Novice EFL Teachers' Decision-making and Pedagogical Reasoning in Implementing Instruction

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Abstract

Teachers' decision-making and pedagogical reasoning and their improvement are key to the effectiveness of teaching. Although a number of studies have been conducted on these issues, there is still not enough information about teachers' interactive decision-making and pedagogical reasoning, and teachers also do not have the necessary skills in this area. To address this gap, the current multiple case study investigated four novice EFL teachers' decision-making and their underlying pedagogical reasoning in implementing instruction. The result of the constant comparative and categorical content analysis on the ten-session classroom observations and the transcribed stimulated recall interviews indicated common themes, including teachers' overusing of learners' L1, excessively using the deductive approach to teaching, failing to incorporate technology but using available resources in class during instruction, using whole-class or individual instructional techniques, and rarely emphasizing on learners' knowledge of the world. The targeted teachers made such decisions to perform their predetermined responsibilities, transfer the correct information, motivate learners, manage time, and help learners toward their language achievement. This study has implications for teachers who are willing to reflect on their instructional decisions and pedagogical reasoning, for institutional administrators and managers to provide them with opportunities for reflection, and for teacher educators who can raise novice teachers' awareness about the importance of teachers' decisions and pedagogical reasoning in their courses.

Introduction

Teachers have a significant role in learners' achievements, their decisions are influential in successful teaching (Bishop, 2012; Lloyd, 2019; Südkamp et al., 2014), and their thoughts and beliefs form their understanding of effective teaching (Hughes et al., 2020; Loughran, 2019). Therefore, teachers' decision-making and pedagogical reasoning are two fundamental conceptions in teaching skills (Richards et al., 2001). Teachers made almost ten decisions per hour (i.e., one per six minutes) in their classroom context while planning (pre-active), teaching (interactive), and evaluating the lesson (post-active) (Freeman, 1989; Shavelson, 1983; Siuty et al., 2018). Every decision involves the man in a series of relatively complex thought processes that make him adopt some decisions (Newell et al., 2007). Consequently, investigating the reasons that lie beneath teachers' decisions is essential for better understanding the 'what' and 'how' of their work (Niess & Gillow-Wiles, 2017). Shulman (1987) has described these decision-making processes as pedagogical reasoning. Pedagogical reasoning is an essential means for teachers to continuously professionalize and progress their teaching (Phillips et al., 2020). Thus, according to Bishop (2012), if we can figure out how teachers take steps in making their decisions, we will more easily familiarize ourselves with the ways teachers are capable of teaching. Since the quality of their decision-making has a significant effect on their personal and professional lives (Bikart, 2019), considering decision-making as a process and recognizing the dynamics of the process will lead to successful teaching (Lloyd, 2019).

The interest in the notion of 'teachers' decision making' has been growing since the 1980s, once the language classroom was considered as the place where formal language teaching takes place, and teachers, as decision-makers, turned out to be the focus of many teaching research (Jiang, 2017; Lloyd, 2019; Vanlommel et al., 2017). Empirical research has suggested that expert and novice teachers differ in their thinking and decision-making; they differ in understanding, interpreting, and managing classroom events (Stahnke, & Blömeke, 2021; Tsui, 2003; Wolff, Jarodzka, & Boshuizen, 2021). Even with the emphasis in the literature on teachers' decision-making and pedagogical reasoning, research evidence suggests that teachers still have relatively little skill in this area (Johnson & Golombek, 2020; Mandinach & Gummer, 2016; Mansfield & Loughran, 2018; Siuty et al., 2018). The uniqueness of exploring these valuable concepts becomes more obvious when according to the existing literature, there is a paucity of research on novice teachers with a focus on instructional strategies. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap in the literature by unearthing novice EFL teachers' interactive decisions and underlying pedagogical reasoning during instruction.

