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Exploring Novice and Experienced Iranian EFL Teachers' Beliefs and Practices Regarding Classroom Interactional Competence and Uncovering Reasons Behind Their Belief-Practice Misalignment

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ABSTRACT

Due to its significance in language teaching and learning, research on teachers' classroom interactional competence (CIC) is well-visited in L2 classroom research; however, exploring EFL teachers' beliefs about CIC and their actual instructional practices is a completely under-researched area. Accordingly, this study aimed to explore this belief-practice relationship in light of the role of teaching experience. To this end, 258 novice and experienced English teachers filled out a questionnaire about CIC. Then six teachers (three per group) were observed for four sessions, and the observed classes were video-recorded for following stimulated recall sessions. The results of the quantitative data analysis showed that novice and experienced teachers had significantly different beliefs with regard to maximizing interactional space, effective use of gestures, and increased awareness of unwillingness to participate (UTP). On the other hand, the results of the classroom observations and stimulated recall sessions indicated that although the two groups' pedagogical practices were different from each other, the relationship between their beliefs and classroom practices was not straightforward, and their practices were affected by internal and external factors at micro and macro levels including contextual factors, educational system, and constraints. The paper finally discusses implications for second language teachers and teacher educators by highlighting the significance of teachers' reflective practice and their participation in CIC development workshops.

***Keywords*:** Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC), Effective Use of Gestures, Increased Awareness of UTP, Maximizing Interactional Space, Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

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1. Introduction

In the methods era, teachers had to follow the prescriptions dispensed by methods gurus because methods were assumed to be all-purpose solutions to teaching problems without taking context into consideration (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). However, with the demise of the concept of methods (Kumaravadivelu, 1994; Pennycook, 1989), a sense of practice was brought into foreign language teaching, which in turn was "due to the ELT's recognition of the complexity of L2 teaching/learning processes, and the social/political forces that are at play in any typical pedagogical context" (Akbari et al., 2010, p. 211).

An area dramatically affected by this post-method era is second language teacher education. Now that the concept of methods is gone, and an external, top down method-of-the-day is no longer available to language teachers, it is second language teacher educators' responsibility to assist teachers in equipping themselves with internal, bottom-up alternatives in the face of all the challenges which may arise in the classroom and take action according to research-based principles (Brown, 2002).

One of the sub-disciplines of teacher education that has been at the forefront of classroom-based research studies in the last few decades is teacher cognition since "the unobservable cognitive dimensions of teaching - what language teachers think, know, and believe" (Borg, 2003, p. 81) and the way they affect teachers' classroom practices are believed to be a key area for reforming pedagogy, teacher education, and educational effectiveness (Li, 2019). These teacher cognition studies have investigated different areas of language teaching, including grammar (Borg, 1999), reading (Tercanlioglu, 2001), writing (Burns, 1992), learner autonomy (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2011), instructional actions and decisions (Johnson, 1992), planning and decision-making (Woods, 1996), teachers' beliefs about L2 learning and teaching (Li & Walsh, 2011), etc. A relatively new area in teacher cognition to which scant attention has been devoted is teachers' classroom interactional competence (CIC). In fact, in spite of its great significance for classroom practices, CIC has remained relatively unknown to most of the language teachers.

Walsh (2011) defined classroom interactional competence as "teachers' and learners' ability to use interaction as a tool for mediating and assisting learning" (p. 165), and to him, CIC acknowledges interaction as conducive to teaching and learning and focuses on how interactional decisions which teachers and learners make and their following actions improve learning and learning opportunity. According to Walsh (2011), interactional competence is predicted to become the fifth skill along with listening, speaking, reading, and writing. He later presented three reasons for

centrality of interaction to learning, noting that "interaction is the most important element in the curriculum" (van Lier, 1996, p. 5), lets teachers and students make interactive decisions, and leads to the professional development of teachers.

Despite the considerable significance of classroom interaction and the necessity for EFL teachers to develop CIC in themselves, it has been a largely overlooked area in research on teacher cognition, and EFL teachers' beliefs about CIC and the way these beliefs influence their classroom practices have not been investigated in any large-scale studies. In other words, the investigation of language teachers' interactional competence has only been limited to case studies, and no nationwide studies have explored the beliefs of a large group of teachers regarding CIC. The present study, as a result, attempted to tap into novice and experienced Iranian English teachers' beliefs about CIC, their instructional practices, and the reasons that lie behind their choices of pedagogical practices in order to reveal probable misalignment between their beliefs and classroom practices.

2.Literature Review

2.1. Teacher Belief and Teacher Practice

Teacher cognition, now an umbrella term for other terms coined by different researchers, such as teacher belief (Richards, 1998) and teacher knowledge (Freeman, 2002), is closely related to the methodologies teachers adopt in their classrooms and fundamentally shapes their framework for practice (Borg, 2003). In fact, studying teacher cognition is believed to be essential to understand teacher mind and practice (Farrell, 2007), and this has guided researchers to explore teachers' beliefs about the main areas of language teaching.

