

Implementation of the Induction Period of Novice Foreign Language Teachers: Challenges and Experiences from Practice

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Abstract

The study presents findings from research conducted among novice foreign language teachers, aiming to determine how their induction period was implemented at schools, from whom they received support, how cooperation with their mentor teacher took place, and in which areas of the teaching profession they would have required additional support. The research was carried out through semi-structured interviews with 11 graduates of teacher training programs in English, German, or Russian. The results show that although legislation requires schools to ensure an induction period and provide support to novice teachers, the implementation of this requirement varies greatly across schools. While a mentor is usually assigned, the induction process is often unsystematic, and support tends to be sporadic or provided only reactively upon request. The novice teachers themselves would welcome systematic support, both in terms of receiving information and in the form of classroom observations followed by reflective feedback to foster their professional growth. From their pre-service preparation, they feel least prepared for classroom management, ensuring discipline in the classroom, communication with parents, as well as for strategies of maintaining personal wellbeing and self-care.

Keywords: induction period; novice teachers; mentor teacher; challenges of novice teachers; support for novice teachers.

Realizace adaptačního období u začínajících učitelů cizích jazyků: výzvy a zkušenosti z praxe

Abstrakt

Studie přináší výsledky výzkumného šetření mezi začínajícími učiteli cizích jazyků, jehož cílem bylo zjistit, jakým způsobem bylo realizováno jejich adaptační období ve škole, od koho získávali podporu, jak probíhala spolupráce s uvádějícím učitelem a ve kterých oblastech učitelské profese by potřebovali další podporu. Výzkum probíhal formou polořízených rozhovorů s 11 absolventy učitelství v oboru anglický, německý nebo ruský jazyk. Z výzkumu vyplývá, že ačkoli zákon školám ukládá zabezpečit začínajícímu učiteli adaptační období a poskytovat mu podporu, naplňování tohoto požadavku je ve školách pojímáno různě. Většinou sice je začínajícímu učiteli přidělen uvádějící učitel, proces adaptace však probíhá nesystémově, podpora začínajícího učitele je spíše nahodilá nebo je poskytována pouze reaktivně na vyžádání začínajícího učitele. Sami začínající učitelé by ale uvítali systematickou podporu jak v poskytování informací, tak i hospitační činnosti s následnými reflexemi, které by jim pomáhaly v profesním růstu. Z pregraduální přípravy se cítí jako nejméně připraveni na oblast zvládnání kázně, řízení třídy, komunikace se zákonnými zástupci žáků nebo i na způsoby udržování vlastního wellbeingu či psychohygieny.

Klíčová slova: adaptační období začínajících učitelů; začínající učitel; uvádějící učitel; problémy začínajících učitelů; podpora začínajících učitelů

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Introduction

In their first years of practice, novice teachers face a number of challenges that significantly affect their motivation, job performance, and wellbeing, and which can fundamentally influence their decision to remain in or leave the teaching profession (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Although novice teachers should be equipped with a range of professional competencies acquired during their undergraduate studies (see Competency Framework for Teaching Graduates – Kompetenční rámec absolventa a absolventky učitelství (Bořkovec, 2023)), they encounter many situations in real school practice where they need systematic support. This need was reflected by the Czech Republic's policymakers, as reflected in the 2023 amendment to the Act on Pedagogical Workers (563/2004 Coll.) included sections §24a Teacher Induction Period and §24b

Mentor Teacher. This amendment created an obligation for all schools to provide novice teachers with the necessary support for their induction into the teaching profession.

International research (e.g., OECD, 2021; European Commission, 2021) confirms that an effective induction period, including mentoring and targeted support, is a key factor in the professional anchoring of novice teachers. Czech studies also repeatedly show that the quality and intensity of support during the first years of practice plays a key role in determining whether graduates of teacher training programs remain in the education sector (e.g., Hanušová et al., 2018; Helus, 2013; Vašutová, 2004). Although the induction period is already enshrined in legislation in the Czech Republic, there is still no uniform framework for it, and schools therefore approach the support of novice teachers in very different ways.

