Maldivian secondary teachers' reflections on their first year of teaching: Enabling factors, perceived problems and proposed solutions

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ABSTRACT *This study investigated the reflections on the first year teaching of 10 beginning secondary teachers with a Bachelor of Teaching Secondary qualification through open ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The participants identified the high levels of student motivation and good student performance in their classes, constructive feedback from the school management and establishment of positive relationships with colleagues as enabling factors. The problems these beginning teachers faced include classroom management issues, time management problems, dealing with special needs students, being under-prepared for real classroom situations, high workload and low salary, dealing with parents, lack of status in the school, lack of resources, dealing with their own emotions and being subject to internal and external policies. Implications for teachers training include establishing support groups to help beginning teachers make the transition from pre-service to in-service teachers, evaluating the teacher preparation curriculum to incorporate coping strategies, improving some school related factors and providing them with more practice before they become fully fledged teachers.*

Keywords: first-year teacher; beginning teacher; novice teacher

Introduction

The term 'beginning teachers' refer to teachers in their first three years of teaching (Veenman, 1984). He defined 'problem' faced by a beginning teacher as 'a difficulty that they encounter in the performance of their task, so that intended goals maybe hindered' (Veenman, 1984, p. 143). For the purpose of this study the terms, novice teachers and beginners will be used interchangeably to refer to beginning teachers. Enabling factors is used to refer to causes that motivate the beginning teachers to continue in their teaching profession.

Literature shows that 20% of teachers leave the teaching profession within the first three years of teaching (Corbell, Osborne & Reiman, 2010; Goddard & Foster, 2001; Romano & Gibson, 2006; Shoffner, 2011). Even more alarming is that 9.3% of these teachers do so before completing their first year in the profession (Goddard & Foster, 2001; Romano & Gibson, 2006; Romano, 2008). Since the pivotal work of Veenman in 1984, the educational field has recognized the problems faced by beginning teachers as quite different from those faced by their experienced colleagues (Romano, 2008; Shoffner, 2011). At a time when there is a great teacher shortage at all levels in many part of the world, understanding the issues beginning teachers face and how they could be supported during the initial years of teaching would be a proactive measure for retaining new teachers in the profession.

The purpose of this study is to identify and prioritize the problems and successes of Maldivian beginning secondary teachers and to discuss their suggested solutions for the perceived problems.

This report comprises of three parts. First it looks at the enabling factors beginning teachers face in their first year of teaching. The findings from this part would help in gaining an insight of what the teacher training programs and schools are doing well so that they could be further strengthened to help beginning teachers in this critical time of their development. In the second part of this study the problems and challenges beginning teachers face in their first year of teaching will be delineated. This is followed by the solutions given by them to solve most of the problems they face in their first year of teaching.

Contextual background

At the time of this study secondary teachers are trained in the Maldives by two institutions: the Faculty of Education (FE) of the Maldives National University (MNU) and Villa College (VC). The former is a government institution which has been training teachers since 1984, and the latter is a private institute that has been in operation since 2007 (The Maldives National University, 2013a; Villa College, 2013). As the majority of the secondary teachers graduate from MNU, MNU graduates were considered for this study.

More than 50 secondary teachers had graduated from MNU annually from 2003 to 2012 (The Maldives National University, 2013b). In spite of these numbers Maldivian schools continue to have a deficit of quality secondary teachers. In the 200 inhabited islands of Maldives 188 schools are offering secondary education (Ministry of Education, 2011). Sixty percent of the secondary teachers are expatriates while 1.6% are untrained teachers (Ministry of Education, 2011). In addition to geographic and demographic constraints, the shortage of trained local secondary teachers could be attributed to the high staff turnover. Therefore there is a need in the country to identify factors that motivate beginning teachers to continue in their chosen field and the reasons why beginning teachers leave the teaching field so that these factors could be studied and remedial actions taken.

Aims and Significance of the Research

The purpose of this study is to investigate beginning secondary teachers perceived problems during their first year of teaching and to delineate their solutions to these problems. The research is significant due to many reasons. First, there is a great need for quality local secondary teachers in the Maldives to replace the many expatriates occupying these positions. At a time of such great national need, it is observed that many teachers leave the teaching field in the first few years. It is believed that such a research can highlight factors that contribute to the short career of some beginning teachers and thus can help to eliminate such factors. Second, this study can help in identifying the nature of support (mentoring, induction, etc.) needed for beginning teachers. The results of this study can also be used to assess the effectiveness and the profession-readiness of the secondary teaching program offered by MNU by highlighting beginning teacher concerns that can be addressed during the program. In addition, this study will help in encouraging teacher educators to appreciate the complexity of beginning teachers' experiences and

identify the concerns they face in the first few years. By understanding beginning teachers' concerns, it is believed that teacher educators may better prepare pre-service teachers to meet and surmount the challenges posed by those concerns in their first years of teaching. Additionally, the research will help determine whether the problems faced by the Maldivian beginning teachers are similar or different to problems faced by the beginning teachers in general.

Research Questions

The three general questions guiding this study were:

1. What enabling factors in their first year of teaching motivate the Maldivian secondary teachers to continue in the teaching field?
2. What problems do teachers face in their first year of teaching?
3. What are the solutions proposed by the teachers to overcome the problems they face in their first year of teaching?

Literature Review

First Year of Teaching: Enabling Factors

The first year of teaching is recognized as an important segment of a teacher's career, believed to have long-term implications for teaching effectiveness, job satisfaction, and career length (Hebert & Worthy, 2001; Maistre & Pare, 2009; Rust, 1994; Shoffner, 2011). The 'criticality' of the first year of teaching for a beginning teacher is reflected in the alternative terms, 'survival stage' and 'novice stage' used to describe this year in relation to the professional development of a beginning teacher (Rust, 1994). Peralta illustrated the sense of being a first year teacher as the feeling of 'stumbling down a dark corridor, discovering things as they happen' (2005, p. 361).

