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DEALING WITH CRITICAL INCIDENTS: EXPERIENCES OF TURKISH NOVICE EFL TEACHERS

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Abstract
Moments causing teachers to stop and think about their teaching are called critical incidents and reflecting on them can be a way of gaining insights into their practices and contexts. However, critical incidents are underexplored in the Turkish EFL context. Thus, this qualitative case study aimed to understand the types of critical incidents encountered by six Turkish novice EFL teachers who all graduated from the same English language teaching program, their ways of dealing with these, and how this affected them. Data obtained from reflective journals and a focus group interview were analysed thematically. The results revealed critical incidents related to multiple sources, mainly due to students' behaviors. Moreover, teachers' strategies varied from addressing the student to acting as the authority. These critical incidents affect novice teachers in various ways, such as questioning their language teacher education and teaching competence, which were discussed in this study along with implications and directions for future studies.

Keywords: critical incidents, novice teachers, Turkish EFL context

Introduction

Teachers encounter many incidents throughout their teaching careers and develop their own strategies for coping with them. However, these coping strategies do not develop overnight, and teachers need to reflect on their experiences and analyse their practices to be able to make good judgments during these incidents. Although years of experience help teachers develop techniques and routines for getting through incidents, there can always be new problems that leave even the most experienced teachers baffled. Besides, while incidences may occur frequently, critical incidents (CIs) that "trigger insights about some aspect of teaching and learning" (Richards & Farrell, 2010, p.13) and are significant events that teachers reflect upon are less frequent in a teacher's career.

These moments in a teacher's career are "vividly remembered" (Brookfield, 1995, p. 84), and teachers need to identify, study, and, more importantly, reflect on what it means for their beliefs and values about their practices (Farrell, 2008). The ability to reflect on such occasions is essential to becoming good practitioners and continuous growth, especially for teachers who are at the beginning of their professions (Romano, 2006, p. 947). Furthermore, by examining their CIs, teachers

can form an awareness of themselves, their students, and their practices (Richards & Lockhart, 1994).

Furthermore, what is critical to an experienced teacher may not be for a novice teacher (Farrell, 2008). According to Richards (2010), experienced teachers have a range of strategies for classroom management and previous experiences to refer to when dealing with problems, thus, define CIs differently compared to novice teachers (Molani et al., 2021).

Critical incidents in English language teaching

The literature reveals various studies that focus on the types of CIs language teachers encounter (Atai & Nejadghanbar, 2016; Atai & Nejadghanbar, 2017; Esmaeli & Afzali, 2020; Farrell, 2008; Pourhassan & Nazari; 2021; Putri & Kuswandono, 2020). In the Iranian EFL context, Atai and Nejadghanbar (2016) collected the CIs of in-service teachers through reflections via blogs to share with their colleagues and came up with six categories. The main categories of CIs were *behavior, language proficiency, clashes, individual difference, class participation, and teachers' unpreparedness*. The most frequently mentioned CIs were related to behavior, thus, the authors suggested emphasizing behavioral incidents is needed in second language teacher education (SLTE) programs.

Esmaeli and Afzali (2020) also came up with six categories and 14 subcategories of CIs after analysing 15 Iranian EFL teachers' narrated CIs. These categories were *language skills and competence, heterogeneous classrooms, materials, mother tongue, testing issues, and teaching L2 (second language) cultural aspects.* This study also revealed that productive strategies used during CIs differed for each teacher, as each CI can be interpreted and responded differently (Farrell, 2008; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011).

In a different EFL context, Putri and Kuswandono (2020) categorized high school Indonesian EFL teachers' CIs, and these were: *students' misbehavior, smart student, and self-improvement*. In the young learners teaching context Pourhassan and Nazari (2021) analysed five major categories related to young learners: *collegial nonconformity, learner behavior and engagement, learner parent behavior, teacher knowledge,* and *teacher-learner emotional tie.* Regardless of their changing categories, CIs happen, and the important thing is to develop the flexibility to deal with them, and such resilience can be achieved by reflecting on CIs (Dixon & Byrne, 2011).

Teacher reflection on critical incidents

In educational contexts, reflecting on CIs can be helpful for teachers' professional development and identity constructions (Woods, 1993). Several studies conducted with EFL teachers show that reflecting on CIs is crucial, as it helps them gain awareness of themselves (Molani et al., 2021), and their contexts (Atai & Nejadghanbar, 2016; Richards & Farrell, 2005). Reflection also influences teachers' image of themselves and helps in defining their roles regarding other individuals in their school communities (Babaii, et al., 2021).

In the Mexican EFL context, Lengeling and Mora Pablo (2016) investigated eight novice English teachers' reflections on their CIs and concluded that each participant had a unique way of reflecting on their CIs. The authors put forward that these reflections led to the analysis and examination of their underlying principles

and methods of their practices. Similarly, Tripp (1993) discussed how analysing CIs could be the basis for improving teaching.

