

## DOES EXPERIENCE MATTER? A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EFL TEACHERS' CHALLENGES

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**Abstract.** *Even-though teaching experience has been identified as one of the main variables affecting student academic gains, teacher cognition, and practices, research focusing on the influence of experience on language teacher challenges is still rare. Hence, the study aims to analyse comparatively the challenges encountered by EFL teachers with varying lengths of teaching experience. Quantitative data were collected utilising a questionnaire involving 208 language teachers. The respondents self-reported being especially challenged by teaching speaking, learner motivation, teaching writing and listening, learner engagement, differentiating instruction, and providing effective learning. The overall challenge rate was moderate. Notably, a statistically significant difference in the perceptions of challenges was established between groups of teachers with varying lengths of teaching experience. As expected, novice teachers reported being more challenged than their most experienced counterparts. Contrary to popular belief, challenge estimates of a group of experienced teachers (10-15 years) were higher than that of less experienced teachers (1-5 years). The principal implication of the current study is that experienced language teachers also need assistance in dealing with professional challenges arising from the complexities of language teaching. To serve well, teacher development courses should be sensitive to language teacher needs and challenges, aligned with transformations they undergo as they move along the career stages.*

**Keywords:** *challenges; English as a foreign language; teaching; teacher; experience.*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

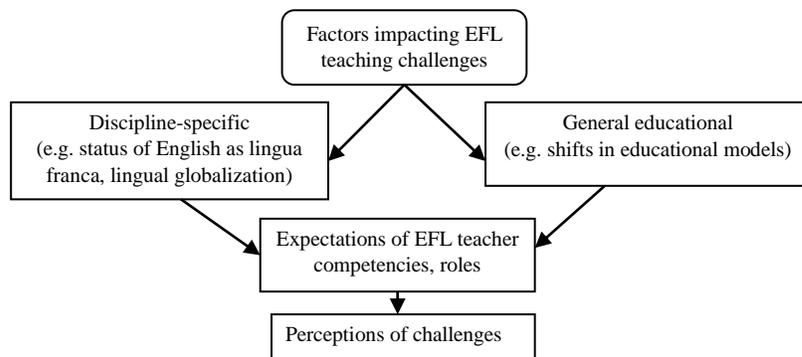
While teachers have been recognised to contribute substantially to student learning (Blazar & Kraft, 2017), relatively little attention has been paid to the challenges teachers experience throughout their careers. This neglect of the impact of teaching experience on EFL teacher perceptions of challenges is unjustified. Language teachers' professional mindset and expertise undergo transformations throughout their careers, which deserve heed in providing relevant teacher development opportunities. To study language teaching challenges and the influence teaching experience may have on teacher perceptions, it is necessary to trace the recent tendencies shaping language teaching and learning expectations, as they have ramifications for standards of effective practices.

The conception of language teaching challenges is intertwined with the language learning objectives and the expectations of teacher competencies, the latter has seen a dramatic increase due to several reasons. The first group of evolving alterations occurs against the backdrop of lingual globalisation, the status of English as lingua franca, and World Englishes (Bilikova & Seresová, K., 2021; Canagarajah, 2006; King, 2018). All these movements call for the need to prepare learners for global citizenship, where the major staple is EFL proficiency. Such preoccupation with language fluency has had consequences on language learning and teaching approaches. If a language serves the purposes of intercultural communication, then language lessons cannot be reduced to decontextualised manipulation of language forms. Huhn (2012) is insistent that "today's teachers must be more than transmitters of knowledge who orchestrate repetitive practice of decontextualised language forms with students: They need to infuse language instruction with meaning and purpose, design opportunities for interaction within and beyond the classroom, and provide responsive and useful assistance throughout the learning process" (p. 163). Placing teachers on the slippery ground of methodological eclecticism (Kumaravadivelu, 2012) calls for an informed selection of relevant language teaching approaches. Indeed, present-day teachers require knowledge of and sensitivity to a vast spectre of didactic repertoire and theoretical background to scaffold language learning. At the time of the dominant methodology or search for an ideal method, language teachers were expected to be well-versed in a single method and taught to a recipe. Thus, language teachers in the 21st century might feel challenged by having to achieve near native-like proficiency (Afshar et al., 2014; Houghton, 2018) and designing a learning environment congruent with well-grounded eclecticism (Tarnopolsky, 2018).

