Relationship between EFL Teachers' Emotional Intelligence, Reflective Teaching, Autonomy and their Students' L2 Learning

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Abstract

This study set out to provide empirical evidence on the relationship between EFL teachers' emotional intelligence, reflectivity, and autonomy, and their students' L2 performance. The participants of this study included 88 EFL teachers who taught English at different private English teaching institutes and their students (N = 1266). First, the teachers completed three validated questionnaires: Emotional Quotient Inventory (Bar-On, 1997), Teacher Reflectivity Questionnaire (Akbari, Behzadpour & Dadvand, 2010), and Teacher Work-Autonomy Scale (Friedman, 1999). Then, their learners' scores on their final English proficiency exams were collected as an indication of their L2 performance. The results of the study revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between teachers' reflectivity, emotional intelligence, and autonomy, on the one hand, and their students' L2 performance, on the other. The results of multiple regression analysis showed that from among the variables of this study, reflectivity was the stronger predictor of the learners' L2 performance. In addition, the findings indicated that EFL teachers' educational degree and gender significantly affect their levels of emotional intelligence and reflectivity. The findings of this study offer evidence to substantiate teachers' emotional intelligence, reflectivity, and autonomy as important variables in L2 teaching and confirm their instructional nature.

Keywords: Autonomy; Emotional intelligence; L2 learning; Reflective teaching

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INTRODUCTION

Discussions on teachers' professional development have emerged in a quest for improving students' outcomes (Meiers, 2007). Teacher quality is one of the most important educational factors, which contribute to students' academic achievement (Goldhaber, 2002). Echoing the importance of teachers in education, Hattie (2003) contends that teachers' knowledge and performance account for about 30 percent of the variance in students' learning (as cited in Meiers, 2007). These debates may serve as the logic for most of the examination of teacher characteristics considered to be translated into learners' better achievement. However, there is no agreement on which teacher characteristics are the most effective ones for student learning outcomes (Toropova, Johansson & Myrberg, 2019).

Teaching possibly rests more heavily upon intricate manifestations of emotional intelligence than any other variable; if enough and appropriate attention is not given to the emotional status of teachers, effective teaching and, hence, learning will not occur (Barnes 2003). Moreover, Moradkhani, Raygan, and Moein (2017) mentioned that few studies have been conducted to explore the relationship between teachers' involvement in reflective practices and the enhancement of teachers' performance. Teacher autonomy is another variable, which was thought, by many researchers, to have a significant impact on teachers' instructional practice (Vahasantanen, 2015).

Due to the paucity of research on the association between the above-mentioned variables and EFL learners' L2 learning, this study was designed to tap into the possible relationship between three fundamental teacher variables, i.e. emotional intelligence, reflectivity, and autonomy, and their students' L2 achievement. Moreover, it tries to examine whether EFL teachers' educational degree and gender significantly influence teachers' degree of emotional intelligence, reflectivity, and autonomy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is "a cross-section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills and facilitators that determine how effectively we understand and express ourselves, understand others and relate to them, and cope with daily demands" (Bar-On, 2006, p. 3). Ameriks, Wranik, and Salovey (2009) explain that emotional intelligence is a psychological variable that is related to the recognition, understanding, and regulation of emotion.

Unlike the conventional belief, which confines the practice of teaching to the mastery of subject and knowledge of teaching and learning, emotional intelligence, is the unrecognized third element of teaching professionalism (Mortiboys, 2005). The cardinal role of emotional intelligence as a valuable attribute for the effectiveness of teaching has been grounded in the literature (Ergur, 2009; Khani & Ghasemi, 2019). Teachers' emotional competency influences learners' academic achievement and performance (Baker, 1999). Emotional intelligence plays a significant role in managing appropriate social interaction and enhances the quality of interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers (Khani & Ghasemi, 2019).

Teaching with emotional intelligence, according to Mortiboys (2005), includes "putting a great deal of energy into creating a positive emotional climate; recognizing and working with the feelings of yourself and your learners" (p.8). Jennings and Greenberg (2009) maintain that teachers' classroom management skills are linked to emotional competencies which enhance teachers' ability to establish supportive and constructive relationships with the learners, design materials that build on learners' strengths and competencies, employ instructional guidelines which improve intrinsic motivation, coach learners through intricate situations, reinforce cooperation among learners, and perform as a paragon for appropriate and respectful communication and representation of pro-social behavior. Emotional intelligence supports the establishment of emotionally competent and relationally appropriate instructional practices (Corcoran & Tormey, 2012). Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011) also recommend that teachers' emotional skills help to construct a more positive

and engaging learning environment that is conducive to more productivity and engagement of both teachers and learners.

