

## The Experiences of Neophyte Teachers: *Meeting the Challenges of the First Professional Practices*

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**Abstract:** Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has lately proven to be a motivating and challenging experience for novice teachers who may face numerous problems at the beginning of their career. The core of this study is to investigate the problems encountered in the teaching/learning process by both novice teachers of EFL and their students. This study seeks to find out what difficulties novice teachers may face at English classes. Based on a quantitative-qualitative framework, the study has a descriptive-analytical nature was carried out with 11 master students at the Department of English - Laghouat University. To collect the necessary data, an online questionnaire was administered to the EFL learners, besides a semi-structured interview carried out with 7 novice teachers of English. The findings revealed that novice teachers face different problems such as choosing and updating the teaching methods that better suit the learners' needs, the lack of library sources, and developing students' motivation and engaging them in learning as well. These all were due to the lack of experience and training in teaching. Moreover, this research found out that students have problems too, from learners' perspectives, such as the low level of language proficiency and the lack of background knowledge in culture and literature. Therefore, this study recommends further research on those and other challenges, the importance of training, and teachers colleagues' support for novice teachers of English.

**Keywords:** Challenges, EFL Learners, Lack of experience, Novice teachers, Training

### Introduction

The teaching profession is a precious and valuable job. Thus, the field of education receives thousands of graduate students who want to be in that field and profess to teach. What inspires them to this profession is the good affection they will have on learners and help in making a difference in students' lives. Their desire to raise a clever and responsible generation is what motivates them to hold this responsibility. Nowadays, and with the demand for learning languages, especially the English language, our educational system allocated subjects to facilitate the learning of this language. Teaching Literature in English classes has become a matter of interest in recent years, due to literature's role in helping students to acquire the English language. However, the first years of teaching are challenging. Novice teachers of literature face numerous problems. When they teach for the first time, they put in mind that an objective must be accomplished and achieved by the end of the session. Actually, teachers with less experience may not be able to integrate easily within the teaching atmosphere. For that, the core of the study is to investigate the problems that may occur and which novice teachers of literature face focusing on both sides: teacher-related problems and student-related problems. This research targets

novice teachers of literature in Algerian universities particularly teachers of literature at Ammar Thelidji University.

## I. Literature Review

The first step in doing any job or activity is the most difficult one. Thus, the initial years of teaching are regarded as challenging and crucial. When we say learning from teaching experiences this means that learning comes after numerous problems and difficulties. Novice teachers of English Language, especially teachers of Literature face a variety of problems. These problems led the newcomers to the teaching career leave their profession after less than three years of teaching. Consequently, in recent years there was a great interest to search for this arising issue, concerning novice teachers' problems. Many studies and researches have tackled this topic. Regarding the problems that most novice teachers meet, much attention has been drawn to discuss this issue. One of the figures who dealt with novice teachers' problems is Veenman (1984), Senior lecturer, in his study "Perceived Problems of Beginning Teacher ". It was an analysis of 83 studies concerned with the problems that novice teachers have in different countries. He comes up with eight perceived problems, the top five ones are classroom discipline, the motivation of students, dealing with individual differences among students, assessing students' work, and relations with parents. At the end of his study, he called for a comparative analysis of novice teachers problems in different countries to see what kinds of problems a particular country with its own social and cultural aspects has. A study published by Dickson et al (2014), illustrates six major areas of challenges: classroom management, implementing the curriculum to mixed ability classes and a perceived lack of resources to do it, administrative demands, relationship with colleagues, dealing with parents, and balancing home and family life. We notice that the findings of the study are almost similar to Veenman's above research. To that end, teachers have problems when they face real teaching atmosphere, this what Dickson et al suggested. They stated that the training institutions should take much care to better prepare students for teaching by applying training more closely to the realities of teaching.

