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Proposing a Conceptual Model for Teacher Expertise in ELT

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Abstract—Interest in expertise studies has been shown from the beginning of 21st century so far in quite many fields including art, music, chess, medical sciences, etc. Just recently, applied linguistics has joint this new wave of research and this was an inspiration for conducting the present research. Since the early twenty-first century, expertise studies have been undertaken in a large number of domains. Applied linguistics is relatively a newcomer to the list which makes any study aiming to cast light on some aspect of expertise in this domain worth considering. In the present study, a model is proposed for the construct of teaching expertise in ELT comprised of 8 interrelated factors. Based on a perusal of previous research on expertise in education and the thought patterns and behavior of exemplary teachers of English language these factors were extracted. The direct or indirect effect of each factor on the latent variable, teaching expertise, is indicated in the model. For further content validation, 20 specialists of the field were interviewed. These specialists included university professors of applied linguistics, teacher educators, teacher trainers at the private sector, mentor teachers and experienced teachers. The 8 factors which were extracted from prior research and interviewees' remarks include: teacher's language proficiency, pedagogical content knowledge, social recognition, cognitive skills, experience, professional development, contextual knowledge, and learner-centered teaching. These are perceived to be the key constituents of teaching expertise in ELT. This model is aimed to be later used as a basis for developing an instrument for operationalizing the construct of teacher expertise in ELT.

Index Terms—expertise, teaching expertise, ELT, expert teacher

I. INTRODUCTION

The domain where expertise was studied first was playing chess. Early work in this domain was done by de Groot in the first half of the twentieth century. Further studies in this field suggested that expertise involved knowing how to deploy that knowledge in a focused way, for example to solve specific problems at particular points in a chess game. Therefore, it was not just what was known, but knowing when and how to use what was known that was important in expertise (Tsui, 2005).

Efforts targeted at differentiating experts from novices among teachers were not as easy as in the other domains such as music, sports or nursing. As described by Tsui (2003), setting objective criteria for teacher expertise in ELT, despite being a difficult task, is worth of attempting. Expert teachers are supposedly to act as models for other teachers to follow and then the question arises: Who is an expert teacher of English? Can we simply rely on insufficient criteria such as the length of experience or other-evaluation, or are we in need of a well-grounded basis of judgment? In the case of novices, as described by Tsui (2003), the task of identification seems to be easier. In the body of previous research, novice teachers are characterized by having inadequate (little or almost none) teaching experience. In other words. These people have subject matter knowledge but lack the practical and behavioral aspects and they have had no formal pedagogical training. In the case of expert teachers, however, studies with that aim so far have used one or more of the following subjective along with objective criteria each of which has its own drawbacks. These criteria have been enlisted in Tsui (2003), Tsui (2005) and Goodwyn (2011) as: Length of experience, Rewards and recommendations from school, and Learners' achievement.

There have been a number of models of expertise in education which have been proposed so far including: Dryfus Brothers' model proposed in 1986, Glaser and Chi's introduced in 1988, and finally Bereiter and Scardamalia's model in 1993. These models will be reviewed in the second section of this article along with their deficiencies.

What currently exists in the literature concerning the nature of expertise suffers from certain inadequacies. Among them are: lack of consistency and agreement on many features, core basis in static nature of expertise, no clarification of the interaction of features, main basis in comparing novice and experienced teachers and less interest in cognitive features related to expertise.

The present study first seeks to present a framework of teaching expertise in ELT that is to define the informational and behavioral features of expertise in this domain; then it seeks to take one step further and explore the interrelationship between and among these features and how they directly or indirectly contribute to the latent variable, expertise.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

We will briefly introduce the pre-existing models of expertise in education. What distinguishes our model from these models is that:

- They simply point out a number of limited and in some cases just intuition-based characteristics of expert teachers. Some of these characteristics have been criticized and even totally refuted in subsequent models.
- These models are in fact only frameworks since they merely pinpoint several static features without delving into their mutual interaction and interrelated effects.
- These models have addressed teaching in general and have focused neither on language teaching nor EFL teaching.
- These models have been based mainly on a comparison of novices and experts. However, this comparison cannot always be reliable. It does not reveal all the truly existing characteristics of expert teachers. It tells us nothing about how an expert teacher becomes an expert. In our suggested model, however the links among the underlying factors show how an expert becomes what s/he is.

