

## The Relationship between Iranian EFL Teachers' Reflection and Critical Pedagogy

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### Abstract

The present study was designed to find the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' reflection and critical pedagogy. To this end, 158 EFL teachers from different high schools and institutes in Shiraz and Marvdasht took part in this study. The researcher utilized two instruments including Critical Pedagogy Questionnaire, and English Language Teacher Reflective Inventory (ELTRI). By running Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regression analyses, the findings showed that there was a statistically significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' reflection and critical pedagogy. Moreover, critical pedagogy was able to predict the variance in teachers' reflection. Besides, the other independent variable, teaching experience and gender, did not have any role in the variance observed in the teachers' reflection.

**Keywords:** critical pedagogy, teacher reflective, teaching experience, gender

### INTRODUCTION

Education has an important role in developing and socializing a country. Therefore; researchers show their interest in investigating the subjects which are related to it. These subjects can be teachers, students, principals, books and so on. One of the subjects, which most of researchers show their interest in it, is teachers. The important role of teachers is obvious in education. Researchers try to do research about teachers to help them better teach in classroom. According to Davies (1995) they require to know how to solve problems that may happen within the classroom when they teach in the classroom.

Researches have also indicated that teacher education programs do not prepare teachers effectively to educate future generations of students and because of that they have been criticized (Darling-Hammond, 2006). So it is important for teacher education programs to emphasize the subject matter and also pedagogical preparation that teachers receive and they try to create alternative pedagogies for teacher education that link theory

(Lampert, 2010; Zeichner, 2006). Therefore, in teacher education programs, reflective teaching education has been introduced as an appropriate approach (Ottesen, 2007; Tinning, 2006).

There are many definition of reflection. For example, Dewey defines reflection as action based on "the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it" (p. 9). Boud, Koegh and Walker (1985, p. 19) defined reflection as "a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciation."

Reflection can happen in human's life. For example, when a person makes a mistake in her/his life, he /she should think about it to understand why it happened. By doing this he/ she can prevent to happen it again. So reflection can be beneficial in human's life. For teachers, reflection involves critical thinking about the past or current experiences which may happen in the classroom. Nunez Pardo and Tellez Tellez (2015, p.55) believed that "reflection guides teachers to self-dialogue and inquiry that lead the decision-making process within teaching-learning contexts."

As it is mentioned above education is so important for all countries, so the process of teaching and learning is so important. Teachers are supposed the only authority in the classroom in traditional pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2003); their basic responsibility of teachers is to convey content knowledge from their mind to students' mind (Freire, 1972). In such condition there is not an emotional and socially interaction between teacher and students. The role of students is passive one and there is not any social relationship between teacher and students. Most of researchers and educators question these methods and try to find alternative method for example Freire (1972). Freire called traditional methods as banking methods; instead he introduced problem solving method which requires students' engagement in the activities and students' role is active.

After questioning the traditional methods and by emerging the new theories in education, the theory of critical pedagogy was emerged as an alternative way of thinking of education (Kincheloe, 2004). Critical pedagogy tries to remove teacher-centered and text-centered methods and, by focusing on students' interests, tries to motivate students to learn.

Pennycook (1999, p. 33) defines critical pedagogy as "seeks to understand and critique the historical and sociopolitical context of schooling and to develop pedagogical practices that aim not only to change the nature of schooling, but also the wider society." Critical pedagogy's attempt is to focus on students' interest and instead of teacher- center and text-center (Mahmoodarabi & Khodabakhsh, 2015, p.100). In other word, critical pedagogy tries to empower learners in the education setting. McArthur (2010, p.493) believes that "critical pedagogy with its strong agenda for change is grounded on the belief that education and society are intrinsically inter-related; and because of that, the aim of education is for the improvement of social justice for all." So all the students in the critical pedagogy should be creative and also should be independent.

Because of these reasons, the present study aimed at revealing Iranian EFL teachers' reflection and critical pedagogy. Furthermore, it tried to investigate how well critical pedagogy, gender and years of teaching experience predict reflective teaching. The stimulant behind carrying out the present study was the fact that research considering the impact of critical pedagogy on teachers' reflection. Moreover, the relationship between reflective teaching, critical pedagogy, gender and years of teaching experience has been reported by no studies.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Reflection guides teachers to self-dialogue and questions which leads the decision-making process in teaching-learning contexts. Most of the people use reflection in their lives. The concept of reflection has been used in a variety of different teacher education programs in order to help teachers clarifying their ideas about their own teaching practices (Schön, 1983; Clarke, 1994; Allen and Casbergue, 1997; Conway, 2001; Bean and Stevens, 2002). Edwards, Gilroy & Hartley (2002) presumed that in the literature on teaching and teacher education, the concept of teacher reflection has been used for several decades and has been given many meanings.