In the Iranian EFL context, Babaii et al. (2021) and Karimi and Nazari (2019) conducted studies on language teachers and suggested that thinking on CIs increases peer reflection as well as expands their classroom management skills and contributes to their professional development. Furthermore, according to Putri and Kuswandono (2020), some of the CIs high school English teachers encounter in the Indonesian EFL context led them to improve their professional knowledge. Coming from the same context, Wijaya and Kuswandono (2018) observed that CIs affected three teachers' professional goals of developing and becoming good teachers. Concentrating on both novice and experienced teachers' reflections on their CIs, Molani et al. (2021) carried out a study with 40 Iranian EFL teachers, and the findings suggested that there is a difference among practitioners' views on CIs based on their teaching experiences.

Significance and purpose of the study

After reviewing the related literature, it is proven that asking teachers to identify CIs and how they decide to respond to these incidents can promote reflectivity in teaching and contribute to teachers' professional growth (Karimi & Naziri, 2019; Lengeling & Mora Pablo, 2016; Molani et al., 2021).

In addition to these, it is important to acknowledge how context can be a determining factor for CIs, which are underexplored in the Turkish EFL context. Therefore, it can be beneficial for Turkish in-service teachers to identify the sources of CIs in their contexts through self-reflection. Furthermore, as teachers begin to develop techniques and context-bound strategies for coping with CIs through experience, it can be of interest for prospective teachers and other novices to learn the experiences of novice EFL teachers when dealing with CIs.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to answer the following research questions to understand how novice Turkish EFL teachers deal with the CIs they encounter in their teaching contexts in their first year of teaching and how they reflect on their CIs.

1. What sources of CIs are mentioned by Turkish novice EFL teachers in their teaching contexts?
2. What are the strategies Turkish novice EFL teachers use to deal with these CIs?
3. How do Turkish novice EFL teachers reflect on their CIs?

Method

Context and participants

This study was conducted with six Turkish novice EFL teachers. Convenient sampling was used for the selection of participants who were easily accessible and willing to participate (Dörnyei, 2007). All the participating teachers had graduated with a bachelor's (BA) degree from the same English Language Teaching (ELT) department of a state university and were in their first year of teaching as in-service EFL teachers. Thus, according to Farrell's (2009) definition, they were all novice teachers.

During their SLTE, the participants took two courses focusing on classroom management, *English Language Teaching Methods I* and *Classroom Management*

which aimed to prepare these teachers to maximize student learning by dealing with behavior issues in the classroom. In addition to these courses, as part of SLTE, participants completed a *Teaching Practice* course at practicum schools for two semesters. However, due to COVID-19 pandemic, all of them had to complete this course online, which eliminated these teachers' chances of practicing what they had learned and experiencing real-life classroom management. Additionally, throughout their practicum experience, all participants had kept reflective journals as a course requirement, which included reflective questions related to the CIs they observed or experienced.

In terms of demographic information, all the participants were females aged between 22 and 23. Three of them were working at private schools, while the other three worked at state schools. In addition, the teachers worked with different age groups from young to teenager and adult learners. Detailed information about the participants' backgrounds and teaching contexts is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Participant information

Participant	Gender	Age	Teaching Context	Student Profile	Teacher Education
T1	F	23	Public school	Teenagers	BA in ELT
T2	F	22	Public school	Teenagers	BA in ELT
T3	F	22	Public school	Teenagers	BA in ELT
T4	F	22	Private school	Teenagers	BA in ELT
T5	F	22	Private school	Young learners	BA in ELT
T6	F	22	Private university preparatory school	Adult learners	BA in ELT

Research design and instrument

The current study adopted a qualitative case study research design, which allows research of a phenomenon through participants' understanding of their experiences (Merriam, 2009). The participants were asked to keep reflective journals about their critical incidents for data collection. According to Gil-Garcia and Cintron (2002), keeping and using reflective journals can improve teachers' professional development. The participants were encouraged to write about any details regarding the CIs and were free in terms of the reflection format. For guiding purposes, they were given the following prompt questions similar to the questions they had answered during their practicum: *What happened? When did it happen? How did you react? How did you feel? Who was there with you? How did they react?*

The second instrument for data collection was a focus group interview, where all the participants are present at the same time. The researcher decided on conducting a focus group interview, as it is a useful way of collecting data when the interviewees are similar and cooperative with each other, and due to the limited time of the study (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1988; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

In Table 2. below, the research questions and the corresponding data collection and analysis methods are given.

Table 2. Research questions and corresponding data collection methods

Research Question	Data Collection Method	Type of analysis	Purpose
RQ1: What sources of CIs are mentioned by Turkish novice EFL teachers in their teaching contexts?	Teachers' Reflective journals	Qualitative thematic analysis using NVivo	To identify the sources of CIs
RQ2: What are the strategies Turkish novice EFL teachers use to deal with these CIs?	Teachers' Reflective journals	Qualitative thematic analysis using NVivo	To identify teachers' coping strategies for CIs
RQ3: How do Turkish novice EFL teachers reflect on their CIs?	Focus Group Interview	Qualitative thematic analysis using NVivo	To investigate what thoughts and feelings novice EFL teachers have when reflecting on their CIs, and whether they believe any factors influence their CIs' sources and the coping strategies they use.