Teacher cognition research originally started in mainstream education in the 1970s, with researchers recognizing the effect of teacher cognition on their professional lives, and several reviews were later undertaken on the topic (e.g., Calderhead, 1996; Clark & Peterson, 1986). In the next years, language teaching researchers also became interested in teachers' beliefs, and most of the research on second/foreign language teacher cognition began to appear in the second half of the 1990s (Borg, 2003). These teacher cognition studies can be discussed from various angles, among which teachers' belief-practice relationship is a critically important theme.

Teachers' cognitions seem to have a central role in their classroom practices, and are consequently considered a key psychological construct for teacher education purposes (Mansour, 2009). However, due to their psychological nature, they are extremely difficult to investigate precisely. As

Pajares (1992) pointed out, beliefs are a "messy construct" because of two reasons. First, they are remarkably similar to knowledge. This is in spite of the fact that beliefs are linked to opinions and perceptions, while knowledge is associated with facts (Calderhead, 1996). Second, exploring beliefs is too much dependent on the method of investigation, and research methods and instruments implemented can easily change the findings of such studies.

Many studies describing the significant effect of teachers' beliefs on their classroom practices state that it is vital to investigate beliefs in order to understand teacher behavior (e.g., Borg 2006; Kane et al., 2002). In a series of studies, Farrell and colleagues compared language teachers' beliefs to their practices about grammar instruction (Farrell & Lim, 2005), language teaching (Farrell & Bennis, 2013), and second language reading (Farrell & Ives, 2015), and concluded that although teachers' beliefs significantly affect classroom practices, some beliefs are not realized in the classroom due to a number of reasons, most of which are related to the teaching context.

In a review article, Basturkmen (2012) also investigated the language teachers' belief- practices relationship in a set of studies conducted in the first decade of the new millennia and concluded that most of the studies showed a lack of a close correspondence between teachers' beliefs and their actual practices done in the classroom. In fact, her study produced results that were in agreement with Farrell's findings indicating that "Context and constraints mediated the relationship between teachers' stated beliefs and practices - teachers across the case studies reported external factors making it difficult for them to put their beliefs into practice" (p. 291).

In another critical review of research on teachers' cognitions and their implications for teaching practices of university academics, Kane et al. (2002) reviewed 50 papers and questioned some studies at the tertiary level with regard to their methodological issues, saying that studies that only rely on what academics say about their classroom teaching and pay no attention to their actual practices are "at risk of telling half the story" (p. 177). In fact, they remained unconvinced about the sufficiency of research on the correspondence between teacher beliefs and their pedagogical practices and believed that no definitive conclusions could be reached based on the current literature.

There is also a large volume of published research in Iran describing teachers' cognitions and comparing them with their actual practices in the classroom. For example, Taherkhani (2019) looked into university teachers' beliefs and actual practices of collaborative EAP teaching and came to the conclusion that there is a gap between EAP teachers' cognitions and practices. In another study, Ahmadianzadeh et al., (2020) explored EFL teachers' cognitions and their instructional practices about learner autonomy

regarding their teaching experience and licensure and found out that learners' expectations and policy-makers are the factors hindering practices promoting autonomy. Ashkani et al. (2021) examined the correspondence between EFL teachers' beliefs and actual practices and the extent that teacher grit affected the connection between them. The results of their study revealed that having high grit levels significantly affected a close correspondence between teachers' beliefs and their instructional practices in the classroom. Several attempts have also been made to explore Iranian EFL teachers' cognitions and classroom practices about corrective feedback (e.g., Gholami, 2021; Goldouz & Baleghizadeh, 2021; Sepehrinia et al., 2020), each of which has implications for language teachers and teacher educators.

2.2. Teaching Experience and Teacher Cognition

As mentioned above, literature is replete with studies investigating the effect of cognition on classroom practices. However, cognition is, in turn, affected by other factors, such as the experience that teachers have gained over the years (Borg, 2003; Mok, 1994). In a study on the effect of teaching experience on teachers' cognition by Crookes and Arakaki (1999), they reported an experienced teacher saying, "As you have more practice, then you know in the classroom what will work and what will not work" (p. 16). In another study, Gahin (2001) found that Egyptian in-service teachers tend to be more form-focused (e.g., they are too sensitive about grammar), while their novice counterparts are much more obsessed with communicative aspects of language teaching. Norouzian (2015) also investigated the effect of teaching experience on applying different feedback strategies and concluded that it significantly affects the direct method of feedback provided by experienced teachers.

