



NATHEP

PART TWO

**University case studies of
contextualised induction**

CHAPTER FIVE

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA



University of Venda



A Needs-Based Induction Programme for New Academics at the University of Venda

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Introduction

Our case study focuses on our journey to conceptualise and implement a needs-based induction (NBI) programme at the University of Venda (UNIVEN). We reflect on our participation in the New Academics Transitioning into Higher Education Project (NATHEP), an initiative we viewed to be significant in supporting new academics in transitioning into higher education. Our engagement with NATHEP was instrumental in shaping the NBI induction programme. Our case study examines the institution type and induction policies that guide and underpin induction at UNIVEN. We describe the steps we undertook to conceptualise and implement our NBI programme and its key features, guided by the NATHEP CRITicAL Framework. Lastly, we explore the lessons we have learned from the NATHEP journey from 2018–2022, reflecting on the value of the initiative.

Our university: location and institution type

The University of Venda is one of the small comprehensive universities in South Africa located in the rural town of Thohoyandou in the Limpopo Province. It was established in 1982 to serve the former Venda Bantustan of the Republic of Venda (UNIVEN History Book, 2012). As part of the transformation agenda of South African higher education (HE), UNIVEN was mandated to transform into a comprehensive university and was expected to offer a wide range of vocational and academic programmes. This would ensure that students had access to a much wider range of programmes leading to certificate and diploma qualifications in work-related fields (Department of Education, 2004). Our observation was that the mandate of the Department of Higher Education (DHET) had not been adequately addressed as the institution was still grappling with ensuring that technikon-type programmes were made available for students. This was attributed to the fact that unlike other universities whose mergers involved technikons, UNIVEN was not merged with any university of technology or technikon. The challenges in developing these programmes included a shortage of qualified academics with appropriate skills; and the university's location made it difficult to attract diverse and experienced personnel in key positions due to its remoteness to the rest of South Africa (Ndebele, Muhur & Nkonki, 2016).

The 2021–2025 Strategic Plan and its implications

for our NBI programme

UNIVEN had adopted a new Strategic Plan (2021–2025) which unlike the former (2016–2020) plan incorporated student-centeredness and entrepreneurial thrusts in its comprehensive mandate. This also necessitated the adoption of the new vision and mission statements of UNIVEN:

New Vision: A leading university in engaged scholarship

New Mission Statement: The University of Venda is committed to producing graduates who are locally relevant and globally competitive

This new strategic plan was intended to respond simultaneously to the university's local rurality (Chigbu, 2013) and to broader global contexts. Central to the achievements and realisation of the 2021–2025 Strategic Plan were the academics themselves, which included new academics (NAs) or new university teachers (NUTs). Although the former plan highlighted that academics/lecturers identified inadequate academic support for both students and staff, resulting in low academic success for students, the new 2021–2025 strategic plan was skewed towards student academic support and silent on staff academic support. This startling lack of strategic focus on academic support meant that the new plan overlooked the central role that academics play and the need to invest in their professional development.

Given this, the strategic plan had major implications for our NBI programme, which should align with the university's strategic direction. This was crucial as our NBI programme needed to be agile and to adapt to a variety of HE dynamics and landscapes, and most importantly, it needed to be sensitive to the diverse nature of NAs that were attracted to our institution. Such an undertaking would mean that the way we engaged with NAs should be a journey that necessitated adaptation and agility by us as academic developers (AD), while remaining fit for purpose. Again, it was imperative that our NBI programme stressed the need to enable NAs or NUTs to adapt, to be agile and responsive to the entrepreneurial context they were transitioning into. Therefore, the induction had to be relevant and contextualised.

Induction policies at UNIVEN

Policy on Orientation and Induction Programmes

In the past, and before our NATHEP journey, induction of NAs at UNIVEN was underpinned by UNIVEN's Policy on Orientation and Induction Programmes

(UNIVEN, 2011). This policy has since been amended and is now ratified as the Policy on On-Boarding, Orientation and Induction Programmes. In the original policy, the induction of NA staff was aimed at integrating new staff members into the University to enable them to adapt to their jobs quickly in a positive and supportive working environment and to ensure that academics are able to obtain a good understanding of how the organisation works, including its principles, values and objectives. Moreover, the policy describes induction as “the process of integrating new staff members to the University by giving them the necessary support to enable them to quickly adapt to the workplace culture” (UNIVEN, 2011, p.3). It further stipulates that “every new staff member is obliged to attend the orientation session which was organised by the Organisational Development and Training Unit of the HR department” (UNIVEN, 2011, p.3). This would mean that any logistical arrangements pertaining to induction at UNIVEN were exclusively administered and organised by the Organisational Development and Training Unit of the HR department.

Initially, there was no involvement from the Centre for Higher Education Teaching and Learning (CHETL)’s Academic Development Unit (ADU), in setting up dates on which induction for the NAs would be held. Moreover, although the policy prescribes that induction should happen within the first two months of NAs’ appointment, we observed that such induction was never done within the prescribed time frame. It could be argued that HR-led induction adopted a corporate programme, reinforcing the neoliberal agenda in which the provision of engaged and collaborative induction was never considered critical in the lives of NAs. We attributed this to the fact that AD work was still misunderstood by many at UNIVEN, and a profound understanding of what induction of NAs entailed was still lacking from many of the university’s major stakeholders. This was also shown in the academic structures of the university, which position the AD work, role, and posts as administrative and not as academic or university teaching-related, a challenge experienced by academics in other university settings as well (Marhaya et al., 2017; Kensington-Miller et al., 2015; Boud & Brew, 2013; Harland & Staniforth, 2008; Green & Little, 2013; Kinash & Wood, 2013; Quinn, 2012; Rowland et al., 1998). Our observation was that induction at UNIVEN was held once, during the third quarter of the academic year. As a result, NAs would have started with their academic duties of teaching and ensuring that students learn without being inducted. It could be argued that such inductions were envisioned yet not enacted in the policy. We contended that such induction programmes were for compliance purposes only as they appeared too generic, lacking in theoretical basis or underpinnings, and with no follow-up sessions held with the academics.

