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## Decision Making in English Language Teaching: Unpacking Novice Teachers' Pedagogical Reasoning

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### Abstract

Teachers are constantly involved in the act of decision-making in every moment of the classroom. These decisions are underpinned by pedagogical reasoning, which entails situated knowledge about particular teaching episodes and is reconstructed through teaching practice. The present case study sought to explore the pedagogical reasoning skills that novice English language teachers use in making classroom decisions. Results from a combination of lesson plans, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews revealed that novice teachers applied their pedagogical reasoning to achieve syllabus objectives and deal with learners' misbehavior. In the absence of previous teaching experiences, they did not tend to reflect on the decisions they made to deal with learners' learning and their teaching. They also lacked consistency in their reasoning process, disrupted by their changing beliefs about learning and teaching. These findings imply the need for the improvement of teachers' pedagogical reasoning through teacher education programs.

**Keywords:** *Pedagogical Reasoning, Decision Making, English Language Teaching, Case Study, Novice Teachers*

### Introduction

Teaching is more than the application of abstract knowledge. It has been defined as a complex undertaking where decision-making occurs in every moment of the classroom before, during, and after the instruction (Levin & Nolan, 2014; Schoenfeld, 2010). Teachers constantly face pedagogical situations that employ reasoning arguments and professional judgment to choose

the most effective alternative (Kavanagh et al., 2020; Lampert, 2010). The act of decision-making happens in every stage of teaching, i.e. when teachers are involved in class observation, self-reflection, and assessment and have to make spontaneous decisions (Richards, 2011; Shavelson & Stern, 1981). Teachers' decisions run the gamut from snap decisions on sitting or standing at a particular juncture over the course of the lesson, calling a particular person, offering timely input, and providing feedback to informed decisions about content, methodology, or classroom dynamics (Freeman, 1989; Kavanagh et al., 2020; Schoenfeld, 2010). What underlies all these prompt or delayed decisions is pedagogical reasoning (Loughran, 2019; Richards, 2011). It is "the thinking that underpins informed professional practice" (Loughran, 2019, p. 526). The reasoning to make different decisions out of the available alternative is significantly important as it can vary and impact the quality of teaching. As Lloyd (2019) argues, recognition of this effect has stimulated substantive research investigating the decision process over the past decades.

The role of experience in the application of pedagogical reasoning is undeniable (Forkosh-Baruch et al., 2021; Karimi & Asadnia, 2022; Kavanagh et al., 2020; Khatib & Saeedian, 2021; Richards, 2011). While novice teachers' pedagogical acts are expected to follow the taught principles of teacher education programs, experienced teachers' decisions have been driven by principles that had not been discussed or practiced during the education programs (Richards, 2011). In other words, experienced teachers are capable of engaging with novel problems and enacting non-routines that are pedagogically consistent with the requirements of the context (Kavanagh et al., 2020). On the other hand, less experienced teachers rely on their familiarity with routine instructional practices and are rather incompetent in the face of novel situations (Männikkö & Husu, 2019). Despite the significant role of experience, teachers' mentality during teaching, whether they are novice or experienced, is rather unexplored. Furthermore, Richards' (2011) quadripartite model of pedagogical reasoning skills, as a unique and unified framework linking teachers' decision making to pedagogical reasoning skills, has thus far received scant attention. Given that this model has integrated the tasks of setting goals, evaluating the content of a lesson, predicting potential problems, and making decisions about time, sequencing, and grouping in English teaching, it could contribute effectively to the study of pedagogical reasoning in real teaching practice. To address this gap, this study set out to investigate the required skills employed by non-native novice English language teachers. The way these teachers apply pedagogical reasoning in their everyday teaching was explored and explained.

### **Literature Review**

Shulman's (1987) model of pedagogical reasoning provides a detailed description of educational processes and defines it as the teachers' ability to transform the subject matter of instruction into pedagogically powerful forms adaptive to the students' variations in ability and background. Teachers need to acquire this reasoning through the process of "planning, teaching, adapting the instruction and reflecting" (Shulman, 1987, p. 17). The cyclic model of *Pedagogical Reasoning and Action (PRA)* describes six processes: *Comprehension, Transformation, Instruction, Evaluation, Reflection, and New Comprehension*. It begins with comprehending purposes and

subject matter structure, followed by preparation, selection, and adaptation to students' characteristics, continued by teaching and adjusting one's teaching performance at the third and fourth stages, and concluded with reconstructing and analyzing one's own and students' performance to meet the last cycle of new comprehension and "consolidation of new understandings and learnings from experience" (p. 15). The outcome of each step in PRA would be a decision, acting as input for the next step, and the cyclic nature of this process can influence the quality of teaching as it is driven forward by effective decisions.

