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Insights into TEFL: Moral Dilemma Patterns in Teaching Practice

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Abstract: Though moral aspects of English language teaching (ELT) have recently attracted much attention, moral dilemmas teachers encounter have not been given the sustained attention they deserve. The present study was conducted to document the types and frequencies of moral dilemmas ELT instructors face and the likely differences between the pattern of moral dilemmas experienced and less experienced, male and female ELT practitioners deal with. Forty teachers participated in stimulated recall and focus group interviews. Results showed that teachers are mainly concerned with dilemmas raised from Rules and Regulations. Experience was found to affect both the order and the frequency of the dilemmas teachers faced in different groups. Gender, however, did not result in significant changes in the pattern of moral dilemmas experienced by participants.

Introduction

The last three decades have brought about a partial reinterpretation of teaching as a moral activity. There are now numerous books and papers dealing with morality of teaching (e.g. Akbari & Tajik, 2012; Campbell, 2000, 2004, 2005; Ehrich, Kimber, Millwater, & Cranston, 2011; Hansen, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2007, 2008; Rice & Stein, 2009; Widodo, Perfecto, Canh, & Buripakdi, 2018), and the moral climate of schools is believed to have a far greater influence on students' moral growth than hitherto perceived (Johnston & Buzzelli, 2008). The moral dimension of teaching becomes more tangible in moral dilemmas requiring decision making on the part of teachers (Tirri, 1999). Such dilemmas have been termed as moral stress, moral demands, ethical demand, moral ambiguity and polyvalence, practical dilemmas, practical ethical dilemmas, conflicts of values, and contradictions of values. More frequently, the term "moral dilemma" has been used interchangeably with the terms ethical dilemma, moral conflict and ethical conflict in the available scholarship; this is also practiced in the present study. Moral dilemmas have been viewed to be the main part of practical choices teachers try to resolve in their daily works, evident in many classroom situations, inherent in every encounter between teacher and learners, and a permanent feature of all teaching, including language teaching (Bergem, 1993; Johnston, 2003; Lyons, 1990; Tippins, Tobin & Hook 1993).

Though moral dilemmas are thought to pervade various aspects of ELT classrooms, it seems that these matters have rarely, if ever, been given the attention they deserve (Banli, Kaya, & Adamhasan, 2015; Johnston, 2003; Johnston & Buzzelli, 2008) and our understanding of moral dilemmas teachers confront is yet to be improved. Although the literature is useful, most

of the research was conducted two or three decades ago and may well be irrelevant in today's rapidly changing, technologically-driven world. There also appears to be very little literature on the kinds of moral dilemmas experienced by teachers of different genders and different years of experience. Research into the nature of moral dilemmas male/female, experienced /less experienced teachers face can assist them in acting and responding in a morally acceptable manner (Bergem, 1993). The assumption is, if one can discern what these dilemmas are, then one can deliberate upon them and find creative resolutions (Lyons, 1990). With little research, training or focus, it is quite possible that ELT educators are unconscious of the moral nature of the problems they encounter in their workplaces and, as a consequence, do not know how to resolve them.

The present study was conducted to explore the moral dilemmas ELT teachers confront during their careers. The study starts by addressing the frequency and the type of moral dilemmas English teachers in an Iranian context face in their teaching and goes on to examine the impact of teaching experience and teachers' gender on the type and frequency of these dilemmas. More specifically, the following research questions are addressed in this study:

- What kinds of moral dilemmas do ELT teachers face?
- Is there a significant difference between the pattern of moral dilemmas less experienced and experienced ELT teachers face?
- Is there a significant difference between the pattern of moral dilemmas male and female ELT teachers face?

A brief background on moral dilemmas as well as some relevant research findings follow.

Review of Literature

Moral dilemmas have been defined in various ways: Johnston (2003), for instance, views them as points at which teachers are obliged to choose between two or more courses of action knowing that any possible choice will have both good and bad consequences, while Tippins et al. (1993) define the term as "complex decisions found in the sense-making process and deeply embedded in the professional lives of teachers" (p. 221). Campbell (2008b) highlights moral dilemmas as a "darker side of the literature on ethics", jeopardizing teachers' moral agency and their moral practice. They cause internal conflict within teachers (Tippins et al., 1993) and are easily recognizable from daily routines due to their being unpredictable (Johnston, 2003), complex and untidy (Tippins et al., 1993) and insoluble (Lampert; 1985; Lyons, 1990; Tippins et al., 1993).

Teachers face ethical dilemmas due to a number of reasons. On occasions, conflicts may arise as a result of discrepancies between various moral values played out in the classroom (Johnston, 2009; Buzzelli & Johnston, 2001). They might be inherent in specific professional conditions: teachers meet students in large groups; they need to assess and grade students; they bring up other people's children; they are responsible for the students not only in the present but also in the future; and they have relationship with students (Colnerud, 1997). Similarly, the complementary functions teachers need to perform in class may result in a number of moral challenges. Teachers need to be supportive of students and loyal to their colleagues (Colnerud, 1997); they are expected to be kind and considerate, yet demanding and stern as the situation requires; they must be responsive to the needs of individual students, without neglecting the class

as a whole; and they are expected to maintain discipline and order, while allowing for spontaneity and caprice (Jackson, Boostrom, & Hansen, 1993). Teaching has further been viewed to be imbued with moral dilemmas since teachers' acting in the class requires choices involving moral decisions (Tippins et al., 1993). Finally, the prescribed practices of the institutions or the institutional constraints make it difficult for teachers to act in a way that is consistent with their morals (Colnerud, 2015).

There are different interpretations about the way ethical dilemmas occur and where they reside. The notion that moral conflicts arise due to the interpersonal nature of teaching has been echoed by authors such as Campbell (2008a) and Lyons (1990). To them, the interpersonal essence of teaching provides fuel to ignite moral conflicts among teachers, between teachers and principals, students or parents. In some other cases, authors do address dilemmas arising out of pedagogical concerns (Johnston, 2003; Johnston, Juhasz, Marken, & Ruiz, 1998; Lyons, 1990; Tippins et al., 1993).

