

Perceived Problems of Novice English as a Foreign Language Teachers in Taiwan

Yi-Chun Liu

Department of Applied Foreign Languages,
Chia Nan University of Pharmacy & Science, Tainan, Taiwan
ycliu715@gmail.com

Abstract: *The study aims to shed some light on the problems facing novice EFL teachers in their first-year teaching experiences, and how these experiences are reflected in their teaching in subsequent years. The overall goal is to suggest a need for in-service education to help Taiwanese novice teachers succeed and cultivate their teaching confidence. The results of a case study showed that a novice EFL teacher thought that she still needed to sharpen her teaching approach through further study in Applied Linguistics with an emphasis on English teaching. In addition, this English teacher indicated she felt gradually more confident in her second-year and third-year teaching compared to her first year's teaching experience, but that she still struggles with the challenges imposed on her by her superiors and the teaching environment.*

Keywords: *English as a foreign language (EFL), novice teacher, teacher education, teaching confidence, the teaching of English in primary schools (Taiwan)*

1. INTRODUCTION

Taiwan has put emphasis on English education more in recent years, reflected in the fact that it has been made a compulsory subject from third grade in elementary school (Wang, 2009). However, there are some significant issues among English teachers, particularly those with less experience, including anxiety, lack of confidence, lack of English teaching knowledge, and insufficient teaching experience. Within this study, the researcher examined perceived problems of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in Taiwan.

2. PERCEIVED PROBLEMS OF BEGINNING TEACHERS

The study investigates novice elementary school teachers' teaching experience. Some investigations include what they have changed in their second-year teaching, in what areas they have grown, and what factors affect their planning decisions (Bullough & Baughman, 1993; Sardo-Brown, 1996). Bullough and Baughman (1997) indicate that life is not as neat as we plan, filled with successes and failures. This fact is reflected in our teaching experiences as well, and it is challenging for novice teachers when facing the realities of teaching practice. Veenman (1984) suggests that some of the perceived problems of beginning teachers in their first years of teaching include reality shock, shifts in attitudes and behaviors, students' assessment, and difficulties in coping with individual disparities.

2.1. Teacher Development & Teaching Experience

Moreover, other studies (e.g., Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Chan & Leung, 1998; Tinker Sachs, 1996) have explored how knowledge impacts what novice teachers have learned from their teaching experience and the development of student teachers' knowledge, helping them realize the necessity of professional training procedures in order for planners of teaching institutions to make sure that training is beneficial to them. In one particular study, Chan and Leung conducted a survey with student teachers during their internship, aiming to minimize the gap between what preservice teachers have been taught in their institutions and how to assist them in applying theory into practice in EFL classrooms, aided by in-service teachers. Chacon (2005) argues that teachers' individual views of their efficacy can impact students' behaviors. The Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale is used to "assess efficacy for management, engagement, and instructional strategies" (p.257). These studies provide some evidence that professionals in teacher education institutions need to be aware of concerns of student teachers, factors for the changes in confidence, and then to benefit novice teachers with higher and realistic level of self-assurance.

Furthermore, Tinker Sachs (1996) collected thirty-five first year novice teachers' feedbacks to respond to the question "which module have fostered you to think and talk like real teachers? The two modules are "approach and methods in language teaching" and "classroom observation." The findings of the responses are sixty percent of student teachers select the school visit and forty-five percent of them choose watching videos. Therefore, most of the students prefer the school visit. One of the students responds, "I think that the most valuable experience is the school visit. It is because we can go into the real classroom and experience a little bit teaching experience. Besides, we can also recognize the strengths and weaknesses of students. So we can base on their difficulties to design appropriate activities to assist their learning" (p. 16). In summary, above papers are to assist novice teachers to overcome ensuing challenges and help to reinforce the professional teacher preparation.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participant

The participant who is the twenty-six-year-old EFL teacher graduated from National Pingtung University of Education in Southern Taiwan. Even though her major is Visual Arts Education, she was interested in English during her college education and took a number of English courses in order to receive an English certificate. After graduation, she had her internship in a bilingual elementary school in Taipei. Then she passed the exam to be a substitute English teacher in National Pingtung University of Education Affiliated Primary School for one year, was assigned to Penghu where is off the western coast of Taiwan in her first year of full-time teaching and Pingtung for two years.

This teacher was selected to participate in the study for two reasons: (1) she passed the extremely competitive exam to be qualified as an official primary English teacher in Penghu for one year. This exam was held by the Bureau of Education in Penghu county. However, she would love to

live closer to her hometown so she took another exam held by the Bureau of Education in Pingtung. She is competent enough to be able to pass a series of qualified exams; and (2) the author was willing to devote time for this study.

