

Investigating the Differences between Male and Female Iranian EFL Professors' Critical Thinking

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Abstract – According to Sener (2015), teachers play a crucial role in the learners' development and improvement of learning conditions, which are the main objectives of every educational system. However, the main focus of education is concerned with selecting and preparing proficient and successful teachers (Vegas & Umansky, 2005). This study aimed to explore the differences between male and female Iranian EFL professors regarding their critical thinking ability and their professional success. To this end, 60 university professors were asked to fill out Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal. The students that were 100 male and female university students were also required to answer the questions of Characteristics of Successful EFL Teachers questionnaire. The results demonstrated that male and female Iranian EFL professors did not differ significantly from each other concerning their critical thinking ability and professional success. The results highlighted the need to improve critical thinking ability of language professors, which would inevitably leads to their pedagogical success.

Keywords: critical thinking, professional success, successful EFL teachers

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most frequent questions arising about pedagogical success is who a successful teacher is. A successful teacher can be characterized as an educator who helps the learners to learn better in various ways. Also, an effective and successful teacher should go beyond transferring information and should apply different ranges of key roles to play in the education process. A successful teacher should act as a guide, counselor, and analyst (Harden & Crosby, 2000).

Teachers are proposed to make outstanding changes in learners related to their educational achievements. Due to the importance of this issue, teachers' success has been the center of various researchers' concern and attention. To be fruitful teachers, teachers should not only improve the quality of teaching, but also they should focus on the attributes and perceptions (Pishghadam, Ghorbani Nejad & Shayesteh, 2012).

On the other side, Gojkov, Stojanović, and Rajić (2015) pointed out that for more than two centuries, European system of studies has been trying to prepare students for being independent, scientific learners, and critical thinkers. Based on the system, the transfer of knowledge is concerned with the transfer of thinking competence, and scientific work makes the core of higher education teaching. Today, it is clear that critical thinking is not a unique competence; it is rather mastering of a technique. In other words, critical thinking means going beyond the currents of thinking and examining or re-examining something which has already been accepted. Also, critical thinking is concerned with personal development, which involves having critical attitude in learning about reality, evaluating, searching for possible solutions, verifying, checking and so on.

Teaching for critical thinking is an important objective of modern education since it provides students with the ability to challenge social affairs in the modern growing world. To improve such competency, learners have to learn skills and abilities related to judging information, evaluating, and discussing rather than getting and absorbing information involved in the textbooks. These skills, which are related to critical thinking ability, are not only vital for students to perform well in an educational context, but also necessary in social and interpersonal contexts, in which important decisions are to be made individually and cautiously (Ku, 2009).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Significance of Critical Thinking

Generally speaking, critical thinking is a universal skill, which every individual may be engaged in it depending on the decisions or judgments have to be made. In fact, these skills can be learned and taught. As a result, some individuals are more proficient in applying these skills than others by exploiting direct or indirect instructions (Ijaiya, Alabi & Fasasi, 2011).

The concept of critical thinking training in education is traced to early 80s. Ijaiya, Alabi, and Fasasi (2011) focused on the urgent request for teaching of critical thinking skills in higher and teacher education. They mentioned that in the context that teachers are poorly skilled, educational reforms cannot succeed, promotion and development are not probable, and educational system cannot contribute to the modern development of science and technology. Thus, he suggested teaching of the critical language skill and intentionally including the skills in all teacher education programs (Ijaiya, Alabi & Fasasi, 2011).

Sriarunrasmee, Suwannathachote, and Dachakupt (2015) affirmed the importance of critical thinking skills by introducing learning model consisting of five components: "1) content and activities, 2) virtual field trip medias including video clips, pictures, animations, online diaries, worksheets, activity sheets, and games 3) experts in field trips resources, 4) learning management system for virtual field trips, and 5) assessment and evaluation" (p.1724). Assessment and evaluation is regarded as one of the components of learning model here. So, it can be concluded that critical thinking ability is an obligatory part of learning.

