TO DO OR NOT TO DO? INVESTIGATING LECTURERS' MORAL DILEMMAS THROUGH CRITICAL INCIDENTS

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Abstract

The notion of moral dilemma also termed as *knots* (Wagner, 1987) in some research has gradually gained much popularity in recent decades. Everyday teachers inevitably find themselves in the situations where they question their values, ethics, and thought processes with respect to the norms of their educational settings "since the nature of the teaching tasks lends itself to being of an ethical and moral nature because of the complexity of the teacher tasks" (Melo, 2003: 179). Based on this view, the present study aims to investigate moral dilemmas of EFL instructors through their critical incidents and to show how they struggle with the processes of ethical conflicts and moral dilemmas by comparing their perceptions, real life events, solving strategies, and reasoning process behind their decisions. Participants (*n=30*) consisted of English language instructors having different teaching experience from diverse EFL contexts in Turkey. Data was collected through a semi-structured interview method. The analysis of the collected data revealed that issues related to grading or assessment were the most frequently encountered incidents that created moral dilemma for the participants. While single-handed problem solving strategy was the most preferred solving strategy by the participants, majority of the participants reported that they prioritized the best interest of the student.

Keywords: Moral Dilemma, Critical Incident.

1. INTRODUCTION

Every day, we all face situations that demand difficult decision- making and require us question the ethically right thing to do, generally referred as moral dilemma we have to deal with. Therefore, moral dilemma is not a term specific to educational contexts only; however, researchers in this field have given more credit to this concept than those in any other disciplines. In terms of educational perspective, a moral dilemma can roughly be defined as a state of conflict in which the ethics of a context contradict with your own values as a teacher. With this idea, by its very nature, teaching is one of the critical professions that are quite susceptible to such dilemmas. "Teaching decisions- whether to teach one way rather than another, to emphasize one skill at the expense of another skill, to punish or not to punish- usually involve moral decisions and evaluations" (Sabbagh, 2009: 664). Parallel to this view, there seems to be a consensus among researchers on the idea that "the mission of teaching, as a moral activity, is to develop the moral character and virtues of the students" (Gholami & Tirri, 2012: 1). Sometimes, in teaching what is considered ethical becomes what is the best in the interest of the students. Parkay & Stanford (2004: 195) explained this as "behaving ethically is more than a matter of following the rules or not breaking the law-it means acting in a way that promotes the learning and growth of students and helps them realize their potential".

Upon the emergence of Cognitive and Constructivist approaches where teachers' and students' cognition, belief and personal constructs have been emphasized, general tendency has been towards these topics accordingly. However, the existence of theoretical knowledge does not suffice to enlighten the problems in the real world. Unlike the abundance of studies on the students' cognition, learner types, and learner autonomy; the research on teachers' cognition, identity and ethical moral conflicts occupy less space

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in the literature. Thus, this scarcity has borne a necessity for more empirical data equipped with comparative surveys owing to the fact that their thought processes are transforming into a more intricate pattern contrary to what have been portrayed in current studies. Accordingly, in this study we aimed to shed light on the moral dilemmas experienced by EFL instructors from different context while dealing with critical incidents.

1.1. Teachers' Moral Dilemmas

In its broadest sense, morality is defined as "principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behaviour" (see the entry in *Oxford Online Dictionary*). This term comes into prominence parallel with the complex nature of teaching profession which is composed of various dynamics. The dilemmas or conflicts that teachers are likely to confront might range from punishing a student or grading exam papers to more collegial or administrative problems. Hence, depending on its scope, the moral dilemma takes different forms. In the research agenda, there is a wide variety of classifications and distinctions among the types of moral dilemmas. For example, Oser (1991) proposed a distinction among three types of morality, namely normative, situational, and professional. Normative morality refers to the unreal or hypothetical actions with respect to moral norms whereas situational morality puts the real-life situations and contexts at the centre in the decision making process. Professional morality of teachers is more related to "functional, professional, seemingly nonmoral acting" (Oser, 1991: 202). Considering this fact, moral dilemma is far more beyond choosing the right or wrong action and teachers' ethical conflicts are more complicated than expected. Shapira-Lishchinsky (2010: 1) suggests that "when teachers' sense of proper action is constrained by complex factors in educational practice and decisions are made and carried out contrary to the 'right course', critical incidents which involve ethical conflict and moral distress result". Moreover, as Tirri (1999: 31) points out, "the moral dimension of teaching might become more concrete when a teacher faces a conflict in his professional conduct".

1.2. Critical Incidents

As teachers, we frequently face with problems and incidents unexpectedly that we have to manage and resolve. Brookfield (1990a: 84) defined this kind of critical incidents in teaching as any 'vividly remembered event which is unplanned and unanticipated'. In fact, during teaching and learning process, incidents happen all the time but it is important to keep in mind that these incidents only become 'critical incidents' when the individuals involved attach a particular significance to them, as Tripp (1993: 8) clearly stated:

'Incidents happen but critical incidents are produced by the way we look at a situation: a critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an event. To take something as a critical incident is a value judgement we make, and the basis of the judgement is the significance we attach to the meaning of the incident.'

Reflecting on these incidents leads teachers to uncover new understandings of taken for granted perceptions of the teaching/learning process (Richards & Farrell, 2005). According to Tripp (1993), formal reflection on them consists of a description/production phase followed by an explanation phase. In the description/production phase, a specific phenomenon is observed and documented. Thus the incident is 'produced'. The incident is then explained by the teacher in terms of its symbol, value, or role (Measor, 1985) that requires a decision making process.

1.3. Decision Making Processes in a Case of Moral Dilemma

Oser (1991) outlined three remarkable claims in the professional morality of teachers; *justice*, *caring* and *truthfulness* (Figure 1).

