

The Effectiveness of Induction of Novice Academics at Kwame Nkrumah University in Zambia

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Abstract

The paper problematizes career induction for novice academicians at Kwame Nkrumah University in Zambia. The study aims to investigate the effectiveness of inducting both young and new academic members of staff at the named institution. The article probes whether induction for new academicians exists at Kwame Nkrumah University or not. Data were collected through structured interviews. Eight participants were drawn from the purposively chosen sub-samples of four existing faculties or schools at the institution, namely, Humanities and Social Sciences, Education, Natural Sciences, and Business Studies, at the recommendation of Faculty Heads. Each faculty had two nominees in the study sample. Being a qualitative study, participants were purposively selected from the sample faculties. Using the phenomenological approach, data were collected, described, examined, and analyzed thematically based on the novice academicians' individual experiences regarding induction during their early careers. The study reveals that new academicians at Kwame Nkrumah University are rarely inducted into academic life but are left to be taught by nature as they embark on the job of training. Therefore, there is a need to induct new academicians into the life of research, publications, presentations of lectures, general code of ethics of academics, prospects in terms of appointments as well as continuous assessments and examination. Implementation of the above issues defines mentorship of new academics.

Keywords: Academicians, effectiveness, induction, mentorship, novice

1. Introduction

The paper probes whether the induction of new academics exists at Kwame Nkrumah University or not. Kwame Nkrumah University is among the big teacher training institutions in Zambia. The university only trains teachers in the following programs; secondary, primary, and early childhood education. In addition, the university provides postgraduate education at diploma and master's levels. The university has four major schools namely, Humanities and Social Sciences, Education, Natural Sciences, and Business Studies. It is worth noting that the induction of every new workforce at an institution like Nkrumah is inevitable. According to Hunter (2016), induction is viewed as a deliberate academic program or a process of helping members of staff who are appointed to new positions in new environments to familiarize and acquaint themselves with how things are done in particular organizations or institutions such as Nkrumah University. It can be argued that induction is an introduction of the new members of the workforce into

their respective duties, responsibilities, and expectations in a new environment. It is, therefore, necessary for any higher learning institution like Kwame Nkrumah University to consider inducting new academic staff as an investment that should be used to promote quality, efficiency, and an effective workforce.

As pointed out by Teferra (2016), academic development and training opportunities to equip academics for the teaching profession have grown significantly across the world. This shows that the notion of inducting novice academics in higher learning institutions has been embraced worldwide. According to Masaiti et al. (2023), novice or early academics are considered to be junior academics with either an earned master's or doctoral qualification appointed in a university but with less than five years of teaching and research experience. This is an indication that novice academics are expected to be trained by local institutions where they have been appointed. It should be stressed that induction is an important component and shows that a new academic staff has been welcomed at a new environment, in this case, a higher learning institution.

This research, therefore, set out to investigate the existence of induction of new academics at Kwame Nkrumah University. The paper also outlines the benefits of having an inducted workforce and the need to induct all new academics irrespective of age. The work proceeds as follows: introduction, literature review, theoretical locale, methodology, results, and discussion, as well as the conclusion.

2. Literature Review

Masaiti et al. (2023) describe higher education as the postsecondary education and training offered by universities in Zambia. This kind of education is offered at higher learning institutions that include colleges of education and universities such as Kwame Nkrumah in Zambia. According to Ndebele (2013), the concept of induction encompasses learning about the policies, procedures, values, and goals of an organization and its people. Given Jeske & Olson (2021), induction can be described as the initiation, socialization, or onboarding of every new staff member into the culture of their profession. It must be pointed out that different institutions conduct induction in different ways according to their governing policies. Masaiti et al. (2023) note that the process of induction cannot be complete without mentorship. Banja (2022) describes mentorship as an indispensable component of induction in which a newly qualified staff member is supported and guided to navigate their new role by an experienced member or a mentor. Therefore, effective mentorship is a prerequisite to the successful implementation of lecturing, research, and consultancy skills and knowledge in universities with a variety of faculties.