Vanicheva, Kah, and Ponidelko (2015) discussed that these days it is widely accepted that education is more than just teaching and learning knowledge, but it involves learners'

emotions and perceptions. Emotive features such as feelings, emotional responses, and intuitions, are fundamental to critical thinking skills in daily life. Therefore, teaching thinking critically becomes an integral element of education in the 21st century. Furthermore, each of the approaches of modern education emphasizes teaching and learning skills like creativity, critical thinking, productivity and problem solving that depart from traditional notions of education. On the other hand, without a critical approach and understanding, an individual will not be able to make rational decisions and judgments. In this vein, Vanicheva, Kah, and Ponidelko (2015) tried to pay attention to the critical thinking aspect of teaching English as a foreign language. They found that critical thinking needs to be practiced in both native and foreign languages.

Averkiewa, Chayka and Glushkov (2015) claimed that are common characteristics among individuals who have high level of critical thinking ability. Firstly, they can clearly interpret facts, data, terms, questions, and diagrams. Secondly, they are able to perceive serious arguments and “for” and “against” notions. Thirdly, they can easily analyze and estimate main points of view on an issue. Finally, they are able to make distinctive and valid conclusions referring to the objective data and evidence independently and open-mindedly. Consequently, the level of critical thinking development relies on the students’ accomplishment of the above-mentioned actions. In other words, in case of some difficulties or inability about each of the factors, average or low level of critical thinking development will be occurred.

2.2. Teacher's Pedagogical Success

It is widely accepted that technology development has had great positive effects upon teaching and learning a language; however, Zandi, Thang, and Krish (2014) declared that in Iran, inclusion of technology into education is not taken in to account seriously. In fact, Iranian teachers may not believe that technology can help them improve the quality of teaching and learning. As a result of not using and benefiting technology, they possibly will lack understanding the impacts of technology on improving both teachers and students’ achievements. In this regard, Zandi, Thang, and Krish (2014) carried out a study to investigate the impacts of technology on teachers' professional development, teaching practices, and students' learning.

Worawuth, Kanokorn, Udomporn, Chadchawarn, and Wilawan (2014) mentioned that carrying out researches on human development is essential and requires organizations to achieve the wanted objectives. They also added that teacher development is one of the important topics of these researches. Hence, they conducted a research on 13 teachers and conclude the following results. To be successful and developed, teachers should utilize an effective teaching process through preparation, implementation an appropriate teaching role, practicality rather than memorization, and cooperation with students. Teachers also have to be up to date and aware of the changes in technology. Teaching knowledge should help students in many aspects for example to apply their knowledge in daily life, solve problems in everyday life, and develop their achievements. Therefore, the teachers need to have skills, integrate learning activities, know and use different teaching methods, focus on learners' learning process and development, and use various strategies in line with the reform of learning.

In a recent study, Veisi, Azizifar, Gowhary, and Jamalinesari (2015) conducted a research to investigate the relationship between teacher empowerment and teacher self-efficacy. To answer the question of study, the researchers selected 60 Iranian English EFL teachers and asked them to fill out the School Participant Empowerment Scale (SPES) and the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) questionnaires to measure teachers' self-efficacy and empowerment regarding their age, gender, and teaching experience backgrounds. The findings showed that there was a positive relationship between teacher empowerment and teacher self-efficacy. In addition, there was no significance difference between teachers' empowerment, their age, and their teaching experience while there was a positive relationship between teacher empowerment and their gender. Female teachers revealed high level of self-efficacy than males. One implication of this study is that educational administrators should recognize the expert and master teachers and encourage them for more improvement and promotion. Furthermore, teachers ought not to carry out prescribed orders, but they have to think, give their own points of view, make decisions, and design innovations related to their classroom and students' learning. Another implication of this study is that teachers should be provided by different strategies and practices to be more autonomous in order to train autonomous learners.

In addition, Trif, and Popecu (2013) proposed that the pre-service teacher education programs should emphasize the teachers' professional development. In fact, pre-service teachers must be aware of all components of professional development such as initial training, induction courses, in-service training courses, and continuous professional development in schools. Teachers should be taught some innovative processes of teaching and learning, evaluation and monitoring of teaching and learning performance, engagement in the process of professional and personal development, and designing and implementing a special curriculum. Furthermore, explicit training of teachers is recommended since it makes them aware of the elements that cause success or failure in an educational context.

