Voices of novice teachers in Malaysian international schools: Challenges in the first year of EMI teaching

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The growth in the popularity of Malaysian international schools conducting English-medium instruction (EMI) highlights the importance of an alternative perspective in examining the challenges encountered in the first year of teaching. While numerous relevant studies have been conducted among expatriates working as international school teachers, a research scarcity is observed concerning novice teachers in international schools. The study data were collected from semi-structured interviews and reflective journal entries. Nine novice teachers were recruited as the current study participants. The findings reveal that novice teachers encountered different challenges during the first year of teaching at international schools. Hence, adequate knowledge and support are pivotal for novice teachers. The results emphasise a refined teacher education program with continuous professional development, training and support, which would ease novice teachers' challenges and struggles during the first year of teaching at international schools.

Introduction

The entrance into the teaching profession is considered the most determining phase for novice teachers (Cross et al., 2020; Farrell, 2016; Sali & Kecik, 2018). The initial years of teaching would determine career progress, work efficiency, and job satisfaction (Bailey, 2015; Farrell, 2016; Sali & Kecik, 2018; Shen, Basri & Asimiran, 2018), while shaping a teacher's professional identity (Lap, Ngoc & Thao, 2022; Paula & Grinfelde, 2018). Therefore, integrating into the school environment successfully is crucial for teachers, as teachers are the most important asset of every educational institution (Lap, Ngoc & Thao, 2022). Teachers or educators are expected to plan lessons effectively, maintain conducive classroom management, accommodate different student learning styles, implement pertinent teaching strategies, be knowledgeable in curriculum planning and instruction, and communicate effectively with parents (Sali & Kecik, 2018). Due to various roles and responsibilities, teachers encounter numerous challenges during the initial years of teaching. Before inquiring about the nature of challenges encountered by novice teachers, the term 'novice' requires an unambiguous definition. Currently, an exact definition or consensus is lacking in stipulating the novice stage (Gholam, 2018). Nonetheless, past studies (Huberman, 1993; Farrell, 2016; Petty, Good & Putman, 2016), defined a novice teacher as an educator with less than three years of teaching experience.

Fry and Anderson (2011) posited that "in an era of increased teacher accountability, new teachers are encountering unprecedented challenges" (p. 13). Fry and Anderson (2011) asserted that a teacher's first year of teaching is the most difficult, as various novice teachers perceive personal incompetence and isolation in classrooms with minimal support or guidance (Arends & Kilcher, 2010). For instance, previous researchers demonstrated that novice teachers, who experienced an intricate transition from teacher

education programs to real-life classrooms, frequently perceived a lack of preparedness for the challenges encountered in the first year of teaching (Senom, Zakaria & Ahmad Shah, 2013; Gholam, 2018; Cross et al., 2020). Accordingly, the present study aimed to bridge the existing gap in the current literature to effectively assist in alleviating novice teachers' challenges and struggles at Malaysian international schools. With the growing number of international schools, institutional management is required to employ not only expatriate teaching staff but also qualified local teachers (Bailey, 2015; Gibson & Bailey, 2023; Hammer, 2021). The competitive success of an international school is highly dependent on teacher quality, specifically the professionalism level of educators (Tkachyk, 2017; Lap, Ngoc & Thao, 2022). Nevertheless, prior academicians discovered that local novice teachers at Malaysian international schools practised teaching strategies recognised as 'old-fashioned' and 'indoctrinating', not adhering to contemporary teaching and learning strategies required for international school curricula (Bailey, 2015; Devarajoo, Tengku & Wani, 2016; Pedigo, 2019). In particular, local teachers could not facilitate an optimal learning environment for students, owing to the lack of necessary teaching skills (Bailey, 2015; Budrow & Tarc, 2018; Castillo-Clark, 2018; Devarajoo, Tengku & Wani, 2016; Pedigo, 2019).

