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Research Paper

**Iranian EFL Teachers' Cognitive Change in
Relation to Curriculum Reform**

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Abstract

Iran's latest ELT curriculum reform began in 2013 and was completed in 2019. The reform has had a significant impact on various aspects of instruction, but one of the most important aspects was the teachers' cognition as implementers of the reform. The concept of teacher cognition encompasses a wide range of issues related to teaching, including the classroom environment, contextual factors, and professional coursework. Yet, little was known about the cognition of EFL teachers in relation to curriculum reform. The purpose of this study was to examine how teachers' cognition is influenced by the curriculum reform process. Due to the qualitative nature of this research, a semi-structured interview was conducted to gather pertinent information regarding this issue. The researchers analyzed the collected data to identify the most relevant findings. The findings suggest that the curriculum reform was largely successful in its implementation, with teachers' cognition demonstrating its effectiveness; however, some deficiencies exist. The reform also prompted a transformation in teachers' cognition, necessitating them to update their knowledge and enhance their language skills. The findings provide practical implications that can be used to improve curriculum planning, instructional design, and the facilitation of successful curriculum reform processes.

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1. Introduction

Since 1939, ELT in the Iranian Ministry of Education has undergone four major reforms (Foroozandeh & Forouzani, 2015; Foroozandeh, 2011). The first series of books did not follow an official curriculum and did not include a teacher's manual or a workbook. Instead, they were based on the Direct Method and the Reading Method (Azizfar, et al., 2010; Foroozandeh, 2010; Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2016). In addition, the absence of a suitable national curriculum for guiding the entire ELT education process was profoundly felt (Atai & Mazlum, 2013). They were used until 1964 when a series called "Graded English" were introduced. Following the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the book series had been changed to "Right Path to English" with many different objectives such as introducing revolution, and attaining science and technology (Kheirabadi & Alavi Moghaddam, 2014; Tajeddin & Chamani, 2020; Zarrinabadi & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2018). After the Fundamental Reform Document for Education (FRDE) in 2012, the English books were changed into "English for school" with two subcategories, Prospect and Vision. This reform placed a strong emphasis on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This approach aims to encourage students to actively participate in the learning process while simultaneously encouraging teachers to enhance the communicative skills of the learners (Aghagolzade & Davari, 2014). Implementation of the curriculum began in 2013 and was completed by the end of the academic year 2019.

It is crucial to consider whether and how curriculum revision is incorporated into teachers' cognition and professional behavior (Zhu & Shu, 2017) simply because effective curriculum revisions can have a positive impact on the intellectual lives of teachers as well as the educational systems in which they work (Bantwini, 2010; Borg, 2006; Park & Sung, 2013). Any educational response to such variations will have a decisive role to play, and teachers' cognition is an integral part of this process. Based on the perspectives presented by Borg (2006, 2019), the present study aimed to examine how teachers' cognition impacts their teaching experiences and shapes their thinking when the language curriculum changes. Accordingly, the impacts of curriculum reform on Iranian EFL teachers' cognition are investigated and discussed.

Over the past decades, teacher cognition has become an increasingly popular issue in ELT instruction (e.g., Kochem, 2021; Macalister, 2012; Samar & Moradkhani, 2014; Zhu & Shu, 2017). This concept has been described as "the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching - what teachers think, believe, and know" (Borg, 2003, p. 81). Among the factors that can manipulate L2 teacher cognition (Borg, 2003, 2006, 2019), schooling, professional coursework, contextual factors, and classroom practice were proposed as more significant (see Figure 1.). Based on Borg's (2019) definition, teacher cognition can be regarded as an understanding of a teacher's personal, professional, sociocultural, and historical dimensions. As early as the 1970s, teacher cognition was referred to as teacher thinking; however, over time, the word thinking was replaced with the word cognition (Borg, 2003; Burns, et al., 2015; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Crookes, 2015). Therefore, it is necessary to examine the interconnection between teacher cognition and its affecting factors in order to gain a better understanding of how these factors affect students' learning (Kubanyiova, 2015). Nonetheless

to say that only a few studies have concentrated on teachers' cognition within the context of curriculum design (e.g., Graus & Coppen, 2018; Tran, et al., 2021; Zhu & Shu, 2017).



