Predicting Conscience in Language Teaching through Instructional/Behavior Management and Critical Thinking of EFL Teachers

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ABSTRACT

There are various psychological and personal factors which could, one way or another, affect the teaching process. A sense of right and wrong, based on particular norms, rules, or religions can tell teachers whether what they are doing is morally correct. Since conscience in language teaching is almost an untouched factor in language teaching, the present study was an attempt to investigate the interplay among Iranian EFL teachers' language teaching conscience, behavior/instruction management, and their critical thinking ability. The result of the data analysis showed that there was a statistically significant relationship among the language teaching conscience and behavior management (r = .76), instruction management (r = .78), and critical thinking (r = .81) of Iranian EFL teachers. Also, a multiple regression model was run to check whether language teaching conscience could be predicted through behavior/instruction management and critical thinking scores. The result showed that totally 71% of the variation in the dependent variable could be accounted for by the independent variables, which was a rather high index. English language teaching stakeholders including teacher trainers, researchers in teacher education, and language teachers may benefit from the findings of the present research in that the level of conscience in language teaching could be an index of instructional/behavior management and critical thinking ability.

1. Introduction

Many factors contribute to the value of an English language teacher, among which, behavior and instruction management as subcategories of classroom management (Martin & Sass, 2010) and critical thinking can be named. Yet, there is a newly developed factor which claims to add value to a language teacher; this new factor is called language teaching conscience. Conscience is the sense of right and wrong which tells us whether what we are doing is morally right or wrong based on particular norms, rules, or religions (Hamidi & Montazeri, 2014). Conscientious teachers seem to be more responsible for their job, classroom practice, and students' needs. On the other hand, teachers who are emotionally more able to understand their students' needs may have better control on students and classroom atmosphere, thereby promoting student success (Rust, 2014).

Darling-Hammond (1997) believes that outside of the child's home environment, it is the classroom teacher who has the most influence on students' achievement. Effectiveness of a good language teacher can be interpreted in different aspects. Several components constitute the value of a language teacher; classroom management, critical thinking, and language teaching conscience are some of them. Classroom management refers to the ways in which student behavior, movement, interaction, etc., during a class is organized and controlled by the teacher (or sometimes by the learners themselves) to enable teaching to take place mot effectively (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). On the one hand, teachers with high classroom management ability tend to have better behavior and instructional management (Martin & Sass, 2010). On the other hand, teachers with good critical thinking ability applies problem-solving techniques in domains other than those in which learned, is aware of the fact that one's understanding is always limited, often much more so than

would be apparent to one with a non-inquiring attitude, and can help students learn independently and has an abiding interest in doing so (Schafersman, 1991).

Considering the importance of the behavior/instruction management and critical thinking abilities of EFL teachers and also the mediating role of conscience in language teaching, the present study was an attempt to investigate the relationship among language teaching conscience, behavior/instruction, and critical thinking of Iranian EFL teachers.

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1 Language Teaching Conscience

There are various psychological and personal factors which could, one way or another, affect the teaching process. A sense of right and wrong, based on particular norms, rules, or religions can tell teachers whether what they are doing is morally correct. Conscience, based on Hamidi and Montazeri (2014), is the sense of right and wrong which, as a part of our mind, tells us whether what we are doing is morally right or wrong based on particular norms, rules, or religions. A conscientious person (in this context a teacher) tries to do her/his work or responsibility well and as completely as possible. Conscientious language teachers in typical classroom environments, as Freiermuth and Jarrell (2006) mention, care about their students and do their best to support students as well as motivating them to show signs of interest in expressing themselves in the foreign language. Unless students receive support from their teachers, they might not experience effective interaction among themselves; therefore, poor language production is possible to happen.

2.2 Critical Thinking

Pithers and Soden (2000) concur that critical thinking encompasses a number of abilities such as identifying a problem and the assumptions on which it is based, focus in the problem, analyzing, understanding and making use of inferences, inductive and deductive logic, and judging the validity and reliability of assumptions and sources of data. Facione (2011) believes that critical thinking means good thinking, almost the opposite of illogical, irrational, thinking. He thinks that critical thinking includes: interpretation, analysis, inference, explanation, and self-regulation.

Ennis (1987) suggests that "critical thinking is reasonable, reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do." However defined, critical thinking refers to a way of reasoning that demands adequate support for one's beliefs and an unwillingness to be persuaded unless the support is forthcoming. Skills needed to begin to think about issues and problems do not suddenly appear in our students (Tama, 1989). Teachers who have attempted to incorporate higher level questioning in their discussions or have administered test items demanding some thought rather than just recall from their students are usually dismayed at the preliminary results. Unless the students have been prepared for the change in expectations, both the students and the teacher are likely to experience frustration.

