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**Struggles and Strategies in Constructing Professional Identity: The First-Year Teaching Experiences of Indonesian EFL Novice Teachers**

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**Abstract**

Several studies have recorded the increasing number of teachers who left the profession in the first year of teaching in recent years. The main cause is the difficulties over the first year of teaching and the unsatisfactory construction and growth of professional identity. This qualitative study attempted to reveal the struggles faced during their first year of teaching by EFL novice teachers working in Nusa Tenggara Timur, Indonesia, and how they coped with those struggles regarding their development of professional identity. The data is gained through in-depth interviews with three novice teachers. The participants' challenges during their first years are discussed and analyzed in theories of teachers' professional identity development. The struggles are split into internal and external struggles based on the result. The internal struggles are linked to how teachers controlled their emotions self-efficacy and ability to teach, their jobs, and their personal opinions. The external challenges related to the management of the classroom, the abilities, and attitudes of the students, the lack of resources and facilities in the school, the relationships with their colleagues, and their salaries. This research is intended to provide more insight into the realities of teachers working in an underdeveloped province like East Nusa Tenggara, in particular how they establish their professional identity in a lack of facilities and learning resources.

**Keywords:** East Nusa Tenggara; Novice Teachers; Professional Identity; Struggles and Strategies

**Introduction**

Every year, colleges and universities all over the world send out their graduates to explore the fields that they are supposed to be in. The graduates enter a new stage of life in which they have responsibilities to apply what they have learned in college life.

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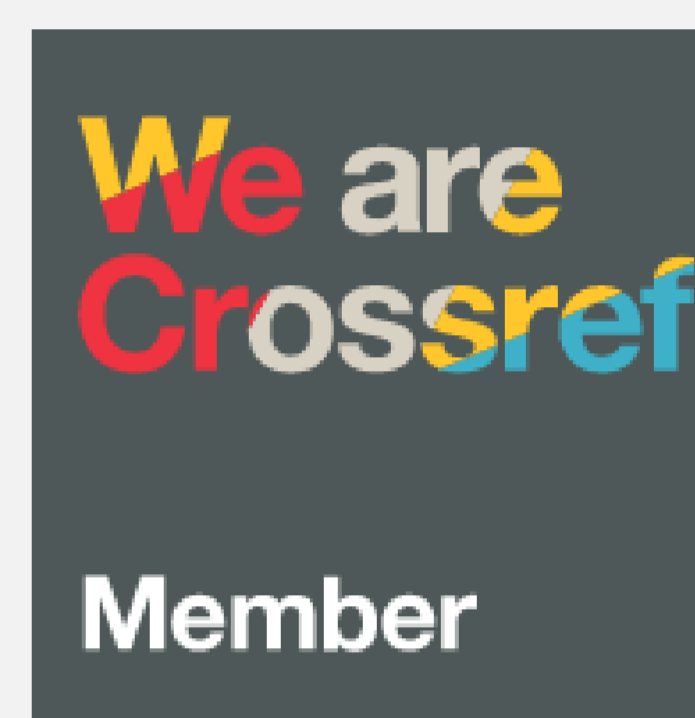
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# 19. Struggles and Strategies

*by* Mbato Concilianus Laos

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## **Struggles and Strategies in Constructing Professional Identity: The First-Year Teaching Experiences of Indonesian EFL Novice Teachers**

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### **Abstract**

Several studies have recorded the increasing number of teachers who left the profession in the first year of teaching in recent years. The main cause is the difficulties over the first year of teaching and the unsatisfactory construction and growth of professional identity. This qualitative study attempted to reveal the struggles faced during their first year of teaching by EFL novice teachers working in Nusa Tenggara Timur, Indonesia, and how they coped with those struggles regarding their development of professional identity. The data is gained through in-depth interviews with three novice teachers. The participants' challenges during their first years are discussed and analyzed in theories of teachers' professional identity development. The struggles are split into internal and external struggles based on the result. The internal struggles are linked to how teachers controlled their emotions self-efficacy and ability to teach, their jobs, and their personal opinions. The external challenges related to the management of the classroom, the abilities, and attitudes of the students, the lack of resources and facilities in the school, the relationships with their colleagues, and their salaries. This research is intended to provide more insight into the realities of teachers working in an underdeveloped province like East Nusa Tenggara, in particular how they establish their professional identity in a lack of facilities and learning resources.