Policy on On-Boarding, Orientation, and Induction Programmes

The amended On-Boarding, Orientation, and Induction Programmes policy stipulated that new or returning employees must attend the academic induction sub-programme within the first three months of joining the University (UNIVEN,

2020). This would mean that these academics could be inducted in their first, second or even in the third month of joining the university, and having taught or engaged students. This was not aligned with the conceptualised NBI, which seeks to induct new academics/teachers immediately after being employed before they can start teaching students.

It was simultaneously exciting and worrisome to note that the policy further stipulated that “the Centre for Higher Education Teaching and Learning must facilitate a three-day, new academic, staff-induction programme called a ‘New Academic Preparation Programme’” (UNIVEN, 2020, p.13). One major challenge came from the realisation that the three days stipulated in the policy were insufficient for the robust engagement and interaction that is supposed to occur during the induction process. In the past, three days were usually spent orienting new staff members to familiarise themselves with UNIVEN processes, which resulted in AD practitioners presenting PowerPoint slides rather than engaging with NAs. At the end of the three days, there was no follow-up on how the NAs were exercising their agential role in their new environment, how they related to the different structures within the university, and whether they could adapt to the culture at UNIVEN. Moreover, as key stakeholders, agents or partners, students were not involved in the induction of NAs. On this basis, we argued that the three days apportioned to our centre, CHETL, were inadequate to cover all aspects of teaching and learning; hence, the NBI programme was developed as a five-day induction process.

NATHEP journey: steps towards realisation of our induction programme

The engagement during NATHEP allowed us to reimagine an induction programme for our university. This proved we could move from our comfort zones and conceptualise a context-responsive, theoretically underpinned induction programme for our institution. This meant that we needed to reflect deeply on how NAs were inducted into our institution, and what could be done differently from what we observed was a “compliance” or “tick-box” induction programme. With renewed and reinforced agency, we embarked on a journey of conceptualising and implementing our NBI programme. This necessitated that from 2018 to 2022, we had to pull away from the human resources (HR) or organisational development (OD) department induction processes and logistical arrangements.

1st Step: pulling out of HR tentacles – disrupting induction status quo within the University of Venda

As noted in this case study, initially, HR was the main driver of the induction program for new staff members at UNIVEN given that the Organisational Development and

Training Unit (ODTU) was responsible for funding the induction. That essentially meant that all the logistical arrangements and the drafting of the induction programme were the responsibility of ODTU. Considering this, one of the critical steps we undertook was separating core teaching and learning-related activities from HR activities and organising to engage the NAs once they assumed their contractual obligations at the university. This was achieved through ongoing discussions and maintaining a close relationship with the HR OD Unit. This involved having several meetings coupled with various correspondences in trying to sell our ideas on how we would like our induction at UNIVEN to be done, which would not be for compliance purposes but to benefit the university's key core business, which is teaching and learning. Another key aspect of the discussion with HR personnel was the quest to transform induction from an event into a process-oriented induction hosted in the Academic Development Unit (ADU).

Once an understanding was reached with HR, we planned key features that should constitute our context-responsive needs-based induction (NBI) programme for NAs (see Figure 24 in the section below titled "Transformative features of UNIVEN induction"). It is worth noting that our pragmatic approach; the philosophy of induction of new academics and the conceptualisation of the NBI programme was based on the DHET's (2017) National Framework for Enhancing Academics as University Teachers. This framework states the following fundamental principles that underpin what we were trying to tentatively propose:

- The need to recognise that teaching can only be advanced when the discipline and the people involved identify and address their own teaching development needs.
- Ensuring that any professional development (PD) initiative is not imposed on any individual academic but must be undertaken by the person concerned. The emphasis is on academic agency, and when they take ownership and agency of what they need to improve on as academics and take responsibility for their own development, real change can be realised.
- University teachers know their own limitations through their own reflections and collaborative interaction in terms of what and where they need to improve as teachers, as opposed to having such learning needs prescribed to them.

As AD practitioners, we drew from Pierce and Hunsanker (1996), Ravhuhali et al. (2015a), and Ravhuhali et al. (2015b), in advocating for professional development (PD) of academics, by academics, and for academics, hence the conceptualisation of a context-responsive, theoretically underpinned induction programme for our institution. Moreover, we understood that the new academic staff needed to be introduced to the university structure and culture so that they can exercise their agency to advance the mission and vision of the university.

We also believed in and advocated for induction programmes that were developed with more attention paid to the individual needs of academics/teachers both on a professional and personal level (Eisenschmidt et al., 2013), and the needs of their students; hence we developed a needs-based induction (NBI) programme. Based on our reflections, such induction sessions organised and led by HR OD were simply reduced to employee relations sessions at the expense of the advancement of teaching and learning pedagogy, as well as positioning and strengthening NAs' agency to be innovative and transformative as university teachers. It was on this basis that through the capacitation from NATHEP, we realised the need to exercise our agency by thinking of new ways in which NAs at our institution could be inducted. One such way was understanding how NAs could be part of knowledge co-creation in their induction process to contribute meaningfully to the core businesses of the institution.

2nd Step: the birth of our NBI programme and its transformative features

The rationale to conceptualise the NBI programme of induction arose from the need to disrupt ways in which induction was being conducted in our institution as we felt uncomfortable doing induction that we regarded as a "box-ticking" event meant for compliance purposes. Moreover, during the various NATHEP sessions, we delved deeper into our own existing induction programme, learned good practices from other institutions, and felt challenged to come up with a context-sensitive induction programme. Our strength in the NBI programme lies in the fact that once we conceptualised the plan, we implemented it from 2019 until this year (2024), and we have observed and reflected on practice and in practice to enhance our programme thus far. We gained understanding of what worked and what did not and how to address challenges.

