

## The Correlation among EFL Teachers' Critical Thinking, Class Management and Teaching Style

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**Abstract:** *This study attempted to explore the relationship among EFL teachers' critical thinking (CT), teaching style (TS) and classroom management (CM). To fulfill these objective three questionnaires on critical thinking, classroom management and teaching style administrated to 50 randomly selected teachers 18 males and 32 females with the age ranging from 25 to 50. According to the data analysis the correlation between the teachers' CT and CM turned out to be non-significant and the correlation between TS and CM turned out to be not significant and negative furthermore predictors (CT and TS) failed to correlate significantly with the predicted (CM). The conclusion is that neither variables (CT and TS) could predict the EFL teachers' classroom management significantly. Since this study could not prove the existence of any relationship between the three variables it is recommended that the same study to be carried out using other or same types of instruments or techniques.*

**Key Words:** *critical thinking, classroom management, teaching style, EFL teachers*

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### 1. Introduction

Researchers view classrooms as detached from larger historical and social conditions, and the targets and stages of learning are also made narrower and clearer to provide a convenient means of measuring pedagogical progress. Yet these process results are likely to be over-simplified and possibly distorted. Hall (1995) argues that language learning theory and pedagogy need to give attention to the larger sociohistorical and political forces residing in both the meanings of the linguistic resources and the social identities of those who aim to use them.

Researchers, who are interested in complex, sociohistorical, and political aspects of language learning and teaching, suggest that an alternative approach, critical thinking, should be the vital essence of language teaching (Benesch, 2001; Canagarajah, 1999, 2002b; Morgan 1998; Norton, 1997; Norton &Toohey, 2004; Pennycook, 1999, 2001; Ramanathan, 2002). Critical pedagogy in EFL maintains that both language learning and language teaching are political processes, and it sees language as not simply a means of expression or communication but as a practice that constructs, and is constructed by, the ways language learners understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, and their possibilities for the future (Norton &Toohey, 2004). Nowadays, experts introduce critical thinking as the main outcome of higher education and consider teaching "how to think" as the basis for learning. This study compares the critical thinking skills and their effects on classroom management along with teaching style of the instructors. The role that the EFL teachers play in the classroom and the styles they use affect creating a classroom climate that can be positive, stimulating, energizing, and effective for language learning (Underwood, 1991; Brown, 2007).

One crucial factor in teaching practices preferences is the outcome of teaching or students' achievement (Erdle, Murray, & Rushton, 1985), meaning that teachers often try to match their teaching styles with learning styles of their students to prevent problems such as students' boredom and

inattentiveness, poor performance in class activities and tests, or lack of interest about the course (Oxford, Ehrman, & Lavine, 1991). Although teachers always look for reasons in their students or their competencies as teachers for low scores of their students (Zenhui, 2001), the source of the problem is the conflict between teacher-student styles most of the time. Some of the researchers in this area (e.g. Smith and Renzulli, 1984; Griggs & Dunn, 1984; Charkins, O'Toole, & Wetzel, 1985) suggest that there should be a strong match between teaching and learning styles in any school subject in general and English as a foreign language in particular (e.g. Oxford, Ehrman, & Lavine, 1991; Wallace and Oxford, 1992; Zenhui, 2001). Therefore, studies on the factors that affect teachers' practices and their preferred teaching activities and how he should manage their classroom have started to boom recently.

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Furthermore, the issue of classroom management in English classes has been discussed only from the theoretical standpoint. In the way that, some language educationists have determined the principles for managing a language classroom successfully (Brown, 2007; Chastain, 1989), but the relationship between language teachers' classroom management and their teaching style and with other classroom variables is still open to research. Classroom management in general and EFL classroom management in particular is one of the major concerns of pre-service and in-service teachers, especially English language teachers in Iran (Esmaeeli, 1381). Ayers (2001), believes that an essential first step toward becoming a good teacher is good classroom management. Unfortunately, this subject is not included in any teacher training course in Iran. Therefore, it is necessary to look for some classroom management strategies that will facilitate an environment that is conducive to learning a foreign language. "Teaching ESL or EFL to young learners is an evolving field, and many efforts are being made around the world to improve the process to both teachers and students" (Murray, 2002).

According to what has been said so far the following research question is then formulated:

1. Is there any significant relationship between critical thinking and classroom management?
2. Is there any significant relationship between teaching style and classroom management?
3. Is there any significant difference between predictability of critical thinking and teaching style of EFL teachers about their classroom management?

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Participants

Participants of the present study are 50 non-randomly selected teachers (university, high school and English language institutes teachers) both male and female. They all speak English fluently. Participants were recruited and treated in the present study in accordance with all applicable standards

for research with human participants, including active, informed consent, confidentiality, and freedom from coercion.