Figure1. Teachers' Cognition (Adapted with permission from Borg, 2003, p. 82)

During the 21st century, instructional emphasis has shifted from cognitive to social contexts, emphasizing focusing on the essence of schooling and teacher education (Feryok, & Oranje, 2015; Golombek, 2015). In relation to the development of L2 teachers' abilities, teacher cognition has been one of the primary topics of discussion (e.g., Chang, et al., 2022; Corcoran, & O'Flaherty, 2022; Pennington, & Richards, 2016). Consequently, researchers have advocated for a more comprehensive plan that extends beyond a focus on beliefs and knowledge alone (e.g., Borg, 2019; Borg, & Sanchez, 2020; Li, 2019; Tettegah, et al., 2008).

When implementing curriculum reforms, it is essential to consider the impact of the changes on teachers' intellectual lives and education systems. Teachers, as well as students, were impacted by the Fundamental Reform Document of Education (FRDE), which was implemented due to the lack of academic goal attainment during its development and the failure to respond to the decisions made at that time to achieve environmental and behavioral modifications (Maghsoudi & Khodamoradi, 2023). Most studies on teacher cognition have been conducted from a geological perspective within

countries where English is the predominant language, with a nominal perception of school conditions where languages are primarily taught by non-native English language instructors to large numbers of trainees (Borg, 2003; Vilà, 2018). In light of the fact that few studies have been conducted on the cognition of EFL teachers within the framework of curriculum reform, this study was conducted to fill this gap and shed more light on this topic, with a particular focus on teachers' cognition. The following questions were developed as a guide for the study:

1. What are Iranian EFL teachers' cognition on the language curriculum reform?
2. What changes have occurred in teachers' cognition as a result of the reform process?

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1 Language Teacher Cognition

Breen et al. (2001) argue that language pedagogy can emerge directly from classroom experience by focusing on teacher cognition. The teachers' cognition framework (Borg, 2003, 2019) could serve as grounded alternatives to current language education paradigms. Through the development of their own personal theories and principles, teachers can gain guidance for their future practices.

As Ferreryok (2010) noted, language teacher cognition is a complex dynamic system that emphasizes interrelationships, a concept similar to sociocultural and ecological theories, that can be combined to create an effective structure hypothetical by combining a variety of research findings regarding language instruction. Burns, et al. (2015) examined the language-teaching mind and research on language teachers' cognition from a sociohistorical perspective. The researchers found that teachers' cognition was significantly influenced by time and place. They argue that the teacher's

cognition is formed by the social actions that occur in the classroom and the actual timing of those actions. Teachers use this framework to shape their thinking and behavior. According to Ngo (2018), when examining L2 writing teacher cognition in a socio-cultural context, it is found that the modifications to teacher cognition follow a complicated, non-linear path, as well as interdependent argumentative relationships. The teacher cognition study increases our present perceptions of formal education by clarifying not only what instructors do, but also by providing insight into the cognitive underpinnings of these exercises (Borg, 1999). According to these findings, teachers' cognition may be dynamic and position-related, differing between teachers, and may also influence their thinking.

There has been significant research into teacher cognition that has contributed to understanding teachers' roles and responsibilities, particularly how teachers perceive their evolving identities as teachers as well as how they view and locate students (see Bullough, et al., 1992; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Yuan & Lee, 2015; Burri, et al., 2017). In spite of the fact that teachers and learners play a vital role in the understanding of teaching and learning, limited investigation has been conducted to explore their identities in the classroom (Amini, et. al., 2019; Gray & Morton, 2018). Teachers' decision-making and wisdom in teaching foreign languages reveal their cognition about themselves and their students (Li, 2019).

Graus and Coppen (2018) illustrate the multifaceted interaction between teacher cognitions and teacher development. Teacher education should integrate harmonious teaching, persistent modeling, and the recognition of the influence of experience and prior cognitions to optimize the potential for ideal changes in teachers. Considering the role and function of grammar in foreign language environments, this study investigates how observed learner characteristics (e.g., needs, learning preferences) impact student-teacher

cognitions. Furthermore, the study underscores the significance of coherence in teaching and the effect of exercise on early cognitive development. Consequently, the likelihood of ideal changes in student-teachers is substantially increased. A pivotal element of teachers' cognition and professional development is the support they receive in their endeavors to enhance students' language proficiency across the curriculum (Kalinowski et al., 2020). These findings clearly indicate that the learning environment exerts a significant influence on the cognitive abilities of teachers.

