NOVICE FACULTY DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN POST-SOVIET AZERBAIJAN

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore novice faculty development in public and private higher education institutions (HEIs) in post-soviet Azerbaijan, to identify perceptions of support from administration and experienced faculty members, and to find the difficulties that novice faculty members may have encountered in their early years of being a member of academic staff and factors that contribute to their professional development.

The study employed qualitative methods of data collection and data analysis. A convenience sampling strategy assisted in selecting research sites and participants that were easily accessible to investigate the phenomenon. The target population was faculty members and administrative staff at public and private higher education institutions across Azerbaijan. The decision to select those sites was not to limit access to a single institution, and the sample made of research sites from different regions of the country provided a chance for obtaining rich data based on diverse experiences that were beneficial to get a better understanding of the phenomenon since the perception of people might differ depending on their geographical situation and types of universities they worked. The sample was made up of twenty-four novice and experienced faculty members as well as heads of departments at eight HEIs. The data were collected from novice faculty members who were in the field for less than five years, experienced faculty members who were in the field for five years or more, and heads of departments regardless of the years of experience in the administrative position since the research questions of the study focused on pedagogical, academic, and administrative support from the university community. Constant comparative data analysis was exercised to identify the difficulties that novice faculty members encountered and factors that contributed to their professional development and to ascertain whether there was any support provided by the administration and experienced faculty members in place. The data were obtained in both Azerbaijani and English because some respondents were from regional universities and they might not speak English well, the data was translated, analysed, and double-checked by two bilingual peer reviewers. The triangulated data helped reach authenticity and test validity through the convergence of information from three different groups. A member check was conducted to receive the participants' verification and ensure the credibility of the findings.

The significance of this study was adding to the theoretical and practical aspects of novice faculty development, which might be necessary in the post-soviet Azerbaijani setting. We attempted to understand the novice faculty development and factors contributing to it through the lens of sociocultural perspectives as several empirical studies indicated the validity of the explanation and prediction of how humans develop and change. The understanding was derived through semi-structured interviews with a predetermined set of open-ended and close-ended questions, and follow-up questions spontaneously posed during the interviews.

The findings suggest that the administration and experienced faculty members permit novice faculty members to observe and assist with class materials. Regarding difficulties, communication, teaching new subjects, classroom management, failed expectations, age gap, and student behaviours remain the most

apparent. The study concludes that public and private higher education institutions in post-soviet Azerbaijan do not identify novice faculty development as a policy mechanism and apply any formal induction procedures in place for building professional skills and adjusting to new jobs.

In light of the research findings, it is recommended that HEIs should develop and maintain an induction mechanism as well as mentoring that can stimulate novice faculty members to adapt to the academic community and serve as a professional development opportunity and a chance to receive diverse perspectives in discussing insufficiency in teaching, classroom management, and the research capacity building.

Further quantitative studies with a more representative sample are suggested to be conducted on novice faculty development to provide interested parties with data that can be used to inform decision-making and contribute to improving the academic body of knowledge.

Keywords: novice and experienced faculty members; administration; higher education institution; professional development; induction; mentoring

1 INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions are gradually addressing issues to attract qualified teachers and managers to the teaching and learning process (Onestini, 2020). As higher education quality entails growth, educational leaders consider a comprehensive teacher education program as a form of staff development that aims to ensure new faculty members' necessary abilities and skills, to provide opportunities, resources, and structures to support the formation of a community of practice among faculty members from various disciplines (Harvey, 2006; Rodgers et al., 2014). Once novice faculty members (Altbach & Balan, 2007), step into the profession, their presence should be taken into consideration during staff development as the majority encounter several challenges related to their functions and the demands of the academic environment.

Waddell (2016) states that throughout the career continuum, faculty members are under increasing pressure to develop and publish as early-career academics while embracing new technologies and pedagogies. In their early years, new faculty members indicate a desire to interact with colleagues and get assistance in navigating the organisation's political fabric and support for efficient operation (Gazza & Shellenberger, 2005; see also White, Brannan, & Wilson, 2010). Academics generally believe that new lecturers' professional growth should occur within the community formed by the lecturer's designated center and department (de-Marcos et al., 2014). However, the teaching methods they should employ are not specified (European Commission, 2017) and there are no special programs for the initial education of future academic staff in higher education. The absence of specified teaching methods and special programs could lead novice faculty members to frequently use teaching tactics that they learned during their schooling, regardless of whether they were appropriate for the audience or the course being delivered (Prosser et al., 2003). In turn, it can be a threat to staff quality (Zemichael, 2020) as a fundamental element in determining the effectiveness of higher education.

