
Teacher Induction and Mentoring in Malta: A Review of the Literature

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Abstract

This article offers a review of the literature on teacher induction and mentoring programs in Malta. Highlighting the importance of the support that is needed for newly qualified teachers (NQTs), the article also explores the perceptions of teachers towards the newly introduced induction scheme in the Maltese islands. For this article, we have reviewed policy documents and research papers that have been conducted since the introduction in 2010 of the induction and mentoring policy in the islands of Malta and Gozo. While exploratory in nature, the article highlights the issues raised that present what has been learnt so far from the studies conducted and presents issues that need to be looked into both from a research perspective and also from a policy perspective. After situating the article within the broader literature on induction and continuing professional development, we offer a contextual overview of induction and professional development for teachers in Malta. Subsequently, we detail our literature review approach and present a thematic analysis of the key findings related to the focus and outcomes of the program, NQTs' and mentors' perceptions of the program, and the role of heads of school in the induction program, with a specific focus on the mentoring dimension. Based on the results of the review, recommendations include the need for purposive attention to attracting more educators to take on the role of mentors, the need for mentees to have a lighter load to have more time for mentoring, and the need for the heads of school to take on a more direct role in the induction and mentoring of NQTs.

Keywords

Continuing professional development, Malta, Mentoring, Newly qualified teachers, Teacher induction.

There is a common understanding that being and becoming a teacher is a complex undertaking, given the ever-changing educational context in which they are expected to work. Learning to teach in the current dynamic education climate requires considerable efforts on the part of aspiring teachers to manage all that the teaching profession entails (Kutsyuruba et al., 2020). Beginning educators are situated in a contextual landscape that both influences their development and practice and dictates professional expectations of the increasingly demanding work world (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). Some scholars (e.g., Andrews & Abawi, 2017) have even highlighted the need for *new teacher professionalism* that is needed for educators to address the needs of a student population that is becoming more diverse and multicultural. The quality of a teacher's experience in the initial years is critical to developing and applying the knowledge, competencies, beliefs, and attributes acquired during the initial teacher education [pre-service] phase, and helps in the formation of a positive attitude toward teaching as a career. New teachers bring energy, enthusiasm, and commitment to their classrooms (Goodwin, 2012), but at the same time face what Fernet et al. (2016) describe as 'daunting challenges' that need to be addressed. A teacher's first few years on the job are the most critical and often the most difficult. They have been identified as the most stressful, as new teachers try to settle in challenging situations while coping with the complexity of teaching (Sabar, 2004; Spencer et al., 2018).

Induction has been viewed as one of the most useful ways to retain novices in the profession and help their professional development (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Kearney &

Lee, 2014; Kutsyuruba et al., 2022). There is a general acceptance of the value of good induction programs (Bubb, 2013; European Commission, 2010; OECD, 2017) for beginning teachers; however, as the European Commission reported, “new teachers do not have access to coherent and system-wide support measures; where support measures exist, they are relatively unsystematic and not fully embedded in the education system” (2010, p. 7). The induction period for beginning teachers is also very important in view of their future careers. It is during the initial years that teachers form their professional identity, construct a professional practice, and often decide whether to stay in the profession or to leave it (Caspersen & Raaen, 2014; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Gallant & Riley, 2014; Lindqvist & Nordänger, 2016). At the same time, mentoring has a long history as an approach to support teachers, particularly those in the early stages of their careers, to help them navigate the challenges of the profession and build professional capacity. While mentoring is often considered a major component of induction programs, together with onboarding, orientation, and professional development, it can also serve the role of the induction program itself (Hobson et al., 2009).

International studies (OECD, 2017) highlight that some countries (e.g., Sweden and the United Kingdom) are facing massive problems in attracting, recruiting, and retaining teachers. Malta is no exception. Whereas up to ten years ago Malta did not face any teacher shortages, the current scenario does not illustrate a serene situation. Many studies conducted in Malta have shown that teacher attrition is a cause of concern (Borg & Riding, 1991; European Commission, 2010; Galea, 2020), and studies have shown evidence of teacher burnout (Caruana & Borg, 2020). Previous policy reforms have resulted in a considerable shortage of teachers due to mediocre working conditions, and a rigid salary scale system (Galea, 2020; Malta Union of Teachers, 2017; Micallef, 2017; Mifsud, 2017; Shanks et al., 2020) has led to fewer candidates following teacher education programs. Therefore, there is a shortage of teachers in various subject areas. The problem has recently worsened due to challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic (European Commission, n.d.; Farrugia, 2022). Scholars have proposed two main reasons for this finding. First, teaching is regarded as a less attractive profession compared to other opportunities with better pay and working conditions. Second, many teachers are disposed to leave the classroom for their career progression (in non-teaching roles) or to leave the profession entirely (Attard Tonna & Calleja, 2018). A recent study showed that only 18% of 755 participating teachers preferred to remain in the classroom (Attard Tonna & Calleja, 2018). Unfortunately, teachers in Malta who voluntarily leave the profession are replaced by unqualified teachers (known as supply teachers, who hold no teacher qualifications and are therefore employed on a temporary basis) who fill in these vacant positions (Galea, 2020; Glazer, 2018). This has led to student disengagement, changes in the school climate, and a reduced quality of education (Galea, 2020). To address retention concerns, beginning in 2010, the Ministry of Education and the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) mandated support for all newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in the form of a two-year induction period (European Commission, n.d.). This induction program includes a mentoring aspect through the involvement of teacher mentors, who are directly responsible for supporting NQTs on issues related to teaching pedagogies, classroom management, and lesson planning. In parallel, the head of school or an Assistant Head of School is responsible for helping the NQT settle in the school as staff members. They do this by creating a welcoming and supportive environment, holding regular meetings, observing them in class, and involving them in school life.

