

# BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: INDONESIAN NOVICE EFL TEACHERS' TENSIONS AND NEEDED SUPPORTS DURING PANDEMIC<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The abrupt changes in the situation and policy caused by the COVID-19 pandemic might dwindle novice teachers' well-being and add more pressure to their minds that are already clouded with uncertainty. If left untouched, it is more than likely that they would quit teaching entirely. Nevertheless, while challenges, struggles, and tensions experienced by novice EFL teachers have long been studied and well-documented, the novice EFL teachers' tensions experienced during the pandemic and the supports they need have not been examined. By analyzing guided reflections and interviewing five Indonesian novice EFL teachers, the present research is to answer two questions: 1) What kinds of tensions are experienced by Indonesian novice EFL teachers during the time of the pandemic? 2) What kind of supports do they need to stay in the teaching profession? The result shows that novice teachers experience tensions related to pedagogical-technical, a sense of belonging to the teaching profession, and culture-relationship, which are caused by the abrupt shift to online learning and excessive workload. To mitigate and ease these tensions, needed supports from the government and policymakers, school and school leaders, or colleagues are also discussed.

**Keywords:** novice EFL teachers, pandemic, supports, tensions

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When COVID-19 first struck, UNESCO (2022) reported that at least 80% of the countries did a country-wide school closure during the height of the pandemic. All education-related activities were abruptly transformed into their online form (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Marshall et al., 2020). With that, the teachers, including the novice ones, needed to adjust to the new condition almost overnight.

Novice teachers, who are mostly young adults, might have easier times adapting their teaching to the online learning environment compared to their senior counterparts (Daar, 2021; Wulandari & Pasaribu, 2020). However, they might feel more overwhelmed in this pandemic situation as they are still on their journey of adapting to their work environment, finding their calling and identity and, on top of that, facing their tensions. Studies conducted before the pandemic (e.g., Cendra, 2019; Yayli, 2017) have underlined that novice teachers experience a

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lot of tensions, such as being a caring vs a strict teacher, following curriculum vs students' progress, and fantasy vs professional reality.

Yet, during the pandemic, these young teachers are facing even more tensions. They need to constantly and quickly adapt their teaching and daily life to the ever-changing policies on top of negotiating with tensions and finding their identity. As pointed out by Dvir and Schatz-Oppenheimer (2020), novice teachers experienced heightened tensions during the pandemic, which, in turn, will affect both the novice teacher's performance and well-being. Combined with their turbulent emotion, this can negatively impact their teaching. If left unattended for too long, some will quit teaching entirely (Hanušová et al., 2019; Lomi & Mbato, 2020; Whalen et al., 2019).

There have been several studies on the impact of the pandemic on Indonesian novice EFL teachers (e.g., Daar, 2021; Kusuma, 2022). They pointed out that the EFL teachers experienced many challenges during the online teaching and learning processes, especially in terms of internet access and students' motivation. Yet, while the challenges during the pandemic have been studied, Indonesian novice EFL teachers' tensions and the needed supports during the pandemic are not yet exhaustively researched.

This research focuses on this particular phase (i.e., novice teachers) due to the fact that it is a 'make-or-break' phase for a teacher to stay in the profession long-term. As explained by Whalen et al. (2019), "15-50% newly-hired teachers leave within the first 5 years" (p. 1). Furthermore, many researchers (e.g., Camp et al., 2022; Fullard, 2021) have found that the pandemic increased – the already high – teachers' attrition rate. With that notion, it is important to look into and learn from the novice teachers' experience in this pandemic to figure out ways to reduce the already high teachers' attrition and also prepare a supportive environment that promotes teachers' resilience for future novice teachers. This research, therefore, aims to seek answers to two questions: 1) What kinds of tensions are experienced by Indonesian novice EFL teachers during the time of the pandemic? and 2) What kind of supports do they need to stay in the teaching profession?

To gain a better understanding, the tensions of novice teachers will be reviewed and discussed. It is then followed by an explanation of pandemic-related challenges in education. After the fundamental theories have been reviewed and established, the methodology of this research is explained, and the results are presented. Those results are then discussed and corroborated with the theories to provide a conclusion.

### **Tensions of Novice Teachers**

Right after graduating from their respective programs, novice teachers have their view of teaching (Xu, 2013). This view is shaped both by their prior beliefs and the values promoted by their respective universities (Nguyen & Dao, 2019). Most of the time, it would be idealistic. For example, they want to give their students a very well-prepared, sophisticated lesson. These novice teachers have their own teaching beliefs, and they want to exercise those beliefs in their schools.

However, when they begin their teaching career in their schools, their prior view often collides with the harsh reality (Lomi & Mbato, 2020; Pravita & Kuswandono, 2021). Xu (2013)

reported that novice teachers' prior views and imagined identities were molded into a more practical identity. One of his participants experienced intense pressure that she let go of her idealistic view of being a spiritual guide for her students in exchange for being a routine performer due to her institutional pressure. It is important to understand that this experience is not a solitary occurrence; it is an ongoing worldwide challenge (Whalen et al., 2019). Further explained by Tan et al. (2015), "the interaction between societal expectation and personal beliefs presents grounds for differing ideas and hence tensions" (p. 1585). As such, when novice teachers encounter conflicting views between their imagined teaching life and the stakeholder's expectation, tensions will emerge.

