Iranian EFL Teacher Cognition: Tracing Cognitive Dissonance

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This paper is based on research with two groups of novice and expert teachers with and without TEFL Certificate (Standard Licensed and Alternatively Licensed) in contexts with prescribed methodology. It considers discord and tensions between teachers' preformed beliefs, prior experiences and conceptions of teaching with the contextual obligations and teaching practices which may result in cognitive dissonance. In addition, it attempts to understand how teachers' dispositions as indicated through teaching practices could affect them with various professional profiles such as expertise and teaching licensure. Associated with this, the article also studies how awareness and experience of dissonance in different teachers may be reflective of a 'change provoking disequilibrium' which may affect and shift their cognition and quality of their teaching. Cognitive Dissonance questionnaire (DARQ), class observation, and semi-structured interviews are used to help explain to what extent teachers experience and respond to dissonance during their field experiences and professional development. © Association of Applied Linguistics. All rights reserved

For three decades, there has been a surge of studies that reflect on the effects of teachers' cognition to teaching practices and look at intellectual changes while learning to teach (Borg, 2003, 2006, 2009). For instance, it has been already acknowledged that novice teachers come to the teaching situation with perceptions, thoughts, and beliefs, previously constructed by learning experiences, pre-service training, and contextual factors which influence their behaviors, decision-making, and classroom practices (Hung, 2011; Johnson, 1994; Nishino, 2012; Pajares, 1992; Phipps & Borg, 2007; Woods, 1996). Furthermore, the influence of previous experience and attitudes on teachers' behavior (Richardson, 1996); and teachers' beliefs about teaching on their pedagogical decisions (Johnson, 1994; Farrell & Kun, 2008), style of teaching (Kagan, 1992), approval of new approaches and methods (Li, 2013) and evaluations (Borg, 2001) have been studied which indicate a direct connection between teachers' cognitions and actions that is conducive to likewise performance. This connection implies the necessity of congruency between beliefs, experience and actions which are in constant interaction with each other (Freeman & Richards, 1996). However, this connection could be distorted by different means (Farrell & Lim, 2005) which may give rise

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to frustration and negative feelings in teacher education courses (Galman, 2009), and even tensions in classroom practices (Phipps & Borg, 2007). Cognitive dissonance is the consequence of such mismatches, tensions, and conflict between opposing thoughts, beliefs and action (Festinger, 1957), because of the inconsistency of previous attitude with the recent behavior. Besides, contextual factors (Kilgore, Ross, & Zbikowski, 1990) could be a potential element in leading to incongruence between teachers' beliefs and practices which could hinder language teachers' ability to adopt practices that reflect their beliefs (Fang, 1996).

In other words, when we restrict teachers' practice, actually we restrict their cognition, reflection, and efficiency. Therefore, teaching and learning to teach, and issues inherent in the structures of departments and institutions also contribute to dissonance (Fanghanel, 2004). One of these inherent issues involves attempts to educate L2 teachers by transmitting externally defined and prescribed techniques to teachers (Richards, 2008). While this approach is still more or less in vogue in many contexts where teachers are like robots who simply implement curricula designed by others, in an unthinking manner, and ignore their decisions and cognition during teaching; more awareness of the complex nature of teacher development has created a new focus (teachers' cognition and mental lives) for educational researchers that viewed teachers "not as mechanical implementers of external prescriptions, but as active, thinking decision-makers" (Borg, 2009, p. 2). When students enter teacher education programs, they already have certain notions about teaching and learning (Zeichner & Liston, 1987) and methodological prescription put these preformed conceptions at risk of rejection which make these contexts susceptible for cognitive dissonance to occur. Therefore, failing to implement ideal teaching models or teaching methods by lack of knowledge and skills (Thompson, 1992) as well as contextual constraints (Duffy & Anderson, 1986; Kilgore, Ross, & Zbikowski, 1990) could yield inconsistency between beliefs and practice. Furthermore, the interactions of the school culture and its recognized values, teachers' beliefs and practices has also been examined by Sato and Kleinsasser (2004) which reveals and enhances the role of school culture in eroding teachers' motivation to learn to teach in specific contexts. Also, students themselves could cause such discrepancies between teachers' beliefs and actions. For instance, Nelson and Guerra (2014) reports on deficit beliefs that the majority of practicing teachers hold about students from diverse backgrounds both culturally and linguistically which indicate associated practices that generate academic disparities. Similarly, Guerra and Wubbena (2017) have considered cognitive dissonance to explain teachers' heterogeneous beliefs and beliefs of culturally proficient teaching effect on their practices. They have used Cognitive dissonance theory to help explain the distinction between conflicting beliefs and practices and to prove that deficit beliefs associated more with classroom practices considering the context and school policy.

Despite the plethora of the studies on the beliefs and practice correspondence (Artiles, Mostert, & Tankersley, 1994; Borg, 2003, 2006; Hollingsworth, 1989) and dissonance (Galman, 2009; Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Golombek & Doran, 2014; Hamilton, 2010; McFalls & Roberts, 2001) in the literature, no study, to best of our knowledge, has addressed dissonance as situated by considering the interaction effect of teachers' licensure, teachers' experience, and their core and peripheral beliefs in dissonance arousal or reduction. Particularly, there appear to be little documentation and empirical studies as to how cognitive dissonance may differ across teacher groups with different professional profile in EFL contexts. This study was therefore conceived of the broad aims of exploring the complex cognitive system which Iranian EFL teachers draw on in their pre-specified instruction.

