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Resilience in Chinese Novice English Teachers: Exploring Dynamics in Challenges, Coping Strategies and Institutional Support

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Abstract: Novice English teachers often encounter challenges in curriculum requirements, classroom management, student engagement, community expectations, etc. Understanding the factors that foster resilience — the ability to adapt and thrive in the face of adversity — is significant for improving teacher retention and professional development outcomes. Existing research has investigated key factors such as self-efficacy, administrative support, and access to professional development; however, the complex interplay of these factors, working collectively to enable novice English teachers to accommodate and flourish in their daily challenges, remains relatively under-explored. This study aimed to investigate the challenges faced by novice Chinese English teachers, the coping strategies they employ, and the role of institutional support in fostering their resilience. We conducted a thematic analysis of data from 18 semi-structured interviews, each lasting 40 to 50 minutes, with novice English teachers working in China's public schools. Results show that Chinese novice English teachers encounter a combination of challenges, including a heavy workload and classroom management difficulties, which they try to overcome with strategies such as prioritising tasks, focusing on their successes, and seeking emotional support from colleagues. Institutional support, particularly structured mentorship, access to professional development, and collaborative school culture, was found to significantly reduce the impact of the challenges, with 89%

of participants reporting increased confidence and adaptive capacity when supported by mentorship programs. This research reveals a dynamic process in which the challenges Chinese novice English teachers encounter feed directly into their coping strategies, influenced by both personal factors (emotional and cognitive) and institutional support (mentorship, resources, professional development, etc.). This research highlights the importance of structured mentorship programs to offer guidance, professional development programs to address the practical needs of novice teachers, and a collaborative school culture to build a thriving professional learning community.

Keywords: Chinese novice English teachers, resilience, challenges, coping strategies, institutional support.

Introduction

Teaching is widely recognised as a demanding profession, and novice teachers often experience high levels of stress and burnout due to the complexities of classroom management, student engagement, and the pressure to meet curriculum demands (Ghasemi, 2025; Kyriacou, 2001; Madigan & Kim, 2021). Teacher attrition and early-career difficulties have raised concerns about the quality of education and workforce stability, highlighting the need to understand how novice teachers adapt and thrive in the face of professional adversity (Brandenburg et al., 2024; Buchanan et al., 2013). As a result, resilience - defined as the ability to adapt, recover, and thrive in the face of adversity (Gu & Day, 2013; Wang, 2021) - has become an essential concept in understanding how teachers manage these challenges, thus supporting teacher retention, effectiveness, and well-being (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017; Kinnunen et al., 2020; Täschner et al., 2025).

Research indicates that multiple personal and institutional factors contribute to resilience. Individual traits such as self-efficacy, emotional regulation, and a positive mindset have been shown to help teachers cope with stress and maintain professional engagement (García-Crespo et al., 2021; Ghasemi, 2025; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Institutional support, including structured mentorship, access to professional development, and collaborative school cultures, has also been found to significantly enhance novice teachers' capacity to navigate early-career challenges (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Hargreaves, 2021). There have been investigations into the dynamics of perceived stress, stress appraisal, and coping strategies (Maqsood et al., 2024), or of teachers' occupational stressors and coping strategies (Ghasemi, 2025), however, few studies examined the dynamic interaction between challenges, coping strategies, and institutional support, resulting in limited insight into how these factors collectively foster resilience. Furthermore, the majority of existing studies focus on Western contexts, with limited research specifically addressing the development of resilience among Chinese novice English teachers.

Research Aim and Research Questions

Adopting a qualitative approach involving semi-structured interviews with 18 novice English teachers in the Chinese public school system, this research aims to explore how dynamics in challenges, coping strategies, and institutional support help foster resilience in novice English teachers in China. Adopting a qualitative approach, this study draws on semi-structured interviews with 18 novice teachers to identify the challenges that Chinese novice English teachers encounter during their first years of teaching, examine the coping strategies employed by these teachers, and explore how such strategies contribute to their resilience. Additionally, it examines the role of institutional support in enhancing teacher resilience. Specifically, this research sets out to answer the following questions:

- (1) What challenges do Chinese novice English teachers encounter in their first years of teaching?
- (2) What coping strategies do Chinese novice English teachers use to manage challenges, and how do these strategies contribute to their resilience?
- (3) How does institutional support impact the resilience of Chinese novice English teachers?

