Conscience in Language Teaching and its Relationship with Language Proficiency and Emotional Intelligence of EFL Teachers

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Abstract

The present study aimed to explore the relationship among Iranian EFL teachers' language teaching conscience, language proficiency, and emotional intelligence. To this purpose, 82 homogenized language teachers, M.A. students and M.A. holders in TEFL, English literature, and English translation, both males and females, were taken as the participants. The result of the data analysis showed that there was a statistically significant relationship between the language teaching conscience and the emotional intelligence of Iranian EFL teachers, $\mathbf{r_s}(80) = .83$, $\mathbf{p} < .05$, 2). There was also a statistically significant relationship between the language teaching conscience and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers, $\mathbf{r_s}(80) = .59$, $\mathbf{p} < .05$. And finally, there was a statistically significant relationship between the emotional intelligence and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers, $\mathbf{r_s}(80) = .52$, $\mathbf{p} < .05$. Teacher trainers, researchers in teacher education, and language teachers can benefit from the findings of this study.

Keywords: Iranian EFL teachers, emotional intelligence, language teaching conscience, language proficiency

1. Introduction

Several factors contribute to the efficacy of an English language teacher, among which, language proficiency and emotional intelligence can be named. Yet, there is a newly developed factor which claims to add value to a language teacher; this new factor is called language teaching conscience. Conscience is the sense of right and wrong which tells us whether what we are doing is morally right or wrong based on particular norms, rules, or religions (Hamidi & Montazeri, 2014). Conscientious teachers seem to be more responsible for their job, classroom practice, and students' needs. On the other hand, teachers who are emotionally more able to understand their students' needs may have better control on students and classroom atmosphere, thereby promoting student success (Rust, 2014).

Finding the relationship among different teacher characteristics including either emotional intelligence or language proficiency as one of their study variables has been the goal of many language researchers. For example, Alavi and Rahimi (2011) investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and learning English language vocabulary. Tok, Tok, and Dolapcioglu (2013) carried out a study to find the relationship between classroom teachers' emotional intelligence and their classroom management ability. Abdolmanafi, Hamidi, and Gorgani (2014) investigated the relationship between English as a foreign language students' emotional intelligence (EI) and their language achievement scores. Borzou (2014) in a study sought the relationship between EFL teachers' language proficiency, classroom management ability, and learning achievement of second language learners. In another study, Ezzati, Amirtash, and Tojari (2015) tried to find the relationship between emotional intelligence, classroom management styles, and cultural intelligence of physical education teachers. The new concept of conscience in language teaching (which is quite an unfamiliar variable) is foreseen to play an important role in the classroom setting. Yet, no study has yet been done to investigate the relationship among teachers' characteristics and the role teachers' conscience in language teaching. Hence, the present study was an attempt to investigate the possible relationship among Iranian EFL teachers' language teaching conscience, emotional intelligence, and language proficiency. To this purpose, the following research questions have been proposed:

1. Is there any statistically significant relationship between the language teaching conscience and the emotional intelligence of Iranian EFL teachers?

2. Is there any statistically significant relationship between the language teaching conscience and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers?

3. Is there any statistically significant relationship between the emotional intelligence and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers?

2. Review of the related literature

2.1 Language Teaching Conscience

Conscience, based on Hamidi and Montazeri (2014), is the sense of right and wrong. It is the part of our mind that tells us whether what we are doing is morally right or wrong based on particular norms, rules, or religions. A conscientious person (in this context a teacher) tries to do her/his work or responsibility well and as completely as possible. Conscientious language teachers in typical classroom environments, as Freiermuth and Jarrell (2006) mention, care about their students and do their best to support students as well as motivating them to show signs of interest in expressing themselves in the foreign language. Unless students receive support from their teachers, they might not experience effective interaction among themselves; therefore, poor language production is possible to happen.