Keywords: East Nusa Tenggara; Novice Teachers; Professional Identity; Struggles and Strategies

### **Introduction**

Every year, colleges and universities all over the world send out their graduates to explore the fields that they are supposed to be in. The graduates enter a new stage of life in which they have responsibilities to apply what they have learned in college life.

However, many of the fresh graduates feel that it is hard for them to survive at the beginning of their career. During the training process, graduates have acquired the concepts and ideas that relate to their profession. They have learned to utilize their skills by engaging in practices during the learning process. Moreover, when they start to work in the profession, they have to assure that they keep studying and being up to date on the development of professional knowledge, as well as contributing their own experiences to its development (Shagrir, 2010). Pennington & Richards (2015) also states that the graduates from education department are expected not only to know things and know how to work with things in their jobs but also to understand the new environments, i.e., "to adapt and personalize disciplinary or professional knowledge to their identity and contexts of teaching" (p. 6).

Novice teachers are categorized as 'new' in the teaching field. They have recently graduated from education faculty in their respective universities and are starting their journey as real teachers. Senom, Zakaria, Sharatol, and Shah (2013) mention that novice teachers experience the transition from their prior study in educational faculty to real life. When beginning or novice teachers enter the field of language teaching, they become engaged in many different dimensions of learning, from those related to mastery of the subject matter of language teaching to those involved in managing learning in the classroom, as well as issues involved in developing an understanding of themselves as novice teachers (Pennington & Richards, 2015, p.2). Senom, Zakaria, Sharatol, and Shah (2013) describe the transition from teacher training to the first teaching job as both dramatic and traumatic (p.120). They refer to the transition as a real shock that occurs when novice teachers' beliefs formed during pre-service training are collapsed by the harsh realities of everyday classroom life. With inadequate assistance, limited perceptions are more likely to result in talented and passionate teachers finding their job stressful, unsatisfying, and unbearably challenging, which eventually raises their risk of becoming a victim of the profession. Fitriati (2018) stated that teachers have a crucial role to play in establishing, maintaining and enhancing the interaction between the teacher and the students. The question is how novice teachers adapt themselves properly and integrate their past learning experiences into the real world of teaching' and become professional.

In the following years, studies have classified some sources of strain and tension for novice teachers: work intensification, heavy workload, negative professional interactions and relations with colleagues, inadequate salary, students with behavioral problems, demanding parents, poor school leadership and absence of autonomy (Pietarinen, & Salmela-Aro, 2011). When teachers experience tension and strains, it could be potential wellsprings for the challenge and professional identity development. If the teachers could effectively cope with the difficulties, the experiences certainly turn into a source of learning for the teachers. Many qualitative studies focus on the impact

of work environments and on how personal experiences and relationships with colleagues and students directly (as well as outside classroom needs) play a major part in the self-perceptions of teachers. Caspersen & Raaen (2017) state that novice teachers' ability to cope (i.e. their sense of certainty and self-efficacy) can be negatively impacted by this type of transition and their lack of experience, which in turn could lead to burnout and stress (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008) and attrition (Le Maistre & Paré, 2010). Day (2018) described teachers' identity as their perceptions of their cognitive knowledge, feeling of self-consciousness, voice, trust, and relations with their colleagues, students, and parents. Developing a powerful identity of the teachers supports their commitment to learning, expanding their understanding and abilities and motivating them to play an active role in their teaching Izadinia (2018). Xu (2012) conducted a 3-year longitudinal case study in China. It describes the transformation of the professional identities of four novice teachers of English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) during their first years of teaching in K-12 schools. The study presents that the novices' professional identities developed from the initially imagined identities formed in the pre-service phase to the practiced identities constructed in the novice stage (the beginning year of their teaching practice). Xu (2012) argues for the need to include a deeper understanding of teacher identity development in the knowledge base of English Teacher Education and suggest that perseverance and agency be instilled in novice teachers' development. Teachers' professional identity is important for the teachers as it will help them to understand their professional lives and career decision making (Hong, 2010, p. 1531).

In Indonesia, there have been many educational changes made by the policymakers and related stakeholders. These changes occur from the past until now particularly to the teachers as the pillars of education as well as to students who are most impacted by the changes. Findings from an earlier study by Yuwono (2005) suggest Most English teachers in Indonesia have always been aware of the implications of career development and learning along with dealing with cooperating with the latest changes in the educational system or any changes in the English curriculum and ELT practices. Yuwono (2010) accurately presented the realities of the daily life of English teachers in Indonesia, especially those working in rural areas. She stated that the teachers are required to serve in isolation with insufficient assistance from policymakers and other relevant stakeholders. Rather than leading to growth as professionals, this condition may inevitably result in skepticism, uncertainty, ignorance, reluctance, lack of willingness or even rejection from English teachers (p.147).

