

Perceptions of an Induction Program from Beginning Teachers and Teacher Mentors in an Urban School District

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Abstract

This study sought to document the perceptions of beginning teachers and teacher mentors concerning the effectiveness of a formal induction program and compare the perceptions of the two groups. Data related to this topic was collected via a survey. The study aimed to reveal the perceptions of the two groups, beginning teachers and teacher mentors, regarding the induction program. No significant effects were found in the study; however, the researcher identified four themes concerning participants' perceptions: positive influence, implementing different strategies, peer observation, and no support or negative feedback.

Gabrielle rushes into her classroom from the early afternoon convocation excited about her first day at Oakhill Elementary School as a fourth grade teacher. She is finally able to fulfill her dreams of working as a teacher, and because she loves children, she cannot wait to help them learn. Gabrielle wants to be a successful teacher in the classroom. Unfortunately, she has seen several of her friends who entered the teaching profession also exit the profession within two years. All of Gabrielle's friends left because they were not prepared for the classroom and the obstacles, hindrances, and stumbling blocks that teachers encounter during their first year as professional teachers. Gabrielle also has several concerns and fears about entering the classroom. How can Oakhill Elementary ensure that Gabrielle has the resources and skills needed to be a successful beginning teacher? Darling-Hammond (2003) reported that of college graduates who enter the teaching profession, approximately 30% leave within the first year or two. Therefore, research is necessary to determine how school districts can ensure that beginning teachers have the resources and skills they need to be successful and remain in the field.

The transition period that beginning teachers encounter can be extremely daunting and challenging. Beginning teachers are faced with several issues when they enter the classroom concerning discipline and classroom management, strategies for organization and planning,

motivating students, regulating the teaching environment, and sustaining their personal lives (Troman & Woods, 2001). Sometimes beginning teachers receive little or no assistance or support in finding solutions to these problems. The combination of these challenges and little support result in an undulating effect that cannot be rewarding for beginning teachers, their students, or their colleagues.

Considering the challenges and barriers, it is important to determine whether beginning teachers are being encouraged to stay in the profession as well as determine the types of programs and procedures that could help provide necessary training for beginning teachers to be successful in their initial years and beyond. This research study is designed to determine the perceptions of beginning teachers and teacher mentors after participating in an induction program for one year. Of specific interest in this research will be participants' perceptions of the significance of the induction program in a particular district.

Statement of the Problem

According to the Texas Center for Educational Research (TCER, 1999), the number of teachers with five years of teaching experience or fewer has increased by 4.9% in the past 10 years. This finding reveals a demand to retain teachers. Local school districts in the United States as well as state and national organizations for teacher development have realized that teacher attrition is a concern and pertinent problem that needs to be addressed. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE, 2004), most states have leadership and teacher organizations specifically initiated to encourage teachers to remain in the profession. Teacher turnover is a ubiquitous, recognizable problem; therefore, it is critical for beginning teachers to have purposeful, professional support. Induction programs provide professional support for beginning teachers to increase their chances of remaining in the education profession. Theobald and Michael (2001), stated, "Teaching is an occupation that loses many of its newly trained practitioners very early in their careers" (p. 3). School districts have realized this alarming concern and have begun taking initiatives to remedy the issue. This research highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of the induction program from the lenses of the teacher mentor and beginning teacher in their roles as participants to provide insight into the effectiveness of the induction program.

The unspoken message to beginning teachers often is "Figure it out yourself, do it yourself, and keep it to yourself" (Breux & Wong, 2003, p. 7). Breux and Wong (2003) also noted that this "sink or swim" or "lost at sea" approach is challenging for beginning teachers. The researchers suggested that if school districts do not have a beginning teacher induction program, it could affect beginning teachers' decisions to remain in the profession after their first year of teaching as support is essential for beginning teachers to be successful. However, it is unclear whether all induction programs are successful for all beginning teachers. Additionally, it is important to determine whether induction programs are a "cure" for beginning teachers to be undoubtedly prepared for survival in the classroom. As such, this study was designed to uncover the perceptions of participants of an induction program from a particular school district.