Novice teachers may experience tensions in at least these three aspects: pedagogy-technical decision (Cendra, 2019; Pillen et al., 2013; Sydnor, 2017; Xu, 2013), sense of belonging to the teaching profession (Cendra, 2019; Pillen et al., 2013; Sydnor, 2017), and culture-relationship (Cendra, 2019; Pillen et al., 2013; Xu, 2013). When their views and beliefs in these three aspects clash with the stakeholders' expectations (i.e., peers, students, parents, schools, regulators), oftentimes novice teachers are forced to negotiate and get their ideal view down to reality, creating tensions (Cendra, 2019; Xu, 2013).

It could be a very agonizing process for novice teachers, as they are usually young and turbulent, to let go of their own beliefs and incorporate new beliefs (Sydnor, 2017). When left unattended, tensions will cause burnout and affect novice teachers' well-being (Cendra, 2019; Xu, 2013). A study done by Hanušová et al. (2019) further supports this as they found that novice teachers are the most vulnerable group to this problem. If this is not deliberately addressed, it will contribute to teacher attrition as novice teachers will leave their teaching careers entirely (Whalen et al., 2019).

### **Pandemic-related Challenges**

Regrettably, the already turbulent "reality shock" situation novice teachers have to face is made worse by the pandemic. These teachers, who are already in a phase of a tricky transition from a student to a teacher, have to encounter more pandemic-related challenges and tensions (see Dvir & Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2020; Mecham et al., 2021). Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic is a paramount trigger to the rapid changes in education, becoming a catalyst for the development of online and hybrid learning. Unfortunately, while previous research has well-documented the benefits of online learning (e.g., Appana, 2008; Dumford & Miller, 2018), what happened at the beginning of the pandemic is not the carefully designed online learning but rather an emergency remote teaching (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Marshall et al., 2020).

During this time, teachers were expected to convert their traditional onsite lesson plans to online spaces, arguably without enough resources and knowledge on how to do so. Yet, as time progresses and teachers become more adjusted to the online teaching world, the teaching-learning activities are now starting to move back and forth between onsite learning and hybrid as we are moving to the post-pandemic era (see Bülow, 2022). These turbulent and rapid changes undoubtedly bring at least three kinds of challenges: challenges related to technology (see Dvir & Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2020; Nugroho et al., 2021), pedagogy (see Marshall et al., 2020; Rahayu & Wirza, 2020), and teachers' well-being (see Dabrowski, 2021; Santamaria et al., 2021;

Sokal et al., 2020) to teachers all around the world, both for experienced teachers and, especially, novice teachers.

During the pandemic, technological-related challenges in the teaching-learning process become prevalent. With the necessity to convert to online spaces almost overnight, teachers have to swiftly learn to fit the lesson plan into the previously unfamiliar online learning platform, such as Zoom (see Dvir & Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2020; Nugroho et al., 2021). Experienced teachers who generally had not had any exposure to teaching virtually may experience heightened challenges; however, it does not necessarily mean the experience is any easier for beginning teachers as these experiences are likely new to all teachers (cf. Pressley & Ha, 2021).

These technological challenges, in turn, trigger instructional-pedagogical challenges for teachers. For instance, Rahayu and Wirza (2020) report that while teachers generally acknowledged that online learning offers flexibility, they still doubted its effectiveness as teachers generally face challenges in terms of explaining the material and assessing students' performance. Furthermore, with the available but somewhat limited technology services, teachers also found it hard to build and maintain excellent interactions or provide meaningful feedback to the students (Marshall et al., 2020; Nugroho et al., 2021).

Challenges related to teachers' well-being that arguably become ubiquitous are also reported in recent research which was done around the pandemic time. A case in point, teachers were reported to exhibit stress, anxiety, and depression symptoms which were seemingly caused by a high workload, uncertain guidelines, and limited resources (Santamaría et al., 2021). Similarly, Sokal et al. (2020) found that the increasing demand due to the pandemic correlates with teachers being exhausted and in the early stage of burnout. If not treated carefully, these burnout, stress, and fatigue may profoundly decrease the education quality (Dabrowski, 2021).

## METHOD

This qualitative-descriptive research utilized a narrative inquiry approach. Narrative inquiry has been widely used in qualitative research in the education area (e.g., Daud, 2021; Zhu et al., 2020) to explore teachers' journey and their teaching careers. In the present study, the researchers studied novice EFL teachers' stories on tensions and needed supports and attempted to "co-construct a narrative analysis of those stories" (Ary et al., 2010, p. 32). Five relatively young novice EFL teachers were selected as the participants of this research. The criteria of this selection were: (1) teaching English subjects at a high school level, (2) teaching for less than five years, and (3) must be less than 30 years old. They were provided with informed consent and all of them agreed to participate in this research. Table 1 shows the background of the participants – all are given a pseudonym.

