



EFL Teachers' Self-Actualization through Critical Friendship

Hanieh Kashi

Islamic Azad University, Qeshm Branch, Qeshm, Iran

Paria Isazadeh

Tabriz Payame Noor University, I.R. of Iran

Khazar Molana

Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Tehran, Iran.

Introduction

The term self-actualization which is at times used interchangeably with 'self-reflection' or 'self-realization' is a psychological construct defined by Gleitman, Fridlund, and Reisberg (2004) as the ability to understand one's own potentials. Other scholars (e.g., Coble & Hounshell, 1972; Richard & Ferrell, 2005; Wang & Seth, 1998) have defined self-actualization as an ability to potentially be able to do a particular career in an appropriate manner. Regardless of slight differences observed in the definition of self-actualization, if any, one can realize that self-actualization is a key concept in teacher development, as a long-lasting desire for many educational systems is that their teachers could achieve their full potential and teach courses in a way that results in more student outcome and satisfaction (Ellis, 2005).

Considering the context of Iran, the issue may be more significant. The EFL context of Iran is growing exponentially and this, in turn, has resulted in the employment of more novice language teachers (Eslami & Fatahi, 2008). In addition, it seems that many EFL teachers in Iran have been educated in other majors such as engineering, medicine, agriculture, etc. (Papi & Abdollahzadeh, 2012). Such disciplines have no common ground with language teaching. These teachers' knowledge of linguistics and educational psychology may be limited to how they have perceived language and not consistent with what is really required for successful language teaching. (Papi & Abdollahzadeh, 2012). Therefore, teachers' inexperience may result in difficulty in second language learning by EFL learners.

As stated by Arumugasamy (2012), one possible way to increase teachers' practical knowledge of teaching is through enhancing their self-actualization. On other occasions, Farrell (2001) and Richards and Farrell (2005) have investigated the effect of CF on language teachers' self-actualization. However, most studies carried out so far are in the western and East Asian contexts and have had different results. This issue urged the need for more research in EFL contexts of Asia; believing that critical friendship is a context-bound issue and the same results may not be gained by researchers in various contexts.

Research Questions

1. How do Iranian EFL teachers perceive self-actualization through critical friendship?
2. Does Iranian EFL teachers' perception of self-actualization through critical friendship differ based on gender?

Review of the Literature

Theoretical Framework

This study is heavily based on the following theories:

Zone of proximal development (ZPD)

A key component of critical friendship is ZPD by Vygotsky (1987, as cited in Chaiklin, 2003). ZPD is the basis of collaborative activities in education. Based on this theory, one cannot reach his/her full potential unless he/she is able to enter aided zones of learning (Cohen, 2014). In the aided zones others such as peers, friends, or teachers are able to share knowledge with the learner and enhance his/her understanding.

Human Development Theory

This study is also based on 'Human Development Theory' as suggested by Maslow (1968). Maslow considers self-actualization as the pinnacle of one's development, making it a worthy issue to investigate. Other factors defined by Maslow in the process of human development, i.e., food, safety, love, esteem, which are out of the scope of this study.

Maslow (1968) believed that prior to development in any career, one should identify the primary needs of the individual. He defined food, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization as prerequisites of human development. In terms of self-actualization, Maslow (1968) posited that not all people reach the state of self-actualization, even if they are capable of reaching this state theoretically. Maslow (1968) estimated that only two percent of people may reach the state of self-actualization. In order to make his view clearer, Maslow (1968) defined characteristics of self-actualizers. He believed that self-actualizers are those who: have ambiguity tolerance, a need for privacy, accepts the reality about themselves and others, and reacts spontaneously. In addition, he believed self-actualizers have a sense of humor, care for other humans, have a democratic attitude, and view life objectively. Other characteristics of self-actualizers include: being problem-centered, creative and ethical.

CF in the field of applied linguistics and with regard to language teaching refers to the process of self-reflection on one's own teaching through observing another teacher (Farrell, 2001). Indeed, teachers work as critical friends to help each other. The main component of CF is collaboration. Collaboration results in talking with, questioning, and even confronting others in a friendly manner (Hatton & Smith, 1995). The overall assumption in the field of teacher education is that training teachers through CF could enhance individual characteristics of the teachers such as self-actualization and, in turn, result in more satisfaction among EFL learners (Tedick, 2005; Wang & Seth, 1998).

Farrell (2001) believed that CF could facilitate teaching processes, as he considered CF a suitable path to reflective teaching. As mentioned by him, people '... collaborate in a way that encourages discussion and reflection in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning' (Farrell, 2001, p. 369).