Borg (2003) believed that one major drawback of most of the studies on teaching experience and teacher cognition is that they are not longitudinal in nature and do not provide us with the cognition changes teachers undergo over time. Woods (1996), however, reported a richly detailed example of a teacher where his understanding of the purpose of language learning changed gradually due to teaching a group of Japanese students. Initially, language learning for this teacher equaled giving communication opportunities to students, but he gradually modified his views in order to take the students' needs into consideration, which in this case, was passing a test.

Although the literature on language teacher cognition and its relationship with actual practice is already extensive, and in spite of the fact that the concept of teachers' classroom interactional competence is a matter of grave importance in encouraging interaction in language classes, little, if any, is known about Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about classroom interactional competence (CIC) and the way they display this competence in

their classrooms. To bridge such gaps, this study attempted to explore Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs and classroom practices regarding CIC to see in what ways their beliefs are related to their classroom practices and what factors may cause any probable misalignment between the two.

2.3. Theoretical Framework of the Present Study

As mentioned above, classroom interactional competence (CIC) focuses on how teachers' and learners' interactional decisions may either facilitate or hinder learning opportunities. Although Walsh (2006) considered CIC highly context-specific, to him, some features of it are common to all contexts. These features include interactional awareness, which is defined as "language that is both convergent to the pedagogic goal of the moment and that is appropriate to the learners" (Walsh, 2011, p. 166), maximizing interactional space (through promoting extended learner turns, resisting the temptation to fill the silence, increased wait-time, and allowing planning time), shaping learner contributions (through scaffolding, modeling, seeking clarification, or repairing learner input), and effective use of eliciting (through asking both display and referential questions).

Following a series of studies on CIC, Sert (2011, 2013) added four more items to the ones proposed by Walsh. However, he pointed out that the new items are closely related to the basic ones. These four proposed items are "successful management of claims/displays of insufficient knowledge, increased awareness of UTP (unwillingness to participate), effective use of gestures, and successful management of code-switching" (Sert, 2015, p. 134).

In the present study, EFL teachers' classroom interactional competence refers to all the above-mentioned eight items, as the items proposed by Sert take not only interactional dimensions but also multimodal and multilingual aspects into consideration.

3. Method

To recap, this research study aimed to explore Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs and practices about classroom interactional competence. In order to achieve these aims, the researchers adopted a mixed-methods design, combining a questionnaire with classroom observation and stimulated recall sessions to provide a clear and complete picture of the findings. This study is also an explanatory sequential design where the qualitative data was used in the subsequent clarification of the results from the quantitative data. In doing so, the study tried to answer the following three research questions:

1. Is there a statistically significant difference between novice and experienced teachers' beliefs about CIC?

2. To what extent, if at all, do novice and experienced teachers' beliefs about CIC align with their classroom practices?
3. What reasons lie behind novice and experienced EFL teachers' choices of pedagogical practices in justification of the probable misalignment between their beliefs and practices?

3.1. Participants

3.1.1. Questionnaire Participants

The target sample of this study was defined as Iranian EFL teachers who teach at schools, institutes, and centers of higher education. The participants comprised a convenience sample as they were asked to complete the questionnaire voluntarily. The initial sample consisted of 303 English teachers, of whom five were discarded because their questionnaires had carelessly been completed (for example, the questionnaires in which one of the responses had systematically been selected), and 40 were discarded because of their teaching experience (The teachers who had three to four years of experience were considered neither novice nor experienced and were not included in the study). This left us with 86 novice and 172 experienced teachers aged between 20 and 60, of whom 164 (63.56%) were females, and 94 (33.64%) were males. Their majors were TEFL (172 = 66.67%), English language and literature (51=19.77%), English translation (20 = 7.75%), linguistics (12 = 4.65%), as well as majors other than language-related disciplines (3 = 1.16%). They consisted of B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. holders.

3.1.2. Observation and Stimulated Recall Participants

In the second part of the data collection procedure, three novice and three experienced teachers were observed for four sessions and took part in stimulated recall sessions at the end of each class. Although teaching experience has been interpreted differently, and there is not an objective criterion for it, following the benchmark put forward by Freeman (2001), the participants who had less than three years of teaching experience were regarded as a novice, and the ones who had spent five years or more in the classroom were considered experienced. The participants included four females and two males and held B.A. and M.A. in TEFL and translation. Their age range was between 23 and 32, and had between 2 and 12 years of teaching experience. Table 1 indicates the information about the participants (The participants have been assigned pseudonyms).

