

**CHALLENGES AND SUPPORT FOR NOVICE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS DURING
INITIAL YEARS OF TEACHING**

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**UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS
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**CHALLENGES AND SUPPORT FOR NOVICE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
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ABSTRACT

The initial years of a teacher's career can determine their sustainability within the field of education. This research aims to investigate the challenges faced by the English Language novice teachers and the support received by the novice teachers to overcome the challenges. Moreover, this research also investigated how far teacher education prepares novice teachers in facing the challenges encountered in the first three years of the teaching profession. This research has adopted a mixed-method research design in which the data for the questionnaire were collected from 80 novice teachers and interviews from 5 novice teachers. The results indicated that the most frequent challenges encountered by the novice teachers were (1) workload challenges, (2) instructional challenges, and (3) social status and identity challenges. The results also showed that the most frequent support received by novice teachers was collegial support. In terms of teacher education, the novice teachers indicated that they faced challenges to apply the knowledge gained and the most applicable skills they have learned are developing tests and classroom management.



ABSTRAK

Tahun awal karier guru dapat menentukan kelestarian mereka dalam bidang pendidikan. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyiasat cabaran yang dihadapi oleh guru novice Bahasa Inggeris dan sokongan yang diperlukan oleh guru-guru baru untuk mengatasi cabaran. Selain itu, kajian ini juga menyiasat sejauh mana pendidikan guru menyediakan guru baru dalam menghadapi cabaran yang dihadapi dalam tempoh tiga tahun pertama setelah menceburi dalam bidang perguruan. Tinjauan ini telah menggunakan reka bentuk penyelidikan kaedah campuran di mana data untuk soal selidik dikumpulkan dari 80 orang guru baru dan borang wawancara dari 5 orang guru baru. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa cabaran yang paling kerap ditempuh oleh guru-guru baru adalah (1) cabaran beban kerja, (2) cabaran pengajaran dan (3) cabaran status dan identiti sosial. Hasilnya juga menunjukkan bahawa sokongan yang paling kerap diperlukan oleh guru-guru baru adalah rakan sekerja mereka. Dari segi pendidikan guru, guru-guru baru menunjukkan bahawa mereka menghadapi cabaran untuk menerapkan pengetahuan yang diperoleh tetapi menghargai ilmu seperti penghasilan soalan ujian dan pengurusan kelas yang kerap digunakan.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MBMMBI	Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia dan Memperkukuh Bahasa Inggeris Upholding Malay Language and Strengthening English Language
TESL	Teaching English as Second Language
SITC	Sultan Idris Training College
UPSI	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris
PISMP	The Bachelor of Training Program
MTS	Malaysian Teaching Standard
SPSS	Statistical Packages for The Social Science
KPD	Teaching, Technology, and Assessment
MCO	Movement Control Order



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

In Malaysia, our educational system has been witnessing some drastic changes and reforms. Moving into the new millennium, the Ministry of Education has been working on some serious and promising educational reforms mainly by constructing a quality education blueprint and policy complementary to the current requirements, needs, and urgency.

Sofiah, Khaliza, and Rozi (2016) mentioned that the fourth shift in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 was set to focus on generating high-quality



teachers who are dedicated to contributing to the improvement of the Malaysian image in the world economic scenario through educational transformation. Since the teachers are considered to play a fundamental role in enhancing the status of a nation, the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2015 (2015) report states that the ministry will only select the finest candidates into the system to guarantee that the teaching profession becomes a respected career and highly regarded (Malaysian Education Blueprint as cited in Noreadyu, Hamidah, & Mahaliza, 2016).

Since the demands and necessity of generating quality teachers increases, therefore the expectations of teachers' skills and knowledge have increased as well. In the process of ensuring the expected quality of teachers is produced, a high target has to be set for the candidates to fulfill to enter the teaching institutes. Besides, the teacher preparation program for the pre-service teachers has to be at high standards as well. Syaiful, Rosnidar, and Hassan (2017) highlighted that the steps taken to transform teaching into the profession of choice are by enforcing the standards for entry into teacher preparation program and also enhancing the professional development and the effectiveness of pre-service teachers.