Within this context, we deemed it important to conduct a review of the literature on teacher induction and mentoring programs in Malta. The main objective of the literature review was to better understand the context in which the induction phase is being undertaken and, more specifically, the impact of the mentoring scheme on NQTs. Such a review should help Maltese education authorities better understand the value behind the induction phase in general, and mentoring in particular, and also help providers of mentoring courses with insights that might help them improve provision.

This study has two main objectives. First, it highlights the importance of the support needed as teachers join the profession. Second, it explores teachers' perceptions of the newly introduced induction scheme in the Maltese Islands. For this article, we have reviewed policy documents, position papers, and research papers that have been conducted over the past twenty-five years since the first position paper was written back in 1998. Within such a context, this article, while exploratory in nature, is also meant to highlight the issues raised that present what has been learned so far from the studies conducted, and present issues that need to be investigated both from a research perspective and a policy perspective. First, we situate the article within the broader literature on induction and continuing professional development. We, then, offer a contextual overview of induction and professional development for teachers in Malta. Subsequently, we detail our literature review approach and present a thematic analysis of the key findings of our review.

Framing the Review: Research on Induction and Continuing Professional Development

Ample research has highlighted that the quality of a teacher's experience in the initial years of teaching is critical to developing and applying the knowledge and skills acquired during initial teacher training and to forming positive attitudes to teaching as a career (Appova & Arbaugh, 2018; Bezzina et al., 2004; Kessels, 2010; Kutsyuruba et al., 2020; Spencer et al., 2018). The term 'teacher induction' is generally understood to refer to a support program for new entrants in the teaching profession, although official definitions and practices can vary from country to country (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018; OECD, 2019). The induction phase refers to the phase in a teacher's career when he/she is crossing over from a teacher-training course to full-time teaching. It is also recognised as the bridge between initial teacher education (ITE) and continuing professional development (CPD) on the continuum of teachers' lifelong learning (European Commission, 2015; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Smith, 2018). Furthermore, teacher induction is recognised as an essential element in the initial stages of a teaching career (Aarts et al., 2020; European Commission, 2010). As the OECD points out, setting up "the conditions in which teachers can continue to grow and develop as professional learners – from their first days in the classroom and throughout their careers – is an important step towards improving the quality of education" (2017, p. 7). The existence of an induction phase has also been shown to positively correlate with teacher retention, continuing professional development, enhancing classroom skills, and improving student learning outcomes (Gaikhorst et al., 2015; Kelly et al., 2019; Tammets et al., 2019).

Beginning teachers are faced with several challenges as soon as they take on full-time teaching in a school. The transition from ITE to full-time teaching can be "dramatic and traumatic" (Haggarty et al., 2011, p. 937) as the beginning teachers go through what scholars

describe as reality shock (Voss & Kunter, 2020) or transition shock (Farrell, 2016), a characterized incongruity between learning at pre-service phase and the first year of teaching. The discrepancy between the beginning teacher's vision of teaching and the real world of teaching can cause serious disillusionment (Johnston-Gibbens, 2014). The realization that their vision of a creative, dynamic, and autonomous professional may conflict with the harsh realities of prescribed curricula, textbooks, or materials may be a daunting experience that could lead to job dissatisfaction or even burnout (Fernet et al., 2016; Harris, 2011).