We therefore focused our attention on how the induction period for novice teachers is implemented in practice. This article presents the specific experiences of eleven novice language teachers and identifies areas where systematic intervention is needed at the school level and in undergraduate training.

The theoretical basis for this issue draws on the concept of teacher professional identity (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004), the professional development model (Day & Sachs, 2004), and learning organization theories (Senge, 2006). The role of the school as a supportive environment – the so-called culture of collaboration (Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves, 2003) – is also crucial, in which, according to research, the mentor teacher should act as a guide rather than merely a colleague (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Some authors also focus on the professional beliefs of novice teachers (Ševčíková et al., 2021).

The results of research on novice teachers often point to their unpreparedness, especially in the areas of classroom management, mental health, communication with parents, and working with school documentation (Česká školní inspekce – TALIS, 2018). For example, research by Smetáčková (2016) shows that stress and uncertainty among young teachers often stem from insufficient support from school management and a lack of systematic reflection on their own practice. Hanušová et al. (2018) also list a lack of support from school management or colleagues and an unsuitable school culture as threatening determinants at the institutional level.

1 Induction period for novice teachers

Act No. 563/2004 Coll. on teaching staff defines in §24a the induction period as “the period from the commencement of the teacher’s first employment relationship to the end of two years of the teacher’s employment relationship with a legal entity operating a school,” whereby “the legal entity operating the school supports the novice teacher during his or her induction period, in particular by appointing a mentor teacher.” This description also defines who is a novice teacher and, therefore, who should be provided with support.

The status of a novice teacher in the Czech Republic is thus clearly defined by law as a period of two years from the commencement of their first employment as a teacher.

However, there is much debate in the professional literature about who is a novice teacher and how long a teacher can be considered a beginner. Most often, a teacher with one to five years of experience is considered a novice teacher. However, a number of factors play a significant role in the effectiveness, speed, and quality of induction, such as the individual knowledge, skills, and experience of the novice teacher, motivation, personality traits, adaptability, knowledge of the school environment, type of school, workload, school culture and climate, assigned roles and functions at school, and, last but not least, the manner and intensity of support provided to the novice teacher by the mentor teacher, school management, and other colleagues. The induction process is therefore a very individual matter and cannot be generalized. Hence, even the two-year induction period stipulated by law should be understood as the minimum period during which a novice teacher is provided with systematic and targeted support not only in all areas of their teaching activities, but also in setting up time management, developing social relationships, developing personal well-being, and coping with mentally demanding situations.

Although the mandatory induction period is only defined for novice teachers, we believe that some form of induction period and related support should be offered to any novice teacher, regardless of their length of teaching experience, especially in cases where they are transitioning from a different level or type of school, such as a transition from secondary school to primary school, a transition from a grammar school to a vocational school, a transition between different secondary schools, etc.

The above-mentioned law defines support for novice teachers primarily by assigning them a mentor teacher, but we consider limiting the induction process to cooperation with the mentor teacher to be insufficient, even though the role of the mentor teacher is absolutely essential for successful induction. We also consider regular communication with school management and other staff to be very important, especially if they hold other positions at the particular school, such as educational advisor, prevention methodologist, school psychologist, school curriculum coordinator, internship coordinator, etc. Hanušová et al. (2018, p. 59) emphasize that the effectiveness of induction is greatly influenced by "the availability of management that is "visibly present", actively interested in teachers, and effectively supports them." It is important to realize that the induction process of a novice teacher, as well as any employee in a new work environment, is very complex, as it involves induction in three basic areas: induction to the organizational environment, induction to the work process, and social induction (Pol & Lazarová, 1997). It is therefore very important that the induction process of a novice teacher be perceived as something that concerns every school employee.¹

¹ For tips on the practical implementation of the induction of a beginning teacher in individual areas, see, for example, Botlík Nuc & Rozboudová, 2024.

