

Investigating the Relationship between Iranian EFL Teachers' Reflection and Their Instructional Practices

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Abstract

The present study made an effort to examine the correlation between Iranian male and female language teachers' reflection and their instructional practices in the school settings. To this end, first, the researcher used convenience sampling in order to select 110 EFL teachers including 50 male and 60 female teachers in different public high schools in Baneh (Iran) and Saqqez (Iran) as the participants of the study. Second, , the researcher obtained the participants' informed written consent and provided them with the Teacher Reflection Questionnaire (Akbrai, et al., 2010) and Instructional Practices Questionnaire (Hong, et al., 2006) of the present study. Third, the EFL teachers completed the teacher reflection questionnaire and the instructional practices questionnaire in 15 minutes. The researcher collected the data in a two-week period of time. Finally, the researcher used Pearson-Product Moment Correlation test to analyze the obtained data. SPSS 20 was utilized to perform the data analysis of the study. Based on the results of the study, there were significant positive correlations between the male and female teachers' reflection and their instructional practices in the context of the classroom. It was argued that there were significant positive correlations between these teachers' reflection and their pertinent instructional practices due mainly to the fact that these teachers' reflection empowered them to assess the effectiveness of their instructional strategies and to redress them in order to ameliorate their efficacy in the context of the classroom.

Keywords: Gender, instructional practices, teacher factors, teacher reflection

Introduction

In light of numerous studies (e.g. Borg, 2006, 2009a, 2009b; Burton, 2009; De Graaff, & Housen, 2009; Dunne, & Toland, 2012; Farrell, 2015) *language teacher factors* have attracted considerable attention in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). These factors comprise the teachers' individual characteristics such as their self-efficacy, motivation, beliefs, burnout, and resiliency that may have a profound impact on the efficacy of their language instruction in the context of the classroom (Farrell, 2011a).

Among the various teacher factors, the teachers' reflection has been investigated in various empirical studies (Gebhard, 2009). Harford and MacRuaric (2008) stated that teacher reflection refers to the language teachers' ability to focus on their instructional practices in the context of the classroom and to evaluate their efficacy in a critical way in order to ameliorate their instructional efficacy in the context of the classroom. They explained that, teachers' reflection enables them to engage in the process of constant learning and ensures their continuous professional development. As they concluded, the teachers' reflection is likely to be related to their instructional practices in the context of the classroom.

Humphreys and Susak (2000) stated that the language teachers' instructional practices encompass their various types of language teaching strategies and techniques which are used in order to expedite the language learners' acquisition of the various aspects of the target language. According to them, these practices may be focus on the language learners' cognitive processes. Moreover, they may prompt the learners to take advantage of their own capabilities or the support of their peers in the process of task performance. As they concluded, the relationship between the language teachers' reflection and their instructional practices may be influenced by their personal factors including their gender among the others.

A close examination of the relevant studies of teacher reflection and teachers' instructional practices highlights the fact that the SLA researchers have not examined these variables in a satisfactory way. More specifically, a number of studies (e.g. Harford & MacRuairc, 2008; Kabilan, 2007) have made an effort to determine the language teachers' attitudes towards reflective practice in their academic settings. Moreover, a number of studies (e.g. Dunne & Toland, 2012) have focused on the impact of teacher education on the language teachers' teacher reflection. Finally, certain studies (e.g. Farrell, 2011b) have tried to determine the degree to which teachers' reflection affects their language teaching beliefs.

Nonetheless, none of the relevant studies has investigated the relationship between the male and female language teachers' reflection and their instructional practices in the context of the classroom. Consequently, there is a need for more studies in this regard in the foreign language learning contexts including the EFL context of Iran. The present study made an effort to deal with the above-mentioned inadequacy of research in Iranian EFL context. More specifically, it strived to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a significant relationship between male EFL teachers' reflection and their instructional practices?
2. Is there a significant relationship between female EFL teachers' reflection and their instructional practices?

