

# Exploring Indonesian EFL Teachers' Tension during the Transition of Online to Offline Learning

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## Abstract

Since the outbreak of Covid-19, novice teachers have experienced considerable challenges and transformation to cope with such abrupt changes. This study aims to know the tension that novice teachers encountered during the transition of the Covid-19 Pandemic. The teaching-learning activity has now been shifting from the online class to the blended class and now to offline classes under some conditions. The method employed in this research was a qualitative method using open-ended questionnaires and interviews. The participants of this research were 5 novice teachers that first became a teacher during the pandemic. The study shows that novice teachers' tensions were influenced by personal factors, interpersonal factors, and organizational factors. To conclude, the intervention of all members of the school is important to make good teaching-learning activities.

**Keywords:** [Covid-19 pandemic, Novice teacher, Teachers' tension]

## INTRODUCTION

The covid-19 pandemic has been hitting all parts of the world since 2019. It was first detected in Wuhan, China in December 2019. Meanwhile, based on the data from World Health Organization, Covid-19 was detected first in March 2020 in Indonesia. The education system in Indonesia also makes new policies to suit the situation by following the needs of the students. In Indonesia, the school has been doing teaching-learning activities from online classes to blended classes to offline classes under some conditions. This change affects the school community. The school members such as the administrators, the staff, the teachers, the families of the students, and the students are also experiencing the effect of it. Therefore, it influences the tension that teacher experiences as a teacher is "the most important aspect in an educational organization" (Gholam, 2018, p. 2). Moreover, the tensions that novice teachers face are increased as they are the new members of the school. Besides the tension of being new teachers, they also feel the tension due to the Covid-19 outbreak. As the Covid-19 pandemic is still ongoing, novice teachers have to

always adapt to the situation. Hence, teachers nowadays need encouragement (PetraKova, Kanonire, Kulikoya, & Orel 2021).

Teachers' tensions can be divided into internal struggles and external struggles. The internal struggles include emotion, ability, efficacy, and dissatisfaction with the job. Meanwhile, the external struggles are the problems that novice teachers have with the facility of the teaching and the others from the school community. It is in accordance with a study which mentions identity transformation factors, internal factors, and external factors (Pravita & Kuswandono, 2021). Besides, the school culture, rules, beliefs, and social context are different one from another. Therefore, novice teachers need some adjustment. In addition to that, novice teachers are also experiencing the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic. Hence, this study wants to know more about the tensions that EFL novice teachers experience when they were first teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Becoming a teacher itself is a continuous process that teachers experience to shape their professional identity (Kuswandono, 2013). The

process itself starts from the teachers' first experience as student-teachers (Castaneda, 2011). Therefore, every challenge that teachers face is the factor that constructs their professional identity. Nowadays, the challenges increase as the Covid-19 pandemic happens. Furthermore, teaching is a tough job as it can give a high level of stress on the teachers (Herman, Prewitt, Eddy, Savale, & Reinke, 2020). Teachers are required to meet end goals for their personal gain and also community gain. Hence, it deals with many different people which resulted in tensions between the teachers themselves and others. Furthermore, the tensions that teachers experience are more likely to affect novice teachers as they might be overwhelmed. Novice teachers can be seen as new teachers who do not have much experience in teaching-learning activities. They are new to the school community. Despite their experience in the learning program for teaching, they are actually experiencing the real 'responsibility' when they are already graduated and gotten a job as teachers. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic might add to the novice teacher's tension. The changes in the system, the activity, and how they teach can add to the teachers' tension.

Several studies have been conducted to understand novice teachers. There are studies about it in Indonesia and also in other countries. One of the studies in Indonesia is conducted by Lomi & Mbato (2020). It is found that novice teachers' struggles might come from within one's self and others or the school community. Another study conducted by Nordin & Samsudin (2017) in Malaysia found the factors in constructing novice teachers' professional identity, which is linked closely with personal experience, professional context, and external political environment. A study conducted by (Santamaría, Mondragon, Santxo, & Ozamiz-Etzexebarria (2021), focusing on teachers in Spain, found that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the teachers showed the symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression. Dvir & Schatz-Oppenheimer (2020), in their study, focus on the experience of Israeli novice teachers while in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic and the construction of their professional identity process as they were dealing with the challenges. In addition, tensions that teachers experience through many chances in their teaching practice

are responsible for the development of the teachers' professional identity.

