

## Problems of Novice Teachers: Challenges vs. Support

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### Abstract

Each year thousands of students (novice teachers) get a degree to start teaching. 30% to 50% teachers leave their jobs in the first five years of their carrier around the world. The novice teachers often appear to be in need of helpful feedback in their first years from experienced colleagues and administrators. The goal of this survey was to find out the problems that beginning teachers face in their first years of teaching, and investigate the support they get in these years from their colleagues and administrators. A conclusion is made that beginning teachers are not emotionally and practically ready to face the difficulties of teaching alone. Teachers are having challenges in their first years with classroom management, relational issues with colleagues, students and administrators. They are not getting enough support from their colleagues in the first years, when they especially need it.

**Keywords:** Beginning teachers, challenges for novice teachers, novice teachers, support for beginning teachers.

### Introduction

Each year thousands of students get a degree to start teaching. In Turkey, government employs about twenty thousand to fifty thousand teachers each year: 40.895 in 2010, 40.153 in 2011, 56.088 in 2012 and 38.571 in 2013 (MEB annual, 2014). Many researches tell that beginning teachers strive with many different problems in schools. 30% to 50% of teachers leave their jobs in the first five years of their carrier (Moir & Gless, 2001). So, the beginning years can affect teachers whether they continue teaching or not.

A survey of 500 teachers showed that novice teachers with three or fewer years of experience in teaching complain more about classroom management than more experienced teachers (Melnick & Meister, 2008). According to Fry (2007), beginning teachers say that their pre-service education did not much help for their real experiences in the classroom setting. And beginning teachers are complaining about the lack of support by their colleagues and superiors. It has been identified on a study that novice teachers find the support they get on their first year as 'poor' (Hover & Yaeger, 2004). More than anything else, beginning teachers often appear to have a need-for-yet-seldom-get helpful feedback on their teaching from experienced colleagues and administrators (Fry, 2007; McCormack, Gore, & Thomas, 2006).

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A study by Gordon (1991) analyzed different researches about the challenges faced by beginning teachers and found that, despite having different participants from different countries, the majority of related studies had found common problems. Gordon noted 12 most experienced problems and concerns of beginning teachers as follows: a) managing the classroom, b) acquiring information about the school system, c) obtaining instructional materials and resources, d) planning and organizing, e) managing instruction and other professional responsibilities, f) assessing students and evaluating their progress, g) motivating students, h) using effective teaching methods, i) dealing with individual students' needs interests, abilities, and problems, j) communicating with colleagues, including administrators, supervisors, other teachers and parents, k) adjusting to the teaching environment and role, and l) emotional support.

Consequently, a study searching the problems and challenges that beginning teachers face was undertaken by the researcher.

### **Problems of novice teachers**

Calliari (1990:260) in his study noted the problem of teachers in their first years and he tried to express these problems of beginning teachers with questions and answers, such as: "Why did not you tell me this before? How can I know I did have to do this! No, I did not know that I had to do this! I had no clue that teaching was this demanding".

Yalçinkaya (2002) investigated the problems of beginning teachers and noted the basic problems as follows: lack of experience; pressures on beginning teachers; trying to complete more tasks than one is able to, fear of inspection, and adaptation to school and its environment. As a result of being inexperienced, teachers have some more problems, such as classroom management, designing the curriculum and implementing it in given time, using specific teaching techniques and addressing the needs of each student as an individual.

Lundeen (2004) identified in his study some perceived problems of novice teachers. The results of his study showed that the main problems were classroom management; problems with colleagues and administrators, discipline problems; adult relationship and interaction problems; lesson and curriculum planning problems and problems with parents.

Achinstein and Barret (2004) in their study about challenges of novice teachers received three main results: the **management issues** like arranging routines and procedures for students during activities in the classroom, disciplinary problems and their consequences, timing, pacing etc.; the **relational issues** like knowing the student and identifying his needs, communications between teacher and student, interaction with students and parents and addressing students' motivation etc.; and the **professional issues** like handling the diversity of students and equity, understanding of students' prior knowledge and cultural background, expectations of teachers about learners and dealing with participation problems.