The initial phase of a teacher's life transforms him or her from a student learner to a teacher who is responsible for promoting learning in others (Cooke & Pang, 1991; Shoffner, 2011). During this phase the beginning teacher acquires and strengthens his/her teaching skills and knowledge and is involved in personal growth and development. In addition, this is a phase in which changes occur to his or her attitude and behaviour depending on his or her experiences in the classroom and the school as a whole (Cooke & Pang, 1991; Hebert & Worthy, 2001; Maistre & Pare, 2009; Shoffner, 2011; Veenman, 1984).

As pre-service teachers enter the workplace, they encounter new and challenging responsibilities, and are forced to let go of the 'missionary ideals' formed during teacher training in the face of the 'harsh and rude reality' of everyday classroom life (Veenman, 1984). He referred to this transition as the 'reality shock' which subjects the novice teachers to uncertainty, anticipation and quite often lead them to rethink their career choice.

Of the few factors that make beginning teachers' satisfied with their work, their ability to motivate the students is considered significant (Maistre & Pare, 2009). In their study, Romano and Gibson (2006) found that the opportunities to work with children, constantly learning about teaching, the enjoyment in teaching the subject

they love, doing something worthwhile and the vacations and working conditions were considered as factors giving satisfaction to the new teachers.

The contentment of a job well done comes with the good performance students' show in the subjects in relation to the results students normally produce (Romano & Gibson, 2006). Many beginning teachers agree that this satisfaction motivates them in their careers (Maistre & Pare, 2009; Norton, 1997; Shoffner, 2011).

As beginners pass through the hurdles of their first few years of teaching any type of help they receive is considered as an enabling factor by them. The participant of Romano and Gibson's study viewed the professional development seminars she attended during her first year of teaching, as a big help to improve her teaching as well as her classroom management skills (2006). These seminars gave her confidence to deal with most of the problems she faced in the classroom. Induction programs and mentorship programs are shown to have positive influences on teacher satisfaction (Hellsten, Prytula, & Ebanks, 2009).

The support novices receive from colleagues and the school management in their first year is perceived as an enabling factor by them. Johnson and Birkeland stressed the importance of a supportive school environment by noting that the teachers who feel successful with students and whose schools are organized to support them in their teaching are more likely to stay in the schools and in the profession in general (2003).

In a case study carried out by Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman and Liu (2001) some beginners described the first year of teaching as a very 'needy' stage of their life in which they constantly questioned their competence. According to these beginners, it was the guidance of the school administration and other staff members that helped them stay afloat despite the obstacles they experienced. Moreover, beginners particularly value the feedback they get from their colleagues and school management after evaluating their teaching (Hellsten et al., 2009; Peralta, 2005).

Some new teachers who participated in the study conducted by Kardos et al. (2001) described the enlightening experience of working in an integrated professional culture in which there was ongoing, two-way interaction about teaching and learning among novices and experienced teachers. They were happy with the constant assistance and encouragement. These teachers especially expressed their contentment over the shared role of responsibility they had with the veterans of the school, its students and with each other.

As much as they crave for student participation in their lessons and support from colleagues and school administration, beginning teachers also desire for positive feedback from parents. Establishing a positive relationship with parents act as an incentive that make the hardship of the first few years of teaching worthwhile (McCarra, 2003; Romano & Gibson, 2006; Veenman, 1984).

First Year of Teaching: Problems Faced

Studies designed to identify problems and issues faced by beginning teachers have been conducted for more than half a century (Romano & Gibson, 2006). From first-hand accounts of beginning teachers to longitudinal psychometric investigations, these literature and research reveal a number of problems and challenges overwhelming first year teachers (Hellsten et al., 2009; Maistre & Pare, 2009; Romano & Gibson, 2006; Romano, 2008; Shoffner, 2011; Veenman, 1984;

Worthy, 2005). The researchers identified two major areas of concern that rouse anxiety in beginning teachers (Rieg, Paquette & Chen, 2007). They are the affective concerns which include classroom discipline, personal issues, and relationships (with students, parents, colleagues and school administration), and instructional concerns which include subject knowledge, instructional strategies, assessment of students work, lack of resources and differentiated teaching. In addition to these factors, beginning teachers are also subject to problems associated with teacher evaluation and internal and external politics (Romano & Gibson, 2006; Romano, 2008; Veenman, 1984; Worthy, 2005).

In his review of 83 international studies that described the perceived problems of beginning teachers during the 1960's, 1970's and early 1980's, Veenman ranked classroom discipline as the most seriously perceived problem area by beginning teachers (1984). Similar studies conducted in the recent years also gave the same status to classroom management issues (Newton, Beardsley & Shakespear, 2003; Shoffner, 2011). Veenman attributed this problem to the inexperience of the beginning teachers to attend to spontaneous student responses and cues from the class as a whole, and to their sensitivity to students' behaviours that disrupt their planned presentations (1984). This can be ascribed to the difficulty first year teachers' face in establishing an appropriate social distance with the students (Shoffner, 2011; Zepeda & Mayers, 2001). Furthermore, the teachers who participated in Rieg et al.'s (2007) study pointed out that the placement of students with emotional and behavioural problems who need individual behaviour plans and a great amount of support in regular classroom settings adds a lot of stress to their daily routine. This observation is also supported by the study done by Shoffner (2011).

Most beginning teachers, who participated in the qualitative study conducted by Britt (1997) on the issues significant to the teaching profession, claimed that most of their classroom time was spent on behaviour management that leads to time management issues. Thus, time management becomes another perceived problem for beginning teachers as they constantly worry about whether their lessons would go according to plan. Worthy (2005) believes that the tendency of most beginning teachers to deal with classroom disruptions on a day to day basis ignoring their long term effect causes 'fires' to erupt in the classrooms and interferes with the teachers' daily plans.

Motivating each and every student in the class becomes an issue to the beginning teacher as they struggle with understanding the difference between being 'liked' and being 'respected' (Shoffner, 2011; Rieg et al., 2007; Veenman, 1984). The beginners constantly wonder about where to draw the line in their relationship with the students. They are afraid to become too close in case the students lose respect in them as teachers or move too far in case the students lose motivation in their teaching.