Subsequently, Yuwono (2010) firmly states that the professionalism of English teachers in Indonesia must be thoroughly reviewed and redefined (p. 149). Astuti (2016) mentioned that most Indonesian EFL teachers tend to dependably follow textbooks and student worksheets. They barely provide opportunities for students to use the target

language and to interact with their peers. This reality of EFL instruction affected the achievement of EFL learners in Indonesia. Anderson (2012) reported a survey involving 1.7 million adults from 54 non-English speaking countries, which focused on their English proficiency. The study ranks Indonesia at 27th, categorizing the country as one of the low English proficiency countries

Yuwono (2010) also presents the statement from Dardjowidjojo (2000) who claims that recent studies on the contexts of ELT practices and English teachers in Indonesia, especially in Java show that English teachers did not master the language they are teaching. Since Java is the country's most significant (thus the most developed) island in Indonesia, then one can imagine what the conditions of the teachers would be like in rural locations outside Java such as those in Nusa Tenggara Timur. This study was an important attempt to investigate the struggles and strategies undertaken by novice teachers working in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) province.

East Nusa Tenggara is the southernmost province of Indonesia. It binds the Lesser Sunda Islands' eastern part facing the South Indian Ocean and the North Flores Sea. The province has administered more than 500 islands. The largest are Sumba, Flores, and Timor's western part; the latter shares a land border with East Timor's separate nation. The province is divided into 21 regencies, and Kupang is the province's capital and largest city. The province is considered to be one of Indonesia's provinces (outside Java) with Indonesia's lowest index of human development. From data presented by Djawa (2017), it is very clear that the Human Development Index (HDI) in NTT is very low compared to other provinces in Indonesia. In 2016, NTT received a ranking of 32 with HDI 63.13%. National HDI 70.18%, the difference is 7.05%. From the data obtained from the Central Statistics Department, there are several facts obtained including: First, NTT Province has always been ranked 31 and 32 out of 34 provinces in the past seven years. Second, NTT Province has an HDI standard under the National HDI with a difference of 6% to 7%. Based on these facts, education should be the solution to the issue. Acknowledging and understanding the teachers with their needs and struggles in the region will create better improvements for education.

This research is focused on three novice teachers in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction in East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Studies on the struggles of novice teachers, especially in rural areas in Indonesia are limited. Therefore, it involves three novice teachers from some parts of East Nusa Tenggara. They originally Indonesian were raised in the area. The participants completed their bachelor's undergraduate study in a state university located in Kupang; the capital city of East Nusa Tenggara Province. Two research questions are formulated as the following: (1) what are the struggles of Indonesian EFL novice teachers in constructing their



professional identity? (2) How do they construct their professional identity in their struggles? It is expected that the findings will be a meaningful learning resource for the future teachers in East Nusa Tenggara and also for the departments and faculties that are preparing their students as professional teachers in the future. They will have a better understanding of the issues faced by novice teachers nowadays and could find the best ways of reforming the pre-service teacher education curriculum. The story of novice teachers in the context of East Nusa Tenggara should also be essential for Indonesian policymakers and stakeholders in the construction or adjustment of any program or policy directed at reducing teachers' difficulties in the region and improving the teachers' chance for professional developments.

### **Research Methodology**

This study is presented to explore the journey of novice teachers in the East Nusa Tenggara region, Indonesia. It is also expected that this study could present more insights about the realities about the teachers in NTT and also the realities happened in the education sector in general. This is a qualitative method research with depth semi-structured interview as the instrument of the research. According to Li and Renandya (2012), in-depth interviews are used in a study to gain a deeper insight into the participants' values and interpretations of their teaching experiences (p.86). Furthermore, we used an open-coding in qualitative approach to interpret and analyze their reflection of the teaching experiences of the novice teachers (Hoggan & Cranton, 2015).