Campbell (2008a, 2003, 1997b, 1996) has repeatedly addressed moral conflicts as residing in the interpersonal nature of teaching. In her (2008a) study, she documented moral conflicts arising from teachers' interactions with their colleagues, students, parents and those emanating from school policies. She exemplifies these moral conflicts in seemingly trivial decisions teachers make from calling on students to take turns answering questions and when to allow extensions on assignments to more serious dilemmas dealing with students who cheat or colleagues whose conduct is potentially harmful to students. Also in her earlier studies, (2003, 1997b, 1996), Campbell notes that teacher participants discussed moral perplexities when they personally opposed some school policies that they were expected to implement professionally. They also reported challenges they faced as to their colleagues' professional conduct to be the most upsetting dilemmas they experienced. They had to decide to report the colleague at the personal risk of collegial ostracism for perceived disloyalty. Similarly, Tirri and Husu (2000, 2002) discussed ethical dilemmas in early childhood education as reported by 26 kindergarten and early elementary school teachers and identified the majority of their cases as involving a colleague's behavior toward a child. Their empirical findings further present conflicts between teachers and parents, which also include competing interpretations of what is in the best interests of a child.

Like Campbell (2008a, 2003, 1997b, 1996), and Tirri and Husu (2000, 2002), many other scholars have assigned high priority to the interpersonal nature of teaching and moral dilemmas residing in it. Their focus, however, has been, both theoretically and empirically, on the dilemmas arising from student-teacher interactions. Koc and Buzzelli (2008), for instance, explored the characteristics of moral dilemmas identified by 14 Turkish teachers working in early childhood settings and found that the majority of the dilemmas dealt with interactions between the teachers and children, and the remainder concerned teachers' conflicts with either parents or administrators. Regarding dilemmas inherent in teacher-student interactions, Koc and Buzzelli refer to a teacher's conflict in dealing with children with emotional problems. According to the teacher, having a child with emotional problems sometimes requires the teacher to spend extra time with the child, but she has also other children waiting for her attention. Consequently, her dilemma is to meet the needs of the child with the emotional problems and the rest of the class in a limited time. Koc and Buzzelli further argue that teachers', parents', and administrators' contradictory perspectives on children's well-being might generate moral dilemmas for teachers. Similar findings were obtained by Koc and Buzzelli (2016) who explored the types of dilemmas 26 Turkish early childhood educators reported. Again, the most number of

dilemmas identified were related to teachers' interactions with children. Other conflicts were categorized as dealing with parents, administrators and colleagues. Their analyses found that dilemmas involving a child or a colleague were related to issues of caring and those dilemmas between the teacher and a parent or administrator centered on issues of power.

Working in a different context, Melo (2003) explores the ethical conflicts and moral dilemmas experienced by novice teachers and found that the majority of them experience ethical conflicts with their students in scenarios like when students are dissatisfied with their marks or when they see students verbally or physically abuse other students. In a similar study, Tirri (1999) asked teachers to describe one particular case of a moral dilemma they had experienced during their teaching career. From the total of 33 interviews, she found four main categories of moral dilemmas, all of which seem to be related to students. The majority of moral dilemmas her respondents reported were concerned with *Matters Related to Teachers' Work* (n=11) which comprised of five sub-categories: how to deal with students; deciding between two grades; problem with confidentiality; dealing with sensitive matters with their students; and matters related to colleagues' work. The next most frequent category was found to be the *Morality of Pupils' Behavior Regarding School and Work* (n=10). This category included teachers' complaints about negative student attitudes toward learning and school work, cheating, and physical and mental harassment of other students. Dilemmas as to the *Rights of Minority Students* and *Common Rules in School* were reported with similar frequencies (n=6) in teachers' responses. The moral dilemmas teachers faced with minority groups resulted from cultural conflicts, minority students' participation in music and sports classes, and their trustworthiness. The category *Common Rules at School* comprised case studies of students breaking rules such as no smoking, students' rights in deciding some school rules, lack of space in their classrooms, and rules in the use of computers.

Dilemmas concerned with teachers' keeping balance between the students' needs and the institutional demands was reported by other studies. Shapira-Lishchinsky (2011) revealed that the most common category of moral dilemmas amongst 50 school teachers was "caring climate versus formal climate". Examples of ethical dilemmas of this type included the teacher needing to decide between the students' personal needs and obeying school rules. Additionally, Colnerud (2015) realized that the main concern of her 75 teachers in 110 moral incidents was with protecting individual students from social risks versus the demands of colleagues, parents, grading, other students.

Moral dilemmas in student-teacher interactions are also frequently encountered in the field of English language teaching. Banli et al. (2015), for instance, report that student assessment and grading, student absenteeism, and disruptive behaviors were the most frequent types of moral conflicts recited by 30 EFL instructors. Johnston (2003) also recognizes conflicts as teachers encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning, with teachers' trying to reconcile their roles as individuals and a representative of the institution. He further cites areas of classroom discourse that can be shown to have a moral substrate.

Ways in which moral values, conflicts of values and moral dilemmas are played out in the context of student-teacher interactions, in general, and in classroom discourse and interaction, in particular, have been addressed by Johnston (1991), Buzzelli and Johnston (2001) and Johnston and Buzzelli (2002). Johnston (1991) explores moral dilemmas in students' cheating and how teachers can handle them, while Johnston and Buzzelli (2001) investigate tensions of power and morality in the exercise of authority. Johnston and Buzzelli (2002) ponder upon a moral

challenge a teacher faces in how to ensure equity between students with unequal expertise in opportunities for speaking and interacting with the teacher, access to materials and resources.

While much of the theoretical and empirical literature on teachers' ethical dilemmas and conflicts being devoted to dilemmas emerging from the everyday interactions between people, a few studies do recognize the pervasiveness of moral dilemmas rooted in pedagogy. Dilemmas of pedagogy, according to Johnston (2003), encompass paradoxes inherent in teachers creating balance between *content and form* (language and meaning); *process and product* (socializing learners into acceptable ways of writing and speaking while respecting their unique writing methods); *voice and silence* (balancing the students' rights to speak with their right to be silent); *justification* (justifying the methods and techniques) and *evaluation*, (assessing learners while maintaining completely fair methods).