The conceptualised NBI programme has four key features that are critical in ensuring that it is transformative while at the same time being agile and adaptable to our changing contexts, our university context, as well as the changing HE and national contexts. We use transformative features to highlight how NATHEP transformed our thinking about how we induct NAs and how such transformative thinking resulted in the conceptualisation of the NBI programme. The four key features, shown in Figure 24 opposite, are a multifocal theoretical framework, a needs analysis questionnaire (NAQ), student inclusion, and the NBI programme as a process and not simply an event.

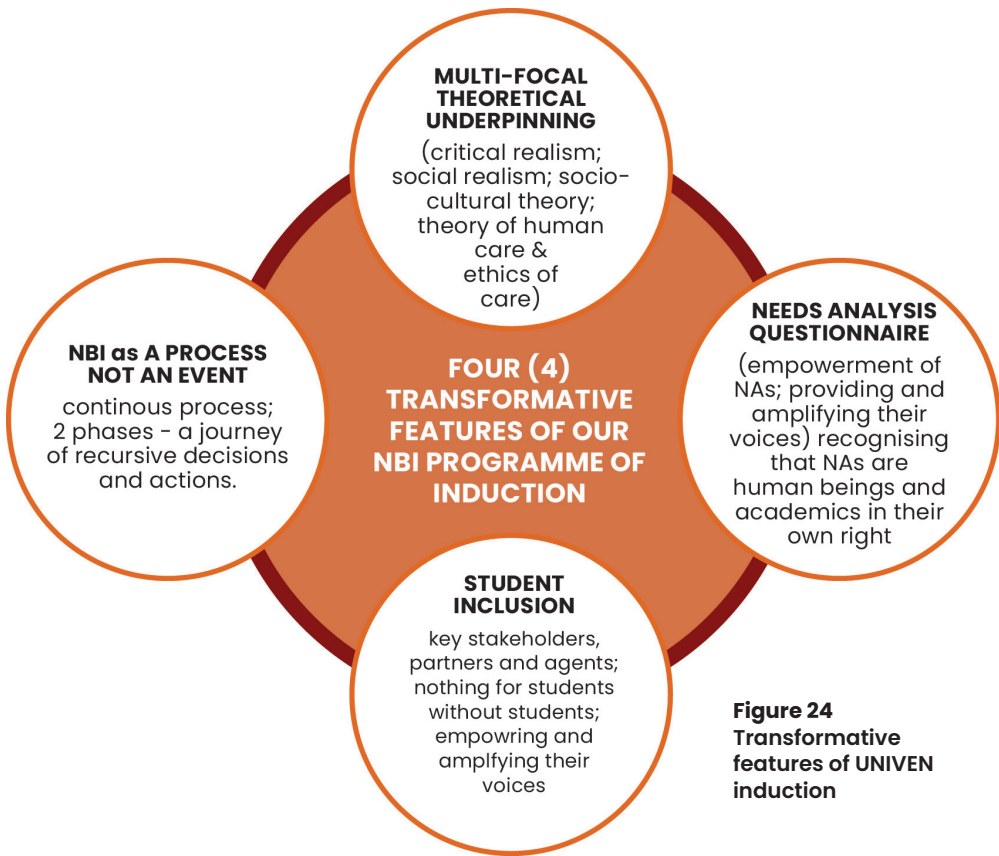


Figure 24
Transformative features of UNIVEN induction

1st feature: multifocal theoretical framework

One key feature of the NBI programme is that it is underpinned by a multi-focal theoretical framework. As shown in Figure 25 below, the NBI incorporates a theory of change, which embraces Bhaskar’s (1975) critical realism, seven scalar being (Bhaskar, 2010) and Archer’s social realist theory (Archer, 2010, 2003), with its focus on ensuring that NAs are able to understand the structural, cultural and agential settings they might encounter in their new environment. This was to ensure that NAs were able to engage deeply and interrogate their own positioning as well as the other levels within which they engage, and how the structure and culture may be enabling or constraining their roles as university teachers.

We utilised Bhaskar’s seven scalar being to provide a platform for new academics to be active agents, able to “‘act back on their world’ by reflecting on their own concerns, commitments, and projects in HE” (Behari-Leak, 2017, p.488). Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (1994) provides some elements of social adaptability, which entail that the environment where people live is a source of development for both the personalities and characteristics of a person. This complies with Watson’s

theory of human care (2007), which provided us, AD practitioners and NAs, with a platform to question ourselves as to what it means to be human and to care for our diverse student population. For us, the theory of human care encases the values of ubuntu and humanity, which should ideally remain central to what we do when engaging with NAs, with a view that NAs, in turn, will take that care with them to their classes; hence we developed a needs analysis questionnaire (NAQ) for each of our induction processes.