Data collection and analysis procedure

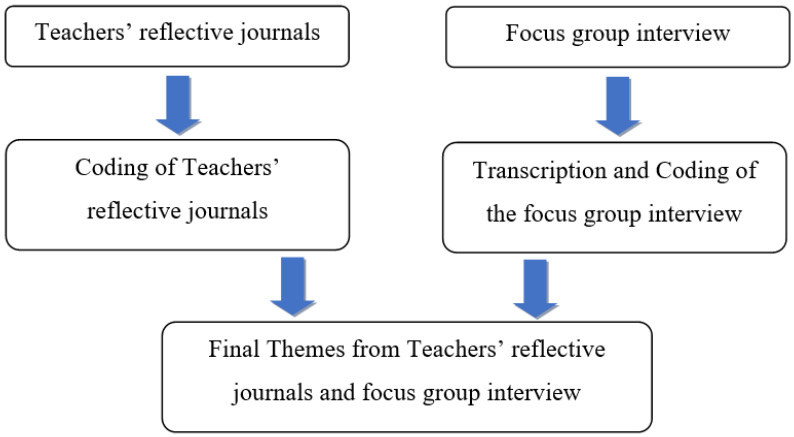


Figure 1. Data collection and analysis procedure

Teachers' reflective journals were collected over a month. As they had already experienced keeping a reflective journal during their *Teaching Practice* course, participants were not given any special training on this matter. The teachers were free to use any convenient tool for keeping their journals. Participants sent their journals, which they agreed to write in English, to the researcher either as a Word document or as photographs of their journal pages.

Next, the date and time were arranged for the focus group interview. Due to her busy schedule, one of the participants (T2) could not join the interview. The interview session was conducted in an online group created by the researcher through a popular messaging application, and participants used voice and chat messages during the session. The language used during the session was Turkish for the teachers to be comfortable when speaking together and expressing themselves. However, there was occasional code-switching to English. The focus group

interview lasted around 90 minutes. The session started with a critical incident analysis using Tripp's (1993) model. After the critical reflection on the incident, participants were interviewed about how they were affected by critical incidents and their opinions on keeping a reflective journal on them.

Once the focus group interview had been transcribed, written data from reflective journals and the transcription were uploaded and analysed through thematic analysis using NVivo 12 (QSR International) software. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), "thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79).

After the researcher was familiar with the transcribed data, first, the data was coded and sorted into organized categories and the recurring themes mentioned the most by the participants were grouped. During the analysis of teachers' reflective journals for the sources of critical incidents, existing studies in the literature (e.g., Atai & Nejadghanbar, 2016; Esmaeli & Afzali, 2020; Pourhassan & Nazari, 2021) were used for referencing and identifying themes as well. By constant comparison of the collected data, the final themes emerged.

Next, to ensure the reliability of the themes, thirty percent of the reflective journals were shared with an independent researcher. The initial intercoder reliability was calculated as 81.25% using the formulation below (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which is a considerable agreement according to Hallgren (2012) Lastly, a consensus was reached by discussing. The data collection process can be seen in Figure 1.

$$\frac{\text{Number of agreements } \mathbf{x}\ 100}{\text{Number of agreements} \quad + \text{Number of disagreements}}$$

Findings

RQ1: What sources of CIs are mentioned by Turkish novice EFL teachers in their teaching contexts?

The study first investigated the sources of CIs teachers encountered in their contexts according to their reflective journals (RJ). The results of the data analysis revealed four main sources of CIs. The sources can be seen in Figure 2 below.

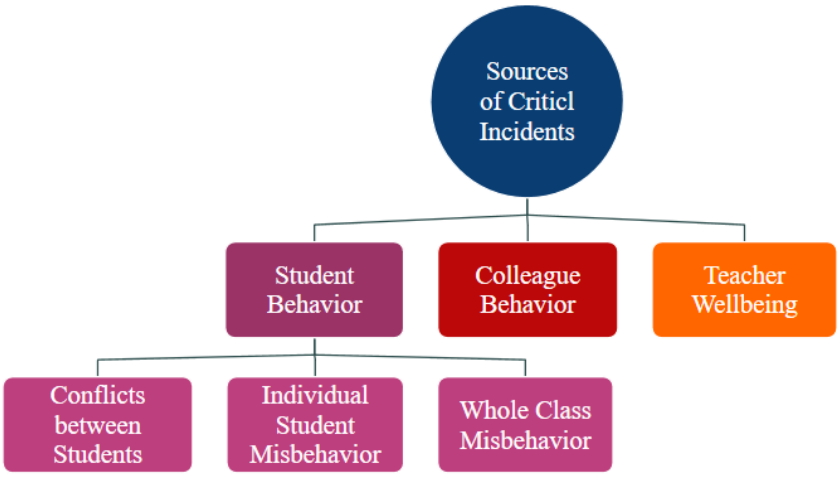


Figure 2. Sources of critical incidents

In Table 3 below, the names of the teachers who mentioned which sources for the CIs they encountered in their RJs, as well as how many times they were mentioned can be seen. Out of all the sources, "student behavior" was mentioned the most (n=16). It was followed by, "colleague behavior" (n=2), and lastly "teacher well-being" (n=1). Each of the categories with their subcategories are elaborated on in the following section.