By addressing these questions, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of resilience in the Chinese English teaching context and offer practical recommendations for supporting novice teachers effectively.

Literature Review

Teacher resilience refers to a teacher's ability to adapt, recover, and thrive in the face of challenges and stressors that arise in the teaching profession (Beltman et al., 2011; Wang, 2021). For novice English teachers in China, where English is taught and learnt as a foreign language, in large classes often exceeding 55 students, with high academic outcome expectations from parents, resilience is particularly critical during their transition from teacher preparation programs into the dynamic and often demanding classroom environment. Research on teacher resilience has gained prominence in recent years, with studies highlighting its importance in enhancing teacher retention, job satisfaction, and overall effectiveness (Kinman & Grant, 2023). This literature review examines the key factors influencing the resilience of novice English teachers, with a focus on the roles of personal attributes, institutional support, and coping strategies.

Factors Contributing to Resilience in Novice Teachers

A variety of factors shapes the development of resilience among novice teachers. Personal characteristics such as optimism, self-efficacy, and emotional regulation are often reported to be foundational to teacher resilience. According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011), teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy are better equipped to face classroom challenges, as they believe in their ability to influence student outcomes and manage classroom dynamics effectively. Similarly, characteristics such as emotional intelligence and a positive mindset are essential as emotional resilience in teachers is directly related to their ability to connect with students, maintain enthusiasm in teaching, and manage emotional labour (Hargreaves, 2021). For novice teachers, these emotional resources are often stretched as they navigate the complexities of their early career, from classroom management issues and high student expectations to the challenges of meeting diverse learner needs (Friedman & Thayer, 2024).

Institutional Support and Its Role in Resilience

Institutional support, including mentorship, professional development opportunities, and a supportive school culture, plays a significant role in fostering resilience in novice teachers. It is reported that teachers who receive continuous professional development opportunities and participate in collaborative school environments report higher levels of job satisfaction and a greater sense of professional efficacy (Täschner et al., 2025; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Effective mentoring programs are also found to significantly reduce teacher burnout and attrition, particularly for new teachers. Mentorship provides emotional support, practical teaching strategies, and professional guidance, which helps buffer the effects of stressors encountered during the early stages of teaching (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Furthermore, providing novice teachers with time for reflection and feedback helps them process their challenges and build resilience over time (Dvir & Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2020).

Coping Strategies Employed by Novice Teachers

Novice teachers employ a variety of coping strategies to manage the stress associated with their profession. These strategies include both emotional regulation techniques and cognitive reframing. Emotional regulation involves managing negative emotions, such as frustration and anxiety. In contrast, cognitive reframing involves altering one's perception of a stressful event, such as viewing challenging student behaviour as an opportunity for growth rather than a setback (Agyapong et al., 2022; Hejazi et al., 2025; Kyriacou, 2001).

Pillay et al. (2022) suggest that coping strategies, such as seeking social support from colleagues and engaging in self-care routines (e.g., exercise, relaxation techniques), help novice teachers sustain their well-being. The ability to adapt to new challenges and reframe negative experiences is essential for building long-term resilience (Beltman et al., 2011; Kinnunen et al., 2020). Furthermore, coping strategies can be categorised into proactive and reactive forms. Proactive coping includes planning, setting realistic goals, and maintaining a sense of professional purpose. Reactive coping, on the other hand, involves adjusting to stressors after they occur, often with the help of external support (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997; Sonnentag et al., 2023). Both forms of coping are valuable for building resilience and ensuring novice teachers' persistence in the face of early career challenges.