Novice faculty members play a vital role in higher education institutions since they are the fundamental factors affecting the quality of higher education. Since most of them are new university graduates and are fascinated by the prospect of working as a lecturer, the early phases of their careers include the process of adjusting to their new roles (Hong & Abdullah, 2020). Thus, educational research related to teaching competencies is serious when attending to the demands of novice faculty members and enhancing the professional skills of experienced ones since all of them encounter the problems of a sophisticated 21st-century society (Altbach & Balan, 2007).

Given contemporary issues regarding higher education, improving the teaching and learning environment is identified as a priority objective in the State Education Strategy on the Development of Education in Azerbaijan (2013). Accordingly, the ones who apply for teaching positions in higher education institutions need a Ph.D. degree while holders of master's degrees may be considered for certain roles. Highly educated professionals with master's degrees who have 5 years of scientific, pedagogical, or production experience and scientific publications may compete for the position of senior teacher (Cabinet of Ministers, 2010; European Commission, 2017). They should plan their lectures following the curriculum which specifies

learning outcomes and content standards, subjects, number of weekly lessons and extracurricular hours, organisation of pedagogical process, a system of assessment, and monitoring of learning outcomes (Cabinet of Ministers, 2010). However, the teaching methods, they must employ, are not specified, and there are no special programs for the initial education of future academic staff in higher education (European Commission, 2017, pp. 8 -13).

The study we conducted in post-soviet Azerbaijan, where the education system is still transforming, and the results sourced from it could serve as a basis for policymakers and implementers to understand how they may use their expertise and resources to maintain novice faculty development as well as review current policy and improve it. Besides, this study may contribute to the current body of knowledge and understanding of novice faculty perceptions of induction and gain insight into the support provided by the administration to continue in the profession.

2 OCCUPATIONAL ADAPTATION

Novice faculty members holding a doctorate or master's degree find it difficult to adjust to their new responsibilities due to a severe workload and life stress (Hong & Abdullah, 2020). Martinez et al. (2014) conclude that novice academic staff have difficulties in the full command of the content and transmission of knowledge, and lack some personal traits and communication skills, theory-practice distinction, and assessment procedures.

Working in a highly specialized field requires sophisticated professional knowledge, and novice faculty members are responsible for developing their skills continually (Mwanza-Kabaghe & Mofu-Mwansa, 2018). Stepping into the profession, adjusting to new jobs, and skill development does not happen overnight. Since *occupational adaptation* determines the relationship between people, jobs, and their surroundings in response to occupational obstacles (Boisselle & DaLomba, 2018), it acclimates newly hired individuals to their new working conditions and becomes the most essential phase in their careers having a significant positive correlation with professional identity (Gajda, 2019; Hong & Abdullah, 2020). *Occupational* adaptability development necessitates individual improvement of professional skills, and psychological quality as well as university and societal support and assistance (Savickas, 2005; Martin, Nejad, Colmar, & Liem, 2012). Understanding the profession with limited knowledge, having unrealistic occupational expectations in the early phase, and encountering high occupational demands (Hong & Abdullah, 2020; Savickas, & Porfeli, 2012), novice faculty members may experience professional anxiety and pressure becoming isolated. Having no mentor and being unable to continuously build skills during their academic learning might cause confusion and failure to manage challenging student behaviours (Bickmore, 2013). Martinez et al. (2014) emphasise social networks and engagement in learning communities to minimize anxiety, avoid isolation, and encourage well-grounded professional development.

3 COMMUNITIES OF LEARNING

Newmann (1994) and Ortlieb et al. (2011) believe faculty development is transformative learning that is based on human interactions including shared norms, values, and practice. Likewise, Wenger (1998) specifies the domain of knowledge as the provision of a common foundation and feeling of shared identity, a network of caring individuals who help to construct communities of learning and common practice that the community develops in the context of the " experience of participating in the world" (p.3). On the other hand, McDonald and Star (2006) contend that the concept of community of practice is not always the case in higher education institutions speculating on the increasingly competitive structure of higher education and the conventional notion of *academic freedom*, which encourages private and personalized methods of classroom instruction rather than a collaborative, collective approach.