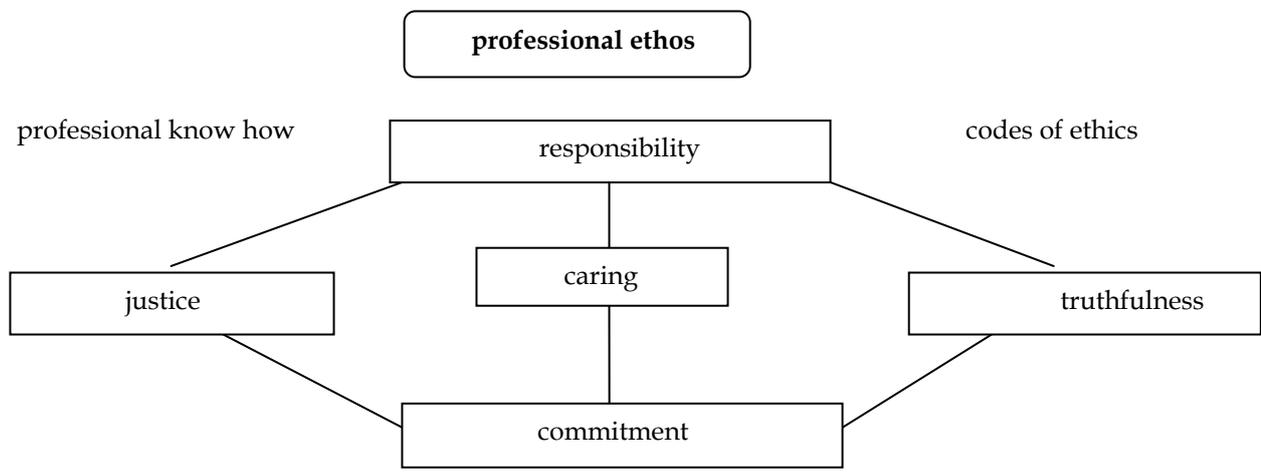**Professional task (esp. professional dilemmas)**

Figure 1: Dimensions of teachers' professional ethos model (Oser, 1991: 202)

As seen in Figure 1, professional decision-making of teachers, also called professional ethos, relies on the commitment to justice, caring, and truthfulness. Otherwise, moral conflicts are likely to emerge in the absence of such a situation.

On the other hand, Kierstead and Wagner's (1993 cited in Melo, 2003) *tripartite taxonomy of moral thinking* presents three philosophical perspectives in decision making, namely *consequentialism, non-consequentialism* and *rule utilitarianism*. Their taxonomy corresponds to other terms in some other studies whose focus shares similar characteristics even though naming differs. Their first perspective is *consequentialism*, also called as *outcome-based approach*, in which the action is judged according to its positive or negative consequences (Sabbagh, 2009). In other words, morality depends on the consequence, not on the action. The second theory is *non-consequentialism* where the morality is judged by the intention of the agent. A moral action is defined as "the one in which no person is treated with respect to others" goals (Kierstead & Wagner, 1993 cited in Melo, 2003: 178). The last perspective is *rule utilitarianism* which is based on the desirable consequences of an action. "Attention is drawn to the tangible consequences of an action and prohibits any consequence that might victimize another person" (Melo, 2003: 178).

Oser (1991) also suggested five main problem-solving strategies in moral dilemmas: These are avoiding, delegating, single-handed decision-making, Discourse I, and Discourse II. In brief, *avoiding* is the effort of teachers' solving the problem without taking any responsibility and without facing it. *Delegating* is the strategy of teachers by taking the responsibility and sharing it with someone else. In *single-handed decision making*, as the name implies, teachers handle with the problem on their own like the absolute authority. *Discourse I* is an orientation where teachers recognize their responsibilities and try to balance justice, caring, and truthfulness shown in Figure 1. However, in *Discourse II*, teachers think that all the parties involved in the process are responsible for balancing justice, caring, and truthfulness. In our study, we used this five problem- solving strategies in order to find out the decision process.

1.4. Justifications of the Decisions in the Moral Dilemma

In the justifications of the decisions made when confronted with a moral dilemma, teachers tend to use a "*backing*" which is a term coined by Toulmin in 1958 (cited in Kansanen, Tirri, Meri, Krokfors, Husu, & Jyrhama, 2000). In his definition, backing refers to abstract justifications behind arguments. The fact that every teacher uses his own backing in the process of decision-making in order to strengthen his justification constitutes the abstractness of the issue. Of the most frequently used backings for actions in moral dilemmas, the best interest of a child takes place on the top in moral ethical dilemma studies (Kansanen et al., 2000); furthermore, "the notion that teachers care about the relationships that they have with their students and make decisions is the student's best interest" (Melo, 2003: 186). In Tirri's (1999) study the backing used was also the best interest of a weaker party. Similarly, "caring for others (e.g. pupils, colleagues) is one of the most important values that teachers consider when dealing with ethical dilemmas" (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2010: 8).

All in all, the purpose of this study was to investigate and foster a greater understanding of the nature of critical incidents that EFL instructors faced and some of the factors that shaped how these instructors dealt with the incidents and whether the way they handled them differ with respect to experience or gender. Therefore, the research questions to be addressed in this study are as follows:

1. How do the EFL instructors perceive moral dilemmas?
2. What kind of critical incident do the EFL instructors face with?
3. What philosophical frameworks do the EFL instructors resort to in their ethical decision-making?
4. What kind of backings do the EFL instructors use to justify their actions while dealing with moral dilemmas?

2. METHOD
2.1. Participants

There were 30 (7 males and 23 females) participants in this study (Table 1). All of them have been working as EFL instructors in School of Foreign Languages in different universities around Turkey. The ages of the participants ranged from 27 to 48 (*mean= 33,7*) and they all had teaching experience between 3-24 years (*mean=10,4*). The selection of them was made on a random basis. Throughout the study, each participant was addressed with the number assigned to him/her.