Ssempebwa et al. (2016), argue that in most African higher learning institutions, the state of affairs regarding the induction of new academic staff is not implemented effectively, and correcting the situation requires the serious attention of responsible leadership. Masaiti et al. (2023), quote Zambia's Higher Education Act of 2013, and argue that the need to ensure quality education at the tertiary level can only be realized through inducting Early Career Academics (ECAs) into the academic profession. It is envisaged that there is no training institution where novice academics should be gloomed, but are dependent on the long-standing and experienced academics to introduce them to the new life of an academician. It can be argued that the lack of proper induction and coaching of the novice academicians at various universities such as Kwame Nkrumah University is likely to pose serious challenges during their execution of duties which would result in institutional inefficiencies.

Masaiti et al. (2023) observe that Zambia's higher education system is struggling to cope with the new and complex trends of increased private higher education providers and the quality of faculty. This shows that there is stiff competition in the higher learning sector which requires having sound academics to compete favorably and survive which can be attained through proper induction of the novice and new academicians. The trio argues that while questions related to internationalization and quality assurance of higher learning institutions are being discussed, very little attention is being paid to the induction process of emerging academics in both public and private providers of higher education. This is a source of concern in both public and private higher learning institutions where Kwame Nkrumah University is not exceptional. Higher education management is expected to be proactive in the induction of new academics because several changes have taken place regarding working conditions that are premised on regular scrutiny of individual research and quality of teaching, and, more importantly, individual academic performance of the academic staff. This entails that underperforming academic staff might be found wanting and rendered redundant if they are not inducted into their expectations at an early stage of their appointments.

Literature shows that in 2015, the Zambian Higher Education Authority (HEA) was established under the Higher Education Act of 2013 to ensure quality education in Zambian Higher Education. The climax expectation of the Act is that new academicians should be inducted into the academic professionalism of higher education. Masaiti et al. (2023) argue that different renowned scholars have attested to the importance of inducting novice academics because their experiences in the first five years of employment shape their future academic success. If new academics are not well inducted, they are likely to be academic failures, and their services and stay in academic life would be rendered futile and redundant. Masaiti et al. (2023) argue that seasoned, experienced, and competent academics are not only increasingly scarce in higher learning institutions but are either retiring or getting other portfolios away from academics. Based on the background, it is necessary to induct new academic staff in higher learning institutions so that they acquire the most needed skills in teaching, research, and publication.

Zambia's higher education has over the years seen an increase in both public and private universities which has necessitated a need to recruit newly qualified academic members of staff. It is worth noting that being qualified is one thing and being inducted in a new working environment is another thing. The above two qualities are required of an academician if their services are to be appreciated. As much as it is a general trend that adults are expected to gain experience through job training, academic induction is inevitable because there are things a member of staff should be introduced to gain experience. According to MoHE (2019:2), it was for the above reason that the Zambian government, through the formulation of the Higher Education Policy (HEP), hoped to "adopt a coordinated and comprehensive human resource development strategy that would promote both quality and relevant skills among academics". In the same manner, Zemicheal (2018) shows that quality improvement in higher learning institutions is directly proportional to the empowerment of new academicians who are expected to apply their potential skills which should be used to contribute to the higher education system. It is envisaged that the induction of new academicians should be held in high esteem because it contributes to the growth of any higher learning institution (King et al., 2018).

In related literature, Masaiti et al. (2023) point out that Early Career Academics (ECAs) are recruited as a long-term investment in the workforce for institutional capacity and growth. This point is very insightful if a higher learning institution should flourish and be highly ranked in academics. Grappling with academic staffing renders an institution to be handicapped and irrelevant. The lack of new academic staff at an institution leads to losing market and self-crucifixion. New academics are necessary at higher learning institutions because they come with new insights, trends, skills, and approaches that are in line with current teaching methodologies and technologies which are aimed at uplifting the standards and ranking of higher learning institutions.

