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Journey to Mastery: Understanding the Lived Experiences of Novice English Teachers in Handling Practical Research Subject in Senior High School

Jeramee Tecson Lizaso^{*1}, Shienna Marie Caparas²

1,2. University of Cabuyao, Philippines

* Correspondence: jhailizaso@gmail.com

Abstract: Teaching is a professional and dynamic calling that demands not only pedagogical content knowledge but also the capacity to identify and apply recent methods based on evidence-based research activities. Practical research is an applied course in the K to 12 senior high school curriculum that equips students with basic inquiry, analysis, and academic writing skills. This study explored the lived experiences of novice English teachers tasked to handle Practical Research subject in senior high schools in Santa Rosa, Laguna. These teachers have been accorded limited training in research teaching, so they typically encounter many challenges, including inadequate preparation, inadequate resources, and managing multiple roles. This research aims to identify how these teachers perform their roles, manage challenges, and become involved in research despite being novices. Utilizing a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten (10) selected novice English teachers. Purposeful non-random sampling and snowball non-probability sampling were utilized to ensure the particular selection of the participants. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis was utilized and revealed ten (10) major themes, including limited research background, personal and institutional challenges, peer mentorship, and the demand for self-directed learning. Teachers indicated both motivation and hesitation was based on a sense of desire to serve students and professional growth, while others were overwhelmed and disinterested in continuing to teach research. Notwithstanding these mixed feelings, numerous teachers expressed resilience and a sense of commitment to continuous improvement. The research concluded that particular assistance, guidelines-oriented training, better facilities, and brief research guidelines were necessary to prepare novice teachers effectively. The findings also have implications for teacher development programs and education policy, especially in creating a supportive environment for research involvement and professional development.

Keywords: Lived Experiences, Novice English Teachers, Practical Research Subject, Senior High School

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1. Introduction

The teaching profession necessitates continuous skills development, such as research and evidence-based practice. Novice English teachers at senior high schools face specific issues in handling practical research topics. Professional development is regarded as an integral and inherent part of their profession. Zorba (2023) concluded that novice teachers primarily engage in context-informed self-directed professional development. Facilitatory factors like English-only communication norms and orientation programs enable professional development, but inhibitory factors like irrelevant training and poor induction programs hinder it. Similarly, preparation and support from the institution are imperative; Barron (2023) found that most teachers perceive that they are inadequately prepared by educator preparation programs, particularly in differentiated instruction,

which impacts their ability to construct inclusive classrooms. Classroom issues add to these issues. Huge class sizes, variability among individual learners, and limited teaching materials also necessitate adaptive methods, as highlighted by Arpilleda (2021).

Self-efficacy and motivation are core to the novice teachers' experience. Lam et al. (2022) concluded that stress affects teachers' self-efficacy negatively but job satisfaction positively. As Marcia (2021) noted, appealing for practical pre-service training and targeted professional development, building flexibility and innovation is a requirement to cope with new teaching contexts. Talampas and Martinez (2021) concluded that in the shift to distance learning, teachers reconvened their roles as facilitators and employed eclectic strategies to address students' needs. In these challenges, novice teachers were still resilient and adaptable, supported by their motivation for professional growth and building strategies. These studies collectively emphasized the need for supportive environments, tailored training, and adequate preparation to develop novice teachers' growth and address their challenges.

Despite these benefits, only a few studies have been conducted about novice English teachers engaging in research in senior high school settings. This study aimed to fill this gap in exploring the novice English teachers' experiences facing the challenge of teaching courses based on research, coping strategies when they encounter challenges, and the support they require in developing pedagogical competencies. Drawing from the experiences and perspectives of these teachers, this study aims to shed light on the tailored professional development programs that can best prepare them with the capacity to teach in research-based pedagogical contexts. The contribution of this study is that it can shed light on policies and practices in novice teacher mentoring, thereby contributing to the enhancement of the quality of education provided in senior high school contexts.