Teachers' emotional intelligence has been the subject of various investigations (e.g., Barlozek, 2015; Dewaele, 2018; Gkonou & Mercer, 2017). Barlozek (2015) measured the effect of teachers' emotional intelligence on their success in establishing a constructive relationship with learners. In this study, 20 English teachers were asked to take a test on emotional intelligence and at the same time, their 493 learners were asked to complete a questionnaire measuring their attitudes toward their teachers. The findings showed that teachers demonstrating a high level of emotional intelligence was better assessed and perceived by the learners. Corcoran and Tormey (2013) explored the relationship between emotional intelligence and the performance of pre-service teachers. MSCEIT (ver. 2.0) test of emotional intelligence was administered and the teachers' scores in their compulsory examination at the end of second-level schooling were considered as their academic achievement. Their study revealed that there was no significant relationship between these variables.

Gkonou and Mercer (2017) conducted a study with English teachers who were found to have high levels of emotional intelligence, and that gender and length of teaching experience were significant predictors of it. The findings also indicated that the participants with high emotional intelligence made use of their teaching experience and the past classroom experiences to interpret and respond to present classroom events and deal with the class accordingly. Dewaele and Mercer (2017) carried out a study with 513 EFL/ESL teachers and took variation in their self-reported attitudes towards their students into consideration. The findings revealed that teachers possessing high levels of trait emotional intelligence had more positive attitudes towards their students and appreciated and enjoyed their vivacious students more.

In the context of Iran, Roohani and Mohammadi (2014) studied the association between teachers' emotional intelligence and learners' motivational attributes. In this study, thirty English teachers were required to complete Bar-On's (1997) Emotional Quotient Inventory. Also, Gardner's (1985) Attitude/ Motivation Test Battery was administered to 221 EFL learners. The findings of the study showed a significant positive relationship between teachers' emotional intelligence and their learners' motivational

attributes. Saeidi and Nikou (2012) carried out a study on the correlation between EFL teachers' emotional intelligence and their students' L2 learning and attitude towards L2 learning. The results of the study revealed that students whose teachers had higher levels of emotional intelligence outperformed significantly their counterparts in the final test and had a higher attitude towards their learning.

      The empirical evidence proved that fulfilling the teaching role, i.e. helping learners grow and learn, requires emotional labor on the part of a teacher (Schutz, Aultman, & Williams-Johnson, 2009). Some researchers even believe that "Emotions are the heart of language learning and teaching" (Dewaele, Chen, Padilla, & Lake, 2019, p. 1). Emotional regulation enables teachers to effectively manage their classroom, cope with and discipline their relationships with students (Sutton, Mudrey-Camino, & Knight, 2009).

Reflection

To Akbari and KarimiAllvar (2010), reflection means getting involved in speculation and self-criticism to refine one's teaching activity. Reflective teachers assume learning as the construction of new knowledge and continuously challenge their teaching methods, beliefs, educational context, and curriculum (Motallebzadeh, Ahmadi, & Hosseinnia, 2018). A reflective teacher should be proficient to develop a critical examination of their instructional activities, concepts, and contexts, consistently attempt to promote their teaching competencies and strive for research-oriented instruction rather than experience-based one.

      Exercising reflection expands teachers' perspective in the class and enhances his/her awareness of the instructional decisions and the rationale behind those decisions (Akbari & KarimiAllvar, 2010). Reflection enables teachers to evaluate the consequences of their decisions on students' learning and helps teachers apply modifications in cases of underachievement. Reflective teaching provides teachers with the opportunity to analyze and discuss their pedagogical practices, raises their consciousness of the context, and enables them to consider the moral points

in their performance (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997).

