

## **New Faculty Orientation as Teacher Education: What Do Teachers in New Positions Need Most?**

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### **Abstract**

This exploratory study investigates the experiences of expatriate English teachers during orientation in higher education in the countries of the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC), also called the Gulf States. Semi-structured interviews were conducted collecting qualitative data from twenty participants – expatriate English teachers working in Gulf higher education institutions (HEIs), with a focus on the induction experiences impacting their work in the classroom. The findings suggest newly arrived English teachers experience inconsistencies within HEI's orientation programs, as those programs are developed for all faculty, without an appreciation for individual differences. Information overload resulted from administrative sessions, but formal orientation to teaching and students was lacking, amplifying feelings of uncertainty and isolation. However, new colleagues provided a means of informal induction, mitigating those feelings and assisting adaptation. These results lead to practical recommendations regarding organizational socialization, as a means to develop better adjusted English teachers working in more supportive communities of practice.

**Keywords:** expatriation, new faculty orientation, semi-structured interviews, professional development, TESOL

### **Introduction**

When teachers arrive in a new position, their immediate priority is socialization into the organizational culture of the school (Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, & Liu, 2001). To expedite this process, most higher education institutions (HEIs) organize new faculty orientation (NFO) programs to assist new teachers. NFO activities typically include 'orientation sessions, faculty collaborative periods, meetings with supervisors, developmental workshops, extra classroom assistance, reduced workloads, and, especially, mentoring' (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011, p.203).

Orientation can be more complicated for those expatriates teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) because of cross-cultural aspects and the necessity to learn the rules and

norms in novel cultures (Troudi, 2005). The issue is acute in the Gulf States due to the rapid growth of Western-style universities and large-scale employment of expatriate faculty (Caldwell, 2018). New faculty orientation represents an important area in need of more research, according to Morin and Ashton (2004), while they further explain the dearth of academic studies: “The finding that orientation programs are infrequently investigated might be due to confounding variables that influence the interpretation of findings” (p.247). Much of the earlier scholarly research conducted is large-scale, based on surveys (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011); while studies of organizational socialization outside of academia typically focus on the employer (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006), expatriate employee work performance (Lee & Sukoco, 2010), or sociocultural adjustment (Farh, Bartol, Shapiro, & Shin, 2010). Rather, the present study is small-scale, collecting qualitative data, investigating the experiences of newcomers’ orientation to the classroom.

## Review of Literature

Orientation or induction are the most common terms referring to such programs, yet *organizational socialization* is a more general term for the process of learning ‘the values, abilities, expected behaviors, and social knowledge essential for assuming an organizational role and for participating as an organizational member’ (Louis, 1980, pp.229-230). Those changes in values, abilities, and culture indicate socialization has implications for teachers’ identity (Romanowski & Nasser, 2015); addressing the learning process for new faculty members means one of the core purposes of induction is uncertainty reduction (Bauer, 2010).

Since new faculty members seem the beneficiaries of orientation programs, the prevalent early theory, known as ‘structural functionalism’, viewed socialization as a formal, collective, fixed process that is ‘transmissive’: newcomers focus on ‘acquiring’ the necessary behaviors to assimilate into new cultures (Merton, 1968, as cited by Trowler & Knight, 1999, p.180). Tierney (1997) instead advocates a ‘postmodern’ approach, with appreciation for the background and agency of newcomers. It is not a one-size-fits-all “series of planned learning activities,” but rather a cultural act, “an interpretive process involved in the creation – rather than the transmittal – of meaning” (Tierney, 1997, pp.5-6). In this conceptualization, induction is complex, less mechanistic or rigid, considering individual differences, placing more responsibility on the newcomer in information seeking (Fetherston, 2017), acknowledging the importance of give-and-take.

The socialization process is initiated prior to newcomers’ departure in anticipatory adjustment based on their expectations and information provided by the employer (Kondakci & Haser, 2012). This has direct implications for the new teacher’s level of preparedness (Tuzlukova & Stead, 2016). After arrival, newcomers undergo greater uncertainty reduction when immediately made comfortable and accepted by veteran faculty acting as ‘organizational insiders’ (Woodrow & Guest, 2019). This informal socialization facilitated by colleagues assists newcomers in

identifying with the organization, avoiding feelings of isolation or being an outsider (Lager & Bertolini, 2018). Accordingly, the assignment of a well-trained and motivated mentor is one of the most critical aspects of the induction process for teachers to adapt to their new situation swiftly and fully (Mann & Tang, 2012).