Purpose of the Study

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) offers the Beginning Teacher Induction and Mentoring Grant (BTIM) to assist school districts in improving teacher attrition (TEA, 2009). The evaluation of participants' perceptions of this grant program in a small urban school district in Texas aimed to provide a deeper understanding as to whether the intentions of the grant are warranted and whether the program is successful in this district. The district selected for this study realized the need to implement programs to keep the teachers they hire and has begun appropriating aggressive measures to meet the needs of beginning teachers while they participate in a formal induction process. This study aimed to determine whether the participants involved felt the program was beneficial and was using the grant appropriately.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant for two main reasons. First, the study illuminated the importance of the mentoring and induction program by highlighting the effectiveness of the program through the lenses of participants. Specifically, the researcher investigated and presented the perspectives of mentors as supervisors and beginning teachers as mentees. Secondly, this research provided the perspective of participants in the program to determine whether the program is worth continuing.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. Does a relationship exist between beginning teachers' perceptions of personal instructional effectiveness and the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program?
2. Does a relationship exist between teacher mentors' perceptions of beginning teachers' instructional effectiveness and the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program?
3. Does a relationship exist between beginning teachers' and teacher mentors' perceptions of beginning teachers' instructional effectiveness?
4. Does a relationship exist between beginning teachers' and teacher mentors' perceptions of the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program?

Hypotheses

This study examined the following null and alternate research hypotheses. A confidence level of $p < 0.05$ was used for all statistical analyses. Independent and dependent t-tests were used to compare the values of the beginning teacher and teacher mentors.

Hypothesis 1

- Ho1. No relationship exists between beginning teachers' perceptions of personal instructional effectiveness and the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program.
- Ha1. A relationship exists between beginning teachers' perceptions of personal instructional effectiveness and the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program.

Hypothesis 2

- Ho2. No relationship exists between teacher mentors' perceptions of beginning teachers' instructional effectiveness and the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program.
- Ha2. A relationship exists between teacher mentors' perceptions of beginning teachers' instructional effectiveness and the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program.

Hypothesis 3

- Ho3. No relationship exists between beginning teachers' and teacher mentors' perceptions of beginning teachers' instructional effectiveness.
- Ha3. A relationship exists between beginning teachers' and teacher mentors' perceptions of beginning teachers' instructional effectiveness.

Hypothesis 4

- Ho4. No relationship exists between beginning teachers' and teacher mentors' perceptions of the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program.
- Ha4. A relationship exists between beginning teachers' and teacher mentors' perceptions of the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program.

Method of Procedure

A survey was used to collect data for this study. Because an evaluation of the induction program at the selected district has not yet been conducted, the researcher developed the survey instrument based on the literature review. The survey consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions that were measured using a 5-point Likert scale and 5 short answer responses. The participants rated the components of the induction program on level of satisfaction from *very satisfied* to *dissatisfied*. The short answer responses allowed participants to answer the questions and provide feedback based on their perceptions of the induction program. The study was conducted with participants from the 2011-2012 school year. The survey variables were measured using

both quantitative Likert type items and a qualitative open-ended question format. Creswell (2005) stated, “Open-ended responses permit you to explore reasons for the close-ended responses and identify any comments people might have” (p. 217). The open-ended portion of the survey disclosed common themes found among perceptions of the induction program from the lens of beginning teachers and teacher mentors.

Limitations

The following limitations will be used for the study:

1. The population of this study was limited to teachers who completed their first year of teaching and participated in the induction program during the 2011-2012 academic year.
2. Only teachers who taught in a Texas public school during the 2011-2012 were included in this study.
3. Only mentors who taught in a Texas public school during the 2011-2012 academic year and who were assigned a beginning teacher were included in this study.

Delimitations

The following delimitation was used for the study:

1. Research was conducted in a small urban school district with a diverse population of students of different social economic statuses and race.

Research Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis Ha₁ proposed that a relationship exists between beginning teachers’ perceptions of personal instructional effectiveness and the applicability of the district’s beginning teacher induction program. A regression analysis was conducted to test this hypothesis and establish a causal relationship between variables (see Table 1). By identifying a relationship, the researcher could gain insight into whether beginning teachers’ perceptions of personal instructional effectiveness significantly affected the applicability of the district’s beginning teacher induction program.