Another powerful movement, transfiguring the role and expectations of teachers, should be searched in the general educational domain. Reorientation of the traditional instructional model based on transmission towards transactional, or otherwise termed, collaborative/transformational models (Levrints/Lőrincz, 2020) have refocused the roles of teachers and learners, observations concerning knowledge construction and interiorisation, and many other priorities in education. Many of them have been made within the social constructivism and critical pedagogy theoretical frames (Levrints/Lőrincz, 2019). In light of these changes, teachers should be ready to assume new responsibilities of facilitating,

scaffolding learning, providing personalised instruction, promoting lifelong learning, learner autonomy, and sustaining learner motivation. An array of new responsibilities pose unprecedented challenges for language teachers, exacerbated by the local exigencies and accountability measures. Thus, teacher perceptions of challenges are impacted by intertwined discipline-specific and general educational groups of factors, as presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. External factors impacting perceptions of EFL teaching challenges



Language teaching experience is another research lens of interest to the present study. It is one of the variables affecting teacher effectiveness. Substantial empirical evidence has showcased a positive correlation between years of teaching experience and students' academic gains (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Podolsky, Kini & Darling-Hammond, 2019). In an extensive review of empirical studies documenting the effect of teaching experience, Kini and Podolsky (2016) summarised that it was significantly associated with student achievement. Further on, it was also positively associated with school attendance by learners, aspects of the discipline, amount of time students spent learning. Finally, experienced teachers had a beneficial effect on their colleagues and schools. Teachers were also found to have higher levels of self-efficacy as they gained experience (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2007). In addition, teaching experience was evinced to influence the planning and implementation of instruction. While experienced language teachers exercised more independence, flexibility, responsiveness to situational demands, and critical stance, their less experienced counterparts preferred relying on laid-down guidelines and rules and abstained from breaking routines (Tsui, 2009). Another observation concerned the number and quality of thoughts reflecting language teachers' pedagogical knowledge, quantitatively and qualitatively different between novice and experienced teachers (Akbari & Tajik, 2012). Novice and experienced language teachers also differ in the organisation of their professional knowledge. Experienced teachers possess a more sophisticated, integrated, and organised store of knowledge than novices, which enables recognition and interpretation of patterns of classroom occurrences (Tsui, 2009; Wolff, 2021).

Despite the fact that the impact of teaching experience has been well-documented in the academic literature, there are hardly any studies picturing its role from the perspective of challenges language teachers experience at different stages of their professional lives.

Moreover, compared to the relatively well-documented challenges of novice language teachers (Komar et al., 2021), the problems of their experienced counterparts have attracted limited research attention. Therefore, the present study aims to analyse EFL teachers' challenges, especially relative to the length of their teaching experience. Accordingly, it is essential to address the following research questions: What is the perceived rate of EFL teaching challenges? Is there any difference in language teachers' perceptions of challenges relevant to the length of their teaching experience? The paper is structured as follows: first, the methodology and results of the questionnaire study are exposed. Next, the analysis and discussion of the findings follow, culminating with their practical implications and directions for subsequent research.

## **2. METHODS**

### **2.1. Participants**

The sample constitutes 208 EFL teachers recruited after their voluntary consent to participate in this study. The participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. The research site was Ukraine. A random sampling technique was applied to select the sample, which added to the representativeness of the population (Griffee, 2012). It included language teachers with BA, MA, Ph.D., and DSc degrees. They worked at educational institutions of different levels (primary, secondary, and tertiary). Their length of experience ranged from one to more than twenty-five years. The teachers were grouped according to their teaching experience duration as follows: 1–5 years, 5–10 years, 10–15 years, 15–20 years, 20–25 years, and more than 25 years. In the given study, the term “novice” refers to teachers with fewer than five years of teaching experience. Accordingly, teachers who worked for more than five years were labelled “experienced” in this study.