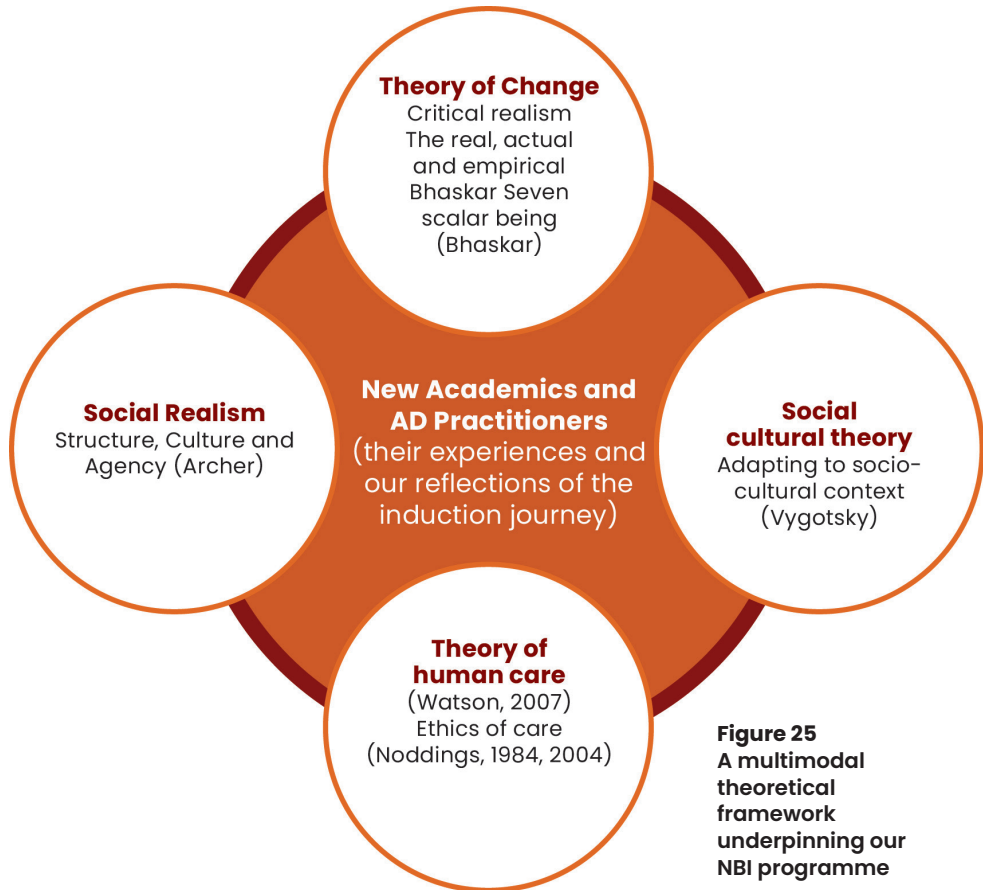


Figure 25
A multimodal theoretical framework underpinning our NBI programme

**CENTRE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING AND LEARNING ACADEMIC
DEVELOPMENT UNIT INDUCTION PROGRAMME 09th – 13th September 2024 –
NEEDS ANALYSIS SURVEY**

Good day, colleagues.

Kindly complete the short survey provided below. This is to assist us in customising the presentations to your needs. Please email back your responses to nndweleni.mathase@univen.ac.za or hlayisani.mboweni@univen.ac.za or Khuliso.muthivhi@univen.ac.za

Questions	Responses
Faculty	
Department	
How many years have you been a university teacher?	
How long have you been a university teacher at UNIVEN?	
What is exciting about being a university teacher/academic/lecturer at UNIVEN?	
On average, how many students do you have per module?	
What challenges have you encountered thus far as a teacher at UNIVEN?	
Have you ever attended an induction programme before? If YES , did you find the workshop helpful in terms of improving your teaching skills at university? If NO , Provide a reason	
Are you well conversant with online teaching and or remote teaching? If YES , what is your experience in relation to online teaching?	
What are your challenges regarding online teaching? If you were to choose between face-to-face and online teaching, which one would you choose as your preferred mode? And Why?	
What are your professional development needs with regard to Teaching and Learning (e.g. curriculum development, assessment, teaching and learning, etc.)?	
What are your expectations from this upcoming induction workshop/ programme?	
What are your views about the inclusion of students in the induction of new academics such as you? Explain fully	

Figure 26 A needs analysis questionnaire (NAQ)

<p>Please add any other information that will be helpful to us.</p> <p>NB: Your answers to these questions are very important to us and may not be used for any other purpose than preparation for our induction</p> <p style="text-align: center;">THANK YOU FOR YOUR RESPONSE</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Kind regards</p>	
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2nd feature: needs analysis questionnaire

In preparation for the induction, a needs analysis questionnaire, as shown in Figure 26 above, is sent three or four weeks before the start of the workshop. The main aim of the NAQ as a preparatory and engagement tool for the induction, is to solicit the professional needs of the NAs and to provide key background information pertaining to their teaching and learning experiences in HE institutions (Ravhuhali & Mboweni-Pataka, 2022). It is equally important to note that as AD practitioners, we are mindful of the fact that being an NA (new in the profession and new in the context) can be a daunting proposition to many staff. Our induction programme is therefore tailored to support NA staff members during such a trying transition through the NAQ. Drawing from our own experiences, we understand that the initial few months of employment at a new institution are generally the most trying. The NAQ is meant to avoid persistent failure to take into consideration the needs of individual academics or university teachers when they are inducted (King et al., 2018).

We acknowledge that the NAs might not necessarily know exactly what their professional development needs are. The NAQ provides the information which helps us prepare the induction accordingly. From the NAQ's responses, we are able to identify the major areas where the NAs require support. These include issues around curriculum development, teaching and learning, assessment, and relevant teaching and learning policies. Apart from these, other areas that are identified by NAs include large classes, teaching diverse students, and integrating within UNIVEN as an institution. This, in turn, helps us to prepare accordingly so that we design the programme towards the NAs needs (see programme structure in Appendix A). In our induction programme, we also consider key aspects of decoloniality, where we engage NAs on issues such as curriculum (re)formation (or transformation) looking into various discourses such as the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), decolonisation, Africanisation, academisation, internationalisation and globalisation. This is done to balance their needs with issues they may not necessarily consider in the NAQs. It is for this reason that we utilise various pedagogies learned at NATHEP to encourage NAs to delve deeper into conversation with themselves and their colleagues to interrogate their beliefs, assumptions and thoughts around those discourses.

3rd feature: inclusion of students in induction (key agents, stakeholders, partners, and knowledge co-creators)

The inclusion of students in an induction process is one of the first to have ever been done in our university. We argue for student inclusion in the induction of new academics as a way of advancing and enhancing epistemic justice, collaborative knowledge-building, knowledge-sharing, and knowledge co-creation, as well as ensuring inclusive participation for all, particularly students (Ravhuhali et al., 2022, p.95). Our quest to include students in induction is drawn from the University of Venda Strategic Plan 2021-2025, which stipulates:

“Our students are at the centre of our Strategic Plan, and their success remains our performance yardstick. The University of Venda aims to promote excellence in teaching and learning through a variety of academic programmes, enhanced learning experiences, and instructional approaches as well as academic support strategies that are intended to address the diverse learning needs, interests, and aspirations of students. The University strives to ensure a co-creation of knowledge that shifts students and community groups from being knowledge consumers to knowledge producers and become partners in problem-solving” (University of Venda Strategic Plan, 2021-2025, p.11).

