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Teacher Reflection and its Relation to Teacher Efficacy and Autonomy

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Abstract

Teacher reflection is the process of examining beliefs, goals, and practices to improve student learning. Present study has tried to come upon the relationship between teacher reflection, teacher efficacy and autonomy by means of a new English language teacher reflective inventory (Akbari, et al., 2010). 172 EFL Iranian teachers voluntary volunatarily participated in this study. The results showed that there was a positive relationship between teacher reflective practice, teacher self-efficacy and autonomy; also reflection elements had positive relations with self-efficacy and autonomy components. Obviously, reflective practice would help teachers to foster their effectiveness as well as independence.

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Keywords: teacher reflection; teacher efficacy; teacher autonomy

1. Introduction

In recent years second/foreign language (L2) teacher education, as an independent subfield of applied linguistics with the aim of educating and informing pre- and in-service language teachers, has been developing rapidly (Ishihara & Lazarton, 2005). With the absence of method in teaching and methodology and the emergence of the post method era (Kumaradavadivelu, 1994; Kumaradavadivelu, 2001; Kumaradavadivelu, 2003; Kumaradavadivelu, 2006), there is no theoretical framework left for teachers to rely on. Actual practices in classrooms greatly depend on the teacher

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and his/her development (Akbari, 2007; Halliday, 1998; Lockhart & Richards, 1994). Among various factors affecting teacher development, reflective practice is becoming an important feature of ESL/EFL teacher education programs worldwide and has been extensively established as a central aspect in the professional development of teachers.

There's there is no doubt that during the method period, practical or procedural knowledge was prior to theoretical knowledge (Johnson, 1996). Therefore, language teacher education was in crisis and one of the ways to come out of this crisis and overcome the control of highly interested, political knowledge was reflection (Akbari, 2007). Since teachers are human beings and have evolving natures, they are complicated to study, but measuring some of their characteristics and finding their relation to each other may help the field of teacher education in specific and applied linguistics in general.

2. Reflection

By referring to previous studies (Akbari, 2007; Akbari et al., 2010; Griffith, 2000; Jay & Johnson, 2002) on reflection and teacher reflection, we may go through John Dewey (1933/1993) who defined reflection as an activity based on "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it" (Jay & Johnson, 2002, p.74). Reflection in education demands teachers' systematic thinking and logical, rational, and gradual analyzing of the teaching environment (Korthagen, 1993). Dieker and Monda-Amaya (1995) proposed the advantages of reflective process like teachers' ability to make changes in methodology, evaluation of effectiveness and objective of their instruction, learning to relate class experiences and its content to make changes in instruction, and helping teachers systematically assess challenges in the teaching context to initiate helpful solutions. Lester (1998) believes that reflective teachers make connections between theory and practice, build up new knowledge base, and their efficacy fosters since they observe the positive effects of their own generated solutions (cited in York-Barr et al., 2001). Also, Braun and Crumpler (2004) posit that reflective practice increases teacher's sense of self efficacy, job satisfaction, and develops interpersonal relationships with other teachers. Research on successful novice teachers shows that reflection and efficacy are two important factors related to teacher persistence, retention, and resiliency. Furthermore, Yost (2006) found that reflective practice and self-efficacy are more significant factors in the success of novice teachers than positive school climate.

3. Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a person's belief in his/her effect and competency in performing a specific task without considering others' accomplishments of the same task (Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 2007). Tschannen-Moran, Hoy and Hoy (1998) define teacher efficacy as "the teacher's belief in his or her capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplishing a specific teaching task in a particular context" (p.22). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) emphasize that "teacher efficacy affects the effort the teachers invest in teaching, the goals they set, and their level of aspiration" (p. 783). A lot of studies showed that student academic achievement, motivation and the students' own efficacy levels are directly related to the teachers' sense of efficacy (Anderson et al., 1988; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Moradkhani, 2009). Also teachers with high sense of efficacy and control of their professional life have shown higher levels of persistence, effort and resilience (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Hoy, 1998). Guskey (1988) noted that teacher efficacy is similar to subject-expectancy effects since the teachers who believe in their control over student achievement are more patient, work harder, and try new approaches; therefore ensuing actual higher levels of student success.

