

The Relationship between Iranian EFL Teachers' Critical Thinking and Their Teaching Styles

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Abstract

The present study is an attempt to investigate the possible relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' critical thinking and their teaching styles. To this end, a group of 15 EFL teachers teaching in different institutes in Farashband and Kazeroon were randomly recruited. In addition, for each individual teacher, about ten students (both males and females) were selected. To evaluate teachers' critical thinking ability, the "Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal" (CTA) (Form A) was employed. In addition, Lowman's Two-Dimensional Teaching Style Scale was also adopted to assess teachers' teaching styles. The normality distribution of variables was tested by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test (p -values were greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$) for all variables). Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was run to test the null hypothesis. For the correlation between Critical Thinking and Intellectual Excitement as well as Critical Thinking and Interpersonal Rapport, the Pearson's coefficient was 0.081 ($p = 0.521 > 0.05$) and 0.158 ($p = 0.213 > 0.05$) respectively. The findings revealed no significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' critical thinking and their teaching styles.

Keywords: EFL, Critical Thinking, Teaching Style, Watson-Glaser, Lowman

1. Introduction

Background of the Study

For the past few decades a lot of attention has been on teachers in mainstream education because of their crucial roles in teaching settings. Several scholars have addressed the significant roles of teachers in students' success (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2000; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005). Wright, Hom, and Sanders (1997) argue that more can be done to improve education by improving the efficiency of teachers than by any other single factor. According to Sarsain (1998) there are four questions that teachers must ask themselves to be more efficient: (a) How do you as the teacher learn? (b) How do you teach your students? (c) How do your students learn best? and (d) How do you accommodate the divers learning styles? Sarsain thinks if teachers can answer these four questions effectively, they can teach more effectively to all students.

According to Brown (2001) and Harmer (2001) the case is not true for the field of ELT, and unfortunately, EFL teachers, despite their significant role have not received enough attention in the mainstream. As a result, this research takes into account critical thinking and teaching styles in relation to EFL teachers.

Critical thinking (CT) is one of the controversial issues that is an interdisciplinary term. In recent years, CT has been a remarkable issue in the area of education. In the course of the final decade of the twentieth century, CT became the focus of attention in the field of language teaching. Teachers play a vital role in ELT and in the procedure of students' progress or lack of it. Teachers must consider that human beings live in a technical world today which is changing every second and that they have curious students who live in this ever-changing world. Consequently, EFL teachers themselves should be researchers; they should be familiar

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with new methods in teaching. They should not be passive characters and only performers of prescribed methods. Rather they should be active decision-makers who have various personalities. If they want to be efficient, they must be critical thinkers. According to Beyer (1985), CT is the ability and tendency to collect, evaluate, and use information efficiently. According to Ketabi et al. (2012) it seems that ELT teachers don't know what CT really means and whether or not it should be incorporated in the ELT curriculum. In order to equip students with CT skills, teachers themselves should be critical thinkers.

Post modernists (e.g.,; Prabhu, 1990; Richards, 1990, 2003; & Stern, 1991, as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006) are against modernists' ideas and practices. They empowered EFL teachers to reflect on their own methods in language teaching. In 1994 Kumaravadivelu introduced a new term "postmethod condition". His ideas are related to CT. CT has been an important issue in education for many years (Schneider, 2002). Halvorsen (2005) argues that CT is not a straightforward concept to define since it can mean quite different things²³ to different people in different contexts and cultures.

Thinking abilities can be regarded as the most remarkable and useful factor in an educational system (Khatib et. al., 2012). To this end, paying attention to CT is one of the fundamental phenomenon and dimensions (Hashemi et. al., 2010).

The second variable in this study is teaching style (TS). According to Razak et. al., (2007), although TS is treated well in mainstream education, its construct has not received enough attention in ELT settings. TS is one of the most vital elements that affects the development of teachers' professional skill (Akbari et.al., 2005). Brown (2007) states that teaching styles refer to the enduring choices within an individual and they are different; thus, the style used by a teacher is a necessary aspect to better perceive the teaching and learning process.

Kaplan and Kies (1995, p. 29, as cited in Fu, 2009) state that the term "teaching style" "consists of teachers' personal behavior and media used to transmit data to or receive it from the learner". Fu (2009) argues that TS emphasize teachers and their different approach to teaching. Variations in teaching styles may also affect areas like classroom arrangements, the organization and assessment activities, teacher interactions with students and pedagogical approaches.