The major determiner of teacher effectiveness is germane to the wisdom which is involved in the decisions (Kleven, 1991). In a similar line of argument, Doyle (1981) contends that "knowing what to see and when to act are far more important than simply what to do" (p. 5). What comes before what to see and when to act is the teacher's pedagogical reasoning. Teachers' wisdom of practice (Shulman, 1987) or in Borg's (1998) term, teaching filter, can be also explained by what Borko and Livingston (1989) called a behavioral repertoire. Basic classroom skills are a repertoire of techniques and routines to open and wrap up the lesson, make a transition, explain and guide the tasks, set up the arrangements, check the learners' comprehension, and monitor their progress (Richards, 2011). These skills assist teachers, particularly early-career ones, to analyze what they see or filter, provide the required rationale, and act at the proper moment. Shulman's (1987) model illustrates the complex and sophisticated nature of teaching and pedagogical reasoning that could be shortened or extended with understandings and performance skills of expert teachers (Loughran et al., 2016). Given that effective teaching is the interplay between thought, action, and knowledge, novice teachers have to gain experience, receive guidance, and develop skills to make effective, rapid, and timely instructional decisions (Kavanagh et al., 2020).

To employ pedagogical reasoning skills effectively, Richards (2011) argues that English language teachers need to be equipped with four skills: analyzing the potential lesson content, identifying specific linguistic goals, anticipating any problems, and making appropriate decisions about time, sequencing, and grouping arrangements. As the determining factor in the quality of teachers' pedagogical reasoning skills is wisdom, how wisdom grows by experience in teaching is a related issue in this regard. Regarding the intricacies of English language teaching, research in the area of pedagogical reasoning needs to investigate how these underlying skills are perceived by teachers with different levels of teaching experience, and how they are employed in their teaching practices. How English language teachers take these factors into account can be studied to reveal their reasoning processes and sub-skills.

In addition, content knowledge (CK) can affect pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and, in turn, pedagogical reasoning, enabling teachers to facilitate learning with explanations and appropriate analogies (Stefaniak et al., 2021). As Richards (2011) argues, teachers possessing relevant content knowledge can make appropriate decisions about teaching, learning, and solving practical problems. Therefore, teacher experience is likely to help teachers develop related content knowledge, face practical dilemmas in their teaching, and rely on the teacher knowledge base to mediate between experience and theory, which can contribute to effective teaching. Leach and Moon (2000) argue that content knowledge changes as teachers use different

resources in their teaching practice. Borg (2009) also argues that the accumulation of experience and knowledge enables teachers to employ more interactive decision-making, depart from the routinized procedure, and make use of a wide repertoire of strategies on which to base their practical classroom decisions. In this sense, as teachers proceed in their careers and become more experienced, they become more knowledgeable in their field and capable of timely pedagogical reasoning.

Many studies have been conducted on teacher decision-making and teacher knowledge (e.g., Johnson & Goettsch, 2000; Khatib & Saeedian, 2021; König et al., 2020; Loughran et al., 2016; Shulman, 1987); although understanding of different aspects of knowledge shaping a teacher's pedagogical thoughts and actions is of value, little is known about the process of pedagogical reasoning in teaching among novice or experienced teachers. Despite the theoretical studies on the significance of decision-making skills on the development of teacher schemata and classroom knowledge, few empirical studies have addressed the pedagogical reasoning applied by language teachers before and during immediate pedagogical decisions. Experienced and novice teachers can differ in the quantity and quality of the used resources, the degree of reflection, and the existing repertoire. It is stated by Loughran (2019) that the main function of teaching experience is to create, develop, and refine new knowledge for the classroom practice and advanced pedagogical reasoning as a foundation for practice; otherwise, long hours of teaching would be "about doing than informed knowing" and cannot result in "enhanced student learning" (p. 531). As novice teachers teach and gain mastery of the basic teaching classroom skills, the fluent use of the skills enables them to consider other aspects of teaching that had not received attention before (Loughran, 2019). Although numerous studies have examined teachers' thinking and interactive decision-making skills (e.g., König et al., 2020; Stefaniak et al., 2021; Stigler & Miller, 2018), there has been little attention to the different pedagogical reasoning skills employed by English language teachers.