Various studies have shown that beginning teachers find it difficult to address students' diverse needs, often feeling inadequate with their lack of understanding of students from different home backgrounds and holding different views and expectations about education. This is especially felt when assigned to schools enrolling poor, minority, and low-achieving students (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Luekens et al., 2004; OECD, 2017). Struggling with classroom management concerns (Bezzina, 2006a; Fry, 2007; Melnick & Meister, 2008), having a large number of students in the classroom, and disruptive or unmotivated students, were identified as other major challenges (McCormack et al., 2006). At the same time, given limited experience, novice teachers tend to be inflexible, finding it difficult to improvise or change plans to suit students' needs and behaviour (Borman & Dowling, 2008). The burden and demands of the curriculum also start having their toll on beginning teachers, who had more freedom to develop sessions during their ITE field practicum. As noted by Fry (2007), novice teachers are often struggling, "just trying to come up with enough curriculum" to address their immediate needs (p. 225). They also report time pressures to plan long-term, mounting paperwork, and feeling overwhelmed and exhausted dealing with non-teaching duties (Gilbert, 2005; Johnson et al., 2005; McCann & Johannessen, 2004). Beginning teachers also highlight the importance of having opportunities to be with other teachers to dialogue, observe, and co-plan, to have time to establish relationships with experienced teachers and mentors (Gilbert, 2005; Mansfield & Thompson, 2017) as well as crafting community through sharing friendships and ideas (Bieler, 2012).

Considering the above observations, one realizes that what it takes for beginning teachers to succeed is having genuinely committed people who want to support and give of themselves, even though this is far from easy and a challenge for many schools and institutions around the world. Several studies (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Spencer et al., 2018) have shown that the school environment has a strong impact on teacher motivation and job functioning. Day et al. (2020) showed that within this context, school leaders play a pivotal role in creating supportive and caring environments that all teachers need, regardless of their age or experience.

The quality of a teacher's experience in the initial years of teaching is therefore critical to developing the knowledge, skills, and attributes acquired during initial teacher education and to forming positive attitudes toward teaching as a career (Bezzina, 2008; Karlberg & Bezzina, 2020). At the same time, continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers has long been recognised as a powerful tool for improving the quality of teaching in schools (Desimone, 2009; Lloyd & Davis, 2018). In this context, mentoring is perceived as a valuable support mechanism, especially for teachers early in their careers and during the induction period (Kutsyuruba et al., 2020). Many studies have highlighted that well-designed and well-structured mentoring systems can have a positive impact on beginning teachers' effectiveness (Chambers et al., 2012; Scanlan et al., 2019), as new teachers report reduced feelings of isolation, increased confidence and self-esteem, more opportunities to grow and

develop their skills, and improved self-reflection and problem-solving capacities (Lindgren, 2005; Marable & Raimondi, 2007). It has been also reported that the provision of effective induction and mentoring programs is paramount in addressing problems regarding teachers' dropout rates which is a major problem in many countries (Chambers et al., 2012; Dawson, 2014).

Contextual Nuances of Induction and Professional Development of New Teachers in Malta

Teachers' career development usually goes through three main phases: pre-service, induction, and continuing professional development (CPD) phase. As noted by various studies over the years (e.g., Bezzina, 1999, 2002, 2006a; Bezzina et al., 2004; Bezzina & Camilleri, 1998, 2001; Bezzina & Stanyer, 2004; Lia & Mifsud, 2000; Vassallo, 2000), up to 2010, the Maltese system tended to focus on the pre-service and the CPD phases. However, this approach had two major shortcomings. First, there was no link between the pre-service and CPD phases. Once students graduated and were employed as teachers in the public or private sector, they were entrusted with a full teaching load from day one. The decision to seek professional development opportunities was left in the hands of the NQT. Second, there were no organizational structures at the school site that encouraged and facilitated opportunities for immediate and sustained practice, classroom observation, collaboration, or peer coaching (Bezzina et al., 2004, p. 48). Teachers up to that stage were not provided with support mechanisms at the school site that could have helped them settle down and be gradually induced into the teaching profession. Studies have shown that NQTs lacked support during their initial stages of development. They saw themselves as inadequately prepared and reported being more likely to leave the profession and unlikely to choose a teaching career if they were to start over. These results coincided with higher levels of stress (Caruana & Borg, 2020; Cassar & Formosa, 2011).

While teaching practice was identified as the most relevant aspect of their education, first-year NQTs craved more practice, exposure, and experience through engagement in schools prior to their full-time engagement (Bezzina & Stanyer, 2004; Lia & Mifsud, 2000). Similar to findings in international studies, the greatest challenges for Maltese NQTs were "‘coping with mixed ability classes', ‘class discipline', ‘curriculum demands' and ‘physical exhaustion'" (Bezzina, 2006a, p. 424). The transition also involves stress, uncertainty, frustration, and sometimes despair. NQTs who were able to collaborate with more experienced individuals were able to overcome this lack of preparation (Cefai et al., 2007). In fact, NQTs believe that cooperation, resources, and teamwork are essential for supporting their early professional development (Bezzina, 2006b, 2007; Bezzina et al., 2004).