**Table 1. Participants' Background**

Name	Age	Gender	Years of Teaching	Teaching on Level
Ava	27	F	4	Junior High
Betty	28	F	4	Senior High
Celine	26	F	4	Senior High

Name	Age	Gender	Years of Teaching	Teaching on Level
Dean	27	M	4	Senior High
Erin	24	F	3	Senior High

A guided reflection form was used to collect the data (see <https://bit.ly/GuidedReflForm>). The form comprises 17 tensions (see Table 2) commonly encountered by novice teachers which were originally taken from the list provided by Pillen et al. (2013) and then were further adapted by Cendra (2019). In the present research, however, this list of tensions was then further adapted and adjusted in three ways. First, based on the guided reflections blueprint, some tensions that had great similarities were merged. For example, in Cendra's (2019) work, the tensions "university ideologies vs practicality found in the reality" and "one's own lay theories vs other theories seen relevant to teaching profession" were considered as two separate tensions. In the present research, however, the tensions were merged into "using this vs that teaching technique" as the theories used as the basis in the blueprint were similar. Second, two new tensions, namely, "own teaching technique vs parents' demand" and "talking to peers vs keeping it to self" which were generated from the newer literature in the pandemic context (see Mecham et al., 2021; White & McSharry, 2021) were added to the current reflection form. Third, the wording for the guided reflection was also rewritten to suit the current situation better. For example, in tension number 2, "imagined teaching life vs reality," in which the original wording was "The teaching life I imagined is different from reality" was changed into "The teaching life I imagined is different from the reality I experience, especially during the pandemic."

Furthermore, to ease the presentation and discussion, all the tensions were grouped into three categories: 1) tensions in pedagogical-technical decisions; 2) tensions in sense of belonging to the teaching profession; and 3) tensions in culture-relationship (see Table 2). To categorize the tensions, the researchers were looking for keywords in the theories provided in the guided reflection blueprint. For example, if the underlying theories of the tensions mentioned the keywords related to teaching activity such as 'educational method,' or 'learning to teach,' the tensions were included in the *pedagogical-technical decisions* group. Likewise, the tensions whose underlying theories mentioned the keywords such as 'image of teaching' or 'emerging professional identity' fell into the *sense of belonging to the teaching profession* category. Finally, those whose keywords were related to relationship or culture, such as 'close relationship' or 'loyalties,' were grouped into the tensions in *culture-relationship*.

Using this guided reflection form, the researchers asked the participants to share their reflections. The participants were asked if they experienced a particular tension. If yes, then they were encouraged to share the stories they experienced regarding that tension. Some spaces were also provided in the guided reflections for the participants to share other tensions they might have experienced that had not been covered in the initial 17 tensions (see Table 2). Several guiding questions to prompt novice teachers' voices on the supports they needed during the pandemic were also provided in the reflection form. To minimize misinterpretation of the questions, the participants were asked to respond in their native language.

**Table 2. List of Tensions**

Category	Tensions
Tensions in pedagogical-technical decisions	1. being 'ideal' vs field practicality
	2. imagined teaching life vs reality
	3. university ideology vs field practicality
	4. own orientation on learning to teach vs others'
	5. enhancing teaching skills or doing other tasks
	6. using this vs that teaching technique
	7. own teaching technique vs parents' demand
Tensions in sense of belonging to the teaching profession	8. own vs others' perspective on the teaching profession
	9. feeling incompetent vs being obliged to become an expert
	10. feeling like a student vs being a teacher
	11. focusing on private vs teaching life
	12. being independent or dependent on others' suggestions
Tensions in culture-relationship	13. being a caring vs strict teacher
	14. sharing opinions vs staying silent
	15. confidentiality vs sharing students' problem
	16. defending students vs defending peers
	17. talking to peers vs keeping it to self

Furthermore, to deepen the analysis of the stories, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with all participants which were done in their native language (see Creswell, 2012). The interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes. The interview protocols were constructed based on what they had written in the reflection forms, which include delving into their teaching-life experiences before and during the pandemic and their strongest tensions around these times. The participants were also asked to elaborate on the supports needed to help them resolve the tensions or, at least, ease their burden. To ensure the validity of the research, member checking was done on all participants by giving them the transcribed interview data and the report draft.