2.2 Language Proficiency

The term 'language proficiency' has been defined with different wordings, yet similar meanings in the literature. The actual performance of language learners which includes the mastery of the forms, the linguistic, cognitive, affective and sociocultural meanings of those forms, the capacity to use the language with focus chiefly on communication and minimum attention to form, and the creativity in language use, is one sort of definition proposed by Stern (1983). As Clark (1972, as cited in Farhady, 1982) explains, by language proficiency it is meant "to use a language for real-life purposes not considering the manner in which that competence was acquired" (p. 5). In similar vein, Bachman and Palmer (1996) associate language proficiency level of learners to their knowledge of the foreign language skill domains (grammar and vocabulary) which are subcomponents of general language ability. In this regard, the term language proficiency can be used to refer to the degree of skill which language learners are able to use a language, such as how well a learner speaks, listens, reads, writes, or understands the language. Of course, we should pay attention that language achievement is not interchangeable with language proficiency. The former considers language ability as a result of particular learning in particular time. Language proficiency, as Richards and Schmidt (2010) assert, can be measured through the use of standardized proficiency tests.

2.3 Emotional Intelligence

According to Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2004), emotions are one of the three fundamental categories of mental operations which include motivation, emotion, and cognition. Hence a person with good emotions should be able to think positively and be productive and vice versa. Accordingly, emotional intelligence is said to be the mixture of the term emotion and intelligence which are associated with each other. Gardner (1993) asserted that old intelligence quotient tests simply measure logic and language disregarding other skills. It is believed that our brain posses some other outstanding types of intelligence as well such as emotional intelligence (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Emotional intelligence, therefore, can be considered one part of a comprehensive group named multiple intelligences.

Bar-On (2004) associates emotional intelligence with relating well to people, effectively understanding our own needs and that of others, adapting to and dealing with the immediate surroundings to be more winning in coping with environmental needs. Bar-On (2004) believes that training can improve the EI of people; hence it can develop over time. Bar-On (2004) summarized

the components of emotional intelligence as self-awareness and self-expression (Intrapersonal), social awareness and interpersonal relationship (Interpersonal), emotional management and regulation (Stress Management), change management (Adaptability), and self-motivation (General Mood).

Recent research studies have proved the role of EI in academic achievement (Abdolmanafi et al., 2014; Brackett & Salovey, 2006; Mayer et al., 2004). This study aims to find the relationship between two seemingly psychological attributes of language teachers; the language teaching conscience and the emotional intelligence.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants of this study were 84 homogenized (in terms of general English language proficiency) M.A. students and M.A. holders from three majors of TEFL, English translation, and English literature. Since two of the participants failed to return the filled out questionnaires, the remaining 82 were taken into consideration. Their teaching experience varied from 3 to 12 years and their age ranged from 26 to 37 respectively. Participants were chosen from among those teachers took part in the English language teacher entrance exam at Poya, Simin, Adib-e Daneshvaran, and Idea English language institutes in Mazandaran, north of Iran.

3.2 Instruments

Three instruments have been used in this study including:

Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire: Bar-On's Emotional Quotient Inventory, which has been proved to be both valid and reliable, was used in order to assess the EI level of the participants. Abdolmanafi, Hamidi, and Gorgani (2014) reported its validity to be .82 which shows high reliability index. Developed by Bar-On (1997), this questionnaire had 32 (1 to 5 Likert scale type) positively or negatively-keyed items. The participants were asked to read the items and choose one level which best fitted their feeling, understanding, or action. Higher scores, based on Bar-On (1997), shows higher level of emotional intelligence.

Language Teaching Conscience Questionnaire: The second instrument measured the conscience of English language teachers in their teaching practice. The instrument, developed by Hamidi (2016), had 24 items with 5 components including conscience in problem solving, job commitment, appropriate use of time, caring about learning, and following the rules respectively. Each item included five options which ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree in a Likert scale format. Participants were given 10 minutes to fill out the questionnaire.

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL): The language proficiency test was an 80-item multiple choice test chosen out of Longman's TOEFL preparation guide book (Phillips, 2003). There were 20 questions of listening, 20 questions of vocabulary, 20 questions of grammar, and 20 questions of reading comprehension (totally 80). The reliability of the test calculated through KR-21 formula in a pilot study with 30 participants was found to be .86 which shows high consistency.

