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Changes in Teacher Beliefs and Identity of In-Service TESOL Novice Teachers

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ABSTRACT

There is a limited body of research that explores the issues encountered by teachers during their first year and how their problem-solving approaches influence the formation of their teacher identity and beliefs, especially in the context of education in Malaysia. The purpose of the study is to explore novice TESOL teachers' experiences to understand changes in in-service TESOL teachers' beliefs and how they influence their teacher identity. The research paradigm employed for this study is rooted in the interpretive paradigm, specifically adopting a qualitative case study approach, and will be using in-depth semi-structured interviews as the primary research tool. The key findings are the change of teachers' beliefs over time, with the impact of environment, support from colleagues, mentors, and personal growth through reflection and addressing mistakes play a crucial role in shaping novice teachers' evolving identities. This study underscores the importance of integrating practical experience with theoretical knowledge in teacher training programs and emphasizes the need for supportive professional networks to navigate the complexities of the first year of teaching. The experiences of novice teachers can help pre-service teachers better understand and prepare for situations they may encounter in their future careers, thereby reducing the challenges and anxieties faced by novice teachers.

Keywords: Novice teacher, teacher identity, teacher beliefs

Introduction

In the early ages, students encountered a variety of teachers, each distinguished by their unique teaching styles and methods of interacting with students. These differences are shaped by their distinct personalities and the experiences they have accumulated throughout their careers and

can be attributed to the particular identity of the teacher (Henry, 2016). The concept of teacher identity refers to the ongoing process of an individual's development in understanding and recognizing oneself as a teacher, particularly during the early stages of one's teaching career (Henry, 2016). Engaging in self-reflection and self-understanding during the initial phases as an educator is crucial for establishing and sustaining a cohesive personal identity, resulting in a robust teacher identity and exceptional adaptability (Johnson et al., 2015). Teacher beliefs refer to those propositions associated with instructional practices, constructed as elements such as attitudes, values, assumptions, mental images, intuitive screens, (pre)conceptions, personal teaching styles, and assumptions based on individual histories (Ferguson & Lunn, 2021).

Over the past two decades, there has been a renewed interest in the essence of teacher identity and its implications and comprehension in the context of language teaching and learning (Richards, 2023). Scholars have pointed out that positive teacher identity is crucial for motivation in English language instruction, and issues related to teacher identity and development have consequently garnered increasing research attention (Basalama & Machmud, 2018; Kayi-Aydar, 2019). Most of the studies on academic teacher identity have primarily been grounded in sociological theories (e.g. Kreber, 2010; Friesen & Besley, 2013 & Liu et al., 2022), with only a small fraction of the research that has delved into how the interaction between the individual and social structures helps in the formation of identity in education (McLean & Price, 2019).

However, the interaction between the individual and social structure in the first year of teaching has not been explored fully in the research literature. The first year of teaching is exceptionally significant for professional careers, as the roles that novice teachers play when independently confronting and addressing issues contribute to their own inductive processes, and such behaviour is crucial for their professional success (Sela & Harel, 2019). There is a limited body of research that explores the issues encountered by teachers during their first year and how their problem-solving approaches influence the formation of their teacher identity and beliefs (Hong et al., 2017). This gap is particularly pronounced in the context of education in Malaysia (Othman & Senom, 2019). Therefore, the purpose of the study is to explore novice TESOL teachers' experiences to understand changes in in-service TESOL teachers' beliefs and how they influence their teacher identity.

Literature Review

Teacher Identity and Beliefs

In the existing literature on the field of teacher identity, a common concept has been revealed, emphasizing the dynamic nature of identity. Teachers' identities experience changes over time, influenced by various factors, and there is unanimous agreement that understanding teacher identity is central to language teaching (Cochran-Smith, 2008; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Pennington & Richards, 2016). The definition of identity underscores three aspects. Firstly, identity encompasses individuals, such as self-definition, relational, including teacher-student relationships and a sense of belonging to social groups (Sedikides & Brewer, 2015). Secondly, as previously mentioned, identity is both dynamic and stable. This is because an individual's self-concept remains stable over time but can undergo changes based on social experiences (Morf & Horvath, 2010). Finally, identity is also multifaceted, as an individual typically coexists with multiple identities simultaneously (Vignoles et al., 2011). Similarly, teacher identity encompasses these three aspects.

Teacher identity can be defined as the teacher's beliefs held by educators regarding what it means to be a teacher and the practical aspects of functioning in the role of an educator (Miller, 2009). On an individual level, research on Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' (NNEST) teacher identity tends to focus more on investigating teachers' self-definition. It is influenced by various factors such as personal history, beliefs, emotional engagement, and multiple layers of influences shaping the cognitive changes in the perception of teacher identity (Li, 2022). At the same time, emotions and teachers' professional identity are inseparable. Classroom experiences influence teachers' cognitive perception of their professional identity. For instance, happiness enhances their belief cognition, while conversely, challenging experiences may lead to a reconceptualization of these identities (Nichols et al., 2017). Furthermore, Song's (2016) study also highlighted that the identity of NNEST is manifested in their emotional experiences of anxiety, vulnerability, and insecurity. However, they demonstrate an ability to transform these emotions and reconstruct their identity. Therefore, Song's study has increased attention to the emotional aspects of teacher identity.