Teachers who demonstrate high levels of resilience are more likely to stay in the profession, despite the challenges they face (Gu & Day, 2013). This is particularly important given the high rates of attrition among novice teachers, especially in challenging school contexts. Research (Johnson et al., 2005) demonstrates that new teachers who feel supported by their schools are more likely to remain in the profession, as they develop the resilience needed to overcome early career stressors. Teaching English requires a multilayered approach, blending linguistic accuracy, cultural awareness, and communicative competence and constantly adapting pedagogy to suit learners' diverse needs, including language proficiency and learning strategies, which can be overwhelming for those new to the profession (Brown & Lee, 2015; Cheng et al., 2023; Choudhury & Pattnaik, 2020). Additionally, English teachers often grapple with issues related to cultural and linguistic identity, especially when teaching in non-English-speaking contexts, where they are frequently scrutinised regarding their linguistic proficiency and teaching legitimacy, leading to identity-based stress (Braine, 2010). EFL teaching as a profession is highly dynamic, requiring constant updating of skills and methodologies to keep pace with evolving standards, technologies, and student expectations (Ludwig & Tassinari, 2023); therefore, novice English teachers often experience "professional dissonance" as they transition from theoretical teacher training to the complex realities of practice (Johnson & Golombek, 2016). Resilience helps them adapt to this learning curve, embrace feedback, and integrate into professional communities for professional growth. The pedagogical complexity of fostering linguistic and cultural competence, the identity-related challenges tied to English as a global language, and the dynamic professional demands distinguish their experiences from those of novice teachers in other disciplines. Effective teacher resilience, as Dörnyei (2020) highlights, is not just about survival, but also about thriving in their multifaceted roles as educators, communicators, and cultural mediators.

Materials and Methods

Sample and Participants

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the study's focus. The inclusion criteria were: (1) being a novice English teacher with fewer than three years of teaching experience, (2) currently teaching in secondary schools within China's public school system, and (3) holding at least one Bachelor's Degree in English Teaching. A total of 18 participants were recruited, comprising 14 females and 4 males. All participants had obtained their B.A. in English teaching between

2021 and 2024 and were concurrently enrolled in an M.A. program in English teaching. Ten participants were teaching in junior high schools, while eight were teaching in senior high schools. Detailed demographic and professional information for the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

	Participant features	n.	%
Gender	Male	4	27%
	Female	14	73%
Grade level taught	Junior High	8	44%
	Senior High	10	56%
Age	Below 25	15	83%
	25-30	2	11%
	31-35	1	6%
Years of teaching	0-1 year	13	72%
	1-2 years	3	17%
	3-5 years	2	11%

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Academic Committee of Southwest University. All 18 participants provided informed consent before participating in the study, understanding the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by assigning pseudonyms and removing identifiable details from the interview recordings and transcripts.

To ensure the validity of the findings, member checking was conducted by sending participants their interview summaries; 3 of the 18 participants made revisions concerning their views, and 15 of the 18 participants provided feedback confirming that the interpretations accurately reflected their experiences. In addition, both authors independently coded all interview transcripts. Emerging codes and themes were then compared, discussed, and refined through consensus to ensure reliability and consistency in the analysis.

Instrument and Procedure

This study employed a semi-structured interview to gain insights into the challenges faced by novice English teachers, the coping strategies they employ, and the impact of institutional support on their resilience, for an in-depth exploration of teachers' lived experiences, subjective perceptions, and meaning-making processes—elements that are difficult to adequately capture through quantitative methods (Hong & Cross Francis, 2020). Semi-structured interviews are a widely used qualitative research method, allowing for a comprehensive and thorough exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives while maintaining a flexible, open-ended structure (Crabtree & Miller, 2023).

Grounded in relevant literature on novice teachers, teacher resilience, and stress management, the interview guide (Appendix I) was developed with a focus on the research questions, aiming to create a conversational yet structured format that would encourage participants to share their experiences openly (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The questions were designed to explore the specific difficulties that participants faced during their first years of teaching, examine the coping strategies they used to manage

stress and challenges, and investigate the role that institutional support played therein, as well as how these strategies and institutional support contributed to the development of their resilience.

The interviews were conducted individually in person between July and August 2025, during the participants’ M.A. program at Southwest University, Chongqing, China. Each interview lasted approximately 40 to 50 minutes. The interviewer began by establishing rapport with the participants and explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality measures in place. Following this, the interviewer asked open-ended questions, allowing participants to respond freely while probing deeper into responses when necessary (Charmaz, 2015). Interviews were audio-recorded with the participants’ consent to ensure accuracy in data capture, and transcripts were later analysed.

Data Analysis

The thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s (2023) six-step framework: (1) familiarization with data through repeated reading of transcripts, (2) generating initial codes systematically across the dataset, (3) searching for potential themes, (4) reviewing and refining themes in relation to the coded extracts and the entire dataset, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report.

Each interview was transcribed verbatim to preserve the richness of the participants’ responses. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and themes related to the research questions, allowing for both the identification of shared experiences and the exploration of unique individual perspectives (Guest et al., 2012). Table 2 shows how initial data extracts are coded and grouped into broader themes relevant to the research questions about novice English teachers’ challenges, coping strategies, and institutional support.