Educational hypotheses must be considered and implemented by educators in the context of classroom instruction. Research indicates that teachers do not inherently translate hypotheses into practice or teach autonomously (Lee, 2018; Li, 2019; Wu & Schunn, 2021). Additionally, teachers bring substantial knowledge and experience to the classroom, which influences classroom management and instruction within complex social, cultural, and historical contexts (Johnson, 2006, p. 239). Understanding teachers' perspectives on the instructional process is essential for elucidating their cognition. According to Zhu and Shu (2017), the implementation of language curriculum changes within the classroom environment requires significantly more time and effort than commonly perceived. This study revealed that the acceptance of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) among teachers gradually increased, while their preparation patterns fluctuated due to changes in teacher education courses, professional development, teacher competence, and assessment effects. These findings indicate that various factors can impact and modify teachers' cognition, which may directly affect the implementation of curriculum reform. Consequently, research has demonstrated that teachers' cognition and knowledge are critical within the framework of curriculum reform.

2.2 Teacher Cognition and Curriculum Reform

The study of teacher cognition in relation to innovative pedagogy has been conducted for three main reasons, as explained by Speer (2005); she emphasizes the importance of providing insider knowledge into the plausibility, barriers, and conditions of such innovations. A second possibility is that teachers can facilitate and speed up the adoption of such innovations by developing strategies, guidelines, or pedagogies in a particular situation. A key component of teacher cognition is how teachers decide which knowledge is relevant. This includes which teaching routines to use, what learning goals to achieve, and what is most significant in the classroom's social context.

The success of curriculum reform is intrinsically linked to the enhancement of teachers' competencies. Underestimating the complexities of fostering a robust connection between curriculum innovation and effective in-service and pre-service teacher education frequently leads to the failure of curriculum reform procedures (Garcia et al., 2022; Kubanyiova, 2012; Li, 2012; Wildy et al., 1996; Yang et al., 2023). The effectiveness of teaching performance is not solely determined by cultural perceptions, as teachers' cognitive processes also play a significant role in shaping this procedure, highlighting the intricate nature of teaching and teachers' cognition. By demonstrating how explanations may be applied to the classroom, researchers create a much more accurate picture of the roots of thinking (Blumenfeld & Jones, 1996; Li & Walsh, 2011; Reichert et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2022). For education reforms to be successful, teachers must perceive, adjust, and adhere to them. The success of a national curriculum reform that is implemented nationally and centrally is determined by teachers and is dependent upon their cooperation and agreement (Cerit, 2013; Guskey, 1988; Riahipour et al., 2019; Ross, 1994). Thus, the implementation of a revised curriculum requires the integration of empirical evidence for all institutions, coupled with

intensive professional development programs (Golombek & Doran, 2014; Hughes & Lewis, 2020). The evaluation of the Vietnam Curriculum Reform Program by Tran et al. (2021) revealed that teachers' cognition was prominently reflected in their classroom exercises, with discussions centered around instructional practices within the regional context. The study confirmed that teachers independently implement curriculum reforms. However, this study failed to take into account the importance of teaching experience and the underlying factors affecting teachers' cognition. The significance of teachers' roles in curriculum reform can be discerned from the aforementioned literature. The objective of the current study was to examine teachers' cognition regarding the recent curriculum reform in ELT instruction at the national level in Iran, as well as to explore the evolution of their cognition throughout the reform process. By comprehending these issues, future curriculum reforms could devise more appropriate implementation strategies.