A. *Dreyfus Brothers' Model (1986)*

These scholars considered that human beings' capacity to learn especially from experience made them infinitely adaptable and capable of improvement. Their five-stage model included: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient and expert. This model identifies the necessity of going through stages in order to reach expertise in teaching. The expert is very automatic and goes with intuition at such a speed that even makes recalling decisions very difficult. In this model, deliberate thought will slow down any process of decision making and therefore hampers the quality of problem-solving. In domains such as teaching there are certain significant criticisms which have been made of this automaticity and thoughtless performance (Goodwyn, 2011).

First of all, this model refers to 'conscious deliberation' and 'analytical thinking' in decision making and problem-solving as something that rarely occurs except when there are deviations from the normal patterns.

Secondly, according to this framework, gaining knowing-how by means of experience gives experts an ability to continue to work 'non-reflectively'. However, it is undeniable that there are quite many experienced teachers described as such who have never become experts. It does not seem fair at all to undermine the value of reflection in the live and dynamic context of a class.

B. *Glaser & Chi (1988)*

These scholars assume a mental psychological view and perceive expertise closely linked to the mental mechanism of our mind. Characteristics this model attributes to experts are long hours of experience, superior perceptual ability, speed in performance and problem-solving, skilled memory, initial understanding of the problem, strong self-monitoring and meta-cognitive skills.

Contrary to the view adopted in Dreyfus Brothers' model, in this model, experts do not just rely on their intuitions. They engage in monitoring and self-regulation. They are also perceived as being able to engage in reflective practice contrary to the other model's characterization of expert performance as automatic and non-reflective. There are questions in this model which yet remain to be answered. Such questions include: How far can the knowledge that experts develop be separated from their expert performance? And, what is the place of conscious deliberation in their performance and development of their expertise?

C. *Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993)*

In the previous models, researchers were invited to compare the performance of the novice and the expert. What this model proposes is to make comparisons between the experts and the experienced non-expert. Moreover, unlike the preceding models which viewed the performance of experts as automatic, fluid and effortless, these scholars believe that such characterization does not fit all the experts.

Bereiter and Scardamalia point out that the critical difference between expert and non-expert problem-solving is by no means in the quality and ability of solving problems. Instead, it lies in the types of problems they solve. Experts challenge problems which promote their expertise. On the other hand, non-experts deal with problems at a less complicated level. They do not get entangled and extend themselves. In other words, experts approach a task in a way that maximizes their opportunities for growth whereas non-experts approach it in a way that minimizes these opportunities. In fact, experts 'problematize' what seem to be routine practices, while the experienced non-experts

merely carry out practiced routines. ‘Reinvestment’ and ‘progressive problem solving’ are perceived as two main characteristic tasks of the experts.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study is in fact part of a more extensive research which aims to both theoretically define and operationalize the construct of teaching expertise in ELT. Since any operational definition needs to be grounded in a theoretical framework, we were supposed to first think of a sound model. This study is, therefore, the pre-requisite for the operationalization of the above-mentioned construct. The data were collected both through a review of literature and interviews which were then analyzed qualitatively.

A. Participants

20 participants were interviewed. They were either teacher educators, university professors of applied linguistics, mentor teachers or supervisors of well-known private language institutes as well highly recognized and experienced EFL teachers. Their demographic information is presented below:

TABLE I.
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF INTERVIEWEES

Feature number	AGE		SEX		EDUCATION		EXPERINECE	
	30-40	>40	MALE	FEMALE	B.A.	M.A./Ph.D.	6-10 ys.	>10
n.	12	8	17	3	10	10	8	12

B. Instrumentation

Interviews were made based on an interview outline consisting of open-ended questions. Three groups of questions were asked:

- Information about interviewees’ own background
- Their general view of an expert teacher of English language
- Guided questions on some aspects of expertise in teaching English language

The rest of the data were gathered through perusal of related literature.

C. Procedures

The data gathering was done primarily in two steps. Initially, we reviewed prior research concerning all (accessible) studies in ELT which investigated some aspect of expertise in teaching. We perused the existent literature on different aspects of language teaching of novice versus experienced teachers. A variety of terms with a common core were used to characterize what we here call ‘expert’ teacher including ‘outstanding’, ‘exemplary’, ‘model’, ‘mentor’ or ‘experienced’ teacher. All the observed characteristics of outstanding teachers and how they affected teaching expertise were derived.

