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**Concerns and Current Classroom Challenges of Novice English Teachers**

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**Autoras:** Jessica Viviana Montero Sigüencia

C.I. 0302888631

[jessica.jvms@gmail.com](mailto:jessica.jvms@gmail.com)

Mélida Susana Montero Saiteros

C.I. 0105617971

[melida.montero198@gmail.com](mailto:melida.montero198@gmail.com)

**Tutor:** Magister Ana María Calle Calle

C.I. 0102305562

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## RESUMEN

A medida que el inglés es aprendido alrededor del mundo también es requerida la presencia de un docente. De hecho, los profesores de inglés juegan un papel importante en la educación. A menudo, nuevos profesores están ingresando al mundo de la docencia; entonces identificar los problemas más comunes que los nuevos profesores de inglés experimentan cuando empiezan a trabajar, es un tema a ser tratado. El primer año de trabajo para los profesores novatos es muy significativo debido a que durante este tiempo se encontrará con algunos desafíos muy diferentes a sus expectativas previas. En nuestra investigación nos concentramos en los problemas y desafíos que enfrentan los profesores principiantes de inglés cuando empiezan su vida laboral. Una compilación de 20 estudios empíricos y un análisis detallado nos permitieron descubrir que los profesores novatos experimentan un “choque con la realidad” el cual está relacionado con la ansiedad por la transición de ser estudiante para convertirse en profesor. Entre otros factores se encontró el “manejo de la clase”, “métodos de enseñanza”, “relaciones”, etc. como los problemas más comunes para un profesor novato.

Palabras clave. Profesores de Inglés. Profesores Novatos de Inglés. Desafíos y Problemas.



## ABSTRACT

As English is learnt worldwide, the presence of a teacher is needed, too. In fact, English teachers play an important role. Frequently, new teachers are starting their professional lives; therefore, identifying the most common problems that new English teachers have when they start working is a topic to be discussed. The first year of work for beginner teachers is significant since it is the time when the teacher will encounter some challenges very different from their expectations. Through this research synthesis, we will focus on the concerns and challenges that novice English teachers face when they start in the profession. A compilation of 20 empiric studies and a detailed analysis lead us to discover that novice teachers experience "reality shock", related to anxiety for the transition from being a student to becoming a teacher. Among other concerns, we found in our study "classroom management", "teaching approach", "relationships", etc. as the most common concerns for a novice teacher.

Key words: English Teachers. Novice English Teachers. Concerns and Challenges.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
RESUMEN.....	2
ABSTRACT .....	3
Acknowledgements.....	10
Dedication .....	10
CHAPTER I .....	11
Description of the Research.....	11
1.1 Introduction .....	11
1.2 Background.....	12
1.3 Problem Statement .....	13
1.4 Rationale.....	14
CHAPTER II .....	15
Theoretical Framework .....	15
2.1 Teacher cognition.....	15
2.2 Teachers’ concerns.....	15
CHAPTER III.....	16
Literature Review .....	16
3.1 Concerns related to teachers’ transition from being a student to becoming an English teacher .	16
3.2 Concerns associated with teaching-learning environment.....	22
CHAPTER IV.....	30
Methodology .....	30
4.1 Inclusion criteria .....	31
4.2 Summary and research questions .....	31
CHAPTER V .....	33
Analysis.....	33
CHAPTER VI.....	39
Conclusions and Recommendations .....	39
6.1 Conclusions .....	39
6.2 Recommendations .....	41
References .....	42



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Publication dates of the analyzed studies.....	33
Table 2. Years of experience considered for being a novice teacher .....	34
Table 3. The most common concerns associated with teaching-learning environment. ....	34



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Cuenca, 24 de noviembre de 2020

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of stylized initials and a surname, positioned above a horizontal line.

Mélida Susana Montero Saiteros

C.I: 0105617971



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C.I: 0302888631



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C.I: 0302888631



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### **Dedication**

I dedicate our undergraduate project to my family. A special feeling of gratitude to my loving parents Manuel and Ana for being my strong pillar and my source of inspiration.

Jéssica Montero

I dedicate our final work to my lovely family especially to my beloved husband Rolando and my children for their patience, support and encouragement.

Mélida Montero



## CHAPTER I

### Description of the Research

#### 1.1 Introduction

Over decades, the concerns of beginner teachers had been analyzed, because the first year of teaching poses massive challenges that lead to attrition among novice teachers. School communities often fail to provide adequate support to novice teachers to help them adapt to their new professional environments and these, among other concerns may affect significantly the development of the teaching-learning process (Meister & Melnick, 2003). This research synthesis aims to examine the most common challenges that novice English teachers face as they transit into their first teaching jobs. Information for this work was collected from databases such as Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Elton B. Stephens Co (EBSCO), ELSEVIER, Pro-Quest, and Google Scholar. Twenty studies have been analyzed to better understand the most common challenges that novice English teachers face. The gathered information is divided into two main categories: the concerns related to the transition from student to teacher and the concerns associated to the teaching environment.

In the first category, we mention the term “reality shock” which deals with the frustration and disappointment for some new teachers when they face teaching in real context. In the second category, we examine classroom management, teaching approach, teachers’ proficiency and communication as the most common challenges in the teaching environment.



## 1.2 Background

Every day many people may try to learn English because of the importance it has worldwide. Reddy (2016) claims that “English may not be the most spoken language in the world, but it is the official language in a large number of countries” (p.179). Additionally, Alrawashdeh and Al-zayed (2017) argue that “The English language learning is one of the ABCs of life now, and is the most important requirement, especially when it is adopted as a norm in several segmental areas as essential in dealings with other cultures and knowledge”(p.167). Therefore, we consider that learning English is important, as it can offer many benefits. For instance, English allows better employment, education, and travel opportunities; thanks to this language we can easily be understood everywhere. In the context of Ecuador, The Ministry of Education as part of an educational policy has implemented a new English Foreign Language curriculum. This includes the learning of English since the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Basic General Education until the last year of high school (Acuerdo Ministerial 1- 4, art. 1). Considering the advantages that knowledge of the English language offers, focus on how it is learnt and taught is important. The association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages TESOL (2017) mentions that “learners vary considerably, and there is no reason for us to believe that they should all go about language learning in the same way” (p.9). In fact, there are different ways in which a person learns a language. However, what about the teachers? Do they really want to teach? Is there any challenge that makes the teaching process difficult? If a person does not learn English by himself or herself, they would need a teacher to acquire the language. According to Khan (2011), “the teacher of English plays the most important role in the process of teaching/learning” (p. 112). Teachers indeed face important tasks when teaching the target language and, because of teachers, learners are able to develop and achieve their skills in English. However, teaching is not an easy task, specifically, when teaching a foreign language; teachers have to face possible challenges that make the teaching process difficult. As



Mohamed mentions, professors will overcome the difficulties they encounter in their own way (as cited in Tomlinson, 1995).

