

Induction of junior faculty members of higher education institutions in Eritrea

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore how the graduate assistants (GAs) are inducted into the system and ethos of the institutions of higher education (IHE) in Eritrea. The paper serves in the purpose of creating more conducive and supportive work environment in IHE facilitating the socialization of junior faculty members to the culture, standards and system of the institutions.

Design/methodology/approach – The research adhered a combined approach of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Data were gathered through a Likert scale questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The study was conducted in seven IHE involving 165 participants.

Findings – The GAs' knowledge of job description, access to institutional information, sharing of resources, the quality of guidance and support provided, supervised teaching and feedback are discussed in detail. Results revealed that the GAs shoulder vital responsibilities but they receive poor induction at individual and institutional levels. GAs complain for lack of job description clarity and lack of transparent institutional communication at work. Holding first degree, GAs teach senior courses without any prior induction, pedagogic trainings and unsupervised. The GAs are recruited on the basis of the colleges' long-term staff development plan, but little is done.

Practical implications – Despite their academic rank, the GAs represent 64 percent of the national academic staff (ADF, 2010). Creating conducive work atmosphere for the junior faculty members in the institutions is a long-term investment on institutional capacity building and quality assurance of the institutions' performance.

Social implications – Induction of the newly recruited junior faculty members to the social, professional and the institutional ethos is a socialization process that would minimize the professional isolation and inefficiency of new recruits.

Keywords Guidance, Professional support, Access to information and resources, Duties and responsibilities, Induction

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Recruitment of newly graduated candidates as graduate assistants (GAs) in teaching in the Eritrean institutions of higher education (IHE) is very common practice. The IHE consider the recruitment as a long-term investment of institutional capacity development and as a means to relieve the country from paying massive amounts of hard currency to large numbers of expats. The recruitment of these young graduates in Eritrea is contrary to the findings by Austin (2002) that stated teaching assistants are temporarily hired to respond to seasonal departmental demands without a vision to develop them to future professors. Austin noted that as a result, less attention is given to planned conversation opportunities, feedback and guidance of career aspirations for them. However, the guidelines of the National Board for Higher Education (NBHE)[1] in Eritrea (January, 2010) indicated that the GAs are recruited on



the basis of the colleges' long-term staff development plan in "a specific field of specialization within a particular department" (p. 2). The recruitment puts challenges to the colleges to make the transition of the recruits from student life to the workplace in the IHE.

In the Eritrean IHE, GAs are bachelors (first degree holders), but practically work as fully-fledged instructors in the institutions. These newly recruited GAs are fresh graduates that require induction and close guidance to better adapt to the workforce and effectively contribute to the IHE. The paper explored the views of the senior and the junior faculty members to understand how the GAs are inducted into the system and ethos of the IHE in Eritrea. Induction refers to an organized way of introducing GAs to the rules, regulations, guidelines, culture, ethos, standards and procedures, their duties and responsibilities and expectations (Aspfors, 2012; Major and Dolly, 2003). As it is implied in Figure 1, induction program in IHE is constructive way of influencing the attitude, knowledge and values of beginning faculty and keep them on track in the workplace. As it is implied in Figure 1, induction adequately prepares the newly recruited GAs for the complex task of teaching and improves their academic skills, self-confidence, self-efficacy, enthusiasm and accountability (Potter and Hanratty, 2008; Major and Dolly, 2003).

Induction as a process of professional and institutional socialization of GAs is not an isolated incident, rather a continuous process. Induction and mentorship are inseparable elements in the continuum of professional development of the GAs in the colleges. A combination of induction and mentoring programs would play a constructive role in inducing all the professional values required for the GAs at work. Figure 1 is used to illustrate the significance of institutional support of GAs' professional development combining the principles of induction and mentoring.

The diagram is generated by the researcher to explain the significance of induction to beginning GAs in an academic institution. Metaphorically, the diagram represents an induction and mentorship ladder in IHE displaying an educational institution, its management system and all the staff members with their inputs in one way or another. The institutional setting and its management system are set up as the foundation of the ladder. This is to indicate the significance of these components to design strategic programs such as induction to create a conducive teaching and learning environment, cultivate quality manpower and render competitive services with the available resources. Induction and mentoring are the main arms in creating team spirit within IHE. Integrating induction and mentoring programs as tools to socialize junior faculty members is an effective mechanism