Farrell (2003) defined two roles in a critical friendship process. Novice teachers and True friends. While novice teachers (often referred to as beginning teachers) encounter difficulties in teaching and need

to know the school and teaching processes, the true friend (a more experienced teacher) plays a supportive role and gives guidance to the new teacher. This process usually occurs in the first year of teaching. This process has been found to be effective by many scholars such as Ponte (2005) who stated critical friends ‘...helped each other to reflect on what they were doing and why, mainly by asking questions’ (p. 572). Other scholars such as Johnson (2009) believed that such groups with novice and experienced teachers could improve the learning among teachers as teachers could take risks and experience new things. Thus, teachers could explore and learn. The goal of this process was also defined by Dunne, Nave, and Lewis (2000) who believed that CF is used “to identify student learning goals that make sense in their schools, look reflectively at practices intended to achieve these goals, and collaboratively examine teacher and student work in order to meet that objective” (p. 9).

Method

Participants

The participants for this study were 40 EFL teachers teaching at a language institute in Tehran, Iran. The participants formed 20 pairs of 2 teachers as a critical friend and a true friend who observed each other's classes (18 males and 22 females). One of the teachers in each pair was a novice teacher and the other teacher was an experienced one. Experienced teachers had more than 5 years of experience in TEFL and novice teachers had less than 2 years of experience in language teaching.

Instrumentation

Two main instruments were used in this study. Firstly, a 16 item Likert scale questionnaire designed by Richards and Farrell (2005) to gauge self-actualization through critical friendship was used. Both reliability and validity of the questionnaire were measured in this study and were equal to $\alpha = .872$ and $\alpha = .79$, respectively. Secondly, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 20 participants out of 40 in different groups. The interview focused mostly on self-actualization through critical friendship.

Procedure

This study was conducted during the summer 2018 at a Language Institute in the capital city of Tehran. A briefing session was held for the participants prior to the study and the critical friendship procedure was explained to the participants. In order to avoid subject expectancy, not all information regarding the study was presented. In the same session, consent forms were administered to the participants, and their observation schedule was given to them.

Each critical friend (experienced teacher) observed each true friend (novice teacher) for 5 sessions, and each true friend observed the critical friend for 5 sessions. Each group of participants had 3 sessions of discussion to discuss the teaching techniques and processes used in the class.

Two semi structured interviews were conducted. The first time was in the middle of the semester, and the second time was at the end of the process. Finally, Richards and Farrell's (2005) questionnaire was administered to the participants at the end of the study. The data collected from these 2 different sources, i.e., the questionnaire, the interview, and the observation were used to answer the research questions.

Data Analysis

In the first phase of data analysis, the normality of the scores collected from the questionnaires was checked. As ratios of skewness and kurtosis were within the range of +/-1.96, it was assumed that the distribution of the scores is normal.

Next, based on Cronbach’s Alpha method, a reliability test was carried out. The test result in Table 1 ($\alpha = 0.872, p = 0.05$) proved that the reliability of the questionnaire data was acceptable.

TABLE 1
Reliability Statistics

Cronbach’s Alpha	N of Items
.872	40

$p = .05$

Question 1

In order to answer research question 1, data collected from 2 different sources, i.e., questionnaire, and semi-structured interview were used. Table 2 reveals descriptive data with regard to the questionnaire.

TABLE 2
Frequency of Distribution, All Teachers

Assigned Score	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
Questions	Frequencies (Percent)					
Q1	0	30	70	70	30	200
Q2	0	30	30	60	100	200
Q3	160	40	0	0	0	200
Q4	30	70	100	0	0	200
Q5	0	0	100	90	10	200
Q6	0	0	100	90	10	200
Q7	0	30	80	90	0	200
Q8	0	10	100	80	10	200
Q9	0	0	90	80	30	200
Q10	0	10	80	100	10	200
Q11	0	0	90	100	10	200
Q12	0	100	30	70	0	200
Q13	70	60	30	0	0	200
Q14	140	60	0	0	0	200
Q15	20	50	30	70	30	200
Q16	20	10	50	70	50	200
Q17	0	130	70	0	0	200
Q18	0	0	30	130	40	200
Q19	0	50	50	50	50	200
Q20	20	20	20	70	70	200
Average	15.75%	26.25%	26.75%	20.5%	10.75%	100%

As can be seen in Table 2, 50% of the teachers held a positive view about the use of CF as a teacher training method, however, 35% of the teachers found its effect neutral (Question 1). While 80% of the teachers believed that CF could help them reflect on their teaching, 15% of the teachers disagreed with this issue (Question 2). All teachers (100%) posited that their colleagues treated them as a critic rather than a friend (Question 4).

