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# Teacher Language Awareness from the Procedural Perspective: The Case of Novice versus Experienced EFL Teachers

**Zahra Hesami, Golnar Mazdayasna*, Ali Mohammad Fazilatfar,** *Yazd University, Yazd, Iran*

**Abstract**

Despite the abundance of research on ELT teachers, little is known about teacher language awareness (TLA) with focus on its impact on pedagogical practice in the EFL context. To fill this gap, an in-depth study was conducted to examine the procedural dimension of TLA among eight EFL teachers with different teaching experiences (novice versus experienced) related to teaching grammar at Iranian language institutes. Data were collected through non-participant classroom observations and stimulated recall interviews (of at least 7 lessons per teacher) from eight EFL teachers at three private language institutes in Iran. The findings revealed the experienced teachers' application of TLA in their pedagogical practices in comparison to their novice counterparts. Most importantly, the application of TLA in classrooms was affected by factors, such as context, time constraints, learners' emotions, and previous experiences as learners and teachers. This study may expand the current understanding of TLA and its impact on grammar teaching and have implications for language teacher education and development.

**Keywords:** Teacher language awareness; Procedural dimension; Novice EFL teachers; Experienced teachers; Pedagogical practice

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*Corresponding author:* Department of English Language and Literature, Yazd University, Yazd, Iran Email address: gmazdayasna@yazduni.ac.ir

## 1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the term ‘language awareness’ has attracted many scholars and researchers who have focused on the teachers’ language awareness (knowledge about language/KAL) of both L1 and L2 (e.g. Andrews, 1994). The underlying assumption behind these studies was that the teachers' knowledge of the language they teach and their ability in analyzing it will impact the teachers' efficacy. Teacher language awareness (also known as TLA) is an area of growing concern to researchers, teacher educators, and those attempting to set professional standards for L2 teachers (e.g. Andrews & Svalberg, 2017; Svalberg, 2016; Wach, 2014).

According to Andrews (2001), the significance of TLA comes from its impact upon the ways in which input is made available to learners. Andrews 1994, (p. 80) uses the metaphor of *filter* to reveal “how a teacher’s language awareness can affect the way in which input from each of the three essential sources, that is, teaching materials, other learners, and the teacher is made available to the learner in the L2 classroom”. Viewing TLA from both angles, i.e. declarative (subject-matter knowledge) and procedural (knowledge in action) dimensions, teacher educators are responsible for developing the subject-matter knowledge of prospective language teachers and the role such knowledge plays in determining the quality of teaching and learning which takes place in the class. The issue becomes a great concern in EFL settings, where practice opportunities can be limited outside the classroom environment.

Wright and Bolitho (1993) identify a number of pedagogic tasks, where TLA may have an indispensable positive impact on selecting, designing, and adapting materials; preparing lesson plans; designing syllabus and

evaluating learners' performances. They emphasize that these points about TLA apply equally to native speakers (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) teachers. Edge (1988), writing about non-native speakers of English, identifies three roles, i.e. language user, language analyst, and language teacher that the TEFL trainee must learn to take on. Furthermore, Wright (2002) relates TLA to the teacher's overall sensitivity to language and illustrates how different domains of TLA (Edge's three roles) interact. In this light, "a linguistically aware teacher not only understands how language works but understands the student's struggle with language and is sensitive to errors and other inter-language features" (Wright, 2002, p. 115). According to him, a linguistically aware teacher utilizes tasks and activities which will encourage intuition and promote creativity.

TLA is defined in terms of three distinct (sometimes overlapping) domains, i.e. the user domain, the analyst domain, and the teacher domain (Wright, 2002; Wright & Bolitho, 1993). The user domain addresses the L2 teacher as a user of English, which requires knowledge of the English language or language proficiency. The analyst domain emphasizes the crucial role of knowledge about the language for teachers and the teacher domain focuses on the ability of the teacher to recognize the language demands inherent in the content of the lessons and use the language pedagogically to convey information. Later on, Andrews (2007) made a distinction between declarative and procedural aspects of TLA. While the declarative dimension refers to the possession of subject-matter knowledge, procedural dimension refers to knowledge-in-action. As he noted:

> In order for the L2 teacher's handling of the content of learning to be 'language-aware', that teacher needs to possess not only a certain level of

> knowledge of the language systems of the target language, but also those qualities (i.e. the 'awareness') that will enable the subject-matter knowledge base to be accessed easily and drawn upon appropriately and effectively in the act of teaching (p. 94).