This is, in fact, the role that induction can play. An induction policy has two main principles: an entitlement to support NQTs, as they are induced into the school system, and assessment against defined national standards. During the induction phase, NQTs need to have an individualized program of support from a designated tutor or mentor. Such involvement and participation require that school leaders and experienced colleagues provide professional support and introduce organisational structures for this to happen. This perceived need was nearly two-fold greater for teachers in the first year of their career than for their colleagues in their second and third years (Bezzina, 2006a, 2006b; Bezzina et al., 2004). A selection of studies in the area of teacher professional development was conducted

locally during the 90s and the 2000s (Astarita & Pirotta, 1999; Bezzina, 1999, 2002; Bezzina & Camilleri, 1998; Bezzina & Stanyer, 2004; Vassallo, 2000), intended to influence policymakers in the way they looked at professional development on the island. This led to the introduction of an induction phase in 2010. The appeal made in 2006 for the Maltese education authorities to embrace the concerns of NQTs has led “to the institutionalization of the induction phase” a few years later (Bezzina, 2006a, p. 427).

The teacher induction and mentoring policy and strategy were launched by the Quality Assurance Department within the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education in 2012 (Quality Assurance Department, 2012) for NQTs in the public sector, and are recognised as an integral condition of employment for all those employed within this sector. This was followed by the publication of an induction handbook in 2013 (Quality Assurance Department, 2013). NQTs are thus required to undergo a two-year induction and mentoring program during their probation period before they can be awarded a permanent teacher warrant. Throughout these two years, NQTs are expected to focus on developing key professional knowledge, attitudes, and skills, as deemed necessary by the school and mentor, to become effective teachers and reflective practitioners (Attard Tonna, 2023). During this time, they are required to participate in a three-day induction seminar, maintain a personal reflective journal, attend a group mentoring session with the college principal as a mentor, participate in two formal meetings with the college mentor, and attend a national concluding seminar at the end of the academic year organized by the Quality Assurance Department (Attard Tonna, 2019). In their first year of induction, NQTs are also allocated a mentor who meets with them during that scholastic year, and who is required to complete a checklist at the end of the year, providing details of the support given. In addition, NQTs working in the private sector (church and independent schools) also undergo induction programs within their schools. However, in this case, the head of the school decides on the need and format of this program and whether the NQT is assigned a mentor. Given a scenario that shows schools that are not fully aware of the benefits of mentoring (Attard Tonna, 2019), practices vary, and this leads to a fluid context with mentors and mentees calling for a more robust and consistent approach to be enacted.

The Agreement between the Government and the Malta Union of Teachers (which represents most teaching grades) stipulates that those serving as mentors are provided time to be with the assigned mentee/s. Such time was recognised as contact time and was thus seen as part of their official duties. Thus, instead of being given monetary compensation, mentors are assigned two lessons (roughly 90 minutes) per week as dedicated time with mentee/s. At the secondary level, teachers are assigned around ten hours per term (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2017, p. 33). Unfortunately, there are anomalies in the system. Given the current situation in which most teachers have been designated a full teaching load, finding the time to be with mentors does not always prove that easy (Abela Craus, 2017).

For several years, members of the school leadership team and teachers were prepared to be mentors through a short training program offered by the Ministry of Education. Mentors are usually allocated several NQTs to mentor each year within their own public-run college network (a cluster of schools within the same geographical area coordinated by the Head of College Network, previously known as the College Principal). They are expected to fix appointments with the NQTs and visit the school for meetings. In some cases, mentees have mentors who are actually not at their own schools. This is currently an issue that hinders the

efficiency and effectiveness of the program. At the same time, as noted by Attard Tonna (2019), “mentors may choose not to provide this support, especially if they have time restrictions in their school schedule” (p. 269). Other educators within schools can request to be mentored at any time in their careers.

Review Method

After more than a decade since the introduction of the induction and mentoring scheme which started around 2010, it was deemed appropriate to review the current state of affairs by looking at the studies that have been undertaken since then. Prior to the review, we set out to identify studies that have been undertaken on teacher induction and mentoring in Malta. For this purpose, we reviewed both refereed literature and grey literature (policy documents, dissertations, theses, reports, and position papers) that have been produced with a focus on teacher induction and mentoring policy in Malta since 2010. We conducted a major search of literature databases (ERIC, PsycINFO, PubMed, Queen’s Summons, and Google Scholar) with relevant inclusion/exclusion keywords, including teacher induction, mentoring, and Malta. In addition, we searched publicly available policy documents from the government of Malta and European Union agencies. In total, our review encompassed 25 sources: 10 peer-reviewed articles and chapters, seven Maltese government and teacher union policy documents, six European Commission reports, and two theses.