Taub (2015) held the idea to add some reforms in education while many reforms have been already introduced and implemented in the educational system, and none of them were successful in changing the teachers' status and development. He suggested that the main objectives of the new reforms should empower teachers' status, change the structure of the teachers' work, develop teaching staffs professionally, and improve employment conditions and salaries. He, also, pointed out that the focus of educational reforms should be on the improvement of the teachers' perception about the teaching profession and their motivation for teaching. In other words, the main purpose of the reforms is making a change in traditional perceptions.

In spite of the importance of the relationship between teachers' critical thinking and professional success, the differences between male and female teachers regarding this issue have been taken for granted. Hence, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

Q1: Is there any significant difference between male and female Iranian EFL teachers regarding their critical thinking ability?

Q2: Is there any significant difference between male and female Iranian EFL teachers regarding their pedagogical success?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

Two groups of participants were chosen to meet the aims of this study. The first group was a 60 EFL university teachers (females=30, males=30), who were selected randomly from Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Sabzevar Tarbiat Moalem University, Semnan University, and Tabaran University. The second group of participants was 100 university students, who were BA and MA students majoring at English Literature, TEFL, or Translation. 55 participants were females and the rest were males.

3.2. Instrumentation

3.2.1. *Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (WGCTA)*

This questionnaire was used to explore the university teachers' critical thinking abilities. It consisted of 80 items, which measure 5 dimensions of critical thinking, which are inference, recognition of assumptions, deduction, interpretation, and evaluation of arguments. It includes 16 likert scaled questions, measuring inference; 16 two scaled questions, assessing recognition of assumptions; 32 two scaled questions, evaluating deduction and interpretation; and 16 other likert scaled questions, measuring evaluation of arguments. The questionnaire was in English. The reliability index of the questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha is 0.85, which is acceptable.

3.2.2. *Characteristics of Successful EFL Teachers*

To investigate teachers' success in this study, the Characteristics of Successful EFL Teachers questionnaire, designed by Moafian and Pishghadam (2008) was used. It consisted of 47 items, revealing the characteristics of successful EFL teachers by revealing students' comments and opinions about their teachers. The items are followed by a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. This questionnaire was administered to the students to gather information about the characteristics of successful EFL teachers. The questionnaire was in English. The reliability index of the questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha is 0.90, which is high.

3.3. Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedure

First of all, two groups of participants consisted of EFL university teachers and their students were selected from different universities based on availability and feasibility criteria. 60 male and female teachers were answered the questions of Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal. Moreover, the Characteristics of Successful EFL Teachers questionnaire was given to 100 university students, who were required to fill out the questionnaire based on their own ideas and perceptions about their EFL teachers' success.

The data gathered by the questionnaires were analyzed through SPSS 16th software. To answer the questions of this study, independent sample t-test was used to compare the male and female professors' scores related to critical thinking and characteristics of successful EFL teachers.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Research Question 1

To probe the first research question, regarding the significant difference between male and female Iranian EFL teachers in terms of their critical thinking ability, descriptive statistics were used. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Critical Thinking

| | Gender | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|-------------------|--------|----|---------|----------------|-----------------|
| Critical thinking | Male | 30 | 63.7727 | 6.45816 | 1.37688 |
| | Female | 30 | 62.2174 | 5.94640 | 1.23991 |

Table 1 presented the descriptive statistics of male and female university teachers' critical thinking. The findings showed that that the mean score of the male teachers (63.77) is higher than the female teachers (62.21). Hence, for comparing the mean scores of the two groups, an independent sample t-test was used. The results are shown in table 2.

Table 2: Comparison between male and female professors' critical thinking

| CT | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|-------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|-------|
| | F | Sig. | T | Df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Equal variances assumed | .428 | .516 | .841 | 58 | .405 | 1.555 | 1.849 | -2.17 | 5.28 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | .83 | 42.31 | .406 | 1.55 | 1.852 | -2.18 | 5.29 |

The results show that there is not any significant difference between the mean scores of the male and female university teachers' critical thinking (T= .841, sig = .405). Consequently, if there are some differences between male and female teachers' critical thinking, it cannot be easily generalized to the whole population. Therefore, it can be stated that male and female professors have very similar critical thinking ability.

