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**INNOVATION: A CASE STUDY OF AN
ENGLISH TEACHERS' INDUCTION**

*INNOVACIÓN: UN ESTUDIO DE CASO
DE LA INDUCCIÓN DE PROFESORES DE
INGLÉS*

Recibido:
02/03/2019

Aceptado:
12/07/2019

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Abstract

The induction of new English teachers is not often made the focus of language programs. In many institutions, the orientation experience receives little attention, resulting in work-related stress at the beginning of an instructor's teaching contract. Consequently, not only the quality of teaching is affected but also the teachers' motivation and perception of the program. This research article analyses the results of a case study of an innovation to a new teacher induction in a language program in the city of Cuenca, Ecuador. For this, the case study was based on two-way communication between the administration and the teaching staff through direct feedback, the consideration of language program management principles, as well as the application of a teacher survey after implementation. As a result, the innovation to the induction of new teachers seemed to reduce teachers' job-related stress during the first week of classes, thus helping to create a learning environment where the program, its teachers, and its students benefit as a whole.

Keywords: program management, new teachers, induction, orientation, innovation

Resumen

La inducción de profesores nuevos usualmente no es el foco de un programa de inglés como lengua extranjera. En muchas instituciones, la experiencia de los profesores con respecto a su orientación recibe poca atención, con el resultado de estrés, relacionado con el trabajo, al comienzo de su contrato. En consecuencia, no solo la calidad de la enseñanza se ve afectada, sino también la motivación del profesor y su percepción de su lugar de trabajo. Este artículo de investigación analiza los resultados de un estudio de caso de una innovación a la inducción de profesores nuevos de un programa de lenguas en la ciudad de Cuenca, Ecuador. Para esto, el estudio de caso se basó en la comunicación bidireccional entre la administración y el personal docente por medio de retroalimentación directa, la consideración de principios administrativos de programas de lenguas, así como la aplicación de una encuesta a los profesores después de la implementación. Como resultado, la innovación de la inducción de profesores nuevos parece haber reducido el estrés laboral de los profesores durante la primera semana de clases; así, ayudó a crear un ambiente de aprendizaje donde el programa, sus profesores y sus alumnos se benefician en general.

Palabras clave: administración de programas, nuevos profesores, inducción, orientación, innovación

INTRODUCTION

A key aspect which directly influences successful instruction is how well a language program meets the needs of its teaching staff. This is relevant since factors that influence teachers also have an effect on their students, as has been evidenced through different educational research (Curby, Rimm Kaufman & Ponitz 2009; Darling-Hammond 2017; Frenzel, Goetz, Lüdtke & Pekrun 2009; Hinnant, O'Brien & Ghazarian 2009).

One important step towards meeting the needs of the teaching staff is by ascertaining that an institution's newcomers receive training from the beginning of their teaching contract by means of an adequate induction, thereby preparing them to face the challenges of the program and lowering the rates of attrition (Ingersoll & Strong 2011).

Although induction can encompass various areas, such as planning, mentoring, and other types of teacher development (Geddes & Marks 2012; Ingersoll & Strong 2011), herein induction specifically refers to orientation (curriculum information and socialization) before starting teaching. In this sense, as a professional practice, an orientation is "designed to facilitate the entry of new recruits to an organization and to equip them to operate effectively within it" (Trowler & Knight 1999:178).

A program's induction through orientation, as an information and socialization mechanism (White, Hockley, van de Horst & Laughner 2008), is meant to help lower new teachers' level of anxiety. As such, it serves to introduce teachers to what is expected of them in their new jobs, what needs to be done, and what should be avoided (De Cenzo & Robbins 2010). In fact, the importance of a teacher's induction can be seen in three areas.

In the first place, an effective induction addresses the issue of work-related stress. Not having enough information about a program from the beginning of an instructor's contract contributes to what is known as occupational stress, "the experience by teachers of unpleasant negative emotions, resulting from aspects of their work as a teacher which is triggered by a perception of threat in dealing with the demands made upon them" (Kyriacou 2011:1). In effect, the success or failure of an induction

could influence their overall feelings of well-being during their first weeks of teaching.

Second, the induction also serves to introduce teachers to a program's culture, understood as how things are done in a particular environment (White *et al.* 2008); this could include from understanding what is expected in regards to assessment to what procedures to follow when addressing student behavior and plagiarism issues, for example. Understanding of the program's culture could contribute to a teacher's favorable or unfavorable perception of it.

Finally, induction is also directly connected to the achievement of high standards in the language service provided when new instructors are selected and trained adequately (White *et al.* 2008). The time and effort spent on an adequate induction would likely result in increased quality of the academic instruction provided and the teachers' success in addressing the needs of the students, as well as the prevention of possible misunderstandings (Soppelsa 2012).