An interview-based study by McCann, Johannessen, and Ricca (2005) presented the main problem categories as: relation with other parts, i.e. parents, colleagues, and administrator; the amount of work assigned; curriculum and subject knowledge; assessment and grading; management and disciplinary problems.

A study in Turkey by Taneri (2004) that concentrated on the problems of beginning classroom teachers found out that teachers experienced problems in these areas: dealing with mixed ability students; understanding rules and regulations about teachers by government; teaching how to read and write; and student involvement.

Dunn (2002 as cited in Cantu Tijerina & Martinez Sanchez, 2006) identified the difficulties that beginning teachers face in the following areas: academic, organizational and social problems, also material and technology-using problems. She investigated disciplinary and motivational problems, using different methods of assessment and evaluation and student involvement problems under the area of academic problems. Among the organizational problems, she added the planning and implementing of the work that are related to policies and regulations. Regarding social problems, she mentioned the relations with students, parents, colleagues and administrators issues.

The problems of beginning teachers have been investigated in different countries by many researchers and the findings were almost same. These are some of the studies: Dewalt and Ball (1987) in US; Flores (2001) in Portugal; Ballantyne and Hansford (1995) in Australia; Myint (1999) in Japan; Fredheim (2000) in Norway; and Brighthouse (1995) in England.

## **Method**

To explore the problems and challenges that beginning teachers struggle within the context of Samsun, Turkey, a questionnaire was used. Through a detailed analysis of literature, the questionnaire was formed from different sources (Teaching Interrupted, 2004; Lessons Learned, 2008; Ozturk, 2008) that were investigating the problems of beginning teachers. The questionnaire was applied to 49 teachers from 18 schools (state and private) who were in their first years of teaching profession. Teachers were chosen randomly from public and private schools. The questionnaire was conducted in March 2016 in Samsun, Turkey.

The questionnaire included four main parts: personal information; challenges related with job; social challenges and collegial support. A Likert scale was adopted in the questionnaire to find out the frequency of challenges at five levels, 1 (never) to 5 (always). Some of the questions had different options to answer.

## **Results and Findings**

To investigate the problems and challenges of beginning teachers, results of surveys were studied under the sections; job related challenges, social challenges and collegial support. Results of each category were organized with the related questions that were asked in the surveys and shared below.

**Table.1 Job-Related Challenges**

<i><b>*Please choose one of the answers for each question that you think is best to explain your situation</b></i>								
I have difficulties and challenges		5 (always)	4 (usually)	3 (sometimes)	2 (rarely)	1 (never)	Mean	N
	in preparing administrative paperwork, official correspondence, and reports	20.4	38.8	16.3	14.3	10.2	<b>3.4</b>	49
	in getting everything done because of overwhelming workload	18.4	36.7	20.4	12.2	12.2	<b>3.4</b>	49
	in implementing what I plan	6.1	22.4	32.7	28.6	10.2	<b>2.9</b>	49
	in choosing appropriate teaching method	8.2	18.4	30.6	32.7	10.2	<b>2.8</b>	49
	in drawing students' attention	12.2	20.4	32.7	18.4	16.3	<b>2.9</b>	49
	in teaching strategies	6.1	18.4	36.7	34.7	4.1	<b>2.9</b>	49
	in testing and evaluation	4.1	16.3	22.4	44.9	12.2	<b>2.6</b>	49
	in using instructional tools	6.1	14.3	32.7	34.7	12.2	<b>2.7</b>	49
	in setting classroom rules	16.3	30.6	30.6	16.3	6.1	<b>3.3</b>	49
0	in leading the class during activities	12.2	24.5	36.7	22.4	4.1	<b>3.2</b>	49
1	in following the curriculum	12.2	38.8	34.7	10.2	4.1	<b>3.4</b>	49
2	in using effective classroom management strategies	16.3	32.7	30.6	14.3	6.1	<b>3.4</b>	49
3	in managing the disruptive classes	20.4	36.7	30.6	10.2	2.0	<b>3.6</b>	49
4	in determining the course objectives	6.1	14.3	32.7	36.7	10.2	<b>2.7</b>	49
5	in finding a way to approach students' problematic behaviors	14.3	30.6	32.7	16.3	6.1	<b>3.3</b>	49

The average mean result of the job-related challenges survey is 3.1 out of 5 and this shows that the challenges in this section are above the average. Each mean result in this survey is more than 2.6 and the highest is 3.6. The lowest mean score is in 'testing and evaluation' and 6.1% always and 16.3% usually have difficulties in it. Preparing official paperwork and reports are challenging always for 20.4% and usually for 38.8% of participants. As it is revealed in literature analysis, classroom management is one of the most challenging issues. 20.4% always and 36.7% usually have difficulties in managing disruptive classes. Similarly, 16.3% of participants always have difficulties in using effective classroom management strategies, where 32.7% have it usually.