The availability of necessary resources or rather their unavailability is a concern for many beginning teachers especially when it comes to motivating the students (McCarra, 2003; Romano, 2008). With limited classroom experience, these teachers depend on a variety of teaching strategies that require different resources to maintain the students' attention during the lesson. However, few of these teachers are lucky enough to get all the resources they need for their lessons.

In his ranking of the most seriously perceived problems of beginning teachers, Veenman (1984) had given a high emphasis to the relationship beginning teachers

have with the parents of their students. When it comes to contacting parents and organizing parents meetings, the new teachers become stressed (Rieg et al., 2007; Saber, 2004; Veenman, 1984). Beginners attribute this behaviour to the lack of support given by parents to their ideas and the well-being of the students in school. In addition, the parents' lack of confidence in the novices' competence somehow makes them feel inferior in their new job (Brown, 2005; Veenman, 1984).

Being constantly approached by parents for clarification of assessment procedures is another problem perceived by beginning teachers (Rieg et al., 2007). In addition, the pressure put on them to obtain a better performance from their students on State standardized tests adds anxiety to their already hectic first year as they see the student performance as a direct reflection of their teaching (Rieg et al., 2007).

Workload is another aspect beginning teachers perceive as a concern in their first year of teaching (Goddard & Goddard, 2006; Hardy 1999; MacCarra, 2003; Romano, 2008). A significant proportion of the participants in the study conducted by Goddard and Goddard (2006) to find out the association between workload and turnover rates of novice teachers, noted that they were working under high work pressures relative to their colleagues and their perceptions of job rewards. This is also highlighted by Brock and Grady (1997, cited in Zepeda & Mayers, 2001, p.11) when they stated, "teaching is one of the few careers in which the least experienced members face the greatest challenges and most responsibilities.'

Novice teachers find burdensome the active role they have to play in extracurricular activities, clubs, discipline, maintaining students' dress code, duty, and advisory committees on top of their teaching load (Brown, 2005; Romano & Gibson, 2006, Shoffner, 2011). According to Hardy (1999), the placement of beginning teachers in difficult teaching situations such as in low ability classes and with special-needs students (who veteran teachers refuse to teach), tend to raise doubts in their minds about continuing teaching as a career.

Factors related to the school environment such as the lack of status and limited decision making opportunities underpin novice teacher dissatisfaction (Hardy, 1999; Romano & Gibson, 2006). Furthermore, Hardy (1999) attributed time-tabling constraints as factors that demoralize novices as their eagerness to teach using innovative methods they have learnt in the pre-service program remain unrealized due to the unavailability of blocks of periods or certain rooms which they need to carry out such lessons effectively. Communication problems within departments and between the school management and the beginning teachers sometimes tend to confuse the novice teachers demotivating them (Fox, Wilson & Deaney, 2010; Romano & Gibson, 2006). In addition, having stubborn head of departments or veteran teachers who force the new teachers to adapt the old methods they use kill the excitement new teachers have for their new job (Rieg et al., 2007).

One of the major challenges faced by beginning teachers is their lack of knowledge when it comes to dealing with special needs students in their classrooms (Romano & Gibson, 2006). The few courses that are offered in the pre-service program in this matter are considered too general by a significant amount of beginning teachers (McCarra, 2003; Shoffner, 2011; Veenman, 1984). In addition, some new teachers regard the inclusion policy as a disruption to their instructional time (Romano & Gibson, 2006).

In their first year of teaching, beginners experience a rollercoaster of emotions ranging from exhilaration, frustration, uncertainty, confusion and isolation (Shoffner, 2011). The high expectations of self and towards the students, with which novice teachers enter the teaching field is a problem they identify with (Appleton & Kindt, 2002; Shoffner, 2011; Williams, 1985). At the very beginning, they are excited of their role as a teacher and the prospect of trying the modern methods and ideas of teaching they have studied. They expect each of their students to fit into the 'generic model' of a student portrayed in their text books but become dismayed when they experience 'real' students. The atmosphere of the schools which is so alienated from their expectations create uncertainty (Fox et al., 2010; Intrator, 2006). They become confused when their lessons do not go according to plan. Some beginning teachers described the sense of isolation they felt amongst the veteran teachers as being a 'stranger in a new land' (Saber, 2004, p. 147).

One of the most significant problems encountered by beginning teachers is the overwhelming feelings of disillusionment and the belief that they are unable to cope with the multitude of pressures they encounter each day (Intrator, 2006; Shoffner, 2011). The first year is considered by most beginners as a constant struggle as they try to balance their time between planning detailed lessons with interesting teaching methods on one hand, and dealing with other personal issues on the other (Rieg et al., 2007; Romano & Gibson, 2006, Shoffner, 2011). Some beginners feel they do not have any time for themselves, let alone time to spend with their families (Rieg et al., 2007). In addition to problems in school, they are forced to deal with problems at home. As their sense of security becomes threatened, their ability to involve deeply with the needs of their students also become affected (Shoffner, 2011; Worthy, 2005).

The sense of isolation that confronts the beginner when he or she enters the social and political system of the school hinders professional growth (Hebert & Worthy, 2001; Shoffner, 2011). For the novice, 'finding a place in the school culture and establishing a web of professional relationships is challenged by the harried pace of school, physical isolation from other teachers, and unfamiliarity with individuals, the school context, and the established social and political structure (Hebert & Worthy, 2001 p. 898). A major concern expressed by the participants in the study of Kados et al. (2001) was the veteran-oriented professional culture that was established in their schools. In these schools the modes of professional practice were determined by the veteran faculty. Though some of the experienced colleagues were socially friendly, professional norms of privacy and autonomy prevailed. Hence, new teachers lacked the guidance of the professionals and remain confused in such schools.