It can be argued that most of the universities in Zambia, including Kwame Nkrumah have very few seasoned academics who can assume the role of mentors (Masaiti et al., 2023). It is against this background of deficiency of expertise in higher education that there is a need to foster some aspect of peer support among early academicians (Merga & Mason, 2021). The above idea is meant to promote academic growth and sustainability of the new academic members of staff in higher learning institutions in the world and Zambia, in general, and Kwame Nkrumah University, in particular, and possibly most of Africa. Masaiti et al. (2023) suggest that for the sake of growth and sustainability to be attained in Zambian universities, it would be necessary to consider giving some form of accreditation to those teaching in higher education such as a postgraduate certificate to teach at any of the universities in Zambia, a situation which would require trainers who are already scarce and staffing is grappling hence not workable at the moment.

It envisages that Zambia's resilient academic labor output is anticipated to be the backbone of a focused process of inducting the much-needed workforce both at the national and institutional levels. Dishena & Mokoena (2016) observe that changing from a novice academician to an accomplished one faces many difficulties that can only be overcome through formal induction and mentoring of new academic members of staff at any higher learning institution. Therefore, as indicated by Betlewski (2019), there is a need for higher learning institutions to greatly invest in new academics through induction and mentorship for them to cope with new working environments, remain afloat, and compete favorably in the international market. It is worth noting that the relevance of higher learning institutions in the world, in general, and Zambia, in particular, is measured by the academic outputs. Some of the most profound and notable examples of the academic outputs in universities include research and publications, citations, collaborations, and networking, completed supervision of masters and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) students as well as successful grant applications which can only be realized through induction of new academics into the world of academia (Hunter, 2016; Masaiti et al., 2021).

The above-related literature review is insightful during the analysis of the present study regarding the effectiveness of induction of novice academicians at Kwame Nkrumah University. It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge of earlier studies on career development and induction of new members of staff and will foreground further research in other universities. New members of staff irrespective of age and position are expected to be inducted so that they know the norms and expectations in their new environments. The notion of 'let nature teach a child' should not arise in an academic environment where there is cooperation. On the other hand, seasoned academics should not wait for novice academics to make mistakes or errors for them to come on board and blame them because that is costly and borders on the integrity of the institution.

3. Theoretical Locale

The theory of teacher development was adopted as a framework to justify the need for induction of novice academics both young and old after joining academia in Zambia's higher education sector. The theory of teacher development is premised on the Mutual Benefits Model is derived from the social exchange theory, the stages of teacher development theory, and later improved upon by Ingersoll & Strong (2011). Ingersoll & Strong (2011) argue that an individual will enter and remain in a relationship as long as they meet their needs. In the teacher development theory, it is envisaged that after pre-service training, a university teacher should be exposed to induction and mentorship to socialize them in their newly found profession for both their growth and organizational benefits. In the context of novice academics and induction in the higher education sector, the theory postulates that after postgraduate education and training, a newly recruited academic staff in any university must be exposed to induction and mentorship programs for them to learn more about what is involved in their new job. The induction program should lead to improved teaching practice, research output, and ultimately, positive student outcomes in the university. This entails that acquiring the master's degree and doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.) qualification to get a teaching job is insufficient for professional growth.

Induction is, therefore, a critical and indispensable bridge for transitioning from pre-employment education and preparation to an academic position where novice academics are required to effectively engage in teaching, community outreach, research output, and dissemination. Through effective induction and mentoring programs, universities are expected to socialize and develop novice academics so that they adjust to their newly found role to benefit themselves and the university. To achieve the above notion, novice academics are expected to be exposed to various activities to assess their growth and suitability for the academic job through meaningful interactions with mentors. This theory is befitting in this study as it deals with the benefits of inducting novice academics which is the sole purpose of the present study.

4. Methodology

The study used the descriptive qualitative research design. Mongia (2013) suggests that a descriptive qualitative research approach offers the researcher the ability to describe and explain the relationship between two groups or outcomes. Cavana, et al., (2001) in Omona (2013) adds that qualitative research reveals people's values, interpretative schemes, mind maps, belief systems, and rules of living so that respondent's reality can be understood. The choice of the descriptive approach is in tandem with the descriptive and explanatory objectives of the present study.