The subjects of this study were three English teachers who have worked for about one year in their schools in East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. They were contacted by the researchers by WhatsApp application and e-mail to participate in this study. Their ages range from 23-25. They had completed their undergraduate degree (majoring in English Language Education study program) at a state university in Kupang, the capital city of East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. After graduation, they went back to their homelands and started their teaching career there. The novice teachers are now teaching in secondary education level. One of them is teaching in a private junior high school. Another is teaching in vocational senior high schools and the third one is teaching in a government-operated public school.

**Table 1:** A Brief Description of the Participants

Name	Major	Background	Teaching Place	Duration of Teaching Service
Anna	English Education	Anna grew up in a rural area called Saharan, Southern Amarasi, East Nusa Tenggara. She moved to Kupang when she was 15 until graduated from college in 2017. She decided to move back to her homeland to work there. (Interview, 2019)	A Private Junior High School in South Amarasi, Kupang Regency, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT)	July 2018 - Present (1 year, 5 months)
Elsa	English Education	Elsa was born in Kupang but then moved to Soe followed by her parents living there. She came back to Kupang to pursue her bachelor's degree in English Education in 2013. She loves teaching and sharing knowledge. (Interview, 2019)	A Vocational Senior High School in Soe, South Central Timor (TTS), East Nusa Tenggara (NTT)	May 2018 - Present (1 year, 7 months)
Isabelle	English Education	Isabelle believes that being a teacher is her real profession. She dedicates herself to be an English teacher in a rural area located in TTS regency, East Nusa Tenggara. (Interview, 2019)	A State Junior High School in Nunkolo, South Central Timor (TTS), East Nusa Tenggara (NTT)	January 2019 - Present (11 Months)

The researcher used semi-structured interview as the data collection instrument. It consisted central questions. The interview for each novice teacher ranged from 60 to 80 minutes and conducted in Indonesian because they are Indonesian native speakers. Then, the data is translated and transcribed. The translation into English is also supported by one of the researchers in the present study who is competent in both Indonesian and English Language. The participants were the graduates of the teacher education program (2017-2018) invited by e-mail to participate in this study. The novices shared their first-year experiences in teaching and their relationship with their

students, colleagues, and environments. Participants were also asked to comment on their teaching, self-perception, and connection with their social environment at work so far. After getting the data from the novice teachers, notes were made regarding the topic of the research. The researcher tried to find and mark the underlying information in the data. Then, the researcher started grouping the similar kinds of data; the internal and external struggles. The researcher put the explanation of the two different group of data in the finding and discussion and made relation of the data to the previous studies (Health, Of, & Of, 2017).

### **Finding and Discussion**

In this segment, we portray the struggles and challenges reported by the participants in chronologically, first internal struggles and afterward external struggles. The strategies used to address the challenges are then summarized in each description of the struggle. The discussion is presented after the description of the findings.

#### **1. Internal Struggles and The Strategies**

There are some internal struggles of the novice teachers found in this study. Those are emotion control, maintaining self-efficacy, language ability, and job dissatisfaction:

##### **Dealing with personal problems (Emotional control)**

The novice teachers were given a chance to express their feeling and how they cope with their problems in the first year of teaching. The novice teachers felt that it was not easy for them to control their emotions when personal problems appeared. It seemed clear that Anna and Elsa tried to keep controlling their emotions in front of the students. They did not want everything they felt at the time to affect them in teaching the students. For example, Anna understood that by playing games or singing before class, it could revive her mood better as she could then focus on seeing the joy of the students.

"In many times, my mood and emotional state influenced me during my teaching. When I felt bad about starting the lesson that day or when I was still overwhelming with the demands of other responsibilities outside the classroom, I would not start the teaching-learning process immediately. First, I would invite the students to sing or play a game that indirectly normalized my terrible mood." (Anna).

From the statements, we can see that the novice teachers had experiences in which their problems affected their moods and feelings. But then, when they had to teach, they tried not to express their feelings straightaway to the students. They attempted to create a professional picture of the teacher to the students.

##### **Maintaining Self Efficacy**

The novices said that they were confident in the first time entering the workplace as teachers. It was supported by their expectations and the preparations they had made

before. But after being in classes, issues began to arise and it provoked the amount of their confidence. If they experienced unsatisfactory teaching, they did some sorts of reflections and evaluations after the class as explained by Elsa:

"I reflected on learning today, what was missing, problems, and so on. I continued to search for more additional materials after arriving at home so that the students could be to understand them more (Elsa).