Table 1: Demographic profiles of the participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Experience/year
T1	F	33	10
T2	F	31	9
T3	M	32	10
T4	F	27	4
T5	F	35	12
T6	F	41	20
T7	F	31	8
T8	M	32	11
T9	M	46	15
T10	M	34	9
T11	F	32	10
T12	F	33	10
T13	F	31	9
T14	F	32	8
T15	F	35	12
T16	F	37	15
T17	F	33	10
T18	F	32	9
T19	F	35	12
T20	F	28	4
T21	M	34	7
T22	M	42	18
T23	F	48	24
T24	F	36	14
T25	F	31	6
T26	F	27	4
T27	M	34	12
T28	F	27	3
T29	F	32	9
T30	F	32	10
n=30		Mean: 33,7	Mean: 10,4

2.2. Data Collection

In line with the focus of this study, the data were collected by the help of a semi-structured interview which included seven open-ended questions similar to the questions employed in Shapira-Lishchinsky's (2010) study (Appendix I). A systematic and step-by-step procedure was pursued through interview questions. First of all, the instructors were asked to define moral dilemma in general during the interviews. Next, they were asked to share critical incidents they had experienced during their teaching with all the details (see Appendix II). After that, their decision making strategies were questioned as well as the rationale behind those resolutions at the time of dilemmas. In the final section, the participants were asked to evaluate their decisions retrospectively.

The data collection procedure lasted for approximately half an hour with each interviewee. Some of the interviews had to be applied to the participants online via Skype because of the distance and unavailability of in-person communication. Most of the interviews were audio taped and transcribed afterwards except for the ones who did not consent to because of the privacy concerns.

2.3. Data Analysis

A qualitative content analysis method has been adopted. Data gathered from interviews were categorized according to four main themes. The purpose was to determine teachers' perceptions, their own moral dilemmas in critical incidents, the problem solving strategies and backings used in conflicting situations. Therefore, the transcribed interviews as well as the notes taken have been analyzed in the light of preset themes as follows:

Teachers' Perceptions of Moral Dilemma

3. RESULTS

This section of the study presents the findings upon the analyses of the interviews with 30 EFL instructors. Results will be shown under four categories:

3.1. Teachers' Perceptions of Moral Dilemma

The interviews with the instructors revealed that their understanding of a moral dilemma share some certain characteristics despite the changes in their focus (shown in Table 2). The table reveals that instructors have different definitions for moral dilemma. However, it is also possible to see that several participants share common views related to moral dilemma. While six of the participants (20%) defined it as having to decide between to apply the one's own rules or the others' rules, four of the instructors (13,3%) defined it as a conflict between conscience and emotions. On the other hand, three of the participants (10%) perceived it as a mismatch between their in-class activities and their teaching philosophy.

Table 2: Instructors' Own Definitions of Moral Dilemma

Participants	Gender	Definitions
T1,T6,T24,T25,T26	F	Having to decide between to apply the **rules** of yours or the others
T22	M	
T2	F	Having to give up your **values** when deciding to act in a certain situation
T3	M	being in between what you should do and what you actually do in certain circumstances
T28	F	
T4	F	Being in between **the thought** in your mind and ethical judgments
T5	F	a conflict in which people have to choose between two **actions**
T10	M	
T7	F	Doing something that you shouldn't do which in return makes you **regret**
T8	M	Ethical **instability** we experience inside and outside the classroom
T9	M	a severe problem for which I can suggest alternative solutions which also cause a remarkable disadvantage or **harm** for one or more participants involved.
T11,T12,T13	F	when my in-class practices do not match with my real teaching philosophy
T14,T15,T23	F	Getting stuck in between **conscience and emotions** while doing the right thing
T21	M	
T16	F	I start to question my behaviors and know that I'm on the wrong way
T17	F	questioning whether or not I'm finding the balance in terms of **equality** between the students
T18,T19	F	when I face with a student's inappropriate behaviour
T20, T30	F	Trying to find the balance between my **beliefs** and realities
T27	M	a complex situation in teaching that you stand right in the middle of two poles and you cannot decide which to choose as both of them present hidden ethical concerns for the teacher
T29	F	getting stuck in a difficult situation

3.2. Teachers' Critical Incidents

During the interviews, the participants shared their critical incidents that had made them stop and think about their behaviour, beliefs, reasoning, and philosophy. Table 3 briefly presents those incidents (see Appendix II for full reference) some of which carry similar characteristics with another incident in another context. Namely, T4, T8, and T21 interestingly told almost the same incidents in which they admitted that they added extra points to their favourite students' exam paper; otherwise, they would have failed. In relation to the grading issue, some other instructors (T12, T13) stated that they had some dilemmas about the fairness of their grading. On the other hand, in 5 out of 30 incidents (see Table 3) instructors reported that they had confronted with absenteeism problem of students where they either had to make them fail (T1,T2) or chose to ignore for some reasons (T6, T17). Another common dilemma was about teacher behaviour by losing temper and showing off the authority in the class (T19, T24). Similarly, in two incidents teachers (T14, T27) shared their dilemmas on disruptive student behaviour.

