Attention for the new teacher in Rwanda

Policy brief

November 2021

Executive summary

New teachers require extra support, especially during their first three years in-service. Induction programmes have proven to have a strong and positive effect on new teacher wellbeing and in turn on teaching and learning outcomes. In Rwanda, a five year pilot project was conducted to better support new teachers in their induction period. This included a training for School-Based Mentors (SBMs), math School Subject Leaders (SSL) and TTC tutors; in-school mentoring by the SBM and math SSL and; out-of-school mentoring and monitoring by a TTC tutor. All components of the pilot have proven to be very successful in ensuring more access to induction programmes and in enhancing new teacher wellbeing and teaching outcomes. This policy brief sets out the main actions and recommendations to take forward on the basis of this pilot project so that all new teachers in Rwanda can benefit from high quality induction programmes.

Each year a large number of new teachers are recruited in Rwanda. In 2020, when more than 600 new schools were constructed, this number rose to almost 30,000 new teachers. Of these 30,000 new teachers, approximately one third do not have a formal teaching degree. New teachers are a special category of teachers, given that they are new to the profession and/or the school environment. Without the right support, new teachers struggle to find their position within schools and run the risk of getting demotivated and eventually leaving the teaching profession (Veenman, 1984). New teachers that have not received proper in-service professional development, yet continue to teach, can jeopardize the overall quality of education.

Challenging teaching environment

It is known that pre-service training alone does not equip new teachers with the competences required for teaching in the classroom (Ingersoll and Strong, 2011). In Rwanda, new teachers are not well prepared for the challenging teaching environments. After completing a rather theoretical pre-service training with limited or no room for practice, new teachers struggle with managing the often large classrooms and experience difficulties in implementing the Competency Based Curriculum. The limited availability of learning materials for both teachers and students, adds to the difficulties that new teachers experience. A lack of collegial support and intense pressure from school leaders and parents to perform well from the first day on the job, does not help new teachers to cope well with the challenging teaching environment.

The importance of induction programmes for new teachers

There is consensus that induction programmes can have a strong and positive impact on the new teacher (Ingersoll and Strong, 2011). Induction programmes consist of a bundle of different activities that are designed to improve the performance of new teachers. One may think of mentoring and coaching, monitoring teaching performance, video-analysis and/or peer discussions. Different studies (Ingersoll and Strong, 2011, Evertson and Smithey, 2000) have shown that offering different induction activities to new teachers over a longer period, can positively affect teacher wellbeing, teacher motivation, teacher retention and teaching practice. In addition, there are indications that induction programmes can indirectly impact student learning outcomes, especially in schools where there are a lot of new teachers (Harris and Sass, 2011).

"Induction is very important to all new teachers because it connects theory and practice for the new teachers; it helps them easily put into action what they learned in classes and also gives them all the necessary requirements before beginning work." (New teacher, midline evaluation LTLT programme)

There are different ways to implement induction programmes at school level, depending on the resources that are available. Overall, it is argued that the quality of mentoring provided to new teachers is more important than the frequency (Richter et al., 2013) and that all school members need to be supportive of the induction programme (Cherian & Daniel, 2008).

In the Rwandan context, there are two instruments that explicitly mention the induction of new teachers. These are: the National teacher Continuous Professional Development (CPD) framework and the draft Teacher Development and Management policy. However, no implementation plan exists that provides clear actions that can be taken at national level so that all new teachers can participate in high quality induction programmes. Based on five years (2017-2021) of implementing a pilot project that focused on improving induction programmes for new teachers in six districts in Rwanda, an overview of the main actions and recommendations is provided so that all new teachers in Rwanda can participate in induction programmes.

Action 1: Training the right actors on the right skills

A smooth and effective induction programme for new teachers in schools, starts with training the right actors on the right skills. In Rwanda, the following actors have been identified as being crucial in the induction of new teachers: School-Based Mentors (SBMs), School Subject Leaders (SSLs), deputy headteachers, headteachers, District Education Officers (DEOs), Sector Education Inspectors (SEIs) and Teacher Training College (TTC) tutors (in charge of pre-service teacher training). The key roles and skills required from these actors/players in the induction of new teachers are listed in the annex.