### 1.3 Problem Statement

In the context of Ecuador, there is little information available regarding the positive or negative experiences that novice English teachers face when they begin their teaching role, and how lack of experience can cause frustration and disappointment for inexperienced teachers, and resulting obstacles to the teaching-learning process. According to Farrell (2003), during the first stage of employment for beginner teachers, there is a change of the ideal of teaching before experiencing the real teaching context to the concerns about their own survival as teachers; beginner teachers are also worried about classroom management and the content of their instruction. As previously mentioned, in Ecuador, it was recently<sup>1</sup> proposed that English should be incorporated officially in all schools (Acuerdo Ministerial 1- 4, art. 1). Thus, classroom setting provides an optimal opportunity for all students to have access to learn this language. However, research done in Ecuador argues that “many tasks are still pending to be completed as the EFL teachers are being trained, teaching materials are being developed, and educational centers are equipped with the required technology” (Intriago, Soto, Vargas, Cajamarca, Cárdenas, Fabre, Bravo & Morales, 2017, p. 294). These are the most common aspects that teachers can face in a classroom, especially novice teachers, because they are just starting in the teaching world. Lack of information about these aspects can cause frustration and disappointment for novice teachers, and can alter the teaching-learning process in a negative way.

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<sup>1</sup> In the previous reform English was taught since the eighth year of Basic Education



## 1.4 Rationale

It is important to understand what can be considered problems or challenges in the classroom because, as future English teachers, we could face similar problems, especially during the first year of instruction. Therefore, being aware of those challenges will allow us to explore possible solutions ahead of time. A study by Duessen et al. 2008 states the following regarding English language acquisition: “English Language Learners move through different stages as they acquire English proficiency” (Deussen, Autio, Bruce Miller, Lockwood, & Stewart, 2008, p. 5). Additionally, in another study conducted by Senom, Zakaria, and Ahmad (2013), teaching is described as a complex task, as the transition from student to teacher can be considered as a shock for most inexperienced teachers. Therefore, being a novice teacher also implies difficulties, as some troubles might arise. As Poom (2014) mentioned, the first year of employment has been considered critical: in the first year, the concept of one self as a teacher begins to develop. The experience and knowledge gained from this experience significantly influences the teacher’s future. Knowing these kinds of things would lead us to the knowledge of concerns and current classrooms challenges that novice teachers can face and how they may influence the teaching process. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify and analyze what has been reported about the most typical challenges that new English teachers encounter in a real teaching environment.



## CHAPTER II

### Theoretical Framework

#### 2.1 Teacher cognition

Given the importance of the relationship between what teachers think, know and believe and how they manage the classroom the beliefs of language teachers is a topic which has been analyzed for many decades (Borg, 2006). The perspective of the teachers' role in the classroom has changed over time. For instance, by the 1970s and 1980s it was believed that a teacher fulfilled the role of a physician. In other words, according to Clark, teachers were seen as an "information processor involved in planning, anticipating, judging, diagnosing, prescribing, and problem solving" (As cited in Borg, 2006, p.26). By the 1990s, the conceptualization of a teacher stated by Clark was reformed. According to Fenstermacher, "it is focused on understanding teacher knowledge" (As cited in Borg, 2006, p.32). Our focus is on novice teachers, considering that novice teacher cognition is different from experienced teacher cognition (Borg, 2006). Novice teachers are more concerned with classroom management, while experienced teachers focus on issues of content (Borg, 2006).

#### 2.2 Teachers' concerns

For novice teachers it is a challenge to face real life inside a classroom, as they often do not feel prepared to assume the teaching role. As reported by Öztürk and Yıldırım (2012), "Every novice teacher passes through an induction process in adapting to his/her teaching profession and remembers those early years sometimes as nerve-racking sometimes as pleasurable" (p.1). In fact, Veenman (1984), mentions, "reality shock" in his study: *Perceived Problems of Beginning Teachers*. This study on novice English teachers identifies this transition process as "reality shock",



which refers to the assimilation to the complex reality of everyday classroom life. The author uses this term to indicate the collapse of the ideals formed during teacher training by the harsh and rude reality of classroom environment. As a result, novice teachers present changes in behavior, changes in attitude, changes in personality; the disillusion may even be so great that they leave the profession. “Reality shock” can be the result of different causes, which mainly involve a misguided choice in profession, improper attitudes, unsuitable personality characteristics, inadequate professional training, any problematic relationships with the school, fixed organizational structures, inadequate staffing and shortage of materials and supplies, the absence of explicitly stated educational objectives, loneliness in the work place, parents who lay special emphasis on the transmission of knowledge, and the multiplicity of tasks that a teacher must fulfill (Veenman, 1984). Additionally, Senom, Zakaria, and Ahmad (2013), suggest that “Novice teachers struggle during their first year of teaching regardless of the way in which they were prepared, previous life experiences and differing school and classroom contexts” (p. 121).

In sum, all of these experiences lead to the further development of novice teachers in their profession.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Literature Review**

#### **3.1 Concerns related to teachers’ transition from being a student to becoming an English teacher**

The majority of beginner teachers will encounter some challenges, especially during the first year of instruction. As previously mentioned, this “reality shock” involves perception problems and changes in behavior: the participants in the previous study by (Veenman, 1984) explained that





although initially they tried to apply a democratic teaching style, they changed it into a more authoritarian method as time passed. The term “reality shock” also concerns changes in attitude and changes in personality related to stress, pressure, and workload. As a result, teachers may show lack of control, personality clash, immaturity, lack of organization and lack of confidence, which sometimes pushes inexperienced teachers to leave the profession (Veenman, 1984).

