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**ESTONIAN NOVICE EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE  
MOST AND LEAST SUPPORTIVE FACTORS IN THEIR FIRST  
YEARS OF TEACHING**

**MA thesis**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Teacher turnover is an issue concerning education systems all over the world. To alleviate the phenomenon, scholars have investigated the factors influencing teacher turnover, including the turnover of beginning teachers. However, specifically novice EFL teachers' perceptions have not been studied in Estonia. The aim of the thesis, therefore, is to establish the views of novice EFL teachers on the most and least supportive factors during their first years of teaching and see whether there are any features distinctive to teaching English that might influence them.

The thesis consists of two main chapters. In chapter one, an overview of the factors influencing teacher turnover in general are given. Then, each organisational and individual factor is discussed. Finally, EFL teachers' attrition, as well as distinctive features of teaching English posited in recent studies are examined. The second chapter focuses on the procedure of investigating Estonian novice EFL teachers' views of the factors influencing their first years of teaching. The chapter ends with the results and a discussion. The final chapter of the thesis includes the conclusion.

## INTRODUCTION

Teacher shortage is a well-known issue discussed in the media around the world. It is a consequence of teacher turnover, consisting of teacher migration and attrition. According to Ingersoll and Smith (2003: 31–32), the term teacher attrition stands for teachers leaving the profession, and teacher migration occurs when teachers leave their current school to work in another one. Teacher migration is also referred to as teacher mobility (see, for instance, Hahs-Vaughn & Scherff 2008). Although teacher turnover is not a new phenomenon (see, for instance, Grissmer & Kirby 1987; MacDonald 1999), in the cases where the numbers are too high, it can lead to a lack of teachers. This affects the entire school environment causing staffing problems and impacting students.

The scale of teacher turnover varies from country to country, but beginning teachers are found to be more affected by teacher attrition and migration than experienced teachers. Researchers (see, for instance, O'Brien et al 2007; Gallant & Riley 2012; Hahs-Vaughn & Scherff 2008) have identified several reasons why novice teachers decide to leave the profession or their current school. The main factors influencing teacher attrition and migration are lack of support from the school's administration, government policies and personal reasons.

According to a recent study about teacher workflow in Estonia (Selliov & Vaher 2019: 20–23), teacher mobility rates are quite high. The authors state that, in the years 2008–2017, 40% of the teachers decided to leave the profession for some time and then return to the occupation. The authors claim that young teachers tend to be at a higher risk of leaving the profession from schools with higher leaving rates. However, the study does

not consider job satisfaction and does not deal with the reasons why teachers in general decide to leave the profession.

To understand teachers' decisions of staying or leaving the profession, the essence of teaching must be closely looked at. Vesaly et al (2013: 72) argue that, due to its demanding nature, teaching is considered a stressful occupation by our society. It requires different levels of communication and skills. Ingersoll and Smith (2003: 31–32) have investigated the situation in the United States of America and found that, in 1994–1995, about 40–50% of the beginning teachers decided to leave the profession after five years of teaching. Fifteen years later, the five-year exit rates of novice public school teachers in the USA ranged from 27% to about 44% depending on the state (DeAngelis & Presley 2010: 616).

Naturally, the situation differs from country to country. Cooper & Alvarado (2006: 5, 17–19) state that, in Europe, teacher attrition rates are high in the United Kingdom, where 30–50% of beginning teachers leave within the first five years. In contrast, the attrition rates in Germany are as low as 5%, in France and Portugal even lower and, therefore, not considered noticeable. The differences in teacher attrition are caused by the government policies and the education systems. For instance, teaching is more attractive in the three European countries mentioned because the number of students has declined. The workload and working conditions in general, among others, have been the main reasons why teachers decide to leave. The studies conducted around the world (Marable & Raimondi 2007; Buchanan et al 2013; Gallant & Riley 2012) and in Estonia (Selliöv & Vaher 2019) share quite a similar understanding of the main factors influencing teacher turnover.

Although quite a lot of research has been conducted to understand the overall teacher turnover, there are very few studies focusing on English as a foreign language

(EFL) teachers in particular. One of the few ones (Khawary & Ali 2015) describes EFL teacher turnover in one of the developing countries, where teacher shortage has almost reached a critical stage. Khawary & Ali (2015: 31) report that the major reasons why EFL teachers tend to leave the profession are related to lack of motivation, low salary, poor communication between teachers and school administration and workload. The authors suggest that teacher turnover affects students' emotional health and can also harm their achievement. Still, as the situation varies in different countries, generalisations about novice EFL teachers' views and position in Estonia cannot be made on the basis of studies about EFL teachers around the world. In fact, there are no current studies about the factors influencing Estonian EFL teachers in their first years. Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate their perceptions of the influencing factors and find out whether EFL teachers consider their subject in some ways different from other compulsory subjects, which might affect teacher turnover in a positive or negative way.

Hence, the research questions are:

1. Which organisational and individual aspects are the most supportive of novice EFL teachers?
2. Which organisational and individual aspects are the least supportive of novice EFL teachers?
3. Do novice EFL teachers perceive their subject to have any distinctive characteristics compared to others and how might that affect their turnover?

Understanding what factors novice EFL teachers consider the most and least supportive allows schools and the government to improve beginning teacher support in their first years. In addition, it might provide some insight into how to alleviate teacher turnover and help novice teachers adapt to their working conditions more easily. In order to receive in-depth data about novices' experiences, semi-structured interviews were

conducted. This method helps the participants to reflect on their situation in their first years, add some extra information and give suggestions. It also allows the interviewer to focus on each participant separately and to be more flexible with the questions if necessary.

The thesis consists of two main chapters. Chapter one discusses factors influencing teacher turnover. The factors are divided into individual and organisational. Individual factors include novices' personality characteristics and the support they receive from their family. Organisational factors depend on the specific organisation, its hierarchy and novices' colleagues, as well as the mentoring system. The second chapter demonstrates Estonian novice EFL teachers' views on what has supported them the most and the least. In this chapter, the research questions, the methodology, the participants and the results and discussion are covered. The conclusions of the thesis give suggestions for further investigation.

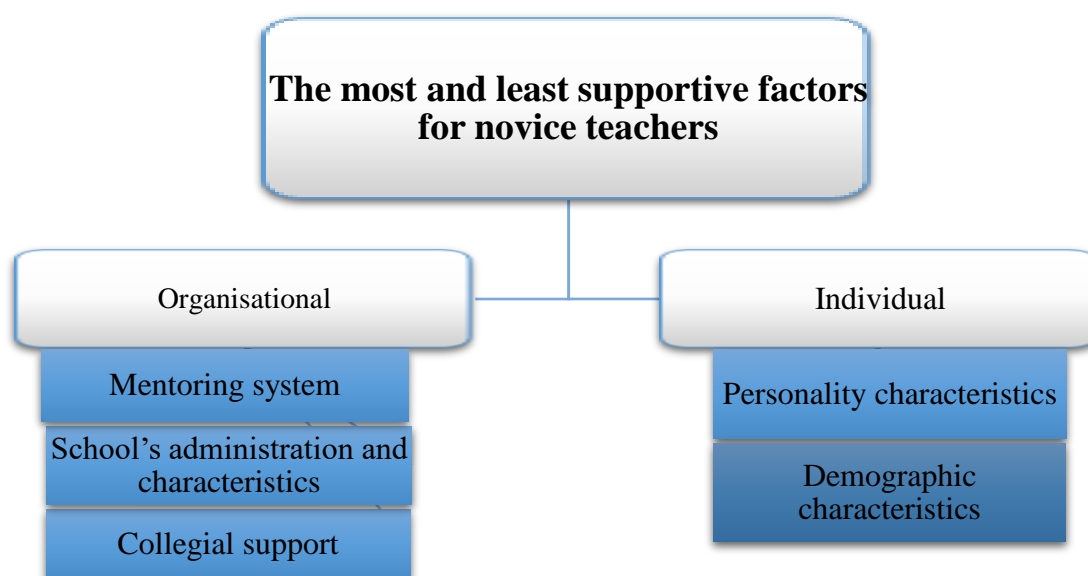
## 1. FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHER TURNOVER

In this chapter, the major factors influencing novice teachers in general are discussed. Factors influencing teacher turnover are divided into two categories – organisational and individual. Organisational factors include school's administration and characteristics, collegial support and mentoring as a part of the induction programmes. Individual factors consist of personality characteristics and demographic features of teachers. Then, EFL teacher attrition and distinctive features of teaching English are demonstrated to highlight the differences between general findings and EFL teachers' situation.