Some notions of reflection in the process of professional development are reflective practice, inquiry-oriented teacher education, research-in-action, teacher as decision-maker, teacher as professional, and teacher as problem solver (Larrivee and Cooper, 2006; Taggart and Wilson, 2005; Zeichner and Liston, 1996). Calderhead (1989) argues that these varied terms of reflective teaching indicate a vast number of conceptual variations with their alternative implications for the organization and the design of teacher education courses. In addition, he argues that the concept of reflective teaching has been defined in various ways based on the context of the writers or researcher's professional education or beliefs about teaching and teacher education.

John Dewey (1933, 1938) was the first educator who introduced the concept of reflection and reflective teaching. There are many definition of reflection. For example, John Dewey noted reflection is an "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and further conclusions to which it tends" (p. 9). Williams (1998) sees reflection as "a theory of metacognition which directs skilled behavior during professional activity or assists in the deliberative processes which occur during problem solving" (p. 31). Johari (2006) noted that "reflective teaching means looking at what you do in the classroom, thinking about why you do it, and thinking about if it works a process of self-observation and self-evaluation. By collecting information about what goes on in our classroom, and by analyzing and evaluating it, we identify and explore our own practices and underlying beliefs. Reflective teaching is significant and it has a high potential of bringing about desirable improvements and changes in the teachers' instructions albeit learners performance. Reflective teaching is a means of professional growth which begins in our classroom" (as cited in Petalcorin Sanopao, 2016, p.362).

Schon (1983) divided reflection into two parts: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. According to Schon reflection-in-action is the reflection that happens at the same

time of teaching process; in another word it is the inner conversation of the teacher when he or she faces a problem in the class, and he or she can get some experiences from it. On the other hand, reflection-on-action is the reflection which happens after the classroom he defined it as "teachers' thoughtful considerations and retrospective analysis of their performance in order to gain knowledge from experience". Day (2001, p. 2) contested that "reflection involves the participant in a critique for practice, the values which are implicit in that practice, the personal, social, institutional and broad policy contexts in which practice take place, and the implications of these for improvement of that practice."

Through reflection teachers can explore themselves. Teachers can understand themselves, their learners and their practices when they do systematic research and question into themselves. Miller (1990) mentioned that "learning becomes a major process in teaching when the teacher becomes reflective, focused and conscious in teaching, when he or she starts inquiring to understand the processes going on around him or her, and when he or she takes himself or herself into account as the object of inquiry" (p.45). Bartlett (1990 as cited in Gnawali, 2008, p.70) presents a five step reflective cycle: mapping, informing, contesting, appraising and acting. At the mapping step, teachers observe and collect evidences about their own teaching. In this stage, teachers can use diary, journals, audio or video about the event in the classroom. By doing this they take the first step in reflecting on and about practice. In informing step, the teachers map their images in relation to teaching and try to look for meaning behind the maps. This stage can be better done if teachers share their note with their colleagues. The teachers try to find the underlying reasons and background for the behavior in the contesting. Contesting means look for inconsistencies and contradictions in one's own thinking and doing. In the appraising step, teachers establish the contradictions in principles and behavior. By doing this, the teachers go on to find out alternative ways of their teaching which are consistent to their understanding. The teachers act in the way envisioned in the appraising in the acting stage. If this acting does not bring about expected results, the second cycle of reflective teaching begins.

With respect to "Critical Pedagogy", Reagan (2010) noted that critical pedagogy is a theoretical framework, a political and ideological effort that attempts to enquire about current views and practices present in schools Pennycook (1999, p. 33) defines critical pedagogy as "seeks to understand and critique the historical and sociopolitical context of schooling and to develop pedagogical practices that aim not only to change the nature of schooling, but also the wider society." McLaren (2003, p.75) describes critical pedagogy as "a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation-state." Akbari (2008) rightly defines critical pedagogy as "connecting word to world"(as cited in Norooziasiam & Soozandehfar, 2011, p.1241).

