

## Challenges of First Years of Teaching in Turkey: Voices of Novice EFL Teachers

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### Abstract

The present study aims to describe the challenges as perceived by novice teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL). The participants of the study were seven (7) novice EFL teachers in public primary and secondary schools in Turkey. The data sources include semi-structured interviews, diary entries, video-recorded classroom observations and stimulated recall interviews. The results, discussed in relation to pre-service and in-service teacher education, suggested that the novice EFL teachers started out their pedagogical journey amid competing and interacting challenges.

**Keywords:** novice teachers, English as a foreign language, teacher education, teaching challenges, teachers' perceptions.

### 1. Introduction

New beginnings might be sometimes frustrating or promising. However, for novice teachers, those new beginnings might imply frustration and disappointment. As widely recognised and documented in the research literature, initial years of teaching have been marked with confusions, challenges and tensions (Farrell, 2003; Farrell, 2006; Loughran, Brown, & Doেকে, 2001; Veenman, 1984). Research in educational literature has paid considerable attention to those challenges of first years of teaching. Veenman (1984), in his analysis of eighty-three studies, provided a comprehensive list of areas of difficulty as perceived by beginning elementary and secondary teachers. The reported problems covered such areas: classroom management, assessment, relations with parents, administrators, and colleagues, heavy teaching load, knowledge of subject matter and school rules, inadequate school materials, inadequate guidance and support, large class sizes. Some other studies echoed similar findings. In their case study of 20 student primary teachers, Calderhead and Shorrock (1997) tracked the development of a group of student teachers into their initial years of teaching. Their study revealed that those student teachers, when they became full teachers, were coping with a number of difficulties such as planning their work, getting to know the children, little mentor support and high levels of stress. McCormack's and Thomas' study (2003) sought to understand the induction experiences of a group of beginning teachers within a New South Wales context and indicated that the beginning teachers were experiencing difficulties in terms of the teaching processes and the school socialisation aspects. The difficulties associated with the teaching process itself were classroom management, the poor literacy and numeracy skills of students, lack of resources to promote student learning, being required to teach unfamiliar content outside specialisation, no relief for training and development, programming to meet all students' needs, lack of parental support and large amount of paperwork. At the level of school socialisation process, lack of administrative and collegial support, teaching positions in isolated country areas, being given lower or more difficult classes, negative public perception of teachers were the major areas of challenge for those beginning teachers. Relatively recent research furthered our understanding of novice teachers' challenges. Toren and Iliyan (2008), in their study of beginning teachers in Arab schools in Israel, found out that the novice teachers were continually frustrated by challenges in relation to their didactic and disciplinary knowledge, the school culture and the organisational climate of the school, teaching load and dealing with individual differences in the classroom. Similar areas of difficulties were unfolded in Fantilli's and McDougall's study of two novice teachers in Canadian context (2009) such as meeting the diverse needs of students, time constraints, immense workload, lack of communication skills when dealing

with parents in difficult situations. Gavish and Friedman (2010) reported high levels of burnout experienced by novice teachers due to such challenges as lack of appreciation and professional recognition from students, from the public and lack of collaborative and supportive school culture.

Although much has been written on novice teachers' challenges in the educational literature, little attention has been paid to this issue in the field of English language teaching. (ELT henceforth) (Farrell, 2009, Ferguson & Donno, 2003; Freeman & Richards, 1996, Werbinska, 2011). As also noted by Farrell (2016), the scarcity of research on novice teachers in the field of TESOL is shocking, although this understanding is central if we are to help novice teachers successfully transition into their profession. In ELT research, though few, there are attempts to understand novice EFL teachers' challenges. One of the studies, conducted by Numrich (1996), revealed the following as challenges of novice language teachers: managing class time, giving clear instructions, responding to student needs, teaching grammar effectively, assessing student learning, and focusing on students rather than on self. Richards and Pennington (1998), in their study of five novice teachers of English as a second language (ESL henceforth) in Hong Kong secondary schools, found that heavy teaching and non-teaching workload, large class sizes, low levels of learner proficiency, and learner misbehaviour were the major problems. In two different case studies, Farrell (2003; 2006) investigated an ESL novice teacher's challenges obscuring his socialisation experiences. In the first case study, increased teaching load, outside-class responsibilities, marking examination papers, teaching lower proficiency students, lack of collegial collaboration and mentor support were the challenges reported by the novice ESL teacher. The second case study revealed additional challenges experienced by the same novice teacher: dilemmas as to how he was expected to teach in contrast to how he would like to teach, lack of collegial and administrative support. An array of similar challenges was reported by some other novice language teachers in Farrell's recent study (2016) which indicated lack of professional support and guidance, feelings of alienation and isolation, not being allowed to be creative, and large class sizes as daunting issues in the first years of teaching. Although novice EFL teachers' challenges are an underexplored issue, too, in the context of the present study, there are few attempts to unearth those difficulties experienced in the initial years of language teaching. Korukçu (1996), for example, aimed to investigate pre-service and beginning EFL teachers' problems in Basic English departments of universities in Turkey. Teaching methods, classroom management, lesson planning, and motivating learners were the major problematic areas for those novice EFL teachers. A very recent study about EFL novice teachers' challenges in Turkish education context was carried out by Akcan (2016). Her study revealed such challenges as classroom management, implementation of the communicative approach in classrooms, unmotivated students and students with learning disabilities. Sparked off by the relative scarcity of research on novice EFL teachers' challenges then, this study attempts to contribute to the current body of literature by throwing a look into a Turkish context. Most of the research studies on novice teachers' experiences were carried out in Western education settings. Although the Turkish context of education bears some resemblance to those settings, it also has some unique features such as large class sizes, inadequacy of instructional materials, high-stakes testing system, lack of professional support. This research endeavour might then add unique and teaching educational culture-specific insights to the current research and trigger further inquiry in foreign language teacher education. In the light of all these, the present study aims to unearth the challenges as perceived by Turkish novice EFL teachers teaching in public primary and secondary schools and seeks answers to the following questions:

- 1). What challenges do novice EFL teachers in public primary and secondary schools report to be experiencing in relation to foreign language pedagogy?
- 2). What challenges do novice EFL teachers in public primary and secondary schools report to be experiencing in relation to forms of professional support that are available to them?