With a local guide, new teachers can better understand the cultures of the institution, helping them to ‘learn the hidden rules and the elements of the culture that are taken-for-granted’ (Romanowski & Nasser, 2015, p.667). This underscores the importance of a ‘realistic job preview’, including potential disappointments (Saks & Gruman, 2010). Hence, the induction process requires candor and clarity, in an ongoing format, rather than a front-loaded information dump, since ‘information overload’ is commonly reported by inductees (Bowman, Mazerolle, & Kilbourne, 2018). As a learning process under the auspices of professional development, acknowledging individual differences, orientation cannot be one-size-fits-all, but rather learner-centered (Siddiqui, Papanagnou, Bruno, & Novielli, 2019).

## Methodology

Within the paradigm of interpretivism – the philosophy that research delves into each participant’s individual construction or interpretation of their realities (Grix, 2019) – qualitative data was collected to accrue ‘rich material for the research report’ in the form of ‘*thick*’ descriptions to be interpreted for deeper understanding of each participant’s reality (Dörnyei, 2007, pp.39-40). Part of a larger thesis project, this portion of the research was guided by these questions:

1. When they began a new position, how were the participants’ orientation sessions delivered and organized?
2. What role did new colleagues play in participants’ socialization?
3. How prepared were the participants for teaching after the induction programs?

The narratives of the participants provide data closest to their experiences and feelings, meaning that semi-structured interviews offer an efficient means of covering the breadth of experiences with the requisite emotional depth (Babbie, 2010).

Data collection involved multiple steps and considerations. Ethics are a priority, confidentiality, particularly. All names are pseudonyms, and every effort has been made to protect the data and identity of participants. Before data collection, the researcher received ethical approval through the University of Exeter. Convenience sampling was ongoing with an aim to include participants from a range of backgrounds and teaching contexts, different HEIs in different member countries of the GCC. The interview format was piloted (Turner, 2010), followed by 60-90-minute semi-structured interviews with each participant utilizing a flexible design, allowing for follow-up questions.

For analysis, the researcher transcribed the interview recordings, also delivering them to participants for member validation (Kvale, 2006). Subsequently, the data was categorized in pattern codes, utilizing NVIVO, based on the research questions and chronology (Saldana, 2009). Many of the semantic relationships emerged during further analyses; the detailed codes and themes arose over time through inductive analysis (Greener, 2011).

Interviews feature multiple limitations, according to Cicourel (1964, as quoted by Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011), to exemplify: confounding factors creating variance between interviews, respondents' unease, lack of control in data collection, and misinterpreting data, and lack of control in data collection. The narratives also rely on participants' memories and cannot confirm actual performance in the classroom. Within the paradigm of interpretivism, lack of control and difference between interviews can be a strength of the method since the data is closer to each individual's constructed reality. In the data collection and analysis, the researcher worked to ensure consistency and rigor, reflecting on the credibility of the investigation, the dependability of the methods, and the transferability of the descriptions, as well as other categories of validity (Greener, 2011).

### ***Participant contexts***

This study investigates the experiences of 20 expatriate English teachers working in higher education across the Gulf States: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Participants hail from the United States, Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, and Pakistan. Equally divided between the genders (10 men and 10 women), the teachers work in a range of institutions (private, state, and international), and described experiences within the last several years.

## **Findings**

The findings have been organized thematically based on the research questions and responses: participant's individual learning needs, the use of time during orientation, orientation to the classroom, and entering the classroom.

### ***Individual needs***

Thirteen participants discussed issues with the administrative presentations regarding their roles, responsibilities, and duties. For example:

It would be a good idea if (human resources - HR) could tell, "This is the information you must read now. This information you can do, consult later." (...)  
Two presentations by HR, then different departments, facilities, student services, counselors, academic services, IT. (Hussein)

Hussein's particular issue was the lack of the hierarchy of that information. The sheer volume to absorb requires clarity, as well as variation in the format of presentation. Similarly, Hanna spoke of several presenters speaking concurrently: "Five or six people in a row come in and talk to us, and they each asked us our name. (...) We knew each other's names by the end of two and half hours, but that's all we knew." Her experience shows the issue with abutting, front-loaded orientation sessions on multiple subjects, delivered by a revolving door of presenters. The materials are presented, but the information overload makes it difficult to retain.

