

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IRAQI EFL TEACHERS' CRITICAL THINKING AND THE QUALITY OF THEIR PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

In the face of too much incoming information and too many people trying to convince us in today's world, the ability to think critically gains an ever greater saliency as a prime goal of student and teacher education. The present study aimed at substantiating the relationship between EFL teachers' critical thinking ability and their performance. For the purpose of the study, the sample included 53 Iraqi EFL teachers all of them were chosen from among different schools in Baghdad. Two instruments were used including Honey's Critical Thinking Questionnaire, and Job performance questionnaire. The questionnaires were scored and analyzed by SPSS software. As the design of the study, it was ex post fact correlation alone; therefore, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was run in order to determine the relationship between two variables. The findings indicated significant, positive correlations between teachers' critical thinking ability and their performance.

Keywords: Critical Thinking ability, Quality of Job Performance, EFL teachers, Critical Thinking skills.

1. INTRODUCTION

It goes without saying that teachers are an ultimate key, if not the key, to successful education and that they play a vital role in bringing about educational reform (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Suwantee, 1995). This is true of education in general and language education in particular. Therefore, it is not surprising that an extensive range of language education research has addressed the characteristic features of successful language teachers, and the ways language teacher education programs can induce the enhancement of such features. Some of these studies have sought to yield a broader conception of teacher success than one which only accords significance to professional qualities as language proficiency and managing skills. In an attempt to keep in line with developments in psychology and cognitive science, this upsurge in language education research has investigated the impact of language teachers' various cognitive, affective and personality characteristics on their teaching practices and professional success. Among those investigated, one can refer to EFL teachers' multiple intelligences (Pishghadam & Moafian, 2007), emotional intelligence (Hashemi, 2008), and self-efficacy (Moafian & Ghanizadeh, 2009). Following this line of inquiry, the ability of L2 instructors to think critically is another relevant arena in which to study the concept of teacher success in foreign and second language teaching programs.

Critical thinking appears to be a solution in an ever-changing environment where nearly nothing can be taken on faith for lengthy periods of time. Critical thinking, defined as the ability to discipline and control one's thoughts in order to process information more easily, effectively, and efficiently (Paul, 1985; cited in Longman, Atkinson, & Breeden, 1997), is essential for students to succeed not only in educational systems, but also in future workplaces, social, and interpersonal contexts.

Students must develop abilities in judging information, evaluating alternative facts, and arguing with reasonable arguments in addition to absorbing knowledge (Ku, 2009). As a result, educators must place a high priority on improving students' thinking abilities. Mainstream critical thinking research has concentrated on how to build this capacity in learners (e.g., Dantas-Whitney, 2002; Faravani, 2006), but has failed to look into how it applies to instructors' success and the efficiency of teacher education programs. What appears to be self-evident is that in order to prepare students for the types of thinking that would be demanded of them, teachers must be able to think in such terms themselves. The questions of how teachable critical thinking is and how much contemporary EFL/ESL teacher education programs depend on the idea implicitly or overtly remain unanswered. Critical thinking is also a way of thinking about any subject, substance, or situation in which the thinker enhances the quality of his or her thinking by analyzing, appraising, and reconstructing it with competence. Furthermore, critical thinking is self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-correcting thinking. One of the other relevant criteria in becoming an effective leader. This paper attempts to investigate the relationship between teachers' critical thinking and their job performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.2. Critical Thinking

2.2.1. Definition

An overwhelming number of definitions of critical thinking can be found in the literature, all culminating in Mizner's famous sentence: "I respect faith, but doubt is what gets you an education." (cited in Vaughn, 2008). Paul (1985, p. 37) defines critical thinking as "learning how to ask and answer questions of analysis, synthesis and evaluation". Similarly, Brookfield (1987, p. 229) claims that critical thinking entails two interconnected processes: "identifying and disputing assumptions, as well as imagining and investigating others". Critical thinking, according to Pithers and Soden (2000), entails a variety of skills such as identifying a problem and the assumptions that underpin it, focusing the problem, analyzing, understanding, and applying inferences, inductive and deductive logic, and judging the validity and reliability of assumptions and data sources. Critical thinking, according to Siegel (1988), is "the educational cognate of rationality," and a critical thinker is "appropriately moved by arguments" (p. 32). Longman, Atkinson, and Breeden (1997), following Paul (1990), utilize the acronym MIND to represent the components of the critical thinking process. They state that a critical thinker can begin at any place in the circle, but he must cover all of the elements. Ku (2009) maintains the evolution of the