The following are the steps taken to analyze the data. First, the data collected concerning tensions were put into the initial 17 tensions listed, exactly as reported by the participants. For example, when a participant wrote that she *"felt like a student instead of a teacher because most of the time, the senior teachers asked the junior teachers to help and resolve technological*

*problems in their teaching*” in the “feeling like a student vs being a teacher” tension, the researchers kept the data as it was. Then, all the data was then discussed between the two researchers to ensure the accuracy of the categorization. If some of the tensions were found to be mistakenly categorized by the participants, they were moved into their respective categories. From the given example, the researchers deliberated and agreed to put the particular tension to “feeling incompetent vs being obliged to become an expert” due to it being more related to this particular tension. All the fixed data were then reported to the participants to ensure validity. Finally, the researchers calculated the number of each tension and reported the categories of tensions that had at least one tension in them. For the needed support data, the researcher reviewed the participants’ answers based on the guided reflection and interview data in three categories: supports from the government and policymakers, school and school leaders, and colleagues. The appropriateness of the data was checked, both by internal discussion and member checking with the participants. Finally, the researchers summarized and reported all of the participants’ needed supports based on the said categories. To ensure the accuracy of the participants’ responses, the translations of their answers were kept as close to their native language as possible, while still preserving the sentence structure.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

#### ***Novice EFL Teacher Tensions***

In this section, the findings of novice EFL teachers’ tensions are presented. From the list of 17 kinds of tensions, 12 were experienced by at least one participant, with a total of 31 tensions identified. The findings and discussion of these tensions follow the category of tensions in Table 2.

#### ***Tensions in Pedagogical-technical Decisions***

The most common tension from this category, as seen in Table 3, is “5. enhancing teaching skills or doing other tasks.” For instance, Ava mentioned that “[her] orientation for teaching and learning processes during this pandemic was to boost [her] students’ interest in learning and apply the simplest learning system” Yet, she also pointed out that she could not focus on it as she had to do other tasks, such as to “proctor a test from 8 to 12 and start teaching at 12.15 to 15.00 which then was directly followed by afternoon meeting” without any time for rest. Similarly, Celine shared that there was an expectation for teachers to master many teaching platforms which, in turn, demanded her to “join many training courses that made [her] exhausted and lose focus”. Erin and Betty also mentioned how besides having to learn to adjust their teaching, they had to tackle many administrative and other tasks. Meanwhile, although Dean did not see this as his tension, he brought up the heavy workload he experienced during the pandemic in his interview. Consequently, with the heavy workload, all of the participants were forced to divide their attention.

**Table 3. Participants' Tensions in Pedagogical and Instructional Decision**

Tensions	Ava	Betty	Celine	Dean	Erin	Total
5. enhancing teaching skills or doing other tasks	✓	✓	✓		✓	4
6. using this vs that teaching technique	✓	✓	✓			3
1. being 'ideal' vs field practicality	✓			✓		2
3. university ideology vs field practicality	✓					1
2. imagined teaching life vs reality		✓				1

The next tension, which is “6. using this vs that teaching technique”, was faced by three participants. To make her class livelier, for instance, Betty wanted to hold a discussion group during the class on an online platform. Yet, she was unable to do it effectively as she did not have access to the paid feature of the platform. Thus, she decided to lean on using the lecture method as she found the alternative (i.e., written discussion through a learning management system) was not effective. Celine further corroborated that she “*still had not found the appropriate method for assessing students' listening skills [during this pandemic]*”. Similarly, Ava found that it was difficult to keep the teaching and learning processes fresh and engaging.

Ava and Dean encountered “1. being ideal vs field practicality” tension and they both identified it as their strongest tension. Ava mentioned that “*in the early days of the pandemic, [she] felt that all the teaching and learning plans had to be well-finished. Yet gradually [she] realized, there were many things needed to be adjusted*”. During the interview, she elaborated that the duration of her English class was cut down from 7x40 minutes to only 4x30 minutes during online learning. This resulted in a cascading effect on the students' English skills, and she needed to tone down her expectation. Aligned with Ava, Dean shared his frustration that he once found a student who neither did any of the assignments nor joined the regular meeting. Yet, forced by the rule in his school, he had to give at least the minimum score of 69 for that student against his ideal; this demoralized him.

Ava also shared her tension in “3. university ideology vs field practicality”. She saw that what she got from her study at the university was very different compared to the situation in the field. Because of that, she tried to come up with her own teaching technique for the situation during the pandemic. A similar situation was encountered by Betty, who considered “2. imagined teaching life vs reality” as her strongest tension. She shared that “*[she] imagined an enthusiastic class with active students. Yet, the reality of online learning was not like what [she] imagined*”. She wanted to establish a close relationship with her students and “*[she] yearned that in this situation because [she] did not feel close with [her] students anymore*”. She provided counseling time outside of the regular class hours. However, it was only effective for some students.

### **Tensions in Identity and Sense of Belonging to the Teaching Profession**

As presented in Table 4, in terms of tensions related to the sense of belonging to the teaching profession, the most common tension is “8. own vs others” perspective on the teaching profession”. For instance, Dean shared how “*people often said that being a teacher in a*



pandemic was easier as the teacher did not do anything but still got paid". This is elaborated by Celine who shared "not a few parents doubted the teachers' work ethic during the pandemic". Yet, as pointed out by Erin, teachers during this pandemic were "demanded to explore and be willing to learn and adapt for the sake of delivering the materials and developing comprehension".