We then interviewed 20 individuals who were either teacher educators, university professors of applied linguistics, mentor teachers or supervisors of well-known private language institutes as well highly recognized and experienced EFL teachers. Their selection was based on acquaintance, revelation of personal interest and adequate experience in the field. They basically taught in Khorasan and Tehran provinces. Interviews were conducted in spring and summer 2014. All questions were asked in Persian. Yes/No questions were mostly avoided. The interviewer attempted just to provided prompts and let the interviewee pose his/her remarks and elaborate on them.

Each interview was conducted after pre-arrangement and on a date and time best preferred by the interviewee. Interviewees were visited face to face. A brief introduction was offered to them about what they were supposed to do. They had already been told about the goal of interview upon making the arrangements. Three groups of questions were asked:

- Information about interviewees’ own background
- Their general view of an expert teacher of English language
- Guided questions on some aspects of expertise in teaching English language

At the end, they were asked to add any further quality they thought it was necessary to mention. Interviews were audio-recorded and they took between 15 to 20 minutes to conduct. They were later transcribed. The comments made by the interviewees were reviewed to look for recurrent themes which were later integrated within the first draft of the model.

IV. RESULTS

The content analysis of our research resources ended up in a pool of over a hundred features ascribed to expert teachers of English. They required a sound, logical and literature-supporting grouping. The primary framework was eventually introduced which included 8 factors coded as below:

TABLE II.
8 TEACHING EXPERTISE FACTORS IN ELT

Factor	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8
Descriptor	Language proficiency	Pedagogical content knowledge	Social recognition	Cognitive skills	Experience	Professional development	Contextual knowledge	Learner-centered teaching

The full model which shows the interrelationship of all factors which was derived from research, specialists' accounts and direct observations is indicated in figure 1:

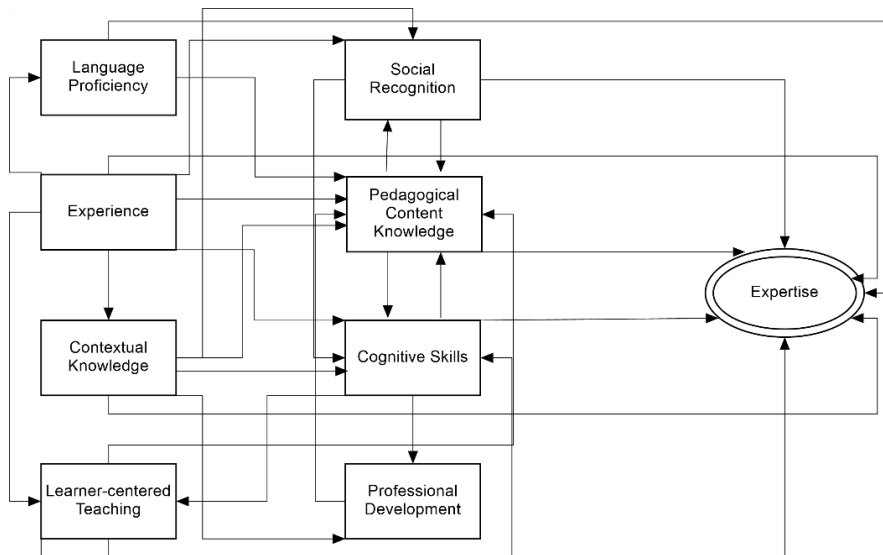


Figure 1. Schematic model of teaching expertise in ELT

As it can be observed, each factor is either directly or indirectly (through mediating factors within the model) affects the latent variable, expertise. This model is not yet statistically tested and is currently only a hypothetical model. Since the full model, presented above, might be perceptually hard to follow, we will re-present it separately for each factor in the following.

Factor 1: An Expert Teacher's Language Proficiency

The language-specific competencies an English language teacher requires to teach as effectively as possible include an ability of: understanding texts correctly, setting a proper TL example in class, keep a consistent use of TL (English) in class, use English language fluently in speech, provide explanations and instructions in fluent and correct English language, give effective examples of vocabulary and grammatical points, use proper classroom language comprehensible to all students, monitor one's speaking and writing for accuracy, provide correct feedback for students, and have level-adaptation for all instructional input (Richards, 2011).

Getting to know how to fulfill these dimensions (speaking, writing, etc.) accurately and completely in the target language is an important aspect in teacher training for teachers whose first language is other than English. There exists a minimum proficiency that a teacher requires so as to be able to teach efficiently in English. If someone does not attain this level yet, s/he would depend more on teaching resources. Such a teacher is less likely capable of acting out improvisational teaching (Medgyes, 2001, as cited in Richards, 2011).

