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Investigating the Professional Adaptation of English Teachers in the First Years of their Profession to School Environment

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This study investigates English teachers' socialization to the school environment, their behaviour in the classroom, and their attitudes towards their profession in the first few years after graduation. An explanatory research design was used with a mixed-method methodology. We administered a survey to 800 novice English language teachers in 16 cities where there is high rates of governmental teacher placements in Turkey based on the data provided by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE). The questionnaire included five category components: professional competence, interpersonal relations, organizational history and language, organizational goals and values, and organizational policy. We then selected 9 English teachers using purposeful sampling from the three of the 16 cities in order to gain information about novice teachers' experiences and to elaborate on the results of our quantitative data findings. After observing the classes of those English teachers, we conducted semi-structured interviews. The content analysis of the responses revealed important issues the teachers experienced during their socialization period. These included their relationships with the school administration, colleagues, parents, and the teachers' own professional competence, particularly in the areas of the target language (TL) use and language teaching methodology. A discussion of the findings provides suggestions for teacher education programmes, thereby contributing to the development of educational curricula. Having postgraduate studies to sustain professional development has been suggested for teacher growth, which will also establish a link between the university-school partnership. The university-school partnership will only be possible with a willingness to

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collaborate, dedicated time and systematic feedback to share knowledge and experience.

Introduction: Early Years of Teaching

The school culture, working conditions and classroom behaviour are important factors for retaining teachers and making them grow professionally, particularly in the first years of teaching when they have faced the challenges of being a novice teacher. Providing an improved school culture may increase teacher retention and teacher professionalism by promoting better teaching and learning practices both for teachers and students.

This study explores novice English language teachers' professional adaptation to their work environment, their classroom behaviour, and their attitudes towards their profession. As Farrell (2012) states, it is difficult to define the term 'novice teacher'. A novice teacher is a practitioner who enters the field for the first time. In this study, the term has been used for teachers who have 3-4 years of teaching experience.

When teachers first start their teaching profession they face many challenges (Voss & Kunter, 2020). Pillen, Beijaard and den Brok (2012) investigated 182 novice teachers by focusing on how they coped with the tensions of the first years of teaching. Tensions were mostly feelings of helplessness, fear, and anger and most novice teachers coped with their tensions by speaking to the people around them.

School culture has been seen as a major challenge for novice teachers. Kardos (2005) points out that the schools should support novice teachers in order to create a positive environment and culture for teachers to foster teachers' growth. Gordon and Maxey (2000) and Ryan (1986) state that social and professional isolation at school have been major challenges for novice teachers. Experienced teachers are hesitant to support beginning teachers; they would not be perceived as interfering with them. This may result in a lack of communication between them.

Karataş and Karaman (2013) explored the challenges experienced by novice language teachers in terms of understanding the curriculum, a need to support in planning lessons, and coping with the classroom management problems. The novice teachers are also faced with social challenges, such as conflicts with colleagues and administration. Creating a positive learning atmosphere, coping with students and managing the class are seen as major challenges by the teachers in Karataş's study (2015). Karataş reports that novice teachers are hesitant to share their experiences with their colleagues, because they are worried about being seen as 'weak' as a teacher. Novice teachers are also hesitant to ask for support, concerning this might be seen as incompetence. However, having support and guidance from their colleagues may reduce the difficulties of the initial years.

Akcan (2016) also examined the challenges of EFL novice teachers in the Turkish context. She found that unmotivated students, not being able to use the communicative methodologies due to the large class size, concern for completing the curriculum on time, and classroom management were the main areas the novice teachers tried to cope with. Similar to Akcan's study, Sali and Keçik (2018) conducted a study to investigate the challenges of novice EFL teachers in Turkey. Their study revealed challenges such as classroom management, establishing rapport with learners, planning problems, motivation-related problems, overcrowded classrooms, lack of classroom facilities, and problems related to administrative attitude. The participating teachers reported that professional development opportunities and guidance are not adequate in their initial years of teaching.



The mechanisms that can support novice teachers have been investigated; for instance, Dias-Lacy and Guirguis (2017) indicate that having the support and guidance from colleagues and administration in planning and lesson preparation, managing the classrooms, and dealing with diverse contexts of classrooms may assist novice teachers in resolving some problems. In order to improve the teaching skills of novice teachers, Anggraini, Mirizon and Inderawati (2020) found that recognizing students' abilities, receiving support from colleagues are essential. However, novice teachers are expected to think critically to increase the quality of instruction and grow professionally. In addition, Anggraini et al. (2020) and Kennedy (2005) report that novice teachers should have a good understanding of professional development and need to see how they should develop it.

In order to support the professional development of novice teachers, Ekşi (2010) carried out a study to evaluate the professional needs of English language teachers in Turkey. The results showed that sharing experiences with colleagues is the most useful need for novice teachers. Yurtseven-Yılmaz and Sever (2021) also conducted a study with Turkish language teachers and they showed that Turkish language teachers participate in professional development activities, but their past experiences were not satisfactory. The teachers stated that their opinions were neither asked to determine their professional development needs nor any feedback was provided for them about their needs. The study showed that the teachers consider participating in professional development activities necessary for professional growth.