Several studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between reflective teaching and presentation of effective instruction. Mahmoodi, Izadi, and Dehghannezhad (2015) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between EFL teachers' classroom management orientations, reflection, and perceptions of language learning strategies and their students' L2 achievement. A sample of 105 EFL teachers took part in this study and completed three questionnaires related to the teachers' variables under investigation. The scores of the English final exams of their students' (N = 2673) were also considered as indicators of L2 achievement. They found a strong positive correlation between teachers' reflective teaching and their students' L2 achievement. Moreover, multiple regression analyses showed that reflection was the strongest predictor of students' L2 achievement. Akbari and KarimiAllvar (2010) also investigated the relationship between EFL teachers' teaching style, sense of efficacy, reflectivity, and students' L2 achievement. Thirty EFL teachers participated in this study and the final-exam scores of their learners were considered as the dependent variable. The findings showed a positive correlation between these teachers' variables and students' achievement.

Seydi Shahivand and Moradkhani (2019) investigated if EFL teachers' EQ predicted their degree of involvement in reflective practices. Results of correlational analyses demonstrated that EFL teachers' emotional intelligence and its subcomponents significantly correlated with their commitment to reflective practices and their corresponding subscales.

Marzban and Ashraafi (2016) investigated the effect of graduation degree and nationality on reflective thinking of American and Iranian EFL/ESL teachers. The results of the study indicated that both factors had a significant positive effect on the participants' reflection. That is, American teachers and teachers with higher academic degrees, had a higher perception of the need for reflection. Moradkhani and Shirazizadeh (2017) examined reflection among Iranian EFL teachers of private language institutes and public schools. A mixed-method approach was utilized to collect the data.

The findings of the study revealed that the two groups of the teachers were significantly different in total reflection and the practical, cognitive, and affective subscales of reflection.

Wilson and Jan (1993) showed that teachers who have reflection abilities and utilize these abilities in their classes directly improve their students' motivation and problem-solving skills. From another perspective, students and student teachers frequently challenge their thinking, express their views, and notice the problems that they face in the classroom in the process of reflective teaching (Stoddard, 2002). Furthermore, they make use of scientific techniques to solve problems, review unforeseen results of a suggestion, and evaluate the extent to which the suggestion contributes to the results.

Reflection is usually practiced in learner-centered classrooms. In these contexts, students can make their own decisions, establish their learning objectives, shoulder the responsibility for their growth, recognize and correct their own mistakes, and practice self-motivation (Wilson & Jan, 1993).

Autonomy

Teacher autonomy has been referred to as the capacity to make conscious intellectual and moral decisions considering different perspectives and to make decisions, which benefits all the learners (Castle, 2006). Autonomous teachers, according to Richards (2008), "develop their theories of teaching, they can teach more from an art-craft approach, creating teaching approaches according to the particular constraints and dynamics of the situations in which they work" (p. 399). Autonomy includes teachers possessing the power to act, impact, make decisions and choices, and take positions associated with their work and professional identities (Vahasantanen, 2015). An autonomous teacher is "more willing to pass control over the learning process to those engaged in it so that learning becomes a collaborative effort, rather than the imposition of knowledge

from above" (Lawson, 2004, p. 3). The body of literature on teachers' professional autonomy confirms the value of pursuing autonomy both for teachers and learners. Scholars discuss that teachers' autonomy should evolve through their experiences of professional development and is linked to other elements in the process of professionalism.

Little (1995) emphasized the significance of having autonomous teachers to foster student autonomy, He believed that analyzing this concept is crucial in our field since learner autonomy is considered to be so important. Littlewood (1996) described autonomy from two viewpoints, willingness, which includes motivation and confidence to conduct decisions; and the capacity for independent decision making, which embraces having abilities for action. Later, McGrath (2000) recommended that teacher autonomy be regarded as self-directed professional development as well as freedom from being controlled by others. Similarly, Smith (2003) encapsulated some of the former discussions and highlighted the multidimensional nature of teacher autonomy and the significance of teacher-learner autonomy. In the same vein, Huang (2005) united these conceptual discussions and presented one of the best definitions for teacher autonomy in the field. He defined it as "teachers' willingness, capacity and freedom to take control of their teaching and learning" (p. 4).

Harrison (2004) prepared a program to help 14 EFL teachers become autonomous and develop self-reflective practices. The researcher determined that the adaptations of different reflective practice strategies are linked with improvement in teachers' professional autonomy.

