

Induction for Teacher Retention: A Missing Link in Teacher Education Policy in Ghana

Cosmas Cobbold

ABSTRACT The metaphor of 'sink or swim' that has for many years been used to describe entry into teaching is gradually changing. In its place is emerging the notion of induction, which holds that novice teachers should be supported in developing their practice, just like other novitiate professionals. While this idea has been widely accepted in many countries, it is rarely mentioned in teacher education discourse in Ghana, a country that is struggling to retain teachers in its basic schools. This paper discusses the concept of induction and argues for its formal introduction in teacher education in Ghana. The case is made that a strong induction program that is geared to the needs of individual new teachers provides a crucial link between formal preparation and expert practice and an important tool for teacher retention. The paper also proposes a model of induction, which could be implemented in Ghana to reduce attrition and retain teachers in basic schools.

INTRODUCTION

There is currently much interest by policy makers and professional educationalists in the value and impact of induction schemes for new teachers, especially their ability to contribute to raising standards and improving teacher retention rates (OECD, 2002). As Villani (2002, p. 2) observes: "[T]he idea that beginning teachers require a structured system to support their entry into the profession has moved from the fringes of the policy landscape to the centre. It is now generally recognized as a critical component of a comprehensive approach to teacher development." Increasingly, policy makers are focusing on induction programs as part of broader educational reform initiatives (Humphrey et al., 2000). A practical demonstration of this commitment is that in many American states and European countries induction is related to specific new standards of performance expected of new entrants to the profession, and participation in induction programs is made a requirement for teacher licensure and certification (Totterdell et al, 2004). Consequently, among teacher

educators and educational researchers, induction and the associated practices of supporting and sustaining new teachers have become important themes for inquiry and deliberations at annual conferences (ibid.).

This new development cannot be more important in view of the fact that historically, the teaching profession has not had the kind of structured induction and initiation processes common to many of the traditional professions such as law and medicine (Lortie, 1975). New recruits were often left on their own to succeed or fail within the confines of their own classrooms – an experience likened by some to being “lost at sea” (Kauffman et al., 2002; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). This has given grounds for some to criticize teaching as “the profession that eats its young” and in which the initiation of new members is a “sink or swim”, “trial by fire” or “boot camp” experience (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

This kind of neglect can cause premature burnout and a weakening of new teachers’ commitments to stay in the profession, as they become disillusioned and unable to cope with the many daily pressures of work (Gold, 1996; Kelley, 2004). New teachers need opportunities to collaborate with other teachers in professional communities, observe colleagues’ classrooms, be observed by expert mentors, analyse their own practice, and network with other novice teachers (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996; Huling-Austin, 1992). The induction process, it is argued, provides opportunities for new teachers to engage early in the collegial dialogue that is crucial to commitment, growth and effectiveness in one’s profession (Kelley, 2004).

Although these findings are encouraging, developing countries appear not to have learned from the developed world. In their research into teacher education policy and practice in four low-income countries (Ghana, Malawi, Lesotho, and Trinidad and Tobago), Lewin and Stuart (2003) observe that none of them had a formal policy for induction of newly qualified teachers and that any decision to orient new teachers was left to the discretion of headteachers as and how they thought fit, with varying degrees of support from class teachers. Lewin and Stuart (2003, pp. 701-702) comment on how such a conspicuous gap in teacher education policy could render the outcome of pre-service preparation ineffective and possibly induce teacher attrition:

The lack of systematic arrangements for guidance and support in the first year on the job was striking. This almost certainly contributes to the ‘washout’ of training, to the extent that NQTs’ learning is not reinforced purposefully in their first appointment. It may also lead to problems with morale and lead to premature career changes if support to overcome problems is not forthcoming.