TS may be different from teacher to teacher because they are highly affected by teachers' personal qualities, philosophy in life, educational philosophy, and attitude (Beyond Crossroads, 2006). According to Barnes and Augerrbere (2006) teacher quality can be linked to student achievement directly. Mc Combs and Miller (2007) say that there is not only one teaching method best for everyone and many teaching styles can be motivational. So, TS and the curriculum should be aware of the variety of learning styles preferences for all students. This study tries to find if there is any relationship between teachers' CT and their TS.

Statement of the Problem

Nowadays there's a rich body of research that reveals that teachers have the most significant impact on students' achievement and success (e.g. Akbari, Kiany, Imani Naeni, Karimi Alvar, 2008). The role of the teacher as the key factor in students' success has been accepted. Therefore, as teachers the more we know about teachers and their personality factors, the more we'll be effective teachers. Teachers' crucial role in EFL context and lack of research on the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' critical thinking and their teaching styles are good reasons for conducting this study. Thus this study tries to explore the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' critical thinking and their teaching styles.

This research may create a sense of urgency for ELT teachers to find suitable ways to help foreign or second language learners enhance their learning. The results of the present study may help all educational stakeholders in addressing the criticality and the teaching styles of teachers to meet the learning needs of students. Additionally, the outcomes of this research may employ as a template for instructional lead teachers and staff development coordinators in the continuous effort to improve teacher training.

Research Question

Regarding the problem of this study, the following research question is posed:

Q. Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' critical thinking and their teaching styles?

Research Hypothesis

With regard to the above-mentioned research question, the following directional hypothesis is formulated:

H0. There is no relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' critical thinking and their teaching styles.

Purpose of the Study

According to this key role played by teachers in educational context, there's an essential need to know and their personality factors. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, there has not been any research done in an Iranian EFL context to investigate the relations between teacher's CT and their TS. In particular, the researchers intend to provide a rich body of knowledge regarding these variables and investigate if there is any relationship between them. So, this study is to examine this relationship and shed light into this issue.

Significance of the Study

According to Brown (2001), although scholars have addressed the significant roles of teachers in students' success, the case is not true for the field of ELT, and unfortunately, EFL teachers, despite their significant role have not received enough attention in the mainstream. Both teachers' CT and their TS influence students learning and progress. As a result, this research takes into account these two variables. Being a critical thinker and being aware of teaching styles, teachers can be much more efficient. As a result of a lack of research exploring this domain, the need for conducting such piece of research is quite noticeable.

2. Review of Literature

Critical Thinking

CT has been interpreted in a number of different ways. There seems to be little agreement on exactly what critical thinking is (Allen, Rubenfeld, Scheffer, 2004, as cited in Fahim & Ahmadi, 2012). Siegel (1988) defines CT as "the educational cognate of rationality" (p. 32). According to Chance (1986, 2003) CT is the ability to analyze facts, generate and organize ideas, defend opinions, make comparisons, draw inferences, evaluate arguments and solve problems. According to Elder and Paul (1997, p.88) "critical thinking is best understood as the ability of thinkers to take charge of their own thinking. This requires that they develop sound criteria and standards for analyzing and assessing their own thinking and routinely use those criteria and standards to improve its quality". The father of modern critical thinking, Dewey (1933) defines CT from philosophical point of view whereby education wants to make conditions to cultivate habits or training of mind.

Critical Thinking in Education

The notion of CT has received much more attention recently (Ennis 1987; Tony, Christine, John & Jennifer, 2001, as cited in Zhou, Yan, Zhao, Liu & xing, 2012). According to Schafersman (1991, p.33) "critical thinking is an important and vital topic in modern education". Hale (2008) states that CT can enter every aspect of human life if it is substantively understood and engaged. He focused on the significance of CT in education and believes that CT and education are so inter-related to each other that cannot be separated. Students should be helped in participating in a type of thinking which is reflective, reasonable, and directed to what to believe or do (Ennis, 1962; as cited in Simpson, 2002).