“Reality shock” can be seen in factors related to teachers such as their own proficiency, problems related to their environment, and the availability of resources for classes. Teachers participating in a study conducted by Alrawashdeh and Al-zayed (2017) showed these factors. The authors analyzed English teachers’ perceptions while teaching listening comprehension during their first year of instruction. The participants of this study were all English teachers of Karak in Saudi Arabian schools, but a sample of 55 teachers was chosen randomly. The main data collection tool was a questionnaire designed to analyze and report the difficulties that participants experienced during their teaching process, followed for a more detailed description of these difficulties. The results of the study found the following: “Teachers are not motivated in teaching listening comprehension. Methods of teaching listening comprehension are too difficult” (Alrawashdeh & Al-zayed, 2017, p. 173).

“Postmodern reality shock” is also a concept defined as "The effect of transformation and constant change [during the first practice year] [...] on the teaching identity, characterized by instability and uncertainty" (Correa, Martínez-Arbelaiz & Aberasturi-Apraiz, 2015, p. 68). An article called *Post-Modern Reality Shock; Beginning Teachers as Sojourners in Communities of Practice*, conducted by Correa, Martínez-Arbelaiz, and Aberasturi-Apraiz (2015), delved into the first experiences that teachers encountered with their students, their students’ parents and their colleagues. The authors paid special attention to the participants own teaching identity and their communities of practice. The participants were five beginner teachers in charge of three to six year old children in the Basque Autonomous Community of Spain. All participants had less than five years of experience. Just one of them attended a private institution and four of them went to public



universities. Data from the participating teachers was selected through stories or compositions about who they were previously, and how they became who they are now. They also gathered data from interviews, class observations and memories from when the participants were students themselves. Additionally, another data collection method included a biographical composition collected through interviews from all participants. This last instrument gave participants the opportunity to mention how they felt in their work environment. The results described some of the most relevant scenarios that participants mentioned. One example described that, one of the participants, “suffer[ed] from job precariousness” “She told the story about her trauma of waiting [for] a call that would announce a teaching substitution” (Correa, Martínez-Arbelaiz & Aberasturi-Apraiz, 2015, p. 70). She was nervous about not knowing where she had to go; also, she was in a completely new school, and she had to assume the responsibility of continuing the established lessons which were unknown to her. The authors concluded that their findings could be useful “to describe different tensions and dilemmas in the first years of instruction” (Correa, Martínez-Arbelaiz & Aberasturi-Apraiz, 2015, p. 71) showing that “reality shock” is present in different ways.

The article *Novice English Teachers’ Learning to Teach*, conducted by Chen and Zhang, (2015) in various provinces of China, examined how teachers felt during their teacher education process. The participants were thirty novice English teachers in junior and middle school. Their average age was 26 and they were in their first year of teaching. The author created a questionnaire with 10 items; nine questions were closed questions and the tenth was an open-ended question. The questionnaire was distributed to each participant through e-mail, and the author’s analysis showed that, in the open-ended question participants mentioned that they “felt overwhelmed and exhausted in the teaching process” (Chen & Zhang, 2015, p. 750). Some of them had difficulties with the teaching approach and practice, and some with classroom management (specifically, discipline). Some mentioned that they had the opportunity to go to peer-observations, conferences and workshops, and some mentioned that they used to write reflective diaries to correct their mistakes. Data from the closed questions showed that “participants required that teacher educators and middle



school administrators” pay attention to the novice teachers’ process related to training (Chen & Zhang, 2015, p. 751) emphasizing the importance of learning different elements, such as classroom management and student discipline by means of workshops or conferences.

Similarly, Ping (2015) in the study *An Evaluation of the Pre-service English Teacher Education in a University in China: Pros and Cons of an Insider’s Journey of Learning*, examined how well-prepared pre-service teachers perceived themselves to be. This study was conducted in China from a random list of universities. The participants were 300 pre-service English language teachers with less than 4 years of experience. There were two stages involved for the data collection and analysis: the first involved data collection through a survey to all participants, and an interview for just 200 of them. The second was the data analysis, which was conducted through a quantitative methodology. Results showed that most participants “felt confident”, but that their confidence came from “their ignorance about the great challenges in identifying and correcting students’ mistakes” (Ping, 2015, p. 167). Further, results indicated that most pre-service teachers “either hold a blind preference for teaching, or have no idea of what being a teacher means before entering into pre-service education” (Ping, 2015, p. 167), but after their first experience of teaching, few of the participants “seriously consider their lifelong career” (Ping, 2015, p. 167).

An example of “reality shock” was also found in the study entitled *Learning to Teach English Language in the Practicum: What Challenges do Non-Native ESL Student Teachers Face*, conducted by Gan (2013) in a university in Hong Kong. The study examined challenges that 16 participants faced in an eight-week teaching practicum. The participants were students becoming teachers majoring in the English Language. The participants were female and spoke Mandarin as their native language. They first completed an interview to obtain a detailed report, perspectives and insights on each participant during their practicum. Following this, they presented their “reflective journals”. In the journals, participants reported incidents and their routines during their practicum. The data was analyzed through a qualitative methodology, and as result, some participants claimed that task-based methodology, the most used method, was a demanding and consuming time



approach, but an effective one in the success of teaching the target language in the practicum. This results illustrated “reality shock”, as participants showed difficulty in adapting to the teaching style of the practicum (Gan, 2013).

The article entitled “*English as a Foreign Language Instructors’ Induction: Early Practices of Language Teachers Teaching at Tertiary Level*” by Öztürk and Yıldırım (2012), mentioned the process of novice English teachers adapting their teaching profession. This study focused on Ankara, Turkey, with fifteen novice instructors teaching at four different public universities. Participants were selected according to two criteria: 1 to 3 years of teaching experience, and teaching in higher education. The only data collection method were participant interviews conducted after their first period of teaching. The results showed that common concerns of novice teachers were categorized under four headings: worries, priorities, efforts, and desires (Öztürk & Yıldırım, 2012).