Study objectives

Previous studies focused on expatriate staff's perceptions of local educators' teaching quality. However, minimal attention was provided to the challenges perceived by novice teachers during their initial years of teaching at international schools. Hence, several gaps in current knowledge need filling to acquire a comprehensive picture of the international educational system (Hayden & Thompson, 2016; Bailey, 2015; Sali & Kecik, 2018; Gibson & Bailey, 2023). The present study sought to uncover novice teachers' perspectives on the challenges encountered during the first year of teaching at international schools. Acknowledging the challenges encountered by novice teachers is imperative for understanding their needs for support. Providing adequate support in the initial years of teaching could reduce the teacher attrition rate, which is detrimental to the profession (Farrell, 2016; Lap, Ngoc & Thao, 2022; Paula & Grinfelde, 2018).

Theoretical framework

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory was established on the work of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget (as cited in Dakwa, 2016). The theory focuses on experience as the main factor in the learning process. Kolb introduced the experiential learning theory by developing an integrated and cyclical approach incorporating "experience, perception, cognition, and behaviour" (p. 21), which is highly applicable to resolving the aforementioned challenges. The present study applied the theory in analysing the challenges encountered by novice teachers teaching at Malaysian international schools. The cyclical process in Kolb's experiential learning theory is parallel to novice teachers' concrete experience in the present study, in which all experiences with teaching challenges pose a concrete phase in teacher development.

Novice teachers are expected to experiment with adaptation strategies to resolve challenges encountered during classroom instruction and complete the tasks assigned by the management. Correspondingly, novice teachers would develop a relevant schema from the respective teaching experiences by reflecting on all occurrences and assessing personal behaviours and interactions with students. Thus, this study also analysed novice teachers' self-reflections in the form of journal entries. Subsequently, novice teachers would transition to the abstract conceptualisation phase. Novice teachers would explore a valid and rationalised explanation of the current situation and proceed to change the first course of action through pertinent revisions for an improved outcome.

Background of international schools

Students learn subjects through English at international schools conducting English-medium instruction (EMI), which were initially established in different countries worldwide to serve the families of diplomats, army officers, and entrepreneurs in the respective countries (Bailey, 2015; Hayden & Thompson, 2016). Presently, international schools are open for admission to not only expatriate workers' children but also individuals with sufficient accessibility, eligibility, and resources (Hayden & Thompson, 2008; Bunnell, 2022). Although international schools operate under the authority of the local education ministry, international institutions possess full autonomy to select and implement a particular curriculum, with the International Baccalaureate (IB) and the Cambridge International Curriculum as the most popular examples (Hayden & Thompson, 2016). Furthermore, the industry is expanding exponentially (Bailey, 2015; Gibson & Bailey, 2023; Bunnell, 2022; Hayden & Thompson, 2016), with over 12,000 international schools across the globe currently, according to International Schools Consultancy (ISC Research, 2021). Predictions revealed that the number of students in international educational institutions would surpass seven million by 2023 (ISC Research, 2019). The growth is primarily driven by the growth in Asia and the Middle East (Gibson & Bailey, 2023; ISC Research, 2021), including United Arab Emirates, China, Saudi Arabia, India, and Malaysia (ISC Research, 2021) and the local population (Chuck, 2015; Gibson & Bailey, 2023). The number of staff at international schools also increased, by 60% from 2012 to 2022 (ISC Research, 2022).

International schools in Malaysia

International schools conducting EMI in Malaysia previously served predominantly expatriate children. Currently, a large increase is occurring in the admissions of local Malaysian employees' children (Hayden & Thompson, 2016; Bailey, 2015; Gibson & Bailey, 2023). Only 26 Malaysian international schools existed in 2000 (ISC Research, 2019; The Star Online, 2013). Until 2006, a Malaysian student who wished to attend an international school was required to seek permission from the Ministry of Education and adhere to strict criteria before obtaining permission (Bailey, 2015). Specifically, a parent of the student was required to be a foreigner or the student was required to have previously studied abroad for three consecutive years (Gibson & Bailey, 2023). Nevertheless, a sudden upsurge in the number of enrolments among local students was observed after the

revocation of the 40% cap for local students in 2012 (Bailey, 2015; Gibson & Bailey, 2023). According to the Market Intelligence Report on Malaysian international schools by ISC Research in December 2019, Malaysian students constituted the majority, 65%, at most international schools (ISC Research, 2019; The Star Online, 2017). Malaysian international schools are growing to be popular when parents perceive the schools as a platform for children to gain mastery of English and a gateway to globally reputable universities, such as Harvard, Cambridge, and Oxford Universities (Gibson & Bailey, 2023; The Star Online, 2017).