Table 2

Example of Initial Coding and Thematic Grouping

Data Extract	Initial Code	Potential Theme
“I feel overwhelmed with the number of lessons I need to prepare every week. It’s hard to balance everything.”	Workload stress	Teaching Challenges
“I often have trouble managing classroom behavior, and I feel like I’m not prepared for it.”	Classroom management difficulties	Teaching Challenges
“I try to seek advice from more experienced teachers whenever I can. They’ve been a huge support.”	Seeking mentorship	Coping Strategies
“I sometimes take a walk during my lunch break to clear my head and recharge.”	Self-care, taking breaks	Coping Strategies
“The school offers regular workshops on teaching methods, and these really help me feel more confident.”	Professional development workshops	Institutional Support
“I often feel like I don’t have enough time to reflect on my teaching because of the workload.”	Lack of reflection time	Teaching Challenges
“I have access to a peer network where we share ideas and support each other, which helps me a lot.”	Peer support network	Institutional Support

After familiarising ourselves with the data by reading through transcripts and notes to understand the challenges faced by novice English teachers, their coping strategies, and the role of institutional support in building resilience, we identified initial codes reflecting stressors (e.g., workload and lack of experience)

and coping mechanisms (e.g., seeking mentorship and self-care). These codes were then grouped into broader themes, such as teaching challenges, resilience-building strategies, and institutional support. After refining the themes for consistency, we defined and named them for clarity. Data extracts supported each theme to illustrate its relevance. This thematic analysis aims to address key questions about the challenges that novice teachers encounter, their coping strategies, and the impact of institutional support on resilience, offering insights to inform teacher training, professional development, and policies that better support teachers in their early careers.

Results

Findings from the thematic analysis reveal a dynamic process in which Chinese novice English teachers face multiple challenges in the first years of their teaching careers. Adopting organisational, cognitive, and motivational strategies, as well as classroom management strategies, along with support from institutional resources, helps them gradually build resilience. These key themes and their subcategories are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3

Frequency of Identified Themes (N = 18)

Theme	Sub-themes	No. *	% of Sample
Challenges	Structural challenges (large classes, workload)	15	83%
	Technology-related difficulties	11	61%
	Emotional stress and parental pressure	13	72%
Coping Strategies	Organizational strategies	14	78
	Classroom management strategies	12	67
	Cognitive & motivational strategies	10	56
Institutional Support	Mentorship	12	67
	Professional development	10	56
	Collaborative school culture	11	61

*: No. of Participants Mentioning

Challenges Encountered by Novice English Teachers

Several factors were identified as contributing to the early career experiences of novice teachers, ranging from structural issues within the educational system to emotional and psychological stress. These challenges can be grouped into three sub-themes: structural challenges, challenges related to technology use, and emotional strain and stress.

Structural Challenges

A majority of participants (15) emphasised structural challenges, huge class sizes and heavy administrative loads. Structural Challenges arise out of the underlying structure of the public school system in China. One of the most significant challenges novice teachers face is the large and diverse nature of their classrooms. With class sizes often exceeding 50 students, the task of delivering effective, individualised instruction becomes daunting. Young teachers often find it a struggle to engage the class, particularly when proficiency levels and student motivations vary significantly. This difficulty is compounded by the limited resources available to teachers, including access to teaching aids and technology. Teachers mentioned the challenge of maintaining student attention in such large classrooms, which often undermines the effectiveness of their instructional strategies. Not only do teachers need to differentiate their instruction to

different proficiency levels, but they must also maintain a high level of student engagement. This is particularly challenging when students are at different stages in their learning and possess varying levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Z, for example, pointed out that the varying needs of students present a dual challenge:

“There are big gaps between the students. Some are doing fine, but others are really struggling. Some students struggle with the very basics, which makes everything else even harder for them. They cannot keep up with the latest materials. They’ll sit there and look confused, because they can’t even follow the basic stuff...”

Teachers expressed the need for more professional development in these areas to help them better navigate these classroom dynamics:

“Having more strategies for guiding students through these experiences would be really helpful. Lesson observations, accompanied by discussion or collaborative lesson preparation, would make a difference.

