



IMAM KHOMEINI
INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY



Print ISSN: 2676-5387
Online ISSN: 2676-5985

Iraqi Novice vs. Experienced EFL Teachers' Beliefs about Classroom Interactional Competence

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Article info **Abstract**

Article type: Classroom interaction is the result of interplay of complex feelings and varying ideas and thoughts between the students and the teacher. As a major player, the L2 teacher can deploy different interactional resources to promote classroom interaction. Their decision to do so depends partly on their beliefs about the role of interaction in developing second language competence. To explore novice and experienced Iraqi EFL teachers' knowledge and experience of classroom interaction and its practical components, in-depth interview data were obtained from ten high school English teachers. The data were transcribed and analyzed through deductive content analysis. The findings revealed that while both novice and experienced teachers believed in the promotion of classroom interaction, their conceptions of the adoption and practice of interactional resources varied. The findings underscore the need for L2 teacher education that equips teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively implement interactional competence in their classrooms.

Keywords: classroom interactional competence, Iraqi teachers, teachers' beliefs

Cite this article: Hameed, Z., Allami, H., & Tajeddin, Z. (2025). Iraqi novice vs. experienced EFL teachers' beliefs about classroom interactional competence. *Journal of Modern Research in English Language Studies*, 12(2), 23-50.
DOI:10.30479/jmrels.2024.20179.2355

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1. Introduction

Students usually come to class with a view that the teacher is accountable for tapping into their intrinsic desire for learning by offering a space that can create an interaction in the classroom. Although classroom interaction is not easily achieved, it is essential for second language acquisition. L2 classroom engagement has been widely and intensively studied in second-language acquisition research (e.g., Ellis & Shintani, 2013; Long, 1983; Shakki, 2022; Zhou et al., 2021) indicating its strong influence on language learning (Kim & Taguchi, 2015; Nagao, 2014; Sato, 2017; Wang & Castro, 2010).

Interaction in the classroom is the communication between students and their teacher, resulting in the collaboration between thoughts, feelings, or ideas, which has a reciprocal impact on them all (Brown, 2007). One of the components that can help achieve this goal is the teacher. Teachers take multiple real-time decisions every day and facilitate countless interactions (Walsh, 2011). They are the major players in influencing students' education and bringing about innovations in the teaching process (East, 2022). Teacher educators have also repeatedly emphasized that classroom interaction is a crucial pedagogical skill required by teachers to master to encourage interaction in the classroom (Tikoo, 2009). Successful learning outcomes are determined, in reality, by the right choice of approaches to improve students' abilities, communication, and interaction (Shah & Coles, 2020)

A key factor that can warrant the success of language learning is classroom interactional competence (CIC). This competence encompasses the ability of teachers to create an environment that promotes effective communication and interaction among students (Walsh, 2013). Interactional competence is more than mere knowledge of formal properties of language; it incorporates skills such as turn-taking, repair, and sequence organization in talk (Markee, 2008) as well as non-verbal actions such as facial expression, gaze and social institutional proxemics (Barraja-Rohan, 2011). The degree to which classroom interaction is promoted is partly influenced by teachers' beliefs and perceptions. Teachers who believe that active participation and collaboration are essential for student learning are more likely to facilitate interactive activities such as group work and pair work, encouraging students to communicate in the target language. Similarly, teachers who view themselves as facilitators of language learning tend to foster an interactive learning environment. This research aimed to discover novice and experienced Iraqi EFL teachers' beliefs about classroom interactional competence and the employment of interactional resources in the classroom.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Classroom Interactional Competence

Interaction in second language (L2) classrooms plays a crucial role in language learning as it promotes communication and supports sociocultural theories of learning (Nunan, 2004; Thornbury, 2017). Learners acquire language skills through interaction and cooperation, gradually creating shared meaning (Coll et al., 2011). Understanding classroom interaction structures is essential for improving instruction quality and providing more learning opportunities (Walsh, 2003). Previous studies have shown that interaction in learning activities leads to active learning, increased motivation, better processing of material, enhancement of metacognitive and social skills, and improved knowledge acquisition and retention (Chen, 2018; Guo et al., 2023; Li & Yuan, 2022; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Teachers play a critical role in facilitating classroom interaction. They are responsible for managing interactions, asking questions, selecting interactions, and engaging students (Ellis & Shintani, 2014; Johnson, 1995). Teachers' interactional competence contributes to language and social skills development, making it essential for maximizing learning opportunities (Walsh, 2003).

