

# **The Relationship among EFL Teachers' Critical Thinking, Self-Esteem, and Classroom Management**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship among EFL teachers' critical thinking, self-esteem, and classroom management. To carry out the study, 60 EFL teachers who teach in different public and private schools in Gorgan, Iran participated in the study. Honey's (2004) Critical Thinking Questionnaire containing 30 items was used to measure teachers' critical thinking. Regarding self-esteem, the Coopersmith Questionnaire containing 58 items was employed. Two sessions of each teacher's classes were observed by two raters who used Murdoch's (2000) checklist to score each teacher's classroom management and then their inter-rater reliability was established. To find out the relationship among three variables of this study, the Pearson correlation coefficient was applied in order to identify the relationship among EFL teachers' critical thinking, self-esteem, and classroom management. Furthermore, a subsequent regression analysis demonstrated that teachers' critical thinking and self-esteem was a significant predictor of their classroom management.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Critical thinking; self-esteem; classroom management.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Classroom management (CM) is one of the most essential skills for a teacher to become an effective classroom teacher. Teachers who possess the ability to manage their classrooms are able to create an environment where learning is the focus (Burden, 2000). Similarly, Ayers (2001) considers good classroom management as an essential first step to be a good teacher. In an EFL classroom, a teacher controls many factors, such as classroom physical environment, student mood and behavior, the amount of communication between teacher and students which in turn will affect not only students' motivation for English language learning but also their environment and behavior.

Teacher plays the most important role in classroom management. Foutz (2005, p. 3) states, "Effective classroom management begins with the teacher. The teacher must plan well so that the students will be able to meet their learning and behavior objectives". Mayeski (2005, p. 1) argued that creating a safe and orderly environment in the classroom is a survival skill for teachers and optimizes the learning environment for students. In this regard the role of the teacher as leader is also very crucial. Referring to this point, Ramsey (1999, p.15) stated that the role of an effective leader is to create a climate that welcomes, supports, and rewards innovative thinking and problem solving.

Another concept of teacher success in foreign and second language teaching programs in L2 teachers is critical thinking (CT) ability. Thinking in general and critical thinking in particular could be beneficial in all teaching domain and critical thinking is foundational to the effective teaching of any subject, and it must be at heart of any professional development program. In order to foster CT in students, it is necessary first to nurture teachers' CT (Elder & Paul, 1994).

The intellectual roots of CT are as old as its etymology, which goes back to the teaching practice and vision of Socrates, 2500 years ago (Fisher, 2003). Socrates started the importance of asking deep questions that make us think before accepting ideas as worthy of belief. His method of questioning is now known as 'Socratic

questioning' and is the best known critical thinking teaching strategy. Socrates and his followers emphasized that things are often very different from what they appear to be and that only a trained mind can find out the deeper realities.

Johnson and Holubec (1998) opine that "Teachers who are good questioners motivate their students , stimulate high level thinking, encourage creativity, ,and enhance self concept in their students and themselves" (P.4). EFL teachers with more advanced CT capabilities are pedagogically successful. Schafersman (1991) asserts that all education must involve not only 'what to think', but also 'how to think'. Furthermore, Individuals try to produce solutions for issues when they encounter with different situations (Choi, 2005). Ku (2009) states that "besides the ability to engage in cognitive skills, a critical thinker must also have a strong intention to recognize the importance of good thinking and have the initiative to seek better judgment"(P.71).King (2003) states that teaching is a complex activity that is influenced by the multitudinous facets of teacher quality and teacher quality is a crucial predictor of student performance.

Considering the above mentioned importance of CT, SE and CM, this study was intended to find the relationship among the three variables to shed more lights on their consideration in CM.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The present study sought to answer to the following questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between EFL teachers' critical thinking and their self-esteem?
2. Is there any significant relationship between EFL teachers' critical thinking and their CM?
3. Is there any significant relationship between EFL teachers' self-esteem and their CM?
4. Is there any difference between predictability of critical thinking and self-esteem of EFL teachers about their CM?