4 IDENTITY BUILDING

Being a novice member of the community leads to certain difficulties such as adopting particular responsibilities and adjusting to the frequent tacit regulations of an organisation where socio-cultural, micro-political relations, and conflicting professional and administrative job ideologies (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Siler & Kleiner, 2001) and makes the issue of identity crucial to define. To negotiate and create an existence for novice faculty members, eliminate inconsistencies between academics' expectations and real experience (Siler & Kleiner, 2001), and discover what it means to be an academic and understand the culture of the specific area and how to relate to it remain challenging (Remmik et al., 2011). The notion of identity is a pivot between individuals and communities (Wenger, 1998). Similarly, professional identity development encompasses the process of learning and adapting to the community, generating a feeling of belonging, and getting the approval of co-workers as a result of a dialogue between self and external reality (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007; Remmik et al., 2011). Thus, the identity development of novice academic staff depends on

their motivation and passion for teaching, the balance between their various tasks, the level of perceived insecurity, their willingness to ask for help or assistance, and their awareness of isolation (Remmik et al.,

2011). A novice faculty member may have contradicting responsibilities (being a doctoral student and a lecturer at the same time), which can cause conflicting feelings in their connections with fellow students and workmates, inability to manage the obligations and obstacles they have to confront, and challenges in admitting their failed expectations and incompetencies that are not always met in terms of their imagined career path and the real-life experience (Remmik et al., 2011).

5 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Faculty members execute a variety of complicated duties without appropriate training or opportunities for professional development to perform them effectively. Bickmore (2013) states that the majority of the teaching workforce was not inept underachievers who sat quietly during their tenure rather they made efforts to work long hours struggling in isolation with little professional advancement. If the newly minted teaching workforce used their expertise to engage in dialogues and collaborate with colleagues to find satisfaction in their job, they might rediscover their passion for learning and teaching, remaining dedicated to the profession and breaking away from the typical isolation of teaching (Bickmore, 2013). Thus, Martinez et al. (2014) consider the professional development of academic staff who are new to the profession at universities as a significant revolution for generating, managing, and distributing content knowledge, encouraging collective participation, empowering cohesion to and alignment with norms and assessments, which consequently leads to the establishment of classroom practice and teaching methods that emancipate learners and themselves (Garet et al., 2001).

6 MENTORING AS A FORM OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mentoring provided by seasoned faculty incorporates the exchange of essential institutional knowledge during the positional induction and career objectives, ongoing support for research initiatives and funding accomplishment, psychological assistance, shared experiences, and promotion of "successful entry into the culture" (Mazerolle et al., 2018, p. 266). During the mentorship, *peers* or *academic friends* offer support, and provide advice and guidance that concentrate on smooth socialization in the workplace (Perna, F. M., Lerner, B. M., & Yura, M. T.,1995; Williams, 2013). In a higher education setting, mentorship is defined as a professor-student relationship (Sands et al.,1991) in which working together partners support the personal and professional growth that leads to success and development. However, on a department level, the situation is slightly different when a faculty member mentors another faculty member, or their colleagues. Faculty members who are mentored by colleagues find themselves in an unequal and vulnerable place regarding those who will be making judgments about their position and advancement at some point in the future (Sands et al., 1991).

7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework provided an articulated lens for how the study we designed would process new knowledge. Given that we applied a sociocultural lens to investigate novice faculty development in the context of higher education. To assist the audience in understanding our approach, we discussed tenets of sociocultural theory that are most relevant to exploring the development of novice faculty in the context. Needless to say, sociocultural theory asserts that learning is social (Vygotsky, 1997). Consequently, individuals learn or/and develop when they repeatedly interact within cultural contexts as well as peer groups, schools, and professional learning communities. It is believed professional communities may provide time and space for creating and exchanging knowledge through interpersonal interactions and collaboration as stated by Renshaw (2003), Hord and Hirsh (2008) as well as Klar (2012). Being informed by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning and development, our study addressed the following research questions: 1. What are the experiences of novice faculty in creating and exchanging knowledge when interacting and collaborating in public universities? 2. What are the challenges novice faculty members encounter in their early years of teaching? 3. What are the perceptions of novice faculty members on existing support from administration and senior faculty members?

8 METHODOLOGY AND STUDY DESIGN

We aimed to explore the world through the eyes of academic staff by listening to three different perspectives, novice and experienced faculty members as well as department heads, at public and private universities in Azerbaijan regarding academic, administrative, and teaching issues, and analysing their experiences (Willis, 2007; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Hence, emphasis was put on understanding study respondents' perceptions and their interpretations of the novice faculty development and existing support in the higher education context in which they interact (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Yin, 2016).