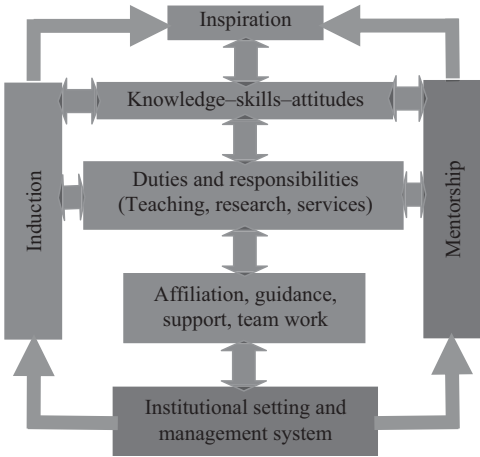


Figure 1.
Multidimensional
influences on junior
faculty members'
professional growth

to improve work quality. Motivation, inspection, recognition, feedback and other support systems for the GAs are expected at different parts of the ladder. The GAs are anticipated to go up the ladder holding and footing on the stepladders. The arrows symbolize the interdependence of the influencing elements within the academic institutions. Committed and inspired GAs are more likely to develop a sense of institutional belongingness, strive to improve their professional competency and creatively contribute to the system. The magnitude of the inspirational influence of the GAs increases when they contribute back into the system that shaped their professional development *vis-à-vis* the inspired GAs aspire to contribute inspiring inputs into the student community.

Ssempebwa *et al.* (2016) noted that the state of affairs of the early career academics (ECAs) in African colleges and universities requires serious attention of responsible leadership. The lack of proper induction and coaching of the ECAs is spawning multitude program and institutional inefficiencies. According to the researchers, the academic mediocrity of faculty and the compromised educational quality at the African colleges and universities inevitably follows the influx of inexperienced faculty to the IHE. The majority of the national academic staff at the IHE in Eritrea are GAs that require at least on-the-job short-term and further formal trainings to work as full-fledged professionals in their respective fields.

2. Methodology

The research was conducted in the seven IHE in Eritrea. These seven IHE comprise nine colleges which are servicing as the country's centers of tertiary education offering diploma and undergraduate degree programs. Three of the colleges offer masters' programs in a handful fields. The study employed a mixed approach combining qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Representatives of the leadership of the colleges, senior staffs in the departments and the GAs participated in the research. The leaders were purposefully identified for an in-depth interview; however, the senior staffs and GA participants were randomly selected from all the IHE. Representing the IHE, 165 staff members (7 deans, 25 senior staffs and 133 GAs) took part in the research.

Qualitative and quantitative information were gathered as primary data for the study. In addition, a desk review analysis was conducted with the documents of the NBHE. Therefore, the academic community in the higher education and the working documents of the institutions were the major sources of data. The quantitative data were collected through Likert scale questionnaire and guiding questions were used for the in-depth interviews. These data collection tools were developed in consultation with established researchers in education and humanities. The questionnaire was pilot-tested and ratified accordingly.

Participants had offered their full consent for the research participation. The self-administered questionnaires were distributed in the participants' workplace. Some GAs were consulted via the internet to fill the same questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered for the GAs only, but the authorities in the colleges, the senior staffs and 28 of the GAs were interviewed in their respective workplaces. The in-depth interviews were audio recorded and carefully transcribed. Complementary secondary data were collected from the NBHE office and some of the colleges. The fact that the IHE are scattered in different parts of the country, time and financial constraints were among the main challenges during the data collection. The data from the different sources are organized to answer the major research questions of the study including:

RQ1. How are the GAs inducted into the system, standards and ethos of the IHE in Eritrea?

RQ2. What are the duties and responsibilities the GAs engaged in?

The qualitative data are thematically summarized and the quantitative data are analyzed using SPSS. One-way ANOVA is used to compare between GA groups from the

colleges with respect to their views on induction and support systems at the colleges for GAs. Based on the area of relevance and administrative practices the colleges were categorized into four groups.

3. Results

This section presents the major findings of the research. The researcher used results from institutional documents, in-depth interviews and questionnaire to triangulate the analysis. The following issues, figures and tables succinctly summarize the major findings of the research. The in-depth interviews with key informants revealed the issues including:

- GAs are working as “instructors” at IHE in Eritrea.
- GAs are described as the “backbones” of the colleges in teaching.
- GAs teach specialized courses without supervision.
- Newly recruited GAs are not properly inducted and professionally supported at the IHE.
- Organizing induction programs for the beginning GAs is regarded as significantly important by the participants.
- The GAs complain for lack of transparency of relevant information at the colleges.
- Despite a huge need for professionally and hierarchically promoting the GAs, the issue is not seriously handled.
- Despite the circumstances, GAs do not have resentments for their work experiences in the graduate assistantship.

Figure 2 displays the national and expatriate staff members at the EIT with respect to their academic qualification. The report adapted from the EIT official reports of the existing staff on ground in the first semester of the 2017–2018 academic year. The expatriates are hired on contractual basis mainly Indian nationals. The bar graph shows teaching composition of the staff on ground in one institution (EIT). Learning from this report, it does not require great effort to understand the huge number of bachelors (GAs) teaching staff in the IHE at national level.