Table 1

Demographic Information about the Participants

No	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Teaching Experience	Level of Education	Latest Field of Study
1	Golnaz	32	Female	12 years	B.A.	Translation
2	Omid	31	Male	9 years	M.A.	TEFL
3	Ahmad	28	Male	6 years	B.A.	TEFL
4	Somaye	23	Female	2.5 years	B.A.	Translation
5	Elham	24	Female	2 years	B.A.	Translation
6	Setareh	24	Female	2 years	B.A.	Translation

3.2. Materials and Instruments

3.2.1. Questionnaire

Following the usual procedure for developing a reliable and valid questionnaire (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010), a thorough review of the related literature was conducted to check for any available model of CIC, and the one proposed by Sert (2015) was chosen as the theoretical framework of the questionnaire development as it is considered the most comprehensive model of CIC in the literature.

In order to develop the questionnaire, an initial item pool including 57 items was compiled and then was revised several times by the researchers, reducing the items to 46. Following Dörnyei and Taguchi's (2010) suggestion on eliciting expert feedback, four experts made comments on the items. All of these experts had Ph.D. degrees in TEFL and had experience developing questionnaires in areas related to assessment literacy, EAP, and teacher education. Finally, the revised version of the questionnaire, which included 40 items, was piloted with 62 language teachers who were similar to the target population, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was estimated to be 0.86, which is a highly acceptable index. The questionnaire was then filled out by 197 EFL teachers and went through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses for its validity to be established. The final version of the questionnaire included 37 items.

3.3. Procedure

In order to explore Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about CIC, a researcher-made questionnaire was administered online among 258 participants teaching English at language academies, schools, and universities. In the next phase, three novice and three experienced teachers were observed for four sessions to see how they displayed CIC in their classrooms, and the observed classes were finally video-recorded for stimulated recall sessions. The reason for not observing more teachers and

classes was due to the fact that no new concepts were forthcoming from additional participants (Ary et al., 2018). The teachers did not know anything about the purpose of this research study in advance because it was highly probable that this would affect their teaching behavior. After each classroom observation session, which was aimed at understanding teachers' classroom practices regarding CIC, a stimulated recall session between one of the researchers and the teachers took place. During these sessions, the teachers verbalized their thought processes while performing their actions, justified their choices of pedagogical practices, and raised many factors that affected their classroom practices. The conversations during these stimulated recall sessions were recorded and transcribed, and the sections that seemed to be ambiguous were checked by the participants to make sure their opinions were not misinterpreted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.4. Data Analysis

The present study employed a mixed-methods design and the data were collected and analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. After administering the questionnaire, an independent-samples t-test was run in order to spot the possible differences between novice and experienced teachers' ratings of Likert-type questionnaire items. Regarding the qualitative data analysis, thematic analysis was employed, which is "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). However, owing to the nature of the research questions, two different forms of thematic analysis were employed. Since the data collected through video-taped classroom observations were driven by a pre-existing coding frame (i.e., the eight features of classroom interactional competence), theoretical/deductive thematic analysis was used to see how these six teachers displayed CIC in their classes. On the other hand, in order to uncover the reasons why they had a particular reaction to an event or employed a particular strategy at a specific moment, inductive/bottom-up thematic analysis was used in order to identify the themes within the data obtained through stimulated recall technique as this form of thematic analysis is data-driven, and the coded data do not need to fit into a pre-existing coding frame. So the teachers' audio-recorded verbalized thought processes were transcribed, organized, coded, collated into themes, named, and interpreted (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Novice and Experienced Teachers' Beliefs about CIC

In the first research question, the differences between novice and experienced teachers' beliefs about CIC were investigated, and to do so, and the independent samples t-test was run. However, the normality of the data needed to be checked using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test before running the t-test. The value of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was 1.065, indicating that the data were normal. Therefore, the independent samples t-test was run, the results of which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Results of the t-test for the Effect of Experience on Teachers' Views on CIC

Features of CIC	Teaching Experience								
	Novice			Experienced					
	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	*t*	*df*	*p*
Maximizing interactional space	86	21.37	2.67	172	22.37	2.18	-3.22	256	.001*
Shaping learner contributions	86	19.55	2.61	172	19.59	2.22	-.112	256	.911
Effective use of eliciting	86	11.95	1.69	172	12.06	1.57	-.518	256	.605
Interactional awareness	86	28.93	3.43	172	29.45	2.91	-1.27	256	.202
Management of CIK	86	5.45	1.27	172	5.61	1.11	-.944	256	.346
Increased awareness of UTP	86	10.18	1.77	172	10.73	1.47	-2.62	256	.009*
Effective use of gestures	86	12.01	1.80	172	12.56	1.60	-2.52	256	.012*
Management of code-switching	86	26.45	4.57	172	27.64	4.73	-1.92	256	.055
CIC	86	135.93	11.83	172	140.04	9.59	-3.00	256	.003*

The asterisks (*) show the significance of the item.