According to the model, the following relations can be conceived of for this factor:

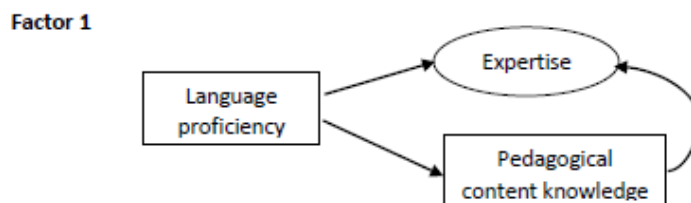


Figure 2. Theoretical relations of language proficiency and expertise in ELT

One hypothesis is that an expert teacher of English is necessarily, but not sufficiently proficient in the language itself, though the opposite is not always true. That is, a highly proficient language user is not necessarily an expert teacher, not even a good one. With this regard, a number of comments made by the interviewees are:

“What all students and colleagues expect you to have is to be a flawless, highly proficient model in class. I don't want to say this is so realistic. But this should always matter to us. The most well-known English language institutes in

this country, in their teacher assessment process and class observation checklists take a great care of teacher’s proficiency in class”. (a supervisor)

“You are to be a model in class. Students learn from you even more than the books and tapes. We can never do without proficiency of the language we teach. It has always been a key feature. When we remember our best teachers we unconsciously find ourselves appreciating their fluent speech or high level of vocabulary”. (a mentor teacher)

It was previously mentioned that not all proficient teachers are necessarily good ones. It appears that language proficiency should go hand in hand with teacher’s practical skills, termed as ‘pedagogical content knowledge’ which is further explained in factor 2. Pedagogical content knowledge plays a key role as a mediating variable in the model presented in figure 1. That is, many other variables constituting teacher expertise in ELT influence the latent variable indirectly through this variable. Here in factor 1, this relation can be interpreted as this: teacher’s language proficiency, when accompanied by practical skills in teaching can lead to expertise.

Factor 2: An Expert Teacher’s Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)

Pedagogical content knowledge acts as the foundation of language instruction. It refers to the knowledge derived from the study of language teaching and language learning, which can be used in many forms practically in teaching a language. PCK can encompass course-related issues for example curriculum design, evaluation, reflection in instruction, class discipline management, teaching the key skills, etc. (Richards, 2011).

As Tsui (2003) also adds, PCK is elaborating on a topic using comparisons, proving examples, using pictures, explanations, etc. so as to make it clear, easy and understandable to students. So as to do this effectively, teachers are required to know students well and also predict certain differences or easy parts in the forthcoming lesson.

Based on the model, the following relations can be conceived of for this factor:

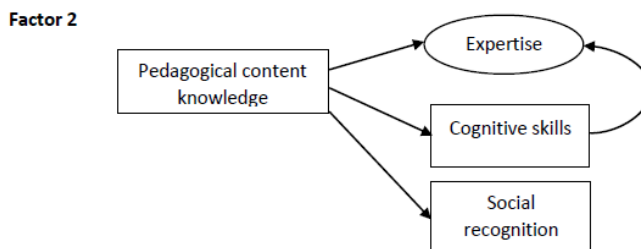


Figure 3. Theoretical relations of pedagogical content knowledge and expertise in ELT

As it can be observed, besides a direct effect of the second factor on expertise, an indirect relation is also conceived. That is to say, teacher’s pedagogical content knowledge can affect teacher’s cognitive skills and then the latent variable expertise. Or in other words, what a teacher actually does in class affects the way s/he perceives the class and his/her performance. This relation is actually two-way as far as the full model shows. You can see part of the full model below which indicates this relationship:

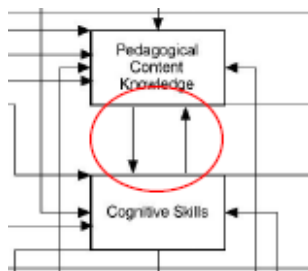


Figure 4. Two-way relation of an expert teacher’s pedagogical content knowledge and cognitive skills

Put it simply, it is assumed that an expert teacher’s practice influences and is influenced by the way s/he thinks about oneself, class and other related issues. With this concern here is part of an interviewee’s account:

“Practical skills an expert teacher shows in class helps him tackle with many problems in real. Sometimes it’s a trial and error matter. Anyway, he learns from them and that affects the way he sees the whole class and what happens there. It affects how he sees problematic situations. Sometimes it even helps the teacher predicts what’s going to happen and how to prevent it”. (a teacher trainer)