Professional development can help teachers to understand the processes of teaching and learning and improve the quality of teachers' performance (OECD, 2009). Continuing professional development activities serve to promote teachers' professionalism through informal and formal activities. These activities are conducted in order to improve teachers' competencies to increase the quality of instruction (Kennedy, 2005; Mann & Tang, 2012). It is essential to determine the difficulties novice teachers face in the school context and develop the professional development activities. It is also crucial to evaluate the pre-service teacher education programmes and develop the courses, such as "practicum/school experience" based on the needs of the novice teachers. The challenges of the first years of teaching might be alleviated if the problems are identified with larger scale studies.

Since the studies related to challenges and adaptation problems of novice teachers are mainly small sample studies, this study aims to investigate the problems teachers face in their job on a large scale comprehensive study.

This study aimed to investigate the following research questions:

- (1) To what extent do the novice teachers perceive their skills/knowledge in the following areas:
 - Interpersonal relationships with their administrators, colleagues, students and parents
 - Professional satisfaction
 - Professional competence
- (2) What are the areas of self-inadequacies in the first years of teaching?

Methodology

Research Method

The study makes use of the explanatory research design, specifically adopting a mixed-method research paradigm. To this end, we first conducted a quantitative study and then added a qualitative study to clarify and elaborate on the results obtained from the quantitative study in order to make an interpretation of the data from various perspectives (Fraenkel & Warren, 2006).

Research Sample

The purposeful sampling method was used in this study. Participants in the first stage in the study comprised 800 teachers working in primary and high schools and they are novice teachers who are in the first three years of teaching experience. The novice English teachers are chosen from 16 cities in Turkey in the 2017-2018 academic year. The distribution of teachers in these provinces is given in Table 1. Using Cochran (1977)'s formula, the sample size is considered well above the average which is estimated to be around 750 and is large enough to represent the research population.

Table 1. Number of Teachers in Major Provinces

Provinces	Teachers	Sampling size
İstanbul	19765	180
Ankara	10406	95
İzmir	8252	75
Bursa	5152	47
Antalya	4712	43
Adana	4665	42
Konya	4408	40
Mersin	4298	39
Şanlıurfa	4037	37
Gaziantep	3663	33
Diyarbakır	3415	31
Kocaeli	3391	31
Hatay	3161	29
Van	2902	26
Manisa	2901	26
Samsun	2743	25
Total	87871	800

The socio-demographic background of the teachers participating in the study is presented in Table 2. As seen in the table, 565 (74,74%) of the teachers are female and 191 (25.26%) are male. When the distribution of the participants by age is analyzed, it is seen that 64.02% of them are under 30 years old and the rest are 30 years old and over.

Table 2. Socio-Demographic Background of Novice English Teachers (N=756)

	N	%
Gender		
Male	191	25.26
Female	565	74.74
Age		
20-29	484	64.02
30-39	227	30.03
40-49	45	5.95
Department Graduated		
American Culture and Literature	13	1.72
Translation and Interpreting Studies	17	2.25
English Linguistics	11	1.46
English Language and Literature	148	19.58
English Language Teaching	567	75.00
Educational Background		
Bachelor's Degree	685	90.61
Master's Degree	15	1.98
Master's Degree (In Progress)	56	7.41
Teaching Experience		
1-6 months	42	5.56
7-12 months	91	12.04
13-18 months	82	10.85
19-24 months	78	10.32
25-36 months	463	61.24
Level of the School		
Primary	65	8.60
Primary/Secondary	65	8.60
Primary/Secondary/High School	62	8.20
High School	169	22.35
Kindergarten, Primary, Secondary School	11	1.46
Kindergarten, Primary, Secondary School, High School	27	3.57
Secondary School	308	40.74
Secondary/High School	49	6.48

As seen in the table, 567 (75.00%) of the teachers participating in the research are English Language Teaching graduates, approximately 20% are graduates of English Language and Literature, and the remaining 5% are graduates of departments such as American Culture and Literature, Translation and Interpreting Studies and English Linguistics. When the distribution of the teachers is examined according to their experiences, it is seen that most of the teachers (61.24%) have 25-36 months of teaching experience, the proportions of those with 7-12 months, 13-18 months and 19-24 months of experience are approximately the same (10-12%). Those with 6 months of experience are 5.56%.

Participants in the second part of the study are 9 English teachers who are in the first 4 years of their profession. They are all females and their ages range from 23 to 28. Table 3 below shows the general profiles of the novice English teachers who participated in this part of the study. As seen in the table, 5 of the participants teach in primary, 3 participants in secondary, and 1 participant in high school. 6 of the participants were graduates of the ELT department whereas 3 of them graduated from the Literature Department. Only 1 participant was observed to have received a professional development programme.