Method

Participants

On the basis of the aforementioned aims of the study, the researcher used convenience sampling in order to select 110 EFL teachers including 50 male and 60 female teachers in different public high schools in Baneh (Iran) and Saqqez (Iran) as the participants of the study. These teachers ranged in age from 25 to 46 and were native speakers of Kurdish. Moreover, they had a B.A. MA., or Ph.D. in English Language Teaching or English Language and Literature. Finally, the experience of these teachers was in the range of 2 to 14 years.

Assessments and Measures

The following measures were used in the present study:

Teacher Reflection Questionnaire

In the present study, the researcher used Akbari, Bhezadpoor, and Dadvand's (2010) Teacher Reflection Questionnaire in order to examine the participants' reflective practices. This questionnaire is a self-report questionnaire which examines the language teachers' reflective

practices in five major categories of reflective practices including the *practical*, *cognitive*, *affective*, *meta-cognitive* and *critical* categories. It involves 29 Likert-scale items which are scored on a 5-point scale ranging from *never* to *always*. Akbari et al. (2010) noted that the reliability (.85) and validity (.87) indices of the questionnaire were satisfactory. Nonetheless, in the present study, the researcher used Cronbach's alpha measure of internal consistency in order to examine the reliability of the questionnaire in a pilot study which involved 30 EFL teachers whose characteristics were similar to the characteristics of the participants in the main study. The results of the statistical analysis showed that the reliability index of the questionnaire (.82) was satisfactory and it could be used in the present study.

Instructional Practices Questionnaire

Considering the main objective of the study, the researcher used Hong, Greene, and Higgins's (2006) Instructional practices questionnaire in order to examine the participants' instructional practices. This instrument is a self-report questionnaire which asks the teachers to expound on three categories of their instructional practices including the *cognitive*, *interpersonal*, and *Intrapersonal* categories. It involves 30 Likert scale items which are scored on a 5-point scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. Hong et al (2060 stated that the statistical analyses have ensured the reliability (.87) and validity (.88) of this instrument. Notwithstanding, the researcher took advantage of Cronbach's alpha measure of internal consistency to examine its reliability in a pilot study before the onset of the study. On the basis of the obtained results, the reliability of this questionnaire (.81) was satisfactory. Consequently, it was used in the present study.

Procedure

In this study, first, the researcher contacted the management departs of the public schools in Baneh (Iran) and Saqqez (Iran) and informed their managers about the objectives of the present study. Moreover, he asked the managers to provide the researcher with the phone numbers of the teachers in their schools. Second, he contacted the EFL teachers, apprised them of the main objectives of the study, assured them of the confidentiality of the information, and arranged to meet them in person to provide them with the relevant questionnaire of the study. Third, the researcher met the teachers, obtained informed written consent from them, and provided them with the Teacher Reflection Questionnaire (Akbrai, et al., 2010) and Instructional Practices Questionnaire (Hong, et al., 2006). The EFL teachers completed both of the teacher reflection questionnaire and the instructional practices questionnaire in 15 minutes. The researcher collected the data in a two-week period of time. Finally, the researcher used Pearson- Product Moment Correlation test to analyze the obtained data. SPSS 20 was utilized to perform the data analysis of the study.

Design

In this study, the researcher took advantage of the correlational design to answer the relevant research questions. Mackey and Gass (2016) pointed out that the correlation design constitutes one of the major design types in the quantitative approach to research. As they explained, this design empowers the researcher to determine the strength and the direction of the correlation between various variables. Accordingly, in this study, the researcher used the correlational design to determine the strength and the direction of the correlation between Iranian male and female EFL teachers' reflection and their instructional practices.