In a similar study, Genc (2010) investigated the effect of writing reflective journals on English teachers' autonomy and decision making. A sample of six teachers wrote a reflective journal, reflecting on their experiences during a 12 week enrolling in a language teaching methodology course. The analysis of qualitative data revealed that teachers applied bottom-up strategies in their reflection of the classroom indicating that teachers adapt to meet the needs of learners and compensate for the constrains in their careers which were to enhance their autonomy.

Hyslop-Marginson and Sears (2010) indicate that teachers' professional autonomy implies the consideration of teachers as the primary author of the success or failure of their pedagogical decisions, which, in turn, will be translated into students' learning, and aims to enhance teachers' responsibility to accept the ownership of their teaching. They maintain that developing teachers' autonomy pushes them ahead from the mere technicians who employ the established external methods of what to teach and how to teach, rather teachers have to be adaptive experts who exercise reflection on their instructional practices in the light of their professionalism.

Emotional Intelligence, Reflectivity, and Autonomy

Applying emotional intelligence in instruction is colored by conscious reflective teaching practices (Nelson, Low & Hammett, 2012). "Emotional intelligence is a learned ability to think reflectively and constructively, develop positive choices, make healthy effective decisions, and act wisely" (Nelson et al., 2012, p.244). The employment of reflection as a constructive instrument in professional development is interconnected with emotional intelligence development, as emotional intelligence is crucial for effective reflection (Mortiboys, 2005). Reflection is the process of learning from experience; this process is inevitably associated with the emotional aspect of the experience.

Perry and Ball (2005) discuss that teachers who are not enjoying high levels of emotional intelligence are incapable of capturing the moment. They fail to deal with the feedback constructively and are weak in showing a reaction to the feedback associated with professional validation. Consequently, effective teaching depends on the teachers' ability to manage and regulate their emotions within the classroom and emotional intelligence is a key determining element in personal, academic, career excellence, and advancement.

Researches in the field indicate that high emotional intelligence

helps teachers in developing independent teachers who continuously consider learners at the center of education and direct the process of education independent from the external authorities (e.g. Nelson, Low, & Hammett, 2012). Little (1995) indicates that autonomous teachers have strong personal responsibility for their job and exercise high levels of emotional and cognitive control over the teaching process via continuous reflection and analysis (as cited in Nelson et al., 2012). Teacher educators place the significant task of achieving teaching and learning excellence on the shoulders of teachers and consider teachers as the key figures in guiding education and preparing learners for their future.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The literature on teachers' emotional intelligence, reflectivity, and autonomy acknowledges the significance of these variables for teachers' success. Hence, this study attempted to empirically evaluate the possible relation between EFL teachers' emotional intelligence, reflectivity, autonomy, and their students' L2 achievement. To this end, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Is there any statistically significant relationship between EFL teachers' degree of emotional intelligence, reflectivity, and autonomy with their students' achievement?
2. Which of the three variables of emotional intelligence, reflective teaching, and autonomy better predicts the students' achievement?
3. Is there any significant difference among EFL teachers' degree of emotional intelligence, reflectivity, and autonomy concerning their gender and educational degree?

METHOD

Participants

The sample of the study consisted of 88 EFL teachers who were selected

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from different private language institutes in Kermanshah and Hamedan provinces. The participants were selected based on cluster sampling procedure. The participants were both male (N = 34) and female (N = 54) teachers, who had either an M.A. or B.A. degree in teaching English as a foreign language or English translation. All of the participants had attended a teacher-training course (TTC) in the past.

The second group of participants was EFL learners participating in the teachers' language classes. Ten to twenty students were chosen for each teacher comprising the total number of 1266 students.

Instrumentation

Emotional Quotient Inventory: This questionnaire was developed by Bar-on (1997) and consists of 133 items. Bar-On's (1997) model of emotional intelligence comprises five composite scales, each of which includes several associated competencies:

1. Intrapersonal skills;
2. Interpersonal skills;
3. Adaptability;
4. Stress management;
5. General Mood.

This questionnaire is a Likert scale with five options and has been validated for the context of Iran by Soodmand and Rahimi (2014).

Teacher Reflectivity Questionnaire: Teacher Reflectivity Questionnaire (Akbari et al., 2010) consists of 29 items on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire has five sub-components including metacognitive, affective, critical, practical, and cognitive dimensions. The affective factor concerns the knowledge of learners and their affective/cognitive states. The cognitive component is the conscious endeavor for PD by taking part in conferences and reading specialized books and journals. The metacognitive component deals with teachers' knowledge of learning and teaching, their view of their

profession. The practical component refers to the actual act of reflection by making use of different tools, such as keeping journals and talking to colleagues. The critical factor deals with the socio-political dimension of teaching. Akbari et al. (2010) reported high reliability and validity estimates for this instrument.