3.3 Procedure

The test of TOEFL, prepared out of the TOEFL preparation sample tests (Phillips, 2003), was administered to 115 teachers, the aim of which was to have homogenized participants (teachers) in terms of their English language proficiency. The mentioned test had already been piloted with a group of 30 participants and proved to have a reliability index of .86 calculated through the KR-21 formula. From among 115, 82 teachers who got the scores between -/+ 1 standard deviation below and above the mean were considered homogenous members and were taken as the participants of the study. Then, the two questionnaires of language teaching conscience (Hamidi, 2016) and emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 1997) were given to the participants to fill out.

They had 25 minutes to complete the two questionnaires. Finally, the data gathered out of the questionnaires were extracted to be analyzed through SPSS 22.

4. Results

This section presents the results of data analysis. The reliability of the questionnaires and the analysis of the research questions are provided. This chapter presents related data analyses to test the following null hypotheses:

H01. There is no statistically significant relationship between language teaching conscience and emotional intelligence of Iranian EFL teachers.

H02. There is no statistically significant relationship between language teaching conscience and language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers.

H03. There is no statistically significant relationship between language emotional intelligence and language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers.

Before presenting the analysis for research question, the demographic information of the participants is shown.

Table 1. The Demographic Table for the Participants of the Study

Gender	Number	Level	Teaching Experience	Major
Male	29	M.A. students and M.A. holders	4 to 12	TEFL, Translation, English Literature
Female	53	M.A. students and M.A. holders	3 to 10	TEFL, Translation, English Literature

As Table 4.1 shows, there was a total number of 82 (53 females and 29 males) participants at M.A. level with the teaching experience ranging from 3 to 10 for females and 4 to 12 for males. The participants' major were TEFL, English translation, and English literature. The next part deals with the analyses of the research questions. The descriptive statistics and the related inferential statistics are provided. It is worth mentioning that since at least one set of data was of ordinal type, the non-parametric Spearman's rank-order correlation test was run in order to investigate the possible relationship between the two variables, and thus there was no need to run any test of normality.

4.1 Analysis of the First Research Question

The first research question of this study investigated the relationship between the language teaching conscience and the emotional intelligence of Iranian EFL teachers. Since the data gathered out of the questionnaires were of ordinal type, the Spearman rank-order correlation test was used to determine the possible relationship between the two mentioned variables. The descriptive statistics of the two sets of scores is presented below.

Table 2. The Descriptive Statistics for the Teaching Conscience and the Emotional Intelligence Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teaching Conscience	82	2.66	4.01	3.2807	.39776
Emotional Intelligence	82	2.94	4.51	3.6870	.51858
Valid N (listwise)	82				

As Table 2 above shows, the minimum and maximum scores for the language teaching conscience and the emotional intelligence questionnaires were 2.66, 4.01 and 2.94, 4.51 respectively. The following table shows the result of the Spearman rank-order correlation test.

Table 3. The Result of the Spearman Rank-Order Correlation Test for the Teaching Conscience and the Emotional Intelligence Scores

			Teaching Conscience	EI
Spearman's rho	Teaching_Conscience	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.834**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	82	82
	EI	Correlation Coefficient	.834**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	82	82

The Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to determine the relationship between the language teaching conscience and the emotional intelligence of Iranian EFL teachers. There was a strong, positive correlation between the two mentioned variables, which was also statistically significant, $\mathbf{r_s}(80) = .83$, $\mathbf{p} < .05$. Therefore, the researcher safely rejects the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between the language teaching conscience and the emotional intelligence of Iranian EFL teachers.

4.2 Analysis of the Second Research Question

The first research question of this study investigated the relationship between the language teaching conscience and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers. Since the data gathered out of the questionnaires were of ordinal type, the Spearman rank-order correlation test was used to determine the possible relationship between the two mentioned variables. The descriptive statistics of the two sets of scores is presented below.

Table 4. The Descriptive Statistics for the Teaching Conscience and the Language Proficiency Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teaching Conscience	82	2.66	4.01	3.2807	.39776
Language Proficiency	82	45.00	65.00	55.4756	4.98201
Valid N (listwise)	82				

As Table 4 above shows, the minimum and maximum scores for the language teaching conscience and the language proficiency questionnaires were 2.66, 4.01 and 45, 65 respectively. The following table shows the result of the Spearman rank-order correlation test.