Table 3. Frequencies of sources of critical incidents

Sources of Critical Incidents	Frequency	Teachers
Student Behavior	16	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6
Colleague Behavior	2	T5, T6
Teacher Well-being	1	T3

Student behavior

CIs that fell in this category included an act of misbehavior from the students' ends, such as interrupting the flow of the lesson, distracting other students, fights, and conflicts between students, and not following the classroom rules that existed. Within this category, three subcategories emerged as well: *individual* (*n*=11) and *whole class misbehaviors* (*n*=3), and *conflict between students* (*n*=2). These three categories were created because it was apparent that some of the critical incidents stemmed from one student's acts mentioned above, some CIs were caused by the whole class's act, and lastly, some of them were caused by fights between students. For example, CIs caused by an individual student's misbehavior can be seen in the extract from T6's journal:

> *One of the students just randomly stood up and started walking around and talking to his friends. He also played his newest song for them to listen to. I was teaching at that moment. I stopped talking and looked at him to stop. He did not understand it, and he just looked at me and continued.* (T6, RJ)

The second extract taken from T3's journal refers to a conflict between students leading up to a CI.

> *Two of my students in the classroom started arguing about race. One of the students (SA) said to the other student (SB) that SB was Kurdish. SA said it like it was an insult. So, SB got angry, and they kind of started a fist fight. Most of the other students chose a side and wanted SA and SB to fight. Only one or two of the students tried to calm them with me.* (T3, RJ)

Colleague behavior

This category refers to the teachers' interactions with their colleagues, partners and how they led to incidents that were perceived as critical by the participants. Two CIs shared by two teachers fell in this category. For example, in her RJ, T5 expressed that another colleague interrupted her lesson to get into an argument with one of the students, which led to a CI, disturbing her and other students:

> *One of the students was not ready for the lesson. He was walking around the class, trying to talk to his friends even though the whole class was ready to greet me before starting the lesson. The class teacher was around the classroom, and she saw his behavior by coincidence. She immediately came*

> *into the classroom and started to shout at him. She told him to pack up his stuff and leave the classroom. When he did not do it, she packed everything up and threw the bag out of the classroom. She told him that he would not be able to study in this school anymore. Then, they left the classroom and shut the door. I and the whole class were in shock.* (T5, RJ)

Meanwhile, T6 was disturbed by her colleague, who was the partner teacher during their speaking class, when he started talking about inappropriate topics in an unprofessional manner with the students and made her feel uncomfortable:

> *We were sitting outside with our students, and my partner started talking inappropriately. He started talking about his alcohol consumption, his sexual life, and alcohol use. He also talked about how he beats people proudly. He also commented that he and a few of the students in that group smoke some weed together inside of the uni. I was so shocked that at first, I acted like I did not hear any of them. After that, I got up and left. I felt disgusted. I did not feel safe.* (T6, RJ)

Teacher well-being

This last category refers to the CIs that occurred due to the teachers' unexpected mental and physical changes in the classroom. For example, in this study, one teacher's reflection included an accident where she had almost fainted. She expressed feeling unwell at the time of the incident, and the addition of whole class misbehavior triggered her condition to get worse.

> *I was having a very busy day. My last two lessons were the most difficult class in the school. I told them I was tired and asked them to be gentle toward me. Of course, they were not. They talked, used bad words toward each other, and mocked the ones who tried to participate in the lesson. At the end of the lesson, they came to my desk to take their phones which were in a box. I told them to come and take their phones one by one, but they came all together. Then, I kind of fainted. I said kind of because I did not totally faint. I tried to go outside to take a breath. but I could not walk properly, so I fell. The students got scared and went to the other classes to get help. Other teachers came and made me drink some water and took me to the garden to breathe. I felt awful and exhausted. a little embarrassed too. I felt like I fainted, but now I think it was a medical condition I had zero control over.* (T3, RJ)

RQ2: What are the strategies Turkish novice EFL teachers use to deal with these CIs?

The second research aim of this study was to investigate what strategies novice EFL teachers use to deal with the CIs they encounter in their contexts. The analysis of teachers' RJs revealed three main categories for these strategies. As seen in Figure 3, these categories were: "addressing the student", "acting as the authority", "modifying the lesson", and "ignoring the conflict".