conceptualization of critical thinking from a focus with cognition to one that has both a cognitive and a dispositional aspect, taking a more holistic perspective of critical thinking. Simply put, “a critical thinker must have a strong intention to realize the importance of excellent thinking and the initiative to seek improved judgment” in addition to the ability to participate in cognitive processes (p. 71). When considering these and other definitions of the term, a number of characteristics that define a critical thinker emerge:

- A critical thinker is someone who recognizes the value of good thinking,
- identifies difficulties, and concentrates on relevant themes and issues,
- distinguishes between valid and flawed conclusions, and
- suspends judgments and decisions when there isn't enough evidence.
- is conscious that one's understanding is limited and that there are degrees of belief;
- distinguishes between facts, opinions, and assumptions;
- looks out for authoritarian influences and specious arguments;
- anticipates the implications of alternative actions.

2.2.2. Critical thinking, language education, and language educators

One of the prevailing concepts in educational reform today is critical thinking. A vast majority of educators now recognize the importance of critical thinking in education, particularly higher education. According to Schafersman (1991), every education must include not only "what to think," but also "how to think". He worries, however, that much education has been focused on conveying and learning knowledge and facts, and that the subtlety of the idea of critical thinking has obviated students' and educators' comprehension of its importance. However, with the growing number of fields, the need of learning and teaching approaches for acquiring, understanding, and evaluating information emerges. According to Atkinson (1997), the concept of critical thinking has already made an impact in the field of language teaching. He is suspicious, however, that it can be taken at face value, and feels that language educators should carefully assess its applicability to the profession. He states four reasons for this speculation:

- (a) Critical thinking may be more on the order of a non-overt social practice than a well-defined and teachable pedagogical set of behaviors;
- (b) critical thinking can be and has been criticized for its exclusive and reductive character;
- (c) teaching thinking to nonnative speakers may be fraught with cultural problems; and,
- (d) once having been taught, thinking skills do not appear to transfer effectively beyond their narrow contexts of instruction.

Atkinson's argument Davidson (1998) reciprocates by referring to what Siegel (1989) calls “self-reflective justificatory strategy” meaning that even to make a case against critical thinking, one has to presuppose its validity, i.e. to be a critical thinker. As far as the cultural load of critical thinking is concerned, Davidson (1998) cites Ennis (1996) as saying that the problem for

educators is not whether critical thinking has value for people from non-Western cultures, but how and when critical thinking should be drawn upon. He continues: Part of the English teacher's task is to prepare learners to interact with native speakers who value explicit comment, intelligent criticism, and intellectual assertion. We, as L2 teachers, have a good reason to introduce higher level pupils to components of critical thinking, perhaps even more than the L1 teacher. If we don't, our students may struggle when faced with the need to think critically, especially in an academic atmosphere (p.121).

However, Davidson acknowledges that critical thinking must be explicitly defined and culturally adapted in order to be useful in TESOL. A treatment group of Japanese college students getting extra education in critical thinking abilities dramatically outperformed a control group receiving just content-based, intense academic English instruction in a pilot research employing a critical thinking essay test (Davidson & Dunham, 1997). Critical thinking can be taught to ESL/EFL students, according to the findings. A word of caution about the confusion between critical thinking in TESOL and critical approaches to TESOL; Pennycook (1999) clearly summarizes the difference: Critical thinking is generally an apolitical approach to developing a sort of questioning attitude in students; critical approaches to TESOL have to do with a political understanding of the subject (p.341). Given the large number of research indicating that critical thinking can be taught, the question is how to execute a critical thinking-based education and what credentials and duties language teachers should play in this process. Lin (1999) takes advantage of teachers' critical thinking and teaching abilities, demonstrating in her research that certain methods of teaching English in Hong Kong can either perpetuate or transform class-based inequality. Similarly, Ruminski and Hanks (1995) argue that before beginning to teach and evaluate, educators should have a thorough understanding of critical thinking.