Hedges’s (2002) qualitative study of the experiences of newly qualified teachers in Ghana throws more light on the country’s specific situation: “There is no officially stated policy on induction in Ghana. It is encouraged at the college, district and school level, but provision is patchy and expectations are not clearly stated” (p. 359). In that study, teachers who had encountered problems in their interaction with the community and the district office, and “who had not received any form of induction or orientation, but knew of others who had, seemed to see it as an entitlement that they had been denied” (ibid.). Therefore, there appears to be a felt need for beginning

teacher induction. But much more remains to be learned about such support programs and how best to ensure they serve an appropriate link in the teacher development process and impact on new teachers' expertise, professional development, job satisfaction and retention rates. There is a need to see induction as part of a continuum of teacher development and to extend support for new teachers beyond their initial training into the first few (for example, five) years of teaching through some form of structured, rather than merely episodic, early professional development.

In this paper I discuss the concept of induction and its importance in teacher retention, and argue for its formal introduction in teacher education in Ghana. The case is made that a strong induction program that is geared to the needs of individual new teachers provides a crucial link between formal preparation and expert practice, and an important tool for teacher retention. I then propose a model of induction that could be implemented in Ghana to retain qualified teachers in basic schools (years 1-9 for ages 6 to 15).

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Ghana has a constitutional mandate to provide Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) for all school-age children (Government of Ghana, 1992). This provision requires government to improve access to and participation in basic education, and enhance teaching and learning in basic schools (MOE, 1994). Pursuing this goal ties in with the global aspirations of Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals to which Ghana is committed. Recent demonstration of government commitment to this responsibility includes improvement in school infrastructure, introduction of a Capitation Grant that absolves all fees, a School Feeding program by which all basic school students are provided with one free meal a day, and a Bus System by which basic school students enjoy free transport to and from school, if available. The result of these measures is increased enrolments in schools, which call for an adequate number of well-qualified, highly competent, stable and dedicated teacher workforces.

This need, however, comes at a time when policy makers and school leaders face the challenge of retaining qualified teachers in schools to ensure quality teaching and learning for all students. At the basic school level, the rate at which teachers leave the profession and the consequent demand for teachers continue to increase. A recent national study (Quansah, 2003) reports a shortage of 40,000 trained teachers in basic schools, with 24,000 of these vacancies filled by untrained personnel. The teacher training colleges (TTCs), which produce the bulk of basic schoolteachers, do not have the facilities to admit and turn out enough teachers despite yearly increase in admission of teacher candidates. Added to this problem is the fact that many basic schoolteachers teach for only three years after graduating from the TTCs. They take advantage of a study leave with pay facility in the Ghana Education Service (GES), by which they upgrade their certificate qualifications to diploma and degree levels in the universities through full-time study on full salary. But the great majority (about 70%) of such teachers do not return to the classroom after their studies (Akyeampong, 2002;

Quansah, 2003), making an otherwise good policy counterproductive. Why do the teachers leave?

Previous studies investigating why Ghanaian teachers leave the profession cited inadequate salary, low prestige for teachers and lack of opportunities for promotion as the major factors (Bame, 1991; Godwyll & Ablenyie, 1996; Wyllie, 1964). More recent studies have found poor or non-implementation of conditions of service, and deplorable socio-economic conditions in rural areas where most teachers work, as additional factors. Moreover, many beginning teachers think they are neglected by the system once they are posted to schools (Cobbold, 2006; Hedges, 2002). In particular, isolation from professional colleagues and from the District Office, and a perceived hostile attitude from community members are cited as key demotivating factors. These latter findings raise challenges, which could be addressed through induction programs.

Induction Explained

One of the complexities of, and gaps in, the induction research base is the variation in the use of the term 'teacher induction', its components and purposes, and how long it should last in a teacher's career. One useful definition is that offered by Smith and Ingersoll (2004). They use teacher induction as a collective term to describe "programs offering support, guidance, and orientation for beginning teachers during the transition into their first teaching job" (p. 681). As a form of professional development, an effective induction program is well structured, comprehensive, involves many people and components, and usually continues as a sustained process for the first two to five years of a teacher's career (Wong et al., 2005, p. 379). Smith and Ingersoll (2004) also urge the need to distinguish teacher induction from pre-service preparation and in-service training, and to conceptualize induction as support for the transition into full professional teacher status and survival of a novice teacher through and beyond the first year.

