Participatory Language Teaching: Iraqi EFL Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions

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Article info	Abstract
	Learners' participation in the decision-making process of language classes constitutes a major prerequisite to their development of critical consciousness and autonomy. This study strove to determine novice and experienced Iraqi EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions of participatory language teaching. To this end, the researchers selected 17 novice and 22 experienced EFL teachers and 39 English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners as the participants at 22 public schools in Baghdad. In addition, the teachers were guided to implement participatory language teaching (PLT) in their classes in 16 sessions in 2 months. Lastly, the researchers used two semi-structured interview protocols to delve into the teacher and learner participants' perceptions of this approach. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the obtained interview data. The findings indicated that both experienced and novice teachers had favorable views on the efficacy of PLT in their classes. Nonetheless, experienced teachers faced fewer problems during the implementation phase than novice teachers did, owing to their capability to allot adequate time to language instruction and assessment. Moreover, although EFL learners preferred this approach to traditional approaches, they acknowledged its demanding requirements. The findings indicate an urgent need for revised teacher training and learner-centered materials within the Iraqi educational context.

1. Introduction

Language learners constitute the main stakeholders in the process of language acquisition (Florian & Linklater, 2010). As a result, participatory language teaching (PLT) has attracted considerable attention in language instruction as an approach that empowers learners to take ownership of their learning and to become actively involved in their learning process (Ooiwa-Yoshizawa, 2005).

A perusal of the related literature (e.g., Dobakhti et al., 2023; Khalili et al., 2025; Niemi, 2019; Van der Vleuten et al., 2016; Zohrabi & Jafari, 2020; Zohrabi & Khalili, 2023; Zohrabi et al., 2025) indicates that researchers have focused on learners' participation in language instruction as a major objective in language classes in recent years. The focus on the learners' active role in their language learning process is mainly underpinned by the critical pedagogy (CP) approach. CP endeavors to integrate the principles of social justice and equal power distribution into the language teaching process (Freire, 1970). In addition, this approach strives to ameliorate the learners' critical consciousness of their own biases and perspectives along with the social factors that shape the pertinent perspectives (Freire, 1985). Additionally, researchers have highlighted the consequential role of learner participation in the learning process mainly due to its role in learners' autonomy (González-Lloret & Nielson, 2015), which determines their capability to exert control over their learning process (Lazareva & Karnaukhova, 2021).

Accordingly, the related studies (e.g., Florian & Linklater, 2010; Moradian et al., 2015) have tried to itemize the prerequisites of learner participation in language teaching and have determined effective teaching approaches that promote this kind of participation. Among these approaches, PLT has attracted considerable attention in different academic settings (Macrine, 2020).

PLT constitutes a communicative language teaching approach that attracts learners' attention to the target language by focusing on their personal lives and empowers them to take responsibility for their language acquisition (Ooiwa-Yoshizawa, 2005). This approach is distinguished from traditional language teaching methods because it considers learners the main agents and stakeholders in their language learning and enables them to determine the content of their courses and curricula (McLaren, 2003). In other words, PLT allows the learners to share their life experiences with their peers to select the topics of their discussion (Van der Vleuten et al., 2016). In this way, PLT prompts language learners to use language learning to develop solutions to the problems in their everyday lives and raises their awareness of diverse cultural and social issues (Norton, 2000).

The relevant studies of PLT have followed certain research lines and have disregarded some aspects of this approach in foreign language contexts,

including the Iraqi context. Some of these studies (e.g., Mousavi & Ketabi, 2021) have focused on its impact on learners' language learning. Other studies (e.g., Kim et al., 2017; Sarıcaoğlu & Geluso, 2019) have scrutinized learners' perceptions of PLT. Lastly, limited research (e.g., Sarani et al., 2019) has tried to specify teachers' perspectives on this approach. Nonetheless, most of these studies have focused on university and language institute settings and have disregarded the school settings. Moreover, they have either concentrated on learners' or teachers' perspectives on PLT and have not compared the perspectives of these groups on this approach. The focus on both teachers' and learners' PLT-based attitudes is justifiable in light of Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) that accentuates how individuals' perceptions of behaviors affect their exhibition of the relevant behaviors. In addition, the relevant studies have not dealt with the role of teachers' experience in their attitudes toward PLT. Lastly, there is a notable scarcity of research on the learners' and teachers' perceptions of PLT in the context of Iraq.

The present study focused on these research issues in the Iraqi context. The study findings will likely provide EFL syllabus designers with guidelines for developing learner-centered materials that promote their communicative interactions and language learning. Moreover, they may facilitate the overhaul process of the education courses for language instructors by making them cognizant of the pivotal role of learner participation in classroom decision-making. Considering these issues, this study strove to answer the following questions:

1. What are Iraqi experienced EFL teachers' perceptions of participatory language teaching in school settings?
2. What are Iraqi novice EFL teachers' perceptions of participatory language teaching in school settings?
3. What are Iraqi EFL learners' perceptions of participatory language teaching in school settings?