2. Cognitive Dissonance

The original theory of cognitive dissonance formulated by Leon Festinger (1957) who theorized that when an individual exposed to new elements of knowledge in the context of his preexisting knowledge which

are relevant, but inconsistent to each other, a state of discomfort is created. In other words, Festinger believed that if the new event or information is in line with the previously constructed beliefs, then the individual would feel supported as the new stimuli match with the individual's prior knowledge which is referred to as a state consonance. On the contrary, the state when new information or events stood in opposition to previously constructed beliefs are referred to as the state of dissonance which causes some discomfort for the individual. Therefore, dissonance is a negative drive state which individuals strive to reduce it through adding consonant cognition, changing cognition (Aronson, 1961), changing action, or changing perception of action (Festinger, 1957). However, the theory is somewhat counter intuitive and, in fact, referred to as action-opinion theories which propose that actions can influence subsequent beliefs and attitudes. Furthermore, cognitive dissonance theory is based on three fundamental assumptions which emphasize humans' sensitivity to inconsistencies between actions and beliefs, namely, a) recognizing the inconsistency would motivate for resolution, b) possibility of resolution by changing beliefs, and c) changing actions, changing perception of action (Festinger, 1957).

One of the latest revision of this theory is the Action-Based Model of dissonance (Harmon-Jones, Amodio, & Harmon-Jones, 2009) which emphasizes the connection between cognition and action in that, perceptions and cognitions are considered to serve as action tendencies. Since, dissonance can interfere with effective action, resolving conflicts between cognitions would be critical. Therefore, reducing dissonance by consonant cognitions facilitates effective actions.

Furthermore, a state of dissonance can affect an individual's behavior, as she or he attempts to regain consonance. For example, the impact of positive and negative prior language learning experiences on teaching thinking and instructional decisions and practices has been acknowledged (Phipps & Borg, 2007). In another study by Fanghanel (2004), the issues inherent in the structures of departments and institutions have been studied in the new forms of training presented to novice lecturers in UK universities by using "Engeström's activity systems" which is conducive to dissonance, both the activities of training and the 'object of study' itself. Also, Hamilton (2010) explores the construct of the ability by considering tensions that teachers reflected in their beliefs and actions in their narratives which resulted in dissonance moments. By analyzing these dissonant moments, it was concluded that these moments help to shape teachers' identity.

Considering classroom realities, sometimes friction between teachers' teaching style and teaching environment as well as "a recent change in teachers' teaching strategies, some confusion associated with that change, and inability to reflect on their own teaching in ways that challenged the teaching approaches in their department" might lead teachers to develop dissonant ways of dealing with their approaches and strategies (Postareff, Katajavuori, Lindblom-Ylänne, & Trigwell, 2008, p. 59). Although prescriptive approaches may be a contribution for novice and pre-service student teachers during their initial training to make appropriate decisions (Davis, 1999), resistance may be observed for these prescription for various reasons eventually. However, according to Pedder and Opfer (2013), teachers tend to learn and work in contexts of values–practice dissonance in which they may simply choose to live with the dissonance between what they do and what they value individually and/or collectively.

Apparently, the relationship between teachers' beliefs and classroom practice are by far the most researched theme in L2 teacher cognition research (i.e. Golombek & Doran, 2014; Johnson, 1996; Basturkmen, Loewen, & Ellis, 2004; Basturkmen, 2012). In fact, beliefs have been conceptualized as containing a cognitive, an affective, and a behavioral component, which influence what one knows, feels, and does (Rokeach, 1968). Therefore, when the consistent interaction of these factors are distorted by any means, teachers may experience tensions which may directly influence their practice and professional developments (Phipps & Borg, 2007). In addition, teaching experience has been recognized as one of the significant determinants of the belief and practice correspondence (Basturkmen et al., 2004) which indicate the competence of experienced teachers in adjusting their espoused theories to their practices. Despite

these studies in the literature, considering dissonance and the interaction effect of teachers' situated cognition, contexts, experience, and licensure, there could be significant correlations and effects which has not been addressed in contemporary research. As a result, following research questions were addressed to systematically look at inconsistencies held between cognitions or between a cognition and behavior in a susceptible context.

1. To what extent do teachers with different level of expertise (i.e. novice and expert) experience cognitive dissonance in contexts with prescribed methodology?

2. How does dissonance affect their practice and demonstrate any obvious signal in their teaching performance?

3. How do they recognize and address their dissonance to make it congruent or consonant with their previous beliefs, and thoughts?

In short, the main concern of this inquiry was to understand the reactions or responses of novice and expert teachers to the effects of cognitive dissonance in prescribed contexts which could serve a valuable role in teacher education.

3. Method

The research adopts a mixed methods research design. The "triangulation" (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989, p. 259) of data in mixed methods increase the reliability of the findings (Allwright & Bailey, 1991) and "enhance quantitative and qualitative findings" (Bryman, 2006, p. 106). Also, by a qualitative priority design, more emphasis was given to the qualitative data to explore the depth of teachers' cognition and practices. Regarding the limited time to collect data, this study employed a concurrent triangulation design which is the most common approach to mixing methods (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). The purpose of using this design is to realize the differences between quantitative statistical results and qualitative findings (Creswell et al., 2003), and to combine their differing strengths and weaknesses (Patton, 1990).