Teaching is the act of consistently filtering productive and unproductive courses of action for student learning in moments of uncertainty (Kavanagh et al., 2020). These actions are the result of the connection between teachers' decision-making and pedagogical reasoning skills (Richards, 2011). However, this "unique filter through which English language teachers make instructional decisions, choose instructional materials, and select certain instructional practices over others" (Johnson, 1994, p. 440) is an underexplored field (Borg, 1998; Kavanagh et al., 2020; Kennedy, 2016; Loughran, 2019). Against this backdrop, the present study used Richards' (2011) quadripartite model of pedagogical reasoning skills to present a picture of this filter, as the central aspect of teacher cognition, among novice English language teachers. For this purpose, this study sought to answer the following question:

RQ: How do novice English teachers employ pedagogical reasoning in their teaching?

## **Method**

### *Participants*

This study used the multi-methods qualitative case study design to investigate the pedagogical reasoning of two female EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers. The teachers, teaching at

private language institutes, were contacted and participated in this study voluntarily. The participants were recruited based on a criterion-oriented selection method, rather than a random one. In this method, according to LeCompte and Preissle (1993), the researcher seeks participants who fulfill the criteria essential to the purpose of the study. Novice teachers were among the recently recruited teachers with less than one year of experience who had passed locally run teacher training courses in various institutes. Table 1 summarizes the demographic information of the participants of this study. Pseudonyms are used to refer to both the participating teachers.

**Table 1***Teachers' Demographic Information*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Experience in hours</b>	<b>Academic background</b>
Teacher A	28	400	B.A. in English literature
Teacher B	30	80	B.A. in English Translation

Teachers A and B were B.A. graduates. They decided to start teaching as they had degrees related to English teaching.

*Instruments*

Given the goal of this study, the design was exploratory interpretive. In this regard, the lived experiences of beginning teachers cannot be understood only through an investigation of responses to a Likert-type scale (Goddard & Foster, 2001). Therefore, multiple sources that could represent a thorough picture of the novice teachers' reasoning during English teaching were employed. These included lesson plans, videotaped classroom observation, field notes, and interviews.

*Lesson Plan*

Lesson planning is a challenging task for novice teachers as they should consider student needs, learning content, goals, and teaching methods and get involved in decision-making before the teaching practice (König et al., 2020). Kleven (1991) argues that teachers' decisions in an immediate situation can be compared with their thoughts and goals as they are expressed during their planning. To this end, the teachers' lesson plans had been analyzed before each class observation. Although the teachers were free to use any form to design their lesson plans, they were examined based on the employed model of pedagogical reasoning. Each lesson plan was evaluated concerning the presence or absence of the following issues: the content of the lesson, linguistic and non-linguistic goals of the lesson, predicted problems and the suggested solutions to deal with them, and management issues in terms of timing, sequencing, and structuring. In case of any observed discrepancies between what was planned and what happened in the class, the second author wrote down a question to be asked later during the first interview.

*Video-taped Classroom Observation and Field Notes*

Observation sessions were organized in advance and the institute's supervisor informed the participating teachers about it before the first video-recording session. The second author arranged the subsequent sessions with each teacher. Each day she observed three 90-minute

classes of teachers A and B. During the observation, she used Richard's (2011) pedagogical reasoning model as a framework of reference to analyze and observe the class simultaneously. Any pedagogical events outside the framework were notified and recorded as "other".

### *Interviews*

Two semi-structured interviews were arranged, for each participant, to provide further information and clarification for the recorded cases of inconsistencies between the lesson plan and class behavior. The first interview, which was conducted immediately after the observation, helped collect relevant demographic data such as age, years of teaching experience, and previous teacher training courses of the teachers to be informed about the background of the teachers and more importantly to break the ice and make them feel more comfortable as the participants of the research. The collected data were of use in the data analysis stage of the study while comparing teachers' thoughts, lesson plans, and their reasoning in the actual series of events in class. This information was thought to be useful to explore the decisions made by teachers in their lesson plans, classroom management, and materials development. Put differently, the main function of the first interview was to investigate the teachers' pedagogical reasoning for what they had done during the observed session. Ten questions concerning the required sub-skills of the framework were developed and asked at this stage of the study.