4. Autonomy

Nowadays many studies dealing with human motivation extensively address autonomy construct and define it along with the concepts such as self-empowerment, volition, self-determination, self-governance, self-direction, and independence (Coolican & Wilson, 1996; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deck & Ryan, 1985; LaGuardia & Ryan, 1999; Paige, 2003; Wilson, 1993; Cited in Han, 2006). Thus, teacher autonomy is teachers' feelings of controlling themselves and

their work environments (Hall & Pearson, 1993; Moomwa & Pearson, 2006). So, teacher autonomy is their independence in making professional decisions about classroom and instructional help to learners (Licata & Street, 1989; cited in Rudolph, 2006).

5. Research questions

The following questions are answered in this study:

- Is there any relationship between teacher reflection and teacher self-efficacy?
- Is there any relationship between teacher reflection and teacher autonomy?
- Is there any relationship between teacher reflection elements and teacher self-efficacy components?
- Is there any relationship between teacher reflection elements and teacher autonomy components?

6. Method

6.1 Participants

172 EFL teachers (68 male and 104 female) were sampled from teacher population of state and private schools and also English language institutions in Tehran and Karaj. Convenient sampling was used for data collection (http://dissertation.laerd.com). Participation in this study was totally voluntary. Seventeen (10%) teachers were teaching at high schools in Karaj, both state and private while one-hundred-fifty-five (90%) of participants were EFL teachers at the institutes in Tehran and Karaj. Seventeen (10%) teachers were teaching at high schools in Karaj, both state and private while one-hundred-fifty-five (90%) of participants were EFL teachers at the institutes in Tehran and Karaj and taught English language to students with different levels of proficiency from elementary, pre-intermediate and intermediate to advanced levels. Among them, eighty-four (48.8%) teachers held a bachelor's degree, sixty-nine (82.1%) in English-related majors while fifteen (17.8%) in non-English-related majors. Also, seventy-five (43.6%) teachers reported holding master's degree, seventy-two (96%) in English-related majors and three (4%) in non-English-related majors. Furthermore, nine (5.2%) of the participants of the study got their PhD degree or are a student at this level in English-related majors. The four (2.3%) remaining teachers didn't have any academic degree.

6.2 The Instruments

To measure variables of this study three questionnaires were used which are discussed thoroughly in the following lines. There was a paragraph in all of the three questionnaires in which teachers were informed about the aim of the study, the concept which would be measured, and confidentiality of given responds responses.

English Language Teacher Reflective Inventory (ELTRI)

In previous studies, in the absence of any specific instrument to measure reflectivity, teachers were asked to reflect on their teaching by keeping journals, videotaping their classes, using portfolios, conducting action research, and writing narratives (Akbari, 2007). Akbari et al. (2010) tried to develop an instrument called the English Language Teacher Reflective Inventory (ELTRI) based on reflection elements. There is not an agreed upon definition or theory, therefore; a tentative model was proposed by Akbari et al. using related literature and expert ideas. After validation processes, a 5-factor-model of English teacher reflection was proposed encompassing practical, cognitive, learner (affective), meta-cognitive, and critical elements. Akbari et al. (2010) explain reflective teaching elements as: *Practical* component is related to the ways teachers reflect such as keeping journals, talking to colleagues, teaching portfolios. *Cognitive* factor deals with conscious efforts for professional development such as reading books and journals. Knowing about learner's affective and cognitive state is the theme of *Learner (affective)* component. *Meta-cognitive* factor is about teachers' awareness of their strength, weaknesses, personality, and teaching profession. Lastly, socio-political aspects of teaching are the theme of *critical* element (Akbari, et al.,

2010). To measure the internal consistency of the reflective teaching questionnaire used for this study, Cronbach alpha coefficient was calculated and determined to be .87 while Akbari et al. (2010) reported it to be .80.