## 2.2 Instrumentation

In order to accomplish the purpose of the study, the following three instruments were utilized:

- Critical thinking (CT) questionnaire by Honey (2005)
- Attitudes and Beliefs on Classroom Control Inventory-Revised (ABCC-R) (Martin, Yin, & Baldwin, 1998)
- Teaching Style Questionnaire (TSQ) by (Evans, 2004)

### 2.2.1. Critical Thinking Questionnaire

Honey's critical thinking questionnaire includes 30 items which evaluates the students' CT skills: analysis, inference, evaluation, inductive reasoning, and deductive reasoning. It explores what a person might or might not do when thinking critically about a subject. The questionnaire includes Likert type items and every item is followed by five alternatives including never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always. According to the rating scale, never is given the minimum value of zero since it shows the lowest CT ability and, on the other hand, always receives the highest value of five. Therefore, the other choices fall within these two values: rarely = 2, sometimes = 3, often = 4 and always = 5. As a result, each testee's score could range from 30 to 150. In a study conducted by Nosratinia and Abbasi (2013), the reliability of this questionnaire was estimated to be 0.79 using the Cronbach alpha coefficient. Furthermore, the instrument enjoys face, content, criterion-related, and construct validity (Honey, 2000). As mentioned above this questionnaire is developed by Honey (2005).

### 2.2.2. The Attitudes and Beliefs on Classroom Control-Revised (ABCC-R) Inventory

The instrument used in this researcher consisted of two parts. Part one, questions included demographic information such as gender, certification areas, grade currently being taught, licensure, teaching experience, training received in classroom management, Part two was the Attitudes and Beliefs about Classroom Control-Revised (ABCC-R) Inventory developed by Nancy Martin. The ABCC-R is "a multidimensional instrument designed to measure various aspects of teachers' beliefs and predispositions toward classroom management practices" (Martin, Yin, & Mayall, 2007). This instrument was used to survey the study sample.

The instrument, originally a 48-item scale that measured instructional management, people management, and behavior management, was revised by the authors in 2007. The revision being used in this study consisted of 20 horizontal numeric scale format statements and two subscales: instructional management dimension and people management dimension. A four category response scale for each item was retained with responses of "describes me very well" was scored 4, "describes me usually" 3, "describes me somewhat" 2, "describes me not at all" 1. Scoring of several items was reversed. Items 1 through 10 measure the dimension, and items 11 through 20 measure the instructional management dimension. A score for each sub-scale was determined by summing the responses of all items in that dimension. A broad range of classroom management practices and beliefs were addressed through the ABCC-R. When considering the subscales, the approval of an item indicated the degree of teacher control over students. High subscales scores were indicative of a more controlling,

interventionist attitude while lower scores were considered a less controlling belief in the aspect of classroom management. A study was conducted by Martin et al. (2007) to further refine the ABCC-R, its ability to measure the construct and report the factor structure and concurrent validity of the revised version of the Attitudes and Beliefs of Classroom Control (ABCC-R) instrument.

Internal consistency coefficients for each sub-scale in the ABCC-R were calculated for the total sample and separately by level of certification gender, and years teaching experience. Cronbach's alphas exceed .70 in the instructional management and people management subscales. The reliability coefficients for different levels of certification, gender and years teaching experience were all above .70 for the instructional management and people management subscales with one exception. At the item level, the corrected item to total coefficients all exceeded .30 in the instructional management and people management subscales. The mean inter-item correlations were .24 and .23 for the instructional management and people management subscales, respectively (Martin, Yin & Mayall, 2007).

### 2.2.3. Teaching Style Questionnaire (TSQ)

The TSQ is a newly developed instrument by (Evans, 2004) and is based on the work of Messick (1976), Riding (1991, 2002), and Witkin (1976). It is a self-report, Likert-scale questionnaire with items scored on a range of "1" to "5" for strongly agree to strongly disagree, respectively. The TSQ contains 34 items measuring wholist-analytic tendencies. It has proven to be a reliable instrument for identifying teaching styles with an internal consistency score of .88 (Evans, 2004). This self-report instrument encourages teachers to reflect on their teaching practices. The critically reflective approach adds to the teachers' self-awareness of their teaching, and self-awareness has been found to have a powerful influence on leadership abilities (Whetten & Cameron, 2005). The TSQ is designed to identify teaching styles and this study will serve to provide an additional empirical study of its use in identifying teachers' teaching styles. The TSQ (Evans, 2004; Evans, et al., 2008, Revised Evans & Mandelbaum, 2012) sees teaching styles as "a teacher's personal behaviors and media used to transmit data to or receive it from the learner" (Kaplan & Kies, 1995, p. 29), and involves the realization of the educator's teaching philosophy (Conti, 2004). Evans et al. summarizes Heimlich's (1990) understanding of teaching philosophies finding that they contain "values, beliefs, attitudes, aspirations, personal biographies, social identities, cultural background and teaching experiences" (Evans, et al., 2008, p. 568). As noted the items have been divided into four categories: Structure (e.g., I'm not very pragmatic w/ plans/setting and marks), Sociability (e.g., I'm very active both in & outside of the classroom), Formality (e.g., my planning and organizational skills may appear inefficient & disorganized), and Caution (e.g., I tend to act impulsively rather than cautiously or effectively when tackling tasks).