Teacher Work-Autonomy Scale (TWA): this scale was developed and validated by Friedman (1999) and consists of 32 items rated on a five-point scale. It measures teacher work-autonomy based on four subcategories, including 1. Autonomy in student teaching and assessment; 2. Autonomy in school mode of operation; 3. Autonomy in staff development; and 4. Autonomy in curriculum development. This instrument was reviewed by two experts of TEFL to make sure if it is suitable for the context of Iran.

Data Collection Procedure

The required instruments were administered among the participants of the study in three consecutive sessions. Moreover, the final exam scores obtained by the students (N = 1266) of the participating teachers were collected as the measure of their L2 achievement scores. Because there must be an equal number of scores in both correlating variables (paired observations assumption), the average of the students' achievement scores in each class (88 classes for 88 teachers) was calculated and matched against the teachers' scores in the three independent variables of the study.

RESULTS

To analyze the data, first, the assumptions for using parametric tests were checked. Then, to examine the first research question about the relationship between teachers' degree of emotional intelligence, reflectivity, autonomy, and their students' L2 achievement, Pearson Product Moment correlation was run (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Correlation between Teachers' Emotional Intelligence, Reflectivity, Autonomy, and their Students' Achievement*

			Students' L2 achievement
		Pearson correlation	.37**
	Emotional intelligence	Sig. (2- tailed)	.00
		N	88
		Pearson correlation	.52**
Pearson correlation	Reflectivity	Sig. (2- tailed)	.00
		N	88
		Pearson correlation	.48**
	Autonomy	Sig. (2- tailed)	.00
		N	88

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

As Table 1 shows, there was a statistically significant and positive relationship between the three teacher-related variables and the students' L2 achievement. To be more precise, there was a medium positive relationship between emotional intelligence and the students' L2 achievement ($r = .37$, $p < .01$), strong positive correlation between teachers' reflective teaching and their learners' L2 achievement ($r = .52$, $p < .01$), and medium positive correlation between teachers' autonomy and students' L2 achievement ($r = .48$, $p < .01$).

To answer the second research question investigating the strongest predictor of the students' L2 achievement from among the independent variables of this study, multiple regression was run. As shown in Table 2, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 44%. In other words, 44 percent of the variance in the learners' L2 achievement can be explained by the independent variables, including teachers' emotional intelligence, reflectivity, and autonomy (R Square = .44).

Table 2. *Model Summary for Teachers' Emotional Intelligence, Reflectivity, and Autonomy in Predicting Students' Achievement*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.66[a]	.44	.42	7.87

a. Predictors: (Constant), autonomy, emotional intelligence, reflectivity

Next, the results of the ANOVA test to examine the regression model in predicting learners' L2 achievement by teachers' emotional intelligence, reflectivity, and autonomy are presented in Table 3. As shown in Table 3, the model reached statistical significance (F (3, 84) = 22.57, p = .00 < .001).

Table 3. *The Results of ANOVA for Teachers' Emotional Intelligence, Reflectivity, and Autonomy in Predicting Students' Achievement*

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4200.528	3	1400.17	22.57	.00[b]
	Residual	5210.813	84	62.03		
	Total	9411.341	87			

a) Dependent variable: Learners' L2 achievement
b) Predictors: (constant), emotional intelligence, reflectivity, autonomy

Table 4 shows the results of multiple regression analysis for predicting learners' L2 achievement by teachers' emotional intelligence, reflectivity, and autonomy.

Table 4. *Coefficients*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	17.68	11.45		1.54	.12
E. Intelligence	.04	.03	.12	1.37	.17
Reflectivity	.21	.04	.40	4.45	.00

Autonomy	.25	.05	.38	4.17	.00

As indicated in Table 4, both teachers' reflectivity and autonomy were significant predictors of learners' L2 achievement. However, teachers' reflectivity was the stronger predictor (Beta = .40, t = 4.45, p = .00).