2. Materials and Methods

Using a qualitative, phenomenological research design, this study explored the lived experiences of novice English teachers in handling research subjects in senior high school. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, resulting in valuable descriptions of participants' experiences. For thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke's six-phase process was applied to guarantee systematic and detailed qualitative data analysis. Ten participants were chosen from selected senior high schools in Santa Rosa, Laguna, utilizing purposeful non-random and snowball non-probability sampling methods. Participants were chosen based on inclusion criteria such as 1 to 3 years of teaching experience and handling research subjects. Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection instrument, validated by experts to guarantee their validity and credibility. The interview guide consisted of a set of questions aimed at understanding the lived experiences of novice English teachers, such as the problems they faced, their coping strategies, and implications for their profession in the future.

Data collection was a varied process of collecting in-depth and credible data. During preparation, the researcher prepared data collection tools, obtained ethical clearance, and obtained participants' informed consent. Data was collected through interviewing, audio recording, and transcribing. During data organization and analysis, the researcher coded and structured data in an organized way, building themes and findings that responded to the research questions, and then validated them by a data analyst.

Ethical considerations were prioritized through the study. The approval from the ethical committee was obtained, and participants were provided with detailed information about the research and their rights. Confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing the data and securely storing it. Participants reviewed their transcripts to ensure accuracy and completeness, fostering transparency and trust. The thematic analysis process involved familiarizing the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing, defining, naming, and producing the report. This structured approach enabled a thorough examination of the qualitative data, ensuring the findings were accurate and trustworthy.

3. Results

Table 1. Summary of Themes.

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
1. Limited background in handling research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undergraduate research as the sole experience • Lack of knowledge of basic research principles
2. Personal difficulties of a novice English teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handling multiple strands • Feeling of uncertainty and nervousness • Perceived unpreparedness • Teaching assignment bias • Challenging experience • Avoiding handling research • Struggling to adapt to a subject, compelled to handle
3. Personal learning and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer mentorship • Attending seminars and training • Independent study (self-directed learning) • School's support • Disinterest in research engagement
4. Challenges in teaching practical research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient learning opportunities and resources • Expectations for English teachers to handle multiple roles, especially research • Research guidelines/manuals are not established • Awareness of the capability of handling research • Contact hours and class size
5. Collaborative and self-directed development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal acknowledgement of the need to improve • Collaboration and mentorship among teachers
6. Teachers' motivation in research engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to teaching • Students' observable engagement and learning • Role assignment
7. Applies and solves real-world problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapting to research trends • Innovative breakthroughs
8. Continuous improvement and development of teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing research skills and attitude • Research is a lifelong process

The study identified ten clustered superordinate themes that encapsulate the lived experiences of novice English teachers handling Practical Research in senior high school. These themes comprehensively understand these teachers' challenges, motivations, and developmental processes. Novice English teachers often start with a limited background in handling research, which can lead to initial difficulties in effectively teaching research subjects. They face personal challenges such as managing time, balancing teaching responsibilities with research activities, and overcoming the stress of their new roles. Despite all these difficulties, novice teachers continue to grow and learn, undertaking professional development activities and self-directed study to further their research teaching skills. Research practice teaching also has some difficulties, including planning research projects, guiding students through complex procedures, and assisting students in understanding research concepts.

Novice teachers typically draw on peer support and independent learning to build up their research teaching capabilities, drawing on peer support and collective resources to improve their capabilities. Motivations for practice research were numerous but typically include contribution to academic knowledge, enhancing the quality of instruction, and contributing to student success. Practical research allows teachers and students to address real issues, making the research process valuable and worthwhile. The connection between research and addressing real issues is a good reason to conduct research. Novice teachers constantly evolve, reflecting on their practices, soliciting feedback, and learning to become better researchers. Teachers have different views of their future as researchers of teaching; some view it as an ongoing process, while others view it as a stepping stone to other learning and teaching positions. Based on what they have done, novice teachers recommend improving teaching research courses, for example, by providing better training, offering more resources, and having good mentorship. All these recommendations combined create an idea of the novice English teachers' experience in handling Practical Research in senior high school, emphasizing the difficulties of their work, the means they use to achieve their goals despite difficulties, and their aspirations for improvement.