3.1. Participants

To conduct this study, seven in-service male EFL English teachers were selected to form two groups of novice and expert teachers. The criterion for selecting them was based on years of experience and pedagogical/academic knowledge. The first group were two novice and two expert teachers with academic education in TEFL or "standard licensed" (SL), and the second group included two novices and an expert teacher with limited pedagogical knowledge who lacks academic education in TEFL or "alternatively licensed" (AL). The rationale behind these criteria is their connection with cognitive dissonance and the purpose of the study which explore the role of prior experience or beliefs and methodological knowledge in creating and causing cognitive dissonance or inconsistency demonstrated in teachers' practices. In other words, I utilized purposive sampling by selecting the sample based on personal judgment and the purpose of the study (Schwandt, 1997). In fact, our beliefs formed according to our experiences through education and teaching along with our understandings and preferences of methodological issues, play a significant role in initiating consistency or inconsistency processes and influence both our cognition and action simultaneously (Holt Reynolds, 1992). Each of the expert teachers had almost 4 years of teaching experience and less than a year for novices. Hence, the first group (SL) comprised of two expert teachers with 4 and 5 years of teaching experience and BA and MA degree respectively, and two novice BA degree teachers with 1 and 2 years of experience, all undergraduate TEFL students. The second group (AL) comprised of one expert teacher with 4 years of experience and BA degrees in English literature and two undergraduate novice teachers with almost 1 year of experience

studying English literature. These teachers were selected from two institutes in Iran with prescribed methodology which impose a certain approach and practice on teachers.

Table 1.
Teacher Participants' Demographics

		Participants			Degree Obtained	Gender
		Number	Name	Experience		
	Expert Teacher	2	Teacher 1	5 Y	Bachelor (TEFL)	Male
Group 1			Teacher 2	4 Y	Master (TEFL)	
(Standard Licensed)	Novice Teacher	2	Teacher 3	1 Y	Bachelor (TEFL)	Male
			Teacher 4	2 Y	Bachelor (TEFL)	
Group 2 (Alternatively Licensed)	Expert Teacher	1	Teacher 5	3 Y	Bachelor (English Literature)	Male
	Novice Teacher	2	Teacher 6	1 Y	Bachelor (English Literature)	Male
			Teacher 7	1 Y		

3.2. Context of the Study

The context of this study was two institutes with prescribed methodology where teachers had to follow particular directions, methodology, curriculum and evaluations specified by the institute and dictated in the developed materials in Iran. Although they prescribe particular curriculum, techniques, teachers' roles, and certain procedure to be followed during general educational preservice courses, the particular method and the values of the institutes are not revealed formally in order to distinguish themselves in the field and country. However, it seems that they took eclectic approach or similar methodology without specifying its name like situational or ALM methodology. For instance, institute A adopts structural approach toward teaching grammar by emphasizing situational-based teaching and listening and speaking skills which is closer to situational language teaching method. Institute B, by taking eclectic approach attempts to distinguish its method from ALM which appears to be the way teachers teach in the beginning level, but in the advanced levels tasks come to the picture which is prescribed by curriculum to complement their devised methodology. However, these institutes share prescription in their methodology and developed materials which shapes most of preservice educational programs. A brief preservice teacher training programs run which provide general picture of the institutes' values and methodology to assess teachers' capability in conforming to these practices and appears to be insufficient to engage and reform their prior beliefs and experiences.

3.3. Data Collection Methods

3.3.1. Questionnaire

In order to design a questionnaire that focused on assessing individual differences in cognitive dissonance, Harmon-Jones et al. (2009) considered two main components of dissonance: dissonance arousal and dissonance reduction, in their Action-Based model of dissonance. The items in this questionnaire capture dissonance arousal/affect, tap dissonance/discrepancy reduction, and measure reactions in three of the most commonly used dissonance paradigms, namely, induced compliance, free choice/difficult decision, and effort justification. They referred to the measure as the Dissonance Arousal and Reduction Questionnaire (DARQ; Harmon-Jones, Harmon-Jones, & Newman, 2008). This inventory contains 28 items and captured data using a 5-point Likert-type scale (*from 1= never to 5=always*). Cronbach alpha was employed to determine the reliability of the questionnaire for the sample of this study, coming up with .95 reliability statistics. Factor analysis of the items with an extensive sample was conducted by Harmon-Jones et al. (2009), in order to identify six lower-order factors (dissonance situation X arousal/reduction) plus two higher-order factors (arousal vs. reduction).

3.3.2. Observation

Since dissonance is a phenomenon occurring in class during the process of teaching, the best way to explore it is by direct observation which can be complemented, verified, and collated with the interview data. As the basis for stimulated recalls during interviews, observation and field notes helped the researcher to have a clearer and more accurate view of teachers' practices during the interview. Since this research was concerned with what naturally happened within a classroom setting, the researcher assumed the role of a pure observer. Considering the reliability of the observation, the researcher attempted to verify his interpretations of the classroom observation in the interviews with teachers afterwards. Furthermore, the researcher had attended the classes to be observed a few times already, in order to neutralize the observer effect, since according to Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, and Razavieh (2010), in order to enhance validity of the observation, the researcher should carefully define the behavior to be observed and must be aware of two sources of bias that affect validity: observer bias which occurs when the observer's own perceptions, beliefs, and biases affect his/her interpretation and observer effect which occurs when participants behave differently just because they are being observed. Therefore, the researcher attempted to concentrate on the following predefined aspects of teaching:
- The ability of the teacher to implement the predefined techniques and activities of the method.
- The flexibility and creativity of the teachers in employing new activities not prescribed by the respective methodology.
- The confidence of the teacher in applying the defined methodology and transforming the materials properly.
- The experience of particular tension or pressure during teaching practice.

Consequently, with the selected teacher from each subgroup, there was one observation session to examine the correspondence between cognition and action. By taking field notes the researcher attempted to supplement interview questions and provide stimulated recall during interview.

3.3.3. Interviews

In this research, the semi-structured form of interview, which guarantees the coverage of the main questions and has a certain amount of built-in flexibility (McDonough & McDonough, 1997), was utilized.