Table 1
Regression Analysis for Beginning Teachers' Perceptions of Personal Instructional Effectiveness

Variable	Parameter estimate	Standard error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	T for Ho: Parameter = 0	Prob > T
Intercept	4.102	.569		7.209	.000
Beginning teachers' perceptions of personal instructional effectiveness	.032	.129	.026	.250	.804

Because p was greater than .05, the null hypothesis was accepted. There was no effect of beginning teachers' perceptions of personal instructional effectiveness on the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program. This finding does not support those of previous researchers. For example, Zinni (2011) conducted a study to exam the effects of beginning teachers' perceptions of personal instructional effectiveness on the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program. Based on the regression analysis of data from 241 participants, Zinni (2011) found that beginning teachers' perceptions of personal instructional effectiveness significantly affected the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program. Additionally, Gold (1987) examined the same relationship and found that more positive beginning teachers' perceptions of personal instructional effectiveness were significantly associated with better applicability of the induction program.

Research Hypothesis 2

Research hypothesis Ha₂ proposed that a relationship exists between teacher mentors' perceptions of beginning teachers' instructional effectiveness and the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program. A regression analysis was conducted to test this hypothesis to establish a causal relationship between variables (see Table 2). By identifying a relationship, insight might be gained into whether teacher mentors' perceptions of beginning teachers' personal instructional effectiveness significantly affected the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program.

Table 2
Regression Analysis for Teacher Mentors' Perceptions of Beginning Teachers' Instructional Effectiveness

Variable	Parameter estimate	Standard error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	T for Ho: Parameter = 0	Prob > T
Intercept	4.285	.675		6.348	.000
teacher mentors' perceptions of beginning teachers' instructional effectiveness	-.010	.149	-.007	-.065	.948

Because p was greater than .05, the null hypothesis was accepted. There was no effect of teacher mentors' perceptions of beginning teachers' instructional effectiveness on the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program. This finding does not support the findings in the literature. For example, Gunter (1985) found that teacher mentors' perceptions of beginning teachers' instructional effectiveness significantly affected the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program. Additionally, Stallion (1988) also found significant effects of 35 teacher mentors' perceptions of beginning teachers' instructional effectiveness on the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program.

Research Hypothesis 3

Research hypothesis Ha3 proposed that a relationship exists between beginning teachers' and teacher mentors' perceptions of beginning teachers' instructional effectiveness. A t-test was performed to determine whether a relationship existed between these variables. Table 3 reports the mean, standard deviation, and standard error for teacher mentors and beginning teacher mentees. Table 3 also includes two sets of t-values, degrees of freedom, and probabilities (equal variances and unequal variances). These values were close unless the variances differed widely. The bottom line shows the probability that the variances were unequal due to chance. Note that the F ratio is 7.172. Because the probability was small (.009), the t-value was used and probability for unequal variances. The analysis did not yield significance at the .05 level ($p = .138$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. Thus, the results suggest there is no difference between beginning teachers' and teacher mentors' perceptions of beginning teachers' instructional effectiveness. In contrast to these results, Cheng and Brown (1992) used a pre and posttest design on two groups of beginning teachers ($N = 25$) and teacher mentors ($N = 38$). The findings revealed a significant relationship between beginning teachers' and teacher mentors' perceptions of beginning teachers' instructional effectiveness. Henry (1988) examined the same relationship and found significant results.

Table 3
T-test for Beginning Teachers' and Teacher Mentors' Perceptions of Beginning Teachers' Instructional Effectiveness

Group	Mean	Std Dev	Std Error
Mentor	4.35	.770	.122
Mentee	4.57	.575	.080
Variances	T	df	Prob > T
Equal	-1.552	89	.124
Unequal	-1.499	70.106	.138
For Ho: Variances are equal	F' = 7.172		Prob > F' = .009

Research Hypothesis 4

Research hypothesis Ha4 proposed that a relationship exists between beginning teachers' and teacher mentors' perceptions of the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program. A study conducted by Kilgore and Kozisek (1989) used teacher self-reports to determine whether a relationship exists between beginning teachers' and teacher mentors' perceptions of the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program. Results from the research indicated that a relationship does exist. Additionally, the New York Board of Education (1983) surveyed 20 beginning teachers and 20 teacher mentors to determine whether this relationship existed. The research found that relationship exists between beginning teachers' and teacher mentors' perceptions of the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program effectiveness.

For this study, a t-test was performed to determine whether a relationship exists between beginning teachers' and teacher mentors' perceptions the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program. Table 4 reports the mean, standard deviation, and standard error for teacher mentors and beginning teacher mentees. Table 4 also includes two sets of t-values, degrees of freedom, and probabilities (equal variances and unequal variances). These values were close unless the variances differed widely. The bottom line shows the probability that the variances were unequal due to chance. As seen in Table 4, the *F* ratio is 2.468. Because the probability is large ($p = .120$), the t-value was used and probability for equal variances. The analysis did not yield significance at the .05 level ($p = .316$). The null hypothesis ($p > .05$) was accepted. Thus, no difference was found between beginning teachers' and teacher mentors' perceptions of the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program.