There has been a sufficient number of studies conducted discussing the situation in the teaching profession to note that teacher turnover is an issue in a number of countries. With the purpose of alleviating the issue and avoiding high numbers of leavers each year, researchers have investigated the factors influencing novice teachers the most and the least during their first years of teaching. Scholars have found several factors that influence teachers' decision of leaving or staying. Some prefer to use the terms external and internal factors (see Vesely et al 2013), but in this study, the terms organisational and individual factors are used as these have been used the most in the discussions of teacher turnover (see, O'Brien et al 2007; Gallant & Riley 2012; Hahs-Vaughn & Scherff 2008; Selliov & Vaher 2019).

As mentioned in the introduction, these factors have impacted teacher turnover all over the world. Framing the views of Estonian EFL teachers on the same factors informs Estonian schools and the government about the situation among novice EFL teachers. As a result, changes in some aspects in the education system could be made to help beginning teachers adapt to the profession better. For a clear overview of the factors found the most

and least supportive for novice teachers in general, they are presented in the Figure below. This is a summary of the various factors discussed by different researchers. Organisational factors consist of the mentoring system, school's administration and characteristics and collegial support. Individual factors include the teacher's personality and demographic characteristics.



*Figure. The most and least supportive aspects for novice EFL teachers (O'Brien et al 2007; Gallant & Riley 2012; Hahs-Vaughn & Scherff 2008; Selliov & Vaher 2019)*

Vesely et al (2013: 75) and Schaefer et al (2012: 109) emphasise that it is important to acknowledge the interaction between the factors, as often the individual factors help teachers to cope with the organisational ones. For instance, teacher burnout can be a result of a combination of the teacher's individual factors, such as unclear job expectations, as well as different organisational factors: lack of support from colleagues and administration.

A more complete overview has been provided by Ingersoll and Smith (2004: 10–11) who have investigated both, organisational and individual factors. The authors have argued that the main reasons why teachers decide to leave the profession or the specific

school are retirement, school staffing action, personal reasons, new career and dissatisfaction. They have found that teachers leaving the profession have been dissatisfied with lack of professional achievement, lack of school's administration, poor salary and problems with student discipline and motivation, lack of faculty influence and classroom intrusions.

Schaefer et al (2012: 109) have suggested that individual factors that have a crucial role in beginning teachers' happiness and, therefore, in teacher attrition are the teacher's emotional well-being, resilience and demographic features. According to Borman and Dowling (2008: 396), these demographic features include gender, age and the teacher's family. The authors claim that personal characteristics such as teachers' background and qualifications have an impact on teacher attrition as well.

Teacher turnover has also been in the focus of Estonian scholars of education. Similarly to the studies above, Sellio and Vahter (2019: 10) have stated that the organisational factors that have influenced teacher attrition in Estonia the most are school's administration, colleagues and the mentoring system. Organisational and individual factors have also been in the focus of academic performance in Estonian general educational schools (see, Aidla 2009). Teachers' understandings about the aspects that influence their migration and attrition have also been collected (see, Ratas 2014). The influence of individual factors on novice Estonian teachers has not yet been investigated.

## **1.1 Organisational factors**

Organisational factors have been demonstrated to play an important role in teacher attrition. These factors include school's administration and characteristics, collegial support and induction year programmes. Buchanan et al (2013: 118) have reported that

collegiality, student management, working conditions, professional development and workload are the main factors that have an impact on teacher attrition and migration. In their study, Evers et al (2016: 38) also found that the influence of organisational factors on the teacher's professional development is essential and, therefore, should not be underestimated. The authors suggest that schools should offer teachers more opportunities to participate in social networks as it positively influences teachers' occupational expertise.

Acknowledging the differences between schools around the world, Gallant and Riley (2012: 562, 575) report that organisational aspects have an essential role in early career teacher attrition. The aspects they have found to influence novice teachers the most are directly related to the workplace and the school's administration. Gallant and Riley indicate that even the location of the school could have an impact on teacher attrition in the case of distant schools which result in the teacher living separately from their family. The authors also emphasise the importance of school's administration, which can have a lasting impact on novice teachers.

Collegial support studies have demonstrated that social interactions between beginning teachers and more experienced teachers are also important influences on teacher attrition. Although this factor is not predictable and has multiple moderators such as the number of colleagues and the school culture, the perceptions of beginning teachers have still been investigated. Remmik et al (2015: 182) have found that Estonian novice teachers feel more accepted in the community of teachers and in the organisation if they receive support from colleagues from the start. The introduction is also an important gesture in the beginning and makes novices feel more welcome.

The results of the studies on the impact of mentoring on teacher attrition are inconclusive. Long et al (2012: 21–22) state that it is unclear whether mentoring influences teacher attrition and migration because of the number of other factors that have an effect

on the teacher's decision. Instead of linking mentoring and teacher turnover, the authors rather connect mentoring with teaching quality. Alhija and Fresko (2010) and Hahs-Vaughn and Scherff (2008) also claim that the impact of induction programmes has not been widely examined. Mentoring is a part of induction year programmes that are created and used in Estonia and have been conceptualised (see, for instance, Eisenschmidt 2006). Mentoring has been investigated in Estonia in connection with the teacher's intrinsic motivation (see Meristo & Eisenschmidt 2012).

### **1.1.1. School's administration and characteristics**

School's administration is an organisational factor that differs from school to school. The differences exist due to such school's characteristics as size, location and the population of students. Clearly, there are links between the school's size and hierarchical system which, for instance, moderates the manner teachers communicate with the school's leadership.

The findings of studies into school's administration and characteristics indicate the importance of a supportive management. Gallant and Riley (2014: 575–576) have stated that lack of emotional support from the school's administration and dissatisfying school culture have had a lasting impact on teachers' well-being and influenced their decision of leaving. Similarly, Tickle et al (2010: 346) indicate that administrative support is crucial during novice teachers' first years of teaching as it has an impact on teacher's job satisfaction and, as a result, moderates their intent to stay in teaching. The authors suggest that administrative support influences the teacher's decision to leave more than student behaviour or salary. Buchanan et al (2013: 123) have also found that the lack of collaboration and communication between the school's administration and teachers might

affect novice teachers' self-esteem and well-being. The authors have found that schools with poor administrative support are often characterised by high turnover rates.

The way school's leadership could support novice teachers generally includes assisting teachers with various issues they experience during their first years of teaching. Apparently, beginning teachers have had quite high expectations as to how the school's administration should support them. In their study, Marable and Raimondi (2007: 29) found that, according to the teachers, school's administration should support beginning teachers by observing their lessons and giving constructive feedback as well as sharing materials. Beginning teachers would also appreciate regular contact and time to listen to their problems confidentially. School's administration is also expected to plan mentor-teacher meetings and help novices to find solutions to their problems.

In reality, the way that a school's administration deals with problems and supports a novice teacher depends on the organisational system of the school. Gallant and Riley (2012: 575, 569) state that in the case of small schools with simpler hierarchical systems which allow novices to interact with the school's administration more, novices might still not receive any help from their superiors. The authors argue that it may be a consequence of leadership migration or the absence of trust, awareness of the other and empathy.

Borman and Dowling (2008: 380, 387, 396) have demonstrated in a similar way that the support head teachers provide to novice teachers has a crucial role in teacher attrition. The authors report that the number of leavers is higher in schools with poor administrative support. Borman and Dowling also discuss certain characteristics of schools that have had high attrition rates. The authors claim that there is just a little higher attrition rate in schools that are located in urban or suburban location than in rural schools. They also report that attrition rates are higher in smaller schools and about 1.08 times higher in large schools with 1000 or more students. The authors have found the schools with high

attrition rates to have a high population of low-achieving students. Gallant and Riley (2014: 575–576) have also added that staffing actions might be among the key factors in teacher turnover and have to be investigated more.

To conclude the findings related to the support from school's administration and certain school's characteristics that influence teacher attrition, research clearly implies that these have a significant effect on teachers' decision to stay in the profession. Although school's administrative support is dependent on the specific school and its characteristics such as size, location and the population of students, novice teachers have certain expectations. Research indicates that beginning teachers would like the school's administration to be supportive and provide enough time and feedback during the first years of teaching.

### **1.1.2. Collegial support**

In addition to the administrative support and school's characteristics, colleagues play an important part in influencing novices' first years. Although sharing their experiences and problems with more experienced teachers is what some novices might need the most, it is unpredictable to foresee for a novice teacher and surely depends on the characteristics discussed in the previous section.

According to Pogodzinski (2014: 481–483), experienced teachers should share their experiences with novices, who might find them encouraging and instructive. Beginning teachers wish to be supported by their colleagues. Novices expect their colleagues to advise them on methodology, how to choose materials and perform general administrative tasks of the school. The study reports that veteran teachers advise novices on certain procedures that the school expects and help novices manage different responsibilities.