Furthermore, the researcher attempted to build trust and rapport with the interviewees through appropriate probing techniques in order to obtain the most accurate responses possible (Fowler, 2009). The teacher-interviews were conducted as the last phase of the study, in order to accommodate the responses with the observation data. Thus, a number of core questions (see Appendix A) were developed to cover all major issues and to encourage teacher-participant reflection on their practice and beliefs in order to understand their possible dissonance state, resolutions they take, and to explore whether the participants have developed cognitive dissonance toward the prescribed methodology or not.

The teachers were assured that there would be no assessment about their teaching resulting from the interviews. It was anticipated that the teacher-participants' responses would provide an explanation for their thinking processes in dissonance situations by declaring their espoused beliefs, feelings, and practices.

3.4. Data Analysis and Procedure

Regarding the research design (concurrent triangulation design), the study had a concurrent form of analysis with a separate initial data analysis for each of the qualitative and the quantitative data which was conducive to merged interpretation of data sets (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p.136). First of all, the questionnaire was administered to understand the state of dissonance among teachers in prescribed contexts to differentiate them according to their professional profiles.

Subsequently, the observations were conducted and the field notes were analyzed qualitatively, focusing on incidents of tension among teachers during teaching. These tensions, failures, and difficulties in applying the method were identified, and analyzed. Teachers' reactions and classroom management were also noted in the researcher's field notes, and used later during interviews with them.

In the last phase of the study, each teacher-participant was interviewed by the researcher to understand the way they deal with such a phenomenon. Interviews were audio recorded to be analyzed and subjected to thematic analysis to identify the themes and their relationships. By identifying text segments, the researcher listened through the records and transcribed and coded the text segments concerning dissonance components. Then, all codes were used to form and reflect the themes related to dissonance. Finally, based on their frequencies of occurrence, the themes were counted and presented to understand the nature of teachers' thoughts and responses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Beside quantitative database analysis, through qualitative analysis the segments of data was reconceptualized into thematic groups to identify inconsistencies and dissonances in the teachers' attitude, beliefs and their possible reflection on their teaching. A 97% rate of agreement and intercoder reliability was achieved for the coded transcripts. The results of the data analysis were compared to begin the process of merging two databases (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In other words, the researcher attempted to investigate whether the quantitative data confirmed and supplemented qualitative results by exploring the deeper meanings behind their responses to the questions.

4. Results

This study attempted to explore teachers' cognition in a context with prescribed methodology to understand the impact of dissonance on their practices and investigate the way different teachers cope with it considering their preformed belief systems. This is the first study to investigate dissonance with different teachers in a susceptible context regarding cognitive dissonance as the focus point. The findings of this study provide empirical evidence and validate results regarding the role of dissonance in the relevant literature. They confirm previous findings about the tension experienced by teachers, and offer

insights on how to manage different teachers effectively in a specific context, an aspect that has been generally lacking in the body of research about dissonance in the EFL context so far.

4.1. The Extent of Cognitive Dissonance Experienced by Teachers

According to the result of Dissonance Arousal and Reduction questionnaire which measures two potential aspects of the dissonance (reduction & arousal) through three subscales, namely, effort justification, decision, and induced dissonance, the first group of the novice and expert teacher's mean score of arousal subscales was higher than the reduction ones which signify their dissonance action, reaction, and cognition in their working context. Considering the alternatively licensed (AL) group, we see the increase of the opposite subscale mean significantly which indicate the reduced dissonance cognition for teachers with alternative professional profile in their teaching career.

Table 2.
Descriptive statistics for each subscale in DARQ

		Effort Arousal	Effort Reduction	Decision Arousal	Decision Reduction	Induced Arousal	Induced Reduction
Teachers		Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Expert (SL)	1	3.00	2.33	3.00	2.33	3.00	2.20
Novice (SL)	2	2.75	2.50	3.20	2.50	3.25	2.40
	3	3.50	2.17	2.80	2.17	3.75	2.20
	4	3.75	2.67	3.20	2.67	3.25	2.40
Expert (AL)	5	2.25	3.67	2.60	3.67	2.25	3.20
	6	1.75	3.67	2.40	3.67	2.00	3.20
Novice (AL)	7	1.25	3.17	2.20	3.17	1.75	3.60

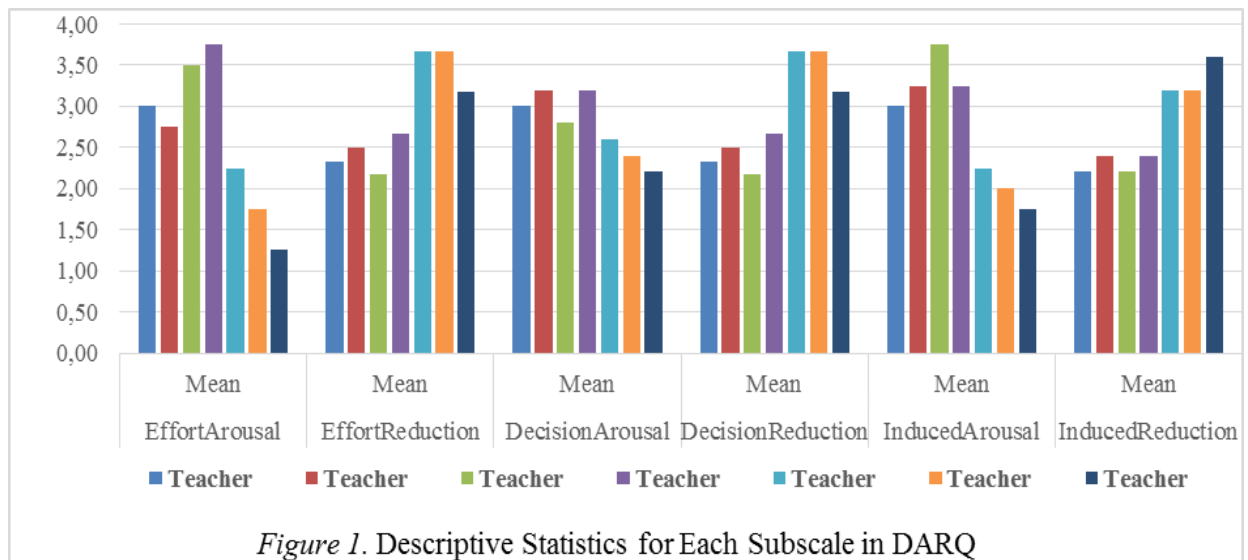The following figure yields a better view of this result.