Theoretically, induction programs are not additional training per se but are designed for teachers who have already completed basic training. These programs are often conceived as a bridge, enabling the "student of teaching" to become a "teacher of students" (p. 683).

The use of the 'bridge' metaphor to describe the induction period is a widely held view in the teacher development literature, although some educators find this analogy inappropriate. Tickle (2000), for instance, argues that the bridge metaphor "presumes too much about the need for, or the possibility of achieving, a safe and smooth crossing from studentship, through novice hood, into experience, expertise and excellence as a teacher" (p.1). Most appropriately, he makes the case that new teachers are not socialized into well-defined and accepted practices that exist on the other side, and that the problematic nature and dynamic contexts of professional practice make even experienced educators unsure of education's future and the most desirable professional practices. In Tickle's (2000) view, therefore, the induction process prepares new teachers to face the unforeseen challenges of their profession, rather than socialize them into an agreed-upon mould.

The variety of elements tolerated in what is included in the term ‘teacher induction’ ranges from a single orientation meeting at the start of a school year to more structured activities, including workshops, collaborations, support systems, and mentoring, which continue for several years (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Of these components, mentoring – the personal, usually one-on-one guidance provided by an experienced teacher to beginning teachers in schools – has been the most discussed, described and researched (Whisnant, Elliot & Pynchon, 2005), to the extent that the terms induction and mentoring are sometimes used interchangeably. Recent reviews of the extant research (Johnson et al., 2005; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Whisnant et al., 2005) reveal variations not only in the duration and intensity of different types of induction programs, but also in the targeted participants and the policy requirements for participation in the programs. Some programs serve only candidates who are new to teaching; others include anyone new to a particular school, even those with prior teaching experience (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Some education jurisdictions require mandatory participation, while others make participation voluntary (Whisnant et al., 2005).

Of particular significance to the primary objective of this paper are the purposes and effects of induction programs. Drawing on numerous descriptive studies, Smith and Ingersoll (2004) identify two main purposes of teacher induction: (1) to foster growth on the part of newcomers and (2) to assess and perhaps weed out those deemed unsuitable for the job. But most programs are designed to achieve both purposes. Firstly, such programs are primarily developmental in nature, and set objectives and targets that are linked to continuing professional development activities and courses to meet the need of the new teacher. Secondly, they relate program activities and assessment to professional standards of practice (Bubb, et al., 2002). In this way, an induction program aims to encourage early career teachers to “build on their initial teacher training, where strengths and development needs will have been identified, and sets the pace and direction for their professional development. It also aims to ensure that all entrants to the teaching profession reach a uniformly high standard and are ready for the challenges they will face in the classroom” (ibid., p. 9).

What is implied in this overarching goal is not a ‘deficit’ theory about beginning teachers and/or the preparation programs from which they come – namely, that beginning teachers are ill-prepared for the realities of actual classrooms and schools, and that induction programs are meant to make up for their inadequacies. The reality is that most new teachers find themselves in a vulnerable situation: their knowledge, skills and values are tested in the crucible of classroom and school conditions; they take the responsibility of teaching on their own, with several of them assigned the most challenging work; and they have to balance conflicting views regarding their practice, which derive from the culture of the specific school, their personal expectations, and the professional norms in general (Beijaard & Papanoum, 2002).

Tickle (2000), in particular, repudiates the deficit model, which dominated the theory and directed the practice of teacher education for decades (Eraut, 1987 in Beijaard & Papanoum, 2002). He argues that new entrants to teaching are dynamic and creative individuals who can bring much to education and humanity on the basis of collective responsibilities, and that recognizing their professional commitment,

creative potential and intellectual capabilities will help to establish the foundation for their own continued professional learning and harness valuable resources in the progressive transformation of education. A well-conceived and effectively implemented formalized system of assistance and support, thus, enables new teachers to survive and prosper during their first years of teaching and gives them an impulse toward continuous improvement.