During the five year pilot project, it was observed that when these actors take part in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes, their skills and attitudes improve.

> "The way we do the induction today is very different from the way we used to do it before training. Before, when a new teacher came I was not encouraged to help him/her and thought he/she will be able to do it alone. I also thought that only the Deputy Head Teacher is responsible for that, so he/she used to go to the Deputy Head Teacher to look for teaching documents alone and go in the class and teach. After being trained, I learned that I am also responsible for helping new teachers to feel safe and free and welcome in the society" (SBM, midline evaluation LTLT programme).

Changes in attitudes and skills are also confirmed in a survey conducted before and after training. SBMs for instance indicated to more frequently organize CPD activities for teachers, experienced and new teachers alike, after receiving a certificate programme on Educational Mentorship and Coaching (see figure 1).
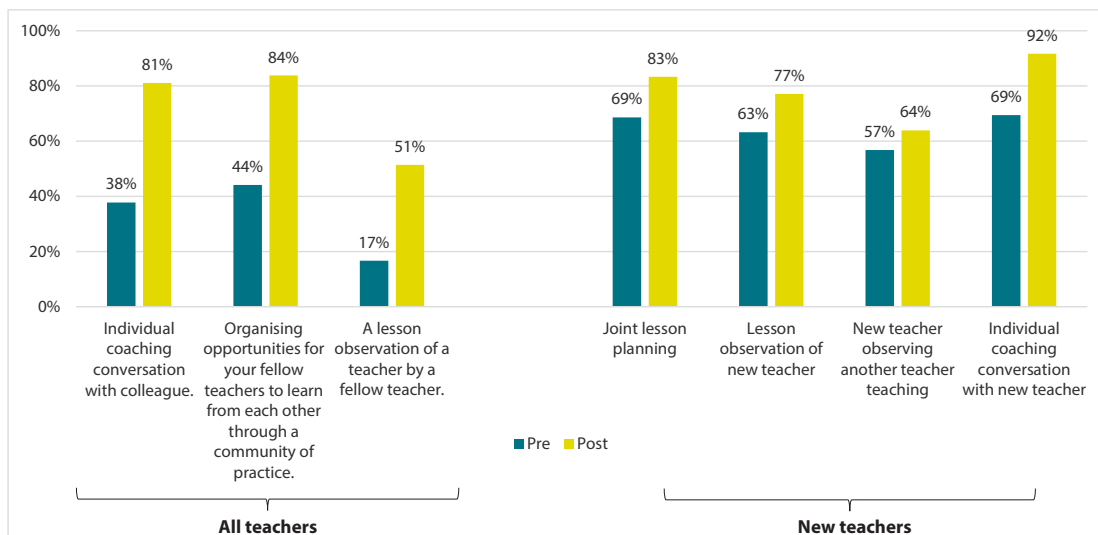

Figure 1. Percentage of SBMs who organised at least monthly mentoring and coaching activities.

During the pilot project, a Randomized Controlled Trial conducted by Maastricht University and Leuven University in 2020, further showed that the certificate programme also significantly improved the likelihood that new teachers took part in induction activities (Cabus et al., 2020). This study differentiated between no support from a trained actor, support from a trained SBM and math SSL and support from a trained SBM, math SSL and TTC tutor.
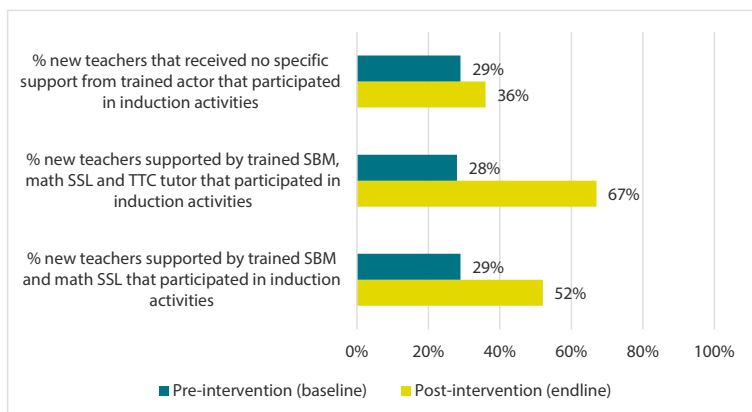
Figure 2. % of new teachers that took part in induction activities.