2. Literature Review

2.1. PLT

Examining the underlying principles of PLT highlights that they are compatible with Freire's (1970) CP notion (González-Lloret & Nielson, 2015; Khan et al., 2014; Mousavi & Ketabi, 2021; Sarıcaoğlu & Geluso, 2019; Zohrabi & Khalili, 2024). Freire (1970) defended CP as an educational philosophy that aims to make learners aware of integrating social justice, power distribution, and relationships into teaching and learning in academic settings. As he explained, CP strives to emancipate learners from academic oppression by improving their critical thinking skills and by focusing on their critical consciousness. Freire (1970) noted that critical consciousness encompasses learners' understanding of educational inequalities based on their

evaluation and understanding of power relationships in their society. He itemized three main sub-components of critical consciousness: reflection, motivation, and action. As he explained, reflection refers to learners' informed evaluation of the inequality-inducing situations in their settings. Moreover, motivation specifies the learners' desire to redress educational inequalities. Finally, action determines the specific measures that the learners take to deal with the pertinent inequalities.

In his later work, Freire (1985) delved more deeply into CP and argued that it constitutes a prerequisite to learners' self-actualization. Freire (1985) defined self-actualization as the highest level of human needs that is obtainable subsequent to the satisfaction of human basic needs. Moreover, he pointed out that CP depends on abandoning the banking concept of education, which considers instructors and teachers as bank clerks who deposit information into the students without paying attention to their knowledge production capabilities. As he explained, providing the learners with an opportunity to take part in the decision-making process of instruction constitutes the main principle of CP, which is likely to make learners inquisitive individuals in their academic settings.

In addition to CP, PLT is compatible with Vygosky's (1978) socio-cultural theory of learning (SCT). In his theory, Vygosky's (1978) argued that human cognition is developed mainly due to mediated learning. He defined mediation as a process in which individuals take advantage of concrete and abstract artifacts in order to internalize knowledge. According to him, concrete artifacts encompass the real objects that help individuals to gain control over their environment. On the other hand, abstract artifacts refer to symbolic systems, such as language, that empower individuals to develop an understanding of various notions in their lives. Vygotsky (1978) noted that social interaction constitutes the main means of mediation that facilitates and expedites the individuals' cognitive development and learning.

In light of these discussions, Vygotsky (1978) developed the zone of proximal development (ZPD) construct and defined it as the gap between the individuals' current ability level and their potential ability level when experts assist them. In addition, he argued that expert assistance takes the form of scaffolding, which refers to more knowledgeable individuals' feedback, guidance, and support that enable novices to perform tasks beyond their current level of ability in a certain field. The scrutiny of the construct of ZPD indicates that PLT operationalizes scaffolding by creating a collaborative learning environment that enables learners to build on each other's knowledge and empowers teachers to provide the learners with feedback based on their needs to improve their abilities and to foster their independence (Kim et al., 2017; Lazareva & Karnaukhova, 2021; Roumell, 2021).

According to Richard-Amato (2010), PLT constitutes a language teaching approach that effectively puts Freire's (1970) CP theory and Vygotsky's (1978) SCT theory into practice. According to him, PLT focuses on the active participation of language learners in the process of educational decision-making by relating the lesson topics and themes to the problems of their personal lives and by making them responsible for selecting the relevant topics. As Richard-Amato (2010) explained, these measures prevent the actualization of the banking concept of language teaching in language classes, awaken language learners' critical consciousness, turn learners into knowledge producers in the process of language learning, and redress the educational inequalities by giving the learners an active role in their classes.

Moreover, Richard-Amato (2010) pointed out that PLT actualizes Vygotsky's (1978) SCT because it prioritizes learners' social interaction and learning in their tasks. As he explained, in these tasks, learners are prompted to communicate with their peers and to internalize the knowledge of the relevant language by taking advantage of their peers and teacher's scaffolding and feedback. As he pointed out, the scaffolding that is provided to language learners in PLT tasks is likely to expedite their ZPD establishment in the process of interlanguage development. Richard-Amato (2010) concluded that PLT constitutes one of the most efficacious and learner-centered teaching approaches in language instruction.

2.2. Empirical Research on PLT

The related empirical studies have focused on certain aspects of PLT without satisfactorily dealing with its other aspects. A large number of these studies have examined the efficacy of PLT in language instruction. For instance, Khan et al. (2014) examined the extent to which PLT affected language learners' class participation and reported that it significantly ameliorated class participation in language institute settings. Likewise, González-Lloret and Nielson (2015) scrutinized the impact of PLT on language learners' vocabulary learning. This study showed that PLT significantly affected these learners' acquisition of abstract words. Additionally, Mousavi and Ketabi (2021) examined the role of PLT in female EFL learners' class participation. They reported that PLT significantly ameliorated these learners' participation in their tasks.