The role of the mentor teacher is defined in Section 24b of the Act on Pedagogical Staff as follows: “The mentor teacher shall, in particular, provide methodological guidance to the novice teacher during his or her induction period, continuously and regularly evaluate his or her direct pedagogical activities and performance of work related to direct pedagogical activities, and familiarize him or her with the activities of the school and its documentation.” Although this definition expresses the most important areas of induction, it certainly does not cover all the needs of novice teachers (see, for example, Juklová, 2013; Vítečková, 2018; Matonoha, 2019, etc.). At the same time, the law does not specify the requirements that the mentor teacher should meet. Syslová and Borkovcová (2022, p. 417–418) state that the mentor should be an “experienced teacher with a good knowledge of the school and its vision, the educational methods used, and the ability to provide collegial support and cooperation.” The question remains whether the mentor teacher should have the same or at least partially the same certification (at least one subject in common) in order to provide the novice teacher with adequate support and feedback, including in the area of subject-specific didactic areas, or whether it is sufficient for them to be a pedagogically skilled teacher who is open and willing to help and pass on their experience.

A meta-analytic study by Keese et al. (2023) analyzed 17 quantitative studies published between 2010 and 2019 that focused on the effectiveness of formal induction and mentoring programs for novice teachers in elementary and secondary schools. The research sample included both intervention and correlation studies from the US and abroad, most of which involved teachers with up to three years of experience. The results showed that these programs have a statistically significant, albeit small, positive effect on teacher retention, professional self-confidence, and, to a lesser extent, student outcomes. An interesting finding was that the “complexity” of induction programs (e.g., the number of support components) was not in itself a predictor of greater effectiveness. The authors recommend that schools take a systematic approach to supporting novice teachers, with an emphasis on the quality of mentoring, regular feedback, and tailoring support to the specific needs of teachers and the school context.

Stewart and Jansky (2022) focused their study on the challenges faced by novice teachers during their first three years of practice and analyzed data from a ten-month professional development cycle based on the so-called “Oral Inquiry Process”. The research sample consisted of seven secondary school teachers from various fields who shared their moments of uncertainty and professional exploration. The results showed that the main sources of tension were conflicts between the theory acquired during their studies and practice in a standardized school environment, as well as difficulties in building relationships with colleagues and mentors. The authors recommend that the professional development of novice teachers include space for reflection, dialogue, and experience sharing, which help teachers perceive professional uncertainty as an opportunity for growth.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) analyze how advanced education systems (e.g., Finland, Singapore, Canada) systematically support teachers through mentoring, professional development, and practice sharing. They show that high-quality induction programs are key to retaining teachers in the profession. The Czech school system can therefore draw inspiration from foreign support tools, not only for novice teachers.

In our survey, we focused primarily on the practical implementation of the induction period for novice foreign language teachers in schools, how the induction period for novice teachers was designed, the role of school management in this process, the nature of cooperation between the novice teacher and the mentor teacher, the support provided by the mentor teacher to the novice teacher, how often and in what way, and the perceived problem areas of induction in which novice teachers would need further support.

2 Research methodology

The aim of the research was:

- to find out how the induction period for novice foreign language teachers proceeded or is currently proceeding,
- to find out what problems novice teachers most often encounter and in which areas they need support,
- to identify factors that influence the retention of novice teachers in education.

For our survey, we set the main research question: How is the induction period for novice teachers implemented?

The sub-research questions were as follows:

- How systematically is the induction period planned, how is it subsequently implemented and reflected upon?
- How does the cooperation between the novice teacher and the mentor teacher work?
- Which other school employees provide support to novice teachers?
- What other support would novice teachers need during the induction period?
- Do novice teachers consider leaving the teaching profession, and if so, are the reasons related to a lack of support?
- What specific professional difficulties and needs do novice teachers experience in the first months/years of their practice?
- In which areas of their professional activity do they feel unprepared from their undergraduate studies?