Strategies to Overcome Problems Faced by Beginning Teachers in their First Year of Teaching

A number of beginning teachers who participated in the reviewed studies, suggested providing them with a support system either in the form of an induction or orientation program or a mentoring program (Hellsten et al., 2009; McCarra, 2003; Ottesen, 2007).

The purposes of induction programs are to improve teaching performance, to increase the retention of capable teachers, to promote the personal well-being of novice teachers, and to transmit the culture of the school to the beginners (Gore,

Williams & Ladwig, 2006; Hellsten et al., 2009; McCarra, 2003). Providing orientation programs for the new teachers would help acclimatize them to their new environments (Rieg et al., 2007). It is very important that these programs include precise issues that a new teacher would face. The recommended areas to address include evaluation procedures, effective classroom management techniques that work in the respective school, strategies to deal with problems, and step-by-step problem solving strategies (Hellsten et al., 2009).

Assistance and emotional support in handling the everyday pressures of teaching which is dubbed as the profession 'that eats its young', is essential for the novice teacher (Bartell, 2004; Hellsten et al., 2009). One of the best ways to prepare a new teacher for the responsibilities ahead is to pair him or her with a mentor (Carter & Francis, 2000; Hellsten et al., 2009; Jonson, 2002). 'Mentoring mitigates teacher isolation, promotes the concept of an educative workplace and leads to the creation or understanding of consensual norms in a school, faculty or grade team' (Carter & Francis, 2000, p. 1).

A discovery documented from the work of Rieg et al. (2007) is the amount of help novices crave from their former lecturers in order to deal with the problems they face in the beginning years. Thus, mentoring can be extended to include the teacher training institutes by establishing a continuing relationship between the beginning teachers and the institutes (Maistre & Pare, 2009; McCarra, 2003).

Another type of support system that could be provided to the beginning teachers is peer support groups and networks. These types of programs provide a chance for a similar group of teachers with similar concerns to meet and reflect on their experiences thus helping them alleviate their worries (Gratch, 2000; McCarra, 2003; Shoffner, 2011). Through such interactions the novices can identify and describe issues and concerns they are facing, identify patterns and call on their previous knowledge, and determine what they might need to improve their practice (McCarra, 2003; Norton, 1997; Romano & Gibson, 2006; Shoffner, 2011).

One of the suggestions made by McCarra (2003) to help beginning teachers overcome their loneliness is to give them internet access. According to her, internet acts as a means for beginners to keep in touch with other beginning teachers as well as mentors. Furthermore, internet provides easy access to subject matter experts and up-to-date resources—an added benefit for beginning teachers.

Over the years beginning teachers have recommended including ways of effectively dealing with the needs of diverse learners, the victims of bullying situations, the students who lack respect and manners, and the pressures placed on students regarding standardized tests in their course work, so that they would be better prepared to deal with the problems they face in their first year of teaching (McCarra, 2003; Rieg et al., 2007; Romano, 2008; Shoffner, 2011). Beginning teachers have also urged to provide them with more practical experience and teaching them how to use textbooks and curriculum guides effectively (McCarra, 2003). The use of real classroom scenarios when teaching them classroom management skills was also recommended (McCarra, 2003).

Though mandated reform of the curriculum is implemented immediately in most schools, it takes a while before they are incorporated into the curriculum of the pre-service program (Goddard & Foster, 2001). Due to this 'time-lag' the teachers experience a mismatch between what they have learnt in the pre-service program and what they experience in their first year of teaching. To avoid this

latency Goddard and Foster (2001) urge the teacher educators to be up-to-date with any curricular reforms, innovations, policy changes and parental expectations for the education system.

Teaching by its nature is very unpredictable. However well prepared and committed the teacher may be, there is no assurance of succeeding in school (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). They believe that an enabling work environment can reduce this uncertainty thereby increasing the teacher's chance of success and satisfaction. An enabling work environment here refers to a positive school culture with good facilities, reasonable amount of workload, supportive colleagues, competent school administrators and opportunities for professional development.

A great social welcome of the new teachers to the schools is considered very important in the literature that discusses helping beginning teachers settle down to their new jobs (Dollase, 1992; Goddard & Foster, 2001; Harris & Anthony, 2001; McCarra, 2003; Veenman, 1984). According to Goddard and Foster quite often the most basic needs of the beginning teacher, which is watering their low self-esteem, is ignored by most of the schools (2001). They recommend creating a supportive 'family atmosphere' in the schools in order to provide the novices with a sense of belonging and welcome.

One of the solutions proposed by the participants of the study carried out by McCarra (2003) for the perceived problems of beginning teachers is to improve the teaching conditions by giving them more planning time, providing them with necessary resources, assigning them smaller classrooms and more teaching assistants. In addition McCarra (2003) deliberated on the importance beginning teachers place on professional development programs in order to provide them with an easy transition from pre-service to in-service teaching. The beginners want these programs to meet individual teacher needs as well as include strategies to deal with student needs.

Kardos et al. (2001) found that new teachers are more likely to stay in teaching and remain at their schools when they perceive their schools to be places that promote frequent and reciprocal interaction among faculty members across experience levels, recognize new teachers' needs as beginners, and develop shared responsibility among teachers for the school and its students. McCarra (2003) also identified the importance of including beginning teachers in decision making processes (both curriculum-wise and school-wise) so that they will have ownership in important decisions that directly influences them.

In McCarra's (2003) study, she found out that the beginners as well as veteran teachers feel that their salary does not measure up to the hard work they are doing compared to other professions. Hence she recommended improving teacher salaries in order to keep teachers in the profession.

This brief review of literature suggests much research has been conducted to identify the perceived problems of beginning teachers and strategies to address them. Through this study it was my intention to see whether the same enabling factors and problems documented in literature are similar to those faced by Maldivian secondary teachers.