Classroom interactional competence (CIC) has been extensively used to analyze face-to-face classroom interactions. Previous studies have employed CIC to explore teacher discourse, student participation, and language integration in various contexts (Badem-Korkmaz & Balaman, 2022; Can Daşkın, 2015; Derakhshan et al., 2023; Sert & Walsh, 2013; Urmeneta & Walsh, 2017). These studies shed light on the importance of understanding and improving classroom interactional competence.

The term interactional competence was defined as a “dynamic process of communication built through the collaborative effort of the interactional partners” (Kramsch, 1986, p. 386). It is a person’s capability to comprehend, interpret, and perform verbal and non-verbal communicative events (Oksaar, 1990) according to sociocultural norms of the context (Kasper, 2006) by drawing on different semiotic resources (Zimmerman, 1998). It includes the ability to use linguistic and paralinguistic resources to repair language comprehension and production problems, organize and produce boundaries between verbal activities (Schegloff, 1968; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973), and build effective stance (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1995). Acquiring the ability to interact effectively in a second language not only requires mastering its formal structure but also involves becoming familiar with various communication systems, such as turn-taking, repair, and sequence organization (Markee, 2008). Additionally, learners must learn to use nonverbal cues like eye contact and body language to co-construct complex interactions accurately with their interlocutors in the second language (Barraja-Rohan, 2011).

According to Young (2008), interactional competence refers to how people use linguistic as well as interactional resources such as identity, language interaction and so on. He observed that interactional competence is not based on an individual's capacity to use interactional resources, but on how these resources are employed by individuals and styles of discursive activity.

Teachers often monopolize classroom conversations and lack a theoretical foundation for evaluating and measuring CIC (Soraya, 2017). Nemati et al. (2022) found that novice and experienced teachers hold different beliefs about the incorporation of interactional space in the classroom. Their findings also indicated a mismatch between the teachers' beliefs about classroom interactional competence and their practices. Drawing on Walsh's (2003) conceptualization of classroom interaction, Derakhshan et al. (2023) employed both quantitative and qualitative data to analyze novice and experienced teachers' use of interactional strategies in enhancing students' engagement. They discovered that experienced teachers' discourse was more simultaneous and immediate. Tai and Dai (2023) used translanguaging as a practice of classroom interaction to enhance meaning-making process. In a recent study, Tajeddin and Kamali (2023) tried to develop and validate a classroom interactional competence scale. They employed an exploratory factor analysis of the data obtained from 564 EFL teachers to yield some major variables affecting CIC. Studies conducted in different contexts have revealed a gap between teachers' proclaimed expectations and their actual practices in terms of classroom interactional competence (Dine & Menezla, 2019). This highlights the need for training and support for teachers to develop a clear perspective on their interactive decision-making procedures.

2.2. EFL Education in Iraq

Iraq's educational system has seen several changes over the previous century, but English has always been an important part of it. Due to the ever-changing cultural and political demands, the curriculum has gone through numerous stages of growth. During the British occupation, English was taught from the first grade at a base level as a second language. Later, the policy was revised such that from the fifth grade onward (Chalabī, 1976), English would be studied as a foreign language. The curriculum was based on a 19th-century European grammar-translation system. In the latter half of the 19th century, the method quickly expanded to other countries (Rivers, 2018). English was first taught in the third grade from 2008 and 2013; however, in late 2013, a major shift in the teaching meant that English was now taught from the first grade onward. Students are now required to pass English to advance to the next grade level. Teaching materials and procedures have also undergone a major redesign. In fact, the grammar-translation method has been supplanted by a communicative one. Using the communicative method of language learning,

students in this course are given plenty of chances to practice speaking and interacting with others. These shifts in textbooks and instructional materials needed the development of new programs to assist teachers in modernizing their teaching strategies and expanding their understanding of current pedagogy. When the education system implemented a new policy in 2014, it mandated the use of textbooks designed specifically for elementary schools in the country (Abdul-Kareem, 2009). Using communicative language teaching methodology as a guide, new textbooks were created.

Even though the existing research on language teacher cognition, as well as its relationship to actual practice, is already extensive, and even though the notion of teachers' classroom interactional competence has paramount importance for promoting interaction in language classrooms, teachers' classroom interactional competence in the context of Iraq has remained under-explored. Almost less is known about the beliefs and practices of EFL teachers in Iraqi classrooms with regard to CIC. To bridge the knowledge gap regarding Iraqi EFL teachers' beliefs and practices related to interactional competence, this study aimed to investigate teachers' perspectives on classroom interactional competence and its impact on the teaching and learning process. It aimed at discovering how novice and experienced EFL teachers deploy interactional resources in fostering classroom interaction. More specifically, this research aimed to answer the following research question:

What are Iraqi novice and experienced EFL teachers' beliefs about classroom interactional competence?