At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia, a study conducted by Lestiyawati & Widyantoro (2020) found that the teachers were using online chat, video conference, and a mix of both ways to help their students to learn. Yet, the main struggle was the teachers' lack of knowledge to use the technologies. In addition, the teachers were also experiencing a loss of motivation (Purwanto, Masduki, Fahlevi, Mufid, Agistiawati, Yoyok, & Siryani, 2020). Lizana, Vega-Fernades, Gomez-Bruton, Leyton, & Lera (2021) report the negative effect of Covid-19 on teachers' psychological and physical health. However, the situation from the Covid-19 pandemic also brings a positive impact on education. The teachers have a chance to learn and integrate technology in a more conventional way (Thaheem, Abidin, Mirza, & Pathan, 2022). It also encourages the students to become more independent in learning (Fuad, Ariyani, Suyanto, & Shidiq, 2020). Moreover, Alves, Lopes, & Precioso (2020) mention the importance of researching the well-being of teachers to enable the government to make and reform educational policies that suit the situation. Understanding the challenges faced by the teachers from those studies, this research tries to show the connection lines. There are many studies about challenges faced by the teachers while facing the Covid-19 pandemic and also studies about novice teachers. Yet, there is little study about novice teachers' tension during the transition of the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia. Hence, this study wants to conduct research in this area, the novice teachers' tension during the transition of the Covid-19 pandemic which focuses on the well-being of the novice teachers. Besides, this study employed a qualitative method with open-ended questionnaires and interviews which enable the research to portray the novice teachers' tension during the transition of the Covid-19 pandemic.

### *Novice Teachers' Tension*

Tension is one of the notions that construct a teacher's identity. Teachers' tension sees teachers' conflict with the school elements as a positive process while processing to become a teacher

(Castaneda, 2011). However, Wal, Oolbekkink-Marchand, Schaap, & Meijer (2019) argue that tension is not only happen one time. It happens continuously as the teachers are teaching. Yet, novice teachers can get overwhelmed by it as they are new in the teaching-learning career. Besides, the new condition, the Covid-19 pandemic forces novice teachers to adapt to the situation. Therefore, it is important to know and understand the tensions that novice teachers have to give all of the support that they need. Pillen, Beijaard, & Deb Brook (2013) argue about the reasons why tensions might happen; the transition period from student to teacher, and the dynamic yet complex interaction between personal and professional identities.

Based on the literature that Pillen et al. (2013) collected, there are 13 tensions that novel teachers face; 1) Feeling like a student versus being expected to act like an adult teacher. As novice teacher is considered new to the vocation or the profession, they might be shocked by the transition from student to teacher. The transition is when they are expected to be responsible as a professional teacher (student vs teacher). 2) Wanting to care for students versus being expected to be tough. The novice teachers might be confused about whether to show their emotions or not to their students. They might experience the urge to care for their students but they also need to remember that they have to be tough to make their students disciplined (care vs tough). 3) Feeling incompetent in terms of knowledge versus being expected to be an expert. As novice teachers are new teachers, they might feel they are incompetent in doing the teaching-learning activity. Yet, they are expected to know and be experts in the areas that they are teaching about (incompetent vs expert). 4) Experiencing a discrepancy between one's own, usually implicit, lay theories and theories that are relevant to the teaching profession. The novice teachers might confuse about whether to follow what he/she thinks is right and what others feel is right. 5) Experiencing conflicts between one's own and others' orientations regarding learning to teach. The different perspectives or opinions toward something in the teaching-learning activities can also make novice teachers confuse (conflicting orientations). 6) Being exposed to contradictory institutional attitudes. The novice teachers face

different attitudes between his/her school where he/she learned to teach and the school that he/she teaches. It might confuse them, as when they become teachers, they bring the attitudes that they learn while they are in school while they teach in an institution that has different attitudes (contradictory attitudes). 7) Wanting to invest time in practicing teaching versus feeling pressured to invest time in other tasks that are part of the teaching profession. The tasks that are faced by novice teachers might overwhelm them. Since they are new teachers, they might confuse about the management of task-load such as the teaching task and administration task, and also the need to practice their teaching (teaching vs other tasks). 8) Wanting to respect students' integrity versus feeling the need to work against this integrity. The different beliefs or opinions between the novice teachers and the students might make them confused about whether they should interact with them to change or to respect those differences (respect integrity). 9) Experiencing conflicting loyalties towards students and colleagues. Loyalties can be confusing for novice teachers as they are asked about confidence by the students about their colleagues. 10) Wanting to treat pupils as persons as a whole versus feeling the need to treat them as learners (or vice versa). When novice teachers have not decided yet on the treatment that they want to give their students, it might be confusing for them (students as a whole vs learners). 11) Experiencing difficulties in maintaining an emotional distance. As novice teachers are new to the profession, it is hard to maintain the emotional level. They have to be open yet they need to have personal privacy too. The balance of the personal and professional levels might confuse them (private life vs work). 12) Experiencing difficulties regarding approaches to teaching. The novice teachers do not have much experience in teaching practices. Therefore, they need time to figure out the right approaches for helping their students to learn. As it takes time, they need to adjust and readjust (peer vs teacher). 13) Misconceived career perspectives about the teaching profession. If novice teachers have a misconceived career perspective, and the reality is different from what they have expected, it can be difficult for them to continue the vocation.