Results

Data Analysis

In this study, the researcher had to determine the appropriate statistical test to perform the data analysis. To this end, he examined the characteristics of the obtained data. The results of the preliminary analysis highlighted the fact that the data did not violate the assumptions of the parametric tests since they were interval data and were collected independently. Moreover, they were normally distributed based on the results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests which examine the normality of data distribution. Table 1 and Table 2 show the results of normality test regarding the obtained data on the male EFL teachers' reflection and instructional practices and female EFL teachers' reflection and instructional practices respectively:

Table 1

Tests of Normality of the Male EFL Teachers' Performances on the Teacher Reflection and Instructional Practices

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Teacher Reflection	.136	50	.222	.917	50	.452
Instructional Practices	.205	50	.278	.889	50	.566

Table 2

Tests of Normality of the Female EFL Teachers' Performances on the Teacher Reflection and Instructional Practices

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Teacher Reflection	.126	60	.219	.934	60	.563
Instructional Practices	.108	60	.279	.952	60	.519

As shown in Table 1 and Table 2, all of the p-values (Sig.) in the results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests were larger than .05. Consequently, the collected data on the male and female EFL teachers' reflection and instructional practices were normally distributed. Considering these results, the researcher used Pearson Product-Moment Correlation test to perform the data analysis of the present study. The following part answers the research questions on the basis of the results of the data analysis of the study:

RQ1: Is there a significant relationship between male EFL teachers' reflection and their instructional practices?

Based on the aim of this question, the researcher took advantage of a Pearson Product-Moment Correlation test to determine the relationship between the male EFL teachers' reflection and their instructional practices. Table 3 shows the results of this test:

Table 3

Pearson Correlation Test of the Relationship between Male EFL Teachers' Reflection and their Instructional Practices

	Teacher Reflection	Instructional Practices
Teacher Reflection	Pearson Correlation	.857
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	50
Instructional Practices	Pearson Correlation	.857
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	50

As shown in Table 3, the correlation coefficient between male EFL teachers' reflection and their instructional practices was .857. The lack of a negative sign in front of this coefficient showed that its direction was positive. Moreover, this coefficient was in the range of .50 to 1 and constituted a strong coefficient. Finally, the p-value .000 in the results of this test (Sig.) was less than .05. Based on these results, it was argued that there was a significant strong correlation between the male EFL teachers' reflection and their instructional practices Figure 1 shows these results:

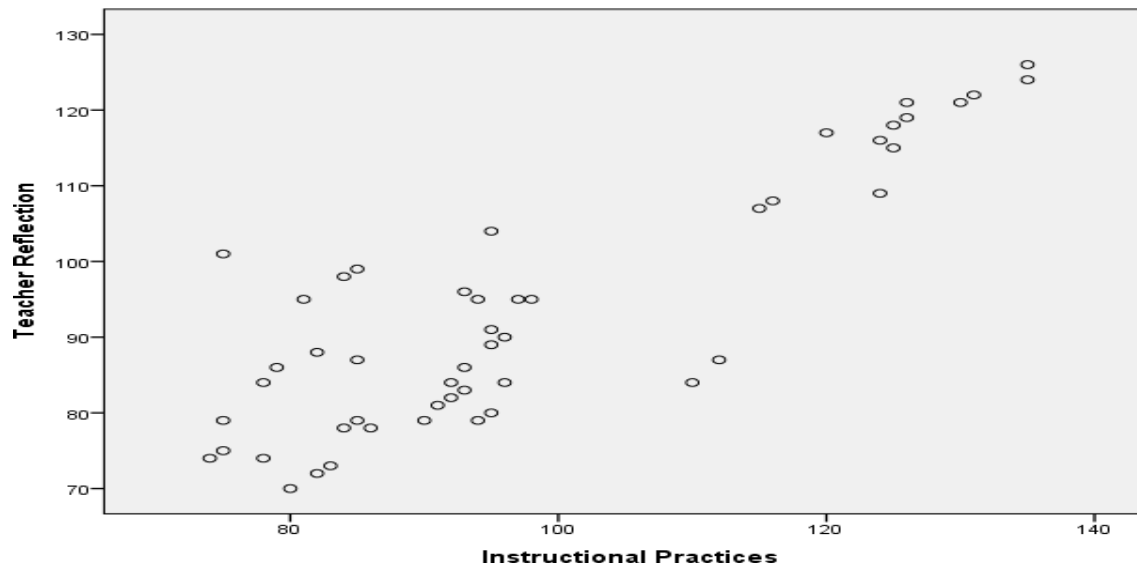


Figure 1. Correlation between Male EFL Teachers' Reflection and their Instructional Practices