The Malaysian Ministry of Education considers the development of private and international schools as equally important as public schools, to provide adequate access to quality education for all students. In addition, the *Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025* distinctly listed strategies to ensure committed and professional teachers (Senom et al., 2013). Accordingly, resolving the challenges encountered by novice teachers is essential to improving teacher quality and providing support for the initial stage of the teaching career and professional growth, while improving the international educational system aspired by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (Senom, Zakaria & Ahmad Shah, 2013). Hence, the present study aimed to discover novice teachers' viewpoints on personal challenges during the first year of teaching at international schools. Acknowledging the challenges encountered by novice teachers is vital to understanding personal struggles and providing adequate support in the initial years of teaching that would reduce high teacher attrition rates, which are detrimental to the profession (Lap, Ngoc & Thao, 2022; Pedigo, 2019; Shen, Basri & Asimiran, 2018).

Challenges in the first year of teaching

The existing educational literature has provided considerable attention to novice teachers' challenges during the first year of teaching. Bailey (2015) detailed a list of challenges encountered by expatriates and local novice teachers at Malaysian international schools based on expatriate teachers' perceptions. The challenges primarily revolved around practical, cultural, and professional aspects when the teachers transitioned to an international educational setting. Specifically, unfamiliarity with curricular content and lack of specific teaching skills were frequently discussed. The findings also demonstrated that beginning teachers tended to imitate expatriate staff's teaching styles. Concurrently, Devarajoo et al. (2016) obtained similar findings from seven novice teachers in an international school. The school principal and human resource officer identified that the challenges among novice teachers were frequently associated with inadequate teaching knowledge and skills with the unfamiliar curricular content.

Abd Wahid (2016) conducted a mixed methods study among 106 novice teachers from public, private, and international schools to describe the encountered challenges. The findings revealed that novice educators were highly unprepared to teach and support diverse learners while ensuring sufficient classroom discipline. Similarly, Ye (2017) examined Chinese novice teachers' competence and ability to resolve challenges at international schools in Thailand. The results indicated that novice teachers experienced significant challenges in terms of the teaching processes and school socialisation. The

difficulties associated with teaching were classroom management issues, effective management of student diversity, and the lack of skills in selecting appropriate teaching materials. In regards to the school socialisation process, the scarcity of administrative support in managing parental expectations was reported as the major challenge for novice teachers.

Sali and Kecik (2018) conducted a case study to investigate the challenges perceived by novice teachers when teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Turkey. They reported challenges related to classroom management, which encompassed issues related to instructional planning and lesson management, foreign language learning, teaching-related challenges including teacher knowledge, individual learner differences, applying theory into actual practices, and insufficient support from the school management to fulfil parental demands (Sali & Kecik, 2018). El Saeed and Mahmoud (2020) investigated novice English teachers' in-class challenges through a case study at Egyptian national and international schools. The study revealed that novice teachers were required to cope with various challenges related to classroom management issues and distinctive student needs. Contrarily, Hammer (2021) discovered that novice teachers were continually frustrated by existing perceptions towards expatriate counterparts, who were perceived as more effective educators regardless of actual ability or capability. As such, local teachers perceived significant pressure to routinely exhibit sufficient capability and teaching skills.

Owing to the research scarcity on local novice teachers' challenges, this study endeavoured to appraise the Malaysian international school context. Specifically, the current study focuses on novice teachers' challenges in the first year of teaching at Malaysian international schools, through self-reports (Bailey, 2015; Gibson & Bailey, 2023; Lap, Ngoc & Thao, 2022; El Saeed & Mahmoud, 2020; Sali &Kecik, 2018).

Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was employed to understand the challenges perceived by novice teachers at international schools. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and reflective journal entries. The data collected from different sources enriched the current study findings. Arguments might arise that different insights could also be garnered from a quantitative study with a larger sample of participants, as the present study recruited only a small number of novice teachers as study respondents. Nonetheless, quantitative findings might not be generalisable, as each educator possesses unique teaching experiences.

Participants

Participants were selected through a snowball sampling technique. All nine participants were Malaysians and novice English as a second language (ESL) teachers, who acquired English as a second 1anguage (Table 1). In Malaysian national schools, English is taught as a second language (L2). Eight participants acquired Tamil as their first language (L1) while one acquired Hindi as L1. All nine participants completed primary and secondary education in different Malaysian national schools. All nine participants were graduates

from teacher education programs offered by private universities in Malaysia and were teaching at five different international schools in Malaysia. All were in their first teaching position after graduation. Their teaching experience was one year or less and all were teaching English as a first language. Table 1 summarises their profiles.

Table 1: Study participant profiles

Participant (pseudonym)	Gender	L1	L2	School type	Teaching qual. (Bachelor degree)	Teaching experience
Sarah	Female	Tamil	English	Pre-school and primary	English education	8 months
Sham	Female	Tamil	English	Secondary	English education	1 year
Amirtha	Female	Tamil	English	Secondary	English education	6 months
Marishka	Female	Tamil	English	Secondary	English education	1 year
Niralya	Female	Tamil	English	Secondary	TESL	1 year
Pranithi	Female	Tamil	English	Primary	TESL	1 year
Manjeet	Female	Hindi	English	Primary	TESL	8 months
Areena	Female	Tamil	English	Primary	TESL	1 year
Jay	Female	Tamil	English	Secondary	English education	1 year

Data collection procedure

A snowball sampling technique was employed for data collection. The consent letters with details explaining the study background and objectives were sent to participants via email. The participants also shared the contacts of other participants who fulfilled the required participation criteria. All participants were invited to reply via email after ticking the consent box stating "I am willing to take part in the study". A total of 10 participants initially agreed to participate, but one withdrew from the study before data collection. The data were collected from May 2019 to September 2019. Participants were asked to send two reflective journal entries bi-weekly. After receiving two reflective journal entries from each participant, the researcher administered the interview schedule for individual participants. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and audio-recorded with participants' consent. Participants also provided consent for the results to be utilised as research data and to be published subsequently. Interviews were transcribed verbatim before each participant verified the provided responses by perusing a copy of her interview transcript.

Data collection instruments

Semi-structured interviews
Semi-structured interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) were conducted with novice teachers after completing reflective journal entries. Open-ended questions incorporated several question types, such as novice teachers' educational backgrounds, personal histories, teaching commencement dates at the respective international schools, personal working life, the encountered challenges, and the approaches employed to resolve the challenges. Each participant was interviewed for 45 minutes guided by a list of questions

to reveal specific information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The exact wording or the question order was not fixed beforehand. A pilot study was conducted with the instruments to ensure high clarity and appropriateness in avoiding ambiguous and misleading questions.

Reflective journal entries
Two reflective journal entries were collected from each participant over a month. The teachers were invited to write reflective journal entries bi-weekly before the researchers collected two journal entries from each participant and conducted the interviews. Each participant was required to email personal journal entries at the end of each week. Reflective journals allowed the researcher to obtain the chronological record of real events and experiences of novice teachers (Majid, 2016) from an "annotated chronological record or 'log' of real experiences and events" (Wellington, 2000, as cited by Majid, 2016) to explore novice teachers' challenges during the month of completing reflective journals before asking relevant questions for clarification during the interview. The reflective journal entries served as written examples of real-life classroom incidents by explicating personal perceptions and methods implemented by novice teachers to resolve encountered challenges.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was adopted to analyse the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews and reflective journal entries from nine participants. The interviews were fully recorded and transcribed verbatim. The average interview length was 40 minutes. According to Braun's and Clarke's (2006) guidelines, the data were analysed through an inductive approach to examine the challenges encountered by individual participants instead of comparing the findings with previous studies. The researchers familiarised with the collected data during the transcription of interviews and listed down potential codes. Subsequently, the researchers thoroughly perused the transcripts before identifying and providing the initial codes and determining emerging themes. The researchers uncovered similar patterns between the themes to avoid overlaps before categorising the data trends into major themes. The generated themes emerged from the interview data and reflective journal entries were identified. An educational expert was consulted on the transcripts to identify and generate additional themes via the same procedures. The researchers and the expert compared personal ideas and remove overlapping sub-themes to finalise the themes with higher validity and reliability (Creswell &Creswell, 2017). The high consensus on the majority of similar codes and themes reflected a high level of consistency between the researchers and the expert.