In addition, some of the pertinent studies have scrutinized learners' perspectives on PLT. In this regard, Gómez and Cortés-Jaramillo (2019) investigated ESL learners' perspectives on PLT. Based on the findings, the learners preferred PLT to their traditional language teaching approaches. Moreover, Kim et al. (2017) delved into language students' perceptions of the utility of PLT in university settings. The findings of their study showed that the participants had mixed feelings about PLT and were not certain about its

supremacy over the other approaches. Similarly, Sarıcaoğlu and Geluso (2019) examined EFL learners' perspectives on PLT in online courses. The findings indicated that the participants considered PLT to be a satisfactory approach that satisfied their language leering needs. Likewise, Yung (2020) conducted a study to determine EFL learners' perspectives on PLT in privately tutored language classes. The participants were a number of university students from different majors. The data were collected using an open-ended questionnaire and an interview protocol. The findings highlighted that students considered PLT to be an efficacious approach that ameliorated their autonomy. In addition, Lazareva and Karnaukhova (2021) conducted a study to determine EFL learners' perspectives on various aspects of PLT. In their study, learners considered PLT as an approach that significantly improved their class vocabulary learning and pronunciation.

Roumell (2021) also examined adult language learners' perspectives on PLT in English for occupational purposes classes. Participants were nurses who needed to develop satisfactory speaking and writing skills to perform their tasks in their workplace. Based on the findings, most adult learners believe that PLT expedites their language skill development. Additionally, Pakdaman et al. (2022) examined learners' PLT-based perspectives. Participants were undergraduate students' from different majors. The researchers used an open-ended questionnaire to gather the data. The findings highlighted that the participants considered PLT more efficacious than their traditional language teaching procedures. Similarly, Ouellette-Schramm (2023) investigated adult EFL learners' perspectives on PLT in general language courses. The results indicated that the participants had favorable views about PLT in their relevant academic setting.

Lastly, few studies have investigated EFL teachers' attitudes towards the efficacy of PLT. In this regard, Haneda and Sherman (2016) strived to determine EFL teachers' attitudes towards PLT in schools. An interview protocol was utilized for data collection. Based on the findings, teachers considered PLT to be an approach that facilitates their agentive actions in their classes. Likewise, Sarani et al. (2019) examined EFL teachers' perspectives on PLT. They reported that these participants regarded PLT as a viable approach that enabled them to take advantage of their creativity to expedite their learners' acquisition of the target language.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The researchers utilized convenience sampling to select the participants. To this end, they called 22 school managers in Baghdad, informed them about main aims, and obtained their consent. The researchers received the contact information of 46 English teachers, contacted them in two weeks,

and invited them to take part in the study. Two of these participants did not respond to phone calls, messages, or emails. Moreover, five refused to participate for various reasons, including their busy schedule. Nonetheless, the remaining 39 (18 males and 21 females) EFL teachers gave written consent to the study. The researchers took advantage of Yin et al.'s (2019) five-year teaching criterion for distinguishing novice from experienced teachers. Consequently, 17 novice and 22 experienced teachers were chosen as the teacher participants. These teachers' age ranged from 25 to 47. They spoke Arabic, Kurdish, or Turkish. Moreover, they had a bachelor's or master's degree in ELT.

In addition, in order to select the learner participants, the researchers first informed the parents of the students in one class of each of the above-mentioned teacher participants' classes about the aims and obtained their consent. Next, the researchers randomly selected one learner in each class as the learner participant. Consequently, 39 EFL learners constituted the learner participants. These learners were aged 14 to 16 and spoke one of the above-mentioned languages as their mother tongue. The results of proficiency test indicated that all of the selected learners were at the pre-intermediate proficiency level.

3.2. Materials and Instruments

The following materials and instruments were utilized to carry out the study.

3.2.1. Protocols

In light of the underling objectives, the researchers developed two semi-structured interview protocols, including the teachers' interview protocol (TIP) and the learners' interview protocol (LIP), to gather the data. TIP encompassed five items that focused on the teachers' perspectives on *utility, practicality, challenges, operationalization*, and *novelty* of PLT in the classroom context. On the other hand, LIP comprised five items that delved into the learners' perspectives on the *advantages, disadvantages, uniqueness, requirements*, and *consequences* of PLT in their relevant academic setting.

The researchers developed these protocols based on the themes of the focus group interview. Specifically, they first invited five Applied Linguistics professors at a university in Iraq who taught courses on PLT to participate in a focus-group interview. Second, they performed the role of facilitators. Accordingly, they prompted the professors to expound on their perspectives on the significance of PLT for teachers' and learners' pedagogical performance and learning facilitation and recorded their discussion. Third, they extracted the themes for the discussion. Finally, the researchers used the themes to develop TIP and LIP.

In addition, the researchers took advantage of expert feedback to examine content and face validity of TIP and LIP. First, they sent the primary versions of these protocols to the aforementioned five Applied Linguistics professors who were familiar with PLT and had published several articles on this teaching approach. They asked the professors to evaluate them. Second, they revised the primary version of the protocols in view of these experts' feedback and comments.