As such, declarative knowledge about language factors might heavily draw upon the Analyst Domain and procedural knowledge may be more easily attributed to the User Domain of a teacher's language proficiency. However, as Lindahl (2013) mentioned, both procedural and declarative knowledge are not exclusive to one Domain over another. As an example, procedural knowledge could be included in both the User and the Teacher Domain since teachers not only need to know how to use English, they also need to know how to use it pedagogically to convey information (Andrews, 2001).

*1.1. Conceptual framework*

During the 1980s, the term teachers' "knowledge about language" (KAL) was used frequently especially in the UK (see, e.g., Carter 1990). Although "the focus on KAL in the UK National Curriculum for English may have led to a narrow view of KAL as a renewed call for formal grammar teaching" (Andrews, 2007, p.11), Van Lier (1996) stated that "in principle this term (KAL) should be compatible with any conception of LA" (p. 80). As both terms (TLA/KAL) share a common assumption (Van Lier, 1996), the researchers of the current study preferred to use the term TLA rather than 'KAL'.

Thornbury (1997) defined TLA as the network of beliefs and knowledge which EFL teachers hold of the underlying systems of the language that enables them to teach effectively and efficiently. In the same vein, Hales (1997) pointed out that language aware teachers should be sensitive to grammatical, lexical, or phonological features, and the effect of different forms on meaning. Based on these definitions, it can be concluded that an essential part of any teacher's language awareness system is the subject-matter knowledge or the explicit knowledge about language.

In spite of the fact that subject-matter knowledge has a central role in any teacher's language awareness, it does not seem to be sufficient by itself to ensure an effective teaching. As discussed by Andrews (2007), what is central to the operation of TLA is the teachers' awareness of learners as well as the ways in which input is made available to learners.

Using the terms 'declarative' and 'procedural' knowledge to refer to teachers' subject-matter knowledge (what teachers know, or need to know about language) and the impact of their knowledge and awareness upon their pedagogical practice respectively. Andrews and Svalberg (2017) defined TLA as a teacher development activity that focuses on the interface between teachers' declarative and procedural knowledge.

### *1.2. Empirical studies*

Early research relating to TLA was conducted with respect to primary teachers, teachers of English as an L1, and teachers of modern foreign languages (e.g., Williamson & Hardman, 1995). The focus of the above-mentioned research was assessing aspects of teachers' language awareness

and seeking the teachers' understandings of TLA rather than investigating the effects of this knowledge on classroom teaching.

Later, some researchers investigated various aspects of L2 teachers' language awareness, with particular reference to grammar (Andrews, 1999) and vocabulary (McNeill, 1999), and to explore the impact of teachers' language awareness on their professional practice. One of the valuable findings from their studies on TLA is that although explicit knowledge of language is necessary to the successful application of TLA in practice, it is not sufficient to ensure that the teacher will deal with language-related issues conducive to learning. According to Andrews and McNeill (2005), the extent and the adequacy of L2 teachers' engagement with language content in their professional practice is a significant factor in determining the quality and potential effectiveness of L2 teachers' instructional practices.

More recently, Wach (2014) investigated the metalinguistic awareness of EFL teachers, teacher-trainees, and advanced EFL learners. The findings showed that the teacher-trainees' and teachers' overall levels of language awareness were higher in comparison to advanced learners.

As the concerns of TLA are relevant to teachers of all subjects (Andrews & Svalberg, 2017), Gok and Rajala (2017) investigated the language awareness of three Finnish primary school teachers in their profession. Using video recordings, observations, and interviews, they found that the everyday pedagogical choices that classroom teachers make could support language awareness.

In some other studies, the researchers sought to investigate the effectiveness of raising teachers' awareness of the language. Lindahl (2013) conducted a quasi-experimental study to investigate the construct of TLA in a group of pre-service teachers. While one group enrolled in a course adopted an incidental approach to the development of TLA, another group enrolled in a course adopted a deliberate approach. The results showed a significant improvement in the analyst domain for the group who received treatment in the form of an explicit approach to the development of TLA. However, neither group demonstrated significant improvement in the teacher domain.

Likewise, Zhang and Hung (2014) investigated the effectiveness of integrating language awareness into grammar teaching in the Chinese EFL context. Giving language awareness teaching interventions as well as using questionnaires and interviews with fifty-eight participants, they found that a majority of the participants showed positive changes in their attitudes regarding learning grammar, and responded positively to integrate their learning of grammar with four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). Their findings were in line with what Wong (2011) found in his longitudinal collaborative study with the aim of enhancing the teachers' language awareness. As his findings revealed, the teachers developed a deeper understanding of language structures and improved their teaching practices, such as inductive teaching or error correction.