3. Method

A Qualitative content analysis method was used to serve the exploratory nature of the present study. This method allows for a deep examination of the content as well as the underlying themes, patterns, and meanings (Mayring, 2000). Moreover, it highlights the contextual insights that can help a detailed description and interpretation of the data within a particular sociocultural context (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Krippendorff, 2018). Data were gathered through a semi-structured interview to yield more in-depth data collection.

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study were recruited from several language centers in Iraq. The sample included 10 novice and experienced teachers. Five novice teachers (two males and three females) with teaching experience of less than two years and five experienced teachers (three males and two females) with teaching experience of more than five years (Gatbonton, 2008), who were teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) at the intermediate level in their institutes, were invited to answer the questions in an interview. The

participants had degrees in English language teaching from Bachelor's to Master's (eight teachers with BA degree and two with M.A degree in ELT) and were all native speakers of Iraqi Arabic. Their ages ranged from 23 to 45 (See Table 1 below). They were informed about the objectives of the study and were ensured that their identities would be kept confidential.

Table 1

Demographic Information of the Participants (Pseudonyms)

Novice	Gender	City	Age	Certificate	Extra courses
T1/Abd- Irahman	Male	baghdad	28	MA	
T2 Mohammad	Male	baghdad	27	BA	
T3 Asma	Female	baghdad	24	BA	
T4 Essraa	Female	karbala	23	BA	
T5 Eman	Female	Thi-qar	27	BA	2/Unpaid courses
<hr/>					
Experienced					
T1 Rana	Female	Baghdad	33	BA	
T2 Widad	Female	Baghdad	29	MA	Paid webinar and courses
T3 Maali	Male	Karbala	33	MA	
T4 Murtadha	Male	Karbala	40	BA	
T5 Sattar	male	Thi-qar	45	BA	

3.2. Data Collection Methods

A semi-structured interview was designed to gather data on the teachers' (both novice and experienced) cognition and beliefs about classroom interactional competence. A semi-structured interview is an effective method which is often used to explore thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about an issue (Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Tracy, 2013), and can produce data that is deeply reflective of participants' perceptions (Seidman, 2013). Five major questions with subparts were primarily derived from existing literature on classroom interactional competence, as well as input from experienced teachers and educational researchers. The questions aimed to elicit detailed information about the participants' understanding of classroom interactional competence, strategies they use to promote interactional competence in their students, and their overall ideas about this concept. The validation of the interview questions was based on a thorough review of existing literature on classroom interactional competence, as well as consultation with experts in the field. The interview sessions were conducted individually to allow for a more focused and detailed response from each participant. Each interview session lasted approximately 35-40 minutes, depending on the participant's level of engagement and the complexity of their responses. The questions went around their present knowledge of classroom interactional competence, interactional

promoting strategies they were possibly using, and their overall ideas about interactional competence. The interviews were conducted in English as the participants could speak English well. The interviewer took the position of a researcher with expertise in the area of classroom interactional competence, but who also maintained a neutral and non-judgmental stance throughout the interview process.

3.3. Data Analysis

Deductive content analysis was employed for the analysis of the qualitative data obtained in the interviews. Unlike inductive content analysis, which allows for the emergence of new themes or patterns, deductive content analysis starts with a predetermined set of categories. Predefined categories are used to analyze textual data, making the process more structured and focused (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). By applying deductive content analysis, we could systematically examine and interpret data in relation to categories, ensuring consistency and rigor in the analysis process. The participants were asked several questions under five categories of belief about their conception of CIC, CIC and curriculum, components of CIC, CIC and teacher education, and CIC and their teaching methods.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

The teachers (both novice and experienced) were interviewed to gather data on their beliefs about classroom interactional competence. The questions were divided into five main categories each with its own objective, measuring the teachers' beliefs about knowledge, curriculum, teacher education, practical components, and experience. Some extended questions were also added based on the responses made by the participants so that they could offer more noteworthy details about the subject matter, allowing the researchers properly recognize participants' attitudes of the issue.

4.1.1. Teacher's Cognition of CIC

In order to explore the EFL instructors' perceptions of interactional skills in the classroom, the participants were asked to answer three questions regarding the characteristics of interactional competence and what they thought about it - i.e., what is interactional competence?

The participants' responses indicated that three novice instructors knew almost nothing about the concept; however, four experienced teachers, despite their lack of technical knowledge, were somehow familiar with it.

4.1.1.1. Iraqi Novice Teachers' Beliefs About CIC (NTs). From their responses, it was evident that novice teachers' knowledge of CIC was inadequate. Three of them showed a vague understanding of CIC. They were unfamiliar with the concept and interpreted it as group work or pair work. The rest of the teachers expressed that CIC is a novel concept, and they do not have enough experience and knowledge to describe it in depth.