The research was conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews with 11 novice foreign language teachers (English, German, and Russian) (n=11, 10 women and 1 man), graduates of master's programs in English/German/Russian language teaching for secondary schools at the Faculty of Education, Charles University, Czech Republic, who completed their undergraduate studies in 2023 or 2024 and then took up teaching positions. At the time of the research, the respondents were therefore at the end of their first or second year of induction. Although the above-mentioned studies focus on novice teachers with up to three years of experience, we adhered to the requirement set by the Czech legislative framework, i.e., up to two years from the start of teaching. The respondents taught at lower or upper secondary schools in various locations (cities and small towns) in the Central Bohemian, South Bohemian and Pilsen regions and the capital city of Prague.

The interviews were conducted between February and June 2025, either in person or via online meetings in MS Teams, depending on the respondents' preferences. The interviews were recorded with the respondents' consent. The data was evaluated using content analysis based on open coding by both researchers independently, and the identified results were then compared and summarized.

3 Research results

The results of the research show that the induction period for novice teachers is approached in very different ways in schools, ranging from the mere formal assignment of a mentor teacher to intensive cooperation between the mentor and the novice teacher, including support and reflection on the induction process by the school management. The research clearly showed that novice teachers' perception of the quality of the induction process is directly proportional to their perception of the quality of cooperation with the mentor teacher, the mentor's personal qualities and professional vision, and the school management's commitment to the successful integration of the novice teacher into all areas of the educational process.

3.1 Induction period plan and its evaluation

According to the research, one of the key weaknesses of the induction process appears to be its planning. Only 1 respondent out of a total of 11 stated that their induction period had a clearly defined plan. The others had to rely more on their own initiative or partial advice from colleagues. This respondent stated that immediately after starting work during the preparatory week, they received a detailed schedule for the induction period, which included tasks and induction goals for each month (e.g., familiarization with school documentation, familiarization with support departments, employees

responsible for individual agendas, a schedule of mutual classroom observations between the novice teacher and the mentor teacher and their reflection, a schedule of classroom observations of the novice teacher in other subjects, a schedule of classroom observations of the novice teacher by the school management, a schedule of consultations before pedagogical councils, consultations on the creation of a thematic plan, meetings to evaluate the implementation of the induction plan with the school management and mentor teacher, and much more), with more tasks in the first year and fewer in the second. This plan was discussed with the respondent at an introductory meeting attended by the school principal and the mentor teacher, and its implementation was evaluated at the end of each term in both years of induction. The respondent expressed great satisfaction with the system in place, stating that they found all the steps and procedures to be functional. This plan enabled them to acquire all the necessary knowledge and skills to perform their teaching profession at their school.

As the main advantage of the system, they highlighted the confidence it gave them: they felt supported by both their mentor and school leadership, did not have to worry about burdening others with questions, and obtained information they would not have thought to ask for but which was often essential for teaching and related activities.

This single positive experience described above by one of the respondents is in direct contrast to the statement of another respondent, who said that the induction period was not discussed with them at all and that they did not even have a mentor teacher. The remaining nine respondents stated that they were basically only assigned a mentor teacher, and therefore everything depended on the mentor's approach, commitment, and willingness to provide support to the novice teacher, that no induction plan was drawn up with them, and that everything proceeded rather spontaneously. This also influenced the way in which the induction process of novice teachers in schools was reflected upon and evaluated. If no induction plan is in place, and therefore no development goals for novice teachers are set, there is nothing to evaluate, and reflective meetings do not take place. Only two respondents reported that reflective meetings took place between the novice teacher, the mentor teacher, and the school management, in one case once at the end of the school year, in another case at the end of each term. One respondent reported that they met regularly with their mentor teacher to discuss various current issues. In other cases, respondents reported that someone occasionally asked them in the hallway or at lunch how they liked the school and whether everything was okay, but there was no formal framework for this.

3.2 Cooperation with the mentor teacher

As stipulated by the Act on Pedagogical Staff, it is the school's responsibility to assign a mentor to a novice teacher. In our survey, 10 respondents confirmed that they had been assigned a mentor, while one respondent stated that they had not been assigned

a mentor, but that two colleagues had taken it upon themselves to mentor them and that they turned to them for advice. The results presented in this section therefore reflect the responses of only 10 respondents.