2.3 Empirical Studies

Despite the authors' efforts to review empirical studies in this section, only a limited number of studies were identified that concurrently investigate curriculum reform and teacher cognition. Therefore, the aim of this section is to introduce the most relevant studies on this topic and the related research conducted in this area. Research indicates that, despite teachers' profound understanding of grammatical principles, they predominantly apply the awareness principle in their instructional practices (Kaivanpanah et al., 2012). A separate study by Sun and Zhang (2021) on form-focused instruction and EFL teachers' cognition concluded that teachers find focus-on-forms more practical for instruction than focus-on-form. Understanding teachers' cognition enables researchers and educational planners to make more informed decisions by integrating teachers' cognitive processes into

their decision-making frameworks regarding EFL instruction. For instance, Sun et al. (2022) investigated EFL teachers' cognition of implicit and explicit teaching methods, highlighting the critical role of teachers in applying these methods and the significance of their viewpoints. Teachers are therefore essential to the implementation of new strategies and cannot be overlooked when applying new methods. Shafiee et al. (2018) conducted a case study on educators' cognition regarding oral corrective feedback, revealing that new error correction strategies enhanced teachers' awareness of educational knowledge, despite their conceptual and instructional skills showing limited improvement. Consequently, recognizing teachers' limitations fosters improved decision-making for instructional courses. Tsang (2025) examined EFL teachers' cognition regarding listening, pronunciation, and accent, finding that factors such as experience, language competence, and phonological knowledge significantly influence their cognitive processes. In light of these studies, a gap exists in the current literature concerning teachers' cognitions regarding curriculum reform and their role in implementing curriculum reform, emphasizing the necessity of comprehensive research in this area.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design

Narrative inquiry has emerged as a recognized qualitative research method across the social sciences (Barkhuizen, 2013; Pavlenko, 2002; Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). Within the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), it is utilized to examine language instruction from the perspectives of both teachers and students (Barkhuizen, 2015; Barkhuizen & Consoli, 2021; Bell, 2002). In narrative frameworks, narrative features are not only associated with storytelling but also with the interactivity between interviewer and interviewee, which influences the presentation of explanations (Webster &

Mertova, 2007). To address the research questions of the current study, five questions were formulated (see Appendix 1), and participants were asked to respond in English. Researchers employed this approach to explore how teachers think and act in the world, as well as how they teach within a sociocultural context (Golombek & Johnson, 2004). Studying teachers from a narrative perspective provides a deeper understanding of the intersection between public and private discourse. Additionally, it reveals how their experiences are shaped by broader social and cultural narratives (Clandinin, 2006). ELT narratives can illuminate various aspects of ELT and serve as a valuable data source, particularly in the areas of identity construction, teacher education, and the historical aspects of language learning (e.g., Liu & Li, 2023; Zhang, 2022). Traditional forms of personal information, including written and spoken narratives, have been used to demonstrate the teaching and learning processes of L2 teachers and learners, as well as their understanding through interviews, narrations, and trainer memories (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). It appears that narrative inquiry is a suitable method for studying teachers' commitment to language education, as this type of research experience has been developed to facilitate the investigation of cognitive, sensitive, and social aspects of L2 teaching and learning processes, as well as the realization of L2 learning exercises (Benson & Nunan, 2005; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2014).

3.2 Context and the Participants

The current study was conducted during the 2021-2022 academic year, following the implementation of new curriculum reforms in high schools, the publication of Vision 3 in 2018, and the administration of the K-12 national examination. The new curriculum guidelines offer comprehensive coverage of the Vision series books and integrate the CLT method into the curriculum. Researchers concentrated on collecting data from teachers, recognizing their

pivotal role in curriculum reform implementation. Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling techniques were employed to select study participants. Purposeful sampling enables investigators to choose a few information-rich cases for a thorough understanding of the problem under investigation. Participants were chosen based on their professional dedication, with most having educational qualifications similar to their peers. The study's qualitative nature and the time allocated for data collection and analysis determined the number of participants, consistent with practices in similar qualitative studies (König et al., 2022; Wohlfart et al., 2021). Snowball sampling is widely recognized as appropriate in sociological studies, as some participants encourage others to join based on mutual interests and shared curiosity (Ary et al., 2018; Creswell, 2013). Participants' information is detailed in Table 1. It is important to note that all these teachers are certified professionals who have completed in-service teacher training courses and have met the criteria for ELT teacher selection for the school context. In the present study, teachers with diverse teaching experiences, varying levels of education, and both genders participated to avoid any specific type of bias from each group of these participants. This study presents the narratives of ten high school teachers with diverse teaching experiences, who were assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

The participants in the research were informed in advance of the moral factors that guide the administration of research in sensitive societies. The notion of informed consent was evidently summarized earlier in the discussion of their contribution to the study. Prior to the research interviews, participants surrendered signed consent forms. Participants were informed that their individuality would be preserved when the study findings were described. Despite the fact that their descriptions do not specifically describe these participants, they are still used in the ultimate report to illustrate how

the particular confrontations that each of them encounters have a detrimental effect on their access to occupation progress.

