EFL teachers' professional experiences in the southeastern Türkiye

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ABSTRACT

Although a number of English language teachers commence their professional careers in under-resourced and underprivileged regions, far too little attention has been paid to their experiences as an area of research, particularly in Türkiye. This qualitative study investigates the concerns and challenges that English language teachers experience in the southeastern region of Türkiye. The participants consisted of nine novice English language teachers in different school grades in state schools. Interviews were used as a data collection tool. Participants' reflections and comments revealed teachers' sociological and pedagogical negative or positive experiences after their appointment to Şırnak in the southeastern region of Türkiye. The findings of the study revealed context-specific challenges these teachers experience and how they deal with these challanges. Implications are presented in line with the findings to guide administrators, teacher educators, and policymakers.

Introduction

When novice teachers are alone in the classroom, they experience "reality shock", and/or "culture shock" (Veenman, 1984). It is almost impossible to find a classroom or school environment exactly as described in books or by university instructors. Most novice teachers struggle to adapt themselves to an unfamiliar professional environment (Akcan, 2016) and some teachers may decide to leave the profession during this transition period.

After their theoretical education and some practice at university, novice teachers are faced with the real world and "real" teaching life. Lee (2017) observed that teachers might leave their profession because of adaptation and context-related problems, such as challenges with adapting to new school culture, or problems with colleagues or administration. Darling-Hammond (2003) mentions four major factors, which lead teachers to quit: salaries, working conditions, lack of preparation, and lack of mentoring support in the early years. Flores and Day (2006) mentioned the effects of experiences on novice teachers, stating that novice teachers' former teachers play a key role in their career choice and their behavior. They take

former teachers as role models, which might shape their first teaching experiences, although this may have positive or negative influences. In contrast to these past influences, in-service teachers may believe that their more recent university education was not adequate to prepare them for different classroom environments and student profiles (Akcan, 2016). The study seeks to understand novice teachers' thoughts, expectations, and experiences, their views of support needed, their perceptions of their schools, and their plans. A qualitative approach has been employed; the interview is the only tool for data collection and findings leading to implications for administrators, teacher educators, and policymakers.

Challenges of teachers

Çakmak (2013) emphasizes the importance of the first and subsequent years. Most research on the first years reveals specific problems, which can be categorized as; culture shock, instruction, students, parents, administrators, fellow teachers, and extreme feelings of isolation (Ryan, 1974). The transition period affects personal and professional growth, and class management experiences are essential to survival and effectiveness during the first days (McDonald & Elias, 1983). In the final year of training, student teachers have the chance to experience how to teach, observed by a supervisor, an experienced teacher. However, this 'controlled class' environment is not a real classroom, because students are aware that the supervisor teacher has the control, and that misbehavior will be seen by the supervisor, who is also their 'real' teacher. Also, there is a classroom culture already established by the supervisor, and the student-teacher will find it impossible to establish a new culture or new classroom routines and therefore has to continue with this pre-existing culture (Ryan, 1986). It is important, therefore, that teacher education programs should be able to prepare teachers for any possible settings that they may encounter.

Challenges inside the class

Feedback from our participants shows that the general expectation from novice teachers is to be able to implement the knowledge gained from teacher training immediately on beginning teaching. However, Faez and Valeo (2012) argue that it takes time to apply the theoretical knowledge. After graduation, teachers encounter a different environment and a wide range of students. In Akcan's (2016) study participants mostly cite being inadequately informed or prepared for such workplaces. Uztosun (2016) compared pre-service and in-service English language teachers' efficiency beliefs in Türkiye, finding that 50 participants out of 157 held negative beliefs about the effectiveness of their pre-service education. This study reflects the broader Turkish context, but in this study, our is to find problems specific to south-eastern Türkiye; there are cultural differences, and students' and parents' perspectives of English different compared with other regions.

Challenges outside the class

In addition to educational problems such as motivating students, and classroom discipline, teachers can also experience some administrational problems. One of the problems Veenman (1984) mentioned is inadequate or insufficient teaching materials, and teachers need the support

of the administration to resolve this, but principals might be indifferent or unconcerned towards this problem; on the other hand, administration expectations might be unrealistic, and teachers' efforts may be overlooked, creating tensions (Öztürk & Yıldırım, 2013) which may affect teachers' behavior inside and even outside of the school. Kardos et al. (2001) discuss factors that affect the integration of novice teachers into the school culture. First, colleagues' behaviors, and their interest in novices' needs and concerns, can affect the degree to which the novice teacher feels welcome professionally. Second, an important role in professional culture is played by how well the school is established. In a new school, they can contribute to the process of creating professional culture, but in a well-established school, their contributions may be ignored, and they may feel isolated. The third is how the novice teacher is introduced to school culture.