Marable and Raimondi (2007: 30) and Buchanan et al (2013: 118–119) have similarly claimed that experienced teachers might definitely have a positive impact on novice teachers. The authors state that if experienced teachers share their knowledge, resources and expertise with beginning teachers, novices gain more insight and perspectives broadening their view of the profession. Hence, novices might experience professional development and encouragement.

In addition to supporting novices with administrative tasks and procedures, veteran teachers are important in the socialisation of beginning teachers. Pogodzinski (2012: 1010–1011) revealed in his study that informal interactions with colleagues are a source of information and support for beginning teachers. Novice teachers value interpersonal relationships developed with colleagues even more than those with their mentors.

Although collegiality is considered a vital part of novices' first years of teaching, not all experienced teachers consider it their responsibility to support novices. Such unsupportive attitudes of more experienced teachers can affect beginning teachers. Buchanan et al (2013: 122–123) claim that in the case of lack of communication with other teachers, novices might experience different kinds of isolation – physical, professional and emotional. All of these affect the beginning teacher who will most likely need support more than being left alone. Marable and Raimondi (2007: 30–32) have found it noticeable that beginning teachers seek support from colleagues. It appears from their study that experienced teachers are not encouraged to offer help themselves and beginning teachers receive help from colleagues only when they ask for it. Also, it is difficult for experienced teachers to find time for helping beginning teachers.

When existent, collegial support has many positive effects and, therefore, it does have an essential role in the case of teacher attrition. Colleagues impact novice teachers first years of teaching by supporting them with administrative tasks and helping beginning

teachers socialise in the school. Veteran teachers' experiences give more insight and perspective to a beginning teacher, which influences the professional development of the novice.

### **1.1.3. Induction programmes: mentoring**

In order to prevent teacher shortages, special recruitment plans have been designed in several countries. For instance, induction year programmes are created to attract more young people to the profession. According to Borman and Dowling (2008: 397), the purpose of these programmes is “to develop a systematic way to induct beginners gradually into a highly complex job”. Induction programmes provide support, assistance and guidance for novice teachers through classroom observations, reduced workload and teaching materials.

Meristo and Eisenschmidt (2012: 1503) have investigated the link between novice teachers' intrinsic motivation to work and induction programmes and found that the role of the mentor is very important in the novice's first years of teaching. The authors have stated that mentoring helps beginning teachers to reflect and become more self-aware as teachers. Mentoring helps to increase novice teachers' professional development, which is something that beginning teachers need and value. According to Remmik et al (2015: 191–192), teachers in Estonia have considered these programmes along with mentoring and collegial and administrative support the most supportive factors in their first years.

Similarly, Buchanan et al (2013: 119) report that mentoring is found quite important among early career teachers. Appreciated mentors who offer help and acknowledgement without being asked are seen as valuable and helpful by novices. However, in order for novice teachers to experience effective mentoring, certain criteria

have to be met. For instance, Cooper and Alvarado (2006: 20–21) have suggested that a successful mentoring system must definitely have an organised structure and enough funding.

Due to the lack of the qualities mentioned above or for other reasons, some issues have arisen related to mentoring. Marable and Raimondi (2007: 29, 33) claim that novice teachers have experienced confidentiality problems with the mentor they have been assigned. In their study, novice teachers expect mentors to have enough time for visits and meetings, be confidential and supportive, but not judgemental, of novices' actions and decisions. They were also expected to be active and offer ideas, solutions and even act as a model teacher for early career teachers.

On the other hand, Alhija and Fresko (2010: 1593–1594) argue that the impact of induction programmes has not been widely examined. The authors claim that though the novice teacher is assigned a mentor in their first year in the induction year programme, they cannot be considered the only source of support and information. About half of new teachers gain support from the school's administration and 75% receive help from their colleagues as well. Hence, the impact of mentoring is not always linked to teacher attrition and migration. In addition to the lack of studies in the field, Alhija and Fresko state that there have been issues with assigning mentors. In the mentoring system, the school's principal is supposed to decide who from among the experienced teachers with the expected preparation of mentoring will be the mentor. However, some new teachers have had to find somebody to be their mentor themselves.

As the studies imply, if done properly, mentoring can be a very supportive organisational factor for beginning teachers. Mentoring has been found to be one of the most supportive factors in Estonia as well, though, according to scholars, the mentoring system and mentor preparation could be improved. The studies indicate that novice

teachers have experienced confidentiality issues with their mentors. Therefore, researchers believe that mentoring as an influencing and supportive factor needs to be investigated more.

## **1.2. Individual factors: personality and demographic characteristics of teachers**

In this section, individual factors are discussed. As the individual factors are closely related to one another, they are combined. Individual factors consist of personality and demographic characteristics.

Teaching is considered one of the occupations with high levels of occupational stress. According to Qarshieva (2019: 31), professional stress is a result of the intensive workload, the complexity of tasks, interpersonal problems and even poor self-esteem of the teacher. Research today has shown that the way teachers approach stress depends on personal and situational factors. O'Brien et al (2008) have argued that teacher turnover is directly connected with the emotional well-being of teachers. The authors claim that beginning teachers who possess a higher risk of leaving the profession or their current workplace are emotionally exhausted, which means that they are experiencing professional burnout.

A considerable amount of research has been conducted into the teacher's personality and qualities of teachers. Pishghadam and Sahebjam (2012: 228, 233–234) have stated that the issue of teacher's personality started to gain more focus in 1974 with the term "burnout". They demonstrated that there is an interaction between personality structures and burnout. This means that there are some characteristics that help teachers with stress management. The authors suggest that these characteristics are dependent on

teachers' emotional intelligence and, therefore, include, for instance, adaptability and general mood.

Teachers' personality traits have been studied more generally using the well-known Big Five model, which gives an overview of the major aspects of personality (see, for instance, Goldberg 1992). The studies that focus on language teachers' personality traits have considered resilience, teacher immunity, emotional intelligence and the strengths of personality characteristics (see, for instance, Mercer and Kostoulas 2018).

In addition to the teacher's personality, teacher demographic characteristics have been examined to find out whether they have an impact on teacher attrition. These characteristics include gender, age and teachers' families. Borman and Dowling (2008: 385) argue that gender has been in the focus of teacher attrition studies more than any other school or personal feature. The authors claim that odds are significantly higher for women to leave the profession than men. The study also states that teachers who begin their teaching career at the age of 31 or older are more likely to stay in the profession than teachers who start younger.

On the whole, the teacher's personality is an important factor to discuss when investigating the situation of beginning teachers. Studies have reported the value of certain personality characteristics. Such qualities are, for instance, adaptability, flexibility, patience. These specific characteristics are found to help teachers to adapt to various situations and create healthy student-teacher relationships. The lack of these qualities can result in leaving the profession. In addition to personality characteristics that support the beginning teacher, demographic features as gender, age and teacher's personal life have been found to have an impact on teacher turnover. Studies have reported that young female teachers have a higher chance of leaving the profession.

### **1.3 EFL teacher attrition and distinctive features of teaching English**

Most of the research into teacher turnover has not been focused on English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers but teachers in general. Still, there have been some studies that focus specifically on EFL teachers and their attrition.

Hanušová et al (2019: 67) have compared beginning English teachers to teachers of other subjects and some significant differences have appeared. Namely, English teachers have a higher risk of teacher migration, which could be explained by English teachers being less satisfied with the school's administration and leaving the school to find better work conditions. Despite that, they were satisfied with interactions with their colleagues and leadership as well as school culture. Hanušová et al have also stated that EFL teachers found mentoring and induction programmes supportive.

The reasons why EFL teachers might experience lack of administrative support could be due to the school's hierarchical system, as Ewing and Smith (2003: 18) suggest. For instance, teachers might not have the opportunity to speak with the management openly or frequently, which could eventually lead to resentment and misunderstandings.

Hans-Vaughn and Scherff (2008: 48, 50) argue, in contrast to Ingersoll and Smith (2004), that the factors the authors claimed to influence teachers (mentoring, school characteristics) have not actually increased or decreased EFL teacher turnover. They suggest that English teachers have perhaps participated more in induction year programmes and received more help from the mentoring system. They claim that due to contradictory results, more research has to be conducted to have a better overview of English teacher attrition and migration.

Cowie (2011: 236–240) has likewise indicated that there are very few studies conducted focusing on EFL teachers and, more specifically, on the way individual factors influence them. In his study, it appeared that in their interactions with students, EFL

teachers made an effort to create emotionally warm relations. What is more, due to the variety of topics in language teaching and the possibilities of discussion and expressing oneself, teachers considered sensitivity towards students one of the important characteristics of a teacher. The author also investigated some of the organisational factors influencing EFL teachers. Cowie suggests that beginning EFL teachers' relations with colleagues impact their job satisfaction and, therefore, EFL teacher turnover. He has stated that beginning teachers are positively influenced by respect and friendship. In the case of very different educational values and perceptions, supporting one another could become difficult between a novice and an expert.