Teacher Self- Efficacy Scale (TSES)

To measure teacher self-efficacy, Tschannen-Moran & Hoy's Teacher Efficacy Instrument (2001) was used. The 24-questioned scale consists of three subcomponents: student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. *Efficacy for student engagement* measures how much teachers believe in their ability to engage the learners in class activities. *Efficacy for instructional strategies* deals with teachers' belief in effectiveness of their strategies used in the classroom. *Efficacy for classroom management* is designed to study teachers' belief in their ability to manage the class in the best possible way. Internal consistency reliability of the efficacy inventory of this study using the Cronbach alpha value was .89 while Tschannen-Moran & Hoy's Teacher Efficacy Instrument (2001) determined it to be .94.

Teacher Autonomy Inventory (TAI)

Autonomy is measured by Pearson & Moomaw (2006) teacher autonomy inventory which is the verified version of the previous 2-factor structure of the Teaching Autonomy Scale (TAS) from Pearson & Hall (1993). Teacher autonomy scale is based on a two factor model consisting of general teaching autonomy and curriculum autonomy. *General teaching autonomy* deals with the issues concerning classroom standards of conduct and personal job discretion. *Curriculum autonomy* is the selection of activities, materials, instructional planning, and sequencing. Internal consistency reliability of the autonomy scale of this study using the Cronbach alpha coefficient was estimated to be .74. However, Pearson and Hall (2001) in the first manual set it at .80.

6.3 Procedure

All three copies were distributed simultaneously to the teachers to measure reflection, efficacy, and autonomy construct. The participants were introduced to the significance of the study and confidentiality of their information before participating in the study. To meet the representativeness of the sample, some English language institutes in Tehran and Karaj and some schools in Karaj were selected.

350 questionnaires were distributed in 60 days, 70 soft copies were sent to the teachers' emails and 280 hard copies were distributed by the researcher. However, only 202 questionnaires were returned (return rate was 58%) and 30 questionnaires were discarded due to the incomplete answers. In the end 172 convenient copies were used in the study.

6.4 Data Analysis

The collected scores were fed in to SPSS software, version 17. Total scores for each variable were computed as total reflection, total efficacy, and total autonomy. Also, the scores for each of the components of the four variables were calculated. The mean score and standard deviation of every computed total score of variables and their subcomponents were calculated. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to find out the significant relations.

7. Results and discussion

7.1 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics for the total scores

The mean score and standard deviation of total English teacher reflection, efficacy, and autonomy were calculated and are presented in table1.

Table1. Descriptive Statistics of the total reflection, efficacy, personality, and autonomy (N=172)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Max	Min
Total Reflection	97.18	14.51	139	40
Total Efficacy	93.02	11.39	120	69
Total Autonomy	47.21	4.70	69	37

Descriptive statistics of elements

The results (table 2) show that English language teachers mostly reflect about the meta-cognitive (M=27.06) aspects of their teaching compared to the four other components. Critical reflection (M=21.81) is the second subcomponent which is generally reflected. Subsequent to critical factor, teachers' reflective practice is on average based on cognitive (M=19.59) and practical (M=18.63) aspects. Learner element is the one that less reflected on by the teachers of the study (M=10.30). Furthermore, teachers' answers around the title of learner reflection seems to be more homogeneous (S.D. =2.42) than practical reflection (S.D. =4.19), meta-cognitive reflection (S.D. =4.33), cognitive reflection (S.D. =4.49), and critical reflection (S.D =5.13) respectively.