One of the unpredictable facts from the novices' is Anna. The headmaster asked her personally when applying for a teaching job in the school. At first, she believed that teaching religious matters to junior high school students is not too difficult. She also wanted to help, because there was no religious teacher in the school. She accepted the offer. However, she still needed extra preparation for teaching the lesson. She mentioned that she felt very confident if she had made proper preparations at home before going to school, but not everything went according to what she had expected:

"Sometimes, I gave my students chances to ask questions about teaching the religion subject. I ever experienced when there were questions from the students whose answers I also did not know. It was beyond the material I had prepared before. That situation made my confidence went down. Do you know? I told them that I didn't know about that case, and I asked them to find out together." (Anna)

Anna added that if she could not offer appropriate explanations, she would hold a group debate to encourage the students to find out the issues by themselves. She did not present herself as a teacher who knows everything. She stated that learned that value in the time when she self-reflections. She believes that teaching will be more meaningful if she presents her 'wholeness' to the students. Anna concluded that teaching religion is not a burden for her so far.

### **Teacher's Language ability**

When the novice teachers were asked about how they assessed their language skills and teaching, Elsa and Isabelle said that they lacked teaching ability. Elsa explained that after being a teacher, she was busy with the administrative requirements in the school. She mentioned that she did not have much time developing her skill and learning material. On the other hand, Isabelle told me about how she managed herself in improving her language ability.

"Honestly, sometimes I was not motivated to read or find additional materials for teaching. I only rely on the textbook, without any desire to develop existing material. When I enter this in-service teaching, there are so many administrative things to do, and that ultimately makes me tired and lazy to dwell on other things" (Elsa).

The novice teachers shared the strategies that usually they did to minimize their struggles related to language competency. They seemed to have a similar strategy which is watching English videos;

"Sometimes I watch videos on YouTube. Videos of Indonesian people speaking English. I observed their fluency, intonation, pronunciation, grammar, etc. Then I compared it with mine and I realized that my English is still so far from perfection. I keep on learning by reading books, watching English videos, etc. Yah, I keep improving my English. I hope it will get better" (Isabelle)

Novice teachers usually experience this kind of issue. They are overwhelmed with the administrative requirements, and no longer put attention to their professional development.

#### **Dealing with job dissatisfaction**

In this case, the researchers found that the lack of job satisfaction mostly came from Anna. Based on the interview, Anna stated clearly that she was still battling with her commitment to stay as an English teacher in her school. She found many disappointments during her teaching in the first year especially about the school management and her salary. She expressed that she was still hoping that she could find a better workplace than the current place.

"My reason to stay teaching here is that I feel the responsibility. But to be honest, I want a better workplace. Unfortunately, I still don't have a better option than this school yet. I will be a permanent teacher here if the school management and the prevailing system change. It is not only because of the salary, but it's mainly about the quality and satisfaction" (Anna)

Personally, Anna said that it was not her dream to be a teacher it just was not her personal choice. Since graduating from college, she had even applied to several jobs that were not related to teaching and education. She ended up applying at school, however, because she was unable to get any work back then. She was only accepted as a teacher at that school, and that's how she began working there.

"At first this job was just because I didn't have a job at that time. I decided to return to my hometown. And then, the teaching job offer came to me. And I agreed." (Anna)

It is clear to see that the identity of Anna shaped naturally as she decided to begin her teaching journey although she was not initially motivated to be a teacher. The motivation appeared after seeing her mother enthusiastically and sincerely taught her

students. Her mother is also a teacher of a kindergarten in her village. Her environment also inspired her to be a teacher. She felt that it is her responsibility to create a better future for her neighborhood. She also mentioned that teachers are given respects from society. The society considers teachers as the smart people in the village.

"Since the past until now, teachers are still valued and respected in my village. People say the teacher is the smartest person. There is an honor when people greet you as a "teacher" in my village. Furthermore, my students keep me in the teaching profession. For example, when I was not able to be in class, they would look for me; "Why didn't you come in yesterday, Miss?" Such kind of things. I was touched, honestly. It keeps on giving me a sense of responsibility to come and teach them." (Anna).

Though all the participants mentioned that they are struggling in their first year of teaching service, they also stated that they feel the honor of being teachers. They also begin to feel their students begin to appreciate them and pay attention to them. That is what makes Anna believes that what made her survive in the teaching profession is because of the students. She also added that there is a feeling of affection for the students; she could not just leave the students.