Additionally, at the relational level, teacher identity can be constructed within the teaching environment through the relationships formed between the available cultural knowledge and the everyday knowledge and experiences of colleagues and students (Brown & Heck, 2018). By collaborating with others and using "meaning-making" and resources from others, teachers can explore various solutions to problems, thereby refining and enriching their own teacher identity (Edwards, 2005). Lastly, at the collective level, teacher identity can be interpreted as a social identity (Sang, 2023). Drawing on Tajfel & Turner's (1986) notion of an individual's self-image stemming from their perceived membership in social categories, it is determined by the specific social, cultural, historical, and political context in which they find themselves (Ye & Law, 2019). Through these research studies, it is evident that teacher identity can be defined from various perspectives, with influences ranging from individual factors to broader environmental considerations. These factors play a crucial role in shaping and altering a teacher's perception and development of their professional identity.

Belief is defined as a subjective, experientially formed individual judgment, typically prefaced with phrases such as "I believe" as a prelude. Beliefs can also be interconnected with other beliefs, deemed as "core" or "central beliefs," with these interrelated beliefs leading to further consequences (Raymond, 1997; Gilakjani & Branch, 2012). Teachers' beliefs are influenced by their own experiences as learners and are established during their university years. It helps novice teachers in processing new information and profoundly impacts their teaching practices (Phipps & Borg, 2009; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017). This influence is evident in shaping the strategies and decisions they employ in the classroom and significantly shaping what and how they learn in the area of language teaching education (Phipps & Borg, 2009; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017). Teachers concurrently hold different beliefs, encompassing perspectives on knowledge, classroom subjects, and instructional methods, as well as numerous moral and ethical dilemmas, and societal issues that influence their teaching (Levin, 2014).

Furthermore, according to Albert Bandura's theory of teacher self-efficacy (Lazarides & Warner, 2020), individual beliefs among teachers influence their willingness to adopt new teaching methods. And the impact on setting more challenging goals for themselves, having higher levels of planning and organizational skills, concentrating on problem-solving, seeking assistance, and teaching strategies when facing challenges. Therefore, researching teacher beliefs is crucial (Lazarides & Warner, 2020; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). While beliefs formed through prior language learning experiences may be challenging to revoke or alter, assisting

teachers in acknowledging their professional beliefs can effectively help them innovate and embrace new methods, technologies, and activities (Schlam & Inbar-Lourie, 2023).

Factors that influence the development of novice teachers' identity

Teachers' beliefs and their experiences engage in a two-way manner and change over time. For novice teachers, the transition from being a learner to assuming the role of a teacher involves particularly significant changes, as they are in the process of moving "from one world to another" and grappling with the challenges of adapting to a "radically different and novel environment." (Saunders & Ash, 2013; Jiang et al., 2021) In Huang et al.'s (2021) study, an analysis of interviews with three novice teachers in Hong Kong revealed that when novice teachers experience a misalignment with their pre-existing beliefs, it leads to changes in their attitudes and practices towards colleagues and students. Furthermore, they tend to deepen and expand their existing beliefs by incorporating new dimensions. Additionally, another study on the professional development of novice English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Indonesia indicates that external struggles such as negative relationships with colleagues, student behaviour issues, and inadequate school management can impact teachers' emotional self-efficacy (Lomi & Mbato, 2020). Consequently, this prompts them to reassess their teacher identity and beliefs (Hong et al., 2018; Lomi & Mbato, 2020). Both of these studies conducted analyses based on interviews with novice teachers, using their narratives as a foundation. They unanimously emphasized that support from the school can assist novice teachers in addressing challenges, reinforcing their self-beliefs, and solidifying their professional identity. Additionally, the attitudes of colleagues and students were identified as primary factors influencing the changes observed in these novice teachers.

Teaching beliefs influence the development of teacher identity

As previously mentioned, a teacher's professional identity and beliefs are inseparable, with changes in beliefs influencing the perception of identity. In the practice of teaching, educators can achieve classroom transformation by reflecting on their teaching beliefs, instructional practices, and professional values. This process facilitates the reconsideration of who they are as teachers and provides a perception of the essence of their role as educators (Ulla, 2022). In a Finnish study on the development of teacher education, it is highlighted that beliefs in teacher education form the foundation of teacher identity (Maaranen & Stenberg, 2020). Aspects such as inspiration, respect, fairness, and a sense of responsibility play a crucial role in their teaching practices. Moreover, significant emphasis is placed on how teachers perceive themselves in their role as educators (Maaranen & Stenberg, 2020). From these studies, it can be inferred that beliefs can significantly influence the construction of identity, and most teachers highly value the demonstration of their teacher identity in teaching practice.

Teacher Education in Malaysia

In the Malaysia Economic Transformation Plan (METP) enacted in 2010 and the Malaysia Education Blueprint for 2013-2025 released in 2013, it is emphasized that the pressures confronting educators extend beyond the imperative of proficient classroom performance (Economic Planning Unit Citation, 2008). Teachers are expected not only to excel in instructional delivery but also to demonstrate innovation. Furthermore, the METP Blueprint underscores a paramount focus on elevating the quality of educators within the educational system as a critical priority (Jala, 2010). In reports from pre-service teachers engaged in

practicum teaching within Malaysian schools, it is noted that novice teachers often lack the essential skills required for effective collaboration with students (Goh & Matthews, 2011). Additionally, these teachers are reported to be inadequately prepared to facilitate student learning (Goh & Matthews, 2011). In a study conducted by Goh and Wong (2014), it was indicated that novice teachers in Malaysia perceive that teacher preparation programs overly emphasize theoretical aspects, thereby lacking the practical interactions between theory and practice. This deficiency is suggested to hinder their ability to transcend superficial teaching methods and transition towards employing more complex skills to facilitate effective learning environments. Additionally, women make up approximately 70–80% of school teachers (Hoque, Razak, Zohora & Islam, 2013). Women are more likely to enter and remain in the teaching profession due to perceived job security and working hours that align with family life (Noor & Mahudin, 2016; Norzaini, 2012).

