



P-ISSN 2355-2794
E-ISSN 2461-0275

Malaysian English Language Novice Teachers' Challenges and Support during Initial Years of Teaching

Vishin Nair Chandran¹
Intan Safinas Mohd Ariff Albakri*¹
Siti Shuhaida Shukor¹
Noriah Ismail²
Mohd Haniff Mohd Tahir¹
Mazlin Mohamed Mokhtar¹
Noraini Zulkepli¹

¹Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Tanjong Malim 35900, MALAYSIA.

²Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi Mara, Segamat 85000, MALAYSIA

Abstract

This study investigates the challenges encountered by Malaysian English language novice teachers throughout the initial years of their teaching. This study also explores the support received by these novice teachers at the beginning of their careers. The mixed-method research design was adopted for this study. A number of 80 novice teachers participated in the study. Data were collected through a questionnaire survey and an interview with five novice teachers. The findings indicated that the most frequent challenges faced by the novice English language 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 the novice teachers was collegial support. Based on the findings, one of the most crucial issues to be addressed during the teacher training was equipping the novice teachers with the knowledge and skill in managing their multiple work and responsibilities in schools. Training novice teachers in using various instructional methods,

* Corresponding author, email: safinas@fbk.upsi.edu.my

Citation in APA style: Chandran, V. N., Albakri, I. S. M. A., Shukor, S. S., Ismail, N., Tahir, M. H. M., Mokhtar, M. M., & Zulkepli, N. (2022). Malaysian English language novice teachers' challenges and support during initial years of teaching. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 9(2), 443-461.

Received October 12, 2021; Revised February 24, 2022; Accepted April 23, 2022; Published Online May 23, 2022

<https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v9i2.22974>

particularly on the use of computer technology is also important. The novice teachers also need to be provided with more professional development courses that can develop their confidence in teaching, help them build a relationship with students and colleagues, and educate them on how to manage their problematic learners. A structured support system with good mentoring practices during the initial years of teaching is also crucial in assisting the novice teachers to adapt to the teaching environment and carry out assigned responsibilities.

Keywords: Challenges, English language, mentoring, novice teachers, support.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, the 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. Since teachers are considered to play a fundamental role in enhancing the status of a nation, the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2015 report states that the ministry will only select the finest candidates into the system to guarantee that the teaching profession becomes a highly regarded and respected career. The Ministry of Education also emphasized that the teacher preparation program for pre-service teachers has to be at high standards. Teacher training institutions need to select quality candidates and equipped them with the knowledge, skills, and values of effective teachers (Alaa et al., 2019; Gopal & Mokhtar, 2020; Ismail et al., 2019). Teacher preparation programs must address the changing ecosystem in education and prepare teachers who are ready for the current needs and trends in teaching and learning (Ismail et al., 2019; Tahir et al., 2021; Zulkepli, 2020).

In the context of English Language teachers in Malaysia, several studies reported that the language teachers are demanded to be critical in choosing the teaching methods to be used and they are required to practice the ideal teaching strategies in the classroom (Albakri et al., 2017, 2021; Ismail & Albakri, 2012; Katitia, 2015). 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.

Teaching has often been described as one of the most stressful and exhausting professions. 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 (Ahmed et al, 2020; Alhamad, 2018; Karatas & Karaman, 2013). Novice teachers encounter stress and the lack of support to overcome it eventually led them to feel burnout and drop out of the teaching profession in their initial years (Ahmed et al, 2020; Alhamad, 2018; Karatas & Karaman, 2013). In terms of the Malaysian context, the research findings by Mukundan 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. Other studies on novice English Language teachers have documented that the teachers encountered difficulties in adapting to the school context,

delivering the knowledge and skills to their students, and conducting effective lessons (Albakri et al., 2021; Senom et al., 2013). The studies also indicated that language teachers face conflicts in presenting their image as a teacher, managing the classroom, handling the work stress, and demanding a commitment as a teacher.

Although studies related to novice teachers have been well-explored in the general education context in Malaysia, in-depth studies elucidating experiences, challenges, and support among novice English language teachers have not been well-documented. Considering the complexity of the teaching profession, it is doubtlessly crucial to explore the conflicts faced by these language teachers as they will influence both the early and later days of the teaching career. Exploring the experience of novice English language teachers is critical. Revealing their experiences can help policymakers understand how training of new teachers can be reshaped and specifically determine the types of support received and required by novice teachers.

Therefore, this research intends to explore the challenges faced by novice teachers during the beginning of their teaching careers. This study also explored the support received by novice teachers in overcoming the challenges in the initial three years of their teaching experience. This study is unique because it gathers data from the novice teachers who graduated from a teacher training institute in three different cohorts of 2015, 2016, and 2017.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching is more than just knowledge of the subject matter. In the 21st century of teaching and learning, teachers are required to do multitasks 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 (Albakri et al., 2017, 2021).

During the initial years of teaching, novice teachers need to adapt themselves to a collective working environment that consists of patterns of interaction that depend on the culture and politics of the school, individual characteristics, and the needs of the students (Ahmed et al., 2020; Alhamad, 2018; Karatas & Karaman, 2013). A considerable number of studies reported that novice teachers faced unique difficulties linked to the concerns and adaptation problems that emerge during the initial years of teaching (Ahmed et al., 2020; Alhamad, 2018; Karatas & Karaman, 2013).

2.1 English Language Novice Teacher

According to Ahmed et al. (2020), a novice teacher could be anyone who is teaching for the first time or who has entered a new cultural context for the first time. Karatas and Karaman (2013) defined a novice teacher as a teacher who has less than two years of teaching. Mahmoudi and Ozkan (2015) stated that novice teachers are defined as those with little or no mastery experience. A novice teacher is defined as a trained new teacher who had worked for between one to three years (Ariff et al., 2016). The novice teachers have been trained at specific teacher training institutions prior to being attached to schools.