### **PARTICIPANTS**

To answer the research question, 60 female Iranian EFL teachers from public schools and private language institutes in Gorgan, Iran took part in this study. Some of the teachers held a Master's degree and the rest had Bachelor's degree in English Literature, English Teaching, and English Translation and some teachers pass English schools' entrance exam and TTC courses which made them qualified to teach. The teachers ranged in age from 21 to 50, and vary in their ELT experience from 6 months to 30 years.

### **INSTRUMENTATION**

Three different instruments were chosen to aid the gathering data. Honey's (2004) Critical Thinking Questionnaire and Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Questionnaire, and Murdoch's (2000) Checklist were used in this study which are described below.

### **CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONNAIRE**

The Critical Thinking Questionnaire intends to explore what a person might or might not do when thinking critically about a subject. Developed by Honey (2000), the questionnaire aims at evaluating the three main skills of comprehension, analysis, and evaluation of the participants. It is a Likert-type questionnaire with 30 items that is a reliable and valid (highlighted by the literature), and practical (easy to administer, score, and interpret) which allow researchers to investigate the teachers' ability in note-taking, summarizing, questioning, paraphrasing, researching, inferencing, discussing, classifying, outlining, comparing and contrasting, distinguishing, synthesizing, inductive and deductive reasoning.

### **SELF-ESTEEM QUESTIONNAIRE**

Another measuring instrument which was used in this study is the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (1967) to measure the teachers' self-esteem. Peterson and Austin, (as cited in Zhiansarsangi, 1994) believe that, "It is the best

known and one of the most widely used instruments to measure self-esteem. It is reliable and stable, and there exists an impressive amount of information bearing on its construct validity" (p. 396). The Coopersmith self-esteem inventory contains 58 items: eight of which are lie items: (6, 13, 20, 27, 34, 41, 48, 55); items number (2, 4, 5, 10, 14, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24, 28, 29, 30, 32, 36, 45, 47, 57) will be given one mark if they are marked by "yes", and they receive no mark if they are answered by "no". The rest of the items are marked in a reverse order. The desirable score on this test ranges from 25 to 50. The teachers choose one of the choices of "like me" and "unlike me" that each is in the place of "yes" and "no" answer. Each of the 58 items will be scored on 2 points, ranging from 0 to 1 point, which shows the most positive attitudes and the most negative attitudes. The maximum score for this questionnaire is 50 and the minimum is 0.

### **MURDOCH'S (2000) CHECKLIST**

The instrument used for evaluating classroom management, is Murdoch's (2000) checklist. This checklist is selected according to Brown (2001) it is prepared for observing language teachers. The complete checklist contains 54 items each follow by four values from 1 to 4 (4= excellent, 3= above average, 2= average, 1= unsatisfactory) and N/A meaning not applicable. The 30 questions which are related to classroom management in this test were taken into consideration. The total score is calculated based on the mean of values given to the teachers by two raters (one of them the researcher, and the other an official supervising observer of public school with more than 5 years of experience of observing classes)..

### **PROCEDURE**

To conduct this research, a briefing session was arranged for the participants who are teachers in Gorgan Public Schools. Each teacher was shortly introduced to the purpose of the research and was provided with some brief oral instruction on how to complete the form. To receive the reliable data, the researcher explained the purpose of administering the questionnaires and observations, and assured the participants that the result of the study would be kept confidential and would be used exclusively by the researcher for her study. By doing this the researcher tried to enhance the teachers' willingness to participate in the study.

In this study, observation was important for collecting data. To increase the internal validity of the observation results, the researcher asked the supervisor who had enough experience of observing classes to participate in this process. The researcher and the supervisor used Murdoch's checklist that is a kind of standard instrument for classroom observation as described above.

Next, the participants were given the Honey's Critical Thinking Questionnaire to fill out that included 30 items and the recommended time is 20 minutes. The participants were asked to rate the frequency of each category they use on a 5-points Likert scale. Therefore, the participants' scores were calculated by adding the numbers of the scores. The scores ranged within 30 to 150.