However, if an induction through orientation is not working well, it needs to be innovated to meet the teachers' needs. In this case, aspects of a program can be renewed, such as the orientation, to become innovations when they are understood as better than what has been experienced before and based on an "informed change" (De Lano, Riley & Crookes 1994:489), improvement being a key characteristic of an innovation, or if they are perceived as new to a group or an individual (Rogers 2003). Unlike change, which can happen without any intervention and might not result in improvement, innovation is purposeful and deliberate in creating improved practices that result in innovations (Stoller 2009, 2012). Both these words, innovation and change, are used here with the second meaning intended. Additionally, innovation in education has the potential to make the program responsive, flexible, and self-renewing (Hamilton 1996). An innovation should be guided by clear language program management principles to help it achieve a higher probability of success in its implementation (Stoller 2009).

Based on these considerations, this research article aims to present the results of an innovation

to the induction of new foreign teachers to an English language program in a city in the southern Ecuadorian Andes. The innovation came about due to the internal evaluation by the program's teachers and implemented by the language program's administration (i.e. Director of Studies). First, the methodology used to analyze the information is presented as well as information regarding the English program and its teaching staff. This is followed by the results and discussion which present the process of innovation.

METHODOLOGY

Based on a qualitative approach, this research article reports a descriptive case study (Stake 1995) undertaken to analyze the process of innovation to an induction of new foreign teachers in an English language program, located in the city of Cuenca, Ecuador.

To analyse the implementation of the innovation, data collection included several sources (Stake 1995; Yin 2003), such as written records of teacher feedback from the program's teacher forum, an interview with the English Program's President of the Board, and review of the program's original induction documents. Additionally, an anonymous and voluntary paper-based survey was applied to the teachers for the January-March cycle who experienced the new induction session (n=12).

The participants were informed of the purpose of the survey and signed a consent form to be part of the study. The six-item survey combined closed and open type questions; the questions aimed to obtain direct feedback from the teachers regarding the effectiveness of the orientation, which areas of the orientation needed more development, and additional general observations.

The analysis of this case study is developed in two stages. The first stage presents a description of the participants' background and teaching requirements to be part of the language program as well as information regarding the new teacher orientation session before the innovation. The second stage analyzes the implementation of the new induction based on the phases proposed by

the Innovation Diffusion Process (Stoller 1994, 2012) initiation, implementation, and diffusion.

THE PARTICIPANTS

The English program's teaching staff is mainly composed of native or fluent English speaking teachers with a level C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR 2018). The teachers are recruited principally, but not exclusively, from countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia.

Candidates are required to have a university degree (not necessarily in language education) and CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), TEFL (Certificate in Teaching English as a Foreign Language) or TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) certificate. Teaching experience is ideal but teachers having just finished a certificate program, as indicated above, could also be recruited.

Since the program's inception, the number of teachers has increased steadily based on the rise in student numbers. For example, in 2006 there were between 30 to 35 teachers on staff each ten-week cycle; when the study took place, the program had over 50 teachers on staff to cover the needs of a growing student body. The English program is in charge of the English Director of Studies (DOS), who reports directly to the President of the Board.

Once in the program, teachers are assigned between three to four classes per ten-week cycle; the number of students in each class varies from 3 to 15. Teaching contracts range from a minimum of nine months to two years, depending on the availability of the instructors. These short contracts as well as the nature of the teachers' foreign status and level of experience directly affect the hiring and training processes, as well as the topics covered in an induction.

Without much variation until January 2015, new teachers received an induction through orientation consisting of a one-morning session (approximately 3 hours). First, newcomers were introduced to the curriculum to be followed (textbooks to be used, divisions of levels, extra material available, etc.);

then they were given general information about the program (e.g. visa information, payment procedures); and finally, they were taken on a tour of the three different branches of the program and a short city tour, which included showing foreign teachers key institutions of interest for their time in the country (e.g. bank, post office, tourist office).

Thus organized, the orientation was felt to serve the purpose of socializing new teachers into the program (De Cenzo & Robbins 2010). The induction was managed by the Director of Studies (DOS), the Assistant Director (ADOS), and the lead teacher, the latter a senior member of the teaching staff with additional administrative duties.

However, starting in 2012, the orientation was also followed by additional curriculum guidance in the form of short workshops (1 hour to 1½ hours each) dealing with specific academic aspects of the program (assessment, children's courses, and writing portfolio courses) spread throughout the first week of class. Only the assessment workshop was mandatory to all new teachers (NT). Teachers were required to attend the other two workshops only if these had been assigned to them. However, NT attended on average at least two workshops during their first teaching week.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion section describes the implementation of the innovation. The innovation in this case study followed the three phases of the process of innovation for Intensive ESL Programs (Stoller 1994): the initiation phase, the implementation phase, and the diffusion phase.