Table 5. The Result of the Spearman Rank-Order Correlation Test for the Teaching Conscience and the Language Proficiency Scores

			Teaching Conscience	LP
Spearman's rho	Teaching_Conscience	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.589**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	82	82
	LP	Correlation Coefficient	.589**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	82	82

The Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to determine the relationship between the language teaching conscience and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers. Based on the triple division rule, there was a medium, positive correlation between the two mentioned variables, which was also statistically significant, $\mathbf{r_s}(80) = .59$, $\mathbf{p} < .05$. Therefore, the researcher safely rejects the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between the language teaching conscience and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers.

4.3 Analysis of the Third Research Question

The third research question of this study investigated the relationship between the emotional intelligence and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers. Since the data gathered out of the questionnaires were of ordinal type, the Spearman rank-order correlation test was used to determine the possible relationship between the two mentioned variables. The descriptive statistics of the two sets of scores is presented below.

Table 6. The Descriptive Statistics for the Emotional Intelligence and the Language Proficiency Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
/Emotional Intelligence	82	2.94	4.51	3.6870	.51858
Language Proficiency	82	45.00	65.00	55.4756	4.98201
Valid N (listwise)	82				

As Table 6 above shows, the minimum and maximum scores for the emotional intelligence and the language proficiency questionnaires were 2.94, 4.51 and 45, 65 respectively. The following table shows the result of the Spearman rank-order correlation test.

Table 7. The Result of the Spearman Rank-Order Correlation Test for the Emotional Intelligence and the Language Proficiency Scores

			EI	LP
Spearman's rho	EI	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.522**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	82	82
	LP	Correlation Coefficient	.522**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	82	82

The Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to determine the relationship between the emotional intelligence and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers. Based on the triple division rule, there was a medium, positive correlation between the two mentioned variables, which was also statistically significant, $\mathbf{r_s}(80) = .52$, $\mathbf{p} < .05$. Therefore, the researcher safely **rejects** the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between the emotional intelligence and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL teachers.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This study was correlational in nature and aimed at investigating the interplay among Iranian EFL teachers' language teaching conscience, emotional intelligence, and their general English language proficiency. The summary of the result and related discussion are presented below.

1) There was a strong, positive correlation between the language teaching conscience and the emotional intelligence of Iranian EFL language teachers, which was also statistically significant, $\mathbf{r_s}(80) = .83$, $\mathbf{p} < .05$.

2) There was a medium, positive correlation between the language teaching conscience and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL language teachers, which was also statistically significant, $\mathbf{r_s}(80) = .59$, $\mathbf{p} < .05$.

3) There was a medium, positive correlation between the emotional intelligence and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL language teachers, which was also statistically significant, $\mathbf{r_s}(80) = .52$, $\mathbf{p} < .05$. Although the present research was concerned with the EFL teachers, findings of Abdolmanafi et al. (2014) in which significant relationship between the students' emotional intelligence and their language achievement was found are in line with the result of this research

question. The result of this research question is in contrast to the findings of Alavi and Rahimi (2011) in which they found low and negative relationship between emotional intelligence and vocabulary knowledge of Iranian EFL learners.

Language teaching conscience was found to be more correlated with emotional intelligence ($\mathbf{r_s}(80) = .83$) than with the language proficiency ($\mathbf{r_s}(80) = .59$). It might be claimed that those teachers with higher level of language teaching conscience are emotionally more aware of the needs of the students and thereby creating a more positive relationship with students. Bar-On (2004) associates emotional intelligence with effectively understanding oneself and others, relating well to people, and adapting to and coping with the immediate surroundings to be more successful in dealing with environmental demands such as students' needs.

The present research has shed some light on some psychological abilities of language teachers such as language teaching conscience and emotional intelligence as well as their general English language proficiency. It is suggested that Iranian EFL school teachers be compared to EFL institute teachers in terms of their language teaching conscience and emotional intelligence with regard to their language proficiency. It is also suggested that the role of gender of the ELT teachers be investigated in their language teaching conscience and emotional intelligence.

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