In comparison to the control group (teachers that received no specific support from a trained actor), new teachers that were supported by trained SBMs, SSLs and TTC tutors through induction activities, were also less emotionally exhausted, had higher job satisfaction (especially feelings of autonomy), had higher teaching efficacy and perceived their personal accomplishments to be higher (Cabus et al., 2020).

Action 2: TTC tutor support to new teacher induction

Research shows that having both an in-school and out-of-school mentor helps new teachers to thrive (McIntyre& Hobson, 2016). While the in-school mentor can provide day-to-day and more contextual support, the out-of-school mentor, being an external third party, can provide a 'safe' and motivating third space for new teachers to discuss challenges (McIntyre& Hobson, 2016). When selected and trained properly, out-of-school mentors can also provide support to in-school mentors through so-called 'mentoring the mentor' (Evertson and Smithey, 2010). As also depicted in figure 3, trained TTC tutors fulfilled both roles in the pilot project.
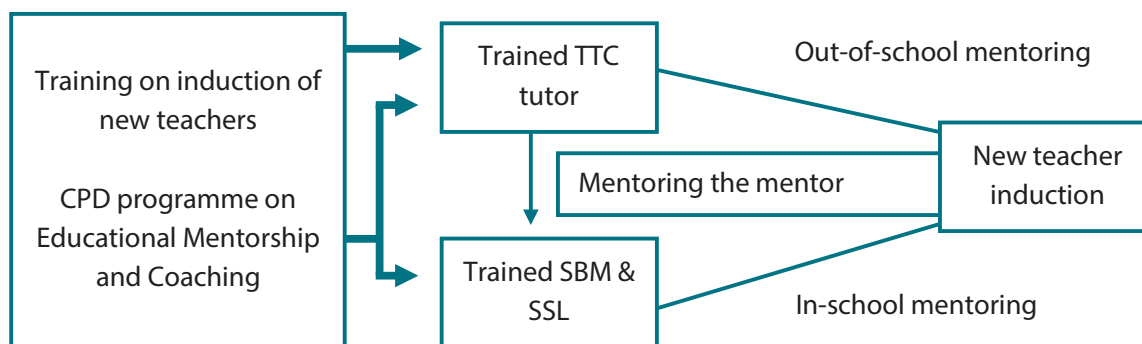

Figure 3. Overview of support provided to new teachers in the pilot project

During the pilot project, the support provided by TTC tutors to SBMs, SSLs and new teachers involved three school visits per academic year and additional phone call support. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic in Rwanda, the subsequent lockdowns and school closures, as of 2020, the support was solely provided remotely through phone calls and an online platform that was established in Moodle. An overview of the activities conducted during the different school visits can be found below.

Table 1. Overview of support provided by the TTC tutor

Supporting period	Activities that were conducted
First school visit halfway term 1	• Coaching and mentoring support to in-school mentors on organization of induction activities (e.g., lesson observations, CoP, lesson study); • Support in the development of a new teachers' CPD plan.
Second school visit halfway term 2	• Support the review of CPD plans for new teachers' and discussing new teacher targets, areas for improvement, the collaboration between new teacher and his/her new teacher mentors (in-school new teacher mentor & TTC tutor).
Third school visit halfway term 3	• Support in-school mentors in evaluating the CPD plans for new teachers. • Coaching/mentoring of in-school mentors with organizing CPD activities for new teachers. • Suggest the most appropriate induction activities at school level (based on individual school context) and on the REB guidelines (Continuous Professional Development (CPD) framework and draft Teacher Development and Management policy).

A cost-effectiveness analysis conducted as part of the Randomized Controlled Trial, comparing schools without TTC support to schools with TTC support, shows that the additional support provided by the TTC tutor is worth the extra investment (Cabus et al., 2020). TTC tutors were found to play a very critical role in reducing emotional exhaustion, improving job satisfaction and increasing feelings of autonomy among new teachers. In addition, and as can also be seen in figure 2 above, new teachers were the most likely to participate in induction activities when the school was also supported by a TTC tutor.