Another prevalent theme in the participants' responses was the overwhelming workload they faced. They reported having to prepare numerous lesson plans, deliver lessons, and grade assignments, which led to feelings of burnout. They also described working long hours, including evenings and weekends, which negatively impacted their work-life balance. Q talked about it in detail:

“I’m responsible for almost everything related to the students while they’re at school. I’m involved in their day-to-day activities and homeschool communication, ensuring that everything runs smoothly. I also help organise and oversee various competitions throughout the year, which can be a lot of work. Additionally, I frequently respond to questions posed by parents in Parent Chat Groups.

Challenges in using technology

The integration of technology into the classroom is another area where novice teachers experience significant challenges. Over half of the teachers (11) reported difficulty integrating technology due to poor infrastructure, lack of training, and restrictive school policies. While teachers are often familiar with digital tools, they lack the pedagogical knowledge to use these tools effectively in teaching. As a result, many novice teachers stated that technology integration did not always enhance their lessons and, at times, even disrupted them. Technical difficulties, such as poor internet connectivity, software glitches, and limited access to devices, were commonly cited as sources of stress, notably when technology failed during critical teaching moments. And on top of that is the strict rule that middle school students in China are not allowed to have electronic devices in school, as pointed out by L:

“Right now, it’s mainly the teachers who use digital tools, not the students. We’re not allowed to let students use electronic devices in class, so their exposure is minimal. The school’s policy is quite strict on this.”

The sheer volume of available digital tools also contributed to confusion. Teachers often struggled to choose the most effective resources for their instructional goals, leading to wasted time and effort, as put by Wang:

“Also, one of the challenges we face is that we don’t have access to high-quality digital resources. While we try to make use of what we have, it’s difficult to provide a vibrant digital learning experience with the current resources available to us.”

Emotional strain and stress

Emotional stress was a common theme in the interviews of all participants, reported by 13 participants. They discussed feelings of inadequacy, particularly when managing classroom behaviour or addressing students' academic struggles. This lack of confidence often led to self-doubt, which in turn affected their overall emotional well-being. They also expressed anxiety about meeting the high expectations of students, parents, and school administrators. The pressure to perform well and ensure positive student outcomes led to heightened stress levels, especially during exam periods. Feelings of isolation worsened the emotional toll of teaching. Many novice teachers felt they lacked a support network within their schools. This isolation, combined with a competitive school culture where teachers may feel reluctant to share their struggles, prevented them from seeking help or guidance from more experienced colleagues, as commented by L:

"... I have to handle a lot of disciplinary issues every day ... There's also a lot of unhealthy competition among colleagues, which doesn't help."

Another source of emotional strain stems from high parental expectations, posing a significant challenge for novice teachers. The participants noted the pressure from parents for measurable outcomes in the form of test scores, which created tensions between teachers and parents. Y commented that:

"One of the toughest parts is dealing with constant complaints from parents. It feels like they can report or accuse teachers without much reason, which makes things stressful."

Coping strategies

The participants reported a variety of coping strategies, which both help the novice teachers to navigate the demands of the profession and contribute to their resilience, enabling them to continue their careers and improve their effectiveness in the classroom. The findings from the data reveal several categories of coping strategies: organisational strategies, classroom management strategies, and cognitive and motivational strategies.

Organizational strategies

One of the most frequently mentioned coping strategies was the use of organisational techniques to manage the overwhelming workload, reported by 14 participants. Given the extensive teaching loads and numerous administrative responsibilities, novice teachers often struggle to keep up with the demands placed on them. To cope with the pressure, many participants employed strategies such as prioritising tasks, breaking tasks into smaller, more manageable parts, and setting realistic goals. They reported that focusing on one task at a time and organising their schedules effectively allowed them to fulfil their responsibilities without becoming overwhelmed. L explained how she coped with her workload as a class teacher and English teacher of two senior high classes:

"I prioritise by handling the most important tasks first. That way, I ensure that the important things are taken care of before moving on to other matters. I also break down big tasks into smaller stages, which makes it easier. It's about staying organised. By setting clear goals for each stage, I feel less overwhelmed. This approach helps me stay ahead of my schedule, even when there's a lot to do."

Classroom management strategies

Classroom management strategies were instrumental in coping with the challenges posed by student behaviour and engagement. Twelve participants reported using classroom routines, setting clear

expectations, and employing positive reinforcement techniques to foster a positive learning environment, as illustrated in M's interview:

"I try to make lessons as interesting as possible with fun activities. Using a system of rewards and incentives has also been effective—students really respond to it. However, I believe the key is giving each student sufficient attention. I make sure to encourage each student personally, recognising their progress and efforts. It's important to make them feel valued and supported in their learning journey."