3.2. Instrument

The research design for this study employed a case study of qualitative research. The qualitative research method included emails and two interviews. The researcher emailed the participant questions first in order to let her have time to think about the answers and then interview her later. The threats to the internal validity of the research design are the participant’s biases. It is possible that the participant may not be comfortable when asked about her teaching experience, and there is some danger that the responses may not be a true reflection of her actual beliefs. The researcher interviewed twice for thirty and fifty minutes respectively.

Nevertheless, it is very likely that different novice EFL teachers may have different struggles when facing the realities of teaching practice. In summary, generalization of findings from the study must be made with care.

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Through interviews with the respondent, the difficulties of this novice English teacher in her first-year of teaching were evident. The interviewee’s perceptions regarding teaching strategies are identified in this study.

The researcher analyzed how this EFL teacher changed after her first year of teaching as well as what concerned her most about her role as a primary English teacher. A summary of the data collected from the respondent during the interviews is shown in Table 1.

Table1. *Factors affecting teaching*

	First year	Second year
Teacher	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. teaches in a hasty and disordered manner 2. more nervous 3. spends too much time on doing teaching aids and collecting materials 3. watches and follows the videotape’s teaching style 4. simulates traditional English teacher’s image 5. no other English teacher to consult with in her school 6. insufficient teaching resources 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. more confident 2. more familiar with the materials 3. save time in doing teaching aids and focus more on teaching strategy 4. has good control of classroom management 5. Understands students’ reactions more 6. Is able to observe herself from the third person’s angle 7. More teaching experiences keep her stable and calm when being on the stage 8. has more time to reflect on teaching pros and cons and adjust her teaching 9. access to forum to exchange information

These responses were taken from an analysis of the two interviews, and the main points that were relevant to the issue of teaching experience were focused upon specifically. The differences between first-year and second-year teaching are illustrated with respect to the factors impacting teaching efficacy. The elements influencing beginning teachers' instruction in the second year of teaching include the following: an increased level of confidence, greater familiarity with the contents of textbooks, and improved skills in classroom management.

5. CONCLUSION

The result of this case study has contributions for preservice and for teacher education institutions. First, this novice EFL teacher regards the area of her professional knowledge as a major concern in that her major is not English. She wants to learn more theory-based concepts and understand more cultural background of the target language. Currently, she took one year off and just received her Master's degree in Applied Linguistics in the United Kingdom. She would like to make up for what she lacks in her academic background of English teaching. Second, although it is obvious that this teacher feels more comfortable in her second year compared to her first year experience, it is still hard for her to cope with other new challenges in her second year. Sardo-Brown (1996) suggests that normally it takes five years to establish teaching efficacy to overcome teaching load. Thirdly, although this novice EFL teacher has shown growth and confidence in her second and even third-year of teaching experience, she is still struggling with the demands imposed on her by the teaching environment.

Bullough and Baughman (1997) argue that "teaching, like writing, is indeed a recursive activity" (p. 6). Becoming an effective teacher is unlikely to occur with trial and error, and this means that there are likely to be failures and mishaps in addition to the successes. Novice teachers need to receive not only professional support, but also emotional support from family, friends, co-workers, and other teacher educators (Gordon & Maxey, 2000). Our knowledge of actual difficulties faced by new teachers remains quite anecdotal.

However, due to the fact that, Bullough & Baughman (1997) point out not all teachers feel comfortable with voicing their concerns and difficulties that they have faced in their teaching. Overcoming the problems that new teachers must deal with depends upon teacher educators exploring new methods of expanding conversation. In an environment where there is more pressure on teachers in Taiwan to teach English effectively, improved teacher development programs and in-service programs for novice EFL teachers appear to be a necessity.

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APPENDIX

1. Please talk about your learning background.
2. Please share me about your story of teaching experience.
3. What have you changed and grown in your second and even third-year of teaching?
4. Talk about your teaching phases to review your career path.
5. Talk about your teaching principles and your teaching expertise compared to other EFL teachers.
6. Reflection on development and teacher education. What do you want to add for teacher preparation?
7. What do you want to learn most currently?

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



Yi-Chun Liu is currently the assistant professor in the Department of Applied Foreign Languages at Chia Nan University of Pharmacy & Science, Tainan, Taiwan. She received her Ph.D. in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) from Texas A&M University, USA. Her research interests are in the field of computer-assisted language learning, vocabulary learning, English for tourism, and sports English.