In a study conducted with Malaysian pre-service language teachers with two years of international learning experience, it was highlighted that their language learning experiences underscored the importance of using language for learning and maintaining proficiency. Despite facing limited resources and opportunities to engage with English outside the classroom, participants believed in their own abilities to overcome some of the challenges through their personal skills (Macalister, 2017). This study reveals that teachers' differing levels of education and educational environments significantly influence their perceptions and beliefs about teaching. Moreover, their learning experiences can profoundly shape their existing or evolving beliefs, contributing to the formation of their own teacher identity.

Purpose of Study

Researching teacher identity and beliefs during the first year of a novice teacher's career is highly beneficial. Identifying the challenges and factors contributing to their changes can assist schools in refining and developing teacher training programs (Margot & Kettler, 2019), thereby reducing the confusion and challenges faced by novice teachers in their inaugural year (Aktas, 2018). This, in turn, can facilitate a quicker and more steadfast engagement in teaching within the school context. However, the majority of the literature on the identity and beliefs of novice teachers over the years has been conducted in Hong Kong (Yuan, 2020; Huang et al., 2021; Lap et al., 2022; Yuan et al., 2022). Research grounded in the context of a diverse nation like Malaysia is notably limited. Therefore, this study will be conducted within the context of Malaysia.

This research seeks to comprehend the beliefs and teacher identity of in-service TESOL educators through an exploration of the experiences of novice TESOL teachers. It aims to investigate shifts in their teaching beliefs because of the deepening understanding of novice teachers' belief transformations, thereby elucidating the underlying factors and experiences contributing to such changes. Additionally, a thematic analysis was conducted to explore the implications of these belief changes on teacher identity. Therefore, the unique contribution of this study lies in its capacity to provide a profound understanding of the issues faced by novice TESOL teachers in Malaysia through an examination of their experiences. As these issues come to the forefront, educators and researchers in the fields of education training and educational studies can enhance the design and improvement of their training programs and curricula. At the same time, it can empower novice TESOL teachers in their first year of professional practice, fostering increased confidence and problem-solving abilities.

To address the gap in existing research gap, this study seeks to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are the changes which occurred to the novice TESOL teachers' teaching beliefs in their first-year working experience?
2. What specific factors or experiences contribute to the changes in novice TESOL teachers' teaching beliefs during their first year of teaching?
3. How do the changes in their teaching beliefs influence the development of their teacher identity?

Methodology

Research Design

The research paradigm employed for this study is rooted in the interpretive paradigm, specifically adopting a qualitative case study approach, and used in-depth semi-structured interviews as the primary research tool. The interpretive paradigm enables researchers to attain deeper insights by seeking experiences and perspectives within specific social contexts (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). According to Dangal and Joshi (2020), employing in-depth interviews allows for a more profound understanding of individual perspectives and assists researchers in comprehending participants' personal feelings, viewpoints, and experiences. The purpose of a case study was to conduct a thorough analysis of a problem within its contextual background. It is exploratory and explanatory in nature, primarily employed to comprehend the problem and answer and address the "how" and "why" of research questions (Harrison et al., 2017). Hence, the case study research method, coupled with the utilization of in-depth semi-structured interviews, proved effective in exploring the profound narratives of novice teachers. It facilitates an understanding of the challenges they face and the factors that contribute to their transformations.

Participants

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

| Participants | Gender | School | Subjects thought |
|------------------|--------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Teacher 1 | Female | Public school, International School, Private School | Primary homeroom teacher |
| Teacher 2 | Female | International School | Primary homeroom teacher |
| Teacher 3 | Female | International School | Secondary English Literature teacher |

The sampling strategy of this study utilises purposive sampling to enhance the alignment of the sample with the purpose and objectives of the research, thereby increasing the rigour of the study and the credibility of the data and results (Campbell et al., 2020). In this study, particular emphasis was placed on the professional career narratives of novice teachers. Therefore, this study employed purposive sampling to recruit three novice teachers who have been in service in international schools within the first year of teaching. The selection was based on the teacher's pre-confirmation status, reflecting the novice teacher's experience. All the

participants have completed their Bachelor of Education in TESOL. The sample of the study consists of women because of the gender imbalance in the Malaysian teaching workforce. All participants have teaching experience in private schools, with the exception of Participant 1, who has taught in both public and private schools as she had the opportunity to be employed in a public school after teaching in a private school. The sample of the study included both primary and secondary teachers because they represent two key tiers of the national education system.

Research Instruments - Semi-structured interview protocol

Semi-structured interviews provide interviewees with the flexibility to address specific topics while still allowing investigators the autonomy to explore relevant ideas that may arise during the interview (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Furthermore, in the existing literature on the challenges faced by novice teachers and the changes in identity beliefs, almost all studies have employed semi-structured interviews to generate a comprehensive perception (Huang et al., 2021; Lap et al., 2022). Therefore, this research employed semi-structured interviews as the interviewing tool, consisting of nine core questions and adding more prompts after the core questions. These interview questions integrated items from the Teacher Professional Identity Scale (Zhang et al., 2016) and the Teacher Beliefs Survey from Elgin Community College. These two instruments assisted the researchers in capturing key themes and refining the interview questions.

Data Analysis

Following the transcription of the interviews, an initial summary and description of the narratives of the three participants were provided. Subsequently, thematic analysis (TA) was employed to analyse the data and facilitate discussion. TA can assist in identifying data related to participants' life experiences, perspectives, attitudes, behaviours, and practices. In doing so, it helps in comprehending participants' thoughts, feelings, and actions (Clarke & Braun, 2017). This will help researchers in addressing the research questions posed in this study. This research follows the TA steps to analyse the data. The analysis started by familiarizing the interview content, generating initial codes, and searching for patterns and themes. Then refined themes through a careful review, ensuring coherence and consistency (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The final analysis involved defining and interpreting themes, supported by examples. This produced an evidence-based report aligned with the study's aims.