Figure 1. Descriptive Statistics for Each Subscale in DARQ

Furthermore, by performing two one-way ANOVA tests it was found that teachers' dissonance mean and state are significantly different across the teacher groups, since, the p values (.002 & .000) of the reduction and arousal subscales were less than the alpha significance level (.01), which implies a significance difference between the teachers with different licensure in experiencing and responding to the dissonance. This result demonstrates the possibility of experiencing dissonance by SL teachers in prescribed contexts which may result in diminished efficiency in teaching and behavioral commitment that is considered in the following sections.

4.2. The Reflection of Dissonance in Practice

Field notes were taken throughout the observations to detect predefined issues and the researcher talked to the supervisor in order to confirm the field notes on the participants' practices and enhance the objectivity of the observation. In the primary group a novice (Teacher 4) and an experienced (Teacher 1) teacher were observed. According to the field notes, the researcher's interpretation, and the supervisor's comments, the expert teacher demonstrated a better sense of confidence in managing and conducting the respective techniques and activities. The same goes to the novice teacher in implementing the prescribed method with a lesser degree and more obsession in following the methodology. In other words, the expert teacher could respond flexibly and better to students' performance cues than the novice teacher and move beyond the defined constraints to attend to a greater variety of instructional activities. The decision pattern of these teachers, as in the literature, are different in prescribed contexts. While the experienced teacher concentrated on the learning side, the novice teacher emphasized the teaching aspects of his practice. I mean the experienced teacher was somehow in control of his students than the methodology which the novice teacher strictly followed. Furthermore, the experience of tension was more obvious with the novice teacher than the expert one, since the novice teacher attempted to accomplish thoroughly what he was asked, even by ignoring learners and their learning. Therefore, it appeared that the sense of not teaching well and the students not learning created the tension in some of his conduction of the activities.

In the second group of the teacher-participants, teacher 5 and 7 were observed. Considering the limited pedagogical knowledge of these teachers, it was anticipated that the experience of tensions would also be limited. However, they spent somehow longer time in conducting activities and attempted to follow exactly the processes of methodology and techniques to satisfy their supervisors. In addition, the novice teacher seemed to be unable to analyze the contextual factors and control the learners' track of learning by identifying their emotional and cognitive interests. Lack of experience made the teacher's practice spontaneous in an unexpected situation which was conducive to have difficulties in managing such situations and adopting the appropriate instructional decision. Nevertheless, we should not ignore the role of learners in causing dissonance and tensions, since lack of motivation, proficiency, and learning (Rashidi & Moghadam, 2015) by violating teacher's expectations and potentials may be the major factors associated with dissonance.

4.3. Interviews

4.3.1. Extracting Major Methodological Issues

4.3.1.1. Teachers' low methodological awareness

Teachers' methodological knowledge about the prescribed methodology was assessed to be insufficient both theoretically and practically, specifically in AL teachers. For example, when asked to clarify on the theoretical and methodological aspects of their practice, teacher 6 asserted that:

I just follow the exercises in the book and the techniques that I am told. I try to follow the procedure of the method and the book, and I don't know much about the theoretical and methodological aspects (T6)
.

Although there seem to be several preservice educational programs for the new teachers, presenting the sum of techniques and activities from the practical perspective are the foundation of these sessions which lack required justification and theoretical understanding for the respective methodology. Additionally, applying some of these techniques seems to be demanding and imposes stress on teachers when they consider themselves not competent enough to manage it which is conducive to exhaustion by both teachers and students. This aspect is reversed in SL teachers, particularly the novice teachers who asserted that the techniques are somehow outdated and restrict them and their potential in the class which yield inefficient teaching practices and diminish their motivation. Considering the SL expert teachers, although they attempt and believe to adhere to the values and practices of the institute, in some situations they are compelled to apply other supplementary techniques to keep the students motivated and interested; since the techniques presented in the preservice educational courses are kind of fit-to-all prescriptions which do not have the potential to be executed in the classroom.

4.3.1.2 The inevitable impact of the prescribed methodology

The impact of the prescribed methodology was found to be different for various teacher-participant groups. For the AL teachers, such prescriptions could be an initial step in acquiring pedagogical understanding of teaching. Therefore, they do not have to devise or find specific techniques to follow and such prescription could serve their purpose very well. Although they experience some difficulties at the beginning, as teacher 5 pointed out, these difficulties motivated him to try to understand the pedagogical aspect of teaching and study to refine his practice. Regarding the first group of the study (SL), they asserted their dissatisfaction with the result and blamed the prescription applied by the methodology. However, at the present time their commitment to the institute's values appears to be increased, since they follow the procedure and the techniques as they are told. Considering the experienced SL teachers who seem to conform to the methodology, they have attempted to minimize the impact of the prescribed methodology by utilizing their potential in understanding the pedagogical consequences of their decisions and keep themselves and their students motivated. However, as teacher 2 mentioned, lack of decision-making power creates tension in teaching practices for various reasons such as the availability of a better technique or activity to engage students.