Farrell (2003), in his study, *Learning to Teach English Language During the First Year: Personal Influences and Challenges*, analyzed personal influences on beginner teachers. This study was carried out in Singapore and the author mentioned that many Singaporeans speak English as their first language. This did not affect the study, as there was just one participant, who did not have English as his first language, and from whom data was collected in 6 hours of classroom observation, post-observation conferences, and semi-structured interviews with the teacher and the school principal. The study also included data from a written regular journal on the part of the beginning teacher. Results indicated that the participant’s first “reality shock” (Veenman, 1984) “was that his teaching load greatly increased from what he had experienced in his practicum. During his practicum he was only expected to teach 16 periods of 35-min classes per week, but he was teaching 35 periods of 35-min classes each week” (Farrell, 2003, p.102). Another crucial finding showed that, “during the first year, he had to relate better with the students lower proficiency (English language), and he noticed that these students had discipline problems but he did not want to punish them” (Farrell, 2003, p.103). Finally, results showed that the participant had



to go through specific stages in his time as a novice teacher, “First, he entered the school with some early idealism characterized by a strong identification with the students, as he really wanted to make a difference in their lives” (Farrell, 2003, p.104). Nevertheless, he mentioned discipline problems he was experiencing with one of his classes and his lack of communication with his colleagues (Farrell, 2003).

In the study *Beginning Teacher and Mentor Relationships*, conducted by Gratch (1998), the author did not directly mention “reality shock”, though she analyzed the experience of beginning teachers in their first years in ways similar to the aforementioned studies. The research was conducted within a teaching program, in North Carolina with 10 beginner teachers. During their first year of teaching, participants completed various interviews. Each of the participants had a mentor teacher assigned who could help them and corresponded with them regarding whether they wanted to stay in the program or withdraw. The mentors also taught in the same school previously, but were not beginner teachers. An analysis of the interviews showed that the beginner teachers were exposed to different ideas from the beginning to the end of teaching period. They felt discomfort and their idea of teaching completely changed. According to the author, it is important to mention that, she believed that the results were not one hundred per cent truthful; she mentioned that the teacher’s behavior could have changed due to the presence of the teacher’s mentors.

Sezen-Gultekin and Nartgun (2018) investigated the relationship between reality shock expectancy and future teacher’s self-efficacy. This study was conducted in Turkey with a sample of 293 prospective teachers in Abant İzzet Baysal University Pedagogical Formation Certificate Program. It is important to mention that this program was for students who were not directly admitted to the education department. The data for the study was gathered through a survey, utilizing the *Reality Shock Expectations Scale* and *Self-efficacy Scale*. These scales were adapted to the Turkish classroom context. The first scale measured reality shock expectations, and the second measured self-efficacy of prospective teachers from different perspectives. The results showed that there was no relationship between reality shock and self-efficacy, as “prospective teachers’ reality



shock expectation levels were generally higher in the possible problems with professional differences, while the teacher self-efficacy levels were lower in the situations regarding individual differences” (Sezen-Gultekin & Nartgun, 2018, p.13). Therefore, self-efficacy was related to the teachers’ level of education, while reality shock could occur regardless of age, gender and among other variables. In other words, while self-efficacy can vary depending on other factors, reality shock is a phenomenon faced by all teachers regardless of educational background and individual differences.

### **3.2 Concerns associated with teaching-learning environment**

The problems that beginner teachers encounter in the classroom consume both effort and time. In fact, academic and behavioral problems such as hyperactivity and lack of attention influence the teaching-learning process directly (Salem al-amarat, 2011). Salem al-amarat also emphasizes how an overcrowded classroom plays a role in the occurrence of problems; a large number of students in the classroom does not allow the teacher to maintain students’ attention. Furthermore, Gan (2013) also agrees that one of the most common concerns for novice teachers is classroom management, which involves dealing with misbehavior, as well as establishing rules and routines.

Peacock (2001) in Hong Kong conducted a longitudinal study entitled *Pre-service ESL Teachers’ Beliefs about Second Language Learning*. Participants included 146 pre-service language teachers, who reported that mistaken beliefs about teaching were their main concerns and that these beliefs could influence the students’ learning process. The participants were divided into three groups in order to gather information via observations and interviews. The mistaken beliefs which the analysis revealed included the following: pre-service teachers found not only learning a foreign language mostly a matter of translating from Chinese to English, but also a matter of learning a variety vocabulary. Additionally, novice teachers assumed that people who speak more than one



language well are very intelligent and, therefore, they may wrongly blame their students' failure or slow progress on lack of intelligence. The study also revealed that those detrimental beliefs were gradually changed as new teachers acquired more experience (Peacock, 2001).

A study entitled *Pursuing a "Sense of Success": New Teachers Explain their Career Decisions* by Johnson and Birkeland (2003) illustrated the main causes related to why some new teachers abandoned the profession. The study took place in Massachusetts with 50 novice teachers. The study demonstrated that certain characteristics of the 50 participants, such as their prior career experience, gender, and preparation directly related to their decisions about whether to continue teaching during the first 3 years. However, these characteristics only partially explained their career choices. They described the many ways in which the working conditions in their schools, teaching assignments, collegial interaction, curriculum, administration, and discipline, either supported or stymied them in that search for success. The majority of the participants felt overwhelmed about classroom management and also feared that a plea for help would result in a negative evaluation. Many felt that they failed as a teacher. Nevertheless, some novice teachers decided to continue working at the public schools where they started, and the others changed from public school to private schools (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

A study entitled *Constructing the Teaching Process from Inside Out: How Pre-service Teachers Make Sense of their Perceptions of the Teaching of the Four Skills* conducted by da Silva (2005) in Brazil investigated the perceptions of three female Brazilian pre-service EFL teachers in order to understand how their teaching perceptions were related to pedagogical practice. Participants reported that while they observed classes during their practicum, they noticed that the free use of L1 was a problem, instructions and information were given in Portuguese, and students used English solely to fill vocabulary worksheets. In essence, the teachers were depriving the students of an opportunity to speak English. Pre-service teachers thought that listening could be a means to acquire language and that classes must be given in English to help students learn the language in realistic situations. Regarding speaking, novice teachers pinpointed pronunciation



practices as the most difficult skill to develop in the classroom due to the large number of students, especially in public schools. This factor disallows the teacher to guide and control speech production. Other concerns for novice teachers included: following lesson plans, time management, students' comprehension and participation and giving feedback when lesson was finished (da Silva, 2005).