Literature Review

In the 1930s, the concept of "decision making" was initially introduced by American management literature. Through the growth of cognitive psychology, this concept was brought into the field of education (Jiang, 2017). Since the 1980s, the language classroom has been regarded as the place where formal language teaching occurs, and teachers as decision-makers became the focus of many studies since their decisions have positive or negative effects on students' paths (Jiang, 2017; Lloyd, 2019; Südkamp et al., 2014). Different factors affect teachers' decision-making, such as the information about learners (e.g., learners' motivation, interest, and ability), the nature of teaching tasks (e.g., the complexity of the subject matter,

the time allocated to teaching), the context of teaching, teachers attributes, and curriculum standards (Boadu et al., 2020; Borko & Shavelson, 1990).

Various psychological models interpret teachers' decision-making as an information-processing activity that enables teachers to recognize problems, adapt related evidence from the environment, assess the advantages and disadvantages of diverse strategies, choose appropriate criteria, and finally make decisions based on the most appropriate action (Smith, 2017; Verma, 2014). Freeman (1989) stated that teaching can be considered a decision-making procedure in which instructional decisions constantly function before (pre-active), during (interactive), and after (post-active) teaching. The improvement of teaching quality will be facilitated when the answer/s to how teachers reach and adopt different classroom decisions is found (Bishop, 2008; Lloyd, 2019). However, underlying processes of these decisions are elusive and have not been studied in detail within second language teaching and teacher education and hence worth in-depth investigations (Johnson, & Golombek, 2020; Siuty et al., 2018).

Shulman (1987) has described these decision-making processes as pedagogical reasoning and recommended six stages in his model. His model comprises a cycle of activities that a teacher goes to in the teaching process encompassing "comprehension, transformation, instruction, evaluation, reflection, and new comprehension" (Shulman, 1987, p. 14). The connection between teachers' actions (decisions) and their knowledge is evident in Shulman's work. Put it differently, teachers' pedagogical reasoning refers to the teachers' reflection on their decisions (actions) and the reasons for making those decisions to reach the target, indicating teachers' knowledge in use (Jung et al., 2020). Therefore, pedagogical reasoning is not just about thinking about teaching; instead, it is about the prominence of better comprehending and appreciating the 'wisdom of practice' (Nilsson, 2009; Shulman, 1987).

Several empirical studies have been conducted to examine decision-making and pedagogical reasoning from different perspectives (e.g., Boadu et al., 2020; Buxton et al., 2013; Harell, 2019; Khatib & Saeedian, 2021b; Lloyd, 2019; Osada, 2016; Sheppard & Levy, 2019; Siuty et al., 2018). In a study, Osada (2016) investigated an inexperienced teacher decision-making process regarding English language teaching in an elementary school in Japan. The results indicated that different factors, including the teacher's inadequate language proficiency, his actual classroom experience, and his students' reflections, influenced his decisions. Siuty et al. (2018) investigated the role of curriculum in teacher decision-making. The findings of this study specified how such a curriculum assisted teachers' decision-making and improved their self-efficacy. Lloyd (2019) scrutinized teachers' pedagogical decision-making in real-world educational contexts, revealing that the decision process of novice and experienced teachers can be built and improved through training programs. Boadu and his coauthors (2020) studied the way teachers perceive and implement the curriculum concentrating on their pedagogical reasoning practice. They Found that theory does not always lead to actual classroom practices. Kavanagh, Conrad, and Dagogo-Jack (2020) conducted a study to examine the role of pedagogical reasoning in practice-based teacher education. Findings indicated that when representing, decomposing, and facilitating approximations of practice, T.E.s differed in how they supported novices to see and practice the pedagogical reasoning. Khatib and Saeedian

(2021b) identified novice English teachers' initial decision-making and pedagogical reasoning in terms of the managerial mode and informed the teachers about their decisions and reasoning through feedback sessions between novice and experienced teachers. The findings revealed contradictions between the scenarios and teachers' actual teaching, and their decisions were reassured by addressing these contradictions during feedback sessions.