English is an international language; therefore, learning English has been increased. The purpose of pedagogical practices in any educational system is to increase learning. Language teaching profession faced a vivid critical shift over the last two decades. This critical shift can likely be considered as one of the last academic principles in the field of

humanities and social sciences to go critic (Kumaravadivelu 2006). According to him, this critical turn is just concerned with the recognition of language as an ideology, not just as a system and connecting the word to the world. It is also concerned with developing the educational space to the cultural, social, and political dynamics of language use and the realization that language learning and teaching are more than learning and teaching language. This critical turn is also about constructing the cultural forms and knowledge which gives meaning to teachers' and learners' lived experiences. Teachers and the planners of English Language Teaching try to introduce better ways of learning English to increase learners' awareness. Critical pedagogy can develop learners' awareness.

The life of critical pedagogy started from the work of key thinkers from the Frankfurt School in 1923. One of the prominent figures whose ideas and views greatly influenced the critical theoretical tradition developed by Frankfurt School was Marx. Eisner (2002) noted that Marx believed that all people needed to work toward a socialized economy, within which each individual received according to his or her needs and contributed according to his or her ability. Marx thought that the essential societal problem was socio-economic inequality. Indeed, Marx discussed that social justice is dependent upon economic conditions. The "Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt School" established in 1923, adopted a less unified social criticism, while still embracing some of Marx's views as they related to schools and education.

Marx, Horkheimer, Theodor, Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse (1923) were the first critical theorists of Frankfurt school, who adopted and accepted some of Marx's views related to schools and education. Some scholars such as Freire (1970), Giroux (1992), Luke (1988), and McLaren (1989) applied critical pedagogy in their researches. These scholars concentrated their efforts on the realization and examining the roles which schools have in conveying specified messages about political, economic and social life. Kincheloe (2004) notes that these scholars believed that critical pedagogy will allow teachers to understand the possibilities of democratic social values in their classrooms. McLaren (2000) mentions that among these scholars, the Latin American scholar, Paulo Freire, is the pioneer of the use of critical pedagogy.

Freire's book (1970), *pedagogy of the oppressed*, was the result of his personal experiences with the poor villagers in Brazil, enforced him to develop ideas that served to modify and improve the lives of the marginalized. Palmer and Emmons (2004) point that Freire's book inspired radicals who then entered the teaching English profession and remained as a point of common reference for critical pedagogues.

Freire believed that schools would be the barriers for the poor to educate, therefore; he tried to find strategies for students to interfere in this process. According to Freire's idea (1970), this process was called laboratory action or Praxis. Accordingly, people are needed to engage in Praxis which combines theory, action, and reflection to social change and justice. The concepts such as "the banking theory of education", "conscientization", "dialogical method", "and transformative education" are the key concepts which introduced by Freire. In the "banking theory of education", knowledge and predetermined facts are transferred from the teacher to the students, the teacher is the authority and the students are the passive receivers who do not have any chance of

challenging, questioning, and reconstructing. The transformative approach is in contrast to a banking approach to education. For Freire, transformative learning is emancipatory and liberating at both a personal and social level. So, the transformative approach is an alternative to banking approach.

Cimer, Cimer, and Vekli (2013) tried to explain the importance of reflection and reflective teaching for teachers in terms of their contribution to ensure effective teaching in detail based on the literature on effective teaching and reflection. As a result, they claimed that teachers who did not reflect upon their practices might be terribly ineffective because they may not know why they did what they have been doing. However, it has also been realized that reflection and reflective skills may not be the only factors to become effective teachers. In other words, reflective teachers might not be necessarily good teachers. Effective teaching involved more than reflection. Therefore, reflection cannot be the only condition for effective teaching.

Faghihi and Anani Sarab (2016) examined the English language teachers' perception of their level of reflection and the way their perceptions were realized in practice. They adopted a multi-method design, therefore; the study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, data were elicited from 60 EFL teachers using a questionnaire. In the second phase, six teachers were randomly selected from among the surveyed teachers and their teaching practices were observed. The results revealed a relatively low level of reflection with the teachers under study tending to rely more on their own rationality in teaching. It was argued that for teachers to develop desirable levels of pedagogic integrity, they should involve themselves more in exploring their students' learning styles and critical aspects of the teaching context.

Paudel (2014) conducted a study to find the Nepali English language teachers' attitudes regarding critical pedagogy in ELT, focusing on how they employ critical pedagogy in their classrooms. The findings were all the teachers were in favor of critical pedagogy in most cases in ELT. Even if all the teachers were notionally appeared in favor of practicing critical pedagogy in most of the aspects that were asked to them, quite contrary to it, observation results of the teachers' classes revealed that they did not, in any real sense, embrace critical pedagogy in their teaching practice.