Farrell (2006), in his study: *The First Year of Language Teaching: Imposing Order* mentioned the use of a story structure framework as a support for teachers. The story structure framework is a type of diary in which beginner teachers would write down their experiences, so that the new teachers could read them in order to have a clearer idea about what they would face in their first year in the profession. This paper presented a case study with only one participant who applied this framework to show how in the first year of teaching, the participant balanced a delicate, and sometimes conflicting, role between learning to teach and learning to become a teacher within an established school culture in a neighborhood in Singapore. The participant explained the three main complications he faced. The first complication was related to the teaching approach: he experienced a conflict between how he wanted to teach and what was expected from the school and the English department. He focused on a learner-centered approach that entailed student to student interaction, but the school maintained a traditional teacher-centered approach. The second conflict was related to the course content. The participant had to follow an established syllabus which did not satisfy the students' needs in educational content, and which limited his new teaching ideas for the class. Finally, the third conflict was related to collegial relationships not only due to a culture of individualism in the school, but also because the participant was reluctant to ask for help (Farrell, 2006).

Avalos and Aylwin (2007), in their study entitled: *How Young Teachers Experience their Professional Work in Chile*, worked with 15 neophyte teachers who were part of a survey containing 242 questions. The goal of the study was to explore the professional experiences of young teachers with three or less years of teaching, by examining their perceptions of their initial





teaching experience. The participants viewed their first months of teaching as a transition from a greater to lesser level of insecurity about content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, management of individual pupil differences in learning, handling of school routines and relationships with parents. Their initial concerns involved relationships with students, parents and other colleagues, as well as teaching and classroom management, such as maintaining discipline or stimulating student interest and learning. Further concerns also included working conditions, such as excessive demands on scarce time and compliance with particular forms of management, rules and regulations. Although classroom discipline was considered as difficult initially, it was not a major problem later on. An important finding was that teachers linked their positive or negative experiences to the context in which they taught. For instance, they considered the academic level of students, the school culture, and the students' social status. The participants also reported that they entered the profession abruptly taking on full responsibilities, and the school's rules and regulations were not explained. Additionally, the majority of them were never observed in practicum, nor did they received feedback that might help them to improve. As a result, they had to learn independently by trial and error until establishing a useful pattern to follow (Avalos & Aylwin, 2007).

A study of novice teachers: *Challenges and Supports in the First Years*, conducted in Toronto, Canada by Fantilli and McDougall (2009), showed the major challenges of new teachers during their first years of teaching as well as the support available to them. This study employed an online survey and follow-up interviews to gather information about 86 novice teachers' experiences. The majority of the participants agreed that "classroom management [...], salary and wages [...], balanced literacy [...], long-range planning [...], communication with parents [...], and [relationship] with administrators" were their main difficulties (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009, p.818). Moreover, just 5% of teachers reported that they had collaboration from experienced colleagues, despite school principal promoting a collaborative school culture to support them. The results of



this study also showed that, 28.6% of the novice teachers had considered leaving the profession because of the challenges they faced, while 71.4% of them did not (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009).

In addition, Salem al-amarat (2011), conducted the study *The Classroom Problems Faced Teachers at the Public Schools in Tafila Province, and Proposed Solutions* to identify the problems faced by teachers in public schools in the classroom. The study collected information from 196 teachers of public schools in the Tafila province in Jordan. The data was collected using questionnaires, and the results showed that behavioral problems and academic problems were the main concerns for novice teachers. Among the problems related to students' behavior, the author found the following: lack of attention relating to the use of mobile phones in classroom, a large amount of criticism among students, which caused violence and hostility towards others in the classroom, the large number of students in the classroom, and the effect of economic and social circumstances of the students. The participants also reported that sometimes they were biased against students, as it was difficult to be neutral in their educational interactions. On the other hand, the author explained various academic problems such as: administrative weakness in the hiring process, specifically the slow hiring system of the Ministry of Education in Jordan. Students' low level of academic achievement is also mentioned as a result of pre-learning non-relevant skills; along with quantity of the educational material given to students. This, according to the participants, was due to the procedures undertaken by the Ministry of Education, which included a high number of educational activities, requiring educational facilities, such as computers, Internet, and school library resources. Nevertheless, not every school had such facilities; therefore, these factors made teaching a complicated and difficult profession. Moreover, teachers felt that the curriculum was filled with activities that required additional effort to implement (Salem al-amarat, 2011).

The study entitled *National New Teacher Study: Beginning Teachers' Concerns*, conducted by Meister and Melnick (2003), in Pennsylvania considered forty-two participants. This study was conducted utilizing survey research to gather information about what the most challenging and most



rewarding parts of teachers' first teaching experience was, as well as what made teachers resilient throughout the year when situations and times were difficult. The challenges faced by the participants were divided into three categories. First, regarding classroom management; the results of the survey showed that 81 % of the participants felt prepared to maintain discipline in the classroom, while the 19% strongly disagreed, suggesting that the majority of novice teachers are not well prepared to face behavioral problems. Second, regarding time management, it was reported that 84% of teachers felt sometimes overwhelmed by time constraints and workload, while 15% were undecided about indicating difficulty handling the workload. However, referring to time management, 55% of participants felt that they were well prepared for organization and paperwork required to do their job effectively. Third, regarding interaction with parents; results showed that 70% believed that parents are kept well aware of their child's progress through frequent progress reports, but only 34% of first-year teachers involved parents regularly in classroom activities (Meister & Melnick, 2003)

The research study entitled *Novice Teachers' Challenges and Survival: Where do Malaysian ESL Teachers Stand?* conducted by Senom, Zakaria, and Ahmad (2013), examined through a literature review<sup>2</sup>, on the challenges of novice teachers in schools of Malaysia. The authors reported a list of problems novice teachers encountered, by analyzing several Malaysian studies. Among the main problems, they found: classroom management, student motivation, handling differences among students, grading student work and dealing with students' parents, problems of individual students, heavy teaching load with little preparation time, relations with colleagues, planning of lessons and schooldays, effective use of different teaching methods, awareness of school policies and rules, determining learning level of students, and knowledge of subject matter, relations with principals/administrators, inadequate school equipment, dealing with slow learners, dealing with students of different cultures and deprived backgrounds, effective use of

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<sup>2</sup> We considered this literature review article because it offered paramount information for the topic.



textbooks and curriculum guides, lack of spare time, inadequate guidance and support, and large class size (Senom, Zakaria, & Ahmad, 2013).