Such moral dilemmas arising from pedagogical concerns were highlighted in a prior study Johnston conducted with his students (Johnston et al., 1998). The moral paradox they observed was in understanding that the content is both valued and valueless within the context of communicative language teaching. This moral complexity was manifested in a teacher's urging his students to "just say something" while engaged in a communicative activity. In fact, the study found the paradox in the principles of communicative language teaching: on the one hand, communicative language teaching promotes meaningful communication; hence, the primacy of content. On the other hand, this methodology necessitates using the language; hence, what the students say is of little consequence. In addition to the ELT research, inquiries into general education have witnessed moral dilemmas connected to matters concerned with pedagogy. Tippins et al. (1993) conducted an interpretive study of a middle school science teacher to examine the nature of the ethical dilemmas inherent in issues such as laboratory safety, as well as the assessment and presentation of subject matter in science teaching.

No matter where moral dilemmas reside, they are complicated matters, much more complicated than many people, both inside and outside education, are inclined to believe (Hostetler, 1997) and teachers should be prepared to confront and resolve moral conundrums that come about as a result of their day to day classroom life (Ta, 2016; Salvano-Pardieu, Fontaine, Biuazzaoui, & Florer, 2009). Here the import of teacher education emerges (Lampert, 1985; Melo, 2003). Teacher education programs can familiarize teachers with moral theories and approaches, with ethical theories assisting teachers in dealing with the ethical conflicts they face in their professional lives (Malloy & Hansen, 1995).

The review of the literature on moral dilemmas in teaching, particularly in ELT, identified that research on ethical conflicts is not as plentiful as research on general moral aspects of teaching (Campbell, 2008). The seminal works that enquire into the moral dilemmas inherent in ELT context are those conducted by Johnston (2003), Johnston and Buzzelli (2002), and Johnston et al. (1998). The problem is that these studies are outdated, and very few studies in this context have been conducted in the last twenty years. Teachers today continue to encounter moral dilemmas on a daily basis so current research is necessary if they are to develop the capacity to resolve the problems efficiently and effectively.

Method

This section provides an overview on the ELT teaching context in Iran, participants of the study, data collection techniques, procedure and data analysis.

English Language Teaching Context in Iran

English language teaching in Iran as supervised by the Ministry of Education starts at the middle school and continues to the last year of the secondary school for 2-4 hours a week. These courses are subject to strict governmental criteria regarding the curriculum, structure, assessment and general requirements. Besides the highly centralized English language teaching at schools, a multitude of private language institutes, owned by private individuals or local companies and supervised by the Ministry of Education, and a few state-owned, non-profit ones offer English language classes in the country. The language institutes differ in the number of language schools they have, the type of language learners they attract (young children, teenagers, young adults, adults), the client group they target (general English, business English learners), teaching supplies and other resources, and their hiring standards for teachers.

This study was conducted in four private language institutes in large cities that catered for all levels of general English language proficiency, with the aim of developing learners' competence in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Teacher candidates needed to meet the entry requirement of an upper intermediate or advanced level of language proficiency measured by an interview and a Paper Based Test (PBT). Upon employment, they had to complete an initial Teacher Training Course (TTC), a common certification policy, in their institute. Though each institute had its own teacher education unit which determined the content and the instructors of the program and implemented the course and associated programs like periodic training workshops, the TTCs administered in different institutes shared similar content and training requirements. They all had been designed to help develop trainee teachers' teaching skills and to build their confidence as they learnt about key teaching methods. The syllabi contained carefully planned and balanced selection of language content. Having spent between 30 and 40 hours in the training program, the student teachers were expected to have gained considerable practical teaching experience which was measured during a teaching demonstration by the student teachers. Upon successfully passing the course, teachers were able to teach in different language schools. For quality control, head instructors or supervisors visited the classes at fixed or random intervals.

Participants

Forty participants for the study (20 male, 20 female) were selected through purposive sampling (Creswell, 2012). They were ELT teachers teaching general English courses in four private language institutes in Tehran, with ages ranging from 19 to 30 years. The participants were also categorized based on their teaching experience; those with between one and three years of pedagogical practice (n=20) were labeled as less experienced and those with between four and eight years of pedagogical practice were viewed as experienced in this study. Twenty eight teachers had received their BA, which is a four year program at the university, in English language and two were BA students; all had completed TTCs in their institutes. In a later stage, all the participants (n=40) were evenly assigned to four groups based on their gender and experience. Experienced male teachers (n=10) were aged between 23 and 32. One taught students at the elementary level of language proficiency, 3 were teaching both elementary and intermediate level students, 4 were teaching intermediate and 2 were teaching advanced level students at the time of data collection. Less experienced male practitioners (n=10) were aged between 19 and 29 years. Three were teaching elementary students, 4 both elementary and

intermediate, and the remainder were teaching intermediate levels of English language proficiency. Experienced female teachers (n=10) were aged between 24 and 31. Two teachers were tutoring elementary level students, 3 were teaching at both elementary and intermediate levels, 4 were teaching intermediate, and one was teaching both intermediate and advanced students. Among the less experienced female teachers (n=10), aged between 20 and 30, one was teaching elementary students, 3 were teaching at both elementary and intermediate levels, and 6 were teaching intermediate students. The age range of the students at the elementary, intermediate and advanced level classes varied from 7 to 15, 8 to 19, and 12 to 20 respectively.