3.2.2. Oxford Placement Test

The researchers used Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) (Allan, 2004) to examine the pre-intermediate-level learner participants' proficiency level and to ensure their homogeneity in terms of their language ability. This test encompasses 60 items in three main sections: *vocabulary, grammar*, and *reading comprehension*. Table 1, which derives from OQPT, represents the participants' proficiency level.

Table 1
Interpretation of Scores in OQPT

Score	0-17	18-29	30-39	40-47	48-54	55-60
CEFR	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
Level	Beginning	High Beginning	Low Intermediate	Intermediate	High Intermediate	Advanced

3.2.3. PLT Guidebook

In the present study, the researchers utilized Wiggins's (2004) textbook as the guidebook for enabling the teacher participants to operationalize PLT in their classes. The researchers selected this PLT textbook mainly because it provides teachers with a thorough explanation of PLT principles and empowers them to operationalize it effectively in the classroom context. Moreover, it helps them to prepare the learners for dealing with their PLT-based language learning tasks by determining their language skill levels, setting their personal language acquisition goals, developing the content of their lessons, and evaluating their own and their peers' performance based on their determined criteria. In order to enable the teachers to implement PLT based on Wiggins's (2004) textbook, the researchers asked them to take part in a 6-session training program in one week before the onset of the treatment. Each program session lasted for one hour and strived to empower the teachers to put the PLT theory into practice effectively.

3.2.4. Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers need to ensure the rigor of their studies by expounding on their trustworthiness (Grinnel & Unrau, 2008). Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined the trustworthiness of a study as the degree to which

different researchers support its methodological choices and procedure. Based on this definition, these researchers particularized four aspects of trustworthiness: *dependability, transferability, credibility*, and *confirmability*. According to them, dependability specifies results consistency. Additionally, transferability explains generalizability. In addition, credibility specifies result accuracy. Lastly, confirmability indicates the researchers' objectivity in reflecting the participants' perspectives.

The researchers took a number of measures to ensure the trustworthiness of the present study. Accordingly, they utilized *peer review* along with *thick description* to examine findings' dependability and transferability (Hammersley, 2008). They asked four colleagues to comment on the results' consistency. Moreover, they described the procedure and provided adequate information on the participants' characteristics to make sure that results were generalizable to other settings. In addition, they used *member-checking* and *audit trail* to examine credibility (Grinnel & Unrau, 2008) and confirmability (Koch, 2006) of the findings. More specifically, the researchers provided teachers and learners with the transcripts of their interview sessions and encouraged them to scrutinize the transcripts. Furthermore, they kept a record of their data collection and analysis decisions to show that they objectively reflected the participants' perspectives on PLT. Lastly, the researchers used Cohen's kappa measure to scrutinize the inter-rater reliability (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). Based on the results, this measure (.83) was acceptable and indicated the reliability of the data coding process.

3.3. Procedure

In this study, the researchers first selected 17 novice and 22 experienced EFL teachers from among the school EFL teachers. Furthermore, they randomly selected 39 pre-intermediate level EFL learners from among the learners in the above-mentioned teacher participants' classes as the learner participants.

Second, the researchers prompted the teacher participants to teach one of their classes by adopting the PLT approach using Wiggins's (2004) textbook guidelines in sixteen sessions in two months (i.e., two sessions per week). The teachers prompted the learners to provide adequate information on their learning objectives during the treatment. Moreover, they asked the learners to expound on the problematic situations in their lives. Furthermore, they made a list of these situations and randomly selected one as the topic of the relevant and upcoming session. In addition, they asked the learners to brainstorm ideas about the selected topic and to share their ideas with their classmates. Furthermore, the teachers assigned the learners to small groups and asked them to collaborate with each other (by engaging in second language communication) in order to offer solutions to the raised problem.

Additionally, they prompted the learner groups to share their solutions with the other groups. Besides, they encouraged the learners to look for content in various resources, such as the Internet that supported their solution and to present it as their developed course content in the upcoming session. Finally, the teachers asked the learner groups to assess their own and the other groups' performances by completing the self-assessment and the peer assessment forms, respectively. In order to ensure the teachers' consistent implementation of PLT in their classes, the researchers periodically observed their classes and provided them with formative feedback in order to enable them to integrate PLT principles into their instruction effectively.

Third, the researchers used TIP and LIP to conduct the 30-minute interviews of the study and to gather the required data on experienced and novice teachers and EFL learners' perspectives on various aspects of PLT respectively. In order to deal with the participants' perspectives on these aspects, the researchers followed a number of general guidelines, including careful planning, building rapport, asking open-ended questions, and adapting to the interviewee's responses. The researchers conducted the relevant interviews in Arabic to empower the teachers and learners to expound on their attitudes on this approach to language learning. The Arabic language was used in the interview sessions because all of the teacher and learner participants were fluent in this language. Moreover, the researchers recorded and transcribed each of the relevant interviews. Finally, the researchers performed the study's data analysis.