More importantly, however, the narratives reveal a lack of planning for orientation overall, with benefits for individuals often diluted. Ali illustrated that the orientation catered to faculty in every department: "I don't think there was much focus really on individual courses because the orientation was for everyone, whatever they were teaching." For organizers, large cohorts of new faculty across multiple departments seems to necessitate an institution-wide, one-size-fits-all orientation; however, such an orientation does not address many of the distinct needs of these participants, evident in how they described their cultural orientation. It mostly encompassed 'standard' rules of interaction, which the participants largely found disadvantageous. A few admitted that inexperienced joiners needed such rules, like Bobby, who contributed to others' learning, illustrating her own agency in the process:

I kept asking questions I knew the answers to, but I knew my colleagues didn't. For example, (...) "Is it OK for us to touch students if they are sick?" And she said, "Oh, no." And so the male colleagues asked, "Well, what do we do?" And she was able to explain. (Bobby)

These and other comments show that a 'general orientation' for the entire new cohort regardless of their backgrounds can potentially leave certain teachers uninformed as to key aspects of their jobs and others frustrated at time wasted.

The dearth of individual attention is unsurprising as participants reported that their supervisors had innumerable duties when they arrived. In actuality, the informal induction filled much of that void, yet it was unsettling for many of the participants who felt they were bothering new colleagues. Sheila, for example, talked about her experience: "I was a pain in the neck, actually, you know, begging everyone for information." Those actions demonstrate new teachers' agency in their socialization; however, without an official venue for such interactions, participants may have felt less confident about the information they received or their own role in pursuing such information.

### *Use of time during orientation*

Very few participants talked about receiving a clear schedule for the orientation period, yet most discussed various sessions outlining HR rules or administrative duties making up a large part of their orientation. Perceived as necessary, participants did not have strong emotions concerning

those sessions. Nonetheless, large-scale, institution-wide meetings were highlighted by seven participants as an impediment to the orientation process. Chris described a workshop “the first day before we started teaching” focused on faculty developing strategies and plans:

It was a full-day workshop with hundreds of people, (...) so at the end of this whole day, then the dean stands up and goes, “Right, this is what we're going to do.” (...) Almost everybody in the room was pretty much in agreement: “This was a complete waste of time.” (Chris)

Though such meetings took place at different institutions, the reaction of participants was similar. Because of other, pressing duties, many of the new teachers went into those meetings with a skewed perspective, believing that they should be elsewhere, particularly as the meetings were not seen as beneficial, as Bobby remarked, “Nobody talked about students or teaching.” Afterwards, frustrations intensified, with participants saying, for example: “Nothing was accomplished,” “I was none the wiser,” or “One of the worst days of my life.” An implicit purpose of such meetings or conferences would be welcoming and socializing new faculty members, yet if the broad reaction was this negative, it is not having the desired effect, and could hasten new teachers’ departure rather than their adjustment.

### ***Orienting to the classroom***

An acclimation to the classroom would be an expected priority for expatriate teachers arriving in new positions. However, only two participants felt well-prepared to teach; eighteen said there was little helpful orientation to the classroom, the curriculum, or the students. When asked about such preparations, Bobby responded:

There was no link, whatsoever. I think orientation was all about admin, like what happens when students dispute their grades, and we were assured that there were rubrics for everything, but there was nothing about the actual teaching. (Bobby)

This was a common sentiment amongst the participants: they learned about the administrative side of their job, but not the teaching side, leaving most to begin their classes underprepared for their specific contexts. Several admitted the necessity of an administrative orientation and talked about sessions explaining policies for attendance, assessments, grades, and other rules; however, those sessions did not address teachers’ core duties: day-to-day classroom interactions, exemplified by the 11 participants who were surprised by their students when classes began, resulting in frustration. Still, the stress levels reported were relatively minor, largely due to the teachers’ experience, to which many credited their adaptability.

The contrast is stark between most of the participants’ experiences and the two who reported a more complete orientation to their teaching:



Within your teaching team, that's the serious orientation. I worked under a guy (...) who brought me into his class, had me observe the class for two or three days. He said, "Just get the feel of it" Then he said, "Ok, you teach a little bit." (Louis)

Observing veteran teachers' classes as part of an orientation program are a useful means of introducing new teachers to typical classroom dynamics, thus reducing uncertainty before starting teaching. Under normal circumstances (a cohort of teachers arriving at the start of the semester), observations are a large, complicated aspect of induction to undertake, yet are worth the effort: the slight delay beginning teaching, the extra work for colleagues to teach and observe different classes, and the possible early disruption for students. That may be an explanatory factor in this case, as Louis arrived when classes were in session, providing various options for observations, helping him feel supported in the classroom, rather than being isolated or abandoned.