The answers to these questions might be crucial in developing or redeveloping any programme or strategy that would alleviate the problems of the novice EFL teachers. Moreover, the challenges faced by the novice EFL teacher might not only hinder his/her attempts of creativity and experimentation but also might obstruct his/her professional development and actualisation. As Loughran, Brown and Doecke (2001, p. 7) illustrate, '... the difficulties of beginning to teach can create a situation whereby student teachers' ideals and hopes for teaching might be repressed...'. The enriched understanding of novice EFL teachers' difficulties therefore seems to be of critical importance to create growth-nurturing contexts for our new forces.

Within the scope of the study, a novice EFL teacher was defined as a teacher with a maximum of four years of teaching. Any difficulty that novice EFL teachers reported to be interfering with their instructional decisions and practices was considered as a challenge (The word is interchangeably used with such other words as difficulty and problem).

## 2. Methodology

In pursuit of understanding the challenges as perceived by novice EFL teachers, a qualitative methodology was adopted. In-depth case studies were carried out to ‘learn at first-hand about the social world the researcher is investigating by means of involvement and participation in that world through a focus upon what individual actors say and do’ (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 12).

### 2.1 Setting and Participants

The present study was carried out in public primary and secondary schools. The participants were seven novice EFL teachers teaching English at primary and secondary schools in Bursa and Eskisehir, Turkey. Their ages ranged between 22 and 23. (See Table 1 for the participants’ overall profile).

The participants were selected by means of convenience sampling method. In this method, research participants are selected on the basis of their willingness and availability to be studied (Creswell, 2005). The collection of data started in fall term and lasted until the end of spring term of 2005-2006 academic year.

Following the formal correspondences for a list of novice EFL teachers and for permission of research from the directorates of national education in Bursa and Eskisehir, the researcher took the preliminary steps into the research context. She first contacted with a few teachers teaching in primary and secondary schools in Bursa and Eskisehir and asked them whether they would like to take part in a case study. The teachers were informed in detail on the purpose, significance and requirements of the study such as diary-keeping throughout the fall term, a few classroom observations, and interviews. It was emphasised that classroom observations did not aim for any evaluation of teaching and learning performance and that the participants’ names and the schools where they were teaching would not be mentioned in the study. Some of the teachers—due to their tight schedule of teaching and some other personal issues—did not want to take part in such a study. A few ( $n=13$ ) agreed to participate, and the exploratory fieldwork thus started in the fall term and lasted until the end of the spring term of 2005-2006 academic year. However, as the study proceeded, some of the teachers stated that they would like to withdraw from the study due to their heavy teaching load or to some other personal issues. Their decisions were respected immediately, and the present study was conducted with the rest of the teachers ( $n=7$ ). The participant profile is shown in the table below. All teacher names were pseudonyms.

Table 1. Participant profile

<i>Participants</i>	<i>The type of school the teacher is teaching</i>	<i>Appointment date to teaching</i>
1. Bahar	Primary, Eskişehir	Fb. 2005
2. Yağmur	Primary, Eskişehir	Fb. 2005
3. Sema	Voc. High school, Bursa	Fb. 2005
4. Eylül	Primary, Bursa	Sept. 2005
5. Ahmet	Primary, Bursa	Sept. 2005
6. Elif	Primary, Bursa	Sept. 2005
7. Perisu	Primary, Bursa	Sept. 2005

Six of the participants were teaching English as a foreign language in public primary schools, one of them in a vocational high school. All the case study participants ( $n=7$ ) were in their first year of teaching and in a teaching orientation status. During the time of the present study, the teaching orientation programme was slightly different from the newly designed one in 2016. In the older version of the induction practices, being assigned to their work places, novice teachers who were in the orientation status started teaching (although this was not stated as a requirement in the regulations for teaching orientation) and receiving their teaching orientation training at the same time. In the newer version, novice teachers are assigned to primary or high schools in their hometowns, and under the guidance of their mentors they receive a 220-hour of practical training in which they are to only observe classrooms. The novice teachers in the present study participated in the older version of the induction programme. Except one novice teacher, all the other novice teachers had mentor teachers from the field of ELT or from other fields such as Fine Arts or Turkish. Yagmur -a pseudonym-was not assigned a mentor due to a shortage of teachers at her school (The other novice teachers in the present study will be referred to by their pseudonyms henceforth.). All the participants were taking some courses on basic rules, regulations and

procedures involved in the teaching profession as part of the induction programme. Ahmet was not attending the teaching orientation programme, because he was working on a contract. In Turkey, it is a usual practice to assign those teacher candidates who have failed in the KPSS exam as ‘a teacher working on a contract’. KPSS-Public Personnel Selection Exam-is a formal test all teacher candidates are to take to be assigned as in-service teachers. Novice teachers starting to work on a contract are not included in teaching orientation programmes.

The participants were the graduates of ELT departments offering four-year teacher education programme. They took courses on language skills, ELT methodology, English literature, general educational principles. In the first year of the programme, they took the first teaching practice course ‘School Experience I’ in which they observed classes of any subject matter in primary schools and wrote reflective observation reports. In the fourth year of the programme, they were provided with practicum experiences all throughout the year. In the first term, they observed English classes in primary schools, prepared joint lesson plans with their peers and were engaged in teaching practices. In the second term, they were involved in both classroom observations and teaching practice, with an increased amount of practice opportunities.

