The Relationship between Iranian EFL Teachers’ Critical Thinking Ability and Emotional Intelligence and Their Professional Success

MOUSSA AHMADIAN
Associate Professor, Dept. of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Arak University
Arak 38156-8-8349, PO. Box: 879, Iran
E-mail: m-ahmadian@araku.ac.ir
Tel: +989181611261

SEYYEDEH-MAHSA AMINI
Ph.D. Candidate, Dept. of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Arak University
Arak 38156-8-8349, PO. Box: 879, Iran
E-mail: m-amini@phd.araku.ac.ir
Tel: +989125423995

LEILA BAHRAMI
Ph.D. Candidate, Dept. of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Arak University
Arak 38156-8-8349, PO. Box: 879, Iran
E-mail: l-bahrami@phd.araku.ac.ir
Tel: +989139354984

Abstract
Thought and emotions are the inseparable characteristics of human beings that can influence personal life, job performance, and success. Regarding this fact, the present study aims to examine the relationship between EFL Teachers’ Critical Thinking Ability and Emotional Intelligence and their Professional Success. To this end, 50 EFL teachers from language institutes were selected to collect data using the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Assessment, the Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test, and the Successful Iranian EFL Teacher Questionnaire. The correlational analyses through SPSS revealed a significant relationship between EFL teachers’ critical thinking and their professional success, and between their emotional intelligence and professional success. The findings of the study may have implications for language education.

Key Words: Critical Thinking, Emotional Intelligence, Professional Success, EFL Teachers, Correlational Study.

Introduction
There are substantial evidence from recent research that teachers have great potentials to affect their students’ educational life (e.g. Anderson, 2004). What a teacher does or says can influence the development of educational process; therefore, teacher’s characteristics, behaviors, skills, and abilities can have positive or negative impacts on students’ motivation, skills development, and success (Lenka & Kant, 2012). Affect and attitudes can be influenced by emotional intelligence (Hughes, Thompson, & Terrell, 2009). This means that emotional intelligence (EI), which is the ability to cope with emotions, can contribute to the
positive affect and attitudes of teachers in their academic performance and professional development (Lenka & Kant, 2012).

Emotional intelligence is "an array of noncognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures" (Bar-On, 2004, p.111). These capabilities and skills are required for controlling stress and conflict, and for academic success as well (Brackett & Katulak, 2007). For professional success of teachers, not only the teachers’ knowledge of the course is required but also emotional intelligence, which is a combination of thinking and feeling, is also needed (Mehmood, Qasim, & Azam, 2013). While satisfaction is a leading factor in reaching success in teachers’ profession, higher level of emotional intelligence in teachers make them more contented and satisfied with their job (Darling-Hammond, 2001).

Furthermore, in today’s world flooded with information, critical thinking ability (CTA) seems to be crucial for EFL teachers to perform well in evaluating and using information. The role of critical thinking as one of the facets of professional quality of teachers is prominent (Birjandi & Bagherkazemi, 2010). Elder (1997) claims that the cognitive or thinking component is the key to other functions of human mind; accordingly, critical thinking is the link between cognition and emotions in the emotionally intelligent person and any investigation of emotional intelligence can also include critical thinking (Elder, 1997).

To date, fewer studies have been done on the relationship between critical thinking and EFL teachers’ professional success (TPS) (e.g. Birjandi & Bagherkazemi, 2010) or between emotional intelligence and EFL teachers’ professional success (e.g. Hashemi, 2008), but none of which has attempted to investigate both in a single study. The present study, thus, attempts to shed light on the relationship between emotional intelligence and EFL teachers’ professional success, and between critical thinking ability and EFL teachers’ professional success.

**Review of the Related Literature**

Emotion and intelligence are the inseparable and unique characteristics of human beings. These two concepts have come close to each other by the theory of emotional intelligence (EI) (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The notion of EI refers to Gardner’s (1983) concept of personal intelligences in multiple intelligences theory. Salovey and Mayer (1990) define emotional intelligence as "the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and action" (p. 189). Then, Goleman (1995) extended the concept of Emotional Intelligence to “abilities such as being able to motivate oneself, and persist in the face of frustration, to control impulses and delay gratification; to regulate one’s moods and keep distress from swapping the ability to think; to emphasize and to hope” are the demonstrations of Emotional Intelligence (p. 34). Lynn (2005) describes EI as the knowledge of managing our behavior with others in order that we truly convey our intentions. Lynn believes that EI influences individual’s personal life, job performance, and success.