Similarly, a study by Gan (2013), which involved a set of semi-structured interviews with 16 non-native pre-service ESL student teachers from a university in Hong Kong, gathered information regarding the challenges and perceptions from their practicum experiences. This process also revealed three main challenges the participants faced in the practicum. First, there was a struggle experimenting with innovative pedagogical practices. The participants tried to apply a task-based approach in the classroom but realized that it required too much time, energy and effort in order to design tasks and develop materials for their lessons. The second and most common concern was classroom management as well as students' misbehavior, discipline problems and establishing rules and routines. Lastly, language was a as challenge in instruction and communication. The results of the study showed that some of the participants had difficulty in providing clear task instruction, coherent explanations and English fluency. This last element was related to the difficulty teachers faced when trying to speak English spontaneously with their students (Gan, 2013).

In China, the study entitled *Understanding Novice Teachers' Perceived Challenges and Needs as a Prerequisite for English Curriculum Innovation*, conducted by Jiang, Zhang, May and Qin (2018), investigated the challenges and needs of Chinese novice English teachers. This study used a questionnaire to collect information about novice English teachers' perceived challenges and needs in teaching environments. Additionally, the study used an interview in order to describe the specific support needed in these contexts. Participants in this study were 208 Chinese teachers with no more than 2 years of English teaching experience. Based on the findings of this study, challenges and needs were closely linked to teacher knowledge and skills, which were comprised of knowledge regarding the following: developing new subject matter, needs and students, developing new pedagogical content and mapping out existing communication skills in new curriculum contexts.



Findings suggested that curriculum innovation required teacher knowledge and updates of teachers' skillset. The results revealed that policy support is essential when teachers' needs involve connection and collaboration with people, with either other colleagues or various stakeholders in the target language-use communities (Jiang, Zhang, May & Qin, 2018).

As shown in the studies reviewed above, novice teachers face a number of different challenges in their first years of teaching. The most commonly cited challenges that teachers face include reality shock and classroom management. Based on these findings, the present study aims to identify the most common challenges that novice teachers face, and then propose possible solutions and recommendations.



## CHAPTER IV

### Methodology

The present work analyzes various studies to explore what has been reported regarding perceptions on current classroom challenges and concerns of novice English teachers. Data collection and analysis followed the characteristics of a research synthesis, which is defined as “the conjunction of a particular set of literature review characteristics” (Cooper, Hedges, & Jeffrey, 2019, p. 6). Therefore, to identify the most common problems that new English teachers face when they start working we conducted an exhaustive search for information via an examination of a large body of previous literature.

Through this study, we focused on the most common problems and challenges faced by novice English teachers. These problems were divided into two categories. The first category refers to the concerns related to teachers’ transition from being a student to becoming an English teacher, such as the lack of experience; guidance, support, and the teachers’ proficiency. The second category refers to the concerns associated with the teaching-learning environment, such as overcrowded classrooms, academic and behavioral students’ problems, classroom management and lack of resources at schools. Through the consideration of these categories, this synthesis attempts to discuss how those concerns influence the teaching-learning process.

The research keywords included combinations of the following terms: classroom challenges, teachers’ concerns, teachers’ problems, novice teachers’ challenges, and teachers’ current problems. This combination of words aided in finding the data necessary to illustrate the most common trends in novice teacher adjustment.



#### **4.1 Inclusion criteria**

In this investigation, the information was collected from journal articles about the teachers' experiences of current classroom challenges when teaching ESL or EFL. Each article had to be revised carefully to find relevant information that enhances the investigation. Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods used in research studies were considered as important characteristics of these articles. This helped us to categorize the results. The year of publication had to be from 1998 until present. Exception to this criterion was considered when pivotal information was found such as in an article published in 1984 by Simon Veenman, one of the first authors of work on teachers' challenges. Information was gathered from databases such as Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Elton B. Stephens Co (EBSCO), ELSEVIER, Pro-Quest, and Google Scholar as that these databases provided empirical and educational articles. The participants in the different research studies had to be non- native novice and beginner English teachers matching with our background as novice English Teachers. Studies had to be conducted in EFL or ESL classrooms.

#### **4.2 Summary and research questions**

Empirical studies and one literature review article were revised in order to identify the challenges and concerns for ESL or EFL novice teachers. As they were conducted in different contexts, they showed a wide variety of results. Consequently, each study differed in relation to their key findings, results and conclusions. Therefore, it was not possible to generalize information considered from the studies. Rather, by combining information not as individual studies but as a whole, we addressed the following research questions:

- 1. - What are the most common challenges that novice teachers face when they start working?*
- 2. – How do these concerns affect the teaching-learning process?*



Our first research question was directed towards finding the concerns and challenges experienced by beginner teachers, especially during their first year of teaching. With the second, we identified the effects of those issues on the learning process.





## CHAPTER V

### Analysis

The following section includes a presentation of the analysis for the present study. Essential information from the studies was separated. The first category is related to the teachers' transition from being a student to becoming an English teacher, and the second is associated with the teachers' concerns linked to the teaching-learning environment. Through analyzing the studies, findings indicate that information related to the two categories matched more than one study.

*Table 1. Publication dates of the analyzed studies*

<b>Years</b>	<b>Number of studies</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1984-1999	2	10%
2000-2005	4	20%
2006-2010	3	15%
2011-2015	8	40%
2016-2018	3	15%
<b>Total of studies</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>

This table refers to the total number of studies considered into our inclusion criteria.