In the context of English language novice teachers, these teachers were trained at teacher training institutions and most of them received a Bachelor in Education

Degree specializing in teaching English as a second language. The structure for English language teacher training is almost similar to most teacher training institutions in Malaysia. The program is structured for four years and the practicum is scheduled during the final year of study.

In terms of English language novice teacher preparation, the training of novice teachers during teacher education involves teaching them the subject matter; language skills, grammar, and linguistics. They are also introduced to various pedagogical skills, approaches, theories, assessment methods, and also the school system (Senom, 2013). By doing so, the novice teachers will not only be able to teach effectively in class but also complete the non-instructional tasks given by the school administration. The Ministry of Education in Malaysia highlights that a suitable curriculum, teaching approaches, and also assessment methods are equally significant to forming quality English language novice teachers.

Apart from transferring knowledge and skills about teaching and learning of English language, the teacher preparation program also ensures that the future English language novice teachers have equally strong practical skills via teaching practicum. Strong practical skills will help the teachers to be more sensitive about the realities of the teaching profession. They would learn to survive thousands of interactions that occur either within or outside the classroom since they will always be receiving duties and instructions from the school management. Also, the teachers are taught to work effectively with their colleagues and parents to gather information and motivation to promote students' progress.

Teacher education institutions prepare English language teachers with the skills knowledge and values for their teaching careers. However, teaching is a dynamic process, it is essential to comprehend the experiences in terms of the initial years of the English language novice teachers in the teaching profession. Although novice teachers are lacking in terms of experience, these novice teachers are required to fulfill the same tasks and responsibilities as experienced teachers. The general idea is that a novice teacher should be able to transfer the inputs and drill the pupils at the same level as the teachers with 20 years of teaching experience (Ahmed et al, 2020; Alhamad, 2018).

Greater pressure on English language novice teachers will make them vulnerable to various obstacles found in the real teaching environment. Studies have indicated that novice teachers commonly described the teaching profession with the adjectives such as 'challenging', 'difficult', and 'tiring' (Ahmed et al, 2020). At this point, it is pivotal that the challenges faced by the novice teachers are identified so that they could receive suitable support to overcome the challenges. Failure in identifying and overcoming the challenges could lead novice teachers to leave the teaching profession sooner.

2.2 Challenges Faced by English Language Novice Teachers

Past literature has shown that there are many challenges faced by English language novice teachers in their early years of teaching. The challenges encountered in their initial years should be identified and analyzed to help novice teachers remain enthusiastic about the teaching profession (Senom et al., 2013). Senom et al (2013) argued that the ideals novice teachers formed during training may not be the reality of what they faced in their initial years of teaching. They emphasized that since the

challenges encountered by the teachers might be varied in each educational system, thus all the aspects of the problems should be examined respectively.

Many previous studies have indicated the types of challenges encountered by novice teachers. According to [Kozigoklu \(2017\)](#), the challenges faced by novice teachers can be classified as planning and execution of teaching, relationships with college administrators, parents and community, school physical structure and equipment, professional development-legal rights, and duties. It can be seen here that the first year of teaching for novice teachers comprises confronting classroom realities and the adaptation process. The research findings from [Dickson et al. \(2014\)](#) indicated that there are six major areas of challenges faced by novice teachers: classroom management, implementing the curriculum to mixed ability classes, administrative demands, perception of a lack of support, relationships with colleagues, dealing with parents of students, and balancing home and family life. These findings show generally their challenges in terms of instructional, classroom management, workload, and relationship with students and colleagues.

Despite job-related and social challenges discussed above, difficulties in applying the theory learned in teacher education such as 21st-century teaching skills and materials development skills posed challenges to novice teachers ([Dayan et al., 2018](#)). The lack of resources, large classes, and school culture prevent novice teachers from using audio-visual aids or engaging students in activities. Here, it can be seen that there is a gap between the theory and practices. They also highlighted classroom management particularly managing large classes, heavy workload, and adjusting to the school environment as issues faced by the novice teachers.

A study by [Dias-Lacy and Guirguis \(2017\)](#) on novice language teachers highlighted that the teachers felt stressed out due to several factors. Among them are the overwhelming workload, lack of support from teachers and administrators, unable to manage students and the class time, curriculum challenges, and wanting to meet self-expectation. A later study by [Alhamad \(2018\)](#) and [Sali and Kecik \(2018\)](#) echoed the findings reported by [Dias-Lacy and Guirguis \(2017\)](#). [Sali and Kecik \(2018\)](#) conducted a study on novice English language teachers in Turkey. They reported that the teachers faced difficulties related to language teaching due to lack of resources, learners' low proficiency, and classroom discipline. The teachers also encountered challenges in planning their lessons, managing class time, finishing the syllabus, and managing learners' needs and interests. The findings also indicated that there was insufficient support and guidance received by the novice teachers from the school administrators and mentors. Similar findings were reported by [Alhamad \(2018\)](#) who conducted a study on the challenges faced by novice English language teachers. He reported that the major challenges were the students' low English language proficiency and their negative attitude towards learning the language.

2.3 Support for Novice Teachers

Novice teachers are often exposed to challenges due to their lack of experience in the teaching profession. Despite receiving teacher education, the real classroom situations might demand novice teachers to receive support from their mentors and also colleagues to master certain skills. For novice teachers, being away from the 'safe' and familiar environment of their teacher training college can be very isolating and

may add to the pressure they experience during their early years (Dickson et al. 2014). Hence, novice teachers should seek support to overcome the challenges.