Support for novice teachers

When EFL teachers start to work in a different culture, whether in their own country or abroad, they mostly face students with different understanding levels, and need to adapt approaches accordingly. Sometimes they may need to abandon the theoretical knowledge from the teacher training program and create completely new techniques and approaches. For this approach to succeed, experienced teachers should be involved in the process as mentors. According to Feiman-Nemser et al.'s (1999) research, mentoring is the most popular induction system, but unfortunately may only perpetuate traditional norms and practices, rather than promote high-quality teaching (pp. 3-4). Novice teachers who are left alone to cope with the problems of adaptation may give up on their careers (Crookes, 1997; Peacock, 2009). Winter and McGhie-Richmond (2005) suggest that novice teachers and experienced teachers should collaborate.

Methodology

Research Design and Data Collection Tools

This study employs a qualitative approach and case study to reveal the experiences, thoughts, feelings, and experiences of teachers in Silopi about teaching English in underprivileged circumstances. Grounded theory is implemented in the research, which provides researchers with methods consisting of systematic but flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data thus researchers can construct theories from the data (Charmaz, 2014). This research is an in-depth analysis of participants' teaching experiences; therefore, the case study method is followed. Listening to participants' stories was only part of the process, the stories needed to be put into context. By contextualizing the experiences, thoughts, and behaviors, we were able to understand their actions (Seidman, 2006). We used the standardized open-ended interview method to gain "in-depth information pertaining to participants' experiences and viewpoints" (Turner, 2010, p. 754). We conducted three different interviews divided into different themes: first, teachers' thoughts and experiences, second, the support they were provided and expectation they had, and third, their school contexts and future plans, which were conducted a month apart with each participant (See Appendix).

The most important thing in the interviews is how participants convey their stories. The language they use points to their degree of sincerity. Teachers' stories of their experiences

reveal their consciousness, and "it gives access to the most complicated social and educational issue because social and educational issues are abstractions based on the concrete experience of people." (Seidman, 2006, p. 7). We focused on the individual experiences and personal stories of the participants' professional life. Professional stories have great effects on reflective and interpretative thinking, regarding novice teacher's educational life, especially when they share their thoughts and experiences with more experienced teachers (Schatz-Oppenheimer & Dvir, 2014).

For the ethics part of the research, the Provincial Directorate of National Education granted permission for these teachers currently working in state schools. The participants were informed about the anonymity of the research. Most of those approached were unwilling to be involved in the research, having doubts about sharing their experience in their workplace. Interviews were conducted and recorded via phone calls from home, as this created a more relaxed and flexible atmosphere, and made it easier to converse. Some participants preferred to send their reflections and comments by audio recording. Three different interviews were conducted a month apart with each participant. This allowed participants time to reflect on their behaviors, which made the data more meaningful and understandable (Seidman, 2006). Interviews lasted approximately 20-25 minutes each.

Context and Participants

The study was conducted in Silopi, which is a province of the city of Şırnak in southeastern Türkiye. Silopi borders Iraq and Syria, and most of the people work in the commercial sector, e.g. in transport. The mother tongue in Silopi is Kurdish, and people learn Turkish at school. The province does have many immigrants; in fact, local people resist immigration. There are direct flights only to Ankara and Istanbul, and there is one university in Şırnak. People's perspective on school and teachers has become more positive over the years. Tourism attractions and opportunities for entertainment in Silopi are very limited.