Data Collection Techniques

The study's data collection techniques are stimulated recall protocol and focus group interview. According to Meijer, Beijaard, and Verloop (2002), stimulated recall protocol, a substitute to the “think-aloud” procedure, is the most appropriate data collection approach for examining teachers’ interactive cognitions. It entails videotaping a class session taught by the target teachers and a follow-up recollection interview in which each teacher verbalizes the thoughts he or she was engaged in while teaching. The second data collection technique employed was focus-group interview, defined as a “carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 5). This type of interview “capitalizes on group dynamics and allows a small group of respondents to be guided by a skilled moderator into increasing levels of focus and depth on the key issues of the research topic” (Mulwa & Nguluu, 2003, cited in Nyariki, 2009, p.95). In fact, focus-group interview is a specific type of group used to gather information from members of a clearly defined target audience who are similar in one or more ways and are guided through a facilitated discussion (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001).

Procedure

In order to identify the types of moral dilemmas ELT teachers face and to document any pattern in the frequency of moral dilemmas experienced and less experienced, male and female practitioners encounter, a teaching session (90 minutes duration) of 12 teachers was observed and videotaped. Of the 12 teachers, 3 were experienced male, 3 less experienced male, 3 experienced female and 3 less experienced female practitioners. The classroom observation was closely followed by stimulated recall in which the observed teachers were asked to view the video of their lessons and recall what they had been thinking while teaching. Their recollections were audio recorded to be transcribed later.

Several measures were taken to enhance the reliability and validity of the elicited stimulated recall data in this study. First, efforts were made to minimize the time lapse between the videotaping and the recall interviews to enhance the precision of teachers’ reports (Gass & Mackey, 2000). This interval ranged between 5 to 10 minutes for 9 teachers and an hour for 3 other teachers. Second, the participants were familiarized with the purposes of stimulated recall protocol and its operational procedure before conducting the interviews. Finally, to control the “camera effect” on the teachers’ and students’ typical class conduct, the main videotaping phase started in the third session after having set the camera up on the tripod in the rear of the class for

two sessions. The videotaping was also carried out with the camera recording in the absence of the researchers so that their presence would not affect the class performance of both the teachers and students.

In a later phase, 28 teachers participated in focus-group interviews. Interviews were carried out in four evenly-divided groups: experienced male, experienced female, less experienced male, and less experienced female teachers. The participants were asked to describe particular cases of moral dilemmas they had faced during their teaching career and were encouraged to choose situations in which they had had difficulty in deciding the right way to act. All 4 interview sessions, each of which lasted about one hour and a half, were recorded and later transcribed.

To make sure respondents can distinguish moral dilemmas from other types of conflicts, before the main interview session, the researcher provided them with definitions and actual examples of moral dilemmas in the classrooms. For instance, they were defined broadly as incidents in which teachers need to make decisions based on their sense of what is right and wrong. Contrary to pedagogical decisions, moral decisions cannot be made based on science, research and objective principles (Johnston, 2003). For further clarification, moral dilemmas were introduced to teachers as two types: in some cases. In the first scenario, teachers are perplexed over which different set of values to follow when responding to the dilemma (Edge, 1996). For instance, they do not know whether to be loyal to the moral value of care or justice, autonomy or integrity, equal or differential allocation and treatment (Colnerud, 1997). The second set of moral dilemmas were defined for teachers to occur when there is a conflict between organizational norms and personal values. For example, teachers need to make a decision between protecting students and collegial loyalty when hearing students' criticism of a colleague.

Based on the definitions and examples provided to teachers about the situations which inhere in moral dilemmas, we trusted teachers' own accounts of their moral conflicts. This is congruent with similar studies in the literature which relied on teachers' moral perceptions and their intuitions about instances of moral dilemmas (Campbell, 2003, 1997a, 1996; Husu & Tirri, 2001a, 2001b). Based on the examples teachers gave during the interviews or informal conversations, we found that they have learned what a moral dilemma situation entails. Many of them, however, admitted that they had been unaware of the moral nature of the conflicts they encountered in their teaching and that they tried to solve them by resorting to their knowledge of methodology or their institutional norms.

Data Analysis

Data analysis of the study was carried out by one of the researchers and followed a qualitative–quantitative scheme. In the qualitative phase, using inductive analysis procedure (Thomas, 2006), the transcribed data of the interviews, both the stimulated recall and focus group, were subjected to content analysis, i.e. following the content transcription of interview data, the transcribed interviews were first segmented into distinct incidents of moral dilemmas, or more technically condensed meaning units. Each moral dilemma or condensed meaning unit identified comprised a number of chunks or independent meaning units which were organized on the basis of their content into condensed meaning units. Independent meaning units were either single simple sentences or a part/parts of a compound sentence with a distinct theme. Next, based on its content, each moral dilemma incident or condensed meaning unit was labeled. In a later stage, moral dilemma incidents were classified under relevant moral dilemma categories-an

umbrella term for condensed meaning units with a similar thematic core. Finally, moral dilemma categories were labeled. The following extracts from different teachers' responses clarify the way segmentation, categorization and labeling proceeded in practice:

Example 1

In a class of female intermediate students, I had an outgoing, smart and intelligent student (1) who appeared to be very interested in class activities (2). She used to volunteer for responding to any question the teacher posed (3). On the negative side, however, her interest turned out to be a nuisance (4). In 'free discussions', in group or pair work and almost in any activity the class got involved, she expected me to devote most of the talking time to her (5) (an experienced female teacher).

This example represents one incident of a moral dilemma reported by the teachers. Specifically, this moral dilemma, or condensed meaning unit, consists of five separate chunks, or, more technically, independent meaning units, with the same underlying theme, which is concerned with the experienced female teachers' dilemma in meeting the expectations of a "smart" student. This condensed meaning unit and other similar dilemma incidents were later labeled as *Dealing with Gifted Students*. It should be noted that for discerning the majority of moral dilemma incidents, the researcher felt no need to do the initial segmentation of the transcribed data into independent meaning units and could simply identify the condensed meaning units, or incidents of moral dilemmas reported by the teachers, reading through the transcription.

Example 2

This is a very weak student (1) who comes from a working class family (2). She cannot keep up with the class activities (3); her grammar is poor (4) and her pronunciation is barely intelligible (5). Here, we are having dictation (6); as usual, she falls behind the other students (7) and expects me to repeat the dictated materials (8). This is while we don't have enough time to satisfy her expectation (9) (an experienced female teacher).