As Table 2 shows, the difference (t = -3.000, p = 0.003, two-tailed) between the two groups of novice (M = 135.93, SD = 11.83) and experienced teachers' beliefs (M = 140.04, SD = 9.59) regarding CIC is significant. In addition to this, the groups were compared with regard to all the eight factors of CIC separately. In fact, it is clear that experienced teachers' beliefs differed significantly from their novice counterparts in three features of CIC. The results of the independent t-test indicated that the two groups' views about maximizing interactional space, increased awareness of UTP, and effective use of gestures was significantly different (p < .05). However, the

differences between novice and experienced teachers' views about shaping learner contribution, effective use of eliciting, interactional awareness, successful management of CIK, and successful management of code-switching were not significant ($p > .05$).

4.1.2. *Novice and Experienced Teachers' Display of CIC in their Classrooms*

In order to obtain a deeper understanding of EFL teachers' awareness of CIC, the second research question attempted to examine three novice and three experienced teachers' actual instructional practices to see how they displayed their CIC in the classroom. The results of the data obtained from the observation sessions revealed that although both novice and experienced teachers employed effective strategies to maintain interactional flow at some specific moments, they both failed to hold the process of interaction at others. However, experienced teachers showed a higher level of competence with respect to maximizing interactional space, shaping learner contributions, interactional awareness, effective use of eliciting, and successful management of code-switching. On the other hand, neither of the groups seemed to be highly skilled at the features of management of claims of insufficient knowledge, increased awareness of unwillingness to participate, and effective use of gestures.

For example, Omid (an experienced teacher) allowed some planning time to let his students think about their next task to be able to get ready for it (maximizing interactional space):

Student: Can I answer the question?

Teacher: Ummm, No. All of you, read this paragraph and think about it. You have 30 seconds to cover this part. Then, I am going to ask you about it. It's about South America. OK?

Students: OK.

In another class, Ahmad (an experienced teacher) introduced a new activity skillfully, and students got involved in a group interaction for almost 3 minutes because of his referential questions. At the same time, he tried to repair their outputs without hindering the flow of communication.

Teacher: OK, we're done with part 3. Now let's move to the next part. "Jason Wu, A Passion for Fashion". What does it mean? A passion for fashion.

Student 1: Uhm, fashion.

Teacher? What?

Student 2: He likes fashion.

Teacher: Yes. He is interested in fashion. What are you passionate about? What are you interested in Shilan?

Student 3 (Shilan): I interested in English, …

Teacher: I AM interested in, OK, go on.

Student 3: I'm interested in English, and when I study English, to makes me in a good mood.

Teacher: It makes me feel good.

Student 3: Yeah.

Teacher: How about you Roya. What are you interested in?

Student 2 (Roya): I'm interested in everything.

Teacher: In everything?

(The whole class laughing.)

Teacher: OK. Let me ask you in another way. What are you interested in most?

Student 2: In guitar.

Teacher: In playing the guitar? OK. …

Another experienced teacher (Golnaz) successfully managed an item of learner-initiated code-switching as follows:

Teacher: The Chinese played a kicking game called tsu chu.

Student 1: kicking game یعنی چی؟ (in L1)

Teacher: A kind of game in which you use your leg to kick something in order to play it. (in English)

The novice teachers, on the other hand, seemed to pay too much attention to formal aspects of language and constantly provided students with corrective feedback even in the middle of interaction and were quite obsessed with students' grammatical mistakes/errors. In addition, they sometimes

shifted the emphasis away from meaning towards grammar and lexis during fluency-oriented activities. The following is an excerpt from Setareh's class:

Teacher: When did you last get punished physically, Arezoo?

Student: Well, it was many years ago. I was nine. I had a fight with my younger brother and I was told to stay in my room for some hours. I couldn't leave there and play.

Teacher: Oh. That's bad. Everybody. I was told to stay in my room. I was told. What tense is it?

Some students in the class: (In Persian) مجهول گذشته ساده، مجهول حال ساده

Teacher: Simple present passive? Was told. Was. That's simple past passive.

The following excerpt is another example of a novice teacher's (Somaye) attention to vocabulary in the middle of a conversation.

Teacher: What is the series about?

Student: It's the story of some thieves who work for a person.

Teacher: Thieves? Actually, they are not thieves. They are robbers. You know everybody. Thief, robber, burglar, shoplifter (At the same time, she starts writing them down on the board). They are all different. (She then told the students what they exactly mean)

4.1.3. The Reasons Behind Novice and Experienced Teachers' Pedagogical Practices

The first two research questions of the study explored EFL teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom practices regarding CIC, respectively. However, these questions did not reveal the entire story. Therefore, a third research question was developed to uncover the reasons why these six teachers had a particular reaction or implemented a particular strategy at a specific moment by verbalizing their thought processes associated with performing an action retrospectively. During the stimulated recall sessions, these six teachers justified their pedagogical activities and how these activities were sometimes affected by various factors. The results of these sessions showed that many internal and external factors at both micro and macro levels are involved in teachers' decision-making. For example, Ahmad

said that a particular strategy cannot be used for all the students since every student has their own specific psychological characteristics.