The participants were chosen among newly appointed English language teachers experiencing a new culture and different living standards. The participants in this research can be categorized as novices according to Farrell's (2012) observation that those "who enter a new cultural context for the first time could also be considered novice teachers." (p. 437). New assigned nine English teachers (4 male, 5 female) who have 0-4 years of experience have contributed to the research by sharing their valuable experiences. They teach at secondary school and high school levels. The number of the participants had to be restricted to nine due to compelling conditions of interviews that are conducted face to face and via phone because of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Data Analysis

In the research, grounded theory was used to explain the educational process of participants (Creswell, 2012) to gain insight into teachers' thoughts and experiences. Audio recordings of in-depth interviews were transcribed for an accurate analysis. The first aim of this study is to gain insight into teachers' thoughts and experiences and in-depth interviews are used to understand participant's perspectives, meanings, and experiences, participants were chosen

from active teachers who have their first experience with the research topic that is one of the key characteristics according to Charmaz (2014). While analyzing the transcribed data, redundancies were removed such as repetitive words or stumbles of the participants. However, the participants' words remained unchanged. In-depth interviews created a great amount of transcribed texts out of 27 different interviews, which were transcribed approximately in two weeks. Open, axial, and selective coding were used for the development of themes (Cohen et al., 2005). Transcribed data were coded to identify interviewees' responses, feelings, and thoughts. Codes were induced from the interviews to thematize overall findings. We first segmented data for the open coding phase, and then other categories were clustered with one central category in the axial coding phase, and finally, identified axial codes reduced to one core theme, which is the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2012). A three-stage interview we adopted in the data collection improved credibility, interviews were conducted in different months (Seidman, 2006). The truthfulness and consistency in the answers of the participants in this study for the three different interviews provide very clear evidence of the situation of the participants (Ary et al., 2010). Three interviews are divided into different themes: teachers' thoughts and experiences, their support and expectation, and their schools and plans to make it easier to focus on participants' stories and experiences. Three different interviews were conducted a month apart with each participant. This allowed participants time to reflect on their behaviors, which made the data more meaningful and understandable (Seidman, 2006). Interviews lasted approximately 20-25 minutes each. Participants' expressions are mentioned as "T1" which stands for "Teacher1" and the interview number is mentioned as "Int.1" in the findings section.

Findings

Challenges in the classroom

After the participants were appointed, they started a new life in Silopi. Participants expressed that they encountered very different student profiles and schools than their expectations and experienced a range of professional challenges inside and outside the classroom. The novice teachers stated that their teacher education in the university was mostly based on theoretical knowledge. In the ELT course books, classrooms were depicted with well-behaved, quiet students who are willing and motivated to learn English as a second language. However, after the teachers experienced real teaching, they saw the ideal classroom environment and students do not exist. T1, for example, reports that the experience was very different from the one shown in the university.

> In the university, they need you to feel like everything is so easy, teaching English is so simple, and you can use technology and everything but in reality, it is so much more different. There is a whole world between these two. "In the district, I am teaching there is no smartboard, there is no electricity at all, and there are always electricity cut-offs, I have many difficulties while trying to use technology because I cannot use smartboard or things that can be used with electricity. I mostly used whiteboards and some materials that I have prepared, and they do not teach this in college. This is the biggest difference." (Int. 1)

For students, Silopi does not offer good job opportunities unless students escape from the city. Students' world is their village, with little interaction with those beyond their local community.

Televisions play a crucial role in their knowledge of the world. Most of them lack ambition. Male students are most likely to follow their fathers' occupations, but female students are more likely to get married and look after children. As T2 expresses, students' perceptions of learning English:

> They always want to graduate the middle and secondary school and they love going on. The family told them so because of that they take idols, their father, their mothers, their uncles, etc. So English is not the second plan for them it is the third or fourth plan actually in our society that is the people things that English is not an OK lesson. It's not an important one because we don't need it in every aspect of life, they say. (Int. 1)

Student profiles may not match those in the university textbooks. Every country, city, or region has its unique sociocultural structure, and approach to schools; lessons have variations across contexts. Language education is seen as different from subjects like math and science because language is not generally a requirement for university entrance. This situation affects students' motivation on learning a foreign language. Teachers can feel frustrated when they try to use inappropriate techniques and approaches. In Silopi, students' motivation is very low, English is seen as an unnecessary burden, and consequently, the proficiency level is low.

