



Mazandaran University

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

English Department

**A Comparison of Novice and Experienced EFL teachers'  
Pedagogical knowledge in Iran**

MA Thesis in TEFL

Supervisor:

**Dr. Rajabali Rayati**

Advisor:

**Dr. baqer Yaqubi**

By:

**Sima Khalaj**

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*In the Name of God*

*The Compassionate*

*The Merciful*

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## Abstract

The present study set out (a) to examine the categories of pedagogical knowledge related to the act of teaching of novice and experienced teachers as gleaned from their verbal report of what they were thinking about while teaching and (b) to compare the categories of pedagogical knowledge of novice and experienced teachers. The aim of comparing these two groups of teachers was to see whether differences between them could be attributed to differences in their number of years of teaching experience. Stimulated recall methodology was used to collect the data. The results of the study indicated that novice and experienced teachers were to the large extent similar to each other in term of major PK categories, however, there were differences both in the number and particularly the order of the thoughts experienced and novice teachers produced. Experienced teachers produced an average of 1.7 pedagogical thought per minute, while their novice teacher counterparts produced 1.31 thoughts. The two Categories; *Aid Comprehension* (PTUs dealing with ways to help students' memory and comprehension) and *Problem* (PTUs dealing with the difficulties or problems the teachers had or anticipated they would have with the lesson and the students) have been shown to be a significant area of difference, both at the category level and at the level of detailed PTUs.

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### **List of abbreviation**

|     |                                   |
|-----|-----------------------------------|
| PK  | Pedagogical Knowledge             |
| EFL | English as a Foreign Language     |
| ESL | English as a Second Language      |
| TTC | Teacher Training Course           |
| PTU | Pedagogical Oriented Thought Unit |

## **Appendix**

Appendix: One teachers ' transcription with its categorization as sample

# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

## **1.1 Statement of the problem**

Until 1970s, teacher education has been largely based on 'knowledge transmission view' which emphasized the idea that knowledge about teaching and learning can be transmitted to individual teacher-learners through processes of professional education. "A popular notion was that education is something carried out by one person, a teacher, standing in front of a class and transmitting information to a group of learners" (Williams & Burden, 1997: 5). Freeman (2001) in his article 'Second language teacher education' states, "In general terms, it is fair to say that teacher education was predicated the idea that knowledge about teaching and learning can be transmitted through processes of organized professional education to form individual teachers" (p. 73). Since the 1980s, this transmission view gradually gave way to construction view in which teacher-learners built their own understanding of language teaching through their experience by integrating theory, research and opinion with empirical and reflective study of their own classroom practices. This "shift to a constructive perspective of teaching and teacher learning make teachers a primary source of knowledge about teaching, reflected in an increasing focus on teacher cognition, the role of reflection in teacher development, and the importance of teacher inquiry and research through education and development programs" (Crandall 2000: 35).

In fact during the last decade, research on teaching has increasingly focused on the knowledge and beliefs that underlie teachers' classroom practice rather than on their behavior (e.g. Borg, 2003; Meijer et al, 1999; El-Okda, 2005). This change in focus follows from developments in cognitive psychology based on the fundamental assumption that one's cognition and actions influence each other (cf. Clark & Peterson, 1986, as cited in Borg, 2006).

And finally behaviorist conceptions of instruction have been replaced by cognitive/ social view of teaching. In this new conceptualization , teaching is a complicated activity in which

“teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs” (Borg, 2003, p. 81). The way teachers teach is not only affected by the training they have received, it is also a result of their hidden pedagogies, or their personal philosophy of what teaching is all about (Denscombe, 1982).

Therefore it is claimed that the chief determinant of teacher behavior in class seem to be his/her knowledge, theories and beliefs, henceforth pedagogical knowledge (PK), commonly defined as “the teachers’ accumulated knowledge about the teaching act (e.g. its goals, procedures, strategies) that serves as the basis for his or her classroom behavior and activities (Gatbonton1999, p. 35). In the literature focusing on this issue, gaining insight into teachers’ pedagogical knowledge have been introduced essential for a fuller and more complete understanding of the teaching process.

In fact a large number of studies of teacher cognition in both general education field (e.g. Clandinin & Connelly, 1987; Leinhardt, 1990) and second language teaching field (Gatbonton, 1999; Johnson, 1994; Richards, 1998) examined teachers’ pedagogical knowledge and beliefs.

Although one can gather insight from novice and experienced teachers’ thinking and behavior independently, Gatbonton asserts some advantages for comparing both together in the same study. In her (2008)’s paper for instance, she asserts "examining both sets of teachers together in the same study allows one to compare them on very specific points and identify more clearly how they differ or how they are similar to each other. In addition, by identifying what components of pedagogical knowledge are missing in the novice teachers’ repertoire, but present in their experienced counterparts, one can form hypotheses about gaps in the novice teachers’ pedagogical knowledge and see how these may be filled through teacher training” (p. 163). However a review of literature indicates that most studies conducted to understand

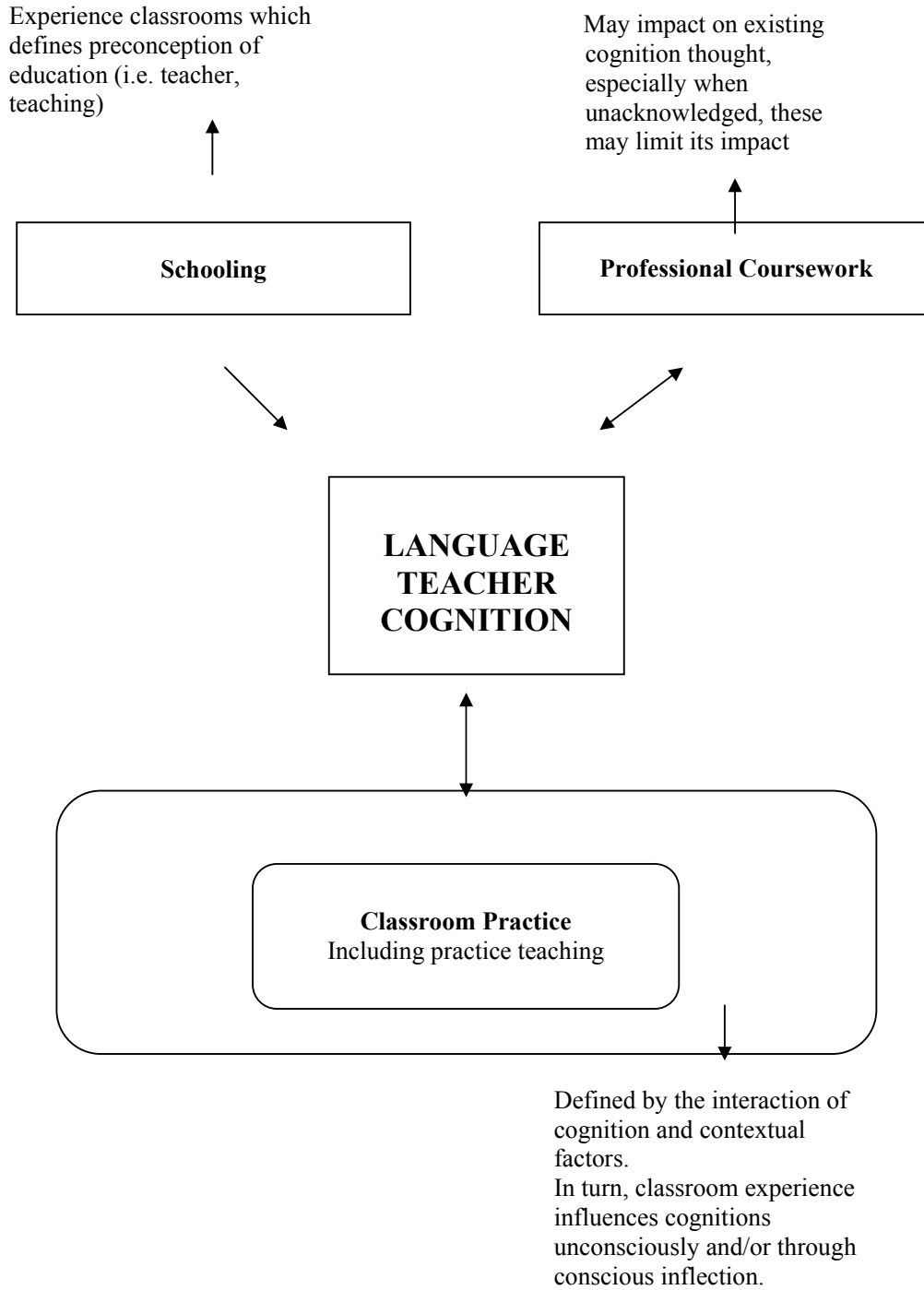
L2 teachers' pedagogical knowledge have focused separately on either experienced or novice teachers but seldom both together in the same study. The paucity of research can also be understood from both Gatbonton's assertion in her article in 1999 and her latest work in 2008. In the latter, for instance, she asserts that "although comparative studies on novice and experienced teachers abound in the general teacher education field, such studies are still rare in the L2 teacher education field" (p. 162). Hence the present study intends to focus on investigating novice and experienced EFL teachers' pedagogical knowledge and compare them with each other

## **1.2 Conceptual framework**

The conceptual framework of the study will be Borg's (2006) model on teacher cognition. "The model represents a schematic conceptualization of teaching within which teacher cognition plays a pivotal role in teachers' lives (Borg, 2003). (See figure1).

Figure 1.1

Elements and processes in Language teacher cognition (Borg, 2006: 283)





In addition it reveals that there is a close and an indivisible relationship among teachers' cognition, teachers' learning and their classroom practices in that those cognitive process and structures known as 'cognition' strongly influence, and are influenced by what teachers bring to their teaching process, what teachers learn during their professional coursework as well as what teachers do in the classroom.

As to the first component of the model, i.e., schooling, it is claimed that in addition to their personal early experiences in life "which may be defined through relationship with influential adults, such as parents" (Borg, 2006: 281), teachers' beliefs before entering teacher preparation programs are highly shaped by the learning experiences they had had during long time of being schoolchildren. That is, their prior cognition usually originates from observing different methods of teaching they received during these years. So this "form[s] the basis of their initial conceptualizations of L2 teaching during teacher education, and may continue to be influential throughout their professional lives" (Borg, 2003: 88).

As to the second component ,i.e., teacher education, it is an intervention process for the purpose of impacting on the teachers' preconceptions, more specifically those inappropriate, unrealistic understandings of learning and teaching often held by teacher trainees. For teacher education to be effective it should include consciousness-raising opportunities of the pre-existing beliefs, long period of practical experiences and repeated cycles of guided reflection in order to provide "the opportunities to acquire ways of thinking (general strategies, personal orientation, and habits of mind) that characterize being a member of language teaching community" (Crandall, 2000: 38).

As regard the third component ,i.e., the interactive role of the teaching experience, and teacher cognition that constitutes the focus of the present study, it can be stated that teachers' plan, decisions, and what they do in classroom are highly influenced by what they know, think, and believe, either consciously or unconsciously. In turn, what happens in classroom (i.e.

classroom experience) can influence and improve their cognition if they are consciously aware of them, see their classroom as laboratory for continuous research about learning-teaching process, have 'reflection-on-action', i.e. "by constantly generating questions and checking out emerging theories with both personal past experience and with the reflections of others" (Williams and Burden, 1997: 54), and reevaluate their previous knowledge.

Research in area related to teacher experience (e.g. Crooks and Arakaki, 1999) is in short supply to exactly pinpoint the effects of such a variable on teachers' performance in L2 settings. Hence the present study intends to address the impact of experience on the type and frequency of pedagogical thoughts teachers make use of in conducting their classes.

### **1.3 Objective and significance of the study**

The present study is based on the premise that studies comparing experienced and novice teachers' instructional thoughts and actions are essential to fully understand the professional development of teachers. Similarities confirm the areas of pedagogical knowledge that seem essential to the performance of the pedagogical task (by virtue of the fact that experienced teachers use them) and indicate which of these the novice teachers have already acquired.

In addition, examining the thinking and performance of experienced teachers and comparing them with novice teachers can reveal what aspects of pedagogical knowledge are associated with experience. In fact by comparing the two groups we can see what PK is available in experienced teachers but missing in novice teachers to incorporate them in teacher education course for the latter's assistance. Examining the thinking and performance of novice teachers as they grapple with essential aspects of teaching (e.g. managing learning in the classroom) also provides insight into difficulties they encounter in becoming experienced.

The purpose of the present study, therefore, is in the first place, to examine the categories of pedagogical knowledge related to the act of teaching of novice and experienced teachers as

gleaned from their verbal report of what they were thinking about while teaching. Its second purpose is to compare the categories of pedagogical knowledge of novice and experienced teachers. The aim of comparing these two groups of teachers is to see whether differences between them could be attributed to differences in their number of years of teaching experience.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

Regarding the above matters, in this study I am going to seek answers to the following research questions:

**1-**What categories of pedagogical knowledge can be inferred from the novice teachers' report of their 'thought' and how frequently does each category appear?

**2-**What categories of pedagogical knowledge can be inferred from the experienced teachers' report of their 'thought' and how frequently does each category appear?

**3-**Are the pedagogical knowledge categories extracted from the experienced teachers' data the same or different from those extracted from the novice teachers?

## **1.5 Key Concepts**

**Pedagogical knowledge:** As Gatbonton (1999) defines, pedagogical knowledge refers to the teachers' accumulated knowledge about the teaching act (e.g. its' goals, procedures, strategies) that serves as the basis for his or her classroom behavior and activities.

**Experienced teachers:** The term refers to those teachers with many years of teaching behind them, with 'many' interpreted in various studies as at least to five years' (Gatbonton, 2008, p. 162).

**Novice teachers:** The term refers to those who 'are still undergoing training, who have just completed their training, or who have just commenced teaching and still have very little (e.g. less than two years) experience behind them' (Gatbonton, 2008, p. 162).