Review of Findings: State of Teacher Induction and Mentoring in Malta

In the next sections, we will critically examine the themes gleaned from the review sources related to the focus and outcomes of the program, NQTs’ and mentors’ perceptions of the program, and the role of heads of schools in the current Maltese induction program, with a specific focus on the mentoring dimension.

Program Foci

The studies reviewed helped identify several central foci that have been highlighted because of the introduction of the induction phase and the mentoring scheme, namely *professional agency*, *reflective practice*, and *context*. As one engages with each focus, it is evident how interrelated and interdependent they are.

Induction and mentoring are mainly about the cultivation of relationships based on personal care and professional support. Under the category of *professional agency*, one finds themes that present mentees acknowledging that the mentorship scheme provides unique learning opportunities. Supportive relationships are established when mentors and mentees engage in structured dialogue, and over time, they note the development of mutual trust and respect. In fact, the way mentors and mentees engage helps dispel what is critically the first phase of the relationship – the fear of evaluation (Attard Tonna et al., 2017). This can be understood given the context of isolation in which teachers in Malta are used to work. As noted by Attard Tonna et al. (2017) “the mentoring support did not just help to build the mentees’ confidence and see them through their practicum/induction, but also enabled them to view themselves as learners, to identify their learning needs and to develop their own skills and characteristics” (p. 218).

This engagement helped develop teacher agency – developing a sense of empowerment, having a voice, and autonomy in their professional practice. Thus, the

mentoring scheme helped address one of the lacunas identified by previous studies for the need to develop relationship skills that NQTs found lacking (Bezzina et al., 2004). This was gained not only thanks to engagement with others (i.e., mentors and experienced teachers) but also through the self-reflection that the process of engagement nurtured. Through her study, Abela Craus (2017) identified a series of factors that helped contribute to effective mentoring, namely, the importance of setting goals, the mentor's subject knowledge, the fact that the school mentor was school-based, and that a good rapport was established (p. 90).

The results from the local studies reviewed showed how mentees matured as they engaged with their mentors. The process of engagement between mentor and mentee not only helped to nurture positive relationships, but also allowed the two to appreciate the importance of *reflective practice*. The more reflection was internalised, the more confidence they developed, and the mentor-mentee relationship grew. As Attard Tonna et al., (2017) noted: "a developmental generative approach places mutuality and co-development at the centre of the reflective process" (p. 217). Findings from the studies pointed towards the way mentoring impacted mentors' own practices and their identity as teachers. First and foremost, mentees were not working in isolation but in collaboration with their mentors, and through active engagement, observation, and reflection they were able to address issues of immediate concern leading to professional growth. The data also imply that the roles of the mentor and mentee are in a state of flux and that even mentors benefit significantly from enhancing their practice through this experience, as suggested by Aderibigbe et al. (2018).

All of this occurs within a *context*. As pointed out by Attard Tonna (2019), "mentoring is a collaborative experience closely dependent on the context in which it takes place" (p. 279). The findings from this study suggest that the skills mentors nurture in their training are not enough to adequately support their mentees, and factors such as time, exposure, and support from the school are extremely important for an effective system of collaboration whereby mentors are allocated sufficient time for them to meet their mentees, observe their lessons, give them feedback, and engage in reflective practice. Attard Tonna (2019) concluded that when teacher mentoring is situated within the school contexts that promote and encourage an inquiry-based orientation to support colleagues, one where educators reflect, give, and receive feedback, it is found to be more rewarding and sustainable.

Program Outcomes

In terms of program outcomes, many benefits have been identified, including the introduction of the induction phase and mentoring as a means to support NQTs. At the same time, several concerns have been raised by beginning teachers and mentors as they start to engage with the process. These naturally throw light on potential areas that need to be addressed at various levels, whether personal, institutional, or political. The following sections will address both types of outcomes through the lens of NQT experiences, mentor perspectives, and the role of school administrators in teacher induction and mentoring.

Newly Qualified Teachers' Experiences

Studies have highlighted that, despite the institutionalization of the mentoring scheme as part of the Induction Phase, not all NQTs benefit from the expected support. This issue is more pronounced in the private sector, where heads of schools decide on the mentoring format and whether the NQT is assigned a mentor. As Attard Tonna (2023) noted, this latter

arrangement is problematic, as not all NQTs are provided with a mentor, and not all are supported during these first two years. To highlight this inconsistency, Abela Craus (2017) reported that only nine of the 13 NQTs in her study were assigned a mentor; the four who did not receive support from the mandated program were employed in private schools. Furthermore, in their second year of teaching, only 4 of the 13 NQTs participated in compulsory appraisals, none of whom were employed in the private sector (Abela Craus, 2017). Therefore, there is an evident inconsistency between the program mandates and their execution.