### **2.2. Data collection and analysis**

This paper reports the findings of a broader study examining challenges confronting EFL teachers. It adopts a quantitative research paradigm and a survey design. To this end, a questionnaire was developed to generate quantitative data. Its items primarily incorporated the gleanings obtained from an interview study that explored the challenges of Ukrainian language teachers from a qualitative stance (Lőrincz, 2022). Thus, the parallel use of quantitative and qualitative methods added to the study's trustworthiness. The research instrument's validity and reliability were additionally strengthened by means of its piloting with five language teachers. Its reliability computed through SPSS yielded Cronbach's Alpha = .96 coefficient, which is very high. The questionnaire was delivered via Google Forms application. The study took place in 2021.

The questionnaire comprised two parts. The principal part of the questionnaire asked the respondents to indicate which areas of language teaching they found challenging and to what extent. The questionnaire targeted the challenges specific to foreign language teaching,

such as teaching the four language skills (speaking, writing, reading, and listening) and the linguistic aspects (vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation). Difficulties of more general nature associated with pedagogic competence were also addressed, including challenges of attending to learner motivation, planning, and managing instruction, understanding students, their needs, interests, strong and weak points, maintaining discipline, engaging all learners with the instructional material, individualisation and differentiation of instruction, providing effective teaching for all learners. To elicit responses, Likert-scale items were used, including a five-point scale where 1 stood for not challenging, 2 – somewhat challenging, 3 – challenging, 4 – very challenging, 5 – most challenging. The second part of the instrument requested the participants to provide information on their gender, educational level, the type of institution in which they hold teaching positions, and the length of their teaching experience.

The obtained data were analysed with the application of SPSS and the MANOVA technique. It enabled the computation of the ratings on the questionnaire items and to compare teachers' responses relative to the length of their teaching experience.

### 3. RESULTS

#### **Research question 1: What is the perceived rate of EFL teaching challenges?**

In order to answer research question 1, the participants were requested to estimate the challenge associated with language teaching on a 5-point scale, where 5 corresponded to the highest and 1 – to the lowest degree of complexity.

Table 1. Ratings of the language teaching challenges

Which aspects of language teaching do you find challenging? Rate them from the most challenging (5) to the least challenging (1):	Mean	Std. Dev.
1. Developing learners' speaking skills	3.27	1.283
2. Motivating learners	2.89	1.354
3. Teaching writing	2.87	1.259
4. Teaching listening	2.78	1.163
5. Engaging all learners with the instructional material	2.64	1.211
6. Differentiation and individualisation of instruction	2.60	1.240
7. Providing effective instruction for all learners	2.58	1.294
8. Understanding students, their needs, interests, strong and weak points	2.48	1.348
9. Teaching pronunciation	2.48	1.266
10. Assessing students' knowledge	2.44	1.202
11. Explaining grammar in clear terms	2.43	1.178
12. Maintaining discipline	2.38	1.284
13. Planning and managing instruction	2.38	1.174
14. Teaching reading	2.38	1.173
15. Teaching vocabulary	2.15	1.178

Table 1 illustrates the results of measures of the central tendency of the challenges associated with language teaching. The teachers indicated that the most challenging aspects of EFL were developing learners' communicative competence (M=3.27), motivating learners (M= 2.89), teaching writing (M= 2.87), and teaching listening (M= 2.78). They were rather challenged by having to engage all learners with the instructional material (M= 2.64), differentiating instruction (M= 2.60), providing effective instruction for all learners (M= 2.58), knowing their students (M= 2.48), and teaching pronunciation (M= 2.48). Student assessment (M= 2.44) and clear teaching of grammar (M= 2.43) attracted similar responses. The lowest rates were obtained for vocabulary teaching (M= 2.15), teaching reading (M= 2.38), planning and managing instruction (M= 2.38) and discipline issues (M= 2.38).

Although the participants felt challenged by all enumerated language teaching tasks, none was considered overly demanding, with the highest rate for teaching speaking (M= 3.27) and the lowest for vocabulary development (M= 2.15). In other words, only one item on the list was located on the scale between very challenging and challenging, while the rest of the items clustered on the continuum between challenging and somewhat challenging.

**Research question 2.** *Is there any difference in language teachers' perceptions of challenges relevant to the length of their teaching experience?*

To compare the perceived EFL teaching challenges between groups of teachers with varying lengths of experience, the MANOVA technique was utilised. The result of the one-way MANOVA set in Table 2 revealed a statistically significant difference in the perceived challenges associated with language teaching between groups of teachers with varying lengths of experience ( $F = 2.73, p < .0005; \text{Wilk's } \Lambda = 0.376, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .18$ ).