RQ2: Is there a significant relationship between female EFL teachers' reflection and their instructional practices?

On the basis of the objective of this question, the researcher used a Pearson Product-Moment Correlation test to determine the relationship between the female EFL teachers' reflection and their instructional practices. Table 4 shows the results of this test:

Table 4

Pearson Correlation Test of the Relationship between Female EFL Teachers' Reflection and their Instructional Practices

	Teacher Reflection	Instructional Practices
Pearson Correlation	1	.917
Teacher Reflection	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

	N	60	60
Instructional Practices	Pearson Correlation	.917	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	60	60

As shown in Table 4, the correlation coefficient between male EFL teachers' reflection and their instructional practices was .917. The lack of a negative sign in front of this coefficient showed that its direction was positive. Moreover, this coefficient was in the range of .50 to 1 and constituted a strong coefficient. Finally, the p-value .000 in the results of this test (Sig.) was less than .05. Based on these results, it was averred that there was a significant strong correlation between the female EFL teachers' reflection and their instructional practices Figure 2 shows these results:

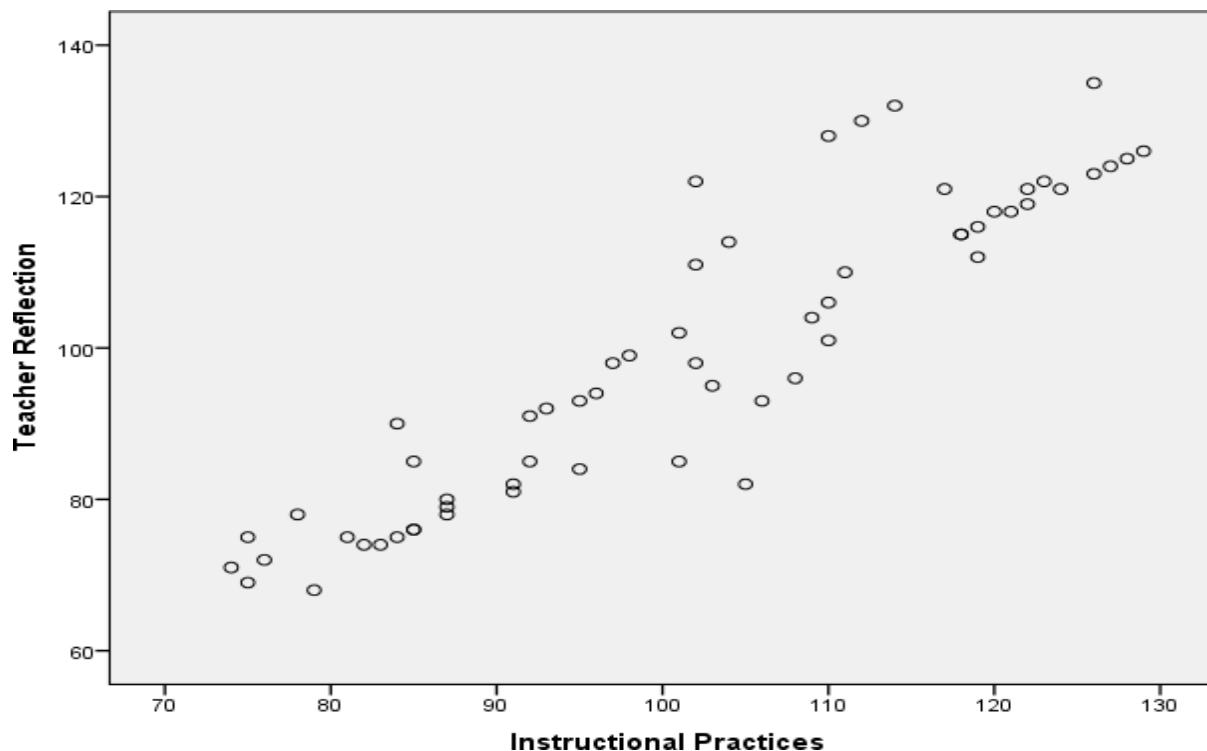


Figure 2. Correlation between Female EFL Teachers' Reflection and their Instructional Practice

Discussion

The first and the second research questions of the present study made an effort to determine the relationship between the male and female language teachers' reflection and their instructional practices. The results of the study highlighted the fact that, there were significant positive correlations between the male and female teachers' reflection and their relevant instructional practices. These results are in line with the results of a number of studies including the studies which were conducted by Bigelow and Ranney (2005), Akbari (2007), Babai Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009), Bailey (2012), Abednia, Hovassapian, Teimournezhad, and Ghanbari (2013), Cajkler and Wood (2016a, 2016b), Cammarata and Haley (2018), Larssen, Cajkler, Mosvold, Bjuland, Helgevold, Fauskanger and Norton (2018), and Contreras, Arredondo, Díaz, Inostroza, and Strickland (2020).

Von Esch and Kavanagh (2018) pointed out that the language teachers' reflection is a key factor in their instructional strategies and is not influenced by their gender. They explained that both the male and female language teachers' reflection enables them to evaluate the efficacy of their instructional practices and to modify them in order to ameliorate their instructional efficacy in the context of the classroom.