### *1.2.1. Iranian studies*

In the Iranian context, Moradan and Pourasadollah (2014), and Ahmadi and Shafiee (2015) examined Iranian L2 teachers' beliefs. Alipoor and Jadidi (2016), and Atai and Shafiee (2017) investigated teachers' cognition and

thought patterns. Ferdowsi and Afghari, (2015) explored teachers' reflection. Atai and Fatahi-Majd (2014) examined congruity/incongruity between L2 teachers' beliefs/cognition and their actual practice in the classrooms.

Although few studies have investigated teachers' language awareness regarding different components of language, almost all of them have focused on the declarative dimension of TLA. Aghaei and Jadidi (2013) investigated the effect of EFL teachers' TLA and gender on their reflective behavior. They administered a language awareness test and a reflectivity questionnaire to fifty English teachers teaching in language institutes in Shiraz. While the results confirmed that TLA significantly affects EFL teachers' reflective behavior, gender was not found to have any significant effect on teachers' reflectivity.

Abdolmaleki and Mohebi (2014) determined Iranian EFL teachers' awareness and practice regarding supra-segmental area using a test and a questionnaire. The results revealed a poor command of literacy in the supra-segmental phase by a noticeable portion of the population. Moreover, few of them incorporated this phase into their common classroom procedures.

Recently, Hayati, Vahdat, and Khoram (2017) examined the metalinguistic awareness of prospective teachers at teacher education universities in Iran. Using a metalinguistic knowledge test and a grammaticality judgment test, they found a moderate level of metalinguistic knowledge and a significant relationship between metalinguistic knowledge and error identification ability.

To date, few studies have examined EFL teachers' procedural dimension of TLA in teaching grammar. Although discussions about the importance of TLA have received some attention in previous research, there has been relatively little research into the nature of TLA or its impact on pedagogical practice (Andrews & Svalberg, 2017). Since the concept of TLA is a contextualized issue, an in-depth exploratory interpretive study in the real contexts of English classes is needed to broaden our understanding of TLA in the EFL settings.

Given the growing importance of TLA and bridging the gaps in the literature, this study examined the nature of the procedural dimension of TLA with specific reference to grammar teaching. The present study represents the first attempt to shed light on the concept of TLA as well as the role of teachers' experience of grammar teaching in the Iranian context. The study addressed the following questions:

1. How do Iranian novices versus experienced English teachers display TLA in their pedagogical practice of grammar teaching? (The procedural dimension of TLA)
2. What factors influence the impact of TLA on Iranian English teachers' pedagogical practices related to grammar teaching in the classroom?

## 2. Method

### *2.1. Participants and sampling*

The participants of this study were eight teachers were selected out of a population of 86. They were chosen based on convenience and access (i.e. convenience sampling), and classified into novice (n=26) and experienced (n=60) groups based on their teaching experience. The teachers with less

than five years of experience were included in the novice group, while those with more than five years were included in the experienced group. As the declarative dimension of TLA (teachers' subject-matter knowledge) affects its procedural aspect (Andrews, 2007), all the 86 teachers were given a 60-item test of Language Awareness (LA) focusing specifically on grammar, which was adapted by Andrews (1999). The test appeared to have construct validity as a measure of the declarative dimension of TLA in that it is potentially revealing about both knowledge of meta-language and also the ability to state grammatical rules (Alderson et al., 1996; Andrews, 1999).

Then, eight teachers were selected from those participants who had gained high scores on the LA test in each group. They were all Persian-L1 speakers with an age range of 20 to 35 who were teaching at language institutes in one of the cities of Iran (Birjand) which is the capital of South Khorasan province. The demographic information of these teachers is provided in Table 1.

Table 1
*Demographic Information of the Teachers*

| Pseudo Name | Gender | Experience (years) |
|---|---|---|
| **Farhad** | Male | Experienced (11) |
| **Ali** | Male | Experienced (10) |
| **Tina** | Female | Experienced (10) |
| **Saeed** | Male | Experienced (8) |
| **Bahar** | Female | Novice (4) |
| **Nader** | Male | Novice (3) |
| **Maryam** | Female | Novice (2) |
| **Reza** | Male | Novice (4) |

*2.2. Data collection and analysis*

In order to shed light on the procedural dimension of TLA, data were collected over a six-month period. Classroom data for each teacher were collected through classroom observations and were audio recorded and transcribed. The observational data after each lesson was analyzed for key instructional episodes, such as classroom incidents that generated questions about the rationale for the teacher's approach to grammar, the use of a particular grammar teaching activity, the explanation of a grammar rule, a response to a student's question about grammar, or a reaction to a student's grammatical error through which the researchers gained insight into the procedural aspect of TLA.

Detailed descriptive field notes of the observed lessons (at least seven lessons per teacher) were made, and copies of the instructional materials were collected. The ability to provide accounts of real classroom events relevant to grammar teaching was seen as indispensable to the research.

