Teacher Educators' Perceptions of Critical Incidents in Teaching Practice: The Case of Novice EFL Teachers

Masoomeh Estaji
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8014-9491
Scopus Author ID: 56200945500
mestaji74@gmail.com
Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran

Javad Ahmadi Fatalaki
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2378-4621
ahmady.fatalaky@gmail.com
Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran

Abstract. Teachers experience various challenges and conditions in their profession, and they may require to make appropriate decisions and take action based on the analysis of the situation. The present study attempted to identify the critical incidents that occur in teaching practices for the novice teachers from the teacher educators' standpoint. Moreover, they were asked to offer some solutions for these critical incidents. To do so, eight teacher educators at a teacher education university in Iran were asked to be involved in a semi-structured interview to openly express their views. Content and thematic analyses were carried out on the transcript of the interviews. Based on the findings, teacher educators referred to nine major incidents in the teachers' pedagogical practices and offered six solutions. The major incidents included time management, the students' ineffective cooperation, odd behavior, demotivation, dissatisfaction, lack of empathy and sympathy, the teacher's content knowledge, and the required type of feedback. The solutions provided by the teacher educators were familiarizing the pre-service teachers with the critical incidents, management strategies, use of classroom observation, running workshops, reflective practice, and emotional intelligence development. The research results help novice and pre-service teachers to identify the critical incidents, reflect upon them, and be prepared to react appropriately. Moreover, the results confirm the necessity of a course, emphasizing both the critical incidents and the probable solutions.

Keywords: critical incidents, EFL teachers, teacher reflection, teacher educators.

Естаджі Мазумех, Фаталакі Джавад Ахмаді. Сприйняття викладачами критичних випадків у педагогічній практиці (на прикладі молодих викладачів англійської мови як іноземної).

Учителі стикаються з різними викликами та працюють у різних умовах, і вони можуть вимагати прийняття відповідних рішень та вживання заходів на основі аналізу ситуації. У цьому дослідженні була зроблена спроба визначити критичні інциденти, які трапляються в педагогічній практиці викладачів-початківців як педагогів. Крім того, їх попросили запропонувати деякі рішення для цих критичних інцидентів. Для цього вісьмох викладачів

педагогічного університету в Ірані попросили взяти участь у напівструктурованому інтерв'ю, щоб відкрито висловити свої погляди. Змістовий і тематичний аналізи проведено на стенограмах інтерв'ю. На основі отриманих даних викладачі назвали дев'ять основних інцидентів у педагогічній практиці викладачів і запропонували шість рішень. Серед таких випадків були неправильний тайм-менеджмент, неефективна співпраця зі студентами, неадекватна поведінка, демотивація, незадоволеність, відсутність емпатії та симпатії, недостатнє знання вчителем змісту прдмета та невідповідний до ситуації тип зворотного зв'язку. Рішення, запропоновані педагогами, полягали в ознайомленні молодих учителів з критичними випадками, стратегіями управління, використанням спостереження в аудиторії, проведенням семінарів, рефлексивною практикою та розвитком емоційного інтелекту. Результати дослідження допоможуть викладачам-початківцям і викладачам-асистентам визначати критичні випадки, обмірковувати їх і бути готовими до відповідних дій. Крім того, результати підтверджують необхідність розроблення курсу, який наголошував би і на критичних випадках, і на потенційних рішеннях.

Ключові слова: *критичні випадки, викладачі англійської як іноземної, міркування викладача, педагоги.*

Introduction

Underrating the novice teachers' needs and meeting them are critical concerns for all language and educational policymakers, mentors, principals, and even local educational associations. Not dealing with their difficulties, novice teachers may feel frustrated and consider leaving the profession for good (Kwan & Simpson, 2010). Roberson and Roberson (2009) contended that the principals should be aware of the problems the novice teachers face during the first year of teaching as they attempt to adapt to the new atmosphere. Wong (2004) also stated that novice teachers may experience different feelings of stress, fear, excitement, lack of confidence and organization in planning, uncertainty, joy, and the like in their career. Therefore, it is necessary to help them overcome the problems they encounter during the first year of teaching.

To better understand the novice teachers' needs, school principals and university administrators should carry out a comprehensive analysis of these teachers' performance during and at the end of their educational period through surveys, observation, keeping journals, and reflection notes (Schulz, 2005). Still, the main reason for frustration is that the depth of teachers' emotions is not evaluated and their approach for handling them is not discussed well (Roberson & Roberson, 2009). McCann and Johannsson (2004) believe that "teacher persona" is among the most burning issues new teachers struggle with as they need to identify their role as competent teachers. Novice teachers may misjudge their influential role in education and take on a special role without considering reflection and suitable assessment of their performance when dealing with school principals, benchmarks, supervisors, and parents (Roberson & Roberson, 2009). Besides, many new teachers feel lonely and are overwhelmed during the first year of teaching. Therefore, powerlessness is the typical feeling of most of the new teachers (McCann & Johannessen, 2004). These instances show that the novice teachers face lots of challenges during the first year of their teaching.

The first case of frustration for the novice teachers may be the critical incidents that they may face. Hence, the teachers' behavior should be examined to identify the critical moments of their pedagogical practice. The conglomeration of all critical incidents needs

proper investigation, which is bound to offer a practical solution for pre-service teachers; however, providing a one-size-fits-all approach does not serve the purpose. As the problems may vary according to contextual differences and teachers may not face the same challenges throughout the world, a more localized approach should be developed to fill the gap between theory and practice.