To answer the third research question addressing the significant difference among EFL teachers' degree of emotional intelligence, reflectivity, and autonomy concerning their gender and educational degree, two MANOVA tests were run.

Table 5. *Multivariate Test*

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Degree	Pillai's Trace	.263	10.007[b]	3.00	84.00	.00
	Wilks' Lambda	.737	10.007[b]	3.00	84.00	.00
	Hotelling's Trace	.357	10.007[b]	3.00	84.00	.00
	Roy's Largest Root	.357	10.007[b]	3.00	84.00	.00

a. Design: Intercept + degree
b. Exact statistic

The results obtained on the MANOVA test suggest that there was a significant difference between B.A. and M.A. holder teachers regarding their emotional intelligence, reflectivity, and autonomy (Wilks' Lambda = .737, F = 10.007, p = .00). In Table 6, tests of Between-Subject Effects are presented to indicate which variable scores are different for teachers' educational degrees.

Table 6. *Test of Between-Subjects Effect*

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Degree	Autonomy	13.38	1	13.38	.05	.82
	Reflectivity	8242.77	1	8242.77	26.60	.00
	E. intelligence	9577.99	1	9577.99	11.36	.00

As shown in Table 6, the amounts of F values for the means of different academic degrees was significant at $p < .05$; that is, EFL teachers with different academic degrees were significantly different with regard to their reflectivity (F = 26.60 & sig. = .00, $p < 0.05$) and emotional intelligence (F = 11.36 & sig. = .00, $p < 0.05$). However, M.A. and B.A. holder teachers were not significantly different regarding their level of autonomy (F = .05 & sig. = .82, $p > .05$). An inspection of the mean scores indicated that EFL teachers holding M.A. degree were emotionally more intelligent (mean= 403.34) than B.A. holder teachers (mean = 382.28).

The second MANOVA test was run in order to check whether there is significant difference between teachers' emotional intelligence, reflectivity, and autonomy with respect to their gender. Table 7 shows the results of descriptive statistics for both male and female teachers in this respect.

Table 7. *Multivariate Test*

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.15	5.24[b]	3.00	84.00	.00
	Wilks' Lambda	.84	5.24[b]	3.00	84.00	.00
	Hotelling's Trace	.18	5.24[b]	3.00	84.00	.00
	Roy's Largest Root	.18	5.24[b]	3.00	84.00	.00

a) a. Design: Intercept + gender
b) b. Exact statistic

Table 7 reveals that male and female participants differed on a linear combination of emotional intelligence, reflectivity and autonomy (Wilks' Lambda = .84, F = 5.24, p = .00).

In Table 8, tests of Between-Subject Effects are presented to indicate which variable scores are different with respect to teachers' gender.

Table 8
Test of Between-Subjects Effect

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Gender	Autonomy	330.19	1	330.19	1.31	.25
	Reflectivity	3171.34	1	3171.34	8.60	.00
	E. Intelligence	6446.89	1	6446.89	7.33	.00

When the results for the dependent variable are considered separately, male and female EFL teachers were significantly different with regard to their reflectivity (F(1) = 8.60, p = .00), and emotional intelligence (F(1) = 7.33, p = .00). But, no significant difference was observed between male and female EFL teachers with respect to their autonomy (F(1) = 1.31, p = .25).

DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to examine the relationship between EFL teachers' emotional intelligence, reflectivity, and autonomy, and their EFL learners' L2 performance. To study this issue, three research questions were posed.

The results of the study about the first research question, which investigated the probable relationship between teachers' emotional intelligence, reflective teaching, and autonomy and their students' L2 achievement, showed that there was positive significant correlation between the three teacher-related variables and their students' L2 achievement.

Considering the relationship between teachers' emotional intelligence and students' L2 achievement, the findings of this study are in line with the findings of Wentzel (2002) and Ghanizadeh and Moafian (2009) who found significant positive relationship between teachers' emotional intelligence and their job success.

The literature has documented the importance of emotions in learning, teaching, and in learning to teach (Corcoran & Tormey, 2012). Teachers' influence is not restricted to the transition of knowledge to students. It is also manifested in how they establish relationship and manage

a socially and emotionally supportive learning atmosphere. This is more pervasive in English classes where active communication and participation are prevalent and teachers' high emotional intelligence guarantee the creation of warm and positive environment conducive to learning.