As the preceding review of the literature shows, there is still a paucity of research on this topic, focusing on novice teachers. Therefore, this study examines the interactive decisions made by Iranian novice EFL teachers in the classroom, together with the pedagogical reasoning underlying the adoption of such decisions. Accordingly, the current study aims to answer the following research question:

What instructional decisions do language teachers make during instruction, and what pedagogical reasoning underlies their instructional decisions?

Method
Participants

The current study is part of a larger study conducted on eight novice language teachers selected through purposive sampling from different private language institutes. The criteria for purposive sampling were two-fold: (a) selecting teachers with utmost 3-year experience in English language teaching; Since these teachers are considered as novices (Farrell, 2012) (b) selecting teachers who were students of TEFL-related majors or who passed teacher training courses (TTC) in teacher training centers; Because the purpose of this study is to examine the teacher's instructional decisions and reasoning based on their prior knowledge of language teaching. The researchers focused on four participants as cases to present a rich and deep picture of the decisions and their underlying pedagogical reasoning. Two female (Sara and Maryam) and two male (Ali and Reza) novice EFL teachers were selected to participate. Their age ranged from 22 to 34, their level of education ranged from B.A. student to B.A. graduate and had utmost one year of teaching experience at the time of data collection.

Table 1 *Novice Teachers' Demographic Characteristics*

Name	Gender	Age	Major	Education level	Years of teaching experience	Learners' Age group	Coursebook
Sara	Female	34	English Translation	B.A. graduate	One year	Teenagers	Solution 1
Maryam	Female	22	Psychology (TTC certificate)	B.A. student	Six months	Teenagers	Family and Friends 6
Ali	male	22	English Translation	B.A. student	One year	Teenagers	American English File 1
Reza	male	22	English Translation	B.A. student	Eight months	Teenagers	Family and Friends 6

All four participants had the experience of teaching teenagers in private language institutes at elementary and pre-intermediate levels. Participating novice teachers' profiles are presented in Table 1. For reasons of anonymity, pseudonyms are used.

Instrumentation

As a descriptive qualitative multiple-case study, the researchers investigated four novice EFL teachers' interactive decision-making and their underlying pedagogical reasoning regarding the instructional strategies they used during instruction. To this end, the researchers used mainly two data collection methods: classroom observations and stimulated-recall interviews. Methodological triangulation was used to enrich the data. Each instrument is elaborated on below:

Classroom Observation

The present study employed observation as the first method to collect the required data regarding novice teachers' interactive classroom decision-making. The first author observed, took field notes, and videotaped each participant's classes for 10 sessions, twice a week for five weeks. In addition to observation, video recording, as Dörnyei (2007) suggests, providing rich and detailed information regarding participants and their practices.

Stimulated-recalls interview

This method of collecting data is considered a stop-and-start, highly interactive process (Dempsey, 2010). The participant is requested to verbalize their thoughts while looking at their pedagogical practices on videos of their classes immediately after the recording. This playback process helps the participants remember what was in their minds at that very moment while doing the action seen in the playback (Busse & Ferri, 2003). According to Fox-Turnbull (2011), the advantage of this approach is that it allows the targeted participants to explicate their decision-making and undertaken practices. Stimulated-recall interviews were conducted to gain more comprehensive insights into teachers' decision-making and also hidden pedagogical reasoning. Stimulated-recall interview sessions were held on the same day of the teachers' classes and in their native language to increase the accuracy and validity of the discussions on their pedagogical reasoning. The interviews were face-to-face sessions, and each took approximately one hour to get accomplished. All interview sessions were audio-recorded for the consequent analysis.

Data collection procedure

Initially, novice EFL teachers were chosen from different private language institutes through 'purposive sampling.' Then, classroom observations were done by the first author to investigate teachers' decision-making. Immediately after each session of the classroom observations, the observer ran stimulated-recall interviews to request teachers to verbalize their thoughts and underlying pedagogical reasoning while looking at their behavior and actions on the recorded videos. Also, the teachers' responses during stimulated-recall interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for content analysis.