The quest to include students is aimed at disrupting cultural tendencies and the longstanding normalised status quo (we elaborate below in our fourth feature of the programme), of not seeing students as key stakeholders who can contribute to how NAs are inducted (Ravhuhali et al., 2022). Other notable scholars, such as Mbembe (2015) and Sophia and Stein (2020), have also advocated for the inclusion of students so that their voices are heard by providing them with platforms to share their overall experiences on how they were previously lectured or taught and what their expectations from NAs are.

It is on this basis that the NBI programme includes both undergraduate and graduate students. Among them are students who are living with disabilities or differently abled students. The rationale for student inclusion is that the induction of NAs is meant to capacitate them to understand the students they will be teaching. We contend that since induction is meant to capacitate NAs, anything planned for students will only be successful if such students are involved in the planning and the conceptualising. Student inclusion in the NBI involves debriefing sessions with selected students two weeks before the induction and seeking questions they would like to ask their lecturers (Ravhuhali et al., 2022). The most appealing or intriguing questions from the listed questions are selected and included in our needs analysis questionnaire (NAQ) form designed for our induction programme. During the induction session, students are involved in round-table discussions and make presentations on the challenges they face and on their expectations of NAs (Ravhuhali et al., 2022).

Moreover, the inclusion of the student component is based on our beliefs and arguments that if we are to do anything right for our students, it certainly makes sense to involve them rather than assuming that they cannot contribute meaningfully to the overall induction. Scholars such as De Bie et al. (2019), Cook-Sather et al. (2018), O'Shea (2018), Sophia and Stein (2020), Bovill (2014), Matthews (2016), Cameron and Woods (2016), Behari-Leak (2017) and Warner (2014), have advocated for student partnership and collaborations in teaching and learning spaces. This is seen as a platform to advance and enhance epistemic justice as well as ensure inclusive participation for all, where students are not understood as key agents and stakeholders or partners in the entire teaching and learning journey. It is on this basis that our NBI programme involves students as key agents and stakeholders in learning and teaching matters.

4th feature: NBI programme – induction as a process, not an event

Wong (2004) argues that teachers who are hired by institutions of learning and teaching are teachers who are envisaged to be key figures to support the next generations of students, and their success can be ensured if they are provided with a comprehensive, coherent professional development programme. It is on this basis that the NBI programme is tailored to engage the NAs beyond the actual induction period either through informal follow-up conversations or meet-and-greet sessions during the follow-up induction sessions. As argued elsewhere in this case study, one of the key aspects of the NBI was that NAs are engaged as soon as they are employed and have become part of the university teaching staff. This is mainly because the appointment of NAs at UNIVEN happens throughout the academic year. In cases where the NAs are employed towards the end of the year, such as October and November, we engage them at the beginning of the following year. This is a great shift from the past when the HR OD would wait for a few NAs to be employed, and then provide induction for them. This kind of structural or cultural practice is used to render the induction of NAs an event rather than a process. Again, the process itself was in contravention of the university policy on induction, which states that NAs need to be inducted within two months of employment. Drawing from Fullan (2001), we also argued that induction was not about having just one special event, meeting or activity; rather, its success lies in understanding and sustaining a process that entails a journey of recursive decisions and actions.

As a way of enhancing and strengthening the NBI process, we have transformed the induction sessions from a mere PowerPoint presentation to adopting various pedagogies that we have learned through the NATHEP project. The pedagogies learned from NATHEP are the pedagogy of being and becoming (ontological), the pedagogy of engagement (methodological), the pedagogy of knowledge generation (epistemology), and the pedagogy of transformation (current discourse such as decoloniality, academisation, and Africanisation, fourth industrial revolution), as a way of also modelling such practices for NAs (NATHEP, 2018). This was done considering the NATHEP CRITicAl Framework as a lens that shapes the induction programme as we try to meet the needs of NAs (see Table 1).

Key features of the induction (NATHEP CRITICAL Framework)	Topics responding to the feature in the induction programme	The rationale for the session	NAs identified needs in the NAQ
Conceptual and Re-centred Pedagogy of Engagement (Methodological); Pedagogy of Knowledge generation (Epistemology)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity in (and) knowledge: Whose knowledge matters the most? • Re-Thinking curriculum transformation 	Providing a voice to the historically voiceless and recognizing that knowledge comes from many different sources.	Curriculum development identified as a need through a needs analysis
Contextual Pedagogy of Being and Becoming (Ontological); Pedagogy of Transformation	UNIVEN context: histories, present and future	Exposing NAs and engaging them on issues relating to HE in South Africa and abroad how injustices of the past have influenced and shaped what the university of Venda has become.	University policies and other frameworks to fully comply with the standards set by the university.
Responsive Pedagogy of Engagement (Methodological)	Promoting student's centeredness through diverse teaching and learning methods Teaching students living with disabilities	Exploring how NAs as university teachers can respond to the strategic plan of UNIVEN and produce graduates that are relevant to societal needs and possess the 21 st -century skills.	Principles of teaching and learning and what is expected from them as new members of the UNIVEN community
Reflexive Pedagogy of Engagement (Methodological)	Using students' evaluation of teaching as a reflective tool	Promoting reflexivity and reflection in NAs' teaching through teaching evaluations (student, self ,and peer evaluations)	Learning how to be an excellent university teacher
Theorised praxis Authentic Pedagogy of Being and Becoming (Ontological)	Being and becoming an academic at UNIVEN	Promoting ontology, identity, and an idea of self in university as well as enhancing agential powers as university teachers	Confidence curiosity, continuous learner, ability to empower, leadership, team player and innovative
Relevant Pedagogy of Engagement (Methodological)	Students' experiences Who are our students? Understanding students in late adolescence and early adulthood	Promoting diversity in classroom	Learn how to interact and engage better with students

Table 1 Mapping the NBI programme to the NATHEP CRITICAL Framework

Reflexivity on the NATHEP journey so far: 2018–2022

Archer (2003) argues that the interplay between our internal concerns and our social and environmental contexts is shaped by what she calls a “mode of reflexivity”. A “mode of reflexivity” is the way we think about our thinking, our “inner conversations”, which then shape our actions. Our NATHEP journey as AD practitioners and how we experienced the needs-based induction (NBI) programme is captured in Figure 27, which shows how through the NATHEP experience we transformed the NBI programme to be relevant and responsive to our university context, while also bearing in mind the broader contexts within which HE is located. Most importantly it provides our reflective position as AD practitioners in sharing what can be viewed as the “below the iceberg” or simply the source of tension between academic-led induction and HR-led induction in our institution. These include who the NAs are, and the challenges we encountered as we implemented the NBI programme of induction.