One of the novice teachers connected CIC to the process of testing students in all skills to measure interaction.

Extract 1 (NT1/Abd-Alrahman)

Well, yes, I'm familiar with classroom interactional competence in general. I do define classroom interactional competence by testing them, I mean my students in pairs, I can say, or individually in different activities ... in four skills but listening and speaking are too little because I need more time to apply them to forty students.

Some teachers attributed the features of CIC to some common techniques used inside classrooms, such as questioning and giving direct feedback or using the teacher-centred approach.

Extract 2 (NT3/Assma)

CIC can be defined as the ability of teachers and students to interact for interposing and assisting learning.

Extract 3 (NT 3/Assma)

I think that the features of classroom interaction are more related to strategies or I can say questioning and answering techniques, or it would be the way of feedback and that's it.

Mohammad maintained that interactional competence is tied to certain tactics that teachers should utilize in the classroom. They were primarily restricted to classroom interaction patterns, such as teacher-student interactions, student-student interactions, and other interactional patterns.

Extract 4 (NT2/Mohammad)

A feature of interactional competence is how an instructor interacts with the pupils in the classroom. Teacher-student engagement, for example, or student-student interaction.

This instructor described interactional competence very simply as how teachers create interactional patterns, rather than providing a deeper understanding of it.

Another CIC feature derived from the data is that interactional competence refers to the tactics used by instructors to create pair and group projects. Three out of five instructors agreed on this issue.

Extract 5 (NT4/Essraa)

Interactional competence features, in my opinion, is the manner the teacher uses to facilitate students' interaction in the classroom. For example, how to group them, and how to offer and control this in a relaxed way.

This excerpt also demonstrates a superficial description of CIC, reducing it to the teacher's skill in grouping procedures as possessing interactional competence.

Finally, here the teacher defined interactional competence from the perspective of learners' competence. She viewed it through the lens of the learners.

Extract 6 (NT5/Eman)

A tool which assists a learner in becoming proficient enough to think more critically and express their perspectives with their peers.

As noted in the excerpt, the instructor characterized interactional competence as a mechanism for students to apply their knowledge they have acquired, implying that she does not address this ability from the standpoint of teachers.

4.1.1.2. Iraqi Experienced Teachers' Beliefs About CIC (ETs). As the data revealed, experienced teachers had noticeable knowledge and awareness of CIC. However, this knowledge was restricted to only applying and using some of these elements and techniques but still incomplete visions. Teachers differed in their awareness of this issue. The results showed that teachers had favorable opinions regarding aspects of classroom engagement. Two MA-holding teachers described how the practices of CIC could involve students in expressive activities and promote their learning more efficiently than in an independent way. ET2/ Widad defined CIC as language use and how teachers and students employ it for learning purposes.

Extract 7 (ET2/Widad)

CIC is the teacher-student's ability to demonstrate "language use" interactionally inside the classroom for the purpose of learning and assessment.

ET3/Maali emphasized the importance of a positive classroom atmosphere and strong student-teacher relationships in order to overcome all obstacles and achieve their goals.

Extract 8 (ET3/Maali)

CIC is the way teachers create a good environment with a positive feeling for learning, support, and help learners to do their tasks freely.

Moreover, ET5/ Sattar added that classroom interaction promotes learners' autonomy, cooperation, confidence, critical thinking, and a friendly environment. However, this knowledge was vague for the rest of the teachers, as they were only familiar with theoretical aspects, but not how to put them into practice.

Extract 9 (ET5/ Sattar)

I see that CIC increases learners' quality like autonomy, cooperation, confidence, critical thinking because it encourages learners to produce more.

The next concept implies that interactional competence is the manner in which instructors communicate with learners. This is the same as initiate, response and feedback (IRF), a classroom interaction pattern.

Extract 10 (ET4/ Murtadha)

In most classes, the teacher initiates a dialogue, the students respond, and the teacher provides feedback.

Another concept voiced by one of the teachers (ET1/ Rana) was that teachers had much more constructive influence.

Extract 11 (ET1/ Rana)

I believe so. Of course, to some extent. I mean, giving learners enough time to think, and consider the positive functional role of a teacher rather than just a speaker.

The extract shows that the instructor embraces a more supportive role than merely a speaker, indicating a greater degree of knowledge.

Extract 12 (ET1/Rana)

It refers to the elements of dialogues between teachers and students (as well as among students) that result in effective communication and facilitate learning of a second language.

Here the teacher focuses on the conversation process and how this offers them opportunities for more learning.

