Pedagogical Reasoning for Interactive Decisions: Case of Novice EFL High School Teachers

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Abstract

Decision-making is a vital professional competency that develops through practice; however, the literature on novice EFL teachers' decision-making and pedagogical reasoning remains underexplored, particularly in interactive classroom contexts. This qualitative multiple-case study examines novice Iranian EFL teachers' abilities in decision-making and pedagogical reasoning within such contexts. Data were collected over one academic year via audio journals, classroom observations, and post-observation interviews, enabling a longitudinal view of growth. The analysis centers on the decisions five novices made during the interactive phase and the reasoning supporting those actions. Findings reveal decisions spanning management domains, including learner behavior, instructional management, and the use of space, time, and technology. Reasoning encompasses knowledge of learners and pedagogy, along with personality, experience, attitudes, beliefs, and commitment. Implications address teacher education, practicum design, and curriculum development for context-responsive practice.

Introduction

Teaching, like any other profession, demands application of specialized skills, knowledge, and competencies. One of the important teacher competencies is making decisions throughout their professional practice, i.e., before, during, and after teaching (Li, 2019; Lloyd, 2019; Trevisan et al., 2021). Decisions made before teaching are known as 'pre-active' decisions, while those made during teaching are 'interactive' and the ones made after teaching are recognized as 'post-active' decisions. Among these three decision phases, 'interactive' decisions have been of most challenge to novice teachers and of special interest to educational researchers (Khatib & Saeedian, 2021; Siuty et al., 2016). This is because of the nature of classroom "multidimensionality, simultaneity,

immediacy, and unpredictability" which, as claimed by Tsui (2003, p. 30), calls for the teacher's ability "to process simultaneously transmitted information very quickly, [and] to attend to multiple events simultaneously." While teaching, teachers are engaged in certain actions that require complex cognitive skills, careful planning, and rapid decision-making to manage complexities of multidimensional classroom situations. This management skill of classroom procedure requires online or interactive decision-making, the spectrum of which seems wide and varied requiring an in-depth analysis of teachers' cognition, reasoning, and deliberation of their actions.

Studies on teachers' interactive decision-making areas or domains have increasingly gained momentum in mainstream teacher education over the past decades (Asghari et al., 2021; Cornito, 2021; Gün, 2014; Karimi & Vaez-Dalili, 2022; Khatib & Saeedian, 2021; Koni & Krull, 2018; Lloyd, 2019; Stosich, 2021; Stouraitis, 2017; Wermke et al., 2018). Some researchers have addressed teachers' management skills especially classroom management. Some have identified domains of managerial, instructional and curricular while others have attempted to explore teachers' cognitive processes in instructional planning and the interactive phase of their practice; mainly by comparing novice and experienced teachers, in order to develop a model of teacher thinking, or to explore the concept of teacher expertise. Also, processes of teacher decision-making and control have been addressed and investigated to reach empirical understanding of teacher autonomy. Such practice-based experiences grow out of drawing attention to certain elements of instructional context when addressing teaching problems or dilemmas and making reasonable decisions about them. However, novice teachers have not been the focus of researchers, nor have interactive decisions and pedagogical reasoning of novices been investigated. The present study aims at exploring types of decisions novice language teachers make in their instructional contexts and the pedagogical reasons they hold for the decisions they make.

Literature Review

The dynamic and evolving nature of the teaching profession has spurred researchers to develop models and frameworks that articulate its structure, components, and elements. Notably, Danielson's framework (Danielson, 2007, 2013) remains influential for describing teaching in its entirety, with four domains that encompass activities before, during, and after professional practice: planning and preparation; classroom environment; instruction; and professional responsibilities. Within this framework, two domains foreground interactive practice: classroom environment (e.g., creating respect and rapport, establishing a culture for learning, managing classroom procedures and student behavior, organizing physical space) and instruction (e.g.,

communicating with students, questioning and discussion techniques, engaging students, using assessment in instruction, and demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness). More recent work, however, suggests the need to situate these domains within the dynamic, context-responsive realities of contemporary classrooms (e.g., technology integration, hybrid modalities, culturally responsive practice) and to consider how decision-making operates within those contexts (e.g., Kavanagh et al., 2020; Kourti & Potari, 2024; Li, 2019; Marschall et al., 2025; Wermke et al., 2018).

The study of teachers' decision-making and its underlying reasoning has attracted sustained scholarly attention in the 2010s and 2020s. Earlier work characterized teaching as an interpretative-transformational process wherein teachers interpret student activity and meaning-making to guide instructional choices (Pihlström & Sutinen, 2012; Sutinen, 2008). This perspective has been extended by subsequent researchers who examine the cognitive, affective, and contextual factors shaping moment-to-moment decisions. For example, recent studies emphasize that expert-like decision-making involves balancing knowledge of pedagogy, knowledge of learners, and the situational demands of the classroom, with professional beliefs and dispositions mediating instruction (Kang, 2025; Kavanagh et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2017; Tajeddin & Bolouri, 2023; Wermke et al., 2018).

More contemporary investigations have foregrounded classroom interactions and real-time decision-making in diverse contexts. Li (2019) argues that teaching expertise emerges from distributed and context-sensitive knowledge—the convergence of personal experience, subject knowledge, contextual knowledge, and pedagogical knowledge—within Classroom Interactional Competence. This view aligns with the notion that cognition in action is fluid and context-dependent, rather than a fixed set of correct practices. In line with this, Li's work contributes to understanding how novice and experienced teachers develop professional identities and capabilities through situated decision-making. Recent reviews and empirical studies (2020–2025) further corroborate that context, culture, technology, and policy pressures shape how teachers reason and decide in the moment (e.g., McGugan et al., 2023; Saeedian et al., 2025; Shabani et al., 2022; Tajeddin & Bolouri, 2023).

Several studies since 2018 have explored misalignments or tensions between teachers' beliefs and practices, particularly in classroom management, organization, and pedagogical knowledge. Mehrpour and Moghaddam (2018) documented mismatches across a range of domains in language teaching, indicating that beliefs do not always translate into practice. These findings corroborate the idea that developing decision-making expertise requires aligning cognitive schemas with contextual demands and institutional constraints. More recent work continues to document belief–practice

tensions and the role of reflective practice, professional development, and collaborative inquiry in aligning these facets (McGugan et al., 2023; Saeedian & Shojakhanlou, 2024; Unciti & Palau, 2023).

In the domain of novice EFL teachers, recent work highlights how initial decision-making and pedagogical reasoning unfold in the interactive phase. Asghari et al. (2021) found that novice EFL teachers commonly make decisions aimed at information transfer, learner motivation, time management, and progression toward language achievement. Khatib and Saeedian (2021) examined initial decision-making and pedagogical reasoning through managerial-oriented interactions between novice and experienced teachers, underscoring the role of negotiated interactions in shaping early practice. Yazdanpanah and Sahragard (2017) compared novice and expert teachers' procedural knowledge, emphasizing domains such as classroom management, teacher-student rapport, and talk management. While these studies illuminate important facets of novice practice, they also signal the need for more systematic, longitudinal inquiries into how novice teachers develop decision-making competencies within dynamic instructional contexts. Recent longitudinal studies and cross-context syntheses (2020–2025) reinforce the value of following novice teachers over time to capture the development of decision-making repertoires and the influence of mentorship, practicum design, and school culture (e.g. El-Henawy, 2025; Li, 2025; Shanks et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2025; Watkins, 2025).

In sum, contemporary scholarship converges on a view of teacher decision-making as a complex, context-dependent practice that integrates personal beliefs, pedagogical knowledge, and situational factors. It also emphasizes the role of interactive contexts, technology, and evolving classroom realities in shaping decision-making processes. To advance understanding in this area, recent longitudinal and cross-context studies—particularly focusing on novice teachers and interactive classroom dynamics—are essential for informing teacher education, practicum design, and policy aimed at context-responsive practice.

Based on contemporary research on decision-making and pedagogical reasoning, this process is central to teaching practice and exhibits efficiency when shaped by social, educational, cultural, and, as Demirkasimoglu (2010) notes, political contexts. The accumulating evidence underscores the importance of decision-making, particularly for novice teachers who often struggle to translate knowledge into practice. Against this backdrop, the present study aims to (a) identify novice EFL teachers' interactive decisions and (b) examine the reasoning they articulate for these interactive decisions within high school classroom contexts. Accordingly, the study is organized around the following research questions: What are the domains of high school novice EFL

teachers' interactive decision-making and pedagogical reasoning? In other words, which interactive decisions do high school novice EFL teachers make, and what rationales do they provide to justify their decision-making?

The Study

The primary aim of this study is to identify the domains of decision-making and pedagogical reasoning among high school novice EFL teachers during the interactive phase of teaching. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how novice language teachers deploy their knowledge in real-time classroom decisions and how they reason about their instructional actions in the context of their first teaching experiences. The inquiry also examines how social, educational, and political issues surrounding the context of practice influence interactive decision-making and reflective practice. By identifying the domains of decision-making and pedagogical reasoning among novice EFL teachers, the study aims to inform the design of teacher education programs that prepare novices to apply their knowledge effectively to particular instructional actions or novel classroom problems. The findings are expected to reveal how novice teachers translate theoretical knowledge into practice under real-world conditions, identify gaps between knowledge and action, and suggest targeted strategies for preparing novice teachers to respond effectively to classroom challenges.

Method

Participants

This case study involved five female novice English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers teaching at grades 7–9 in junior high schools across multiple districts in Tehran, Iran. Participants were purposefully selected based on recent BA in TEFL completion, current employment with the Ministry of Education, first-year teaching status, and diverse practice contexts across districts. The selection reflected variations in district-level factors such as facilities, culture, and socioeconomic background, which may influence teaching and demand different teacher withitness (i.e., a teacher's ability to monitor classroom events, anticipate student needs, and maintain instructional control while remaining responsive to students' cues; Wong & Wong, 2009). Anonymity was preserved for all participants in accordance with ethical guidelines. The participants' demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Teachers' Demographic Information

Name	Gender	Age	Field of Study	Degree	Grades of Practice
Atie	F	22	TEFL	B.A	7
Mary	F	22	TEFL	B.A	7 & 9
Yasi	F	23	TEFL	B.A	7& 8
Zari	F	24	TEFL	B.A	7 & 8
Tahere	F	23	TEFL	B.A	8 & 9

Note: F=female; TEFL: Teaching English as a Foreign Language; B.A. =Bachelor of Art

Data Collection Sources

The complex, diverse, and multidimensional nature of teachers' interactive decision-making, as described by Danielson (2007), prompted the researcher to employ multiple data collection methods. This approach aimed to enhance the credibility and dependability of the findings. Building on Cohen et al. (2018), who recommended using observations, interviews, and audio journals to capture participants' cognitions and perceptions, the researcher applied these qualitative methods to examine novice teachers' interactive decisions and the rationale underlying them. These methods were deliberately chosen to illuminate novice teachers' experiences and the meanings they ascribe to their actions. To ensure data accuracy, equity, and consistency, participants were informed that they would not be evaluated or judged based on the audio journals, observations, or interviews, and that the collected data would be used solely for research purposes.

Classroom Observations

To conduct non-participant classroom observations, the researcher observed and video-recorded the teaching practices of the cases to examine their decision-making skills. Each participant was observed for a full session, with session lengths ranging from 70 to 90 minutes in accordance with district or school regulations. Across the study, each participant was observed three times, limited by school and district policies. In total, 15 classroom observation sessions were conducted, yielding approximately 1,230 minutes (about 21 hours) of video recordings.

During the observation sessions, the online (interactive) decisions of participants were considered. The video recordings facilitated detailed documentation of the cases' teaching practices for subsequent in-depth analysis. Following each observation, participants were interviewed to elicit their reasoning behind their decisions. Thus, the rationale for conducting the observations was linked to the planned post-observation interviews.

Post-Observation Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured and conducted face-to-face in English and Persian and were audio-recorded for documentation and analysis. The interviews focused on novice teachers' decision-making competency and pedagogical reasoning during the interactive phase of teaching. Accordingly, interview questions were informed by two domains of Danielson's framework (2007; 2013): Classroom Environment and Instruction. The researcher conducted all interviews, each lasting approximately 20–30 minutes. Each case was interviewed three times during one academic year, on the same day as the corresponding classroom observation, as noted earlier.

Semi-structured interviews allowed for adaptation; responses to one question often guided subsequent questions, preventing a fixed set of questions across all cases. Following each interview, the researcher conducted meticulous in-depth analyses of the participants' answers. When necessary, and after reviewing the recorded files, additional interviews were pursued to solicit further explanations or clarifications, sometimes via telephone to conserve time and align with school regulations.

Content analyses of the data were non-linear; data from classroom observations, post-observation interviews, and audio journals were repeatedly analyzed during and after data collection to enhance accuracy and precision. For example, responses from the first post-observation interview were used as the basis for questions in the final post-observation interview. Similarly, themes identified in classroom observations and audio journals were sought in the interviews.

Audio Journals

Novice teachers recorded audio journals throughout the study (one academic year) to describe the decisions they made during teaching practice and the rationales for those decisions. Audio recording, rather than written journals, was chosen to simplify preparation and sharing, eliminating the need for typing and reducing the likelihood that events would be forgotten. There was no predetermined limit on the number or length of audio journals; participants decided when to record, selecting occasions, events, sessions, or classroom procedures for which they wished to describe their decisions. Participants explained the events, stated the decisions they made, and articulated the reasons for those decisions. Their explanations focused on managing teaching performance during class, addressing student learning and behavior, and considering actions to take during instruction. Sessions occurred weekly, and participants typically recorded and transmitted their audio journals soon after each class when memories were clearest.

Audio journals were recorded on participants' cellphones, which they habitually carried, facilitating easy sharing. To further streamline data collection, files were shared via social media applications soon after recording. The researcher recognized the challenges associated with the first year of teaching for novice teachers and thus sought to minimize participant burden in data collection. As noted earlier, participants determined the number of audio journals to submit based on the classroom events and decisions they wished to share. By the end of the academic year, approximately 25 audio files were collected from the cases, ranging from about 2 to 10 minutes each, for a total of 180 minutes (3 hours) of audio. These recordings were transcribed and coded to identify the domains of interest.

Data Analysis

In this study, qualitative data analysis was conducted using descriptive coding, incorporating codes for situations, participant perspectives, cognitive processes about people and objects, process, activity, and event codes, strategy codes, relationship and social-structure codes, and methods codes derived from the data (Cohen et al., 2011). Both open and axial coding were employed. During open coding, transcripts of audio journals, classroom observation video files, and post-interview audio files were read line by line, and codes were assigned to phrases, sentences, or paragraphs to address fundamental questions such as who, why, what, where, how, how much, and how long. Axial coding followed, with related open codes grouped under category labels, enabling the development of hierarchies of categories. To enhance precision and rigor, NVivo 12 Pro, in combination with manual coding, was used to code the data. Memory checks of the recorded classroom observation video files and audio recordings of interviews were also conducted to maintain accuracy and rigor.

Findings

Classroom Observation Findings

As stated earlier, the participants' classes were both observed and video recorded three times making up 15 sessions of observations throughout the academic year. In total, about 21 hours of video recordings were analyzed. Decisions associated with the interactive phase of teaching were revealed. Table 2 demonstrates the results.

Table 2

Novice Teachers' Decision-Making in the Classroom Observations

Teaching Phase	Domain	Decisions
Interactive	Class Management	Response to misbehavior
		Flexibility
		Accountability
		Feedback to learners
		Time management
		Materials management
		Physical space management
		Technology management
		Instructional group management
		Interaction management
		Learner participation management
		Classroom disruption management
		Management of the unexpected events

Table 2 illustrates how classroom observations revealed novice teachers' decisions in the management domain during interactive phase of teaching. These decisions encompassed responses to learner misbehavior, demonstrated flexibility, accountability, feedback to learners, and a range of management skills, including: time management, materials management, physical space management, technology management, instructional-group management, interaction management, learner-participation management, disruption management, and management of unexpected events.

Examples of responses to learner misbehavior ranged from nonverbal cues (e.g., a negative look) and verbal reprimands or warnings to negative marking or assigning responsibility to the learner. Flexibility examples included considering learners' requests to extend deadlines, ending class early, postponing exams, overlooking mistakes, or offering another chance.

Accountability examples involved providing explicit explanations of teacher responsibilities and offering appropriate answers to criticisms or questions posed by learners. Materials management included novice teachers' online decisions to add, omit, replace, or reorder materials; for instance, Zari altered the order of two worksheets to increase task challenge, and Mozhi replaced a textbook activity with a chain drill without prior planning.

Physical space management examples entailed changing seating arrangements, moving classes to alternative spaces (e.g., a prayer room or outdoors), and varying classroom layout. For example, Tahere's large room led to round-table seating, whereas Zari's smaller room prompted space-based grouping to facilitate mobility.

Disruption management included addressing outside disturbances, regulating classroom temperature or lighting during critical times (e.g., power outages or cloudy days, when Yasi's classroom lacked windows and portable lights were used). Management of unexpected events encompassed adapting procedures in response to sudden schedule changes, learner conflicts, or unplanned visitors (e.g., Atie adjusted activities to recover lost class time due to inspectors; Mozhi arranged a makeup session when the school unexpectedly took students to an international book fair).

It is important to note that all interactive decisions—from encouraging or discouraging certain learner behaviors to handling unplanned events—were made under varying levels of anxiety or discomfort. Nevertheless, the cases generally managed these situations without exposing their affective states. At times, teachers paused to reflect before acting. While this does not imply that every decision was correct, participants appeared to exert their best efforts given the circumstances.

Post-Observation Interview Findings
Post-observation interview questions were semi-structured and focused on the aspects observed in participants' classrooms during the professional-practice sessions. During observations, notes were taken on the decision-making domains of the cases, and questions were developed regarding their rationales. Consequently, the post-observation interview questions aimed to elicit the novice teachers' perspectives on the reasons behind the classroom decisions. Table 3 presents the results.

Table 3
Domains of Novice Teachers' Decision-Making and Pedagogical Reasoning Reflected in Post-Observation Interviews

Teaching Phases	Domain	Decisions	Pedagogical Reasoning
Interactive	Class Management	Response to misbehavior	Knowledge of learners
		Flexibility	Personality features
		Accountability	Pedagogical knowledge
		Feedback to learners	(PK)
		Time management	Experience
		Materials management	Pedagogical knowledge
		Physical space management	(PK)
		Technology management	Attitudes
		Instructional group management	Beliefs
		Interaction management	Commitment
		Learner participation management	
		Classroom disruption management	
		Management of the unexpected events	

Table 3 illustrates that novice teachers' pedagogical reasoning during classroom-observation episodes centered on their knowledge of learners, Content Knowledge

(CK), Pedagogical Knowledge (PK), prior experience, personality traits, attitudes, beliefs, and commitment. Excerpts from participants' post-observation interview responses clarify the extracted themes. For example, when asked why they behaved as observed in the classroom:

> Yasi: *I usually worry about my weak learners and feel that I have to help them catch up with the others. At the same time, I don't want the more proficient learners to feel that their time is wasted in class and they don't learn anything new, so I'm always looking for new ways, ideas, and solutions to make everyone benefit from taking part in my class. I remember when I was at school, I always admired my teachers who cared for our learning. They were more respected and accepted at school and so students listened to them, behaved well in their classes, and showed more enthusiasm and responsibility.*

Yasi grounded her decisions in knowledge of learners, Pedagogical Knowledge (PK), and prior experience. In addition, her characteristics and beliefs significantly influenced and monitored her practice, and she engaged in ongoing reflection, which is interpreted as contributing to her professional development.

> Tahere: *before beginning my job at school, I planned for all the units of the school textbooks based on what I had learned at university. Besides, my classmates and I shared our lesson plans and activities so that we would be full handed when we start our teaching. But so many unexpected things happen that I need to have a plan B or even C in order to overcome any possible challenges or changes in schedules. I have to have different budgeting of time and content and anticipate everything even weather pollution!! This is hard work! I have to manage almost everything from student behavior to my instruction, to technology, and the unexpected incidents. My experience at school and university and my mother's experience* [as an expert high school teacher] *are of great help to me.*

Tahere appeared to be a considerate and engaged teacher who leveraged the collective knowledge and experience of others. She was described as humble, enthusiastic, and reflective in both her responses and performance, and these personality features substantially influenced her decisions. Like other cases, Tahere's decisions drew on her knowledge, skills, and personality features. In the early months of the academic year, she appeared overwhelmed by the scope of her responsibilities and constraints. With support from colleagues and her mother, who is an experienced teacher, she gradually developed greater awareness of her obligations and increased control over her practice by year's end. She did not hesitate to seek help from friends, colleagues,

former professors, practicum supervisors, and online courses, and this engagement contributed to her professional development.

> Zari: *as you saw, this classroom is quite small and with 33 students in this room I can't move around and check on the groups. So, I give each group member responsibilities to make sure they all participate in the groupworks. I learned this during practicum courses when we analyzed our performance films in class. We received recommendations and feedback from our supervisor.*
> *I try to use tasks, texts, or games that apart from providing language practice, have an ethical message at the end and groups compete over finding that ethical message. Students like it and I'm happy to train them morally besides teaching English.*
> *I learned classroom management from my mentor during practicum. I was lucky to have her as my mentor in all the four practicum courses* [two years].

Zari's responses indicated that her pedagogical reasoning stemmed from university knowledge and practicum experiences. She also described a distinctive approach to selecting tasks, texts, or materials informed by her beliefs and attitudes toward her profession, including how her personality features influenced her practice. Her self-confidence appeared to grow as university knowledge translated into competence through practicum experiences.

Regarding the question, "If you were to repeat this session, would you do the same or make changes? Why?" all participants indicated that they would make changes to lesson planning, performance, or immediate responses to students. This is interpreted as evidence of reflection in action among novice teachers, with on-the-spot adjustments occurring in some instances.

Audio Journal Findings
Regarding another source of data triangulation, the transcribed audio journals were examined carefully to identify the main domains underlying novice teachers' decision-making and pedagogical reasoning during interactive classroom decisions. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Novice Teachers' Decision-Making and Pedagogical Reasoning in the Audio Journals

Teaching Phases	Domains	Decisions	Pedagogical Reasoning
Interactive	Class Management	Response to misbehavior	Knowledge of Learners
		Interaction type	
		Meeting learner expectations	
		Flexibility	Personality Features
		Accountability	
		Response to learners	
		Time management	Experience
		Space management	Class Population
		Technology management	
		Instructional group management	

The results illustrated in Table 4 display novice teachers' decisions and themes of pedagogical reasoning derived from the audio journals. Based on the coded journal data from the interactive phase, decisions related to classroom management encompassed responses to misbehavior, interaction type, meeting learner expectations, flexibility, accountability, responses to learners, time management, space management, technology management, and instructional-group management. Novice teachers' pedagogical reasoning for these decisions reflected their knowledge of the learners, personality features, prior experiences, and class population. Examples drawn from the coded data help clarify the extracted themes.

> **Tahereh:** *I had to change my whole lesson plan right then since the students in this class were nothing like my first class. They are hard to control.*
> **Zari:** *I decided to end the class sooner because my students were tired and could not carry on.*
> **Yasi:** *I had to ask two students with good English to read and role play the dialogue since the speakers of the PC did not work and I could not play the audio file.*
> **Mozhi:** *For this session, I had to take the students to the prayer room since they needed more space to do their tasks.*
> **Atie:** *I added a step to the activity procedure and asked the students to reshape their groups like a jigsaw because some of the members in groups did not work well with each other.*

The excerpts indicate that novice teachers' interactive decisions pertained to class management, including time management, physical space, technology use, student behavior, instructional groups, and teacher/student accountability and flexibility. Their rationales derived from: (a) knowledge of learners (as illustrated in the first two excerpts); (b) prior experiences as school students, reflected in Zari's remark, *"because my students were tired and could not carry on"*; (c) attempts to manage instructional

groups, as noted by Atie's comment, *"because some of the members in groups did not work well with each other"*; and (d) experience with their designed activities, such as Mozhi's statement, *"since they needed more space to do their tasks."*

'Class population' influenced participants' management of time, instruction, physical space, and student behavior. The following excerpts illustrate that this factor was a component of novice teachers' pedagogical reasoning for many of the interactive decisions they made.

> **Tahere:** *many students were absent today so I could have smaller groups for this activity which made it easy to handle and move on faster.*
> **Atie:** *the large number of students in this class doesn't allow for activities that involve physical movement, so I decide not use them.*
> **Zari:** *decided to use group work in this crowded class, and the groups are either large or many.*
> **Mary:** *decided to let volunteer groups present their work because of the large number of students and groups.*
> **Yasi:** *because of the number of students in this class, I decided to modify the arrangement of groups for the task.*

Tahere could manage group activities more effectively and maintain a faster class pace when her class was less populated. Atie chose not to involve learners physically because of the large number of students in her small room. Mary decided to limit participation by allowing only a subset of volunteer groups to present their class work rather than having all groups share. These decisions may reflect the novices' prior experiences and their pedagogical knowledge and skills, though there is no clear boundary between the decision domain and the reasoning that underpins it.

Other instances of participants' pedagogical reasoning—specifically, knowledge of learners and personality features—were identified in their audio journals for decisions related to meeting learner expectations, responding to learners, and demonstrating flexibility. Examples drawn from the coded data include:

> **Atie:** *to show more flexibility, I decided to be more patient in answering students' repetitive questions.* (response to learners)
> **Mary:** *I had to be stricter with them otherwise they wouldn't take the activity seriously.* (response to learners)
> **Tahere:** *I decided to check on the group and give them approval of their work to raise their confidence.* (response to learners)

> **Mary:** *to help them learn, I decided to keep on to the task till it's completed before leaving the class.* (meeting learner expectations)
> **Zari:** *decided to stick to my principles though it would make my job harder.* (flexibility)

It could be inferred from the excerpts that novice teachers recognize the complexities and challenges of their profession and employ a variety of strategies to meet students' needs while maintaining their professionalism. Their reasoning reflects patience, flexibility, persistence, and a commitment to their principles and standards. For example, Atie chose to exercise greater patience in response to students' repetitive questions, whereas Mary adopted a stricter stance to encourage students to engage more seriously with the instructional procedure. Tahere devoted additional time to work with certain learners during group activities and provided approval to raise these learners' confidence. Zari adhered to her principles to guide learner behavior, even though this was challenging. Collectively, these excerpts portray the teachers as reflective practitioners who continually learn and adapt to better serve their students.

The results presented in Tables 2–4 not only corroborate the cases' decision-making and pedagogical reasoning but also reveal the multidimensionality of their teaching practice. The cases' pedagogical reasoning indicates that novice teachers' thinking is based on a combination of knowledge, skills, personal qualities, personality traits, prior experiences, and commitments.

To enhance the credibility of the interpretations, this study employed methodological triangulation by integrating findings from three data sources: (a) classroom observations with video recordings (Table 2), (b) post-observation interviews (Table 3), and (c) transcribed audio journals (Table 4). Descriptive and axial coding procedures were applied across data types, with open coding identifying initial categories and axial coding organizing these into higher-order themes. NVivo 12 Pro facilitated systematic linkage of codes across transcripts, video observations, and interview data, enabling a convergent analysis that yields a meta-inference about novice teachers' decision-making and pedagogical reasoning.

Integrated Results and Meta-Inference
Convergence across sources is documented in Table 2 (interactive decision-making in classroom observations), Table 3 (pedagogical reasoning derived from post-observation interviews), and Table 4 (domains and reasoning from audio journals). The integrated analysis reveals that core domains—time management, knowledge of learners, and adaptability in instructional decisions—consistently emerged across data sources, with Table 2 illustrating management and interaction decisions during

the Interactive Teaching Phase, Table 3 detailing the knowledge, PK, CK, and experiential bases for pedagogical reasoning, and Table 4 capturing the decision domains and corresponding reasoning that underpinned audio-journal reflections.

- Convergence: Across observations, interviews, and audio journals, the most consistent patterns pertain to timely adjustments in classroom management, responsiveness to learner needs, and flexible adaptation of tasks and groupings to accommodate context (as summarized across Tables 2–4 and their accompanying narrative).
- Divergence: In contexts with differing classroom dynamics (e.g., class size, space constraints, or scheduling disruptions), sources sometimes emphasized different priorities for intervention or pacing. These divergences were explored through consensus coding and memoing, with reflections integrated into the cross-source synthesis (see the synthesis narrative accompanying Tables 2–4).

Representational Links and Transparency
NVivo's coding references, along with memoing and decision logs, were used to create traceable links among data segments contributing to each theme. Where applicable, cross-source excerpts are embedded in the integrated narrative accompanying Tables 2–4, providing concrete exemplars of convergence and divergence across sources.

Meta-inference statement
The integrated meta-inference indicates that novice teachers synthesize knowledge of learners, pedagogical content knowledge, and prior experiences to adapt real-time decisions across varying classroom contexts. Triangulated evidence confirms that adaptive decision-making is central to novice practice, with the integrated narrative across Tables 2–4 illustrating how decisions, reasoning, and reflections cohere to form a comprehensive picture of novice teaching practice.

Discussion
The significance of novice teachers' competency in making interactive decisions and in their pedagogical reasoning is a central focus of the present study. The themes of decisions and reasoning identified here illuminate aspects of novice teachers' professional practice, knowledge, skills, and dispositions (as Fuller, 2016, described). The study reveals that novice teachers make primarily management decisions during classroom procedures. This finding aligns with Danielson's (2007, 2013) framework of teaching at the classroom environment domain, which includes management of instructional groups, materials and supplies, student behavior, and transitions. A distinctive feature of this study is the explicit distinction between decision-making and pedagogical reasoning. In other words, some management themes also function

as rationales offered by novices for their decisions. Consequently, the two Danielson domains—classroom and instruction (domains 2 and 3)—can be recast as domains of decision-making and pedagogical reasoning in light of the current findings.

The study also demonstrates the multidimensional scope of teachers' interactive decision-making and pedagogical reasoning. This scope ranges from managing learner behavior, instruction, physical space, time, and technology at the decision-making level to considerations of class population, teacher flexibility, and care for learner achievement, assessment, participation, materials management, and seating arrangement at the pedagogical-reasoning level. Most decisions were made concurrently and spontaneously during classroom procedures, underscoring both multidimensionality and simultaneity in teacher decision-making and pedagogical reasoning. This observation aligns with the views of Pihlström and Sutinen (2012) and Tsui (2003), who emphasize the simultaneity and immediacy of teachers' educational activity and provide empirical support for this idea.

Numerous studies have examined knowledge domains of teachers during professional practice (e.g., Demirkasimoglu, 2010; Mork et al., 2021; Toledo et al., 2017; Trevisan et al., 2021). Others have focused on teacher competency or skill during classroom procedures under labels such as expertise, autonomy, and procedural knowledge (Gün, 2014; Li, 2017; Li, 2019; Lloyd, 2019; Palmer et al., 2005; Tsui, 2005; Wermke et al., 2018; Yazdanpanah & Sahragard, 2017). Moreover, personality features of teachers have been explored as influential factors in professional practice (Fuller, 2016; Ibad, 2018; Kell, 2019; Kim et al., 2019). In this study, novice teachers' pedagogical reasoning can be conceptualized as comprising three major components: knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Put differently, novices' reasons for their decisions appear to be grounded in knowledge, skills, or dispositions, which Fuller (2016) terms "essential teacher characteristics" (p. 3). Thus, one may infer that teachers' pedagogical reasoning is shaped by these essential characteristics.

An important issue illustrated in this study is the influence of context on novice teachers' decisions and reasoning. For example, class population affected nearly all management themes, prompting greater flexibility, accountability, and withitness. This finding is consistent with Aho et al. (2010), who reported that teachers orient their actions to manage situations guided by their own will, regardless of emotional state (p. 398). In contrast, Mehrpour and Moghaddam (2018) reported incompatibilities with this pattern: their novice teachers did not exhibit flexibility or accountability or make lesson adjustments in managing instruction, instead following textbook sequences with little variation (p. 27). Time-management patterns also differed between the studies; in the present study, class population influenced time

management, whereas Mehrpour and Moghaddam attributed timing differences to participants' personality traits (being hasty or slow). On assessment, the present study prioritized learner assessment, while Mehrpour and Moghaddam centered on language assessment. Collectively, these contrasts suggest that practice context plays a crucial role in shaping teachers' decisions and their reasoning, with direct implications for the decisions teachers make based on their reflections.

Finally, expertise, as argued by Li (2017), is situational and cannot be viewed as an abstract attribute; teachers demonstrate expertise when they apply their knowledge and skills effectively in a given situation. Li (2017, 2019) questions the notion that work experience alone constitutes expertise, emphasizing that expertise "involves personal experience, subject knowledge, contextual knowledge, and pedagogical knowledge" (Li, 2019, p. 346). The findings of the present study align with Li's (2019) definition of expertise and support the view that expertise and work experience are not necessarily correlated.

Conclusion

This qualitative multiple-case study explored novice EFL teachers' competency in making interactive decisions and their pedagogical reasoning within the framework of Danielson's (2007, 2013) classroom environment and instruction domains. Data were gathered from classroom observations, post-observation interviews, and audio journals over one academic year, enabling a longitudinal perspective that enhances credibility and dependability. Analysis of the decisions made by five cases during their first year of professional practice, together with the underlying pedagogical reasoning, yielded four major findings. First, novice teachers' interactive decisions were predominantly management-oriented, spanning a range of contexts and situations. Second, novice teachers' pedagogical reasoning was diverse, reflecting a broad spectrum of knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Third, both decision making and pedagogical reasoning exhibited multidimensionality, with spontaneity, unpredictability, and dynamism characteristic of early-career teaching. Fourth, context significantly influenced decisions and reasoning, underscoring the importance of reflective practice in adapting to real-world classroom conditions.

For teacher education and practicum design, integrate practicum experiences that cultivate flexibility in decision-making and explicitly connect classroom management with pedagogical reasoning, and promote reflective practices that help preservice teachers articulate how lived classroom experiences map onto theoretical frameworks. For teacher educators and supervision, use these findings to tailor supervision and feedback to develop decision-making fluency and nuanced reasoning across diverse contexts, and encourage explicit discussions of how context shapes choices and how

dispositions interact with knowledge and skills. For curriculum developers and program designers, incorporate case-based modules that simulate context-rich decision-making scenarios, illustrating the interplay among management, pedagogy, and professional dispositions. For SLTE researchers, the study offers a template for examining the situational nature of expertise and the simultaneous, dynamic nature of decision-making and reasoning, with future research opportunities to extend the longitudinal scope, diversify participant pools, and triangulate data with classroom outcomes.

In terms of sample and context, participants were all female and based in a single city, which limits generalizability. Future work should include diverse genders, locales, and cultural/economic contexts to examine contextual influences on decision-making and reasoning. Regarding longitudinal scope, extending observations beyond one year would illuminate longer-term development in interactive decision-making and pedagogical reasoning. For comparative groups, including more experienced teachers could clarify trajectories from novice to expert practice. With respect to additional data sources, incorporating classroom observations, student outcomes, and ongoing teacher reflections would enrich understanding of how decisions and reasoning translate into practice.

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