Data Validation

As the researcher served two roles as both the data collector and analyst, there was a possibility that the data may be biased due to the researcher's personal beliefs and interests. Therefore, the proactive approach of returning interview or analysis data to participants is known as member checking, also referred to as respondent or participant validation. This method can help mitigate the potential for researcher bias by enhancing credibility through the validation, verification, or evaluation of qualitative findings (Birt et al., 2016; Thomas, D. R. (2017). Therefore, after the transcribing and analysis of the interviews, the compiled data was sent to the three participants for validation to ensure the authenticity of the study's data and to enhance its credibility.

Ethical Considerations

Before the interview process, informed consent was obtained from participants, emphasizing their voluntary participation. It is crucial to underscore that participants' confidentiality and anonymity will be rigorously safeguarded throughout the study, ensuring the ethical integrity and privacy of those involved in the research based on the British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines (2018). Moreover, online interview conversations were audio-recorded via Microsoft Teams. Teams were selected for two reasons. Firstly, the transcription feature in Microsoft Teams facilitates the transcription of every utterance made by participants, streamlining the transcription process for researchers. Second, Microsoft Teams is compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), which ensures higher data security since personal experience is involved in the study. To ensure minimal technological interference, participants were required to join Microsoft Teams only through computer desktops, with a stable internet connection and in separate rooms to reduce echoes.

Findings

This section presents the results of semi-structured interviews conducted with novice teachers from different schools, representing the three cases in this study. The findings are presented thematically under the three research questions, with data organized in the scope of interview questions.

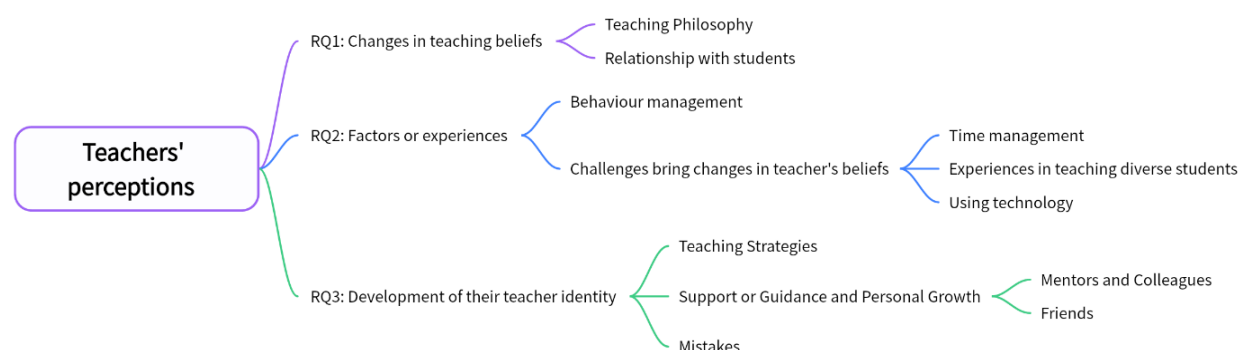


Figure 1: Thematic Map of Findings

RQ1: What are the changes which occurred to the novice TESOL teachers' teaching beliefs in their first-year working experience?

Changes in teaching beliefs

All participants reported that they tried to maintain their original teaching philosophy as much as possible during their first year of teaching experience. Teachers 2 and 3 indicated slight changes in their teaching philosophy. All participants experienced some changes in their teaching beliefs during their first year of teaching experience. The finding from this study for RQ1 is the changes in beliefs within their teaching philosophy and the way of relating to the students.

Teaching Philosophy

All participants have similar teaching philosophies. Teacher 1 perceived that her teaching philosophy is “to create a holistic and inclusive learning environment that provides all students equal access to education”. Similar to Teacher 1, Teacher 2 also believes in the importance of creating a “holistic education” environment. Additionally, she perceived that ‘mostly based on holistic education, right? So it was more of a progressive education philosophy. OK, so whereby a lot of hands-on activities, experiential learning, and students’ awareness.’ and to be “student-centred”. Teacher 3 has a very similar view to Teacher 2, who perceived that “students learn most in hands-on activities” and focused on “student-centred learning”.

All teachers expressed their efforts to maintain the same teaching philosophy and beliefs to the best of their ability during their first year of teaching. As mentioned by Teacher 1, she will use reflection to ensure that she has stuck to her philosophy when designing the lesson plan:

It has been actually my second year now ever since I graduated, I think there's not much changes in my philosophy. I still stick to my belief and whenever I create my lesson, I always remind myself of my philosophy and that helps me to reflect on my lesson plans, whether I meet my philosophy. So I don't see any changes with my teaching philosophy. (Teacher 1)

In contrast to Teacher 1, Teacher 2 and 3 perceived slight changes in their teaching beliefs while maintaining a consistent teaching philosophy. They still focus on a student-centred approach, but at the same time, they also recognise the necessity for teacher guidance for certain students. Therefore, they integrated both student-centred and teacher-centred approaches into their teaching practices:

So I feel like my perspective on teaching has changed a little bit in that sense because I realised that, OK, I'm teaching year five students, you know, young kids not always will be able to, we need their lessons. You know, they still need the teacher's guidance and at certain times today to be a mix of programmes. (Teacher 2)

Relationship with students

Two teachers (Teacher 2 and Teacher 3) reported that they found some changes in their beliefs about how the way of relate to students during their first year of teaching. Teacher 3 perceived herself as very “naive” in the early stages of her teaching career because she wanted to “establish rapport with the students” and “view them as friends instead of students.” After some time, Teacher 3 found that “students will actually take advantage of you, and then they wouldn't do your work because you are too nice.” This situation has impacted her classroom, as students do not “listen to what you want to say.” Therefore, she starts to “set boundaries and expectations.” She felt that when she started changing her beliefs, she maintained “dominance in the classroom” and educated students in a teacher-like manner.