Data analysis

To address the first part of the research question, which aimed to reveal novice English language teachers' interactive decision-making during instruction, the top-down deductive approach (Riazi, 2016) was conducted on the data from classroom observation and the transcripts of the participants' stimulated-recall interviews. The researchers drew on Stronge's (2007) framework to code the data. To this end, the researchers read, reflect, describe, compare, and finally relate themes to the dataset. According to Stronge (2007), a teacher skills checklist

consists of five categories: (1) the teachers as a person, (2) classroom management and discipline, (3) planning and organizing instructions, (4) implementing instructions, and (5) monitoring learner progress and potential. The focus of this study was on the fourth domain of Stonges' checklist, 'implementing instructions,' which included five different sub-categories: instructional strategies, content and expectations, complexity, questioning, and learner engagement. This study sought to unravel instructional strategies to present a rich and profound picture of the nature of this sub-category.

To address the second part of the research question related to the pedagogical reasoning underlying teachers' decisions, the transcribed data from stimulated recall interviews were analyzed deeply through a bottom-up inductive approach (Riazi, 2016). In this regard, as suggested by Riazi (2016), the transcribed data were coded based on three levels of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Initially, after transcription, the authors read the data iteratively to get immersed in the data. After getting familiar with the data, its content was analyzed to find the meaningful utterances from the transcripts to label them (open coding). Next, the specified labels were compared and contrasted through comparative content analysis, merged in the case of similarities, and summarized to broader categories (axial coding). Finally, the related categories among the data gathered from the four teachers were gathered under different themes to explain the phenomenon (selective coding).

In order to increase the reliability of codes and patterns, double-coding was conducted. To this end, an iterative process was employed. The codes and categories were finalized when the two coders reached a complete agreement. When there was a disagreement or difference of ideas on the categories' initial codes and definition, an in-depth discussion took place, and the codes or categories were redefined.

Results

This study investigated novice EFL teachers' classroom decision-making and their underlying pedagogical reasoning regarding strategies they use in implementing instruction. The comparative and categorical content analysis of the data is reported in the following sections. Generally, novice teachers' five most frequent decisions and their underlying pedagogical reasoning for instructional strategies are categorized and outlined in Table 2 below. All teachers emphasized using the Persian language in teaching and learning. In most cases, they used a deductive approach to teaching; they had limited technology use but used available sources during instruction, they had Few groups or pair activities, and rarely emphasized learners' knowledge of the world. The pedagogical reasoning behind these decisions was for learners' complete understanding of the subject, putting no pressure on learners, avoiding confusion and demotivation, following the syllabus, time management, etc.

Table 2. *Novice Teachers' Decision-Making and Pedagogical Reasoning with a Focus on Implementing Instruction (Instructional Strategies)*

Decision	Pedagogical reasoning
Overusing L1 as a method of instruction	Clarifying every point and preventing any confusion or misunderstanding Learners' complete understanding of the subject Considering learners' levels Using L1 to teach L2 Time management
Excessive use of deductive approach to teaching	Putting no pressure on students Learners' complete understanding of the subject Saving time Following the syllabus
Failing to incorporate technology and overusing paper and pencil tasks	Saving time Lacking facilities Considering learners' levels
Using all available resources during instruction	Learners' better understanding of the subject Enhancing learning opportunities Avoiding demotivation
Using whole-class or individual instructional techniques (Few groups or pair activities).	Due to COVID-19 Saving time Considering learners' levels Avoiding chaos
Emphasizing learners' knowledge of the world.	Enhancing learners' learning Using known to teach unknown Motivating learners Saving time

The most frequent decision made by the participating teachers was their use of learners' first language during instruction (in this case, Persian). The teachers' pedagogical reasoning analysis indicated that, in their view, this strategy was useful since it resulted in learners' complete understanding of the subject. For example, while teaching a grammar section in Ali's class, the teacher gave a detailed explanation in Persian after a brief explanation in English.