Eight respondents were assigned a mentor with the same subject certification, or at least one of the subjects taught by the mentor and the novice teacher was the same; one respondent stated that their mentor teaches a different foreign language; one respondent said that their mentor teacher had completely different subject qualifications and that they did not know why they had been assigned to her, but believed it was because of their personality traits – openness, friendliness, and communicativeness. Although the respondent expressed satisfaction with the mentor, the fact that they did not have the same teaching qualifications was not an obstacle, as they felt well prepared in their field from their undergraduate education, but they would still welcome the opportunity to consult on the preparation and other subject-specific didactic issues.

The form of cooperation between the mentor and the novice teacher correlates to a large extent with the level of planning for the induction period. Only one respondent, whose induction period had a clear plan and development goals and tasks were set for each phase of induction (see above), stated that coordination meetings with the mentor teacher, reflection on the induction process, and mutual classroom observations took place regularly, and that it was also possible to meet ad hoc at any time. For the other nine respondents, support was always reactive and provided on request when the novice teacher needed something or did not know what to do. Only two respondents reported holding reflective meetings on the status of induction with the mentor teacher, possibly also in the presence of the school management.

According to respondents, support from the mentor teacher was mainly advisory in nature, with regular mutual classroom observations and reflections or joint tandem teaching being rather rare. Only two respondents said that their mentor regularly attended their lessons and that they also observed their mentor's lessons. Three respondents said that their mentor had observed their lessons, but that this was not systematic or aimed at supporting novice teachers. Others stated that classroom observations do take place at their school, but on a general level, with the school management or subject section leaders attending, but this is done as part of the normal classroom observation system at the school, and there is no specific focus on them as novice teachers.

Only two respondents mentioned regular tandem teaching with a mentor teacher, and one respondent stated that they had conducted two tandem lessons with their mentor teacher, which were planned by chance, so they did not actually bring any significant benefits.

As the respondents to our survey stated, the mentor teachers tended to provide them with only diverse technical information. When asked what they most often asked their mentor teacher, respondents gave the following answers (respondents could give

an unlimited number of answers, the number indicates how many times the item was mentioned):

- administrative activities (working with the school's information system, filling out necessary forms, including, for example, travel orders) – 9 times,
- questions about the technical running of the school (e.g., how the lunch break works, how many pages I am allowed to copy, who I should hand things in to) – 4 times,
- dealing with problems with pupils, especially disciplinary issues – 4 times,
- teaching content (what I should teach, what I should assess, how strict I should be, etc.) – 4 times,
- thematic or weekly plans – 4 times,
- who is who at school – 2 times,
- how to deal with parents – 1 time,
- what are the unwritten rules at school – 1 time.

It is clear from this overview of questions that novice teachers need much more support in the areas of administration and the day-to-day running of the school; questions about teaching content tended to relate only to the customs of the school in question. Interestingly, none of the questions concerned the teaching process as such, which corresponds to their perceived preparedness from their undergraduate studies (see below). Respondents expressed confidence in lesson planning, implementation, and reflection, with some even stating that they provide their teaching materials to mentor teachers or share them with other teachers.

Nine respondents mentioned sharing teaching materials with colleagues, but according to the respondents, the extent of sharing varies, from a well-functioning sharing system to an existing sharing option that teachers use only sporadically, with only some contributing to the system. Five respondents confirmed that teaching materials are provided to novice teachers by their mentors. The responses show that sharing practices vary across schools and that this is an area where schools could improve, especially since there are a number of suitable digital tools that facilitate sharing (for more details, see Botlík Nuc & Konečný & Rozboudová, 2024). Making sharing between novice and experienced teachers more effective would certainly bring many benefits for both sides.