ET1/ Rana referred to the connection between pedagogical goals and some techniques which represent features such as extended learner turns, teacher feedback, scaffolding, and so on.

Extract 13 (ET1/Rana)

It may be applied to achieve pedagogical goals such as scaffolding, and teacher's feedback.

4.1.2. Teachers' Belief about the Place of CIC in a Curriculum/Course

Engaging pupils in learning integrates academic and practical experiences. Teachers' beliefs impact their approach to teaching and learning and are a determining factor of instructional process and student achievement (Borg, 2003; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). The curriculum approach affords teachers the opportunity to be inventive and impart their unique mark on the classroom setting (Hennebry-Leung, 2020).

4.1.2.1. Iraqi Novice Teachers' Beliefs About the Place of CIC in a Curriculum/Course (NTs). As they strive for excellence, novice teachers face numerous obstacles. In addition to demonstrating mastery of the subject area, they must also demonstrate class participation, method, and proficiency. When a prospective EFL teacher decides to complete a teaching degree, achieving near-native fluency becomes an additional challenge.

Two divergent types of responses emerged from the data. First, some of the teachers were confused between answering yes or no to the question if the school curriculum supports classroom interactional competence. They did not quite understand how the curriculum can support CIC.

Extract 14 (NT1/Abd-Alrahman)

Yes, to some extent... I have seen many tasks and activities in the school curriculum like projects, working in groups, etc.

Extract 15 (NT5/Eman)

No, it does not because I don't have enough knowledge about CIC.

Some of the teachers mentioned activities related to speaking skills. Using a situational approach to set activities, they described some tasks and their role in creating interaction between teachers and learners.

Extract 16/ 3 (NT3/Assma)

Yes, I think in every lesson, we, as teachers, should focus on speaking activities, and consider them as main parts for every lesson, we can create real situations for these tasks.

4.1.2.2. Iraqi Experienced Teachers' Beliefs About the Place of CIC in a Curriculum/Course (ETs). The teachers with postgraduate degrees demonstrated a higher level of curriculum awareness than those with only a graduate degree. MA teachers' awareness of curriculum and CIC reflected their realization of how curriculum includes tasks to build this competence. According to them, the curriculum is described along with high-quality instructional materials.

Extract 17 (ET4/Murtadha)

Well, let me say 70% yes, in different parts it contains a number of activities that help teachers to stress these skills such as role play, IRF tasks, and free activities which have high-quality instruction.

Extract 18 (ET2/Widad)

In fact, the interaction does not depend mostly on the curriculum but rather the teacher and students as well as the context where the curriculum is taught.

Moreover, most of the teachers approved of the interactive curriculum and its strong relationship with CIC. They declared that it contains a variety of activities that support and supplement CIC. In addition, it is a learner-centered curriculum. However, teachers needed extra training and actual practice to know how to connect theory and practice. Teachers who held MA clarified how different tasks focus on CIC such as discussion with the teacher or classmates, talking with peers and expanding answers according to the teacher's feedback.

Extract 19 (ET3/Maali)

In fact, as an experienced teacher, I consider it a learner-centered curriculum since there are lots of activities whose aims affect learners' performance.

One of the teachers believed that the curriculum had a limited purpose and focused mostly on traditional ways of delivering information.

Extract 20 (ET1/Rana)

In Iraq, the English language curricula are limited to specific goals. Most teachers cannot go outside the context of these goals because of the limitations of the curricula.

4.1.3. Iraqi Teachers' Beliefs About the Need for L2 Teacher Education on CIC Implementation

Many Arabian educational organizations, particularly in Iraq, view teacher education as the most effective means of teacher professional development and learning process (Alkhateeb, 2013).

4.1.3.1. Iraqi Novice Teachers' Beliefs About the Need for L2 Teacher Education on CIC Implementation (NTs). Almost all teachers agreed that they just knew a little about CIC and they studied about it for only one week. They worked on this notion and its elements from the theoretical aspect without any reflection or practicing it.

Extract 21 (NT1/Abd-Alrahman)

Most of us heard and read about classroom management and interaction, unfortunately, this experience is just theoretical, we didn't have the chance to practice these strategies.

One of the teachers believed that it would be beneficial if they knew about CIC and how to manage and implement its strategies in their classes.

Extract 22 (NT4/Essraa)

We could shift our teaching level and improve ourselves as teachers and also our students.

All the teachers agreed that there were no other courses or training programs with the theme of CIC. It is often the case that novice teachers have a limited perspective on classroom interaction.