Excerpt 1
*By explaining the subject in Persian, which is the learners' mother tongue, I can make sure that they **fully understand** it. So I always use this strategy, and I get a positive result from it. [Ali, male, experience: 1 year]*

Another reason given by teachers regarding this decision was clarifying every point and preventing confusion or misunderstanding. Reza said:

Excerpt 2
*Learners will understand 50% of the issues before translating the text, and they will understand the rest after translating and analyzing the text sentence by sentence. It also helps to **solve the problems in their minds**, and if they do not understand and are confused, these **problems will be solved**, and **the right concepts will be imprinted on their minds**. [Reza, male, experience= 8 months]*

All four teachers also pointed out 'considering learners' level' and 'time management' as other pedagogical reasoning for using L1 because of the difficulties learners face when English is used as the medium of instruction. The teachers' main pedagogical reasoning for using L1 as a method of instruction revealed that they have positive attitudes toward using it in teaching English.

Novice teachers' second most frequent decision was related to their approach to teaching. Most of their decisions were based on the deductive approach, which arose from the pedagogical reasoning underlying their decisions. All four novice teachers exhibited this approach as they attempted to put no pressure on learners so that they could stay concentrated and understand the subject thoroughly. For instance, Sara asserted:

Excerpt 3

*As a teacher, I have to convey information accurately and clearly to my students. If I ask them a question at the beginning of the lesson, they will be confused and not understand the subject well. So I prefer to explain the subject completely first so that **the learners are not under pressure** and can **fully understand the subject**. [Sara, female, experience: 1year]*

Other reasons asserted by the participants were 'saving time' and 'following the syllabus.' Ali expressed his dissatisfaction with institutional policies by criticizing their emphasis on following the syllabus and devoting limited class time:

Excerpt 4

*As a teacher, I am not the only decision-maker for my class. The institute already prepares a syllabus for us that we have to follow. I do not have the power to stand against these policies, so I have to implement this approach to **adhere to the guidelines and requirements in the syllabus and follow the time plan**. I should save time because of the time limitations that I face. [Ali, male, experience: 1 year]*

As it is clear, the first two reasons, namely putting no pressure on students and learners' complete understanding, underlying their decisions illustrate that the teachers were satisfied with the excessive use of the deductive approach to teaching. At the same time, the next two reasons, i.e., saving time and following the syllabus, indicated their dissatisfaction.

In terms of the third most frequent decision, which was related to teachers' failure in using technology and overusing paper and pencil tasks, Maryam expressed her reason by criticizing the lack of facilities:

Excerpt 5

*I am limited to learners' books and notebooks because there are no other facilities in the class. The most important reason I do not use audio and video files to teach is the **lack of facilities**. [Maryam, female, experience: 6 months]*

Other teachers stated the same reason except for Sara. She presented other reasons. She maintained in the interview that:

Excerpt 6

*I am very eager to use technology in my classes because we have the necessary facilities. But I don't. Because of **language learners' level,** which is the first issue. I have heard from them many times that we do not understand the accent of English speakers. And they ask me not to use videos and audio files. And the second issue is the **issue of time**. If I use technology, I lose a lot of time because I have to move the file back and forth many times and repeat, and in other cases, I even have to teach them how to use technology. [Sara, female, experience: 1year]*

It is crystal clear that all participating teachers were dissatisfied with overusing paper and pencil tasks and several reasons motivated them to use these types of tasks.

The fourth most frequent decision made by the participating teachers was using all available resources during instruction. They considered it as a helpful strategy for learners' achievements. Reza reflected on his decision:

Excerpt 7

*As I used the visual tools, they **understood the point better**. In addition to better comprehension, using existing tools **increases learners' learning opportunities and motivates them** to learn the language using their environment. And the difficulty of the issues **does not make them lose their motivation.** [Reza, male, experience= 8 months]*

Analyzing Reza's view shows that he is aware of the importance of using different resources in language teaching and tries to use available resources to achieve a better result. However, this view indicates that he has not made any effort to provide more facilities, including technology, in his classroom. At the same time, he is not satisfied with the currently available facilities.