Action 3: Monitoring the implementation of induction programmes at school level

During the implementation of the pilot project, it was remarked that training alone was not sufficient to ensure that induction activities would take place. Systematic monitoring of induction activities was deemed necessary to improve the quality of implementation and to hold actors accountable for the actual implementation of activities. The same TTC tutors that were supporting new teachers, SBMs and math SSLs, were therefore also trained to monitor the implementation of induction activities at school-level during their school visits. As part of the project, a dedicated monitoring tool was developed using Kobo Toolbox, a data collection toolkit.

DData was collected by TTC tutors during the school visits and was discussed onsite with the (deputy) headteacher during a debriefing. TTC tutors compiled TTC level reports that were discussed with the TTC principals. VVOB then compiled all the information into one overall report which was discussed during reflection workshops organised by VVOB with TTC tutors and UR-CE facilitators after each termly school-visit. Based on the data, discussions at the school-level focused on the quality of implementation of

induction activities and how this could be improved, while the reflection workshops mostly focused on reflecting on barriers experienced by SBMs and SSLs when implementing induction activities (e.g. lack of time).

Putting actions into practice

This brief also proposes some clear recommendations on how to assure that the described actions can be implemented in the most effective and efficient way.

1. CPD course on induction of new teachers

The field visits conducted during the pilot project demonstrated that induction programmes were more likely to succeed when all key actors involved in the induction of new teachers had been trained and as a result, collaborated well together. During the pilot project the induction of new teachers was integrated as a separate unit in three different CPD programmes offered to SBMs, SSLs, SEIs, (deputy) headteachers and DEOs. However, it would be more effective to offer a separate, standalone and mandatory CPD course on the induction of new teachers to all the identified key actors that have not yet been trained on the induction of new teachers. By providing the same content to all actors, and assuring that all actors in a district, sector and school can be trained simultaneously, a more conducive school environment for induction programmes can be established.

In terms of content, it is recommended that the CPD course is short and accessible including the following essential components at a minimum: Coaching and mentoring, conducting CoP sessions, developing individual CPD plans for new teachers, promoting reflective practice and monitoring and evaluation of induction programmes.

Although a fully online programme may be the more cost-effective choice, a blended programme, which combines online learning activities with a few in-person activities at district level, will be more motivating to trainees and will allow for more learning and interaction with fellow trainees.

Key recommendations

- Offer a separate course on the induction of new teachers so that key actors with different roles in the induction can participate simultaneously.

- Keep the course short and focus on a few key competencies.

- Offer it as a blended course.

2. Engagement of TTC tutor as out-of-school mentors

Given the valuable role that TTC tutors play in increasing access to induction programmes and improving teacher wellbeing, TTC tutors need to continue to play a role in induction programmes. Firstly, TTC tutors need to be recognized as official out-of-school mentors by MINEDUC and REB and each school should have one assigned TTC tutor. Secondly, termly contact moments with SBMs, SSLs and new teachers are recommended. To that end, it is recommended that TTC tutors visit the schools (at least) once per year and that this visit focuses on supporting the SBM and SSL with their CPD activities for new teachers (e.g. observing a SBM conduct a lesson observation and providing feedback to the new teacher) and having short, one-on-one or group coaching conversations with new teachers. The remaining visits (preferably (at least) twice per year) can be replaced with remote support which is best given through phone calls. These phone calls can be used to check-in with the SBM and SSL and discuss how activities are progressing.

Key recommendations

- Officially recognize Teacher Training College tutors as out-of-school mentor and ensure each school has been assigned a TTC tutor.

- Ensure that the Teacher Training College tutor can conduct at least one school visit per year to observe the School-Based Mentor and School Subject Leader, and to conduct coaching conversations with new teachers.

- Provide Teacher Training College tutors with the means and time to conduct at least two extra phone calls per year to School-Based Mentor and School Subject Leader to check-in on progress.