A recent study into the well-being of language teachers (MacIntyre et al 2019: 34–35) also emphasises that the key to coping with stressors and maintaining teacher well-being lies in the emotional dimensions of personality, particularly in such characteristics as flexibility, forgiveness, trustworthiness, empathy, tolerance and kindness. Schaefer et al (2012: 110) similarly demonstrate that there are specific qualities that are supportive in this profession. Three most significant ones include resilience, resourcefulness and commitment. According to Hong (2012: 434), self-efficacy, beliefs, value and emotions are also major indicators of staying in this profession.

Scholars have also found some characteristics distinctive to teaching foreign languages. In his exploratory study, Borg (2006: 24) suggests several themes that differentiate teaching a foreign language from other subjects. These themes include status and nature of the subject and the content of teaching. Among other characteristics, language teaching provides a more personal teacher-student relationship as there is more communication on various several topics.

Similarly, Al-Seghayer (2017: 886–887) has suggested a number of characteristics that are necessary for successful English teaching. These qualities are said to be flexibility,

patience, passion, tolerance and positivity. They are necessary because of the dynamic nature of language teaching. They are also needed for finding new ideas, experimenting with teaching methods, trying out different classroom activities and maintaining an enthusiastic and enjoyable foreign language environment.

Studies have also looked into the characteristics that EFL teachers should have from students' point of view. According to Zamani and Ahangari (2016: 81), students expect English teachers to have certain skills and qualities. They would like to see their EFL teachers communicate effectively, be patient, motivate students and create an enjoyable atmosphere in the classroom. Furthermore, students would appreciate it if EFL teachers encouraged them by giving them enough opportunities to speak up and express themselves.

The studies conducted into EFL teachers' attrition and distinctive features of teaching English demonstrate a further necessity to investigate teaching EFL and the specific qualities of language teaching. Research has indicated that there could be a higher rate of mobility among novice English teachers than among other teachers due to discontent with the school' administration. The personality characteristics that would support EFL teachers include flexibility, patience and tolerance.

Factors influencing teacher turnover in general consisted of two main categories: organisational and individual factors. According to scholars, organisational factors (school's administration, collegial support and mentoring programmes) have been supportive to novice teachers with various tasks including administrative tasks and classroom management. Individual factors consist of teacher's personality and demographic features. Teachers have suggested that adaptability, flexibility and patience among others to be the personality characteristics that support a beginning teacher during first years of teaching. Demographic features of teachers that have been important in

teacher turnover are gender, age and teachers' families. Studies focusing on EFL teachers specifically indicate that English teachers perceive some of the factors differently and confirm the existence of distinctive qualities in EFL.

## **2. ESTONIAN NOVICE EFL TEACHERS' VIEWS OF THE FACTORS INFLUENCING THEIR FIRST YEARS OF TEACHING**

This chapter reports on the study carried out among the Estonian novice EFL teachers in the autumn of 2019. The chapter provides an overview of the methods adopted, the participants, the process of the analysis, and the results combined with a discussion.

### **2.1 Research questions**

The aim of the study undertaken was to constructively contribute to framing the least and the most supportive factors for beginning EFL teachers in Estonia and, also, to find out whether novice EFL teachers perceive their subject to have any distinctive characteristics that may influence their mobility. The main research questions were:

1. Which organisational and individual aspects are the most supportive of novice EFL teachers?
2. Which organisational and individual aspects are the least supportive of novice EFL teachers?
3. Do novice EFL teachers perceive their subject to have any distinctive characteristics compared to others and how might that affect their turnover?

### **2.2 Method**

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews. This method was considered the most suitable because of its flexibility as well as its structured focus. The author of the study considered these aspects important because of the different experiences

the teachers might have. According to Kallio et al (2016: 2955), semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to gain in-depth data in each interview by changing some details in the questions if needed. In semi-structured interviews, interview questions are based on the literature review, the underlying theory. When the questions are developed, a preliminary interview guide is created to increase trustworthiness. Afterwards, a pilot interview is conducted to test the appropriateness of the questions, allowing the researcher to make modifications (Kallio et al 2016: 2955, 2961). The steps mentioned were all completed in this study.

The process of interviewing novice EFL teachers started in the autumn of 2019 when the preliminary questions were developed. All the interview questions were created by the author on the basis of the findings of the literature review. When constructing the preliminary interview questions, the author was inspired the most by the study by Marable and Raimondi (2007), which formed the basis of the study discussed. The interview plan consisted of 19 questions. The aim of the interviews was to receive answers to the research questions as well as get the novice EFL teachers' views on how to alleviate the unsupportive factors. In December 2019, a pilot interview was conducted with a novice EFL teacher, which was later used as one of the analysed interviews in this study.

After the pilot interview, modifications were made in the preliminary interview guide. During the pilot interview, the author was too focused on the main questions and the teachers interviewed did not really get the opportunity to reflect on their experiences. It also became clear after the pilot interview that it is difficult for novice teachers to offer solutions to teacher turnover because of their little work experience as a teacher. Hence, their suggestions and ideas were asked in a more subtle way (Do you have any suggestions on how to alleviate the unsupportive factors?). The other improvements made in the interview plan include the following: one introductory question was left out (Did you have

any expectations when you started teaching?). The question did not have any relation to the research questions and, therefore, was not relevant.

In addition, four introductory questions were added to give the teachers the opportunity to give suggestions on how to make the first years easier for beginning teachers. The author also hoped for these questions to help the teachers evaluate their current situation more efficiently. These questions were:

1. How much time does it take you to prepare the lessons?
2. How much time does it take you to mark the papers?
3. How much time does it take you to give feedback to your students?
4. What would make these aspects less time-consuming for you?

The reconstructed interview plan is included in Appendix 1. The main questions that were directly related to research questions were:

1. What kind of organisational factor has supported you the most?
2. What kind of organisational factor has supported you the least?
3. What kind of individual factor do you think is the most supportive for a novice EFL teacher?
4. Do you feel you have any personal characteristics that are important in your job?
5. During your first years of teaching, have you perceived teaching English different from teaching other subjects?

All the participants agreed to answer the questions in English. Five interviews were conducted via a video call or a voice call in Google Hangouts and one of the interviews was recorded live using a voice recorder. The participants could choose themselves which option (video or a voice call) they preferred. Interviews conducted as video calls or voice calls were recorded with the permission of the teachers in order to transcribe the interviews.

After conducting the interviews, the analysis of the data began. For a more clear and structured overview of the data, the author decided to transcribe the interviews in a Google Docs document. The transcribed interviews were then uploaded to QCAmap, which is a programme designed to analyse texts qualitatively. The programme allows to effectively code and categorise the findings and the marked passages can be easily downloaded after the analysis to focus on the quotes and opinions. The interviews were coded repeatedly during a three-month period (see Appendix 2). For a higher reliability, the supervisor of this thesis analysed the data as well.

### **2.3 The participants**

Interviews were conducted with six beginning EFL teachers. The teachers were found using personal contacts. All the participants share one criterion: they are novice teachers who have been working as English teachers for less than five years. They work in basic and secondary schools in different locations of Estonia. Two of the participants work in the same school but teach English to different level students. To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, their schools and the specific locations they teach in are not mentioned in the study.

All the participants are novice EFL teachers. Four of the teachers are female and two are male. The six participants of the study are 20–45 years old. Their work experience as an EFL teacher varies from five months to three years. Two of the participants do not work full-time and four of the teachers do. The participants teach students on different teaching levels: two of the teachers only teach in basic school, three teachers teach secondary level and upper secondary level students and one only teachers upper secondary level students. Four of the novice EFL teachers work in different schools and two of them

work in the same school but teach different level students. Half of the teachers work in an urban school and another half in a rural school.

The necessary information on the participants is presented in the following table. This data was considered important for the further discussion of the results based on the research. The table includes the participants' gender, age range, work experience as an EFL teacher, workload, teaching level and school's characteristics: the number of students and the school's location.

*Table. Information on the participants*

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age range</b>	<b>Work experience as an EFL teacher</b>	<b>Full-time teacher</b>	<b>Teaching level</b>	<b>School's characteristics: the number of students, the location</b>
<b>Teacher 1</b>	Female	25–30	7 months	No	Basic	1000<, urban
<b>Teacher 2</b>	Female	30–35	3 years	Yes	Basic, secondary, upper secondary	500<, rural
<b>Teacher 3</b>	Male	30–35	2 years	Yes	Secondary, upper secondary	1000>, rural
<b>Teacher 4</b>	Male	25–30	5 months	Yes	Secondary, upper secondary	1000<, urban
<b>Teacher 5</b>	Female	20-25	1,5 years	Yes	Basic	500>, urban
<b>Teacher 6</b>	Female	40-45	2 years	No	Upper secondary	500< rural

## 2.4 Results and discussion

The results of the study are presented under five categories, based on the research into the factors influencing novice teachers. Three of the categories are organisational (collegial support, mentoring, school's characteristics and administration) and two are individual (teachers' personality and demographic features).

