

## NOVICE ESL TEACHERS' CONCERNS AND PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES

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First year of teaching is a difficult challenge. Equally challenging is figuring out ways to support and assist novice teachers as they enter the profession. Novice teachers often feel overwhelmed, isolated and feeling inadequate as teachers (Ngoh & Tan, 2000; Abbot, 2003). Consequently, they develop a survival mentality and learn to cope with their problems. Numerous studies indicated that novice teachers faced various challenges in the performance of their work. Among the serious problems encountered by novice teachers according to Veenman (1984) are as follows: classroom discipline, motivating pupils, dealing with individual differences, assessing pupils' work, relations with parents, organization of class work, insufficient materials and supplies, and dealing with problems of individual pupils. Kagan (1992) found that new teachers do not have the requisite knowledge of classroom procedure to understand the complex interrelationship among management, behavior and academic tasks. This lack of knowledge prevents new teachers from focusing on student learning; instead they are preoccupied with their own behaviour as they try different workable procedures.

In Malaysia, very few studies have been conducted on novice teachers. Most of the research has involved exploring the relationships of mentors and novice teachers especially in the first year of teaching and establishment of partnerships with schools through mentoring. So far it appears that there has been relatively little systematic research on novice teachers concerns during their early years teaching in school. Mohd Nasir (1994) study on novice teachers in primary school reported that among the problems which these teachers faced was related to co-curriculum activities, pedagogical skills and classroom management. Ng Foo Seong (1995) and Mazni (2000) found that novice teachers in secondary schools cited discipline problems as their main concern.

### Objectives

As there are relatively only few studies on understanding the concerns and coping strategies that novice ESL teachers in Malaysia employed, it is then essential to examine these situation. The objectives of this study are:

1. to find out the novice ESL teachers' concerns during their early years of teaching; and
2. to investigate the strategies that novice ESL teachers use to help them cope with their problems.

### Methodology

A survey study was conducted with ninety nine novice teachers to investigate their areas of concerns, perceived important factors of successful teaching and coping strategies employed in their ESL classroom. The respondents of the survey consisted of novice ESL teachers teaching in schools around Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. Eighty six of the respondents were female and thirteen were male. Their ages ranged from twenty three to twenty five and the number of years in terms of teaching experience ranged from one to three years.

### *Questionnaire*

The questionnaire comprised of items related to novice teachers' biographical backgrounds as well as items on the types of concerns and the strategies used to cope with the challenges. The strategies to cope with the challenges were categorised into language learning strategies as well as teaching strategies. This is in line with the purpose of the study which examined teachers' strategies in dealing with their teaching concerns. The questionnaire was specifically designed for this study.

All items in the questionnaire were constructed based on the researchers' experience as language teachers as well as relevant literature. Due to its novelty, the questionnaire was subjected to a pilot testing procedure. Following this procedure, amendments were made to the questionnaire. Using a 4-point Likert-scale respondents were asked to rate from 1 (Very concerned) to 4 (Not concerned). The questionnaires were self-administered to all ninety nine novice teachers.

### Findings

Descriptive statistics were used to illustrate the results obtained. Table 1 shows the mean of various types of concerns which the pre-service teachers had about teaching. As a whole, the pre-service teachers in this study exhibited three kinds of concerns about teaching. These are self-concerns, task concerns and impact concerns.

Table 1  
*Novice Teachers Self Concerns*

Self Concerns	Mean* (M)	Std Dev (SD)
1. acceptance by pupils	1.26	0.58
2. classroom discipline	1.28	0.59
3. teachers' mastery of pedagogical content knowledge/ teaching skill	1.34	0.67
4. lecturers' comments & assessments	1.39	0.75
5. teacher-pupils' relationship	1.40	0.64
6. acceptance and respect by other teachers	1.52	0.71
7. the location of the school	1.67	0.82

\* Value based on 4-point Likert scale: 1=Very concerned, 2=Moderately concerned, 3=A little concerned, 4=Not concerned

On a scale from 1 to 4 (1=very concerned, 4=not concerned), we calculated the top seven self-concerns that novice teachers had. Self concerns which were considered the most important to the trainees were: acceptance by pupils (M= 1.26, SD=0.58); classroom discipline (M= 1.28, SD=0.59); teachers' mastery of pedagogical content knowledge/ teaching skill (M=1.34, SD=0.67); lecturers' comments & assessments (M= 1.39, SD=0.75), teacher-pupils' relationship (M=1.40, SD=0.64), acceptance and respect by other teachers (M=1.52, SD=0.71) and the location of the school (M=1.67, SD=0.82).

Novice teachers' self-concerns were about how to survive in the classroom. The novice teachers in this study exhibited similar kinds of concerns about teaching as the Hong Kong samples reported in Chan and Leung (1998) study.