The observation of the participating teachers' classes revealed that they focused on whole-class or individual instructional techniques as the fifth most frequent decision. Only a few groups or pair activities were implemented. They presented different reasons for their decisions. For example, in Ali's class, he often called learners' names or asked all language learners to participate in the activities while teaching. During these ten sessions in his class, it happened twice that the learners were divided into groups of three or four or in pairs to participate in activities. In response to the question about his decision in the stimulated-recall interview, Ali said:

Excerpt 8

*Due to the **extensive spread of Coronavirus**, we cannot have much group activity, so I try to get language learners to work one by one or the whole class together. Another reason I have always faced is **the difference in the level of language learners**; those who are weaker are less active in their groups. And finally, to control the class and **avoid chaos**. [Ali, male, experience: 1 year]*

Ali's answer shows that he is satisfied with choosing this strategy. As he has advanced different reasons for doing so, the only reason that might indicate his slight dissatisfaction is the spread of the Coronavirus as a deterrent to group activities in the classroom. The other teachers all pointed to the same reasons, i.e., the time-consuming nature of group work and their preference for individual work.

The last frequent decision made by participating novice teachers was on the connection between instruction and learners' real lives and emphasis on learners' knowledge of the world. All four participants acknowledged that connecting instruction with learners' real lives enhances their learning. For instance, Sara said:

Excerpt 9
*In every lesson, **resemblance to everyday life or things** like that will help learners **learn much sooner** and better than something complicated and awkward. [Sara, female, experience: 1year]*

The teachers also gave other reasons. Maryam stressed that:

Excerpt 10
***I used what they knew to teach new things.** But The most crucial reason for connecting instruction to real life is **motivating the learner to learn. Also, saving time** because the issue was quite clear with an example from their real lives, and I didn't need more explanation and additions. [Maryam, female, experience: 6 months*

The teachers' pedagogical reasoning for emphasizing learners' knowledge of the world provides evidence that they have positive attitudes toward using it in teaching English. However, this strategy was not frequent in their classes.

Discussion

Benefiting from Stronge's (2007) teacher skills checklist, the present study investigated four novice EFL teachers' interactive decision-making and their underlying pedagogical reasoning for the instructional strategies they use in implementation. Several previous studies on teacher skills compared experienced to novice teachers (e.g., Lloyd, 2019; Stahnke & Blomeke, 2021; Tsui, 2003; Tsui, 2009; Wolff et al., 2021). However, the study reported in this paper focused only on novice EFL teachers, corroborating previous research findings (e.g., Khatib & Saeedian, 2021a; Nilsson,2013; Zhang et al., 2021). The current multiple case study thus presents a taxonomy of novice EFL teachers' interactive decisions and their underlying pedagogical reasoning. It unravels the complex nature of teachers' skills in implementing instruction and provides a more descriptive and inclusive understanding of EFL teachers' capabilities. The findings are discussed below based on Stronge's (2007) framework and other related scholarship.

The findings indicate that the novice EFL teachers had a positive attitude toward overusing learners' L1 as a method of instruction. This finding concurs with previous studies, which marked the usefulness of using learners' native language in the foreign language classroom (e.g., Ahsan et al., 2021; Mayni & Paramasivam, 2021). However, these studies emphasize the use of L1 as a mediating teaching-learning tool and English as the medium of instruction, observations made in the current study make it clear that they use this strategy for numerous instructional purposes. It was observed that the ratio of using this strategy in 40 observed sessions was many times higher than other strategies. As noted in Strong's Framework (2006), an effective teacher uses a variety of strategies. The pedagogical reasons given by participating teachers for using this strategy (including clarifying every point and preventing any confusion or misunderstanding, learners' complete understanding of the subject, and using L1 to teach

L2) corroborates the findings of Mayni and Paramasivam (2021) and Khatib and Saeedian (2021a). Khatib and Saeedian (2021a) considered codeswitching as a method used by English language teachers to achieve their pedagogical goals due to the complexity of the situation or the insistence of learners to receive instruction in their native language.

