Research Article

Comparing EFL Language Teachers and Students' Perceptions of Teacher's Interpersonal Behavior: A Case Study in an Online Iranian Context

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ABSTRACT

Teachers' interpersonal behavior and the way it is perceived are considered to be determining factors in the quality of any educational context. However, due to the lack of face-to-face interactions in an online context, this issue is under question. Since this phenomenon has not been studied in an online environment, the primary objective of the present case study was to explore how experienced EFL teachers and their students perceived teacher interpersonal behavior in online classes and the extent to which the two groups' perceptions either converged or diverged in six selected online classes in Shiraz, Iran. The samples of the study were six EFL teachers and their respective 106 language students. To gather the data, The Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI) was administered to both groups to assess the eight scales of interpersonal behavior and dimensions. To analyze the data, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was employed to compare the two groups in terms of interpersonal behavior dimensions and scales. Accordingly, the results revealed that the EFL teachers and their students perceived the teachers to be moderately dominant and highly cooperative. There was a high level of convergence between the experienced teachers and their students' perceptions of interpersonal behavior in terms of the Influence and Proximity dimensions. The Student Responsibility Freedom and Strict scales, however, were rated higher by teachers than their students. Following the findings, the present case study provides particular implications in the field of applied linguistics.

Introduction

In the digital age, every aspect of people's lives has undergone unprecedented changes. Educational settings and experiences, by the same token, are not excluded from this massive transformation. While classrooms used to be mostly considered physical rooms, today they are also defined as ideas due to the digitalization of educational settings (Kostenius & Alerby, 2020). Whether physical or virtual, the language classroom environment involves a myriad of factors such as teachers' and learners' thoughts, values, identities, etc. This setting also encompasses how the teacher and learners act on the physical and temporal context properties (Larsen-Freeman, 2021).

Traditionally, social research on teaching portrays classroom operations as unilateral actions from the teacher to the students (Fraser, 1998). Therefore, to make better sense of this complex reality in language education and get away from the simplistic view of the teacher as a conduit, Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST) can make substantial contributions (Larsen-Freeman, 2016). The word 'complex' denotes the sense that in the real world of people, agents interact in such a way that the system within which they reside develops unpredictably (Harrison & Geyer, 2021). As Larsen-Freeman (2016) merged CDST and language education, this viewpoint looks at the classroom environment as an emergent setting where the interaction of components creates and develops it constantly. Additionally, CDST recognizes that the class is one of many systems nested within other systems. To clarify the point, a particular language class in Iran exists within a larger system which is a private language institute, and this in turn resides within another overarching system which is the school district containing other institutions and so on. Not only do these interconnections nest within one another, but they also impact any other level below or above (Larsen-Freeman, 2016).

Guided by the aforementioned complexity approach, teaching and learning can be considered as a form of constantly changing behavioral acts leading to different forms of communication. This view is because behavior is inevitable in the presence of others and there is no non-behavior (Watzlawick et al., 2011). Consequently, no matter how much one might try, one cannot communicate (Watzlawick et al., 2011). This view of behavior and communication is an element of the 'systems approach' (Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). From an educational standpoint, this pragmatic view of communication primarily examines the impacts of behavioral acts between teachers and students involved in any given form of communication in the ecological and contextual system of the classroom (Wubbels et al., 1993).

To analyze the interpersonal aspect of teacher behavior, Wubbels et al. (1985) developed a model for interpersonal teacher behavior based on the work of Leary (1957). This model maps teacher interpersonal behavior using two dimensions: an *influence* dimension describing who has control in the teacher-student relationship, and a *proximity* dimension, describing the extent to which cooperation exists between teacher and students (den Brok et al., 2003). As shown in Figure 1, the two dimensions can be further subdivided into eight scales representing eight behavioral styles: leadership (DC), helpful/friendly behavior (CD), understanding behavior (CS), giving responsibility freedom (SC), uncertain behavior (SO), dissatisfied behavior (OS), admonishing behavior (OD), and strictness (DO) (den Brok et al., 2003). The abovementioned dimensions and scales have been operationalized and measured using the Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI) which has been developed based on the model for interpersonal teacher behavior developed by Wubbels et al. (1985).
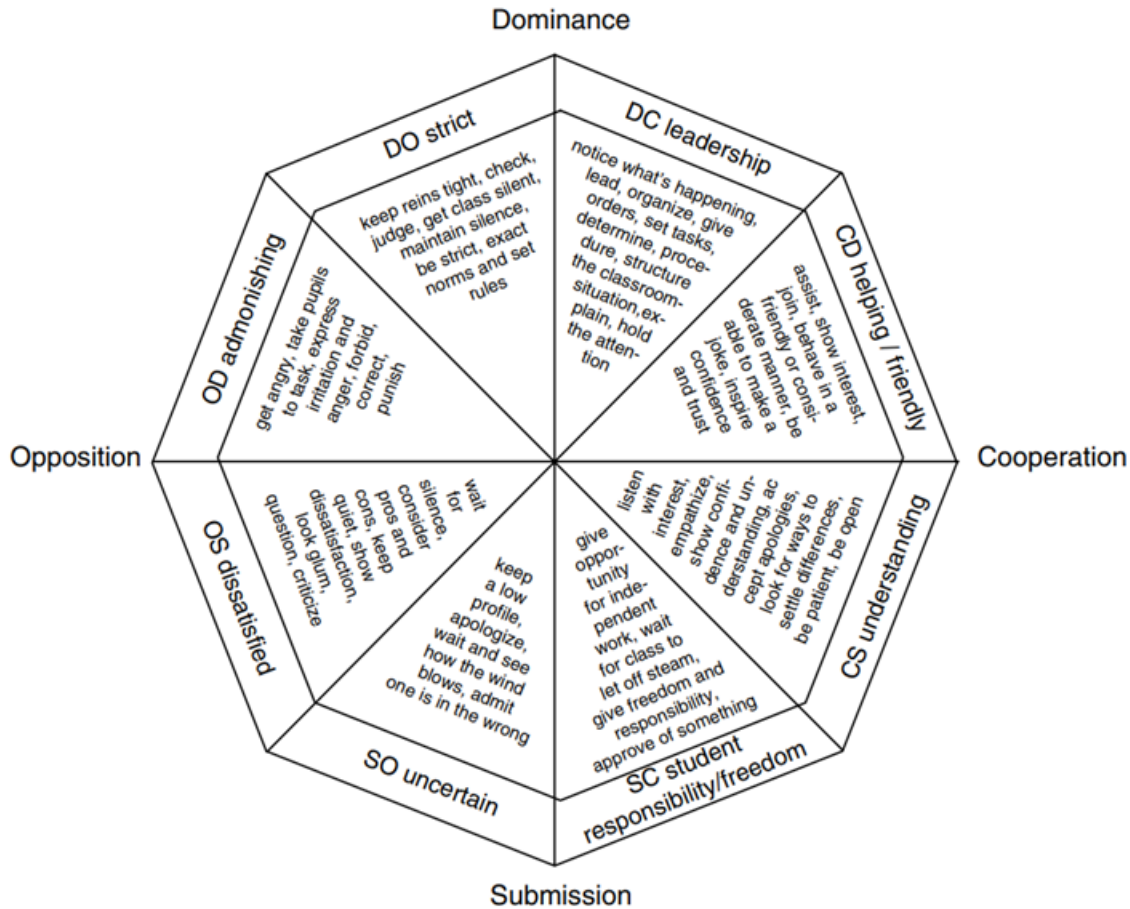
Figure 1. *Patterns of Teachers' Interpersonal Behavior (adapted from Wubbels et al. 2006)*