Figure 3 shows the state of job description clarity for the GAs at the colleges. Participants were asked whether the GAs have clear job description. Though there is a difference of views between the senior staff and junior staff toward the issue, in general both groups agreed that the GAs job description is not clearly specified. However, on average the

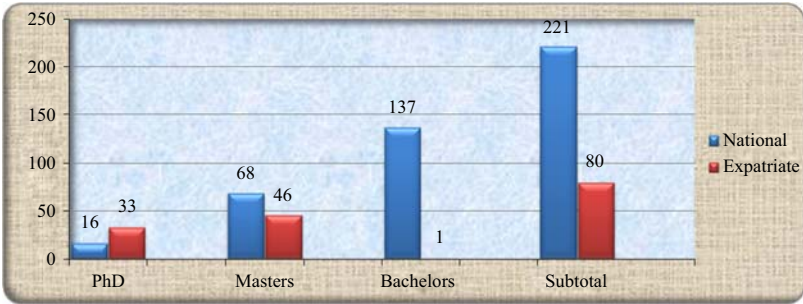


Figure 2.
Academic staff of the
Eritrea Institute of
Technology (EIT)

Source: Eritrea Institute of Technology

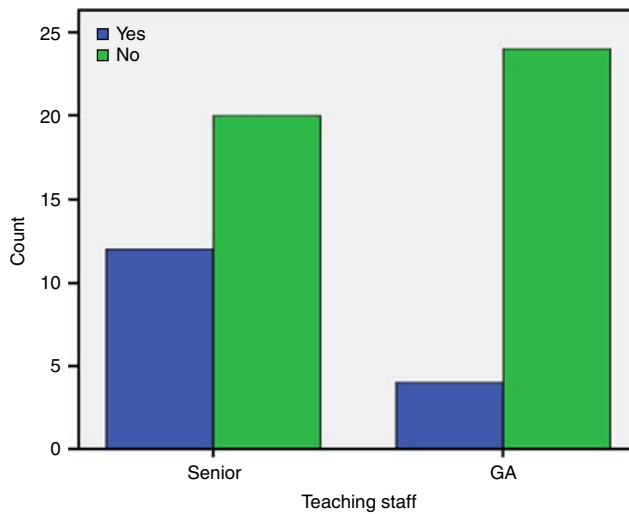


Figure 3.
GAs' job
description clarity

GAs themselves are more aware about the blurrily described role the GAs are required to play in the colleges (Figure 3).

One-way ANOVA was calculated to determine the differences of induction programs and support systems available at the colleges to professionally nurture the GAs. Table I displays the results of the comparison. *Post hoc* test has been calculated to further explore the differences between the groups.

4. Discussion

The discussion section focuses on the major themes identified from the data. Therefore, the GAs' induction is treated in light of the duties and responsibilities in which the GAs are

Scale	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
<i>Guidance</i>					
Between groups	3.647	3	1.216	2.442	0.067
Within groups	64.215	129	0.498		
Total	67.862	132			
<i>Access to information</i>					
Between groups	12.750	3	4.250	9.557	0.000
Within groups	57.367	129	0.445		
Total	70.117	132			
<i>Promotion</i>					
Between groups	1.076	3	0.359	1.554	0.204
Within groups	29.769	129	0.231		
Total	30.845	132			
<i>Experiential stimulation</i>					
Between groups	2.207	3	0.736	1.513	0.214
Within groups	62.704	129	0.486		
Total	64.911	132			

Note: *p* is significant at 0.001

Table I.
Comparison
between groups of
GAs in the IHE

actively engaged. The guidance GAs receive in the IHE in line with the tasks they are assigned for and the significance of induction for them. The paper also discusses the GAs' access to institutional information, sharing of available resources, the promotion strategies for the GAs and the GAs' experiential inspirations in the graduate assistantship position. The findings show that there is no statistically significant difference between the groups of GAs from different colleges with respect to their views on the induction and support system available for the GAs at the college with the exception of their access to information.

4.1 GAs' duties and responsibilities

The NBHE guidelines indicate that "at normal conditions" GAs are not legible to take full responsibility of an independent teaching of a course. The NBHE guidelines for recruitment (Revised February, 2008) allow GAs to teach "under exceptional circumstances [...] at the level of lower division courses and under the supervision of a senior faculty member" (p. 8). However, the context is crystal clear evidence of the gap between theory and practice of higher education management. In reality, the vast majority of teaching activity is carried out by GAs for several years without prior induction and pedagogic orientations. It is not only the academic qualification of the GAs that matters at work but also the support systems offered to them.

The question "is there lack of clear job description for the GAs?" was asked to the senior staff and the junior staffs alike. The findings show that the GAs complain about blurred job descriptions. GAs complain for being called up on to fill gaps created now and then; especially for none "benefit" activities in the departments, GAs are at the forefront" (GA-28). Surprisingly, when GAs formally ask for clarity of job description, their leaders perceive it as a sign of less commitment at work. The GAs claim that they were told by the "leaders" to "never ask such questions." The lack of clear job description can be used as an excuse for failing to do one's own again and could make the GAs rather unaccountable and less responsible. A GA noted that "I can pretend as if I did not know that it was my duty whenever I fail to accomplish my job due to lack of clear job description" (GA-12).