3.4. Research Design

Considering the aims, the researchers used the phenomenological research design. According to Creswell (2009), it examines individuals' lived experiences of a certain phenomenon using interviews and observations. In addition, they strive to delve into the essence of the pertinent experiences by particularizing the patterns and themes in the obtained qualitative data. Accordingly, in this study, the researchers scrutinized the essence of Iraqi teachers' and learners' lived experiences of PLT using interviews and performed thematic data analysis.

3.5. Data Analysis

The data of the present study were analyzed using thematic analysis. Creswell (2009) stated that thematic analysis constitutes a qualitative data analysis method that prompts the researchers to scrutinize the data to interpret them and specify their underlying patterns or themes. Likewise, the researchers thoroughly examined transcripts in order to familiarize themselves with the data in this study. Next, they identified codes in interview transcripts to label

them. After that, the researchers integrated codes into similar ones. Finally, the researchers developed underlying patterns (Creswell, 2009).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Iraqi Experienced EFL Teachers' Perceptions of PLT

The first question scrutinized experienced teachers' PLT-based perspectives. Table 2 provides the themes in the experienced teachers' interview data.

Table 2

Experienced Teachers' Perceptions of PLT

Codes	Themes
Ameliorating learners' classroom engagement Enabling students to deal with inhibitions Increasing the students' motivation for acquiring the target language	Advantageous impact of PLT on learners' learning and performance
Facilitating group work and pair work Allotting adequate time to different language skills and aspects	Improvement in teachers' classroom management
Dealing with learners' personality characteristics Resolving the disagreements among the learners	Learner-factor-based PLT implementation difficulties
Allotting adequate time to session planning Supervising learners' performance Providing learners with formative feedback	Teachers' total dedication to PLT implementation
Making learners aware of their important role in language learning Engaging learners in language learning by focusing on their personal issues Prompting learners to develop autonomy	Novelty-induced learner attention to language acquisition

The analysis showed that the first major theme was the *advantageous impact of PLT on learners' learning and performance*. Eighteen of the 22 participants stated that PLT improved their learners' language learning motivation and improved their classroom performance. Regarding this theme, Experienced Teacher (ET) noted that "I could see that my learners attended the classes with alacrity. They asked me about the discussions of the following sessions and showed me the materials they had found on the Internet and wanted to share with their classmates".

Likewise, ET 8 noted that PLT decreased his learners' language learning anxiety in a noticeable way. As he noted, "In the process of task

performance, most of the learners lost their inhibitions and took part in the discussions by expressing their views on the examined topics".

In addition, the second theme in experienced teachers' data was *improvement in teachers' classroom management*. Sixteen participants noted that PLT helped them carry out their responsibilities effectively. In this regard, ET 5 noted that "the use of this approach expedited the learners' pair work. Every learner knew what he had to do in the process of tasks. I did not waste the time of the class to make them aware of their roles".

Likewise, ET 18 highlighted her ability to deal with every aspect of the syllabus in an acceptable way. She pointed out that "I realized that the implementation of PLT could facilitate my teaching. The tasks engaged the learners in discussion and enabled me to attract their attention to the relevant language skills".

Moreover, the third main theme in experienced teachers' data was *learner-factor-based PLT implementation difficulties*. Nineteen of the participants noted that their learners' preferences caused certain problems in their classes.

Regarding this theme, ET 15 stated that "some of the learners are introverted. It was really hard for me to attract their attention to the tasks and persuade them to actively participate in them".

Similarly, ET 9 noted that "in my classes, a number of learners were not used to constant group work and preferred to complete their tasks by themselves. It took time to make them aware of the utility of collaboration".

Furthermore, the fourth theme in the obtained data was *teachers' total dedication to PLT implementation*. Twenty of the experienced teachers stated that the use of PLT depended on their hard work. In this regard, ET 6 noted that "You need to work hard to use PLT in your classes. You may need to spend considerable time before each class to plan the stages of PLT implementation".

Similarly, ET 4 pointed out that "it is different from traditional approaches to language teaching. It is communicative in its true sense of the word. Therefore, teachers need to spend enough time and energy to implement it effectively".

Lastly, the fifth theme in experienced EFL teachers' data was *novelty-induced learner attention to language acquisition*. Fifteen of these participants indicated that the novelty of PLT procedures directed their learners' attention to language learning: In this regard, ET 7 noted that "my learners were surprised when they found that the course revolved around their personal experiences. They were really interested in the selected topics and actively took part in their tasks".

Likewise, ET 17 pointed out that "being allowed to talk about problematic situations in their life was the novel aspect of PLT. It made the

learners aware of the fact that their group work and discussions were meaningful and focused on genuine real life topics".

4.1.2. Iraqi Novice EFL Teachers' Perceptions of PLT

The second question investigated novice instructors' PLT-based perspectives. Table 3 provides the novice instructors' PLT-based attitudes.