Factor 3: An Expert Teacher’s Social Recognition (SR)

As Agnew, Ford and Hayes (2007) point out, human expertise is in part a social attribution. Teacher expertise is not an exception. A common manifestation of experts’ SR is their membership in a group that is certified, awarded or professionally well-reputed as having expertise (Palmer, 2005). Nomination by school administrator, other teachers, and university personnel, students, and parents is a sign of expertise. Being recognized as an experienced teacher, working as a mentor teacher who helps and guides novices are among the others (Palmer, Stough, Burdinsky & Gonzales, 2005).

As Moallem (1998) puts it, experts attempt at team teaching and peer coaching. And they concern about parent satisfaction. If we return to our model, the effects of this factor on the notion of expertise are perceived as:

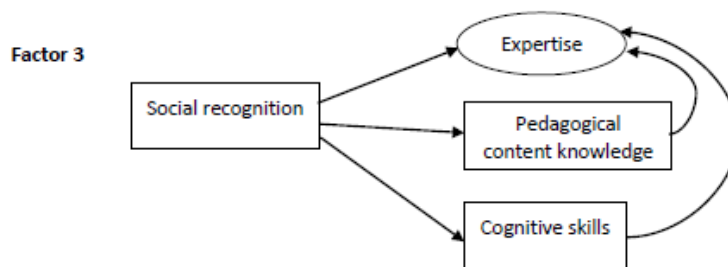


Figure 5. Theoretical relations of social recognition and expertise in ELT

As it can be observed, two mediators can exist between the independent variable social recognition and the latent variable expertise. These two are teacher's pedagogical content knowledge and cognitive skills. In other words, it is predicted that teacher's social recognition in the community of practice, which itself is affected by other factors as can be seen in the full model, affects both practical skills in teaching and also teacher's perceptual and cognitive skills. With this concern, here is a part of interviewees' comments:

"Experienced teachers are well-known in their school. They are often considered experts in their job and are known and admired by colleagues. It is very motivating for them and changes their outlook towards their job, teaching and their classes. It, therefore, affects their practice too. I mean how they teach in class and do everything needed. But the other way round is more probable. It seems more logical. I mean one reason why they become famous among colleagues is their great performance in class". (a supervisor)

The last point pinpointed by this EFL specialist reminds us of a reciprocal relationship between the two factors 3 and 2. This is quite visible in the full model an extract of which is shown below:

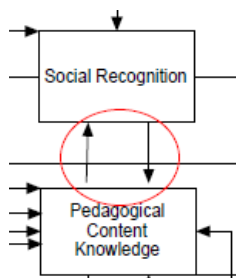


Figure 5. Two-way relation of an expert teacher's social recognition and pedagogical content knowledge

Factor 4: An Expert Teacher's Cognitive Skills

From among the literature on expert teachers' cognition, we managed to derive 10 main themes:

- Fast recognition of patterns and meaningful interpretation of them (Borko & Livingstone, 1989; Gruber, 2001; Berliner, 2004; Tsui, 2003; Tsui, 2009; Hattie, 2003; Opre, Calbaza-Ormenisan & Opre, 2011)
- Selective attention to class events (Shanteau, 1992; Tsui, 2003; Tsui, 2009)
- A holistic perception of class events (Hogan & Rabinowitz, 2003; Hattie, 2003; Cellier, Eyrolle & Marine, 1997)
- Superior long-term and short-term memory (Hogan & Rabinowitz, 2003; Glaser & Chi, 1988)
- Fast encoding of new information (Cellier, Eyrolle & Marine, 1997)
- High anticipation power of decisions made and students' reactions (Cellier, Eyrolle & Marine, 1997; Lewis & Sugai, 1999)
- Perception of one's role as a professional and a facilitator of learning (Moallem, 1998)
- Awareness of the situation-specificity and context-dependence of class events (Hattie, 2003; NBPTS, 2012; Hardre & Chen, 2005)
- Awareness of what they know and what they do not know (Moallem, 1998; Glaser & Chi, 1988)
- Forming connections between prior and new knowledge (Rich, 1993; Shulman, 1987; Hogan & Rabinowitz, 2003)
- Language (both as students' input and output) management in class (Gatbonton, 2000; Karimi, 2011; Akbari & Davdand, 2014)