Zeidner, Matthews, and Roberts (2009) assert that EI has two different aspects: one deals with interpersonal intelligence which is the social aspect of it; the other copes with the intrapersonal intelligence which is the internal aspect of EI. Lynn (2005) characterizes emotion as having three different components: cognitive, physiological, and behavioral components. The cognitive component of emotion includes the effects that thought, expectations, and beliefs have on the emotional state. The physiological component is the immediate physiological reaction of the body. The behavioral component is the nonverbal expression of emotions. In her model, emotional intelligence comprises five components as:
• Self-awareness and self-control: the ability to become aware of oneself and to make use of that ability to control emotions,
• empathy: the ability to consider others’ standpoint,
• Social expertness: the ability to collaborate and resolve conflict with others,
• Personal influence: the ability to deal with your internal world and the external world around you, and
• Mastery of purpose and vision: the ability to know your life’s direction and what you want to do in your life (Lynn 2005, pp. 39-40).

Salovey and Mayer (1990) describe the concept of emotional intelligence in detail. Figure 1 shows the conceptualization of the emotion.

In the above authors’ view of conceptualization, emotional intelligence embraces the precise appraisal and expression of feelings. Emotions can be appraised and expressed verbally through language. Non-verbal communication of emotions can take place through facial expressions. Perceptual ability in understanding emotions can be extended from intrapersonal emotions to interpersonal emotions. The appearance of emotions toward others can be shown through facial expression and empathy, which is the ability to understand another’s sentiment. Emotional intelligence encompasses the ability to regulate, monitor, and evaluate emotions in self and in others. The regulatory system can perform consciously or quite automatically. The utilization of emotion and its components can be described, according to Salovey and Mayer (1990), as follows:

First, emotion swings may facilitate the generation of multiple future plans [flexible planning]. Second, positive emotion may alter memory organization so that cognitive material is better integrated and diverse ideas are seen as more related [creative thinking]….Third, emotion provides interrupts for complex systems, “popping” them out of a given level of processing and focusing them on more pressing needs. Moods such as anxiety and depression, for example, may focus attention on the self [redirected attention]….Finally, emotions and moods may be used to motivate and assist performance at complex intellectual task [motivation]… (pp. 198-199).
With regard to the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social aspects of teaching, teachers require a high level of emotional intelligence in order to be successful (Syiem, 2012). Pugh (2008) emphasizes the weight of EI in professional standards for teachers. Most successful teachers and higher achievers make use of their emotional intelligence (Hughes, Thompson, & Terrell, 2009).

Tamblyn (2000) declares that successful teachers have some characteristics, personality features, and qualifications. They have subject competency, the ability to create motivation in learners, ability in flexible adapting of the materials with regard to their students’ needs, risk-taking skills, respect for learners, warmth and a sense of humor, and self-esteem and satisfaction with their profession. Moafian and Pishghadam (2009) consider teaching accountability, interpersonal relationships, attention to all, examination, commitment, learning boosters, creating a sense of competence, teaching boosters, physical and emotional acceptance, empathy, class attendance, and dynamism as the features of successful teachers.

Edannure (2010) investigated the presence of EI in teachers and its effect on their profession. S/he found that teachers are average in terms of having EI but the most successful teachers make more use of their EI. A number of scholars (e.g. Romanelli, Cain, & Smith, 2006; Ganizadeh & Moafian, 2010; and Mehmood, Qasim, & Azam, 2013) studied the effect of Emotional Intelligence of teachers on their academic and/or professional success and found a significantly positive relationship between them. However, Hashemi (2008) arrived at no significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers’ EI and their professional success. Conversely, Khodadady (2012) hit upon a negative relationship between teachers’ EI and their success.

Teachers have a prominent role in providing opportunities for critical thinking and the end goal of education is to learn to think critically (Buskist & Irons, 2008). As Paul (1990, p.4) states, “[c]ritical thinking is disciplined, self-directed thinking which exemplifies the perfections of thinking appropriate to a particular mode or domain of thought”. Fisher (2001) depicts critical thinking as a skilful activity that is clear, relevant, adequate, and coherent and requires interpretation and evaluation of information. Halpern (2003) illustrates critical thinking as follows:

Critical thinking is the use of those cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome. It is used to describe thinking that is purposeful, reasoned, and goal directed—the kind of thinking involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions, when the thinker is using skills that are thoughtful and effective for the particular context and type of thinking task (p.6).