Shin and Crookes (2005) explored the possibilities for EFL critical pedagogy in Korea (a two-part case study). Their study reported an investigation carried out in two Korean EFL classrooms, being small-scale interventions within existing classrooms or institutional structure. The focus was on establishing critical dialogue between students and teachers, providing opportunities for learners to develop English language abilities while engaging in critical discussion of topics. Data collected included audio and videotapes of classrooms, oral and written interviews with students and teachers, student class evaluations, and associated documents. Findings (based on qualitative analyses of data) suggested that students were by no means resistant to this kind of material or class, and showed the ability to handle and generate critical dialogue in English.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were posed to guide the study:

- Is there any significant relationship between teaching reflection and critical pedagogy?
- How well the independent variables of critical pedagogy, gender and years of teaching experience predict teacher reflection? Which is the best predictor?

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

The participants of the study included 158 EFL teachers who worked in Marvdasht and Shiraz institutions and schools in Iran. 69 of the participants were male and 89 of them were female whose age ranged from 20 to 50. The sampling method was availability non-probability sampling or convenient sampling.

### **Instruments**

Two scales were used as the instruments of the study: English Language Teacher Reflective Inventory (ELTRI) (Akbari, Behzadpoor, and Dadvand, 2010), and Critical Pedagogy Questionnaire (Mahmoodarabi and Khodabakhsh, 2015). The ELTRI consists of 29 items on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire items covered five different categories: Practical, Cognitive, Learner, Meta-Cognitive and Critical. Akbari, Behzadpoor, and Dadvand (2010) validated the questionnaire on a sample of 300 teachers using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. The validation process enabled them to reduce the original 42 items into 29 items. The reliability of the modified version was measured and enjoys a high reliability index of 0.82 according to Cronbach alpha by Akbari et al. (2010). The present study showed a reliability of 0.92.

The Critical Pedagogy Questionnaire was used to elicit EFL teachers' attitudes towards the application of critical pedagogy in the Iranian educational context. It was prepared by Mahmoodarabi and Khodabakhsh (2015). The reliability was measured and enjoys a high reliability index of 0.82 according to Cronbach alpha. It contained a total of 17 items on a 5-point Likert scale. The reliability of 0.81 was obtained for the current study.

### **Data collection procedures**

This study was conducted to find out whether there was any significant relationship between teaching reflection and critical pedagogy. To reach the goal of the study, 200 teachers working in different institutes, schools and in Shiraz and Marvdasht were asked to complete the two questionnaires. The total questionnaires which were filled in and returned were 158. The two questionnaires were completed simultaneously after the researcher provided the participants with brief information on the objectives of the research and how to complete the questionnaire. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaire in 30 minutes at most.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 24. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum) were obtained for the variables.

Pearson correlation was also used to investigate the relationship between teaching reflection and critical pedagogy. Finally, multiple regression analysis was conducted to find out how well the independent variables of research, means critical pedagogy, gender and years of teaching experience predicted teacher reflection and to reveal which was the best predictor.

## RESULTS

Before addressing the finding related to the research questions, some descriptive data of the study are provided.

Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics of the variables such as mean, standard deviation, and minimum and maximum score. The mean score of participants in teachers' reflection was  $M= 109.05$ ,  $SD= 15.33$ ,  $Min= 66$ , and  $Max= 133$ . Besides, the mean score of participants in critical pedagogy was  $M= 68.48$ ,  $SD= 10.24$ ,  $Min= 27$ , and  $Max= 116$ .

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics for Variables

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reflection	158	66	133	109.0506	15.33565
Pedagogy	158	27	116	68.4810	10.24398

### The First Research Question

The first research question concerned identifying the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' reflection and critical pedagogy. The researcher considered the Pearson correlation between Iranian EFL teachers' reflection and critical pedagogy. Table 2 represents the results, and explanations associated with the results are offered below.

**Table 2.** Pearson Correlation between Teachers' Reflection and Critical Pedagogy

		PEDAGOGY	REFLECTION
PEDAGOGY	Pearson Correlation	1	.528**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	158	158
REFLECTION	Pearson Correlation	.528**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	158	158

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As presented in Table 2, the correlation coefficient was 0.528 and the  $\rho$ -value (.000) which was less than 0.01 indicating that there was a statistically significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' reflection and critical pedagogy.

### The Second Research Question

The second research question attempted to show how well the independent variables of research, means critical pedagogy, gender and years of teaching experience predicted teacher reflection.