**Table 4. Participants' Tensions in Sense of Belonging to the Teaching Profession**

Tensions	Ava	Betty	Celine	Dean	Erin	Total
8. own vs others' perspective on the teaching profession	✓		✓	✓	✓	4
9. feeling incompetent vs being obliged to become an expert		✓		✓	✓	3
10. feeling like a student vs being a teacher		✓				1

The second tension in this category, "9. feeling incompetent vs being obliged to become an expert", was experienced by Betty, Dean, and Erin. Betty shared how, "[she] was required to master learning management system". Furthermore, Dean was "asked to help in many areas, even though [he] did not have expertise in that area". Erin also mentioned that she was often asked to help other, more senior, teachers, especially in terms of online, technology, and media; making this her strongest tension. She felt that she was "being used by the senior teachers, to help them". She shared that the other young teachers in her school also experienced and felt the same thing, to the point that "their motivation to teach diminished".

Lastly, "10. feeling like a student vs being a teacher" tension was encountered by Betty. She shared how the reduced teaching time and flexible working hours, especially at the beginning of the pandemic, made her feel like a student instead of a teacher. In particular, she said, "it became easier for [her] to neglect [her] responsibility as a teacher, just like a student who easily skipped the class because of internet trouble."

#### **Tensions Related to Culture-Relationship**

As presented in Table 5, "13. being a caring vs strict teacher" was the only tension in the list of 17 tensions experienced by all of the participants. Ava, Celine, and Dean wanted to be strict in their class but sometimes it was hard to do so. For example, as this was Celine's strongest tension, she mentioned that her school upheld honesty as its core value. Yet, it became difficult during the pandemic, or as Celine explained, "trust issues often happened" because of students' lack of discipline, plagiarism, late submission, and cheating during tests. This is reiterated by Dean who said how "it was hard for [him] to believe in them". However, knowing the hardship caused by the pandemic, Ava reflected that while she was being strict before the pandemic, she lowered her strictness due to the situation. This was echoed by Celine, who shared that "[she] needed to also consider [her] students' situation as they need to be understood".

On the flip side, Betty and Erin wanted to be caring teachers. Betty shared that she was not that strict during the online learning as some of the students might not have laptops, internet data, etc. Furthermore, Erin recognized that by positioning herself as a caring teacher, her

students could better accept her and ultimately, made the teaching and learning processes more effective. Yet, as the students saw them as easy-going teachers, they became harder to control. Erin shared how “*there were times that they were too complacent with the freedom [she] gave that they have no fear of [her]*”.

**Table 5. Participants’ Tensions in Culture-Relationship**

Tensions	Ava	Betty	Celine	Dean	Erin	Total
13. being a caring vs strict teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
14. sharing opinions vs staying silent	✓			✓	✓	3
15. confidentiality vs sharing students’ problems			✓	✓		2
16. defending students vs defending peers			✓		✓	2

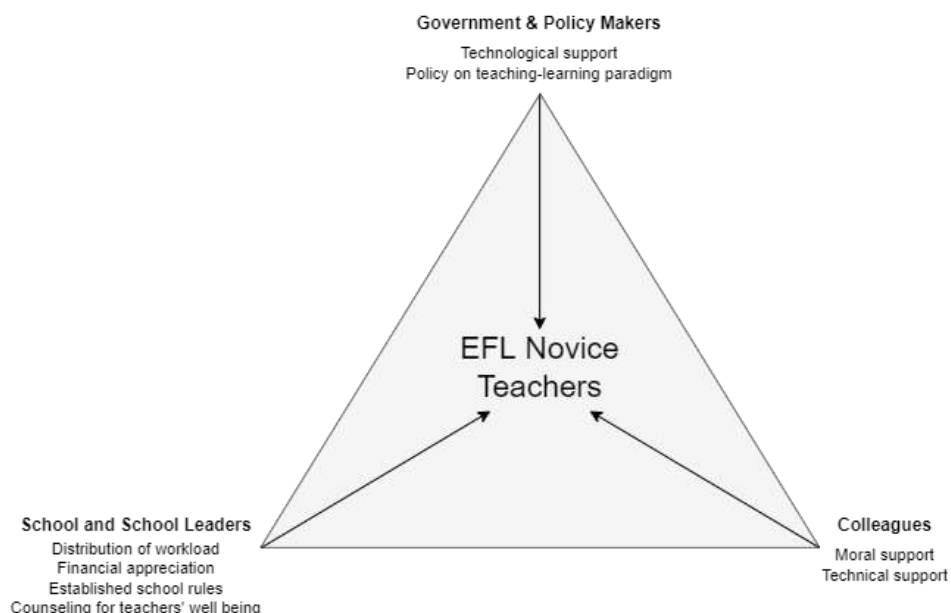
Three participants shared “14. sharing opinions vs staying silent” tension. Ava, Dean, and Erin all shared that it was difficult for them to share their opinion with their more senior peers and superiors. Dean was afraid that he would be “*deemed as a ‘disobedient’ person and it would affect [his] status in [his] workplace*”. Erin shared the same sentiment as when she tried giving her opinion, it was either disregarded or debated by some groups of people. Similarly, Ava shared, “*at the end, when our voice was not heard, many of us stayed silent.*”

Celine and Dean faced “15. confidentiality vs sharing students’ problems” tension. Celine recalled that many students put their trust in her as she was seen as approachable due to being a young teacher. Celine mentioned that so far, she would keep their story to herself. Yet, sometimes, the students shared a problem that the novice teachers could not handle. In Dean’s experience, one of his students had a suicidal thought. Feeling that he could not handle it, he directly consulted with the student’s homeroom teacher to find a solution.