Oster (1989), in a similar vein, praises the Western educational system for being open to a diversity of viewpoints and stressing innovation and analysis over memorization and quotation. If students are to attend an American or European institution, he believes they must be educated to think in a way that will be required of them, not to assume things are universal when they are culturally bound, and to feel free to communicate their opinions and experiences and to see value in doing so. To this purpose, he recommends studying and analyzing target language literature as a safe and hopeful environment for foreign or second language learners to build critical thinking abilities. Given what has been discussed above about critical thinking's increasing importance and EFL instructors' success researchers' seeming misunderstanding of it, the current study was conducted to examine if Iranian EFL teachers' performance was significantly influenced by their capacity to think critically.

2.3 Job Performance

Inayatollah and Jehangir (2016), in their study, Teacher's Job Performance, indicated that there is a significant and positive relationship between teacher's motivation and their job performance. Although there have been studies on the impact of motivation on performance, there is a paucity of study on the interaction between public and private school teachers in KPK.

The research appears to close the gap. The research would aid organizations (schools, colleges) in increasing teacher motivation, which would result in improved job performance. In their study titled, Teachers Job Performance at Secondary Level in Khyber Pakhyunkhwa, Pakistan, Amin et al (2014) stated that the findings of this study should be used in the recruitment and training of secondary school teachers. and to enhance teachers' performance in-service training programs should be offered for present school teachers. Omieri (2009) focuses on influence of in-service training on teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Manga Sub-County of Kisi County. Omieri also believes that educational institutions should devote more resources to educating their employees in order to develop human capital with the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out their responsibilities effectively. The more training is embraced on a regular basis, the more people can improve their skills in order to do duties more efficiently. According to the preceding literature, there are various needs that must be completed during the self-actualization process. Individuals can and must be equipped with these requirements, according to Hanlon (1968, p. 24). It is important to understand that full self-actualization of individuals is unattainable without education. A true image of the self within the world, as well as a set of self-actualizing goals, give the impetus for willing, planning, evaluating, and solving problems. Today's educational system appears to be lacking in terms of envisioning and operationalizing a comprehensive approach to education.

The tremendous pressure of good academic success has frequently left students to their own devices in terms of psychological nurture, personal growth, and overall well-being. Despite the existence of long-standing self-actualization educational ideas, this vision has yet to find its way into current educational policies and practices. Furthermore, it is critical for our educational system, which is currently affected by a variety of behavioral and academic interventions, to study interventional strategies that support students' personal growth and well-being in addition to their academic and behavioral learning. The development and application of general critical thinking is one of these educational strategies. The appeal of critical thinking in educational contexts stems from the hope that it will help students become self-sufficient and effective learners. We all know that critical thinking, effective communication, and problem solving are skills that can be learned in school and at work. In addition, approaches allow for the measurement of these competencies in the workplace.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.2 Participants

The total number of participants were 53 Iraqi EFL teachers (N=53) between the ages of (25-50) years old, all of them have teaching experiences from 3 years to 24 years. Among these participants, 24 are male and 29 are female.

3.3 Materials and Instruments

Peter Honey's Critical Thinking Questionnaire (CTQ)

The test was developed by Honey (2000) as an instrument to measure L2 learners' levels of CT ability. It's important to note that he made some further changes later on to make it more acceptable for the intended uses. In terms of the CTQ's format, it consists of 30 items in the form of brief statements that aim to assess L2 learners' skill in several CT abilities. The CTQ response format uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always), with Always being the highest score and Never being the lowest. Because CTQ has a high readability index, it is estimated that it will take about 15 minutes to complete (e.g., Honey, 2000). The purpose of the critical thinking ability questionnaire is to assess the participants' understanding, analysis, and evaluation abilities. It is a 30-item, 5-point Likert scale questionnaire that assesses the participants' abilities in summarizing, paraphrasing, questioning, note-taking, classifying, researching, discussing, comparing and contrasting, inductive and deductive reasoning, outlining, distinguishing, inference, and synthesizing on a scale of 1 to 5.