Table2. Descriptive statistics of five elements of teacher reflection (N=172)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Max	Min	Range
Practical reflection	18.63	4.19	30	6	24
Cognitive reflection	19.59	4.19	30	8	22
Meta-cognitive reflection	27.06	4.33	35	9	26
Critical reflection	21.81	5.13	35	8	27
Learner reflection	10.30	2.42	15	3	12

The results are presented in table 3 which specify that teachers of this study feel more efficacious in instructional strategies (M=31.55) than student engagement (M=30.88) or classroom management (M=30.79). Additionally, teachers' responses to classroom management are more homogenous (S.D. =4.06) than students' engagement (S.D. =4.11) or instructional strategies (S.D. =4.55). As it is shown the distribution of the responses to student's engagement questions is more than instructional strategy and classroom management.

Table3. Descriptive statistics of three subcomponents of teacher self-efficacy (N=172)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Max	Min	Range
Student Engagement	30.79	4.55	40	20	18
Instructional Strategy	31.55	4.11	40	22	18
Classroom Management	30.88	4.06	40	22	18

The results of the teacher autonomy analysis are presented in table 4 which indicate that teachers feel highly more autonomous in general teaching, classroom conduct and personal decisions (M=31.71) than curriculum and material selection (M= 15.52). English teachers' responses are more homogeneous around the title of curriculum autonomy (S.D. =2.65) compared to general teaching autonomy (S.D. =3.05).

Table4. Descriptive statistics of teacher autonomy subcomponents (N=172)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Max	Min	Range
Curriculum Autonomy	15.52	2.65	22	8	14
General Autonomy	31.71	3.05	47	25	22

7.2 Inferential statistics

Teacher reflection and self-efficacy

The results of Pearson correlation (table 5) demonstrated that the p-value is smaller than 0.01, therefore, there is a significantly positive correlation between participants' reflection scores and efficacy scores (r=.40, p<.01). As a result, the first null hypothesis is rejected.

Table5. Pearson correlation for Total reflective practice and total efficacy practice

Total Reflection	Total Efficacy
Pearson Correlation	0.40 **
Sig. (2- tailed)	0.00
N	172

** Correlation is significant at level of p< .01

The findings of this study are in line with a study by Braun and Crumpler (2004) in which they refer to the positive relation of reflectivity and efficacy. They think reflectivity helps teachers to become more efficacious and believe in themselves. As Inchausti (1991) describes it as *second self* and Colton and Sparks-Langer (1993) define it as "an on-going effort to explore and understand oneself which is reciprocally linked to continually serving others and living as rich and a life as possible" (cited in Braun & Crumpler, 2004, p.60). They think the second self can help teachers to develop their identity and raise their efficacy, change their lives in a better way, nurture their potentials, and finally engage in reflective practice (Braun & Crumpler, 2004).

Additionally, there are some unique personal qualities of a reflective teacher from Korthagen and Wubbels' (1995) standpoint as: they have good relationships with the students and colleagues, foster their tendency toward research and investigation, have strong sense of efficacy and job satisfaction, and less probable to experience "burnout" (cited in Griffith, 2000). Also, reflective teachers find solutions for the problems they face during and after teaching process and their efficacy fosters since they observe the positive effects of their own generated solutions (York-Barr et al., 2001). Moreover, Yost (2006) in his research on successful novice teachers shows that reflection and efficacy are two important factors related to teacher persistence, retention, and resiliency. He also found that reflective practice and self-efficacy are more significant factors than positive school climate in success of novice teachers. So, reflective practice and efficacy of the EFL teachers are strongly and positively connected to each other and EFL teachers can be more efficacious by practicing reflectivity.

Teacher reflection elements and self-efficacy components

The results (table 6) showed that P-value is less than .01, so there is significantly positive relationship among practical reflection element and instructional strategy (r=.20, p<.01), classroom management (r=.25, p<.01), and student engagement (r=26, p<.01) which conveys that more teachers reflect on practical aspect of their teaching, the more they are efficacious and vice versa. For cognitive reflection also P-value is less than .01 which indicates there is significantly positive relationship among cognitive reflection element and all three subcomponents of teacher self-efficacy: instructional strategy (r=.26, p<.01), classroom management (r=.30, p<.01), and student engagement (r=.28, p<.01). Therefore, the more cognitive reflection of the teacher, the more efficacious he or she is.