In addition, distinctive features of teaching EFL and their relationship to teacher turnover are also discussed. After that, the novice EFL teachers' suggestions for each of the factors are provided. The teachers' perceptions of these factors were received by asking the main questions in the interview plan:

- Have you felt supported by school's administration?
- Have you felt supported by your colleagues?
- Has the mentoring system supported you during your first years of teaching?
- What kind of organisational factor has supported you the most?
- What kind of organisational factor has supported you the least?
- Do you have any suggestions on how to alleviate the unsupportive factor(s)?
- Do you feel you have any personal characteristics that are important in your job?
- What kind of individual factor do you think is the most supportive for a novice EFL teacher?
- Do you feel supported by your family?
- During your first years of teaching, have you perceived teaching English different from teaching other subjects?

The most supportive organisational factors for the novice EFL teachers are collegial support followed by support from the school's administration. Among individual factors, the novices find family support and certain personality characteristics such as patience, fairness and flexibility to be important in the first years of teaching. The least supportive factors are mentoring which has become a rather problematic experience for the novice EFL teachers and lack of social skills and persistence. The distinctive features that the EFL teachers indicate their subject to have are variability and popularity. The teachers also find English to be more motivating and easier than other compulsory subjects.

### 2.4.1. Collegial support

The novice EFL teachers considered collegial support the most supportive organisational factor. Five out of six teachers said that when they have a question or a problem, colleagues would always help them. In the words of Teacher 6:

I have great colleagues who give me materials and if I want to ask something they always help me.  
(Teacher 6)

It appeared from the interviews that colleagues are more easily approachable and the novices have more opportunities to speak with them. For instance, one of the teachers explained that they have a large common room where he would meet his colleagues and this allows him to ask them for help very often. The teachers find socialising with their colleagues important and informative. This could be one of the main reasons why colleagues have such an important role in the novices' first year.

According to the novice EFL teachers, their colleagues have supported them in different ways. As Pogodzinski (2014: 483) argued, colleagues usually help beginning teachers by sharing materials and advising them on classroom management. This has been true for most of the novice EFL teachers. Some of the teachers mentioned that all of the shared materials were also stored in specific folders which the teachers had access to. This was considered extremely helpful as the materials could be used whenever needed, which helped novices to receive ideas with less effort.

One of the teachers had shared a class with a more experienced teacher and the veteran teacher discussed student behaviour with the novice. This way, the novice teacher received information and did not feel alone with student behaviour management. Teachers sharing their tips on classroom management can also help students accustom more quickly to the methods teachers use. In the words of Teacher 1:

They have given me tips or just background information as to which students there might be a problem with or which students might need more help so I have been able to ask them advice for particular students. (Teacher 1)

Two of the teachers pointed out that they had a few colleagues who they trusted the most and knew they would receive help from them if needed. The teachers preferred to have just a few colleagues they would interact with the most. Both teachers worked in a school with over 500 students but less than 1000 students. In the words of Teacher 5:

I have two colleagues who I know that when I have some problem or I need something or maybe they can explain better then they help me. They are kind of the only ones I actually talk to. (Teacher 5)

One of the teachers had received the most support from a colleague who decided to act as his informal mentor and explain everything in detail beforehand. This made the novice feel accepted and welcomed into the organisation. Despite that, he did not usually seek support from colleagues. On the other hand, one of the teachers saw colleagues as the least supportive organisational factor during their first years. Marable and Raimondi (2007: 30–32) have also stated that collegial support is not always present and, therefore, beginning teachers could have some negative experiences with it. The teacher described the colleagues as unsupportive because after talking to them, the novice felt incompetent and did not feel comfortable or welcomed in conversations they had. The teacher perceived the colleagues' attitudes as unfriendly and unsupportive. Therefore, she did not seek any help from them.

In brief, the experiences the novice EFL teachers had with their colleagues were mostly positive. Based on their perceptions, the more experienced teachers seem to care about novice teachers and are willing to share materials and give advice to their less experienced colleagues. The novice EFL teachers really seemed to appreciate collegial support. The expectations of how and to what extent colleagues should support beginning teachers were different. Some teachers found it natural to develop friendly, trustworthy relationships with their colleagues while some seemed to look elsewhere for support.

### 2.4.2 Mentoring

The idea of mentoring was found helpful and necessary by all the teachers. The reality for the novice EFL teachers, though, was that only half of them were officially assigned a mentor. One of the teachers had no idea whether she had had a mentor during the first year of teaching. The experiences of the teachers in regards with mentoring were overall very different.

According to the novice EFL teachers, if the expected guidelines of mentoring are followed, it is a very supportive factor. However, the mentoring system in Estonian schools will definitely need to be improved in a way that each beginning teacher gains a positive and helpful experience. Some teachers viewed mentoring as a source of emotional support. In that case, the teachers expected the mentor to be more like a counsellor and explain the situations in the classroom or support the novice in student management. According to Teacher 6:

Starting teachers need somebody who is more experienced and maybe a bit calmer and knows that everything won't end when you have a bad lesson. (Teacher 6)

Others viewed the mentor as somebody who would explain organisational matters more than just advise the novice on, for instance, student management. This meant that the teacher could receive all the practical information from the mentor. All the teachers found one-on-one conversations with the mentor necessary and helpful. In the words of Teacher 3:

I think once you actually start practical work then it could be very helpful. At least I felt much more comfortable when somebody actually sat me down and explained everything. (Teacher 3)

Although all the novice EFL teachers perceived the idea of mentoring as positive and supportive during the first years of teaching, it was still considered a less supportive organisational factor than the school's administration and collegial support. This was probably the case because only half of the novice EFL teachers were assigned a mentor.

Moreover, the teachers who had been assigned a mentor still experienced some problems, which might indicate that the mentoring system could definitely be improved in some Estonian schools. One of the teachers felt that the mentor was assigned a little late for her. More specifically, she was assigned the mentor not until she had been working for a couple of weeks. She explained that it would have been more effective and supportive if the mentor had been there for her right from the beginning. She had to search for information herself at first and, due to that, experienced isolation. Luckily, she received help from some of her colleagues.

Usually, a beginning teacher is assigned a mentor who is an experienced teacher in the same school. In the case of one of the EFL teachers, the school's head teacher was assigned as a mentor. This teacher worked in a rural school with fewer than 500 students; therefore, the reason why the head teacher was assigned was probably related to staff problems or the lack of experienced teachers who had had mentoring training. The novice EFL teacher did not perceive this way of mentoring to be helpful or supportive. In her words:

I didn't get any support from her. It was like she was just a mentor by name but I never actually got any help from her. She didn't have time and she didn't have the answers so I always turned to somebody else. (Teacher 2)

The beginning EFL teachers had experienced issues that were similar to the ones mentioned by Marable and Raimondi (2007: 29, 33). The mentors had been too busy to help the novice teacher. As a result, the teachers perceived the mentoring system as not very efficient. Also, there had been mentors who were involved in their work and might have been assigned for official reasons only. They were not active enough or did not have enough time for a proper meeting with new teachers.

To summarise, the novice EFL teachers value the mentoring system and understand the necessity of it. In contrast to Vaughn & Scherff (2008: 48, 50), who indicated that

mentoring does not have an impact on teacher turnover, the findings of this study suggest the opposite. The novice EFL teachers expect mentors to have more time for them and to be more interested in the novices' problems to find solutions together. Overall, the teachers did perceive mentoring as less supportive than the school's administration and their colleagues. Although it was considered not as efficient, it is important to note that the novice EFL teachers really did appreciate the idea of a specific person explaining everything to them and answering their questions.

### **2.4.3 The school's characteristics and administration**

The novice EFL teachers reported that they did feel generally supported by the administration of the school. It was considered the second most supportive organisational factor besides collegial support. The novice EFL teachers found their school's leadership to be helpful but the teachers seemed to have quite different perceptions of how the school administration should support a beginning teacher.