4. Discussion

These novice English teachers entered the profession with minimal exposure to the realities of conducting educational research. Their exposure to research came through theoretical learning while pursuing their undergraduate degrees. Such academic exposure, while informative, did not equip them with the competence to implement research concepts in real-world classroom settings. Therefore, most of these new teachers had minimal confidence in conducting or engaging in research work, being detached from the research process due to a lack of hands-on exposure or guidance. Similarly, in-classroom research through teaching practicum can build teacher capacity, allowing pre-service teachers to gain research knowledge, social strategy, and dispositions as in-classroom researchers (Mak et al., 2022). However, challenges such as time constraints and the absence of preparation persist even as teachers transition to research-oriented tasks in higher education. Situations such as mentoring and belonging to research-nurturing communities of practice can ease such transitions, but these may not be sufficient for all teachers to excel in research work (Cárcamo et al., 2024).

The teachers showed a high level of feeling overwhelmed by the intricacies of their work demands. Besides classroom instruction, they had to spend time on lesson planning, grading, fulfilling administrative demands, and sometimes overseeing extracurricular activities. The resulting excessive workload contributed to heightened stress levels, ambiguity, and overall lack of preparedness for the profession's demands. Additionally, some teachers felt they were subjected to task inequities, particularly in allocating subjects related to research. These tended to be assigned to less senior or preferred staff, contributing to marginalization and professional dissatisfaction. The workload intensification contributes to time poverty, limiting teachers' ability to participate in quality pedagogy and professional growth (Lagawid, 2024). New and experienced teachers report ambiguity and not being prepared for the profession's demands (García-Hernández et al., 2022). The pressure of performance-based accountability has reshaped teachers' identities and roles, leading to role discrepancy and varying responses in prioritizing tasks. These issues and negative perceptions of teachers by society contribute to reduced motivation, result in job dissatisfaction, and generate potential attrition (Lagawid, 2024; García-Hernández et al., 2022). Addressing these issues entails reforms in education policies, prioritizing instructors' well-being, and preserving reasonable work environments.

Although they encountered several challenges, novice English teachers were extremely resilient and took active steps towards professional development. Most

consulted experienced colleagues through informal peer mentoring, attended workshops and seminars, and undertook independent learning to study research in-depth. The intensity of institutional support, however, varied considerably across schools. While some institutions offered systematic resources and mentoring, others failed to support research teaching, leaving it to teachers without help, creating unequal professional development. Pre-service and in-service programs should make classroom management, emotional labor coping skill, and a supportive community of teachers their top priorities to solidify teacher resilience and professional development (Anggaraini et al., 2020).

Teachers found strength from support networks. They established informal support networks, shared teaching resources, and took different approaches to handling research subjects. These peer networks were critical to emotional support and professional development, particularly where no formal mentoring initiatives existed.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of novice English teachers in handling the practical research subject in selected senior high schools in the City of Santa Rosa, Laguna. The findings presented the challenges and coping strategies that impacted and molded the novice teacher's personal and professional growth. The key findings showed that the novice teachers faced significant challenges since they still had a limited research background and felt inadequately prepared. Dealing with multiple-role expectations for teachers and lacking guidelines and sufficient resources compounded these challenges. Despite these challenges, the novice English teachers were resilient and committed to their professional growth. They proactively sought improvement through peer mentoring, attending seminars, individual study, and looking out for school support. Their motivation was based on their commitment to teaching, passion for engaging student learning, and appreciation of research significance in solving real-world issues and challenges.

Novice English teachers perceived research as an ongoing, lifelong process of learning that needed constant improvement. However, the stress and workload of teaching research caused hesitation about their future, with some teachers still committed to handling research subjects in the following school year. In contrast, others were disinterested due to the difficulty they went through in handling the research subject for the first time. Department of Education (DepEd) valued the importance of education research and facilitated programs that allow teachers to become professionally qualified. Programs offering comfortable and resourceful learning environments were the most significant in empowering teachers to succeed, ultimately enhancing teachers' and students' teaching process and experiences.

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