Relating to relationships with their students, the last tension is “16. defending students vs defending peers” which Celine and Erin had. Both of them had an experience in which their students spoke ill of the other teachers. To overcome this, they chose to not pick a side. Instead, they had a discussion with both the students and the teachers to figure out a solution. As Celine shared, “*[she] asked the students to still see the positive side of the lesson and assignment*” and “*invited the teachers to do an informal reflection*”.

### ***Needed Supports***

To help novice EFL teachers navigate themselves amid the stream of tensions during the pandemic time, some supports from various parties will be very valuable. The needed supports that the participants shared were put into three big categories: from the government or policymakers, from the school and school leaders, and from their teacher-colleagues. Figure 1 presents the research finding on the needed supports reported by the participants.



**Figure 1. Novice EFL Teachers' Needed Supports during Pandemic**

**Supports for Novice Teachers from the Government and Policymakers**

From the government and policymakers, the participants wished for some technological assistance, ranging from the procurement of some teaching applications, the necessary training to use the applications, and, to some, financial aid to cover the internet expenses. Related to the procurement of some teaching applications, Betty shared how she wished for “*access to some paid applications for online teaching*” to help her improve class interaction both in online and hybrid learning. In addition, to increase their skills in carrying out online learning, the participants wanted to have training and guidance. A case in point, Erin shared that she would appreciate “*a training or online seminar on using IT for teaching as [she] felt that even the young teachers like [she was] still used trial and error method when it came to using teaching technology.*” Finally, as the internet expenses were increasing during the online learning period, some financial aid to cover this expense would be much appreciated. As Celine mentioned, the government had provided some “*internet subsidy*” for the teachers, however, the delivery was sometimes late.

In addition, the participants also mentioned that the government and policymakers had to be more aware of the changes in the teaching-learning paradigm, especially concerning curriculum changes. Dean, in particular, shared his thought that the regulation of curriculum in Indonesia “*should be constantly updated to keep up with the everchanging era*”. He noted it was good that the Indonesian curriculum and teaching approaches had been adjusted throughout the era. However, he believed that the regulation and implementation of such curriculum and

approaches should be regularly evaluated and adjusted to the field's needs. As mentioned by Ava, one way to do this was by conducting a survey and field study of the schools. By doing this, the government and policymakers can “*understand more about what really happened in the field*” so that they can take the necessary steps to improve the quality of education and the well-being of the teachers.

### **Supports for Novice Teachers from the Schools and School Leaders**

From the school and school leaders, firstly, the participants were longing for their job desks to be reviewed as generally they felt overwhelmed with the amount of work, compared to before the pandemic time. Related to having to attend more than one activity at one time, for example, Ava had a big question of “*which one was more important as both of them were important*” and further asserted that the schools and school leaders had to immediately “*review and adjust these activities to help [her] understand which one [she] should prioritize first.*” Furthermore, to further ease the workload, Dean and Erin also wanted the school and school leaders to hire more teachers. As mentioned by Dean, “*teachers were already doing so much work and becoming overwhelmed*”.

Secondly, financial appreciation and sufficient facilities should be made available to help novice EFL teachers do their work more comfortably. As they felt that the workload was increasing during the pandemic, the participants wished for financial appreciation given in accordance with what they did. Erin, for example, complained about how her “*workload was increasing but the salary stayed the same, even it was once reduced.*” The same suggestion was brought forth by Ava who would appreciate an “*honorarium for every effort the teachers had done, for example after guiding students to join an English competition.*” These kinds of financial supports will likely help the participants feel that their work is being appreciated by the school.

Thirdly, established school rules and their implementation should be a concern. One of the participants, Betty, felt that “*[her] school needed improvement in terms of enforcing the rules to the students.*” After sharing her experience of many of her efforts to help several students who were displaying an indifferent attitude towards the learning activity (e.g., not responding at all and not doing the assignments) during the pandemic, she wished that “*the school did something brave, for example by not allowing the students to pass to the next grade.*” To do this, all parties, especially the homeroom teachers, who can directly work with students’ parents, should be on the front lines of keeping the school rules implemented so that the quality of learning activities can be improved.

Finally, schools and school leaders should also be mindful of teachers’ well-being. As the heart of education, the pandemic surely took some toll on the teachers’ overall well-being. As mentioned by Celine, “*it was not just students who felt stressed [because of the pandemic], the teachers were stressed too.*” Therefore, the participants demanded that schools and school leaders provided spaces for them to take care of their well-being. One possible way to do so is by “*providing the teachers with counseling*” which was suggested by Celine. The counseling program will help the participants to ease their overwhelming stress, anxiety, and burnout during the pandemic.