The overall result of this section is that about 40% of beginning teachers are always or usually having difficulties in job-related issues, such as classroom management and lesson planning.

**Table 2. Social Challenges**

<i><b>*Please choose one of the answers for each question that you think is the best to explain your situation</b></i>								
I have difficulties and challenges		5 (always)	4 (usually)	3 (sometimes)	2 (rarely)	1 (never)	Mean	N
	in helping students with behavioural problems.	12.2	18.4	34.7	26.5	8.2	<b>3.0</b>	49
	in guiding students and giving advice.	4.1	16.3	28.6	38.8	12.2	<b>2.6</b>	49
	in dealing with students' physical and social development.	8.2	16.3	22.4	34.7	18.4	<b>2.6</b>	49
	in providing emotional support to the students.	6.1	14.3	32.7	34.7	12.2	<b>2.7</b>	49
	in establishing a positive relationship with students.	4.1	12.2	26.5	40.8	16.3	<b>2.5</b>	49
	in satisfying the expectations of my principal/supervisors.	22.4	34.7	32.7	8.2	2.0	<b>3.7</b>	49
	in preparing the works that my principal/supervisors ask.	14.3	30.6	36.7	12.2	6.1	<b>3.3</b>	49
	in communicating with my principal/supervisors on professional development issue.	10.2	18.4	28.6	26.5	16.3	<b>2.8</b>	49
	in asking questions to my principal/supervisor.	6.1	10.2	18.4	44.9	20.4	<b>2.4</b>	49

0	My principal does not nurture an environment that encourages me as a new teacher.	18.4	30.6	32.7	14.3	4.1	<b>3.4</b>	49
1	Unfriendly approaches of my colleagues make me upset.	22.4	28.6	30.6	14.3	4.1	<b>3.5</b>	49
2	I am not glad with my colleagues' behaviour and manner.	10.2	20.4	26.5	24.5	18.4	<b>2.8</b>	49
3	I am dissatisfied with my salary.	42.9	32.7	20.4	4.1	0.0	<b>4.1</b>	49
4	I am dissatisfied with my employee rights.	30.6	28.6	32.7	6.1	2.0	<b>3.8</b>	49
5	I think I need emotional support.	32.7	36.7	18.4	8.2	4.1	<b>3.9</b>	49

The average mean result of the social challenges survey is 3 out of 5 and this shows that the challenges in this section are above the average. Each mean result in this survey is more than 2.4 and the highest is 4.1. The lowest mean score is in 'asking questions to my principal' and 6.1% always and 10.2% usually have difficulties in it. Helping students with behavioral problems are challenging always for 12.2% and usually for 18.8% of participants. Satisfying the expectations of their principal/supervisors are always challenging for 22.4% of participants and usually for 34.7%. As it is revealed in literature analysis, relation with the colleagues is one of the most challenging issues. 22.4% always and 28.6% usually get upset with unfriendly approaches of their colleagues. 32.7% of participants always feel that they need emotional support, whereas 36.7% feel they need it usually. The highest mean result of the section is in dissatisfaction with the salary. 42.9% of participants always think the salary they get is not enough for their effort and 32.7% usually think the same.

The overall result of this section is: about 40% of beginning teachers are always or usually having difficulties in social relation issues, such as relation with students, colleagues and administrators.