Its effects on the latent variable expertise in ELT is schematically presented as:

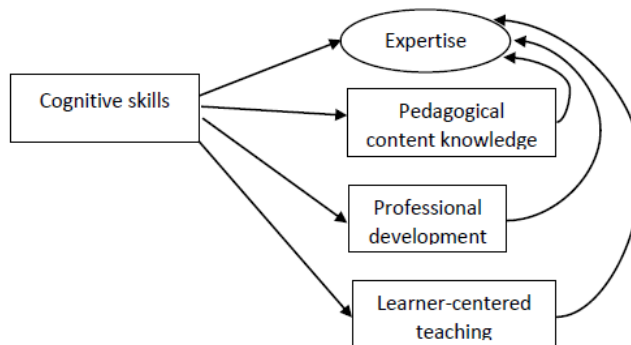


Figure 6. Theoretical relations of teacher's cognitive skills and expertise in ELT

As it can be observed, three mediating factors can be conceived of in directing the effect of cognitive skills on expertise. Firstly, the way a teacher thinks about and views one's role, one's students and class events affects whatever s/he does in class: need analysis, problem detection and solution, lesson-planning, task design, class management, etc. Secondly, we expect that teacher's cognitive power affects one's professional development which consists of reflection, teaching assessment, goal setting and so on. Finally, the model presumes an effect of cognitive skills on learner-centered teaching which is characterized by high student involvement, instruction linked to their personal lives, interests and motivation, etc. We can now see the following extracts of interviews:

"After so many years of work, now I know which things are worth noticing and which are not in class. Certain students' behaviors have become like patterns. They are familiar to me. They affect how I treat them. In fact it has made my class management easier". (a highly experienced teacher and mentor teacher)

"The way a teacher sees his role is very important. The best teachers I have ever had in this institute have felt so committed to their job; very motivated and interested in what they do in class. They take their role so serious that are not easily satisfied with what they are like. They ask other colleagues to observe their class and mentor them. They themselves volunteer to observe and guide other colleagues. They try to find ways to reflect on what they do and assess their teaching. They try to improve their way as far as possible and seem to enjoy it". (a supervisor)

Factor 5: An Expert Teacher's Experience

Meyer (2003) points out that expertise and experience are not identical at all. The relation between the two is a crucial one. Experience has always been a component of expertise, but on its own it does not guarantee expertise. In other words, experience is the necessary but not sufficient component of expertise.

According to Palmer et al. (2005), the most agreed-upon requirement for an expert teaching of English is 5 to 10 years of practice. In Berliner's (2004) study, experts were identified to have had at least 5 to 7 years of teaching experience. In the body of literature, often 5 or 7 have been treated as the cut-off point, or in other words the minimum requirement of teaching expertise.

Now how this factor fits into the model of expertise presented earlier is illustrated below:

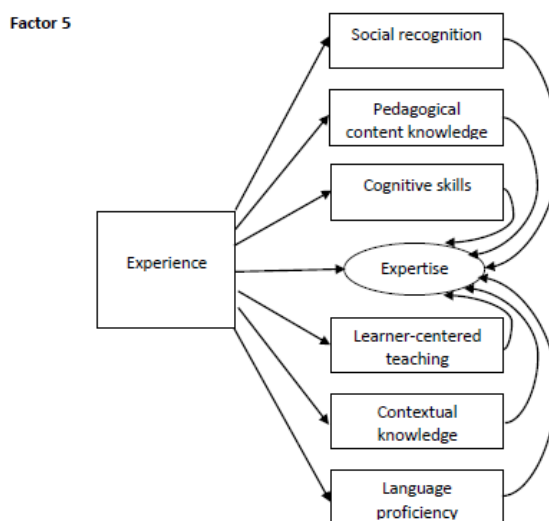


Figure 7. Theoretical relations of teacher's experience and expertise in ELT

Experience seems to affect the latent variable expertise through affecting six mediating factors. Experience can bring with itself social recognition in the community of practice, excellent performance in class, highly developed cognitive skills, high student involvement, deep contextual awareness and high language proficiency. All these affect the latent variable expertise on their own terms. With regard to this 7th factor, here are some extracts of interviewees' comments:

“Of course there are many things that cannot be gained unless through years of experience. More experienced teachers are much more effective in class management, feedback provision or lesson planning and yet many other issues. They use every moment of their class in the best way possible because they have learnt the ropes” (a class observer)

“Not all experienced teachers turn out to be very popular or efficient. But I can say that almost all the experts I have worked with have been experienced in their job. They have learnt many things that are not learnable from books or even training courses. Each have devised their own personal theory of teaching and apply it in class. They seem to have learnt a lot of strategies they choose to apply in different situations and when one does not work, they try another”. (a teacher trainer)

“When they work for some years in a school or institute they become familiar with the rules and regulations over there, with the expectations and students. This knowledge adds to their expertise further”. (a school manager)

Factor 6: An Expert Teacher’s Professional Development

According to Liu and Xu (2011) one variable that affects teacher’s professional development is the workplace communities of practice and this issue is of a great significance in teacher education programs.