The third element of reflective teaching is meta-cognitive reflection which has, according to the P-value; significantly positive relationship with three elements of self-efficacy: instructional efficacy (r=.48, p<.01), classroom management (r=.31, p<.01), and student engagement (r=.39, p<.01). So, having more meta-cognitive reflection leads to be more efficacious. Learner reflection element was the fourth reflective teaching component which had the P-value less than 0.01 and significantly positive relation to instructional strategy (r=.32, p<.01), classroom management (r=25, p<.01), and student management (r=.31, p<.01). The more teachers reflect on affective aspects of their teaching the more efficacious they are.

Critical reflection had a bit different results from all of the discussed elements. P-value is less than 0.01 for instructional strategy and less than 0.05 for student engagement. While it has significantly positive relation to instructional strategy (r=.48, p<.01) and student engagement (r=.18, p<.05), there is not any significant relationship between critical reflection and classroom management. Subsequently, critical teacher reflection improves their efficacy for instructional strategy and student engagement.

Table 6. Pearson correlation analysis for elements of reflective teaching and teacher self-efficacy components

	Instructional Strategy	Classroom Management	Student Engagement
Practical Reflection R Sig (2- tailed)	0.20 ** 2. 0.008	0.25 ** 0.001	0.26 ** 0.000
Cognitive Reflection R Sig (2- tailed)	0.26 ** 0.001	0.30 ** 0.000	0.28 ** 0.000
Meta-cognitive Reflection R Sig (2- tailed)	0.48 ** 0.000	0.31 ** 0.000	0.39 ** 0.000
Critical Reflection R Sig (2- tailed)	0.21 ** 0.004	0.13 0.7	0.18 * 0.1
Learner Reflection R Sig (2- tailed)	0.32 * 0.000	0.25 ** 0.001	0.31 ** 0.000

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

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

R = Pearson correlation.

In accordance with the first question, all of the five reflection components have a positive relation to the three sub-components of the self-efficacy except critical reflection and classroom management which did not have any significant relationship which can be explained by their definitions. The critical element deals with the political aspects of teaching, race, gender, and student empowerment (Akbari et al, 2010) while classroom management is related to the teachers' abilities in controlling and managing the classroom.

Additionally, among reflection elements meta-cognitive reflection can significantly predict instructional strategy and student engagement components of efficacy as well as meta-cognitive reflection which significantly predicts student engagement. Cognitive reflection fosters teachers' professional development and meta-cognitive reflection helps them to find the problematic aspects of their personality and emotional make-up. By practicing these facets of reflectivity teachers can improve professionally and find new instructional strategies to engage the students in lessons.

Teacher reflection and autonomy

Having a look at table 7, the P-value is smaller than 0.01 which shows there is significantly positive relationship between total reflective practice and total autonomy concept (r=.26, p<.01) so the second null hypothesis is rejected.

Table7. Pearson correlation for Total reflective practice and total autonomy construct

Total Reflection	Total Autonomy
Pearson Correlation	0.26 **
Sig. (2- tailed)	0.00
N	172

** Correlation is significant at level of p< .0

As reflectivity leads to more efficacious teachers, it can help teachers to be more autonomous in their teaching practice and literature review shows that reflectivity and autonomy have positive relation with each other and the results of this study confirm the previous findings. Reflective practice is a process to help teachers to overcome the problems they face in teaching environment. They can use reflectivity to question the held policies and curriculum and become independent lifelong learners (Lester, 1998). On the other hand, autonomous teachers are independent professional decision-makers (Rudolph, 2006). Friedman (1999) describes autonomy as "being able to initiate ideas and activities and being involved in major school policies and practices" (cited in Rudolph, 2006, P.17). The degree of teachers' autonomy shows their job satisfaction (Moomaw & Pearson, 2006) and reflectivity is a process which develops teachers' persistence and job satisfaction (Braun & Crumpler, 2004). Consequently, EFL teachers can improve their autonomy by practicing reflection.