**Table 3. Collegial Support**

<i><b>*Please choose one of the answers for each question that you think is best to explain your situation</b></i>								
How you would rate the support you feel you are getting from other teachers or mentors in the following areas:		5 (always)	4 (usually)	3 (sometimes)	2 (rarely)	1 (never)	Mean	N
	Creating strong lesson plans	6.1	12.2	22.4	40.8	18.4	<b>2.5</b>	49
	Handling students who are disruptive or unmotivated	12.2	16.3	28.6	38.8	4.1	<b>2.9</b>	49
	Working and communicating with parents	8.2	14.3	30.6	34.7	12.2	<b>2.7</b>	49
	Working with special needs students	6.1	10.2	24.5	38.8	20.4	<b>2.4</b>	49
	Finding the correct teaching technique	6.1	6.1	28.6	42.9	16.3	<b>2.4</b>	49
	Providing different types of testing and assessment types	10.2	24.5	34.7	20.4	10.2	<b>3.0</b>	49
How would you rate the administration at your school when it comes to the following?								
	Supporting you in handling discipline problems	18.4	30.6	34.7	10.2	6.1	<b>3.4</b>	49
	Providing adequate resources like textbooks and supporting resources	26.5	38.8	32.7	2.0	0.0	<b>3.9</b>	49
	Providing technological aids: computer, projector, etc.	18.4	20.4	22.4	26.5	12.2	<b>3.1</b>	49
0	Providing instructional leadership and guidance	12.2	18.4	16.3	36.7	16.3	<b>2.7</b>	49
1	Overall, looking back, would you say you were prepared or unprepared for this first year of teaching? (5 -very prepared- to 1 -not prepared)	8.2	10.2	24.5	36.7	20.4	<b>2.5</b>	49

2	My university education/teacher training program put too much emphasis on the theory and philosophy (5 -very much- to 1 -none)	24.5	28.6	36.7	10.2	0.0	<b>3.7</b>	49
3	My university education/teacher training program put too much emphasis on handling the practical challenges of teaching (5 -very much- to 1 -none)	8.2	12.2	24.5	32.7	22.4	<b>2.5</b>	49

Each mean result in this survey is more than 2.4 and the highest is 3.9 out of 5. The support for the beginning teachers that they get from their colleagues in creating lesson plan is low. 18.4% think that they get no support and 40.8% think they rarely get it. 20.4% think they get no help and 38.8% think they rarely get help in working with the students who need special help. 20.4% of the participant beginning teachers think they were not ready for starting teaching. 22.4% think that university education did not give practical knowledge for teachers, whereas 24.5% think that it put too much emphasis on the theory.

The overall result of this section is that about 50% of participant beginning teachers think they do not get enough support from their colleagues about 30% think the support from the administration is not enough and about 50% think the university education put much emphasis on theory where about 55% think the practical knowledge that given at university is not enough.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

As it has been shown in the literature analysis above, teachers are having challenges in their first years with classroom management. In this research 16.3% of the participants "always" and 32.7% of the participants "usually" have classroom management problems. They also have problems in relational issues with colleagues (10.2% of the participants "always" and 20.4% of the participants "usually") and administrators (10.2% of the participants "always" and 18.4% of the participants "usually"). They are having difficulties in finding a way to approach students' problematic behaviors (14.3% of the participants "always", 30.6% of the participants "usually"). Teachers are dissatisfied with their salaries (42.9% of the participants "always" and 32.7% of the participants "usually").

They are not getting enough support from their colleagues in the first years (49% of the participants), when they especially need it. Most of the respondents think that they were not prepared for the challenges of the first years in teaching (20.4% of the participants rated 1 – 'not prepared', and 36.7% of the participants rated 2 – 'not very prepared', out of 5). Some teachers (22.4% of the participants) think that university education put no emphasis on handling the practical challenges of teaching.

According to the result that the study revealed, some practical support could be helpful for teachers in their real teaching activities. But the beginning teachers are not the only part here that needs to be considered. Teacher organizations, education specialists; state and local officials; school principals, students, and parents - are all need to be included. To ensure the professional development for beginning teachers, the partnership between the schools and university trainers should be provided.

An effective teacher preparation program can solve the problems of novices. Therefore, a deep and large-scaled analyses of the problems of the beginning teachers must be carried out. Solutions to these problems must be searched and implemented in teacher induction program. This program is expected to be more practical, with sufficient practical guiding and support, not a theoretical one. Teachers in their first years must be well supported by colleagues and administrators. These first years must not be in the nature of 'sink or swim' for teachers. Peer-coaching method s an effective way to overcome the discussed challenges.

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