Regarding behavioral patterns of the model, each sector is labeled DC, CD, and so on based on its position in the system (Wubbels et al., 2012). As an example, the sectors Leadership and Helpful/Friendly are both high in Dominance and Cooperation. DC signifies that Dominance outweighs Cooperation, while CD shows that Cooperation prevails over Dominance (Wubbels et al., 2012).

Initially, while the model seemed to fit various teaching contexts, its operationalization seemed vital to generate reliable data for research. As a result, The Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI) was developed in the early 1980s (Levy & Wubbels, 2005). Regardless of the versions and languages of the instrument, the QTI is divided into eight scales that conform to the eight sectors of the teacher interpersonal model (Levy & Wubbels, 2005). The number of items, however, varies across different versions and translations of this instrument.

Data gathered by the QTI have also been used to develop different typologies of teachers' interpersonal behavior to better characterize how teachers tend to act in their classes (Ahmadi Safa & Doosti, 2017). As displayed in Fig. 4, these types are namely Directive, Authoritative, Tolerant/Authoritative, Tolerant, Uncertain/Tolerant, Uncertain/Aggressive, Repressive, and Drudging (Levy, 1993). These typologies have been confirmed in several studies carried out in different cultural contexts (Rickards et al., 2005; Telli et al., 2008). Wubbels and Brekelmans (2005) pointed out that these typologies illustrate a single teacher's behavior in a particular class. These typologies coupled with their typical characteristics put one in a better position to interpret a teacher's interpersonal behavior style.
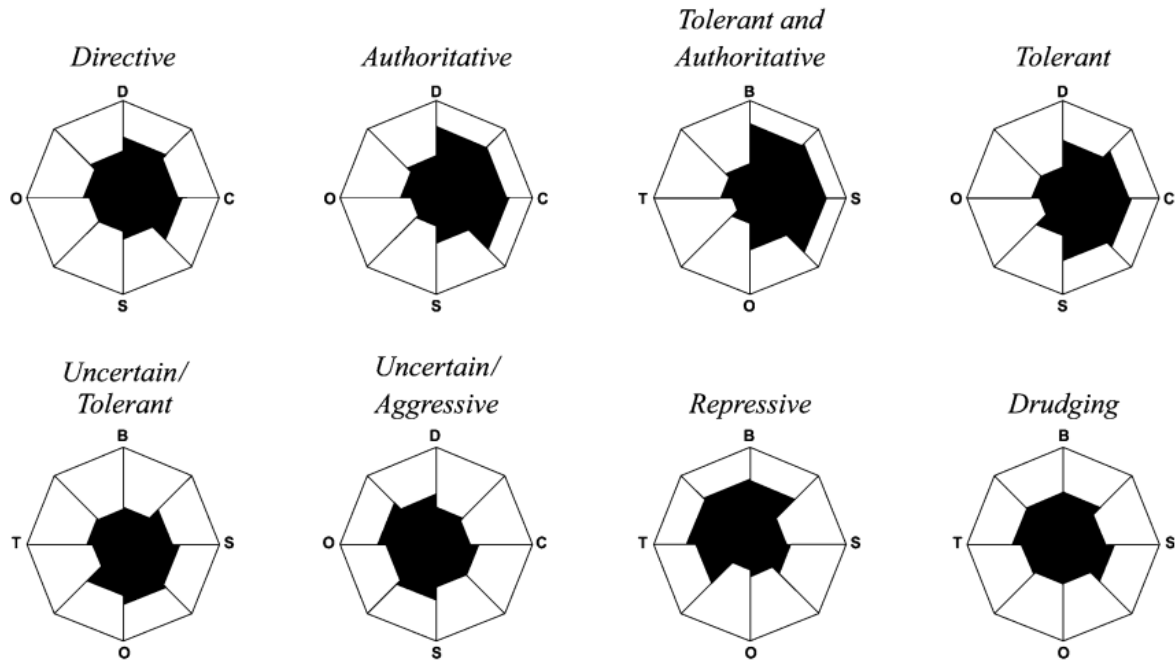
Figure 2.*Typologies of Teachers' Interpersonal Behavior (adapted from Telli et al. 2007)*

Wubbels and Brekemans (2005) describe Directive, Authoritative, and Tolerant/Authoritative as patterns that are perceived as relatively high on the Proximity Dimension, with the Tolerant type lowest on the Influence Dimension. The Directive, Uncertain/Tolerant, Drudging, and Uncertain/Tolerant, however, are perceived lowest on the Dominance Dimension. The two typologies that are the least cooperative among the patterns are Repressive and Uncertain/Aggressive.