Even though administrations rarely manufactured such encounters between newly arrived teachers and their veteran counterparts, participants overwhelmingly described new colleagues as their greatest resource, as if being welcomed into a community of practice. Abdullah, for example, talked about how his manager assigned a mentor and provided support:

(She) does try to do a "team" thing, (...) I think overall she's got a pretty good approach to everything at that time. (...) She did a good job of trying to rearrange my schedule (...) It was clear that there was the effort being made to make it better. (Abdullah)

The actual importance of these colleagues' support only becomes clear if had those colleagues not provided such extensive assistance, Abdullah revealed: "At least it kept me around. I would probably have been looking for another job, seriously." Thus, it is possible to see the impact that veteran faculty members can have during new teachers' socialization processes. Particularly when there may be gaps in the official orientation, faculty members can supplement the induction that new teachers receive. Most of the participants actively sought answers from their new colleagues. It appears the greatest difficulty most of them faced in that endeavor was knowing which questions to ask.

### ***Starting to teach***

Taking the time to directly introduce the curriculum, assessments, teachers' roles, etc. was beneficial for Chris and his colleagues, yet avoiding that introduction can result in a less confident, potentially less effective teacher in the classroom:

Students are rarely an issue with me; it's making sure that I'm teaching them as best as I can, and not spending time thinking about how to create materials to get them to

do what I want. (...) That got me worried. And I did, I spent an awful lot of time questioning what I was doing. (Tim)

Thus, lack of orientation can amplify uncertainty. In this case, a teacher with extensive years of experience was unsure of his teaching through the entire first semester and extending into the next, as he explained a preoccupation with remedying his prior mistakes. Hence, not orienting new teachers to the materials and modes of presentation can have long-term repercussions for them and their students. Tim admitted that the students may have been shortchanged: “I think I could have done better. I think students could have learned more, yeah, definitely.” While lack of materials orientation is the antecedent to Tim’s uncertainty, the underlying issue of this situation is the isolation in the classroom that many new teachers feel.

Accordingly, induction does not finish at the start of the semester; it continues until teachers’ activation as fully independent faculty members. Only two teachers mentioned ongoing, regular contact concerning their teaching: a professional development program that was part of the new teacher probation. Several teachers touched on their own probation but said there was little follow-up. With more regular contact, there may have been different outcomes for seven participants with early issues with students or six who struggled with course materials. Like Abdullah’s early experiences, as he described multiple schedule changes with little notice or opportunity to prepare, saying “you look like an idiot in front of the students.” In an already unfamiliar situation, negative feelings can be more easily augmented. For participants, that negativity also created perceptions of unprofessionalism, preventing new faculty from identifying with colleagues and management. Four more participants had similar experiences regarding schedules and course loads, while two others discussed feeling disadvantaged regarding their workspaces, all potentially leading to maladjusted teachers feeling isolated shortly after arriving.

## Discussion

Although the experiences of the 20 participants across similar contexts (different HEIs in the six Gulf States) were diverse, several themes emerged from the data relating to those experiences. Despite teachers’ extensive professional backgrounds, they all appreciated support during orientation and resented when the induction demonstrated lack of organization or care. Most reported that their start lacked a comprehensive, well-planned orientation program. The onboarding literature advocates ‘clear and concise communication’ delivered in ‘small doses’ (Graybill, Carpenter, Offord, Piorun & Shaffer, 2011, p.202), yet most participants still described long, arduous administrative sessions. Such front-loaded, one-directional delivery of administrative information does not show appreciation for teachers’ agency as they form new identities (Fetherston, 2017). Also generally absent was a realistic job preview, considering the needs of the new teachers themselves, laying out the path for teachers to be successful in their



new institutions, taking into account the cultures of various departments, as well as faculty members' individual differences (Scott, Lemus, Knotts, & Oh, 2016).

Colleagues can facilitate the orientation process throughout: pre-arrival, 'buddies' are ready-made friends with valuable information catered to new faculty's needs (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002). After arriving, 'organizational insiders' (Bauer, 2010) provide an honest and practical picture of their new positions, as well as a realistic description of the cultures of the institution or department (Trowler & Knight, 1999). Participants described limited benefits mostly because they needed to seek out the information themselves, rather than organized means of such exchanges (Morin & Ashton, 2004). Supportive colleagues were highly beneficial during participants' early time in the HEIs, similar to the results of Kondakci and Haser (2012). The two-way nature of the socialization that most participants reportedly experienced accelerated their adjustment, allowing them to embrace their new identities as fully fledged members of the faculty sooner.