Getting informed of all the critical incidents is far-fetched; however, several critical incidents in language teaching occur for all the novice teachers and due to their frequency and saliency, they are easily deciphered by the experts of the field. The teacher educators, being responsible for training the pre-service teachers during the practicum course, can share their experiences regarding the critical incidents that the teachers usually encounter and guide them to deal with these incidents and difficulties in the teaching practice. This study attempted to identify the most frequent and important critical incidents and their appropriate solutions from the teacher educators' perspectives.

Literature Review

Problem-Based Teacher Education

Current educational movements emphasize the role of teacher education programs to resolve the novice teachers' problems. As Desimone (2008) mentioned, teaching for novice teachers is a complex phenomenon since they need to satisfy parents and principals, evaluate textbooks, assess the students' performance, and manage the classroom events effectively. As a solution, problem-based learning (PBL) is considered for preservice teachers to learn how to confront the difficulties and be comfortable enough to solve them. PBL is an educational process posing an open-ended problem and giving the opportunity to learners or even student teachers to come up with ideas regarding the problem and discuss it autonomously or cooperatively.

Koray, Presley, Koksal, and Ozdemir (2008) carried out a study to allow the pre-service teachers to learn the problem-solving process and express their attitude toward PBL. After using the PBL curriculum in one group and the traditional approach of instruction in the second group, they concluded that the experimental group that received PBL outperformed in perceiving the problem-solving skills and they stated that PBL had enhanced their self-confidence and helped them struggle with problems, although it took a while to become comfortable with PBL.

In a quasi-experimental study, Desimone (2006) attempted to identify the role of PBL in decision-making and strategic problem-solving skills of preservice teachers. The pre-test of the study required the student teachers to decide on a terminally ill student, and the post-test required them to offer solutions. Using MANCOVA, he concluded that the students who were taught by PBL could better understand the main problem and give varied solutions to the problems at hand. They could also use various sources to find the proper solutions.

To help the prospective teachers, Levin, Hibbard, and Rock (2002) designed a pedagogical tool to practice teaching strategies in special education and work collaboratively with other professionals. The result of their study showed that PBL

helped the prospective teachers to learn skills, strategies, and techniques to work with children who have lots of disabilities in a problem-solving setting that necessitates peer collaboration.

In a seminal study, Caukin, Dillard, and Goodin (2016) investigated the difference between prospective teachers who used the problem-based learning approach and those who used the traditional style. They also discussed the effect of problem-based learning on the student teachers' self-efficacy. Based on the results, there was a significant difference between the two groups and this showed that PBL had influenced edTPA, which is the test that analyzes the teachers' performance on planning, instruction, and assessment. Likewise, there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups considering their perceived self-efficacy.

Critical Incidents in Teaching

Critical incidents can be interpreted as a circumstance in teaching that has unpredictable features and needs special attention. Farrell (2008) pointed out that a critical incident is any unplanned event that occurs during class. If trainee teachers formally reflect on these critical incidents, "it may be possible for them to uncover new understandings of the teaching and learning process" (p. 3). Farrell (2013) defined teaching high and teaching low as concepts that may have a lot in common with critical incidents. In the former case, spontaneous intervention can be implemented by the teacher which has positive consequences, and the latter is the problematic incidents that may bring along difficulties for the teacher. Critical incidents are unpredictable events that need to be considered and based on which proper decisions should be taken.

Kwan and Simpson (2010) mentioned that critical incidents are "characterized by an element of unplanned occurrence which can be problematic for the teacher, calling for an on-the-spot adjustment (reflection-in-action) of the planned course of the lesson" (p. 423). Tripp (1993) stated that critical incidents are daily moments that occur for all teachers and believed that every moment of teaching can be critical. He also noted that no behavior is intrinsically critical, and it is the attitude of the teacher that makes it critical.

Tripp (1993) has also claimed that "critical incidents are produced by the way we look at a situation: A critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an event" (p. 8). In a similar vein, Angelides (2001) stated that critical moments are not necessarily emotion engaging and can happen in every class. The reasons for the occurrence of such moments are sometimes unimportant, and the awareness of their existence can help the novice teachers or even teacher trainees to reflect upon these moments whether they are minor or major issues (Farrell, 2008).

Critical incidents may occur in every educational context, and it is the teacher's responsibility to deal with them effectively. One of the solutions to deal with these critical incidents is the reflection and knowledge of the reflective practice. The activities and situations that necessitate the proper type of reflection can be perceived to be the focal point of teacher education programs as reflection and reflective practices are given higher priority (Kolar & Dickson, 2002; Yost & Moska, 2003). Hence, critical incidents in teaching are at the heart of reflection and the novice teachers should be aware of them

and know influential strategies to deal with them. Hereupon, the role of teacher education should be familiarizing the teachers with the difficulties and dilemmas in the form of critical incidents.

As Yost, Sentler, and Forlenza-Bailey (2000) pointed out, if teachers get involved in the process of problem-solving for daily problems, their critical reflection increases substantially. Some studies considered the effect of critical incidents on in-service and pre-service teachers (e.g., Griffin, 2003; Romano, 2006). They believe that these critical incidents should be accompanied by appropriate reflection. Some critical incidents need to be responded to immediately, and some others need time to think about deeply. Romano (2006) has used the term "bumpy moments" for these critical incidents that novice teachers encounter. He believes that reflection is the best tool to manage and understand the critical incidents.