Cody (2006) asserts that there is little congruence on the definition of critical thinking and the best way to prevail over the debate on its definition is to describe the aspects of the concept of critical thinking. Lawrence et al. (2008) emphasize that there is no agreed upon an exact definition of critical thinking. Critical thinking is “to make sound judgments based on careful weighing of evidence” (Buskist & Irons, 2008, p. 56). Critical thinking skills are cognitive skills that include analysis, interpretation, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation (Facione, 2010).

Critical thinking, according to Willingham (2007), means assessing evidence to believe something, observing an area under discussion from manifold viewpoints, employing reasoning, decision-making, and problem-solving. Moreover, Edman (2008) states that critical thinking is “evaluative meta-cognition…that is, thinking about one’s thinking to make that thinking better” (p.45). As Moon (2008) asserts, “… critical thinking is not just a cognitive process, but is linked with expression and action and the various capacities that become relevant” (p. 9).

Critical thinking enables teachers to make informed decisions in their profession (Gambrill & Gibbs, 2009). Having ample content knowledge is a prerequisite for being able to think critically (Willingham, 2007).
Birjandi and Bagherkazemi (2010) explored the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers’ critical thinking and their professional success and discovered a significant positive relationship; that is, teachers with high levels of critical thinking are more successful in their profession. Afshar and Rahimi (2014) investigated the relationship between critical thinking and Emotional Intelligence and ascertained a significant positive relationship. Hence, the present study attempts to provide further insights into the interconnection between EFL teachers’ emotional intelligence, their critical thinking ability, and their professional success.

**Study Research Questions**

Based on what mentioned before, the research attempts to find answers to the following questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers’ critical thinking and their professional success?
2. Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers’ emotional intelligence and their professional success?

To provide more objective answers to the above questions, the following hypotheses were constructed to be tested out.

1. There is no significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers’ critical thinking and their professional success.
2. There is no significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers’ emotional intelligence and their professional success.

**Participants**

The participants of the study were 50 EFL male and female teachers at English language institutes in Zanjan and Isfahan, Iran. They were M.A. holders of translation studies, English language and literature, and teaching English as a foreign language. They were chosen randomly based on their years of experience in teaching, 3 to 7 years, and based on their ages, 27 to 32 years.

**Instrumentation**

To carry out the design and to answer the research questions, three instruments were used to obtain measures of the Iranian EFL teachers’ critical thinking ability, emotional intelligence, and professional success; they are as follows:

(I) Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (WGCTA)

The Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (WGCTA) measures individual’s critical thinking skills. The instrument requires test takers to evaluate reading passages that include problems, statements, arguments, and interpretations (Watson & Glaser, 2012, p.3). The WGCTA measures gains in critical thinking abilities, predicts success in a number of occupations, and determines the relationship between critical thinking ability and other abilities or traits (Watson & Glaser, 2012, p. 8).

This test comprises 80 questions and can be completed within 45-50 minutes. In addition to the face, content, construct, and criterion validity of the appraisal, its test-retest reliability has been shown (r=0.81) by Watson and Glaser (2012, p.24). Therefore, the test proves to be validated for measurement of individual’s CT.
(II) Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso Emotional Intelligent Test (MSCEIT)

The MSCEIT is a 141-question self-evaluation ability-based test developed by John Mayer, Paul Salovey, and David Caruso in 2002; it measures the four branches of the emotional intelligence, namely perceiving emotions, facilitating thought, understanding emotions, and managing emotions. Due to the ability-based structure of the MSCEIT, it was selected over the Bar-On emotional quotient inventory (EQi) (1997) and the Goleman emotional intelligence inventory (ECI-360) (1998). The Bar-On EQi is a self-report scale that includes other attributes such as self-actualization, mood, and other related qualities. The ECI-360 is also a self-report test and asks for other’s opinions (Mayer et al., 2000). The MSCEIT provides a total EI score, two area scores, four branch scores, and eight task scores (Mayer et al., 2000). In this study, the total EI score was used. The MSCEIT takes 30 - 45 minutes to complete. Studies have concluded that the MSCEIT has content and structural validity (e.g. Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2004, p.202). In terms of reliability, the MSCEIT has found to score full test reliability of .93 for the general category, .91 for expert scoring, and test-retest reliability for the total MSCEIT score is .86 (Mayer et al., 2004, p.202). Examples of items included in the above-mentioned questionnaires are provided in Appendix A.