**Table 3.** Model summary of the multiple regression analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.530 <sup>a</sup>	.281	.267	13.13104

As the findings in Table 3 show, the obtained R Square is .28 indicating that 28% of the variation in teachers' reflection scores is explained by the combination of the independent variables of the study, namely, gender, teaching experience, and critical pedagogy.

In addition, in order to see if the independent variables had been able to significantly predict the variance in the dependent variable, the researcher checked the ANOVA Table.

**Table 4.** ANOVA for the effect of independent variables on teachers' reflection

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	10370.247	3	3456.749	20.048	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	26553.348	154	172.424		
Total	36923.595	157			

Table 4 demonstrated that the model reached statistical significance ( $F = 20.048$ ,  $\rho < .0005$ ), claiming that the variation explained by the model was not due to chance.

Then, in order to know which of the variables, gender, teaching experience, or critical pedagogy contributed to the prediction of the teachers' reflection, the Coefficients table was scrutinized.

**Table 5.** Coefficients for the degree of prediction of independent variables

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	55.022	7.933		6.936	.000
gender	-1.036	2.133	-.034	-.486	.628
teaching experience	.328	.723	.031	.453	.651
pedagogy	.797	.103	.533	7.730	.000

As the results in Table 5 shows, just critical pedagogy reveals a significant relationship (less than .05) to the prediction of the dependent variable. As shown in this Table, the Beta value for critical pedagogy was 0.53, indicating that one standard deviation unit change in teachers' critical pedagogy could lead to 0.53 units of change in the teachers' reflection.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study aimed at investigating any probable relationship between teachers' reflection, and critical pedagogy. Furthermore, it aimed to show which one, gender, teaching experience, and critical pedagogy, were a more powerful predictor of teachers' reflection.

To achieve such goals, 158 English foreign language teachers were considered to participate in this study. The sample consisted of both female and male teachers and the

sampling method was availability non-probability sampling or convenient sampling. 69 of the participants were male and 89 of them were female whose age ranged from 20 to 50. English Language Teacher Reflective Inventory (ELTRI) developed by Akbari, Behzadpoor, and Dadvand (2010) was used to measure teachers' reflection. Besides, the Critical Pedagogy Questionnaire developed by Mahmoodarabi and Khodabakhsh (2015) was utilized to elicit EFL teachers' attitudes towards the application of critical pedagogy in the Iranian educational context.

Based on the findings of this study, there was a statistically significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' reflection and critical pedagogy. Therefore, the first research hypothesis denoting that there was not any significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' reflection and critical pedagogy is rejected.

In fact, Iranian EFL teachers' critical pedagogy could be affected by the level or the degree of their reflection. However, it should be mentioned that there are some limitations imposed on Iranian teachers in the educational context of Iran. To the best knowledge of researcher, there were no similar studies.

In accordance with the findings of this study, among independent variables of research (gender, teaching experience, critical pedagogy), just critical pedagogy could predict had significance level below 0.05, stating that this variable had been able to predict the variance in teachers' reflection. Besides, the other two independent variables, gender and teaching experience, did not have any role in the variance observed in the teachers' reflection.

On the based on teaching experience it is in the line with Khoshsima, Shirnejad, Farokhipour, and Rezaei (2016) who shown that there was no significant difference among different groups of experienced teachers in practicing critical dimension of reflective teaching. The finding of this study, based on gender, is in line with Aghaei and Jadidi (2013) who found that there was not a significant difference between male and female groups regarding reflectivity questionnaire.

The result of this study could be helpful for EFL teachers, school administrators, teacher trainers, and Ministry of Education to identify the level of teachers' reflection in the school and strengthen the current level. Regarding EFL teachers, the findings of this study can assist them to broaden their horizons and to open their eyes to the fact that learning a language is not restricted to learning language skills, but other angles and issues should be noticed as well.

Moreover, the finding of this research can be insightful for the teachers and practitioners as well as researchers and scholars undertaking research in the second language pedagogy. Language schools, language institutes, schools and universities may enjoy the finding of the present study in designing syllabi and evaluation. Educators can benefit from the results in that they can adapt them to their own practices in the classroom, their own lesson plans and even the syllabi and course examination.

Furthermore, according to the obtained results, it is suggested that teacher trainers through training classes, motivating teachers, and using brochures provide the necessary context for these types of behaviors. Besides, in order to raise the level of reflection in

teachers, teacher trainers should build trust with their teachers. Showing sincerity in speech and action, supporting teachers, timely and accurate informing teachers are among the factors through which teacher trainers can help the creation of trust in schools.

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