Furthermore two hours of post-observation interviews in form of stimulated recall were conducted for each teacher. The focus of these interviews was on the discussion of the key episodes identified in the observational data. The interviews were also audio-taped and transcribed.

## 3. Results

The samples of teachers' behavior or comments were analyzed with regard to the three potential sources of input, i.e. teacher himself/herself, materials, and other learners (Andrews, 2007). following conventions were used to

identify the sources of the data we quote: (CO) classroom observations, (SR) stimulated recall interviews, and the first letter of the teachers' pseudo names (e.g. R for Reza).

*3.1.TLA and teacher-produced input*

As Andrews (1994) clarified, one of the manifestations of TLA in teacher's input, and perhaps the most important one, is the ability to analyze grammar from a learning perspective. The data revealed some strong as well as weak samples of this feature. As the weak samples could better illustrate the limitations of teachers' TLA on their teaching, in each case, most of the examples were allocated to the weak samples of teachers' behavior.

In explaining the indirect speech grammar for imperatives, Reza clarified the meaning-difference of direct and indirect sentences using the board. He first drew three points and named them as A, B, and C. Extract 1 presents the discussion that took place in his class.

**Extract 1**

**R:** Suppose that there is something common between A and B…However, C is not present there. [Putting A and B in one circle and C in another]…now look at this example…[writing on the board]

*A: The news announced that Sunday the weather will be rainy. Please be careful about driving.*

*B: Hum. I've heard it too. OK.*

*A: But our friend, C, does not know about it. Please tell him too.*

*B: OK.*

*The next day*

*B: Hi C. Our friend, A, said to be careful in driving on Sunday.*

*C: Why?*
*B: He said: "The news announced that Sunday the weather will be rainy."*
Now answer my questions…what is common between A and B?
**Sts**: The news announced that Sunday the weather will be rainy.
**R:** What does A ask B to tell C?
**St 1:** That Sunday the weather will be rainy…
**St 2:** Please be careful in driving
**R:** Yes, and how did B tell C about driving? Did he use exactly A's words or use his own words?
**St 2**: …mm… his own words
**R:** What about the weather?
**St 1**: A's words
**R:** Yes, and that's the difference between direct and indirect speech… [pointing to the board] direct speech is when we report what someone says by repeating the exact words… indirect speech is when we give the same meaning of what someone says without repeating the exact words. (R/CO2)

Next, he attempted to expose learners to more examples while drawing their attention to the structural points and mechanics. The learners were then expected to discover the structural and punctuation differences between direct and indirect speech. Explaining this episode in the post-lesson interview, Reza stated the following: "*I think the learners' problem with the direct and indirect speech is that they don't know their difference in meaning…. If we clarify the meaning difference then they will successfully learn structures, punctuation, changes in pronouns and adverbs…by asking them questions I want to trigger their mind…that's what happens in the mind while learning… you have some questions in your mind and try to answer them*." (R/SR2)

As Extract 1 reveals, Reza successfully engaged his TLA in explaining the grammatical point of the lesson. He attempted to involve the learners by asking and answering questions while directing their attention to the grammatical points in the sentences on the board. However, this was not the case for Bahar, Nader, and Maryam. In explaining the same grammatical point, Bahar attempted to clarify the different meaning between direct and indirect speech orally. She stated that: "*direct speech appears between the quotations but in indirect speech, there is no quotation*" (B/CO5). As it is clear from the data, her explanation was not revealing in clarifying the meaning difference. She continued her lesson by asking the learners to find all the direct speeches in the story she had given to them. Then, she directed their attention to one indirect speech and asked them to discover the way in which direct speech is changed into an indirect one. As her explanation was not revealing in this case, the learners were confused about what to do [which was heard from the learners whispering together] and, finally, she herself explained all the grammatical points. Elaborating on her behavior in the post-lesson interview or post-lesson interview, she mentioned that: "*discovery learning is the one that I really appreciate and try to implement in my own classes…but in this class the learners are not that much eager to discover the points…*" (B/SR5). In spite of the fact that Bahar attempted to encourage the learners to discover the grammatical point, it seems that her endeavor was not successful since the learners were not aware of the difference between the two. However, she referred to learners' willingness rather than her unclear explanation as for the reason for the unsuccessful application of discovery learning.

Nader's lesson on noun clauses also illustrated the inadequacy of the teacher's input regarding learning. He wanted the learners to open their books and read aloud the grammar box for them. He did not make use of the

board; likewise, he did not use any illustrations to provide explanations regarding grammar. Consequently, the learners were not able to perform the follow up grammatical practices successfully. Even at the start of the next session, when the learners' homework was checked by the teacher, it was evident that they were not successful in answering their grammatical homework correctly. In the post stimulated recall interview, he added that: "*the grammar boxes include explanations and good examples… the important sections are also highlighted… so I think we should focus on these boxes…*" (N/CO3). As a teacher, he just read aloud the grammar boxes in the book. However, as Svalberg (2016) stated, the involvement of learners in exploration and discovery is indispensable of teachers' TLA.