In the context of language teaching, Dubin and Olshtain (1986) present a scale for assessing the cognitive potential of language learning processes drawn upon in the classroom as follows, beginning with the most through to the least cognitively demanding; of course, these processes are not exclusive to language learning and can be applied to all kinds of learning such as, evaluation, synthesis, analysis, application, interpretation, translation, and memory.

What Paul deems as central to the concept of critical thinking are those that Dubin and Olshtain view as the most cognitively demanding. Accordingly, developing the ability to think critically is on a par with directly engaging one's cognitive resources. Brookfield (1987) takes a similar path when he states that critical thinking involves two inextricably interrelated processes: identifying and challenging assumptions, and imagining and exploring others. This definition highlights the significance of original and creative thinking in an attempt to unearth hidden agendas and judge them on the basis of one's own designated standards and he believes that critical thinking encompasses two interconnected processes, namely, identifying and challenging assumptions, and imagining and exploring others (Brookfield, 1987).

2.3 Behavior/Instruction Management

The dichotomy of behavior and instruction management in controlling the classroom has been introduced by Martin and Sass (2010). They believed that the majority of the activities which are done by the teacher to manage the class fall within two categories: behavior and instruction management, henceforth referred to as classroom management. There seems to be,

to a great extent, a general consensus among ELT practitioners as to the definitions of classroom management. Martin and Sugarman (1993, p. 19), for example, consider classroom management "the activities of classroom teachers that create a positive classroom climate within which effective teaching and learning can occur". In line with this definition, Nasey (2012) asserts that classroom management refers to actions of the teacher to ensure that things get done. It has to do with rules, routines, structures – meaning instruction, organizing learning materials and activities. Classroom management, based on Richards and Schmidt (2010), refers to the ways in which student behavior, movement, interaction, etc., during a class are organized and controlled by the teacher (or sometimes by the learners themselves) to enable teaching to take place mot effectively. As Richards and Schmidt (2010) maintain, classroom management includes procedures for grouping students for different types of classroom activities, use of lesson plans, handling the equipment, aids, etc., and the direction and management of student behavior and activity. Classroom management covers a wide range of techniques, one such technique is discipline. Discipline, as believed by Scrivener (2012, p.2) is "certainly one area of classroom management, but it is only one, and, interestingly, many of the biggest problems associated with keeping order are often best answered by dealing with other, seemingly separate, issues of classroom management". Encouraging all students to participate in classroom interaction is another classroom management technique.

Evertson and Weinstein (2006) defined Classroom management as "the actions teachers take to create an environment that supports and facilitates both academic and social-emotional learning" (p.4). This definition focuses on both the facilitating aspect of the classroom management and its didactic role in learning moral-social issues. Other scholars defined classroom management in various ways. Al-Hamdan, (2007) claimed that effective classroom management means to minimize tension inside the classroom, moderate students' behavior, listen to students' ideas, encourage students to do better and pay attention to their needs. Effective classroom management in multi-cultural contexts, as Psunder (2005) asserts, is establishing a positive and mutual teacher-student relationship and teachers' adapting their teaching methods to students' needs and responses. In such settings, of course, most teachers should not refer to the cultural and ethnic background of their students. Every teacher has his/her own style of classroom management. Considering this, well-managed classroom help teachers have good relationships with their students, and better organization and instruction. Similarly, as Good and Brophy (2000) and Ritter and Hancock (2007) put it, classroom management is the indication of the teachers' endeavor to monitor students' learning, behavior and control the classroom in the way that leads to student achievement.

2.4 Empirical Studies

Although language teaching conscience is a newly developed and researched variable (Hamidi, 2016), various studies (Borzou, 2014; Hamidi, 2016; Hamidi & Khatib, 2016; Tok, Tok, & Dolapcioglu, 2013) have been carried out worldwide to investigate the interplay among critical thinking, classroom management or its main factors including behavior/instruction management, and other teacher related variables. For example, Tok, Tok, and Dolapcioglu (2013) examined the relationship between classroom teachers' classroom management approaches and their emotional intelligence. The result of their research showed that emotional intelligence was a positive predictor of teacher-centered classroom management with weak predictive power. The findings of Borzou's (2014) research revealed no significant relationship between the teachers' language proficiency level and their classroom management, but a high significant relationship with learning achievement of L2 learners. Hamidi (2016) in a study to assess the value of English language teachers found that both critical thinking and classroom management were the key factors for successful English language teachers. He also found that there was a positive correlation between these two variables. Hamidi and Khatib (2016) investigated the interplay among Iranian EFL teachers' emotional intelligence, classroom management, and their general English language proficiency. The result of their research showed positive relationship among the emotional intelligence, classroom management, and language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers. In a correlational study, Jalili (2017) investigated the interplay among Iranian EFL teachers' language teaching conscience, emotional intelligence, and their general English language