## *2.2 Data Collection Tools*

A variety of research tools was used in the present study for purposes of triangulation and for a rich description of the research issues under scrutiny. The data sources included semi-structured interviews, diary entries, video-recorded classroom observations and stimulated recall interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were held to triangulate data and elicit deeper insights into the issues under scrutiny. The interviews were audio-recorded and held in Turkish. They lasted between 60-90 minutes and started off with a few predetermined questions, but there was also some space for flexibility and freedom of expression. The interview questions focused on the novice EFL teachers’ challenges and their underlying reasons for those challenges. The teachers were given the full transcriptions of the interviews to check whether the content of the transcriptions matched with the information that they provided during the interviews. The interviews were audio-recorded and held in Turkish.

Diaries were employed to have first-hand accounts into the research participant's day-to-day experiences and feelings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Cohen & Manion, 1998). The participants kept their diaries throughout the fall term of 2005-2006 academic year. They were given notebooks and were asked to record the positive and negative aspects of that teaching day, and how those aspects influenced them.

Classroom observations were also held for purposes of stimulated recall interviews in which the novice teachers were asked to stop the recording and retrospectively to comment on their lessons in terms of the difficulties they were experiencing. The full transcriptions of these interviews were given to the participants again to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions in terms of their content.

## *2.3 Data Analysis*

Data were analysed by means of constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), i.e., a blend of inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all events observed and coded in data. Data were thus continuously refined throughout the analysis process which opened up possibilities for the emergence and discovery of new dimensions and relationships within data (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Two different levels of analysis were thus carried out: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. First, themes and sub-themes in each individual case were identified and compared within each other. Following within-case analyses, all the themes and sub-themes in each case were compared and grouped into larger themes. For purposes of validation and verification of analyses, an independent researcher was asked to analyse a certain amount of the qualitative data. To calculate inter-rater reliability, the total number of agreements was divided by the sum of total number of agreements and disagreements (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As a result, 84% agreement was achieved between the researcher herself and the co-rater in the analysis of diaries, 80% agreement rate in the analysis of the semi-structured interviews and 85% in the stimulated recall interviews.

## **3. Findings**

In this section, the findings from the cross-case analyses of the all qualitative data are presented in the light of the research questions posed in the study. Direct quotations from the cases are also included in the report of qualitative findings accordingly. ‘D’ at the end of each quotation stands for ‘diary’, ‘I’ ‘interviews’ and ‘SRI’ to ‘stimulated-recall interviews’.

### 3.1 What Challenges Do Novice EFL Teachers Report to Be Experiencing in Relation to Foreign Language Pedagogy?

The present study indicated how the challenges affected the novice EFL teachers' instructional decisions and practices and how they experienced by the novice teachers. In the light of the research questions, those challenges were grouped under two general headings:

- Challenges in relation to foreign language pedagogy
- Challenges in relation to forms of professional support available to novice EFL teachers

The cross-case analysis of the qualitative data revealed the following themes and sub-themes of challenges in relation to foreign language pedagogy, as seen in the figure below:

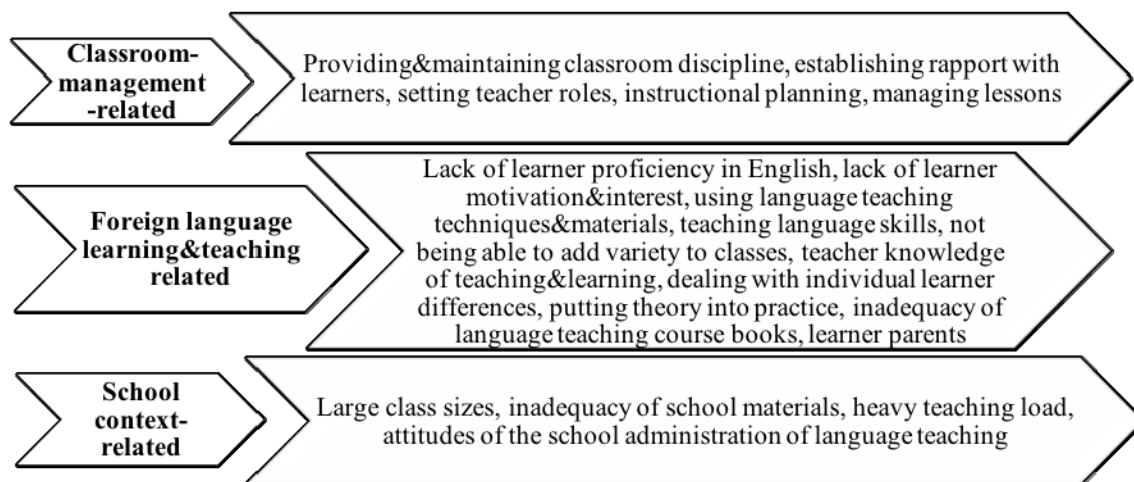


Figure 1. Themes and sub-themes of challenges in relation to foreign language pedagogy

In what follows, all these challenges reported by the novice EFL teachers will be mentioned in detail.

#### 3.1.1 Challenges in Relation to Classroom Management

Challenges in relation to classroom management were classified broadly under the following sub-themes: providing and maintaining classroom discipline, establishing rapport with learners, setting teacher roles, instructional planning and managing lessons.

##### 3.1.1.1 Providing and Maintaining Classroom Discipline

Providing and maintaining classroom discipline was one of the repeatedly mentioned challenges, and the participants reported it as a problem ( $n=7$ ). The following specific challenges appeared to haunt the novice EFL teachers: disruptive learner behaviour and how to deal with it.