Teachers in this study emphasized the use of the deductive approach to teaching. They argued that this approach led to learners' better understanding of instruction, did not put pressure on the learners, saved time for other parts of the lesson, and helped adhere to the syllabus. This decision and the teacher's pedagogical reasoning indicated their resistance to using different and diverse teaching methods (Stronge, 2007). Resistance to changing the strategies used by teachers, even when faced with problems, indicates that novice teachers reflect less on their approaches. According to Farrell's (2013) study, novice teachers do not reflect. However, by having reflections, teachers can provide better learning opportunities for their students (Webster & Schempp, 2008) and improve the quality of their decisions (Lloyd, 2019). It is one of the distinguishing factors of an expert teacher from a non-expert teacher (Tsui, 2003; Tsui, 2009). The interviews show that they are sometimes aware of some problematic issues during their teaching but face difficulties changing them. For instance, participating teachers pointed to the lack of self-confidence to change strategies, which is also accentuated in Tsui's (2003) study.

The findings also show that teachers are rather incompetent in using technology for teaching and focus more on paper and pencil tasks, which is one of the red flags of ineffective teaching (Stronge, 2007). The reasons given by teachers indicated teachers' dissatisfaction with overusing paper and pencil tasks and their awareness of the positive effects of using technology in language teaching-learning, which resonate with a study conducted by Cahyani and Cahyono (2012). According to Danielson's (2007) framework, teachers need to meet learners where they are. Nowadays, as learners live in a technology-based world, educators must equip them for their future by attending to the challenges of integrating technology in their classes (Kazu & Issaku, 2021). In many instances, teachers expressed their interest in using technology. Still, they do not have the necessary facilities (Boadu et al., 2020) or literacy for this. Although the teachers in this study performed poorly in using technology, they tried to use the available resources for teaching most effectively. For example, they used body gestures, drawings, available classroom types of equipment, and the like to help learners understand concepts better and enhance learning opportunities.

One of the positive qualities sometimes seen in the classes of novice teachers was their decision to connect teaching with learners' real lives and to bring to light learners' knowledge of the world; This has been pointed out in various studies as a strength in language teaching (Nilsson, 2013; Stronge, 2007). Teachers raised the issue of motivation in stating their reasons for this decision mentioned and many of their other decisions, which are in line with previous studies on teachers' attention to learners' motivation as an essential learning factor (Lloyd, 2019). Other decisions often observed in participating teachers' classes included the use of few group and pair activities during instruction and limiting students talking time to the instructional phase of task performance. Both decisions could be signs of ineffective teaching based on Stronge's (2007) framework. He pointed to providing little time for teacher-student

and student-student interaction during instruction as red flags of ineffective teaching. Unlike novice teachers, as Farrell (2013) pointed out, expert teachers consider learners' perspectives in the classroom process and try to make learners aware of their responsibility. However, the teachers in the current study did not consider students' perspectives. They did not place any responsibility on the learners except for doing the exercises and answering teachers' questions. According to Nelson's (2013) study, novice teachers are afraid of students' prior knowledge of the subject because they usually do not have alternative plans. Accordingly, the participating teachers in this study tried to move the class forward one-sidedly through teacher-centered strategies and reduced the interaction as much as possible to avoid such problems. As Nelson (2013) points out, novice teachers initially think that teaching is just a process of transferring information.