In the context of establishing cooperation between novice and mentor teachers, we were also interested in what they felt was lacking in their cooperation and what they would like to see improved. The responses clearly show that novice teachers need to receive regular feedback, which is consistent with the above-mentioned research (Keese et al., 2023). Seven respondents said they would like to meet regularly with their mentor teacher, ideally once a week or every two weeks, with the frequency of meetings decreasing over time. At these meetings, they would like to set development

goals, which they would evaluate together with their mentor, discuss opportunities for improvement, and see their progress. One respondent even suggested keeping their own teaching journal and evaluating it on an ongoing basis. The need for a systematic approach was also evident in another requirement, namely regular classroom observations by the mentor teacher or any other experienced colleague and reflection on these observations, which was mentioned four times. Two respondents also emphasized that it is essential for the mentor teacher to be motivated to perform their role and not to do so only because they are forced to. Other requirements also appeared individually: the same teaching qualification; the opportunity to discuss lesson preparation; willingness to help when problems arise; open communication even when things are not going well; willingness to share teaching materials; and personal harmony between the novice and mentor teachers so that they “get along well.”

3.3 Obtaining information and support for novice teachers from other school staff

A novice teacher, especially at the very start of their professional career, needs to obtain a large amount of very specific information about the school's vision and culture, how the school operates, the rules for communicating with students, parents, and colleagues, the required principles and rules for teaching at the school, and much more. Only then can teachers work effectively and in accordance with established rules and processes.

Due to the absence of an induction plan (with one exception) that would establish a system for passing on the necessary information to novice teachers, i.e., determining who would familiarize novice teachers with what, respondents obtained information from various sources, with some searching for information independently on the school intranet and others relying more on advice from colleagues. However, all respondents agreed that they most often obtained the necessary information very spontaneously from their colleagues, especially those with whom they shared a staff room, regardless of whether the mentor teacher or anyone else shared the staff room with them. Respondents also unanimously stated that their mentor teacher (and sometimes the school management or other colleagues) offered them the opportunity to come and ask anything at any time. However, at the same time, four respondents stated in this context that although help was offered to them, they did not feel comfortable going to their mentor teacher and constantly asking questions, as they felt they were bothering and delaying their mentor teacher, even though the mentor teachers apparently did not perceive it that way. This finding suggests that the systematic provision of information to novice teachers is crucial. This will ensure that novice teachers learn everything they need to know about all the essential elements of the educational process at a given school (novice teachers often do not even know what questions to ask), and at the

same time that they will not experience negative feelings resulting from their own ignorance of the processes in place at the school, or from feelings of uncomfortable social interaction with their mentor teacher or other colleagues.

The research shows that for most respondents, school management did not play a significant role in the induction process. It was more a matter of initial interviews, occasional classroom observations, or personal interviews, which, however, were not specifically aimed at the induction of novice teachers and were more a routine practice of classroom observations and evaluation meetings between employees and the school management. Although, according to the respondents, there were no targeted interviews between the school management and the novice teacher to evaluate the induction process (again, with one exception), during which the school management could explicitly express its support, when asked whether they felt supported by the school management, all respondents answered that they did, that they felt that the management supported them and stood behind its teachers, that it accommodated them in various ways, for example by granting them concessions or helping them with their timetables, and that it supported them in conflict situations with pupils or their parents, etc.

When asked who else (apart from the mentor teacher and school management) provided respondents with support or information, most respondents said that they received the most support from their colleagues in the staff room and that they were told immediately after joining the school that they could turn to the relevant colleagues responsible for specific areas at the school – the educational advisor, school psychologist, school prevention specialist, etc. Some said that they only received a list of contacts, some said that in addition to the list, they were also told what problems or questions they could turn to them with, some were introduced to individual colleagues in person, and in only one case did a personal meeting take place with the relevant colleague, who explained their agenda to the novice teacher.

Although a novice teacher should be familiar with the system of support agendas in schools at a general level from their undergraduate training, we consider it absolutely essential that a novice teacher be familiarized in detail with these agendas in the context of the specific conditions of the school in question, not only in terms of providing information about who is responsible for what and therefore who to contact about what, but also to meet in person with the relevant staff member, who would explain their activities in detail in relation to the current needs of the school, using specific practical examples. Only in this way can a novice teacher identify potential problems or conflicts in time and initiate early intervention.