First, the initiation phase began with a preliminary step consisting of the analysis of teacher feedback, which highlighted the need to improve the induction session. Having gone through orientation, new teachers in the September-December cycle, before the study took place, gave voice to their dissatisfaction with how things were done by providing feedback through the teacher forum at the end of their first teaching period. This is relevant since in Stoller's study of diffusion

of innovation in Intensive ESL Programs, the Dissatisfaction Factor "plays the strongest facilitative role for innovations" when dealing with personnel issues (1994).

When established, the forum's purpose had been to give teachers the opportunity to voice their concerns and suggestions about the English Program as a whole, serving as a mechanism to determine its level of effectiveness (Everard, Morris & Wilson 2004) and as a source of open communication with the administration.

From the administration's perspective, the forum was meant to serve the purpose of turning teachers' possible dissatisfaction into opportunities to make things better for all concerned. As such, through open dialogue between the administration and the program's English teachers, the forum played a key role in conveying the dissatisfaction with the orientation. The ADOS conducted the forum meeting and all comments and suggestions were reported anonymously in writing to the DOS.

The results of the analysis of the teacher feedback indicated that there were two problems, in other words, the Dissatisfaction Factor (Stoller 1994), as presented by the teachers: first, the additional curriculum guidance during the first week of classes was too stressful and overwhelming as it happened while teachers were adjusting to an unknown education system (Soppelsa 2012).

Newcomers felt that receiving information about their courses after these had started, while at the same time trying to plan lessons, adjust to their teaching schedules, and deal with cultural changes as foreigners, was overwhelming. This situation seemed to create work-related stress, anxiety, and frustration; in other words, it was the cause of dissatisfaction which needed to be cleaned up (Herzberg 1975).

The second problem resided in the delay in the reception of key information about particular courses, affecting students and the pacing of the course as well as having a direct effect on the quality of instruction. It meant that certain activities that should have been done on the first or second day of classes with specific courses were delayed because educators did not receive this information until the middle or end of the first

week during the workshops. As a result, teachers and students were affected by how the orientation was done.

Once the problems had been determined, another step in the initiation phase involved the administration's evaluation of the situation, determination to improve the induction session, and decision to proceed (Stoller 2012). Thus, an assessment was made of the possible changes and implications (positive and negative) that a new type of induction could bring. Because the innovation required few resources for implementation, the Viability Factor which deals with how those concerned see the innovation "as easy to develop and beneficial to implement" (Stoller 1994:317), it was deemed feasible and appropriate.

In conjunction with the ADOS, the DOS restructured the orientation by changing it to a three-day induction instead of a one-day induction in order to provide curriculum guidance of all the program's academic aspects before classes started. As a result, instructors would be prepared to teach any type of course no matter their teaching assignments, a key difference as now they would have all relevant information from the beginning.

The three-day induction then was divided into six mini-sessions, two per day, each lasting an hour and a half approximately, unlike the previous induction which lasted three hours on one day. The first-day mini-session maintained the same structure as the original one-day orientation (general information, visit to school branches, and city tour).

The second phase of the process of innovation, the implementation phase, was based on the administration's decision to proceed. This phase meant moving the innovation from an idea into practice (Stoller 2012). The new teachers were informed via email of the three-day induction, so travel arrangements could be made based on this change. Except for two teachers, who later had separate individual meetings to receive information missed, all other NT arrived on time for orientation.

Although the newcomers had not experienced the previous type of orientation and every aspect of the program was 'new,' during the interviews

with the DOS about the position, they had asked if and what type of orientation was provided, thus indicating a positive disposition to receive induction to help them better understand and become part of the program.

This preliminary interest in the induction is connected to the teachers' later perception of success or failure of the innovation, an important aspect in any undertaking (Stoller 2012). Having made the necessary preparations, the new induction through orientation of new teacher was carried out a week before classes started.

The final phase of the process, the diffusion phase, was carried out to determine if the new orientation had accomplished its purpose, thus serving to evaluate the results of the innovation (Stoller 2012). For this case study, this was done through the voluntary and anonymous survey to the participants. The survey was sent out and later collected during week three after the teachers had started the teaching cycle, to determine the effects of the change.

The survey was organized as follows: the first three questions used a Likert-like scale with five options to choose from; they specifically referred to the effectiveness of the induction before the start of classes, the length of each session per day, and the usefulness of the academic information received.

Question 4 aimed to determine if, of the academic information presented, specific areas should receive more attention. Additionally, question 5 gave respondents the opportunity to list topics that were not covered but could be useful to include in future inductions. Question 6 asked respondents to add any other comments relevant to the induction.