There were also a number of instances in the recorded lessons that revealed the positive impact of TLA on teacher-produced input for learning. As an example, Tina's explanation for the use of tag questions was presented in Extract 2. After working on the conversation section of the book, she selected the first sentences of the dialog and wrote it on the board:

*Good morning. Beautiful day, isn't it?*

**Extract 2**

**T:** Why did speaker A use this question?
**Sts:** mm…
**T:** You see without this question the sentence was complete... but why did she use it?
**St 1:** She wanted speaker B to answer the question.
**T:** Is the answer really important to her?
**Sts**: …No
**St 2**: To continue talking.
**St 3**: To see whether B has the same opinion or not.

**T:** Yes, exactly. To encourage speaker B to make a small talk with her…or to confirm information she already thinks is true… we have the same in Farsi… Ruze Khubiye, intor nist/mage na? (Nice day, isn't it?) [writing on the board]…Can you give me more examples in Farsi? (T/CO1)

Then she started translating the sentences that were produced by learners into English and writing them on the board. When she was asked to talk about using L1 in her teaching, she said that: "*sometimes using L1 could be really helpful especially when the structures are the same in two languages … also, being able to use the L1 with students can be more efficient and make time for more useful activities… it also minimizes students' stress… I can remember this sentence from my M.A. courses which I passed: communicating with students in their mother tongue could improve teacher-student rapport*" (T/SR1).

Another feature that can impact teachers' TLA is the teachers' ability to monitor their own output (Andrews, 2007). The data contained several episodes of the teachers who managed to talk about grammar with clarity in a way which makes salient the key features of the target structure. However, there are also some teachers who talked too much focusing on the features that were not the focus of the lesson. Nader is one of the teachers whose output was inadequately monitored. In explaining the noun clause structure, he read a sentence from the students' book: *Other noun clauses with that often follow certain predicate adjectives*. Then, for half an hour, he talked about what is a predicate adjective which resulted in diverting students' attention from the key grammatical point.

In some cases, the teachers made generalizations that were not always true. For instance, at one point in the middle of her explanation about noun

clauses, Maryam stated that: "*…before noun clauses we have a verb…*" (M/CO3). However, the lesson just focused on noun clauses as the direct object of a mental activity verb and, therefore, her explanation may lead the learners to make an incorrect generalization that there is always a verb before a noun clause.

Using the board as an instruction aid was also ignored by some teachers. As mentioned above, Nader preferred to read aloud the grammar boxes and its examples from the textbook (see above). In the same way, at the beginning of her class, Maryam played a video about noun clauses as embedded questions. She highlighted some points in the video and did not use the board at all. However, as the learners were not aware of the aim of playing the video, they misunderstood most of the explanations provided by the speaker in the video and some of them mistook the grammar explanations for a listening task.

*3.2.TLA and materials*

Although most of the teachers observed in this study did not go beyond the language content presented in *Top Notch* textbooks, the data included some episodes involving teacher mediation of the grammatical content of materials. For instance, after teaching causative verbs: get, have, and make, Saeed started using examples of *let* as another causative verb which was not included in the book. In the same lesson, Ali attempted to clarify a common error using causatives: "*be careful! Don't confuse these two…* [writing on the board] *I had them call me before 10… I had called them before 10… the first one means they called me… but the second means I called them … first is simple past tense causative 'have' and second is past perfect auxiliary 'have'*" (A/CO4). The data revealed the impact of TLA on his contribution

through his ability to anticipate learners' grammatical difficulties. Likewise, after teaching each structure, Reza wanted the learners to browse the photo story page and find the structure in authentic conversations which appeared on that page.

*3.3.TLA and learners' output*

According to Andrews (1999), "interaction with the spoken output produced by learners potentially represents the most challenging of demands upon teachers' language awareness." (p.172). According to him, this is due to the fact that learners' output is unpredictable and the response it requires is produced spontaneously; therefore, TLA could have a great impact on teacher mediation of learner's output. Consequently, the quality of corrective feedbacks which teachers provide is crucially dependent on their language awareness.