Table 2. Between-group comparison relative to the length of teaching experience: results of Multivariate Tests

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Wilks' Lambda	.376	2.735	75.000	904.710	.000	.178

Table 3 presents the measures of central tendency computed to summarise the data for the teaching experience variable. Measures of dispersion highlight the variability of rates for the teaching experience variable. Since the standard deviation indicators were rather small, the estimates of perceived challenges within groups of respondents did not vary significantly. Looking at the mean scores, it is evident that the novice teachers (1-5 years) demonstrated higher challenge rates than their most experienced colleagues on the instruments' prevailing number of items. Thus, there was a declining tendency in the challenge estimates on comparisons between the least and most experienced EFL teachers. By way of example, novices rated communicative competence development at M= 3.40, while teachers with more than 25 years of experience at M= 2.53. Similarly, planning and managing instruction was M=

2.53 for novice teachers and M= 1.89 for the most experienced group of teachers. Maintaining discipline was M= 2.73 for novices and M= 2 for experienced teachers.

A surprising finding to emerge from these calculations was that teachers with a length of experience of 10-15 years and, to a lesser extent, 5-10 years reported the highest rate of challenge (for example, Figures 2, 3). In the predominant number of instances, they estimated challenges higher than novices. For instance, the group of teachers with 10-15 years of experience scored M= 3.7 on teaching speaking, while novices scored M=3.4 on the same item. Teaching grammar was calculated and distributed respectively at M= 3.1 and M= 2.27; teaching vocabulary - M= 2.6 and M= 1.67; teaching pronunciation - M= 3 and M= 2.33; teaching reading - M= 2.5 and M= 2.13; teaching writing - M= 3.6 and M= 2.6; knowledge assessment - M= 3.3 and M= 2.6; engaging all learners - M= 3.1 and M= 2.6; motivating learners - M= 3.3 and M= 2.67; knowing students - M= 3 and M= 2.2. The only exception was discipline maintenance, where novices rated the challenge at M= 2.73 and the group of teachers with 10-15 years at M= 2.2. This indicates that novices were more challenged by discipline issues than their more experienced colleagues.

Table 3. Challenge estimates relative to the length of teaching experience: descriptive statistics

Which areas of language teaching do you find challenging? (the most challenging (5) - the least challenging (1)):	Teaching experience:	Mean	Std. Dev.
Developing learners' speaking skills	1-5 years;	3.40	1.221
	5-10 years;	3.30	1.133
	10-15 years;	3.70	1.361
	15 -20 years;	3.68	1.157
	20-25 years;	3.07	1.363
	>25 years.	2.53	1.246
	Total	3.27	1.283
Explaining grammar in clear terms	1-5 years;	2.27	1.015
	5-10 years;	2.83	1.141
	10-15 years;	3.1	1.165
	15 -20 years;	2.14	1.153
	20-25 years;	2.4	1.329
	>25 years.	2.11	1.034
	Total	2.43	1.178
Teaching vocabulary	1-5 years;	1.67	.711
	5-10 years;	2.17	1.102
	10-15 years;	2.6	1.465
	15 -20 years;	2.32	1.073
	20-25 years;	2.47	1.479
	> 25 years.	1.84	1.103
	Total	2.15	1.178