Table 2  
*Novice Teachers Task Concerns*

Task Concerns	Mean * (M)	Std Dev (SD)
(1) planning a good lesson	1.22	0.53
(2) pupils' motivation for learning	1.28	0.65
(3) relate content to students interests	1.34	0.63
(4) pupils' mastery of knowledge	1.42	0.61
(5) time management	1.46	0.66
(6) progress of scheduled lesson	1.52	0.64
(7) lack of preparation time	1.57	0.74
(8) good relation with other teachers	1.65	0.66
(9) getting support from other teachers	1.74	0.70
(10) covering the syllabus	1.74	0.69
(11) working with too many students in a class	1.75	0.83
(12) record keeping, administrative matters	2.05	0.79

\* Value based on 4-point Likert scale: 1=Very concerned, 2=Moderately concerned, 3=A little concerned, 4= Not concerned

With regard to task concerns, results from Table 2 indicated that the top 5 main task concerns among the respondents in this study are planning a good lesson (Mean=1.22, SD=0.53), pupils' motivation for learning (M=1.28, SD=0.65), relate content to students' interest (M=1.34, SD=0.63) and pupils mastery of knowledge (M=1.42, SD=0.61) and time management (M=1.46, SD=0.66).

Many of these tasks concerns were associated with lack of adequate experience to deal with teaching skills and time constraints and workload. Novice teachers were concerned with the amount of time required to plan and implement a lesson.

Table 3

*Impact Concerns*

Impact Concerns	Mean* (M)	Std Dev (SD)
(1) pupils' achievement	1.32	0.57
(2) guiding students toward intellectual and emotional growth	1.35	0.63
(3) meeting the needs of different kind of students	1.41	0.67
(4) challenging unmotivated students	1.44	0.64

\* Value based on 4-point Likert scale: 1=Very concerned, 2=Moderately concerned, 3=A little concerned, 4=Not concerned

In terms of impact concerns, Table 3 shows that novice teachers were most concerned with their pupils' achievement (M=1.32, SD=0.57). Next, they were concerned with guiding their students toward intellectual and emotional growth (M=1.35, SD=0.63) and meeting the needs of different kind of students (M=1.41, SD=0.67). Lastly, respondents were concerned with challenging unmotivated students (M=1.44, SD=0.64).

The strategies employed by novice teachers in this study are related to three main self-concerns they had on teaching i.e. acceptance by pupils, classroom discipline and teachers' mastery of pedagogical content knowledge/ teaching skill.

Strategies utilised to gain acceptance by pupils include ensuring all students participate in classroom activities (M=1.40), knowing students' names (M=1.48) and finding out their students' likes and dislikes (M=1.85). The second group of strategies was used to maintain classroom discipline. Novice teachers used firm tone of voice to reprimand students (M=1.58), establish clear rules at the beginning of the school year (M=1.65), ensuring that students' negative behaviours are dealt with immediately (M=1.76), showing disapproval with facial expressions (M=1.78) and positioning themselves near badly behaved students (M=1.84).

As for strategies adopted to deal with teaching skills, ESL novice teachers would simplify their language when appropriate (M=1.30), using visuals and realia to communicate meaning (M=1.37), rephrase and repeat messages in a variety of ways (M=1.44), speak clearly (M=1.56), using hands on activities such as games, role plays (M=1.56), use grouping techniques (M=1.61), made frequent comprehension checks (M=1.71), model accurate use of language (M=1.72), select and adapt instructional material for learners' developmental level (M=1.73).

## Conclusion

The findings of this study indicated that for the novice ESL teachers under study, self-concerns such as acceptance by pupils, classroom discipline, mastery of pedagogical content/teaching skills and teacher-pupils relationship were perceived to be highly important to their survival in the classrooms. Classroom discipline is a worldwide concern among novice teachers. With more students of diverse abilities and needs, novice teachers found it difficult to maintain their interest and motivation to learn. Due to lack of experience and insufficient mastery of teaching and management skills, the novice ESL teachers in this study are very concerned of their ability to cope with the challenges. These concerns were perceived to be important factors for successful teaching.

In response to numerous concerns that novice teachers had during their beginning years of teaching, respondents in this study employed various coping strategies in order to make them feel

accepted by the students, managing classroom discipline and instructional strategies related to ESL classroom.

Knowledge of how novice ESL teachers cope with their concerns would have the benefit of informing teacher education programs of the most effective ways of providing support.

Thus the results of this study can be useful to teacher educators and school administrators by helping them to understand the concerns of novice teachers. Such understanding could lead to changes in teacher preparation programs, better assistance during the beginning years of teaching, and the improved professional development for teachers at all experience levels.

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