A growing body of literature has examined novice teachers' thoughts about their first years in teaching. For instance, a study by Cakmak (2013) "Learning from Teaching Experiences: Novice Teachers' Thoughts". It is stated that novice teachers have problems especially when they put in a real atmosphere. Along with, the awareness of the problems will allow us to think of adopting approaches that will help transition from novice teachers to experts. This means helping them to put theory into practice. Learning from experienced teachers may help novices avoid many problems. One of the best ways to cultivate learners and enhance their language skills acquisition is via literature learning. However, many problems occurred and prevent teachers to accomplish their task. A research that covers almost of the encountered problems in English literature classes was done by El Helou (2010) in which the researcher presents several problems as students focus on the content just to pass exams rather than learning and acquiring language skills, the lack of literature' appreciation, the issue of alien to the mother culture, and the lack of useful teaching tools. All these problems affect students first than challenge the teacher's task. With regard to, teaching literature and the problems encountered a study by Zhen (2012) investigates the problems encountered by novice teachers of literature in the EFL classes. In

which, the findings have shown that the need of qualified teachers, the lack of appropriate teaching materials, learners' level in English, and the need for an effective approach to teaching literature, are to be the arising issue in literature classes.

According to Bachrudim (2014) literature teachers face seven problems. He presented them as follows: differences as source threats and or opportunities, instructors' personal-professional, task design, assessment methods, programmatic missions, available resources, and academic leadership. A noticeable point was addressed, is that in some cases it happens where the teacher especially inexperienced did not like a particular type of literature to teach, it is his personal preference. However, the real teacher challenges whatever may have effects on his task. In fact, it has demonstrated that language and literature are intertwined in which change in approaches and teacher's training is needed. A communicative competence should be improved by expressing ideas through task designs by teachers to help students engaged in learning.

Moreover, Hussein and Al Emami (2016) discussed the difficulties that the majority of the teachers of literature at University met. Teachers viewed that students have a low level concerning language proficiency, also the difference that exists between cultures and the social beliefs stood as an obstacle for literature teaching/learning. Though, literature is about learning other's cultures to acquire a language not about possessing and imitating other's culture. Thus, the teacher's task is to solve this incident issue. The points highlighted in this paper are the "language proficiency level of the students, the linguistic and the stylistic degree of difficulty of the texts and the degree of cultural (un)familiarity ". A similar finding found in Khandoker' s work (2018) in which the lack of language competency, lack to read independently, and unfamiliarity with culture-related elements considered as difficulties challenge teachers of literature.

In a recent study by Gubair and Eltahir (2019), discussed both teachers and students problems that have been encountered in the literature teaching/learning process. They stated that similar problems may occur in many parts of the world. The challenges encountered by both teachers and students in literature classes include the lack of well-trained and specialized teachers, lack of appropriate literature resources, students' low standard of English language proficiency, lack of motivation, and the wide gap that exists between the cultural background of the students and the cultural background of English literature.

In the light of the previous studies, novice teachers experience various challenges when trying to cope with their role as professionals. Novice teachers of literature's perceptions about their initial years in teaching differ from one to another according to each ones' own experience. Several researches have been tackled in order to find and discuss as much as possible the difficulties and the problems that novice teachers met.

#### **A. Statement of the Problem**

The first years in the teaching career are unforgettable in the minds of novices. They teach their students and at the same time, they learn from them. In fact, novice teachers enjoy doing their task. However, the problem underlying this study entails that novice teachers of literature may meet problems that vary from one teacher to another according to the teaching situation. We intend to discover these problems set in English literature classes.

#### **B. Research Questions and Hypotheses**

To reach these objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions. The general question is: What are the main difficulties that novice teachers of literature face at English classes? There arose a set of sub-questions which are:

- Why do novice teachers face these problems?
- How did novices overcome the problems that stood at their teaching path?
- Finally, since experience means learning, the last sub-question is: Do novice teachers learn how to be more effective and successful?