The purpose of the second delayed interview was to clarify those vague events and actions that might have been overlooked in the observer's field notes. Major questions during the delayed interviews were premised on the shared events of the class with the observer (planning and implementation of the lesson) and the comparison between the lesson plans' claims and the actual teaching.

### **Data Collection**

The second author's old acquaintance with the institute's supervisor facilitated the initial arrangements and she could have three teachers willing to participate in the study. As building rapport with case study participants increases the authenticity of the collected data (Schachter & Freeman, 2015), the second author used to meet and have a friendly conversation with the participants twice during the fifteen-minute break time of each class to feel comfortable being observed. Primarily, the teachers were asked to send their lesson plans before each observation session to be examined. As most English classes at this institute were held in the afternoon, the second author could only observe three classes in every arranged session from 3 to 8 p.m. Her role in the classroom was that of a nonparticipant observer. Using the quadripartite model of pedagogical reasoning skills (Richards, 2011), she observed and categorized the observed teacher's move based on the model's skills.

Teacher C was observed only once because she withdrew from the study the week after the 2nd observation. It is natural that in a case study, some participants may not be willing to share their inner feeling and beliefs. Sensitivity toward confidentiality and the participant's right over the control of the data gave her this option.

Following the observation, the teachers were asked to participate in an interview (1<sup>st</sup> interview or immediate interview). The purpose of this interview was to uncover the rationale behind some

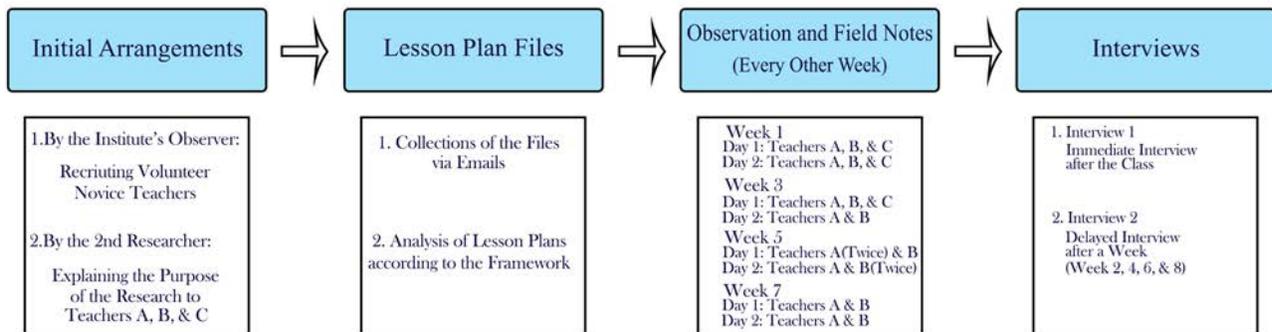
of the tasks and activities in their lesson plans and to explore their language learning and teaching beliefs and experiences. Based on the observation field notes, the teachers were asked about the seven issues discussed in the model: content, goals, problems, solutions, timing, sequencing, and grouping. The ten interview questions encompassing these skills were asked during the first interview. The immediate interview took place at the earliest possible time to increase the reliability and validity of the teachers' pedagogical reasoning (Schachter & Freeman, 2015).

The second interview was scheduled for a week after the observation, after the analysis of the collected data. For the time management difficulties during the first phase of the data collection, the participants requested to continue discussing the details of the observed class via phone. During the phone conversations, the teachers were prompted to elaborate on the key episodes of the observed session, especially the ones that the second author could not fit within the applied framework. Borg (1998) listed four ways for teachers to answer in these situations: (a) commenting and elaborating on the action, (b) responding to the researcher's assertion based on observation, (c) talking about the fitness of specific episodes into a lesson structure, and (d) explaining the decisions regarding the instructional activities. The teachers were inclined to explain the reasons for their deviations from the lesson plan and elaborate on their decisions.

All phases of data collection lasted two months and data analysis of the immediate interviews proceeded in a parallel fashion throughout these two months. Each Teacher A and B were observed for 9 sessions, every other week. Due to the withdrawal of Teacher C, as of week three, there were minor modifications in observation sessions. The phases of the study are illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*The Schematic View of the Data Collection Procedure*



As Figure 1 shows, 21 class sessions were observed, excluding Teacher C's sessions, 18 field notes were employed for this study. The teachers attended four immediate and four delayed interviews.