Extract 23 (NT4/Essraa)

The mistakes I made during the first year of my teaching continued to annoy me. Nonetheless, I did pick up on that. It's safe to say that most of the

knowledge we acquire as new instructors regarding classroom management is gained via trial and error.

4.1.3.2. Iraqi Experienced Teachers' Beliefs About the Need for L2 Teacher Education on CIC Implementation (ETs). Like novice teachers, experienced teachers agreed on the lack of educational programs regarding CIC. However, they had some knowledge of the concept theoretically.

Extract 24 (ET4/Murtadha)

We graduated a long time ago and our resources didn't focus on learners or active learning.

As mentioned above, teachers' personal development and experiences enable them to learn about new pedagogical trends, but they still need professional programs to help them in this respect.

Extract 25 (ET5/Sattar)

Even if there is, they will be boring and traditional, most of the courses just elaborate on testing, scoring, and the form of paper exam and its components. Therefore, relying on self-development will be a better solution.

Having been involved in a few incomplete workshops helped them gain some knowledge of CIC. One of the teachers who participated in a paid course commented on how those courses could affect their teaching and enhance teachers' efficiency.

Extract 26 (ET2/Widad)

Participating in paid webinars and courses help and guide me a lot in developing my own way.

4.1.4. Iraqi Teachers' Beliefs About the Practical Components of CIC

In response to the questions about teachers' required competencies in implementing CIC, novice and experienced participants were different in views.

4.1.4.1. Iraqi Novice Teachers' Beliefs About the Practical Components of CIC (NTs). When the novice teachers were asked what competencies they needed to create an interactive atmosphere in their classes, their answers were limited to being qualified in speaking skills and having control over the social aspect of conversations. This refers to teachers' abilities to ask questions and offer explanations throughout the lesson.

Extract 27 (NT1/Abd-Alrahman)

Teachers should manipulate the speech style, I mean they should employ a variety of methods to offer for different contexts, like asking questions in different stages of the lesson.

Extract 28 (NT2/Mohammad)

Doing group activities or pair works with a leader in each group, will help in the success of the mission.

One of the participants mentioned that teachers were advised to be well-prepared for each class and design a flexible plan.

Extract 29 (NT5/Eman)

Always have an engaging learning, well-designed lesson with flexible plan. This advice is crucial over all others.

4.1.4.2. Iraqi Experienced Teachers' Beliefs About the Practical Components of CIC (ETs). Expert teachers have a deeper comprehension of the complexity of classroom interaction in contrast to novice teachers. The results from the responses of experienced teachers revealed a relatively mature perspective of their interactive English teaching abilities. Most of them presented the idea of having a high-quality knowledge of classroom content knowledge, knowledge of learner need, and pedagogical knowledge. However, this type of knowledge needs practice in order to be used in the classroom.

Extract 30 (ET2/Widad)

To create an interactive atmosphere inside the classroom, teachers should have a number of competencies like the ability to deal with conversation issues, the ability to manage the content in an interesting way with good instruction and feedback using variety of activities.

Teachers should create an atmosphere that encourages students to become autonomous learners. Thus, in challenging situations, teachers' scaffolding is essential. Two of them focused on giving good instructions as well as offering feedback on their classroom participation.

Extract 31 (ET1/Rana)

Teachers encourage students to learn by presenting information in creative and effective ways. Whole-group instruction, individual attention, hands-on

learning, and looking at the world through a global lens are all ways that teachers can be successful.

4.1.5. Iraqi Teachers' Beliefs About the Role of Teaching Experience in Implementing CIC Tasks and Activities

In response to the questions on the role of classroom experience in developing CIC and the most effective tasks and activities in supporting it, interesting results were obtained.

4.1.5.1. Iraqi Novice Teachers' Beliefs About the Role of Teaching Experience in Implementing CIC Tasks and Activities (NTs). Novice teachers believed on working by themselves and stated that experienced teachers' pieces of advice will pave the way for them.

Extract 32 (NT1/Abd-Alrahman)

They must follow the new methods which need lots of experience to have control over them and expand their roles as teachers.

Extract 33 (NT2/Mohammad)

I think experienced teachers have their own strategies that they acquired through years teaching various learners.

According to some teachers, it seems that they know that practice is at the heart of acquiring new competencies and continued professional development (CPD) is the key to being an effective teacher.

Extract 34 (NT4/Essraa)

We may call these strategies "the art of talk." I mean when to ask, when to add, when to correct, and when to end the talk.

Extract 35 (NT5/Eman)

Knowing students' personalities and names make students feel relaxed and comfortable and create a motivated.

4.1.5.2. Iraqi Experienced Teachers' Beliefs About the Role of Teaching Experience in Implementing CIC Tasks and Activities (ETs). The experienced teachers expressed their positive feelings about the use of interactional activities in the class.