Which areas of language teaching do you find challenging? (the most challenging (5) - the least challenging (1)):	Teaching experience:	Mean	Std. Dev.
Teaching pronunciation	1-5 years;	2.33	1.373
	5-10 years;	2.78	1.191
	10-15 years;	3	1.522
	15 -20 years;	2.36	1.123
	20-25 years;	2.53	1.224
	> 25 years.	2.05	1.207
	Total	2.48	1.266
Teaching reading	1-5 years;	2.13	1.224
	5-10 years;	2.43	1.223
	10-15 years;	2.5	1.071
	15 -20 years;	2.32	1.073
	20-25 years;	2.37	1.213
	> 25 years.	2.05	1.114
	Total	2.38	1.173
Teaching writing	1-5 years;	2.6	1.429
	5-10 years;	2.96	1.316
	10-15 years;	3.6	1.046
	15 -20 years;	2.95	1.16
	20-25 years;	2.93	1.311
	> 25 years.	2.42	1.056
	Total	2.87	1.259
Teaching listening	1-5 years;	3.13	1.224
	5-10 years;	2.91	1.189
	10-15 years;	2.8	1.005
	15 -20 years;	2.73	1.107
	20-25 years;	2.73	1.363
	> 25 years.	2.42	1.004
	Total	2.78	1.163
Planning and managing instruction	1-5 years;	2.53	1.106
	5-10 years;	2.39	1.022
	10-15 years;	2.8	1.281
	15 -20 years;	2.45	1.210
	20-25 years;	2.47	1.332
	> 25 years.	1.89	1.085
	Total	2.38	1.174
Assessing students' knowledge	1-5 years;	2.33	1.373
	5-10 years;	2.57	1.025
	10-15 years;	3.3	1.218
	15 -20 years;	2.41	1.245
	20-25 years;	2.27	1.143
	> 25 years.	2.11	1.085
	Total	2.44	1.202

Which areas of language teaching do you find challenging? (the most challenging (5) - the least challenging (1)):	Teaching experience:	Mean	Std. Dev.
Engaging all learners with the instructional material	1-5 years;	2.6	1.38
	5-10 years;	2.74	.905
	10-15 years;	3.1	.852
	15 -20 years;	2.64	1.382
	20-25 years;	2.67	1.322
	> 25 years.	2.32	1.233
	Total	2.64	1.211
Motivating learners	1-5 years;	2.67	1.516
	5-10 years;	2.91	1.297
	10-15 years;	3.3	.923
	15 -20 years;	3.32	1.343
	20-25 years;	2.93	1.552
	> 25 years.	2.32	1.141
	Total	2.89	1.354
Understanding students, their needs, interests, strong and weak points	1-5 years;	2.20	1.540
	5-10 years;	2.48	1.329
	10-15 years;	3	1.026
	15 -20 years;	2.68	1.506
	20-25 years;	2.53	1.279
	> 25 years.	2.16	1.151
	Total	2.48	1.348
Providing effective instruction for all learners	1-5 years;	2.53	1.525
	5-10 years;	2.7	1.245
	10-15 years;	2.7	1.129
	15 -20 years;	2.68	1.343
	20-25 years;	2.47	1.279
	> 25 years.	2.37	1.239
	Total	2.58	1.294
Maintaining discipline	1-5 years;	2.73	1.596
	5-10 years;	2.65	1.215
	10-15 years;	2.2	1.005
	15 -20 years;	2.23	1.327
	20-25 years;	2.4	1.380
	> 25 years.	2.05	1.012
	Total	2.38	1.284
Differentiation and individualisation of instruction	1-5 years;	2.73	1.461
	5-10 years;	2.7	1.093
	10-15 years;	2.7	1.031
	15 -20 years;	2.64	1.348
	20-25 years;	2.67	1.269
	> 25 years.	2.21	1.166
	Total	2.6	1.240

Figure 2. Teaching speaking

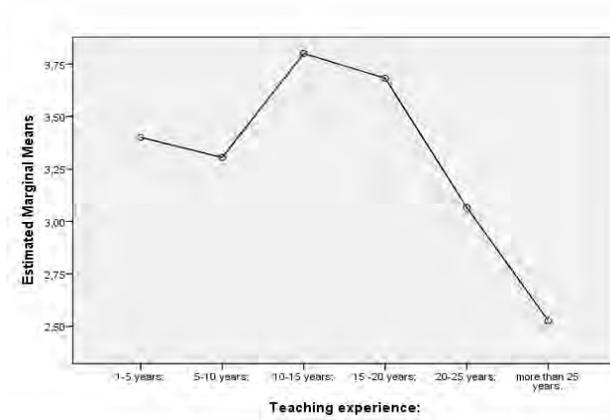
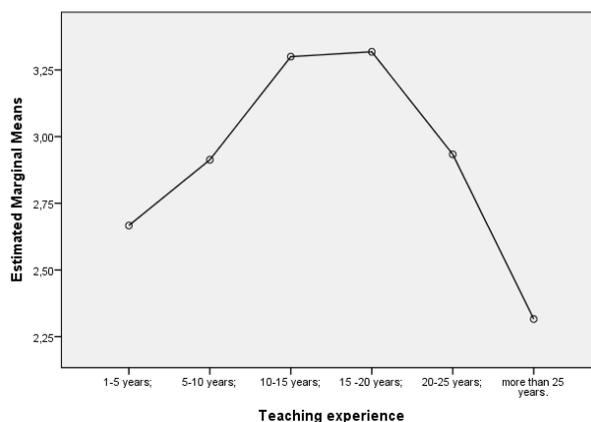