Regarding the use of QTI, since 1985, this questionnaire has been translated into other languages and used in various countries and educational settings (Wei et al., 2015). For instance, in a study carried out by den Brok et al. (2004), the influence of teacher interpersonal behavior on EFL and physics students' cognitive and affective outcomes was researched. In this study, *influence* was shown to be negatively correlated with students' confidence, and positively correlated with physics students' scores. In another work of research by den Brok et al. (2006), interpersonal relationships were studied under the light of nationalities, and it was found that teachers in countries with higher levels of power distance are expected to exert a great deal of dominance and students are expected to follow directions more. In a more recent study in

Greece, Karamane et al. (2023) gathered data from 1669 students and 43 secondary teachers. The results of this study demonstrated a high degree of divergence between teachers' self-perceptions and students' perceptions of their teachers' interpersonal behavior.

Several studies on teachers' interpersonal relationships have been done in Iran. Ahmadi Safa and Doosti (2017), for example, developed a culturally adaptive Iranian version of the QTI to investigate how secondary school teachers and students perceive teachers' interpersonal behavior. This study indicated that teachers can be described as tolerant and authoritative. This study also reported some level of discrepancy between teachers' perception of their behavior in comparison with their students' perception; teachers were reported to rate themselves higher on Leading, Friendly, and Understanding scales. In another work of research done by Khodamoradi et al. (2020), the correlational relationship between teachers' personality and their interpersonal behavior was analyzed. Having used The QTI and NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), the researchers found significant associations between personality traits and interpersonal behavior among student teachers.

Iranian Culture and EFL Context

To better understand the notion of interpersonal relationships in any context, it is vital to put the corresponding cultural aspects in the background. The QTI and the construct it represents have been investigated in a wide range of cultural backgrounds and the findings based on this instrument have been shown to be under the influence of this factor.

Cultural differences have often been studied in terms of dimensions based on which people tend to communicate (den Brok et al., 2002). The cultural dimensions that can help one better understand cultural contexts and how they might differ from one another, as used in similar studies such as den Brok et al. (2002), are approach/ avoidance, individualism/ collectivism, femininity/ masculinity, and power distance (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Iranian national identity is considered diverse, complex, and multicultural owing to its dramatic history (Kirkham, 2022). Iran was reported by Hofstede et al. (2010) to be a collectivist society where family or group membership tends to predetermine relationships. This characteristic in language education implies that learners with higher cultural or religious identities may find a new language and culture as a threat to their existing selves.

Another cultural characteristic of Iran is being a large-power-distance country (Kabasakal et al., 2012). This cultural dimension is defined as the extent to which the members of a society are willing to accept the unequal distribution of power (Hofstede et al., 2010). From an educational standpoint, this would translate to a higher perceived social gap between students and instructors and more deference paid to the instructor (Cray et al., 2019). It must be born in mind, however, that since young Iranians are also under the influence of 'cultural globalization' (Kirkham, 2022), it would be inaccurate to strive for one definitive conceptualization of Iranian society in terms of its cultural characteristics.

With regard to English language education in Iran, students are provided with obligatory foreign language courses from junior high school at public schools. Private institutions also offer a wide range of courses and programs to students of different ages and levels. As Leather and Motallebzadeh (2015) noted, a traditional method focusing on grammar and reading skill tends to be employed in public schools while language courses in private institutes are mostly under the influence of communicative language teaching approach. Teachers working in the private sector mostly employ modern language coursebooks such as Top Notch, English File, and Touchstone series. As opposed to the ostensibly communicative materials used at public schools, the materials and teaching methodologies employed in the private sector are more in line with the recent tenets of language education.

There are several reasons for carrying out this work of research. First, although the QTI has been used in many countries extensively (Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005), comparatively, few Iranian researchers have worked on teachers' interpersonal relationships in the Iranian educational context. Second, while most previous studies have analyzed teachers' interpersonal behavior from different aspects, this concept has been analyzed mostly in face-to-face educational contexts. Even though the majority of learners prefer face-to-face language learning experiences, the online mode has changed the educational state of affairs by bringing numerous plus points such as self-paced, self-regulated, and self-motivated learning to many (Balbay & Erkan, 2021). Studies on online language education often involve more descriptive research questions regarding language teachers' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of online education (Tao & Gao, 2022). However, the transition to distant modes of teaching involves deeper amorphous influences such as shifting in imagined identity, adoption of teaching activities, or online environmental management competencies (Tao & Gao, 2022). As a result, a more focused effort to observe the behavioral patterns of language teachers in this particular learning environment can shed light on more deep-seated states and conditions teachers experience in their practice.

Another rationale behind the current work is the eccentric nature of the EFL area. Despite recent works focusing on applied linguistics area, the lion's

share of the studies based on the QTI in the literature were mostly in school science, mathematics, physics, or biology classroom environments (Wei et al., 2009). The EFL area, as a complex educational context in its own right, needs to be researched more deeply in this regard. On a more national scale, owing to the recent social and economic changes and conditions, language education is playing an even more important role in the Iranian young generation's academic and professional life; consequently, looking at this enterprise from an interpersonal perspective can enrich our understanding of this field.

It is also worth mentioning that a large body of research in the EFL area about interpersonal relationships has been done in secondary schools or university general English courses. Since the private sector boasts the majority of language institutes, focusing on this particular educational context can corroborate our understanding of previous findings in the literature. Therefore, this study delved into the following research question:

RQ1) What are Iranian experienced EFL teachers' perceptions about teachers' interpersonal behavior in an online context??

RQ2) What are Iranian EFL students' perceptions about teachers' interpersonal behavior in an online context?