It is sometimes irritating when you know a better technique and activity to follow or work with students according to the situation, but you have to match yourself with the rules (T2).

Therefore, the impact of the prescriptive practice, both for good or bad, is inevitable.

4.3.2. Understanding the Essence of Dissonance in Teachers' Cognition

4.3.2.1. Experiencing tension

As the AL teachers declared, there are some situations where they wonder what they should do to teach efficiently, particularly when encountering problems with students' learning, which may lead to the experience of tension and stress. But, this tension appears not to be due to dissonance. Although they have, also, some core beliefs and pedagogical notions shaped through their exposure and experience of

the language, the conflict between these beliefs and the present methodological prescription is slight which is evident in teacher 5 comment:

> *Despite the fact that every teacher has its own way of teaching, as I do, the current method seems to be more academic which helps us to determine what to do in the class and how to manage the activities (T5).*

The main portion of the tension, as was anticipated, is experienced by SL teachers who have formed, reformed, and refined their core beliefs and cognition on teaching with the recent advancements in the field. For instance, teacher 2 pointed out that:

> *I don't understand why they (the institute's founders) ignore the fast progress of the teaching field, and use the old methodology in teaching English exclusively without considering other important factors involved in learning a language such as the students' background and teachers' ability or the materials to be taught (T2).*

With such an opinion about the values and rules of the institute, experience of tension is predictable. When asked about the feeling of stress and tension during teaching and implementing the methodology, the experienced teachers described the situations in which they have to decide among or between options available for them to teach the materials. Therefore, they attempt to reserve (and sometimes utilize) an alternative option, in case of necessity, and use the prescribed technique first to indicate their adherence to the institute's values. By subordinating the institute's policies and contextual constraints for their own beliefs, their core beliefs seem to find a symmetry with their peripheral beliefs, at least temporarily. However, avoiding tension is not possible every time, because there could be no plan B at all, and as they already consider the impact of the methodology on their practice and blame it for any inefficiency, experiencing tension is again inevitable, even if it occurs occasionally.

Regarding novice SL teachers, we should consider the following assertion which may indicate the consequences of tension and prescriptive methodology.

> *If the institute prescribes the method, no problem we do it, but they should take the responsibility of the students' progress and learning. I'll do my job as I'm told, the rest doesn't concern me (T3).*

Obviously, this teacher attempts to relieve the tension through justification and cognition change which are the usual strategies in dissonance reduction. Responsibility denial to change the dissonant cognition (Gosling et al., 2006) is a method utilized by this teacher to avoid tension. However, during the process of teaching, the preformed dominant beliefs may yield unexpected tension for this teacher as in decision processing, or effort justification.

4.3.2.2. Justifications presented

Interviewing teacher-participants provided interesting and different justification strategies for each subgroup of participants according to their professional profile. First of all, AL teachers, particularly the novice teachers, were unaware of incompatible beliefs between their beliefs systems and the new approach, until it was directly pointed out during interviews by the researcher in which after accepting their experience and exposure to be different from the institute's values, they simply ignored the conflict and emphasized the present position as the desirable and final objective. Accordingly, the AL experienced teacher emphasized the logic for prescribing the methodology and appears to find symmetry with the institutes values by acting accordingly.

Considering the SL teacher-participants' cognition, it seems that they have chosen to live along with dissonance and continue their career with dissonance in spite of the inconsistency, without value and cognition reconstruction. This fact was confirmed when experienced teachers attempted to adhere to the institute's values and use an alternative plan sometimes, if the original values fail. This means that they have designed a priority scheme to be used which determine their practice and refine their original values if needed. Therefore, they adopt the third method (Festinger, 1957) to add consonant cognition by altering their practices sometimes and considering the contextual and learners' factors in the class.

The novice SL teachers have complex cognitive processing by trying different means to add consonant cognition to create consistency. By responsibility denial, they attempt to deny any inefficiency in their teaching by blaming the methodology and its consequences. Furthermore, by ignoring the mismatch between their beliefs systems and institutes' policies, these teachers attempt to relieve dissonance and as teacher 3 pointed out in answering the fourth question:

> *Having a job as a teacher and its prestige is more important for me than the prescribed methodology and I suppose I should do my job as they want me to do, the rest is not that important now (T3).*

As you may notice, the dissonance gap for this teacher was large enough to reject the mismatch and conflict between his cognition and action and find a justification to reconstruct or block the core beliefs and values, even temporarily.

In conclusion, we could conceptualize teacher dissonance as an evolving phenomenon composed of contradictions, conflict and compromises in the process of teacher development in which teachers strive to deal with their cognitive dissonance by reflecting and engaging with their belief systems. By studying the underlying reasons and strategies for experiencing dissonance, we can determine that teachers' expertise or experience, licensure and contextual issues could be the significant and predictive factors of dissonance. But, recognizing inconsistencies between values and practices may motivate teachers to learn (Pedder & Opfer, 2013); and perhaps find a solution. Also, during the interviews and observation, the expert teachers conduct activities and talked with a sense of confidence and had justification for their practice when they violated the institute's values; which imply the importance of 'cognitive conflict' in teachers' thinking (Cobb, Wood, & Yackel, 1990, as cited in Pedder & Opfer, 2013). Since, teachers in prescribed methodology face challenges to their approach and thinking which is demonstrated through cognitive conflict, this motivates them to reconstruct or refine their practice and beliefs and even to develop new practices by unlearning what they believed and do to satisfy the situation (see Pedder & Opfer, 2013). Furthermore, cognitive dissonance should not be the tendency to place failure on the teacher to accomplish teaching duties, but dissonance awareness, self-knowledge and attributing responsibility on institutes' values could alleviate institutional dissonance. The interference of dissonance with classroom practices seems to distinguish alternatively licensed teachers from licensed teachers both in practice and cognition, but what emerges as striking in teachers' interviews is how they would carve open their path in their professional development by justifying their actions and decisions even by ignoring the contradictions and conflicts which has been discussed in the following section.