Figure 3. Motivating learners



Overall, these findings indicate that teachers' perceptions undergo substantial transformations throughout their professional lives. These outcomes suggest that teachers come to realise the potential challenges and hidden risks of language teaching not immediately at the outset of their careers in light of the fact that beginning teachers estimated EFL teaching challenges lower than the group with 10-15 years of teaching experience. Yet, the summative results of novices were substantially higher than those of teachers with more than 25 years of experience.

The results of tests of between-subjects effects specify the language teaching tasks that account for the variance in the responses of teachers with varying lengths of teaching experience. As observed from the findings set in Table 4, perceptions of teachers with various lengths of teaching experience differed significantly on such items as teaching speaking ( $p = .000$ ,  $F = 4.75$ ,  $\eta^2 = .105$ ), teaching grammar ( $p = .002$ ,  $F = 3.824$ ,  $\eta^2 = .09$ ), teaching vocabulary ( $p = .015$ ,  $F = 2.85$ ,  $\eta^2 = .07$ ), knowledge assessment ( $p = .011$ ,  $F = 3.06$ ,  $\eta^2 = .07$ ), and learner motivation ( $p = .015$ ,  $F = 2.9$ ,  $\eta^2 = .07$ ), with  $p$  set at 0.015 level. Thus, the length of teaching experience was significantly related to the perceived challenge rates, and its effect was large.

Table 4. Between-group comparison of challenges relative to the length of teaching experience: results of tests of between-subjects effects

	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
1. Developing learners' speaking skills	4.755	<b>.000</b>	.105
2. Explaining grammar in clear terms	3.824	<b>.002</b>	.086
3. Teaching vocabulary	2.853	<b>.015</b>	.066
4. Teaching pronunciation	2.301	.046	.054
5. Teaching reading	2.100	.067	.049
6. Teaching writing	2.801	.018	.065
7. Teaching listening	1.443	.21	.034
8. Planning and managing instruction	2.031	.076	.048
9. Assessing students' knowledge	3.057	<b>.011</b>	.07
10. Engaging all learners with the instructional material	1.198	.312	.029
11. Motivating learners	2.913	<b>.015</b>	.067
12. Understanding students, their needs, interests, strong and weak points	1.514	.187	.036
13. Providing effective instruction for all learners	.413	.839	.01
14. Maintaining discipline	1.588	.165	.038
15. Differentiation and individualization of instruction	.923	.467	.022

A detailed look at the obtained results revealed that the most substantial differences between teachers' responses concerned the linguistic aspects of EFL teaching, including teaching speaking, grammar, vocabulary, knowledge assessment, and motivation. The smaller variance was observed for more generic teaching tasks, such as effective teaching, differentiating instruction, disciplining learners, and student engagement. Altogether, summative findings indicate that the highest challenge rate was self-reported by the groups of teachers with a length of teaching experience of 10-15 and 5-10 years. They were followed by the novices, while the lowest challenge rate was observed for the most experienced teachers (more than 25 years).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

This study investigated EFL teachers' perceptions of teaching challenges in relation to the length of their teaching experience. The study was designed with two-fold objectives in mind. First, it was a quantitative follow-up to the previous interview study, which observed the challenges associated with language teaching in the context of Ukraine (Lőrincz, 2022). Moreover, it compared language teachers' perceptions of challenges relative to the length of their teaching experience. The data, collected with the help of a questionnaire, was worked through the MANOVA technique of SPSS.