Example 2 marks another incident of moral dilemma, or condensed meaning unit, with a focus different from the previous one. This dilemma, which comprises nine independent meaning units, represents another experienced female teachers' moral conflict in dealing with a very weak student in the class. Based on their common focus, these independent units were organized into the condensed meaning unit labeled as *Dealing with Students in Need of Support*.

When all the transcribed data were segmented into condensed meaning units and labeled, the condensed meaning units were further scrutinized to find their similar thematic cores and to group them under moral dilemma categories. Hence, moral dilemma incidents with a common focus were classed under the same moral dilemma categories. This practice was done with the aim of condensing data into a more meaningful and manageable form in a research paper and a more comparable one across the four groups of experienced/ less experienced, male/female teachers. Examples 1 and 2 and similar cases were found to share similar content and were included in the same category which was later labeled as *Student-Teacher interactions*. The total

number of moral dilemma categories, the condensed meaning units each category entails and examples of each category are presented in Table 1.

To make sure the participating teachers concurred with the categorization of the data, some instances of segmentation, categorization, and labeling were checked with them. Since the participants had busy schedules, they could only review a small part of the transcripts with 18 teachers checking around a third of the analysis of their own interviews. In 98% of the cases, consensus was obtained between the researchers and teachers over the categorizations.

Concurrently, to check the interrater reliability of the content analysis phase (i.e. segmentation and labeling), a research colleague familiar with the study's analytic scheme reexamined 20% of all the transcribed data, a procedure believed to increase the reliability of the findings (Gass & Mackey, 2000). The results of this second round of content analysis yielded 98% consistency between the researchers' analyses and those of the external examiner. In addition, this second rater was systematically consulted throughout the project, especially in cases when the segmented meaning units could fit into more than one category.

The analysis of data resulted in the identification of a number of moral dilemma categories, the frequency of which were then calculated and compared across four groups- experienced, less experienced, female and male practitioners- in the quantitative phase that followed the segmentation and labeling stage. This frequency data enabled comparison between experienced, less experienced, female, and male teachers in terms of (a) the number of moral dilemma categories and (b) the frequency of each reported moral dilemma category. In order to examine whether there was any significant frequency difference among the groups in terms of the number of dilemmas they produced, a Chi-square analysis, a non-parametric test of relationship in frequency data, was employed.

Results and Discussion

The study's findings are presented in three separate sections: the first section gives an overview of the type and the frequency of moral dilemmas teachers faced in their teaching, while the second and the third sections present the results of the impact of teaching experience and gender on the pattern of moral dilemmas teachers encounter in conducting their classes.

Moral Dilemma Categories Identified

Table 1 shows the extracted moral dilemma categories and summarizes the meaning units each category entails, along with examples taken from interview transcripts. F shows the frequency of each reported moral dilemma category in the form of percentages. In fact, the table responds to the following research question:

- What types of moral dilemmas do ELT teachers face?

As Table 1 demonstrates, teachers in the current study reported dilemmas as to *Rules and Regulations*, *Student-Teacher Interactions* and *Student-Student Interactions* with the highest frequency (a total of 65% dilemmas for the three). One can easily discern that the source of the conflict in all three is a student; in some cases, he/she violates the class rules, in others he/she expects more of the class teacher and still in a number of other instances he/she has disputes with a classmate. This finding is congruent with the results obtained in Johnston (2003), Johnston and Buzzelli (2002), Melo (2003), Joseph and Efron (1993), Lyons (1990) and Lyons, Cutler, and

Miller (1986) whose studies highlight the primacy of dilemmas emerging from teachers-student interactions. As observed by Melo (2003) and Lortie (1975), it is not surprising that teachers experience ethical dilemmas in their interactions with students since the greater part of a teacher's day is spent with students and not with colleagues, administrators or parents.

Apart from their interactions with students, respondents seem dissatisfied with their colleagues' *Professional Conduct and Qualification*; related dilemmas, however, occupied a small proportion of the total number of dilemmas recalled (15%). This finding does not offer strong support for the claim that the majority of conflicts teachers encounter is in deciding whether to remain loyal to their colleagues or to protect students from any harm caused by a colleague (Campbell, 1996, 1997b, 2008; Husu & Tirri, 2003).

A review of the literature found that the only studies conducted in ELT context are Johnston (2003), and Johnston and Buzzelli (2002). These studies supported the general literature showing that all teachers face moral dilemmas related to class *Rules and Regulations*, *Student-Teacher Interactions*, *Student-Student Interactions* and their colleagues' *Professional Conduct and Qualification*. However, this is not the complete picture of how moral dilemmas appear in ELT settings. What is missing in this picture and, probably, more important to attend to is the fact that though every individual teacher in every teaching context may face moral conflicts inherent in the aforementioned five categories, the majority of the actual incidents which create moral dilemmas for ELT teachers are different from those of other types of teaching. For instance, while it is quite possible that teachers in all teaching situations need to make moral decisions when two or more students in the class do not respect each other, teachers in the English language classrooms confront incidents typical of language learning contexts. The following example reported by one of the participants in this study helps to clarify the point:

It was the third session of my class when a new student arrived. I introduced her to the whole class. After some minutes, she started asking a question in English. That was when I found that her English accent was a noticeably strange, sub-standard variety of English, not the American or British type my students were used to. Another student started laughing, making fun of her.