There is a growing body of studies in the teacher induction literature that reports the positive impact of induction programs. Whisnant and her colleagues' (2005, pp. 12-21) review of this literature identifies five areas of potential impact. These are reduction in teacher attrition from the profession; reduction in the costs of attrition; increased teacher satisfaction; enhanced professional growth; and development of a tiered professional career model. The conclusions drawn in the individual studies regarding these themes are, however, far from unanimity. For instance, Lopez et al. (2004) analysed 12 studies for empirical evidence of the effect of beginning teacher induction on teacher retention. Citing methodological limitations as the basis for their conclusion, they wrote: "Taken together, although this research includes some positive findings, the studies are not strong enough for us to conclude that induction works – that it improves retention" (p. 33).

In contrast, Ingersoll and his colleagues (Ingersoll, 2000, 2001; Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004) have documented a strong and significant link between induction, and especially mentoring, and teacher retention. In their analysis of 10 studies, they found "empirical support for the claim that assistance for new teachers and in particular, mentoring programs, has a positive impact on teachers and their retention" (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004, p. 1). In these studies, retention rates for teachers who had participated in induction programs with effective mentoring ranged from 86 per cent to 100 per cent over a two to four year period compared with 70-73 per cent of non-mentored teachers over the same period. Another study by Kelley (2004) reports similar retention rates, with 94 per cent of participants still teaching after four years.

In what Johnson et al (2005) describe as a "recent and well-done study", Smith and Ingersoll (2004) used nationally representative data – the 1999-2000 USA Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) – and controlled for a broad variety of teacher and school characteristics. The study has the additional strength of specifying the underlying assumptions and definitions of the measures used in the analysis. Confirming the positive correlation between teacher participation in induction programs and retention found in previous research (e. g. NCTAF, 1996; Odell and Ferraro, 1992), the study also revealed that the number of components in a new teacher induction program correlates positively with a lower percentage of predicted probability of teacher turnover. In other words, teachers who experienced no induction were more likely to leave their school or exit teaching than teachers who experienced an induction program with several components. "Notably, the largest reductions in turnover were associated with activities that tied new teachers into a collaborative network of their more experienced peers" (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, p. 704). While several researchers present cautionary arguments, the evidence base for claims that induction improves the retention of teachers is undoubtedly becoming stronger. Across major studies in

different countries, there is a shared understanding that good induction programs, when combined with an attractive pay and conditions package, can make a measurable difference in improving the retention of teachers, at least, over the first few years (Arends & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2000; Bubb, Earley, & Totterdell, 2003).

Induction in Teacher Education Policy in Ghana

Current teacher education policy in Ghana provides for pre-service preparation of teaching candidates and in-service training for practising teachers. Pre-service preparation is located in the universities and teacher training colleges, which offer full-time diploma- and degree-level courses in Education for prospective teachers. In-service training takes place in two ways. One mode provides for knowledge and skills upgrading through further study in the universities, and leads to higher qualifications. Many teachers who upgrade their qualifications this way will normally be granted study leave with pay, meaning they are paid their full salary during the period of study. The other mode is non-qualification updating of knowledge and skills through periodic workshops and seminars (GES, 2000), which has been implemented on an ad hoc basis.

However, the transition from pre-service to qualified teacher status is taken as a given. Newly qualified teachers are assumed to be certified on the basis only of their success in the final college or university examinations; they do not go through any further process of credentialing and licensing. As a matter of interest, graduates from the teacher training colleges receive their registration numbers as professional teachers before writing their final examination. On their first appointment, they become members of the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), which starts deducting monthly dues from the salaries of such teachers once payment commences. There is no official policy on induction and mentoring. In basic schools, head teachers have the responsibility of “introducing the new teacher to the class assigned to him/her and the materials available to support him/her, helping to settle the new teacher in the community, finding housing for him/her and ensuring that his or her salary is paid on time or making arrangements for a stop gap measure if there is some delay in salary payment” (GES, 1999, p. 7). And some districts organize a one-day orientation program to introduce key District Officers and explain their roles to new teachers (Hedges, 2002).