These research questions arose to test the following hypotheses that are proposed as temporary answers:

- Novice teachers may experience a variety of problems such as choosing the appropriate teaching methods, the lack of training, students' low language level, and the lack of motivation towards learning literature.
- Due to the lack of training and less teaching experience and practice, novice teachers may not be engaged in the teaching environment without facing problems.
- If Novice teachers be updated to the teaching methods and strategies and match the students' needs, they will overcome such problems.
- Experience equals learning, that is to say, novice teachers learn not just from their teaching experiences, but also from their previous teachers' and colleagues' experiences to be successful teachers.

## II. Methodology

Among the essential elements in a study is research methodology. It is all about how the research was done "the process of the study". To determine the problems and test the hypotheses, a descriptive and analytical study was conducted. In this research, data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed to novice teachers of literature, besides; semi-structured interview with them to gain more clarifications.

## III. Results and Discussion

### A. Teachers' Questionnaire and Interview

The teachers' questionnaire aims at investigating the problems and the challenges that novice teachers of literature faced. Also, it provides a clear description and understanding of the studied phenomenon through teachers' opinions and perceptions about their teaching experiences. The interpretation of data collected via questionnaire and its analysis is presented in forms of charts and tables.

#### Part One: Teacher-related Problems

**Question 1:** For how many years you have been teaching literature?

Table 1: Years of Teaching Literature

Options	One year	Two years	Three years	Four years	Five years
Number of teachers	8	0	2	1	2

Reading above the result, it is highlighted in the table that most of the teachers of literature are novices (e. i.) eight teachers have been teaching literature for just one year. Whereas, the number of teachers who teach literature since three and five years is two and only one teacher has been teaching literature for four years. This means that teaching literature takes much interest nowadays more than earlier.

**Question 2:** Would you describe your first teaching experience?

When teachers are asked about their first teaching experience's opinions, the majority (31%) described it as not easy, the same result was noticed for teachers who find their first teaching experience successful. While some teachers with the percentage of (31%) stated that their first teaching experience was amazing. The minority of teachers described their experience as a reflection of their ambitions.

**Question 3:** Did you face any problems?

The number of teachers who faced problems when teaching English literature is seven. While six teachers asserted that they did not face any problems. With reference to the fourth question, we find that six novice teachers who teach literature for one year face problems. This means that teachers with less teaching experience are susceptible to teaching problems more than teachers with two or more years of teaching.

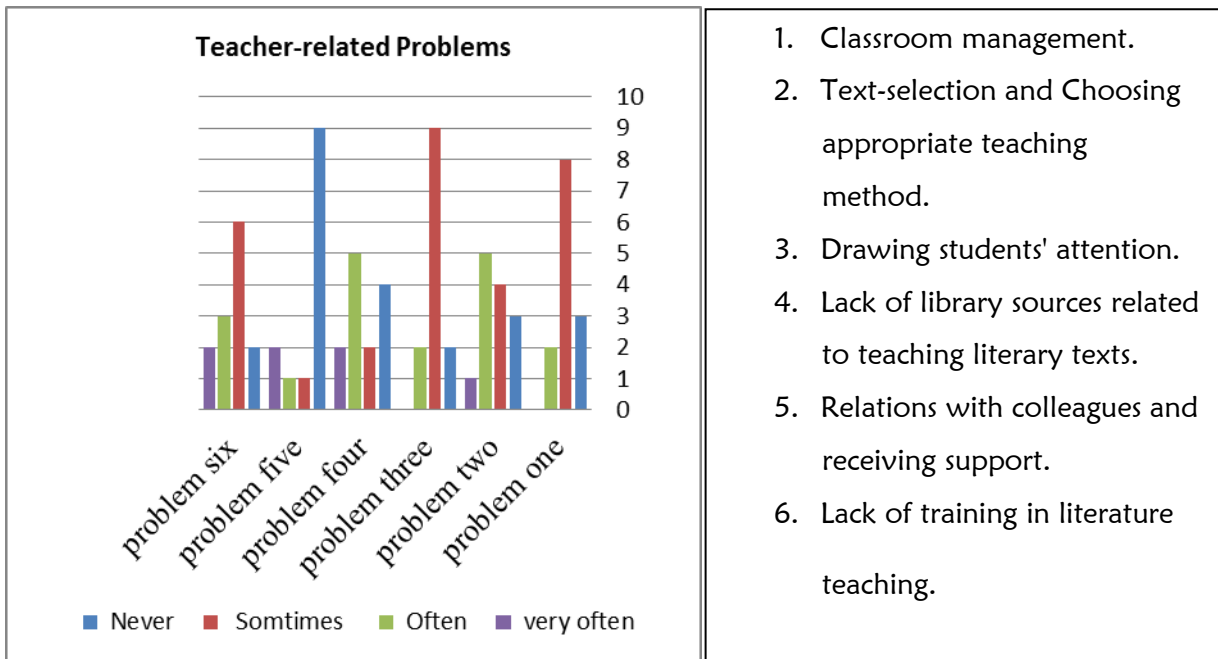
**Question 4:** What was most difficult for you to teach?