Table 4
T-test

Group	Mean	Std Dev	Std Error
Mentor	4.40	.591	.093
Mentee	4.25	.744	.104
	Variances	T	df
Equal	1.009	89	.316
Unequal	1.037	88.982	.303
For Ho: Variances are equal	$F^* = 2.468$		Prob > $F^* = .120$

Summary of Findings

No significant effects were revealed in the current study, which has been shown to be contradictory to previous research. It is important to note that because the researcher did not find a significant relationship in the current study, it does not mean that the study was weak. Rather, one must assess the researcher's approach to measuring teachers' perceptions of personal instructional effectiveness and the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program. Specifically, self-selection bias may be of concern in the current study. Additionally, the researcher did not control for variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, education level, and socioeconomic class as covariates (Rhee & Waldman, 2002). The researcher also suggests interpreting the results with caution because of the sample size used for data collection ($N = 91$). Because the sample was small, the researcher was less likely to find a significant relationship between two variables.

Implications for Practice

Mentoring is a crucial component for the success of a beginning teacher. Texas has taken the initiative to implement a framework that school districts have access to use as a resource, the TxBESS. Many school districts use the framework to create a program that fulfills the needs of their beginning teachers. Induction programs require a systematic process prior to the beginning of school that continues during the beginning teacher's first year. Prior to school starting, the beginning teacher participates in an induction process in which they meet their mentor. During the school year, the beginning teacher and mentor meet weekly to cover topics and concerns. Further, instruction is an important addition that should be considered when developing a framework of an induction program.

Accountability and teacher attrition rates are two key terms for school districts. An effective teacher has a substantial impact on student achievement. School districts have realized the importance of training beginning teachers properly and have made it a priority to expose beginning teachers to all facets of the school system. Induction programs are a valuable component for beginning teachers. As such, induction programs are being developed in school

districts to meet the needs of beginning teachers and increase the retention rates of teachers. School districts have high expectations for teachers and induction programs strive for excellence. Preparing beginning teachers for the classroom is a challenging job, but school districts appear up for the challenge.

Specifically, school districts collaborate with universities' college teacher preparation programs. As these institutions communicate, they are better able to develop standards to ensure that beginning teachers are successful upon graduation. The skills that beginning teachers are exposed to during their internship hours include the following: working with staff members on campus to develop Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), implementation of the IEPs, meeting the needs of students with disabilities, and understanding the school district's vision.

Recommendations for Further Research

Future research should consider controlling for demographic effects such as age, gender, ethnicity, education level, and socioeconomic class as covariates. The following would be appropriate for future research designs:

- Incorporate techniques such as propensity score matching to examine and control for potential self-selection bias effects.
- Require a significantly larger sample size, which would help distinguish significant relationships between variables. A larger sample size would also help researchers to draw clearer conclusions about the impact that perceptions of beginning teachers' instructional effectiveness on the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program. Such findings could also be useful in determining the types of individuals who would be best suited for an induction program.

Leaders should have good relationships with teachers. Perceptions of beginning teachers' instructional effectiveness do not predict the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program. It is imperative that organizational leaders understand how to properly develop relevant leadership strategies to manage no effects of perceptions of beginning teachers' instructional effectiveness on the applicability of the district's beginning teacher induction program. To address these concerns, organizations should use the results of the current study to assist with taking the following actions:

1. Leaders have to evaluate the attributes of induction programs to ensure that they possess the relevant qualities to succeed in the United States.
2. Leaders have to evaluate their leadership strategies to ensure those characteristics align with induction programs.
3. Leaders have to develop training courses that help business leaders understand the unique dynamics associated with induction programs and aim to develop the characteristics/skill sets necessary to manage induction programs.
4. Leaders who are evaluating whether or not they should let teachers use induction programs should use the current study as an additional decision-making resource.
5. Leaders have to encourage beginning teachers to express their feelings about concerns they have regarding the induction program.

To conclude, induction programs must be evaluated on a regular basis and prompt feedback should be given when necessary. This study provided meaningful feedback from the perceptions of participants regarding the instructional relationship to the induction program. The emphasis the school district has placed on the induction program has many benefits that assist beginning teachers' transition into their careers.

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