From the language perspective, one of the prominent reconstructions of policy made by the Ministry of Education is by shifting and allocating more focus on our second language which is the English Language. The introduction of the policy of Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia dan Memperkukuh Bahasa Inggeris, Upholding Malay Language and Strengthening English Language (MBMMBI) stresses the importance of maintaining knowledge in the Malay Language and also the need of





polishing knowledge in the English Language. According to Hamidah, Farita, and Ilyas (2014), the reconstruction of policy made is mainly because the competencies in the languages are different. This policy enables Malaysia to have its people skilled in more than one language. Being able to master and communicate in more than one language is vital especially in Malaysia since the people are of different cultures and ethnic groups.

The English Language teachers are deemed to play a vital role in ensuring the success of the plans and policies introduced by the Ministry of Education. The English Language teachers are required to play their part as significant agents by delivering appropriate knowledge adhering to the guidance in the plans established. According to Farhana and Islam (2018), the performances of the students in the English language, which is taught as a compulsory subject, are determined by the role of the English teachers. Katitia (2015) reinforced that despite the effectiveness of the curriculum, facilities, and teaching, the teachers are the ones who make a difference in preparing the learners.

As it is known, teacher education trains novice teachers to be well-prepared in various aspects. The novice teachers gain essential knowledge regarding the subject matter to transfer it efficiently to the students via teacher education. Besides, teacher education creates a platform for novice teachers to create platforms to learn and be critical by utilizing pedagogical theories. The pedagogical theory includes the philosophical, sociological, and psychological considerations that would enable the teachers to have a sound basis for practicing the teaching skills in the classroom





(Nikose, 2013). On top of that, professional skills are inculcated among teachers to assist their continuous growth in the teaching profession. The knowledge and skills obtained by novice teachers demand them to be a good teacher and to have good characteristics in teaching to support and create a good education (Ani Septiani, Raynesa Emiliyasi, & Agus Rofii, 2019).

Hence, today's language teachers must think critically and reflect on the knowledge gained from four years of teacher education to support effective teaching in the classroom. The high expectations of the teacher's knowledge and skills will lead novice teachers to encounter various challenges during their initial years of teaching. According to Karatas and Karaman (2013), expectations of teachers' knowledge and skills have increased and novice teachers, in particular, are likely to face adaptation problems during their initial years.

1.1 Background of Study

Teaching is not all about teachers standing in front of the class, delivering their lesson, providing tasks, and finally transmitting knowledge to the pupils. As stated in Ayua (2017), teaching is more than just knowledge of the subject matter. In the 21st century teaching and learning, teachers are required to multitask by not only delivering the knowledge of the subject matter but also incorporating the necessary values and principles for the development of the pupils' minds and potential. Good and effective teaching is a mixture of both and even more in the series of academic principles and





practices on the round table of knowledge, understanding, memory, and wisdom (Ayua, 2017).

In this context, effective teaching for novice teachers depends heavily on how well they can constantly change and learn to adapt themselves to a collective working environment. According to Tang (2013), novice teachers enter the teaching environment with a collective environment in which they have patterns of interaction relying on the culture and politics of the school, individual characteristics, and the needs of the students. Moreover, effective teaching also requires novice teachers to modify and update their existing knowledge to cater to the pupils in their school environment.



Unfortunately, effective teaching is hard to achieve because the teaching profession can be considered a stressful and complex profession. According to Gavish and Friedman (2010), teaching has often been described as one of the most stressful and exhausting of all professions. Apart from fulfilling their prime role which is to unleash the pupils' best potentialities, teachers are required to put a great amount of effort to accomplish the non-instructional duties at the same time. Hasani and Zainuddin (2012), reinforced that teaching is among one of the professions which report the highest level of work-related stress.

The failure in practicing effective teaching due to the challenges encountered in the initial years will lead novice teachers to stress. Novice teachers, in particular, are likely to face unique difficulties linked to the concerns and adaptation problems that





emerge during the initial years of teaching (Karatas & Karaman, 2013). In the study by Dias-Lacy and Guirguis (2017), the major sources leading to stress for the novice teachers during the first year of teaching have been summarised into three categories such as the lack of support from other teachers and administrations, curriculum challenges, and time management and discipline challenges. The findings suggested that the requirement for support in the first year of teaching is extremely high.

Novice teachers will encounter stress and the lack of support to overcome it will eventually lead them to feel burnout and to drop-out of the teaching profession in their initial years. Teaching has always been a stressful occupation, but it is commonly accepted that in the last decade teaching has become more demanding than ever, with the term 'burnout' becoming more applicable to teaching than any other occupational field (Farber, 2000).