Categories	F.	Condensed meaning units	Examples of each category
Rules and Regulations	27%	meaning units in which teachers face conflicts in dealing with student absenteeism, their being late in the class, their doing or not doing homework, plagiarism and a number of similar cases in which learners disobey or do not comply with a specific class rule	My intermediate students were required to write an essay in English and compare life in two different US cities. Checking the papers, I found one of the most proficient students had plagiarized (i.e. copied) the whole assignment; this is while I had already talked to them about plagiarism and the penalties I'll consider for those who copy their assignments.
Teacher-Student Interactions	21%	meanings units in which teachers are concerned with problems dealing with bright and weak students, minority students, shy students, and young students in the class	In one of my classes, I had an outgoing, smart and intelligent learner who appeared to be very interested in class activities; in activities that required speaking or oral production, she volunteered for responding to any question I posed. In 'free discussions', in group or pair works and almost in any activity the class got involved, she expected me to devote most of the talking time to her.
Student-Student Interactions	18%	meaning units dealing with dilemmas related to the students quarreling with each other and making fun of each other	This term, I have a number of foreign students in my class. The English accent of a few of them is noticeably different from that of those who speak the home language. It happens repeatedly that whenever one of them starts speaking or

			reading English, a number of home-language speakers start laughing, making fun of their accents.
Testing and Evaluation	14%	meaning units pertaining to the problems with the exam questions, the low score of the pupils with family problems, grading of students attaining similar scores on the final exam but with various levels of ability at the beginning of the term, and those showing different amounts of effort throughout the course	I was teaching English to a group of working class students. One of my students was uncooperative and unfriendly; despite both encouragement and warnings, he did little work and hardly made any progress. He had a poor performance on the final examination too. Before I completed his grading, I heard from a colleague that this student lived in a very poor family and he needed to work long hours in order to provide for his family. The colleague added that he needed to finish his studies in order to find a better job and that a failing grade would mean that his chances for employment would be seriously affected.
Professional Conduct	8%	meaning units in which teachers acknowledged their difficulty in coping with the cases when a colleague practices the sample exam questions with his/her students, misrepresents a colleague's conduct, and does not keep confidentiality	It has recently become a common practice when a number of my colleagues in the teachers' room mention the name of a student and make fun of his/her pronunciation or actions in their classes. Last week one of the colleagues who had collected a poor assignment from a weak student was making fun of her writing style.
Professional Qualification	7%	meaning units related to a colleague's not being competent or qualified, not keeping up with the new methods of teaching	I know a number of colleagues who show resistance to any kind of change, even for the better, in their teaching methodology. A telling example is the English teacher of the school who resorts to the same old Grammar Translation Method (GTM) in her teaching. In teaching reading, for instance, she reads the text word by word and translates the passage. The students need to write the translation and are supposed to recall it next session. The one who memorizes the material better gets the best score. I've heard the method is dull, her tone of voice is monotonous, and the class is tiring.
Content	4%	meaning units in which practitioners were troubled by the cultural clashes, differences between the lifestyle of students and the one represented in the books, gender discrimination as represented in the textbooks	A student came to me and complained about the image of women as represented in their course books.

Table 1. The extracted moral dilemma categories, condensed meaning units, their frequencies and examples

The same story holds for the representation of other types of moral dilemmas in ELT contexts. Besides the distinctions between ELT and general education in terms of the actual nature of the moral dilemmas English teachers face, other possibly significant divergences between the two teaching contexts were found in this study. In addition to the categories mentioned previously, practitioners, in the present study, recalled dilemmas arising from matters related to pedagogy, i.e. the two categories *Testing and Evaluation* and *Content*. Contrary to the above five categories, moral dilemmas related to *Testing and Evaluation* and *Content* have rarely been reported in general education. Though it seems quite possible that all teachers in all teaching contexts face dilemmas related to the proportion of the students' efforts in their class, their attendance and their performance on the final exam in the total score they assign to the students, it needs to be pointed out that the English language testing raises moral dilemmas in

teachers' mind which makes it quite different from testing in other fields of study. As Johnston (2003) mentions, there is an indirect relationship between the students' performance in the test and their actual knowledge of the language. Neither language nor competence in language is naturally measurable, forcing teachers to subjectively assign scores or grades to the students, which, at times, may have definite consequences for them. In other words, the decisions teachers are forced to make about the students' language competence and their placement in different levels of language proficiency in language institutes or their obtaining a language proficiency degree are all subjective and hence lend a major moral dilemma to ELT teachers' work. Teacher participants in the present study reported their ambiguity in how to devise a test and how to assign a score to the students which can help objectively measure the students' actual knowledge of the language and, in consequence, help place the student appropriately.

More importantly, the English teachers in this study reported dilemmas residing in the students' and their own interaction with the texts. The only studies referring to such moral dilemmas raised by teachers' concern with the materials they teach are Johnston (2003) and Johnston et al. (1998) which were conducted in ELT contexts. It seems quite possible to Johnston (2003) that English teachers face a different set of moral dilemmas inherent in the content they teach than those who teach general education due to the peculiarities of English language teaching. In many English language teaching settings, learners are from a variety of first language, cultural and religious backgrounds with teachers who do not share similar backgrounds with the students. In such contexts, the dilemma arises when interacting with the texts, prepared in native English speaking countries which represent the national culture. Johnston (2003) adds that the moral dilemma for the ELT teacher, whether native or non-native speaker of English, is how to present, explain, or justify cultural practices that they believe are superior or inferior to those of the students' culture.

The context in the present study, and in broader terms in Iran, is both similar to and different from what portrayed by Johnston (2003). Here, teachers are Iranian non-native speakers of English who share similar religious and cultural values with the students. The class consists of Iranian students with similar religious and cultural values. All these homogeneities decrease the probability of facing dilemmas resulting from cultural and religious boundaries between different members of the class. What remains is the differences between the national culture and religion as represented in the books, imported along with their teacher guides from the native English speaking countries, and the home culture and religion of the class. Inevitably, cultural and religious beliefs of the people in the books directly or indirectly influence teaching and cause dilemmas. Here, it is difficult for teachers to act as a cultural bridge between students and the new culture. In consequence, our participants reported cases related to the problem of balancing respect for the home culture with their responsibility as teachers to facilitate integration into the new cultural environment. More specifically, they were troubled over dealing with the native life style norms as reflected in the texts and quite different to the students'. Overall, based on our teachers' accounts of their moral dilemmas, one can conclude that the moral landscape of ELT is more complex than other types of teaching.