While 50% of the teachers felt teachers' competition in the process, 50% of the teachers found the process neutral rather than competitive. Most teachers found CF a suitable process to learn how to teach language skills (Questions 6 to 9), as in most cases the teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the effect of CF on learning to teach language skills. 55% of the language teachers found CF an effective approach to teach vocabulary and grammar, while 50% and 45% of the teachers found its effect neutral on vocabulary and grammar, respectively (Questions 10 and 11). In terms of pronunciation (Question 12) 55% percent of the teachers found CF effective and 45% of the teachers found it neutral.

Only 35% of the teachers agreed that critical friendship broadened their view on the scope of language teaching (Question 13). Indeed, 50% of the teachers disagreed with the effect of CF on broadening their view on the scope of language teaching. 85% of the teachers believed that CF did not have any effect on their confidence as a language teacher (Question 14) and all teachers agreed that CF was not an incentive for them to conduct research on language teaching methods (Question 15).

50% of the teachers agreed that critical friendship made teaching a more enjoyable process for them (Question 16). 60 % of the language teachers stated that critical friendship was not a practical approach, however; the idea was changed after the course of the study (Question 17). None of the teachers believed that critical friendship is more suitable for experienced teachers (Question 18). Indeed, 85% of the teachers found it effective (Question 19). 60% of the teachers stated that CF helped them realize their strengths and weaknesses (Question 20). Finally, 75% of the teachers stated positive feelings toward CF.

Qualitative Analysis (Semi-Structured Interview)

The researcher transcribed the interview data collected from the participants and made use of qualitative content analysis approach as suggested by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) to analyze the data. Following Hsieh and Shannon (2005), the data was coded based on the main themes. Next, the researcher attempted to select the themes which were related to the study and find relationships between the themes. The relevant themes were next subject to interpretation. The researcher could extract 6 main themes from the participants' speech. Table 3 reveals the themes.

TABLE 3

Main Themes in Participants' Speech

N	Theme	Speech Sample
1	Anxiety while teaching	True Friend: I forgot how to teach when a senior is observing me. I even missed the page number twice.
2	Disagreement between critical friend and true friend	True Friend: The teaching technique I selected was not favored by the critical friend, but I know my students and I know which is better. I accepted him only for respect.
3	Usefulness of comments	True Friend: I think most comments are useful, and practical. I had many problems with classroom management. My friend suggested me techniques to get hold of the situation. Critical Friend: Sometimes novice teacher give you suggestions that really work. I think experienced teachers shouldn't miss the comments.
4	Cultural and social burdens	True Friend: We are not used to saying 'I don't know', or 'you know more than me'. I am afraid other students may think I still need training when [X] comes to observe me. This is a serious issue.
5	Enhanced friendship	Critical friend: I didn't know that I can be useful as a help to others. I enjoy helping friend out.
6	An opportunity to think about teaching	

As observed in Table 3, the participants pointed to both weaknesses and strengths of critical friendship and how it affects their progress as a language teacher. As for weaknesses, the participants pointed to anxiety while teaching, disagreement between the friends, and social and cultural burdens. As for benefits of critical friendship, the participants pointed to enhanced friendship, an opportunity to think about teaching, and usefulness of comments.

Question 2

To run independent samples t-test, its assumptions were checked. The first assumption is a normal distribution of the scores which, in turn, indicates the need to run parametric analysis. In order to answer research question 2, an independent samples t-test was run between the scores collected from the male participants ($n = 18$) vs. the female participants ($n = 22$).

As can be seen in Table 5, there is a small difference between the mean score of the male participants ($M = 57.11$, $SD = 4.746$), and female participants ($M = 54.08$, $SD = 3.53$).

TABLE 5
Descriptive Statistics of Male and Female Participants

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male	18	57.11	4.746	.783
Female	22	54.08	3.536	.699

As observed in Table 6, the results ($t(19) = .546$, $\alpha = .564$) [0.81, 4.73] reveal that there is no significant difference between the answers of the male and female participants.

TABLE 6
Independent Samples t-test; Male and Female Participants

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.645	.638	.546	39	.564	3.03	1.322	0.81	4.73

Discussion

The study explored the effects of critical friendship on Iranian language teachers' self-actualization. The findings of the study revealed that, in general, Iranian Language teachers' perceptions with regard to critical friendship and its effect on self-actualization is positive. However, their perception varied with regard to various items in the questionnaire which were discussed in the previous section. In addition, it was found that Iranian male and female language teachers have very similar views about critical friendship and its effect on their self-actualization.