Similarly, Romano (2006) concluded that reflection could influence the way teachers manage the class or even the students' behavior in critical moments of teaching practice. Griffin (2003) also asked the pre-service teacher to express their views toward the concept of critical incidents, and they were asked to think of appropriate responses to the problem at hand. She concluded that these pre-service teachers became more critical after thinking about these incidents. They moved from being concrete thinkers to alert thinkers of their own attempts in teaching.

Richards and Farrell (2005) asserted that awareness of critical incidents can serve several purposes. For example, it can be a type of reflective inquiry or it can facilitate the identification of the problems and solutions. They also stated that analyzing critical incidents can influence professional development in several ways:

•.It can create a greater level of self-awareness. By writing about and discussing the critical incidents, a teacher can become more aware of some of his or her assumptions about language teaching and learning.

•.It can encourage teachers to pose critical questions about teaching. By considering the meaning of critical incidents, teachers learn to pose questions about many dimensions of teaching that they had not given a great deal of thought to.

•.It can help bring beliefs to the level of awareness. By writing, reading, analyzing, and interpreting critical incidents, teachers can become more aware of their beliefs and decide if they should be changed. Kagan (1992) points out that the teachers' beliefs are generally stable and determine the kind of instruction teachers provide to students. However, beliefs are generally not open to critical examination. Analyzing critical incidents is one way that beliefs can be clarified and explored.

•.It can create opportunities for action research. Critical incident analysis can be the starting point for follow-up research, such as a case study or action.

•.It can help build a community of critical practitioners. Through examining critical incidents with other teachers, a community of practitioners can be created who may be able to influence teaching practices and policies in a school.

•.It can provide a resource for teachers. Compiling a file of critical incident reports can serve as a useful resource for both the new and experienced teachers. (pp.116-117)

Achinstein and Barret (2004) studied the challenges the novice teachers face and found three major frames in this regard. The first one is the managerial frame, which deals with the procedures, behavioral problems, time management, and the teaching

pace. The human relations frame is related to the student-teacher relationships, students' individual needs, motivation, collaboration, and sense of community. The political frame, as the last frame, is related to the teachers' perceptions of students' race and cultural differences. Alternatively, Schulz (2005) discussed the in-class challenges for the novice teachers and reported their worries. These problems include the mixed-level management, implementation of rules and regulations, getting the students to participate in class activities, teaching reading and writing, and preparing supplementary materials for teaching. Kilgour, Northcote, and Herman (2015) also examined the most important critical incidents for final year pre-service teachers in their first attempt to teach. Based on the analysis of the interview, classroom management, planning, communication, and learning were among the most common emotional distress that they faced.

Likewise, Atai and Nejadghanbar (2017) analyzed the critical incidents in EAP courses and interviewed 34 EAP teachers by focusing on 13 subject-related critical incidents. They concluded that these teachers mainly used three strategies to deal with these critical incidents, including ignorance, avoidance, and risk taking. They also claimed that the knowledge of critical incidents in EAP courses has provided teachers with valuable insights. In a Japanese context, Hall and Townsend (2017) conducted a study to find suitable tools to emphasize the commonest critical incidents during practicum. They took emotional and cognitive barriers into consideration and introduced E-portfolio to the student teachers to find the critical incidents and reflect upon them. The results of the study showed that E-portfolio as a technique helps the student teaches to analyze the strategies of dealing with critical incidents.

To explore the nature and types of critical incidents, Karimi and Nazari (2019) identified the ones occurred to Iranian EFL teachers as an initiative for their professional development. The teachers were asked to share their written CIs and reflect upon these CIs in an online group. The results of their study showed an interconnection between the factors influencing the varied CIs. The initiative implemented in this study also helped the teacher to enhance their knowledge of classroom critical incidents and boost their techniques to deal with pedagogical decisions. Barth et al. (2019) also discussed the influence of two different methods of problem-based learning and compared them with regard to the gained knowledge of critical incidents and professional vision. The first group received self-directed learning and the second one experienced direct instruction. The result of their study showed that the second group scored higher regarding the knowledge of critical incidents while there were no meaningful differences between groups concerning their professional vison.

Similarly, Esmaeili and Afzali (2020) conducted a research study to identify the critical incidents and categorize them and asked the pre-service teachers to propose their coping strategies. The findings of their study indicated that language skills, heterogeneous classrooms, materials, mother tongue, testing issues, and teaching cultural issues were among the most important critical issues. Dvir and Schatz Oppenheimer (2020) also examined the novice teachers' experience of teaching in the Covid-19 pandemic. Their study was based on 32 narratives of novice teachers in Israel, and they categorized the main issues into three broad domains: Technological, pedagogical, and

educational. They stated that their study may contribute to the understanding of the turmoil teachers' face in the Covid crisis.

In a recent study, Tian, Louw and Kamal Khan (2021) explored their perceptions of language assessment literacy (LAL) in three different contexts in Asia during Covid-19 pandemic as a critical incident and used duo-ethnographic approach to analyze their perceptions of LAL and progress on their professional development. They concluded that they had low confidence in what they design, and what they know was too theoretical. However, their group-based reflection helped them to progress and considered more objective patterns for assessment. Although the mentioned studies were among the most appreciated efforts to render the novice teachers' difficulties, more research is required to unravel the complicated challenges in the teaching practice. Hence, this study gave an account of the teacher educators' perceptions regarding the critical incidents that EFL teachers frequently encounter in their pedagogical practices and some practical solutions to cope with these incidents.