Table 3 General Profiles of the Novice English Teachers

		Number of Novice English Language Teachers
School Type	Primary School Secondary School High School	531
Graduate Degree	ELT Literature	63
Professional Development	Yes No	18
TOTAL		9

Research Tools

In the first part of the study, a two-part questionnaire was used. The first part of the questionnaire aimed to collect demographic information of the participants including gender, age, the field of education, educational status, teaching experience, and school level, which is thought to have an impact on the research findings.

In the second part of the questionnaire, the Organizational Socialization Scale developed by Erdoğan (2012) was used to evaluate the organizational socialization levels of English teachers. The Scale consists of 24 closed-ended five-point Likert-scale items, and it had five sub-dimensions/categories. These include professional competence (items 1-5), interpersonal relations (items 6-11), organization history and language (items 12-15), organizational goals and values (items 16-20), and organizational policy (item 21-24).

The questionnaire was tested to ensure item reliability under each subset using Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's-alpha coefficients expressing the internal consistency coefficient of the scale were found to be 0.89 in the total scale; 0.78; in professional competence, 0.83; in interpersonal relations, 0.85 in the history and language of the organization, 0.81 in the adaptation to organizational goals, and values, and 0.72 in the organizational policy. In the present study, we utilized a relational survey model that describes the current situation (Karasar, 2005). A relational screening model is defined as a research model that aims to determine the existence and/or degree of co-change between two or more variables. In relational scanning models, relational analysis can be done using correlational relationship and comparison. Accordingly, the Organizational Socialization Scale aimed to determine the sub-dimensions of the organizational socialization levels of English teachers who have been assigned to public schools since 2014 and who are in the first years of their profession in order to examine whether they differ depending on some personal variables.

Observation was the next research tool we used. The observation period took one semester; we observed the teachers' classes and took descriptive and analytical field notes. The purpose of the observation was to see the classroom environment and the nature of the interaction between the teacher and students.

Additionally, we held semi-structured interviews (Cohen et al., 2007) to get a comprehensive view of the participants' perspectives regarding their first year experiences, such as if they had



any problem with the school administration, staff, teachers, students, the school environment, or parents, what kind of difficulties they experience in the classroom (See Appendix for interview questions). We used observation notes to triangulate the data obtained from the survey and the interviews.

Procedures

Having received approval from the University's academic ethics review board, we proceeded to conduct the study in two stages:

Stage I: Administering and evaluating the questionnaire. The questionnaire was carried out online through electronic media since it would be very difficult to access all 800 teachers from whom the research data would be collected, and using an online questionnaire was considered to be time effective for collecting the data. Information about the research and how to fill in the questionnaire was sent to teachers electronically. The data collection process lasted for three months, and all those completed questionnaires were received electronically.

Stage II: Conducting fieldwork in the three provinces-Adana, Samsun, and Istanbul- with a total of 9 English teachers (three in each province) who were in the first 4 years of their profession "with a view to obtaining breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration" (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007, p. 123). One of the researchers was living in each of these cities, so each conducted this part of the study with 3 participants in their respective locations. The fieldwork lasted 14 weeks, one academic semester. We observed and took notes on two consecutive lessons of each English teacher on three occasions; at the beginning of the term, at the mid-term, and at the end of the term.

In addition, we held face-to-face semi-structured interviews with each teacher to learn more about how they cope with the problems and expectations in their teaching environment. The teachers were interviewed at the end of these observations. The participants' responses to interview questions were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis and Evaluation

The SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) for Windows 22.0 program was used for the statistical analysis of the data from the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics are shown as numbers and percentages for qualitative variables such as mean and standard deviation, gender, and age. The normal distribution tests of the data used were performed with the Shapiro-Wilk test. The resulting data showed a normal distribution, and parametric tests were used in statistical analysis. In binary comparisons between variables with two categories such as gender, t-test, and an analysis of variance (ANOVA) test were performed to find the differences between variables with three or more categories. A correlation analysis was conducted to reveal the relationship between dependent variables. The mean and standard deviations of the scale expressions, sub-dimensions, and scale overall scores are presented in a descriptive statistical table. To test the structure of the scale, a factor analysis, Cronbach alpha test, and item-total correlation tests were performed to determine reliability and validity. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients were calculated to test the internal consistency reliability of the scales. The significance level was accepted as 0.05 for the whole study.

The qualitative part of the study is based on classroom observations and interviews. The qualitative data analysis process from the interviews was inductive, structured, and included several stages. First, the interview data from each participant was analysed separately. Each of

the researchers independently looked for repeated meaningful themes that related to the research question. From the data that emerged, they identified and isolated tentative categories (Shkedi 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Then, the tentative categories were compared across participants and the three researchers agreed upon the categories. As a consequence, the categories from all the interviews and the survey were re-examined and organized by the researchers together into resulting categories (presented in the Findings section below). The researchers have previous experience with the research topic; they have conducted similar studies before and have been working with English teachers for more than 20 years. They discussed the emerging categories in their research meetings and reached a consensus. To respect their privacy, participants were attributed labels as N1, N2, N3 (Samsun), N4, N5, N6 (Istanbul), N7, N8, N9 (Adana). N stands for ‘Novice’. The names of the cities the novice teachers teach are indicated in parentheses.