The effect of CF on teachers' development was also explored by The National Union of Teachers (2004, as cited in Weiner & Compton, 2008). The union finds CF a dynamic process; starting from the teachers' status quo and continuing through their profession. Thus, the union views CF as a vehicle that turns teachers to authorities who can control their development. The current study also revealed that CF is a suitable approach to enhance language teachers' teaching skills (as stated in the interviews) which results in their self-actualization.

While Bowman and McCormick (2000) find CF an approach through which collaboration occurs among teachers, the language teachers in the current study felt more competition rather than collaboration. This may refer to individual differences between teachers in various contexts. Bowman and McCormick (2000) also believed that CF leads to reflection; meaning that language teachers can reflect on their teaching through CF. In line with Bowman and McCormick (2000), the teachers in this study posited that CF gives them the opportunity to think about their teaching methods. Moreover, McKenzie and Carr-

Reardon (2003), posit that teachers who take part in the CF process hold a positive view toward it. The current study looked at the depth of this issue and studied the language teachers based on their gender. As a result, it was found that gender does not affect language teachers' opinions about CF. Indeed, both male and female language teachers held a positive view with regard to CF.

The teachers' concurrent teaching in this study created an opportunity for receiving reflective peer feedback by them. Chick (2015) believed that observation is one of the most common practices for preparing skillful language teachers. As such and according to Schuck and Russell (2005), the crafts model is the popular teacher training procedure in which novice teachers observe an experienced teacher conducting the class. Observation was, indeed, the most significant tool to level teachers' experience. Although some teachers found it rather disturbing to be observed by a senior teacher. In most cases, the teachers attempted to benefit from the feedback they received after observation.

A rather similar study was carried out by Wang and Seth (2008). In their study, classroom teachers observed each other's classes to reflect on their teaching. Wang and Seth reported positive insights among teachers after the study. Although the teachers were not willing to be observed prior to the study, there were reports of independent observations among the teachers and a change in attitude. The findings of this study are congruent with the findings of Wang and Seth (2008), as language teachers' attitude toward observation was positive (as reflected by questions 1, 2, 17 in the questionnaire).

Danielson (2007) states that classroom observation cannot tell everything about a teaching process; teaching occurs out of the classroom atmosphere as well. The findings of this study proved that observation schemes through critical friendship can bring about a considerable change in the attitude of the language teachers in terms of their own beliefs about their development and language learners with regard to their attitude about the teacher. It can be argued that what was mentioned by Danielson (2007) refers to observation, however; critical friendship uses observation as a tool and is a more effective approach to teachers' development and self-actualization.

Murphy (2015) finds reflective observation a core component of teacher's development. In contrast to Murphy (2015), Calderhead (1989) states that novice teachers' observation is shallow and superficial. The findings of this study tend to support those of Murphy (2015) who believes that the descriptive accounts of classroom activities can provide teacher trainers and researchers with data on the cognitive processes they undergo.

Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that most language teachers in this study hold a positive view about CF as a teacher development process. In addition, the majority of language teachers believed that CF could be a useful approach for learning to teach language skills and subskills. The findings of the second research question also revealed that there is no significant difference between male and female teachers' perception with regard to the effects of CF on their self-actualization.

The study also revealed some negative points about the process in the view of the teachers. Half of the teachers believed that the process fosters competition rather than collaboration, and the majority of teachers believed that CF does not have any effect on their confidence as teachers.

This study can have pedagogical implications for teacher trainers who may wish to adopt a practical approach to teacher's development. It comes highly suggested by the researchers that other researchers should focus on the possible effects of CF on teachers' cognitive and metacognitive skills, as teaching is a cognitive process and it is important to raise teachers' cognitive and metacognitive skills. Others may wish to find out how CF processes can be amended to fit the Iranian context. This issue is significant; due to various levels of collaboration between individuals in different cultures which can affect the success of CF process.

The Authors

Hanieh Kashi is a researcher in the field of applied linguistics. Her areas of research include language teaching and assessment, problem-based learning, and research in the second language. Her articles focus on implementing problem-based tasks in language classes. She is currently a Ph.D. Candidate at the Faculty of Languages at Azad university, Qeshm branch. She has worked as the quality control manager of Safir Language Academy in Iran for about 14 years.

Email: Hani_kashi2000@yahoo.com

Paria Isazadeh is a language teacher and researcher. She holds a master's degree in language teaching and has 10 years of experience in teaching English in East Azerbaijan Province in Iran.

Email: p.eisazadeh@gmail.com

Khazar Molana is a graduate student of TEFL from Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Tehran, Iran. She got her M.A in 2012. She received her B.A in English Literature from University of Mazandaran, Babolsar, Iran. Her field of interest includes language learning, individual differences, teacher education, and technology-enhanced language instruction.

Email: khazar.mn@gmail.com

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