(III) Successful Iranian EFL Teacher Questionnaire (SIETQ)

Moafian and Pishghadam (2009) developed a 47-item questionnaire on the characteristics of successful Iranian EFL teachers based on the elicited comments and opinions of EFL teachers and learners and also existing teacher success questionnaires. This questionnaire was utilized to obtain measures of teacher success through student evaluation. The SIETQ is divided into different parts, namely, teaching accountability, interpersonal relationships, attention to all, examination, commitment, learning boosters, creating a sense of competence, teaching boosters, physical and emotional acceptance, empathy, class attendance, and dynamism.

The results of reliability analysis exhibited that the total reliability of the questionnaire is very high (Cronbach' alpha = .94) (Moafian & Pishghadam, 2009, p.136). The item-total correlations were also assessed for all items, ranging from .40 to .62. Correlations were therefore within the acceptable range of 0.30 or greater (Moafian & Pishghadam, 2009). To obtain measures of Iranian EFL teachers’ success, SIETQ seems to be the most comprehensive instrument because it is based on the characteristics of successful Iranian EFL teachers using comments and opinions of EFL teachers and learners in Iran, and also existing teacher success questionnaires; moreover, SIETQ has been proved to be highly reliable (Cronbach' alpha = .94).

Procedure

To obtain measures of teachers’ critical thinking ability and emotional intelligence, the teachers were given the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (WGCTA) and the Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso Emotional Intelligent Test (MSCEIT) to fill out. Moreover, these teachers were evaluated through the Successful Iranian EFL Teacher Questionnaire (SIETQ) at the end of the term.

Results

The purpose of this study was to reveal the degree of association between the critical thinking scores and professional success of EFL teachers, and also between their emotional intelligence and professional success. The descriptive statistics (Table 1) indicates that all the 50 teachers who filled out the WGCTA and MSCEIT and were evaluated through SIETQ were included in the data analysis as valid cases. The participants’ scores ranged from 20 to 71 on WGCTA, from 68 to 137 on MSCEIT, and from 37 to 153 on SIETQ.
To test the research hypotheses, Pearson $r$ correlations were used to determine the relationship between the intended variables. The tabular forms of statistical analyses of data, and their results are as follows.

The first hypothesis states that there is no significant correlation between EFL teachers’ critical thinking ability and their professional success. To test this hypothesis, Pearson product moment correlation was run. Table 2 shows the coefficient of this correlation between total WGCTA and SIETQ scores. The calculated correlation coefficient is 0.308 which is significant at 0.05 level of significance ($r = 0.308, p \leq 0.05$). In other words, the two variables are significantly positively correlated with each other; thus, the first null hypothesis is rejected. This finding is better represented in Figure 2, which provides a visual representation of the correlation.

![Figure 2. Scatter-gram of the correlation of WGCTA and SIETQ scores](image-url)
The second hypothesis expresses that there is no significant correlation between EFL teachers' emotional intelligence and their professional success. To test this hypothesis, another Pearson product moment correlation was run. Table 3 shows the coefficient of this correlation between total MSCEI and SIETQ scores. The calculated correlation coefficient is 0.352 which is significant at 0.05 level of significance ($r = 0.352, p \leq 0.05$). In other words, the two variables are significantly positively correlated with each other; thus, the second null hypothesis is further rejected. This finding is better represented in figure 3, which provides a visual representation of the correlation.

Table 3 Pearson r Correlation between MSCEIT and SIETQ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SIETQ</th>
<th>MSCEI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SIETQ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.352*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSCEI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>0.352*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Figure 3. Scatter-gram of the correlation of MSCEI and SIETQ scores

Discussion

The results of the analysis revealed that there is a significant relationship between EFL teachers' critical thinking and their professional success and also between their emotional intelligence and their professional success. A discussion of prominent findings associated with each research question follows.

The findings of the present study are in the same line with the findings of Birjandi and Bagherkazemi (2010), who investigated the effects of five aspects of critical thinking on Iranian EFL teachers’ professional success. They realized that among five aspects of critical thinking, namely, making deduction,
recognition of assumptions, drawing inferences, interpreting evidence, and evaluating arguments, the last three aspects are positively correlated with Iranian EFL teachers’ professional success. The present study confirms their findings that critical thinking is positively correlated with Iranian EFL teachers’ professional success.

Since many studies demonstrate that teachers’ critical thinking ability influences nearly all their decisions concerning their students and classroom management (Gambrill & Gibbs, 2009; Facione, 2010), the positive relationship between their critical thinking ability and professional success cannot be surprising. As Brown (2014) asserts, nowadays language teaching is not easily categorized into methods and trends and each teacher should develop a sound approach to various language classrooms. Therefore, language teachers need to be critical thinkers to avoid being constrained by ideas of others, to evaluate different ideas, to examine critically what they are doing in classroom, and, finally, to develop their own sound approach in various teaching contexts.