Method

This study adopted a qualitative approach to unravel the teacher educators' perspectives regarding the critical incidents that occur in teaching practices for the novice teachers. Deep perception of the phenomenon is gained by carrying out an inductive analysis of the participants' attitudes by using semi-structured interviews.

Participants

To fulfill the aim of the study, eight teacher educators were selected out of 20 experts from a teacher training university, which prepares teachers for the state-funded schools. These teacher educators are responsible for preparing pre-service teachers to be employed both as middle and high school teachers. The teacher educators were chosen based on purposive sampling, considering their educational background, teaching, and teacher training experiences. They were all university professors, who had their PhD in TEFL and Applied Linguistics. To identify and discuss the critical incidents that teachers face in their teaching practices, they were involved in a semi-structured interview. Table 1 presents further information regarding the background and characteristics of the teacher educators who participated in this study.

Table 1
Participants' Demographic Information

Country of Origin	Iran
Gender	6 males and 2 females
ELT Qualification	PhD
Years of teaching experience	8-19
Age range	31-47

Instruments

Interviews are an applied tool that enables the interviewers to receive first-hand data by asking the interviewees to express their notions, feelings, and thoughts (Berg, 2007). In light of this view, a semi-structured interview was held to identify the teacher educators' perceptions regarding the critical incidents that teachers encounter in their pedagogical practices and the role of reflection as a solution for dealing with the critical incidents, its effectiveness, and the way they apply it. As this interview was semi-structured, there was room for discussion on the critical incidents and the role of reflection in teaching practices from the teacher educators' standpoint. To check the content validity of the interview questions, developed by the researchers of the current study, five experts were asked to discuss their suitability in terms of language and content. Content validity index (CVI) as a measure to indicate the agreement between the experts was implemented by examining their views on the relevance of the items to the objectives using a 4-point Likert scale. Its value was found .84, representing the experts' agreement on the appropriateness of the items. Based on their evaluations of the items, one item was removed. Table 2 shows the interview questions of the study. The length of every interview was at least 30 minutes, and an audio recorder was used to save the spoken data and later trace the recordings and source information.

Table 2
Critical Incidents in Teaching

Q1. What are the critical incidents that need reflection?
Q2. Do you pay attention to these critical incidents during the practicum?
Q3. What are the solutions at hand for these critical incidents?

Data Collection Procedure

To fulfill the objectives of the study, eight participants were selected through purposive sampling. To begin with, the researchers asked the participants for their consent to cooperate in the study. Then these teacher educators were invited for an interview to discuss the critical incidents in language teaching that need proper reflection by the teachers. They were asked to both state their personal experiences of critical incidents, and the ones explained by pre-service teachers when they asked for consultation. The allotted time for every interview was, at most, 40 minutes. Due to the outbreak of Coronavirus, the researchers could not interview the participants in person. Therefore, the researchers video-called the participants to ask for their perceptions regarding the most important critical incidents in teaching practice. They also asked them to discuss the solutions at hand to help the novice teachers overcome these critical incidents or even be ready to tackle them. Afterward, the recordings were transcribed by the researchers, and content and thematic analyses were applied. The interview analysis was done inductively since there were not enough research studies, identifying the various types of critical incidents in language teaching. The analyses were done by
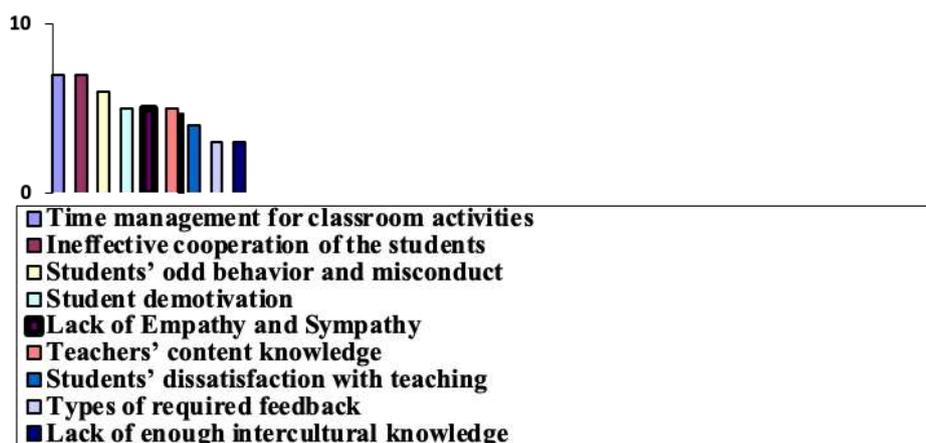
running the MAXQDA (22nd version) software to organize the data and extract the themes accurately and effectively.