New teachers can be helped and supported to adapt to their new classroom cultures and roles. Based on Karatas and Karaman (2013), there are four types of support which are mentors, co-workers, family, and perceived efficacy. The research indicated that apart from the support obtained from the working environment, family support is also important for novice teachers to manage their emotional aspect of teaching.

Hudson and Hudson (2018) emphasized that in the early phases of their teaching career, novice teachers need enough assistance. It is necessary to implement a good mentoring scheme in schools to help all novice teachers enhance their quality as teachers. Hudson and Hudson (2018) reinforced that assigned mentors can assist beginning teachers by modeling practices and providing feedback on the beginning teachers' planning, preparation, behavior management, and assessment.

Albakri et. al. (2021) also highlighted the significance of the mentoring, reflective practice, and evaluation of practice among pre-service teachers to shape and inform the nature of the pre-service teachers' experience, expectations, and actions. These strategies also offer them a window into the type of working environment a beginning teacher will be experiencing. The keywords 'reflection' and 'evaluation' indicate the significance of teacher education as a coping mechanism in preparing the pre-service teachers for the transition to novice teachers.

3. METHODS

This study used the mixed-method research design to collect the data on the challenges faced by novice teachers and the support received during their initial teaching experience. It employed the questionnaire and interviews to collect the data.

3.1 Participants

The population for this research consisted of novice English language teachers from a university in Malaysia while they were still within their first three years of teaching experience. The participants graduated from the same teacher training institution in Malaysia. The participants selected specialized in the field of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and they were in their first three years of teaching in government secondary schools. The selected participants were teaching at different schools across Malaysia since they were posted according to the needs of the teachers in a particular area or region.

For the quantitative component of the study, 80 participants were selected from a population of 296 using convenient sampling. Reaching the participants who were currently working in different areas was impossible for the researchers considering the resources of the research such as time, transportation, and financial support. Therefore, the questionnaire was distributed and retrieved from the participants online.

For the qualitative component of the study, five participants were chosen for the semi-structured interview session. These participants were selected from each different year of teaching experience: the first year, the second year, and the third year of teaching experience.

3.2 Instruments

3.2.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire constructed comprised of three parts: Section 1 (personal information), Section 2 (challenges faced by novice teachers), and Section 3 (the support received by the novice teachers). In Section 1, the participants were required to fill in their names, the area of the school they have been posted, and the current year of teaching. Section 2 consisted of 34 questions and they are divided based on the five challenges faced by novice teachers in their first three years of teaching, they are instructional challenges (10 questions), classroom management challenges (6 questions), challenges related to the relationship with students (6 questions), workload challenges (6 questions), and social status and identity challenges (6 questions).

The items related to the challenges in the questionnaire were adapted from [Ozturk and Yildirim \(2013\)](#). In Section 3, there were 14 items constructed related to the support for the novice teachers: mentoring practice (5 questions), collegial support (5 questions), and teacher education (4 questions). In terms of the items related to the support for the novice teachers, the researchers adapted and adopted the items based on the instrument on the novice teacher support structure by [Warsame \(2011\)](#). Therefore, there is a total of 48 close-ended questions in the questionnaire.

3.2.2 Interview

The interview questions constructed were linked to the questionnaire to allow the researchers to further explore the challenges faced by the English language novice teachers and the support they received. Before conducting the interview sessions, the participants were given the sample questionnaire and the notes of reference to give them proper guidance to assist them while answering questions during the interview session. This list of references consisted of the structure of TESL courses that the participants have learned throughout their teacher training program.

3.3 Data Collection

In this mixed-method research, the data collection process was done in two phases. Phase one involved the quantitative process, using the online questionnaire while phase two involved a qualitative process, using the structured interview.

3.3.1 Quantitative

The list of English language novice teachers who graduated in three different years was collected from the representative of each graduating year to identify the relevant participants. As the questionnaire was in the form of Google Form, the data were automatically saved once the participants completed the online questionnaire. Besides that, the participants were required to fill in their names and schools and they were only allowed to answer the questionnaire once.

3.3.2 Qualitative

The semi-structured interview was conducted in the second phase of the data collection. The researchers selected five participants to be interviewed based on their different years of teaching experience to inquire more in-depth information and triangulate with the data from the questionnaire. Once the selected participants have given their consent, the interview sessions were scheduled. The interview sessions were conducted in a place according to the participants' preferences. The interviews were recorded to avoid misinterpretation. Each interview session took about 30-40 minutes to achieve a clear representation of each participant's views and experiences. The audio recordings from the interviews were transcribed and the data was analyzed using content analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis was done in two ways: quantitatively and qualitatively. The descriptive statistic was used to analyze the close-ended questions in the questionnaire. The responses related to the challenges faced by English language novice teachers gathered from the questionnaire were tabulated based on the five different challenges and support received. The frequency of the responses and percentages were used to interpret the trend of the study. Similarly, the frequency of responses and percentages related to the support were tabulated according to the categories listed. The support received will be explored to see how they assisted novice teachers to overcome challenges in their initial years of teaching. As for the data from the interview, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data transcribed. This allowed the researchers to generate codes and themes. The common themes were defined based on the codes given to produce a report of the analysis.

4. RESULTS

Two types of data were collected in this study which are the quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data was collected from a questionnaire and the qualitative data was gathered through interviews conducted with the selected novice English language teachers.

4.1 Quantitative Findings

Data from the findings presented five types of challenges faced by novice language teachers. The challenges were related to workload, instructional, social status and identity, classroom management, and relationship with students.

Table 1. Results for the most frequent challenges.