Cognitive and motivational coping strategies

A key strategy for coping with the stress of teaching involved maintaining a positive mindset. Ten participants emphasised the importance of positive self-talk, focusing on their successes, and reminding themselves of the joy and purpose that teaching brings. By emphasising the rewarding aspects of teaching, such as student progress or positive feedback, teachers were able to maintain their motivation, even in the face of difficulties. For example, L talked about how important it was to focus on the rewarding aspects of teaching:

"I remember one student who had been very quiet and disengaged at the start of the year... and there were days when I doubted if I was making any impact. However, one day, I noticed that she had significantly improved her writing skills, and she seemed more confident when sharing her ideas with the class. That reminded me why I teach."

Institutional support

Novice teachers face a range of challenges, from managing classroom behaviour to coping with the emotional demands of teaching. However, institutional support plays a pivotal role in helping these teachers build resilience, reduce stress, and enhance their teaching effectiveness. The key areas where institutional support impacts resilience include mentorship, professional development, and collaborative school culture.

Mentorship and guidance

One of the most consistent themes in the research was the need for well-structured mentorship programs. Twelve participants expressed a clear desire for guidance from more experienced colleagues in aspects such as lesson planning, classroom management, and managing parent-school communication, as H pointed out:

"Experienced teachers who are willing to share are invaluable, even if it's just for the first year ... regular meetings or informal catch-ups between colleagues could also be a good way to keep that communication flowing. It doesn't always have to be about teaching methods — it could be about sharing stories, or just talking through frustrations."

Professional development

Another crucial area where institutional support impacts novice teachers' resilience is through professional development. Ten participants in this study consistently identified the need for accessible, targeted professional development that addresses their specific needs, such as classroom management techniques, teaching strategies, and emotional resilience. Workshops and training that focus on practical, real-world challenges help teachers feel more competent and confident in their roles, as put by Z:

"I think schools should offer more systematic, ongoing workshops or training that focus on practical teaching strategies ... diving deeper into specific areas like classroom management,

differentiated instruction, or even how to assess students' needs more effectively ... would be really valuable."

Collaborative school culture

Ultimately, fostering a collaborative culture within schools is crucial for developing resilience among novice teachers. Eleven participants reported that peer support networks, such as emotional support, sharing teaching resources, and collaborative planning sessions, were all highlighted as valuable forms of support, as reflected in Y's interview:

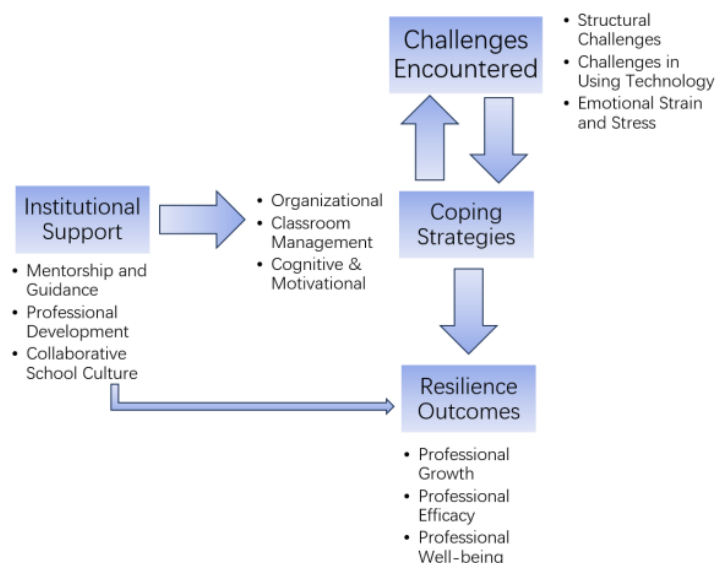
"Having a supportive teacher community where new teachers can learn from those with more experience ... where we can openly discuss our challenges and successes ... would go a long way in reducing the stress of teaching ... It makes you feel like you're part of something bigger than just your own classroom."

Discussion

The results reveal a dynamic process in which Chinese novice English teachers cope with challenges, institutional support provides help and assistance, and novice English teachers gain resilience. The challenges that Chinese novice English teachers encounter directly inform Coping Strategies—the more challenges a teacher faces, the more they rely on specific coping mechanisms.