### **Supports for Novice Teachers from Colleagues**

The participants also demanded supports from their teacher-colleague, particularly related to technical supports and unity in working together. Ava and Erin mentioned that it was usually the young teachers who were given more work. Ava hoped that *“the local English teacher association could be more solid to do the work together.”* Additionally, Betty and Erin hoped that she and her fellow teachers could have an open discussion, for example on tips related to teaching and learning activities. As mentioned by Betty, she hoped that her colleagues would spend some time *“sharing how they implemented the online learning, especially how to deal with troubled students.”* By doing so, the participants hoped that they could improve their teaching-learning activities.

In addition to the technical supports from their fellow teachers, the participants also needed moral supports from their colleagues. As a young teacher, Celine shared that she needed *“time to share and ‘complain’ together with [her] fellow teachers”*. This would hopefully cause the feeling of being in the same boat together. In the same light, Erin wished for *“verbal supports”* from her colleagues.

### **Discussion**

The aims of this research are two-fold: first, to uncover the tensions experienced by Indonesian novice EFL teachers during the time of the pandemic; and second, to collect the kinds of supports they need to stay in the teaching profession. All the findings for these research questions have been presented in the previous section. This section is to discuss the takeaways from those findings.

Related to the first research objective, the findings have presented a total of 31 tensions spread across 12 types of tensions, ranging from tensions in pedagogical-technical decision, sense of belonging to the teaching profession, to tensions related to culture-relationship. Among those tensions, some of the tensions are arguably a common phenomenon among novice teachers, even before the pandemic. For instance, aligned with other studies that have well-documented how hard it is to be a novice teacher (e.g., Hanušová et al., 2019; Nguyen & Dao, 2019; Tan et al., 2015), some participants mentioned tensions between *“university ideology vs field practicality”* and *“imagined teaching life vs reality”*. When those collided, the participants needed to negotiate to bridge their prior views into a practical identity (Pravita & Kuswando, 2021).

The present research, however, further found that novice teachers faced even more tensions that were caused by the pandemic, which can be attributed to two reasons. The first reason is that the pandemic caused a huge impact on people's lives and shifted the teaching and learning processes to an online form (Kusuma, 2022). As such, it caused and strengthened several tensions. One of them is *“being a caring vs strict teacher”* tension, which was experienced by all of the participants. This becoming the strongest tension for novice teachers is in line with the previous studies (Cendra, 2019; Pillen et al., 2013) and the pandemic further reinforced this particular tension. They wanted to be strict in terms of the assessment and completeness of assignments. However, the participants realized that this was also a trying time and wanted to understand their students' situation. As pointed out by Kim et al. (2022) and Tarabini (2022),

caring becomes a crucial trait for a teacher to have during this pandemic. Nevertheless, it could be difficult for novice teachers to regain control of the class if the students mistook caring for being easy-going and lenient, just as one of the participants had experienced. Thus, it becomes a delicate balancing act. Other tensions caused by the shift are “confidentiality vs sharing students’ problems”, “defending students vs defending peers”, “using this vs that teaching technique”, “being ideal vs field practicality”, and “own vs others’ perspective on the teaching profession”. Many studies (e.g., Daar, 2021; Kusuma, 2022; Rahayu & Wirza, 2020) underline the challenge for teachers to design teaching and learning processes that can keep their students motivated during online learning. Yet, some people belittled the teaching profession during the pandemic; they saw it as an easy, safe job. This created tensions and affected the novice teachers’ well-being.

The second reason is that novice teachers experienced a heavier workload during the pandemic. It has been reported by many studies (e.g., Marshall et al., 2020; Nazari & Seyri, 2021) that making online learning effective requires a lot of consideration and preparation. This was also experienced by the participants, and it sparked the tension “enhancing teaching skills or doing other tasks” within them. They needed to design materials that were enticing for their students, which arguably is harder to do in an online class (Rahayu & Wirza, 2020), while also doing the other teacher’s tasks, for example: grading, doing administrative tasks, joining teaching training, taking care of the students’ organization, etc. (Sydnor, 2017). Those other teachers’ tasks were also important and some might have a set deadline needed to be met by the teachers. As such, more often than not, novice teachers are forced to choose one over the other (Pillen et al., 2013). As the pandemic created more workload for the novice teachers, this tension became more apparent. Furthermore, as the participants were seen as better at using technology, the senior teachers handed over tasks related to technology (e.g., preparing a learning management system and setting up cameras) to them. While it is true that young teachers are generally more capable of using technology, they still need to learn it first as there are various kinds of technology related to education (Rahayu & Wirza, 2020). Thus, this created “feeling incompetent vs being obliged to become an expert” tension. Additionally, this heavier workload also caused other tensions, such as: “feeling like a student vs being a teacher” and “sharing opinions vs staying silent”.