Student 1: Have you ever meet a f….?

Teacher: met.

Student 1: Yes. Have you ever met a famous person?

Student 2: Yeah. I have met some singers, some politicians.

> (Ahmad): I provided her with feedback because I know her. It depends on who I am talking to. Some students shouldn't be given immediate feedback because they get distracted. This student should be corrected at once.

One of the novice teachers (Somaye) admitted that teachers' practices are sometimes guided by educational system.

Teacher: When did you last get a present.

Student: About three weeks ago.

Teacher: Three weeks ago. Ago. Past tense. OK. What was it?

Student: (Points to her watch) This watch.

> (Somaye): I repeated the time expression to help them internalize the tenses. They are high school students and are taking the university entrance exam in a year. They expect us to teach grammar. Even their parents. They will easily question us if their children do not become successful.

The effect of constraints was also discussed by Setareh as another factor influencing her teaching when she read a text quickly, while she could have used it as a topic for classroom discussion.

> (Setareh): I cannot do whatever I like in class because I have to finish the semester on time, and students also feel bored. Above all, some parents think that we deliberately want to lengthen the semester.

Many other cases were observed during stimulated recall sessions indicating that the teachers' actual practices were affected by factors other than their own beliefs including contextual factors, educational system, and constraints.

4.2. Discussion

The present study attempted to compare novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs and classroom practices with respect to CIC. The results of the data analysis of the Likert-Scale items of the questionnaire revealed that the two groups had different beliefs about CIC in general. This finding corroborates the ideas of Allen (2002) and Flores (2001), who suggested that beliefs are clearly affected by teaching experience. The analysis of the qualitative data obtained from classroom observations and stimulated recall sessions, however, indicated that the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their actual practices is by no means straightforward and is dramatically affected by contextual factors. These findings are in keeping with those of Li and Walsh (2011), who reported that the relationship between beliefs and actions is too complex rather than straightforward.

The results of the quantitative data analysis showed that in comparison with their novice counterparts, experienced teachers enjoyed a deeper knowledge of maximizing classroom interaction. Classroom observations also revealed that experienced teachers fostered interaction and were not preoccupied with students' grammatical mistakes/errors as much as novice teachers. This finding might be interpreted in light of some earlier studies in the literature. First, it can be attributed to novice teachers' difficulty in dealing with problems emerging from interaction (Westerman, 1991). In addition, Li (2013) pointed out that when facing a problem, novice teachers tend to see it from a short-term perspective (in this case, error correction) and fail to connect it to a long-term goal (here the ability to speak fluently). Finally, as Harmer (1997) put it, experienced teachers attain a balance between student talk and teacher talk and give their students much more opportunities to talk.

Regarding shaping learner contributions, although novice and experienced teachers did not have significantly different beliefs, the results of the classroom observations revealed that the experienced teachers demonstrated a higher level of ability in their classrooms. Both groups placed emphasis on formal aspects of language such as grammar and lexis in the middle of the interaction; however, the way students' mistakes/errors were treated by them was not completely the same. While novice teachers sometimes interrupted students' utterances to correct their mistakes/errors, experienced teachers tended to fix them without hindering the flow of communication or keeping them in their mental repertoire to be raised after that communicative activity had finished. In fact, novice teachers seemed to see language primarily as a system of rules rather than a means of communication, but meaning appeared to be the main issue for experienced teachers. This finding accords with Fallah and Nazari's (2019) results, which

showed that novice teachers display a clear preference for immediate feedback, whereas experienced teachers prefer delayed corrective feedback. In light of Schon's (1983) concept of reflectivity and its tripartite incarnations (reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action), Fallah and Nazari concluded that experience helps teachers develop a mental fixture of the nature of classroom by which they acquire the ability to ignore students' mistakes/errors during the interaction and recollect them later.

Successful management of code-switching was another feature of CIC, which experienced teachers were practically more skillful at, even though the results of the questionnaire showed no significant differences between the two groups' beliefs about it. In practice, experienced teachers displayed cases of teacher-initiated and teacher-induced code-switching and purposefully shifted to L1 depending on the objective of the activity. This finding supports previous research into this area, which links the pedagogical focus of the teacher and language choice (Üstünel & Seedhouse, 2005). Experienced teachers also successfully managed learner-initiated code-switching and used L2 in response to their L1 utterances. Ziegler et al. (2012) showed that teachers can handle learner-initiated code-switching using modified repetition and other strategies such as monolingual reformulation and meta-talk about language in the subsequent turns.