Table 3

Novice Teachers' Perceptions of PLT

Codes	Themes
Ameliorating learners' language learning enjoyment moderately Motivating the learners to participate in language tasks	Relative utility of PLT in learner engagement
Being forced to devote considerable teaching time to PLT tasks Not being able to allot time to language testing and assessment based on school curricula Feeling the need to furnish constant feedback to facilitate task performance Realizing difficulties in assigning the learners to their groups Being aware of the disagreements that do not let learners collaborate with each other effectively	Challenges to PLT implementation in school settings
Spending a lot of time to develop teaching plans Being forced to supervise learners in a constant way Being exhausted due to feedback provision in the process of learners' tasks	Perceived High Teacher Workload and Prerequisites
Making the learners active decision-makers in language learning Planning the lessons based on the learners' opinions Motivating the learners to relate language learning to their own lives	Motivating-nature of PLT tasks

Data analysis showed that the first theme was *relative utility of PLT in learner engagement*. Twelve of 17 participants stated that PLT was relatively more effective than traditional teaching approaches. For instance, Novice Teacher (NT) 5 noted that "I believe that learners preferred PLT to our own teaching techniques because it empowered most of the learners including the introverted learners to play an active role in their tasks and enjoy their language learning".

Similarly, NT14 stated that PLT was a motivating approach in her classes. As she explained, "PLT gave the learners a good reason to participate in class activities. They know that they could talk about the things that were important to their personal lives".

In addition, the second theme in novice teachers' data was *challenges to PLT implementation in school settings*. Fourteen of the participants noted that the use of PLT did not allow them to deal with the other aspects of language teaching. Regarding this theme, NT 12 stated that "I had to teach the language based on the tasks. I felt that PLT tasks replaced everything in my classes. I did not have time to teach certain aspects of the language". Likewise, NT 2 stated that

> Based on our school curricula and syllabus, we have to assess the learners' language ability in certain sessions. I spent all of my time to implement PLT effectively and was not able to give the related test to the learners based on the syllabus.

Moreover, the third theme in these participants' data were *perceived high teacher workload and prerequisites*. Sixteen of the novice teachers noted that they had trouble in implementing PLT. For instance, NT 7 stated that "I was not used to constant planning in my classes. I was forced to devote a lot of my free time to developing plans based on the relevant topics". Similarly, NT 2 noted that

> Implementing PLT is a formidable task. A teacher has to make an effort to engage the learners in different stages of tasks such as brainstorming, topic selection, and group work. Moreover, the constant supervision of learner performance can be exhausting in certain cases.

Finally, the fourth theme in novice teachers' data was *motivating-nature of PLT tasks*. Fourteen novice teachers noted that the novelty of PLT tasks motivated the learners to engage in them. Regarding this themes, NT 7 stated that"the learners brainstormed ideas enthusiastically. They knew that they could influence the language teaching and learning process in the class". Likewise, NT 5 stated that "PLT was different from our teaching approaches. It helped the learners to put their own life in the center of classroom discussion and to relate their language learning to their personal life experiences".

4.1.3. Iraqi EFL Learners' Perceptions of PLT

The third research question focused on EFL learners' perceptions of PLT. Table 4 shows the themes in EFL learners' data.

Table 4

Learners' Perceptions of PLT

Codes	Themes
Being able to take part in all of the tasks Having the capability to make decisions about language learning Learning new vocabulary items and expressions from discussions in tasks Asking for peers' support to use difficult grammatical structures Improving the pronunciation ability with the support of peers	Favorable impact of PLT on language learning
Being forced to constantly focus on tasks to perform them Spending time to search various sources such as the Internet based on task requirements Needing to spend time to consider various solutions to task problems	PLT-induced high study load
Being learner-centered Being flexible and compatible with learner needs Being practical in real-life situations	Supremacy of PLT over traditional language teaching
Needing to collaborate with peers effectively Being forced to spend more time on language compared to other school subjects	Practical considerations in PLT-based language learning
Developing strategies for learning the language outside the classroom Developing and implementing effective language learning plans	Autonomy-inducing nature of PLT

According to the results of data analysis, the first theme in the EFL learners' data was *favorable impact of PLT on language learning*. Twenty-six of 39 participants stated that PLT noticeably improved their language learning. Regarding this theme, Student (S) 22 stated that "I learned a lot of words. Our group members used various expressions and helped me to understand their meanings and to use them". Similarly, S5 noted that "the tasks helped me to express my ideas. I could talk about everything that was interesting and influenced my life. I enjoyed discussing our topics and listened to my teachers' instructions to complete my tasks".

Moreover, the second theme in EFL learners' data was *PLT-induced high study load.* Thirty-two of these participants noted that PLT forced them to constantly work on their tasks. In this regard, S32 noted that "I needed to do a lot of things. Searching for content, selecting various pieces of texts that provided solutions to task problems, and collaborating with my group members to determine the most effective solutions were some of my responsibilities". Similarly, S25 pointed out that "I worked hard to prepare myself for my classes. Our tasks were challenging. I had not worked with the other students

in a group for long time periods and experienced difficulties in interacting with some of them".