Most of the observed teachers in this study used 'recast' as their preferred corrective feedback. The teacher implicitly reformulates the student's error or provides the correct response without directly indicating that the student's utterance was incorrect. However, it seemed that in most cases, teachers' amendments of the problematic grammatical points were not perceived by the learners, as they made the same error in their following speech. As an exception, Reza often attempted to elicit the correct response from the learner and the class: "*I try to make sure that the problematic point is understood by the learner…first I try to elicit the response from the learner himself… then if he is not able to correct it, I will ask other students… then if nobody finds the error, I myself will explain it… In fact, it's a form of self-correction, peer-correction and, then, teacher correction…*" (R/SR3). As the data and his elaborations revealed, Reza's

TLA appeared to have a constructive impact upon his tackling of student utterances.

Another feature for the grammatical knowledge and awareness that is required of teachers is the ability to deal confidently with spontaneous grammar questions (Andrews, 1994). One of the episodes that vividly illustrated the challenges to TLA posed by the spontaneous learner's contribution is the lesson taught by Bahar. After explaining the usage of 'will' and 'be going to' to talk about the future tense, she asked the learners to go through a story which had been given to them and find all the instances of future with `will'. This procedure was common in her classes. One of the students found the following sentences from the middle of the story, where the writer was talking about his personal desires to a friend:

A: Is it true that you won't go to the dentist?
B: I'll go to the dentist, but I don't like fillings.

The teacher plainly accepted the example and wrote it on the board. Then, one of the students asked her "why does he use future? While all the previous sentences are in the simple present tense and they are not talking about the future!"(B/CO1). This question made Bahar feel uncomfortable while her body language revealed her embarrassment obviously. Correspondingly, she had no idea how to handle it. Eventually, after a long pause, she responded: "I'll check it for your next session". This suggests that the teacher did not possess sufficient knowledge of TLA. It also revealed her inability to think on one's feet in dealing with grammar problems.

The teachers who participated in this study also mentioned several factors while elaborating on their lesson episodes in the stimulated recall

interviews, which could be regarded as the factors that influence the impact of TLA on their pedagogical practice. Some of them highlighted the influence of time restrictions, institute's mandates, and classroom context on their teaching; *" we have just 90 minutes each session and grammar is just one of the parts that should be taught… so I prefer to use good examples and explanations provided in the textbook to save time…*" (N/SR3). For the same reason, Bahar and Maryam did not go beyond what is presented in the textbooks: "*I usually face lack of time when I try to talk about a grammatical point beyond the textbook…and we are supposed to finish the pre-selected parts of the textbook by the end of semester …*" (B/ SR4). Besides time, classroom management was another factor that was mentioned by Maryam which affected her teaching:

" *In previous years, sometimes, I asked students to have a group work activity and discover the grammatical point in the examples, but they start talking together about issues not related to class…you know they are girls [laughing]. Nowadays, I prefer to explain grammatical points myself.*"(M/SR2).

Another important factor that was admitted by several teachers was the influence of their past experiences as a learner or university student. Tina referred to her M.A. courses which she had passed when asked to provide the reason for using L1 in her classes (See T/SR1 above). Reza also, frequently, referred to different books, articles, and authors when elaborating on his practice. Likewise, talking about the use of video clips in her classes, Maryam stated that: "*as a learner, I always like to watch English clips … I had an English teacher who used such clips in her classes … I always love her since I learned much more in her classes*" (M/SR5)

The third factor that was highlighted in the stimulated recall interviews was focusing on learners' mental state. Bahar talked about her students' unwillingness to discover grammatical points as a reason for the ineffectiveness of discovery teaching in her class (See B/ SR5 above). Tina also highlighted learners' stress and the role of the teacher in minimizing stress by using L1 when necessary (See T/ SR1 above). Maryam highlighted the role of video clips in minimizing learners' boredom in class.

Finally, preserving teachers' self-image was another factor that affected the teachers' instructional practice. Saeed reported the following reason when he was asked why he did not allow the students to have peer correction: "*I believe that the teacher should be the most reliable authority in the learners' mind*" (S/SR3). The same factor was highlighted in Bahar's comments while elaborating on her inability to deal confidently with a learner's spontaneous grammar question: *"... teachers' are not a grammar book, and sometimes they may forget some rare points. I think they should go and check them. However, in the learners' viewpoint, such teachers are not that much valid … So sometimes I ask learners to check the problematic point and bring it to class for the next session as an assignment … a trick [laughing]*" (B/SR1).

## 4. Discussion

The first research question sought to examine the extent to which Iranian novice and experienced teachers display TLA in their pedagogical practice of grammar teaching (the procedural dimension of TLA). The results revealed that teachers' teaching experience had an influential impact on the application of TLA in their pedagogical decisions and strategies. The findings of the stimulated recall interviews regarding the above-mentioned

teachers indicated that the content of learning and how best to make input available for learning was central to their reflection-on-action (e.g. see T/SR1 above), which is a feature of '*Good Language Teachers*' noted by Andrews and McNeill (2005, p. 172).