proficiency. The results showed that there was a statistically significant relationship between the language teaching conscience and the emotional intelligence of Iranian EFL teachers, $rs(80) = .83$, $p < .05$, 2) as well as between teaching conscience and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers, $rs(80) = .59$, $p < .05$. Zakian (2018) in her study sought relationship among the critical thinking, classroom management, and working experience of Iranian EFL teachers. Working on 85 male and female EFL teachers, she found that there was a strong positive relationship among Iranian EFL teachers teaching experience, classroom management, and critical thinking.

To achieve the purpose of this study, the following research questions were formulated:

Question 1-Is there any statistically significant relationship between language teaching conscience, behavior/instruction management, and critical thinking of Iranian EFL teachers?

Question 2-Can language teaching conscience be predicted through behavior/instruction management and critical thinking scores?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

Eighty Iranian EFL male and female teachers were the sample of this study. This homogenized number was taken out of 118 participants who had taken the test of TOEFL as a requirement for attending the teacher training courses at Poya, Simin, Adib-e Daneshvaran, and Ideal English language institutes in Mazandaran, north of Iran. The participants were both M.A. students and M.A. holders in TEFL with the age range of 26 to 37 and teaching experience of 3 to 12 years.

3.2 Instruments

The instruments which were used in this study were as follows:

Classroom Management: The first instrument used in this study was the standardized classroom management questionnaire developed by Martin and Sass (2010). This questionnaire was in Likert-scale format, having originally 6 options, which was reduced to 5 options in this study in order to ease the answering and scoring process. The questionnaire had 24 items under two components of behavioral and instructional management. Each component included 12 items. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability of the questionnaire used in this study was calculated to be .86 which shows high reliability index.

Critical Thinking: 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), this 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 allows researchers to investigate the learners' ability in note-taking, summarizing, questioning, paraphrasing, researching, inferencing, discussing, classifying, outlining, comparing and contrasting, distinguishing, synthesizing, inductive and deductive reasoning.

Language Teaching Conscience Questionnaire: The third instrument measured the conscience of English language teachers in their teaching practice. The instrument, developed by Hamidi (2016), had 24 items with 5 components including conscience in problem solving, job commitment, appropriate use of time, caring about learning, and following the rules respectively. Each item included five options which ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree in a Likert scale format. Participants were given 10 minutes to fill out the questionnaire.

3.3 Procedure

First, the test of TOEFL was administered to 118 teachers, among whom 80 were considered homogenized members and were invited to take part in the study. The homogenized participants were told that they were participating in a research about teachers' abilities. Then the language teaching conscience questionnaire developed by Hamidi (2016), the critical thinking questionnaire (Honey, 2000), and the classroom management questionnaire by Martin and Sass (2010) were given to the participants to fill out. The data gathered out of the questionnaires were collected and analyzed using SPSS 22. The first research question was answered through running the Spearman correlation test and the second research question was answered through a multiple regression model.

4. Results

This section presents related data analysis to test the following null hypotheses:

H01-There is no statistically significant relationship between the language teaching conscience,

behavior/instruction management, and critical thinking of Iranian EFL teachers.

H02-Language teaching conscience cannot be predicted through behavior/instruction management and critical thinking scores.

4.1 Testing the First Null Hypothesis

The first research question of this study investigated the relationship between the language teaching conscience, behavior/instruction management, and critical thinking of Iranian EFL teachers. Since the data gathered out of the questionnaires did not enjoy normal distribution, the Spearman rank-order correlation test was used to determine the possible relationship between the four variables. The descriptive statistics of the four sets of scores is presented below.

Table 4.1 The Descriptive Statistics for the Language Teaching Conscience, Behavior/Instruction Management, and Critical Thinking

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Conscience	80	64	96	6316	78.9600	9.55661
Critical Thinking	80	88	135	8878	110.9775	15.57206
Instruction_M	80	24	44	2564	32.0520	4.23372
Behavior_M	80	24	48	2589	32.3625	4.81097
Valid N (listwise)	80					

Based on Table 4.1 above, the mean scores for the language teaching conscience, behavior management and instruction management, and critical thinking were 78.96, 110.97, 32.05, and 32.36 respectively. The next table shows the result of the Spearman rank-order correlation test.