Study reliability

The study reliability was determined by adhering to Lincoln's and Guba's guidelines (1985). Reliability was established through peer debriefing (scholarly guidance from an expert in the relevant research field), the withdrawal right (participants could withdraw from the study), and member checks (a preliminary analysis of data with study participants). To ensure transferability, adequate information about the study context,

tools, and participants were provided to assist future researchers in conducting similar studies in a similar context (Anney, 2014). To ensure data reliability, the conducted data analysis was reviewed by an expert in the teacher education field to prevent any bias when generating the codes and themes (Anney, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Findings

The current section presents and discusses the emerging themes from the data analysis. To ensure participant anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to each teacher participant (Table 1). The analysis revealed relevant themes and sub-themes concerning novice teachers' challenges in the first year of teaching at international schools, as depicted in Figure 1.
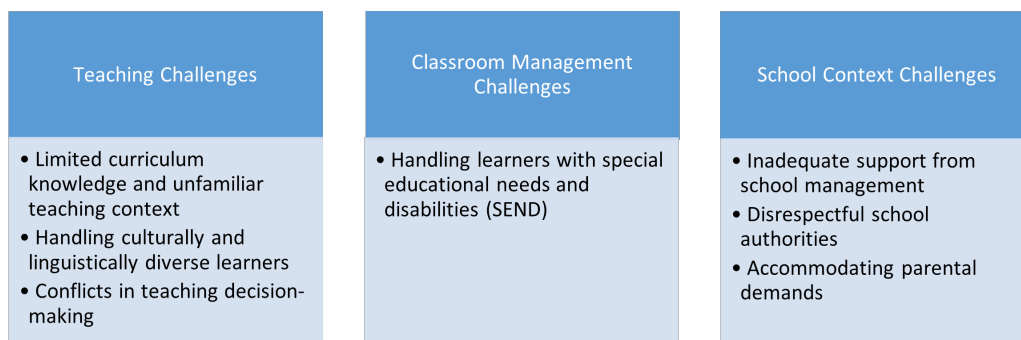
Teaching Challenges	Classroom Management Challenges	School Context Challenges
• Limited curriculum knowledge and unfamiliar teaching context • Handling culturally and linguistically diverse learners • Conflicts in teaching decision-making	• Handling learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)	• Inadequate support from school management • Disrespectful school authorities • Accommodating parental demands

Figure 1: Themes and sub-themes of novice teachers' challenges

Teaching challenges

The theme of teaching challenges encompasses the sub-themes of limited curriculum knowledge and unfamiliar teaching context, handling culturally and linguistically diverse learners, and conflicts in teaching decision-making.

Limited curriculum knowledge and unfamiliar teaching context
Without prior curriculum knowledge, participants wished that teacher education programs could introduce different curricula implemented in Malaysian education institutions. This study discovered that all teachers graduated from private higher learning institutions were eligible to teach only in private or international schools. Sarah, a teacher participant, revealed her experience of teaching the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) syllabus, in an unfamiliar context with limited curriculum knowledge:

> When I went in, I was shocked… I was a bit shocked… I was a bit scared and nervous because initially my teacher education programme… they focused on secondary and… you know when I went into this international school… they actually asked me to teach the primary level… KS1 and KS2… and the more shocking part was the IGCSE because I had no background in IGCSE at all. So, they were about 6, 7, and 8 years old… all mixed… depending on their background level of English (Sarah).