The survey yielded the following results. Of the 12 surveys sent out, 11 were returned, giving a response rate of 91%. The survey's first question was of main interest to this study; 8 participants responded that the induction session had been quite effective (option 2) in helping them prepare for the first week of class.

One indicated that it had been extremely effective (option 1) while another participant indicated that it had been somewhat effective (option 3). Overall,

the length of the induction session, question 2, (three-day session) was considered satisfactory by 10 participants, while one considered it somewhat long.

In general, teachers felt that the academic information provided was useful, question 3, with 6 participants indicating that it had been quite useful (option 2); 3 indicated that it had been extremely useful (option 1); 1 participant considered it somewhat useful, and the remaining one considered it a little useful.

Of the topics covered during the induction, question 4, the majority of the participants expressed a desire to receive more information about assessment; this is understandable since this is one of the areas that require more teacher attention as it directly affects students in the classroom. For question 5, seven participants added additional topics of interest; these could be divided between academic and living concerns, for example: classroom management, course load, housing prices, and other job opportunities.

Regarding question 6, where participants could include comments about the orientation session in general, one of the participants wrote: "I think the orientation was very helpful and I think I would have been very confused and nervous going into class without it." Some teachers still felt that, although the orientation session had been spread over three days, it was still a lot of information to process; despite the induction session, some topics were just understood by "actually starting to teach to get a grasp on it," as one participant put it.

Considering the participants' overall positive response regarding the new induction, as an evaluation tool, the survey served to guide the decision to preserve the innovation or make adjustments to it, "rather than leave the process to chance" (Stoller 2012:45). It also served to give new teachers an opportunity to provide their input regarding the induction, thus giving them a sense of agency and an active role in the process (De Lano *et al.* 1994).

The survey was indispensable in ascertaining the innovation's success or failure since the participants' responses informed the Director of Studies if the new induction had met the teachers'

needs and could be maintained or if it needed to be abandoned due to lack of success (Stoller 2012:45). Perhaps one of the limitations of the study is that, despite the seemingly positive results, no comparison can be made of these results with concrete data from a previous induction, as no survey was administered then.

Most importantly, through its implementation, the innovation served to address the induction's purpose. First, it helped to reduce work-related stress, creating a positive reaction from teachers and decreasing their anxiety during the first week of class (De Cenzo & Robbins 2010). The administrative staff (i.e. the DOS, the ADOS, and the lead teacher) observed that the work atmosphere and new teachers' attitudes during the first week of class seemed less stressed compared to the previous cycle when many teachers had felt overwhelmed and tired, thus helping to determine to what degree the results of the innovation are visible to others (Rogers 2003).

Second, it introduced the newcomers to the program's culture through the detailed information provided ahead of time regarding the general expectations of the program, the types of courses taught, how evaluation was conducted, among other aspects. Finally, it promoted an environment where the English program's students and the quality language education offered would also benefit by having teachers ready to begin classes.

CONCLUSIONS

The innovation to the induction of new foreign English language teachers here presented, although at a micro-level, was purposeful and deliberate, informed by language management principles. It "challenge[d] the status quo, necessitating modifications in routine practices" (Stoller 2012:38; information in brackets added).

As such, this study has aimed to highlight the potential language programs have of turning "the negative energy of dissatisfaction," into positive opportunities through open communication, a supportive administration, and a desire for quality education (Everard *et al.* 2004).

The ease of change of the induction could be attributed to a perception by all concerned (i.e. the administration and the teaching staff) of the relative advantage, compatibility, observability, and trialability of the innovation, characteristics that work together to increase the potential for an innovation to be adopted (Rogers 2003). In the first place, since the need for change came from the teachers themselves through the forum, what might have been seen as a natural inclination to oppose ideas imposed on them was avoided (Everard *et al.* 2004).

Moreover, the program administration's support and concern in addressing teachers' job satisfaction propelled the change and helped sustain it, which would not have been possible otherwise (Stoller 2009); this factor emphasizes the need for two-way communication between the administration and staff achieved through the teacher forum. Finally, the change was given support by the participants' responses to the survey.

Despite the fact that the results cannot be generalized due to the specific working environment of this program, they could serve to highlight the importance that an effective induction has in helping teachers meet the challenges of becoming part of a new language program. A well thought-out induction could have the potential to lower teachers' anxiety and stress from the start, thereby paving the way for a successful experience overall.

This also aligns with the belief that effective change in education can only take place when educators' working life is improved (Fullan 2007). As a consequence, by reducing teachers' work-related stress, language students' learning experience would also be enhanced (Johnstone 2004), paving the way for successful instruction.

Finally, two-way communication (i.e. the forum) and the consideration of language program management principles can help language programs to implement innovations successfully to benefit not only their teaching staff but also their language learners and the program as a whole.

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