The GAs make paramount contribution to their respective departments in teaching the undergraduate students. The answer to one of the research questions (RQ2) revealed that they are highly involved in teaching courses and offering services. In some departments, the GAs are responsible for every task including leading the department – acting as head departments. Rena (2008) noted that it is not unanticipated fact to witness GAs taking full responsibly of course offerings in the colleges (in Eritrea). The senior staff members attempt to rationalize the phenomenon that when GAs are teaching, they are assigned to teach introductory courses. But a large number of GAs are given responsibility to teach the undergraduate students. In some departments, courses are primarily taught by GAs including specialized courses in colleges such as education and engineering. In a number of departments, inexperienced GAs teach even specialized courses independently. Taking the contribution of the GAs to the colleges in teaching into account, a dean of a college described them as "the backbones" of the colleges. On the other hand, with respect to the level of education and experience of the GAs, there is no doubt that the situation is contributing to a compromised quality of tertiary education, especially when the GAs teach senior students and more specialized courses. This situation is likely to multiply inefficiency in the colleges and beyond.

4.2 Guidance and professional support for the GAs

The GAs need psychological, moral and professional back up and guidance from the senior faculty members and the leadership to boost their professional performance. Osman and Hornsby (2016) remarked that the commitment of leadership to work for a common purpose of promoting teaching and research in IHE materializes the "necessary conversations

around teaching and learning within disciplinary contexts and [to] be a source of help or inspiration for ECAs” (p. 1848). The GAs need support to cope with their personal and professional demands at the early stage of their career development. Research indicates that social and professional isolation characterizes the major concerns of junior faculty during their early careers (Johnston and McCormack, 1997). Hardwick (2005) explained that joining the IHE as a staff is “both the best of times and the worst of times” (p. 22). The demanding, competitive, hectic campus life and the multitude roles a faculty member has to play in academic and social lives create difficulties for junior staff members to maintain a balance between the tasks at work and personal life affairs. Researchers in the area found out that setting a goal at the early stages of career.

Price and Cotten (2006) noticed that well organized on-the-job socialization for junior faculty determines the quality of their experience and the effectiveness of their contribution to the academic institutions. All groups of respondents revealed that there are no on-the-job trainings organized to foster the GAs’ teaching and research assignments. The GA participants explicitly explained that things could have been much better for them and for their institutions if effective induction mechanisms were organized at the beginning of their career. The participants indicated that there is lack of coordinated guidance and support for the junior faculty members. The guidance subscale results for the one-way ANOVA revealed that there is no statistically significant difference between the different colleges in terms of the guidance and support system they have to nurture the professional development of the GAs $F(3, 129) = 2.442; p = 0.067$. IHE give the GAs huge responsibility but fail to induce GAs to the institutional standards and beyond. The participants revealed GAs are not properly inducted into the system of the colleges. Thereby personal and institutional inefficiencies linger and spread as the IHE are the powerhouse of the educated manpower of other institutions in the country.

Guidance and direction are needed to shape the GAs’ professional career and build their confidence at work. In academia, guiding and supporting the junior faculty gives more credit to socialization of professional role than organizational role (Ortiz-Walters and Gilson, 2005). Moses (1985) remarked that:

Staff as teachers and researchers do not work in a social vacuum. Departmental morale, institutional ethos, career ambitions, interpersonal relationships, and available resources all contribute to whether the individual staff member is helped or hindered in the pursuit of [...] academic excellence. (p. 338)

The GAs need a bridging help and guidance from the seniors in handling professional demands, especially in teaching and research methodologies. A GA remarked “We are looking for seniors who can genuinely lead us along the professional journey to discover our strengths and limitations” (GA-22). The GAs asserted that new faculty members need to actively engage in group projects with senior staff members. The NBHE faculty evaluation guidelines (Revised February, 2008) stated that GAs are “expected to work very closely with a senior faculty member in preparing a detailed MA/MSc dissertation proposal which will account for the 10% weight given to the category” (p. 4). However, this is not practical and the GAs have little chance to grow professionally in research.

GAs’ active participation in interdisciplinary teamwork and professional partnership with the senior faculty members is very much missing. The GAs blamed the institutional system and working conditions in their colleges for the unsatisfactory guidance and support and described it as “little” help. They elucidated the fact that their colleges have no conducive work environment that invites faculty to work in teams. Thereby, the seniors and the GAs are not working in a complementary manner. However, the GAs remarked that there are helpful senior faculty members who provide credible guidance when approached. GAs described some of the senior staffs as willing to involve the GAs in their research projects.

The GAs characterized majority of the senior staff as “individually own good qualities” but lack commitment to work in teams. GAs explained that with the exception of few, the majority of the seniors try to keep their “fame and dignity” by keeping distance between them and the most junior staff members.

A head of department in EIT noted that though healthy teamwork spirit among faculty members is crucial, the seniors are taking neither good nor bad initiatives to influence the GAs. The senior faculty members acknowledged the fact they are not serving as role models for the GAs due to lack of institutional motivation for the faculty members. Participants indicated that with the exception of few resourceful and experienced expatriate instructors, GAs expect very little from the large number of expat staffs in the colleges. A GA noted that nearly all expatriates are from the same cultural background and they create their own folks in the colleges.