No.	Challenges	Percentage (%)
1.	Workload	45.6
2.	Instructional	28.8
3.	Social status and identity	24.3
4.	Classroom Management	19.5
5.	Relationship with students	9.5

The results for the most frequent challenges experienced by novice teachers are presented in Table 1. Based on the quantitative findings, the three most frequent challenges encountered by the participants were workload challenges (45.6%) followed by instructional challenges (28.8%), and social status and identity challenges (24.3%). Classroom management (19.5%) showed lower frequency and the lowest average score is the relationship with students (9.5%). This result indicated that most of the participants experienced workload challenges, instructional challenges, and social identity and status more often than other challenges.

Table 2. Results for workload challenges.

No.	Challenges	Percentage (%)
1.	The productivity of my instructional work is affected due to workload.	72.5
2.	I have difficulty balancing between instructional (teaching) and non-instructional duties (non-teaching).	70.0
3.	I have challenges in preparing administrative paperwork and reports.	70.0
4.	I spend my time at home assessing students' homework.	62.5
5.	I fail to conduct my classroom lessons due to time constraints.	52.5
6.	I experienced sleepless nights due to the workload burden.	31.3

For workload challenges, the data presented in Table 2 clearly showed that most of the participants perceived workload as the most challenging part of the profession. 72.5% of the participants felt that the productivity of their instructional work was affected due to their workload. Approximately 70% of the participants mentioned they faced difficulty to balance between the instructional and non-instructional work. Similarly, 70% of the participants stated that they struggled to prepare for their administrative work. The failure of managing their unlimited workload has also caused 62.5% of the participants to assess their students' homework at home. Moreover, more than half of the participants (52.5%) failed to conduct their lessons sometimes due to time constraints. Finally, 31.3% of the participants sometimes had sleepless nights due to the workload burden. The findings indicated excessive workload mainly from instructional and non-instructional duties had detrimental effects on the novice teachers' ability to perform as effective teachers. They also faced difficulty in managing their time, hence, they need to continue their work at home to complete the unfinished tasks.

Table 3. Results for instructional challenges.

No.	Challenges	Percentage (%)
1.	I find it challenging to teach speaking skills in the classroom.	62.6
2.	I face difficulties in implementing technology in the classroom.	58.7
3.	I use the Malay Language often in the English language classroom.	57.6
4.	I find it challenging to teach writing skills in the classroom.	55.1
5.	I find it challenging to teach listening skills in the classroom.	47.6
6.	I cannot decide on ways to strengthen the students' understanding.	21.3
7.	I find it challenging to teach reading skills.	20.1
8.	I find it difficult to prepare appropriate teaching materials	18.1

Table 3 presents the instructional challenges encountered by the participants. More than half of the participants (62.6%) reported that they had trouble teaching speaking skills in the classroom. The data showed the highest percentage in terms of difficulty to teach was speaking skills compared to other language skills, writing skills

(55.1%), listening skills (47.6%), and reading skills (20.1%). In addition, 58.7% of the participants reported that they faced difficulty in implementing technology in their lessons hence indicating that they need assistance in terms of training to equip them with the knowledge and skills in using technology in their lessons. Apart from that, 57.6% of the participants also responded that they use the Malay language while teaching English which can be considered a significant challenge in terms of teaching the English language. The use of the mother tongue is still a significant alternative in the Malaysian English language teaching contexts at the secondary level. However, the data showed a lower percentage of challenges in terms of participants who struggled to strengthen their students' understanding and prepare appropriate teaching materials with 21.3% and 18.1% respectively.

Table 4. Results for social status and identity challenges.

No.	Challenges	Percentage (%)
1.	I feel great pressure in the teaching profession.	77.5
2.	I need support to survive in the teaching profession.	76.4
3.	I am unable to link my undergraduate training with the current atmosphere of the school.	66.5
4.	I have worries about whether I am a good teacher or not.	55.1
5.	I am unable to adapt myself to the school system.	40.0
6.	I struggle to develop a positive relationship with my colleagues.	11.2

For social status and identity challenges, Table 4 shows that a majority of the participants (77.5%) felt great pressure about the teaching profession. Most of the participants (76.4%) felt that they need more support to survive in the teaching profession. The data indicated that having a mentor is crucial in providing support and guidance to inexperienced teachers at the initial stage of teaching in the real context. Apart from that, 66.5% of the participants felt that they were unable to link their undergraduate training to the classroom realities. Teacher training institutions need to provide more exposure to the real school environment and guide the teacher trainees on the practices to make the experience meaningful and relatable to the knowledge imparted during training. Other challenges indicated by the participants were their concerns about whether they were good teachers (55.1%), the challenges in adapting to the school system (40%), and the struggle to build a positive relationship with their colleagues (11.2%). The data showed that the novice teachers were doubtful about themselves as good teachers and struggled to develop relationships with students and colleagues. The need for support in terms of a mentor who advises and guides them at this stage could build their confidence and positive perception of themselves as good teachers.

Table 5. Results for classroom management challenges.

No.	Challenges	Percentage (%)
1.	I have problems managing students of mixed abilities.	67.6
2.	I don't know the best way to approach students' problematic behavior.	41.3
3.	I struggle to utilize classroom management strategies.	31.3
4.	I find it hard to manage students with discipline problems.	33.8
5.	I have problems enforcing class rules.	43.8

Table 5 is regarding classroom management challenges. The data showed that 67.6% of the participants faced problems in managing students with mixed abilities.

Almost 43.8% of the participants have issues with managing students with discipline problems, and 41.3% admitted that they were not equipped with the knowledge on the ways to approach students with problematic behavior. About 31.3% struggled to implement classroom management strategies and 33.8% have issues enforcing class rules. Based on the data presented, the novice teachers encountered issues in classroom management as they have limited knowledge, exposure, and experience in managing students in the real classroom context, particularly problematic students.