In Teacher 2's experience, she mentioned the necessity of a “boundary” between teachers and students. This boundary can assist teachers in better educating students. Additionally, she feels more positive about herself as a teacher upon hearing about positive changes in her past students:

Comments from the teachers, oh, you know your student? Last time he was. So naughty. You're so you know every always getting to trouble. But now I'm seeing a change. They are doing so much better. So that has made me feel better about myself. And as a teacher. (Teacher 2)

RQ2: What specific factors or experiences contribute to the changes in novice TESOL teachers' teaching beliefs during their first year of teaching?

Novice teachers change their beliefs after they encounter challenges in behaviour management, time management, and experiences teaching diverse students and using technology.

Behaviour management

All the teachers mentioned that their experience with behaviour management is an important aspect of contributing to the changes in novice TESOL teachers' teaching beliefs during their first year of teaching. Teacher 1 used to believe that setting classroom rules would manage students' behaviour, but in the first year of teaching experience, she realised it was not effective enough. Therefore, she changed her beliefs to be more humanistic by setting behaviour goals because she “saw the actual changes with the students.” Teacher 1 mentioned that during her teaching practicum, she already implemented classroom rules in her classroom, “when I was doing my teaching practical, I'll have my lessons, so when I was doing as a module, as a student, I would have classroom rules”. However, after implementing them and gaining a better understanding of the students, she decided to change the classroom rules with behaviour goals. She also observed positive changes in the students as a result:

It's not about telling them this is the rule. You have to follow. No, they're not robots. You have to make them understand. Why are we doing this? It's because you're acting in that way. If you don't act in a certain way, we won't have classroom rules. So I always make my students understand their behaviour. I don't have classroom rules. I have behaviour goals. (Teacher 1)

Teacher 2 mentioned that “behaviour management was one of the biggest things.” She created a “healthy create a routine in the class.” Teacher 2 used to believe that behaviour management merely required establishing rules for students to stick to it. However, through practical teaching experience, she changed this belief to recognize behaviour management as an ongoing process and “create a healthy routine.” She found it to be very different from university and in real class because she felt it was a challenge and she learned from it:

But actually applying the you know applying what you're supposed to do, it's a big difference. I would say that applying classroom routines, you know, things like continuously reminding students of their classroom rules, you know, lining up things as sample as lining up all these things. I learned along the way right, so it's the challenges I faced. (Teacher 2)

Teacher 3's experience was a bit different from Teachers 1 and 2. She (used to believe) established a “friend” relationship with her students, which led to them not listening to her. However, after setting clear “boundaries,” while the students began to “hate” her, she gained better behaviour management:

You have so many things to do, so you have to keep them in check in order to protect yourself and like help become healthy in a sense. But if you don't have good classroom management. This is called classroom management. A lot of students. Of new teachers, they struggle with classroom managements. Yeah. So if you don't have good classroom management skills, you are bound to become burnout. Yeah. Yeah, I did experience that as well. So we just eventually learn. (Teacher 3)

Challenges that bring changes in teachers' beliefs

Time management

Only Teachers 1 and 2 mentioned the effects and changes brought about by classroom time. Teacher 1 expressed challenges in time management, at the beginning struggling to complete her lesson plans within the allotted time. This often led to "disappointment" in herself because she "did not achieve the objective". However, she learned that it is "as a teacher, it's OK to carry forward your lesson".

Teacher 2 mentioned that time management is "very, very important" and she "still struggles between all the subjects and lesson planning." She found that she often found herself spending time addressing unforeseen situations in the classroom, such as student "behavioural management." This resulted in her having to "reduce the time for a lot of classroom activities," meaning that she "usually has 1 to 2 activities that are planned out", but sometimes "just one that is conducted.":

Challenge at that time you can easily pick up 10 minutes just getting through the issue, right? So let's say you're starting activity just requires 5 minutes, but because of that your standard activity gets 15, 20 minutes already and you only have one hour for it, right? So I wouldn't say it has taken me away from believing about believing in students participation, but it has reduce the time for a lot of classroom activities. (Teacher 2)

Experiences in teaching diverse students

The teachers experienced that after teaching diverse students, it changed their teaching beliefs. Two teachers (Teacher 1 and Teacher 2) mentioned that having an effective and efficient understanding of students is essential. Teacher 2 observed and evaluated students through "learning objectives" and by asking about their feelings towards the lesson. She helps students based on her understanding of the students and whether she can "provide this child with more worksheets" or "send them more videos to help them out on working."

Teacher 1 focuses more on understanding students' behaviour. She always "puts herself in their shoes." Knowing students' different actions helps her to create the lesson, allowing certain students to participate in her classes:

If let's say a certain student is acting in a different way, maybe he's not an activist, that he's very quiet. I have to know why. Why is it quiet? Is it afraid? Is it an introvert? And then that would help me to create lessons to allow him to bring to enhance the skills that he's lacking. (Teacher 1)

In Teacher 3's experience, she believes that demonstrating models and feedback mechanisms are crucial factors in promoting effective learning. She believes that whenever she teaches a new concept, she creates "a lot of model paragraphs" on herself, "definitely a long modelling and a lot of feedback, a lot of follow-up questions that I feel like it's really, really, really crucial in whatever that you are teaching." Furthermore, she also perceived that "feedback mechanisms are very, very important." In her English language teaching, everything is "subjective." She doesn't really focus on teaching "grammar and punctuation and spelling, it's more towards how to write in a way that readers can understand what you're trying to convey."