The outcome of the present research that EFL teachers’ emotional intelligence is positively correlated with their professional success is in line with the other studies such as Romanelli, Cain, and Smith (2006), Ganizadeh and Moafian (2010), Lenka and Kant (2012), and Mehmood, Qasim, and Azam (2013). A possible explanation is that since teachers with high emotional intelligence may be able to manage and understand their students’ feelings better, they can make better pedagogical decisions in their classes and to devise effective strategies that help them achieve positive outcomes which can, in turn, lead to their professional success; therefore, teachers high on EI are likely to investigate the issues in the classroom better and find more creative and effective solutions.

These findings are significant because they show the role of factors like emotional awareness and use of emotions in problem solving (Mayer et al., 2002) as specifically influencing the teachers' success. Emotional intelligence by definition enables individuals to understand and control their feelings, understand others’ feelings, have empathy, and raise motivation or self-confidence. For this reason, emotional intelligence levels of teachers are important in effective teacher-student communication, and in achieving positive work atmosphere and success.

The results of the present study are different from the findings of Hashemi (2008) and Khodadady (2012). Hashemi found no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and Iranian EFL teachers’ professional success. Khodadady arrived at a negative relationship between EI and Iranian EFL teachers’ professional success. The possible explanation for such differences in the findings can be due to the differences in the contexts of these studies and in the instruments used to obtain data.

Although the present study showed the positive relationship between teachers’ critical thinking ability and emotional intelligence in their success, this relationship should not be overestimated because calculating the coefficients of determination ($r^2$), which gives the proportion of the variance of one variable that is predictable from the other variable, reveals that only about 9% (.308)$^2$, of the variation in teachers’ success could be explained by taking into account their critical thinking ability and only about 12% (.352)$^2$, by considering their emotional intelligence. This is not unexpected because teaching is a complex process that is influenced by various elements and also a wide range of teacher instructional and affective behaviors and beliefs may shape students’ judgments of a successful teacher.

**Conclusions and Implications**

To put it in a nutshell, the findings of this study revealed that EFL teachers’ ability to manage their emotions and to think critically relates to their professional success. Therefore, a teacher needs to equip her/himself with high levels of critical thinking and emotional intelligence to be able to judge and evaluate
various information and beliefs systematically and also to manage and understand her/his own and others’ emotions in order to achieve a hard core around which to shape one's own thinking and reasoning and to be professionally successful.

The findings of the study may have implications for teachers, teacher trainers, teacher training programs and students. The findings make teachers more familiar with the factors that can influence their professional success. By recognizing that teachers’ EI and critical thinking directly affect their professional success, teachers, teacher trainers, and teacher training programs can find ways of enhancing teachers’ EI and critical thinking in order to be more successful in their profession. By having successful teachers, the probability of bringing into being successful students will be increased. However, further research is needed for better generalisation. Also, further research is required to study the other more varied groups of EFL teachers, to observe if demographic variables are relating, or to use other EFL teachers’ success measures.

References


Appendix A

Samples of the Items in the WGCTA and MSCEIT Questionnaires

(I) Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (WGCTA)

Directions

An assumption is something presupposed or taken for granted. When you say, ‘I’ll be a qualified solicitor in two months’, you take it for granted that you will be alive in two months, that you will pass the relevant examinations, and similar things.

Below are a number of statements. Each statement is followed by several proposed assumptions. You are to decide for each assumption whether a person, in making the given statement, is really making that assumption i.e., taking it for granted, justifiably or not.

If you think that the given assumption is taken for granted in the statement, mark ‘YES’ under ‘Assumption made’ in the proper place on the answer sheet. If you think the assumption is not necessarily taken for granted in the statement, mark ‘NO’ in the space under ‘Assumption made’. Remember to judge each assumption independently. Below is an example.

Statement: Proposed assumptions:

‘The proper aim of education in a free society is to prepare the individual to make wise decisions.’

1. People who have been educated in a free society will not make unwise decisions.
2. Some education systems in our society do not have the proper aim.
3. Some kinds of education can help individuals make wise decisions.
4. In a society

(II) Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso Emotional Intelligent Test (MSCEIT)

Understanding Emotions

Tom felt anxious, and became a bit stressed when he thought about all the work he needed to do. When his supervisor brought him an additional project, he felt ____. (Select the best choice.)

a) Overwhelmed
b) Depressed
c) Ashamed
d) Self Conscious
e) Jittery