## **2. External Struggles and the Strategies**

As stated by Hong (2010) that teachers generally make perceptions about themselves and internalize all the external conditions related to their jobs (p. 1351). It means that the process of constructing how good they are being influenced by their social environment in the workplace. Furthermore, Canrinus, Beeijard, and colleagues (2011) believe that commitment to remain in the profession depends on more external variables such as the unhealthy social environment in the school (p.124). The following are the struggles faced the novice teachers that mainly come from the external factors in their teaching:

### **Class management (students' behaviors)**

Mostly, the three novices said that their first challenge was how to manage the class. Anna stated that her expectations before entering the field as she would face students who respect and follow every single rule she made in class.

"Teachers have a great responsibility because we are not only teaching but also we educate and motivate the students. Different behaviors are shown by the students, both positive and negative. I understand that it is because the students are still looking for their identity. Emotional instability can influence the mindset and behavior of them, and varied family backgrounds can also be the main factor in the formation of students' characters" (Anna).

Anna expressed that she had to deal with the students who were not motivated to do their assignments and even attend the class.

"I am a strict teacher in school. Indeed, at first, I thought they would be obedient, but it wasn't as simple as I imagined I started to set several regulations in the class and also the consequences for those who break it. Every time they did not do the task, I gave a statement not to take the class on that day."

"There is also a regulation in the school that if the students do not attend a class, their parents will be given such kind of notice from the school and parents probably should come to the school and meet the teachers. I feel better now that my students started to understand it. They finally began to attend the class frequently and worked on assignments, even without any force."

She decided to make rules, and there were consequences for every broken rule. It was not easy at first, but then she felt that the students began to change. There were rules made by the school for the students to help her to manage the students. She changed her identity from a friendly teacher to be a strict teacher with rules.

#### **Overcoming the lack of teaching resources and facilities**

The three novices strongly argued that they experienced a great lack of resources, as they are teaching in rural areas. Anna, for example, stated that in her school there is no library. They are merely depended on the textbook from the government. They still have to find some resources that could support their teaching. Elsa expressed the same issue. She faced similar problems regarding the school facilities.

"My school is a vocational school and I teach automotive major, It is not the main major in the school, that is why the automotive classes are not given too much attention. There are many broken desks and chairs in these classes so the students in this department are usually feeling troubled when they are in the learning process. The library condition is also not good. The textbooks are very limited so the students usually have to make copies first. Certainly, it is disturbing the learning process" (Elsa).

"My educational background strongly supports me to be a creative teacher, but because I am teaching in a rural area which is far away from the city (Kupang), it's rather difficult to do but well." (Isabelle)

Eventually, Isabelle still believes that she could do the best even in the condition because she had learned from her previous study that being creative is very important for teachers. She tried to do her best, and now she proudly stated that she is grateful because the students show much improvement than before.

### **Dealing with negative relations with colleagues**

The novice teachers were asked to describe their social relations in the school. The most problematic experience was that of Elsa. She was still new at that time, and according to the school policy, all teachers were paid according to the number of hours they taught. The more hours of teaching, the greater the fee earned. When she first went to teach at the school, she got 24 teaching hours a week. She got classes also in the agriculture and farming departments; in other words, she got quite a lot of classes. There was a dispute among the senior teachers because they thought that she was just a new teacher, she did not have much experience yet. Finally, her teaching hours were reduced to 20 hours a week. But there was still debate about her, so her teaching hours were reduced to 15 hours per week. Finally, Elsa was only given the rest

"Well, at that time, I was passionate about teaching but my colleagues did not seem like that. They did not teach in agriculture and animal husbandry departments for several times, and instead, they asked me to teach their students. They are the ones who argued about the class divisions and our salaries are already based on the agreed changes. Yeah, I felt that I was just a new at the school, so I just agreed (again). However, the deputy head of the curriculum told me firmly that I should not teach in their classes. I followed the direction, and as my expectation; there was tension between me and the senior teachers. They began to show their dislike ness to me. They were like forming their group to gossip about me. I realized that creating a good social relation in schools was harder than teaching in class." (Isabelle)

Time passed and the problem reappeared again. Elsa explained that it was related to the lesson plans. At first, the teachers used the k13 curriculum in the school. But then, there were changes in the curriculum so that it became k13 revision. As a result, all the lesson plans that were made last year could not be used. The teachers had to make new ones in a new format. Elsa expressed that she made and compiled her lesson plans from zero.