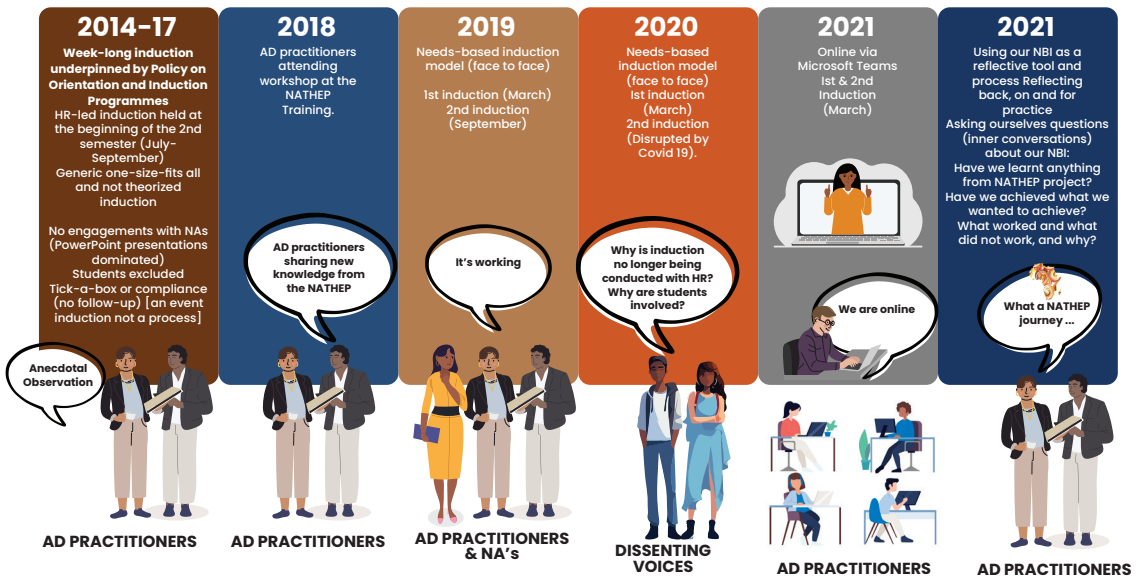


Figure 27 Our NATHEP journey and our needs-based induction programme

Fathoming NAs at UNIVEN: who are they?

As we embarked on our journey, we discovered that the concept of “new academics” (NAs) is as complex as it is reflexive and contextual. Boughey and McKenna (2021, p.122) highlight that academics in HE come from different contexts and, in most cases, tend to take up positions in different kinds of institutions to the one they had previously worked. Furthermore, such NAs bring with them assumptions and beliefs

they held in their previous contexts, and often experience their new contexts as unwelcoming, and feel unable to fit in (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). It is against this backdrop that our understanding of “newness” in relation to the NAs is four-fold. We were influenced by the findings we drew from our NAQ responses as well as the engagements we had with academics during induction processes. Notwithstanding that, we would like to caution that our understanding and description of NAs should not in any way be generalised as the trend in all HE, but is based solely on our NAQ responses.

Firstly, NAs are those academics employed to teach in university soon after completion of their studies in either Master’s or PhD, or any required qualification for the position; they have met the required employment requirements for the position and have never taught before. These NAs are new to the environment (structure), which is a university, and are “new” in the teaching profession at the university.

Secondly, some NAs have been university teachers for a while but in another institution of higher learning. These academics are new in their current employment, structural or environmental settings but have some experience as university teachers. Such NAs are new to the structural and cultural orientations, especially ways of doing things, which are largely influenced by the new context in which they find themselves.

Thirdly, our concept of NAs also refers to those who are new in the HE landscape but were initially attached to industries or private institutions other than universities or colleges. This category of academics are used to how things were and are done in the industries where they previously worked, but lack an understanding of the teaching and learning practices relevant to university settings.

Fourthly, there are academics who are part of the New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP). These academics are regarded as highly capable scholars who are recruited in South African universities. Such NAs who are part of the nGAP are appointed into permanent posts or positions firmly factored into long-term staffing plans right from the outset, and appointments are governed by contracts which clearly spell out the expectations, obligations, roles, and responsibilities of the “employing university and of the newly appointed academic” (SSAUF, 2015, p.1).

We assert that even though NAs are new, their newness does not necessarily mean that they are new in the HE sectors or to teaching and learning. Our assumptions about new academics coming to our induction are that they have curiosity and certain beliefs and expectations of what they would be inducted on, whether such would be met or not.