Another challenge forwarded by the participants was most of the colleges are located out of the capital. Everyone moves back from the colleges to the city after teaching the assigned course leaving little room for collegial at the IHE. However, location was not justifiable excuse because the responses of unsatisfactory interpersonal and professional relationships are similar in all colleges irrespective of the faculty’s workplace and residence location including the colleges in the capital. Tierney and Bensimon (1996) remarked that “collegial relationships are sporadic at best and intellectual conversation appears to be on the verge of extinction” (p. 128). The interviewees of the current research indicated that both interpersonal and professional communication at the colleges need nurturing. Professional harmony develops when the faculty develop a culture of team work. Induction and on-the-job training programs can play vital role in creating the spirit of team work among faculty, enhancing the GAs’ capacities and task performance in teaching and research to foster educational excellence in the IHE.

The GAs are still below the requisite of the institutions’ qualification to teach. Thus, supervising the GAs at work is beneficial not only for the colleges to keep the standards of teaching and learning process, but also for the GAs’ professional growth through constructive feedbacks. Therefore, the combination of the seniors’ teaching strategies and the GAs’ technological know-how could create an excellent blend in the form of team teaching or supervised teaching. Healthy professional relationships help junior faculty not only develop teaching and research skills but also decrease social isolation and consequentially increase job satisfaction, morale and retention (Price and Cotten, 2006).

The criteria used as indicators of staff performance are aimed at promotion, but neither adequately defined nor openly discussed (Price and Cotten, 2006). According to the NBHE (2010) scholarship guidelines, the GAs’ performance is used as one of the major criteria for selection of postgraduate study candidates (master’s). The guidelines stipulate GAs’ tasks are regularly evaluated by department heads and the NBHE; those who perform better in their assignments get priority.

Adams (2002) noted that even though teaching, research, and service in IHE “are listed as the criteria for tenure, the specific standards and weighting of them seem unclear to new faculty” (p. 7). The GAs are concerned about the unclear criteria for evaluating their research, teaching and service performances. Furthermore, GAs complained for the inadequate feedback, absence of recognition for their contribution and lack of reward. The NBHE guidelines state that every faculty’s evaluation is professionally evaluated at the students’ evaluation, peer evaluation and department heads’ evaluation. The GAs reported that there is no systematic supervision and evaluation mechanism for the GAs except for the irregular students’ evaluation. Once given a teaching task, there is no professional supervision on what/how they teach. The respondents explained that with the exception of the inconsistent usage of the students’ evaluation procedure, none of the evaluation mechanisms stated in the NBHE guidelines are applied on ground - neither departments nor NBHE practice it.

The GAs complained that their performances are evaluated in subjective ways except for the irregular students' evaluations. They are concerned not only with the inconsistency, subjectivity and procedure of the performance appraisal, but also with relevance of some items in the students' evaluation form, its purpose and significance too. According to the guidelines, students' evaluation of instructors serves two major functions: to provide feedback to the instructors to improve their teaching quality and as a source of information for curriculum revision. But the GAs said that the results of the evaluation are neither systematically summarized nor professionally kept as records for promotion or demotion related recommendations; students' evaluations are vain attempt for the sake of formality. The GAs remarked that there is no distinction between the evaluation mechanisms applied to senior faculty members and the GAs in the students' evaluation form. Huling-Austin (1992) recommended for "beginning teachers to be evaluated differently from experienced teachers because learning to teach is highly complex process that takes time to master" (p. 178).

A GA respondent indicated that the students might flatter the "instructors" for fear of failing or lower grades and "students evaluate a professor's fame than his/her performance" (GA-24). Moreover, the students associate the delight teacher's evaluation with their performance on a subject matter the teacher is teaching. A GA noted that "for instance if a student is poor at mathematics, he/she is more likely to poorly evaluate a good performing mathematics instructor" (GA-10). Another participant pointed out:

The timing of the evaluation is very short and inappropriate too. The students' evaluation form is distributed at the end of a semester to the students for two or three minutes to be filled after the class session of the course to-be-evaluated is over. Above all, the students may not have a thorough look at the evaluation questions for they might be under the pressure of exam anxiety as it is distributed in the advent of the final exam (GA-2).

However, a dean of a college remarked that though it has to be researched, there are more complaints against expatriate instructors from students than for the GAs; students evaluate GAs very positively. According to the NBHE guidelines, the appointment procedures of faculty members "at all levels" in the IHE are based on one-year probation contract. The appointment fate of the faculty is finally determined based on the faculty's one-year performance. But the reality is different as an associate dean eloquently put it "more people dismiss the colleges than the colleges do."