Results

The findings of the study are presented based on the perspectives of teachers in the areas of their interpersonal relationships at the school, professional competence and satisfaction, and the inadequacies of their teaching practice in the first years of teaching. This enables us to learn more about the challenges of being a novice teacher.

While naming each factor obtained as a result of factor analysis, the contents of the items in the factors and the factor structure developed by Erdoğan (2012) were used as the Organizational Socialization Scale. The original factor structure of the scale developed by Erdoğan (2012) and the modified factor structures with the data obtained from this study are presented in Table 4. When this table is examined, it is seen that the factor structure of the original study and the factor structure of the current study are quite similar. Therefore, it was decided to name the factors obtained from this study in accordance with the original. Thus, F1 was named "interpersonal relations", F2 "adaptation to organizational goals and values", F3 "organizational policy", F4 "organization history and language" and F5 "professional competence".

Table 4. The Original and Modified Factor Structures of the Scale

Original Scale		Modified Version	
Factors	Items	Factors	Items
Organizational Policy	1-4	F3	1-5
Adaptation to Organizational Goals and Values	5-9	F2	6-11
Organization History and Language	10-13	F4	12-15
Professional Competence	14-18	F5	16, 17, 19
Interpersonal Relations	19-24	F1	20-24

The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients for the overall and sub-dimensions of the Organizational Socialization Scale were obtained and presented in Table 5. The internal consistency coefficient obtained for the whole scale is $r=0.9354$, indicating that our scale is a very reliable scale. When the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency values of the dimensions were examined, it was determined as 0.7805 for the F5 sub-dimension as the lowest and 0.9393 for the largest F1 sub-dimension, and it is seen that all sub-dimensions are highly reliable.

Table 5 Organizational Socialization Scale and Its Sub-Dimensions

Sub-Dimensions	Number of the Questions	KR 20
F1	4	0.9393
F2	5	0.8799
F3	4	0.8562
F4	5	0.8794
F5	5	0.7805
General Score	23	0.9354

Correlation analysis was performed to reveal the relationship between the general score and sub-dimensions of the Organizational Socialization Scale, and the results obtained are given in Table 6 together with the descriptive statistics, and the scatter plot of the relationship between the general score and its sub-dimensions is given in Figure 1. From this table, the mean of the scale general score is 4.2544 ± 0.5412 , the mean of the smallest sub-dimension to the F3 sub-dimension, 3.8535 ± 0.8657 , and the mean of the largest sub-dimension to the F4 sub-dimension, 4.5542 ± 0.5603 , appears to belong. It is seen that the correlations between all sub-dimensions and the overall score of the scale are positive and statistically significant at a very high level. In addition, it was found that the correlations between the sub-dimensions were positive, moderate and statistically significant.

Table 6. The Relationship between the Organizational Socialization Scale and Its Sub-Dimensions

Sub-Dimensions	Mean	Std. Dev.	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	General Score
F1	4.29894	0.60167	1.00000	0.37158 <.0001	0.46790 <.0001	0.53571 <.0001	0.44394 <.0001	0.70555 <.0001
F2	4.22068	0.70475	0.37158 <.0001	1.00000	0.51483 <.0001	0.50403 <.0001	0.53523 <.0001	0.80371 <.0001
F3	3.85351	0.86571	0.46790 <.0001	0.51483 <.0001	1.00000	0.58474 <.0001	0.43405 <.0001	0.77724 <.0001
F4	4.55423	0.56027	0.53571 <.0001	0.50403 <.0001	0.58474 <.0001	1.00000	0.51086 <.0001	0.75390 <.0001
F5	4.39127	0.75795	0.44394 <.0001	0.53523 <.0001	0.43405 <.0001	0.51086 <.0001	1.00000	0.78327 <.0001
General Score	4.25443	0.54122	0.70555 <.0001	0.80371 <.0001	0.77724 <.0001	0.75390 <.0001	0.78327 <.0001	1.00000