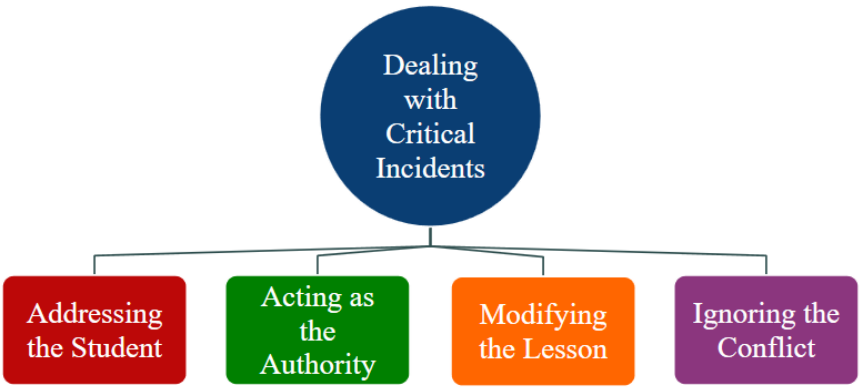


Figure 3. Teachers' strategies for dealing with critical incidents

In addition to these, Table 4 below represents how frequently these strategies were used and by which teachers. According to this table, the most used strategies were addressing the student (*n*=8), followed by acting as the authority (*n*=7), ignoring the conflict (*n*=2), and modifying the lesson (*n*=1). These categories are explained in detail with example extracts in the following sections.

Table 4. Frequencies of teachers' strategies for dealing with critical incidents

Dealing with Critical Incidents	Frequency	Teachers
Addressing the Student	8	T3, T5, T6
Acting as the Authority	7	T1, T2, T3, T4
Ignoring the Conflict	2	T5, T6
Modifying the lesson	1	T4

Acting as the authority

This category included strategies teachers use that remind the students about who the authority belongs in the school and were used during CIs stemming from student misbehaviors and conflicts between students. For example, in the following extract, T1 told the students to remember their places, otherwise, they would face consequences:

> *I was walking to class, and I saw their classroom teacher. She complained about the students and came to the class with me. She told one of the students that she wanted to see his mother. Then she left class, and the student kept complaining. I told him to stop talking, as I wanted to start my lesson, and he would not stop. Then I told him that I also wanted to see his mother, and he said, "DO SEE HER". He was, like, shouting at me. I did not like his behavior at all. I asked "How could you talk to me like that? How dare you?" I was angry. "I don't care about your ego. You cannot talk to me that way. If you do, I will make you regret it." I cannot stand when students talk to me like I am not their teacher. In this school, students do not respect their female teachers, especially the boys. When we threaten them somehow, they seem to be more respectful. I hate it, but that is the truth.* (T1, RJ)

Addressing the student

This category refers to incidents where the teachers had to address the student by confronting them due to the CI, either in the classroom or after the classroom in

private, sometimes using "I" language, empathizing with the students, and trying to get their attention by looking at them until they notice and stop the behavior, calling out student's/students' names to get their attention, and trying to explain the situation and the reason to do/not to do something calmly, showing empathy towards' student's feelings. In the following extract, T5 shared how she addressed the student who was causing the incident:

> *One of the students showed his middle finger to one of his friends. Not only me but also other students saw it. A couple of them laughed. I was going to ignore it at first, but I saw some of the students found it funny. I went next to his desk and held his hands kindly. I made him show his little finger. I asked him to laugh at it and explain what it means. I waited almost a minute repeating the same question, but he kept silent. Then, I made him show his ring finger and told him to laugh at it. He did not react. I made him show his middle finger. At first, he refused to do it, but I made him do it. I told him to explain what it means. He said it means a bad word. I kept asking what it meant till he answered. I did the same with the other fingers. He and the ones who laughed got ashamed and saw me very angry. They stopped after that incident.* (T5, RJ)

Modifying the lesson

This category refers to teachers' decision to modify the rest of their lessons or activities to cope with their CIs. For example, in the extract below, T4 explains how she changed her lesson plan to confuse the students and stop them from interrupting the lesson:

> *My students were talking to each other loudly, standing up and wandering around the class, throwing different items at each other as if I were not there. I waited for them to stop again but this time, when I realized that they were not going to stop and it would not be easy for me, I wanted to make them confused. I told them to put their head on their desk and be in a sleeping position. They stopped talking and asked each other questions like "What? Wait what?". I repeated my sentences, and they started to do that one by one. I waited about 2 minutes to make them snap into the mood. After that, I told them that I was going to touch a student and that student would be the vampire, and after choosing the vampire, I told him to wake up and choose a student to kill. It was a classic murder mystery game, and even the sleeping position made them surprised and interested. It was a different lesson, and obviously, I could not have my actual lesson from our book, but it was a different idea for dealing with the chaos in the class. I was happy with my unusual idea/resolution, but at the same time, I knew that it was not a permanent solution as well. However, I think it is great to be an unpredictable teacher.* (T4, RJ)

Ignoring the conflict

This strategy refers to the moments the teachers were shocked or uncomfortable during a CI to respond, thus, they ignored the conflict. In this study, the two times this strategy was used were during CIs caused by interactions with colleagues. For example, when T5's lesson was interrupted by her colleague, the colleague did not leave a chance for her to intervene, thus, T5 had to ignore what

was going on. In T6's previous CI, she expressed getting up and leaving the environment because she did not feel safe due to her colleague's behavior.