Table 4: Teachers and Difficulty in Teaching Literature kinds

kinds of Literature	Poetry	Drama	Fiction
Number of teachers	11	0	2
Percentage	85%	0%	15%

Since the majority of teachers of literature are novices, it is not an easy task for them to teach literature kinds effectively from the first beginnings. The giving table shows that (85%) of teachers have difficulty in teaching poetry. In contract, (15%) of teachers have difficulty in teaching fiction. However, concerning teaching drama, no one finds it difficult. From the findings, we can say that poetry is the hardest kind of literature to be taught and it requires more practice and expertise.

**Question 5:** What were the main difficulties you have met?



1. Classroom management.
2. Text-selection and Choosing appropriate teaching method.
3. Drawing students' attention.
4. Lack of library sources related to teaching literary texts.
5. Relations with colleagues and receiving support.
6. Lack of training in literature teaching.

Chart 5: Teacher-related Problems

In order to know the problems that most novice teachers of literature encountered, multiple options of common problems were suggested. The chart illustrates six problems that novice teachers faced. Thus, novice teachers very often meet problems related to teaching literature as a lack of library sources or training and relations with colleagues and receiving support. Most of the teachers (five) often face problems with selecting the text and choosing the appropriate teaching method and lack of library resources. While, from six to nine teachers confirm that they sometimes have problems like managing the classroom, drawing students' attention, and lack of training in literature teaching. However, the problem that they have never met according to nine teachers is in establishing relations with colleagues and receiving support.

**Question 6:** Did these problems affect your students' level in literature?

Table 6: The Effect of Teacher-related Problems on Students' Level

	Yes	No
Number of teachers	7	6
Percentage	54 %	46%

The findings of this question show that the above-mentioned problems have an effect for students' level in literature. Teachers confirm this fact with a percentage of 54%. In contrast, teachers with a percentage of 46% view that teacher-related problems did not affect students' level in literature.

### Part Two: Students-related Problems

**Question 7:** How did your students find the literary texts you teach?

Table 7: Students and the Literary Texts

The literary Texts	Teachers	Percentage
Easy to read and understand	1	8%
Texts with interesting content	10	77%
They cannot understand the language used	0	0%
Boring texts	2	15%

Concerning the selection of the appropriate and suitable texts, most of the teachers of literature demonstrated that their students find the literary texts interesting; as it is shown in the table ten teachers with the percentage of 77% confirmed that. In contract, just two teachers asserted that their students find the texts they present boring.