Methodology

This qualitative research was framed by the interpretive paradigm. It impregnates perspectives, beliefs and judgments of the participants (O'Donoghue, 2007; Rowlands, 2005). Rowlands (2005) define interpretive research in terms of epistemology. According to O'Donoghue (2007, p. 7) qualitative paradigm emphasizes 'social interaction as the basis for knowledge.' It assumes that people create and associate their own subjective and inter-subjective meanings as they interact with the world around them. In reflecting about their first year of teaching, the participants of this study were constructing a diversity of meanings based on their experiences and the social context.

The research was conducted with ten participants who graduated from the Bachelor of Teaching-Secondary program conducted by the Faculty of Education of the Maldives National University in December 2010. They had no substantial teaching experience prior to their appointments to secondary schools of the Maldives in 2011. At the time of the study, the participants had completed two years of full-time teaching. The participants include five males and five females from schools in the capital city.

Open-ended questions were first mailed to the participants exploring their reflections on their first year of teaching. As a means of triangulating the data, semi structured in-depth face-to-face interviews were then conducted with participants to seek their reflections of their first year of teaching and to explore more on what they have reported on the questionnaires. These interviews were forty-five minutes to an hour long and was conducted in Dhivehi.

The questionnaires and interview transcripts were then analysed following the process of data reduction, data display and the drawing of conclusions. The simplification of data, conducted at the conclusion of the round of interviews used first level and second level coding strategies which generated categories. The categories were mapped onto charts as a means of visually representing how the categories related to each other which supported the identification of themes. At the conclusion of the data analysis process, the themes identified were verified and validated with participants.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study show that the enabling factors and problems faced by Maldivian beginning teachers, though unique to each participant's own experience, have similarities to what have been documented in literature.

Reflections on the First Year: Enabling Factors

The enabling factors described by the participants of this study can be categorised into two broad themes; students related factors and school related factors.

Student Related Factors. The most prevalent enabling factors given by the participants were student related. They expressed positive emotions with student motivation. One participant stated:

> Planning the lessons, carrying them out and getting good reactions and response from students during and after a lesson gave me a sense of accomplishment that made me want to do the job even better. With my ability to build good rapport with the students, I found the classroom environment both enjoyable and challenging. When students have that look which shows me they have understood something I have explained, that really makes my day.

Intrator (2006) equated these positive emotions a beginning teacher goes through when a lesson goes well, or a student offers words of appreciation, to the 'fuel' that energizes the novice to operate in the midst of the strange and novel atmosphere of the school.

Another participant further explains:

> The highest motivation I got was from my students when they accepted me as a good and helpful teacher. Almost all the students liked my way of teaching which gave me confidence and satisfaction. As the feelings of students about a teacher contribute a lot to a teachers' reputation, I think I made a good impression in front of the school management and parents.

The participants also noted that the good performance some students showed in the assigned work and assessment components gave them contentment. As one participant mentioned: :

> I get satisfaction from working with the students and seeing how their daily learning changes. For example, the improvement I see in my students' test scores is a good sign that I am having an effect on their learning. Also witnessing the 'aha' moment as they grasp a certain concept and master a certain technique is worth all the hardship and sleepless nights.

Many studies carried out on job satisfaction and motivation of teachers have shown that teachers in different countries generally derive job satisfaction from factors integral to teaching: assisting the growth of children, developing good relationships with students, and experiencing self-growth in the teaching and learning process (Dinham and Scott 1998; Dinham and Scott 2000; Scott, Cox, Dinham1999; Scott, Stone, & Dinham 2001; Lam & Yan, 2011).

School Related Factors. In the context of the school, some participants mentioned the support and the positive evaluation they received from the school principal or the Head of Department after observing their lessons. According to four participants these evaluations helped them in improving their teaching and classroom management skills in addition to helping them gain more confidence. According to Kyriacou and Kunc (2007), the degree to which senior staff is perceived as supportive by new teachers is one of the main factors that affect retention and commitment towards teaching. The provision of adequate support by head teachers and mentors are considered necessary for the creation of a healthy school climate and a collaborative school culture (Bickmore and Bickmore, 2010). New teachers who rarely interact with administrators report diminished perceptions of success (Corbell et al., 2010).

Fifty percent of the participants described the freedom they had when dealing with behaviour problems as a motivating factor. One participant explained this:

> Another significant factor which motivated me is the freedom given by the management for all the teachers in general and to advise and correct the students' behaviour. In other words, the teachers have full power to take necessary actions towards students in the process of bringing the child into the desired behaviour and condition.

Another school related enabling factor mentioned by some participants was the good relationship they had established with their colleagues, especially with other beginning teachers. One participant went on to say:

> If it wasn't for the help I got from my peers I wouldn't have survived my first year. Every day during break time we met and discussed things that happened to us in the classroom. We also discussed ways of dealing with these issues and other sources of help we could use. Getting their support and knowing I wasn't the only one having these problems really helped.

Gratch (1998) had advocated the importance of peer support groups in helping the beginners develop abilities to reflect on classroom experiences. Furthermore, Gratch (1998) advised beginning teachers to establish meaningful relationships with colleagues and be willing to admit difficulties and ask for help in order to achieve successful early teaching experiences. The study done by Corbell et al. (2010) shows that beginning teachers provided with a common planning time with colleagues and a scheduled time to interact with colleagues on instructional issues are about half as likely to leave the teaching profession at the beginning of their careers.

Reflections on the First Year: Problems and Concerns

The problems identified by the participants can be grouped to the following categories; problems related to students, problems related to a mismatch between pre-service training program and real practice, problems related to high workload, problems related to lack of resources, problems related to working with parents, problems related to dealing with emotions, problems related to internal and external politics and problems related to salary issues.

Problems Related to Students. Among the student related problems, classroom management was perceived as the most stressful concern the participants faced in their first year of teaching. Two of the participants explained their experiences as follows:

> Participant A: The main problem I faced was classroom management issues. I tried the different methods they taught us in FE by trial and error. I have to tell you they don't really work. The methods given in the text books are so standard.

> Participant B: I really was not prepared to the behaviour of those students. In FE, they taught us how to teach the good students. They never taught us how to teach the bad ones. It was so difficult because we did not have much practice in dealing with classroom management problems.