Maslach (1993) has defined burnout as a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, which can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity. Gavish and Friedman (2010) pointed out that burnout is caused by the long-term experience of emotionally damaging situations. The constant feeling of burnout will finally cause novice teachers to drop-out of the teaching profession in their early years. At this point, the novice teachers need support to survive in the teaching profession. Without practical and applicable support, new teachers are burning out at a faster rate, are unable to cope with the daily stress and pressures, and eventually end up leaving the classroom (Joiner & Edwards, 2008).





The constant feel of burnout might force the novice teachers to quit the teaching profession at the initial stages. In the survey conducted by Karsentin and Collin (2013), teacher drop-out is defined as a premature departure from the teaching profession, whether voluntary or not. From this perspective, novice teachers, not the senior teachers, are the ones who are most often leave the job. Based on the data obtained, 77% of drop-out teachers indicated the main difficulty of drop-out teachers is the excessive workload while 80% of drop-out teachers indicated that too much work to be done at home. It can be seen that the senior teachers have enough skills and experience to handle the excessive workload compared to the novice teachers who often quit.

According to Joiner and Edwards (2008), novice teachers or new teachers are the biggest number of teachers leaving the field, and their reasons for quitting the field varies. Commonly named reasons are: lack of instructional support, lack of emotional support, feeling of being isolated from colleagues, unrealistic expectations of what classroom environment includes, inadequate and poorly timed professional development, no support or induction program, no formative observations and feedback, and ineffective school climate and culture. It has to be noted that the lack of support highlighted above pertains to both university-based and school-based support. There has to be a balance between the support received by the novice teachers to prevent them from quitting the teaching profession.

The research findings of Struyven and Vanthournout (2014), who highlighted five overreaching motives for exit attrition such as job satisfaction and relations with students, school management and support, workload, future prospect, and relations with



parents. The researches above show that novice teachers need different forms of support due to the challenges they encounter in the initial years of teaching. The keyword such as “administrations”, “curriculum”, “time”, “discipline”, “relation”, and also “workload” clearly indicates the types of challenges the novice teacher are exposed to within the teaching environment.

Considering the complexity of the teaching profession, it is doubtlessly crucial for novice teachers to be aware of the challenges in their initial years of teaching. All the challenges encountered by the novice teachers will influence both their early and later days of the teaching career, so they need to take into consideration the types of support available. Otherwise, the novice teachers might not sustain themselves in the teaching profession for a long duration.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The transition phase of novice teachers is fundamental since the novice teachers tend to establish long-lasting pedagogical habits and make critical decisions regarding their long-term engagement in the teaching profession during this phase. Beginning teachers’ transition from pre-service education to professional practice is often ‘unsettling’ because there is no gradual induction into the teaching profession (Ozturk & Yildirim, 2013). Unfortunately, novice teachers are likely to struggle in the transition phase which makes it hard for them to adapt themselves to the working environment.



The research conducted by Fantilli and Mcdougall (2009) suggested that it is crucial to conduct researches in terms of novice teachers since it has been identified that 40-50 % of novice teachers quit their jobs in the first seven years of a teaching career. Besides, the findings highlighted that more than half of teachers quit their job, especially in the initial four years. Here, it can be seen that the initial few years of teaching experience play a huge part in determining the novice teachers' engagement in the teaching profession.

The expectation of novice teachers to perform as efficiently as the senior teachers can be considered as the most difficult adaptation at the initial stages. From their first day, novice teachers are expected to have sufficient knowledge of the school organization. As stated in Gavish and Friedman (2010), novice teachers too are under pressure to function as “organizational person” and to perform a similar responsibility as their colleagues. While struggling to adapt themselves in the teaching profession, the expectations placed on the novice teachers to carry out their roles and tasks as experienced teachers will disrupt their adaptation process in their initial years of teaching. There seems to be a common understanding that what is required from an experienced teacher is also required by a novice teacher (Ozturk & Yildirim, 2013).

The difference in experience when the novice teachers were in their pre-service teaching and full-time service is one more thing that keeps the novice teachers from adapting to the teaching profession. As stated by Struyven & Vanthournout (2014), in most cases, students are primarily focused on their role as classroom teachers during internships, thus providing them with concrete experiences with job satisfaction and





student relationship. Similarly, the workload for learners is regulated during internships to maximize the learning experience. When the novice teachers enter the school environment as professional teachers, they are given both instructional and non-instructional duties to complete unlike during teaching practicum in which they are only assigned with instructional duties such as to teach and test the pupils.