Moreover, Wei (2019) averred that both the male and female language teachers are likely to adapt their instructional practices to their language teaching beliefs which stem from their reflection. According to them, these teachers' reflection empowers them to determine the most effective theories of second language teaching and to utilize the teaching strategies and techniques which are congruent with their preferred second language acquisition theories in various language teaching contexts and settings.

Furthermore, Wolfensberger, Piniel, Canella, and Kyburz-Graber (2010) noted that the teacher instructional practices do not depend on their personal factors including their gender among others. As they stated, the male and female teachers' teaching practices are greatly influenced by their reflection. That is, the male and female teachers' practice-based teaching experiences empower them to determine the most efficient teaching strategies and assist the teachers to implement the relevant strategies in an effective way.

In addition, Zhang, Yuan, and Liao (2019) pointed out that the teachers' gender does not play a major role in their use of the various instructional techniques. They pointed out that, teacher reflection is the main factor in the teachers' use of various strategies since it prompts the language teachers to substitute more useful teaching practices for their ineffective teaching techniques and helps them to facilitate the learners' second language acquisition in various academic settings.

Additionally, Giaimo-Ballard (2010) stated that both the male and female EFL teachers take advantage of their reflection in order to ensure their continuous professional development. He noted that, the teachers' reflection enables them to focus on their various emotions and thoughts in the process of teaching and helps them to develop a better understanding of language instruction with the help of their assessment of their instructional measures and choices in the context of the classroom.

Considering these issues, it can be argued that there were significant positive correlations between the male and female teachers' reflection and their relevant instructional practices since these teachers reflection enabled them to: a) assess the effectiveness of their instructional strategies and to redress them in order to ameliorate their instructional efficacy; b) determine the most comprehensive theories of language instruction and to use the instructional strategies that were compatible with their identified second language acquisition theories; c) specify the most efficacious instructional strategies and to implement the pertinent strategies in an effective way; d) substitute more useful teaching practices for their ineffective teaching techniques; and e) focus on their different feelings and thoughts in the process of teaching and to develop a better understanding of language instruction in their relevant language learning contexts.