Using technology

Teacher 1 loves to use technology in her class because of her teaching philosophy, she likes to "incorporate various teaching methods, such as technology planning lessons" based on students' interests. She likes to "create her lesson plans" by using "PowerPoint slides, giving Kahoot and creating videos". However, she also mentioned facing many challenges when using technology. She pointed out that the use of technology heavily depends on the school's facilities. When the school's facilities cannot provide adequate support, she has to adapt her teaching methods. Nevertheless, this makes her become "more creative.":

Since I had some disadvantages with teaching facilities that using projectors and other materials, they do not have smart board, so it's very similar to public school settings. So those challenges actually allowed me to be even more creative to create engaging.

Similar to Teacher 1, Teacher 2 mentioned that she is a "student-centred" teacher. Therefore, Teacher 2 also enjoys incorporating technology into her classroom, she will have "slides and videos" to play with her students. She also uses "online interactive quizzers" or "videos on YouTube, which are interactive" to engage her students' learning. However, she also faces the same issue, which is the limitations caused by the lack of facilities. Although she would have students who "bring their own devices to conduct the research", due to the limitations of equipment, she tends to use forms like Kahoot less frequently, as it requires everyone to have a device.

In contrast with Teachers 1 and 2, Teacher 3 does "not use a lot of technology" in her classes. In her experience, she has changed her view on technology, believing that it does not effectively help students progress. She mentioned that she already had a lot on her "plate", such as "learn the curriculum", and when using technology, she found that it actually "stoves the learning time":

Sometimes when I use technology number one, it really, really ruins. It stoves, your time for learning. I feel like technology in a way is a way for students to get engaged and they want to have fun. For example, if you give them a Kahoot quiz, they don't necessarily learn, they compete and they want to get the right answer because they want to get a reward. (Teacher 3)

RQ3: How do the changes in their teaching beliefs influence the development of their teacher identity?

Teaching strategies

Teachers 1 and 3 used to teach different students with the same or similar material and strategies for all the students, but after the actual teaching, they found that teaching should be based on their students. They mentioned that they have changed a lot of teaching strategies based on their students' needs and abilities. Teacher 1 mentioned a shift in her belief regarding achieving classroom objectives. Initially, she felt “disappointed” and believed she “did not achieve the classroom objective” when she “did not complete the lesson” as planned. However, over time, she felt “it is ok to carry forward the lesson.” Due to this shift, she found that even when using different materials and activities, the main classroom objectives remained the same:

You need one that that won't be synchronised you know. So I tried my best to do it but it's actually very challenging. So it's very important for me to choose my material accurately. So the material that I'm using in class one may not work for Class 2, but that doesn't mean when I change my material the objective is not being met. (Teacher 1)

Similar to Teacher 1, Teacher 3 evaluates and modifies her teaching strategies through self-reflection and feedback from her students. She mentions that there is “no one way to solve everything,” and it needs a lot of “patience and adaptability” when it comes to strategies and methods. In her experience, she found that it is important to “shift her ego” and “listen to what the students have.” She found that “feedback goes both ways” because sometimes students will provide very “useful feedback and it makes sense that you have to lower your ego” and “change approach.”

Unlike the other two teachers, Teacher 3 did not have significant changes. Instead, she focused more on reinforcing the use of active learning strategies. Drawing from her university learning experiences and practical application in schools, she identified effective strategies and continued to employ them. For example, she found that “student-centred”, “research work by students,” “shared the information and discussion,” and “jigsaw method” are the few strategies she felt were very useful in her class. Furthermore, she perceived that “kinetic movement” can engage the students a lot and reinforce their memorization:

So like, let's say last term we were learning about the path of plant. So I made them use their body. To remember the path of plant. So we'll stand up and then I'll say the name of the part and then they'll point it out or I will, you know, like vice versa. And I realised that that really worked because until now they remember it. It's like something that's ingrained them because of all the kinetic movements. (Teacher 3)

Support or guidance, and personal growth

The challenges novice teachers face will lead them to find support from their mentors, colleagues and friends for help.

Mentors and Colleagues

All three teachers perceived that novice teachers need support and guidance from their mentors and colleagues to help them deal with their challenges. “When it comes to classroom management, definitely learned a lot from other teachers. Support and guidance are key in your first year of teaching. If you don't have that, then your journey will be slightly challenging” (Teacher 3).

Teacher 1 mentioned that colleagues “play a very big role” in her first year of teaching because she is new to the school, and “everything is new to her” too. Therefore, she always seeks help from the “head of the department and experienced teacher”, and this support also helps her in her growth, “I will definitely seek help from my colleagues because they have experience and they know how to deal with fussy parents. They know how to deal with older parents.”

In Teacher 2’s experience, support from colleagues can make her “a bit more perfect” and help her to deal with her challenges:

I used to cry in class and stuff right so she used to help me out with how to deal with problems and all that stuff. Give me advice...I'm a bit more of a timid person. OK, I still end, but I think I have a little bit more confidence in the way I carry myself. Right. So I think with all their encouragement and with their support and their advice, that has helped me in my class and also with mine. So I would say that I have become not too timid anymore and then more confident with my teaching. (Teacher 2)

Teacher 3 expressed that at first, she would become emotional due to students' inappropriate language, and after she took advice from other teachers, she reflected on herself and she “learned a lot classroom management from other teachers”:

And then all of a sudden they started laughing at my clothes, my hair or something like that. It got really personal. To kind of solve that situation, I lashed out at them and then I started yelling at them for saying that, oh, you can't do this to me and the teacher. You're the student. And I got really emotional because I really didn't know how to deal with that kind of situation back then... I sought advice from the teachers, senior teachers. Who told me that It is my job to keep them in place. Yeah, it is not my job to please them, but my job is to make sure that they understand the meaning of respect. (Teacher 3)

Other than that, Teacher 3 perceived that the support and guidance helped in her professional growth. She learned how to “handle conflict with students” in a “professional manner” and “conveying logic” way to communicate with the students. She mentioned that “this communication skill is transferable because when you deal with your boss, it's the same skill.” “Transferable skill to know how to handle conflict” is another important thing to help her to growth because she can engage with “rebellious teenagers, and talk from a stance to them without breaking down without getting really, really burnt out.”