Related to the second research objective, the findings have also elaborated on novice teachers’ needed supports during the pandemic, be it from the government and policymakers, school and school leaders, as well as their colleagues. The pandemic time has surely brought heightened tensions to the already turbulent reality of novice teachers in particular, so it becomes wise to carefully listen to their voices and do our best to help them grow from this difficult situation (Mecham et al., 2021). From the findings, there are three suggestions that we can focus on to better assist these novice teachers, which are related to novice teachers’ physical-practical needs, their well-being, and reasonable regulation from the stakeholders.

First, it becomes crucial to pay attention to novice teachers’ physical-practical needs and provide needed supports, such as the need to master certain learning platforms for remote and hybrid teaching, access to various teaching platforms, as well as financial aid to support their work. Pertaining to the expectation for novice teachers to be skillful in online and hybrid teaching, for example, the stakeholders should provide them with the necessary training,

guidance, and professional development program, especially on how to keep up with the technology needed for these kinds of instructions (Marshall et al., 2020; Nugroho et al., 2021). Stakeholders should also provide access to different remote teaching platforms to further support their effort in teaching remotely during the pandemic. As Xun et al. (2021) have previously noted that while some teachers exercise their agency during this difficult time by attempting to facilitate students' online learning with more appealing and interesting activities, unfortunately, the present finding shows that sometimes they were either unable to do that as they did not have full access to many teaching platforms or had to use their own money to subscribe to the designated platform. Access to these teaching platforms can be very beneficial both for the teachers and the students. Furthermore, stakeholders also need to consider providing teachers with financial aid, especially to appreciate their efforts. The present research has shown that the participants felt their workload was increasing during the pandemic, yet their salary was not. If the balance between the workload and appreciation cannot be met, there is a possibility for them to leave the teaching profession (see Hughes, 2012). Consequently, it behooves the stakeholders, be it government or the school leaders, to cater to these physical-practical needs.

Second, in addition to their physical-practical needs, it is also essential to take care of these novice EFL teachers' well-being. Previous research has documented how the pandemic negatively affects teachers' well-being, especially in dealing with stress, anxiety, and burnout (see Santamaría et al., 2021; Sokal et al., 2020) and the data of the present research highlights that supporting their well-being is indeed imperative. These unfortunate feelings mostly stemmed from the excessive workload (cf. Beutel et al., 2019; Seabra et al., 2021); therefore, one way to support them is by reducing the workload imposed on these novice teachers. The present research yielded an interesting finding, that is, some of the participants felt that 'just because they were young' and arguably more accustomed to technology, more work has been imposed on them compared to the more experienced teachers, which then left them feeling overwhelmed and exhausted. Thus, it is urgent for school leaders to distribute the labor more equally across all teachers or even consider hiring more teachers if the workforce is still felt lacking. Furthermore, a more heart-to-heart approach to ease the tensions and improve novice teachers' well-being can be conducted, for example by providing a continuous mentoring program (see Seyabi, 2020), sharing with fellow teachers (Kwon & Choi, 2022), or simply showing respect and appreciation for their efforts (Dabrowski, 2021).

Third, providing reasonable regulation and established rules during the changing times is imperative. Novice teachers are in the process of negotiating their identity; therefore, maintaining clear policies and instructions will serve them a sense of certainty during this dynamic change. Santamaría et al. (2021) have previously highlighted that the lack of clear regulation contributes to one of the factors of teachers' stress during the pandemic. In this research, while the regulations are there, the participants were hoping for a wiser regulation taken from the stakeholders. The case of Ava, who shared that a new regulation of her school was forcing her to do many things at once made her question whether the regulation makes sense. She further demanded that the teachers, as the frontline of education, should be given a chance to express their thoughts. This suggestion is in the same light as what Gándara et al. (2005) have suggested – that it is vital that every policy or action taken should consider teachers' voices. Furthermore, from Betty's case (i.e., when she found it hard to control the students if the

rules are too lenient), we can learn that establishing rules should be thoroughly and diligently exercised. When regulations are taken carefully, preferably bottom-up, and rules are consistently implemented, teachers will feel more comfortable with their working conditions (see Mecham et al., 2021).

## CONCLUSIONS

The present research has brought forth the tensions that Indonesian novice EFL teachers had to face during the COVID-19 pandemic. These novice teachers have shared their experiences of dealing with 12 different tensions which forced them to navigate their identity around pedagogical-technical tensions, a sense of belonging to the teaching profession, and their culture-relationship with other people. These tensions generally stemmed from, first, having to abruptly convert the teaching into an online or hybrid form, and second, the heavier workload during the pandemic. Furthermore, various supports, either from the government and policymakers, school and school leaders, or colleagues, which are needed by novice teachers to ease their tensions have also been presented. It is recommended that the various stakeholders cater to the teacher's physical-practical needs and well-being and provide reasonable regulation and established rules, especially in order to help novice teachers stay in the teaching profession. Additionally, as the tensions can be very specific within a context, it is necessary for both the school and the government and policymakers to identify and understand the novice teacher's tensions and needed supports in their own specific context so that they can reduce the teachers' attrition. Finally, further research with more participants that taps deeper into the novice teachers' tensions and needed supports in the post-pandemic era is encouraged as the continuation of this research.

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