Job Performance Questionnaire

The job performance level among the respondent's will be tested. Questions which are based on factors that lead to job satisfaction were selected and the respondents were requested to answer the questions confidentially and they were also allowed to take their own time to complete the answers within a week. Because all of the respondents worked in the same industry, they were all asked the same set of questions. Respondents were just need to circle their choice of answer and follow the instructions given in order to answer the questions. This section has 40 questions about the following topics:

- i. Workplace stress level (10 questions)
- ii. Employees' views on their workload (10 questions)
- iii. Compensation (10 questions)
- iv. Working conditions (10 questions)

The respondents' responses were measured and evaluated using the Likert scale.

The Likert scale is a rating scale that assesses the degree to which people agree with a statement (Phillips, 2003). The choices of responses for each of the statements designed in this section were constructed using the 5-point Likert scale. The questions were selected and modified from the online job satisfaction questionnaire (Gobi,2012) and (Chandran,2005).The type of rating scale used is 'Agreement' and the rating scales are as follow:1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Not Sure, 4=Agree, 5= Strongly Agree.

3.4 Data Analysis

The researcher applied a Pearson product-moment test to analyze and compute the probable positive correlation. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) determines the degree to which quantitative variables in a sample are linearly connected. Scores on two quantitative factors are required for each individual or situation (i.e., continuous variables measured on the interval or ratio scales). The significance test for revalues determines if the two variables in the population have a linear connection. The suitable correlation coefficient is determined by the measurement scales of the two variables that are being correlated.

4. RESULTS

All the participant were English teachers and their ages (25-50), 53 participant were the whole number, they divided into 29 female nearly (54,7%) and 24 male nearly (45,3%), as illustrated in Figure 1.

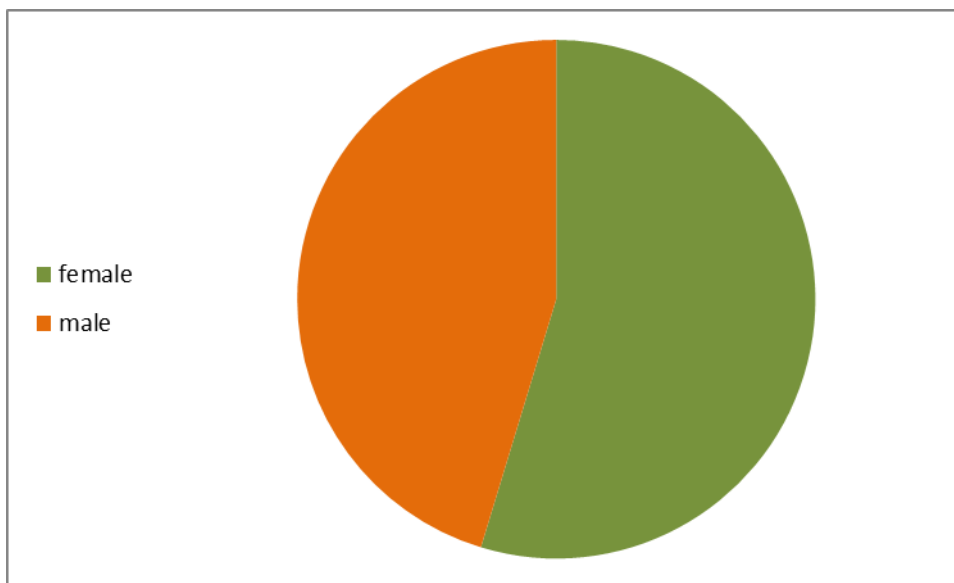


Figure 1. Respondents' gender of study

From the female 27 teacher that nearly (93%), and 22 teacher of the male nearly (91%), believe that the critical thinking have important role in their performance, as illustrated in Figure 2.