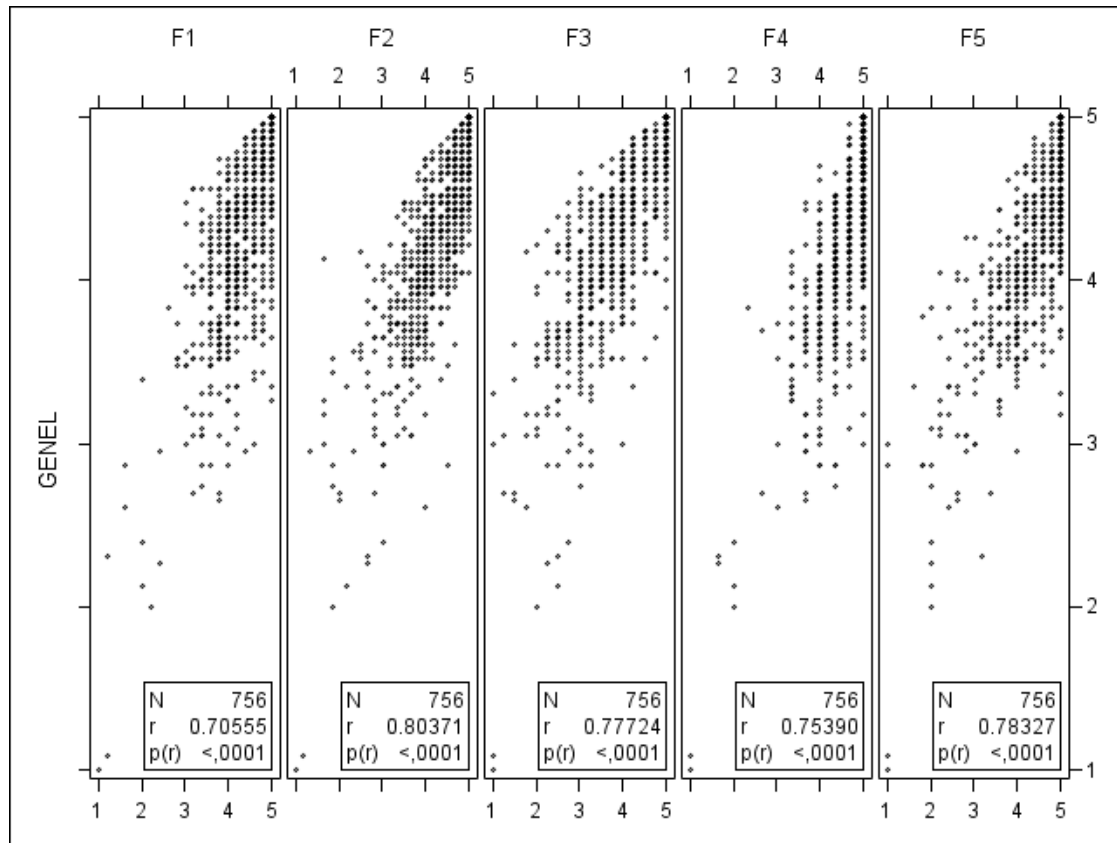


Figure 1 The Relationship Graph between the General Score and Sub-Dimensions of the Organizational Socialization Scale

Interpersonal Relationships at the School

Descriptive statistical calculations were made on the data obtained for the Organizational Socialization Scale and its sub-dimensions. The arithmetic mean and standard deviation values of the scores of the participants from each sub-dimension were calculated. Analysis results are given in Table 7.

Table 7 Descriptive Statistics Results on Organizational Socialization Scale, Sub-Dimension and General Scores

Dimension	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Response
Interpersonal Relations (F1)	756	4.30	0.60	I agree so much
Adaptation to Organizational Goals and Values (F2)	756	4.22	0.70	I agree so much
Organizational Policy (F3)	756	3.85	0.87	I agree so much
Organization History and Language (F4)	756	4.55	0.56	I totally agree
Professional Competence (F5)	756	4.39	0.76	I agree so much
GENERAL SCORE	756	4.25	0.54	I agree so much

When the findings in Table 7 are examined in terms of the interpersonal relations dimension, it is seen that the arithmetic mean of the teachers' scores in this dimension is 4.30 and the standard deviation is 0.60. According to these findings, the teachers agreed a lot with the statements in the interpersonal relations dimension. In other words, teachers' high scores in the interpersonal

relations dimension indicate that teachers have positive relations with their colleagues and other employees in their schools, and it can be said that teachers' socialization levels in the interpersonal relations dimension are high. When the findings in Table 7 are examined in terms of the Organizational Socialization scale in general, it is seen that the arithmetic mean of the teachers' scores from the overall Organizational Socialization Scale is 4.25 and the standard deviation is 0.54. According to these findings, it was determined that teachers highly agree with the statements in the Organizational Socialization Scale and they perceive their organizational socialization levels as high.

The quantitative findings gathered from the questionnaire indicated that the participating novice language teachers received high scores in interpersonal relationships with their administrators, colleagues, students, and parents (M: 4.30, SD: 0.60). The teachers have high levels of socialization and positive relationships with their administrators, colleagues, students, and parents at the interpersonal level. All of the teachers expressed that they did not experience any difficulty with the school administration and worked in harmony with the principal. Most of them stated that their relationships with the other teachers were good. However, this finding is not supported thoroughly by the qualitative findings gathered from the interviews.