Overall, the participants were mainly challenged by teaching speaking, learner motivation, teaching writing, and listening. They were also moderately challenged by learner

engagement, differentiating instruction, providing effective teaching, knowing their learners, and teaching grammar. These findings are largely congruent with the results of a large-scale study by Copland et al. (2014), in which teaching speaking and motivation also featured as the most challenging. They are also partly in line with the challenges highlighted by Madalinska-Michalak et al. (2018), who reported student motivation and differentiation as principal challenges. Looking at the mean indicators for the challenges, the participants felt challenged by language teaching tasks to a moderate degree (means varying from 3.3 to 2.15). Hence, none of them was perceived as hugely challenging and therefore insurmountable, or not challenging, in the least.

The comparative data yielded by the MANOVA technique pointed to a statistically significant difference in challenge perceptions between groups of EFL teachers with varying lengths of experience. It contradicts the findings of Valizadeh (2021), who did not establish a statistically significant difference in EFL teachers' views of challenges. At the same time, these findings comply with the prevailing number of studies pointing to the crucial role of teaching experience. The most striking discrepancies were observed on such language teaching tasks as teaching speaking, grammar, vocabulary, assessment, and motivation.

As expected, the challenge estimates encountered by novice teachers were higher than those of teachers with more than 20 years of experience. This finds partial corroboration in the studies focusing on the influence of teaching experience on multiple aspects, including teacher cognitions and teaching effectiveness (e.g. Podolsky, Kini & Darling-Hammond, 2019). One of the results of this investigation that runs counter to earlier research was that the challenge estimates reported by teachers with 10-15 years of teaching experience turned out to be higher than those reported by novices. Thus, beginning language teachers in the study of Al-bdeerat et al. (2020) felt more challenged than their experienced counterparts. On the whole, difficulties and challenges teachers face in the early years have been widely treated in the literature (e.g., Maskit, 2013), and governments worldwide apply a lot of efforts to support them. These results suggest that as teachers mature professionally, they gain a deeper awareness of the intricacies and challenges of teaching. Cognition research has captured the transformations occurring in teacher beliefs, thoughts, and knowledge (Borg, 2019). A useful lens, if we are to delve deeper into the interpretation of this study's outcomes, is the knowledge schema theory, which explicates the differences between novices and expert teachers. Experienced teachers have a much richer knowledge of all aspects of their work than novice teachers (Tsui, 2009). Consequently, a more sophisticated, elaborate professional knowledge enables experienced teachers to discern and assess language teaching challenges qualitatively differently from novices.

### **Limitations**

A rather small sample size does not render it possible to generalise the outcomes of this study to a larger population of EFL teachers. Also, because the sample includes EFL teachers working only in Ukraine, the study does not claim to represent the target population

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of EFL teachers worldwide. Notwithstanding the study's limitations, it offers a revealing insight for both researchers and teacher educators by pointing out venues for the renewal of teacher development courses.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study provide a window into the challenges encountered by EFL teachers throughout various periods in their professional lives. Prompted by the study's two-fold objectives, first, the challenge rates caused by language teaching were calculated. The participants self-reported being especially challenged by teaching speaking, learner motivation, teaching writing and listening, learner engagement, differentiating instruction, providing effective learning, knowing their learners, and teaching grammar. All groups of teachers alleged being challenged by language teaching tasks included in the study's instrument, although the average challenge rate was moderate. Next, the responses were compared between groups of teachers with varying lengths of experience, and a statistically significant difference was established between them. As expected, novice teachers felt more challenged than the most experienced teachers. However, disparate results were derived from comparisons between groups of novices and their more experienced (10-15 years of teaching experience) colleagues. The latter appeared to demonstrate a greater awareness of language teaching challenges by indicating higher rates even than novices. Thus, it may be true that the novice stage of teaching is more labour-intensive and strewn with difficulties because teacher learning is highly active in this period. As Maskit (2013) explains, beginning teachers (1-4 years of experience) learn how to cope with difficulties and challenges. However, as suggested by the results of this study, EFL teachers at later stages of their careers also require assistance, though qualitatively different from novices.

This research could evolve into a more in-depth analysis of language teachers' challenges, especially across cultural milieus. It would also be interesting to find out if there exists any association between language teaching challenges and mistakes committed in teaching. Finally, probing for challenging areas in language teachers' work can be illuminating in many respects. It can serve to define optimum curriculum content selection and organisation of teacher training and development both in Ukraine and worldwide.

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