3. Monitoring of school-based induction activities

To ensure that induction activities can be monitored on a regular basis, MINEDUC and REB can best make use of existing monitoring structures. Given their close contact with schools and (deputy) headteachers, the SEI is probably in the best position to monitor the implementation of induction programmes. SMART indicators need to be developed so that they can easily be tracked using existing tools/structures (e.g. School Improvement Plan). Examples of such indicators could be: Number of schools with a formal induction programme; Number of school actors trained on induction programmes; Number of new teachers that report to have access to induction activities. The progress against the chosen indicators can be discussed as part of the school visits but also during existing consultation structures, such as Professional Learning Communities, School General Assembly Committee meetings and/or district level meetings. Discussions should focus on ensuring that all new teachers have access to the induction programmes and that the programmes and activities are of high quality.

Key recommendations

- Make use of existing monitoring structures to monitor the implementation of induction programmes on a regular basis.

- Involve the right stakeholders and at least the Sector Education Inspector.

- Develop SMART indicators that can easily be tracked and discussed.

- Use existing consultation structures to discuss the progress against indicators.

This policy brief is based on different studies that were conducted as part of a five year pilot project that aimed to improve the access and quality of induction programmes for primary school teachers in six districts in Rwanda. For further reading, please consult the following resources available online at: rwanda.vvob.org/publications

- Leading, Teaching and Learning Together: Report on the early impact of the programme

- Working paper: Evaluating a certificate programme on educational mentorship and coaching leading to induction activities for new teachers in Rwandan primary Schools

- Qualitative Midline Evaluation of the "Leading, Teaching and Learning Together in Secondary Education in Rwanda

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Annex

Key actors in the induction programme

Key actor	Responsibility in induction of new teachers (NTs)	Skills required for effective induction
Teacher Training College (TTC) tutors	• Coaching the SBM/SSLs in implementing the induction programme • Mentoring the new teachers as out-of-school mentor	• Coaching skills • Mentoring skills • Monitoring skills • Conducting lesson observations • ICT integration • Initiating and facilitating Communities of Practice (CoPs)
District Directors of Education / District Education Officers (DDEs/DEOs)	• Overseeing the overall quality of the induction programmes • Coordinating all education activities at district level in relation to NTs through the District Continuous Professional Development Committee. • Monitoring the induction activities • Facilitating the HTs and SEIs to support new teachers (e.g. providing needed materials)	• Skills in designing, implementing and monitoring induction programme in their districts. • Coaching skills • Mentoring skills
Sector Education Inspectors (SEIs)	• Ensuring that school leaders also prioritize the professional development of NTs by effectively implementing an induction programme • Monitoring the induction activities • Facilitating the HTs and DHTs to support new teachers (e.g., providing materials and allocating time)	• Skills in designing, implementing and monitoring induction programmes in their sectors. • Coaching skills • Mentoring skills
Head Teachers / Deputy Head Teachers (HTs/HDTs)	• Giving NTs a warm welcome and presenting them to the SBM, SSLs, school staff, parents and students	• Skills in effective leadership and delegation • Coaching skills

	• Ensuring the implementation of induction activities • Supporting the SBM/SSL in the induction of new teachers (e.g. providing materials and allocating time) • Paying attention to new teacher wellbeing	• Monitoring and evaluating CPD activities
School Based Mentors (SBMs)	• Supporting NTs in integrating into the school environment and the community at large • Guiding and organising of school-based CPD • Stimulating reflection and facilitating feedback provision on the quality of teaching and learning at school	• Coaching skills • Mentoring skills • Planning and implementing induction activities • Lesson observations • ICT integration • CBC lessons preparations and evaluation • Initiating and facilitating Communities of Practice (CoPs)
School Subject Leaders (SSLs)	• Supporting NTs in familiarizing themselves with subject-specific academic activities • Planning and implementing subject-specific induction activities for NTs	• Coaching skills • Mentoring skills • Planning and implementing induction activities • Lesson observations • ICT integration • CBC lessons preparations and evaluation • Initiating and facilitating Communities of Practice (CoPs) • Role model in subject area