Although GAs are teaching like instructors because of the facts on ground in relation to lack of senior staff members in the departments, their work can be more effective when there is proper professional supervision for their tasks. In the absence of basic professional supervision and task evaluation procedures at workplaces, slight mistakes can cause dire consequences. If poor performances go unsupervised, job remains compromised and in the long run it can have an adverse impact on the institutional competence. The encouragement of the junior staff to bring their unique potentials to the colleges assists the swift bloom of scholarship in the IHE. Therefore, well-coordinated support systems can encourage the GAs to grow professionally, serve diligently and live up to the standards of the colleges. The institutional documents in the IHE such as Figure 2 indicate that the colleges largely depend on GAs and expatriate faculty to function as centers of tertiary education. One way or the other, the situation requires an intervention to ensure the professional competence and efficiency of the GAs through induction and coaching initiatives as well as other long-term plans of professional development including postgraduate education.

The literature and research findings in the area show that junior staff members invariably link their early career challenges to decreased support system at the institutions. A former GA respondent remarked that he was given a duty to conduct practical sessions in a science laboratory class on the first day of his recruitment as a GA without precautionary

advice at least on how to deal with the chemicals in the lab or some basic skills about classroom management. He said that "I unnecessarily suffered a lot [as a GA] though it would have been easier with the help of a senior faculty to show me the route" (Senior Staffs-1). It is very risky for the GAs and the students to work without inductions in the science fields, because they are dealing with chemicals and toxic substances that can cause harm without safety measures.

The importance of properly inducing the junior faculty to familiarize them with their roles and job description, the institutional culture, opportunities and challenges ahead was not questionable for the respondents. However, the deans of the colleges proclaim that departments recruit the "best" graduating students based on their grade point average (GPA) to work as GAs. The deans are convinced that the new recruits know everything about the system of the IHE without additional induction programs because they studied undergraduate studies in the same institution. Similar research findings revealed very pronounced attitude differences between senior and junior faculty with regard to the importance of induction for junior faculty members. The juniors wanted induction as a way of socialization into the culture, standards and procedures of the departments. On the contrary, the senior staff members had contradicting views considering formal induction for junior staff as time consuming and costly (Decker, 2008; Park and Ramos, 2002). The GAs and the senior staffs participants of the current research pointed out that induction is an appropriate way to clarify the duties, responsibilities and expectations of new recruits. Proper communication of relevant information in the colleges clarifies newly hired junior faculty's unrealistic expectations of professional development and facilitates institutional communiqué. A GA participant explained that as a great player does not necessarily make a great coach, scoring a high GPA may not indicate one's pedagogical ability to convey the intended message to students as an "instructor." Another GA remarked that despite the level of academic background, it is not easy to stand in front of students without the basic pedagogic knowledge.

The GAs learn the basic information regarding their duties and responsibilities as well as expectations at work informally from other colleagues in their departments who came across the same circumstances. Francis (2006) explained "employers generally do a good job at welcoming and orienting the new starts, colleges and universities, by contrast, are generally poor at preparing students for the move" (p. 88). GAs disclosed that colleges are in short supply of such support leaving the GAs to work in "swim or sink" conditions.

4.3 GAs' access to information and resources

One of the most frequently heard clichés of our time is "information is power." Transparent communication at workplace benefits both the institution and its members. Transparent communication of expectations at department and college level can positively influence the academic career and productivity of the staff members. Provision of various channels of communication and transparent information reduces uncertainty among beginning employees (uncertainty reduction theory, in Christensen, 2007). The transformational leadership theory noted that transparent communication between individuals working as a team produces better work outcomes (Bass and Avolio, 1994). Flow of information about teaching, research and various existing and expected support services for junior faculty enhances professional development and accountability (Boyden, 2000). The GAs complained for the inadequacy of the information flow about the institutional rules and regulations as well as institutional management processes and expectations.

The colleges are criticized for ambiguity of the top-down flow of information at department and college level. In relation to timely exchange of information to the faculty, the GAs blamed their leadership for sneakily acting. They complained that information is deliberately withheld, especially when it is related to postgraduate study scholarships.

It seems a habit of the college authorities and their allies to work on deadlines rushing at the last hour acting for the sake of formality. Institutional information at department and college levels are fragmented, isolated and indirect. This produces feelings of less belongingness to the institutions and their mission. One of the GAs said that “I have no idea about the mission of the institution [his college]; I simply work assuming that it is to produce more students” (GA-25).

Properly channeled information promotes the cultivation of collegial harmony among faculty members (Kanuka, 2005). In the absence of clear and transparent institutional information, employees are unable to identify and pinpoint the gaps between institutional success and failure. A state of not informed is more or less a state of misinformed. The participants noted that the delays and at times withholding of important information is not only for GAs; it is a common problem for the juniors and the senior faculty alike. One of the deans admitted that “of course there is a gray area” in relation to information flow.