The teachers forwarded many reasons for their decisions, such as the spread of Coronavirus and time management, which were among the most recurring reasons teachers cited as constraints for many of their decisions. In line with many previous studies, time constraint, as well as other reasons such as following the syllabus and implementing books' demand, shows that novice teachers tend to follow the institute rules and uncritically implement what they have in mind without considering the classroom as a living context (Farrell, 2013; Stahnke & Blömeke, 2021; Tsui, 2003; Zhang et al., 2021). Boadu, Donnelly, and Sharp (2020) divided teachers' use of the curriculum into two approaches: adaptive and loyalist. Adaptivists are those teachers who "displayed flexibility in their use of the curriculum by reinventing it in the classroom" (p. 185). However, loyalists are those teachers who "adhered to the contents and arrangement of the curriculum without making any adjustments or additions" (p.186). Therefore, the teachers in the current study could be regarded as loyalists since they were trying to enact every predetermined instruction. It also shows that the teachers themselves were not creative and flexible and implemented whatever was prescribed (Boadu et al., 2020; Tsui, 2003). Some other reasons were given by teachers, such as considering learners' levels, avoiding demotivation, and motivating learners, which are in line with Zhang, Wang, and Zhu's (2021) study about the strengths and weaknesses of novice teachers. Zhang and his colleagues (2021) stated that one of the characteristics of novice teachers is that they are very caring. Novice teachers play the role of a mentor or a helpful friend to learners and are far more tolerant and patient in the face of difficulties that learners have in their learning journey.

Conclusion

This study contributes to a greater understanding of novice EFL teachers' decision-making and underlying pedagogical reasoning during instruction. Despite subtle nuances among participating teachers' decisions and reasons, the results of this study indicated common themes. Analyzing teachers' decisions evidenced the prominent role of the learners' first language on teachers' instructions for promoting learners' complete understanding of the subject and avoiding confusion which is caused by learners' low language proficiency level and time constraints issues. Besides, participating teachers' also highlighted using a deductive approach to teaching, focusing on the prescribed syllabus, time, putting no pressure on learners, and help them fully understand the subject. Teachers constantly attempted to use all available sources in the classroom environment to enhance learners' learning opportunities and avoid demotivation. By contrast, they expressed dissatisfaction with the constraints imposed on them

for not using technology due to time limitations, lack of facilities, and low language proficiency levels of learners. Since time management, learners' motivation, and promoting learners' learning matter for participating teachers, they rarely emphasized learners' knowledge of the real world and used what is known to teach unknown.

This study has contributed to the previous research on decision-making and pedagogical reasoning in EFL classes. The results of this multiple case study, notwithstanding its small number of participants, pinpoint some implications for novice EFL teachers regarding signs of effective and ineffective teaching. Accordingly, this study is of great value for teachers who are willing to reflect on their instructional decisions and pedagogical reasoning. Therefore, it is recommended that institutional administrators and managers provide learning and reflecting opportunities for novice teachers by running in-service teacher education programs, which helps novice teachers toward their professional development and enhances teachers' awareness of their pedagogical decisions and reasoning. Finally, teacher educators could emphasize teachers' effectiveness and prepare them to make reasonable decisions in different situations in the classroom.

This study, like any other study, has its limitations. These limitations could be bridged in other studies. First, further studies could be done on a larger population of EFL teachers. The current study's findings are derived from novice EFL teachers; therefore, a similar study could be done to compare expert teachers with experienced and novice teachers' instructional decisions and pedagogical reasoning since expertise is not something that comes with years of teaching (Farrell, 2013). Moreover, other phenomena such as gender could also be addressed in further studies to examine their effects on teachers' decision-making and pedagogical reasoning. As this study provides insight into only novice EFL teachers, it is reasonable to examine decision-making and pedagogical reasoning for other fields or other subjects in various instructional contexts. Finally, rather than being limited to the direct observation-only, as remote observation would decrease reactivity and provide a more authentic teaching and learning context based on Mac Mahon, Grádaigh, Ghuidhir, et al. (2021), a similar study could be done using remote observation. Another limitation worth mentioning here is the COVID-19 pandemic; as the teachers pointed out, it prevented some of their plans from being implemented. So similar studies can be done at another time to look at this limiting factor, or other studies could be conducted to examine the effects of COVID-19 on teachers' decision-making and pedagogical reasoning in in-person and online classes.

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