Although most participating teachers reported that they did not have any administrative or communication problems with their students, and colleagues in the quantitative data, the qualitative data showed that the teachers at school had their own groups in the teachers' room and the participating teachers were not involved in those groups; they felt lonely in the teachers' room. A teacher in Samsun province (N1) stated that "I sometimes feel very lonely in the teachers' room because I am the only English language teacher in this school. I wish I could have a colleague with whom I can discuss my profession-related problems, and share my thoughts". Some of the participating teachers complained about the negative atmosphere in the teachers' room. For instance, a teacher in Samsun (N2) felt suppressed in the teachers' room, by stating that:

During the breaks, I do not spend my time in the teacher's room. It absorbs my energy. All the teachers know each other and are gossiping in groups. They are not positive to young teachers like me. Most of them ignore me and do not even greet me. Once one of them told me to get off the seat and said "this is my place. (N2, Samsun)

The teachers experienced certain communication problems with other teachers, but instead of trying to solve them they preferred to exclude themselves, and therefore, they could not feel as part of their schools. All of the participating teachers believed in the importance of administrative support in work quality. A teacher in Istanbul (N4) stated that "I think school administration should make teachers feel secure that they are not going to be left alone in possible problems either with students or with their parents". The teachers expressed that the administrative support was one of the major issues that helped them feel themselves as a part of their schools.

Professional Satisfaction and Professional Competence

The quantitative finding of the questionnaire reported that the participating novice teachers found themselves professionally competent (M: 4.39, SD 0,76) and they thought their professional competencies were at the high level. The teachers expressed that they knew what they were doing in the classroom and how to teach English in an effective way. All of the participating teachers interviewed reported that they had the necessary skills and competencies

English language teachers should have. However, this finding contradicted the findings gathered from classroom observations. The classroom observations showed that the teachers were having some inadequacies specifically in the use of a textbook, the use of target language, classroom activities, and classroom management.

The participating teachers expressed that they felt very excited on their first days at school. For example, N3 (Samsun) stated that “I thought I was dying from excitement” and N2 (Samsun) “I believe on my first day at school my students felt my overexcitement and I felt very anxious about how to make them love me.” All of the teachers described a typical working day in a few steps; they get up early in the morning, help their children get dressed and have breakfast, they themselves get prepared and leave home to go to school. A great majority of them expressed that since they put too much effort on teaching at school they did not have any energy left to prepare other supplementary materials after the classes. They rarely prepared extra worksheets and quizzes at home in the evenings. Just one of the novice teachers stated that she spent extra energy, time, and money to prepare other supplementary materials in line with the topics she teaches.

Another participant (N7, Adana) had a positive attitude towards her profession and the school culture. She was planned and organized. She had a sincere relationship with her students. She seemed to earn the respect of her students. We could clearly see her attitude towards her students. In many of our observations, we had come across that she reminded her students that it was okay to make mistakes by saying “if you are wrong, I would not get angry, it is not a problem if you do not know the right answer, I just want you to learn the correct one.”

All of the participating teachers expressed that they felt professional satisfaction when they saw their students using English in an effective way, and when their students received high scores in high-stake examinations conducted in the province. Apart from these, just two of them could remember a particular time that stands out in their teaching experiences. This was when the school principal praised her and her classroom materials to the visiting inspectors, and when she received a certificate of achievement.

Areas of Self-Inadequacy in the First Years of Teaching

The Use of Textbook and Materials

The results of the observations of the actual teaching practices of the participating teachers revealed that a great majority of them preferred to use just coursebooks and did not spend extra time and energy to prepare other supplementary materials appropriate to the age and level of their students. In line with this, the researchers could not see any target language-related visuals such as pictures, charts, tables on the walls of the classrooms to facilitate the learning process.

N7 (Adana) was dependent on the smartboard and the textbook. She never used any authentic material during our observations. She followed a traditional way to teach, which means that the teacher was in charge on every occasion and she did not give a chance to students to be in charge of their own learning. N5 (Istanbul) completed an MA degree in Foreign Language Education. She stated that she combined different disciplines with English, looking for alternatives to materials, applying to various materials and topics, and making language a functional tool in daily life also highlights the value of "autonomy" to get effective teaching circumstances.



In language classrooms, materials are important because they can significantly increase student achievement by supporting student learning. A variety of authentic materials are essential components for teaching a new language but it was seen that all the teachers were only using the smart-board and the textbook the Ministry of Education provided. In addition, all of the teachers asked their students to bring a dictionary with them to every class. These were the only materials used in the class.

Most of the participating teachers did not use their body language and maintain eye contact with their students in an effective way. They generally did not use any lead-in/motivation activity to tap into their background knowledge, and to help them get prepared for the succeeding activity. There was no overall unity and smooth transitions among the activities.