Of course these are important issues, especially for new teachers posted to rural communities, in view of the peculiar problems of such areas and also the bureaucratic problems teachers face in their relations with the district office (Cobbold, 2006; Hedges, 2002). But support for new teachers ought to go beyond these matters to include a program that is systematically planned and implemented to offer new teachers supported and assessed entry to full professional teacher status so that they survive, succeed and thrive in their professional practice. Such a program is yet to be incorporated in teacher education policy and become seamlessly integrated into the routine practices of the schools and districts.

One result of the lack of induction and mentoring in current teacher education policy is that many newly qualified teachers feel neglected by the system. As one rural teacher put it, “They [GES] just post you and dump you here, that is all; nobody cares about

you” (Cobbold, 2006). There is no doubt that this practice does not foster in the new entrants any sense of belongingness to their profession. Instead, it breeds a sense of professional isolation and lack of commitment to teaching. It could be argued that this sense of seclusion and the short period of service (three years) which qualifies one for study leave with pay are major factors which lead to many teachers leaving for further studies. And their being away for that long period of three or four years exacerbates this isolation, making many such teachers discard the idea of coming back. After all, who would like to remain in a profession in which nobody appears to be their neighbour’s keeper?

A Proposed Model of Induction for the Ghana Education Service

Two premises underlie the model of induction proposed in this paper. From the empirical research on the impact of induction on teacher retention reviewed above, it is assumed that three years of unmentored teaching is too short a period to grant teachers study leave with pay to pursue courses which end up increasing teachers’ chances of getting non-teaching employment. A second premise is that some of the factors inducing teacher attrition could be objectively discussed in induction seminars to minimize their impact on teachers’ career decisions.

Based on the above premises, it is proposed that the first two years of the beginning teacher’s career should be a period of mandatory induction. During this period, the new teacher should be accorded provisional registration status, with full professional teacher status granted after successfully completing the induction program. In other words, unlike the current system, which uses a teacher’s success in the final college or university examination as the only requirement for granting them certified and tenured status, participation and successful progress in induction should be set as additional criteria. The three-year period to qualify for study leave with pay should then start from the time a teacher is granted full professional teacher status. This has two implications for retention. Firstly, teachers who wanted to benefit from the study leave facility would remain in the system for the first five years of their career. Secondly, teachers would gain better insight into the nature of their work, and the policies and conditions that affect it, and develop practical teaching proficiency. All this experience would enlighten teachers on any perceived problems and misconceptions about their profession, alter the sensitivities of new teachers, make them identify with their occupation and, hopefully, increase their ability to bear with genuine constraints on government’s ability to address their concerns. Lortie (1975) notes in regard to this point:

The comparative impact of initial socialization makes considerable difference in the overall life of an occupation. Where such socialization is potent, the predispositions of new comers become less important through time; the selves of participants tend to merge with the values and norms built into the occupation. The opposite holds where socialization experiences are weak; in that case the attitudes, values and orientations people bring with them continue to influence [their thinking] and the conduct of work (pp. 55-56).

The content of the induction should be based, first and foremost, on the professional needs of teachers. These should be identified through a system of profiling new teachers based on careful coordination between schools and the training institutions.

Identifying the needs of beginning teachers would help in matching them with appropriate mentors, some of whom might need training in order to play their roles effectively. Ordinarily, induction support would be instructional-related – geared towards success in the classroom and the school; and psychological – aimed at confidence building, and development of positive self-esteem and the ability to handle stress (Gold, 1996). In the specific case of Ghana, emphasis should also be given to issues of professionalism, such as the need for commitment to one's profession and to high quality service, adherence to ethical code of conduct, engagement in continuous professional learning and collaboration, and reflective dialogue. Equal attention should also be focused on the relationships between professional organizations (e.g. GNAT) and employers, including avenues and modalities for airing grievances and addressing concerns.