These 13 tensions can emerge when novice teachers are in the process of teaching their students. When teachers face tensions, it can help the teachers in exercising to face challenges and developing their professional identity (Lomi & Mbato, 2020). However, the tensions that are not handled properly can lead to stress which assists with burnout and leaving the vocation (Diasti, 2020). Karsenti & Collin (2013) in their study report that tensions such as a great deal of workload, classroom management, and relationship with parents, students, and colleagues can lead to the leaving of vocation by novice teachers. Prilleltensky, Neff, & Bessel (2016) mention three reasons for teacher stress; personal, interpersonal, and organizational factors. Personal reasons consist of self-efficacy and abilities (Prilleltensky et al., 2016). Interpersonal factors include the relations that the teachers have with the school community; the school, colleagues, parents, and students (Prilleltensky et al., 2016). Meanwhile, the organizational factors include the regulation from the government, the school culture, and also the management of the school (Prilleltensky et al., 2016). These three factors become the reasons for the teachers' stress which influence directly the teachers. Further, it becomes novice teachers' tensions while doing the teaching-learning activity. Although the previous studies have critically discussed the teachers' tensions, they have not covered sufficient discussion on the experiences of novice teachers during the transition periods of online to offline classes. Therefore, this study aims to examine the tensions that novice teachers face by addressing the following research question "What tensions were experienced by EFL novice teachers during the transition periods of online, blended, and offline class?"

## METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to know the novice teacher's tension during the transition of the Covid-19 pandemic. Hence, this study employed a qualitative method using open-ended questionnaires and interviews to gain information about the teachers' tension during the transition of the Covid-19 pandemic. The participants of this research are five novice teachers who were chosen through purposive sampling. They are English teachers who have been teaching for a maximum of two years from 2020-2022. The five novice teachers consist of three elementary school teachers and two junior high school teachers. The researcher used an open-ended questionnaire first to gain information from the participants. The open-ended questions are used to gather information about the struggle that the teachers face. Pseudonyms were given to the participants to protect their confidentiality.

After that, the researcher conducted interviews with five novice teachers. The interview was conducted to get more detailed information about the tensions that the teachers faced during the transition of the Covid-19 pandemic. The interview was conducted online through an application namely zoom. At first, the interviewer explained what the teacher's tension is to the interviewees. After that, the interviewees were asked several semi-structured questions related to the tension that they felt during the transition from an online class to a blended class to an offline class under some conditions. When the interviewees had difficulties recalling the memories of tension that they have felt previously, the interviewer gave some examples of the teachers' tension to them. This interview was recorded and transcribed for further discussion. The transcription was decoded into several themes following the theory of the teacher's tension. The themes consist of personal factors, interpersonal factors, and organizational factors. Furthermore, the interview was analyzed by the researcher based on the discussion in the transcription.

**Table 1. Instrument Blueprint**

Instruments	Aspects	Tension Sources
Interview	Novice teachers' tension (Kälvermark et al. 2004; Katz & Raths, 1992)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Personal</li> <li>2. Interpersonal</li> <li>3. Organizational factors</li> </ol>
Open-ended questionnaire	Problems teachers face (Lestyanawati, 2020)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Problems</li> <li>2. Solutions</li> </ol>

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following discussion intends to answer the novice teachers' tension during the transition of the Covid-19 pandemic. The data, collected from the open-ended questionnaire and interview, shows that the EFL novice teachers experienced tensions due to personal factors, interpersonal factors, and organizational factors.

### *Personal Factors*

This section portrays the tensions that teachers face during the transition of the Covid-19 pandemic due to personal factors. According to Prilleltensky et al. (2016), personal factors consist of the teachers' feelings toward their ability and self-efficacy. Most of the teachers mentioned they experienced boredom while teaching their students during the transition of the covid-19 outbreak. R1 stated "I have experienced the too much feeling. I have tried to make the learning experiences more fun. Yet, the students did not come to the online class. I don't know whether the students were just being lazy or their parents did not care about their child's education. At that time, I consulted with their class teacher and I also tried to stay calm until they knew their mistakes". It is also supported by the statement from R3 who stated, "I got fed up with the situation because when the beginning of the pandemic, the school did not give the training for the teachers to make the material more interesting". R1 and R4 mentioned that when the school became offline, it became easier for them to handle the students and also it became more fun. Meanwhile, the R5 mentioned that she did not feel bored when she

started teaching because she mentioned that "There is always something new and funny from the students". Hence, it could be seen that the pandemic transition from online to offline helped the teachers and the students to make their learning more enjoyable.

Further, based on the interview, the novice teachers show that they were comfortable making mistakes. So, when they started to teach it was humane to have little confidence. Yet, after they began to teach so many times, they became more comfortable and confident. When they made a mistake, instead of becoming insecure, they treated those mistakes as a process of learning. Most of the novice teachers mentioned that if they found some difficulties to answer the students' questions, they asked the students to solve them together by searching on the internet or dictionaries. In addition, the novice teachers mentioned their time spend to deal with the school administration. Four out of five noted that they did not have difficulties in managing the time between teaching and doing the school administration stuff. They said that they can manage it well. Meanwhile, one of the novice teachers, R5, mentioned that she had difficulties in managing the time for teaching and doing the school administration stuff. Moreover, there was supervision from other teachers about the school administration. So, she had to manage her time well. Yet, even though she mentioned that it was difficult for her, she still managed to do it well.

The ability to manage personal and school life also adds to the novice teachers' tension. Three out of five novice teachers reported that they had

difficulties in maintaining a balance proportion of personal and school life. R1 reported, "There are lots of work that it is needed to be brought home". Further, R5 added that she also had duties at home so it was difficult for her to balance that. In addition, R3 mentioned, "The identity of teacher is the one that is difficult for me. The headmaster of my school encourages us to be a teacher who has integrity. So, we have to behave even if it is outside of the school". Meanwhile, the other two, R4 and R2, reported that they did not have difficulties in managing their personal and school life. So, most EFL novice teachers experienced difficulties in managing their time between personal and school life.

The EFL novice teachers also mentioned their changing perspectives about teaching. The changing perspectives have been moved toward positive perspectives. R1, R2, and R5 reported their changing perspectives toward the positive one, as R2 noted "It is not as hard as what I have thought before". R1 and R5 mentioned the reality of managing the class as their changing perspectives. Prior to that, R1 mentioned that she thought the relationship between teacher and student was formal. However, she added that actually, a close relationship with her students made her students learn better. Moreover, R5 added that the reality of managing the class in the school is different from what she had thought. Even though there were changing perspectives toward positive perception, there was also a changing perspective to a different perception. R4 noted that she previously thought that she wanted to be a friendly teacher and yet in reality when she taught, she could not always be friendly all the time. Sometimes, she also has to be strict to discipline her students. Meanwhile, R3 showed that she does not have a changing idea about teaching. She still thought that being a teacher, she has to be fun, creative, and close to her students. So, personal factors, such as EFL novice teachers' abilities and self-efficacy to cope with the situation, influence their tension while becoming a teacher.

### *Interpersonal Factors*

There are interpersonal factors which include the relationship of the teacher with the supervisor, students, parents, and colleagues (Prilleltensky et

al., 2016). The first one is the teachers' relationship with their colleagues. The novice teachers were asked about their different views about teaching with their colleagues. Participants R1, R2, and R3 reported that they did not have a different view from their colleagues that made them uncomfortable yet. Simultaneously, R4 noted the different views on how to deal with their students. Her colleagues suggested that she should teach gentler while sitting down for her students to listen to her. Yet, when she tried what her colleague suggested, it was a mess, as she described "I tried her suggestion and what happened was the students were chaos till the other teachers came outside of their class to see what was going on. So, I turn back to my first method, to the strict mode, but now I give detailed explanations why the students should do or not do something". Moreover, R5 explained about when she was asked to do something, not at the right time. So, she lost focus.