Conclusion

This study tried to specify the correlation between Iranian male and female language teachers' reflection and their instructional practices in the school settings. The obtained results of the study underlined the existence of significant positive correlations between the male and female teachers' reflection and their instructional practices in the context of the classroom.

It was argued that there were significant positive correlations between these teachers' reflection and their relevant instructional practices since these teachers' reflection empowered them to assess the effectiveness of their instructional strategies and to redress them in order to ameliorate their instructional efficacy. Moreover, it helped the teachers to determine the most comprehensive theories of language instruction and to use the instructional strategies that were compatible with their identified second language acquisition theories. Furthermore, it assisted the language teachers to specify the most effective instructional strategies and to implement the pertinent strategies in an effective way. In addition, it prompted the teachers to substitute more useful teaching practices for their ineffective teaching techniques. Finally, it motivated the teachers to focus on their different feelings and thoughts in the process of teaching and to develop a better understanding of language instruction in their relevant language learning contexts.

Based on these results, it can be argued that the EFL syllabus designers need to provide the male and female pre-service and in-service language teachers with appropriate teacher education courses which empower the teachers to take advantage of teacher reflection in their academic settings. More specifically, the syllabus designers have to develop the language courses which involve a module about the main teacher factors including the teachers' self- efficacy and instructional practices among others. In this module the teacher educators have to provide the language teachers with adequate information on the concept of reflection and need to assist the teachers to take advantage of reflective practices to ensure their continuous professional development and to utilize the most effective instructional practices in the context of the classroom. Moreover, the syllabus designers have to provide the prospective teachers with specific manuals which contain sufficient information on the teacher reflection and help the language teachers to take advantage of reflective practices. These manuals may empower the language teachers to utilize diverse instructional practices which are likely to ameliorate the language learners' acquisition of the various aspects of the target language.

Furthermore, it can be averred that both the male and female language teachers have to obtain sufficient information on teacher reflection in the process of language instruction. These teachers can take advantage of the results of the relevant empirical studies including the present study in order to develop a better understanding of the impact of their reflection on their instructional practices in the context of the classroom. In addition, the EFL teachers can form groups on the social media applications in order to gain knowledge on various teacher factors including reflection. In these groups, the teachers can take advantage of their peers' information on the teacher reflection and can develop a better understanding of the various kinds of instructional practices which are likely to ameliorate the language learners' acquisition of the different aspects of the target language.

Additionally, it can be argued that the SLA researchers have to pay more attention to the teacher factors including teacher reflection in the development of a comprehensive theory of the second language acquisition in various language learning contexts. Finally, the SLA researchers have to make an effort to provide sufficient information on the concept of teacher reflection and should determine its sub-components in order to enable the teachers to take advantage of reflective practice in the process of second language teaching.

In this study, the researcher was not able to deal with all of the relevant variables. Consequently, the study suffered from a number of limitations since it did not control the impact of the participants' age on the results and involved participants from different age groups and was not able to determine the impact of the participants' experience on the obtained results since it focused on participants with various years of experience. Moreover, the researcher had to delimit the study in order to examine the relevant variables in a satisfactory way. More specifically, the study was delimited since it focused on the school setting and did not deal with the other academic settings, and examined the EFL teachers' reflection and instructional practices and did not investigate the other teacher factors.

The future studies need to deal with the above-mentioned limitations and delimitations of the present study. More specifically, these studies should involve larger samples and have to determine the impact of the teachers' individual factors including their age and experience level on the obtained results. Moreover, the future studies have to focus on the language teachers in different academic settings including the university and language school settings. Furthermore, these studies should focus on the other teacher factors (e.g. the teachers' self-efficacy) which were not examined in the present study. Finally, the future studies have to be conducted in both second and foreign language learning contexts.

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Conflict of interests

The author declares that they have no conflict of interest.

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