## Data Analysis

While the lesson plan files were analyzed throughout the data collection procedure, the interview and observation data were investigated later to further probe the employed four skills in Richards' (2011) pedagogical reasoning model among novice teachers. In other words, the analysis of lesson plans was fed into the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> interview questions. Describing the quality of the implemented skills manifested the reasoning and meaning of teachers' actions in particular episodes of the interactive phase of teaching. All interviews and videotapes were transcribed, coded selectively, and qualitatively analyzed for patterns of similarities and differences. Similar to the data analysis of the lesson plans, the class field notes were analyzed accordingly; the analysis led to a set of questions embracing the rationale behind the teacher's actions that occurred at critical points of the teaching.

Discovering the common concerns and patterns of decision-making among the teachers was not straightforward. For instance, the reasoning concerned with the content of the lesson, which at first seemed to match the one stated in the textbook or lesson plan, changed during the actual teaching due to unexpected events. Therefore, the collected data had to be analyzed cyclically for all the required decisions about the content of the course, linguistic and non-linguistic goals, predicted problems and the relevant resolutions, time management, lesson sequencing, and student grouping. Any category that was not accommodated to the list of skills was kept for further studying in the later stage of the study. The teachers' actions were interpreted by understanding why they behaved in the way they did. At first, the second author came up with various specific categories that could have been linked together through the common thread running through them. Next, the main themes of the recurrent categories were extracted and used to understand novice teachers' pedagogical reasoning.

## Results

There are many factors influencing the pedagogical reasoning process of teachers. As a result, teachers' decisions can be of many kinds, such as personal, social, or curricular. Given that the information about learners, class, and the content of teaching, among other factors, can also inform teachers' decision-making, for this study only pedagogical decisions were investigated. The analysis of lesson plans, interview responses, and class observation indicated the shared concerns about classroom management and opposing methodological beliefs, which will be described in the following sections.

### *Classroom Management*

It was difficult to detect any patterns or shared themes among the novice teachers, as each observation had its unique features. Teacher B was asked about the use of different activities to keep learners on the task.

*I designed many innovative activities similar to the ones I learned during the TTC. Following the book is very boring and I know that students don't like just reading the book. [Teacher B]*

As the students did not cooperate and the class was out of control, she reasoned in this way:

*Some students are always unwilling to take part in some activities. I spent time on my flashcards and wanted to use them. As I was being observed, I wanted to do all the designed plans. I am always afraid of not covering the lesson plan but because we are told that a lesson plan is a must, I try to write it regularly. [Teacher B]*

Teacher A's classroom management was inconsistent. She occasionally changed her positions, ways of vocabulary practice, and the focus of the study. Moreover, the two disruptive learners started to talk with their friends in L1 and make fun of every aspect of the lesson Teacher A was teaching. As Teacher A ignored their behaviors, she was asked to give reasons.

*These two students were my students before; they are hyperactive and cannot concentrate for a long period. It is not the fault of others. I have to do my best not to let them distract other students. Sometimes I look dagger at them but I know it doesn't work. [Teacher A]*

In another interview session (delayed), she further added that:

*I think my TTC was not good enough. We did not have any teaching practice about dealing with anomalies. Most of the time, I review my teachers and English learning classes to come up with an appropriate thing to do. I feel that we need someone in the office to turn to at some particular times and get effective consultation. [Teacher A]*

The teachers of the study were not equipped with elaborated schemas or mental representations of the reality of the classroom and hence they regarded any problem as a threat to their flow of teaching. As the above excerpt shows, this problem had been happening even in the previous term, but it did not trigger the teacher's reflection. These novice teachers did not include themselves as part of the reality of the classroom and had the attitude of *they* and *I* as two separate entities. As they could not adapt their roadmap to the encountered dilemmas, they only wanted to follow the plan strictly. They had a limited behavior repertoire and this resulted in problems in classroom management.

