction. The teachers' suggestions, as shown below, are arranged from the most popular suggestion to the least popular. The number in parenthesis shows the number of respondents mentioning each suggestion.

*Content.* The topics suggested were:

- School organisation (27)
- Curriculum (26)

- Teaching methods (24)
- Student discipline (18)
- Interpersonal relationships (17)
- School rules and regulations (15)
- School vision and mission (13)

The topics suggested above are areas of information that the respondents felt they needed to know about most as newcomers to the teaching profession and to the school environment during the probation period. Every school had its own arrangements in relation to the topics listed. The order of arrangement suggests that some information is prerequisite to the other in the process of induction of the NQTs.

*Organisation.* The mode of organisation suggested was:

- Formal programme (26)
- Informal programme (1)

The majority of the respondents preferred the formal induction programme.

Induction activities in the schools may be formal or informal. Formal induction may refer to programmed NQT orientation activities with mentors, experiences and evaluation procedures specified in advance. Informal induction would refer to *ad hoc* NQT orientation activities without a clearly specified programme including mentors, experiences and evaluation procedures.

*Delivery.* The mode of delivery was suggested by the respondents as below:

- Face to face discussion (15)
- Demonstration of lessons (11)
- Provision of relevant literature (4)

Drawing from the order of priority above, the NQTs preferred opportunities for close interaction with their mentors. This may afford them the chance to talk about their perceptions of their new job and to seek guidance in the process of assuming full responsibility for teaching. Close interaction with mentors is likely to make the NQTs feel confident, develop their existing skills and acquire new ones.

*Evaluation.* The following were suggested as evaluation methods for NQT induction:

- Internal inspection (20)
- External inspectors from the Ministry of Education (6)
- End of probation examination (3)
- Students evaluating teachers (1)

Continuous evaluation through internal inspection was preferred by the majority of the respondents. Internal inspection was perceived as a useful basis for continuous feedback to the NQTs.

Drawing from the teachers' suggestions above, reform of the induction of NQTs will have to be comprehensive, not only in content, but also on matters related to organisation, delivery and evaluation. First, the programme content must be based on the needs of the NQTs. This means that the mentors will have to work closely with the NQTs to discover their needs and to provide relevant information. The programmes will also need to be continuous, as evaluation would provide feedback for improvement of the induction process. Since mentors are dealing with adults they must exhibit a high sense of respect in provision of information needed, based on dialogue, rather than lecture. The induction programmes will also have to be formal. This calls for a clear induction policy that recognises induction as part and parcel of a teacher education programme, and which embeds it in the school activities. However, in order to achieve the above, research (Bezzina, 2002) suggests that mentors will have to be well trained in their roles, and the tasks of the mentors and their relationship with the NQTs well defined.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The findings of the study have direct implications for induction policy and programmes in Kenya. The study shows that newly qualified teachers, like anyone else entering a new organisation, have certain expectations, which they hope to find in the schools and in the profession. However, they encounter a different scenario in relation to their expectations. This surprise can be equated to what Louis (1980, p. 231) calls 'reality shock'. The implication here is that, when schools receive a newly qualified teacher, it must consider it as a training responsibility, rather than work relief for regular teachers. The NQT has first to be socialised in the school organisation and operation before the school can hope to benefit from his/her services. The school must first of all help the teacher to come to terms with the reality in relation to their expectations before such a teacher can be effective and efficient at work.

The findings also show that there are no formal NQT induction programmes in the schools. What passes as induction was informal and ad hoc, without clear goals and follow-up procedures.

The NQTs were expected to get professional guidance from head teachers, senior teachers, inspectors of schools and resource persons in teachers' centres. This help was not forthcoming and when it was most of the teachers did not find the help very useful in helping them to solve their day-to-day teaching difficulties.

Newly qualified teachers experienced enormous difficulties from students, senior teachers, head teachers and the school in general. These

problems varied from discipline to interpersonal relationships. Unfortunately, the people who were expected to assist the NQT, i.e. senior teachers and head teachers, did not seem to be well prepared to effectively play the mentoring roles.

The overall management of the induction programme needs revision in matters of content, organisation, delivery and evaluation. There were serious shortcomings in all these areas that need attention. As Wragg & Wood (1995, p. 115) observe, the content of the tutoring that occurs and its organisation are crucial in the socialisation of the NQTs and must therefore be well established.

Drawing from the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made on the development of newly qualified teacher induction programmes in Kenya.

- Induction programmes should be formalised in the school system and emphasised by the Ministry of Education as a prerequisite for confirmation of teachers to the teaching career.
- A specific person, such as the principal or deputy principal or senior master, should be designated as induction officer to coordinate the initiation of the NQTs into the teaching profession. The induction officer could be assisted by the respective subject departmental heads, but s/he should take direct responsibility for organising the whole induction programme and its evaluation.
- Induction of the NQTs should draw its content from the needs of the teachers. The teachers interviewed proposed the following topics as worth covering in induction; school organisation, curriculum, teaching methods, student discipline, interpersonal relationships, school rules and regulations, and school vision and mission. However, since these topics are bound to vary from group to group, there should be specific needs assessment for given individual teachers so that appropriate induction programmes are initiated and implemented.
- Practical methods should be used in dealing with NQTs. Face-to-face discussion, demonstration and provision of relevant literature were highly valued by the NQTs as opposed to the lecture method.
- Internal inspection should be encouraged as a means of evaluating the progress of NQTs. This calls for strengthening the professional role of heads of department for various subjects in order to carry out this function. They can be useful in delivering immediate feedback, as well as offering help through demonstration lessons for the NQT.
- No teacher should be confirmed in the service without proper supervision, monitoring and guidance by the mentors.
- The teacher induction officers should be trained from time to time to play their mentoring roles effectively.

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