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) principles of trustworthiness were implemented to strengthen the quality of the method used in the study. They emphasized credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as the important principles of qualitative studies. As for credibility, the researchers of the current study used member checks technique by asking the interviewees to recheck the transcript of their interviews. Likewise, three participants were asked to examine the extracted codes and themes. Thick description, in comparison with thin description, was applied to show the transferability of the study. To this end, observation and the interview in the study did not lead to the outline of the events and the interpretation and analysis of the data within the context were considered. To check the dependability of the study, external audits technique was deployed by asking an expert in the field of applied Linguistics to evaluate the relationship between the data and interpretations. To employ Audit trail as one of the techniques of confirmability, all steps of the data collection and interpretation techniques were reported by the researchers of the current study.
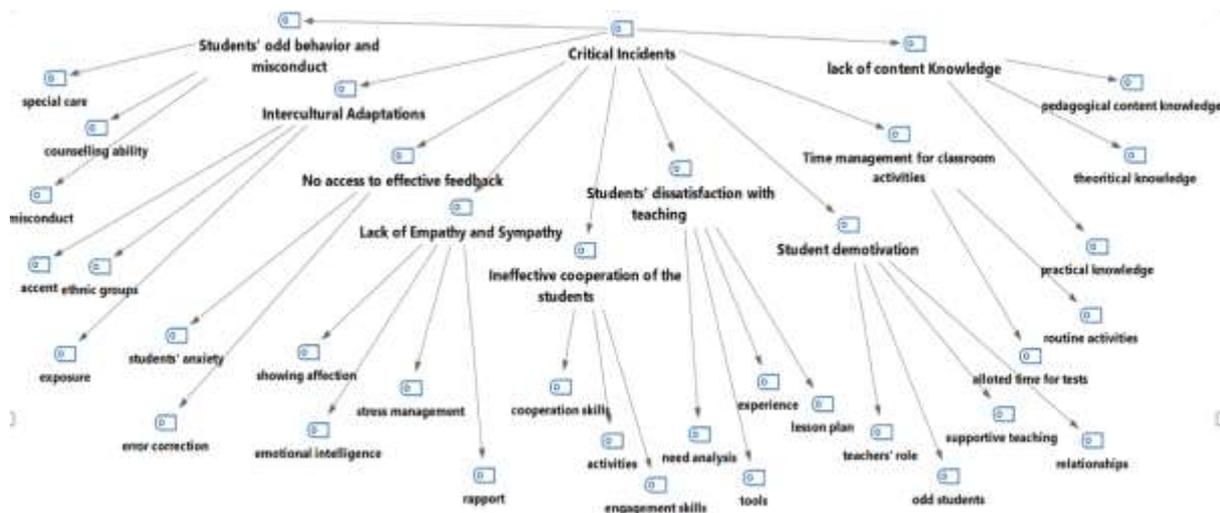
Results

The purpose of this study was to examine EFL teacher educators' perceptions regarding the instances of critical incidents and the role of reflection and its effectiveness for coping with these critical incidents. The following figures depict the results of the interviews. Figure 1 shows the major critical incidents identified by the teacher trainers as the problems that may occur for novice teachers.

Figure 1
Critical Incidents from Teacher Educators' Standpoint

According to the result of the interview with teacher educators, it became evident that time management for the classroom activities during the whole course and the students' inclination to cooperate for the exercises and activities are among the critical incidents mentioned by most of the teacher educators. Figure 2 depicts the concept map for the critical incidents. This concept map is designed by MAXQDA, which shows the sub-codes for the major codes specified in the analysis.

Figure 2
The concept map for Critical Incidents Depicted by MAXQDA

As Figure 2 shows, there are several sub-codes that are connected to the major ones. Exposure, ethnic groups, and accent are the major themes related to the lack of intercultural competence of the pre-service and novice teachers. Concerning the type of feedback required to be presented by the teachers, error correction strategies and the way of confronting the students' anxiety were identified. Student demotivation was analyzed with four sub-codes, i.e. the teachers' role, odd students, supportive teaching, and relationships. Pedagogical content knowledge as one of the major qualities in teaching, theoretical and practical knowledge, and the way these pieces of knowledge can be connected are all considered to be related to the teachers' content knowledge.

Special care for the students with unusual problems, the counselling ability of the teachers to give immediate solutions to the students, and misconducts were all subcategories of the students' odd behavior and misconduct. As for time management for classroom activities, the required timing for the test and the time needed for daily activities were identified as critical for the novice teachers. Students' dissatisfaction with the teaching style and approaches were found related to the experience, educational tools the teachers have access to, needs analysis, and the well-rounded lesson plan. The teachers' emotional intelligence as their major communicative skill, rapport, stress management, and showing affection were related to the lack of empathy and sympathy. The students' cooperation with the teacher was also found connected to engagement activities, the type of activities presented by the teacher, and the cooperation skills that teachers should have to provide meaningful tasks.

The extracts below show some of the teacher educators' views regarding the most critical incidents the teachers encounter in their instructional practices.

> 1. Ineffective cooperation of the students
> *You know you do your best to teach English, but unfortunately, your students don't make any effort to learn. You do your best to persuade your learners, but they are unwilling.* (Teacher Educator 3)
> 2. Lack of rapport, empathy, and sympathy

Some teachers don't know how to establish rapport. Some teachers don't know how to empathize and sympathize, and if we don't know how to do them, they will result in critical incidents. (Teacher Educator 5)

3. Students' demotivation

I find it really hard when my students are demotivated. I sometimes you know that I prepared lots of activities and exercises to do in my class, but sometimes I really find it very hard to manage my time so time management. (Teacher Educator 1)

4. No access to effective feedback

I think giving feedback to my language learners is also another critical incident. Sometimes, the situation can be very stressful, and sometimes, you are stressed out and don't know how to manage a class or a student there act up. And another point that I always think about during my teaching courses is my student's complaints. (Teacher Educator 1)