One of the teachers expected the school administration to help and support a novice teacher with all kinds of planning, for instance, setting up class trips. Another teacher did not expect any support from the school administration at all and preferred talking with colleagues or family about the problems or seeking support elsewhere. The teacher worked in a large urban school with fewer than 1000 students and did not perceive supporting beginning teachers to be the duty of the school administration. In the words of Teacher 4:

I mean I guess I would receive some help if I turn to them with a question but their job is to run the school and they have other things to do. (Teacher 4)

The teachers' perceptions seemed to confirm the findings of Ewing and Smith (2003: 18), who have noted that the support beginning teachers receive from their school's administration depends on the size of the school and the hierarchical system of it. This also

happened to be the case with one of the EFL teachers who had quite a distant view of the headmaster as the school had about 1000 students as well as many teachers. The school had also been divided into different levels, which meant that the levels had their own superiors and it was not possible for the new teacher to go and talk to the headmaster any time she wished. Although this was the situation, the novice teacher did not feel unsupported by the school's administration.

Apparently, there is a greater chance of meeting and contacting the school's administration in the common room in smaller schools. The novices working in schools with populations of around 500 students found the school's administration to be friendlier and more approachable. However, this does not automatically mean the opposite for large schools – the teachers in schools with populations of around 1000 students perceived the school's administration supportive as well. The distinction here is probably in the opportunities and perceived appropriateness of asking the leadership for help. It also appeared that the novice teachers working in urban areas had fewer contacts with the school's administration than the teachers who worked in rural areas.

Some teachers had had very positive experiences with the school's administration during their first year. One of the teachers perceived the school's administration to be extremely supportive because the administration would provide materials and resources to the new teacher. According to Marable and Raimondi (2007: 29), this is what novices actually expect the school's administration to do. In the words of Teacher 6:

Yes, I feel really supported because our headmaster or our headteacher both are supportive and they give me everything I want because they understand that it's not easy for me because to start from upper secondary school level. (Teacher 6)

For one of the teachers, the school's administration was even more supportive during her first years of teaching than her colleagues. This teacher found the headmaster to be easy to talk to and helpful. The headmaster would even help the new teacher with tasks

that were not among the headmaster's duties. The attitude towards new teachers would always be warm and welcoming in this school, which had a great impact on the novice EFL teacher. According to her:

If I have a question even if it wouldn't be on some topic that is solved by the headmaster I can always go to him and we can always have an informal discussion about that. (Teacher 2)

Still, not all the novice EFL teachers had positive experiences with their superiors.

One of the teachers, who did not work as a full-time teacher during her first year, did not receive any support at all from the school's administration. The teacher gave only ten lessons per week in the first year but received no support from the school's leadership nor was she assigned a mentor. According to the teacher, she had quite an easy beginning due to the small number of lessons. Such a small workload could be the reason why the school's administration did not support the novice teacher as much as they would have if she had been working full-time.

The results demonstrate a connection between school's characteristics (size, location) and the way the school is organised. For instance, the novice EFL teachers working in the smaller schools noted that it is easier to approach the leadership. However, there appeared to be no connection between the location and the way school's administration supports the beginning teachers.

The findings regarding the role of the school's characteristics and administration confirm those of Borman and Dowling (2008: 387, 390), who suggested a link between these variables in the perceptions of novice teachers. Though there were a number of differences in the novices' experiences, they overall saw the support from the school's administration in a positive light – even the teachers who did not receive actual support from the school's administration considered it to be helpful if needed.

#### **2.4.4 Individual factors: personality and demographic characteristics of the teachers**

In terms of individual and demographic factors, a number of different perceptions surfaced. All the novice EFL teachers could name qualities that they found supportive and qualities they wished to improve. Understandably, the teachers who had been working for more than two years could analyse the individual factors more deeply.

Personal characteristics the novice EFL teachers found important to have during the first years are patience, fairness, flexibility, acceptance, optimism and open-mindedness. Compared to the characteristics stated by MacIntyre et al (2019: 34–35), there were numerous similarities. While the authors claimed flexibility, forgiveness, trustworthiness, empathy, tolerance and kindness to be the most supportive individual characteristics for a novice teacher, the EFL teachers also found that it is important to accept students as they are. The beginning EFL teachers mentioned flexibility as one of the most supportive qualities as well. The novice EFL teachers might have found acceptance and flexibility as necessary characteristics because of the variability of topics.

Half of the teachers suggested that patience is a really important quality that supports a novice teacher in every situation. Patience was seen as a characteristic that is important in classroom situations but also in the teaching-learning process in general. One teacher viewed patience as a really supportive characteristic in classroom management because of the discipline problem novices might face with middle school students. In the words of Teacher 1:

I just think that's the strongest characteristic I have is just being patient. (Teacher 1)

In addition, one of the teachers associated patience with being patient with oneself as a beginning teacher and not expecting too much from oneself in an early stage. She also emphasised the importance of being patient with students and learning from own mistakes. One of the teachers had thought of leaving the profession at first, but managed to be brave

and find the emotional stability and resilience to stay in the profession. She also noted that taking things personally is something beginning teachers struggle with at first. The novice suggested that a teacher should be emotionally intelligent and not blame everything on oneself. The teacher discussed that it is difficult in the case of unmotivated students, which has an impact on the teacher as well. According to Teacher 6:

I think you have to be brave, at first it may seem really difficult. You can't take things personally and it's really easy to say but hard to do. (Teacher 6)

The teachers also reflected on the characteristics that they have found unsupportive or qualities they wish to improve in themselves. These include persistence, social skills, confidence, assertiveness, emotional intelligence and student discipline. Two teachers believed that assisting beginning teachers with public speaking courses and different social skills might help them to be more confident and assertive. It also appeared from the experience of one of the teachers that it is difficult to find the balance between being strict and lenient. In the words of Teacher 1:

I have tried to be a bit too lenient or perhaps tried to meet the students in the middle of it too much. (Teacher 1)

All the novice EFL teachers found family very supportive. In the case of two beginning teachers, they had a family member working as an educator as well. For both teachers, this was a huge advantage, as they had the opportunity to gain most of the support and knowledge related to work from their close ones. One teacher also had a friend in a similar position and they could share their experiences with one another. This implies that close relationships affect the whole attitude towards working as a teacher. For instance, one of the teachers specifically mentioned that colleagues are not the ones that the teacher receives support from. Therefore, family and close ones have an essential role in the novice teacher's first years of teaching. One of the teachers perceived a difference in sources of support for male and female teachers. For instance, it was more comfortable for this teacher to turn to his family and friends for emotional support. In the words of Teacher 3:

I guess it's like a guy thing but I haven't really asked any emotional support from others. That's what close ones are for I guess. (Teacher 3)

Overall, personality characteristics that novice EFL teachers found supportive were patience, fairness, flexibility, acceptance, optimism and open-mindedness. These qualities might be in the focus during the first years because of the unexpected situations and stress beginning teachers might experience. The teachers also named some of the qualities and skills that they wish to improve to become more successful. These included persistence, social skills, confidence, assertiveness, emotional intelligence and student discipline. The teachers were generally positively disposed towards the characteristics English teachers should have. Family as a supportive individual factor was also important to the novice EFL teachers.

#### **2.4.5 Distinctive features of teaching English**

Scholars investigating language teaching have found some specifics that characterise teaching English. Hence, one of the research questions was about how the novice EFL teachers in Estonia perceive their subject compared to other ones. The findings confirm that teaching English is perceived as different by the beginning EFL teachers. The novice EFL teachers mentioned that they all had noticed some distinctive features since starting teaching English. The features the teachers described are related to the dynamic nature of the subject, which allows the teacher more freedom than other subjects and the variability of the topics.

Four out of six teachers emphasised the number of possibilities EFL teaching provides. This demonstrates that it is interesting for teachers to plan the lessons and organise teaching. The teachers perceived English teaching not as fact-based and learning language in general was viewed differently than learning other subjects. Some teachers

really appreciated the variety of topics and the freedom it allows. In the words of Teacher 3:

That's one of the fun parts of teaching English I think cause you can just talk about anything as long as you are speaking English. (Teacher 3)

In addition to teaching a language as a tool to communicate, the combination of culture and literature in EFL teaching was also considered a distinctive feature. The topics that are covered in order to gain a broader understanding of English as a language has allowed the EFL teachers to choose different materials and have lots of opportunities to connect with students more deeply. As a result, the EFL teachers create more emotional and deep student-teacher relationships. This confirms the findings of Borg (2006: 24), who stated that more personal relationships evolve through discussing different topics and listening to one another. Another aspect that the teachers found supportive when developing more personal relationships was the number of students in the classroom. The teachers stated smaller language classes to be a positive distinctive feature that is specific only to teaching a foreign language.

From students' viewpoint, according to the findings of Al-Seghayer (2017: 886–887), students appreciate it if a teacher gives them numerous opportunities to express themselves. The novice EFL teachers interviewed for this study also reported that their students appreciate discussions and they are more motivated to learn English. Furthermore, half of the teachers perceived English to be more popular among students than other compulsory subjects. The scale of communication and the nature of the subject are the main reasons why the teachers believe English would be preferred.