Although we took 1998 as a starting point, we considered it important to include Venman's article published in 1984 because, it contained relevant information for this study. In fact, 18 studies quoted or made reference to this author. From 1984 to 1999, there is a lack of investigation regarding the concerns of novice English teachers. From 2000 to 2010, there is a marked growth in investigation on this topic. However, in the period between 2011 and 2015, there is a considerable increase on the research related to these issues. This trend shows that the consideration of teaching challenges has increased over time, especially in the last ten years.



**Table 2.** Years of experience considered for being a novice teacher

Years of experience	Number of studies	Percentage
Less than a year	2	20%
1 year	4	40%
3 years	2	20%
4 years	1	10%
5 years	1	10%
<b>Total of studies</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100%</b>

This table refers to the years of experience that authors considered necessary to be a novice teacher. The majority of authors agreed that one year is the minimum period for a teacher to be considered as a novice.

Results from the studies reviewed indicate that all novice teachers experience “reality shock” in some way, regardless of their awareness of the term. As illustrated previously, teachers experience “reality shock” during their first years in the classroom. The authors of the present study do not necessarily mention the term “*reality shock*” however, they emphasize concerns, challenges and struggles that participants may have had. Therefore, these concerns, challenges and struggles are generally defined as “reality shock” (Veenman, 1984). Authors agree that from 3 to 5 years of experience teachers can still be considered novice. Some authors maintain that less than a year is enough to face the reality of the classroom. However, most of them agree that during the first year of experience, novice teachers are capable of overcoming “reality shock”.

**Table 3.** The most common concerns associated with teaching-learning environment.

Concerns	studies
Classroom management	Johnson and Birkeland, 2003; da Silva, 2005;
Time management	Avalos and Aylwin, 2007; Fantilli and McDougall,
Discipline	2009; Salem al-amarat, 2011; Meister and Melnick,
Lack of students attention	2012; Gan, 2013; Senom, Zakaria, and Ahmad
Large number of students	Shah, 2013.




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Students misbehavior	
Lesson planning	
Teaching approach	Peacock, 2001; Johnson and Birkeland, 2003; da
Course content	Silva, 2005; Farrell, 2006; Salem al-amarat, 2011;
Curriculum	Gan, 2013; Senom, Zakaria, and Ahmad Shah,
Coherent explanations	2013; Jiang, Zhang, May and Qin, 2018.
Teachers' proficiency	Jiang, Zhang, May and Qin, 2018; Gan, 2013.
English fluency	
Communication	Farrell, 2006; Fantilli and McDougall, 2009; Salem
Relationship with parents	al-amarat, 2011; Senom, Zakaria, and Ahmad Shah,
Relationship with other colleagues	2013; Gan, 2013.
Relationship with administrators	
Relationship with the principal	
Resources	Salem al-amarat, 2011; Senom, Zakaria, and Ahmad
Inadequate classroom equipment	Shah, 2013.
Internet, computers, library	
Others	Fantilli and McDougall, 2009; Salem al-amarat,
Salaries and wages	2011; Meister and Melnick, 2012; Senom, Zakaria,
Economic and social circumstances	and Ahmad Shah, 2013.
of students	
Organization and paperwork	
Dealing with slow learners	
<b>Total of studies</b>	<b>10</b>

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This table indicates the most common teachers' concerns related to the teaching environment. "Classroom management" was mentioned as the most common concern among the analyzed studies. Studies may consider more than one category if applicable.



In this table, we answer the first research question of this study: *What are the most common challenges that novice teachers face when they start working?* After analyzing our information, we have divided the concerns related to the teaching environment into six categories. Each category includes sub-categories. The first category, *classroom management*, was found to be the most relevant, as it is mentioned by most of the authors. Classroom management primarily involves time management, discipline, lack of student attention, large number of students, student's misbehavior and lesson planning. According to Collins (1990), when teachers waste time in a classroom, there is a lower probability for students' success. "Large classes present more challenges for classroom management, pupil control, and marking, planning, and assessment" (Ayeni & Olowe, 2016, p. 65). Another example is provided by Chandra (2015), who states that students with a lack of discipline who arrive late for classes can miss the class, or they are not really interested more generally. "This may be a result of lack of lesson planning" (p. 13). Misbehavior is another factor, which can be problematic for novice teachers. Dalgic and Bayhan (2014) mention that any type of performance "that violates explicit rules or implicit norms of the classroom, interferes with the classroom order and interrupts the process of teaching learning" (p. 102) can be considered as misbehavior. Classroom management "Can be overcome by being prepared for class, motivating the students, providing a comfortable learning environment, building students' self-esteem, being creative and imaginative in daily lessons" (Chandra, 2015, p.14).

The second category refers to *teaching approach*, which involves elements such as course content, curriculum, and coherent explanations. According to Gill and Kusum, teaching approach "is like the form or the way we teach or how we do it" (2017, p.6692). Teachers can use any method, implying that the teacher should be prepared and be aware of which teaching approach is most beneficial for the class. For instance, if a teacher desires to apply a learner-centered approach, which involves a lot of student-to-student interaction but the school follows firmly a teacher-centered approach, the teacher should adapt his class to what the school requires from him (Farrell, 2006).



The third category is *teacher's proficiency*, which is directly related to English fluency. As Kasumi mentions: the teacher is the person in charge of transmitting the knowledge and skills for pupils in any educational program (Kasumi, 2015). For some beginner teachers is common to experince difficulty in speaking English; they make some lexical, grammar and phonetic mistakes. This problem may be related to thinking in the mother tongue and then translating the thoughts into the second language. Consequently, their sense of selves as teachers can be affected in a negative way (Gan, 2013).

The fourth category is *communication*, which considers the relationships among parents, other colleagues, administrators and the principal of the school. According to Duta, Panisoara, and Ion-Ovidiu “teachers with good communication skills will create a more successful teaching and learning ambience for the students” (2014, p.1). In fact, Farrell (2006) mentioned that one of the most difficult complications for a beginner teacher was collegial relationships as other teachers are worried about their own problems and do not have the time and will to help beginners. Furthermore, sometimes beginner teachers are reluctant to ask for help.