However, participants agreed that as the year went on their skills of classroom management improved. When asked how they dealt with classroom disruptions, the participants identified the help they got from their colleagues and the school management. One participant also expressed his annoyance with the existing system to deal with misbehaviour issues in the school by locals.

> In this school we are allowed to take measures to prevent student misbehaviour, but the expatriate teachers do nothing about it. Therefore, all our efforts go in vain.

Classroom management issues were seen by the participants as time consuming. According to some participants, the time factor also became a concern when they struggled to carry out the planned lessons, cater to the individual needs of the students and meet up to the parents' expectations. One participant commented on the pressure of planning and teaching as follows:

> In my first year I had to teach 4 classes with 30 students in each. With single and double periods of 35 minutes per class, and a big syllabus to cover, it was hard to give individual attention to students. Much time had to be spent on planning and preparation to cater for students' individual needs. Mathematics is a subject which requires drilling exercises for students. In addition to explaining the answers of the exercises to the class, there was the parents' expectation to check the students' books and mark their work every day, and trying to meet this expectation seemed like a never-ending task.

Another participant also described some events in the classroom that led to time management issues:

> When I enter the classroom there are so many things I have to deal with so there just isn't enough time to carry out everything I have planned. First of all I have to get the students in groups, which takes a long time. Then the students might start asking me questions and I have to answer them. Then there is the case of the misbehaving students whom I have to deal with before I start with my lesson. There are always two or three students who have to go to the toilet or to get a book from the staffroom.

These findings are congruent with similar studies done on beginning teachers (Romano, 2008; Veenman, 1984). Research has shown that at the beginning, the main concern of novice teachers are survival, worrying about controlling classes, impressing administrators, and building working relationships with school personnel (Salameh, Al-Omari, & Jumia'an, 2011). However, with successful teaching experience, teacher's concerns finally shift toward students' learning (McCarra, 2003; Salameh, Al-Omari, & Jumia'an, 2011; Veenman, 1984).

In explaining student related anxiety, most participants brought up the issue of having special needs students in mainstream classes. They were particularly concerned about their lack of knowledge in dealing with these students. Researchers investigating inclusive classrooms have found that placing students with academic and physical disabilities in mainstream classes put a lot of pressure on general education teachers as they are not prepared for the instructional adaptations that need to be made to cater for the needs of such students (Brownell, Yeager, Sindelar, vanHover, & Riley, 2008). This pressure is felt more by the novices as they are not ready for the influences individual differences of students can have on their pedagogical choices, selection of appropriate classroom management strategies, and development of relationships with students and colleagues (Brownell et al., 2008).

Problems related to a mismatch between pre-service training and real practice. A recurrent theme that emerged from all the interviews was the participants' feelings of being under-prepared for life in classrooms and their confusion about what confronted them when they reported to their respective schools. They believe that there is a huge gap between what they have learnt and what actually happened in their classrooms. Maistre and Pare (2009) advocate that, in addition to a teaching degree, a teacher should be given enough practice under supervision before placing him or her in a classroom alone.

A problem related to content and pedagogy that was expressed by some of the participants was their unfamiliarity with the activities and teaching strategies they sometimes used in their lessons in the hope of motivating their students. However, due to their lack of experience they had a hard time in giving instructions to the students. According to one participant:

> I tried to include some student centred methods and cooperative learning activities we learned in MNU. But when I went into the class I had difficulty in letting the students' understand what they have to do. Therefore, the lessons never went according to plan and were not effective at all. And to be on the safe side I don't use them anymore.

Problems related to high work load. The participants of this study expressed concerns over the fact that they had to assume the same responsibilities as veterans and were not given much formal assistance. Though overburdened, they revealed their willingness to take on the teaching workload but were not happy with the extra workload. As one participant pointed out:

> I just hated the administrative tasks I had to do and all those extracurricular activities which I had to attend. On the rare weekends I got for my own, there would be an English Club meeting or a Dhivehi Club meeting. On top of that there would be an interclass Quran competition or a quiz which we had to prepare the students for.

All the participants remembered their first year of teaching as physically and mentally draining. In addition to the school hours, they had to spend a lot of time in the evenings and weekends getting ready for the lessons and marking student

work. In addition, they had to participate in extra-curricular activities after hours. According to one participant:

> I felt so exhausted. As I worked in the afternoon session, I had to wait for remedial classes after school. By the time I went home, it would be about 9 pm. Even then I could not rest as I had to prepare for the next day's lesson, mark the books and sometimes, mark student's assessments.

This concern was raised in many other studies conducted on beginning teachers (Romano & Gibson, 2006; Shoffner, 2011; Veenman, 1984). Shoffner (2011) points out that additional stress is added to the novice teacher already burdened by the full time work load and the stress of contending with the energy and occasional resistance of adolescents during the day, when they have to spend their evenings and weekends grading papers, responding to students' writing, completing administrative paper work, and planning lessons.

Problems related to dealing with parents. Most of the participants expressed their distress in dealing with parents. While some participants were worried about the constant criticism they got from the parents, the others expressed their concerns over parent apathy. One participant described her feelings as follows:

> And then there is this group of parents that I am never able to please. They always find something to criticize or comment about. If it isn't about my lessons or teaching methods they will criticize about the way I dress or the homework assignments I give. It is just a never ending story. But fortunately I have learnt to be fair with my students as well as their parents.

While referring to the indifference of some parents when it came to involving in dialogue about their children's work one participant explained:

> Every time I talked to this parent I got the feeling that she didn't care about her kid. When I pointed out the difficulties this particular student were having in the class, the parent just told me it was my job to make sure her child learned.

Peralta (2005) highlighted the pressure a novice can feel when dealing with angry parents. New teachers are advised to think things beforehand, be consistent, remain calm and explain themselves when dealing with difficult parents (Peralta, 2005). Both Peralta (2005) and Maistre and Pare, (2009) attribute the short careers of beginning teachers to the elevated accountability pressure that comes from parents and policy makers.