The study was conducted at Kwame Nkrumah University in Zambia. Being a qualitative study, participants were purposively selected from the four sample faculties. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. Purposive sampling or judgment sampling signifies a series of strategic choices about with whom, where, and how one does one's research (Sahaya & Selvam, 2017). In addition, Tongco (2007) shows that purposive sampling is a non-random technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of informants. This entails that in purposive sampling the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who are willing to provide the information under knowledge or experience. The above situation depicts what exactly happened in the present study to arrive at the respondents. Anonymity was observed for the names of participants from the four faculties. Therefore, pseudonyms were adopted.

The study used a sample of eight respondents who were selected purposively at the university across faculties. Eight participants were drawn from the four existing faculties or schools at Kwame Nkrumah University, namely, Humanities and Social Sciences, Education, Natural Sciences, and Business Studies. Therefore, each faculty had two informants who participated in the study.

Data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The document analysis method was also used to collect secondary data to back the analysis on the effectiveness of induction of novice academics (Chaleunvong, 2009). Data were collected and analyzed using descriptive and analytical skills. Mutch (2005) shows that research findings obtained using the qualitative and descriptive processes are reported using words and sentential expressions. Using the phenomenological approach, data were collected, described, examined, and analyzed thematically based on the novice academicians' individual experiences regarding induction during their early career in the higher learning institution or university. The collected data were analyzed descriptively according to the identified themes (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). Six major themes emerged from the data collection process, namely, teaching and learning, managing students, continuous assessments and examination, research and publication, code of conduct as well as prospects in terms of requirements for appointments.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Teaching and Learning

Results show that 37.5% of novice academics were guided theoretically on how to conduct lecturing in the classroom situation. Academics who claimed that they were guided bemoaned the lack of practical mentorship in a practical classroom situation because no seasoned lecturer invited them for practical classroom observation on how lecturing is conducted. On the other hand, 62.5% expressed ignorance about official induction to academic work at Kwame Nkrumah University.

One novice academic member KG stated that:

When I arrived at the institution, I was merely allocated courses and was given the course outlines. I was not given the course material but was left to look for it and discover how to present it.

Another novice academician JK submitted that:

When I reported on my first appointment, I was given classes to teach. Unfortunately, the Head of Department neither gave me the contact of class representatives nor showed me where the classes were. I, therefore, was exposed to let nature teach the child to discover the students.

The novice academic KL added that:

From the time I was employed by Kwame Nkrumah University, I have not been officially introduced to fellow academic members of staff. To be honest, I do not yet know all the fellow academic members of staff to date.

The other novice academic member GP said:

I have been at Kwame Nkrumah University for almost five years, but have not yet seen a formal deliberate induction program organized by the Department, Faculty, and Office of the Registrar or the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. Unfortunately, I cannot describe the Vice Chancellor because he has never addressed academic members of staff, both old and novice.

Based on the above results, it can be argued that the majority of the novice academics at Kwame Nkrumah University have not been inducted in terms of teaching and learning. These results are not in tandem with Masaiti et al. (2023) who observe that it is necessary to have sound academics to compete favorably and survive which can be attained through proper induction of the new academician. The results also show that the institution pays very little attention to the induction process of emerging academics at the university which is evidenced by 3 out of 8 informants consenting that they were partially inducted when they just reported which is variant with Masaiti et al. (2023) who argue that higher education management is expected to be proactive in the induction of new academics because several changes have taken place regarding working conditions that are based on constant scrutiny of individual research and quality of teaching, and, more importantly, individual academic performance of the academic staff. It can be argued that new academics are also expected to be updated periodically by both seasoned lecturers and management. It can also be argued that Heads of Departments in various faculties and Deans of respective faculties should always organize induction sessions whenever they receive new academics. This trend is meant to promote uniformity and also to make new academics feel at home.

5.2 Managing Students

The induction on how to manage the affairs of the students is another theme that emerged during data collection. This theme borders on the lecturer-student rapport. Results show that 100% of the respondents expressed ignorance about being inducted in this regard.