Handling culturally and linguistically diverse learners
This study appraised the struggles encountered by novice teachers in managing culturally and linguistically diverse learners in the same classroom. Specifically, different sets of student expectations required fulfilment for adequate lesson engagement. Sham, a teacher participant, expressed:

> Like… How do you manage a classroom when you have students from different countries? Students from Korea. They have different kinds of understanding. Words. Students from China. They are in the same class. So, how do you go about it? ... How do you deal with that? Nothing was taught (Sham).

Conflicts in teaching decision-making
The findings demonstrated that most novice ESL teachers underwent conflicts between personal beliefs and values and the demands from school management and parents. Sarah portrayed frustration when encountering a predicament in teaching decision-making or instructional planning:

> I believe that! I can say, just nine months in this school, I can see a lot of things… you know. Sometimes, I know that the kids are not learning anything. But I have to still continue teaching, Left with no choice. But, that shouldn't mean that you can just leave everything. Because, your passion… your passion is in teaching and you want to do it (Sarah).

Classroom management challenges

Novice teachers were required to resolve classroom management challenges. Handling learners with special needs and disabilities (SEND) in mainstream classrooms with other children was one of the most frequently reported struggles in this study.

Handling learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
Handling SEND learners in a mainstream classroom was reported as one of the major challenges. The school management expected teachers to be sufficiently equipped with knowledge in handling SEND learners. Nevertheless, novice teachers did not possess experience in handling SEND learners, as the teachers were not been professionally trained in teacher education programs. The participants believed that teachers with educational backgrounds in special needs should be recruited for SEND students. Feelings of helplessness were expressed by novice teachers, owing to the struggle in managing SEND learners without any form of assistance or support from the school management. Feelings of frustration and helplessness were expressed by Sarah:

> ... there was once this kid, hit another kid and that the other student actually tried to strangle the other kid. At the same time, there was another ADHD student from another class, he followed me from that class to this class and he was throwing a tantrum here. So, I thought, ok… this is the end of my career… you know… because like a lot of things and you got no help (Sarah).

Similar feelings of frustration were also reflected in Areena's case:

> Some special needs children, they tend to be very aggressive and they'll go and harm
> each other. They have mood swings. We have to pull them back. Must make them calm
> down… And they're not giving us shadow teachers. Because these kinds of kids, they
> need a shadow teacher so that they can only focus on that particular student (Areena).

School context challenges

The data revealed several difficulties unique to international schools, namely inadequate support from school management, disrespectful school authorities, and accommodating parental demands.

Inadequate support from school management and limited collegial support
The findings revealed that novice teachers were learning to teach an unfamiliar syllabus and cope with the alternative school system with minimal support from the school management. Sarah, in the interview, also shared personal experience of receiving limited collegial support from colleagues and relevant reasons. The novice teachers, including Sarah, also explicated that learning in isolation was highly solitary with numerous struggles:

> No, I didn't have anything. The teachers there were my reference. Even the teachers
> there were a bit confused because it was a thematic approach and none of the teachers
> was actually sent to any courses… there were no courses at all. No matter how many
> years they worked… 3 years… There were no courses. You're almost like on your own
> and there's no leader and there's no department. There's nothing for English and all that.
> So, you're basically on your own. So, even if you want to ask anything, you want to refer
> something, you can't find anything like that (Sarah).

Disrespectful school authorities
Disrespectful school authorities was one of the commonly encountered issues raised by novice teachers in the first year of teaching at international schools. The study participants revealed that the school principal or head of a department treated the novice teachers as merely service providers, with several humiliated in front of students. The study participants opined that the school authority should exhibit certain respect levels for novice teachers. As shared by Sarah:

> They would instruct the students to sit properly and do this and that and we as teachers,
> we might be just standing in front… and be like… ok… this is my class you know… I'm
> teaching and I'm actually telling the students something and you come in between and
> then you walk in abruptly and… you know… you tell us… you know… you tell us to
> shut down our handphones. But we're teaching, we're not playing with our phones…so,
> you know… you should not come in abruptly into the class or say things… say mean
> things in front of the teachers. You can always send an email to the teacher saying… you
> know… we can meet right after school… things we can discuss and all that. So, I think
> there should be respect (Sarah).