"When I was in the PPL (Teaching practicum), I was taught to make my lesson plans, but this time the format was different. I made it with the guidance of the deputy head of the curriculum. And finally, the problem could be resolved well."

Afterward, she added that at that time there was an accreditation at school. The supervisors came and examined the teachers. The novice teachers were audited by senior teachers, senior teachers were examined by the school principal and the principal was examined by supervisors. Her colleagues did not have teaching devices, such as lesson plans and so on. They came and asked her because they knew that she had done those things before. She put my best effort and tried hard to work on those



lesson plans and the teaching materials for two months, and she was scolded a lot when I was guided by the deputy head of the curriculum. She stated that if she was a selfish person, she would not give all for free. But she was afraid that the incident at the beginning of her entry would happen again. Finally, she gave everything to them.

Elsa expressed that it was not easy for her. She had to deal with all the negative emotions and conflicts emerged at those times. She drained a lot. She wanted to be appreciated as a teacher in the school. She wanted to be recognized by the other teachers and create a good relationship with them. The novice teacher needed support from their colleagues because she was new in school and they need helps from the fellow teachers. The good thing from that incident was that Elsa began to feel her colleagues started to get close to her. The atmosphere between the teachers slowly changed.

### **Handling students' competences**

At the beginning of her teaching, Isabelle was very shocked in the first teaching. The students did not understand anything about English. Even it was hard for them expressing "good morning" or "good afternoon. Her frustration expressed during the interview:

"The problem was, the students did not even know what English is. They got an English teacher, but I don't know what he did all the time so the students didn't even know how to say hello, how to greet people use good morning, or else. They don't even know one to ten in English. Oh my God. So, I started from zero and I was about to cry at that time."  
(Isabelle)

But then, she concluded that it was understandable because she was teaching in a quiet remote area, where access to technology and science was rare. In dealing with such kind of struggle, she invited the students to have classes outside the school. She taught the students in her home and now the students begin to show good improvement.

"I have to teach basic knowledge first. I'm struggling enough, But, I know that there is still a possibility. I realized that the students want to learn. And that makes me even more excited. The ability of the students is different. So I have to make it slow down. If anyone can't understand, they could come to my house. We have an extra class after school. And so far, I get good results" (Isabelle)

Based on this struggle I could see that the novice teacher represented the type of teacher who believes that the students could make changes. She believed in her students, and the students also started to believe in her. The connectedness between the novice Elsa and the students started to grow.

### **Issue about salary**

Talking about their salary, the novice teachers stated that they were paid by their schools according to the number of hours they had in a week or even a month. And they did not receive periodic salaries every month, but generally every three months with little income. Sometimes they had to give up on delaying the salary because there were students who had not paid school fees. Their salary came from the school fees allocated by the school.

"There were times when the payment for us must be delayed until the end of the semester because many students choose to overdue and pay for it all. This time, I firmly said that my orientation is not money anymore; even though I was new at the time. The main reason why I entered the school as a teacher is that I want to get many experiences as much as possible and share the knowledge that I have gained from my previous study. I accept everything and keep in doing what I am supposed to do" (Elsa)

For some teachers, salary is the crucial aspect that determines their commitment to the profession; whether they will continue to teach or leave to look for more materially profitable jobs. However, these novice teachers still choose to teach with such salary regulation. The novice teachers show that their commitment to the profession does not depend solely on material things.

### **Discussion**

According to international researchers, novice teachers encounter a variety of challenges when they try to cope with their new role as professionals (Caspersen & Raaen, 2017). Several different labels have been applied to this phenomenon in teacher research, including 'real shock' (McCormack & Thomas, 2003), 'cultural shock' (Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998) and 'practice shock' (Jordell, 1986, 1989; Monsen, 1970). Based on the findings above, we could see that the novice teachers experience those kinds of shocks; the shocks about the reality of their workplace, the culture associated with the schools and the practices that sometimes did not work as they expected before. Their struggles are also related to each other. The external struggles such as the negative relationship with the colleagues and students' behaviors, affected their emotional self-efficacy. Moreover, poor management of the school strongly produced job dissatisfactions of the novice teacher. On the other hand, the struggles make the novice teachers renegotiate their identity; from a kind and friendly teacher to be a strict teacher, from a sensitive teacher to be a strong-minded teacher, from a frail teacher to be a tough teacher, from a money-oriented teacher to be experience-oriented teacher, from a unmotivated teacher to be a very motivated teacher, and the most important, from novice teachers to be experienced and professional teachers. Another significant issue is related to self-appreciation.