Table 6. Results for challenges in developing a relationship with the students.

No.	Challenges	Percentage (%)
1.	I feel insufficient in dealing with students' social development.	60.0
2.	It is difficult for me to spot individual differences between students.	48.9
3.	I feel insecure about the judgment of students about me as their teacher.	42.5
4.	I feel challenged to grasp the interest and attention of students via communication.	27.6
5.	I experienced hardship in establishing a positive relationship with students.	21.3

As shown in Table 6, novice teachers experienced some difficulties in developing their relationships with students. The highest challenge is in dealing with students' social development (60%). Almost half of the participants (48.9%) reported that they struggled to spot students' individual differences. Interestingly, 42.5% admitted that they felt insecure about the judgment of students about them as a teacher. Apart from that, 27.6% of the novice teachers also felt that it was challenging to gauge their students' attention and 21.3% struggled to establish a positive relationship with their students. The findings exemplified that novice teachers lack confidence in their ability to attract their students and develop a bond with their students. It was partly because they were insecure and they have limited knowledge of dealing with students' emotions and responses.

Table 7. Results for the support received.

No.	Support	Percentage (%)
1.	Collegial	58.4
2.	Mentoring Program	48.4
3.	Teacher Education	35.0

The findings thus far indicated that novice teachers struggled with multiple issues at the beginning of their teaching experience. Hence, support is crucial for the teachers to address and manage the challenges. Table 7 presents the types of support received by the participants. The data showed collegial support (58.4%) followed by the mentoring program (48.4%) and lastly teacher education (35%). This general result indicated that the majority of the participants selected collegial support as the highest support received to overcome their teaching profession difficulties.

Table 8. Results for collegial support.

No.	Challenges	Percentage (%)
1.	I listened to the wise counsel provided by my colleagues to boost my morale.	86.3
2.	I share my disappointments with my colleagues to get effective ways of dealing with them.	78.8

Table 8 continued...

3.	I use the feedback given by my colleagues via peer observations to improve myself as a teacher.	76.2
4.	I use the resources shared by my colleagues to complete my school tasks.	66.3
5.	I collaborate with my colleagues in group work to reduce the burden of school tasks.	57.6

The data presented in Table 8 with regards to collegial support showed that 86.3% of the participants listened to their colleague's council, 78.8% of participants shared their disappointments, 76.2% of participants used the feedback for improvement, 66.3% of participants shared the resources, and more than half of the participants, 57.6%, collaborated with their colleagues to reduce their workload.

Table 9. Results for mentoring support.

No.	Challenges	Percentage (%)
1.	I seek more information about school cultures from my mentor to enhance my adaptation process.	78.5
2.	I used the feedback given by my mentor through classroom visits to improve my teaching skills.	73.8
3.	I seek the help of my mentor for guidance in the teaching profession.	63.8
4.	I use the emotional support received from my mentor to overcome challenges in school more confidently.	48.8

Table 9 presents the results of the support from the mentoring program. The results indicated that the majority of participants (78.5%) did refer to their mentors to get information about the school culture. It is clear that more than half of the participants (73.8%) also used the constructive feedback given by their mentors to improve their teaching skills. Additionally, 63.8% of participants also stated that they seek professional guidance from their mentors. However, only nearly half of the participants (48.8%) used the emotional support given by their mentor to overcome challenges. Although mentor teachers did provide guidance and advice to novice teachers, they were not the main source of support for novice teachers.

Table 10. Results for teacher education support.

No.	Challenges	Percentage (%)
1.	I reflect on my practicum experiences guiding me for the first three years of teaching.	68.8
2.	I apply the knowledge gained from teacher education to be a more effective teacher.	60.1
3.	I used the knowledge and feedback given by my supervisor to improve in the teaching profession.	41.3
4.	I often get in touch with my practicum supervisor to discuss any problems.	5.1

Lastly, as presented in Table 10, the participants indicated that teacher education was not the main support during their initial teaching experience. More than half of the participants (68.8%) stated that they reflected on their practicum experiences and use the knowledge gained from teacher education (60.1%) to overcome their challenges. On the contrary, only 41.3 % of participants used the knowledge gained from the supervisor followed by a minority of participants (5.1%) who contacted the practicum supervisor to overcome the challenges.

4.2 Qualitative Findings

Based on the interview findings presented in Table 11, four common themes have been identified. The themes were divided into two categories: challenges encountered and support received in school. For the qualitative findings, the excessive workload, difficulties in teaching speaking skills and insecurity about teaching abilities have been identified as the common themes in terms of challenges since the majority of the novice teachers expressed their concerns on the themes mentioned above.

Table 11. Common themes were identified during semi-structured interviews.

	Research participant Current teaching year	NV1 1 st year	NV2 1 st year	NV3 2 nd year	NV4 2 nd year	NV5 3 rd year
Theme	Excessive workload	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
	Difficulty to teach speaking skills	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Insecurity about teaching ability	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
	Collegial support	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

The followings are extracts from the interviews in which the novice teachers reported on the respective challenges encountered during their initial years of teaching. The first three excerpts explain the participants' excessive workload.