5. Discussion

The results indicate that standard licensed teachers are the most susceptible teachers in the contexts with prescribed methodology to experience dissonance. This fact demonstrates the long-standing impact of dissonance through teachers' professional career, since both novice and expert teachers experienced (although not at the same rate) dissonance in their teaching practice. This finding elaborates on Borg's (2003) comment that "behavioral change does not imply cognitive change" (p. 91) which explain why

expert teachers after years of teaching in the same context could not completely conform to the values of the institute and left their core beliefs to be intact.

According to the interviews result, Standard Licensed expert teachers enjoy more independence in their practice by relying on their experience and confidence in understanding the needs and interests of the learners and dare to modify some of the prescribed procedure sometimes, based on their perceptions of the class. According to Richardson (1996), teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning may outweigh the effects of teacher education; this fact holds true for SL teachers' educational programs in prescribed contexts which failed to result in change in teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward the institute's policies and values in this study. Considering teachers' beliefs as a system of core and peripheral beliefs (Pajares, 1992), it can be assumed that SL experienced teachers' core beliefs remain intact through their teaching career, and their peripheral beliefs are modified to suit the specific context as in this study. However, SL novice teachers' both core and peripheral beliefs are persistent to change and reorientation toward the prescribed methodology at first which may yield cognitive dissonance.

The SL experienced teachers attempted to utilize the second reaction and method proposed by Festinger (1957) in reducing cognitive dissonance through modifying and rationalizing their practice (new information) to suit their core beliefs. According to Johnson (1994), teachers' core beliefs of teaching have a powerful effect on teachers' pedagogical decisions; which was, also, true about the SL experienced teachers in this study. However, this may give rise to the decision and effort arousal, since decision alternatives and success of a particular activity play an important role in decision and effort justification, as indicated in the result of the survey. The SL novice call for reduction by employing strategies such as responsibility denial and mismatch refusal. In fact, these teachers took the third reaction proposed by Festinger (1957) with accepting the new information and methodology as accurate, but refused to change their original beliefs (including both core and peripheral beliefs) which was conclusive to create a continuing, or unresolved state of dissonance. In addition, they were more emotionally involved in institute's values and had motivational issues on pursuing their professional studies. Lacking motivation in such situations would demand even more effort and more of their time which is conducive to effort arousal and induced compliance arousal, as is evident in the questionnaire's result. In other words, teacher motivation has been considered to be a significantly positive factor in students' learning and achievement (Dörnyei, 2005). Decrease in commitment towards the learners is an inevitable aspect of these teachers' practices which should receive due attention of the institute's authorities.

The AL teachers appear to take the fourth reaction (Festinger, 1957) by modifying their prior beliefs, and, also, accepting the new information as accurate which would eliminate any trace of dissonance. In short, the practice of the teachers in this study was influenced by several factors such as dissonance beliefs, professional motivation, and contextual factors. According to the interviews, the AL teachers find prescription as a reference or beginning point in their way of professional teaching to acquire pedagogical knowledge which makes their task much easier. Although novice teacher-participants of this group had some difficulty implementing the methodology, they, generally, considered such challenges to be the essentials of teaching. In other words, such challenges of teaching are to decide who they want to be as a teacher, what they care, value, and conduct in classrooms with students (Ayers, 2001).

5.1. Shift in Teachers Professional Practices

Regarding the impact of cognitive dissonance in classroom teaching, the SL experienced teachers seem to develop their critical thinking ability, since they provided more detailed and academic explication, analysis, and evaluation by questioning their practice and methodology during the interview and appeared to think and learn from their classroom experience to enhance their efficiency. The very

skill which lacked in SL novice teachers which look to be developed through their teaching. However, Galman (2009) considers dissonance to be different and consequence of critical reflection by stating that: "While critical reflection is a skill and capacity to be developed in teacher education, dissonance is the cumulative effect of any and all experiences that create internal conflict for students, including but not limited to the encouragement of critical reflective capabilities" (p. 471). In other words, according to Galman (2009), dissonance is the effect of the overt critical reflection instruction in teacher education programs. But, according to the interview results, the researcher concluded that there is bidirectional relationship between critical reflection and dissonance, since without the one the other could not exist. However, there should be some basic conditions to approve this relationship, namely, the conflicting situation, critical evaluation, and internal motivation to yield dissonance through or resulting in critical reflection. Of course, this assumption needs more research based investigation to be confirmed.

According to Thompson (1992), besides observing discrepancies, the researcher must question the extent of teachers' awareness of such discrepancies by preparing them to explain it which may reveal various sources of influence on their instructional practices that cause them to subordinate their beliefs. In addition, awareness of dissonance can result in what Woolfolk Hoy, Hoy, and Davis (2009) call a change provoking disequilibrium, which refers to the dissonance between what teachers regard significant for enhancing the quality of their students' learning and perceptions of current professional learning. Based on the interviews, SL teachers' awareness of such discrepancies provokes them to look for consonance through reflection which creates a transition platform for them to refine their cognition to be an experienced teacher. In other words, awareness of disequilibrium drive teachers to search for equilibrium through reflection which enhance their expertise in teaching by considering various factors involved in their practices.