Compared to other subjects, it was said that English is not as demanding as some fact-based subjects, and students usually feel more comfortable in the EFL lesson. What is more, the teachers stated that there are endless ways of integrating English with other

subjects, which expands the point of view of students and offers different perspectives. In the words of Teacher 4:

You start seeing things differently, from different perspectives, for instance, when you're writing a for and against essays. So I guess language classes actually develop a lot more than other subjects. (Teacher 4)

Although the novice EFL teachers found most of the distinctive features of teaching EFL to be positive, the novices also discussed some characteristics that they found more challenging than in other subjects. One of the teachers mentioned that some students are noticeably anxious in EFL classes and learning English is actually more difficult for students who find it hard to express themselves in the classroom. Another teacher found grading to be more complex in teaching EFL. Supposedly, it requires more effort due to the variety of topics and activities. The teacher argued that everything that is graded and tested in English needs to be very clear to the teacher and to the students as well.

The perceptions of the novice EFL teachers about teaching EFL are overall positive and the interviewed teachers seemed to enjoy teaching English very much. The results of this section demonstrate that there are differences in teaching EFL and, furthermore, these differences are perceived by the teachers as well as the students.

The distinctive features the novices identified are related to the variability language teaching offers, for instance, a number of materials that help to approach different topics, different methods and a sense of freedom in covering the topics. The teachers perceived teaching English to have more positive features than negative ones, although some challenges as grading and anxiety among students were mentioned. The teachers found learning EFL to be easier and more motivating for students, which might imply that teachers perceive English to be easier to teach as well. Motivated students might have a positive impact on the novice teacher and influence staying in the profession.

When comparing the results of this study with research conducted in the field, there are both contrasts and similarities. The results support the findings from Marable & Raimondi 2007; Cowie, 2011; Buchanan et al 2013; Pogodzinski 2014, as the support novices receive from their colleagues has a great impact on their first years of teaching. The results contrast with the findings from Remmik et al (2015: 191–192) who reported that in 2015 Estonian teachers considered mentoring a beneficial part of the induction year programme during their first years of teaching. Likewise, Buchanan et al (2013: 119) argued that it is an effective way of supporting beginning teachers as novices do appreciate having one specific person to ask all the questions and receive support from. According to the experiences of the interviewed novice EFL teachers, mentoring was the least supportive factor due to problems with assigning mentoring and organising the process.

#### **2.5.6 The novice EFL teachers' suggestions**

The teachers were also asked to suggest any ideas or solutions to alleviate the unsupportive factors and support novice teachers more in their first years of teaching. In this section, the suggestions from the EFL teachers are provided. According to the interviewed novice EFL teachers' suggestions, there are ways to help beginning teachers receive more support in the beginning and not feel lack of support of the influencing factors which could eventually lead to teacher attrition or migration. These suggestions are discussed here with the purpose to constructively demonstrate the expectations of beginning teachers. In the opinion of the author of the thesis, it is wise to receive some feedback from the ones who are currently experiencing the first years of their teaching career and give some thought to how they would alleviate the adaption to the profession. The teachers' opinions are presented according to supportive factors. Firstly, suggestions for school's administration are given, followed by increasing collegial support,

administrative support and, lastly, some suggestions on how a novice teacher could help oneself are provided.

The beginning EFL teachers expect to gain some support from the school's administration but, overall, they expect the administration to hear them out and have time for them. The attitude towards beginning teachers should be supportive. Two of the novice EFL teachers proposed the concept of precise guidelines for a beginning teacher. The teachers suggested the guidelines as a written document consisting all the most important aspects that a novice teacher would have to know at first. These aspects include organisational tips, for instance, the locations of certain files and the most important events of the schoolyear. The teachers thought that it would make the adaption to the profession easier for teachers because they would have the most important information in one certain document that they could access anytime, instead of asking questions from the colleagues.

Although teacher salary was not in the focus of the study, it appeared from the interviews that the pay arrangements are difficult to understand for novice teachers and they should be more transparent. The administration should inform beginning teachers exactly how their working hours are counted and advise novices on the options they have in regards with additional work hours or working overtime. It could be difficult for a novice teacher to understand which actions are paid for and which are considered free.

For increasing collegial support, the novice EFL teachers advised more experienced teachers to have an open mind and be courageous in sharing their experiences with beginning teachers. That way, novices realise that they are not alone in the school and they are able to trust their colleagues, which is tremendously important to them. For instance, novices find it really helpful if a more experienced teacher advises them in the case of discipline problems.

The novice EFL teachers were able to reflect on their experience and give some useful advice to other beginning teachers in a relatively similar position. One of the teachers advised novices to have patience and not to draw any conclusions based on the first year only. It is important to remember that the beginning is more difficult but the following year will be easier. In the case of a beginning teacher, there is a large amount of experimenting and trying out different techniques for the first time in the actual school; therefore, the next year should be more familiar. The teachers advised to be brave and not overthink situations. As mentioned in the results and discussion section, it is also vital not to take everything personally and be patient with the teaching process as well as with students. The teachers recommend others seek help and support from friends and family and not stay alone and isolated with a problem. The novice EFL teachers suggest to be well-organised with teaching materials and definitely store them in a secure place during the first years teaching. This also helps to maintain quality materials for next year and have a clear overview of what had worked and what had not.

The findings from this study allowed the interviewed novice EFL teachers to reflect on their situation and evaluate the most and least supportive factors. The results demonstrate that the beginning teachers had had different experiences in the beginning of their teaching career. However, the overall perception of the teachers about the scale of support they had been receiving from the start was quite similar. All of the interviewed teachers found that they were generally supported, although the sources of support were different. The teachers had experienced issues with all of the discussed influencing factors, still, they could maintain respect towards the factors and reasonably suggest what should be improved for the beginning EFL teachers.

## CONCLUSION

Research on teacher turnover revealed two main categories of the factors influencing teacher attrition and migration: organisational and individual. Organisational factors (mentoring, school's administration and characteristics and collegial support) were found to have a significant impact on novice teachers in their first years of teaching. Although all of the organisational factors differ in schools due to school's characteristics such as the location and size, scholars have emphasised the importance of the factors in regards with teacher turnover.

The support from colleagues is essential in terms of classroom management, different administrative procedures and teacher socialisation. School's administration has found to be an important factor in beginning teachers' first years of teaching as the teachers themselves expect the school's leadership to have enough time to provide feedback and counsel the teachers if necessary. Research on mentoring indicates that if done in a proper way, the beginning teachers would benefit from the system greatly. Individual factors influencing teacher turnover are teachers personality and demographic features including support from family, age and gender. It has been found that working in a complex profession such as teaching requires adaptability, flexibility and patience. Gender and age have been in the focus of teacher turnover as the researchers have claimed that more women than men tend to leave the and teachers who begin their teaching career at the age of 31 or older are more likely to stay in the profession than teachers who start younger.

The attrition of EFL teachers and the distinctive features of teaching EFL demonstrate a further necessity to investigate teaching EFL and the specific qualities of language teaching. Previous findings of Hanušová et al (2019: 67) have reported that EFL teachers might have a higher risk of attrition due to dissatisfaction with the school's

administration. Distinctive features include opportunities for more personal student-teacher relationship and more variable topics.

The study about Estonian novice EFL teachers' views on the most and least supportive factors in their first years of teaching was set out to contribute to framing the perceptions of Estonian novice EFL teachers. Hence, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six novice EFL teachers working in basic and upper secondary schools in Estonia. The present study aimed to receive responses to three research questions. The main themes included the most and least supportive organisational and individual factors for novice EFL teachers. In addition to that, the novice EFL teachers were asked to report on their views about any distinctive features they have perceived while teaching EFL.

The results of the study imply that the most supportive organisational factor for beginning EFL teachers is collegial support. The teachers found their colleagues easily approachable and helpful. The least supportive organisational factor during their first years was mentoring. The novice EFL teachers had experienced some problems with mentoring and only half of the teachers were assigned a mentor. Individual factors that the teachers found the most supportive were open-mindedness, patience and flexibility. The least supportive individual factors were social skills, such as communicating more effectively and public speaking, as well as assertiveness and persistence.

The novice EFL teachers perceived teaching English different from other subjects in many ways. The main differences were related to teaching foreign languages in general. The distinctive features included a variety of topics and the freedom of experimenting with teaching materials and techniques. The teachers also considered English to be more motivating and popular for students due to its nature. Some of the teachers could mention some challenging that are distinctive to teaching English. For instance, the teachers noted that some students are anxious in the lessons and grading can be quite

complex. Overall, the novice EFL teachers were positively disposed to the subject they teach which might have a positive impact on their first years of teaching as well. Therefore, teaching EFL might influence the beginning teachers to stay in the profession.