In addition, the third theme in these participants' data was *supremacy of PLT over traditional language teaching*. Twenty-five of the EFL learners stated that PLT was more satisfactory than their traditional language teaching approaches. Regarding this theme, S7 stated that "This approach helped us to determine our language learning content. That is, it valued us and our decisions more than the previous methods". Similarly, S14 stated that

> This teaching approach helped us learn the language using topics related to our lives in society. We talked about the problems that we experienced at school or at home. I had never thought about language learning in this way. I want to say that I could feel its importance in my own life.

The fourth theme in the EFL learners' interview data was *practical considerations in PLT-based language learning*. Twenty-two of the participant stated that learning the language based on PLT was challenging in their academic setting. Regarding this theme, S37 stated that "I had to study for the other school lessons. However, I did not have enough time to deal with them owing to the requirements of my language tasks". Likewise, S28 noted that

> A number of my group members did not perform their responsibilities. As a result, we could not complete the tasks on time and share our solutions with the other groups. These issues did not allow me to effectively pay attention to various language aspects in some of our tasks.

Lastly, the fifth theme in EFL learners' data was *autonomy-inducing nature of PLT*. Thirty-seven of the participants noted that PLT empowered them to take the responsibility for their language learning. In this regard, S 22 pointed out that "I knew that I influenced my own language learning. My decisions and collaboration with my group members affected what I learned. As a result, I tried hard to perform my role in tasks effectively". Likewise, S26 noted that "the process of tasks made me aware of the significance of planning in my language learning. Therefore, I planned the things that had to be done and made an effort to implement my language learning plans in my classes".

4.2. Discussion

The first research question examined experienced instructors' PLT-based perspectives. Based on the findings, experienced instructors regarded PLT an efficacious and novel instruction approach that demanded their total dedication, improved their class management capability, and attracted learners' attention to various aspects of the target language. The results corroborate Gómez and Cortés-Jaramillo (2019), Sarıcaoğlu and Geluso (2019), and Yung's (2020) findings. Gómez and Cortés-Jaramillo (2019)

argued that PLT empowered instructors to involve introverted learners in language learning process more effectively than the traditional approaches. In addition, Sarıcaoğlu and Geluso (2019) noted that teachers' positive perspectives on PLT stemmed from the flexibility of this approach that enabled them to take advantage of their creativity in task implementation effectively. Moreover, Yung (2020) attributed teachers' preference for PLT to its beneficial impact on students' acquisition autonomy. Consequently, in this study, experienced EFL teachers' positive attitudes towards PLT may be attributed to the learner-engaging nature of this approach that helped them to improve their learners' autonomy by taking advantage of their creative pedagogical techniques and strategies. This conclusion is compatible with Vygotsky's (1978) scaffolding concept. More specifically, PLT enabled the experienced teachers to create a supportive learning environment that provided the learners with the opportunity to take advantage of peer and teacher feedback and empowered the teachers to foster their learners' autonomy.

Nonetheless, the findings indicated that learning factors caused certain difficulties in experienced teachers' PLT implementation process. This finding is compatible with Kim et al.'s (2017) findings that highlighted the significant role of learners' affective factors including their task anxiety in the utility of PLT. As a result, in this study, the experienced teachers' difficulties may have stemmed from the detrimental effect of learners' anxiety on their performance in PLT tasks.

The second research question devolved into novice EFL teachers' perceptions of PLT. According to the findings, these teachers believed that PLT was relatively more efficacious compared to their traditional approaches and tended to ameliorate their learners' language learning motivation. Generally, these results support Lazareva and Karnaukhova (2021) and Roumell's (2021) findings. Lazareva and Karnaukhova (2021) stated that in their study teachers considered PLT to be motivating since it made the learners aware of the practical utility of language learning in their real-life experiences. Moreover, Roumell (2021) noted that, in his study, teachers adopted more favorable attitudes towards PLT than the other approaches. As he explained, these attitudes emanated from the fact that PLT ameliorated learners' ability to take part in second-language interactions. Therefore, novice instructors' favorable views on PLT in this study could be related to their realization of its practicality and interaction-promoting nature.

Nonetheless, novice teachers believed that PLT was hard to implement and its utility depended on certain prerequisites. This finding underpins the results of Haneda and Sherman's (2016) study. These researchers ascribed their results to the teachers' lack of adequate knowledge about learner-centered approaches including PLT. As a result, in the present study, novice teachers' difficulties in the operationalization of PLT may have stemmed from their

inadequate knowledge about communicative approaches such as PLT that place the learners in the center of language teaching process in language classes. This conclusion supports Vygotsky's (1978) scaffolding concept. In other words, it can be argued that the novice teachers themselves needed more scaffolding to implement PLT effectively.