As a result, we may understand the role of expertise in dissonance and the SL teacher-participants' professional shift by referring to the expert and novice teachers' specifications represented by Tsui (2003). The first distinctive characteristic is efficiency in processing the information in the classroom which enable the expert teachers to make sense of and recognize patterns in a large quantity of simultaneously transmitted information within a short period of time. This characteristic was a determining factor in dissonance reduction, since the SL expert teachers could manage their dissonance by evaluating the class and the students' needs and modify their practices accordingly, unlike the novice teachers' practices who appeared to struggle with the methodology by ignoring the critical factors in their teaching. Subsequently, by selectivity in processing information, the SL expert teachers were more selective in what they process by considering the learners rather than the methodology as the focus point in conducting their practice. Thirdly, the ability of expert teachers to improvise by responding to student needs and a variety of unanticipated classroom events which require decisions and actions by their well-established routines, is exactly what the SL experienced teachers demonstrated to reduce their dissonance and manage their class. Finally, expert teachers' deeper and principled representation and analysis of problems (i.e. prescribed methodology) helped them to offer interpretations and solutions that are guided by principles through reorienting their cognition to suit their practice and reducing the dissonance. Therefore, according to Hamilton (2010), "Dissonance, then, is not a destructive but a dynamic process allowing shifts in structures/organization of learning and negotiation over constructs" (p. 428). Although, there could be some interference at the moment of teaching by experiencing dissonance, but in long term it shapes teacher identity and is prerequisite to teacher transition to be an expert teacher (Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Raffo & Hall, 2006; Galman, 2009). In addition, the shift of teachers in expertise can be considered as a crucial element in resolving or reducing dissonance and cognitive inconsistencies. By contrast, novice teachers' underdeveloped information processing system lacks such specifications in the process of decision-making which will shift through reflection and experience.

6. Conclusion

According to Phipps and Borg (2007), identifying differences, or tensions, between teachers' beliefs and practices is not sufficient for language teacher cognition research; rather, attempts need to be made to explore, acknowledge, and understand the underlying reasons behind such tensions. Therefore, this study attempted to investigate teacher cognition in contexts with prescribed methodology to explore their experience of dissonance through mixed methods approach. It has already been recognized that the contextual aspects so far are still most widely acknowledged factor accounting for the inconsistency concerning teacher cognition and classroom practice (Li, 2013). While, nowadays, institutes attempt to determine their own policies and methodology by prescribing and imposing certain methods, they appear to ignore an important facet of teachers' professional practice which influence their whole career and development in the field (i.e. their cognition). Despite these constraints and their respective influence on various teachers, we may conclude that these prescriptions should conform to the teachers' standards or, at least, refine their beliefs in advance to enhance their efficiency in the class. In brief, the researcher believes that the institutes with prescribed approach may consider Parker Palmer's (1998) perspective of teaching as a reference point in defining their values that "good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from identity and integrity of the teacher" (p. 10).

According to the results of the study, it is suggested that teachers should not be made to give up their beliefs during the in-service program since, as it has been observed, they will attempt to refine their practice as they move through the course. Also, they, themselves, should be enabled to balance their preferences with the new methodologies. Regarding AL teachers, teacher education programs are advised to teach the unplanned aspects of classroom practice and classroom management skills by enhancing their pedagogical knowledge through their teaching or in-service program, since difficulty in conducting some techniques properly was observed to impose some problems for these teachers. In addition, teachers' interactions and reflections with each other, particularly among teachers with different specifications during teacher education programs and in-service teaching may prompt novice teachers' cognition to consider alternative aspects of contexts with specific constraints to move toward equilibrium in their practices. Accordingly, it is strongly recommended for institutes to consider teachers' dissonance by enhancing their awareness of dissonance and encouraging reflective thinking among them by provoking resolution to enable them to pass through change provoking disequilibrium stage to achieve equilibrium in their teaching practices in contexts with prescribed constraints. Finally, teaching experience could be considered a credible criterion to employ teachers in contexts with prescribed methodology, because the experienced teachers proved their ability in modifying their practice to the benefits of the students and their learning besides adhering to the values of the institute.

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Appendix A
Interview Questions

Methodological issues (Extracting major methodological beliefs)
1) Which method do you use to teach here? Could you please explain the method (theoretically and practically)?
2) Have you been successful in implementing the method?
3) Do you find the current methodology effective for yourself and students?
4) What is your favorite method? Have you ever used that method in the class?
5) How do you feel about the department values?
6) How do you feel about the current methodology and policy of the institution?
7) Will you choose another method if you could?
8) What about your performance? Is it influenced by the prescribed methodology? How?

Cognitive Dissonance
1) Do you find teaching in this institute a desirable and pleasant activity? Do you enjoy teaching? Why? (effort justification for desirable outcome = dissonance reduction; Harmon-Jones et al. 2009)
2) Do you feel any discomfort during teaching? Do you feel any tension when students fail to learn the subject matter?
3) If so, how do you deal with this conflict in your mind and practice? How did you relieve the tensions (dissonance resolution; Festinger, 1957)?
   a) Change your mind about the method
   b) Change your practice
   c) Justifying your practice or method
   d) Ignore the conflicting cognitions
4) How you satisfy yourself to go on and continue to use the prescribed methodology?
5) Do you consider yourself responsible for students' learning? (Responsibility denial = dissonance reduction; Gosling et al., 2006).
6) What did you expect at first before implementing the methodology? Were you right? (Expectation violation = dissonance arousal; i.e. Gosling, Denizeau, & Oberle, 2006).
7) What about now, how do you feel about the teaching practice and methodology? (Commitment to the behavior = attitude change = reduced dissonance; Harmon-Jones et al., 2009).