In relation to the apprehension that comes from the parent's side one participant also referred to the inconsistency in the methods used by the school when dealing with different parents by saying:

> Dealing with parents was an issue I had trouble with. The main reason that caused this difficulty was, although the school had a so-called policy in dealing with parents, they were not consistent with it. So depending on the student and the parent there were different protocols to be followed and this sometimes made things very difficult and nerve wrecking for me. For example I had this student

in my class who is the daughter of a minister; and she was a disruptive kid. But, I got the sense that the school management was a bit frightened to report her misbehaviour to the parents so they just ignored her, and as was the normal method, I could not contact the parents directly. I had to wait for the Principal to do that for me which never happened.

Problems related to internal and external politics. Another concern of the participants is the suppression of their voice in matters related to teaching and learning and curriculum issues. They expressed dissatisfaction that the school management rarely asked for the new teachers' opinion when major decisions were made. Some participants described their school environment as having a top down bureaucratic system in which the grassroot teachers, new or experienced, have no power at all. Congruent with these findings, marginalization of teacher's voice in conversations regarding content and pedagogy and curriculum issues has been heavily documented in literature (Gratch, 1998; Menon, 2011). Menon (2011) highlights the importance of recognizing new teachers as individuals who can contribute to the collective knowledge of the school, in order to have a collaborative school setting so that the beginners escape feelings of failure or disadvantage in relation to more experienced colleagues.

As regards to their lack of status three of the beginning teachers expressed their concern over the lack of autonomy they had in planning lessons. They referred to the lessons planned for them by veteran teachers as 'teacher centred and boring' and agreed that the excitement they had for teaching has somewhat diminished when this happened. Multiple reviews conclude that individuals are drawn to teaching for altruistic and intrinsic reasons (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Adoniou, 2012). They embrace the teaching field to do well and to have an impact on peoples' lives. However, the participants felt that these motivators are sometimes compromised by their schools' response to system imperatives and when they have to teach for assessment purposes.

Even the participants who had the freedom to plan their own lessons were dissatisfied with the response they got from their students. One participant expressed his frustration as follows:

Using different types of teaching strategies is very difficult. I tried to conduct cooperative learning activities like jigsaw but the students were just not interested. They said that those types of activities are for babies.

Probelms related to dealing with emotions. The participants revealed that dealing with their own emotions was a difficult phase all of them went through at the beginning of their teaching post. In and outside the classroom, they had experienced a range of positive and negative emotions, from excitement and pride to frustration and anxiety. Zembylas (2007, cited in Shoffner, 2011) explains that these emotions are felt by most novice teachers and it is through their response to these emotional experiences that they learn to manage issues regarding teaching and learning. The most difficult emotional dilemma faced by the beginning teachers was controlling their temper when dealing with difficult students and parents. Shoffner (2011), portrays teaching as the most patience-trying professions there is and equates the feelings beginning teachers go through to being in an emotional roller-coaster.

Problems related to lack of resources. Having to work within a low budget and having access to minimal teaching resources were expressed as problem areas by the participants. According to Corbell et al. (2010), to feel successful beginning teachers need many resources such as enough paper and supplies, textbooks for all students, a classroom dedicated to teaching, a school in good physical condition, a complete curriculum, and knowledge of instruction and assessment of student work.

Problems related to salary. The participants of this study were also worried about the low salary teachers get compared to professionals in other fields. Lam and Yan (2011) attribute the low pay of teachers as the major disincentive for qualified graduates to enter the teaching profession and for serving teachers to remain in it. In addition, many qualified graduates are scared of the teaching profession because it is perceived as a highly demanding career that comes with heavy workloads, heavy emotional demands, low social status and low salary (Lam and Yan, 2011).

Proposed Solutions to Perceived Problems

The solutions proposed by the participants fall into five major categories; those related to establishing support groups, those related to evaluating the teacher training curriculum, those related to improving school related factors, those related to salary and incentives and the need for more practice before they become fully fledged teachers.

There is no support system, at present that guides Maldivian beginning teachers when they make the transition from pre-service to in-service teachers. This was a worry for all the participants. One participant recommended the need for mentoring programs:

> I think we should have a school based support system. Such as mentor teachers or induction programs. These could provide us with guidance, advice and general support in our first year.

Another participant supported this proposal by saying:

> Mentor teachers will have ample experience so new teachers could learn from them. Another advantage of having school based mentors is we can learn specific strategies that work in our school through them.

Mentorships programs induce communication and development of skills among novices. They acclimatize beginners to the work environment by providing appropriate support and resources (Hellsten et al., 2009). Previous research has found that mentor support positively influences beginners satisfaction in the teaching profession and workplace (Corbell et al., 2010; Hellsten et al., 2009).

The participants also highlighted the need for an induction program to bridge the gap between the pre-service training and actual teaching posts. On the subject of mentors, they recommended to establish a link between the schools and MNU. The participants view the teacher training institute as a source they could depend

on to ease their way through the problems they face in their first year. One participant stated:

> FE could periodically check on us or even have seminars or workshops for us where we can go and discuss about our difficulties and get guidance and support from them. Because the teacher educators know us better as they have worked with us and they would know our strengths and weaknesses in the classroom.

Worthy (2005) recounts the benefits of a healthy school–teacher training institute partnership. In addition to providing support to novice teachers, these partnerships could provide a better practicum experience for pre-service teachers, improved education of students, and increased understanding of schooling by the faculty of the teacher training institutes. However, he reasons out why universities and teacher training institutes are reluctant to establish a healthy link with schools stating that the field-based jobs are viewed as more challenging by the faculty when compared to the institute-based teaching assignments. In addition, the academic staff members of the teaching institutes may feel that the time they spend in schools are not very highly regarded by their colleagues in the university or teaching institution often giving them the status of 'second class citizens' (Worthy, 2005).