The study employed a qualitative exploratory design to investigate a research problem that had not been studied earlier to refer to or rely upon to predict some outcome. We adopted a convenience sampling technique to select participants and institutions that were accessible, and respondents were those who could provide in-depth data on the intended setting. The rationale behind the decision to select public and private universities from Baku and regions was to not limit access to a single institution. Various perspectives from different parts of the country may differ depending on their geographical location and contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon and collected countrywide data.

The sample size of the research was limited, which was the main limitation of the study. In total, 24 participants from 8 higher education institutions (HEIs) were interviewed. It was supposed to have one novice faculty, one experienced faculty, and one program director from each university. However, due to the inadequate number of staff members at some of the HEIs, we were not able to maintain the intended number of respondents for each category. The majority of respondents were female, the age varied from 25 to 65, and we had to maintain gender balance within the study. The age of the small number of male participants was above 40.

Twenty-four semi-structured face-to-face and online interviews were conducted (Zoom, Blackboard Ultra, and WhatsApp Video Call) from spring 2022 to spring 2023 in high education institutions (HEIs) located in Baku and regions. Regarding ethical issues and confidentiality of the respondents, permission letters on behalf of the Dean of the School of Education of a university were sent to the public and private universities to obtain their consent to conduct our research. Additionally, respondents were required to read and sign the consent form in which confidentiality of their information and ethical considerations of the research was indicated and assured. We also requested permission to record and transcribe the information afterward to establish confirmability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2016).

As the interview process was in two modes: face-to-face and online, we managed to have face-to-face interviews with only two respondents from the regions. Zoom video calls and WhatsApp audio calls were applied to interview other respondents from the regions as some of them did not have computers at home and audio calls were the only way of communication with them. The rationale behind the decision to choose semi-structured interviews was the availability of probing questions to clarify the ideas and thoughts of the participants. We attempted to comprehend our participants' world by focusing their attention on the meanings of their words and phrases. All interviews lasted 45-60 minutes. The flow of open-ended and close-ended questions was controlled by an interview protocol and necessitated ongoing thought and effort on the part of us as interviewers (Brodsky & Given, 2008; Yin, 2016). To handle ethical difficulties that might have occurred during the data gathering and dissemination phase, safety, and confidentiality were guaranteed via informed consent (Merriam, 2001; Yin, 2016).

We generated an abundant amount of data (Patton, 1990) for recognizing and examining the verbal or visual forms while evaluating them so that they may indicate whether the dimensions and trends in the data had been identified either directly or indirectly (Flick, 2014). Considering some interviewees were from local universities and may have not been fluent in English, the data were collected in Azerbaijani as well as in English. The scripted data were divided into components for coding and producing categories based on them. The data coded and categorized in Azerbaijani was translated into English and double-checked by two multilingual peer reviewers. Continuous comparative data analysis was utilized to contrast each relevant unit to the others and to determine whether there was any provided assistance by the learning community in Azerbaijan's higher education institutions (HEIs).

To ensure credibility, we applied data triangulation and member checking to boost the authenticity and validity of the study's conclusions (Patton, 2015) and to control quality and improve the accuracy of findings and analysis (Rager, 2005). Paraphrasing study results one more time ensured the accuracy of what was meant and assisted to rule out the possibility of misinterpreting, possible researcher biases, and misunderstandings of what participants had said and done and the perspective they had on what was going on (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Maxwell, 2013).

9 STUDY FINDINGS

9.1 Novice Faculty Members' Experience

Findings suggest that at public and private higher education institutions, instructors, lecturers, assistant professors, associate professors, and full professors as well as teaching, lab, and research assistants are faculty members who taught courses offered for academic credit by an institution. Accordingly, a novice faculty member in this study was defined as one who obtained a master's degree which was a minimum qualification for this position, and the right references from their professors and administration and had less than five years of teaching experience in higher education.

9.1.1 Competencies of novice faculty members

All interviewed novice faculty members specified that having a strong academic background and soft skills, such as communication, time management, empathy, and subject knowledge was important for teaching in higher education.

[You must be able to pass on what you know to the student. This is the basis. You may be too literate, and still be not able to pass on what you know to the student. For example, literature is difficult. When you explain the literature in a literary language, the student will not understand it. Speak in a language that the student understands, they will understand it better.]

The quote encompassed the collective viewpoints and emphasised an ability to transmit those skills to the audience and application of them.