There are many ways for professional development that may help all (proficiency) teachers according to their preferences as well as available time. As put forth by Davidson, Dunlop, Soriano, Kennedy and Phillips (2012), key types of activities include adopting a reflective view of one’s job (teaching), extending and promoting one’s knowledge and practice with the help of new sources, benefiting from group-learning and colleague cooperative work, and benefiting from conferences, webinars and workshops.

These four main areas further include: taking part in ELT conferences, networking with other teachers, reading TEFL journals, trying out new materials in class, membership of professional language teaching associations, mentoring, class observations, conducting action research, reflection and attending workshops (ibid.).

How this factor fits into the model of expertise in ELT we proposed can be viewed as:

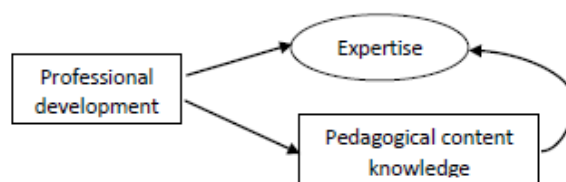


Figure 8. Theoretical relations of teacher’s professional development and expertise in ELT

The mediating factor which can stand between professional development (here as an independent factor) and expertise (as the dependent variable) is pedagogical content knowledge. The premise is that teacher’s activities aimed at assessing one’s quality of teaching and enhancing it further do affect their performance-based skills including class management, discipline control, lesson-planning, task design, learning assessment, and so on. Concerning this, here is part of the remarks made by the interviewees:

“We recommend our trainees to attend workshops we regularly hold for teachers especially novices. I want them to go to these workshops and see that our expert teachers are all there too. They learn many new things over there that can later be used in their classes to change the whole environment of class”. (a teacher trainee)

“Our institute has a credible journal. All the authors are English language teachers in Iran. They share their search results which have been obtained through their real experience. We recommend our teachers to read their colleagues research and they themselves do similar research so that they can publish their findings and share them with other colleagues. The ultimate goal is to enhance the quality of teaching in class” (a teacher educator and institute supervisor)

Factor 7: An Expert Teacher’s Contextual Knowledge

Sociocultural standpoints on learning point out that learning is situated, or occurs in particular environments which form learning. EFL/ESL teachers work in diverse settings. In order to function in those contexts they need to have appropriate contextual knowledge (Richards, 2011).

According to Miller (2009), familiarity with school as one’s workplace, the facilities available e.g. space of classes, cultural and socio-economic background of learners, school curriculum, rules or regulations, the supervisor – these are all critical issues that influence the efficiency and quality of teaching (As cited in Richards, 2011).

Teaching in a school or an institute involves entrance into a community of practice which is a term used by Lave and Wenger (1991) for a kind of learning that occurs within an organizational context which is socially constructed and is accompanied by interaction with mentor teachers, supervisors, class observers and expert teachers of the field.

Figure 9 indicates how teacher’s contextual knowledge affects expertise:

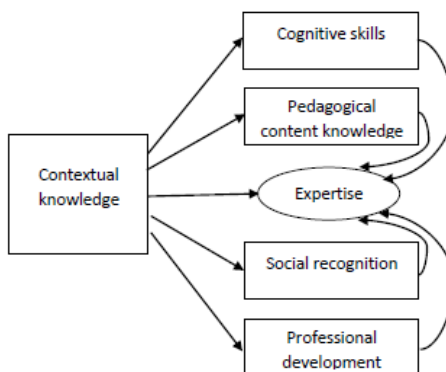


Figure 9. Theoretical relations of teacher's contextual knowledge and expertise in ELT

As it can be observed, teacher's contextual knowledge affects one's self-awareness, decision making, schemata formation and other related cognitive skills. Moreover, it affects teacher's practical pedagogical skills as well as becoming well-known in the community of teachers. It also helps the teacher to reflect more and better on his/her teaching and improve it as far as possible. With this regard, some comments made by our interviewees are:

"They should learn to know who they are working for or with very well. Its affects many things: how to interpret different behavior in class showed by your students, or in school showed by your colleagues or boss. When you get to know them well, you know how to react to whom, when and how exactly". (a teacher educator)

"A colleague of mine whom I really admire and think can be called an expert gets along with all colleagues very well as well as the students. She is experienced too. Her knowledge of all that happens around us helps her to be very well known among colleagues. It has motivated her too. She seeks for every chance to further her expert performance too". (a mentor teacher)

Factor 8: An Expert Teacher's Learner-Centered Teaching

Since the aim of teaching is to facilitate student learning, a learner-focused teaching seems to be an essential feature of a successful class. Borg (2006) reviewed the manifestation of learner-centeredness in expert teachers' classes as in their familiarity with learners' common behaviors, making predictions of class events based on their awareness of students' background, focusing their instructions on students' problems, and keeping learners active all

As Noddings (2006) put it, keeping students highly active shows that teacher cares about them. Such care can have positively affect their motivation, interest in learning and active cooperation.

Hogan and Rabinowitz (2009) pointed out that an expert teacher uses different strategies to communicate with students including questioning, probing, and exchanging ideas and thoughts. The effect of this factor on the latent variable expertise is presented in the following figure:

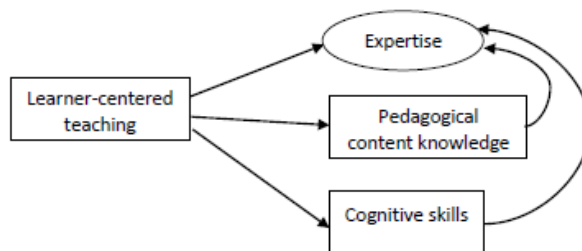


Figure 10. Theoretical relations of learner-centered teaching and expertise in ELT

As it can be observed, learner-centered teaching has a direct influence on such aspects of pedagogical knowledge as class management, need analysis, class discipline, etc. It also affects teacher's cognitive skills such as decision-making, selective attention and recognition of patterns. Concerning these issues, here are parts of the comments made by our interviewees:

"One way I get the control of class even in the harshest situations is through involving students more than ever before. When some particular students are hard to manage and I am hopeless at taming them, I involve them more in class discussions and try to use their willingness to talk and attract the attention of others in a positive and fruitful way". (a highly experienced teacher)

"When the teacher motivates students to be active in class and clearly expose their ideas, he can get the feedback from them and assess their learning. It can help an implicit needs analysis too as well as motivating students to learn more enthusiastically". (a class observer)

It needs to be reminded that these 8 factors, despite being discussed separately, are constituents of a single model of teaching expertise in ELT. This model with its all complexities, as illustrated in Figure 1, is a conceptual realization of

what criteria make up an expert teacher of English language. The mutual effects of these factors have been schematically presented and discussed as well.

V. CONCLUSION

Interest in the notion of expertise in many domains has arisen in recent decades. Applied linguistics, though a newcomer, has not been an exception. In this paper, we aimed to search for the common characteristics of expert teachers of English language. The pre-existing criteria or models of expertise in teaching, as reviewed, have had major drawbacks and insufficiencies. They mostly relied on the comparison of novices and experienced teachers. However, they were later criticized since first of all experience does not equal expertise and secondly experts can be studied on their own and without reference to novices, too. A more severe inadequacy of older models is that they simply pointed out a number of characteristics for expert teachers without conceiving of the mutual relationship among and contribution of those features to the latent variable teaching expertise in ELT.

The model we presented here was formed based on two main sources. One included all accessible literature on teaching expertise in ELT, and the other was the remarks pinpointed by the field specialists who dealt directly with English language teachers, trained them or observed their performance; communicated with them; witnessed their professional development; and found out the nuances of their outstanding performance. The final result has been an 8-factor model of teaching expertise in ELT which reveals the conceptual or theoretical paths of the interactive effects of these factors. Provision of this model is a prerequisite of an operational definition of teaching expertise in ELT. Once an instrument is formed based on this model and sufficient data, in size, are collected from English language teachers, through a proper statistical analysis, the strength of each path in the original model can be assessed and reported. The revised model will act a highly useful apparatus in teacher education, evaluation, selection and promotion programs in ELT.

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