Extract 36 (ET1/Rana)

Well, I think the more strategies I use, the more active learners and classroom I will build.

Extract 37 (ET3/Maali)

My approach is to use discussions, role plays, and information exchange. It also depends on the teacher's role. They have got different roles like resource providers, mentors, and effective planners.

Though they could not name the strategies, they possessed a number of techniques that would help them increase interaction.

Extract 38 (ET4/Murtadha)

I found giving them much more time to express their ideas and negotiate opinions. These are the best technique that help them feel safely to continue talking.

4.2. Discussion

This study aimed to explore Iraqi EFL teachers' conceptions and beliefs about CIC. The results of the study shed light on the beliefs of EFL teachers about CIC. Regarding the degree of their familiarity with CIC and how they define CIC and its features, both novice and experienced teachers were almost similar. They had similar beliefs on the explicit knowledge and instructional skills of classroom interaction and CIC. Three novice teachers reported their use of communicative strategies and language skills to make learners think critically and express their perspectives. They stressed on procedural knowledge and its importance in teaching and learning while experienced teachers focused more on increasing learning space through giving more opportunity for learners to participate. One experienced teacher also talked of using IRF technique to make a dialogic interaction. Other teachers explained how language use interactively can create positive environment full of support and help.

Our findings support the proposals put forth by Allen (2002) and Flores (2001) that teaching experience has a discernible impact on the teacher's beliefs. The results of this study indicate that although novice teachers firmly believed that the interactive method was the most effective teaching strategy, they agreed with the traditional view of teaching. In addition, some novice teachers indicated that they favored student-centered tactics as their primary focus and intended to alter their teaching style. However, experienced teachers' responses revealed that their approaches, strategies, and tactics for

creating their classes interactive and employing the right strategies to give students more opportunities to learn intelligently differed from those of novice teachers, largely depending on the length of their teaching careers (Cazden, 2001; Sundari, 2017). They looked partially more skilled at controlling classroom interactions by encouraging students to reflect critically rather than reply immediately (Li & Zou, 2017). On the other hand, novice teachers' responses revealed that their knowledge and skills were limited and superficial. Pedagogical competence was low because they could not effectively administer educational processes. As a result, the quality of students' interactions could not be enhanced by a novice teacher's instruction. Due to their simple understanding of interactions, teacher engagement with learners was not that much complex. Moreover, because of their lack of agency in the areas of content selection, delivery, assessment, and reflection, the novice teachers had a passive, simplistic approach with learners for their lack of understanding and application of knowledge, concepts, and processes. Our findings confirm Sert's (2019) suggestions that interactional practices aligned with pedagogical objectives can heighten teachers' awareness of the significance of classroom interaction in the context of learning.

The second interview question related to the teachers' beliefs about curriculum and if it supports CIC. Most novice and experienced teachers agreed that the new Iraqi curriculum is learner centered and follows the communicative approach and the main priorities are to focus on active learning and interaction. The finding indicated a mismatch between the teachers' beliefs and the curriculum content as also observed in Yu et al. (2020).

The third part of the interview was about teacher education. Teacher education is regarded as a powerful and valid procedure for producing trained teachers if it is handled appropriately. This confirms the integration of what Walsh (2013) called a *third strand* within teacher education programs, emphasizing the examination of classroom interaction to enhance educators' awareness of its pivotal role in teaching and learning. He contends that teachers should be equipped with tools to scrutinize their own interactions and be motivated to undertake research for mutual benefits to themselves and their learners (Walsh, 2013, p. 19). This explicit emphasis on interaction within teacher education, Walsh argues, ultimately leads to the acquisition of "Classroom Interactional Competence" by teachers (Walsh, 2006). Therefore, there is a pressing need for teachers, especially language instructors, to discern, comprehend, and reflect on their practices, particularly the impact of communication patterns on their students' learning outcomes (Farrell, 2023; Zolghadri, et al., 2019). Yet, several detailed reports on the quality of teacher

education programs in Iraq have revealed that the Iraqi educational system has some deficiencies in these programs. Despite the success achieved in establishing innovative programs, significant changes are still required. Novice and experienced teachers asserted the absence of these types of programs in general. They said that most short courses or workshops are held for discussing the question form, testing, assessment, and other managerial issues. Experienced teachers also mentioned that they developed themselves through paid courses and self-development. This allowed them to use different tools to make their learning active. Preparing prospective teachers requires pre-service instructional programs with a solid structure, training courses, and field experiences (Dai et al., 2022; Wong & Waring, 2020).