The majority of research on teacher success has indicated the facilitative effect of a pleasing and congenial classroom climate, which tends to promote learning (Williams & Burden, 1997). Teachers who manifested more amicable and considerate behavior in their interactions in the classroom had an inclination to not only increase learner learning but also improve attitudes towards the course (Williams & Burden, 1997). Mortiboys (2005) claimed that if a teacher devotes attention to the affective dimension of the classroom, learners' motivation, risk-taking, and positive attitudes would also be raised.

Moreover, the findings showed that teachers' degree of reflectivity and learners' L2 achievement were strongly and positively correlated. The same result was obtained by Akbari and KarimiAllvar (2010), and Mahmoodi et al. (2015) who approved the existence of positive correlation between teachers' reflectivity and learners' achievement. The importance of reflection is evident in Dewey's (1933) discussion which characterizes reflection as the most significant quality teachers have to obtain in order to improve the quality of instruction.

With the assistance of reflection, teachers can monitor their own teaching to make necessary logical decisions to change their teaching practices and improve their professional skills which are conducive to better student learning and development. Moreover, reflective teaching oils the wheels of professional mechanisms to discuss instructional problems and make sound decisions about teaching and learning processes among teachers that may give rise to appropriate amendment in syllabus design and education.

In fact, reflection is teachers' inspiration for change and improvement. Through this process, teachers ponder on their actions and try to create ample opportunities for students to learn and grow. Reflection is

considered to be a resolute endeavor to help solve complicated instructional dilemmas and change them into learning experiences resulting in student and teacher growth. Indeed, reflection in teaching takes students out of usual boring situations and encourages them to grow and improve. In such situations, learners become more motivated and sensitive and try their best to benefit from novel educational activities.

Finally, the results showed that teachers' level of autonomy and students' L2 achievement were in medium positive correlation. Reviewing the literature indicated that there is a dearth of research on teacher autonomy in SLA research. This positive correlation can be justified and clarified considering the nature of teacher autonomy and the established literature. Autonomous teachers grow the capacity to make deliberate intellectual and moral decisions regarding different perspectives and making decisions, which are advantageous to all the learners. Most successful teachers are usually autonomous and have a powerful sense of personal responsibility for their teaching, their students' learning. They tend to regulate and improve their teaching practices via ongoing and consistent reflection and analysis. Learner success and teacher autonomy are usually correlated and complementary so it can be assumed that the promotion of learner success, to some extent, depends on teacher autonomy.

Concerning the second research question, it was found that from among the independent variables of the study, reflectivity was the stronger predictor of the learners' L2 achievement. This finding is in tune with that of Mahmoodi et al. (2015) which endorsed the unique contribution of teachers' reflection in predicting learners' L2 achievement. "Reflective practice is, first and foremost, centered on student learning and a commitment to helping students succeed" (Waltermire, 1999, p. 115). According to Pacheco (2005) through reflective inquiry, theory and practice are linked which bring flexibility in learning environment and help teachers examine success and failure in instructional context.

A viable explanation for this result is in Calderhead and Shorrock's (1997) view, that masterful professional practice relies less on factual

knowledge and rigid decision-making models than on the competency to reflect, communicatively formulating the problem as well as provide possible solutions. Teachers' reflection has distinctive impact on anticipating the learners' learning. This result supports the previously-mentioned correlational findings between reflection and L2 learning, and calls attention to the instrumental role that teachers' reflection could play in affecting learners' learning (Goldhaber, 2002; Sanders, 2000).

Another area examined in this study was whether or not variables such as teachers' educational degree and gender had any significance influence on teachers' emotional intelligence, reflectivity, and autonomy. The results showed that educational degree was a factor that exerted significant influence on teachers' emotional intelligence and reflectivity; however, it did not make significant difference between teachers regarding their autonomy. This finding is consistent with those of Akbari and Tavassoli (2011) and Yahyazadeh-Jeloudar and Lotfi-Goodarzi (2012) who proved that teachers' emotional intelligence significantly differed among teachers of different educational degrees. This finding can be justified by considering Bar-On's (2000) view that emotional intelligence can be taught and developed over the span of time. Hence, M.A. holder teachers receiving more training were more emotionally intelligent.