Disruptive learner behaviour seemed to be a great challenge for all the participants. It was, as they noted, generally either in the form of bullying, excessive talk, talking out of turn, being noisy, being out of seat without good cause, bad language, disobedience, or disrespect to the teacher. Perisu lamented over how disruptive learner behaviour affected her:

‘...Noise, chatting, bullying-I am trying hard to calm them down-I can’t concentrate on what I’m doing and neither can some of my learners...’ (I)

All the novice teachers, as it seemed, were also experiencing difficulty in dealing with disruptive behaviour. In particular, they complained over not being able to pre-empt misbehaviour, using ineffective ways to deal with it, or not knowing how to overcome it. They also seemed to feel helpless and unsure about the way they handled disruptive learner behaviour. As Ahmet reported:

‘They [the students] don’t pay attention at all...I was giving pluses and minuses to those learners...I said that I would lower their grades. These didn’t work, either. I then gave up...I can’t develop a strategy to deal with such behaviour.’ (SRI)

### 3.1.1.2 Establishing Rapport With Learners

Two of the case study participants brought up establishing rapport as a challenge. As it seemed, this difficulty indulged them in feelings of inefficacy and triggered some other problems such as disruptive learner behaviour and not being able to carry out effective lessons. Ahmet questioned himself as follows:

‘This week was dull both for me and for my students...I then keep thinking I cannot teach properly and I can’t break the ice between myself and students and reach a compromise with them.’ (D)

### 3.1.1.3 Setting Teacher Roles

Not becoming the ideal teacher was one of the challenges reported with regard to setting their classroom roles. The novice teachers would like to be tolerant, caring, humorous and friendly teachers. However, this ideal image was in sharp contrast to what they felt they had to be: an authoritarian teacher. As they emphasised, they were sometimes trying hard to become like that idealised teacher, but they were then running the risk of losing their authority. Due to this dilemma, they were sinking into the feelings of demotivation and unhappiness. As Ahmet noted:

‘...my lessons aren’t fruitful because I can’t be the teacher I’d like to be...I’d like to be more constructive, humorous, but I can’t achieve this without losing my authority. I feel demotivated and unhappy.’ (D)

Not knowing which teacher roles to assume emerged as the other difficulty regarding setting teacher roles. As two of the participants remarked, they were not yet able to decide whether to become a teacher as a controller or teacher as a guide. Yagmur, for example, was having ebbs and flows in relation to her classroom roles:

‘I’m having a role crisis. That’s my problem...I still can’t find my way. When my students think of me, they can’t say, ‘She’s angry or tolerant...I feel I’m inconsistent.’ (SRI)

### 3.1.1.4 Instructional Planning

Instructional planning was another area of challenge emerged in data in relation to classroom management ( $n=4$ ). What was particularly challenging for those participants was not being able to write explicit lesson plans, because they did not have the motivation to do so. As Sema reflected:

‘...I don’t make lesson plans. Everything gets harder for me then...Why don’t I? I think it’s just a waste of time...I really don’t know! How will I get used to making lesson plans? Heeeelp!’ (D)

However, the unwillingness and demotivation for making lesson plans appeared to trigger another array of difficulties: managing lessons.

### 3.1.1.5 Managing Lessons

Lesson management was another problematic area for the novice EFL teachers. More specifically, the teachers reported to be having difficulty with the following: catching up with the syllabus, managing class time, gathering and maintaining learner interest, making transitions within the lesson, using body language effectively, and using the board appropriately. As data suggested, these difficulties caused the novice teachers to carry out ineffective lessons.

As four of the participants mentioned, they were continually feeling frustrated due to the volume of the syllabus that they were to cover. Causing them to diverge from teaching practices that they considered appropriate, their frustration was being coupled when they saw that they were falling behind the syllabus. For example, Yagmur, due to her overriding concern for catching up with the syllabus, attempted to teach two things at a time, but it did not work. As she wrote:

‘I can’t keep up with the syllabus...I taught this-that-these-those in the same lesson, though. It didn’t work. I knew it wouldn’t, but it was all because of the fear of lagging behind the syllabus...’ (D)

Managing class time emerged as another area of challenge. Four of the novice teachers complained over not being able to manage class time effectively due to disruptive learner behaviour, lack of learner proficiency and lack of instructional planning. In Yagmur’s case, for example, poor lesson planning and low levels of learner proficiency were adding to her difficulty with using class time effectively.

‘I don’t think it was an effective lesson. Maybe it is because I couldn’t plan the lesson well. My students are low proficient...so I have to teach from the very beginning and I can’t use class time effectively.’ (D)

Making transitions within the lesson was reported to be a difficulty by two of the participants. What was particularly challenging in making transitions was to provide the transitions appropriately within the different stages of a lesson and within different classroom activities. As unveiled in data, ineffectiveness of transitions

within a lesson was creating an inviting context for disorder and confusion. As Sema reported:

‘I’m jumping from one thing to another. I say, ‘your homework is...’ Then I stop and go on with something different...sometimes the students don’t get what I’m teaching and I have to teach and teach it again...’ (SRI)

For three of the novice teachers, gathering and maintaining learner interest was a challenge. Elif, for instance, had difficulty in starting the lesson and gathering learner interest:

‘...it is really difficult to find the students ready for the lesson and to get their attention...I do spend the first 10 minutes of the lesson to calm them down...’ (SRI)

Using body language and using the board effectively were the other pressing issues, as reported by two of the participants. As they complained, that they were not able to use their body language in such a way that would display a self-confident and assertive teacher manner. Ahmet voiced his concerns as follows:

‘I didn’t like this-my hand in my pocket...I’m folding my arms. I’m joining my hands all the time...The students might think - I’m unsure of myself.’ (SRI)

Sema complained over her not using the board appropriately in the stimulated recall interview. As she expressed:

‘I can’t use the board economically...I can’t find any space on the board to write some other things...It really looks bad.’ (SRI)

### 3.1.2 Challenges in Relation to Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

Along with the difficulties in relation to classroom management, it appeared that the novice teachers had to deal with a myriad of some other difficulties in relation to foreign language learning and teaching. These difficulties were reported and discussed in the light of the following sub-themes emerged in the qualitative data: lack of learner proficiency in English, lack of learner motivation and interest for English, using language teaching techniques and materials, teaching language skills, teacher knowledge of language and teaching, dealing with individual learner differences, putting theory into practice, inadequacy of language teaching course books, learner parents.