On the contrary, among the teachers who were in the novice group, i.e. Bahar, Nader, and Maryam displayed a poor level of TLA in their instructional practices, with the exception of Reza. The analyses of Reza's grammar teaching practices revealed a satisfactory engagement of the students. Based on his own personal experience as a student in universities and/or at school, Reza used to provide additional instructions to the students who required more help and support (See Extract 1).

Regarding the positive impact of experience on the application of TLA in grammar-teaching practices, the findings of the current study might be attributed to the fact that while experienced teachers utilize their successful experiences to enhance the engagement of the students in inductive discussions, their novice colleagues had to overcome the "reality shock" (Veenman, 1984, p. 143) they experience as they enter the classroom in their first years of teaching. Facing the realities of teaching practice, according to Veenman (1984), might challenge novice teachers and lead to shifts in their attitudes and behaviors, in conjunction with facing difficulties in coping with individual disparities.

Another factor which might contribute to the experienced teachers' satisfactory performances with respect to the procedural dimension of TLA is the larger number of on-the-job training programs they have attended. According to Akbari and Moradkhani (2010), participating in training

programs throughout the teaching service can enhance teachers' efficacy of instructional strategies and student engagement.

The findings of this study were in line with what Yazdanmehr and Akbari (2015) found in their study. Reviewing the previous studies and conducting interviews with teachers, they identified several qualities that distinguish experienced EFL teachers from novices in terms of the ability to focus their attention on what is worth attending to, the ability to anticipate learners' language problems, awareness of situation-specific class events, and awareness of their knowledge about language. Correspondingly, Sharabyan's (2011) findings revealed that experienced teachers pay more attention to the level of student, and the individual differences. These findings along with several others (e.g. Gok & Rajala, 2017; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Sanchez, 2014) confirmed the assertion that teacher language awareness is mediated through teacher's experience.

Finally, with respect to the fact that all the observed teachers were selected from the participants who got high scores on the LA test, the findings confirmed the claim that although subject-matter knowledge is useful in shaping teacher conceptions of language, "it does not always transfer to teaching, leaving a gap between teachers' declarative and procedural knowledge" (Bigelow & Ranney, 2010, p.222). In line with previous studies (Andrews & Svalberg, 2017; Svalberg, 2016; Zhang & Hung, 2014), the findings of the current study also suggest that TLA can mediate the teacher's pedagogical practice in a manner that facilitates learning first by making salient highlighting the key grammatical features aspects in the within input; second, by providing examples and explanations; third, by helping learners to make useful generalizations, and finally, by getting rid of potential sources of learner confusion.

The second research question dealt with the factors which influence the impact of TLA on the Iranian English teachers' pedagogical practices of teaching grammar in the class. Based on the elaborations and explanations provided by the teachers in stimulated recall interviews and class observations, these factors are summarized in the following section.

The first factor is related to the context of teaching, that is, time, institute, and class. For example, Bahar and Nader's decision to use exact examples and explanations provided in the textbooks instead of eliciting responses from the learners or going beyond what is presented in the materials was shaped by their perceptions of context and due to time constraints at the institutes (See N/SR3, B/SR4 above). It should be noted that all the observed teachers in the current study had to complete the syllabus and cover the textbook, which was selected in advance by the institutes' authorities, in about 20 sessions, three days per week.

In line with the findings of the current study, Andrews (2007) also reported that contextual factors play a significant role in the procedural dimension of TLA. Equally important factors, as he mentioned, were professional (knowledge of subject matter, communicative language ability, and teaching experience), personality (sensitivity, perception, vision, reflectiveness, and alertness), and attitudinal (confidence, readiness, willingness to engage with language-related issues) factors. Likewise, several researchers (e.g. Gok & Rajala, 2017; Sanchez, 2014; Sanchez & Borg, 2014) have highlighted the impact of external forces which teachers have little or no control over them on teachers' cognition, beliefs, and practices.

The teachers in the current study were also sensitive to students' behavior, especially students' negative reactions including students' unwillingness to discover grammatical points, and that they were feeling bored and nervous (See B/SR5, & T/SR1 above). Gatbonton (2008) also found that novice teachers in her study were sensitive to the students' negative reactions, i.e. frustrations and hesitations. She also stated that "there is no reason to expect that the experienced teachers failed to note students' reactions" (p. 174). The findings of this study also support this assertion as both Bahar and Tina's (who were in the novice and experienced groups respectively) preoccupation was learners' behaviors and reactions.