   Of the major concerns expressed by the participants the incongruence between the MNU curriculum and the reality was viewed as adding a lot of stress to their first year of teaching. Thus, some participants proposed to include extra courses in special education and behaviour management in the teacher training program. In addition, some participants suggested revising the text books used for some subjects in the pre-service course as they are not relevant to the Maldivian context. According to one participant:

> I think rather than depending on foreign text books, it would be better if studies are done in the Maldives and the reported findings are taught to us especially in subjects like educational psychology because the cases we study are not really related to the Maldivian context.

All the participants asked to provide them with training sessions and more help to equip them with the skills and support needed to deal with special-needs students in their mainstream classes. Such sessions and aid provide the beginners with both psychological and instructional support through building their self confidence, making them more self-reliant, and enabling them to manage the stress of the classroom more effectively (Brownsell et al., 2004).

   The participants identified school related factors that could be improved to help them in their first year. Though not a major concern, one participant proposed to give them access to their own office space in the school. As is common practice in the Maldivian schools all teachers are given a common staffroom with three or four computers to be shared among all the teachers. According to this participant:

> The working environment for the teachers should be designed in a proper manner with enough space and facilities. One suggestion to solve this problem is to allocate a private area for each individual teacher with enough space and facilities. These areas can be separated with partitions and each block equipped

with necessary facilities and resources like computers with internet connection, tables with drawers, lockers, etc.

In order to minimize parent queries regarding teaching methods and assessment procedures used by novices, one participant also suggested holding a parent-teacher meeting at the beginning of the academic year where information is given to parents.

Some participants blamed the lack of teaching practice they had in their pre-service program for most of the problems they faced in their first year of teaching. They recommended giving them more practice in teaching before they become full time teachers. Regarding this one participant suggested:

> I think it would be better to allocate training teachers to schools for 1 whole semester or a year, for teaching practice rather than 3 weeks or 5 weeks practicum blocks. This way we will learn more about the school culture and experience classroom life first hand.

All in all the findings of this study are congruent on what has been documented in literature, hence it could be said that the problems perceived by Maldivian beginning teachers are not that different from the problems faced by novices in general and similar solutions have been suggested by the Maldivian beginning teachers as their counterparts in other countries.

Implications

This study considered the enabling factors and problems beginning teachers faced in their first year of teaching and their proposed solutions.

The participants suggested improvements to the Bachelor of Teaching Secondary program offered by MNU. The findings of this study may be used in revising this program so concerns of beginning teachers are addressed at the pre-service stage.

One of the major solutions proposed by the participants to was establishing support systems like mentoring and induction programs which, at present, does not exist in the Maldives. Teacher training institutes and education policy makers could consider these recommendations when designing programs and formulating policies related to teacher training.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the Teacher Education Program. Meeting student's needs, such as dealing with slow learners, dealing with classroom behaviour problems and dealing with problems of individual students were major concerns of the participants. In order to be competent in these areas the participants have suggested including more subjects in special education, behaviour management with real life scenarios and curriculum development in their pre-service program.

Recommendations for Improving Teaching Conditions. A sense of being overwhelmed and time pressures were among the perceived problems of the participants. To help with these issues, it is recommended that schools examine

the tasks placed on beginning teachers and provide them with as much support as possible such as introducing induction programs, assigning them mentors and making their workload less.

Since most of the teachers working in Male' schools are from other islands and their rents are high, it is recommended for the Education Ministry to give them an accommodation allowance similar to what is given to expatriate teachers.

Recommendations for Further Study

Only ten Maldivian secondary teachers participated in this study. Therefore, the findings of this study must be generalized with care. A further study could include teachers working in other islands of the Maldives and at other grade levels to get a better idea of enabling factors and problems perceived by Maldivian beginning teachers. In addition, a longitudinal study of the participants of this study could be done to determine how their perceived enabling factors and problems impact their decision to stay in the teaching field.

Research has shown that the enabling factors and problems a novice teacher perceives during the first year of teaching are dependent on the time frame at which the study is conducted as he or she acquires more skills and develop as a teacher at different stages of the year (Gratch, 2001). Therefore, a clearer picture of these enabling factors and problems could be found through a perspective study conducted at various points of the first year (O'Donoghue, 2007).

Limitations

The findings of this study may not be applicable to the general population of Maldivian secondary teachers as literature shows the enabling factors and the problems beginning teachers perceive are situation-specific (Cooke & Pang, 1991). The participants of this study were from Male' schools. The situation in islands is quite different, as Male' being the capital of the country, is the most developed island of the Maldives.

The findings of this study were limited to a questionnaire and one single interview per participant, conducted during their second year of teaching. The interviews could be conducted at three different points of their first year, so that the development could be charted.

Conclusion

The enabling factors and problems Maldivian beginning secondary teachers face are similar to those documented in literature. On the main enabling factors the participants described student-related factors such as students' motivation for the lessons they taught, the students' good performance in assessment components and the students' positive comments, have motivated the participants and have given them job satisfaction. In addition, most of the participants perceived the cooperation and help they received from colleagues and the school administration as inspiration for them to continue in the teaching field.

At the beginning of their first year, the participants were mainly concerned about classroom management problems which, with time, they learned to deal with. In addition, they expressed their concern over the excessive workload, their lack of status within the school, their anxiety in dealing with parents, the lack of resources and their unpreparedness to deal with the reality of the classroom.

In order to deal with these problems, the participants suggested providing them with more help in the transition stage from pre-service to in-service teaching, with mentoring and induction. They also recommended the revision of the existing structure of the Bachelor of Teaching Secondary program conducted by MNU by including more units on special needs education and behaviour management with real life examples from the Maldivian context. Furthermore, they requested to give them more, 'on-the-job training' before they become full-ledged teachers to acclimatize them to the school environment.

The findings of this study have implications for the improvement of teacher training courses conducted in the Maldives. In addition, it identified some of the loopholes in the schools and the education system as a whole, which could be strengthened to retain promising beginning teachers in the field.

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