#### 3.1.2.1 Lack of Learner Proficiency in English

Lack of language learner proficiency was brought about by the all participants ( $n=7$ ) as a challenge. The learners’ poor level of English seemed to be triggering some other difficulties such as ineffective use of class time and lack of learner interest in English classes. As Elif complained:

‘I ask them to write down simple sentences. They can’t. I ask them to say their names. They can’t. How far can I go back? They should have learned all that stuff before...so I don’t want to be pushy...or the students are getting inattentive.’ (I)

#### 3.1.2.2 Lack of Learner Motivation and Interest

Lack of learner motivation and interest appeared to be another pressing issue for some of the novice EFL teachers. More specifically, those teachers were suffering from low levels of learner motivation for learning and lack of learner interest in English. Four of the novice teachers mentioned ‘low levels of learner motivation for learning’ as a challenge. They pointed out that most of their learners did not feel obliged to fulfil simple tasks and responsibilities. What seemed to prevail in those teachers’ remarks were the feelings of anger and despair. As Bahar expressed:

‘They aren’t interested in any lesson...you keep trying and trying, but when you see they don’t do anything for themselves, you begin to feel helpless...’ (SRI)

Lack of learner motivation for learning was not the only difficulty upsetting the novice EFL teachers. The picture seemed to be getting more complex by the presence of learners with lack of interest in English. Six of the novice teachers reported it as a challenge. Perisu was, for example, suffering from her learners’ perception of English as a subject matter. As she noted:

‘For the students at this school, English is just a subject matter...They never take time to ask themselves if they will ever need it...’ (SRI)

#### 3.1.2.3 Using Language Teaching Techniques and Materials

Using language teaching techniques and materials was another area of difficulty reported by the participants. Two sub-categories of challenge emerged under this category: learners’ unfamiliarity with communicative activities and materials and not being able to use communicative activities and materials.

The learners' unfamiliarity with communicative activities and materials was a difficulty for four of the novice EFL teachers. This unfamiliarity was distressing for the novice EFL teachers, because it brought them to the edge of avoiding such activities and materials as communicative games, group work, implicit grammar teaching and authentic materials. Yagmur recounted one of her experiences in her 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes:

'Today I taught the name of months. I used a chart of seasons...but they were distracted, asking if I had made the pictures...This is my biggest problem in using such materials. They aren't used to them...they think the class is over and it is now game time.' (D)

The present study also shed light on how the use of communicative activities and materials posed problems for the novice EFL teachers. Specifically, the novice teachers ( $n=6$ ) complained over either not being able to use communicative teaching techniques and materials (i.e. games, group work, production activities, using English as classroom language, flashcards, pictures) or not being able to use them effectively when they attempted to do so. These were due to their learners' unfamiliarity with such techniques and materials, disruptive behaviour, low levels of learner proficiency and motivation, large class sizes. Furthermore, their sentiments revealed a tension between what they would like to do and what they had to do due to several constraints such as lack of learner motivation, large class sizes, learners' unfamiliarity with CLT techniques. For example, although they would like to employ communicative techniques and materials, they either had to abandon them totally or do not prefer to use them as often as they like. Sema, as she noted, was not able to employ communicative activities due to large class sizes.

'Classes are crowded. This affects the types of the activities you do. Rather than communicative activities, you have to use those of the grammar-translation because they are time-saving and practical.' (SRI)

#### 3.1.2.4 Teaching Language Skills

It was not only the use of communicative activities and materials annoying the novice EFL teachers, but also the teaching of language skills. What was particularly troubling for some of the novice teachers ( $n=4$ ) was that they were not able to do speaking, listening, reading, and writing activities. Learners' unfamiliarity with communicative activities, disruptive behaviour, lack of learner proficiency in English, large class sizes, inadequacy of school materials appeared to add to their difficulty with teaching language skills. The emerging picture was thus a more grammar-based instruction with little variety in terms of teaching techniques and materials. Perisu voiced her concern as follows:

'We can't do speaking in classes with 30 students and...with learners who haven't heard of English or who have poor knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar.' (I)

Sema was not able to teach listening in her classes due to the inadequacy of instructional materials at her school. As she reported:

'We can't do listening, which is a problem...we have a huge tape-recorder and two big loudspeakers, but the teacher of Music uses it.' (I)

#### 3.1.2.5 Not Being Able to Add Variety to Classes

Five of the participants reported that they were not able to draw on a variety of language teaching techniques and materials or were not able to provide their learners with supplementary materials. For example, inadequacy of school materials (i.e. lack of photocopy facilities) and learners' low level of English proficiency came to be those teachers' reasons for not being able to add variety to their classes. Feeling helpless, the novice teachers then tended to submit themselves to the constraints rather than looking for alternative ways to overcome the problem. Ahmet, for example, was annoyed by his not using a variety of techniques and materials. He noted:

'This week was dull both for me and the students. I do try hard to keep them on-task. I feel inadequate and annoyed...perhaps this is because...I don't use a variety of techniques and materials.' (D)

#### 3.1.2. 6 Teacher Knowledge of Language and Teaching

As revealed in data, three of the novice EFL teachers were unsettled about their knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, their speaking skills in English and their knowledge of how to teach English. It seemed that all these caused quite a stir in their pedagogical and affective worlds and turned out to be face-threatening acts. Sema recounted the following incidence, and later in the interview, she used the metaphor 'scar' to depict her trouble.