RQ3) Are there significant differences between Iranian experienced EFL teachers and their students' perceptions of teachers' interpersonal behavior in an online context?

Methodology
Research design

Since the current study was descriptive in nature, and its purpose was to make a comparison between English language teachers' perceptions of their own interpersonal behavior with their students' perceptions in an English language institute in Iran, a cross-sectional descriptive survey design was adopted. Survey designs differ from experimental designs because they aim to describe phenomena rather than involve treatments (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Cross-sectional research studies, as a type of survey research, are widely used in the field of applied linguistics to

compare different groups with each other in terms of affective or cognitive factors (Riazi, 2016).

Participants

Since the present research is part of a case study on experienced Iranian language teachers, the sample comprised 6 male and female experienced English language teachers and their 106 students from 12 classes in a language institute in Shiraz, Iran. The 6 teachers in the current work were selected through non-probability convenience sampling. The reason behind this approach of sampling in educational research is to involve participants who represent the characteristics the researchers are seeking to study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Another reason for using nonprobability sampling was to include individuals who volunteered and agreed to take part in the original case study.

Regarding the professional and academic characteristics of the teachers participating in the study, they had been teaching English for at least 12 years; their work experience ranged from 12 to 26 years. Table 1 provides the teachers' demographic characteristics.

Table 1.
Teachers' Demographic Characteristics

Teacher NO.	Gender	Age	Academic Degree	Years of Experience
1	Female	52	M.A.	26
2	Female	47	M.A.	22
3	Male	39	B.A.	12
4	Male	41	B.A.	14
5	Male	35	M.A.	14
6	Male	34	M.A.	13

As for the students, they were adult language learners, and their ages ranged between 18 to 41. All the students were studying at upper-intermediate or advanced levels of English proficiency.

Instrumentation

The instrument employed in this study was the 48-item version of the QTI which was originally developed by (Wubbels et al., 1985) to examine teachers and students' perceptions of teachers'

interpersonal behavior. The questionnaire consisted of 48 items that were divided into eight scales each with six items, namely Leadership, Helpful/friendly Understanding, Student Responsibility, Uncertain, Dissatisfied, Admonishing, and Strict. Each scale was to be responded to on a 5-point scale (0-4) ranging from 0 = "never" to 4 = "always". To illustrate more, "*This teacher is willing to explain things again.*" and "*This teacher acts confidently.*" are examples of typical items in the Understanding and Leadership teacher behavior scales, respectively.

Since both teachers and students were to fill out the questionnaire about teachers' interpersonal behavior, the wording of items was changed in terms of subject and object pronouns for each group so that it was clear who the items were about. The teachers taking part in the study were also instructed that the word "I" in each item meant themselves, while the students were instructed that "This teacher" in each item meant their teacher. For instance, Item 10 in the teachers' questionnaire was "I am willing to explain things clearly.", while it was "This teacher is willing to explain things clearly." In the students' questionnaire.

The QTI has been shown to be a reliable instrument in a wide range of studies in different cultural and academic milieus (Gedamu & Demissie, 2019; Karamane et al., 2023; Rickards et al., 2005; Telli et al., 2008). The mentioned studies investigated internal consistency reliability scores and validity of the QTI and in turn, showed that this instrument is capable of producing results that are generalizable to different cultural contexts. For the purpose of this study, its validity was also checked by two experts, and the result of applying the Cronbach's alpha formula showed that it has an acceptable reliability coefficient ranging from .63 to .89.

Procedures

The study was conducted in a language institute in Shiraz, Iran, in the Summer term of 2023. The reason for choosing this particular institute was that it was found to be one of the few well-established institutions in Shiraz with a rather large number of language teachers teaching there for a long time.

The permission for the study was first attained from the Institute's board of education. Next, a list of teachers with at least 10 years of experience was provided to the researchers. The instructors were informed about the process of research, the steps required, and the fact that they could quit the study whenever they wanted. Six of the teachers agreed to participate in the current research work.

The consent allowed the researchers to join each teacher's two online classes to present the purpose of the study and necessary instructions to answer the questionnaire. The reason behind observing two classes belonging to each teacher was that a minimum of two classes should complete the QTI so that it generates a reliable measure of the overall teachers' interpersonal style (Wubbels et al., 1993). The electronic version of the QTI was provided through a Google Forms link. The participants were also informed that the findings would be completely anonymous and used for the sake of research.

Since the proficiency level of the students present in the study was high enough to understand the questionnaire items, the original version of the QTI was employed. The learners completed the forms in about 20 minutes during one of the last sessions of their course. This step was conducted during the last few sessions of the classes so that learners would have sufficient time with their teachers to have a deeper understanding of their behavioral patterns.

The teachers were also provided with the electronic forms of the QTI through a Google Forms link. The researchers were constantly in touch with the teachers while they were completing the surveys so that they could resolve any possible related issues.

Data Analysis

The present study aimed to examine whether teachers' and students' perceptions of teachers' interpersonal behavior were significantly different. In doing so, data analysis was carried out based on the eight previously mentioned scales on the interpersonal behavior circular model.

The QTI consisted of 5-point Likert scale items to indicate agreement ranging from responses

of "Never" (0), "Almost Never" (1), "Neutral" (2), "Almost Always" (3), and "Always" (4). In the analyses of this study, QTI scores, however, were transformed from 0 to 4 to scores between 0 to 1. The transformed scores represented a proportion (of the maximum) scores, with 1 representing the highest score possible, and 0 representing the lowest score possible (den Brok et al., 2006). This transformation was for the sake of easier comparisons. Then, QTI scores were computed for all scales across teacher and class levels. Subsequently, the scale scores were used to compute dimension scores. This was done by combining the scale scores corresponding to each of the scales of the MITB into two scores that characterize the two dimensions of the MITB, namely, Influence and Proximity.[1]

The analyses in this study were carried out by SPSS ver. 27. Having computed and established the internal consistencies of the results, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for various scales at teacher and class levels with an average reliability index of .72. Therefore, the reliability of the results of the QTI was confirmed.