Then, Coopersmith Self-Esteem Questionnaire was administered to the same subjects. Each of the 55 items are scored on 2 points, ranging from 0 and 1 points which show the most positive attitudes and the most negative attitudes. The maximum score for this questionnaire is 50 and the minimum is 0. Therefore, having collected the data, the researcher set off on data analysis to answer the research questions as to whether EFL teachers' CT ability, self-esteem and classroom management are related with one another, and whether their CT and SE could significantly predict their classroom management.

### **DESIGN**

It should be mentioned that this study was a descriptive, ex post facto one, as the researcher did not manipulate the variables, and in order to answer the research questions and to test the hypotheses, a correlational design was employed. The aim of the study is to investigate the relationship among teachers' CT, self-esteem, and classroom management. Teachers' CT and teachers' self-esteem are the predictor variables or independent variables, and the predicted variable is teachers' classroom management.

## RESULTS

As the assumptions were met, the parametric Pearson correlation was used to calculate the correlation between the two variables. The following table shows the result of the calculations:

**Table1.** *Correlation between CT and SE*

		Critical thinking	Self-esteem	Classroom management
Critical thinking	Pearson Correlation	1	.482**	.481**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	60	60	60
Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	.482**	1	.559**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	60	60	60
Classroom management	Pearson Correlation	.481**	.559**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	60	60	60

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

As displayed in the above table, the strength of correlation between critical thinking and self-esteem turned out to be .482 and positive. This correlation is shown to be significant ( $p=.000<.05$ ). Therefore, the first hypothesis is rejected. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) is 0.23. Expressed in percentage, 23 percent of the variance in critical thinking is shared by self-esteem. Also, the correlation between critical thinking and classroom management scores turned out to be positive and significant ( $r=.481$ ,  $p=.000<.05$ ) which leads to the rejection of the second hypothesis. The coefficient of determination of 0.23, again, shows that critical thinking scores can explain 23 percent of the variance in classroom management scores. Then correlation between self-esteem and classroom management scores also turned out to be significant and positive ( $r=.559$ ,  $p=.000<.05$ ). Hence the third hypothesis is rejected. Furthermore it is shown that the two variables have 31 percent of variance in common. To test the fourth hypothesis, the predictability of the two predictors (CT and SE) about the predicted (classroom management), a multiple regression analysis was needed. Primarily, the assumptions were checked as reported below: Multicollinearity was met as there was a significant correlation between each of the independent variables and the dependent variable as shown above. Also it was shown that the correlation between the two independent variables (predictors) was less than .7. Therefore, the first condition was met.

**Table2.** *Residuals Statistics*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	70.7613	105.7973	87.5667	8.89509	60
Std. Predicted Value	-1.889	2.050	.000	1.000	60
Standard Error of Predicted Value	1.521	3.991	2.570	.588	60
Adjusted Predicted Value	71.5076	106.0671	87.6135	8.92476	60
Residual	-28.69468	26.04053	.00000	11.58352	60
Std. Residual	-2.435	2.210	.000	.983	60
Stud. Residual	-2.538	2.266	-.002	1.010	60
Deleted Residual	-31.16831	27.39676	-.04687	12.24049	60
Stud. Deleted Residual	-2.671	2.355	.000	1.029	60
Mahal. Distance	.000	5.783	1.967	1.309	60
Cook's Distance	.000	.185	.019	.034	60
Centered Leverage Value	.000	.098	.033	.022	60

a. Dependent Variable: Classroom management

As all the Mahal. Distance values, shown in the above table, are less than the critical value of 13.82, it is concluded that there was no outlier.

The following tables show the result of the regression analysis:

**Table3. Model Summary<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.609 <sup>a</sup>	.371	.349	11.78499

a. Predictors: (Constant), Self-esteem, Critical thinking  
b. Dependent Variable: Classroom management

The above table depicts that 37.1 percent (R square expressed in percentage) of the variation in the dependent variable can be explained by the model (the two independent variables). The following table assesses the statistical significance of this result:

**Table4. ANOVA<sup>b</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4668.232	2	2334.116	16.806	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	7916.501	57	138.886		
	Total	12584.733	59			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Self-esteem, Critical thinking  
b. Dependent Variable: Classroom management

The above table shows that the model is significant (F=16.80. p=.000<.05) implying that the predictability of one or both of the independent variables is statistically significant. The following table shows the predictability power of each independent variable.