Figure 1

Dynamic process of resilience development in Chinese novice English teachers



Their Coping Strategies are influenced by both personal factors (emotional and cognitive) and Institutional Support (such as mentorship, resources, and professional development). Institutional Support serves as a key buffer against challenges, helping foster resilience in novice teachers. Resilience outcomes, such as sustained professional growth, well-being, and effective classroom management, are the long-term benefits of fostering resilience, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Challenges faced by Novice English Teachers

Chinese novice English teachers face a multitude of challenges in their first years of teaching, ranging from structural issues such as large class sizes and administrative burdens to emotional stress and difficulties in using technology effectively. The constant pressure to fulfil multiple responsibilities led to stress and, in some cases, anxiety. In addition to the teaching load, novice teachers often found themselves involved in administrative tasks that they felt disconnected from their primary role of English teaching. These administrative responsibilities, which include record-keeping, attending meetings, and engaging with parent-school communication, added to the sense of frustration. The findings align with existing literature, which has highlighted the challenges that novice teachers face in balancing the demands of teaching with administrative duties (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017; Kyriacou, 2001; Madigan & Kim, 2021), yet the Chinese context highlights additional pressures, such as high-stakes examinations and parental expectations, which exacerbate the early career stressors. These challenges, if not effectively coped with, can lead to burnout and diminished job satisfaction.

The Role of Personal and Institutional Support in Building Resilience

In responding to these challenges, novice English teachers employ a wide range of coping strategies to manage the stress and challenges they encounter in their first years of teaching. These strategies, ranging from organisational techniques to classroom management strategies, as well as cognitive coping methods and motivational strategies, all contribute to building resilience. By effectively managing their stress and improving their skills, novice English teachers are better equipped to navigate the complexities of the teaching profession and sustain their careers in the long term.

Novice teachers we interviewed found that breaking down larger tasks into manageable steps allowed them to celebrate gradual progress, which kept them motivated and focused. Achieving these small milestones provided a sense of accomplishment and reinforced their confidence in their abilities as educators. This type of strategy not only helps manage workload but also prevents feelings of inadequacy. The use of organisational coping strategies is essential for reducing job-related stress and building resilience (Rossi et al., 2023). By managing their time effectively and setting realistic expectations, novice teachers could stay afloat in the face of overwhelming workloads. Strong classroom management skills allow novice English teachers to maintain control and reduce emotional stress associated with disruptive behaviour, which in turn boosts their confidence and teaching efficacy (Alasmari & Althaqafi, 2024). These strategies are vital for building resilience, as they help teachers establish control in the classroom and reduce the emotional stress associated with disruptive behaviour; by effectively implementing such strategies, the participants reported that they were able to create a stable and supportive classroom environment, which is crucial for both their own well-being and the students' development.

Cognitive and motivational coping strategies contribute to resilience by fostering a sense of purpose and motivation (Fullerton et al., 2021). Cognitive strategies, such as reframing challenges, maintaining a focus on long-term goals, and engaging in positive self-talk, enable teachers to manage stress and get through difficult situations more effectively. By viewing setbacks as opportunities for growth and emphasising the broader objectives of student development, teachers are better able to sustain motivation. Motivational strategies, including setting achievable goals and recognising progress, foster a positive mindset, thereby enhancing teachers' sense of accomplishment. Together, these strategies facilitate the maintenance of control, purpose, and an optimistic attitude, thereby supporting resilience in novice English teachers.

Institutional support proved to be a critical factor in shaping novice teachers' resilience. Mentorship, professional development opportunities, and collaborative school cultures provided not only practical guidance but also a sense of belonging and recognition. Teachers who had access to structured mentorship

programs and supportive colleagues were better at managing classroom challenges and sustaining their motivation. Mentorship not only helps teachers improve their pedagogical skills but also provides emotional support in dealing with the inevitable challenges of teaching. When novice teachers feel supported and valued, they are more likely to persist in their roles, build confidence in their teaching abilities, and adopt more effective classroom management strategies (Alasmari & Althaqafi, 2024). Our findings suggest measures to ensure that existing mentorship programs play a functional and effective role in supporting the professional development of novice English teachers and facilitating their integration into the school community.