To investigate whether there were significant differences between teachers' and students' perceptions in terms of each QTI scale and dimensions, the collected data were analyzed using normality tests and, in turn, independent samples t-test, and Mann-Whitney U for the nonparametric data set.

Results

To carry out the data analysis in the present case study, internal consistency analysis for the QTI scales at the teacher and class levels was conducted. Table 2 reports the reliability of each of the scales of the QTI for the individual student and teacher score. The data suggested satisfactory reliability at both levels, ranging from .60 to .80 for the teachers' version of QTI, and from .60 to .89 for that of the students.

Table 2
Reliability for QTI Scales

Scale	Unit of Analysis	Teachers' Version Cronbach's Alpha	Students' Version Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Leadership	Individual	.63	.85	6
Helpful/Friendly	Individual	.64	.89	6
Understanding	Individual	.73	.83	6
Student responsibility	Individual	.64	.60	6
Uncertain	Individual	.60	.68	6
Dissatisfied	Individual	.73	.88	6
Admonishing	Individual	.80	.75	6
Strict	Individual	.67	.73	6

The internal consistency was examined; then, to analyze the collected data, general descriptive analysis was performed to display the teachers' and students' perceptions of teachers' interpersonal behavior. The means and standard deviations for each QTI scale and dimension on both teacher and student levels are provided in Table 3.

Table 3.
Descriptive Statistics for QTI Scales and Dimensions

	N		Mean		Std. Deviation	
	Teacher	Student	Teacher	Student	Teacher	Student
Leadership (DC)	6	106	.83	.89	.19	.13
Helpful/Friendly (CD)	6	106	.79	.83	.11	.18

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[1] Dimension scores are computed as follows: Influence = $0.92DC + 0.38CD - 0.38CS - 0.92SC - 0.92SO - 0.38OS + 0.38OD + 0.92DO$; Proximity = $0.38DC + 0.92CD + 0.92CS + 0.38SC - 0.38SO - 0.92OS - 0.92OD - 0.38DO$.

Understanding (CS)	6	106	.88	.88	.04	.16
Student freedom (SC)	6	106	.38	.09	.12	.08
Uncertain (SO)	6	106	.12	.10	.11	.11
Dissatisfied (OS)	6	106	.13	.09	.11	.16
Admonishing (OD)	6	106	.13	.13	.10	.16
Strict (DO)	6	106	.56	.33	.14	.18
Influence (DS)	6	106	.78	.95	.40	.30
Proximity (CO)	6	106	1.49	1.54	.25	.64

To visualize the initial findings from a more qualitative perspective, Figure 3 demonstrates the profiles of the six Iranian experienced online EFL teachers' self-perceptions and their students' perceptions of interpersonal behavior. Related data for the similarities and discrepancies between teachers' and students' perceptions of teachers' interpersonal behavior.
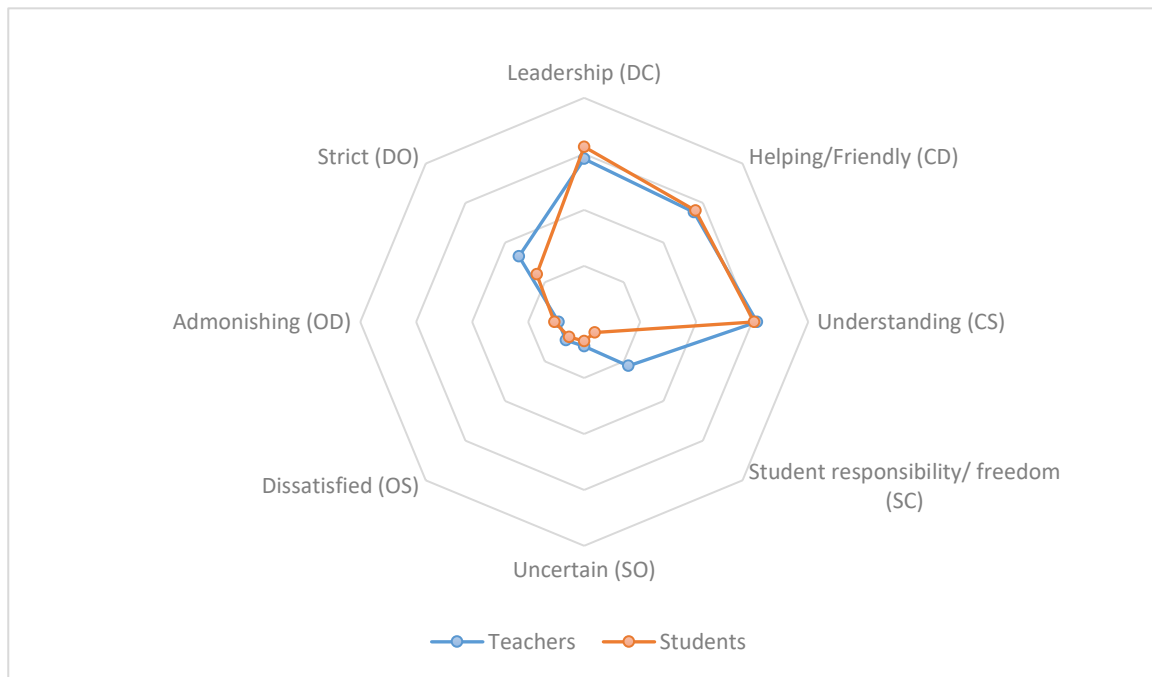

Figure 3. *The profiles of the Teachers' and Students' Interpersonal Behavior Perceptions*

As the results illustrate, teachers and students had similar perceptions of the actual teachers' interpersonal behavior in most of the scales. To examine the preliminary findings in more details, most sectors, except Strict and Student Responsibility Freedom, did not show considerable differences. The Strict and Student Responsibility Freedom scales, however, were perceived higher by the teachers than the students did.