**Table5. Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics		
		B	Std. Error				Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF	
1	(Constant)	26.301	11.846		2.220	.030	2.579	50.023						
	Critical thinking	.293	.127	.276	2.303	.025	.038	.548	.481	.292	.242	.768	1.302	
	Self-esteem	.887	.250	.426	3.553	.001	.387	1.387	.559	.426	.373	.768	1.302	

a. Dependent Variable: Classroom management

As exhibited in the above table, both independent variables can significantly predict the dependent variable as the Beta sig values of both variables turned out to be less than .05 (.025 and .001). By comparing the Standardized Beta values corresponding to the two independent variables, it can be concluded that self-esteem makes a stronger contribution to explaining the dependent variable (.426 vs. .276). Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is rejected based on the observation that self-esteem was a stronger predictor about the classroom management of the teachers, although both of the predictors were shown to be able to predict the classroom management scores significantly.

## DISCUSSION

This finding is in parallel with Birjandi and Bagherkazemi (2010) and Ghaemi and Taherian (2011) studies, in which a significant relationship was found between Iranian EFL teachers' critical thinking and successful teaching. Although there was a relatively high correlation between critical thinking scores and effective teaching scores, among the three components of critical thinking only two, namely analysis that is the extent to which the teachers break a subject down into its component parts and scrutinize each part, and evaluation which is the extent to which one considers or assesses a topic in order to judge its value, quality, quantity, importance, condition, reliability, validity and logic correlated significantly with perception of effective teaching. However, comprehension as the extent to which one ensures that s/he has a good understanding of an issue did not correlate significantly with perception of effective teaching. This may be due to the fact that culturally, Iranians seem to be more judging and analyzing rather than comprehending and understanding. Also, an effective teacher is supposed to be context sensitive and this sensitivity can come directly from the analysis and evaluation of the situation, the learners, etc.

Besides, the results indicated a positive correlation between EFL teachers' self-esteem and their classroom management. This significant correlation is not unexpected since the notion of self-esteem influences different aspects of people's life and teaching is not an exception. This finding is in line with previous theoretical and empirical studies. Ghanizadeh and Moafian (2009) have also shown that teacher self-esteem is one of the most important determinant variable consistently related to positive and effective teaching and student learning outcomes. Definitely, teachers' knowledge in this regard, leads to more fruitful learners' achievements.

It goes without saying that the atmosphere of a class is one of the effective factors which positively influences the outcomes of teaching. Giving room for students' engagement can be quite motivating for the students and it can give them a sense of autonomy; therefore, it can lead to better learning which is supposed to be the outcome of effective teaching. Also, managing the class is among those aspects necessary in education; so, the relationship is not far from expectation. Moreover, the way a teacher introduces a subject is of prime importance to the understanding and internalizing of that subject matter. So, there is no surprise that instructional strategies correlated with effective teaching.

## CONCLUSION

The research provided evidence that there was a significant relationship between EFL teachers' critical thinking, self-esteem and classroom management. In simple terms, the higher the critical thinking and self-esteem of teachers, the more classroom management.

In addition to demonstrating that there was a positive significant correlation between the three aforementioned constructs, a predictability estimation was also calculated between SE and CT about classroom management of the teachers. Hence, the results indicated that teachers' critical thinking and self-esteem was a significant predictor of the teachers' classroom management, but self-esteem turned out to be a stronger predictor of the teachers' classroom management. A teacher as a key element in the classroom not only teaches new subject matter but also by managing a classroom effectively can provide a climate for students to flourish fully and humanely. The aforementioned findings of this study have shown that EFL teachers with higher critical thinking and self-esteem are more successful in their classroom management which could be interpreted this way: they give respect to get respect from their students as they respect themselves.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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