The novice academic staff PT said:

It is news to me that I should be inducted on how to manage students. No one guided me in this regard when I reported on my first appointment at Kwame Nkrumah University.

The above results show that most new academics are not aware that students should be regarded as cooperating partners because they were not inducted when they reported on their first appointment. It is necessary to take notice that most of the university students are grown-ups and require to be treated as such. A novice lecturer is expected to treat the students with integrity as a way of marketing both the institution and the course(s) being taught. It is worth noting that universities are in business and as such the lecturer(s) who are the service providers should relate well with students who pay for the services and can be regarded as customers. The relationship should be purely based on teacher development which is in line with the adopted theory that is premised on the mutual benefits model arising from the social exchange theory (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Hence, the lecturer-student relationship should be upheld because they have the same objective. For instance, to cover the course outline within a stipulated timeframe. However, the opposite is true about Kwame Nkrumah University because management promotes job training without proper guidance by seasoned academics which fulfills the notion of 'let nature teach a child', a trend that makes new academics feel out of place and unwelcomed in the new environment. The above trend is at variant with Betlewski (2019) who argues that there is a need for higher learning institutions to greatly invest in new academics through formal induction and mentorship for them to cope with new working environments. It can be argued that the induction of new academics helps them to remain relevant and warrants them to compete favorably in the international market.

5.3 Continuous Assessments and Examination

The results show that about 50% of the respondents were not inducted on how to design assessments. On the contrary, 100% of respondents added that they were not guided about the total number of assessments that should constitute continuous assessment (CA):

The novice academic LV submitted that:

I was not given direction concerning assessments but simply discovered. I only saw the number of assessments on some course outlines and made assumptions, but no one explained how to go about administering them. I discovered how to conduct assessments through trial and error methods where I was subjected to using the knowledge I had about assessments during my training at college and university level. Otherwise, there was no formal guidance or document to ascertain that.

Novice academic TP added that:

During my first year at Nkrumah, I was asked to prepare for a university examination without proper guidance or a seasoned lecturer to guide me. I sweated to come up with a formidable examination and took longer than expected to finalize the paper because I used a trial-and-error approach.

The above results show that novice academics are not properly guided in the new environment, but are left to discover things on their own. This trend exposes novice academics to anticipated failures that can be avoided and counters the notion of Merga & Mason (2021) who postulate that there is a need to foster some aspect of peer support among the early academicians by engaging seasoned academics to assume the role of mentors to eradicate deficiency of expertise in higher learning institutions. It can be argued that the lack of induction and mentorship of new academics in designing assessments and preparation of end-of-year and final examination papers is chaotic because they can be a haven for producing half-baked teachers as well as reducing the ranking of the institution. The above negative aspects might also lead the institution to lose the market. It is worth noting that assessments and examinations should not be compromised because they help to shape the trainee teachers and the workforce in other faculties. Therefore, new academics require maximum attention and mentorship in designing assessments and examination papers as well as administering them.

5.4 Research and Publication

Results show that 75% of the new academics who were appointed within five years have not been inducted and mentored on the need for research and publications. This can be seen in the responses they provided during the interviews. They confessed that they are expressed to seminar presentations although they are not attached to seasoned academics for mentorship.

The new academic member of staff KT said that:

I have not been told about the importance of research and publication. From the time I came to this university, no seasoned academician has either told me about the need to research and publish or to conduct collaborative research. All I see are announcements about research grants being made and some people being awarded grants. This has kept me thinking that it is probably an institutional policy to award research grants to seasoned academics hence I will probably also be considered when we become seasoned.