A further analysis of the interview transcripts explored the influence of experience and gender on the pattern of moral dilemmas the teachers in the sample encountered.

Importance of Teaching Experience for Teachers' Pattern of Moral Dilemmas

This section addresses the second research question:

- Is there a significant difference between the pattern of moral dilemmas less experienced and experienced ELT teachers face?

Table 2 presents the frequency of the condensed meaning units, along with the ranking and percentage of the moral dilemma categories extracted from the interviews of the four groups. In this section, the data of the experienced and less experienced practitioners are compared. Please note that the justifications provided for different sections are based on researchers' familiarity with the ELT teacher education programs in various contexts, including language institutes, universities, higher education institutes and training programs offered by the Ministry of Education, as well as a second informal interview with one participant from each language institute.

Categories	Male	Female	Experienced	Less Experienced	Total
1. Rules and Regulations	19(32%) ¹	15 (22%) ²	21 (28%) ¹	13(30%) ¹	34(27%) ¹
2. Student-Teacher Relation	9(17%) ³	17 (25%) ¹	16(20%) ²	10(23%) ³	26(21%) ²
3. Student-Student Relation	12 (23%) ²	10 (14%) ³	11(14%) ⁴	11(26%) ²	22(18%) ³
4. Testing and Evaluation	8 (15%) ⁴	9 (13%) ³	13(17%) ³	4(9%) ⁴	17 (14%) ⁴
5. Professional Conduct	2(4%) ⁵	8 (12%) ⁴	10(13%) ⁵	0	10(8%) ⁵
6. Professional qualification	2(4%) ⁵	6 (9%) ⁵	5(6%) ⁶	3(7%) ⁵	8(7%) ⁶
7. Content	1 (2%) ⁷	4(6%) ⁶	3(4%) ⁷	2(4%) ⁶	2(4%) ⁷
Total	53	67	78	43	121

Table 2. Frequency, ranking and percentage of moral dilemma categories across the groups
Note: Superscripts indicate the ranking of teachers' dominant reported moral dilemma categories

As Table 2 indicates, experienced teachers recalled a higher number of moral dilemmas compared with their less experienced counterparts (78 vs. 43), a statistically significant difference using Chi-Square ($\chi^2=10$). The fact that experienced teachers reported more dilemmas is not surprising given that they have taught for more years and thus have had more occasions to experience dilemmas.

Table 2 further reveals the ranking of moral dilemma categories reported by the experienced and less experienced groups. As the table indicates, for the experienced teachers, *Rules and Regulations* was followed by *Student-Teacher Interactions*, *Testing and Evaluation*, *Student-Student Interactions*, *Professional Conduct*, *Professional Qualification*, and *Content*. Less experienced teachers, however, portrayed a somehow different picture of moral dilemmas that they faced in their classes. They recalled moral dilemmas on *Rules and Regulations*, *Student-Student Interactions*, *Student-Teacher Interactions*, *Testing and Evaluation*, *Professional Qualification*, and *Content* with the highest frequencies .

Besides differences observed in the ranking of the dilemma categories between the groups, the two groups reported an unequal number of moral dilemma categories, with no cases of dilemmas as to *Professional Conduct* being recorded in less experienced teachers' data. Given that the key factor distinguishing these two groups is teaching experience, such discrepancy can be interpreted as a likely influence of this variable. In fact, increased years of professional practice might have provided teachers with more occasions to experience a wider range of moral dilemmas, contributing to an increase in the number of moral dilemma categories. The observed

difference between the two groups in the number of dilemmas reported related to *Professional Conduct* might also indicate greater sensitivity of experienced teachers to moral dilemmas related to their colleagues' professional behavior. Compared with less experienced practitioners, experienced teachers may have witnessed more of their colleagues' conduct that they believed to be harmful and disadvantageous to the students. This study showed the primacy of moral dilemmas for the experienced teachers in making decisions about their grading practices in the category *Testing and Evaluation* ($\chi^2 = 4.76$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$).

Despite their frequency variation across the groups, the remaining categories did not prove to be statistically significant. After considering the 3 categories: *Rules and Regulations*, *Teacher-Student Interactions* and *Student-Student Interactions*, one can conclude that both experienced and less experienced language teachers confront dilemmas in which main source of the conflict is a student and teacher experience contributes little in this regard. Similar opinion of instructors, irrespective of their years of practice, may be explained by the fact that the interviewed teachers were teaching in language institutes in similar contexts. Accordingly, their students shared similar cultural, socio-economic backgrounds which may have contributed in their similar behaviors, actions and reactions in their English classes. Similar cultural, socio-economic status of the students was evident in the institutes' records of their family income, parental education and occupational status which are believed to be the three main indicators of the students' socioeconomic backgrounds (Bradly & Corwyn, 2002). Although it is not possible to identify the correlation between socioeconomic status and student behavior because of multiple variables, there is sufficient research to demonstrate some correlation (Bradly & Corwyn, 2002). Also such similar occurrence of dilemmas related to students' manner in experienced/less experienced teachers' recollection might be captured by the observation that all these teachers had spent most of their working life teaching female students in somehow similar age ranges and similar levels of language proficiency. The last likely interpretation seems to be similar policies in the respective English institutes as to how teachers treat their students and how they should solve dilemmas related to the students' conduct in the class.

Regardless of their experience, the teachers in this study were also similarly concerned with dilemmas related to their colleagues' *Professional Qualification*, as well as the *Content* they teach. *Professional Qualification* comprises units in which teachers are dissatisfied with their colleagues' not being competent and not updating their knowledge; hence the primacy of pedagogy for teachers. It appears that experience contributes little in the frequency of pedagogy-related dilemmas ELT teachers' encounter. Having similar teaching contexts and policies regarding how and what to teach, and undergoing similar initial training programs, may well explain the similarity in the concerns of the teachers with moral dilemmas ingrained in pedagogy. As stated previously, the above findings were discussed in light of our knowledge of the English language teacher training programs in the country as well as interviews with the participants themselves. Since we did not find other studies comparing moral dilemmas experienced and inexperienced ELT teachers' encounter in their practice, cross comparison of the current findings with those of the literature is not feasible. To our knowledge, the only available studies investigating the types of moral conflicts faced by teachers of various years of experience are Koc and Buzzelli (2016) and Mabagala (2013) who probed into early childhood education and Physical Education contexts respectively. Neither of the studies found significant differences in the nature of moral dilemmas of novice and experienced teachers.