Friends

Only Teacher 2 mentioned that she will seek support from her friends who also are teachers to help her improve her career:

Some of my friends will still help me, you know, with telling me, OK, this is strength. This is your weakness. How about you build up on your strengths and work on your weaknesses in a certain way? So, I think all these people may help me out and definitely picked guidance from all of them. (Teacher 2)

Mistakes

All the teachers believe that making mistakes has helped them in their personal development to some extent. Teachers 2 and 3 perceived that they were scared of making mistakes. Teacher 2 mentioned that she has an "extra fear of feeling" towards making mistakes, but she is also working to "make believe that making mistakes is normal." Consequently, she is "completely fine" with students making mistakes. At the same time, she mentioned that "it really helps it reflecting a little about what we know, how it should be and being more cautious while between." Teacher 3 mentioned that she was afraid to make mistakes because mistakes bring a "lot of responsibility and accountability, and every single mistake results in grave consequences." However, this fear of making mistakes brought about by this "responsibility" is termed as "bumpy road" by Teacher 3. She mentioned, "I just have to go through it as long as you have the right" and after experiencing it, she stated, "I would say you shouldn't be afraid." However, both of them perceived that when it comes to teaching, they are not afraid of making mistakes because "teaching comes with show and errors." (Teacher 3).

Teacher 1 perceived that she was not afraid to make mistakes at all. She was only afraid to "repeat the same mistakes". This is because she "keeps herself as a positive thinker" and she thinks that "making mistakes is the first step of success." Therefore, making mistakes for her is a learning process, she "learned by mistakes and not to repeat the same mistakes." She also stated that mistakes help her in developing herself:

I think you learn by making mistakes because it allows you not to repeat the same mistakes. So when you make mistakes you learn oh, this is not how it happens. And then you don't repeat it. You actually you will actually remember even longer like that's what is included in your experience as well. (Teacher 1)

Discussion

This study used a qualitative case study approach to explore changes in the teacher identity and beliefs of novice in-service teachers. A qualitative semi-structured interview enabled researchers to understand the challenges and transformations novice teachers encountered in their first year of teaching, encompassing their detailed experiences and perspectives during this period. The qualitative data from the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. The primary discussion revolved around using data findings to address the research questions posed in this study.

RQ1: What are the changes which occurred to the novice TESOL teachers' teaching beliefs in their first-year working experience?

In this study, data indicate that novice teachers' teaching philosophy is formulated during their university years, serving as the foundation for their initial teaching beliefs. Teachers construct their instructional methods and student interactions based on their philosophies and beliefs. Furthermore, novice teachers try hard to maintain these established beliefs as much as possible during their first year of teaching. This aligns with the findings of Phipps and Borg (2009), and Gilakjani and Sabouri (2017), which suggest that teachers' beliefs are often established during university and play a significant role in helping novice teachers navigate new information and profoundly influence their teaching practices. However, the data also reveal that their teaching beliefs may somewhat contradict their teaching philosophy due to student diversity.

Nevertheless, novice teachers continue to strive for a balance between their beliefs and conflicting beliefs. This finding is consistent with the research of Crusan et al. (2016), which suggests that when teachers identify contradictions in their beliefs about classroom practices, they endeavour to reconcile their beliefs regarding how they address student issues.

Furthermore, the data indicated that the relationships novice teachers establish with students during their first year significantly influence their teaching beliefs. Novice teachers' progression from naively forming "friendship relationships" with students to learning to establish boundaries greatly impacts their beliefs. This finding aligns with Levin (2014), which suggests that conflicting beliefs can influence various aspects, including views on knowledge, subject matter, teaching methods, as well as numerous moral and ethical difficulties in teaching. In my research, teachers initially seek to establish equal "friendship relationships" with students in the early stages of teaching because they aim for fair, holistic instruction. However, this approach led to deteriorating student behavioural performance. The difficulty arising from these conflicting beliefs prompted teachers to change their overall teaching beliefs (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017; Schlam & Inbar-Lourie, 2023).

RQ2: What specific factors or experiences contribute to the changes in novice TESOL teachers' teaching beliefs during their first year of teaching?

Previous research has repeatedly mentioned factors influencing or changing novice teachers' teaching beliefs, such as student behavioural issues, school environment and facilities, and student attitudes (Hong et al., 2018; Lomi & Mbato, 2020; Huang et al., 2021). Similarly, these influencing factors have also been identified in the current study. The data indicate that novice teachers' beliefs about effective learning change when teaching diverse students, as students' attitudes and abilities towards learning differ. They no longer pursue uniformity but instead adopt a differentiated approach. Additionally, attitudes towards using technology as a teaching method are influenced by the limitations of school facilities and students' positive or negative attitudes towards its use. Furthermore, the data suggest that all novice teachers have changed their beliefs regarding managing student behavioural issues. All teachers have learned how to establish effective boundaries and rules to manage classroom behaviour. Therefore, when novice teachers encounter situations that contradict their previous beliefs, it leads to changes in their beliefs and prompts them to reassess their teacher identity and teaching beliefs (Saunders & Ash, 2013; Jiang et al., 2021).