3.3 Research Instrument

The qualitative methodology was selected for this study due to the paucity of existing knowledge on the subject (Creswell, 2014; Lichtman, 2023). A semi-structured interview procedure was implemented for data collection and analysis. This approach provides robust evidence, encompassing both verbal and non-verbal information, and is not limited by the constraints of other methodologies (Dolczewski, 2022). Each interview lasted between 55 to 85 minutes, and a digital recording was made for later transcription. It allows participants to express their viewpoints on the topic, thereby facilitating the collection of comprehensive data. This methodology enabled a more profound understanding of the challenges teachers encounter in implementing curriculum reform. Additionally, a more intricate social framework can be utilized to explore how individuals construct meaning from their experiences (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

Table 1.

Biographical information of participants. The names of the participants are pseudonyms.

Teacher's Name	Gender	Educational degree	Age	Teaching experience
Raha	Female	Ph.D. student	25	3
Sima	Female	M.A.	40	20
Fian	Female	B. A.	57	28
Fahimeh	Female	M.A.	37	14
Pari	Female	M.A.	35	15
Ramin	Male	M.A.	48	25
Javad	Male	M.A.	27	4
Majid	Male	B. A.	29	5
Saleh	Male	B. A.	28	5
Hamed	Male	M.A student	28	4

3.4 Data collection and analysis

A semi-structured interview format was employed to gather comparable data on their teaching history, abilities, qualifications, challenges faced, assistance provided, and current methods for integrating their teaching skills with the

new ELT curriculum. To encourage participants to share their experiences, open-ended questions were used instead of specific ones, allowing them to highlight the most relevant and significant moments.

In order to be consistent with the data, a thematic narrative analysis was applied. Grounded theory is closely related to this method of qualitative data examination. It is important to note that, although grounded theory attempts to diagnose constituent keynotes from a variety of situations, thematic narrative analysis requires the investigator to maintain the narration intact and formulate from the case(s). The data underwent inductive thematic analysis, a method where information is categorized without predetermined classifications to minimize the researcher's biases and assumptions. The primary objective during coding and thematic analysis is to ensure precision in the coding of data points. Codes, which are descriptive terms, are assigned to subsets of data deemed relevant to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Herzog et al., 2019). For the purpose of elevating a sense of intimacy with the context, the transcriptions of the interviews were re-examined several times (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). To ensure that the context of transcribed information is fully understood, step-by-step coding was used to create experimental illustrative markers for each part of the information. Based on this analysis, the researchers were able to diagnose analytical classifications and develop a more comprehensive theme analysis.

4. Findings

4.1 Teachers' Cognition of Curriculum Reform

This corpus is a representative sample of the entire data, purified of irrelevant details to respond to research questions. The relevance of the data was determined by its alignment with Borg's (2003, 2019) hypothesis on teacher cognition, which encompasses teachers' coursework, schooling, contextual factors, and classroom practice. The following is a representative sample of

the data collected to answer the research questions. Researchers investigated teachers' understanding of curriculum reform and changes in language teaching procedures to address the first research question. One of the most pressing concerns among teachers is the integration of different skills into the classroom environment. First and foremost, teachers were concerned with the needs of their students. It was emphasized that university entrance exams, acceptance rates, classroom conditions, and teaching methods are significant factors in ensuring effective instruction in TEFL. Adaptations were also made by teachers based on the characteristics of the learners they were teaching in a particular learning environment. Comment from Raha, a veteran, and Fahimeh, an experienced teacher:

The goals and approaches of TEFL differ from the perspective of different groups of individuals. As an English teacher, my primary objective is to help my students develop the four major skills. Despite this, it seems impossible to achieve this objective within schools. In secondary schools, students are prepared for university entrance exams, which emphasize reading and grammatical skills and ignore other skill sets; as a result, they display little aptitude for listening or speaking. Furthermore, the acceptance rate at the end of each semester is an extremely salient aspect of managing the class; therefore, the CLT approach can only be partially implemented due to the number of students in each class. The instructional method in each class is modified or adapted analogously to the circumstances and attributes of the students. (Raha).