According to Kealey et. al. (2005) learners as part of that education need to develop and learn to use CT skills to their academic studies practically. The growing body of literature in teacher education is the teachers' beliefs about CT (Torff, 2005 and Zohar & Dori, 2003). It is got from the scholars that beliefs about CT affect how teachers interact with learners and organize classroom practices (Fang, 1996; Puthman & Boroko, 2000, as cited in Zhou et al., 2012). Ashton (1998) suggests that the biggest problem for the schools' purpose regarding educating the individuals thinking critically is the teachers' lack of understanding and skills. So, the teaching programs must provide this for the teachers.

Overall, it can be claimed that CT plays a central role in academic instruction because it is what students need to progress both in an academic context and real-life situations. Consequently, it is vital to provide unambiguous training in the specific CT skills which students are expected to show proficiency in (Fahim, et. al. 2012).

Stapleton (2011) conducted a research on the attitudes towards CT and found that while the teachers had some conception of the term, it intended to be narrow. Moreover, they expressed strong support for the inclusion of CT in the curriculum, while conveying a desire for training how to teach it. The findings suggest that more exact definitions of critical thinking are needed in educational documents.

Patry (1996) states that in the classroom instructions, CT is not supported and taught. This shortcoming is the result of the following reasons:

1. The teachers are not educated in critical thinking.
2. The number of standard textbooks available on critical thinking is low.
3. The teachers have no time and other instructional resources to add critical thinking into daily instruction (Astleitner, 2002; Petri, 2002, as cited in Rafi, n.d.).

Critical Thinking in language learning and the Role of language Teachers

Recently the importance of facilitating CT skills in education has been widely acknowledged. More exactly, it is believed that the successful use of these skills in the TEFL have a central role. According to Vdovina and Gaibisso (2013) CT is related to quality thinking and, if adequately developed, helps learners to communicate with others, acquire knowledge, deal with ideas, beliefs, and attitudes more skillfully. Language plays a crucial role in all these areas. According to these scholars, learning a foreign language requires more thinking. This is because languages are determined culturally. As the cultures differ, so do languages.

According to Kabilan (2000), it requires asking learners questions and listening to learners' questions. This is a practice which forces and challenges learners to think creatively and critically to match to critical attitude to the world. All language learners must engage in CT regardless of their proficiency level, because it is an ongoing process. CT includes the use of information, experience, and world knowledge in ways which let L2 learners look for alternatives, make inferences, ask questions, and solve problems, thereby showing understanding in different complex ways (Liaw, 2007). The responsibility of language teachers is to help their students acquire critical thinking skills while learning the language (Shirkhani & Fahim, 2011).

Teachers are the ones who play a significant role in assisting students to be critical thinkers. Mimbs (2005) and Halvorsen (2005) assert that today CT is a significant skill in life that teachers should combine some of its main elements into their classes. Unfortunately, the role of teacher as a critical thinker has been ignored. Ketabi et al.(2012) claim that it seems that ELT teachers don't have a true understanding of what critical thinking really means and whether or not it should be involved in ELT curriculum.

Ghaemi and Taherian (2011) investigated the relationship between EFL teachers' CT and their teaching success. To this end, 70 Iranian EFL teachers were chosen to answer the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Questionnaire and their students were asked to assess their teachers' performance through answering a questionnaire that is called Characteristics of Successful ELT Teachers. The findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between EFL teacher's CT and their teaching success. Similarly, Khatib and Alizadeh

(2012) explored the use of literary texts in reading comprehension classes to train students' CT. They found that it is an effective instructional strategy in improving students' CT.

Teaching Style Literature

Different scholars define TS differently. Therefore, there's not a single definition relating to it. According to Rahimi and Asadollahi (2012) TS is related to all the techniques of teaching and activities and approaches which a teacher employs when he is teaching a particular subject in the class. Peacock (2001) asserts that second language TS is "natural, habitual and preferred ways of teaching new information and skills in the classroom." According to Heimlich & Norland (1994, p. 34) TS refers to "a predilection toward teaching behavior and teaching beliefs". Conti (1990, as cited in Lucas, 2005) observes teachers come to classes with their life experiences, beliefs, and expectations and they are influenced and shaped by them. He argues that a teacher doesn't randomly select his TS and doesn't constantly change his style. Instead, his style is linked to his educational philosophy.

