

5. Discussion

The results of the present study showed a positive significant correlation between reflective teaching and critical thinking ability of teachers. ($r=.36$, $P < .05$, table 2). These results can best be manifested through Minott's (2009) statement. He refers to critical thinking as a co-requisite to reflective teaching. He emphasizes the substantial role of critical thinking to the extent that reflective teaching cannot occur without it.

Minott (2009) cites two similar ideas of Newman (1999) and Cole (1997). Newman uses synonyms of critical practice and critical practitioner for reflective practice and practitioner. Minott infers from his idea that critical thinking is an integral, compulsory aspect for any teaching to be considered reflective teaching. Cole also is of the opinion of critical thinking as a co-requisite to reflective practice. He furthermore believes in 'self-directed ongoing critical inquiry'. According to him, critical thinking is regarded as an integral aspect of teachers' self-directed ongoing critical inquiry.. From Cole's idea, Minott assumes that "ongoing critical inquiry of one's practice is a feature of reflective teaching." (Minott, 2009, p.4).

Brookfield (1987) also believes that reflective dimension is one concept closely related to critical thinking. To him Critical thinking involves a reflective dimension. Cole & Knowles, (2000) explain the aim of reflective practice as thinking critically about oneself, one's assumptions, and one's teaching choices and actions.

The importance of the present findings is in the fact that the relationship between reflective teaching and critical thinking has been theoretical and this study sheds empirical light on the issue.

The results of the present study also indicated that there is no significant difference between reflective teaching of high and low critical thinkers with regard to their gender. In other words, critical thinking levels and gender of Iranian EFL teachers did not have any effect on their reflective teaching. Based on the theoretical evidence, it was expected that high critical thinkers would have more reflectivity upon their teaching and conversely low critical thinkers possessed less reflectivity. However, the finding is at odds with the theoretical discussions about the issue and reveals a discrepancy between theory and practice. Despite the critical role of reflectivity in developing critical thinking, there was no difference between high and low critical thinkers' reflection. These results imply that teachers may not have possessed the necessary skills or expertise for reflection and reflective practice and so their levels of practicing reflective teaching may have been low. These results can be justified through the following reasons:

Firstly, teachers' levels of background knowledge regarding reflection and reflective practice may have been low. Secondly, teachers may not have had positive attitudes towards reflective teaching.

The reasons behind teachers' lack of skill or expertise for practicing reflection may be concerned with teachers' low level of background knowledge towards reflective teaching, since reflective teaching is considered a fairly recent approach within the methodology of language teaching and it hasn't been dealt with in depth especially in EFL context.

Reflective teaching as a means of professional development of teachers in mainstream education focuses on teachers' reacting, examining and evaluating their teaching. Reflective teaching also needs enhancing teachers' professional knowledge and skills, their self-awareness as they engage in teaching. Furthermore, reflection and reflective practice is possible when teachers feel responsibility towards their profession as well as devoting time to reflection as a cyclical process. However, many EFL teachers see reflection as an overload job that requires time and effort, this view discourages some teachers not to reflect.

These justifications can be best explained with reference to Ferwana's research in 2006. In his study, he explored student teachers' levels of reflective teaching. He examined student teachers' levels of background knowledge towards reflective teaching, their attitudes towards reflective teaching and their levels of practicing reflective teaching. The results of his study showed that they their level of background knowledge was low, their attitude towards reflection was positive and their degree of practicing reflection was low.

In another study by Al-Jabri and Region (2009), they examined post- basic schoolteachers' attitudes towards reflection and in detail they examined the extent that teachers of English said they reflected on their teaching, the extent that teachers felt it was important to reflect upon their teaching, and the factors that hindered their reflection. Teachers gave positive responses in both their reflective practices and in their attitudes towards reflection. They also cautioned when interpreting results, since the very positive responses were influenced by the Ministry's position on reflection and its value. In answering hindrances to their reflections, teachers referred to teachers' workload as a key factor. The other factors were the stressful nature of observation, the students' level and the lack of cooperation among teachers as they were busy during their work hours, classroom management problems which made reflection during lessons difficult.

Another justification related to teachers' lack of skill in practicing reflection and their low levels of practicing reflection can be concerned with the lack of consensus on the terminology for reflective practice that leads to methodological effects. The literature of reflective teaching is replete with different definitions, models, and frameworks for reflective teaching that make reflective practice difficult. Loughran (2002) asserts that "Challenging this distinction between theory and practice is important, and a conceptualization of effective reflective practice is one way of beginning to help teacher preparation programs integrate in meaningful ways". (cited in Ferwana, 2006, p.109).

This justification is concerned with the views of Collin, Karsenti and Komis (2013). In their critiques of initial teacher training, they state that the absence of a clear terminology or definition for reflective practice has both practical and methodological effects. In terms of theory, they point to clarifying the concept of reflective practice. They suggest for a sufficiently inclusive definition that is not too general, so that they can “gather works on reflective practice under the same roof” (p. 115). In terms of methodology, they point to observation and evaluation problems. The instruments of observation and evaluation in reflective practice should themselves be continuously and thoroughly evaluated. In terms of practice, they suggest for a combination of clear theoretical concepts and the results of empirical studies based on sound, validated methodologies.

6. Conclusion

The present study led to the conclusion that developing reflective teaching is deemed necessary in enhancing critical thinking abilities of teachers. Thus if teachers apply reflection and reflective practice in their classes, they will improve their critical thinking abilities more effectively. The second conclusion derived from the findings of the study proved that the levels of critical thinking and gender did not have any effect on reflective teaching; and even high critical thinkers were not different in their degree of reflective teaching and practicing it from low critical thinkers. This result at first sight may seem in contrast with the first conclusion of the correlation between reflection and critical thinking but the results did not show a very strong correlation. There was a moderate to large effect size between the two constructs, ($r=.36$, $P < .05$, table 2). The second results suggest that Iranian EFL teachers may not have been skillful at reflective teaching and they have had low levels of practicing reflection because of the lack of consensus on the terminology of reflective teaching, low background knowledge, low attitudes towards reflection and reflective teaching, and demanding time and effort on the part of those familiar with it.

The findings of this research have some implications for teacher trainers and EFL teachers. Teacher trainers should familiarize teachers with the concept of reflection and reflective teaching and foster it in their student teachers if they want to enhance their critical thinking abilities. The results of the study also would help teachers become aware of the importance of reflection and practicing it in their classes to enhance the quality of their teaching.

The findings of the study must be treated with caution. This study was conducted only in institutes. Further research is needed to be done in other educational environments such as universities. since reflective teaching is a professional development activity, it is needed to be examined in environments such as universities in which training professional and high quality teachers is of high importance.

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