As the educational system in our country has discarded TEFL for many years, there has been no change in curriculum for over 25 years. Not only did I teach the same textbooks ten years after graduating, but they were also the textbooks that I read as a student. ... GTM was the dominant instructional method, which prevented the integration of other skills. Nevertheless, the revised curriculum provides this opportunity to EFL teachers. (Fahimeh).

Moreover, findings revealed that students were interested in the material, despite the fact that their primary concern was the university entrance exam. Consequently, teachers must organize the teaching process effectively and take into account students' demands.

4.2 Teaching Procedures and Curriculum Reform in Relation to Teachers' Cognition

The second question investigated whether teachers' knowledge of teaching procedures affected the revision of the curriculum. There was an acknowledgement that method selection is crucial, and that no single method is appropriate for every teaching situation. It was also mentioned that teachers can serve as facilitators. The manner in which instruction is conducted may be influenced by factors such as the number of students in the class and the control of the classroom. It may influence the student's role in the learning process.

To achieve a specific objective, a number of activities and experimental stages are undertaken during the teaching process. Selecting the most effective teaching method can lead to greater efficiency with less time expenditure. It is crucial to consider that there is no one-

size-fits-all approach to TEFL, and that every situation warrants a different approach. As a teacher, your responsibility is to adapt the context of the curriculum to the classroom environment. (Pari)

I seek to facilitate students' learning by broadening their perspectives on language learning. TEFL refers to the practice of teaching students about the culture of another country... (Fian)

As the context of my classroom does not lend itself to the CLT approach, it is not feasible to apply it there. The number of students in my class makes teacher dominance more important than implementing the method, leading to barriers in the progress of different language skills. (Hamed)

4.3 The Instructional Materials and the Modifications Made by the Teachers

Participants discussed the importance of instructional materials, current information, audio-visual equipment, as well as the amount of instructional content that is available. Alternatively, time constraints can negatively impact the effectiveness of teaching. However, flipped classrooms and classroom interaction can be used to remedy deficiencies in the curriculum. Teachers can also improve their performance by understanding the problems and consulting with colleagues, as they themselves acknowledge.

Teaching TEFL requires a thorough understanding of the latest progress in the field. It includes effective teaching methods and instructional materials...achieving curriculum goals requires an understanding of educational theories... Language skills have been better integrated into the revised

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curriculum; however, I cannot control some limitations related to instructional materials. (Majid)

Teaching cannot be accomplished without the use of instructional media and educational assistance tools, such as audio-visual aids. The primary concern I have with the course is the time limit, since textbook content is so valuable that each section requires careful consideration. (Saleh)

In my career, I have always sought to facilitate learning, and I have implemented flipped classroom instruction within my classes, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, and have achieved positive results... Since I have always strived to be the best version of myself, I have never felt a sense of weakness. I am capable of moving up to a higher proficiency level in case a condition requires additional expertise. (Javad)

It is impossible to overstate the importance of a teacher in the process of instruction. The quality of instruction provided by a teacher plays a major role in determining the ability of a student to learn. A teacher's qualifications are determined by a variety of constituents, including personal characteristics, educational qualifications, and teaching experience... You do not need to possess a great deal of knowledge. What is more important is how you convey it to your students... I have attempted to reduce the amount of lecturing time and to provide students with opportunities to interact with and participate in language learning procedures through the use of games and exercises... If I

encounter a problem during my instruction, I consult with my colleagues and attempt to find an appropriate solution on my own. (Sima)

Teachers' ability to utilize technology and instructional materials effectively plays a significant role in language instruction, and those lacking these skills would be unable to accomplish curriculum reform effectively.

4.4 Changes in the cognition of teachers

In order to complement answering the second research question, the changes in the cognition of EFL teachers during curriculum reform were investigated in more detail. Through online workshops, webinars, and social media, teachers are able to update their knowledge and improve their speaking abilities. Additionally, the curriculum reform changed their perspective regarding the administration of tests, ultimately motivating them to perform better in the classroom.