The findings suggest that although the teachers' experiences are different, they feel supported as beginning teachers. The sources of support are different as well, which indicates that there is no fit for all solutions to alleviate teacher turnover by supporting novice teachers. Therefore, the suggestions from the beginning EFL teachers were combined in the section of results and discussion. The suggestions imply that there are possibilities for school's administration, colleagues, the mentoring system and the beginning teachers themselves to improve supporting novice teachers. The author of the thesis would like to believe that the suggestions demonstrate teachers' caring attitude towards supporting beginning teachers, as they are in a relatively similar situation themselves.

There are some limitations needed to be mentioned in terms of the study. Firstly, member checking was done only in the case of the pilot interview. Returning the interviews to all of the participants would have increased reliability of the study. (Rolfe 2004: 305) Secondly, due to the small number of participants, no major generalisations can be made. Still, the author of the thesis hopes that the study undertaken helps novice teachers to reflect on their first years of teaching and give some thought on the support system they have.

The results of the study indicate that novice EFL teachers have experienced problems with all of the factors that have influenced teacher turnover. Therefore, the author believes that novice EFL teachers' suggestions on improving the factors have great practical relevance and offers ideas for further research. For instance, each of the factors can be investigated in connection with school's characteristics to find out whether the

location or the size of a school has an impact on each factor. Ideas for conducting a quantitative study can be gained as well. For instance, the results on mentoring demonstrated that only half of the novice EFL teachers were signed a mentor. In the opinion of the author, this is something that needs to be investigated for a whole overview of the mentoring system in Estonia.

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## **Appendix 1. Interview plan**

### **Introductory questions**

- How long have you been a teacher?
- What forms do you teach?
- Do you work as a full-time teacher or is your workload less than that?
- Tell me about your experience as a teacher so far.
- Do you feel you have had enough preparation for this profession?
- Has this profession fulfilled your expectations for now?
- How much time does it take for you to prepare the lessons?
- How much time does it take for you to mark the papers?
- How much time does it take for you to give feedback to your students?
- What would make these aspects less time-consuming for you?
- Do you feel you receive the support you need right now?

### **Main questions**

- Have you felt supported by school's administration?
- Have you felt supported by your colleagues?
- Has the mentoring system supported you during your first years of teaching?
- What kind of organisational factor has supported you the most?
- What kind of organisational factor has supported you the least?
- Do you have any suggestions on how to alleviate the unsupportive factor(s)?
- Do you feel you have any personal characteristics that are important in your job?
- What kind of individual factor do you think is the most supportive for a novice EFL teacher?
- Do you feel supported by your family?
- During your first years of teaching, have you perceived teaching English different from teaching other subjects?

## Appendix 2. An extract from the codebook.

The codebook was created with the QCAmap programme in Excel

1	Document	Category	Category Title	Marked Text
2	pilootinter	D1	lots of resources and materials	I think English teachers have the most resources for teaching and the most materials
3	pilootinter	D1	lots of resources and materials	have so many things that they can useAs materials or classroom work or for homework so it makes life easier but also a bit harder innocent because well for insta
4	pilootinter	D2	no distinctive individual featur	On a personal or individual level I don't think so at least I haven't noticed that quite yet it's more of a the level of the subject that's English teachers teach
5	intervjuu2	D3	more possibilities, flexibility	English allows certain flexibility in terms of the topics so in maths you still have to talk about maths, yes you can you know measure different things in a wide var
6	intervjuu2	D3	more possibilities, flexibility	So i think it allows so much more flexibility and it makes it so much more interesting.
7	intervjuu3	D4	popular, easy	its much more popular and much easier i guess.
8	intervjuu3	D1	lots of resources and materials	watching youtube videos while english is something you can use everywhere so ive found that im much more cooperative while learning english cause they actu
9	intervjuu3	D5	more motivating	personal motivation
10	intervjuu3	D3	more possibilities, flexibility	thats one of the fun parts of teaching english i think cause you can just talk about anything as long as you are speaking english.
11	intervjuu3	D6	more difficult to grade	I guess it might be more related to me personally but tests and testing like grading is more complicated. Like what you exactly test, i guess due to the openness a
12	intervjuu3	D3	more possibilities, flexibility	sometimes i feel bad for other teachers like math teachers cause they cant talk about news or whatever topic of things you can just talk about in english so thats j
13	intervjuu4	D1	lots of resources and materials	you have a lot of freedom in the sense that you can choose different materials you can approach different Topics
14	intervjuu4	D3	more possibilities, flexibility	you have a lot of freedom in the sense that you can choose different materials you can approach different
15	intervjuu4	D3	more possibilities, flexibility	developing language skills can be done in numerous ways for instance you can ask students to read, Express their opinions, teach them grammar and vocabulary.
16	intervjuu4	D4	popular, easy	I noticed that students actually like English classes more because they feel like they can't talk about different things and usually learning a new language is relate
17	intervjuu4	D5	more motivating	I noticed that students actually like English classes more because they feel like they can't talk about different things and usually learning a new language is relate
18	intervjuu4	D3	more possibilities, flexibility	you start seeing things differently from different perspectives for instance when you're writing a for and against essays so I guess language classes actually devel
19	intervjuu5	D4	popular, easy	i find English more relaxed so i think with chemics and physics ther is a lot of mental work, hard work.
20	intervjuu5	D3	more possibilities, flexibility	But in English you can do it differently in every lesson. And it is just as important to hear and speak english so of course the grammar and vocabulary is important
21	intervjuu5	D4	popular, easy	i think english generally is easier for most of the students.
22	Intervjuu6	D7	smaller classes	Yes, i started as teacher of family education and one difference is that there you have to teach bigger classes
23	Intervjuu6	D8	students get anxious	One thing i have noticed is also that some students get really anxious

## RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL  
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

**Joanna Jakobson**

**Estonian novice EFL teachers' perceptions of the most and least supportive factors in their first years of teaching.** *Algajate inglise keele õpetajate arvamused neid esimestel tööaastatel enim ja vähim toetanud faktorite kohta*

Magistritöö

Aasta 2020

Lehekülgede arv:

Annotatsioon:

Käesoleva magistritöö eesmärk on raamistada algajate inglise keele õpetajate hoiakud faktoritest, mis neid enim ja vähim nende esimestel tööaastatel on mõjutanud ja näha, kuidas inglise keele õpetajad eristavad oma õpetatavat ainet teistest õppeainetest. Inglise keele õpetajate hoiakuid ei ole varem selliselt uuritud, samuti ei ole Eestis varem uuritud inglise keele kui õppeaine erisusi õpetaja vaatenurgast. Magistritöö tulemused põhinevad kuue vähem kui viie aastase inglise keele õpetaja staažiga algaja õpetaja kogemustel. Õpetajatega viidi 2019. aasta sügisel läbi poolstruktureeritud intervjuud, kus nad said reflekteerida toetusest oma esimestel tööaastatel.

Töö koosneb kahest suuremast peatükist. Esimeses peatükis antakse ülevaade õpetajate töölt lahkumist mõjutavatest faktoritest, mis jagati mõjutusallika põhiselt välisteks ehk organisatoorseks ja sisemisteks ehk isiklikeks faktoriteks. Teine peatükk koosneb uurimuse protseduurist ja tulemustest, mis on kombineeritud aruteluga. Töö lõpetab kokkuvõtte.

Intervjuudest algajate inglise keele õpetajatega selgus, et neid enim toetav organisatoorne faktor esimestel tööaastatel on kolleegide toetus, vähim toetab neid aga mentorlus. Isiklikest faktoritest olulisimad olid algajate õpetajate jaoks isiksuseomadused nagu kannatlikkus ja kohanemisvõime ning perepoolne toetus. Õpetajad leidsid, et peavad endas arendama sotsiaalseid oskusi, järjepidevust ja enesekehtestamist. Tööst ilmnas, et puudujääke on iga aspekti juures, seepärast andsid paljud õpetajad nõu kõigile osapooltele, sh ka algajatele õpetajatele endile, kuidas esimestel aastatel rohkem toetust saada ja seeläbi õpetajaametis püsida. Peale selle leidsid algajad inglise keele õpetajad, et nende õpetataval ainel on rohkelt erisusi ja omapära, mis tuleneb võõrkeele õpetamise sisust ja teemade rohkusest, kultuurist ja valikuvõimalustest. Õpetajad näevad oma õppeainet positiivses valguses ja peavad seda lihtsamaks, populaarsemaks ja motiveerivaks. Võib eeldada, et see mõjutab nende kutsekindlust suunas, mis kindlustab nende töötamist õpetajana.

Märksõnad: algajate inglise keele õpetajate toetamine, mentorlus, kolleegide toetus, kooli juhtkonna toetus, inglise keele erisused õpetamisel

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