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Checking the Assumptions of Linear Correlation

Regarding the first and second questions of the study through parametric Pearson correlation, firstly the condition of normality had to be checked. The following table shows the result:

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Skewness ratios
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	
CT	50	109.0000	12.28239	.369	.337	1.09
TSQ	50	99.3200	9.29657	1.126	.337	3.34
CM	50	56.4400	10.04512	-.434	.337	-1.28
Valid N (listwise)	50					

As shown in the above table, the skewness ratio belonging to the TSQ scores exceed the normality range of  $\pm 1.96$ , hence the skewness of the distribution of this set of scores has not distributed normally. However, the other two sets are within the normality range, hence normally distributed.

### 3.2. The relationship between critical thinking and classroom management

To find the relationship between the CT and CM scores of the teachers, the linearity condition was checked first. As numbers show the distribution implies a weak positive correlation. As normality and linearity conditions were both met, Pearson correlation was conducted. The following table shows the significance of the relationship:

Table 4. 2 Correlation between CT and CM

		CT	CM
CT	Pearson Correlation	1	.086
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.554
	N	50	50
CM	Pearson Correlation	.086	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.554	
	N	50	50

As displayed in the above table, the correlation between the teachers' CT and CM turned out to be non-significant ( $r=.08$ ,  $p=.554 > .05$ ).

### 3.3. The relationship between teaching style and classroom management

In order to find the relationship between teaching style and classroom management correlation method was applied indicating a weak negative relationship. As normality condition for the TSQ scores was violated, the Spearman non-parametric correlation had to be used to estimate the correlation coefficient between the two variables. The following table shows the result:

Table 4.3 Correlation between CM and TS

		CM	TSQ
Spearman's rho	CM	1.000	-.046
	Correlation Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.751
	N	50	50

TSQ	Correlation Coefficient	-.046	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.751	.
	N	50	50

As exhibited in the above table, the correlation between the two variables turned out to be not significant and negative ( $r=-.046$ ,  $p=.751>.05$ ).

### 3.4. Predictability of critical thinking and teaching style about classroom management

To estimate the predictability of CT and TS scores about the teachers' classroom management, thus testing the third hypothesis, there should be a significant relationship between the predicted and the predictor variables. Nevertheless, as shown above, both predictors (CT and TS) failed to correlate significantly with the predicted (CM) as a condition for regression analysis. The conclusion is that neither variables (CT and TS) could predict the EFL teachers' classroom management significantly.

## 4. Discussion

Regarding the questions posed in the study and based on the statistical analysis of the data, no correlation were found among the three variables of this research. As shown above the first and the second there were no relation between them. Regarding the third question both predictors (CT and TS) failed to correlate significantly with the predicted (CM) as a condition for regression analysis.

Additional results of the ABCC-R Inventory revealed teachers believed that they should require student compliance and respect for law and order and identified themselves as teachers that believed the class rules were important because they shape the student's behavior and development. In addition, teachers stated that they would explain a reason for a rule if a student thought the rule was unfair; however, they would not change the rule. These findings are consistent with Baker (2005) who suggested that the area that teachers reported the highest self-efficacy was in establishing rules for students.

Regarding what has been said above; probably the following factors could be the reason why there were no correlations among the tree variables:

- Although the EFL teachers used as participants are chosen carefully and have enough experience but there could be an error in the sampling techniques.
- Critical thinking is considered a quite new skill in TEFL in Iran educational system, so this can cause some misunderstanding in giving the proper answers to some questions.
- The effect of gender on achievement is not obvious. Feingold (1992) has made a conclusion that the great difference in participation between male and female has disappeared these last years.

The subsequent recommendations are presented hoping that other researchers would find them interesting enough to pursue in the future.

- Considering the instrument used in the current study to measure the variables, it is suggested that the same study be carried out using other types of instruments or techniques with consideration being given to modifying sections regarding amount of training received, identification of tiers for behavior only, sample size, grade level, and areas of endorsements.
- Since different age groups have different personality features, the same research can be conducted on teachers of different age as well as different fields of study.

- Because of the limited scope of this research, it can be repeated with broader sample to investigate whether the same results would be obtained or not.

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