However, there was a statistically significant difference between the groups of GAs from different colleges $F(3, 129), 9.557; p=0.000$ in terms of their access to institutional information and its transparency. *Post hoc* test was calculated to assess the specific differences of responses between groups of GAs from different colleges. The *post hoc* test results show that statistically significant difference between GAs from EIT complained more than the GAs from the other colleges in terms of the transparency and access to their institutional resources. The interviewees complained that institutional guidelines at the colleges are not detailed, consistent and at some point are manipulative.

As e-learning is becoming a norm of teaching-learning processes in today's academic institutions, faculty members complained that they are lagging behind with respect to the technology mediated teaching. A GA participant noted that the technological infrastructure of communications is frustrating. The staff members described the lack of fast internet connectivity in the colleges as “unjustifiable barrier.” In the words of a GA “we would like to provide our students up-to-date information in our teaching. Today, internet in IHE is a necessity, not a privilege” (GA-9). McKimm *et al* (2007) noted that colleges and universities need to introduce change and flexibility in order to cope up with the demands of the twenty-first century; otherwise they will remain marginalized.

In higher education setting, fair share of the available resources and services among the senior and the junior staff matters. The interviewees were happy with fair distribution of the limited available recourses and services at the colleges. The interviewees were convinced that there is shortage, not sharing problem of resources at the colleges. However, they underlined the lack of coordination and inefficient management systems of the resources. One of the GAs described people in charge of resources in the colleges as “good store keepers.” GAs complained that the computers and other equipment get nearly outdated while locked in store and yet the faculty have acute shortage of computer facilities at work. But a discrepancy was noticed between the opinions of the interviewees and the questionnaire respondents with regard to fair sharing of resources and services to some degree. The questionnaire respondents told a different story in which 75 percent of them disagreed with the idea that there is fair allocation of resources and utilization of services in the colleges. Some long serving staff at the EIT still seem to have long-lasting memories of marginalization and discrimination between GAs and the senior staff members with regard to sharing resources and services.

4.4 Promoting the GAs into a higher qualification

The quality improvement in IHE is linked to the empowerment and encouragement of faculty members to maximize their unique and potential skills to individually and collectively contribute to the system. It is common sense that the dynamism of human

behavior is energized, directed and maintained through motivation. Rena (2006) noted "The human resource development strategy pursued by the Eritrean government is in line with the human capital approach" (p. 78). The promotion and professional growth become the consequential outcomes (Luna and Cullen, 1995). The African Development Fund (2010) assessment report reflected on the serious weaknesses of human capital in the academic manpower of Eritrean IHE that desperately need improvement. In view of the current staffing situation of the IHE, creating all possible options of staff development with respect to the mass of GAs appears to be a priority. The IHE Scholarship Guidelines remarked "The IHE should aggressively look for possible sources of scholarships" (p. 2). There is a significant need to reduce the colleges' dependence on importing expatriate instructors in mass by building the colleges' capacity to run by locals with postgraduate qualifications.

Fuller *et al.* (2008) stated that in academics the current junior faculty members are tomorrow's leaders. Therefore, retaining professionally equipped junior faculty is groundwork for the future of the IHE. The majority of the GAs have unshakeable determination for their professional growth. According to the senior faculty explanations, GA is a staff in transition, but keeping the young graduates as GAs for decades is rather a wastage of time and opportunities for them and the institutions. The result of the comparison revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the responses of GAs from different colleges with regard to their unsatisfied need for academic promotion $F(3, 129) = 1.554; p = 0.204$.

Academic profession is a function of professional growth; otherwise, undue career stagnation is not the characteristic of a healthy, dynamic IHE. Therefore, the answer for one of the research questions "Is there a need for the colleges to upgrade their GAs into a higher position?" is crystal clear because the GAs are teaching senior courses and their competency need to be built. The findings from the promotion subscale of the research revealed that there is no statistically significant different between the GAs of different colleges in terms of their need for promotion. Importing expatriate instructors every semester on a contractual basis is a significant problem concerning to manpower at the colleges. In addition to retaining and motivating the senior Eritreans, the problem of professionally trained human capital at the IHE can be alleviated only by promoting and providing opportunities for the junior staff.

In the competitive twenty-first century, the IHE cannot withstand their challenges ignoring the fact that the GAs are the ones expected to shoulder the responsibility of assuming role of the aging national staff and to replace the contractually hired mass of expatriate teaching staff. One of the interviewee noted that "if the expatriate faculty are called upon to fill gaps, importing them cannot fill any gap rather creates a vicious cycle of gap filling." The GAs are the future intellectuals expected to fill the gap and expedite the contribution of the IHE to the society at large. Therefore, promoting the GAs into a higher rank through all supportive means to shift from the import to exit strategy with respect to the large number of expatriate staff is a noble option to make a difference in the human capital of the IHE in Eritrea. The IHE have to use the large number of expatriates to build their internal capacity in terms of manpower. Otherwise the colleges may remain overseas internship training centers for less trained expatriates who never sleep surfing for a better job elsewhere while in the Eritrean IHE.