In this study the researcher will use the instrument developed by Lowman (1995). This instrument is a rigorously developed and frequently referenced two-dimensional model for characterizing the range of teaching styles of different teachers (Larson, 2007). Lowman (1995) developed it through an ethnographic analysis of over five hundred nominations for teaching awards. The model is presented as a two-dimensional matrix which is used to provide a global perspective on teaching that is framed within the concepts of Intellectual Excitement (IE) and Interpersonal Rapport (IR). Intellectual Excitement focuses on the content to be learned- the clarity of what is being presented and how it is being presented. Interpersonal Rapport focuses on the learner- classroom psychology and awareness of the interpersonal phenomena.

Dunn and Dunn (1979, as cited in Chang, 2010) mentioned that teachers teaching styles match to their learning styles. Teachers tend to teach students based on their personal experiences; how they themselves learn the best and present learning strategies that have promoted their own learning.

A lot of researchers conveyed that teachers should match their TS to students' learning styles in order to get learning goals and the level of learning style-teaching style congruency is extremely related to academic performance (Dunn & Dunn, 1975; Vaughn & Baker, 2008; Amir & Jelas, 2010; Naimie et al., 2010, as cited in Heidari, Nourmahammadi & nowrouzi, 2012). Moreover, Willing (1988) asserts that when teaching and learning are matched, learning, attitudes and motivation will be improved. A mismatch is said to take place when students' preferred styles do not agree with the teachers' preferred teaching styles.

According to Dreyer and Walt (1996), it is critical for all teachers to understand, reflect, and respond to different features that make students distinctive as learners and to be critical of their own learning and teaching preferences. Therefore, teachers should create the best teaching-learning settings possible for their learners. They should recognize and emphasize the reality that each person is unique, and should therefore be assisted to the greatest extent possible to promote their own capacities through the optimal utilization of their unique learning styles.

Good teachers consider when and how they change their TS in regard with the situations. Efficient teachers use a variety of styles, depending on the setting. As Thornton (2013) maintains, most efficient teachers change their TS based on the nature of the subject matter, the phase of the course, and other factors. By doing so, they help and inspire learners to do their best at all times during the semester. According to Thornton, using an appropriate mix of teaching styles help students learn, grow, and become more autonomous. Too much dependence on one style causes students to lose interest and only rely on the teacher. There is no one best teaching style. Efficient teachers use a variety of TS, and they know how and when to choose the most appropriate one for specific situation. Thornton (2013) categorizes TS as:

- Direct- tell students what to do
- Discuss- ask questions and listen
- Delegate- empower students

Exploring whether or not there is any relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' self-efficacy beliefs

and their TS, Heidari et al. (2012) conducted a study and concluded that there's a significant relationship between two variables. Peacock (2001) investigated EFL teachers' TS and learners' learning styles at a Hong Kong University. The results indicated a mismatch and suggested that EFL teachers should teach in a balanced style in order to accommodate different learning styles.

Both teacher CT and their TS influence students learning. Being a critical thinker and being aware of teaching styles, teacher can be efficient. As a result of a lack of research exploring the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' CT and their TS, this study is to be conducted.

3. Methodology

Participants

A group of 15 EFL teachers teaching in different institutes in Farashband and Kazeroon were randomly recruited for the purpose of this study. In addition, for each individual teacher, two clusters of students (both males and females) were selected. In addition, the researcher recruited about 300 EFL learners as well. As the selection was random, and as it was beyond the scope of this study, teachers' level of proficiency, their gender or years of experience were not controlled; in other words, they were heterogeneous in these variables.

Instruments

To conduct the present study, two instruments were employed:

a. Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (W-GCTA)

Firstly, to evaluate teachers' CT ability, the "Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal" (CTA) (Form A) was employed. This test involves 80 items and includes 5 subtests, namely drawing inferences, recognizing assumptions, making deductions, interpreting evidence, and evaluating arguments, each comprising 16 items with two to five alternatives. The appraisal is not subject-specific and can be completed in 60 minutes. The test-retest reliability of the original version of this critical thinking appraisal ($r=0.81$) has been reported by Watson and Glaser (1980, as cited in Hashemi & Zbihi, 2012). Many researchers also employed this appraisal (e.g., Birjandi & Bagherkazemi, 2012; Fahim et al., 2010= 85%, as cited in Khatib & nazari, 2012) in Iran. Since it is designed for native speakers, to avoid any misunderstanding, the translated version of this test, translated by Faravani (2006) was used. The reliability coefficient of the Persian adaptation has been estimated by Cornbach's Alpha ($\alpha= 0.85$) in Faravani (2006) and Raza & Hanif (2013). According to Hajjarian (2008, as cited in Ghanizadeh & Moafian, 2011) and Ali & Raza (2015) the appraisal enjoys all areas of face, content, criteria and construction validity. Scoring was facilitated through the availability of an answer key, yielding a composite score for the five subsections of the appraisal from 0 to 80.