9.1.2 Induction of novice faculty members

Novice faculty members of all public and private universities included in this study noted the absence of a formal induction process or mentorship program. They were only allowed to observe class sessions delivered by more experienced faculty members. Being graduates of their respective universities, some novice faculty members were already connected to the target academic community and adapted to the environment.

[I didn't need such a thing to get a job because I started as an assistant. My professional purpose is to be a full-time lecturer and it depends on the scientific degree that I am going to pursue. That is why I don't see any importance in getting those activities.]

This opinion is representative because half of the novice faculty members had never been involved in any professional development activities, and they did not find engagement in professional development pivotal. They relied on the eligibility qualifications required to work in public and private higher education institutions and did not show any interest in being involved in professional development.

9.1.3 Difficulties encountered

Several novice faculty members had difficulties in communication and class management and teaching completely new subjects as well as finding new study materials and translating and adjusting them to their syllabi. Besides, the age gap between them and their students was big but students' different attitudes such as laziness, cheating, and aggression toward the instructor were apparent.

[When I was a student, the admission score to that school was quite high and that was the reason everyone was extremely hardworking, and we were very willing to study and learn. I could not imagine that I would encounter unmotivated, lazy, or naughty students at the university where I am going to teach.]

Because of difficulties, they feared going into any arguments or disputes with students which led to failed expectations of teaching in higher education from the very beginning.

9.1.4 Support from community

Some novice faculty members highlighted exchanging opportunities with experienced faculty members and considered their advice and support valuable. The information they received from experienced faculty members assisted in forming an attitude toward their students and understanding their interests that would provide them with quality learning opportunities.

[It was during the exam process. I caught one of the students cheating and asked him out and he started to be rebellious. I could only solve the problem between him and me with the help of our head of department.]

Novice faculty member emphasised the support received from the administration when solving conflict between them and their students which contributed to the betterment of classroom management.

9.2 Interview with Experienced Faculty Members.

Experienced faculty members were another source in the data triangulation. The categories obtained were support for novice faculty members, their regret about the past, and difficulties in the early years of being in the field.

9.2.1 Regret the past experience

Experienced faculty members regretted ineffective and less relevant teaching and assessment methods and the prejudice they held toward students. Also, some of them expressed sorrow for being satisfied with their current knowledge which they considered not authentic and enough. Regarding their past experiences, experienced academic staff members referred to insufficiency in communication with students and also their prejudiced attitude towards them which led to unfair treatment of the audience.

[In my early years, I used to ask a question and immediately assign a grade. Then, at the end of the semester, I realized that the student was getting stronger, and I regretted that I had written him a low grade at the beginning of the semester. Now I don't do so. I used to regret for not being able to know the students.]

They underlined the negative effect of being satisfied with their current knowledge but valued being constantly in search of new methods and sources for enhancing knowledge and maintaining personal and professional development.

9.2.2 Difficulties encountered

Most experienced faculty members recognized communication and classroom management as the most challenging aspects for the one who was new in the profession.

[The teacher must be able to protect the border. This boundary varies for each group. This boundary varies according to the nature of each teacher. Depending on the nature of the course, the duration of the course, and at what level of education, is it a master's degree, a bachelor's degree, or an MBA? How important is your lesson to them? Is it a specialty? Is it a non-specialty subject? Is the vast majority of the class contingent girls or boys? What is the passing score in the class? All this affects communication.]

The majority highlighted the student-lecturer relationship as a challenge that could be managed if the right ratio of interaction was established.

9.2.3 Support from experienced faculty members

The majority of experienced faculty members supported their novice colleagues in finding resources as well as preparing lectures for the class and providing them with observation opportunities by sharing distinctive practices.

One of the experienced faculty members shared a unique case related to the subject of Mathematical Analysis. At that time, only one professor was able to teach that specific subject, and he saw her as his successor. He allowed her to observe his lecturers and seminars for three years so that she was ready to teach the subject later. That professor's involvement in her professional development as a novice faculty member affected her positively even though there was not a formal mentoring program at that public university. Three years of shared practice was enough for her growth and specialization in the field.

9.3 Interview with the Heads of Departments

Another source of data was the perceptions of department heads at chosen public and private universities for this research. After coding their insights, the following categories emerged: eligibility, competencies, induction, difficulties, and support.

9.3.1 Eligibility

All department heads indicated formal eligibility requirements (Law on Education, 2009) that were holding a master's degree as a minimum qualification and a Ph.D. degree. Having the right references as an additional criterion for evaluation in the hiring process did not apply to all public and private universities included in this study.