#### *Methodological Beliefs*

Teachers A and B were university graduates of English literature and translation studies respectively and currently doing Master classes of TEFL as freshmen students. They had been acquainted with a variety of teaching approaches. In addition, the influence of a recently passed teacher-training course on their practice was undeniable. They tended to enter the class with a well-established theoretical belief or intuition about correct and incorrect pedagogical decisions. However, about Teacher B's excerpt in the previous section, "we are told that lesson plan is a must", novice teachers are not confident enough to use terms such as "I think" or "in my opinion" as the experienced ones usually use in their talks. Teacher B felt there was a problem in lesson plan implementation but could not modify or even question the principle taught in the training course, the ones related to lesson planning and classroom management. This was evident in other

interviews as well. For instance, in response to a question about playing the listening section three times, Teacher A stated:

*The listening seemed to be rather long and boring for some students. We have to play the listening three times according to the guide. However, there was no need to play it again. I have to cover one section in every session, so I am always short of time. [Teacher A]*

This statement depicts vividly the powerful influence of the educational context. She used “we have to” many times in her utterances, indicating that the teacher cannot separate herself from the others and is under pressure to follow a procedure that she cannot fully understand.

Teacher B also acknowledged being incoherent in her approach and explained the reason for her stress:

*If I don't follow each section one by one they [the students] may ask some irrelevant questions. Sometimes, I don't know what to do. It is very confusing when nothing goes according to my mental plan. [Teacher B]*

Teacher A did not feel comfortable talking about her problems in the first place. Nonetheless, in one of the break sessions, when the second author started sharing some of her problems in classroom management in the beginning years of teaching, Teacher A also opened up and said:

*I don't know how to ask for help, I feel that others don't have these problems. If the class goes out of control, I won't be allowed to teach classes at the advanced level in the next term. I want to be a powerful teacher who can predict everything in class. [Teacher A]*

Teacher A was anxious about everything. It seems that she had not accepted her role to teach in a class with different unpredictable events. The training course did not solve many of her concerns about ELT. To further complicate matters, it seems that her decision-making ability was not constructed to a sufficient extent to help her interpret the whole situation and gain control over it.

On the contrary Teacher B was an outgoing person and therefore, felt comfortable talking about her problems and even asking the second author some pedagogical questions. At the end of the final delayed interview session, she brought up the issue of creativity and asked for help. She said:

*I would like to know if it is possible to deviate from the lesson plan. I mean would it be ok if I implement some new ideas I have recently gotten from Jeremy Harmer's book? I start to think that I might be better off passing another TTC elsewhere, just between us. [Teacher B]*

Teacher B was determined to solve her teaching problems when she found that the TTC course was inadequate. She consulted with books, articles, and other experienced teachers to find academically-supported answers to her questions.

The major features of the participants' pedagogical reasoning skills are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Novice Teachers' Pedagogical Reasoning Skills Based on Richards' (2011) Pedagogical Reasoning Model*

Four main PRS (Richards, 2011)	Novice teachers' PRS
Analyze potential lesson content	Using textbook exclusively Limited use of the board, online materials, color markers, and handouts
Identify specific linguistic goals	Using the guidebook as the sole reference
Anticipate problems	Using preventive strategies in case of problems, ignoring and asking for help
Make decisions about classroom management	Having problems with time management, monitoring, and difficulty with dealing with disruptive behavior Disregarding the learner's problems Avoiding non-routine situations Feeling disillusioned at the final decisions

In conclusion, the two novice teachers were not sure how to react to the misbehavior of the learners, and they chose *ignoring* as the only effective solution. Inconsistent implementation of the same activity and constant change of the location had their roots in the teacher's uncertainty, the absence of coherent planning, and the fear of not covering the lesson requirements. As they were not comfortable with *silence* in the class, they did every activity hurriedly for two main purposes: meeting the lesson's expectations based on the guidebook and avoiding off-the-topic issues. The silence here refers to any pedagogical moment that the learners need to comprehend, analyze, or reflect on the taught points, which seemed threatening to the novice teachers of this study. The effective influence of teacher education programs on the actual practice of teachers was not profound, although it was present in the teachers' utterances.

## Discussion

The findings showed a shaky basis of wisdom and rationale for novice teachers' pedagogical reasoning. The two novice teachers in this study were not only unable to implement many of the learned skills properly but also unfamiliar with many tried and tested skills. The experienced teachers' rationales such as maximizing the effectiveness of their teaching, engaging all the learners with the instructional activities, achieving the planned goals of the lesson, assisting the learners in English language learning, recognizing the learners' needs and wants, and providing an appropriate response for their needs (Borg, 2009; König et al., 2020; Richards, 2011) were

greatly missed in the collected data of the study. The novice teachers' low sensitivity to professional situations (Kavanagh et al., 2020) and limited ability to interpret the complexities of language teaching classes (Mason, 2002; Männikkö & Husu, 2019) manifest their weak pedagogical reasoning skills.