Accommodating parental demands

The study discovered several challenges in accommodating the demands of parents with different cultural backgrounds at international schools. Most school managements allowed parents to directly access teachers without the presence of a principal, which resulted in additional stressful feelings for novice teachers. Sarah expressed feelings of anger and frustration:

> When I walked into this international school, my students were from Brazil, they were from North India, South India, Thailand, Indonesia and all this. So, the thing was students from India, they were very much focused on their education and their level was really higher than us. Whereas, students from Indonesia and Brazil, were… their approach… I mean they did not focus much on education. So, there was a debate in the class between the parents because parents from India, they want… you know… a firm education for their kids because they felt that activities cannot help the students (Sarah).

Discussion

This study investigated novice teachers' perceived challenges by employing a qualitative research method to obtain data through interviews and reflective journal entries. As the present study was conducted with a relatively small sample size, other academicians might argue that different insights could emerge from a larger group of participants, and complementary quantitative data collection. Generalisability might be questioned due to the small number of participants involved in this examination of novice teachers' first year of teaching experience. The study results found that novice teachers continuously encountered significant challenges during teaching, including limited curriculum knowledge and unfamiliar teaching context, educating culturally and linguistically diverse learners, and conflicts in teaching decision-making. Furthermore, novice teachers had been exposed only to the Malaysian national school syllabus during their teacher education program and training in a national school. Thus, the teachers lacked international curriculum knowledge, which lead to numerous difficulties in teaching in an international school upon graduation (Bailey, 2015; Farrell, 2016; Sali & Kecik, 2018).

Bailey (2015) found that novice teachers imitated an expatriate teacher's educating method, due to a lack of necessary curriculum knowledge and teaching skills in an unfamiliar context. Similarly, Devarajoo et al. (2016) demonstrated that novice teachers did not possess sufficient curriculum knowledge and skills to teach. Novice teachers in the current study encountered significant challenges in managing culturally and linguistically diverse learners, although local novice teachers had frequently been exposed to multi-racial learners in Malaysia and were aware of multiple culturally sensitive issues. Nevertheless, their cultural knowledge regarding learners from different countries was not sufficient, as novice teachers were not cognisant of different cultural taboos. Hence, the findings here suggest that ample exposure is required in all teacher education programs to prepare novice teachers for handling culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Abd Wahid (2016) also corroborated the present findings by revealing the high unpreparedness of international school novice teachers to educate and support diverse students while

managing classroom discipline. Ye (2017) made similar findings from research with Chinese novice teachers in Thai international schools.

The current study uncovered the conflicts experienced by novice teachers in teaching decisions made to accommodate the demands of parents and school administration, which were contrary to personal principles. Novice teachers shared personally frustrating experiences in adhering to decisions against personal beliefs and non-optimal for learners, owing to the lack of opportunities for exercising flexible decision-making. This finding does not accord with previous research, wherein international schools recruited novice teachers with high flexibility in decision-making (Budrow & Tarc, 2018). Meanwhile, the study results supported previous research on beginning teachers' classroom management challenges. Farrell (2016) indicated that beginning teachers could not effectively balance classroom management and workload. Sali and Kecik (2018) and El Saaed and Mahmoud (2020) also revealed that novice teachers experienced difficulties in classroom management, especially in student behaviour and learner differences. In general, the study findings here are mostly aligned with previous studies, including high demands from school management and parents, disrespectful school authorities, and inadequate support from the school management in curriculum guidelines (Alhamad, 2018; Bailey, 2015; Carpenter, 2002; Gan, 2018; Pikula, 2015).