At this point, the struggle of the novice teachers to adapt themselves to the teaching profession will eventually expose them to various challenges in their early years. If the novice teachers fail to address these challenges by adopting suitable support, it could lead to problems such as losing the desire and passion for teaching and also failing to progress in terms of professional development in the teaching field. In the research conducted by Veenman (1984), the researcher listed out the most frequently cited 24 problems faced by novice teachers. Among the 24 problems, the five most commonly reported are classroom management, student motivation, handling differences among students, grading student work, and dealing with students' parents.

Veenman (1984) also argues that it is common for beginning teachers to feel that they have limited knowledge of the subject matter they were teaching. Besides, the researcher also refers to the transition as a real shock that occurs when novice teachers' ideals formed during pre-service training are collapsed by the harsh realities of everyday classroom life. The findings above reinforced that struggles in the transition phase do lead the novice teachers to face challenges.





Apart from that, previous research conducted by Rees (2015), also noted that in the first few months of teaching, novice teachers experienced a multitude of challenges. The most common obstacles stated by novice teachers are classroom management, individualizing instruction, family issues, and time management. The challenges stated above were arranged in descending order of the frequency. This further proves that novice teachers are indeed struggling to cope in their early stages of a teaching career.

Since there are challenges faced by novice teachers, it is crucial to identify and classify these challenges to have better perspectives on the types of challenges. In the study by Ozturk and Yildirim (2013), the adaptation challenges have been isolated into two groups such as job-related challenges and social challenges. Job-related challenges were further divided into the workload, instructional and classroom challenges whereas the social challenges were sub-divided into social status and identity, relationship with students, conflicts with colleagues, supervisor challenges, and relationship with mentor teachers. The result from the questionnaire stated that the novice teachers were somewhat more likely to encounter job-related challenges than social difficulties. The result of the research provides a clearer understanding of the problems that the novice teacher faced by clustering the challenges.

In terms of the Malaysian context, the research findings by Jayakaran and Khandehroo (2010) proved that a high level of burnout is evident among English teachers in public schools. The results indicated that the youngest group (below the age of 25) suffers from emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. These results also





show that novice teachers tend to be emotionally exhausted thus developing negative attitudes due to the daily conflict in work. Thus, it is obvious that novice teachers are facing a tough time in managing the challenges to which they are exposed in their initial years in the teaching profession.

Sofiah et al. (2016) have identified four issues that are considered problematic among novice teachers in Malaysia. The issues include efficacy, classroom, and student behavior control, novice teacher's professional development, novice teacher's competency, commitment, stress, and support among novice teachers. Moreover, Kamarul and Raja Ida (2008) conducted a case study on the challenges faced and strategies adopted by a female English language teacher during teaching practice. The challenges identified via the reflective journal of the English teacher during the teaching practice are such as handling mixed-ability students, use of mother tongue, and expectation of teacher-centeredness. Using the prior knowledge and learning experience, comprehending the struggles, being determined, and experimenting through the trial of error of theories and ideas are among the strategies listed.

Evidently, Malaysian novice teachers have been reported experiencing considerable challenges. These challenges should be identified to help the novice teachers to cope with the challenges. Many types of research have explored the challenges faced by novice teachers. However, very few researches have focused on the ways novice teachers overcome the challenges faced. Hence, this research intends to explore the challenges faced by the novice teachers as well as the support received and needed by these teachers. By identifying the support, not only the novice teachers



could reflect and overcome their challenges but it will also guide the pre-service teachers who will also become novice teachers. Kamarul and Raja Ida (2008) mentioned that the teacher trainees in teaching practice and in-service teachers would find it useful if the strategies are identified. Hence, in-depth studies and perhaps also bigger-scale quantitative studies are required. It would trigger the novice teachers to reflect on their experiences and guide them in facing the challenges.

Apart from that, this research will also look into ways teacher education prepares the novice teachers to encounter challenges in the teaching profession. Research has indicated that the feel of discontentment and dissatisfaction among the novice teachers regarding the school situation they encounter have started while they are still in teacher training. Since it is a gradual process, the feel of burnout among novice teachers has started in their pre-service training stage itself (Gavish & Friedman, 2010). At this point, it has to be emphasized that focuses should be given on the ways of teacher education to prepare the novice teachers to encounter challenges in the real school context.