Authors

Dr. Alphonse Uworwabayeho is a senior lecturer of education at the University of Rwanda-College of Education (UR-CE). He holds a Doctorate of Philosophy in Education, specializing in integration of ICT in the teaching and learning of mathematics from the University of Bristol, United Kingdom. Currently, he is the head of the department of Early Childhood and Primary Education and member of research committee of African Centre of Excellence for Innovative Teaching and Learning Mathematics and Science (ACEITLMS) based in the UR-CE. He is also coordinating continuous professional development (CPD) programmes offered jointly by the UR-CE, VVOB-*education for development* in Rwanda and the Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) within the framework of VVOB's Multi-Year programme "Leading, Teaching and Learning Together (LTLT-Umusemburo w'Ireme ry'Uburezi" (2017-2021). His research interest lies in the use of ICT for teacher professional development on enhancing active learning (https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Alphonse-Uworwabayeho).

Dr. Jean Francois Maniraho is a PhD holder, a lecturer and a researcher at the University of Rwanda-College of Education (UR-CE). Over the last 10 years, Dr. Maniraho has been lecturing in different higher learning institutions both inside and outside Rwanda. He is specialised in mathematics education with knowledge of teacher education. Based on his background with a Master of Applied Mathematics, he is also a Data Analyst, with experience in MATLAB. Dr. Maniraho has published various peer reviewed articles. He is an associate member of the African Centre of Excellence for Innovative Teaching and Learning Mathematics and Science (ACEITLMS) based at the UR-CE.

Clementine Gafiligi Uwamahoro holds an MBA in International Business at Amity University of India and a BA in Educational Psychology from Adventist University of Central Africa. She is specialised in the Rwandan education system. She has more than 21 years of experience in the education sector, especially in curriculum development, education planning, school leadership, teacher training, quality insurance and assessment of education system. She is currently an Education Advisor for VVOB-*education for development* in Rwanda.

Julius Sebuhalala holds a master's degree in Educational Leadership and Policy, specialising in Education Management. He has been working in education sector as an expert/specialist for both government and international organisations for more than 11years. He served as an education expert in the Ministry of East African Community (EAC), coordinating Rwanda chapter in all negotiations and development under the education sector in the EAC. He has sound experience and capacity in coordination of development-oriented projects and programmes at national and regional level. His expertise in the education sector lies mostly in education management and planning, negotiation, and advocacy. Mr. Julius is also a certified project manager with PRINCE2 (PRojects In a Controlled Environment-practitioner level 2). He is currently the Education Advisor at VVOB-*education for development* in Rwanda.

Jean Baptiste Mushimiyimana is an Assistant Lecturer at the University of Rwanda - College of Education (UR-CE), department of Early Childhood and Primary Education. He holds a Master of Education in Curriculum & Instruction; a Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education and a Bachelor's Degree in Education. He is a Master Trainer in Child Social and Financial Education and has also participated in various Teacher Trainings. Mr. Mushimiyimana has taught in Primary School, served as a Deputy Head Teacher, Sector Education Officer. He has worked for the UR-CE since 2011, and is currently serving as Nyagatare campus Programmes Coordinator for the department of Early Childhood & Primary Education.

Nehemiah Bacumuwenda holds a Master's degree in Public Health from the University of Rwanda; a Bachelor's Degree in Management from Independent University of Kigali and a Bachelor's Degree in Educational Psychology from Adventist University of Central Africa. He is specialised in the Rwandan education system and has more than 30 years of experience in the education sector. He is currently a Curriculum Developer at the Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB).

Jocelyne Cyiza Kirezi holds a master's degree in Economic Sciences. She is currently working as Research Coordinator at VVOB-education development in Rwanda. She has experience in conducting research and disseminating research findings in Rwanda. Previously, she worked at the Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR) where she coordinated different research projects including socio-economic, and poverty analysis studies. At VVOB Rwanda she carries out and supports research on the implementation, impact and cost effectiveness of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes. Further, Ms. Kirezi explores digital monitoring and evaluation systems of CPD programmes. She is a member of the Economic Policy Research Network (EPRN) in Rwanda.

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