RQ3: How do Turkish novice EFL teachers reflect on their CIs?

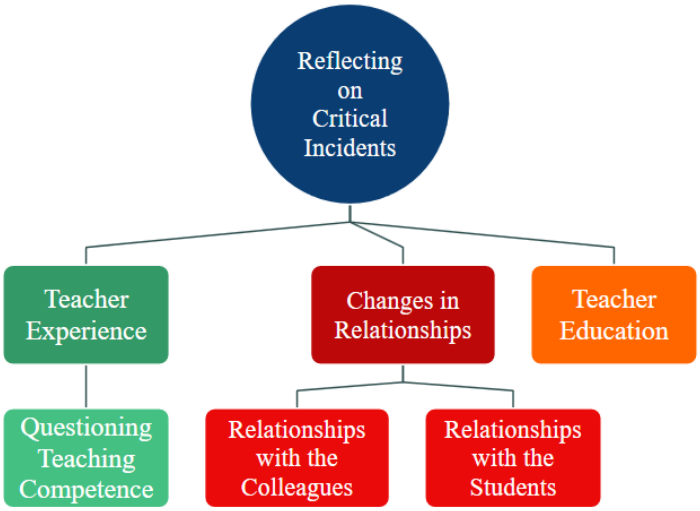


Figure 4. Teachers' reflections on their critical incidents

The final research question investigated how CIs are reflected upon by these novice EFL teachers. As seen in Figure 4 above, the themes that emerged were *teacher experience, changes in relationships,* and *teacher education*. Each one is elaborated on in the following sections.

Teacher experience

When reflecting on their CIs and their sources, some of the teachers associated inexperience as one of the reasons for their CIs. In the focus group interview (FGI), according to two participants, experienced teachers have the time to develop handling mechanisms for CIs, and their identification of CIs may be different, therefore, experience is crucial for knowing how to react.

> *Critical incidents are related to experience. When I talk about them with experienced teachers, they already developed a handling mechanism for this stuff because they have been through all of them. So, they (CIs) are definitely related to novice experience*. (T4, FGI)

However, T4 added that, as it is her first year of teaching, she is in a trial-and-error period, and because she is aware of this, she tries to go easy on herself during her CIs. On the other hand, T3 expressed her thoughts on experience like this:

> *I believe experience is very important. However, no matter how much experience we have, the new generation will always be different. So, we will have some issues in every phase of our career, but our way of handling them will be different.* (T3, FGI)

Lastly, two of the participants did not believe being a novice teacher was a reason or a solution for CIs. They reported that experience is only one of the factors, however, the more important thing is to be able to maintain a good relationship with

the students.

> *No matter how many years of experience you have, you may not know how to handle a specific situation. At one point, it is not about your experience but about the harmony you have with the students.* (T6, FGI)

Related to their novice experiences, all the participants reported questioning their teaching competence. For example, T5 explained that although she questions her teaching competence and classroom management skills, she also acknowledges her progress.

> *There were days when I thought I was not a good teacher and could not manage my class. I still question my competence when there is a critical incident. I think about why I was not able to handle it. However, if I could handle a CI well and take it under control without it affecting my lesson, I think to myself "I did very well and I am making progress".* (T5, FGI)

Furthermore, T3 explained that teaching is a challenging job, so it is important to go easy on themselves.

> *I think teaching is the job for me, but sometimes we need to allow ourselves time to breathe and remember that we are human. Teaching is a very difficult job because dealing with people is the hardest thing.* (T3, FGI)

Changes in relationships

One of the things these novice EFL teachers mentioned when reflecting on their CIs affected them, they mentioned changes in relationships, both between students and colleagues. For example, T6 realized from studying her colleagues' and students' relationships, that students may try to take over the lesson by getting friendly with the teacher:

> *Before, I used to be sweet and go easy on them. Now I started to make sure they know I am not their friend, before approaching me. Once I realized this, I tried not to spend too much time chatting with them outside of the classroom*. (T6, FGI)

Furthermore, T6 reported that her relationship with her colleague changed as well after the CI she had with them.

> *When we were with our students between classes, I noticed how he was talking with the students. After that, I started not to let him interfere with my lessons. Even though we are partners and can comment on each other's lessons, at one point I realized everyone should control their own lesson.* (T6, FGI)

Another realization and change happened for T3 when almost fainted, and she changed her mind about letting the students know about her well-being and decided to share about these things in her future classes.

> *I learned that I need to share with the students if I am not feeling well. Maybe if they had known how busy my day had been, they could have behaved differently. I realized that no matter how naughty our students are, they are also human.* (T3, FGI)

Teacher education

The participants also had some things to say about their experience keeping reflective journals on their CIs and how it affected their professional development. Overall, most of the participants had positive feelings about reflecting on their CIs except for one. Moreover, the critical analysis activity they did at the beginning of the was also favored.