Expert teachers have recognizable mental illustration or *schemata* with which they can understand and interpret the complexities of the classroom (Kavanagh et al., 2020; Männikkö & Husu, 2019). As Mason (2002) contends, "The mark of an expert is that they are sensitized to notice things which novices overlook; experts are aware of their actions" (p. 1), and this sensitivity is integrated into their professional functioning (p. 33). While experienced teachers are equipped with an elaborate sensitivity to a range of pedagogical situations, novice teachers need metacognitive and monitoring skills. Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that teachers' pedagogical reasoning can be shaped by educational and professional experiences. Quality teaching involves effective lesson planning and the ability to implement the lesson plan for a supportive classroom and consider the learners' needs and proficiency (Pang, 2016). The teachers in this study had almost no concern about effective and quality teaching in response to the questions regarding the four skills of the model. As Pang (2016) posited, the teachers' sensitivity to the learners' needs and supportive attitude towards individual learners can assist them to go through the cyclic process of reasoning and be clear about what to reason and implement.

Teachers' reasoning is based on "a process of reflection, critique, and refinement" (Freeman, 1989, p. 40). Considering the teachers' views in this study, this process of reasoning was absent. The more teachers develop their knowledge base and skills, the more they become aware of this process and enrich their behavioral repertoire (Kavanagh et al., 2020; Kleven, 1991). Therefore, possessing such a rich repertoire is what can make novice teachers survive any pedagogical dilemma that they routinely encounter in a classroom. However, all beginning teachers are not capable of experiencing reflective practice during the initial induction. Some are obsessed with the mechanical aspects of teaching and their need to maintain classroom management results in the exclusion of other aspects of teaching (König et al., 2020; Levin & Nolan, 2014). Novice teachers' struggles with survival issues and timing problems might explain some teachers' reluctance to practice teaching reflectively. Therefore, teachers "at the threshold of real-world teaching" (Leshem, 2008, p. 206) become disillusioned because of being told to fit into a pedagogical practice without having the freedom to show their enthusiasm and creativity.

Teachers simultaneously use multiple sources of knowledge during their pedagogical reasoning (Schachter, 2017). Past language learning and teaching experiences, in conjunction with the training courses, influenced teachers' reasoning in this study. Moreover, the students and institutional expectations were revealed to be a driving force influencing the lesson plans. In her phenomenological study of eight teachers, Schachter (2017) found that there are some ideas that outweigh other competing ideas during the teacher's pedagogical reasoning. For example, student-related variables, school setting, nature of the instructional activity, curricular mandates, learning goals, and teachers' ideas about themselves influence basic choices in content selection; and teachers' personal experience is referred to as the mediating factor.

In addition, what is important is the ability to reason about what to implement (Kennedy, 2016; König et al., 2020) which should be set high in any teacher education program. The inadequacy of the recently held education program was both mentioned by the participants and observed by the second author. The participants could not benefit from previous teaching experience, and the recently passed teacher education programs could not function as the backbone for their actions either. This finding is in line with that of König et al. (2020), who studied the written lesson plans, and instructional practice of pre-service teachers. They acknowledged that teacher education programs require practicing lesson planning skills in the teaching practice phase of teacher education. Moreover, Csanadi et al. (2020) studied the reasoning of pre-service teachers during pedagogical problem-solving and stated that the teachers had difficulties with the content and process levels of pedagogical reasoning as they could neither collaborate with other teachers of the problem-solving group nor reach a sound pedagogical solution for the problem.

This can underscore the significant role of effective teacher education programs to provide novices with a rich and consistent pedagogical repertoire that they need in their future professional learning and teaching practice (Loughran et al., 2016). Hence, novice teachers need a "common framework for scaffolding pedagogical reasoning" (Pang, 2016, p. 257), practicing different phases of pedagogical reasoning, and gradually learning from experience (Shulman, 1987). As König et al. (2020) rightly put it; novice teachers have to associate their professional knowledge in the subject area to the specific situation at hand, which needs expertise in considering the specific curricular goals of the program and the peculiarities of the classroom context, embracing different learning styles. This expertise, as reflected in Richards' (2011) model, was not well developed in the teaching practice of the participants.