5. Intercultural Adaptations

When I started teaching, I had some students with a Turkish accent, and I did not know how to manage the class. As a student, not a teacher, I always saw several cases of this problem, and the state schools do not pay attention to these problems. (Teacher Educator 2)

6. Lack of content knowledge

You know, I investigated the effect of pedagogical content knowledge for my thesis and know the extent teacher education can play a role. (Teacher Educator 7)

7. Students' odd behavior and misconduct

At Farhangian University, even you cannot believe that the students behave like they are in high school, and they get used to acting like children and poke fun at each other. I mean, the school staff did not do anything to solve their problem, and you know, their parents do not show any reaction to their children's behavior. (Teacher Educator 4)

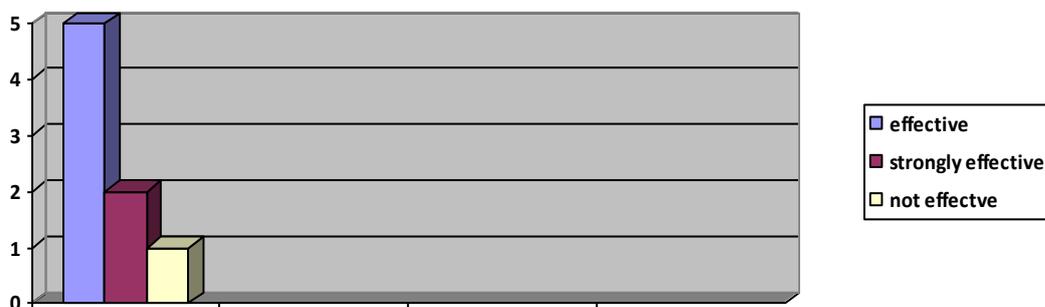8. Students' dissatisfaction with teaching

One of my colleagues told me that we should not expect our students to worship us because we always have some weaknesses, and even God is not left with criticism. So, it is natural but the way of dealing with this issue cannot be discussed by simple reasoning. (Teacher Educator 5)

9. Time management for classroom activities

The other thing I know is the time for doing the work. Students know what you do, and in my experience in a language institute, the students told the supervisor I beat around the bush, and we fell behind the program. I was angry those days, but I later understood that I should not be too emotional. (Teacher Educator 5)

Figure 3 below shows whether the teacher educators agree with using the critical incidents in teacher education programs.

Figure 3
Teacher Educators' Views on the Effectiveness of Critical Incidents
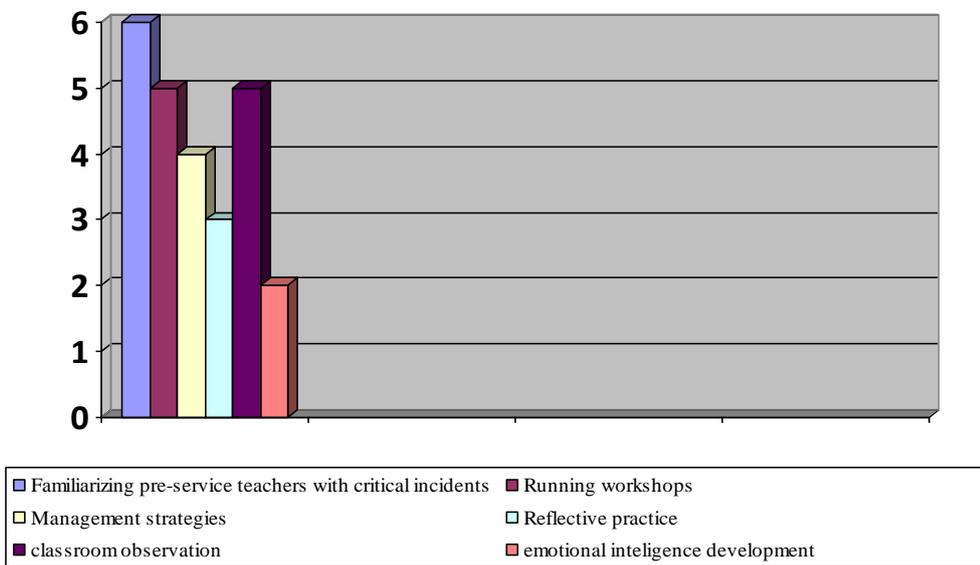

The extracts below show the teacher educators' views on the practicality of the knowledge on critical incidents.

I think teacher education courses should identify this particular incident and then that include them in our teacher education courses. And teacher education should be a bit longer, and that by giving these incidents to our pre-service teachers, and they will be able to have an understanding of the incident they might face in their classes. (Teacher Educator 8)