Table 3: The summary of teachers' critical incidents

Participants	Gender	Critical Incident
T1, T2	F	Making a student she actually likes fail in her lesson **because of his absenteeism**
T3	M	Seeing other **colleagues** leaving the class before the scheduled time
T4,	F	Whether to increase the **grade** of her favourite student whose score was low in the exam
T8,T21	M	

T5	F	Grading an exam prepared unfairly by the **Testing office** where the teachers do not actively teach in the classroom
T6, T17	F	Helping a student who already exceeds the **absenteeism** limit
T7	F	**Punishing** the whole class because of their ignorance of the assigned homework
T9	M	Letting off a student who has **absenteeism**
T10	M	**Beating** a student
T11	F	Not motivating the students enough to **use English** in classroom
T12, T13	F	**Grading** the exam fairly or not
T14	F	Not bearing the **disruptive behaviour** in class
T27	M	
T15	F	Catching the student **cheating** from the Net
T16	F	Complying with the **authority** unfairly
T18	F	Facing with **late comers**
T19, T24	F	**Losing temper** and showing off the authority
T20	F	**Being insulted** by the authority
T22	M	Whether to persuade the student to stop his **disruptive behaviors** through talking or punish him through instituting an inquiry against him.
T23, T26	F	**Scolding** a student who does not deserve such treating (T behaviour).
T25	F	Stopping following solely course book and integrating alternative materials and activities into the syllabus.
T28	F	Quarrelling with a **colleague** because of distribution of duties
T29	F	Knowing the unfairness of my **colleague** but ignoring it
T30	F	Fighting with the **administrator** for his unfair and unequal treatment

Apart from the common incidents, there were also unique instances such as beating (T10), punishing the whole class (T7), using mother tongue (T11), unfair treatment by the administrator (T30) and etc. shared by individual teachers.

Table 4: Overall content of moral dilemmas of the participants in the critical incidents

Content	Number of Incidents	Frequency %
Grading	6	20 %
Absenteeism	5	16,6 %
Students' disruptive behaviour	4	13,3 %
Teachers' own behaviour	3	10%
Authority/administration	3	10%
Colleagues	2	6,6%
Punishment	2	6,6%
Beating	1	3,3%
Testing office	1	3,3%
Late-comers	1	3,3%
Using mother tongue	1	3,3%
Course syllabus	1	3,3%
TOTAL	**30**	

According to Table 4, grading the students' work or exam paper was the most frequently encountered one with 20%, while absenteeism, with 16,6%, had 5 critical incidents that caused moral dilemmas among the participants. When it comes to the third frequent critical incident, students' disruptive behaviour can be seen with 13,3%. With regards to teachers' own behaviour and authority/administration content, it is clear that they have equal number of incidents with 10%. Also, we see the same number of incidents in moral dilemmas based on the colleagues and punishment content with 6,6%. Among the overall content, it can be viewed that the least frequently encountered ones are beating, testing office, late comers, mother tongue and course syllabus with 3,3 %.

3.3. Philosophical Framework for Decision-Making

Having elicited teachers' critical incidents, they were asked to tell how they reacted and solved those problems. Their answers were categorized under 5 headings suggested by Oser (1991) as problem solving strategies:

Avoiding : It is one of the widely adopted strategies by the instructors who do not want to be involved in these difficult incidents. Thus, they chose to be out of these situations either by ignoring (T3,T11) or transferring the problem to another person (T1) or getting rid of it in a way (T14). They expressed the avoiding strategies as follows:

T1: "I preferred to transfer the problem to the directors instead of doing something myself."

T3: "Nothing. I carried on doing what I am supposed to do."

T11: "I did nothing. I ignored the exam and graded his paper."

T14: "I couldn't tell it to anyone for a week. I tried to forget it and at the end of the term. I decided not to go to this department any more. I didn't want to face with him."

**Single-handed:** Out of 30 participants, the majority of them preferred to solve these dilemmas on their own. The instructors presented the rationale for their single-handed decisions as in the following excerpts:

T4: "I made my own decision. Maybe I should have graded his paper according to only his performance in the test but I couldn't ignore his involvement in the lesson. And I added points."

T9: "I personally believed that the rule was unfair for higher level students. In my heart, I knew that the student was proficient enough so I disregarded his absence and let him take the test."

T30: "I did not surrender to him. What he wanted was to make me to obey "his" rules but I resisted and refused to take on the task he was trying to give me. In the end, he apologized for what he did."

**Delegating:** Out of 30 participants, only one of them (T6) reported that she resorted to delegating the responsibility and asked her colleague for help to solve the dilemma together as follows:

T6: "I knew that administration would not help us out, so I insisted that my partner and I revise our attendance sheets again, and finally found one slot where we "could have made" a mistake and we corrected it."

**Discourse I:** This was also one of the rarely used strategies (6,6%) by the participants where they are supposed to balance all the dynamics. T5 and T21 explained their strategies as follows:

T5: "I could have counted the students answers correct, but I didn't do it thinking that it would be unfair for the students in other classes. Although it was not right to give low grades to all the students, to be fair to everyone, I did not give high grades in that exam."

T21: "After all, I thought that I had never favoured any of my students so far giving a higher grade than what he/she deserved, and moreover, it was against my principles. Therefore, I did not favour that student, and he had to wait for one more year to graduate."

**Discourse II:** This strategy was used in only one incident (3,3%). The following excerpt taken from the interview with T2 showed that the teacher wanted to involve all the responsible parties in the solution of the problem.

T2: "This was not a decision I could make myself so I told the student that he had to solve the problem with the administrators."

3.4. Teachers' Backing in Their Decisions

Upon the analyses of the critical incidents where teachers had moral dilemmas, the participants were asked to question their decision retrospectively. Data gathered revealed that there were three backings in their decision making processes:

- Students' Interests
- Teachers' Commitment to Their Own Ethics
- Both Parties' Interests

a. _**Students' Interest:**_ A great number of instructors justified their decisions with the best interest of the student. These teachers put the students on the center by thinking that all the other parties should serve for their purposes as in T5 and T6's excerpts:

T5 : "I think I did the right thing since the exams were bad and it was not the students fault."

T6: "I didn't want to lose such a student….I did not want to sacrifice him to the tyranny of the system."

b. _**Commitment to their own ethics:**_ In this study, the majority of the instructors prioritized their own ethics and values rather than students' interest contrary to what was suggested in the literature. What was common in those statements is that students should take their own responsibilities (T2, T21). In addition, most teachers were confident in their decisions and thought that they were right (T2, T3, T4,T5,T21,T23,T24). The following excerpts illustrate this:

T2: "I did the right thing because I think the students should take their own responsibilities."

T3: "I did the right one. I earn my living from this job and the rules are for everyone."