According to Kelchtermans (, 2011 teachers' recognition becomes a significant issue for teachers. The recognition and appreciation of colleagues will be linked directly to the development of self-understanding. Since this recognition stays as a legacy, something that one gains from others, but at a certain stage it is never fully accomplished and it can also be lost. This kind of struggle was deeply affected by the emotional state of the teachers because they have to deal with the demands that appear during the problem with their colleagues. The conflict intensifies the "emotional labor" with which she is occupied when examining her professional status, Based on Gavish and Friedman (2010), school environments will eliminate the personal interests, values, and personalities of teachers resulting in ' emotional work ' instead of ' emotional work.

Richardson and Watt (2018) stated that teachers whose primary motivation is to run from their responsibilities will not have a high degree of competence, are less likely to have positive relationships with their students or have a strong sense of job or school involvement. Elsa has a goal that she could be better in the future and she still believes that she could reach the goal. Teachers who feel able to achieve valuable objectives are likely to experience enhanced autonomy and skills and thus experience enhanced professional involvement. In addition to building genuine relationships with novice teachers, administrators are encouraged to provide novices with comprehensive orientation programs (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009)

The findings also imply that new teachers lack systematic and appropriate support necessary to mitigate the difficulties and challenges of the first year. The study suggests that programs to support new teachers during their first year should address contextual issues, especially isolation from colleagues and the lack of specific, relevant feedback regarding teaching performance. A teacher training strategy, such as peer teaching, is an opportunity for pre-service teachers to improve their teaching skills and helps to enhance teaching experiences (Fitriati, 20018, p. 414).

According to Schatz-Oppenheimer and Dvir (2014), positive and negative feelings form the professional pictures of teachers, helping to develop and build identity. Novice teachers often try to conceal their discomfort by internalizing their fears and concerns to the requirements of the institution and integrating them into the systemic standards of professional teachers who do not have the same emotional effects (p.140). So, the novice teachers were internalizing all the burdens and concerns they have but they did not express it clearly to the students. They instead reflected on their position in the classroom (Kelchtermans, 2011). In this process, their professional identity was reformulated to allow more purposeful agency in their environment. Regarding the development described above, this process was more demanding and created great emotional forces for novice teachers. Again, this working condition, which is constitutive

for self-esteem and job motivation, is the potential to bring teachers to experience vulnerability. However, according to Schutz, Nichols, and Schwenke (2018) teachers use their agency and attributions to navigate a heightened sense of frustration when their working conditions are not expected or desired ways. In these cases, those attributions tend to be the perceived reasons for success or failures, and they are the potential to influence the future identity of the teachers. The teachers should have the ability to find a constructive balance between their objectives and beliefs and the context with the needs of their workplace. The novice teachers should be prepared well since they were in the educational program. Fantilli and McDougall (2009) agree that novice teachers reported the need for teacher educational programs to include the exposure of practical tasks that are most difficult for teachers at the beginning of their career.

The findings of this study are not without limitation. Because there are only three participants, therefore, there may be some important findings related to novice teachers in East Nusa Tenggara that are not discovered yet. On the other hand, the researchers only conducted online interviews with novice teachers. So, there could be an issue of validation because the researchers did not meet the three participants face to face. Future researchers are encouraged to explore deeper the issues related to novice teachers in rural areas with better methodologies and techniques.

### **Conclusion and Suggestion**

The findings of this study revealed the struggles faced by the three EFL teachers during their first year of teaching. Their struggles are separated into internal and external struggles. The internal struggles are how the novice teachers deal with their emotions, self-efficacy, and ability in teaching and personal opinion about their job. The external struggles faced by the teachers are related to classroom management, the students' competencies and behaviors, the lack of resources and facilities in the school, the relations with their colleagues, and their salary. Generally, this study calls the attention of educational policymakers and stakeholders to see the realities in the real world of education. There should be a connection between what is taught in teacher education programs and the reality of in-service teaching. Since participants expressed their struggles of field experiences and self-reflection in their schools in the region, the results in this study focused our attention on the region of East Nusa Tenggara. Teacher education programs should strategically facilitate new teachers to be mindful of how the context of their future workplaces impacts their professional identity. Leadership preparation for school principals is essential in creating a good school culture for all teachers. The school leaders should also be acknowledged about the importance of understanding the novice teachers.

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## 19. Struggles and Strategies

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