The superiority of M.A. holders with respect to reflective practices to B.A. holders is in line with Ansarin, Farrokhi, and Rahmani's (2015) finding which approved that educational degree influences teachers' degree of pedagogical and critical reflection, and is in contradiction with that of Rezaeyan and Nikoopour (2013) who found no difference in this respect. The study of Harford and MacRuairc (2008) can support this finding that teachers' capacity for reflection can be improved by training teachers in this regard and teachers can learn the habit of genuine reflective practices. This result shows that Iranian M.A. holder teachers benefit from teacher education courses and are more reflective.

The results of this study also determined gender as a variable significantly differentiated male and female teachers regarding the

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emotional intelligence and reflectivity, showing that female EFL teachers were more emotionally intelligent and had higher degree of reflectivity than the male teachers, corroborating the results obtained in the studies of Bastian (2005), and Akbari and Tavassoli (2011). This result is supported by previous literature on gender differences which showed that women show greater interpersonal competencies (Hargie, Saunders, & Dickson, 1995), are more sensitive to the emotions of others (Hall & Mast, 2008), and have higher emotional intelligence (Ciarrochi, Hynes, & Crittenden 2005). In addition, it is generally believed that women, in contrast to men, are more acquainted with the emotional aspect of human relationship.

In addition, it was found that female teachers were more significantly oriented to reflective practices than male. This result is in tune with that of Ansarin, Farrokhi, and Rahmani (2015) and Rashidi and Javidanmehr (2012) who certified that female EFL teachers outperform male with respect to reflective practices. Whereas, Mahmoodi et al. (2014), Aghaei and Jadidi (2013), and Khani and Ghoreyshi (2014) found no significant difference between male and female EFL teachers' degree of reflectivity. This finding can be ascribed to the fact that women are more detail-oriented and naturally develop inclination to carry out meticulous identification and evaluation of their professional behavior and their learners' performance.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study lead to the conclusion that teachers' emotional intelligence, reflectivity, and autonomy were critical aspects of teaching and are significantly correlated with L2 learners' achievement. The findings confirmed that teaching is not confined to the mere transition of subject knowledge rather it is interplay between diverse psychological and cognitive dimensions.

Providing teachers with ample technical and pedagogical knowledge is not enough for boosting teaching effectiveness. It is necessary to stimulate and prompt the development of psychological characteristics such as

emotional intelligence, reflectivity, and autonomy. Therefore, teachers should take these psychological and cognitive dimensions of teacher characteristics into account in language instruction.

Pedagogically, being cognizant of the intricacy of the constructs of emotional intelligence, reflectivity, and autonomy will assist teachers and educators in understanding what actually triggers students learning. This requires the discovery and reduction of forces that diminish the scope and effect of teacher education practices.

The findings of this study connote that teacher training programs need to familiarize in-service EFL teachers with the components of reflective teaching and the advantages of applying reflective practice in their classes. This familiarity would increase the quality of their teaching by identifying and eliminating their weaknesses and improving on their strengths which in turn can lead to students' eventual achievement and success.

Considering Bar-On's (2000) discussion that emotional intelligence can be developed and improved through programming, educating, and therapy, the obtained result calls for exploiting and establishing courses for language teachers focusing on encouraging and assisting teachers to understand the emotional aspects of teaching and inject their emotional intelligence into their teaching activities. Teacher education programs need to equip teachers with the required expertise to exercise their emotional intelligence in their teaching practices.

Teacher education trainings have to provide teachers with the necessary expertise to use their experience and apply initiations suitable to the particularities and dynamics of their instructional environment. Teacher educators should support language teachers with the purpose of empowering teachers to stimulate their autonomy and to help teachers accept, at least to some degree, the responsibility of the learners L2 achievement.

The participants of this study were limited to a sample of Iranian EFL teachers which were selected based on convenience sampling procedure. The participants cannot be considered as a true representative of

the population; hence, the generalizability of this study to larger populations may be questioned. Moreover, the data collection instrument was limited to questionnaire, although, distributing questionnaire according to Dornyei (2007) can provide a large body of data in a short period of time, the obtained data is rather superficial which confines the depth of investigation. Future studies can draw on qualitative methodologies such as in-depth interview and reflective journals to have an in-depth investigation of how these variables are related to each other.

Moreover, longitudinal studies on how teachers' emotional intelligence, reflectivity, and autonomy evolve and change in the process of language teaching could shed new light on the dynamic nature of these constructs.

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