Based on the above results, it can be argued that new academics rarely get involved in research and publication at this institution because they are not inducted and lack mentors to that effect. It can also be argued that this relaxation contributes to the low ranking of the institution which correlates with Hunter (2016) and Masaiti et al. (2021) who posit that the relevance of higher learning institutions in the world, in general, and Zambia, in particular, is measured by the academic outputs. From the onset, novice academics should be inducted and understand that the profound academic strength in universities such as Kwame Nkrumah is measured through a lot of outputs of academicians such as research and publication, citations, collaborations, networking, successful student completion of masters and Doctor of Philosophy under the academics supervision as well as successful grant application (Hunter, 2016; Masaiti et al., 2021). It must be brought to the attention of seasoned academics that novice academics have an interest in research and publication, but lack guidance and mentorship. Novice academics should also be encouraged to publish because not all publishers require payments for authors to publish. Seasoned academics should help novice academics to search for publishers who offer free publication. The novice academics should also be encouraged to hold the bull by its horns by coming out of the cage and consulting seasoned academics. It can be argued that new academics are required to be paired with seasoned academics for mentorship and collaborative publication. Research and publications are rewarding because they put both the author and the institution or affiliation in the limelight and increase visibility. It can further be argued that research and publication is an avenue of self-promotion. For example, promotion to Lecturer 2 and 1, senior lecturer, associate professor, full professor, senior professor, etc. Through induction and mentorship, new academics should realize that appointments in higher learning institutions are based on academic merit which is achieved through research and publications. For instance, universities in West Africa, such as Ghana and Nigeria have upheld the ‘publish or perish policy’ for the academics to remain afloat and relevant to the institutions of learning. It can be argued that academics who are dedicated to research and publication are not only self-reliant and updated but also make the institution visible which enables them to compete favorably in the international market (Betlewski, 2019). Therefore, the recruitment of new academics at Kwame Nkrumah University should serve as a long-term investment in the workforce for institutional capacity and growth (Masaiti et al., 2023).

5.5 Code of Conduct

Results review that 75% of the new academic respondents were not aware of observing the code of conduct and ethics. The above result is attributed to the lack of induction and mentorship of novice academics. The submissions from the informants are tabulated below.

The novice academic respondent KG submitted that:

I have not seen the documents on policies, procedures, and prospects regarding an academic member of staff. Unfortunately, in the faculty where I belong, both the Dean and the Head of Department have not inducted me and my colleagues.

The above results show that new academics are not inducted in terms of the code of ethics and are also not availed of the required documents for their rehearsal, retention, reminder, and practice to ensure the provision of quality education at higher learning institutions. The above result counters Masaiti et al. (2023) who quote Zambia’s Higher Education Act of 2013, and argue that the need to ensure quality education at the tertiary level can only be realized through inducting Early Career Academics (ECAs) into

the academic profession. Induction of novice academics in terms of code of ethics is also consistent with the Zambian Higher Education Authority (HEA) of 2015 which was established under the Higher Education Act of 2013 to ensure quality education in Zambian Higher Education. It can be argued that the climax expectation of the Act is that new academics should be inducted into the academic professionalism of higher education. It can also be argued that inducting novice academicians on the need to uphold the code of ethics produces disciplined academics who subsequently uphold the image and integrity of the university.

It can further be argued that inducting novice academics is important because the experiences they acquire in the first five years of employment are used to shape their future academic success (Masaiti et al., 2023). It is envisaged that when new academics are not well inducted, they are likely to be academic failures, and their services and stay in academic life would be regarded worthless and redundant. The need to induct and mentor novice academics is in line with the Higher Education Policy (HEP) whose focus is to promote both quality and relevant skills among academics (MoHE, 2019) which is in tandem with Zemicheal (2018) shows that the quality improvement in universities is directly proportional to the empowerment of new academicians who are expected to apply their potential skills to contribute to the higher education system. Therefore, induction of the new academicians into the code of ethics or conduct should be held in high esteem because it contributes to the growth of any higher learning institution (King et al., 2018).

6. Conclusion

The article has probed the existence and effectiveness of career induction for novice academicians at Kwame Nkrumah University in Zambia. The study concludes that new academicians at Kwame Nkrumah University are rarely inducted into academic life, but are left to gain experience through what can be described as a ‘job on training’. The study also concludes that there is a need to induct new academicians into the life of teaching and learning, managing students, continuous assessments and examination, research and publication, code of conduct as well as academic prospects in terms of requirements for appointments. It can further be concluded that the successful implementation of the above issues defines the effective induction and mentorship of new academics by seasoned academics.

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