T21:"Those who do not fulfil their responsibilities (doing homework etc.), and get lower grades especially in productive skills (speaking, writing) do not deserve to pass the class even if they have to wait for more years to graduate. Students should fulfil their responsibilities to graduate no matter who they are."

T24: "I think I did the right thing during the process since I tried to find solutions and gave suggestions such as kindly talking to the course instructor about the problem, doing their home works etc. I think students should focus on the solutions not on the problems."

c. _**Both Parties' Interests:**_ There were very few teachers who considered the interests of both teachers and students at the same time. For example, T22 stated that:

T22: "I think I did the right thing since I wanted him to accept and stop his disruptive behaviours before it was too late, and I wanted to ensure that my courses would not be interrupted."

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study aimed at finding out perceptions of EFL instructions about moral dilemma. Besides, philosophical frameworks that they resorted to along with the backings to justify their actions were also investigated through asking the participants to share a critical incident that they experienced with the researchers.

4.1 Perceptions of the Participants about Moral Dilemma

Not surprisingly, instructors from different working conditions interpret the meaning of moral dilemma from their own perspective most probably with the effect of the setting they are in since each context has its own characteristics which distinguish it from the others. For instance, there seems to be a consensus on that it is a state of conflict, mismatch or incongruence whereas most of them associate it with some certain notions such as values, rules, regret, harm, conscience, equality, and so forth. No matter how different they define it, it is certain that moral dilemmas exist by forcing the teachers to make their own decisions during teaching.

4.2. Overall Content of Moral Dilemmas

It is clear that the scope of moral decisions or evaluations of teachers is quite wide. The results show that contents of the critical incidents that the participants reported are not limited to teaching or classroom environment. Authority and the colleagues also leave the instructors in moral dilemmas, which shows the complexity of teaching profession. Besides teaching which require moral decisions or evaluations (Sabbagh, 2009), there are other issues related to administration, colleagues or other offices leaving the instructors in ethical dilemmas. Yet, it was noteworthy that grading or assessment was the most frequently experienced issue that created moral dilemma for the participants. Similar to the results of another study (Pope, et al., 2009) which revealed that most of the instructors were concerned about 'score pollution', majority of the participants in the present study indicated that they had to deal with assessment issues such as consideration of student effort, his/her special situation (e.g.: students expecting to graduate), or his/her characteristics (respectful, hardworking etc.). Lastly, most of the critical incidents reported by the participants were related to issues which were potentially common to all teachers with different teaching majors (ex: grading, absenteeism, students' disruptive behaviours). Although all of the participants were EFL instructors, only a few of critical incidents were directly related to their major.

4.3. Philosophical Framework for Decision-Making

Considering the nature of critical incidents along with moral dilemmas which are generally unplanned and leave the teachers on their own to take a decision, it was not surprising that single-handed decision making was the most frequently used problem solving strategy by the participants. This finding agrees with the result of Tirri's (1997) study where he found that single-handed solving strategy was the most preferred one by the primary school teachers. However, it was disappointing to find out that avoiding was the second most frequently used problem solving strategy since it does not seem to serve to one of the teaching missions which is equipping students with moral virtues (Gholami & Tirri, 2012). Moreover, it is widely acknowledged that teachers should confront with their dilemmas through accepting them, thinking on them, and sharing them with their colleagues, which will be an important step for their professional development (Kelchtermans, 2013). Accordingly, it is also worth mentioning that delegating was one of the most rarely used problem solving strategy, which meant that the instructors avoided collaborating with their colleagues. Similarly, Discourse II as a solving strategy (involving all the responsible parties in the solution of the problem) was the other most rarely used problem solving strategy.

4.4. Teachers' Backing in Their Decisions

When the participants were asked what kind of backings they used to justify their actions while dealing with moral dilemmas, most of the participants claimed that they made such decisions for the benefit of their students. It sounds promising considering the fact that teachers are anticipated to give priority to students' wellbeing when making decisions (Mahony, 2009). On the other hand, the number of the instructors who prioritized their own ethics or values over students' interests cannot be underestimated. Most of the participants who prioritized their own ethics reported to use avoiding or single-handed decision making strategy to solve the problem. In that respect, Schussler (2006) claims that it is not enough for teachers to know about the outer context (classroom context) to be effective teachers. They should also recognize their self-context. Simply put, they should be encouraged to develop self-awareness to understand how they react to specific events or problems related to their profession in their inner world. In that way, teachers have the opportunity to see the consequences of their specific actions on their students (Borich, 1999). Developing self-awareness may help teachers to refrain from using avoiding strategy, and use single-

handed strategy more effectively. Lastly, only a few of the participants indicated that they considered the interests of both teachers and students.

All in all, this study explored the perceptions of teachers' moral ethical dilemmas as well as their decision making processes along with their backings. It has been verified that teachers have to struggle with situations in which they lack the theoretical knowledge. Although the number of research and studies on ethics of teaching has been increasing day by day, no concrete attempt has been made in teacher preparation programs at universities in order to solve this problem. Teachers regardless of their experience try to find their own way simply resting on their instincts. In this sense, "the reliance on philosophical frameworks for ethical decision-making may help teachers in their daily work" (Melo, 2003: 187). Yet, from all the data gathered, one can conclude that teacher education programs must also prepare prospective teachers for such kind of situations since "teachers' heightened awareness and understanding of the ethical dilemmas they encounter may help them deal better with critical incidents they will face in the future" (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2010: 1).

5. IMPLICATIONS

Even though moral dilemmas are not only specific to language teachers and classrooms, it is clear that there are some times, such as using mother tongue, grading the productive skills, especially the oral skills, that language teachers get stuck and really need help. Therefore, curriculums may give a chance to the pre-service teachers to learn step by step how to lead engaging and demanding discussions of values, and moral issues using hypothetical or real-life dilemmas. Such discussions may promote the reasoning and understanding of moral and values issues from another person's perspective while thinking on the situation to make decision and assessing the rationale behind this decision.