In language classrooms materials are important because they can significantly increase student achievement by supporting student learning. N4 (Istanbul) stated that "... in such an environment I needed to work very hard to help students, other teachers, school administration and parents realized the importance of English." N6 (Istanbul) added that "being engaged in technology" is crucial to establishing an innovative teaching environment. However, in public schools access to new technologies is insufficient, so she sometimes applied at least slides to make her lesson more effective. Her school was limited solely to a blackboard and coursebook.

The Use of L2

Although the teacher language is one of the main sources of input, especially in EFL classrooms, teachers used the students' L1 (Turkish) as the medium of instruction, for the most part, and rarely gave the instructions in the target language. On the occasions when they did give instructions in L2, they immediately repeated them in Turkish, so most of the students paid no attention to the L2 instructions, knowing they would hear them in their mother tongue in a few seconds.

The teachers tended to focus on explicit grammar explanations, followed by drills. They constantly gave metalinguistic explanations and asked questions about the target language such as whether a particular adjective form was comparative or superlative, why the verb 'is' was used in a particular context and which suffix appeared in a specific word. Few promoted self-discovery. They preferred to write the grammar rules as formulas on the board and used controlled exercises such as fill-in-the-blanks and substitution.

N7 (Adana) used the target language except when giving instructions. She first spoke in the target language and then translated it into Turkish without giving the students a chance to understand it. For example, 'We are going to listen to a track and match the pictures and the words. Following this, she asks Anladınız mı?[Did you understand?] Students replied Hayır! [No]. One of the participants in the Adana province (N8) mostly used L1 instead of using the target language. To make this claim more concrete we can give some examples such as "Sözlüklerinizden kelimelerin Türkçelerini bulup deftere yazıyorsunuz" [Find the Turkish translation of the words in your dictionaries and write them in your notebook] or "Benden sonra tekrarlayın" [Repeat after me] or "Öğrenci zili çaldığında yerlerinize geçip defter kitaplarınızı hazırlayıp, derse hazır bir şekilde bekliyor olmanız gerekiyor." [When the bell rings, you have to take your seats, prepare your notebooks and be ready for the lesson.]

Another teacher in Adana did not encourage the students to express their own thoughts and feelings. Instead, she would ask students what 'adjective' meant, for example. Then, she explained the differences between 'adjectives, adverbs, verbs, etc.' by translating them into

Turkish. She gave some examples in Turkish like ‘yakışıklı erkek, güzel araba’. She did not give the students the time to think or check their dictionaries or even let them guess.

Classroom Management

Effective classroom management paves the way for the teacher to engage the students’ learning. Two participants (N7 and N8, Adana) were able to manage their classes well in terms of discipline and following the drills and so on but teacher N7 failed to monitor her classroom in a way that would maintain a healthy classroom environment. The students were confused and distracted. She did not move around and made sure that everyone was on the same page and understood what was going on.

As for classroom management, time management and initiating cooperation among students; most of the participating teachers mainly stood by the teachers’ table. They did not walk around the students’ desks nor did they encourage whole class participation. The students sitting in the first rows only participated in the course. Those sitting at the back were not listening to the lesson, some of them were daydreaming, and some of them were talking with each other. Yet, teachers ignored them and did nothing to involve them in the lesson. Some of the teachers entered the classrooms late, thus, did not use the class time in an effective way.

All of the teachers reported similar difficulties that they faced in the classroom. According to them, the major problems were low motivation, classroom management, and the multi-level students with different levels of proficiency in L2. According to them, a majority of the students did not see the importance of learning English, and its relation to their lives. They also stated that it was very difficult to teach in such classrooms and was nearly impossible to engage all of the students in the activities.

The results showed that there have been differences between the quantitative data and qualitative data in terms of how novice teachers perceive themselves in their interaction with the school environment (administrators, colleagues and parents) and teaching competencies, such as the use of the L2 and classroom activities. The teachers’ knowledge and skills of using language teaching methodologies focused more on the isolation of the language from the communicative contexts.

Conclusions

The study investigates English language teachers’ teaching experiences in the first years of their career, the challenges of the initial years and their adaptation to the school culture. New teachers have concerns with survival, confidence, and self-inadequacy in teaching (Jarvis & Algozzine, 2006; Lundeen 2004). Major concerns for novices in research studies are relationship with students, colleagues, and parents, time management, content, and curriculum knowledge. The quantitative analysis of this study reported that novice teachers had positive relationships with their administrators, colleagues, and parents, yet qualitative findings suggested that the novice teachers needed to be supported more to have them socialize in the school environment by the administration in the early years of their profession. Being isolated and lack of professional support are the major concerns of the participating teachers in this study.

Experienced teachers can be hesitant to support novice teachers since they would not be interfering with novice teachers. Novice teachers can be hesitant to ask for help and share their experiences with their colleagues. However, creating a positive and supportive environment at



schools is necessary for teachers' growth and to improve the school culture by promoting effective teaching and learning practices.