It is worth mentioning that both groups rated the actual teachers' interpersonal behavior higher on the scales to the right side of the model which indicates behavioral patterns with communion were more experienced by the participants, while the scales on the left side of the model were rated lower, which shows that behavioral patterns with agentic behavior were not perceived by both groups much. The differences, however, seem more considerable in Student Responsibility Freedom and Strict scales.

In terms of the interpersonal behavior typologies, mean scores indicated that the teachers were (on average) perceived as either Authoritative or Tolerant/Authoritative.

Regarding the two dimensions, as Figure 4 illustrates, it appeared that teachers were perceived as rather dominant by both teachers themselves and learners (DS = .78, .95 respectively on a possible

score range between -3 and +3) and fairly cooperative (CO = 1.49 and 1.54 respectively on a possible score range between -3 and +3).
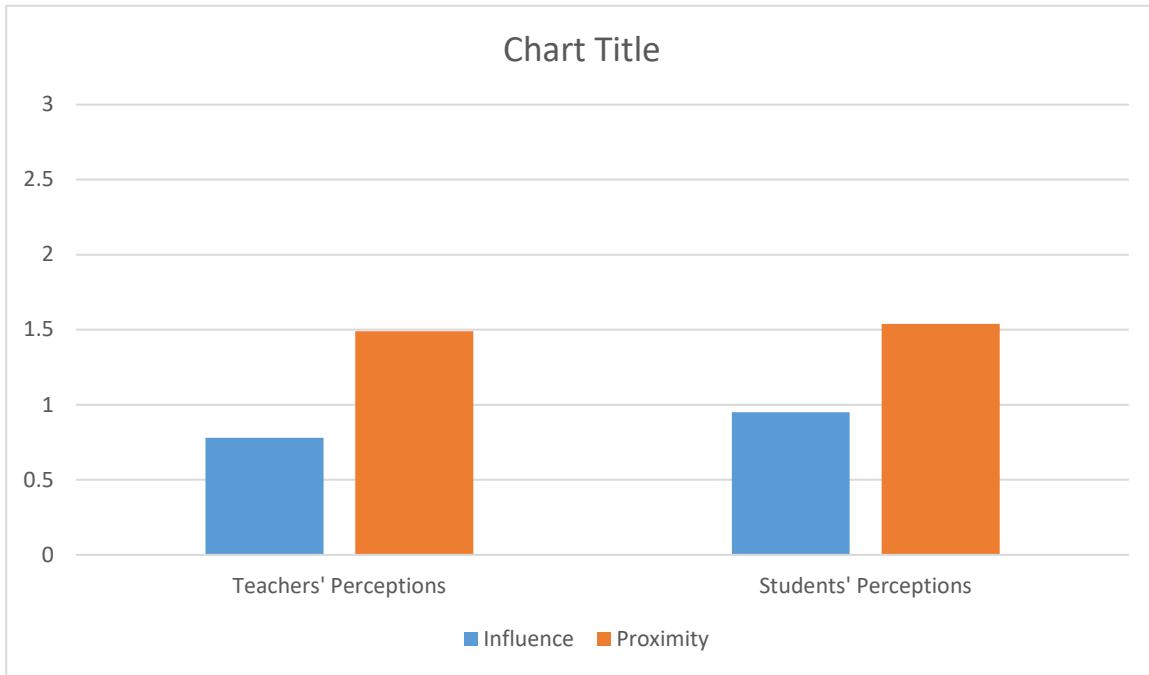

Figure 4. *Teachers and Students' Dimension Scores*

To find any statistically significant differences between teachers and students' perceptions, the normality assumption was assessed for each group using a series of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests to determine if the data followed the standard assumption of normality. The results of these tests illustrate that only the data from Student Responsibility Freedom met the normality assumption necessary for parametric statistical analyses. As a result, for all of the scales, the non-parametric Man-Whitney U Test was conducted. With regard to the dimensions, an independent samples *t-test* was run to examine the difference between teachers and students' perceptions of the Influence, while the Mann-Whitney U test was employed to observe the difference between the two groups' perceptions in terms of Proximity. Table 4 presents the related data sets of the normality tests for both groups.

Table 4.
Tests of Normality for Teachers and Students

	Participant	Kolmogorov-Smirnov⁺			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Leadership	Teachers	.335	6	.034	.834	6	.115
	Students	.227	103	<.001	.723	103	<.001
Helpful/friendly	Teachers	.333	6	.036	.844	6	.141
	Students	.232	104	<.001	.794	104	<.001
Understanding	Teachers	.223	6	.200˙	.908	6	.421
	Students	.230	104	<.001	.735	104	<.001
Student responsibility /freedom	Teachers	.221	6	.200˙	.973	6	.913

		Kolmogorov-Smirnov'			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Participant	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
	Students	.179	105	<.001	.885	105	<.001
Uncertain	Teachers	.195	6	.200'	.922	6	.523
	Students	.204	102	<.001	.820	102	<.001
Dissatisfied	Teachers	.191	6	.200'	.925	6	.540
	Students	.302	105	<.001	.636	105	<.001
Admonishing	Teachers	.194	6	.200'	.891	6	.324
	Students	.209	104	<.001	.796	104	<.001
Strict	Teachers	.286	6	.136	.828	6	.102
	Students	.128	104	<.001	.961	104	.004
Influence	Teachers	.254	6	.200'	.910	6	.433
	Students	.088	97	.059	.972	97	.038
Proximity	Teachers	.163	6	.200'	.958	6	.802
	Students	.185	97	<.001	.972	97	<.001

Following the results of the normality test, the Mann-Whitney U Test was carried out to compare the perceptions of teachers and students on all the scales. The results of the Mann-Whitney U Test, as indicated in Table 5, reveal that there are statistically significant differences between teachers and students' perceptions of the Student Responsibility scale (U=15.500, Z= -3.979, p=.001, r=.80) and the Strict scale (U=101.000, Z=-2.787, p=.005, r=.54).