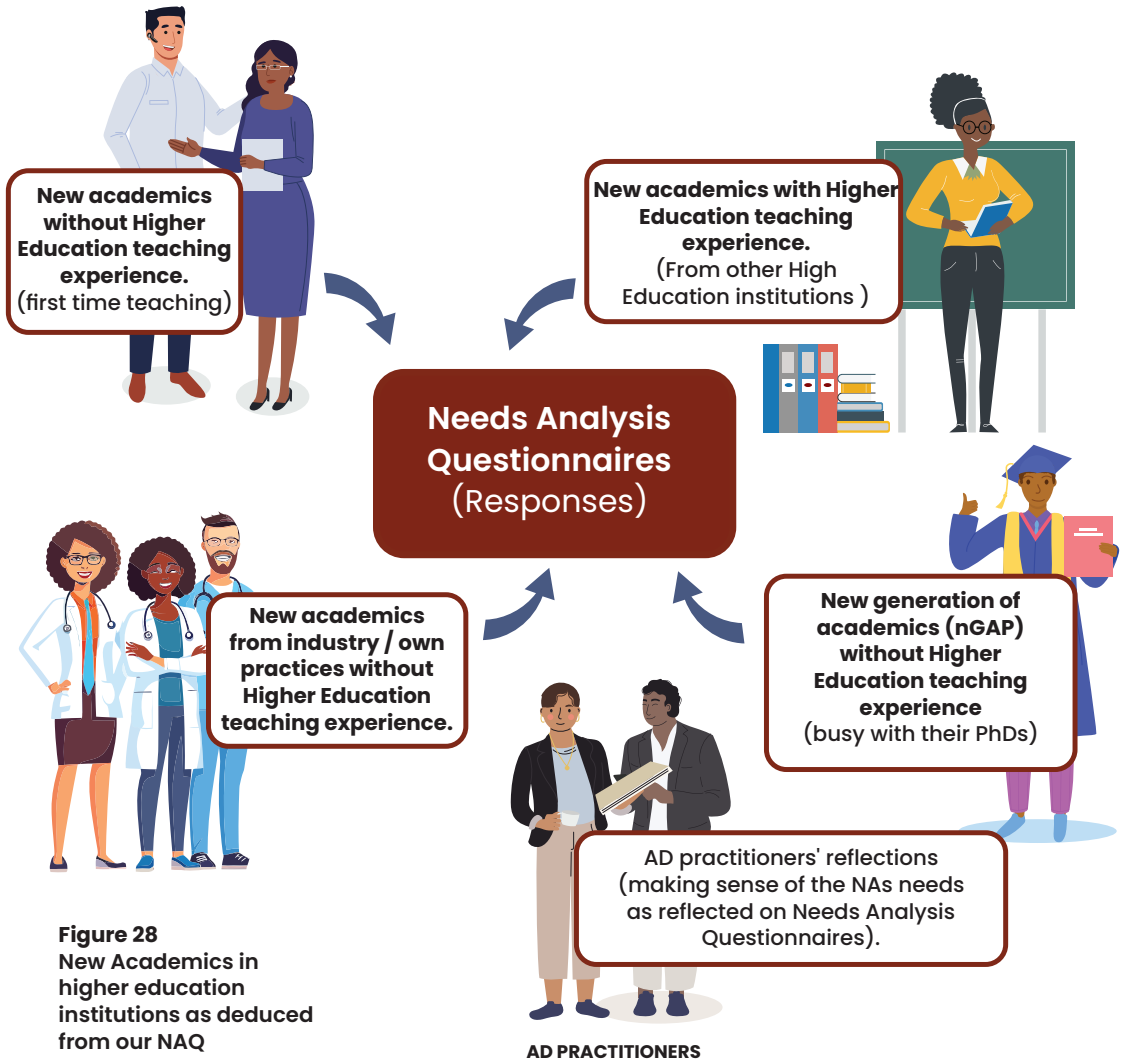


Figure 28
New Academics in higher education institutions as deduced from our NAQ

Weathering storms through dissenting voices in pursuit and implementation of our NBI programme

As we have indicated earlier in this chapter, several consultations were done with key stakeholders before commencing with the NBI programme. Nevertheless, we encountered numerous challenges emanating from dissenting voices. The dissenting voices have persisted since 2019 during the first induction that was done separately from HR, even though we constantly communicated with relevant stakeholders about when we intended to host the induction. The imperative concerning who should lead induction for new academics between the HR and an AD unit persists, with the

constant perception that AD practitioners are regarded as rogue academics whose quest is to move induction away from traditional mechanisms by introducing radical changes concerning ways through which NAs should be inducted. This is also fuelled by the perceptions and views that the NBI is a breakaway, which is informed by a selfish desire not to work in collaboration with other stakeholders and directorates. As a result, many concerns regarding our new practices concerning the induction programme were raised. This, we perceive, might expose induction to issues of institutional enunciation.

We would like to argue that the dissenting voices or “doubting Thomases” are affected by how people in our institution were conditioned and socialised into the induction systems before new learning attributed to NATHEP structures (in this case, HR) and key agents (head of organisational department). Furthermore, people’s cultural orientation has embraced them to such an extent that it has now become “business as usual” concerning the induction of new academics. We assume that agents in HR and within our teaching and learning centre felt threatened and alienated by the new ways of doing the induction of NAs. Though anecdotally, we perceive that they felt alienated by the new powers and privileges, as well as the culture brought in by the agency as proclaimed AD practitioners in terms of how we now understand induction. As AD practitioners, we intend to engage higher structure and the DVC Academic further to exemplify our resolve to have an ADU-led induction that focuses mainly on teaching- and learning-related matters and involves engaging NAs soon after their appointment by the institution. Apart from that, we plan to host a university-wide webinar through which we will be able to share our ideas on the NBI programme as a way of using it to reflect further and refine it better.

Adaptability and agility during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic caught us unprepared and disrupted the foundation we had laid in 2019, necessitating us to reflect on what we saw working and not working for the NBI programme. Our institution was unprepared, and this impacted how we communicated with the NAs and, most importantly, how we dealt with the second phase of the induction. As shown in the figure above detailing our NATHEP journey, we could do the first phase of our six-month induction in March, but were not able to complete the second part due to structural (connectivity infrastructure and organisation), cultural (the rurality and rural-based as well as the disadvantaged HBU pedagogy), and agential (whose powers is it to provide induction programme to NAs and ensure that things do work despite unforeseen circumstances) constraints. Although the pandemic was challenging, it presented us with an opportunity to review, revise, refresh, and renew certain critical aspects concerning the NBI programme.