**Question 8:** What were your students' main problems?

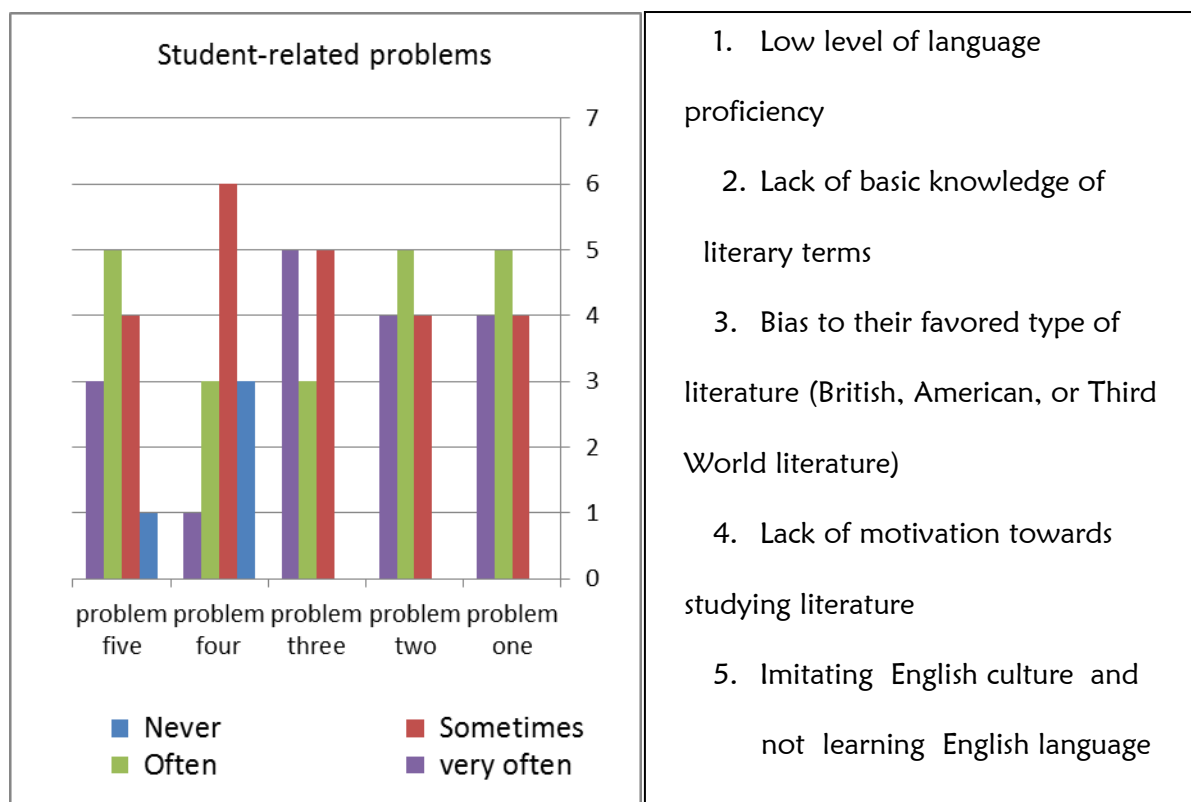


Chart 8: Student-related Problems

In literature teaching, it is not only teachers who face problems, but also students. From teachers' perspectives, the chart above summarizes almost of students' problems when learning literature. According to five teachers, students very often are biased to their favored type of literature. They often have problems concerning the low level of language proficiency, lack of basic knowledge of literary terms due to the lack of reading, and focusing more on imitating English culture and not learning a language. Furthermore, six teachers stated that students sometimes face problems with lack of motivation towards studying literature. While three teachers illustrated that students never face problems with motivation.

### Part Three

**Question 9:** What was challenging for you to deal with? Justify

When teachers were asked which problems you find them difficult, the majority of them with the percentage of 92% illustrated that student-related problems are difficult to deal with them. Whereas, only a few teachers with a percentage of 8% stated that the hardest task they face is related to teacher problems. From the findings, we come into the idea that most novice teachers master the subject they teach (e. i.) knowledge of pedagogy and knowledge of content. However, the problem is when dealing with students and their needs, since they are novices they need more experience to overcome such problems. Novice teachers justify why student-related problems are difficult for them in the following comments:



"I wanted to give more to my students but I couldn't because I lacked the training and the proper experience to face such troubles".

"Students' related problems sometimes go undetected because of the lack of materials. For qualified teachers, they can tell exactly what they need to improve in order to deliver a decent course".