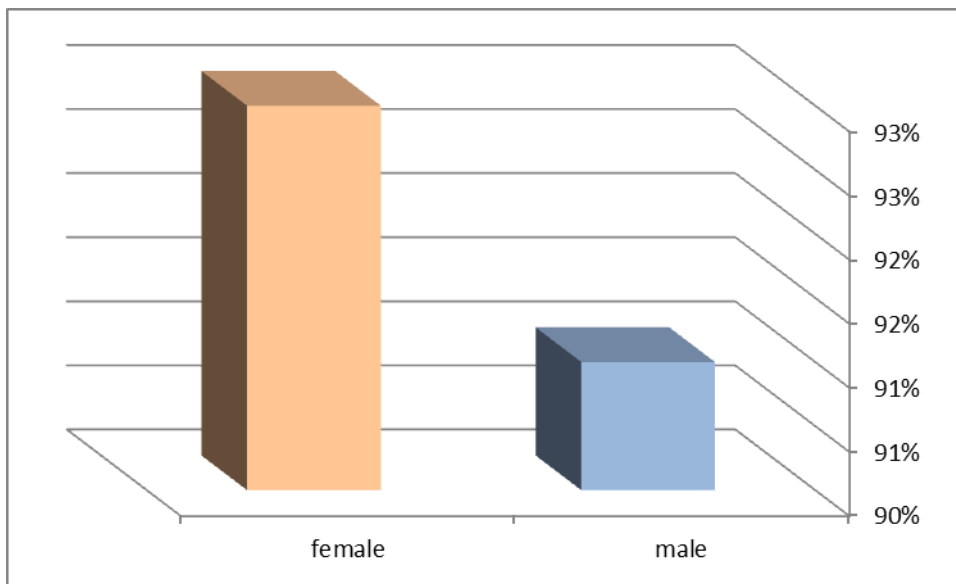


Figure 2. Teachers' belief of critical thinking

This means the result is 49 that nearly (92,4%) believe the critical thinking have important role in their performance as teachers. On the other hand, the rest of the sample are 4 teachers nearly (7,6%) who believe that there is not an important role to critical thinking in their work as teachers, as illustrated in Figure 3.

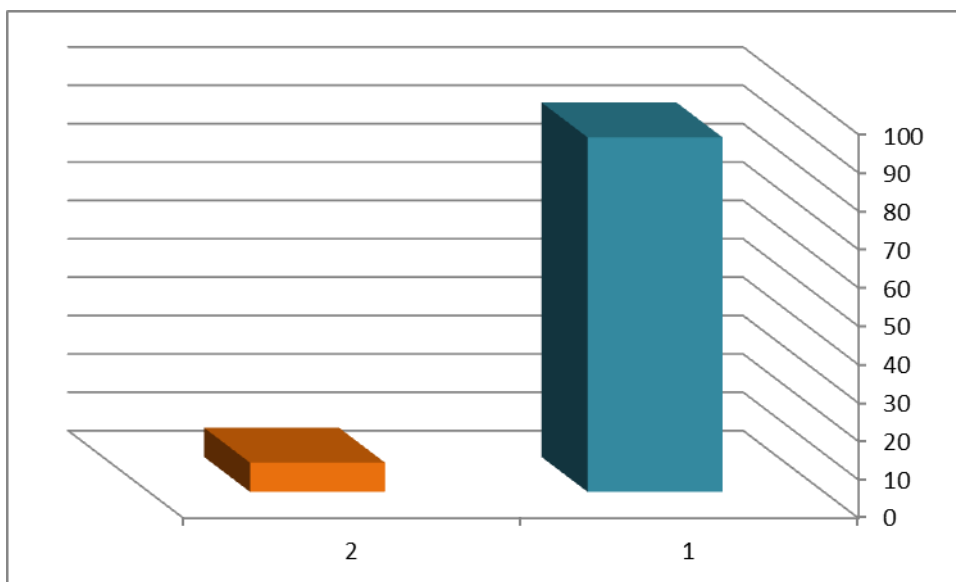


Figure 3. Final result of teachers' opinion of critical thinking

5. CONCLUSION

The present study investigated the assumed relationship between critical thinking and job performance among English teachers in Baghdad. The results revealed that critical thinking correlated with job performance and have important relationship with it.

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