In recent times, sections of the Ghanaian public and media have accused teachers of unprofessional behaviour, including absenteeism, lateness, prolonged strikes, and leaving for other professions after being trained with the taxpayers' money. Teachers are also blamed for poor performance of students and the perceived low standard of education. On the other hand, teachers have cited poor conditions of service and at the workplace, low social status and government's insensitivity to, or tardiness in, addressing their demands, for their actions. These matters require exhaustive discussion involving community members and policy makers during teacher induction workshops. Hopefully, this would positively impact the attitudes of stakeholders, promoting mutual understanding and enhancing relations between teachers, community members and government, and elevating the public perception of teachers, which is a critical retention factor.'

The assessment practices in teacher induction programs should be thorough, based on established standards and demonstrated performance, and aimed at helping the new teacher progress during the induction period itself. As indicated earlier, teachers' participation in the mandatory induction should be counted towards their appraisal and promotion. This requirement would need to be specified with clarity; otherwise teachers may not trust the system and that would affect their commitment to it.

Providers of the induction program should be of high quality, such as experienced teachers who understand the needs of beginning teachers and the broader context of teaching and its challenges. In schools and districts where such teachers are not available, some should be selected and trained. Of course, both mentors and mentees need release time and incentives to participate in induction programs. Moreover, planning and implementing induction programs should be a coordinated and collaborative endeavour between the Ghana Education Service, teacher organizations and relevant stakeholders at the *school level* where the "key factors influencing new teachers' experience converge" (Johnson et al., 2001, p. 2). Above all, it is important that mentoring is organized to benefit both the new and experienced teachers, to further teacher interaction and reinforce interdependence in an atmosphere where both novice and veteran teachers respect each other and share the responsibility for professional growth.

All innovations need enabling conditions to yield the expected outcomes. Admittedly, the existing structures and cultures of Ghanaian schools as well as available resources do not appear well suited to implementing the type of induction program proposed in this paper. Sayed, Akyeampong and Ampiah (2000) found that under the whole school development program, head teachers who tried to organize professional development activities at the school level were often faced with the problem of no or limited resources provided to schools, and experienced difficulties in motivating teachers in the absence of rewards and incentives. The authors also found that “structures for supporting and training teachers...have been established but have not developed an active and visible set of training and development activities (Sayed et al., 2000, p.10). These are resource and institutional challenges that the Ghana Education Service would need to overcome. However, embracing the concept of induction as important and necessary and according it its proper place in teacher professional development policy would be a good starting point. From there, it would be necessary to first tackle the issue of resources and commitment by soliciting the help of private companies and individuals, non-governmental organizations and civil society to ensure an adequate and stable source of funding.

CONCLUSION

Retaining highly qualified teachers, especially at the basic level of education, is an important challenge for Ghana’s school system. The current efforts to increase the numbers of teachers in the recruitment pipeline by increasing the number of candidates admitted into teacher training seem paradoxically shortsighted. We need to take equal account of the professional needs of those already qualified to teach who have been trained at the nation’s expense. Applying supply and demand theory to the solution of teacher attrition and/or shortage, Ingersoll (2000) reasons that “where the quantity of teachers demanded is greater than the quantity of teachers supplied, there are two basic policy remedies: increase the quantity supplied or decrease the quantity demanded” (p. 6) He adds, however, that the former approach will not solve staffing inadequacies if large numbers of teachers who are recruited then leave. His “new approach to solving the school staffing problem” is that education jurisdictions should decrease the demand for new teachers by decreasing turnover in the early years.

Similarly, Ghana’s capacity to maintain an adequate supply of teachers while simultaneously ensuring that they will be prepared to teach effectively lies in the education sector’s investing heavily in improving teacher induction and ongoing professional development as part of a retention strategy. There is need to generate financial and human resources that support novice teachers in meaningful career transitions, rich instructional growth opportunities, and a desire to remain in the profession. If policy makers and educational leaders pay lip-service or insufficient attention to this, the quantitative and qualitative improvement in education that the nation has long sought to achieve will continue to be a mirage.

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