- (1) Most of the time, we have the offline work, because the workload is a lot. That's why. (P1- Excessive workload)
- (2) Most of the time, I am unable to complete my work. Given the amount of non-instructional tasks, I had to bring back my work home to be completed. (P2- Excessive workload)
- (3) ... the Form Three task which was uhm at a certain time the senior forgot to tell me what needs to be done so that's the first workload and the second uhm thing I find, uhm burdening would be the co-curriculum activities. (P4- Excessive workload)

The next four excerpts present the participants' concerns about their difficulty to teach speaking skills:

- (4) ...because why uhm they do not have the vocabulary to speak, they are very poor in vocabulary, okay certain things they are not outspoken, yet, they feel very shy, okay to speak in English and then they always the very low self-esteem to come out and speak or speak in front of their friends. (P1- Difficulty to teach speaking skills)
- (5) This is because the students in my school are reluctant to speak in English. They are not interested to put in the effort to speak English. They prefer to speak in Malay language or their mother tongue. (P2- Difficulty to teach speaking skills)
- (6) But when it comes to speaking, even with prompt they actually still can't speak. (P4- Difficulty to teach speaking skills)
- (7) They have difficulty pronouncing even a simple word. (P5- Difficulty to teach speaking skills)

The following excerpts express the participants' insecurities about their teaching ability:

- (8) I felt that I'm not a good teacher, unable to become an English teacher. I'm not qualified to be an English teacher. (P1-Insecure about teaching ability)
- (9) Because of the, uh, because of the response given by the students, most of the time I don't actually achieve my objectives all the time I feel that okay I...I may...I'm a failed English teacher. (P1-Insecure about teaching ability)

- (10) Sometimes, when the students are not cooperating in my classroom lesson, I feel that it is because they don't like me. (P2-Insecure about teaching ability)
- (11) I think it's a challenge because my students are not proficient in the language. At the end of the day, even though the students say they understand the lesson, I will still ask myself whether they really understand the lesson or just saying it, just to satisfy myself. (P3-Insecure about teaching ability)

From the aspect of support, the common theme identified is collegial support. The novice teachers felt that their colleagues have played an integral part in helping them to cope with the challenges. The participants highlighted that the support they received from their colleagues was in terms of encouragement, advice to improve practice, and solutions to the problems in teaching and learning.

- (12) I felt that my colleagues are the most helpful for me to overcome my challenges. (P1)
- (13) In my first year, I remember seeking my colleagues' advice right after the class. They use to provide ideas not only in terms of teaching but also about the working environment. They helped me to adapt well to the school system. (P2)
- (14) It was helpful because almost all the classes are at the same level. Even the other novice teachers, experience similar problems. When we talk to each other, we share and exchange our ideas and experience to teach better. (P3)

The participants also reported that their colleagues share resources and assisted with their workload, as expressed by P5 in (15).

- (15) Yes, all of them guide me. They taught me how to mark the book, how to correct the students' mistakes, and how to ask them to do correction. (P5)

5. DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, all the novice teachers encountered challenges in the initial years of their teaching careers. Some of the challenges were common across all of the participants which were workload, instructional, social status and identity, classroom management, and relationship with students. From the questionnaire, the majority of the participants reported one of the challenges that they encountered most frequently was workload challenges. Workload challenges received the highest scores compared to the other listed challenges in the survey. Heavy workload has also been highlighted in past studies on novice teachers' challenges at the beginning of their teaching career as one of the most highly reported challenges (Dayan et al., 2018; Dickson et al., 2014; Kozigoklu, 2017; Ozturk & Yildirim, 2013; Senom et al., 2013). According to the result gained, the primary reason most of the participants in this research chose the workload challenges as the most frequent challenge was that they felt that their performance in teaching was seriously affected by the difficulties in balancing a large amount of non-instructional workloads such as preparing paperwork and reports.

The data from the interview echoed the data from the survey which stated workload challenges as the most frequently encountered challenges. The participants felt that their non-instructional duties assigned by the administrators increased their workload and burdened them. Keying in marks offline, attending meetings, and preparing paperwork for events and co-curricular activities were examples of burdening workload highlighted by the interviewed participants. Evidence from the

data clearly showed that novice teachers needed support in handling the workload and some assistance to manage the non-instructional work.

The second most frequent challenge was instructional challenges. Since this research was conducted among English language teachers, therefore the main instructional challenge centered around the teaching of language skills. The majority of the participants encountered challenges mainly in teaching speaking skills. According to the novice teachers, what was particularly troubling for some of them was their students' low language proficiency. They were also challenged by the need to use the Malay language during English language lessons to get students to understand the lesson taught.

Based on the results from the interviews, all of the participants reported that they encountered challenges to teach speaking skills often in terms of instructional challenges. The main factors were known to be the low proficiency of students, low self-esteem, their reluctance to speak in English, lack of exposure to speaking skills, and also the preference to use their mother tongue or Malay language to communicate. The result obtained strengthens the findings gained from the survey which stated instructional challenge as the second most frequent challenge encountered and teaching speaking skills was also the most difficult for the teachers. The findings are in line with [Sali and Kecik \(2018\)](#) who reported that the novice teachers in their study experienced difficulties in language pedagogy due to the learners' low level of proficiency. For language teachers, getting students to use the language is crucial to see their development and ability to use the language in context. Hence, addressing reticence among learners is important and evidence from the study has shown that the challenge is immense in getting students to communicate in the language.

Apart from that, the participants had concerns about their social status and identity. The data indicated it as the third most frequent challenge encountered. The main reason for the participants to feel that social status and identity as a challenge was because the results showed that there was a constant need for moral support among the participants. This is supported by the findings from [Dias-Lacy and Guirguis \(2017\)](#) which indicated that as a first-year teacher, the need for support is very high. A more structured mentoring and support system is crucial for novice teachers to build their self-confidence. Moreover, the participants felt that there were difficulties to link the knowledge gained from teacher training. As stated by [Sali and Kecik \(2018\)](#), another disturbing problem for all novice teachers seemed to be putting theory into practice. They expressed that they could not relate the classroom routines in the school with the training received which indicated the lack of real context exposure to build their experience, knowledge, and skills in the real school context. More exposure to the real context should be allocated in the teacher training program to give the trainees the opportunities to handle and manage problems and issues that enable them to reflect on theories and practice. Training novice teachers during their teacher education years should also expose them to problem-solving case studies and inquiry-based approaches that may equip them with the skill in handling issues and challenges at the beginning of their teaching career.