4.2. Research Question 2:

To probe the second research question, regarding the significant difference between male and female Iranian EFL teachers in terms of their pedagogical success, descriptive statistics were

used. The descriptive statistics related to the results of Characteristics of Successful EFL Teachers are shown in the following in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Characteristics of Successful EFL Teachers

| | Gender | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---------------------|--------|----|---------|----------------|-----------------|
| Pedagogical success | male | 30 | 64.2174 | 4.15557 | .86650 |
| | female | 30 | 66.5000 | 5.45763 | 1.16357 |

The data obtained from the table showed that the mean score of the female teachers (66.5) is higher than the male teachers (64.21). Hence, for comparing the mean scores of the two groups, an independent sample t-test was used to determine whether there is a significant difference between male and female professors regarding their pedagogical success. Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4: Comparison between male and female professors' teacher success

| TS | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|-------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|-------|
| | F | Sig. | T | Df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Equal variances assumed | 1.96 | .168 | 1.58 | 98 | .121 | 2.282 | 1.442 | -.625 | 5.190 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | 1.573 | 39.23 | .124 | 2.282 | 1.450 | -.651 | 5.216 |

The results of the independent sample t-test shows that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of the male and female professors' pedagogical success (T= 1.58, sig = .121). As Table 2 revealed, if there are some insignificant differences between male and female professors' pedagogical success, it cannot be easily generalized to the whole population. Therefore, it can be deduced that male and female professors are very similar regarding their pedagogical success.

The findings of this study, reporting that there is no significance difference between male and female university teachers' pedagogical success, affirmed Pishghadam, Shapoori, and Shayesteh's findings (2011). They investigated the relationship between teachers' success and their teaching experience, gender, and degree. The results of the study exhibited that with the exception of gender, there was a relationship between teacher success, teaching experience and degree. In other words, male and female teachers were not significantly different from each other regarding their pedagogical success.

Another finding of this study revealed that there is no significance difference between male and female teachers' critical thinking ability. It rejected the findings obtained by

Demirhan and Köklükaya (2014), who indicated that there was a statically significant difference between male and female prospective science teachers' critical thinking disposition scores. They concluded that male prospective teachers performed highly better than female teachers in critical thinking measurement.

5. CONCLUSION

According to Sener (2015), teachers play a crucial role in the learners' development and improvement of learning conditions. Potolea and Toma (2015) claimed that professional development has come to existence from the time that teaching career become one of the most common concerns of education. Professional development is defined here as the combination of systematic activities to prepare teachers for their career. These activities include initial training, induction courses, in-service training, and continuous professional development.

Based on the findings of this study, it was deduced that male and female Iranian EFL professors did not differ significantly from each other concerning their critical thinking ability. Although descriptive results showed that male teachers benefit from higher critical thinking ability in comparison to females, this difference was not significant. After comparing the results related to male and female Iranian EFL professors regarding their pedagogical success, it become apparent that male and female Iranian EFL professors were similar regarding their teaching success.

The results of this study have some implications. The findings can help language teachers to reflect on their current way of teaching, try to find the main reasons of their success and failure, and reconsider their teaching method through self-monitoring and self-evaluation. Kirmizi, CerenSaygi, and Yurdakal (2015) believed that critical thinking is the skill that ought to be trained from the opening stage of education. Qing, Jing, and Yan (2010) pointed out that critical thinking is an important issue in higher education, particularly in teacher education. It should be put at the center of attention and in the focus of teachers. Hence, through this study, teachers become aware of the roles of critical thinking ability and its effectiveness on their teaching. They consequently assist their students to benefit from these skills and abilities and use them properly.

Teacher trainers and syllabus designers should be cognizant of the compelling need to arrange some in service courses for EFL teachers to make acquainted them with critical thinking skills. Language courses should be organized in a way to help teachers develop their teaching achievements and supply them with information on the characteristics of critical thinking.

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