An unexpected finding from this study is the significant importance novice teachers place on time management, which can lead to changes in their teaching beliefs if they struggle with it. Due to the excessive emphasis on theoretical aspects in teacher training courses in Malaysia and the lack of practical interactions between theory and practice, teachers find it challenging to apply their previous knowledge in actual teaching situations (Goh & Matthews, 2011; Goh & Wong, 2014). Therefore, in this study, two teachers particularly emphasised that classroom time did not flow as smoothly as theoretical knowledge, as it was interrupted by various student behaviours and abilities. The data indicate that teachers experience self-doubt and disappointment when there is a significant gap between their planned classroom time and its actual completion. This finding aligns with previous research, suggesting that negative student behavioural issues can affect teachers' emotional self-efficacy, prompting them to strive to cope with and adapt to the challenges of dealing with a "from one world to another" (Saunders & Ash, 2013; Jiang et al., 2021)

RQ3: How do the changes in their teaching beliefs influence the development of their teacher identity?

Previous research has indicated that teachers can reconsider their teaching identity and bring about classroom changes by reflecting on their teaching beliefs, practices, and professional values (Ulla, 2022). This finding is consistent with my study. The data suggest that novice teachers reflect on their teaching strategies through actual teaching practices, adjusting existing strategies through self-reflection and collecting student feedback. In this process, teachers gradually form their teaching identity through the collision of beliefs and practices, continuously improving and strengthening their role as educators (Cochran-Smith, 2008; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Pennington & Richards, 2016).

Furthermore, the data from this study reveal that novice teachers in their first year of teaching continuously seek help from peers such as mentors, colleagues, and friends. When faced with challenges in teaching, their teaching beliefs also change. Therefore, they actively seek assistance, advice, and collaboration with other teachers to reflect better and promote the development of their beliefs and identity. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that novice teachers explore solutions to challenges through collaboration with others and resource integration, thereby refining and improving their teaching identity (Edwards, 2005; Maaranen & Stenberg, 2020).

An unexpected finding in this study is teachers' fear of making mistakes. Novice teachers become more afraid of making mistakes because they assume additional responsibilities beyond teaching. As these responsibilities involve unfamiliar knowledge and can have serious consequences, they become more cautious and careful in school. This aligns with Brown and Heck's (2018) research, which suggests that the teacher identity is constructed and changes in the teaching environment through relationships with colleagues and experiences based on existing cultural knowledge. Interestingly, when these mistakes occur during teaching, all teachers indicate that they are acceptable and are part of a process of progress with students. These data suggest that teachers' teaching beliefs and identity are dynamic yet stable, subject to change based on various influences such as the environment (Morf & Horvath, 2010; Vignoles et al., 2011).

Limitations and Recommendations

This study employed an interview format to explore the experiences encountered by participants, similar to a process of self-reflection for teachers. However, not every teacher may have enough time for extensive self-reflection on their teaching practices. Despite using probing questions to stimulate their responses, there is a possibility of obtaining similar or vague answers. This may result in a certain level of repetitiveness and singularity in the collected data.

Furthermore, the sample of this study lacks diversity as all participants share the same gender and educational background. It limits the width of perspectives and experiences represented in the research data to some extent. This may have resulted in the study's findings being unable to capture a more diverse and comprehensive range of viewpoints and behaviours. Therefore, future research should include more diverse participants, such as individuals of different genders and from different courses in different schools, to investigate whether these factors also influence their perspectives and behaviours, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under study.

This study provides valuable insights for further research and application. The results discussed through exploring interview data indicate that novice teachers find it challenging to apply theoretical knowledge to real classroom practices in the early stages of teaching. Therefore, during the three years of university education, students could benefit from regular school internships. For instance, in the first year, students could engage in observations, and by the third year, they could spend a fixed day each week in school, interacting with real students and delivering lessons. This process would allow schools to better prepare pre-service teachers by connecting theoretical knowledge with practical experiences. Additionally, schools could invite these novice teachers to share their experiences through lectures. The discussion results indicated that many teachers face similar challenges but have varied approaches to resolving them. These experiences can help pre-service teachers better understand and prepare for situations they may encounter in their future careers, thereby reducing the challenges and anxieties faced by novice teachers.

Conclusion

In this research, a comprehensive exploration of the change in teacher beliefs was conducted under the context of international education in Malaysia. Recognizing the research gap in an extensive literature review, three research questions were derived with the goal of identifying challenges and factors that contribute to the transition from pre-service to in-service teachers, eventually inspiring and guiding future training programs for novice teachers.

Through qualitative case study methodology, in-depth interviews were conducted with three novice international school teachers to collect conversational data that can be analysed using thematic analysis to discover meaningful insights. The findings are consistent with past research, with the discovery of various new insights serving as the major contribution of this research. Notably, it was found that teachers' beliefs and identities are always evolving in response to their challenges and environment (Morf & Horvath, 2010). This is supported by interviews that further explain this phenomenon, highlighting how the lack of teaching facilities in schools has contributed to teachers' unwillingness to use novel teaching technologies (Huang et al., 2021).

Furthermore, "time management" is identified as one of the major factors contributing to the change in teachers' beliefs, deviating from past research and presenting a new opportunity for further investigation in designing effective, relevant training. Additionally, the findings suggest that teachers are becoming more careful of making mistakes due to additional responsibilities beyond teaching (Vignoles et al., 2011; Brown & Heck, 2018). This can be further investigated to better understand the special circumstances. Such findings enhance our understanding of teachers' behaviour and work perception, which in turn contributes to the development of more effective education and training programs to assist teachers in overcoming these obstacles.

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