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APPENDIX I
INVESTIGATING EFL INSTRUCTORS' MORAL DILEMMAS THROUGH CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Interviewee's Name (optional): _____

Gender: F ☐   ☐ M

Age: _____

Teaching   Experience/year: _____

1. How do you define *moral dilemma*?

2. Could you please give a specific example of a moral dilemma from your own experiences during your teaching (these may be related to the students, colleagues, administrators, or others)?

3. How did you react in that specific situation you stated in Question 2?

4. What made you react in that way?

5. What was your solving strategy in your own moral dilemma?

6. In retrospect, what did you learn from the dilemma you described?

7. Thinking back upon it now, do you think you did the right thing? Why /Why not?

APPENDIX II
CRITICAL INCIDENTS THAT EFL INSTRUCTORS EXPERIENCED

T1: "A student of mine who already had a lot of absences did not come to the lessons on Monday and failed the level because of his absent hours. The following day he came and said that he was in his hometown for the weekend and while he was returning he was in a traffic accident so he was late. I believed him because I knew him personally and all his friends said he was telling the truth but I didn't want to change his absence records because if I had done so, all other students would have known about it and it felt unfair. I told him that I would speak to the principle but they said they couldn't do anything. In the end, he failed."

T2: "A few years ago I had a student in Prep-class. I really liked her and she was one of the bright students in my group. However, she couldn't come to some classes for some reasons and she already exceeded the absenteeism limit. She came to me and asked if I could do anything for her or not. I thought if it would be fair or not. Even though I personally liked her, I couldn't do anything. Personally, I think that absenteeism should not be so important in passing the class but it does not seem possible for the system we are in, unfortunately."

T3: "As an instance, the standard time to leave the class is after 50 minutes, though it is habitually disobeyed at certain classes. Regardless of how others behave, I try hard not to conflict with my personal principles and carry on doing what I am supposed to do."

T4: "Once I had a student whom I really liked but he was about to fail in the exam. As I knew him and his actual performance during the lessons, I added extra points to his exam paper. I thought a student's performance was more important than his grades though I questioned my behavior for a long time."

T5: "The 'testing office' prepares our exams. The teachers working in the office do not teach, therefore they have little knowledge about how the classes go and how the students' level is. last semester, the exams they prepared were very unfair for the students. They asked questions about the topics we didn't cover in class and in one exam the answer of a question was wrong. as teachers, we complained about it. We talked to the teacher and the level coordinator responsible of preparing that exam, but they said the exams were good and we were not experienced enough. The students got low grades because of these poorly-prepared exams. I could have counted the students answers correct, but I didn't do it thinking that it would be unfair for the students in other classes. Although it was not right to give low grades to all the students, to be fair to everyone, we did not give high grades in that exam. Since it was not the students' mistake, I decided to add extra 5 credits to 'class participation' grade to my students. I calculated the percentages of the questions and decided that 5 would be fair enough."

T6: Throughout the years, I have had so many students with attendance problems. I keep informing my students about their total hours of absenteeism, but still there are some who really give me a headache. So, if the student is really concerned about his situation and if he is a good participant in the lessons, I take it seriously as well, and try to help him out of the situation. I count my attendance sheets again and again, hoping that I've made a mistake. If there is nothing wrong with my attendance sheets, I encourage my student to go and talk to my partner, their skills teacher, and I pursue the case until I get a rigid answer. However, I rarely deal with students who never mind their lessons or anything else. It happened to me just this past year- I knew that the administration would not help us out, so I insisted that my partner and I revise our attendance sheets again, and finally found one slot where I "could have made" a mistake, and I "corrected" it. I just didn't want to lose such a good student.

T7: "I had assigned an important homework that would be very beneficial for my students. The following week, when I came to class and asked them what they did, I got shocked by the answer. None of them did it! Even one of them did not bother to do it. I got frustrated more when some of them even dared to ask me if it was a big deal. I did not know what to do. All I could do was to stand up and leave the classroom by slamming the door."

T8: "I had a student a few years ago. He studied very hard before the exams during lessons but whenever he came to the exams, he couldn't show his real performance to the test. He was such a role model for his peers that while I was grading the exam paper of this student, I had a moral dilemma. Should I assess him according to his results or his real performance that I think he deserves?"

T9: "Very recently, a student who had had used up her time of absence almost completely came to my office. She wanted permission not to join my class because she had big problems with her family, and she told me she needed time to sort them out. I gave permission as I assumed she would not lie; obviously she was emotionally aroused (she cried). At other times, when students who were indifferent to (my) classes wanted permission, I refused. And it did happen that I made students fail because they didn't attend class. I gave permission because I felt sorry for her."

T10: "It was one of the first years of my teaching career. I was teaching at a secondary school, and I was in a 7th grade class and talking about the lesson. Suddenly I saw three students chasing one another while everybody else was listening to the lesson. I saw red at that moment, and I had to beat the students. I could have talked to them and warned them instead, but I felt I had already crossed the line of reasoning. I thought what

they did was some sort of an assault to my teacher identity. So, even though I had never beaten a student before, I had to do it then. Also, I thought it was extremely disrespectful."

T11: "This year I have to teach English to a group of students who have very little background in English. Added to that, they are aware of the fact that they won't be responsible for speaking, reading or writing in English when they go to their Turkish-based departments. Therefore, this is a big challenge for me to motivate them to study in English. I am normally in favour of using the mother tongue - Turkish- at a minimum level in my classes. However, in these classes, it doesn't work. I have to use a lot of Turkish in giving the instructions because students somehow insist on not improving."

T12: "After the oral exam, one of my students came to my office and asked me why he had got lower marks. According to him, his speech was perfect and he didn't deserve such a lower mark. I tried to convince him that there were three instructors at the jury and I was not the only one responsible for grading him. Also I told him that I didn't think there was any mistake but as he didn't want to accept it, I promised him to check the marks."