Moreover, the teachers' previous experience as a learner or university student of TEFL was another factor having an impact on the procedural dimension of TLA. For example, Maryam who had learned English successfully by watching English videos was willing to incorporate video clips into her classes. Tina and Reza had both experienced L2 teacher education courses as a part of their university program which encouraged them to adopt a learner-centered approach to L2 instruction (See T/SR1 above). Hos and Kekec (2014), in their study of the mismatch between EFL teachers' grammar beliefs and classroom practices, also found that teachers' previous learning experiences can affect their way of teaching. Likewise, Caires, Almeida and Vieira's (2012) findings revealed that student teachers' experiences and perceptions about teaching practice were influenced by their experience as a student teacher.

The final factor reported by the teachers, which might be a barrier to the implementation of TLA in teachers' pedagogical practices, was related to the teachers as far as their self-image was concerned. In spite of the fact that Saeed believed that peer correction is very useful in language learning, he

still did not allow the students to correct each other's mistakes in order to preserve his authority in class. Consequently, creating an impression on the students seemed to be of much importance to him than learning. In the same way, Bahar referred questions back to the learners to avoid being considered less knowledgeable. Similarly, the teacher in Borg's (2001) study, Eric, bounced students' grammar questions back to the class to extend his wait time when he felt uncertain. Sanchez (2014) also reported that one of the two teachers in his study, Emma, used hedging expressions in her explanations of grammar rules because she believed that it might preserve her face in the eyes of the learners. For the same reason, the other teacher in his study, Sophia, disclosed the correct answers herself and did not accommodate students' questions or further discussion.

## 5. Conclusion

The current study was designed to explore the procedural dimension of TLA in the pedagogical practice of novice versus experienced Iranian English teachers teaching grammar. Although the study was limited in the number of participants, it suggests that one of the important factors shaping ELT teachers' language awareness is the number of years of teaching experience. Considering the teachers' performances in the class as a yardstick of being procedurally language aware, it seems that teachers with more than five years of teaching experience had higher levels of procedural TLA than their novice counterparts.

These findings can have significant implications for language teacher recruitment and education not only at the national level, but also at the international level. As TLA has been included in many TEFL programs around the world, Iranian TEFL programs at universities and teacher

training programs at institutes should also include courses dealing with theoretical as well as practical aspects of language teaching while drawing prospective teachers' attention to TLA by fostering reflective teaching. Such courses could include the participation of prospective teachers' in the classes which are run by their experienced counterparts in order to grasp the pedagogical techniques and strategies useful for language teaching. Class observations and reflective discussions can be helpful for raising teachers' awareness of the procedural dimension of TLA not only before, but also throughout the teaching service.

Correspondingly, the findings of this study confirmed Andrews' (1999) claim that explicit knowledge of grammar (declarative TLA) is necessary, but not sufficient in the successful application of TLA in practice. As indicated earlier, all the eight teachers who were selected to be observed and interviewed were from those who got high scores on the LA test. However, some of them revealed certain limitations regarding the implementation of TLA in their pedagogical practice of teaching grammar. Therefore, regular observations of teachers' classes as well as providing feedback by those who are proficient in the field of TLA seem to be effective, especially in the EFL contexts.

Finally, the findings revealed that contextual factors along with factors, such as experience, learners' emotions, and previous experience as learners and teachers have a powerful impact on the application of TLA in pedagogical practices. As these factors may also combine and interact in different ways, in different contexts, the relationship between subject-matter knowledge and classroom teaching is very complex.

To sum up, these findings may contribute to the study of TLA in two ways. First, they demonstrate the significance of examining the procedural dimension in TLA research because it deals with various aspects of teachers' behavior in the real context of the classes. Although using tests and questionnaires is very helpful in determining the declarative dimension of TLA, locating the evidence of TLA in the details of the instructional practices of the teachers can shed the light on the nature of teacher language awareness. Second, the findings of this study may extend the current understandings of TLA by providing insights into the factors affecting teachers' pedagogical practices with reference to teaching grammar. Even though generalizations of this study may be limited, prospective non-native L2 teachers may realize the importance of increasing their declarative and procedural knowledge about language. It is expected that with its focus on an under-explored geographical setting (i.e. Iran), this study highlighted that non-native teachers need not only declarative grammar knowledge, but also the ability to apply it for teaching purposes.

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***Notes on Contributors:***

***Zahra Hesami*** is a PhD student at Yazd University, Iran. Her research interests are second language acquisition, foreign language instruction, and materials designing and evaluation.

***Golnar Mazdayasna*** is an associate professor of applied linguistics at Yazd University, Iran. Her main research areas are ESP, teacher language awareness, and language skills.

***Ali Mohammad Fazilatfar*** is an associate professor of applied linguistics in the department of English language and literature at Yazd University, Iran. His main interests include teaching methodology and language skills.