Those who participated in the current Maltese induction program felt better prepared and confident in their initial practice to handle the challenges of school life than those who did not have such support, likely owing to the pronounced structure, encouragement, and guidance provided by mentors (Attard Tonna et al., 2017; Shanks et al., 2020). An important point of this review is that NQTs who were not offered mentorship support often developed spontaneous and unofficial mentorships with experienced teachers who taught the same subject at their placement schools (Abela Craus, 2017). Some studies (Berings et al., 2008; Colognesi et al., 2020) have highlighted this point, noting that some would prefer informal learning with a person whom they can trust, and share ideas with as colleagues. In Abela Craus's (2017) study, in a case where a first-year NQT was neither assigned a mentor nor had the support of an experienced same-subject teacher at her school, collaborations with previous colleagues from the same university program were formed wherein lesson plans and classroom challenges were shared and discussed. The latter is similar in format to the tutoring meetings held through the initial teacher education course followed at the University of Malta during the teaching practice component. Notably, NQTs crave the expertise of colleagues teaching the same subject. What this point helps to highlight is that even when systems are not in place, people who genuinely want to learn to address concerns will seek their own learning opportunities. It all boils down to the individual. This resonates with the point raised by Benson (2011) that teachers, as learners, have "the capacity to take control of one's own learning" (p. 58) and that learning takes place through the influence of peers and communities of practice, and hence through social interactions (Grimmett, 2014; Johnson & Golombek, 2016; Wenger, 1998).

Although mentors and mentees frequently discuss general topics in meetings (e.g., classroom management strategies, school structure, and environment) that are perceived as beneficial by all NQTs, subject-specific mentors are seemingly ideal and have been recommended (Abela Craus, 2017). Pre-service teachers' behaviour management self-efficacy is a strong predictor of their resilience (Peixoto et al., 2018); behaviour management strategies are supported regardless of the mentor's subject expertise. Interestingly, however, some NQTs have expressed that having a mentor who is not teaching the same subject is actually a hindrance to their professional development (Abela Craus, 2017). Therefore, a same-subject mentor might help instil a sense of teaching self-efficacy, an even stronger predictor of resilience for pre-service teachers (Peixoto et al., 2018). It is thus unsurprising that most NQTs seek the expertise of same-subject teachers for guidance with lesson plans, despite having support from a different-subject mentor (Abela Craus, 2017). As much as possible, in future, induction coordinators should aim to pair first-year teachers with same-subject mentors to better support them in their early endeavours.

Perhaps most important for the partnership's effectiveness is that the pair teaches at the same school. The mentor must be accessible to the mentee (Abela Craus, 2017; Attard

Tonna et al., 2017). When mentors either do not teach at the same school as mentees or do not have time to schedule meetings and observations with them, NQTs do not perceive the relationship to be as beneficial as those who experienced greater accessibility to their mentors (Abela Craus, 2017). The Quality Assurance Department (2012) recommends that mentors and mentees belong to the same school to ensure that the mentor is able to integrate the mentee into the school culture. Furthermore, a mentor's knowledge, expertise, and engagement in the school environment can enhance the quality of support. For example, the reviewed studies showed that a mentor with an understanding of the school in which the mentee was placed helped to ensure that she called her regularly to encourage and support her. This leads to the development of positive perceptions of the program compared to an NQT whose mentor taught at a different school and merely showed up to have him sign the respective documents without actually observing him or providing him with feedback due to time constraints (Abela Craus, 2017). The current situation, with a small number of mentors compared to mentees, limits the establishment of relationships and contacts. This is further exacerbated by the lack of qualified teachers, which implies that most are assigned a high number of lessons, leaving little or no time to spend with their mentees. Similarly, Attard Tonna (2019) noted that "school and social environment played a crucial role in the way the participants interacted and defined their challenges" (p. 268). Thus, quality of support is critical for the success of NQTs, together with the type of support given and the social context in which things evolve. All of these factors play a critical role in determining the level of success of the mentoring program.