Considering the straightforward structure of the lesson plans designed by the participants, the finding agrees with that of Stigler and Miller (2018) as well. They contrasted expert teachers' lesson planning with novice teachers' decisions made during the planning process; they concluded that novice teachers use stepwise procedures and have difficulties identifying the students' needs and prior knowledge. Therefore, the final result does not integrate learners' needs, goals of the course, and prior knowledge of the learners as they are treated individually. In the same vein, both Teacher A and B had difficulty considering all factors and at times in their teaching practice, they felt mixed up.

Our findings show that the teachers felt inept and unequipped despite attending a teacher-training program. They had problems with all the areas of pedagogical reasoning expounded in Richards' (2011) model. The findings corroborate the empirical evidence of recent studies which are partially similar to the current one (e.g., Csanadi et al., 2020; Kavanagh et al., 2020; König et al., 2020; Schachter, 2017; Stigler & Miller, 2018). Furthermore, the participants' dissatisfaction with the attended teacher-training program could be due to the content of the program which was a set of generic prescriptions that cannot meet the novice teachers' future needs (Kavanagh et al., 2020; Leshem, 2008). Learning how to teach must focus on more than covering established topics and provide novice teachers with built-in learning opportunities and experiences to practice planning the lessons and managing the classroom during the teacher training program

(Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). Although novice teachers enter the profession hopefully to make a change, they encounter the reality of role demands, low salaries, and the absence of recognition, which make them lower their standards and become doubtful of continued learning and growth (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). As a consequence of this disillusion, within their five years of teaching, they leave the profession (Sikma, 2021). Their low self-efficacy beliefs can account for their reluctance in the reasoning process or participation in any academic study. According to Bandura's (1986) theory of self-efficacy beliefs, mastery experience is one of the most powerful sources related to teachers' efforts to cope with pedagogical problems and motivates them to proceed smoothly.

To sum up, as the findings from this study show, the limited repertoire of routinized procedures and strategies, under-developed schemata, and available solutions constrained the novice teachers' ability to improvise, to make use of interactive decision-making, and the most importantly to see the big picture, rather than one specific context, at any moment of teaching. These factors come with teaching experience and free the teacher's cognition from dealing with classroom management issues and help them tackle unexpected problems and slow instructional procedures.

### **Conclusions**

Studying what teachers see, how they perceive what they see, and ascribe meaning to it can provide a window to their repertoire of knowledge and experiences (Leshem, 2008). In this study, novice teachers, not being certain about their roles, felt less competent to deal with the requirement of actual teaching, as they found training programs' input ineffective to resolve the pedagogical problems. These findings warrant two main conclusions. First, pedagogical reasoning, like many other aspects of teachers' professional development, can be enhanced by teaching experience. Second, teacher education programs, particularly those in the context of this study, fall short of affording teachers the requisite ability for pedagogical reasoning for making effective instructional decisions.

Findings from this study can have multiple implications for pre-service and in-service programs. Lesson-planning issues, effective teaching characteristics, and the needs of novice teachers during the teaching practice could be directly addressed and set high in all teacher education programs. The skills of lesson planning could be included as part of the teacher competencies discussed in an education program. Teacher educators could transform the dynamic process of pedagogical reasoning into accessible forms and pedagogically practical skills to be practiced during the course (Forkosh-Baruch et al., 2021; Loughran, 2019; Pang, 2016). The findings can help teacher educators reframe and reexamine their teacher education frameworks and largely increase the quality of English language teacher education. Scholars in the field of teacher education could make concerted efforts to further elucidate the pedagogical reasoning foundation of EFL teacher decisions that can affect the quality of ELT teaching.

The first limitation of this study was the absence of stimulated recall interviews as an effective tool for providing the details of teachers' pedagogical reasoning (Shabani et al., 2022). Given this, the responses might be susceptible to subjectivity and can be considered a source of

bias. The second limitation was related to the number of participants and the length of data collection time, which lasted about two months. Furthermore, longitudinal studies can clearly show the trajectory of decision-making development and effectively provide a conceptual framework (Pella, 2015). A longitudinal timeline can also strengthen the confirmability and dependability of the study. Future research can study the ways that teachers' previous educational experiences or cognitive ability to solve learners' problems (Forkosh-Baruch et al., 2021; Schachter, 2022; Shabani et al., 2022) might influence pedagogical reasoning.

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