> *I think even writing reflective journals and taking notes about our teaching in any way helps us see ourselves, so it was very beneficial. I thought about what I could have done differently. I think training like this would be very effective.* (T4, FGI)
>
> *You can see whether your reaction was reasonable or wrong. If I was passive at that moment, I think "I could have said something constructive", or sometimes I find my reaction "too aggressive" and think "I should not have done that".* (T6, FGI)

On the contrary, T1 did not think reflecting on her own CIs through a journal helped her much. However, she believed reflecting on other teachers' CIs and analyzing them as an outsider helped provide teachers with experience.

> *Writing CIs did not help me much, but they made me realize what I already knew. As a teacher who received a good education, I was not happy with my reactions, so it once again made me feel bad and regretful*. (T1, FGI)

Another thing participants mentioned regarding their previous SLTE was the content of their *English Language Teaching Methods* course. According to T4, it was helpful because there were example incident analyses but added that if they had been done in smaller groups, it would have been more beneficial. T6, to the contrary, thought the incidents they analyzed did not cover any of the incidents that could lead to critical ones in her context, so she found the course unhelpful. Furthermore, T1 believed the examples were irrelevant to the Turkish EFL context and found it more effective to analyze incidents other Turkish teachers had in their EFL contexts.

> *In that course, we did not analyze anything that actually happened. For example, being happy to carry out a lesson with only three students, as T3 mentioned, or yelling back and forth with the student- we have both been through these CIs, but we never talked about these in that course. Most of the things we saw may happen in foreign teaching contexts, but not in Turkey. That is why I think analyzing these CIs could be helpful.* (T1, FGI).

Lastly, based on the analysis of RJs, it was seen that the participants only reported CIs associated with negative moments. Thus, their definitions of CIs were interrogated during the FGI. Two of them defined CI by connecting it to negative moments in the classroom, while two others believed CIs could be both negative and positive. One teacher, contrastingly, thought CIs could be positive as well but added that she mostly associated them with negative ones.

> *For me, critical incidents are moments when my lesson flow gets interrupted, the other students get distracted, they do something I find disrespectful, or do something that puts a student's health in danger.* (T5, FGI)

> *Incidents that interrupt a planned lesson flow are critical, but I think they can be either positive or negative*. (T3, FGI)
> *I mostly associate CIs with negative things, but I agree with others that it does not have to be unpleasant only.* (T1, FGI)

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate how Turkish EFL teachers who graduated from their SLTE programs at a state university in Turkey face, deal with and reflect on their CIs. For this aim, data obtained through reflective journals of these novice teachers and the focus group interview was analyzed using thematic analysis. Through this analysis, this study revealed the sources of CIs Turkish novice EFL teachers face in their teaching contexts.

The most recurring theme as a CI source was student behavior, which included conflicts between students, whole and individual student class misbehaviors. This finding coincides with other studies in the literature that undesirable learner behaviors are one of the most recurring CI sources (e.g., Atai & Nejadghanbar, 2016; Karimi & Nazari, 2019; Molani et al., 2021; Pourhassan & Nazari, 2021; Putri & Kuswandono, 2020). Moreover, in the current study, these CIs were reported by teachers working with young, teen, and adult learners.

Among the participants in this study, one novice teacher was working with young learners (T5) and one with adult learners (T6). According to the findings of Pourhassan and Nazari (2021), when investigating CIs of young learner EFL teachers in the Iranian context, teachers with young learners report different CIs compared to the teachers with and learners. Meanwhile, in this study, both the sources and dealing strategies T5 and T6 reported were the same; *student and colleague behavior*, which they dealt with by *addressing the student.* However, their manners when addressing their students changed; while T5 approached students with more emotion and focused on the teacher-learner emotional tie when trying to reason with them, T6's addressing was more direct. This finding contradicts other studies in the literature (e.g., Pourhassan & Nazari, 2021; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011) since this study shows that similar CIs can happen in both young and adults. However, teachers should beware of how they address these situations when dealing with young learners.

In response to the second research question, this study investigated novice EFL teachers' coping strategies as well. As told by Shapira-Lishchinsky (2011), how teachers respond to CIs can change on an individual level. In the current study, the most used strategy was reminding the students of the teacher's authority, which was only used by the teachers working with teenagers, however, it was used the most by T1. When reflecting on her CIs during the FGI, T1 shared her dissatisfaction with her reaction but believed that she had to use authority due to her school's environment. Meanwhile, in another teacher's experience, T3 explained how the CI was resolved after she had stopped acting as the authority and calmly addressed the student. T3 also added during the FGI that keeping herself together when approaching CIs was a sign of gaining experience and believed it was possible to reason with teenage students since they were more mature compared to young learners. Based on T1 and T3's experiences with acting as the authority, the strategies teachers turn to when dealing with CIs are related not entirely to the age of their students but also to their school environments. It can also

be drawn that, to survive in their teaching contexts, sometimes teachers' beliefs about how CIs should be maneuvered may clash with the reality of their teaching contexts.