The Mentors' Perceptions

Analysing mentor teachers' narratives, Attard Tonna (2020) found that mentoring other teachers is undoubtedly a challenge, as teacher mentors in Malta carried out their mentoring duties in conjunction with the responsibilities they already had towards the students in their class, and in conjunction with other roles they have been assigned. This study highlights the complex issues of building relationships, using classroom expertise, and establishing oneself as a mentor during the induction process. Maltese mentors recognize the importance of matching individual personalities in mentorship experiences. A good match between mentors and mentees encourages collaborative relationships that affect both the personal and professional aspects (Shanks et al., 2020). Such relationships take time to build but are deemed essential for the establishment of a strong rapport between mentors and mentees (Shanks et al., 2020). Moreover, a trusting relationship encourages openness and honesty while reducing the mentee's stress and "fear of evaluation" (Attard Tonna et al., 2017, p. 216). Rather than judging mentees, mentors must offer a safe space where they can empathize with their mentees and develop a greater sense of compassion (Attard Tonna et al., 2017). Positive reflection, including feedback from mentors, can provide a foundation for creating such a safe space. The reviewed studies highlight that once mentees feel comfortable in the presence of their mentors, reflective dialogue becomes more open and sincere.

Reflective practice is a critical component of the mentor-mentee relationship that was integrated into the induction program to further support NQT's personal and professional needs (European Commission, 2010). Arranging time to reflect in a culture of peer learning and team teaching is an ongoing challenge for teachers in Malta. However, through the mentorship program, experienced teachers offer support by observing their mentees' lessons

without providing instruction or interference, and later reflect upon and discuss the lesson and its challenges (Attard Tonna, 2019). This process encourages enquiry and problem-solving approaches that enhance professional development for both the mentor and the mentee (Attard Tonna, 2019; Attard Tonna et al., 2017; Shanks et al., 2020). For experienced teachers, reflective practice develops leadership skills and self-awareness, while instilling a sense of professional agency (Imants & Van der Wal, 2020; Leijen et al., 2022).

Through reflection, challenges are considered growth opportunities, with the focus being on active problem-solving. In some cases, mentors used examples of challenges faced in their own classrooms and worked through the problems with the NQTs, helping each other discover novel strategies and solutions (Attard Tonna, 2019). Knowledge sharing among teachers allows mentors the opportunity to change their own practices by informing them of diverse ways of thinking and acting (Attard Tonna et al., 2017; Attard Tonna, 2019; Attard Tonna & Calleja, 2010). Moreover, NQT offers new knowledge and strategies that can help bring about change if their ideas are heard and appreciated by experienced teachers. As the relationships mature and the mentor and mentee work more closely together, their contributions become two-way. Mentors and mentees foster a learning culture in the school environment (Bezzina, 2006b; European Commission, 2010) that extends beyond Induction and into the CPD phase.

Mentoring is a time-consuming endeavour. For this to be effective, mentors require time to collaborate with and observe their mentees. In an online post, one mentor claimed, “time is the biggest setback” (Attard Tonna, 2019, p. 276). The teaching load is a persistent challenge for one-on-one training and collaboration. This is especially true for those working in the primary sector, where teachers have few opportunities in their day-to-day activities to find adequate time to meet and observe their mentees. Those who taught in separate schools often experienced similar challenges (Attard Tonna, 2019). Finding time slots that coincide was always a challenge, regardless of the location and sector. Accordingly, mentors suggest that their activities in the program should be considered part of their regular workload rather than extra tasks (Attard Tonna, 2019). This is one of the major challenges the Maltese mentoring scheme is currently facing. Given the situation where we do not have a full complement of teachers to teach in all our schools and subject areas, we end up with all teachers are undertaking a full teaching load. This implies that, at times, it is impossible to allocate mentors with formal time to be with their mentees.

Role of School Administrators in Supporting NQTs

School administrators who express positive attitudes toward and recognize the potential of the mentorship approach in supporting professional development tend to enhance the quality and amount of collaboration among colleagues while both nurturing and encouraging regular meetings (Attard Tonna, 2019; Attard Tonna & Calleja, 2010). This benefits both the NQTs and the school as a whole (Attard Tonna, 2019). It is the role of the school administrator to meet with NQTs early in their induction and participate in classroom observations and meetings for formative appraisals (Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, 2013). Unfortunately, the school environment often prevents opportunities for mentors and mentees to collaborate as school administrators typically do not provide the necessary accommodating environments, nor do they participate in the induction process as advised (Attard Tonna, 2019). The need to focus on teamwork has been stressed in research

prior to the current program being institutionalised (Bezzina, 2006a, 2008). School leaders must make efforts to provide a conducive environment to truly embrace the mentoring process as a relationship that requires time, space, and commitment. Both Abela Craus (2017) and Attard Tonna (2019) noted that the administrator-perceived lack of awareness regarding the various aspects involved in mentoring may be encumbering the program's effectiveness. Yet, the duties of the school administrator in the induction program are clear; he or she:

has the overall responsibility of mentoring in the school; [...] provides the guidelines to the Induction Coordinator for the implementation of the mentoring process in the school; endorses the matching of mentors to mentees as proposed by the Induction Coordinator; [and] provides for or approves the necessary timetable arrangements for Teacher-Mentors. (Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, 2013, p. 16)

This detailed description seemingly requires far more engagement, awareness, and attentiveness than has been demonstrated so far in the induction program's execution.