Lastly, the third research question of the study made an effort to determine EFL learners' attitudes towards effectiveness of PLT. Based on results, these learners believed that PLT was a learner-centered approach and preferred it to the traditional teaching approaches due mainly to the fact that it ameliorated their language knowledge and improved their autonomy in the process of language learning.

These results support Pakdaman et al. (2022) and Ouellette-Schramm's (2023) findings. Pakdaman et al. (2022) argued that in their study, language learners preferred PLT to traditional approaches owing to the fact that it enabled them to relate discussion topics to their personal lives and made them cognizant of the practical uses of the target language in the course of their everyday lives. Moreover, Pakdaman et al. (2022) pointed out that the learners in their study had favorable views on the usefulness of PLT since it made them aware of their learning capabilities and empowered them to overcome learning difficulties by taking advantage of their peers' support in the process of tasks. As a result, EFL learners' positive attitudes towards PLT in this study could stem from the fact that this approach enabled them to relate their learning experiences to their personal lives and helped them deal with their language learning inhibitions effectively. This conclusion is in line with Freire's (1970) concept of critical consciousness. In other words, PLT prompted the learners to reflect on the inequality in integrating their personal experiences into their language learning process, motivated them to determine the causes of this inequality, and encouraged them to take action to relate their experiences to their language acquisition effectively.

Notwithstanding, the EFL learners believed that there were certain practical issues that caused difficulties in their PLT-informed language learning. This finding supports Kim et al.'s (2017) results. These researchers ascribed their results to the fact that their EFL learners considered PLT to be overwhelming due to its requirements. Consequently, the present study's time limitations may have overwhelmed the EFL learners in PLT task performance.

These discussions of PLT indicated that although it constituted a viable approach to language instruction, it increased the teachers' workload and their learners' study load in their classes. As a result, it is necessary to take certain measures that empower teachers and learners to deal with the practical issues in the implementation of PLT in Iraqi language classes.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study scrutinized Iraqi experienced and novice EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions of PLT in school settings. The findings indicated that both experienced and novice teachers had positive attitudes towards the effectiveness of PLT in their classes. Nonetheless, novice teachers experienced more difficulties in implementing PLT and believed that it did not let them deal with language assessment satisfactorily. Moreover, EFL learners had positive attitudes towards PLT and preferred it to their traditional approaches despite its practical difficulties.

The results may have certain implications for stakeholders in language teaching in highly centralized, exam-driven educational systems attempting to introduce learner-centered pedagogies. In this regard, these systems can take advantage of PLT to ameliorate their learners' critical consciousness of their significant role in their language learning and provide them with scaffolding through formative peer and teacher feedback in supportive and constructive learning environments. In addition, the results are likely to have a number of implications in Iraqi educational settings. First, there is a need for a significant revision of the current EFL materials, including textbooks and teacher manuals. The relevant textbooks do not involve an adequate number of PLT-based tasks and do not allow the teachers to engage the learners in language tasks and to make them responsible for their language learning. As a result, it is essential to include various PLT-informed tasks in the textbooks that enable the learners to relate language learning to their own lives. Moreover, teacher manuals should enable the teachers especially the novice teachers to implement PLT effectively.

Second, teachers must develop a complete understanding of learner-centered communicative approaches to language instruction, including PLT, to facilitate and expedite EFL learners' participation in language tasks and their target language acquisition. To this end, teachers need to participate in pertinent events such as seminars or webinars. Moreover, teachers may ask their supervisors and experienced peers for advice on the prerequisites to effective PLT implementations. In addition, teachers have to develop effective PLT tasks and utilize them constantly in their classes to improve their PLT implementation during their service years.

Lastly, it is necessary to redress education of instructors in Iraq completely. A large number of these courses mainly focus on teacher-centered instructional approaches and disregard learners' role in language learning. Therefore, a PLT discussion has to comprise a section of the syllabi of the relevant courses to prompt the pre-service and in-service teachers to take advantage of PLT to give language-learning responsibility to the learners and to ameliorate their autonomy in their classes. In addition, it is necessary to

provide the educators of the relevant courses with PLT-informed education to enable them to integrate its discussions in their courses in an acceptable way.

This study had certain limitations. More specifically, it used convenience sampling that limits the generalizability. Additionally, it could not examine the role of participants' attributes, including age, in results. Besides, using the same five applied linguistics professors for both the initial focus group and the subsequent expert validation could introduce a confirmation bias in interview protocol development of TIP and LIP.

In addition, targeting the academic setting of schools delimited this study. It is necessary to address these matters. The relevant studies must use mixed-methods designs in the future to specify language teachers and learners' perceptions of PLT. To this end, they can develop valid and reliable questionnaires to determine teachers and learners' PLT-based attitudes. Moreover, they can evaluate the truthfulness of their questionnaire data using qualitative methods such as interviews and observation among others. Finally, these studies should be conducted in different academic settings to determine the genuine practicality of PLT in language instruction.

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