Professional development equips novice teachers with the tools and strategies they need to navigate the complexities of their roles (Dvir & Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2020). These opportunities not only enhance teaching effectiveness but also reduce stress by empowering teachers with the knowledge to handle classroom difficulties. Providing professional development in areas like differentiated instruction, technology integration, and stress management equips teachers with a diverse skill set, ultimately strengthening their ability to cope with challenges and improve student outcomes. This contributes to their long-term resilience, as teachers feel better prepared and supported in their professional lives. Furthermore, a collaborative school culture not only enhances teachers' professional growth but also builds a sense of community and belonging (Nguyen & Ng, 2022), which is crucial for resilience. Teachers who feel part of a supportive team are more likely to experience job satisfaction and be more resilient in the face of challenges they encounter in their classrooms.

Additionally, teachers who frequently share their experiences and resources are more likely to perform better in team settings. The collaborative approach helps reduce the stress that comes from feeling isolated in a demanding job. By providing opportunities for collaboration and shared learning, schools can foster a positive and supportive environment that enhances the well-being and effectiveness of novice teachers.

Conclusion

This study examined the resilience of Chinese novice English teachers by analysing the interplay between professional challenges, individual coping strategies, and institutional support. Rather than viewing resilience as a fixed trait, the findings highlight it as a dynamic and context-dependent process constructed by both novice teachers' responses and the educational setting in which they are situated. In particular, the study reveals that while novice teachers face demanding workloads, classroom management challenges, and emotional stress, their ability to persist and thrive depends on the interaction between their coping mechanisms and institutional support. Highlighting resilience as a dynamic and context-dependent process contributes to a deeper theoretical understanding of resilience as an emergent, socially mediated construct, rather than merely an individual attribute.

This has important implications for educational institutions, particularly in supporting novice English teachers. Schools should prioritise the establishment of effective mentorship programs that pair novice teachers with experienced colleagues, offering guidance in lesson planning, classroom management, parent-school communication, and emotional well-being. Additionally, professional development programs must address the practical needs of novice teachers, such as effective classroom strategies, emotional resilience, and digital pedagogy, to better equip them to manage challenges and build their confidence. Moreover, providing adequate teaching resources, such as supplementary materials, reliable digital tools and high-quality online platforms, is essential for novice teachers' preparedness and job satisfaction. School leaders should actively engage in providing emotional support and feedback, ensuring that teachers feel valued and supported, which is vital for reducing stress and fostering resilience. Encouraging a collaborative school culture where teachers can share experiences, collaborate on lesson

planning, and offer peer support further strengthens the sense of professional community. It contributes to teachers' emotional well-being, thus enhancing their resilience.

At the same time, this research acknowledges several limitations. The relatively small sample of 18 participants, drawn from a single national context, constrains the generalizability of findings. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported interviews may have introduced social desirability bias, despite measures taken to ensure validity.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study opens up possibilities for future research that could deepen our understanding of the factors affecting the resilience of novice English teachers. Longitudinal studies on the long-term effects of mentorship and professional development would help clarify their lasting impact on teacher resilience.

Comparative studies across different educational settings, such as rural versus urban schools or public versus private institutions, could provide a deeper understanding of how institutional support varies and how it affects the resilience of novice English teachers in diverse contexts. Furthermore, research on the role of technology in supporting novice English teachers, especially in remote or hybrid teaching environments, is crucial as digital tools become increasingly integral to teaching.

Ultimately, more in-depth research into the role of administrative support in shaping teacher resilience could help identify specific strategies that school leaders can employ to foster a supportive work environment and enhance novice English teacher resilience.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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Appendix I. Interview Guide

The interview guide included the following core questions, along with potential follow-up prompts:

1. Challenges in Teaching:

- A. Can you describe some of the biggest challenges you've faced during your first years of teaching?
- B. How do you manage difficult classroom situations or student behavior?
- C. In what ways do you feel prepared or unprepared for the realities of teaching?

2. Coping Strategies:

- A. What strategies do you use to cope with the stress and challenges of teaching?
- B. How do these strategies affect your ability to continue teaching and improve over time?
- C. What role do your personal motivations or professional goals play in helping you stay resilient?

3. Institutional Support:

- A. What kind of support or resources have you received from your institution since starting your teaching career?
- B. How has the support from your colleagues or mentors influenced your teaching experience?
- C. Can you share any specific examples where institutional support made a significant difference in how you handled a teaching challenge?