No one is infallible, so it is imperative that everyone remains up-to-date through educational coursework, online workshops, and social media groups; additionally, interactions between teachers in the school environment or online sessions were held to bring them closer to their instructional duties ... The revised curriculum has affected not only my own teaching procedures, but also the teaching methods of my colleagues... Due to my efforts to improve my speaking skills, I have been able to fulfill the requirements of the revised curriculum ... (Ramin)

In addition to my current knowledge, I have always endeavored to stay up to date with technological advancements within my country and within the international education community. As a result of the

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Covid-19 pandemic, the number of teachers participating in social media and online instruction platforms has increased... In light of the rapid growth of online education over the past two years, I have participated in numerous international webinars and utilized their content... As part of the curriculum reform for the 'English for schools' series books, I have attempted to develop my teaching skills and present the most effective instruction possible. The experience I gained from these experiences enabled me to gain valuable knowledge and instructions; however, I have observed that the testing administration procedure is essential to ensuring full success. During the first year of administering the national English exam for K-12 students after the curriculum reform, I recall the difficulties we encountered in becoming familiar with the procedures for assessing students' learning. By analyzing the first-year exam questions, I was able to resolve this issue and prepare the students accordingly. (Fahimeh)

There are currently a number of online seminars and workshops available to those interested in TEFL. In order to maximize my participation, I have made it a priority to attend as many of them as possible. In addition, I have enrolled in some English courses in an effort to improve my language skills... Since I have no teaching experience with old English books, I am unable to provide any commentary. In the opinion of someone who has studied these books, the Vision series books are superior to those that came before them. Furthermore, redesigned books provide a more

enjoyable reading experience and reduce fatigue and demotivation. There is also a need for teachers to adapt to this process. (Raha)

These findings indicate that the learning environment influences the effectiveness of TEFL instruction. Additionally, teachers' cognition of curriculum reform and the classroom environment significantly influences their professional development.

5. Discussion

The study indicated that there has been a significant change in the curriculum, teaching methods, and the cognitive capabilities of teachers as a result of the curriculum reform. The following section attempts to highlight the most important aspects of these changes.

It is important for officials and teacher educators to pay attention to the effects of management, students' preferences, and high-stakes exams on teachers' cognitive abilities and curriculum (Doo, et al., 2023; Rahimi, & Sayyadi, 2019; Zhu, & Shu, 2017). In accordance with Fan et al. (2020), there is a need to provide teachers with information about high-stakes evaluation reforms and to develop more effective communication procedures between stakeholders and suppliers of language assessments. Teachers must understand the testing procedures associated with the curriculum reform process in order to ensure a successful outcome. Consequently, contextual factors such as learners' needs, curriculum content, learning outcomes, and future assessments influence teachers' cognition. Despite the efforts made to introduce the new curriculum, some restrictions were imposed on its implementation. The restrictions include giving priority to university entrance examinations, the number of students per class, IT literacy, and the manner in which tests are administered. Also, it is important to recognize that those teaching conditions that may result in different capacities for learning

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may also result in different restrictions and opportunities for instructors (Pennington et al., 2016; Richards, 2012).

Based on the context of their classroom, the instructors decided that the most appropriate educational method would be used. Educators who have a great deal of experience strive to design learning environments that are efficient and aligned with curriculum objectives. While the teachers could have implemented the old method without making any changes, they preferred to follow the revised curriculum. An experienced teacher discussed how to influence students' perceptions of language learning by incorporating cultural aspects into the teaching process. As the dominant person in the class, she felt that she had never attempted to facilitate language acquisition through her teaching methods. The findings of this study confirm the claim made by Zhang and Pelttari (2014) that teacher preparation programs should address language requirements and students' interaction with teachers. Furthermore, Jacoby and Lesaux (2019) assert that language acquisition occurs spontaneously and effortlessly within social contexts. Nevertheless, curriculum and teacher training are extremely important factors to take into account.

Several studies have examined teachers' cognition regarding language instruction (e.g., Bozorgian, et al., 2024; Burri, et al., 2017; England, 2017; Kochem, 2021) and, particularly, their cognition within specific contexts (e.g., Georgiou, 2019; Gong, et al., 2018; Lunn Brownlee, et al., 2017; Soysal, 2024). The change in curriculum may result in a shift in cognition in this area. Earlier studies have demonstrated that context influences teacher cognition (Burri et al., 2017; Crookes, 2015; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015), which is in agreement with the results of this study. It is assumed that teachers' cognition and identity are influenced by their curriculum context since the context has a significant influence on their cognition.