9.3.2 Competencies

The main competencies academic staff should possess are a strong academic background, subject knowledge, communication and language skills, and usage of programs and electronic sources. All heads of departments highlighted communication and the individual approach in the teaching process. The academic staff's language skills, software program knowledge, and electronic sources usage mattered to the administration since they facilitated the resource exploration process and enlarged the academic staff's research horizon.

[Another problem we have in the region with [novice faculty]is access to foreign libraries. This opportunity can be provided by an institution. But the extent to which it is used is a problem. It would be much better if a faculty member had foreign language skills. Textbooks for universities have not been written for the last 20 years. When I taught geography, there were no books. The books were very 'poor'. I had to turn to books abroad. Libraries of Poland, England, America.]

Teaching in higher education institutions should comply with modern technology, and the highly valued computer literacy of novice faculty members could assist in building the institutional and academic staff's research capacities.

[Gone are the days of lecturing on yellow cards. We can't continue even if we want to, because it doesn't

matter to the student. The student thinks that if I can go and read it at home, why am I listening here? Therefore, teachers should try to make the lesson effective by other means.]

The majority believed that if the electronic sources were not utilized in the auditorium, students' authentic interests and needs could remain unattended, and they would not become effective instructors and create a conducive learning environment for their students.

9.3.3 Induction

All heads of departments highlighted the absence of a formal regulation for the induction of newly hired academic staff. Only two findings were identified related to the induction process: class observation and being hired for another position for a short period to get adjusted to the work environment in the same institution. The majority of novice faculty members were required to observe class sessions for a few months to get exposed to the real classroom environment and perceive lecturer-student interaction. Several heads of departments preferred to hire former laboratory and administrative assistants, coordinators in the Student Scientific Societies and programs, and librarians for new positions in their respective institutions as they were already able to build a sense of identity in the community and gain a deep understanding of rules and regulations to become novice faculty members.

[Of course, we do not admit a new graduate directly to the audience. First, we hire him in another position. For example, we hire them as a laboratory assistant, a librarian, or a coordinator in the Student Scientific Society to adapt to the environment, to see how we treat students and how we prepare lectures.]

Some of them emphasised that they would certainly not recruit newly graduated individuals as a faculty member and directly introduce them to the academic audience.

9.3.4 Difficulties

Heads of departments believed that novice faculty members faced verbal bullying; a form of misbehaviour displayed by students, and not being specialized in content knowledge also challenged them. They ascertained that verbal bullying impacted lecturer-student interaction and made the audience unmanageable while not being specialized in content knowledge made novice faculty members go off-topic.

[Once the teacher picked up all the electronic devices of the students before the exam and in the second exam, the students started verbally bullying that teacher. Even the teacher cried during the exam. She wanted to go out. I went there myself, sat at the back desk, and told her that she should not leave the room. It is the student who should see that you are more advantageous here. If the teacher left the room, the student would think, "I am superior to the teacher, I defeated her."]

The majority believed the lack of specialized deep content knowledge in particular subjects created insufficiencies in staffing.

9.3.5 Support from administration

More common types of support found were formal meetings with the administration and experienced faculty members. The novice faculty members were introduced to experienced faculty members to discuss the course syllabi and teaching materials.

More equal and modest way of treatment by the administration was reported as another type of support the novice faculty members received to be motivated and feel valued.

[This is a provincial university. Hierarchy does not work here. It is a small community and people know each other. You need to behave more modestly and when you behave with novice faculty in a way that you behave with experienced faculty; they are going to feel more valued in the community.]

Most novice faculty members assumed the lack of psychological awareness in the management caused deficiencies in creating a conducive working environment, providing professional development programs as simulations for promotion, and establishing a well-grounded mechanism for some heads of departments' interaction with them.

10 DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore novice faculty development in public and private higher education institutions in Azerbaijan by identifying perceptions of support from the m administration and experienced faculty members and finding out the difficulties that novice faculty members encounter in the early years of the profession.

10.1 Assumptions Not Aligned With the Study Findings

Despite difficulties in the early years of their academic career, novice faculty members were permitted to observe class sessions and received informal mentoring (Mazerolle, 2018) in place. We anticipated discovering special mechanisms designed for the development of novice academic staff (Remmik & Karm, 2012). However, there was no particular program implemented for that purpose in the research sites.