T13: "While we were having an exam, one of my students came into the class and sat. I gave him the exam paper. The Listening part of the exam was over. However, he had answered the questions related to this part. I hadn't realized it until I checked the exam papers. Even though he hadn't listened to this part, he gave some correct answers. It wasn't easy for me to decide what to do. In the end, I decided to grade the answers as correct and marked him."

T14: "One of my students wasn't listening to the lesson disturbing the others. I couldn't focus on anything. Whenever I said something, he was interrupting me as if he were perfect. If any student made any mistake, he was making fun of them. It was like a torture for me."

T15: "While I was checking one of my students' essay, I felt that the sentences were beyond his English level. When I googled it, I saw that it had been taken from an internet site for teaching writing."

T16: "One day our director called me to visit him after the class. When I went there, he showed my attendance sheets and asked me to correct them for some students. According to him, these students shouldn't fail because of the attendance."

T17: "Students knew that they will be let in class despite the school rules, so they feel very relaxed rather than getting stressed out about arriving on time. In fact, some of them feel free to enter in the last 10 or 5 minutes. When it started to be a problem for me in one of my classes a few years ago, I decided not to tolerate late comings. "

T18: "One of my students was very energetic, moving all the time in the classroom. It was very hard to make him sit. He had attention problems, too. He was getting bored very easily. He had a strong tendency not to attend the lessons. However, he was very respectful to me. He always listened to my advice silently and carefully. Attendance was 80% compulsory in our school and he went over the required limit of attendance so he faced with the risk of failing automatically without taking the end-of-year proficiency test because of his absence. I personally believed that the rule was unfair for higher level students. In my heart, I knew that the student was proficient enough so I disregarded his absence and let him take the test."

T19: "I asked one of students to leave the class having told him to be quiet more than three times. The student kept talking despite my warnings and suddenly I asked him to leave the class as I lost my temper. Instead of apologizing for his behaviour, he demanded to sign the attendance paper and then leave but I did not let him do it as he was rather rude."

T20: "I was waiting for my lesson for half an hour. The time was passing but the professor in the classroom was just sitting and chatting with the students. I had to interrupt him. I told him politely that my lesson was supposed to start at 20.15 but it passed. I asked for his permission in order to start my lesson. He looked at me strangely and said: "Who the hell are you? Are you blind? I'm here." I couldn't believe in my ears. After I introduced myself, he asked me whether I was married or not. On hearing that I was single, he replied me saying "Now that I understand you are so impatient". I wanted to leave the classroom at that time. He was laughing while all my students were staring at me. I got frost."

T21: "A fourth-grade (undergraduate) student expecting to graduate had failed my Academic writing course (a third-grade course). He passed all the other courses but just failed my course. His writing was really poor. He even was not be able to use the verb "to be" correctly. He would not be able to graduate like his friends on the expected date. He would have to wait for one more year to graduate since he failed my course. It was difficult for him to accept that he would graduate one year late just because he failed my course. However, writing was an important course since it was a productive skill. Therefore, I was hesitant about helping that student to pass the class giving extra grades. I was in a great dilemma. On the one hand, there was a student expecting to graduate but cannot because of his failure in my course. On the other hand, he did not deserve to get a better grade in my course. He even did not do his home works throughout the term, and did not fulfil his responsibilities. After all, I thought that I had never favoured any of my students so far giving a higher grade than what he/she deserved, and moreover, it was against my principles. Therefore, I did not favour that student, and he had to wait for one more year to graduate. Then, the student called me several times to persuade me to give him extra grades and to pass the class, but I did not change my decision. I am not regretful for what I did since he did not deserve to pass the class and graduate."

T22: "I gave paperwork to my students in my course. I told them I would evaluate their papers and add their points to their final grades. While evaluating their papers, I found out that one of my students who was hard working and ambitious made plagiarism. He deserved to get a zero (0) but I did not give him zero since he was a hardworking student. I gave him a lower grade. After I announced their grades, he came to my office and objected to his grade. When I told him that he made plagiarism, he told me that he wanted to do his paper work again. I told him that it was impossible. After that meeting, he began to disrupt my courses chatting with his friend during the class hours. He was whispering to his friends and they were laughing looking at me. At first, I ignored them since I thought that he would give up. However, he insisted on his disruptive behaviours chatting with his friends and making them laugh. At last, I asked angrily to one of those who laughed looking at me why she was laughing. She told me that she was not laughing at me. After the class, I wanted her to come to my office and asked her what he told to her and why she laughed. She told me that she could not say what he said to her. Finally, I asked that student (disrupting the class) to come to my office and asked why he was misbehaving in my courses. I told him that I got really irritated because of his disruptive behaviours since he was interrupting my course and distracting my and other students' attention. When I reminded him that I had the right to institute an inquiry against him, he apologized. I talked to him to get him to stop his disruptive behaviours, and after our talk he did not misbehave in the class. I think I did the right thing since I wanted him to accept and stop his disruptive behaviours before it was too late."

T23: "Students like praising their teachers. They think that they will be able to impress us in that way. However, I am not impressed by their compliments, and I try to make it clear to my students that I am not impressed by their compliments. Few years ago, one of my students complimented me on my choice of dress in the class. I was surprised because of what he did since he was an introvert and dignified. I knew that he was sincere but I did not like being praised. I thanked to him and added: "but I did not ask you what you think about my dress". I scolded him since I think that student-teacher relationships should be formal. Few days later, his friend, another student, came to my office and told me that he (the student who complimented me on my dress) was extremely upset and regretful for complimenting me. When I heard that he was upset, I was also regretful for what I did. He was a dignified and respectful student. Therefore, I should not have treated him like that. My behaviour was true but not all the students deserve the same reaction (behaviour). I thought that I should talk to him and tell that I did not mean to hurt him but I could not. I was afraid that such a behavior could give harm to my authority."