Table 4.2 The Result of the Spearman Rank-Order Correlation Test for the Language Teaching Conscience, Behavior/Instruction Management, and Critical Thinking

		Critical ThinkingT	Instruction_M	Behavior_M
Conscience	Spearman Correlation	.816**	.787**	.760**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	80	80	80

The Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to determine the relationship between the four mentioned variables. There was a strong, positive relationship between language teaching conscience and critical thinking, $r_s = .816$, $p < .05$; There was a strong, positive relationship between language teaching conscience and instruction management, $r_s = .787$, $p < .05$; and there was a strong, positive relationship between language teaching conscience and behavior management, $r_s = .76$, $p < .05$.

Therefore, the researcher rejects the first null hypothesis.

4.2 Answering the Second Research Question

The research question of this study was formulated to find whether language teaching conscience could be predicted through behavior/instruction management and critical thinking scores. In order to answer the above-mentioned research question, the multiple regression model was run.

Table 4.3 Model Summary Table to Predict Language Teaching Conscience from Behavior/Instruction Management and Critical Thinking

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.846a	.716	.705	5.19154

a. Predictors: (Constant), Behavior_M, CT, Instruction_M

In Table 4.3 above, the R^2 value or the R Square column shows how much of the total variation in the dependent variable (language teaching conscience) can be explained by the independent variables (behavior/instruction management and critical thinking); in this case, 71% can be accounted for by the independent variables, which is a rather high number. The next table shows how well the regression model fits the data; it shows how well the dependent variable, language teaching conscience, is predicted:

Table 4.4 The ANOVA Table for the Regression Equation Model

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5166.613	3	1722.204	63.899	.000b
	Residual	2048.363	76	26.952		
	Total	7214.976	79			

a. Dependent Variable: Conscience

b. Predictors: (Constant), Behavior_M, CT, Instruction_M

Table 4.4 shows that the regression equation can predict the language teaching conscience (the dependent variable) significantly well, $F (3, 76) = 63.89$, $P<. 05$. The regression table presents the statistical significance of the regression model that was run. Here the Sig is less than 0.05, and indicates that overall the regression model statistically significantly predicted the dependent variable which was the language teaching conscience. Hence, the researcher rejects the second null hypothesis.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study was an attempt to investigate the relationship among language teaching conscience, behavior/instruction, and critical thinking of Iranian EFL teachers, and check whether language teaching conscience could be predicted through behavior/instruction management and critical thinking scores.

The result of the data analysis done through the Spearman's rank-order correlation for the four mentioned variables showed that there was a strong, positive relationship between language teaching conscience and critical thinking, $r_s = .816$, $p < .05$; there was a strong, positive relationship between language teaching conscience and instruction management, $r_s = .787$, $p < .05$; and there was a strong, positive relationship between language teaching conscience and behavior management, $r_s = .76$, $p < .05$. As to the second research question, a multiple regression model was run to check whether language teaching conscience could be predicted through behavior/instruction management and critical thinking scores. The result showed that totally 71% of the variation in the dependent variable could be accounted for by the independent variables, which was a rather high index.

This study found that the classroom management of the teachers could be positively correlated with other variables such as language teaching conscience and critical thinking; however, Borzou's (2014) study found no significant relationship between the teachers' language proficiency level and their classroom management. In contrast to Borzou's (2014) findings, Hamidi (2016) found that there was a positive correlation between the classroom management, language proficiency, and critical thinking of Iranian EFL teachers who taught at English language institutes. Classroom management is a key factor for successful language teachers. Hu (2011) believes that low classroom management skills of language teachers can have demotivating effects on student learning. Years of teaching may add to the language proficiency of the ELT teachers (Hamidi & Montazeri, 2014; Zakian, 2018), but proficiency and experience alone cannot account for a good language teacher (Zakian, 2018). However, conscience of language teachers, as Hamidi (2016) argues, seems to be a variable more important than classroom management, critical thinking, and language proficiency. This untouched variable should be taken into account in determining valuable language teachers.

The present research has shed some light on some psychological factors related to language teacher including language teaching conscience, classroom management, and critical thinking. It is suggested that some research studies be carried out to find the relationship between the language teaching conscience and other variables such as emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction of EFL teachers. Those who are interested in language teaching psychology, teacher trainers, researchers in teacher education, and language teachers may take advantage of the findings of this research. English language teaching stakeholders including teacher trainers, researchers in teacher education in that the level of conscience in language teaching could be an index of instructional/behavior management and critical thinking ability.

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