Importance of Teachers' Gender for Teachers' Pattern of Moral Dilemmas

Table 2 further presents the frequency, ranking and percentage of the moral dilemma categories extracted from male and female practitioners' responses. In this section, the number of meaning units recalled along with the frequency, ranking and percentage of moral dilemma categories of the two groups are compared. In fact, the analysis aims to answer the third research question:

- Is there a significant difference between the pattern of moral dilemmas male and female EFL teachers face?

As Table 2 shows, females reported a higher number of moral dilemmas compared with male teachers (67 vs. 53). The results of Chi-square analysis, however, indicated no significant frequency difference between the groups ($\chi^2 = 1.6$, $df = 1$, $p > .05$), an indication of a relatively homogeneous moral dilemma structure shared by groups' teachers.

The table further demonstrates the ranking of the moral dilemma categories recalled by female and male respondents. For females, *Teacher- Student Interactions* was followed by *Rules and Regulation*, *Student-Student Interactions*, *Testing and Evaluation*, *Professional Conduct*, *Professional Qualification*, and *Content*. Male teachers presented similar responses in the moral dilemma categories they confronted. They recalled *Rules and Regulation*, *Student-Student Interactions*, *Teacher- Student Interactions*, *Testing and Evaluation*, *Professional Conduct*, *Professional Qualification*, and *Content* with the highest frequency. As observed, the type and ranking of the dilemma categories showed a consistent pattern between the groups. Such a consistent pattern can be indicative of common ground of moral concern regardless of teachers' gender.

A closer examination of the table also reveals interesting findings about categories of moral dilemmas. The analysis of the data indicates that despite their frequency variation across the groups, the categories are not statistically significant. These findings suggest that language teachers, irrespective of gender, are equally affected by certain moral dilemmas

Results obtained from analyzing dilemmas related to *Rules and Regulations*, *Teacher-Student Interactions*, and *Student-Student Interactions* indicated that despite their frequency variations, the categories did not show any statistically significant difference. This finding can be interpreted in light of similar teaching contexts in which our male and female respondents were teaching; in other words, they were working within a context in which explicit rules had been written as to student absenteeism, their being late in the class, norms of student conduct, and teachers' professional performance with respect to both their students and colleagues. This fact seems to have alleviated any influence teachers' gender might have otherwise exerted on the number of moral dilemmas teachers encounter as to these categories.

Gender also did not affect teachers' concern with the methodological aspects of their work, i.e. the *Content* they teach and their colleagues' *Professional Qualifications*. An interpretation is that teaching supplies and other resources within an institute or across different institutes our participants worked in were the same or parallel in terms of their content. This fact, along with the understanding that our teachers were tutoring learners with similar cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds can explain the results obtained. The same story holds for colleagues' *Professional Qualification*; that is, male and female respondents were teaching in similar contexts in which they had to pass an initial teacher training course as a requirement for their qualification and throughout their teaching years, they were constantly monitored by the institute's head instructor or the supervisor. Whether male or female, the same procedure was followed in the institutes to standardize teacher qualifications. Another possible interpretation is

that the participants felt uncomfortable commenting on their colleagues' qualifications; their being guilty of the same charge and having the same problems themselves; or their not caring about their colleague's qualification at all.

The existing literature on moral dilemmas of ELT teachers has not scrutinized the effect of gender on the type of conflicts teachers face. Consequently, we cannot cross compare the existing findings with similar literature in ELT. Probably, there is only one study by Mabagala (2013) in Physical Education context, also mentioned above, which did not find significant variations in the conflicts teachers of various genders reported.

Conclusion

This study points to the high frequency and the kinds of moral dilemmas ELT teachers experience in their working lives. Studies of this kind confirm that teaching practice is fraught with moral conflicts; as such, teacher education programmes need to familiarize prospective teachers with the aspects of classroom situation that make a dilemma moral. Properly designed teacher education programs can further give student teachers insights as to the type of moral dilemmas they are most likely to confront. Knowing, for instance, that they will be experiencing the most number of dilemmas in their interactions with their students can assist them in deliberating upon them and responding appropriately. Besides alerting teachers to moral dilemmas, the teacher education community can design programs to familiarize instructors with moral theories and approaches which can help them in dealing with moral conflicts in a professional manner. Lack of proper attention to the moral aspects of teaching in teacher training programs has been captured in the existing discussions on morality of teaching by various authors such as Benninga (2013). According to Koc and Buzzelli (2016), contemporary teacher education programs usually focus on the technical aspects of teaching, and the knowledge and skills required. In consequence, teachers do not receive opportunities to reflect upon the moral dimensions of teaching in their teacher preparation programs. Accordingly, they are not well prepared for how to deal with moral dilemmas in teaching.

This study aimed to determine how moral dilemmas teachers face change in number and category when teachers come from different genders and experiences. The results point to some patterns in the type of moral dilemmas male and female, experienced and less experienced teachers encounter. The findings also indicate a high occurrence of moral conflicts in teaching practice, but challenge notions that teachers' experience or gender contributes to the nature of moral dilemma they encounter. This study appears to be a first step toward identifying the type of perplexities that exist in the mind of teachers regarding the moral aspects of their daily work in the context of ESL teachers of English in Iranian cities.

Future research needs to explore the nature of moral dilemmas English language teachers face in the classroom using different methodologies in different contexts if ESL teachers are to gain a deeper understanding of moral dilemmas and are to be prepared for responding to them appropriately. Finally, more extensive data collection over a period of time will undoubtedly result in more valid interpretation and categorization of teachers' moral dilemmas and any potential differences that might be attributable to personal/contextual variables.

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