According to the findings of this study, educational materials and teachers' educational knowledge play a significant role in the administration of curriculums. Curriculum changes also provide insight into how teachers view language instruction and what their primary concerns are when it comes to teaching the subject. Karvonen, et al. (2018) suggest that an in-depth understanding of the topic is essential in order to fully realize the educational potential of the content. Further, extemporizing and cleverness are essential characteristics required for recognition of this ability. According to the findings of this study, curriculum awareness plays an important role in the cognitive abilities of teachers. "In other words, ... the teachers were still not conduits for the curriculum materials, but were full of agentive power to transform the 'de facto' written curriculum into the enacted one" (Li, & Harfitt, 2017, p.411). In accordance with the results of the study, curriculum design incorporates instructional materials that facilitate the teaching of languages. The importance of considering these factors when planning lessons cannot be overstated. Furthermore, participants emphasized the importance of interactivity between teachers and students during language instruction as well as self-improvement. It has been demonstrated that teachers actively interact with each other within their professional communities while maintaining their own identities at the same time (e.g., Liu, 2013; Mehdizadeh, et al., 2024). Furthermore, the complexity of becoming an expert motivates teachers to pursue further education and professional development. Their objective is to incorporate recent knowledge into future achievements (Dunn & Shriner, 1999). The results of this study indicate that teacher training has a significant impact on the professional development of instructors.

The effectiveness of instruction must be enhanced by the effective functioning of critical groups during curriculum reform. Vo and Mai Nguyen

(2010) demonstrated that friendships within critical groups are important because they allow people to share their professional perceptions as well as work collaboratively to advance their careers. Thus, the critical group facilitates the improvement of teachers' cognition. Additionally, it helps them to develop an acceptable sense of professionalism and association at the workplace. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were able to discuss the importance of online instruction and how they adapted to it. Yan and Wang (2022) also confirmed the importance of online instruction and revealed three stages of the transition for experienced teachers to online instruction, including preparing, adapting, and stabilizing their activities. Fisher (2003) also stressed the importance of IT literacy for teachers. Consequently, professional development courses and teacher training programs should be tailored to meet these needs. The findings of this study are meant to assist all readers in understanding curriculum reform in a more comprehensive manner and to assist in confronting the problems in a more effective manner.

6. Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the cognitive perspectives of TEFL teachers at the secondary level in Iran regarding curriculum reform. The research indicated that teachers viewed curriculum reform as largely successful, resulting in significant cognitive changes. These changes improved their language skills and adaptation to technology, which they sought to integrate into their classrooms despite challenges. The study also found that participants' experiences were influenced by various factors, including classroom practices, education, professional courses, personal thoughts, historical dimensions, and contextual factors. It is crucial to synchronize testing procedures with teaching methods as part of the curriculum reform process. The findings suggest that while the CLT subject is emphasized in the

Iranian secondary school curriculum, teachers often lack the necessary qualifications to teach it. Many teachers reported that their inadequate teaching skills hindered their ability to effectively teach the revised textbooks. In addressing this issue, they encountered conflicting and problematic views regarding teaching methods, improving student proficiency, and the effects and messages associated with textbooks. Based on the research findings, future curriculum reforms should include courses that provide teacher training in IT literacy, teaching skills, and language proficiency, ideally before the curriculum implementation. These findings could assist curriculum planners, educational managers, and the Ministry of Education in recognizing the significant role of teachers in the curriculum reform process. Future curriculum reforms should consider the pivotal role of teachers. Due to the limitations of the qualitative method, it is highly recommended to develop a teacher cognition questionnaire for future research and conduct a mixed-method study in subsequent studies.

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Appendix 1 Semi- structured Interview questions

1. What are your thoughts on curriculum reform and how it may affect your role as a teacher?
2. What changes in thought do you experience as a result of curriculum reform?
3. In what ways does your knowledge of curriculum reform affect the way you teach?
4. When it comes to teaching TEFL, what strategies do you use?
5. What are your thoughts regarding the changes you have observed in your teaching as a result of the curriculum reform?



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