Interactional awareness and effective use of eliciting were the other features of CIC where experienced teachers displayed a higher degree of expertise, while the two groups did not have different beliefs about them. Walsh (2003) proposed a process model of reflective practice known as SETT (Self-Evaluation of Teacher Talk) for second language teachers to develop their interactional awareness, and several studies have paid attention to the ability of language teachers to ask questions (e.g., Brock, 1986; Walsh, 2006; White and Lightbown, 1984), but no studies have compared novice and experienced teachers with respect to these features of CIC in language teachers. These results, however, are consistent with those of other studies concluding that experienced teachers are generally more in control of their pedagogical practices (Li & Zou, 2017) and are more reflective (Farrell, 2013). These findings also support the idea of Gatbonton (2008) who concluded that "pedagogical knowledge of novice teachers is comparable to that of experienced teachers in terms of major categories but not in terms of details within these categories" (p. 161).

Concerning the features of management of claims/displays of insufficient knowledge, increased awareness of UTP, and effective use of gestures, both novice and experienced teachers seemed to have difficulty enacting them in their classes, while the two groups had significantly different beliefs about increased awareness of UTP, and effective use of

gestures. Although the effects of these areas as interactional resources have been investigated in second language research in recent years (e.g., Matsumoto & Dobs, 2017; Sert, 2013), they have not received considerable attention in Iranian teacher training programs, and even the experience that teachers have gained over the years has not helped them develop these features of CIC in themselves. This finding is consistent with that of Tsui (2003) who pointed out that teachers do not have expertise in every aspect of language instruction.

In terms of the relationship between EFL teachers' beliefs and practices, the results of classroom observations revealed that although a degree of belief-practice alignment regarding CIC was observed, the discrepancies were also salient. For example, although novice and experienced teachers held different beliefs towards awareness of students' unwillingness to participate and effective use of gestures, no marked differences were observed in their actual classroom practices. On the other hand, the two groups had the same beliefs about interactional awareness, shaping learner contribution, management of CIK, and successful management of code-switching, but they were clearly different from each other with respect to instructional practices as novice teachers appeared to be less competent than experienced ones. These inconsistencies between teachers' beliefs and practices have frequently been reported in different areas of second language teaching in the literature, such as teaching language skills (Atai & Taherkhani, 2018), intercultural communicative competence (Young & Sachdev, 2011), EFL writing instruction (Yu et al., 2020), and classroom writing assessment (Wang et al., 2020).

The analysis of stimulated recall sessions to identify the reasons behind the EFL teachers' choices of pedagogical practices revealed that experience can be a mediating factor. The main factors involved in novice teachers' belief-practice misalignment were students' needs and their imagination of language learning, teaching culture in Iran, lack of teacher training courses on CIC, and lack of time, while these factors were mainly classroom context and characteristics of students (e.g., their proficiency level and motivation) for experienced teachers. Similarly, while exploring EFL teachers' beliefs and practices regarding writing instruction, Yu et al. (2020) referred to restraints caused by curriculum and schools, which caused mismatches between their cognitions and instructional practices. In another study, Wang et al. (2020) compared EFL teachers' cognitions to their actual practices with regard to classroom writing assessment and concluded that their beliefs and practices are mediated by numerous factors, including teaching experience, assessment training, learner characteristics, school factors, and assessment culture.

Finally, examining the sources of the mismatches between these six teachers' beliefs and practices indicated that novice teachers generally referred to external and macro-level factors, whereas experienced teachers mainly associated these tensions with internal and micro-level factors. It seems that, unlike experienced teachers, novices had some fixed plans in their minds and were unwilling to change them. The present findings seem to be consistent with other research, which found that novice teachers are mostly not so willing to adjust their plans to students' cues (Borko & Livingston, 1989; Kagan & Tippins, 1992). Tsui (2003) believed that such resistance to change is due to the fact that novice teachers are often asked to follow a specific plan. However, as Housner and Griffey (1985) noted, expert teachers can predict possible situations and are able to change the plan with respect to what happens in the classroom.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study attempted to investigate the potential role of teaching experience in shaping foreign language teachers' beliefs and their actual practices regarding classroom interactional competence. As beliefs cannot be completely realized in isolation using questionnaires or interviews, this study adopted a methodology that combined a questionnaire with classroom observation and stimulated recall technique to explore novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about CIC, examine their classroom practices, and uncover their justifications for the probable belief-practice mismatches. The results indicated that generally, novice and experienced teachers held different beliefs about CIC and experienced teachers enjoyed a higher level of knowledge with regard to classroom interaction. This difference was also partly evident in their classroom practices; however, classroom observations showed that the relationship between EFL teachers' beliefs and actual practices is not straightforward and contextual factors, educational system, and constraints might be in between. Therefore, teachers' instructional practices might be affected by both internal and external factors at micro and macro levels.