The teachers, making classroom management harder, also identified overcrowded classrooms as a problem. T7 has some complaints about the number of students "There is too much noise because of the crowd. There are forty students" (Int. 1). T5 stresses overloaded classrooms in his school and the negative effects of crowded classrooms on his teaching:

> I have in one classroom more than 50 students. I have over 50 students. So, the techniques and the method you are taught at university sometimes can be useless during your teaching. So, you have to give feedback to the students individually and your lack of time. And you cannot achieve your plan in a very perfect way. Sometimes you have to skip something. (Int. 1)

The biggest challenge in the classroom was the language barrier according to almost all of the novice teachers. Silopi is in southeastern Türkiye where the mother tongue is Kurdish. Kurdish-speaking children do not start to learn Turkish until they begin school. This makes teaching English harder because most students cannot understand Turkish. English language teachers appointed to this region start their career with this disadvantage. T1 says that "the biggest challenge for me is the language barrier because students always talk among themselves in Kurdish" and she continues:

> I am a teacher in the elementary school and kids in this district learn Turkish when they start school, they speak Kurdish beforehand, so in the elementary school English language starts in second grade, but children don't even know Turkish well. So, trying to teach them English is much harder because I use English and Turkish in the classroom, but they don't understand Turkish well. For example, last day I asked students open to their notebooks, I also mimic them, and showed them my gestures but they didn't understand it. When I say notebook, they understand the student book and they open that. This is the biggest problem. (Int.1)

Participants' statements show that overloaded classrooms, unmotivated students, and lack of physical conditions are general problems while teaching in Silopi. These language-related issues should not be seen as soft problems; on the contrary, they can pose disadvantages in education.

Challenges outside of the classroom

Teacher education provides a great deal of useful knowledge about teaching for pre-service teachers, but there could be issues and topics that cannot be learned in university, including adapting to the environment of the workplace. Pedagogy, teaching techniques, and methods can be learned to some extent, but culture, habits, traditions, social life, and people will always vary according to country, city, or village, which teachers need to adapt. This affects their professional life. Şırnak is an underdeveloped city as is its district, Silopi. Political conflicts in this region have a major effect on the people; it has borders with Iraq and Syria, with their ongoing political upheavals. Unfortunately, Silopi is the first place to be affected by problems in these countries. Most of the schools operate double-shift schooling; morning schools which are for secondary schools start at around 7 o'clock and finish at 12:30, and afternoon schools, which are for primary schools start around 1 o'clock and finish at 17:30, using the same building for both levels, especially in the villages. The study reveals how teachers spend their lives in Silopi and how their working hours affect them and their thoughts on working in Silopi in the future. Almost all expressed their reluctance, and a desire to return to their hometown was very common. T1 does not intend to teach in Silopi in the future because the environment is not suitable for her, after a long teaching day she has to attend seminars to finish her teacher candidate education:

> I get up mostly at five a.m. because I have to prepare for school and classes. I do not like to prepare in the evenings, do not have time for that. After preparing and getting ready, I go out at 7:20 and we go to school. At 7:40, the classes start a kind of tiring because we have to stay at school until 4 a.m. After school, we go to seminars, and workshops. They start at 6; it is a full program for me. I do not have much time to rest and go out, I just go to school, then eat something and go to seminars and just sleep actually. (Int. 1)

T8 does not complain about the working conditions or lack of facilities in Silopi, but he is intending to return to his hometown:

> In my opinion, regardless of where who, and what you teach, the essence of the work never changes. If a teacher sees the eyes of their students light up and feel a sense of fulfillment, he/she can teach everywhere. As for me, in the future, I plan to teach in my hometown, Isparta. Because all of my family members and friends live there. (Int. 3)

T9 has developed a career plan, which involves remaining in Silopi, she says "I want to be the headmaster in Silopi. I believe that management has a very important role in increasing success." (Int. 3) None of the teachers thinks about continuing their career in Silopi for different reasons. The reason behind this decision should be examined carefully for possible solutions.

Administration plays a key role in the school, responsible for the management of school, class and lesson arrangements, teacher adaptation, parent collaboration, and security. According to participants' statements, an interesting administration is very valuable for them. They did not heavily criticize their administration, but noted some drawbacks, for example, 'lots of paperwork' is one of the problems frequently encountered. According to the findings, participants mentioned challenges including 'lack of support', 'lack of understanding of the nature of language teaching', and 'heavy workloads with crowded classrooms. One of the critics of excessive paperwork is T5. He stresses the overcrowded classes and the paperwork this entailed:

> I have told you before that I have more than 50 students in one classroom and dealing with all the students individually is a big problem with these things, you have to do paperwork. You have to prepare many documents and many things, and it makes an extra burden and extra stuff, too, that all these things. I think it should be limited. The teachers should do less paperwork to be more efficient in the classroom. (Int. 3)

Farrell (2006) uses 'collegial relationship" to describe teachers' relationships with the administration and their colleagues. This study also focuses on teachers' thoughts on their colleagues through the interviews. Teachers' room behavior example, is most likely to be noticed by novice teachers. Colleagues play an important role in someone's working environment. Participants' sentences are the proof of this statement. Even a small grouping may disturb and cause a feeling of exclusion. T1 remarked that although some teachers are helpful, not all are so welcoming:

> The teacher's room is a little bit more dramatic; I think. Because there are mostly groups. People sit and talk with whom they get along, but you can see the groups very clearly and because I have just come to school, I am not just getting along with them that much because they have already built their groups. I just have to go there and talk to someone but they are not so friendly….there are some people I liked from the first moment, they try to be helpful also they've experienced the same things, they know what I feel, they are trying to help me to get over with. However, there are some people like the one who do not even say good morning, they do not just look at you and this just makes me feel angry. (Int. 1)

Parents should be loyal supporters f teachers, because, without their support, the teaching process will be more challenging. They are responsible for students' education after school hours, and this support can also affect teachers' performance. In Silopi, large families with relatively uneducated parents are common, resulting in neglected students in most schools. The mothers especially lack education because of their position in the culture of the southeastern region. T1 has a comment about women and mothers in Silopi:

> Local women don't have a lot of respect in front of the local people because they treat women differently like the woman only works for giving birth. And these things always bother you. They don't treat teachers and other people who work there like that. But you can see that every day. And this always bothers you. (Int. 3)

As a result of crowded families and uneducated parents, there are many disadvantaged students, especially in the villages. Sometimes students cannot buy the lesson materials or even a pair of shoes. T5 teaches in a poor district school and he says that:

> I have told you before that find the materials. They may not find any shop to buy the materials to buy some readers or something that you need…. The financial situation of the family is not that good sometimes. Moreover, some children actually of them have no shoes to wear. (Int. 3)

Answers of the participants to the parent-related questions show that they need and expect parents' collaboration. It can be concluded that conscious parents can help to raise the quality of education.

Strategies to Cope with These Challenges and Concerns

Teachers need to overcome the challenges to create a healthy learning environment with their limited sources. Support is very important while dealing with these challenges. This support may come from families, administration, colleagues, and mentors. Teachers' professional development and shaping of their professional identity emerge from their coping strategies. After finishing university, taking exams, and passing interviews, a person is appointed to a state

school somewhere in the country. In this situation, the person looks for support from the environment. Other than teachers' families, the people in the teachers' new school should be the first to offer help. Without this, the adaptation phase could be very difficult. Participants' reflections and comments show much support was given during this adaptation phase. T4 indicates the helpfulness of the vice principal "If I want to ask something the first person that I usually go to vice-principal of the school. If he is not busy, he helps me and explains everything in detail that I need to know" (Int. 2). This kind of management understanding is the key to the working environment, which will allow contented teachers; T8 also highlighted the positive effect of his administration:

> My school administrator has had a positive effect on me. If I make any mistake, he tries to be supportive, and friendly and he shows me how to struggle with a problem before they develop. For example, sometimes students' parents behave rudely in an unexpected way, so I learn how to balance the needs and desires of parents. (Int. 1)

Motivation is one of the problems mentioned. Students of this region plan to start working rather than further studying. Most students plan to follow their fathers into jobs such as truck drivers or tradesmen. This affects their motivation in the class because they see school as an obstacle. Some see the benefits of graduating at least from high school, but even for these students, English is less important than math and science. To overcome this problem of low motivation, teachers try different techniques. One of these is to talk with parents, who are highly influential on students. Another approach, taken by T8, is to give a motivational talk in the classroom:

> I talk to them about their futures and their goals, guiding them through their education route if they want to become a doctor, a lawyer, or a teacher. They all have different goals, but no matter what their age or level, students must understand that they should try to speak English as much as they can, even if it is for simple greetings, requests, or statements. I want my all students to know English to increase their chances of getting a good job. (Int. 1)

Mentors are another important group who can help a teacher to adapt to the working environment. When a teacher is first appointed, they seek help and support for adaptation. Every school has its system and culture, which a newly appointed teacher must adapt. This includes the students, their habits even sometimes their language, like in Silopi, which is Kurdish, and not Turkish. Thus, if someone is new in this job, classroom management could be very demanding. Teachers appreciate the efficiency of the mentor system in Türkiye, but some have complaints about the paperwork involved. At this point, they also appreciate the help of their mentors. T5 says he was happy with his mentor, and T1's candidate process is still continuing despite the burdensome paperwork, she is positive about the experience:

> My relationship with my mentor was good. Moreover, he was a nice man and he did not cause so much trouble for me, he helped me, especially he helped me with some paperwork and with the process and he informed me of many things that I was not accustomed to. Therefore, it was a nice process. (T5, Int. 2)

> I am still a teacher candidate. Moreover, it is frustrating because we have to fill a teacher candidate file and it is exhausting, and it takes a lot of time. Besides that, my mentor is good at guiding and answering all my questions. Moreover, she is not a strict person. This is a good thing for me because it just makes me more relaxed and it just helps me in any way. (T1, Int. 2)

In conclusion, we can understand that a mentor program is beneficial for novice teachers' adaptation. Although extra paperwork was a drawback, the support of the mentors

was a clear benefit for all the teacher candidates and novice teachers. Professional development is a lifelong learning process, which leads to teachers adjusting their teaching according to the needs of their students with a significant effect on their professional growth (Daloglu, 2004). Teachers' professional development begins when start shaping their teaching techniques and methods according to theories learned at university. After practicing in their pre-service training, they begin as novice teachers. In this process, they gradually shape their teaching and their professional development. Teachers indicate differences between university practices and state school teaching experience. T8, for example, describes one of his practices in his university class:

> When I was a university student, I gave a lesson to my classmates. Everybody was quiet, eager to learn and understand everything, as they know English very well. However, teaching English now, I mean in reality, teaching to your real students, I come across some teaching problems in the courses now, as I have never experienced this kind of thing before. (Int. 2)

It is understood that not all the practices prepare teachers for every type of student in Türkiye. Teachers from the west can experience unexpected events and meet with a very different student profile when they start their teaching careers. Pre-service programs should therefore prepare teachers for every teaching environment. All participants try to survive and shape their teaching accordingly. Their answers show that well-prepared and applied teacher education is very helpful for faster and better improvements.

Discussion

Teachers' Thoughts and Expectations

Participants were nine English language teachers from different grades in state schools. Their reflections and comments on three different interviews helped to portray the feeling of being an English language teacher in Silopi. Regarding the inside of the classroom, teachers mentioned different problems. They were disappointed with the real classroom conditions after their teacher education, finding that their imagined classrooms do not exist in real-life state schools. This finding shows a resemblance with Akcan's (2016) study, which indicates the need for comprehensive preparation of teacher candidates in teacher education programs. Teachers realized that the expectation of motivated students in an ideal classroom environment conflicts with real-life (Veenman, 1984). Insufficient equipment is another problem, especially in the rural regions there are teaching material problems like lack of smart boards, projectors and even electricity cuts are not unusual. The success rate in underprivileged schools is lower than expected.

Teachers note the difficulty of classroom management and following students' progress. They try to find novel ways to manage students in classes with approximately 50 students, where it is common to see students walking around and talking. We cannot expect motivated students in this kind of class, where even hardworking students lose interest. In Öztürk and Yıldırım (2013), almost half of the participant teachers in 8 provinces of Türkiye identified classroom management as the most challenging aspect of teaching. All teachers mentioned language problems in the classroom, as an additional classroom management issue. All participants mentioned language as a challenge to healthy student-teacher communication. Participants' reflections and comments show that language challenge hinders interaction in the

class. Since their mother tongue is Kurdish, most students do not learn Turkish until they start their formal education. Teaching policies in Türkiye are based on the average student and do not consider that student profile in this region is likely to be hindered because of the mother tongue.

Events outside the classroom are equally important as the inside. Teachers' social life, working conditions, working hours, and parents' involvement in student progress can affect the classroom indirectly. The double-shift schooling system is very common, especially in the rural areas of Silopi and most of the participants teach in the morning shift, which means getting up at around 6 o'clock to travel approximately ten kilometers to their village school, even though their school finishes at noon, they suffer from this uncomfortable routine. One of the biggest challenges is parents' interest and attitude. Participants expressed that parents ignore their children's education, do not attend parent meetings, help with homework or follow students' progress. Teachers did not mention many challenges with colleagues, except being excluded from the conversation by groups of teachers. One of the teachers expressed discomfort about the lack of communication among teachers at her school, even regarding morning greetings.