This study also investigated how teachers defined CIs and reflected upon them. Karimi and Nazari (2019) argued that, although the term "critical" may be used to express negative experiences, the critical experience can be both negative and positive. Based on Thiel's (1999) explanation of teaching "highs" and "lows", which referred to positive and negative teaching moments, teachers in Karimi and Nazari's (2019) study reported some teaching highs as well as teaching lows. Meanwhile, no positive CIs or teaching "highs" were shared in the current study. When investigated, the participants' answers were divided on whether CIs could be both positive or negative and only negative. However, even the teachers who believed in "teaching highs" did not report such CIs in their reflective journals. This could be due to the limited time allocated for keeping journals, and that teaching "highs" were less recurring during that time. Another explanation is that teaching "highs" were not as significant as teaching "lows" for these novice teachers, which supports Francis (1995).

Alongside sharing their definitions of CIs, the teachers also shared their thoughts and feelings regarding their CIs, their sources, and the coping strategies they preferred. For some teachers, teaching experience was seen as the key to developing dealing strategies for CIs. Furthermore, as shared by one of the participants, experienced teachers view CIs reported by novices as usual incidents that they can handle easily with the coping strategies they have developed throughout their careers. This view of novice teachers aligns with previous studies that suggest that experienced and novice teachers view and judge incidents differently (e.g., Farrell, 2008, Molani et al., 2021).

However, not all participants believed that experience was the solution to dealing with CIs and shared that although experience may grant teachers the flexibility to manage a CI, some are related to context and student profile. Thus, with the changing generation and school environments, unexpected CIs that can shake even the most experienced teachers can still happen. Therefore, reflecting on CIs is still needed for experienced teachers as well.

When teachers shared their thoughts on reflecting on CIs, almost all participants believed that it would improve their teaching, which is in line with other studies (e.g., Babaii et al., 2021; Karimi & Nazari, 2019; Woods, 1993). Moreover, the participants favored the idea of sharing these CIs and analyzing them together as they experience similar incidents in the Turkish EFL context, which can also add to their professional growth (Nejadghanbar, 2021). Regarding gaining awareness of themselves, which is another reported benefit of reflection on CIs (Molani et al. 2021), the only participant in this study who did not favor reflecting on her own CIs expressed that she did not approve of her approach to CIs. In a way, this participant gained awareness about her teaching.

The participants had something to say about their shared SLTE experiences as well. According to these teachers, the courses about dealing with student behaviors related to the Turkish EFL context should be delivered in smaller groups. Furthermore, regarding the examples they analyzed in their classroom management-related courses, two participants shared that they had never experienced anything resembling those examples in their contexts. This means that

the courses they took in their undergraduate years failed them by not preparing them for the realities of their teaching context. As suggested by Molani et al. (2021), some CIs are context-related, and teachers in different contexts may interpret these differently. Therefore, incorporating more context-related CIs in SLTE programs in Turkey can offer prospective teachers not only a glimpse into their futures as language teachers but also encourage them to develop their own strategies early on in their careers (Esmaeli & Afzali, 2020).

Lastly, by enabling prospective and in-service teachers to reflect and analyze incidents together, SLTE programs can help them "to construct their own knowledge about teaching" (Goodell, 2006, p. 240) and increase reflective thinking and sharing among peers as well (Babaii et al., 2021; Karimi & Nazari, 2019), which can also prevent novice teachers from feelings of being ineffective or insufficient.

Conclusion

This study investigated the CIs reported by Turkish novice EFL teachers, their coping strategies, and how they reflected on their CIs. As teacher reflection is an important research area, and teachers' reflections on CIs in the Turkish EFL context are scarce, this study may open an interest towards focusing on and analyzing CIs for pre- and in-service EFL teachers in this context. Based on the result of this study, Turkish novice EFL teachers require better pedagogical training within real teaching contexts to mostly overcome their feelings of inadequacy in dealing with student behaviors.

This study had some limitations as well. First, due to its case study design, the number of participants was limited, and as only qualitative data was collected, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the whole Turkish EFL context and the experiences of whole novice teachers. Moreover, due to the limited time allocated for data collection, the participants could keep reflective journals for one month. Over a longer period, these teachers can encounter different types of CIs. Future studies could explore the experiences of Turkish novice teachers in a longitudinal study and focus on any developments in teachers' coping strategies. Thirdly, due to convenience sampling, all the participants in this study were females, which limited the generalizability of the results. As gender could be a factor in identifying CIs, future studies in the Turkish context should investigate this area with a more balanced sample. Lastly, once again due to convenience sampling, the participants in this study, although having similar teacher education backgrounds, had different teaching contexts. Although it was not within this study's scope, future studies could investigate the differences or similarities in various teaching contexts regarding CIs.

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