Further, three out of five novice teachers, reported that they looked up to their senior colleagues. R2 noted that her colleagues inspired her about how to deal with the students. It is also supported by R3 explanations that her colleagues inspired her to manage her time well. It was because even though her colleagues are married and have young children, they manage to finish all of their school tasks. Moreover, R5 added that she looked up to her senior who was always supportive of her. From the data above, it could be seen that novice teachers have a good relationship with their colleagues. Besides looking up to their senior colleagues, they also looked up to some of their teachers in the past. R4 told about the teacher when she was an intern in a school. She described how her teacher's way of teaching was admiring. Further, R1 also mentioned her teacher in senior high school. She was inspired by her teacher who was really organized. The experiences of interacting with their previous teachers while they were students can give a substantial influence on their life or their identity construction as a teacher.

In addition, the novice teachers might also feel the tension in their relationship with their students. When the EFL novice teachers were asked about their confusion when they had to deal with their students as students or wanted to acknowledge that the students are human too. All

of the participants agreed that when the students made mistakes, they acknowledged their students as humans that could make mistakes too. However, it did not stop at that moment, the novice teachers also guided their students toward the right path. In addition, when novice teachers were asked about when the students had a different view from them, whether they wanted to accept it or change it. All of the participants reported that they were really appreciative of their students' views. However, if it was wrong, they tried to change it by giving them reasons or explanations why it should be or should not be like that. Besides, all of the novice teachers agreed that it was difficult for them to situate themselves when they had to be friends and when they had to act as teachers. When they had to scold their students but they actually wanted to be friendly toward their students. However, it could be completed with a different method. So, instead of scolding their students, they gave explanations or reasons, as R5 described "It is okay to be angry, but you have to manage your emotion so it can be focused on educating". Based on the explanation above, it could be seen that tensions could come from the students. However, as long as the teachers manage it well, the tension becomes a place for learning.

In addition, the teachers were asked whether they felt confused because they were considered experts while they were still learning. R1, R2, R3, and R4 agreed that they feel confused when they were considered experts by other people, such as their students, their colleagues, and their school. R1 explained about when her students asked why she could forget something. Meanwhile, R2 mentioned that her students and school considered her an expert. R3 added that she was even considered an expert by her colleagues. So, her colleagues considered that she was already knowledgeable about everything in the school. R4 noted that her school considered that novice teachers were smarter and brought a transformation to the school. They thought that sometimes it was burdensome for them but they also thought it was a way of learning to become an actual expert.

### *Organizational Factors*

The organizational factors such as the school culture, management of the schools, and the government's regulation might add to the novice teachers' tension (Prilleltensky et al., 2016). Based on the interview with the EFL novice teachers, it could be seen that the school policy influences the novice teachers' tension. Participants R1, R3, and R4 showed that the school policy made it difficult for them to teach. R1 explained, "there is no book that becomes the reference, so the teaching activity is based on the summary book that the teacher makes". R3 added that her school had a policy for online learning that only lasted for two hours. She thought that at that time it was not enough. However, she kept on trying. Further, R4 also noted that when the online class still lasted, the permission for attendance was too easy. So, they thought that those policies were not suitable for their students. Meanwhile, participants R2 and R5 mentioned that they did not have a different view of the school yet. From the data above, it could be seen that organizational factors, especially school policies, might add to the novice teachers' tensions.

### **CONCLUSION**

The finding of this study revealed the tensions that novice teachers face during the transition of the Covid-19 pandemic. Their tensions are influenced by personal factors, interpersonal factors, and organizational factors. The tensions from the personal factors vary, such as the tensions between private life vs work, wanting responsibility, and teaching vs other tasks. Further, the tensions from interpersonal factors also vary, such as conflicting orientations, students as a whole vs learner, mentor vs own way, respect integrity, student vs teacher, and peer vs teacher. In addition, the organizational factor consists of contradictory attitudes. The finding shows that novice teachers' tensions were more complex while in the online class. Meanwhile, after the teaching-learning activities are conducted offline, it becomes easier for the teachers. However, this study has a few limitations. First, this study is conducted with small participants which consist of five participants. Hence, the finding can not be

generalized. Second, the study focuses on the tensions that novice teachers face. Further research can develop a study that includes the factors that make teachers stay on the job. Hence, the finding suggests that it is important for the rule maker and school members to have good teaching-learning activities and conditions for the students. As these tensions from personal, interpersonal, and organizational factors are handled in the right way, the teaching-learning activity will be beneficial for students and teachers. Further, it will also be beneficial for other school members.

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