The next interview question was about practical components of CIC. It consisted of three sub-questions on competencies teachers need in order to implement interaction, the activities or tasks in the course which support CIC and how teachers' practices promote classroom interactional competence. For the first sub-question, most novice and experienced teachers stressed on teachers' pedagogical and communication and interpersonal competencies such as cooperation and team work, teacher-students relationship, feedback about student performance, organization and planning, and classroom management (Walsh & Sert, 2019). The second sub-question, experienced and novice teachers urged on using group exercises, role playing to increase the space for learning (Watanabe, 2017). Even though the instructors we questioned may have similar views on techniques, most confessed having difficulty adopting CIC in the classroom. All of the teachers interviewed reported having difficulty generating engagement in their classrooms because pupils were less inclined to speak than anticipated. This resulted in teachers assisting students in creating a safer classroom atmosphere whenever they interacted. The third part, teachers answered it through offering a verity of chances of interaction and they also reported using strategies like scaffolding to help their learners cope with difficulties. Teachers did not really comprehend how to describe a strategy, and there was a misguided belief about what makes an interaction a strategy.

The last section of interview questions was about the years of experience and its effect on teachers' performance and the strategies experienced teachers use to develop CIC. Derakhshan et al. (2023) reported differences between novice and experienced teachers in their practice of interactional strategies. Our findings also indicate that although novice teachers agreed they use some techniques for interaction, due to their lack of classroom experience, they reported high expectations of their own abilities as

instructors. In addition, they were just beginning to build up their repertoire of instructional strategies and techniques. Their responses to the second part of the question considering the strategies they would use, experienced teachers relied more on their years of experience, which make them control, and exercise their roles as teachers. Other responses were about using clarification request or asking elaboration questions and finally knowing when they talk, add, and correct to interact positively to increase student engagement in their lessons. While experienced teacher responses on the strategies they employ in order to enhance CIC included using IRF as a successful strategy to develop interaction, other teachers preferred to use group and pair work with different tasks to increase discussion interactions.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The results of the study shed light on the cognition and beliefs of EFL teachers regarding Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC). The findings indicate some differences between novice and experienced teachers in terms of their understanding and awareness of CIC. The responses of novice teachers revealed a limited understanding of CIC, with some participants even confusing it with other classroom activities such as group work or pair work. It is evident that these teachers lacked the necessary knowledge and training to articulate a precise definition of CIC. Their understanding of CIC was superficial, focusing on simple classroom techniques such as questioning and feedback. This indicates the need for greater awareness and education on the nuances of CIC among novice teachers. On the other hand, experienced teachers displayed a relatively higher level of knowledge and awareness of CIC. They recognized the importance of creating a positive classroom environment and strong student-teacher relationships for effective interaction. These teachers acknowledged the role of language use in promoting learning and emphasized the significance of engaging students in expressive activities. However, their understanding of CIC was not always comprehensive, and they expressed a need for further training and practical implementation of CIC strategies. The findings also revealed varying beliefs among teachers regarding the place of CIC in the curriculum. Novice teachers generally struggled to grasp the connection between the curriculum and CIC, while experienced teachers recognized the potential of the curriculum to support and supplement CIC through learner-centered activities. However, it is important to note that both groups of teachers agreed on the limited availability of training programs specifically focused on CIC. This highlights the need for L2 teacher education

that equips teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively implement CIC in their classrooms. Due to the nature of interview, which cannot capture the complexity and context-dependency of beliefs (Creswell, 2014; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015), it is suggested that other data elicited via observation and survey triangulate the findings of the current study.

Acknowledgements

Authors would like to acknowledge the participation of the teachers who took part in this study.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Demographic Questions

What is your name? Where are you from? What is the name of your school? Are you a teacher in private or state school? How long have you been teaching English? What level do you teach? Do you teach in a poor/rich area?

A-Beliefs about knowledge

1- Are you familiar with the term classroom interactional competence?

2-How do you define classroom interactional competence?

3-What are the features of CIC?

B-Beliefs about curriculum/course

4-Dose your school curriculum support CIC?

5-if yes explained how?

C-Beliefs about teacher education

6-Are there any teacher education programs requiring you theoretically and practically to implement CIC either as pre-service or in-service education?

D-Beliefs about practical components

7-what competencies do teachers need in order to implement interaction as a tool to mediate and assist language learning in their classes?

8-What are the most activities or tasks in the course which support CIC?

9-How do teachers' practices (moves) promote CIC?

E-Beliefs about experience

10- Do you use strategies for CI and what strategies do you think experienced teachers tend to use to develop CIC? This question is for a novice teacher

11-what strategies/tasks do you use in your classes to develop CIC? This question for an experienced teacher