The research studies show that having the support and guidance from colleagues and administration in planning lessons and managing the classrooms may assist novice teachers in coping with some problems (Dias-Lacy & Guisguis, 2017; Kozikoğlu & Senemoğlu, 2019). In this study, the novice teachers are struggling to involve students in the lesson and keep them on the activity in L2 and they mainly use L1 (Turkish) in the classroom. This finding supported the studies of Veenman (1984), Özder (2011), and Öztürk and Yıldırım (2012), who reported that novice teachers had difficulty in motivating students and keeping them on task. The present study reported that the major inadequacy is the use of the L2 in language classrooms. The teachers mostly used the L1 (Turkish) in their classrooms. This might result from the teachers' styles or it might be due to the age of the students or their levels, yet in the present study, it was observed that the teachers are not competent enough in their L2 proficiency levels.

Within the school environment, continuous professional development in the initial years is highly valuable to sustain teacher professionalism. Teachers need the skills of inquiry to reflect on their own teaching practice. They need to be able to pose questions, develop constructive criticism, and solve certain problems about their teaching practices. They should find their own voice as young professionals (Wang, Strong & Odell, 2004; Richards, 1998; Turhan & Kırkgöz, 2018). As Richards (1998) notes, by observing how teachers do their lessons, novice teachers can develop strategies and techniques that they can employ in their own teaching practice.

In this study, the participating teachers reported that professional development opportunities and guidance were not sufficient in the initial years of teaching. In their studies, Sali and Keçik (2018), Yurtsever-Yılmaz and Sever (2021) report that teachers consider participating in professional development activities necessary to grow professionally; however, teachers think that professional development opportunities and mentoring are not adequate in their early years of teaching. There is a need to design systematic professional development programs based on the needs of the teachers fully equipped with constant feedback and evaluation.

The ratio of teachers having postgraduate studies in Turkey is 8.93% (The MONE Performance Program in 2019). In this present study, the ratio of teachers who have a master's degree is 1.98%, and 7.41 per cent of the teachers are working on their master's degree and 90.61% have a Bachelor's degree. Köseoğlu, Tahancalıo, Kanlı, and Özdem Yılmaz (2020) report that teachers attended master's and doctorate programmes to pursue their professional development. However, it was reported that teachers found accomplishing postgraduate studies challenging. Having postgraduate studies is a powerful way to sustain professional development; teachers should be given opportunities to pursue their master's degree (with thesis or without thesis) while they are teaching. Hybrid learning formats may offer opportunities for teachers; they may have the option of attending graduate classes in-person or synchronously online. Hybrid learning may increase the attendance of teachers in postgraduate studies by also offering them continuous professional development.

While emphasizing systematic and continuous professional development for in-service teachers, Baecher (2012) points out the importance of promoting the link between pre-service teacher education and in-service teacher education and connecting the teacher education programs and school contexts. Providing systematic and continuous professional development opportunities for novice teachers may assist them to overcome the struggles of the initial years. Building a solid link between pre-service and in-service teacher education will enhance the

professionalism of teachers by increasing the quality of instruction at schools.

Oates and Bignell (2019) also indicate the importance of collaboration between the university and the school. The university-school partnership has a key role in the exchange of knowledge between the university and other stakeholders. Yet, factors for a successful partnership must be established for collaboration, dedicated time to work together, and having regular meetings for constant feedback and evaluation. Systematic collaboration between teachers, academics, and other stakeholders will lead to sustainable educational change for better teaching and learning outcomes.

Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors report that there are no competing interests to declare.

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Appendix

Semi-structured Interview Questions

Describe your first day at school with its positive and negative aspects. How did you feel?

Have you had an adaptation problem? Where? In what condition? Why is that?

Do you have problems with the school administration, staff, teachers, students, the school environment, or parents? Are you under pressure in the teachers' room (restriction of movements, inability to express thoughts)?

What kind of difficulties do you experience in the classroom? What do you do to overcome these difficulties? What kind of support do you get from your institution, colleagues and the parents?

Have you been praised for your work? Are you waiting for praise or other types of rewards?

Would you like to be in contact with the university? Why is that?

Do you feel you belong to the institution?

Are you satisfied with your school's rules?

What are the factors that satisfy/dissatisfy you in your institution?

What are the experienced teachers' attitudes towards you? Do you feel unwanted at school?

How did the type and location of the school you work in, the number of students, your lesson time, and other tasks (such as classroom counselor) affect you?

How do you feel while doing your job? Why is that?

What kind of changes do you find necessary to increase your motivation while working in your institution? Do you believe these changes will happen?

Did you choose the profession willingly? If you had a chance to rejoin your profession, would you choose to teach again? How long do you intend to teach?

What difficulties did you encounter during the transition from student to teacher? How long did your adaptation to school take? What were the reasons for this?

Do you think that the education you received from university is sufficient for your profession? If not, what changes do you think should be done in the education faculty?

How did you decide to study foreign language education, have you always wanted to be a teacher, when did you decide this, and what did most influence your decision to become a teacher?