Teacher reflection elements and teacher autonomy components

The results, in table 8, show that curriculum autonomy has a significant positive relation to all elements of teacher reflection as the P-value for curriculum autonomy and cognitive reflection is less than 0.01; and practical, cognitive, meta-cognitive, and learner reflection are less than 0.05. As a result there is a significant positive relationship between curriculum autonomy and all of the reflective teaching components: practical (r=.17, p<.05), meta-cognitive (r=.15, p<.05), critical (r=.22. p<.05), learner (r=.15, p<.05), and particularly cognitive element (r=.32, p<.01). To sum up, practicing all kinds of reflectivity or in other words reflective practice as a whole would help teachers improve their curriculum autonomy.

Additionally, according to the P-value (<.05), there was a significant positive relationship among general teaching autonomy and both critical reflection (r=.17, p<.05) and learner reflection (r=.16, p<.05). However, there was no significant relationship between this component and practical, cognitive and meta-cognitive reflection. Therefore critical and learner reflections can help teachers in general teaching autonomy in a positive way.

Table 8. Pearson correlation analysis for elements of reflective teaching and different components of teacher autonomy

	Curriculum Autonomy	General Teaching Autonomy
Practical Reflection	0.17 *	0.12
R		
Sig (2-tailed)	0.02	0.11
Cognitive Reflection	0.32 **	0.12
R		
Sig (2-tailed)	0.00	0.10
Meta-cognitive Reflection	0.15 *	0.07
R		
Sig (2-tailed)	0.04	0.33
Critical Reflection	0.22 *	0.17 *
R		
Sig (2-tailed)	0.00	0.02
Learner Reflection	0.15 *	0.16
R		
Sig (2-tailed)	0.03	0.03

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

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

r = Pearson correlation

Considering the results, cognitive reflection can be a good predictor of this autonomy facet. Reflective practice can help teachers in the process of selecting, planning, and sequencing and positively develops curriculum autonomy. Practicing cognitive element of reflection helps teachers to develop in teaching and become independent enough at the level of curriculum autonomy to plan the lessons and select the materials. General teaching autonomy which deals with the issues related to classroom standards and management (Moomwa & Pearson, 2006) has positive relations to critical and learner elements of reflection. The English classroom is a small community with learners as its people. While practicing reflection, particularly working on critical and learner elements, the teacher also has this opportunity to find the problematic areas of his or her classroom management and can evaluate the new strategies during the teaching process.

11. Conclusion

This study tried to find out the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' reflection and their efficacy, and autonomy as well as the relationship between various elements of reflection and self-efficacy components, and elements of autonomy. According to the results, teacher educators and the managers of institutes have to organize some preparation sessions to familiarize the EFL teachers with theoretical as well as practical basis of reflective practice, conduct and hold workshops to help teachers to improve their reflectivity, and give feedbacks to the reflective teachers to get motivated and increase their efficacy and effectiveness.

Reflection increases job satisfaction and would help teachers to foster their autonomy and independence also have confidence to participate in determining the school and/or institutes' policy.

12. Suggestions for further research

It's desired that the same study replicated with higher number of participants to increase the reliability and validity of the results. Besides, due to the lack of time and budget only small number of teachers in two cities of Iran, Tehran and Karaj, participated in the study. Thus, in order to find more reliable results, a more representative sample from different cities in Iran or even out of Iran would be worthwhile.

The ELTIR (English Language Teaching Reflection Inventory) is newly developed and it is recommended to conduct replication studies since they help to operationalize the reflection concept and assist its researchers to refine the proposed model. This study found the relationship between reflection and two variables. Future research could be done to find the relation of other constructs to reflectivity.

Finally, Akbari et al. (2010) refer to a problem with teacher education model which is the lack of any research on the relation (positive or negative) of reflection and learners' achievement or efficiency of the instruction. Therefore, one of the urgent needs for further research would be finding the relation or effect of teacher reflection on students' achievement.

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