4.5 GAs' experiential inspiration in the graduate assistantship position

Consistent empirical reports show that junior faculty members attribute their experience of overburden and stress to the multiple demands at work (Austin, 2002). In line with the research findings, the GAs complained for the challenges they face as novice "instructors" and working as "instruments to the senior staffs" (GA-11). Park and Ramos (2002) studied the

experiences of GAs at Lancaster University. The researchers found a number of evidences supporting the idea that GAs are viewed and treated as “the donkeys in the department” due to the burden they carry and incomparable benefits they receive. One of the GA participants pointed out “we are just the mules of the department” (p. 51). Eltringham (2008) was GA simultaneously working and studying at Villanova University. Eltringham described the double modality situation of being a GA and a student at the same time as “schizophrenic.” GAs described the graduate assistantship position as a legitimate ground for the seniors to exploit them where there is “more work than it is worth” (Price and Cotton, p. 12).

The GAs were asked if they are inspired or frustrated from their work experience in the IHE and the responses were with mixed attitudes. A GA who worked in one of the colleges for several years commented that he learned nothing from his work experience as a GA, except “campus politics.” McGregor’s Theory of Y Managers (in Bolden *et al.*, 2003) remarked the fact that practically shaped GAs through induction and coaching have a tendency to exercise self-direction and self-control to achieve organizational objectives. Professional and collegial interconnectedness facilitates the clarity of the institutional mission, reinforce teamwork spirit and ensures effectiveness at individual and team levels. Consequently, they remain “connected to colleagues and common purpose, a connection to something larger than self” (Kinjerski and Skrypnik, 2006, p. 280).

There was no statistically significant difference among the GAs from different colleges in terms of their views toward their experiences working as GAs $F(3, 129) = 1.513; p = 0.214$. Despite their challenges at the workplaces, the GAs did not report regret working for the graduate assistantship. The GAs have positive and resilient attitude in interpreting their work experience. Sometimes the GAs are the source of inspiration to many senior faculty and administration – they are young and visionaries. The GAs have the zeal and energy to hammer their vision and goals. But if the dream of promotion in any form takes time to become a reality, their ambitions naturally wane.

Educators describe inspiration and modeling in education as the key tests of good leadership. Understandably, a number of factors beyond the leadership capacity might have contributed to the current undesirable “backlog of GAs” in the colleges working as “instructors.” The major challenge is that with the exception of few departments all the IHE in Eritrean currently offer undergraduate programs only. The GAs do not have the opportunity to study while they are helping a senior faculty in their department. By the same token, when overseas’ master’s or PhD opportunities are offered too late, pursuing the study becomes “none academic demand” – being personal than institutional demand.

The GAs noted that they try to secure worldwide competitive scholarships through painstaking hard work. However, the GAs blame the IHE for hindering the process instead of being proud of the winners and facilitate the case. The excuses might “kill the intelligence of brilliant citizens” said a GA. Hurting the psychology of the GAs by preventing to pursue their professional career dream through the scholarships might make them wilds in which sometimes they will benefit neither the institutions nor themselves. When the GAs are denied the scholarship by their own institutions, the success becomes wastage and a source of frustration. However, they will never stop from attempting to achieve it at any cost or risk and take drastic decisions of the extent to absconding only for this reason.

5. Conclusion

The colleges are expected to play leading role in finding solution to multitude challenges in the society. GAs are the future intellectuals expected to contribute and expedite this role of the institutions and the society at large. Practically, the GAs in the colleges are working as full-fledged instructors. However, taking the academic qualification of the GAs, the responsibility given to the GAs as well as the guidance and support provided to them in the Eritrean IHE into account, the GAs are below the requisite of their current task. Unless the

colleges work to upgrade the GAs' academic qualification, the situation will multiply inefficiency in the colleges, which has a multiplier effect in the society. Induction and on-the-job training programs play vital role in enhancing the GAs' capacities, task performance in teaching and research, to create the spirit of team work among faculty and to foster educational excellence in the IHE. Participants noted that transparent flow of institutional communication can serve as a buffer for the GAs to withstand burnouts at work and minimize the effects of the tantalizing temptations to abscond for "better opportunities." The interpersonal and professional communication between junior and senior faculty members at the IHE needs nurturing. In view of the current staffing situation of the IHE, creating all possible options of staff development with respect to the mass of GAs appears to be a priority. The situation requires an intervention to ensure the professional competence and efficiency of the GAs through induction and coaching initiatives as well as other long-term plans of professional development including postgraduate education.

6. Recommendations

- The colleges need to organize short-term induction programs to properly introduce and socialize new recruits into the system of the IHE.
- Proper induction for GAs would minimize confusion, professional isolation and fosters collegiality increasing personal and institutional effectiveness in the IHE.
- In the Eritrean IHE, induction would enhance clarity of unrealistic expectations of new recruits.
- Establishing at least master's program for majority of the departments would create a chance to promote the GAs' academic rank and minimize the probability of absconding of staff on study leave.

Note

1. NBHE: National Board for Higher education at the time of data collection, currently known as National Higher Education and Research Institution.

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