'...this year I went abroad. I met a Danish boy...He was 15. He was speaking better than me. I regretted saying I was a teacher of English. Believe me it is really difficult because you have difficulty in expressing yourself...speaking is a scar of mine.' (I)



Eylul, as it seemed, was distressed by her knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary. Her students were challenging her knowledge and authority as a language teacher. As she noted:

‘...they [the students] ask me about a rule...you can’t say, ‘I don’t know it.’ You are a teacher. They expect you to know everything...I say, ‘I don’t know...Shall I lie to you?’ They then keep saying, ‘Aren’t you a teacher of English?’ (SRI)

### 3.1.2.7 Dealing With Individual Learner Differences

With respect to dealing with individual learner differences, one of the particular difficulties was dealing with learners with poor cognitive/academic skills ( $n=3$ ). The teachers, as they pointed out, were trying hard to find a balance between slow and fast learners. As Bahar said:

‘...there are huge gaps in the classroom. There are slow students, but also very smart ones. It’s difficult to find a balance.’ (SRI)

Not being able to address learner interests and needs was the other area of difficulty reported by the novice teachers ( $n=4$ ). Particularly, they complained that they were not able to provide individualised instruction and were not able to meet their students’ demands although they would like to do so. As the teachers failed to do so, they seemed to be indulged in feelings of guilt and sadness. Ahmet, for example, was unable to address his learners’ interests:

‘I can’t tell I’m going through a good, successful term...I can’t meet the demands of my students who-I think-are good at English. This is really distressing and sad...I get angry with myself, but I sometimes feel so helpless...’ (D)

### 3.1.2.8 Putting Theory Into Practice

Putting theory into practice seemed to be another disturbing issue for all the novice teachers. They all complained that they could not achieve to match their knowledge with classroom practice, and according to them, the major source of their difficulty was their teacher education programmes which had created in their minds ideal images of language learning and teaching. As Bahar voiced her concern:

‘...Once you are alone with your own classroom, you see that. You have the knowledge, but in practice, it’s much different. Particularly, issues like classroom management and discipline or ways of responding to misbehaviour are little focused on. Practice opportunities are limited as well in those areas...’ (SRI)

### 3.1.2.9 Inadequacy of Language Teaching Course Books

Inadequacy of language teaching course books was another challenge emerged in data. As three of the case study participants remarked, the course books were not adequate in terms of their layout and content and were above the learners’ proficiency level. Elif described the course books as lacking in terms of their supplementary materials such as CDs:

‘The course books don’t have any CDs. There are listening sections, but the teacher is supposed to read aloud dialogues or texts...’ (I)

### 3.1.2.10 Learner Parents

As two of the participants expressed their sentiments, the learners did not have anybody to scaffold and guide their learning outside the school. Therefore, what they had taught was not going beyond the school, which resulted in little student learning. As illustrated in Perisu’s remark below:

‘I’ve got some problems with the students’ parents...I do believe the students get what I’ve taught, but...they don’t have any one to help them at home, so they forget too easily.’ (I)

Parental attitudes towards English as a subject matter was the other difficulty emerged in relation to learner parents. According to two of the novice teachers, some of the learner parents had negative attitudes towards English as a subject matter. As Ahmet complained:

‘Learner parents here just don’t care about English...They think, ‘my child should learn Turkish and Mathematics...we can send him/her to a language course.’ (SRI)

### 3.1.3 Challenges in Relation to the School Context Itself

Data unearthed a few difficulties that appeared to be unique to the school contexts which the novice EFL teachers found themselves in. These included large class sizes, inadequacy of school materials/equipment, expectations and attitudes of the school administration of language teaching, heavy teaching load, learners coming from deprived backgrounds and time allocated to English in the curriculum. All those difficulties were

grouped under the sub-category ‘Challenges in relation to the school context’. This sub-category, in turn, was dealt with under the major category ‘Challenges in relation to foreign language pedagogy’, because all those school context-related difficulties seemed to influence the novice EFL teachers’ instructional decisions and practices.

#### 3.1.3.1 Large Class Sizes

Large class sizes emerged as a difficulty in three of the cases, shedding further insights into how large class sizes interfered with the novice teachers’ practices. For instance, the teachers tended to use grammar-translation techniques rather than communicative ones, as they were thinking that CLT activities were more difficult to implement in large classes. Large class sizes also appeared to be the justification for not being able to provide individualised instruction for differing learner needs and interests. As Perisu remarked:

‘We were taught, ‘Manage seating plans in the form of a horseshoe, do group work or speaking activities...’, but all these are impossible in classes of 30 students...’ (I)

#### 3.1.3.2 Inadequacy of School Materials /Equipment

Inadequacy of school materials /equipment was another emergent theme in data and was brought up by six of the participants. These teachers described their schools as lacking in various instructional materials such as televisions, tape recorders, computers, projectors and photocopy machines. As with large class sizes, inadequacy of school materials and equipment was a justification for the novice teachers not to do what they intended to do or what they kept doing. For instance, they mentioned that they gave up using extra learning materials because of the lack of photocopy facilities at their schools. Some of them, as they said, were not doing listening activities since there were not any tape recorders or computers at their schools. Ahmet was not able to use supplementary learning materials due to lack of photocopy facilities. He complained:

‘I can’t give my students extra materials, because you can’t photocopy anything. The school administration thinks we are wasting too much paper...I can’t afford extra materials either, so...I have to use the course book...’ (SRI)

#### 3.1.3.3 Heavy Teaching Load

Four of the novice teachers mentioned heavy teaching load as a challenge for themselves. This difficulty seemed to increase the pedagogical and emotional burden of the novice teachers who were already overwhelmed by the tasks and responsibilities of being a full-time teacher. Eylul seemed to be feeling demotivated and overwhelmed cognitively:

‘I’m teaching 8 hours three days in a week and I’m torn apart at the end of the day...I lose my motivation and feel my teaching efficiency decreases...’ (D)

#### 3.1.3.4 Attitudes of the School Administration Towards Language Teaching

This was an issue raised by two of the novice EFL teachers. What they said was that their school administration was not much interested in what they were doing as teachers of English and did not place a value in English as a school subject. As Elif remarked:

‘When it comes to English, the school administration says, ‘Don’t care. What if do you teach like that? What if don’t they come to your classes?’ There’s such an attitude here.’ (SRI)

#### 3.1.3.5 Learners Coming From Deprived Backgrounds

This was a challenge brought up by the all case study participants. They reported that most of their learners were coming from middle or lower class families and were children of uneducated parents. According to them, this was one of the underlying reasons of disruptive learner behaviour and lack of learner achievement. As Bahar commented:

‘These two students...are fighting...chatting...maybe all these are because of their families...you can easily identify students having problems with their families. These problems inevitably affect their behaviour or success.’ (SRI)

#### 3.1.3.6 Time Allocated to English in the Curriculum

Two of the novice EFL teachers in the present study mentioned this as a challenge. In Turkish education system, at primary level, the second and third grade learners are offered two hours of English classes per week, whereas the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth graders four hours. At vocational secondary schools, there are three hours of English classes. This system-wide drawback appeared to influence negatively the novice EFL teachers’ practices, doubling their pressure of having to catch up with the syllabus. According to Sema, three hours of

English classes per week was inadequate, as she was having difficulty in catching up with syllabus.

‘3 lesson-hours a week. For example, I did five extra classes with the 9<sup>th</sup> graders, because it’s not enough. Or I can’t catch up with the syllabus. I’ve got such a problem.’ (SRI)

Apart from all these pedagogical challenges, the novice EFL teachers reported to be experiencing some other difficulties with regard to various forms of professional support that were available to them.

### 3.2 What Challenges Do Novice EFL Teachers Report to Be Experiencing in Relation to Forms of Professional Support That Are Available To Them?

The information gleaned from data in relation to professional support was reported and discussed under the following themes: school administration-related challenges, colleague-related challenges, mentor teacher-related challenges, teaching orientation courses-related challenges.



Figure 2. Sub-themes of challenges in relation to professional support

#### 3.2.1 School-Administration Related

Although support and feedback from school administration is of significance in initial years of teaching, four of the teachers seemed to be deprived of such support. They reported the following challenges: not being appreciated by the school administration, not being encouraged for professional development, being given extra work outside teaching, and not being helped in times of difficulty. Yagmur, for example, was suffering from extra work outside teaching. As she noted, this was interfering with her primary responsibility – teaching English:

‘...The second lesson-I couldn’t do it unfortunately. Dear principal asked me to see him to prepare social activities. Then the bell rang. The students had already turned the classroom upside down. A missing lesson again...’ (D)

#### 3.2.2 Colleague-Related

Along with lack of administrative support, some of the novice teachers were suffering from lack of collegial support and cooperation ( $n=3$ ), augmenting their feelings of loneliness, discouragement, and demotivation. Sema was one of those teachers continually disturbed by lack of collegial support. This indulged her into feelings of loneliness, as she lamented:

‘I’m sad, but it’s my first term in teaching and there’s no cooperation among teachers of English and having such loneliness, I have to struggle with 11th graders 6 hours a week...’ (D)

#### 3.2.3 Mentor Teacher-Related

According to the regulations about training newly qualified teachers in Turkey, each novice teacher, upon his/her appointment to his/her school, is assigned a mentor teacher from his/her subject-matter area. The mentor teacher prepares a training programme, the aim of which is to help the novice teacher learn how to plan lessons on a daily and yearly basis. At the end of the programme, novice teachers are evaluated out of 100 in terms of their general teacher qualities, discipline, diligence, cooperativeness, trustworthiness, and knowledge of subject matter. Nevertheless, all these might remain as written practices. The common practice in the training of newly qualified teachers in the Turkish context is either to leave them to their own devices without any mentors or to assign them to teachers of subject-matter areas other than their own subject matter because of shortage of EFL teachers. The results of the present study provided evidence for this common practice: The novice EFL teachers were not assigned a mentor teacher at all (Yagmur, for example), or, even if they were, the mentor teacher was not a teacher of English. All the other participants-except Sema and Bahar-had mentor teachers, but not from the ELT field. This, in turn, indulged them into increased feelings of loneliness, isolation and unfruitful teacher learning

experiences. Sema had a mentor teacher who was an EFL teacher, but she was worried that she could not see her mentor often:

‘I called my mentor teacher. I was crying...She told me to calm down...She is the only teacher who understands me in the English department. But unfortunately, I can’t see her, so I feel lonelier.’ (D)

#### 3.2.1.4 Teaching Orientation Courses-Related

In the context of the present study, novice teachers, all throughout a school year, attend teaching orientation programmes consisting of three successive components: the basic education, preparatory education, and practical education. The basic education (approximately 60 lesson hours) offers courses on the rules and regulations of civil services such as Atatürk’s Principles, History, Turkish Law, Governmental Structure, Procedures in Formal Correspondences and Filing, Protection of the Governmental Goods and Economic Measures, Public Relations, Communication, Turkish Grammar. The basic education is immediately followed by the preparatory education in which novice teachers take courses on the organisation of the Ministry of Education, school organisation, school rules, and regulations, and responsibilities of a teacher. The preparatory education lasts approximately 120 lesson hours. In the newer version of the orientation programme, this training framework has remained the same. All the novice EFL teachers ( $n=7$ ) raised criticisms against the content of those courses, reporting that they did not much benefit from these courses, because those courses did not address their immediate needs and interests. Elif expressed her discontention:

‘In those courses...there’s nothing about English teaching...there’s no such things as ‘What would you do in that situation or which method would you use?’ I forgot all that stuff.’ (I)

## 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study focused on novice EFL teachers’ perceived challenges and employed a qualitative research methodology. Data obtained through different sources enriched the findings, however, the present study centred attention on a relatively small sample of novice EFL teachers. Therefore, it might be argued that differing insights could have been obtained with a larger group of participants. No claims could also be made as to the generalizability of the results due to the small number of participants and to the idiosyncratic nature of first year teaching experiences.