Informal interactions with veteran teachers provided positive outcomes regarding information that the formal induction sessions omitted, coinciding with Bauer's (2010) research. This is a key aspect of orientation from a postmodern perspective because it embraces new teachers' agency to seek out information, shaping their own induction (Teboul, 1984, p.191, as cited by Ongiti, 2012, p.36). Most glaringly absent was a clear and honest introduction to curricula, teaching materials, teaching standards, and student profiles, with many reporting surprise or disappointment once stepping into the classroom, contradicting the results of a study by Tuzlukova & Stead (2016) at an Omani university, whose participants felt very prepared to teach because of the comprehensive induction received. However, other studies (Kondakci & Haser, 2012) likewise reveal new faculty members' unmet expectations concerning the realities they faced.

## Conclusion

The majority of participants felt the formal orientation they received was lacking in overall planning or coordination, with time wasted or key aspects (of the job or the culture) neglected. However, the most conspicuous deficiency was an orientation to the classroom addressing new teachers' individual needs. They reported a gap in their induction regarding aspects of the curriculum, teaching materials, and most importantly, any introduction to the students and the typical classroom dynamics in the HEI. Rather than uncertainty reduction, much of the experiences amplified teachers' uncertainty. On the other hand, the informal orientation that participants reported was quite beneficial, often filling gaps left by the formal induction program. New colleagues were the most fulsome source of information and assistance during socialization, although sometimes underutilized because participants must seek out help, unaware of what or who to ask. New teachers were unable to fully exploit that resource due to the absence of administration-sanctioned contacts such as mentors or ice-breaker events with established faculty members.

Results further support a postmodern view of organizational socialization as multi-directional and embracing new faculty's information seeking and agency (Fetherston, 2017), yet additionally demonstrating the need for comprehensive, supportive induction programs (Graybill et al., 2011). Expatriate faculty members should be prepared to proactively seek out the needed information or assistance since the results shed new light on informal induction and the mitigating impact of colleagues (Fenton-Smith & Torpey, 2013; Tuzlukova & Stead, 2016), which in most participants' contexts include a positive, pay-it-forward norm. The disorganized nature of induction programs described by participants suggest they are either not conducted by individuals with an awareness of their potential benefits, or institutions do not place similar value on the uncertainty reduction that supportive induction programs provide. Additionally, many teachers find themselves cooperating with colleagues absent much official direction, so it follows that management is generally removed from the actual work of teachers.

### **Suggestions and Recommendations**

The induction process starts with new teachers' preparations; accordingly, a more interactive process prior to their arrival could better reduce the stresses and uncertainty throughout their orientation period. A pre-arrival packet developed in coordination with expatriate teachers could facilitate new faculty members' preparedness and limit the necessity of so many administrative sessions. Additionally, providing a mentor in advance would provide additional local knowledge that new teachers need (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), as well as a warm welcome and support. Mentoring should be a key part of new teachers' socialization process after arrival (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002), with mentors receiving appropriate training and release time (Smith, 2011). It is also vital to provide venues for informal information exchange (Morin & Ashton, 2004). In addition, organizers should make the learning student-centered, considering each faculty's individual needs and differences when organizing orientation sessions, including hybrid sessions or online options to avoid information overload for new faculty members (Siddiqui et al., 2019).

For new faculty to become fully activated sooner, that supportive environment must extend into their first year of teaching, including class observations and professional development (Kearney, 2014). Graybill et al. (2011) recommend utilizing technology and veteran faculty members as part of the process, an approach also suggested by participants. Through ice breakers or question-and-answer sessions, HEIs should exploit the accumulated experience of both expatriate and local academics to provide a more authentic picture of the institution. A well-organized orientation program that taps the knowledge of other teachers will effectively reduce uncertainty through a realistic job preview, ensuring that new teachers are not surprised by any aspects of their new positions, especially the teaching and classroom dynamics.

Any further research into this area could contribute to the knowledge base by different approaches to data collection or analysis. In collecting data from different participants, like administrators or veteran faculty members, a novel perspective could be gained. A change in

methodology, such as action research, could involve both administrators and other faculty, while also attempting to remedy some of the specific issues raised in this paper. An ethnographic study might more fully illustrate the experiences of expatriate faculty members during the orientation process. Finally, expanding the research into additional contexts or to involve a greater number of participants (collecting quantitative data) would also highlight regional differences or how extensive such issues reported in this study are in new faculty orientation.

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