The fifth category encompasses *resources*, which includes inadequate classroom equipment, Internet, computers and library. It is necessary the use of those equipment since “resources do[es] not only consist of making the educational process more attractive and interesting, but also of encouraging active learning, the development of different skills and the adoption of desirable values and attitudes of students” (Bušljeta, 2013, p.55). The curriculum includes many educational activities and they require certain facilities in schools such us computers, Internet, laboratories, and libraries. When schools are not well equiped, teaching proffesion turns more complicated and difficult (Salem al-amarat, 2011).

Our last category focuses on *other* concerns, which mainly involve salaries and wages. For example in the study by Gonzalez et al (2008), seven of eight participants “believed that the teaching salary was low compared to the amount of hours put in” (2008, p.7). One of the participants mentioned her wage was so low to higher amount of hours she had that she realized she



“made about 0.36 cents an hour” (Gonzalez, Stallone, & Slate, 2008, p.7). Other concerns included organization and paperwork, economic and social circumstances of students, and dealing with slow learners.

In addressing the second research question, we found that all of the aforementioned concerns affect the teaching-learning process. For instance, Walsdorf and Lynn (2002) state that novice teachers soon realize how the concerns they face with students’ lack of enthusiasm, management and discipline issues, the exhausting nature of their work, and lack of spare time frequently affect their practices and attitudes of success and ultimately their desire to remain in the profession.

A study that examined evidence-based practices in classroom management (Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, Myers, & Sugai, 2008) emphasized that teachers can increase students’ on task study behaviors by using strategies such as identifying and teaching classroom rules, monitoring student behaviors, rewarding appropriate student behaviors, displaying consistent responses to inappropriate student behaviors and ensuring student participation via different teaching methods. Teachers who apply different techniques for classroom management have proven the effectiveness of them; they realized that students’ achievement and behaviors were better and positively directed.



## CHAPTER VI

### Conclusions and Recommendations

#### 6.1 Conclusions

Our key findings are discussed according to the research questions previously mentioned.

*What are the most common challenges that novice teachers face when they start working? How do these concerns influence the teaching learning process?* According to the results of this paper, 10 studies focused on the transition concerns from being a student to becoming an English teacher, and the 10 final studies focused on the classroom environment. Simon Veenman (1984) refers to “reality shock” which generally focuses on the concerns teachers face when they start working. According to the majority of the authors, “classroom management” is the most common challenge that novice teachers encounter, involving “discipline”, and “students misbehavior” as the most typical problems in a classroom. According to The Association of School Counselors, “one in five students has special needs and require extraordinary interventions and treatments beyond the typical resources available to classroom teachers” (As cited in O’Ferral, Green & Hana, 2010, p.5). This implies that enough strategies and procedures would help teachers to keep a controlled classroom. In short, many different concerns found in the classroom represent challenge for teachers.

After analyzing the main challenges for beginner teachers, we can answer the second research question *how do these concerns affect the teaching-learning process?* According to Veenman (1984), beginner teachers experience a traumatic period when they start working in a real teaching context, and may experience changes of personality, behavior and attitude. There are some teachers who never adapt to the new context; they feel that they are not able to manage the classroom, guide students or overcome all of the concerns they have to face. Therefore, they become disappointed and even abandon the profession (Veenman, 1984; Walsdorf & Lynn, 2010).



Every teacher experiences the transition into his or her profession differently. In our case, our personal experiences as beginner teachers has been significantly different from our expectations and, at the same time, similar to the findings of some of the aforementioned studies. For example, the number of students in the classroom, the lack of student knowledge and not having enough resources, such as projectors or computers have disallowed us to carry out our lesson plans successfully on numerous occasions. Therefore, we have to adapt ourselves to the context. As Salem al-amarat (2011) mentioned that academic and behavioral problems directly affects the teaching-learning process, and maintaining that discipline, in most of the case, is a problem. This situation indeed is related with discipline, and in fact, we have experienced it. It is a big problem to handle if you do not have enough material prepared to keep students busy. We agree that the number of students and the lack of time do not allow having a complete control of the class. For instance, in a class with 30 students between 6 and 7 years old, control can be difficult, as they move around when the teacher is giving instructions. Such problems may be result of inadequate application of skills, which novice teachers learn, choosing inappropriate time for learning, or offering the restricted learning opportunities to students (Salem al-amarat, 2011). Therefore, beginner teachers waste time trying to maintain students' attention and perform the activities at the same time. Our professor, Veronica León, used to say, "Indiscipline in the classroom is the lack of enough activities and procedures"; therefore, after having that experience, we learn that it is important to prepare enough material, activities and strategies to work in the class. Consequently, we realized that it decreases the indiscipline and allows completing the lesson. However, Salem al-amarat (2011) indicates that classroom indiscipline occurs when the teacher does not prepare the activities previously applying the correct method with clear objectives. The intention to give students many activities to keep them busy to work without a break just will increase the probability of misbehavior in the classroom. It is important to mention that the study was conducted in Jordan where students are violent among them, even with teachers (Salem al-amarat, 2011). On the other hand, in two studies conducted in Latin America novice teachers mention that all depends on the





context because it is not the same to teach in a private than in a public school. In fact, some factors like age, gender and social and economic status influence teachers' procedures (Avalos & Aylwin, 2007; da Silva, 2005). Definitely, the context plays a main role. This should be considered as an important element in language teaching education.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

Overall, it will be advisable for pre service teachers to know all about the issues stated in Table 3 in order to be prepared to face and overcome all those kind of concerns. There is not an only established pattern or procedure to follow in the English class. It depends on the context and how the teacher adapts the activities for certain situations.

One important element that novice teachers should keep in mind is classroom management. According to our experience, it seems that pre-service teachers of University of Cuenca pay too much attention to the linguistic contents, forgetting how important the management of the class is. Definitely, classroom management should be considered in a greater extent in the curriculum of the English language major as an important part to be studied.

It would be advisable for prospective teachers to have more teaching practicum in real contexts in order to gain a bit of experience dealing with real students in specific English classrooms (private and public institutions). This exposure to real classes should also consider students with different levels and ages.

If this is not possible, another alternative could be if the teaching program provides with real cases of English classes to be analyzed by pre service students. This effort may help novice teachers have a better idea of real English classes, which may avoid somehow reality shock factors or at least overcome them in a more effective way.



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