"They find literature boring".

"I wanted to give more to my students but I couldn't because I lacked the training and the proper experience to face such troubles".

"It was a bit hard to work on their critical thinking and how they should study the literary text since they are just first-year students".

#### IV. Implications

The findings obtained from research tools argued that the first teaching experience is full of challenges. Thus, novice teachers of literature face numerous problems as choosing the appropriate teaching method, selecting the literary text, the lack of library sources related to teaching literary texts, the lack of training in literature teaching, and drawing students' attention, these all due to the lack of practice and less experience. This concerning the problems they meet. While novice teachers state that during teaching literature subject, they struggle with students' low level of language proficiency, the lack of basic literary knowledge, and imitating the English culture. This supports the first and second hypotheses.

Furthermore, the analysis of the second section of the questionnaire concerning teachers' ways to overcome these problems, the majority of teachers agree on the idea of selecting texts according to students' needs because among the main problems that students face is the text selected by teachers. Also, teachers confirm that attracting students' attention and engage them in the learning process will be a useful way. They state that developing their teaching methods and being updated will help them to better deliver the lesson. By this, the third hypothesis is tested "novice teachers tend to fix these problems by being updated to the teaching methods and strategies and match students' needs".

Based on the analysis of the questionnaire, novice teachers confirm that they often receive support and help from colleagues whenever needed. That it is to say, since they are novices they need to learn from expertise teachers the effective way to teach and how to deal with students. Actually, not just novice teachers learn from other teachers, but also students. It is shown in the analysis of students' answers students learn from previous teachers the way to teach, also they learn from their teachers' mistakes in order to avoid them in the future and to be at least effective and successful teachers.

## Conclusion

One of the best mediums to learn a language is through literature subject due to its contribution to language learning. However, novice teachers of English particularly teachers of literature face numerous problems at EFL classes. This research is designed to investigate the problems encountered in literature classes. Through the analysis of research tools, the results are extracted and the hypotheses are tested. Based on the data collected, novice teachers of literature face problems when choosing the appropriate teaching methods that match the students' needs and this is what makes many students find literature boring. It is due to the lack of training in literature teaching also the lack of library resources that did not allow teachers to select relevant and appropriate texts. In fact, selecting appropriate text is a key element to attract students' attention.

Concerning attracting students' attention, many students argue that the content offered by the teacher is not interesting. Teachers are required to let students choose the text they prefer, of course, the teacher can suggest for them many texts and it is up to them to select what they are interested in. Moving on forward, students at (EFL) classes have problems in understanding the teacher. Because, as they stated, some teachers use complex words and this make them lose focus in which it led them to look for these complex words and forget about the idea that the teacher was explaining. They hope if literature sessions become more practical than theoretical. This issue needs to be fixed by teachers of literature and this is what our study is trying to reach about. Through the investigation of these problems, teachers can rely on this paper to have a look at what kind of problems they would meet in literature classes.

This study has investigated student-related problems and among the problems found is imitating the English culture and not learning the language. The majority of English learners choose to study the language for imitating the English culture without paying attention to what should be studied in a formal setting ' University'. This is a problem that recommends further research in order to be fixed. Here the teacher's role is to highlight the difference between learning about other's culture and imitating the culture.

To better understand the implications of these results, future studies could address novice teachers' preparation programs, especially at our University. The didactic module should not depend only on theories because sometimes students who hold a license degree may have the chance to practice teaching. Thus, here they will find themselves with theoretical background about teaching methods and strategies only, how about the practical side. This is the case that our research targeting, most of literature teachers lack practice and training in literature teaching. Thus each university should develop its model to help graduate students and prepare them to teach.

This research targeted novice teachers and postgraduate students who are by to practice teaching, this work will help them to know the challenges they will face. Moreover, it can be a source for researchers who are interested in this field and looking for recent and beneficial works. There are also several areas for further development and applications for investigating novice teachers' problems in other fields and make a comparative study.

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