3.4 Identified problems of novice teachers

In our survey, we were also interested in what novice teachers perceive as the most difficult aspects of their profession, what questions they are still seeking answers to, and which areas of teaching they felt unprepared for in their undergraduate studies, believing that the faculty should/could have prepared them for these areas. Each respondent could provide any number of answers.

We received a wide variety of answers to the question about the most difficult aspects of the teaching profession, so it is not possible to evaluate any general trends due to the small sample size. We therefore only provide a numerical expression of how many times a given aspect was mentioned:

- objectivity of assessment – 3 times,
- communication with parents – 2 times,
- time management, balancing work and personal life – 2 times,
- confidence that I did the right thing – 2 times,
- establishing my relationship as a teacher with my students – 2 times,
- consistency in following the rules I set – 2 times,
- working with students with special educational needs – 1 time,
- motivating students to be active – 1 time,
- resolving conflict situations – 1 time,
- ensuring discipline – 1 time,
- setting appropriate goals for lessons – 1 time,
- school administration – 1 time,
- classroom management – 1 time.

However, certain trends can be identified in the responses to the question of perceived unpreparedness from undergraduate training. They felt unprepared in the areas of ensuring discipline in the classroom and resolving conflict situations, working with the class group and classroom management, and dealing with parents, which corresponds to the above-mentioned research (Česká školní inspekce – TALIS, 2018). Although our research sample is small, it confirms the areas that teacher training students also mention in reflective seminars on professional practice as some of the most difficult. It would therefore be appropriate to focus specifically on these areas in undergraduate training or to offer students practice-oriented seminars on these topics. Novice teachers perceived their unpreparedness in the following areas:

- ensuring discipline – 4 times,
- working with the group and classroom management – 4 times,
- dealing with parents – 4 times,
- resolving conflict situations – 3 times,
- differentiating requirements for students, taking into account students with special educational needs – 3 times,

- conducting class hours – 2 times,
- taking care of one's own wellbeing – 2 times,
- motivating pupils to be active – 1 time,
- compiling a thematic plan – 1 time,
- organizing extracurricular events – 1 time,
- school administration – 1 time,
- knowledge of the necessary legislation – 1 time.

None of the respondents expressed a lack of preparedness for teaching itself; on the contrary, the respondents felt most prepared for teaching in their field, i.e., in lesson planning, lesson implementation, knowledge of the field, working with textbooks, and using digital technologies in teaching. Given the low number of participants in the survey, this conclusion cannot be considered generally valid, but it can be applied to subject-specific didactic preparation at the relevant faculty or selected departments in the relevant teacher training programs. This component of the study program is perceived positively as adequate and satisfactory, while more intensive preparation would be necessary in the area of common pedagogical and psychological foundations.

3.5 Staying in the profession

We also asked respondents whether they had considered leaving the teaching profession in the past or were currently considering doing so. Five respondents said that they definitely did not want to leave the teaching profession, that they had found their calling and enjoyed it. Four respondents said that they were currently satisfied, but at the same time expressed doubts that they would remain in the profession for their entire lives, for various reasons ranging from personal interests and preferences, a desire to try something else, the complexity and demanding nature of the teaching profession, concerns about future changes in the student population, to financial remuneration. Two respondents even stated that they had seriously considered leaving the profession due to problems with student discipline or the discrepancy between their expectations and the reality at school, but ultimately remained thanks to the support of their family, friends, or colleagues in the profession.

The respondents were most motivated to remain in education by working with students and receiving feedback from them, the fact that students appreciate it when they like something, when they enjoy something or find something interesting (mentioned 9 times). Three respondents mentioned a pleasant team of colleagues and good relationships in the workplace, three respondents mentioned the meaningfulness of the work, for two respondents it was important that the work was creative and varied, and one respondent mentioned a convenient location and decent financial remuneration.

On the other hand, reasons for leaving school were mentioned only to a small extent, as most respondents (9) had either never thought about leaving school or it was not an issue they were currently dealing with. When reasons for considering leaving school were mentioned, they included low financial remuneration (3 times), the time demands of the profession – never-ending work (2 times), ensuring discipline in the classroom (2 times), negative experiences with parents, excessive administration, poor relationships within the team, and the fact that teachers are forced to teach subjects outside their area of expertise – all mentioned once.