b. Lowman's Two-Dimensional Teaching Style

Lowman's Two-Dimensional Teaching Style Scale was employed to assess teachers' TS. This instrument is a dependable measure developed by Joseph Lowman (1995). To evaluate teachers' TS, this scale was used by exploring their perceptions and preferences with respect to the concepts of Intellectual Excitement (IE) and Interpersonal Rapport (IR). The instruments employ a 5-point Likert format beginning with 1 representing that 0% to 10% of the time the item applies to the respondents and ending with 5 showing that 95% to 100% of the time the item is true about them. It consists of 22 items, eleven of which measure teachers' intellectual excitement and the rest measure teachers' interpersonal rapport. Reliability of the present measure was computed through Cronbach's Alpha ($r= .78$)

Data Collection and Analysis

The two instruments mentioned above were prepared. The study was conducted in several institutes in

Farashband and Kazeroon in over a period of two months. The participants were asked to take the questionnaires home, fill them in and submit them to the researcher within a week or so. They were thanked in advance. In order to receive reliable data, the purpose of the filling out the questionnaires was explained to the participants and they were asked to complete the questionnaires carefully and honestly since the answers would be kept confidential. They were informed that there was no need to write their names. Besides, their questionnaires were coded numerically.

First, the normality distribution of variables was tested by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test. As reported in table 1 below, p -values were greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$) for all variables, which indicates the distribution was normal for these variables; as a result, parametric statistical tests were applicable.

Table 1: Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality

Statistics Variables	Z	Sig. (p)
Critical Thinking	0.831	0.38
Intellectual Excitement	0.725	0.35
Interpersonal Rapport	0.134	0.12

To investigate the hypothesis of the study, i.e., there is no significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' CT skills and their TS; the correlation between these variables was found by the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation. The results are reported in table 2 below.

Table 2: The Pearson Correlation test for correlations between Critical Thinking, Intellectual Excitement and Interpersonal Rapport

Statistics Variables	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (p)	N
Critical Thinking and Intellectual Excitement	0.081	0.521	15
Critical Thinking and Interpersonal Rapport	0.158	0.213	15

For correlation between CT and Intellectual Excitement, the Pearson's coefficient found to be 0.081, which indicates a very weak correlation ($p=0.521 > 0.05$). Similarly, as reported in the table, the correlation for CT and Interpersonal Rapport is 0.158, which indicates an insignificant relationship ($p=0.213 > 0.05$). Thus, based on the findings of the current study, it can safely be concluded that there is no significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' CT and their teaching styles. As a result, the null hypothesis of the study is supported.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, although Iranian EFL teachers are critical thinkers, from the view

point of their students, there is no relationship between teachers' critical thinking and their intellectual excitement. The finding is in line with those of Behnam and Bayazidi (2013) as well as Ketabi et al. (2012) who claim EFL teachers don't have a true understanding of what critical thinking really means.

In contrast, Ghaemi and Taherian (2011) found a significant relationship between EFL teachers' CT and their teaching success. In another research by Birjandi and Bagherkazemi (2010), the findings of the study indicate a statistically significant relationship between EFL teachers' CT and their professional success. However, research on CT and TS is disputable and additional research is needed to determine how to increase and improve teachers' success in their teaching.

Write more about conclusion.

It's essential for educators to aid teachers in developing their critical thinking skills and in deciding which teaching style is appropriate for the right situation by holding workshop for them or providing some session and asking them to come and have discussion related to critical thinking and teaching styles. Teachers can improve critical thinking by practice. The research on critical thinking and teaching styles is disputable. Additional research is needed to determine how to increase and improve teachers' success in their teaching.

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