Table 5.
Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test for the Scales

	leadership	Understanding	Student/ R	Uncertain	Admonishing	Helpful/Fr	Dissatisfied	Strict
Mann-Whitney U	385	418	15.500	357	235	444	184	101.000
Wilcoxon W	5741.500	5878.000	5580.500	5610.000	5695.000	5904.500	5749.500	5561.000
Z	1.045	1.422	-3.979	.699	-1.027	1.758	-1.841	-2.787
Asymp. Sig. (2-sided test)	.296	.155	<.001	.485	.305	.079	.066	.005

To see whether the teachers and students' perceptions were statistically different in terms of the two dimensions, an independent samples *t-test* was employed for the Influence dimension, while a Mann-Whitney U Test was carried out for the proximity dimension. As Tables 6 indicates, there are no statistically significant difference between the two groups' perceptions regarding the Influence dimension.

Table 6.
Independent Samples t-test for Perceptions of the Influence Dimension

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Influence	Equal variances assumed	.263	.609	-1.261	101	.210
	Equal variances not assumed			-.972	5.350	.373

Table 7.
Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U
   *Test for the Proximity Dimension*Proximity

Mann-Whitney U	382.000
Wilcoxon W	5135.500
Z	1.281
Asymp. Sig.(2-sided test)	.200

Table 7, similarly, indicates no statistically meaningful difference between the perceptions of the two groups.

Discussion

The present case study investigated how Iranian experienced online EFL teachers and their students characterize teachers' interpersonal behavior patterns within an online context, and the extent to which teachers' self-perceptions and those of their students either diverge or converge in terms of interpersonal profiles, scales, and dimensions in online classes.

With respect to the first and second research questions, the teachers and students' perceptions of the teachers' interpersonal behavior could be delineated in terms of interpersonal behavior profiles, dimensions, and scales. The obtained results showed that Iranian experienced EFL teachers characterized themselves in general as Authoritative and Tolerant/Authoritative due to the relatively high perceptions of Proximity. Students, by the same token, perceived their teachers quite similarly with negligible differences. The findings in the present case study is in agreement with the earlier research by Ahmadi Safa and Doosti (2017), highlighting that Iranian English teachers can be described as Tolerant and Authoritative in general. The Authoritative and The Tolerant/Authoritative are patterns wherein the teacher is perceived as high on the Proximity dimension (Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005).

Regarding the prominent characteristics of teacher with The Tolerant/Authoritative pattern, it is worth mentioning that she tends to foster a sense of responsibility and freedom, and she is likely to employ a battery of methods so that the learners respond well (Brekelmans et al. 1993). These findings also show a low presence of uncertainty

among experienced EFL online teachers and a higher degree of respect and formality (Rickards et al., 2005).

The findings of the present work are also comparable to another study carried out in China with EFL teachers and students in terms of interpersonal profiles. In a research work done by Wei et al. (2009), approximately half (43.8%) of the Chinese EFL learners participating in the study perceived their actual English teachers as Tolerant/Authoritative which was the highest figure among all the interpersonal profile ratings in the study.

With respect to the dimensions, both teachers and students perceived teachers' interpersonal behavior as moderately dominant and highly cooperative. This shows that the EFL teachers in this case study were perceived to show cooperative behaviors coupled with dominant behaviors and manners both by themselves and their students. These findings are aligned with the previous investigation by Telli et al. (2007) in a Turkish context which is relatively similar to the Iranian context from a cultural perspective. This work indicated that while Turkish students perceived their teachers as rather dominant, they found their teachers to be considerably more cooperative. Additionally, similar results have been observed in a study carried out in Greece by Karamane et al. (2023) which indicated a moderate degree of dominance and a considerably higher level of proximity perceived by students. However, it is worth mentioning that the figures for Influence in the present case study were higher than those in the Netherlands which is a Western country with a different cultural milieu (Brekelmans et al., 2011).

Therefore, the dimensional differences and similarities between the findings of the present work and other studies can be examined from a cultural viewpoint. According to den Brok et al. (2002), ethnic background is significantly related to perceptions of teacher communication style. As an example, the fairly high ratings of Influence in this case study, along with the aforementioned similar works, might be rooted in the high power distance in societies with collectivist communities such as Iran, Turkey, and China. In a related study by

Fisher and Rickards (1998), teachers in Singapore were perceived as being stricter than teachers from the USA or Australia-countries with lower indexes of collectivism. According to Hofstede et al. (2010), in collectivist societies, harmony should be maintained and direct confrontations tend to be avoided. In academic contexts, students, similarly, are not expected to speak up individually (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Additionally, the high ratings of Proximity in the current case study corroborate the earlier findings in the literature claiming that ethnic group membership can be significantly associated with the Proximity dimension. For instance, in den Brok et al.'s study in 2002, students from more collectivist and high-power-distance societies such as Asian countries rated their teachers higher on Proximity in comparison with students coming from more individualistic communities. Moreover, the high ratings of Proximity in the current study are in line with the findings of Maulana et al. (2012) indicating that fairly high figures for the Proximity dimension among Indonesian teachers might be due to the fact that they reside in a collectivist society as opposed to Dutch and American communities.

Apart from cultural considerations, a methodological point of view could offer a new insight into the findings of the current case study, which has not been adopted in the previous research to the best of our knowledge. Since this study was conducted in a private institute following the communicative principles of language teaching, the behavioral patterns of the teachers might be under the influence of this philosophy. As Ahmad (2012) argued, communicative language teaching is a highly Westernized approach. Although in some non-European countries including Iran, there have been arguments that teachers have not been able to adopt CLT tenets due to the local particularities, Iranian private institutes' educational policies, teacher training programs, and procedures, and in turn their teachers have been under the impact of this approach.