The qualitative data displayed the perspectives of the majority of the participants regarding the insecurity they experienced mainly due to their students. The participants felt that they were not good teachers due to the responses given by the students and their participation in the classroom lessons. In addition, the low proficiency level of the students as well caused the participants to doubt their ability in enhancing the

students' understanding level. Studies by [Senom et al. \(2013\)](#) and [Sali and Kecik \(2018\)](#) also reported similar findings.

Data related to classroom management was recorded as the fourth most common challenge. This challenge focused on the behavioral management of problematic students and mixed abilities students. The findings indicated that novice teachers found it difficult, to a certain extent, in terms of handling mixed abilities and problematic students. These findings are supported by other past studies which indicated that there were highly demotivated learners who posed several disciplinary problems to the novice teachers ([Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017](#); [Sali & Kecik, 2018](#)). The least frequent challenge was about the relationship between novice teachers with their students. A majority of the participants reported that it was difficult to handle the students' social development and at times they felt worried about the students' opinion of them as a teacher. The novice teachers have issues with self-confidence and were at times doubtful of their ability to teach and gauge their learners.

As for data related to support received by the novice teachers to overcome the challenges, most of them responded that they received collegial support to overcome the challenges. Collegial support received the highest score compared to mentoring practice. From the findings for the collegial support, it can be seen that the participants were heavily dependent on the wise counsel and feedback gained from their colleagues to tackle challenges. For instance, the participants claimed in the interview that they received support on ways to manage the class, mark the students' books, and also adapt to the school environment from their colleagues. Apart from that, the participants also responded that they shared their disappointment with their colleagues often to overcome their challenges. As stated in [Karatas and Karaman \(2013\)](#), having an opportunity to share experiences and interact with other staff depends on the teaching environment. If the novice teachers do not have such opportunities, this may affect their perceptions of their efficacy and may lead to a sense of incompetence.

According to the data, mentoring practice is the second most frequent support to help novice teachers overcome the challenges at the beginning of their careers. In terms of mentoring, the participants responded that they referred to their mentor often to seek information about the school culture to ease their adaptation process. Besides, they also responded that the constructive feedback and guidance gained from the mentor were useful for them to improve their teaching skills. [Dias-Lacy and Guirguis \(2017\)](#) stated that mentoring program is a solution to reduce attrition rates and it provided support for first-year teachers with their ability to cope with work overload, stress, and lack of support from superiors. Although the participants claimed that teacher training is not dominant support in managing the challenges they experienced in the real context of teaching, they did respond that the most useful part of teacher education is the experience that they have gained from the practicum which allowed them to reflect and overcome the challenges.

6. CONCLUSION

This research focuses on the challenges faced and the support for novice teachers in their first three years of teaching experiences. The findings indicated that commonly shared challenges were reported and the challenges corroborate those past studies about novice English language teachers' tensions and conflicts at the beginning of their

teaching experience (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017; Karatas & Karaman, 2013; Sali & Kecik, 2018; Senom, 2013). The novice teachers started their teaching careers with challenges that they were not well-prepared to handle. As language teachers, the language pedagogy presents an array of difficulties in terms of teaching using the English language and getting learners to use the language. Besides that, knowledge and skills in using technology have also been reported as a challenge.

The challenges faced by the novice teachers also seemed to influence each other and create a chain reaction. For instance, the excessive workload affects the quality of teaching. When the quality of teaching or instructions such as lacking time to plan a lesson and prepare materials happened, the novice teachers struggled to engage learners and thus led to doubts about their ability which then affected their confidence. Similarly, the challenge in developing a relationship with the students appeared to provoke other challenges such as their self-confidence and classroom management.

The challenges clearly showed that novice teachers critically need more professional support and guidance. Although the novice teachers reported receiving significant support from colleagues, the findings indicated inadequate professional development opportunities, lack of support from the school administration, and lack of quality mentoring received. Therefore, there is a need to train novice teachers with the knowledge and skills to manage their workload. The school administration also needs to review the workload given to novice teachers and provide some support for the non-instructional work assigned to the novice teachers. Besides that, teacher induction programs need to include contents that address the challenges faced by novice teachers such as managing differentiated and problematic learners, handling non-instructional responsibilities, and developing confidence in teaching. A good mentoring structure with trained and experienced mentor teachers would provide a significant contribution to shaping the quality of the novice teachers and provide emotional support to them.

Finally, perhaps, more importantly, not only does this research alerts the pre-service teachers about the teaching realities, but the findings also can help educational stakeholders who are keen on improving the quality of ESL teachers to include more real-world classroom experiences and sharing sessions with experienced teachers. However, similar to other studies, this research has its limitations. The first limitation is all of the participants involved in this research graduated from one particular teaching university. Hence, the findings may not be generalized to larger populations. Apart from that, the instrument which is the questionnaire was distributed online since the participants were teaching in different areas and due to the spread of the covid-19 pandemic. The participants needed to be constantly reminded to answer the online questionnaire which extended the period of data collection.