Support and Teachers' Plans

All teachers attested the administration did their best to help with students or other school issues. Other than administrators and colleagues, seminars are given by the district directorate of national education and mentor programs contributed to adaptation to the life in province and state school systems. The biggest complaints about this system were the paperwork for candidate teachers and the length of seminars after school in the evening. Participants were happy to collaborate with their mentors and learn from their experiences. Regarding professional identity, teachers tend to create their path in the struggle with the particular teaching environment and students. Using English while teaching is emphasized in university, but is prevented by the language barrier mentioned before. Because of insufficient opportunities and lack of space to develop themselves, most do not intend to continue their teaching career in Silopi. They indicated their desire to move to other cities, and experience different teaching environments. Lastly, findings revealed their perspectives on professional development and professional identity. Silopi provides little opportunity for professional development. To study for M.A teachers need to get acceptance from a university in another city, and transportation from Silopi to other cities is not regular.

Concluding Remarks

In this study, some implications are deduced from the experiences, thoughts, and ideas of participants currently teaching in the southeastern region of Türkiye. According to teachers' statements, administrators should be fair and equal to everyone in the school. Their presence in the school provides confidence to deal with problems teachers encounter. Findings show that a teacher finds a direct solution from an administrator, the teacher's motivation increases, and their attitude to the environment improves. Teachers' expectation from administrators is to decrease the workload and create more time to prepare lessons and constitute a less stressful working environment. They should be the bridge between teacher and parent and be aware of

beginning teachers' need for adaptation. Participants revealed the importance of teacher education and that pre-service training was not sufficient for real teaching experience. Findings show that participants were not prepared for their student profiles in the southeastern region. Teacher trainers should consider that pre-service teachers should be prepared for teaching across the country or even, the world, and they need to be ready for any difficulties that could arise. Teacher trainers should give more time and space for teaching practices and material development lectures to increase teacher confidence. Findings of the research show that the mother tongue undermines progress when taking Turkish language high school and university exams. This situation creates an unequal environment for students of the southeastern region. The illiterate student profile is relatively common in this region therefore; policymakers should focus on more appropriate curriculum and exam methods. Moreover, greater parental awareness of the importance of education is necessary. Policymakers need to consider this while deciding on education policies and they should consider teachers' experiences and opinions. Novice teachers can be trained to be equipped with speaking survival classroom Kurdish language or Arabic language in other districts of Türkiye. This education can be provided as part of in-service training.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

Teachers' Thoughts and Experiences

1. Please tell me about your journey from being a student to becoming an English teacher.
2. What were your thoughts to become a teacher in the past? Did you always want it? What did affect your decision to be an English teacher?
3. How long have you worked in this district?
4. Can you compare your teaching practices at university and teaching experiences in Silopi? Please explain with specific examples.
5. Can you tell me your typical day at school? From the time you woke up till the time you sleep.
6. Have you ever experienced any unexpected or striking event?
7. How is your relationship with your students, colleagues, and administration?
8. Can you talk about difficulties inside and outside the classroom you experience? How do you overcome these difficulties?

Support and Expectations

1. Can you please give information about your student profile? What are your expectations from your students at the end of the year?
2. What kind of support do you get from your administration, colleagues, and parents? Please give a detailed and specific example.
3. Has your perspective changed on teaching English after you have appointed Silopi? What were your expectations when you were a university student and what are your thoughts on teaching English now? Could you mention some of your specific thoughts?
4. Are you still a teacher candidate, if so how is your relationship with your mentor? If you were a candidate, how was your relationship?
5. What kind of school and administration would be an ideal one for you? Please explain it with examples.
6. You get a bunch of seminars or you did in the past. Does/Did it have any effects on your adaptation to Silopi?

Teachers' Schools and Plans

1. What is it like to be an English teacher in Silopi?
2. How do you express your thoughts on school culture? How do you describe your school when other people ask you about it?
3. Every principle has a different management understanding. How would you describe your principal's management and if you had a chance to give any piece of advice to him/her what would it be?
4. Do you plan to teach in Silopi in the future? If not, why?
5. What are your plans for teaching? How long do you plan to sustain this occupation?
6. Would you recommend other teacher candidates to work in your school and Silopi? Do you have any advice to them?