One such important factor is that of adaptability and agility that we use to engage our NAs about being and becoming an academic at the University of Venda, drawing from the chameleon metaphor by Kensington-Miller, Renc-Roe and Morón-García (2015). We now understand that as much as the NAs need to adapt to and forego their past cultural experiences and beliefs about working at a university with its contextual enablers and constraints, we also need to do the same. Drawing from Vygotsky (1994), the context of our university is an environment critical for shaping and reshaping our being, including our personalities and characteristics as persons. The NAs and ourselves, as human beings, are always conscious of varying cultural contexts (Vygotsky, 1979) and are therefore capable of changing and adapting accordingly to any given environment we might find ourselves in. Those structural and cultural mechanisms provide change, adaptability, agility, and actual engagement with the NBI programme and ensure our reflection of the whole induction process.

Summing up the NATHEP journey

With the knowledge and new learning gained from our NATHEP journey, which began in 2018, as well as the good practices learned from other participating institutions, we are currently implementing our NBI programme. Central to our NBI programme is how well we can reflect in and on practice as AD practitioners and be innovative, agile, and adaptable to the dynamics of current times. Through the NATHEP project, we were able to identify our positions and reignite our agency to organise the induction in consultation with, but not led by the HR department. It would be prudent to mention that the HR-related induction is still happening, and it only covers HR-related matters and introduces NAs to various other stakeholders and directorates within the university.

In our first iteration toward a transformed induction programme relevant to our context, we developed a programme that focused on the process of professional development rather than a once-off event held later in the year long after staff were initially employed. As we have argued elsewhere in this case study, such a practice was consistent merely as compliance or as a box-ticking exercise given that by the time induction was conducted, the majority of academics would have been in class, teaching and assessing their learners. By exercising our agency through our learning shaped during our NATHEP participation, the induction programme is now conducted as early as February or March and, most importantly, at any time during the year as and when an NA joins the university. Although one could argue that having more than one induction session in an academic year may require a lot of resources that we may not necessarily have, during the 2022 academic year, we conducted three induction sessions with three NAs cohorts with limited human capacity. Another key aspect which legitimises our tenacity to work closely with NAs as they navigate their journey of becoming UNIVEN teachers has been

the introduction of a second part or phase of our induction. This is conducted in the sixth month after our first induction session as part of a catch-up or follow-up session. During the follow-up session, NAs share good teaching practices related to what they learned in the first phase of the induction, as well as some challenges they encountered in their journey as teachers at UNIVEN. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020–2022, we only managed to conduct the first part or phase of induction online via Microsoft Teams.

It is also worth noting that looking at how NATHEP has positively influenced us, we can identify four critical aspects that changed how we view and facilitate induction. Firstly, the need to forsake compliance or tick-box induction by making sure that the induction is theoretically underpinned and that such induction is key to any NAs in our institution, is understood as a process and not an event, and is inclusive of students as key agents and stakeholders in the learning and teaching agenda. Secondly, the use of pedagogies as outlined in Table 1 (Mapping our NBI programme to the NATHEP CRITicAl Framework), which include, amongst other things, a pedagogy of being and becoming (ontological), a pedagogy of engagement (methodological), a pedagogy of knowledge generation (epistemology), and a pedagogy of transformation (current discourse such as decoloniality, academisation, Africanisation, fourth industrial revolution, etc.), during induction as a way of also developing such practices for NAs to use in their own classrooms or lecture halls. Thirdly, there is a need to believe in ourselves as AD practitioners as that enhances our agential properties and ensures that we feel uncomfortable in our comfort zones when inducting our NAs. Fourthly, there is a need to legitimise our beliefs of the NBI programme as transformative and progressive, and such legitimisation needs to be cordially shared further with those who are sceptical of its relevance and application. Though we have not undertaken research to determine the impact of the NBI on teaching practices and students' learning, we believe that innovations such as the inclusion of students positively impact student learning. This is shown in the following comments drawn from some of the evaluation questionnaires, which also formed part of the article extracted from this case study.

It was useful as it indicates the expectations students have for us, where we, as academics, can improve in our teaching practices, and how we can understand and relate well with them. (NA23)

It is a good idea because we can understand their expectations. (NA6)

Yes, it is useful. I believe that the inclusion of students not only helps students to gain knowledge of their new academics, but new academics can gain more knowledge on students' expectations, experience, and behaviour. (NA26)

Amplifying students' voices and placing them as key stakeholders in teaching and learning-related matters. (NA23) (Ravhuhali et al.,2022).

These comments, as reflected on the induction evaluation reports, provide some glimpses of how the induction is experienced by NAs.

Conclusion

As we have noted throughout this case study, at our university, just like other South African universities, the HR department has always been responsible for organising the induction of NAs. Through our participation in NATHEP, we have realised that for induction to be effective at UNIVEN, we need to disrupt the status quo and change this narrative. This led us to conceptualise an ADU-led NBI process-orientated and theoretically underpinned programme responsive to the needs of academics in which students were included as key partners and co-creators of knowledge. The NBI programme ensures that NAs are inducted as soon as they are appointed to avoid structural and cultural shock, which may determine their attrition. This is critical given that UNIVEN is a rural-based university, which means that it often struggles to recruit and retain academic staff. During our induction process, the NAs are provided with a platform to reflect deeply on themselves and better understand their students and their new context. This is made possible by utilising the pedagogies learnt from the NATHEP project, as well as responding and aligning our NBI programme to the NATHEP CRITicAL Framework. Through Bhaskar's (1975), critical realism and Margaret Archer's (2010; 2003), social realism as theoretical lenses, NAs are provided with opportunities to think deeply and interrogate themselves through the seven scalars (Bhaskar, 2010), and how the university's structure and culture may act as an enabler or constraint to their agency. Again, Vygotsky's (1994), sociocultural theory allows NAs to contemplate UNIVEN as a place for holistic development despite its geographical location. Watson's (2007), theory of human care helps us embed the spirit of ubuntu and care towards NAs and our students. The NATHEP journey enabled us to realise that with the changes happening in HE spaces, there is also a great need to be bold in transforming the induction programme, bearing in mind that academic success can be achieved when the needs of both academics and students are catered for.