T24: "Last year, a group of our students went to abroad within the scope of Erasmus programme. Since I am Erasmus coordinator of the department, I contacted with Erasmus coordinator of the opponent university to prepare course agreements, and I helped the students to match the courses and informed them about the facilities of the opponent university after contacting with the other coordinator. After they (the students) went to abroad, we communicated by e-mail. They were having problems with the school since some of the courses were given in Spanish whereas they

should have been given in English. Our students did not know Spanish. They told me about that problem several months later, but it was too late to cancel the course agreements. I encouraged them to do their best in all courses and attend to the courses regularly. They failed in courses given in Spanish. They were consistently sending me e-mails, and asking what they should do. Firstly, I felt guilty and asked myself if I could do anything beforehand but when they informed me about the problem, it was too late. I think students should focus on the solutions not on the problems. I suggested them to think positive, do their best and enjoy their time there since they could take the courses they needed when they came back. It was not such a big problem. However, they exaggerated the problem and began to irritate me with their e-mails as if I had to do something to eliminate that problem. Their behaviours were really irritating they were negative about the situation and complaining about everything accusing the instructors and the administration in the opponent university. I tried to reveal that I was irritated by their behaviours in my e-mails implicitly. However, they insisted on their behaviours, and I began to speak sharply whenever they wanted me to do something about the problem. I think I did the right thing during the process since I tried to find solutions and gave suggestions such as kindly talking to the course instructor about the problem, doing their home works etc. On the other hand, I could contact with them more frequently and learn about the problem beforehand. Moreover, I could warn them explicitly about their ill-mannered behaviours."

T25: "We chose a course book with my colleagues for the preparatory classes, and prepared a syllabus according to the course book. We decided to follow the syllabus during the term. At the middle of the term, in one of my course, students began to complain about the course book that we were following from the beginning of the term. Most of the students told me that they did not find that course beneficial. After their criticisms, I felt upset since I did not notice that they had so many complaints about the course book so far. I had to decide whether to find alternative materials and activities to the course book or follow the course book only as I did up to that time. It was clear that they did not like the course book and did not want to follow it anymore. I thought that it would be more appropriate to take into consideration students' complains. I decided to find and prepare different activities and materials as alternative to the course book. After beginning to implement my decision, I saw that they were far more active and engaged in the course. I realized that variety in materials and activities increases student motivation to a large extent. Moreover, I saw that it is possible and more effective to adopt a more flexible syllabus without sticking to only the course book. Therefore, I think I did the right thing."

T26: "We were in Grammar course. While I was covering a topic, some students were chatting among them. There was much noise in the class distracting both me and the other students who were trying to focus on the lesson. I kindly warned them several times. However, they kept on talking, and I began to get angry since I lost my focus. At the very moment, I saw that a hardworking student sitting in the front rows was talking to his friend. This was the last straw. I could not stand and I shouted at him. He told me that he just tried to help his friend since he missed one part of the lesson, and he was trying to explain that part. Then, he was silent, and never spoke till the end of the course. After his explanation, I felt regretful because I just warned the other students who were chatting and not paying attention to the course. However, that student whom I shouted at was hardworking and respectful. I was too angry because of the other students' creating so much noise, and he was the victim of my anger. I was not sure whether to apologize from that student or not since he did not deserve such a treatment. It was my first year in teaching. Therefore, I avoided apologizing since I thought that apologizing would weaken my authority. However, I tried to treat well and sincerely that student to lessen the effect of my behaviour, and left it to time. I think what I did was wrong. At least, I could tell my student that I was sorry for shouting at him."

T27: "I was teaching to undergraduate students and one of the students was disrupting the others and distracting my attention. I warned him a few times but he continued to his disruptive behaviors. I was thinking of throwing him out of the classroom but I was worried about hurting his feelings as he was a youngster. I was also planning to ignore the disruptive behavior by not reacting to him but this time I was bothered that the other students would follow the same fashion and this would create a chaos in the classroom."

T28: "I quarrelled with a colleague because of distribution of duties in the department since he accused me of being unfair even though I supported and helped him to fulfil his duties successfully until that time."

T29: "One day, I was supposed to prepare a make- up exam with my colleague. My colleague was very eager to prepare the questions. But, we shared the parts and asked me to send him these parts. I accepted his offer and sent him the questions. While grading the exam papers, I realized that one of the worst students got very high marks. It was impossible, I knew him very well. I asked my colleague about this. He replied me calmly saying that the student may have studied very hard. I didn't believe it so I decided to give an oral exam to the student. I was shocked, he couldn't say anything. After the exam, I wanted to ask him the reason for doing well in the written exam while he couldn't say anything in speaking. But I couldn't find him and despite his oral exam he passed. However, to my surprise, one day I overheard him speaking with his friend outside one of my colleagues office. Not knowing that I was there, he was telling his friend that he got private lessons from my partner and before the exam he answered all the exam questions. He was glad to pass his class. I was shocked. My colleague betrayed me and graded the student unfairly."

T30: "It was 2nd or 3rd year of my teaching. I had just started to work in that institution. We had a deputy headmaster whom I literally hated. He was always rude, inconsiderate, and pretending to be tough. One day, on Sunday evening, he called me and 'ordered' to come to school for a substitute lesson the next morning. In fact, I had no classes at that time. He did the same thing to me a couple of times before and I accepted. But this time I got frustrated and started to shout at him on the phone. I said to him that he had no right to call me in my off times firstly, and the institution had also other teachers for the task he wanted to throw on me. Then, I hung up the phone. The next morning, I went to the school at regular time and I directly went into his office. We started to discuss one more time. I could have behaved more softly but I didn't. I knew that he would do the same thing to me again and again. I resisted and then he had to apologize for his rudeness and he said that he didn't notice that he was giving me so many tasks."