We should pay attention to these critical incidents because those critical incidents will play a very pivotal role in teacher education programs. (Teacher Educator 2)
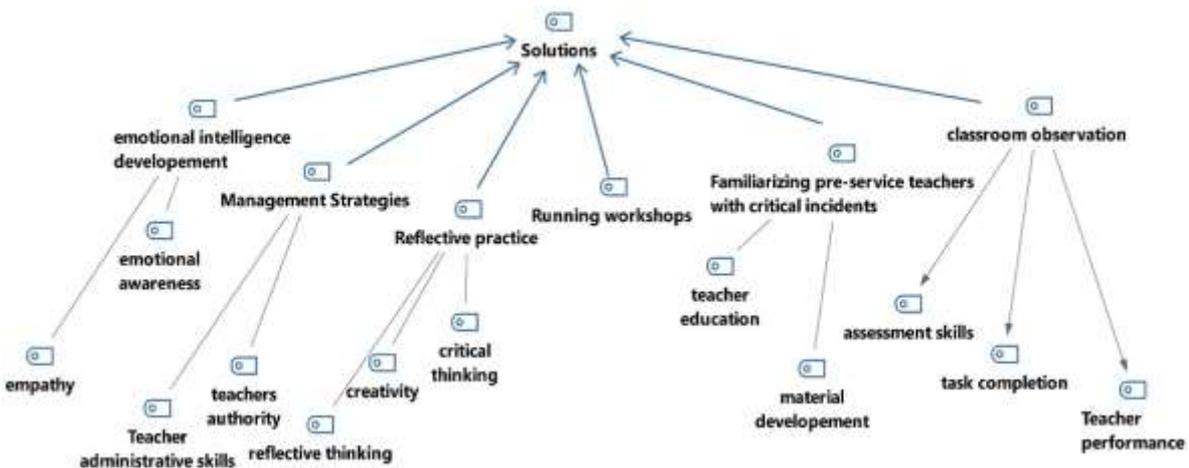
Figure 4 indicates the solutions provided by the teacher educators for the critical incidents occurring in the teachers' instructional practices.

Figure 4
Solutions for Critical Incidents

- Familiarizing pre-service teachers with critical incidents
- Running workshops
- Management strategies
- Reflective practice
- classroom observation
- emotional inteligence development

Six major solutions were presented based on the interview results to help the teacher education and educational policymakers to make appropriate decisions.

Figure 5
The concept map for Solutions for Critical Incidents Depicted by MAXQDA

As Figure 5 shows, six major solutions were identified based on the coding scheme and the relevant sub-themes connected to them. Empathy and emotional awareness were the subcategories of emotional intelligence development. The teachers' empathy and their ability to understand the others' feelings were highlighted there. As for familiarizing the pre-service teachers with critical incidents as a major theme, the role of teacher education programs and the necessity for the development of suitable materials were considered significant. Teachers' creativity, their reflective teaching, and critical thinking were the subsections of reflective practice as the most significant solutions. Teachers' management strategies were defined by their authoritative role and administrative skills to run the class effectively. The teachers' assessment skills, ability to guide the students to complete the tasks, and the teacher performance evaluation were connected to classroom observations. Running workshops was also emphasized by the experts being interviewed. The extracts below show some instances for the provided solutions.

1. Running workshops
   Teacher education programs can provide pre-service teachers with special cases of difficulty and hold workshops if they find it difficult to consider it in teacher education. (Teacher Educator 4)
2. Reflective Practice
   It is important for language teachers to receive enough pre-service education on critical issues that need special reflection, and ineffective responses may influence the teaching practice. (Teacher Educator 1)
3. Practicing and Studying Management Strategies
   New teachers should know that their responsibility is important, and my experience shows that if they do not know the way they talk to the students, they miss the chance. (Teacher Educator 3)
4. Emotional Intelligence Development
   Connection with students helps the prospective teachers to understand their feeling, and you know the feeling is crucially important, and I did a study on this three years ago. (Teacher Educator 8)
5. Familiarizing the pre-service teachers with critical incidents
   University professors, I mean, us, can be given the chance to spend a part of our class to show them how to behave in the class. (Teacher Educator 4)
6. Classroom Observation
   I always liked to be a supervisor in a language institute. Not just for having a new job, but having the chance to make them work efficiently and pay attention to the principles. (Teacher Educator 2)

Overall, in the results section, nine major cases of critical incidents were identified out of some relevant subthemes. To deal with these critical incidents, the teacher educators attempted to offer some cognitive, instructional, and psychological solutions.

Discussion

This research was aimed at identifying the critical incidents and solutions provided by the EFL teacher educators. As for the instances of critical incidents, it can be mentioned that time management has been one of the significant concerns for language teachers. Wong (2004) pointed out that novice teachers have difficulties in organizing

their teaching plan, and time management is related to this category that may occur for every novice teacher. Planning and time management were also among the commonest critical incidents in Kilgour, Northcote, and Herman's (2015) study. Dvir and Schatz-Oppenheimer (2020) also considered three major categories of critical incidents, including the technological, pedagogical, and educational domains. Hence, practicum courses should provide student teachers with time management strategies. Likewise, there can be some practical solutions to effectively monitor the student teachers' progress in their pedagogical practices. As teacher educators claimed, the students' cooperation in the class was another incident that required proper response by the teachers. If the teachers do not know how to find some strategies to help the language learners to cooperate efficiently, there may encounter some difficulties in managing the class. The students' demotivation, dissatisfaction with the teaching style, and misconduct were also the last three critical incidents affecting the teachers.

The students' motivation has undoubtedly been discussed minutely in the language teaching literature, and the teachers' attempt to be reflective can be regarded as the extrinsic force, helping them to be motivated enough. More importantly, the teachers' content and intercultural knowledge can be gauged by the teacher educators at teacher training universities. The intercultural knowledge can be too much important for the language teachers, who work in a situation in which the students' ethnic background varies significantly. This issue was also highlighted in Esmaeili and Afzali's (2020) study in which the main focus was on categorizing the critical incidents. The teachers' ability to sympathize with the students was among the least mentioned points by the teacher educators. The type of feedback the students received was also critical for the educators and might influence all the other factors stated above. If the novice teachers know how to provide feedback for the students, this may affect their motivation and satisfaction with their teaching practice.