10.1.2 Induction

Higher education is still one of the most important requirements for ensuring a competent and diversified workforce (Council of Europe, 2010). Nevertheless, more infrastructure and more educational programs are insufficient to generate qualified labour at the higher education level in Azerbaijan. Considering the human aspect, an efficient and profitable educational institution seeking to provide a praiseworthy service to the community at large needs more than just subject matter expertise. That said, faculty members 'competence, diligence, and other specialized qualifications remain critical.

Researchers define induction as a mechanism of exposure to the colleges' and departments' culture, norms, and procedures, as well as their tasks, responsibilities, and expectations (Hicks et al., 2013; Yu et al., 2021) and the development of expertise and dispositional qualities among inexperienced academic staff in higher education (Hicks et al., 2013). Given that the novice faculty members had never been through a formal induction procedure for professional growth at the research sites. They were informally involved in exchanging thoughts and resources with experienced faculty members. Although they may have not been responsible for teaching when they were hired as lab and administrative assistants, librarians, or teaching assistants before their main position, the administration considered their involvement in the community as a support in developing their professional competence (Bauman, 2005) to some extent.

10.1.3 Competencies

Competence entails the ability to meet complicated requirements by relying on and utilizing psychosocial factors, such as skills and attitudes, in a specific setting (Vitello, Greatorex, & Shaw, 2021). Research related to the quality of education and teachers' competency reveals the problems novice faculty members face and their needs in the sophisticated 21st-century society, emphasizing the enhancement of professional skills (Altbach & Balan, 2007). This study identified content knowledge, content delivery, soft skills, and language skills as the main competencies crucial for novice faculty members at public and private universities in Azerbaijan. Especially, their content knowledge and the delivery of it were critical in holding the attention of the auditorium during the class sessions.

Oral and written communication skills as well as interpersonal and stress management skills were the main competencies found. They assisted in adapting to a volatile environment and effectively presenting persuasive arguments to cater to modern students (Jeyaparvathi, 2018) who necessitated new instructional strategies to be utilized in the classroom (Henard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2008). Besides, possessing the computer skills for using modern technology helped to make their way into the classroom, altering the character of student-professor relations.

Lastly, foreign language skills were important for novice faculty members' competency level. Although they were required to know a foreign language for research, academic writing, publishing in scholarly journals, making speeches, doing presentations in various academic forums and conferences, and participating in workshops and training, the public and private higher education institutions involved in this study did not support novice faculty members in their formal studies (Meniado, 2019).

10.1.4 Challenges encountered

In their first year of the profession, novice faculty members encountered some difficulties such as aggression from the student body which was mainly related to the small age gap between them and students, their ability to manage the class and interaction with students, and obtaining sources and materials due to lack of language skills. The small age gap could make the situation even more challenging for them no matter if they were knowledgeable and qualified. In this regard, the interviewed novice faculty members attempted to be more polite, strict, or democratic; still, they were occasionally verbally bullied and encountered student misbehaviour. This experience may have determined a lack of support by higher education institutions in pedagogy. That said, Austin (1992) and Healey (2000) also stated that faculty members in higher education typically had been trained in their subject matter but not in pedagogy. Not having difficulties with content knowledge but lacking appropriate skills and teaching strategies might cause verbal bullying and student misbehaviour. These findings proposed the presence of prevailing theory-based knowledge but the absence of adequate practice in teaching right after graduation (Remmik & Karm, 2012). Karakaş (2012) indicated

faculty development as a necessity in certain areas, including appropriate teaching skills, efficient use of electronic tools, statistical modeling training for research, writing and publishing articles, and the use of English as an academic lingua. More precisely, academics can consider English language use in academic contexts as the most essential goal for sustaining the continuously changing needs of the scientific world (Flowerdew, 2007; Peacock & Flowerdew, 2001; Salager Meyer, 2008; Tardy, 2004). Accordingly, language skill was another difficulty for novice faculty members since they were surrounded by an academic community where they were required to put something new on the table (Remmik & Karm, 2012). As available research and resources on teaching are mainly in English, novice faculty members may have difficulties utilizing them in daily practice. From that perspective, we believe that in an academic environment, having effective teaching methods and striving to be an academic depends on foreign language knowledge and skills as well as an individual's ability to use them for his or her efficiency.

10.1.5 Support from Community

We did not find a specific induction process for the occupational adaptation of novice faculty members in HEIs included in our study (Gajda, 2019). Considering mentoring activities, the data have not revealed any attempt to implement a formal mentor-mentee interaction (Mazerolle, 2018). The informal interaction could make the situation more difficult due to the absence of any specific regulation for both parties which could encourage mentoring. However, Mazerolle (2018) emphasises that mentoring may assist novice faculty members during the induction and transition stages and benefit knowledge exchange at the institutional level and career objectives, providing continuous research support. Mentoring may also stimulate collective participation, focus on content, and empower cohesion, and alignment with norms and assessments (Birman et al., 2003; Garet et al., 2001).