Interestingly, the ratings for the Proximity dimension were higher than most studies in the literature including the ones mentioned above. Following the principles of CLT, the language teachers' role is to facilitate real communication between the participants of the class so that the learners have the opportunity to negotiate, solve problems, and work out meaning for themselves (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). As Kumaravadivelu (2012) maintained, western-based guidelines tend to be dictated to language teachers not only through training programs but also through the center-based textbook industry. Since Iranian language teachers are generally exposed to CLT-guided training programs and textbooks, it sounds reasonable to conclude that this methodological factor might play a role in the fact that the Proximity dimension was perceived to be considerably higher than the Influence by both language teachers and students in this study. Further research, however, could help to better understand this methodological perspective.

In terms of the scales, it is worth mentioning that the Leadership, Helpful/friendly, and Understanding scales were perceived considerably higher than other scales by both EFL teachers and students. It shows that the EFL teachers and their students thought the teachers tended to organize the class, set tasks, behave in a friendly or considerate manner, encourage trust, assist the learners, be patient, and so on. On the other hand, scales such as Dissatisfied, Admonishing, and Uncertain were rated the least by both teachers and students.

Regarding the second research question, our investigation of the association between teachers and students' perceptions in terms of the Influence and Proximity dimensions revealed no significant discrepancy. Studies on the similarities and differences between teachers and students' perceptions in the context of the teachers' interpersonal behavior have produced varying results in the literature (Donker et al., 2021). While many works of research have found a significant divergence between the teachers' self-perception and students' perception, there have been studies that reported non-significant differences between teachers' and students' perceptions (Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). The findings of this case study are particularly in line with a number of studies in the literature (Ben-Chaim & Zoller, 2001; Donker et al., 2021; Tartwijk et al., 1998; Wubbels & Levy,

1991) indicating convergence between teachers' self-perceptions and students' perceptions.

The similar perceptions in this case study may in part be due to the fact that both teachers and students were experienced in their respective roles in the classroom. Having passed at least eight levels, having had classes with a wide range of teachers with different personalities and styles, and reaching B2 level or higher on the CEFR scale, may put the students in a good position to judge interpersonal behavior on the part of their teachers. In a similar vein, teachers with at least 10 years of experience, tend to have reached As Donker et al. (2021) maintained, having professional knowledge could lead to a higher correlation between the perceptions of teachers and their observers. This could also apply to the more experienced learners at higher levels of their educational trajectories, as observers of their teachers. This could be explained by the fact that both parties are more likely to have comparable behavioral frames of reference owing to their professional insight into the process of learning and teaching.

However, while there were no meaningful divergences between six of the scales, there were statistically significant differences between EFL teachers and students' perceptions of Student responsibility/ Freedom and Strict scales. The higher perception of the Strict scale by teachers in the present case study is in line with the findings of some studies showing higher perceptions of the Strict scale by teachers than students (Gedamu & Demissie, 2019; Fisher & Rickards, 1999; Rickards & Fisher, as cited in Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). Considering the average age of the teachers present in this study and their teaching experience, the findings are consistent with the existing literature indicating that the older teachers become in terms of age and experience, the stricter they tend to be or perceive themselves to be due to the increasing age gap and the emotional distance they witness between themselves and their students (Brekelmans et al., 2005).

The fact that students perceived the student responsibility sector as lower than their teachers could be justified under the light of previous research on the concept of learner autonomy.

Learner autonomy can be defined as the extent to which learners take some or all of the responsibility about their learning either in or out of the classroom (Harmer, 2015). Traditionally speaking, many writers suggested that learner autonomy is rooted in cultural and ethnic backgrounds; in that, this notion is mostly relevant to people from 'individualistic' Western contexts (Littlewood, 1999). However, many studies have asserted that students in authority-centered traditions and educational contexts tend to be willing to take responsibility for their own volition (Ho & Crookall, 1995; Jones, 1995).

As Hall (2011) argued, however, rather than stereotypical perspectives on Asian students and looking at learner autonomy as an all-or-nothing quality, it would be better to define it as a universal capacity for which learners need to be instructed and prepared to achieve this characteristic in their own ways. The lower perception of the student responsibility scale by the students in this study might be due to the lack of autonomy instruction and practice in an online context as a relatively new learning environment to many language teachers and learners.

Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, the findings of this case study indicate that experienced EFL language teachers and students have mostly similar perceptions of teachers' interpersonal behavior in an online context. The results also show that experienced teachers and students perceive the teachers' interpersonal behavior to be moderately dominant and highly cooperative. When convergence and divergence between experienced EFL teachers' self-perception and their students' perceptions were examined, it was found that the two groups perceived teachers' interpersonal behavior in the same way to a large extent. However, teachers rated the two scales of Strict and Student freedom responsibility were rated higher than their students.

The findings of this study have some implications for educators and researchers focusing on the interpersonal aspect of the language classroom. Firstly, this study demonstrates that while interpersonal behavior tends to be perceived

differently by teachers and students, there are particularities that might change this phenomenon. In addition to cultural features, teachers and learners' experiences and more importantly the methodology of language teaching are of the variables that need to be considered when examining interpersonal behavior. Additionally, the present case study highlights the need for future investigation into interpersonal behavior in online classrooms. Even though most educational programs have returned to their conventional face-to-face courses after the decline of the COVID-19 pandemic, distant learning has become a part of the educational status quo. As a result, this new environment needs to be studied in its own right by researchers and teacher educators. Finally, the present research suggests that language teaching programs have particular eccentricities that are worth being studied apart from the school context. Therefore, to have a clear picture of teachers' interpersonal behavior in language classrooms, researchers are recommended to investigate language classes held outside of the school context.

The present case study had some limitations that can generate other lines of research. First, this study involved a short number of teachers since it was part of a case study focusing on experienced EFL teachers; therefore, it was not possible for the researchers to select a larger number of EFL teachers. Future research should involve a larger number of participants to achieve more transferable interpretations. A second limitation is that the questionnaire used in the current study was not exclusively adapted for language educators. Since language teaching has its particular qualities such as its subject matter and teaching methodological considerations, customizing the questionnaire could lead to more reliable and accurate results.

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