For future research, it is suggested that comparative studies among different teaching universities should be conducted with bigger sample size. Apart from that, the researchers could also add journal writing as an instrument besides having a questionnaire and interview. The research should give a specific duration such as two weeks or one month for the selected novice teachers to write down their daily challenges in a journal. The journal writing could further strengthen the findings obtained from the questionnaire and interview since the frequency of the challenges could be determined through it. This would also enable the researchers to analyze the findings better in terms of the types of challenges faced by the novice teachers according to the areas of schools they teach.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was supported by Top-Down Research Grant (2016-02227-107-41) funded by Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, G., Faizi, W. U. N., & Akbar, S. (2020). Challenges of novice teachers and strategies to cope at the secondary level. *Global Regional Review*, *V*(1), 403-416. [http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/grr.2020\(V-I\).44](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/grr.2020(V-I).44)
- Alaa, M., Albakri, I. S. M. S., Singh, C. K. S., Hamed, H., Zaidan, A. A., Zaidan, B. B., Albahri, O. S., Alsalem, M. A., Salih, M. M., Almahdi, E. M., Baqer, M. J., Jalood, N. S., Nidhal, S., Shareef, A. H., & Jasim, A. N. (2019). Assessment and ranking framework for the English skill of pre-service teachers based on Fuzzy Delphi and TOPSIS methods. *IEEE Access*, *7*, 126201-126223. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ACCESS.2019.2936898>
- Albakri, I. S. M. A., Abdullah, M. H., & Jusoh, A. J. (2017). Lessons from experience: ESL student teachers' reflection during practicum through reflective journals. *Studies in English Language and Education*, *4*(2), 226-234. <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v4i2.8039>
- Albakri, I. S. M. A., Ismail, N., Hartono, R., Tahir, M. H. M., Abdullah, M. S. H., Sarudin, A., & Zulkepli, N. (2021). Mentoring practice during practicum: The perspectives of Malaysian pre-service English language teachers. *Studies in English Language and Education*, *8*(2), 642-655. <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v8i2.19282>
- Alhamad, R. (2018). Challenges and induction need of novice English as a foreign language teacher in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, *6*(1), 50-63. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.6n.1p.50>
- Ariff, N., Yusof, H., & Mansor, M. (2016). Availability of novice teacher professionalism: A content analysis. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, *6*(12), 353-373. <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v6-i12/2502>
- Dayan, U., Perveen, S., & Khan, I. M. (2018). Transition from pre-service training to classroom: Experiences and challenges of novice teachers in Pakistan. *Journal of Social Sciences*, *12*(2), 48-59.
- Dias-Lacy, S. L., & Guirguis, R. V. (2017). Challenges for new teachers and ways of coping with them. *Journal of Education and Learning*, *6*(3), 265-272. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v6n3p265>
- Dickson, M., Riddlebarger, J., Stringer, P., Tennant, L., & Kennetz, K. (2014). Challenges faced by Emirati novice teachers. *Near and Middle Eastern Journal of Research in Education*, *4*, 1-10. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5339/nmejre.2014.4>
- Gopal, R., & Mokhtar, M. M. (2020). Literary texts selection for Malaysian lower secondary schools in Perak. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, *8*(8), 3417-3422. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2020.080815>
- Hudson, P., & Hudson, S. (2018). Mentoring preservice teachers: Identifying tensions and possible resolutions. *Teacher Development*, *22*(1), 16-30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2017.1298535>

- Ismail, N., & Albakri, I. S. M. A. (2012). An analysis of ESL students' attitude and interest towards learning to write essays using selected online writing links and resources. *International Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Change Management*, 11(6), 187-198. <https://doi.org/10.18848/1447-9524/CGP/v11i06/50211>
- Ismail, N., Hussin, S., & Aboswider, R. O. S. (2019). Examining the mechanisms utilized by CML web-logging instructors in ESL classroom: A case study. *AJELP: The Asian Journal of English Language and Pedagogy*, 7(2), 31-39. <https://doi.org/10.37134/ajelp.vol7.2.4.2019>
- Karatas, P. & Karaman, A. C. (2013). Challenges faced by novice language teacher: Support, identity, and pedagogy in the initial years of teaching. *The International Journal of Research in Teacher Education*, 4(3), 10-23.
- Katitia, D. M. O. (2015). Teacher education preparation program for the 21st Century. Which way forward for Kenya? *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(24), 57-63.
- Kozikoglu, I. (2017). A content analysis concerning the studies on challenges faced by novice teachers. *Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences*, 12(2), 91-106. <https://doi.org/10.18844/cjes.v12i2.1278>
- Mahmoudi, F & Ozkan, Y. (2015). Exploring experienced and novice teachers' perceptions about professional development activities. *Procedia- Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 199, 57-64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.07.487>
- Mukundan, J., & Khandehroo, K. (2010). Burnout among English Language teachers in Malaysia. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research*, 3(1), 71-76. <https://doi.org/10.19030/cier.v3i1.163>
- Ozturk, M. & Yildirim, A. (2013). Adaptation challenges of novice teachers. *Hacettepe University Journal of Education*, 28(1), 294-307.
- Sali, P. & Kecik, I. (2018). Challenges of first years of teaching in Turkey: Voices of novice EFL teachers. *English Language Teaching*, 11(4), 117- 131. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v11n4p117>
- Senom, F., Zakaria, A. R., & Shah, S. S. A. (2013). Novice teachers' challenges & survival: Where do Malaysian ESL teachers stand? *American Journal of Educational Research*, 1(4), 119-125. <https://doi.org/10.12691/education-1-4-2>
- Tahir, M. H. M., Shah, D. S. M., Shaq, M. S. Y., Albakri, I. S. M. A., & Adnan, A. H. M. (2021). Explicit vocabulary instruction: Effects of vocabulary learning on form two ESL learners. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 8(3), 1227-1247. <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v8i3.19539>
- Warsame, K. B. (2011). *Evaluating the effectiveness of novice teacher support structures* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Walden University.
- Zulkepli, N. (2020). L2 motivational self-esteem as predictors of out-of-class willingness to communicate. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 16(4), 1898-1908.