Nevertheless, at both public and private higher education institutions included in this study, novice faculty members were only provided with the opportunity of class observation and presenting demo classes a few times per semester. Only in one of the universities, an experienced faculty stated that she was informally mentored by her predecessor and permitted to observe and analyse his class for three years so that she could become a specialist in teaching Mathematical Analysis. Overall, the induction process that covers mentoring and professional development for novice faculty members has not been identified at all research sites (Portner, 2005).

10.1.6 Professional Identity

Novice faculty members entering an existing and complicated system with sociocultural and micropolitical relationships (Haberman, 2004) needed to build their identity by defining, negotiating, and creating a presence for themselves (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Remmik, et al., 2011). Almost all public and private higher education institutions included in this study recruited their graduates with master's degrees and hired them as teaching assistants to teach undergraduate courses. The administration may not have acknowledged the importance of induction even though a specific amount of time to adapt to the academic community and teaching process (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007) was given to novice faculty members. Building professional identity (Haberman, 2004) for novice lecturers occurred as a result of a conversation between self and external reality when they were learning and adapting to the academic community (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007). Their presence in academia may assist in building a professional identity whether they are responsible for teaching or not (Bauman, 2005).

To sum up, most respondents mentioned communication, class management, and teaching unfamiliar subjects as major difficulties and emphasized the importance of exchanging opportunities with experienced colleagues as support from the academic community. The findings were consistent across universities in regions and the capital city, Baku. However, when examining novice faculty development in HEIs, specifically drawing a comparison of those situated in Baku with the regional universities, one important discrepancy arose which was the lack of specialized teaching staff for specialized subjects at the regional public universities. The scarcity may have stemmed from the brain drain that could occur from rural areas to urban cities like Baku, where job opportunities and pay were higher. Those regional universities may have faced a hurdle in attracting and retaining faculty members in some areas that might exert pressure on their capacity to provide extensive academic programs. The novice faculty members might have certain challenges in covering a wider array of subjects and topics or they might feel a lack of mentorship from the experienced faculty members in a specific area. In contrast, those universities located in Baku were considered more affluent in accessing a pool of qualified faculty members and resources which may lead to better support for the professional development of novice faculty members. Besides, academic staffing shortages might lead to certain barriers to the development of new faculty members. When there was an insufficiency in the number of senior faculty members to serve as mentors and advisors to novice faculty members could be challenging for them to get the required guidance and resources they needed for

excelling positions. Novice faculty members may have experienced difficulties in professional growth and developing competencies to engage students, create curricula, and navigate the obstacles within higher education due to insufficient mentorship and guidance.

11 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the study findings discussed indicate that in the current context of Azerbaijani higher education, the aim of which is to develop the human capital of the nation, novice faculty development and acknowledgment of the challenges of the early years in the profession remain essential and should be attended to. Novice faculty members are welcome to exchange ideas in the community of practice (Wenger, 1998; de-Marcos et al., 2014) in higher education institutions in Azerbaijan, but they need occupational adaptation and professional development (Gajda, 2019). Given that a specific induction mechanism that could stimulate them to adapt to the academic community (Hord, 1997; de-Marcos et al., 2014) and serve as a professional development opportunity has not been found in this study. If induction programs were in place, they could serve to mentor novice faculty members to adapt to an academic community, acknowledge what is to be a faculty member (Sadler, 2009; Mazerolle, 2018), and build research capacity (Barlow & Antoniou, 2007). Moreover, providing novice faculty members with teaching methods and the inclusion of how to apply them (Demougeot-Lebel & Perret, 2011) via demo classes (Zemichael, 2018) could serve as an opportunity to have diverse perspectives in discussing insufficiency in teaching and decreasing verbal bullying, student misbehaviours, and improve classroom management. Besides, the research capacity building may contribute to the research-based initiatives (Barlow & Antoniou, 2007; Karakaş, 2012) of the higher education institutions and assist novice faculty members in acknowledging their responsibility in academia.

Further quantitative studies with a more representative sample are suggested to be conducted on novice faculty development to provide interested parties with data that can be used to inform decision-making and contribute to improving the academic body of knowledge.

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