The results of the present study seem to suggest that the novice EFL teachers started out their pedagogical journey in the midst of challenges. On the one hand, they had to deal with an array of difficulties in relation to foreign language pedagogy. Low learner proficiency, inadequacy of language teaching course books and school materials, providing and maintaining classroom discipline appeared to be incessant problems of the novice EFL teachers. These results seem to corroborate those of the previous research about novice EFL teachers’ experiences in their initial years of teaching (Farrell, 2003; Korukçu, 1996; Richards & Pennington, 1998). At this point, one might well argue that the challenges reported in this paper would be part of the work and lives of experienced teachers. Nevertheless, how novice teachers and experienced teachers construe these challenges and how they cope with them might significantly differ from each other.

The novice EFL teachers were also deprived from professional support and guidance. Quite a few of them were suffering from the inadequacy of professional development opportunities, lack of support from the school administration and from their mentors (or even lack of a formally assigned mentor), lack of collaboration with their colleagues, and the inadequacy of teaching orientation programmes. These results seem to be in line with those found in previous research on novice EFL teachers’ induction experiences in their initial years of teaching (Farrell, 2003, 2006, 2016; Numrich, 1996; Richards & Pennington, 1998).

As it also seemed, the novice EFL teachers had to deal with a web of interacting and competing difficulties triggering each other and resulting in a chain reaction. For instance, some of the teachers who were faced with challenges in instructional planning experienced difficulties in managing class time, catching up with the syllabus, or in addressing learner interests and needs. Similarly, the difficulties in relation to providing and maintaining classroom discipline or learners’ low English proficiency appeared to provoke some other ones such as not using learner-centred and communicative classroom activities.

The present study yielded information as to the novice teachers’ stances towards the challenges. There were some instances in data which revealed that the teachers tended to accommodate to the difficulties and preferred to give up doing what they would like to do or what they considered appropriate. Thus, most of the novice teachers reported to be quitting many of the principles that were crucial to successful language learning and teaching experiences such as communicative methodologies and learner-centred approaches. Such tendencies of the novice teachers might be explained on the basis of ‘internalised adjustment’, which is one of the social

strategies developed by Lacey (1977) to explain conformity to institutional norms. The novice teachers seemed to use this strategy for the sake of creating safe pedagogical spaces for themselves.

All these results can be a point of departure for reflecting on pre-service language teacher education practices in Turkey. There seems to be a need to raise pre-service EFL teachers' awareness on the possibility that their journey of becoming language teachers might be troublesome and challenging. This could be achieved by means of problem-based learning in which pre-service EFL teachers will be provided with real classroom problems rather than inauthentic classroom situations prevalent in teacher education textbooks (Le Maistre & Paré, 2010). Within the framework of problem-based learning, pre-service EFL teachers might be involved in analyses of real case studies of novice and experienced teachers and might be asked to analyse problematic classroom situations embedded in those cases as well as what they would be doing if they were the teachers in the problematic situations. Such a case methodology might increase the novice EFL teachers' repertoire of educational strategies by providing them with models of how to think professionally about problems and by showing them how expert teachers approach to problems (Kleinfeld, 1990). Varying student teachers' field teaching experiences might be another way to sensitize them to possible problems in classroom teaching. Generally, for their teaching practice experiences, pre-service teachers in Turkey are sent to relatively easy to teach schools, not difficult to teach schools where they are usually assigned to when they become full teachers. We might then design student teachers' practicum experiences in such a way that would involve them in a variety of teaching contexts (i.e. contexts with good and poor conditions) and might encourage them to reflect on the realities of these contexts. This would in turn contribute to the novice EFL teachers' knowledge of those teaching contexts.

The findings of the present study have also implications for school administrators and policy makers, pointing to a need for creating fruitful, systematic and structured induction experiences for novice teachers. As mentioned earlier, the induction programme in the context of the present study has undergone a revision recently. The possible consequences of this revision should, however, be watched out carefully, and there always seems to be a paramount need to consider and reconsider professional support structures for the betterment of novice teachers. Similarly, the content and the practices of the teaching orientation programmes require careful reflection and consideration so that they do not fall behind addressing novice teachers' needs and interests. As with the pre-service teacher education, in these programmes, novice teachers can be engaged in analyses of problematic classroom situations. Besides, as an alternative to these programmes, school-based teacher development schemes could be designed in which the school administrators, colleagues and mentor teachers work collaboratively to help novice teachers survive through their complexities and tensions. These schemes can be supported by online discussion boards (Akcan, 2016), blogs, and platforms of social media. This would likely increase novice teachers' opportunities for 'communities of practice', which flourish when people sharing common interests in some subjects or problems collaborate over a period of time to share ideas, find solutions, and build innovations (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In addition, as unfolded in the present study, the novice teachers are vulnerable and naïve not only pedagogically but also emotionally. Therefore, along with pedagogical scaffolding, novice teachers might be provided with affective scaffolding that would likely aid in the development of their self-efficacy, motivation and professional identity. This scaffolding could be in the form of systematic confirmation and constructive feedback. An alternative type of scaffolding might be not assigning novice teachers to schools with poor and difficult conditions (Kumazawa, 2013). Again, school administrators, colleagues, and mentor teachers appear to be key agents in this task, as the providers of such affective scaffolding (Farrell, 2003; Farrell, 2006).

### **5. Suggestions for Further Research**

The present study aimed to identify the challenges of novice EFL teachers teaching at public primary and secondary schools. Nevertheless, it did not focus on the relationship between those difficulties and the teachers' previous language learning experiences, types of the schools where they were teaching, amount of teaching experience, teacher education programmes that they graduated from, and teacher characteristics. Further studies might thus be conducted on these aspects. Moreover, some other studies might compare novice and experienced EFL teachers' experiences to better understand the challenges that novice teachers are faced with and to see how novice and experienced teachers deal with different challenges of classroom practice.

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