1.3 Purpose of Study

The present research aims to identify the challenges faced by novice teachers in English Language classrooms during their first three years of teaching experience. This research also identifies the support received by novice teachers to overcome the challenges.

Furthermore, this research also aims to investigate how far teacher education prepares novice teachers in facing challenges.

1.4 Objectives of Study

1. To identify the challenges faced by novice teachers in the English Language classroom.
2. To identify the support received by novice teachers to overcome the challenges faced.
3. To investigate how far teacher education prepares the novice teachers in facing the challenges.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the challenges faced by novice teachers in the English Language classroom?
2. What are the support received by the novice teachers to overcome the challenges?
3. How far does teacher education prepare the novice teachers in facing the challenges?



1.6 Significance of Study

This research is particularly valuable to the English Language novice teachers, students, pre-service teachers, and teacher educators in the teacher training institutes. The results from this research will be useful for the English Language novice teachers to identify the challenges and reflect on them. Thinking, analyzing, and reflecting on the challenges will certainly help them to identify the support received to overcome the challenges. By enabling novice teachers to do so, this research will indirectly contribute to the benefits of the students. The novice teachers would certainly deliver a better quality of teaching which will elevate the students' academic performance.



The awareness of the pre-service teachers can be enhanced through the challenges listed by the novice teachers in the teaching reality. They would be crystal clear about the obstacles that await them in the teaching profession. Besides, they will be able to tackle the challenges efficiently since they are exposed to the possible support available from this research to overcome challenges in the future.

Teacher education takes on an integral role in novice teachers' preparation, thus this research will provide suggestions based on feedback gained from the novice teachers to rectify the flaws in teacher education to enhance the preparation of novice teachers. Moreover, teacher educators who deliver teacher education also could utilize the results to modify their training methods if necessary to generate more productive novice teachers.



1.7 Limitations of Study

The first limitation of this research is that the participants will be chosen from only one particular teacher education university in Malaysia and they were all degree holders in Teaching English as Second Language (TESL). The challenges of novice teachers from other courses and teaching universities were not included in this research. Apart from that, one of the instruments which is the questionnaire was distributed to the participants via online since most of the participants are currently teaching in schools from different areas. Moreover, the Movement Control Order (MCO) implemented throughout the nation due to the Covid-19 pandemic has restricted the movement of the researcher thus opting for online distribution of the questionnaire. In terms of the analysis, this research utilized only the descriptive analysis.

1.8 Definition of terms.

There are several terms in the study which are required to be clearly defined:

1. Novice Teachers

A novice could be anyone who is teaching something new for the first time or who has entered a new cultural context for the first time (Farell, 2012). A novice teacher was defined as a teacher who has less than two years of teaching. (Karatas & Karaman,

2013). Novice teachers are defined as those with little or no mastery experience. (Farzaneh & Ozkan, 2015). In this research, the definition of the novice teacher is defined as a new teacher who is trained and has worked between one to three years.

2. Challenges

Cakmak (2013) defined challenges as a variety of difficulties faced and must be overcome by novice teachers in their initial years. Challenges are defined as unique difficulties linked to the concern and adaptation problems that emerge during the initial years of teaching (Karatas & Karaman, 2017). According to Lindgren (2004), challenges are defined as difficulties in applying theoretical knowledge from education to the reality they face as new teachers. In this research, the challenges are defined as the issues faced by novice teachers within the first three years of teaching.

3. Support

Support is defined as a mechanism to help the new teachers to better assimilate to the new school cultures and roles (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017). Support is known to help novice teachers to overcome the challenges and survive in the teaching profession (Karatas & Karaman, 2017). In this research, support is defined as the coping mechanism for novice teachers to overcome their challenges within the first three years of teaching.

1.9 Summary

In this chapter, the background information regarding this research has been discussed. Such information includes the general background of the study, statement of the problem, research purposes, research questions and objectives, the significance of the study alongside its limitations as well as the definitions of terms used in this study. The major research questions have been stated as well alongside the research objectives. The present research aims to identify the challenges faced by novice teachers in English Language classrooms during their first three years of teaching experience. This research also identifies the support received by novice teachers to overcome the challenges. Furthermore, this research also aims to investigate how far teacher education prepares novice teachers in facing challenges.