Conclusion and implications

The present study revealed novice ESL teachers' perceptions of encountered teaching challenges. Particularly, novice ESL teachers were frequently required to adapt to encountered challenges by forfeiting desired or appropriate teaching decisions. Consequently, some novice teachers abandoned personal teaching principles essential to successful language teaching and learning. The findings propounded the requirement to reflect on the existing teacher education programs and practices in Malaysia. All relevant programs should adequately prepare pre-service teachers for anticipated teaching challenges at international schools to prevent significant discrepancies between expectations and reality. The effort could be implemented effectively by considering integrating various curricula in teacher education programs and introducing problem-based learning that exposes pre-service teachers to real-life classroom issues in both national and international school contexts. Effective strategies are also imperative to support novice teachers during the transition from teacher education programs into the first year of teaching.

Suggestions for future research

Future studies could be conducted on a larger scale by employing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Moreover, longitudinal studies would reveal the patterns of novice teachers' challenges and concerns in the initial years of teaching at international schools. Novice ESL teachers reported receiving limited collegial support in resolving challenges and preventing turnover intention. Therefore, future studies could examine the importance of collegial support for novice teachers in the first year of teaching. As the current study was conducted in the context of international schools, future researchers

could consider replicating the study in different teaching contexts to discover unrevealed challenges encountered by novice teachers. A comparative study could also compare the challenges perceived by experienced teachers and novice teachers to gain a thorough comprehension of strategies for effectively resolving teaching and classroom instruction challenges.

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Appendices

Interview protocol
Before interview
- Check if the interview questions are ready.   - Check if the necessary tools and stationery is prepared for note-taking during the interview.   - Check and ensure if the surrounding environment have minimum, if possible, no noise interruption.   - Check if audio-recorder is ready for recording.   - Make confirmation if all the participants provided consent to be interviewed.   - Final check to see if both interviewer and participant are ready for the interview.
During interview

- Follow the prepared questions.   - Pre-interview
  >Greet the participant   - During Interview
  >Follow the sequence of the interview questions.   - End of interview
  >Thank the participant.   - Stop the audio-recording only at the very end of the session.   - Contingency procedure.
  >Should the interview be interrupted. (e.g., serious noise interruption), allow for switching of place of interview.

After interview
- Check if the audio-recorded has successfully recorded the interview.   - Check if the audible quality of the interview is good and no noise interruption in the audio.

- The interview recorded is transferred to the laptop for later analysis.
- A back up is created for the audio file on Google Drive as a precaution should there be any issues with the laptop.
- Label all notes taken throughout the interview, allowing for easier retrieval.

Interview questions

Pre-interview

- Good day [morning/afternoon/evening], how are you doing?
- Express gratitude for participation.
- Explain the purpose of the interview.
    >Probe: Recap the objectives of the research.

During interview

- Can you share about your teacher-training programme?
    >Probe: Duration of the program, courses, teaching practicum
- Can you tell me about your teaching experience?
    Follow-up questions: What were your first days in your own classroom like?
- Can you describe a significant experience in your teaching?
- Have you had any problems connecting what you learned in your educational program to your work as a teacher in the classroom?
    Follow-up Questions: What were the problems that you encountered?
    Follow-up Questions: What did you do to compensate?
- How did you feel when writing the reflective journal entries?
    >Follow-up questions: Can you describe more on the writing experience.
- What are some challenges that you faced in your first year of teaching in the international school?
    >Follow-up Questions: Can you explain further about the challenges?
- What do you think is the cause of the problem?
    >Follow-up Questions: school management/ students/ teaching
- How did you deal with the problem (s)?
    >Follow-up Questions: What were the steps or coping strategies to deal with the challenges/problems?
- Can you share any bad classroom experience that made you feel that the struggle of teaching is real?
    >Follow-up Questions: Are there any particular classroom incidents that you can recall?
- What are the challenges you faced as a novice ESL teacher teaching English as a first language?
    >Follow-up Questions: Can you describe the challenges you faced?
- What are some aspects of teaching English as a first language in the international school that were surprising to you when you first started teaching?
    >Follow-up Questions: Can you describe how different was the experience as compared to your teaching practicum experience during your teacher training program?

End of interview

- Inform the interview has come to an end.
- Express gratitude for participating in the interview.
- Stop the audio-recording.

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