From the reasons given for staying in or leaving the profession, it is clear that some factors are not clearly positive or negative, such as the team of colleagues or financial remuneration. It always depends on the specific context of the school or the personal expectations and preferences of the novice teacher.

Novice teachers most often recommended to other novice teachers not to be afraid to ask questions, not to take failures personally, to take care of their own well-being, to protect their free time, and to seek support from colleagues.

Conclusion

The results of the research confirm that although the induction period is enshrined in legislation, its implementation in practice remains highly inconsistent and often lacks a systematic framework, and thus its supportive potential. Although there are examples of good practice, an unstructured, informal approach prevails overall. It appears that support for novice teachers in most cases depends on the individual initiative of individuals – whether the novice teachers themselves, their mentors, or school management. The absence of a structured induction plan, insufficient methodological preparation of mentors, and a lack of reflective dialogue with mentors and/or school management represent significant barriers to the effective professional socialization of novice teachers into the school system and teaching itself.

Based on the findings of the research, it appears that the introduction of a school induction plan as part of school management, for example in the form of internal guidelines or other supporting documents that would systematically define the forms of support for novice teachers, is key. It is also necessary to ensure that mentor teachers receive methodological training so that they can effectively fulfill their role as mentors. It can be assumed that this support does not have to be provided only on school premises, but also through further training of teaching staff. Regular reflection on the induction process through interviews with school management, support for tandem teaching, and sharing of materials among colleagues also play an important role. Farrell (2024) emphasizes that reflective practice is a key tool for the professional growth of novice teachers. Based on several case studies of novice teachers, the author shows

that systematic reflection helps teachers cope with stress, build professional identity, and increase resilience to challenging situations. Our respondents, novice teachers, also perceived systematic reflection on diverse activities at school as essential.

Last but not least, it is necessary to create an environment that supports teachers' mental health and helps them cope with stressful situations associated with entering the profession. School management can also be advised not to overload novice teachers and not to assign them additional tasks beyond their teaching duties (work as a class teacher, leading clubs, organizing school events, etc.). When selecting mentor teachers, we recommend that their interest and willingness to provide support to novice teachers be taken into account, rather than relying solely on length of experience and, above all, not assigning this role merely as a formality.

In the long term, it is essential to view the support of novice teachers as part of the broader professional culture of the school, rather than as a one-off measure. As a learning organization, the school should create an environment that promotes sharing, collaboration, and reflection across the entire teaching staff. Only under these conditions can professional burnout be prevented, the professional identity of novice teachers be strengthened, and their retention in education be promoted. The results of this study can thus serve as a basis for the development of specific recommendations for schools, faculty departments, and education policymakers.

Farrell (2023) emphasizes that novice teachers often experience shock in the reality of teaching when their ideals acquired during their studies clash with the practical conditions of the school environment. He further points out that teachers are often left without support in a "sink or swim" situation and that teacher education cannot fully simulate the complex reality of school life. It follows that teacher training students should be prepared for induction and selected problems during their studies. Our findings in this regard point to certain shortcomings in undergraduate teacher training in relation to the requirements of school practice. The most frequently cited deficits – classroom management, conflict resolution with students, communication with parents, school administration, and teacher mental health and well-being – should be systematically integrated into teacher education, not only at the theoretical level, but above all through practical simulations, case studies, and more reflective practices. The linking of faculties with faculty schools and the creation of continuous support between the undergraduate and postgraduate phases of the professional development of novice teachers can also play an important role here.

Given the diversity of experiences of novice teachers and the inconsistency of induction processes, it would be desirable to conduct longitudinal research that would follow teachers' professional careers for at least five years. Such research would make it possible to identify the long-term effects of various forms of support on professional anchoring, motivation, and retention in education. Furthermore, it would be appropriate to analyze the effectiveness of specific induction strategies and examine the influence of school culture on the degree of integration of novice teachers into the team.

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