As Roberson and Roberson (2009) stated, during the first year of teaching, all these problems may occur to the novice teachers and the school staff should help them to analyze and monitor their performance to get acquainted with the school atmosphere. Hence, critical incidents are the first step for the teachers to think reflectively. In line with the findings of Richards and Farrell's (2005) study, teacher educators consider the knowledge of critical incidents of utmost significance for language teachers which can help them to prepare themselves. This preparation is one of the major goals of teacher education programs, whether formal or informal. Teacher education universities in Iran can prepare their curriculum to cover these critical incidents and deal with the practical solutions rather than theoretical ones. Since teacher education programs rely on the theoretical aspects of language teaching, the teachers' role in making balanced judgements about the strategies they apply for designing the best atmosphere for learning is crucially important.

The focus on the problem-solving ability of the novice teaches has shown that if they receive enough information, their performance is expected to improve significantly (Koray, Presley, Koksal, & Ozdemir, 2008). Hence, getting familiar with different types of critical incidents in teaching practice can impact the language teachers to monitor the intended outcome, design a flexible pattern, respond effectively to the difficulties, and express their personality in the best manner. Classroom management strategies were

considered to be one of the solutions at hand for the novice teachers. As Farrell (2006) stated, classroom management is a recurring problem for all novice teachers because of the difference between what they learn during teacher education courses and the school reality. He added that they eventually understand how to survive in a new school. Using the relevant strategies can influence the management skill in language teaching, such as classroom discipline, the population of classrooms, dealing with the students' differences, their ethnic background, assignment management, and the like (Sariçoban, 2010).

Undoubtedly, several strategies can help the novice teachers to deal with the problems effectively. One of the strategies mentioned by the teacher educators was related to self-regulation. Self-regulation can be regarded one of the ways by which the novice teachers reflect upon their own performance. Reflection on their performance can help them to prevent the problems to be escalated. Reflection in action and on action as the last solution provided by the teacher educators can be one of the major attempts of teacher education programs. However, the need to develop a well-rounded system for teaching how to perceive and practice reflection is important.

As Kolar and Dickson (2002), Tian et al. (2021), Yost and Moska (2003) stated, reflective practices should be the pivot of teacher training courses to help the novice teachers understand the value of reflection and the incidents that need reflection. In a similar vein, Kwan and Simpson (2010) referred to a direct link between unplanned occurrences in the teaching practice and adjustment in the form of reflection. In line with Yost, Sentler, and Forlenza-Bailey's (2000) study, involving in problem-solving activities can help the novice teachers to reflect on their performance. All in all, reflective practice needs different tools to be operationalized properly. There are different techniques that can be used for novice and pre-service teachers, such as Journals and Portfolios. As Hall and Townsend (2017) stated, E-portfolios are among the best tools used to help pre-service teachers to analyze their performance individually and cooperatively.

Although there are many research studies dealing with the challenges that novice teachers occasionally encounter, areas such as professional identity, efficacy, and being even-minded are the assets in the teaching practice that can be better perceived by further research and empirical evidence.

Conclusion and Implications

Based on the results of the study, several critical incidents were highlighted by the teacher educators. These critical incidents were selected to show the teacher educators' concerns and their own experiences of teaching. As the nature of these incidents shows, the teachers' ability to resolve all these tensions in practice is considered the key to educational success. If the teachers know how to deal with the critical incidents, their instructional practices will be definitely affected. Although deciphering the cases of critical incidents was the major goal of this study, the solutions provided by the teacher educators would be of utmost significance as they would help the novice or even pre-service teachers to find the appropriate and ready-made solution to the unpredictable problems of teaching.

The results of this study can help both the novice teachers and even educational policymakers to identify the areas of difficulty and complication in language teaching. As for the novice teachers, the knowledge of these critical incidents helps them to follow an appropriate approach to teaching and understand that they should further concentrate on their own management strategies and direct the students' behavior. Any mismanagement and lack of enough attention to the psychological aspects of teaching can have great consequences for the teachers. The results of the study can also help the teacher educators to find an appropriate place for critical incidents in teacher education courses and help the pre-service teachers to reflect better and manage their behavior and instructional practices. Teacher education courses can provide pre-service teachers with practical solutions that can be practiced using effective samples and strategies. These in-service teacher education programs can reemphasize the role of reflection by focusing on the teaching incidents that seem resolved, but the teachers do not try to deal with them consciously.

Like any other study, this research suffers from some limitations and delimitations. For instance, the present study was conducted with eight teacher educators who have been working at a teacher training University in Tehran. Therefore, the results of the study may be limited in terms of scope and research context. This study addressed teacher educators as the experts of the field, those whose views can be influential for pre-service teachers, and did not consider the experienced teachers' viewpoints. Future studies can be done considering the experienced teachers' standpoints for identifying the most targeted critical incidents and providing solutions accordingly. The experienced teachers as mentors, considering the local needs, can support the novice teachers to face the potential challenges that are not well-described in theory. Although this study took a substantial step to create a comprehensive picture of the critical incidents, more research can be conducted using a different methodology to address other participants in ESL and EAP instructional contexts.

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