Due to administrative demands, school administrators are often disengaged from NQTs (Attard Tonna, 2019; Bezzina & Cutajar, 2013). Prior to the current induction program, one of the authors (Bezzina, 2006a) reported similar NQT perceptions, namely, that administrators failed to support their initial induction into the school system. Therefore, this is a persistent issue that the current program has not addressed. The responsibility for proper teacher induction and continuing professional development rests in the hands of the school leaders (Bezzina, 2002). Mentors feel that if the leaders are more engaged, there is potential for whole-school involvement in the mentoring process, with more staff members contributing to the NQT's professional development (Attard Tonna, 2019; Bezzina et al., 2006). In fact, the European Commission (2010) report specifically states that "the competences and commitment of school leaders are important for creating a coherent induction system and a collaborative learning culture in the school" (p. 24). Measures must be taken to ensure their vital involvement. However, such findings cannot be taken on their own. We have to acknowledge the ever-increasing tasks that keep being added to the school leaders' workload. The role of the school administrator is often determined by others, and they have to follow the dictates of central authorities which gives them limited to no time to focus on what really matters – namely the professional development of teachers and the improvement of teaching and learning (Bezzina, 2024; Bezzina & Cutajar, 2013). Despite the national documents that speak of school administrators as leaders, reality shows that they have limited autonomy in determining the way forward for schools.

Conclusions and Implications

This paper has served as a review of a number of research studies that have been undertaken over the past twenty-five years to study the role of induction and the impact that the mentoring scheme, introduced around 15 years ago, has had on NQTs. This review paper has its limitations. While a thorough search has been undertaken, in our opinion, a limited number of studies have focused on particular aspects of induction and mentoring schemes. Thus, this is a relatively new area of study, with only a few academic and refereed articles published. However, the points addressed in these studies have helped identify critical issues pertinent to the Maltese scenario but at the same time, ones that resonate with international findings.

Several issues can be extracted from the reviewed studies and shed light on the importance and validity of induction and mentoring as a means for deep reflection and reflective dialogue, which would lead to enhanced professional growth and teacher efficacy. The main issues that have surfaced are as follows:

- Mentoring requires structured time and cannot be truly effective if undertaken sporadically.
- Mentoring helps to address the various personal and professional challenges that NQTs mainly face during the initial years, and evidence shows that the current induction system, when undertaken properly, provides much-needed support to NQTs.
- Organisational structures need to be introduced to allow collaborative enquiry to take place.
- A school-based approach to mentoring would allow the system to be more effective and sustainable.
- An appropriate professional learning context needs to be cultivated so that structured dialogue and systematic reflection can take place within the school.
- School administrators must be given latitude to organise and possibly be involved in the development of the mentoring scheme.
- There is a need for more research that can help us better understand how things unfold and can thus be improved.

Naturally, some of the issues that have surfaced require a system-wide commitment to ensure that the school leadership teams are provided with the necessary training sessions, the support required to introduce mentoring schemes that can have the desired impact, and which it has been emphasised can only be implemented when the right combination of human and organisational aspects are in place. A whole-school approach is needed that shows that mentoring is endorsed, supported, and celebrated. At the system level, at least two issues must be addressed. First, there is a need to attract more educators to assume the role of mentors in their respective schools. This is recommended given the finding that mentors who are school-based and subject-focused (at the secondary school level) provide the best support possible for the mentee. When mentors are not school-based, they do not engage with mentees on a regular basis, which leads to levels of a situation which is inconsistent and hence problematic for the relationship between mentors and mentees to grow. Second, mentees need to have a lighter load, especially in their first year or two, to have more time to be with their mentor and to be slowly inducted into the profession. Learning needs to be incremental, and therefore, they can truly have a scaffolding experience if they have adequate time to reflect on their teaching. Similarly, mentors must have a structured time to be with their assigned mentees to allow for a strong relationship to be established. As the studies have highlighted, professional agency does take place when the induction phase and the mentoring scheme that goes with it are practised. Studies have shown how a mentor-mentee relationship helps address the loneliness of the job as novice teachers start engaging with meaningful others. These findings reinforce the point that learning needs to be job-embedded. A final and crucial point that must be emphasised is the need for the heads of schools to take on a more direct role in not only the administrative part, but also the experiences that novice teachers go through. The recommendations made will help sustain the benefits that have been accrued since the introduction of the Induction and mentoring scheme. A more concerted effort at the

central level would help overcome some of the difficulties highlighted and lead to a more systematic and consistent approach.

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