Theoretically, the present study contributes to classroom interaction research by identifying belief-practice mismatches regarding CIC and exploring mediating factors. These findings deepen our understanding of the extent to which second language teachers' beliefs and actual practices align with each other and whether teaching experience shapes their beliefs and actual practices. This research study also promises implications for teacher development and teacher education. First, EFL teachers can use the notion of CIC and reflective practice to improve their own understanding of classroom interaction (Walsh, 2013), and teacher educators may plan and implement workshops and teacher education programs to enhance EFL teachers'

pedagogical knowledge in light of CIC. Therefore, further research is recommended to examine the contributions of a CIC development course to EFL teachers' beliefs and practices regarding classroom interaction.

However, a number of limitations need to be considered, and the results of the qualitative part of the study need to be interpreted with utmost caution because of the following reasons. In fact, due to "the difficulty of uncovering covert mental processes in teaching" (Mullock, 2006, p. 52) and the subjectivity of the stimulated recall technique (Clark & Peterson, 1986), and owing to the possible threats to the validity of the data obtained from classroom observation due to observer effect (Ary et al., 2018), replication studies are needed to confirm the findings of this study.

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Appendix 1: Iranian EFL Teachers' Awareness of Classroom Interactional Competence

Gender
Male
Female
Age (years) …….
Education:
B.A. (or B.A. student)
M.A. (or M.A. student)
PhD (or PhD student)
Other
Major:
TEFL
Literature
Translation
Linguistics
Other
Teaching Experience:
Less than 3 years
3-4 years
5 years and more

DIRECTIONS: Listed below are statements about what second or foreign language teachers may do in the classroom while interacting with students. After reading each statement, choose the option that applies to you using the scale provided. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers to the statements in this inventory.

*** In this questionnaire

L1: Students and teachers' native languages (for example, Persian, Kurdish, Turkish, Gilaki, Mazandarani, Turkmen, Luri, Balochi, Arabic, etc.)
L2: English
Target language: English

1. Teachers can use L1 to teach grammar.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

2. Teachers should act as a speaking model for students.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

3. Teacher should ignore students' errors during fluency-oriented classroom interactions.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

4. Teachers should repeat students' correct utterances for the benefit of others.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

5. Teachers should welcome students' questions in the middle of an interaction.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

6. Teachers should talk for some minutes at the beginning of a session to prepare students for the day's learning.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

7. Teachers should give some time to a student who says "I don't know" in response to a question.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

8. Teachers should make students talk when they are not willing to answer a question.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

9. Teachers can use gestures to show similarities/contrasts between two words.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

10. Teachers should only use the target language (English) in their classrooms.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

11. Teachers can use certain chunks (for example, Last session we talked about …, First of all, Finally, At the moment, I don't know, In other words, etc.) to help students know where they are in the interaction.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

12. Teachers should talk for some minutes at the end of a session to review what they (have) covered and give a preview about the future session.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

13. Teachers can use materials and games to encourage students to ask questions.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

14. When a student does not know the answer to a question, the teacher should ask another student the same question.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

15. Teachers can use gestures to correct students' errors.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

16. Teachers should accept students' L1 answers during conversations.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

17. When a student is not willing to answer a question, the teacher can ask a willing student the same question

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

18. Teachers should ask students to explain themselves when they are not clear.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

19. Teachers should introduce and conclude every different stage (an activity, a passage, a speaking task, etc.) of a lesson.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

20. When no student is willing to participate, the teacher can ask students to discuss the question in pairs/groups.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

21. Teachers can use gestures to elicit responses from students.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

22. When a student answers a question in L1 during a conversation, the teacher should help him/her produce the answer in L2 (English).

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

23. Teachers should give students some time to answer a question.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

24. Teachers should repeat students' utterances to the class using different words.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

25. Teachers can check students' understanding of a passage/a listening file using display questions (questions to which teachers already know the answer, and their function is to get learners to 'display' what they know about something)

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

26. Teachers can use L1 to teach vocabulary.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

27. Teachers should help students correct their errors and produce sentences during conversations.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

28. Teachers should help their students use English language skillfully.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

29. Teachers can use strategies to make students shift between L1 and L2.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

30. Teachers should let students spend some time on thinking about more complex speaking tasks before doing them.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

31. Teachers can use display questions to elicit target language from their students. (questions to which teachers already know the answer, and their function is to get learners to 'display' what they know about something)

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

32. Teachers can use L1 in the classroom to make meaning clear.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

33. Repeating students' utterances for the whole class is useful for them.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

34. Teachers can use L1 to encourage students to participate in the discussions.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

35. Teachers should repeat their own sentences to the class.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

36. Teachers should enable students to talk about their feelings, emotions, experience, and personal relationships.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

37. Teachers can ask students referential questions (a genuine question, one to which a teacher does not know the answer) to encourage them to talk for a longer time.

Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree