

## **A Correlation Study of Pakistani EFL Teachers' Professional discerning and their Critical Thinking**

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### **Abstract**

A great deal of research is done on teacher training and teacher education worldwide, but a few studies appeared on teacher's professional discerning and particularly on teachers' critical thinking skills. Critical thinking, with regard to EFL teachers, has not been taken into consideration early on. This study explores the relationship between EFL teacher's professional discerning and their critical thinking in Pakistani context. A quantitative paradigm has been adopted to find out if there is any relationship between EFL teachers' professional discerning and their critical thinking. The participants consisted of 93 EFL teachers teaching English at the university level in Pakistan. The researcher utilized a professional discerning (identity) research tool taken from Sheybani and Miri (2019) and a derived Critical Thinking Inventory (DCT) designed by the researcher to collect data. To analyze the relationship between EFL teachers's professional discerning and their critical thinking ability, the data were analyzed by R (statistical program). The results of correlation analysis unfolded that the sub-constructs of professional discerning questionnaire tools are predicted by critical thinking. A highly positive and statistically significant correlation was observed in the analysis. The study highlights the significance and important role of critical thinking in shaping EFL teachers' professional discerning, particularly in their teaching context. The study proves the inventive conduct of EFL teachers in the present era of knowledge and learning. The study will positively contribute to language teaching and learning, and it would open up new vistas for EFL teachers, syllabus designers, and academia.

*Keywords:* correlation, critical thinking, Pakistani EFL teachers, teachers' professional identity

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**Introduction**

The worth and significance of teachers' professional discerning and their critical thinking abilities has been clearly instituted; the dare for teachers exists in strongly furthering students' critical thinking skills inside the perimeters of a conventional classroom occurrence. As teachers are confronted with different issues including lack of professional discerning and lack of critical thinking abilities to come up with their teaching targets, they are mostly suppressed to make teaching discretions between enveloping the content, depth of comprehension, and critical assessment of course content. It is unavoidable to coalesce teachers' professional wisdom and skills that can adeptly and competently expand students' learning and critical thinking.

Present day advancement in technology in the race of globalized era demands efficient and useful critical thinkers to meet complex challenges intelligently (Pithers & Soden, 2000). Policy-designers around the globe have included critical thinking skills as an integral education goal. In Pakistan, like other countries of the world, teaching critical thinking skills has been included in field of education and teachers are required to inculcate critical thinking skill along with the curriculum. Many studies focused on teachers' perception of critical thinking skills, but there is a little body of research, in Pakistani context, which focuses on teaching critical thinking skills.

Teachers cannot enter the new era if they lack professional development and significant training activities the prospective teachers cannot land in the world of education. This lack of these activities may hinder the progress of the teachers and it can also stop the academic achievement of the learners. With the rampant growth in the field of technology, teachers also need to keep pace with this rapid development of the world.

Everyone can be a teacher but everyone cannot teach. The right choice of prospective teachers is very crucial in today's world. Teachers are required to be a referential, effective and efficient thinker, inspirational, prepared and balanced. The role of teacher has transformed from a dictator to a facilitator. The baronial and vintage building and infrastructure stand nowhere if the teacher is not committed, dedicated and an efficient critical thinker. The study suggests that in order to be efficient and effective teacher, teachers must develop a critical mind to think critically and have positive attitude. To bring an effective and positive change in society, prospective teachers must develop the ability of critical thinking. This study will pave the way for the "best" prospective teachers to be effective critical thinkers. Mere knowledge and degree of a teacher are not enough qualifications if the teacher lacks in critical thinking skills. The study will be useful in determining and predicting the measures which affect the proficiency and critical thinking ability of the prospective teachers.

A great strength of university teachers assert that the progress of critical thinking is the basic target of their teaching. However a few university teachers could detail critical thinking and some teachers had restricted or equal to nothing idea of how to connect their professional discerning (identity) with the development of critical thinking. This dubiousness increases to troubling dare of forming activities in classrooms to efficiently meet an ambiguous goal. Thus, the first step of confirming the encouragement of this invisible discerning is to make critical thinking functional.

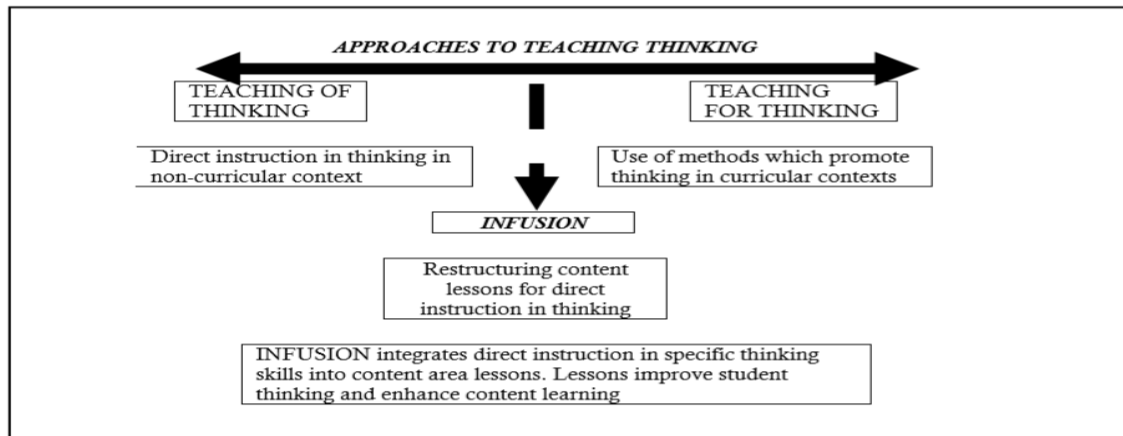


Figure 1 Approaches to teaching thinking (Adapted from Swartz & Parks, 1994, p. 9)

Conventional thinking skills and teaching techniques have left far behind in this accelerating age of information and communication technology. Inventive thinking is prone to determine connections which are not evident and to infer results from the unseen propositions. Such thinking is not aligned with conventional or direct thinking, which demonstrates and ascertains things the way they exist and perceives facts in its exclusive nature. Thinking skills require the teachers to demonstrate unruffled and smooth practice to the students who are the prospective teachers.

Critical thinking is crucial in every field of the scholarly venture. Like other skills, it is also earned and learned over time and experience and applied to everyday activities in different areas. CT becomes a way too long learning ability and a pathway of acquisition of our cognitive domain. To become efficient and practical critical thinkers, it is necessary to know how to think rather than what to think.

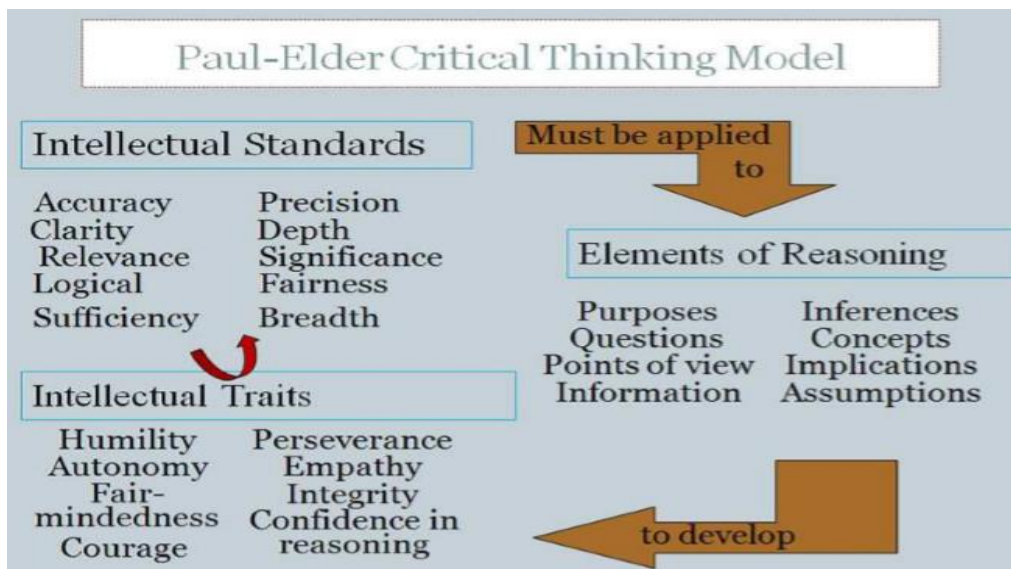


Figure 2 Paul-Elder's critical thinking model (Adapted from Paul, Elder and Barrel, 1997)

To upgrade their thinking abilities and skills, the students need to master these two dimensions of thinking, which are, according to Paul and Elder (1997), essential dimensions of thinking. The students should be able to identify how to think rather than what to think and to assess their thinking abilities. Paul, Elder and Barel (1997) stress the elements to determine the quality thinking ability with regard to reasoning. They consider it the ultimate goal for the standard of reasoning.

**RQ:** Is there any significant relationship between teachers' professional discerning and their critical thinking?

### **Review of related literature**

The name or profession with which a person is known socially other than one's personal identity (social background, surname or family name) would be termed as professional identity. The field in which one is working is also one's professional recognition. This is his/her character or role recognized as one's profession and one's affiliation with this particular profession. Professional discerning is shaped through one's attitudes, beliefs, experiences, motives and values through which individuals recognize and identify themselves in their professional fields. Alshraideh (2015) conducted a study in the Saudi context which aimed at examining pre-service teachers' reasons and beliefs regarding teaching profession. The participants of this study were 321 students of education (187) and Science College (134) in Umm-Alqura University (both male and female). The data were collected through two questionnaires. The results showed significant differences between the interaction between them regarding their reasons and beliefs about teaching as a career. This study stressed the importance of critical study being taught in the curriculum.

Abednia (2012) reported the results of teacher EFL course to teachers' identity reconstruction in their profession in the Iranian context. He observed the created impact of critical EFL course on critical ideologies and autonomy of teachers, their critical and transformative display of pedagogy and technical view of English as a second language in Iranian context.

Bao (2015) stresses the importance of professional development that it occupies greater significance for teachers and administrators. He investigated the vital impact of teachers' professional development activities on their pedagogical skills. Data were collected from 114 participants through questionnaire. The findings showed that teachers showed positive attitude toward professional development courses. It helps teachers improve or alternative their attitudes to make lessons effective. The study suggested that the school authorities should invite effective and experienced facilitators to run the business of the school.

Nur, Christina, Said, & Musirin, (2015) conducted a study in Malaysia regarding teacher education. A questionnaire was utilized to collect data from the final year 60 participants. The findings showed thinking skills integration was lacking in different activities of teaching. The promotion of teaching thinking skills was far behind the traditional approaches. The study recommended some practical implications to promote thinking skills in teacher education programs.

Yuan and Paul (2019) conducted a study on student teachers' perceptions of critical thinking. According to them, little attention was paid to language teachers' perceptions concerning

critical thinking skills. Drawing on data from interviews with teachers showed that the teachers of this study had a limited or no understanding of critical thinking skills. The findings of this study also revealed many individual challenges faced by the teachers to integrate thinking skills particularly into their language teaching.

In the wake of technological advancement and the digital world, critical thinking has become an integral part of education. The existing body of research has looked into several approaches in developing students' critical thinking skills in language classrooms (e.g., Luk & Lin, 2015). There is little research on teachers' perceptions of critical thinking and their professional identity (Peter & Bedir, 2015).

There are few research studies on professional discerning and its relation to their critical thinking in Pakistan. The relationship between EFL teachers' professional discerning and their critical skills has not been explored. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between Pakistani EFL teachers' professional identity and their critical thinking.

## Methods

### Participants

A quantitative methodology was utilized. The data were collected through stratified random sampling from EFL university teachers. A total of 93 EFL teachers from various universities of Punjab (Pakistan), were taken for the study. All the participants were volunteers in this study.

Table 1. *Number of participants with regard to university and gender*

University	Male	Female
BZU	18	<b>09</b>
PU	15	<b>07</b>
IUB	14	<b>10</b>
GCUF	18	<b>02</b>
Total	65	<b>28</b>

### Research Tools

The researcher collected quantitative data through two research tools i.e. professional discerning (identity) scale and derived critical thinking inventory (DCT). To measure and evaluate the teachers' professional identity, Liou's (2008 cited in Sheybani and Miri's 2019) Professional Identity Questionnaire (PIQ) was administered to the participants. Part B of this questionnaire was used that contained 18 items. This professional discerning scale includes three sub-scales: subject matter field, didactical field and the pedagogical field. The reliability of the professional discerning scale was found to be .87.

The critical thinking inventory was derived from Honey's (2000) critical thinking questionnaire. There were 25 items based on four points Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree to strongly agree". The revised inventory was given the name of the Derived Critical Thinking Inventory (DCT). The reliability of DCT was computed as 0.91 on Cronbach's Alpha, it was also found valid to measure the critical thinking ability of Pakistani EFL teachers effectively.

### Procedure

The main objective of the study is to explore the relationship between Pakistani EFL teachers' professional discerning and their critical thinking. The data were collected in February and March 2020. The researcher collected quantitative data through two research tools i.e. professional discerning (identity) scale and critical thinking inventory (CTI). A total of 93 EFL teachers from different universities of Punjab (Pakistan) were taken for the study. It took them almost 30 minutes to complete both professional discerning scale and critical thinking inventory. The participants of the study were told all about the purpose of the research and they were assured of their anonymity. After data collection, they were computed through R (statistical software) and were analyzed by Pearson correlation and frequency measures.

### Results and Findings

The following table shows the results of the derived critical thinking inventory as responded the participants.

Table 2. Summary of all 27 studied categorical variables

Variable	Code	Freq.	Variable	Code	Freq.	Variable	Code	Freq.
<b>DCT1</b>	1	40	<b>DCT11</b>	1	9	<b>DCT21</b>	1	36
	2	43		2	26		2	17
	3	10		3	24		3	10
<b>DCT2</b>	1	60		4	34		4	30
	2	19	<b>DCT12</b>	1	9	<b>DCT22</b>	1	6
	3	14		2	24		2	18
<b>DCT3</b>	1	19		3	29		3	15
	2	24		4	31		4	54
	3	26	<b>DCT13</b>	1	14	<b>DCT23</b>	1	40
4	24	2		25	2		37	
<b>DCT4</b>	1	26		3	25		3	16
	2	20		4	29	<b>DCT24</b>	1	66
	3	13	<b>DCT14</b>	1	47		2	27
	4	34		2	24		<b>DCT25</b>	2
<b>DCT5</b>	1	27		3	22	3		32
	2	22	<b>DCT15</b>	1	29	4		37
	3	19		2	25	<b>Gender</b>	Male	65
	4	25		3	19		Female	28
<b>DCT6</b>	1	33		4	20	<b>University</b>	BZU	27
	2	24	<b>DCT16</b>	1	26		PU	22
	3	19		2	25		IUB	24
	4	17		3	29		GCUF	20
<b>DCT7</b>	1	22		4	13	<b>Code:</b>		
	2	15	<b>DCT17</b>	1	31		1	S. Disagree
	3	24		2	22	2	Disagree	

	4	32		3	28	3	Agree
<b>DCT8</b>	1	22		4	12		
	2	14	<b>DCT18</b>	1	18	<b>Freq.</b>	Frequency
	3	29		2	23		
	4	28		3	21		
		4		31			
<b>DCT9</b>	1	23	<b>DCT19</b>	1	19		
	2	14		2	19		
	3	23		3	30		
	4	33		4	25		
<b>DCT10</b>	1	15	<b>DCT20</b>	1	33		
	2	19		2	26		
	3	21		3	17		
	4	38		4	17		

This table summarizes the results of Derived Critical Thinking Inventory questionnaire. It shows the frequencies of the responses. All the frequencies have been put together in the above table with the help of R analysis.

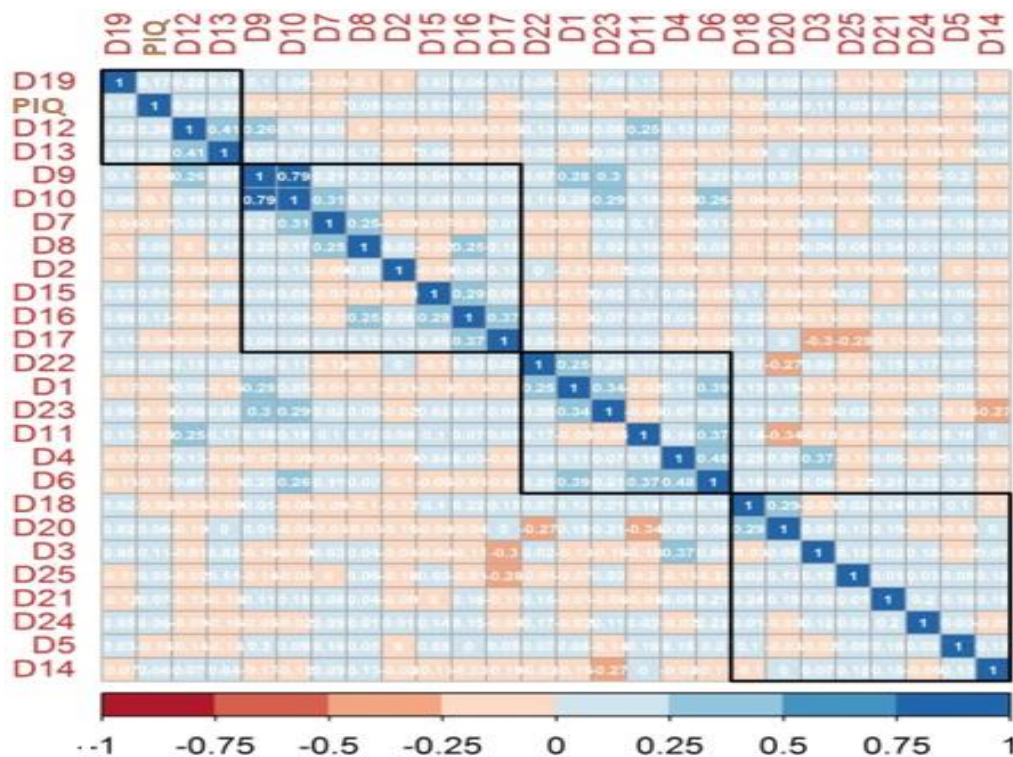


Figure 3. Spearman's rank correlation among variables, rectangles at diagonal classifying variables into four groups and the correlation  $\pm 0.2$  was calculated as significant (p-value < 0.05).

This figure is quite self-evident to show the correlation between teachers' critical thinking with their professional discerning. Spearman's rank correlation among variables, rectangles at diagonal classifying variables into four groups, and the correlation  $\pm 0.2$  was calculated as significant (p-value < 0.05). This study implies that developing teachers' critical thinking skills will clearly alter their expert persona. The findings of the study revealed that professional discerning could be promoted by nurturing critical thinking skills. Thus, this study directs at testing this assertion in the Pakistani scenario.

### Discussion

The primary purpose of this research was to explore the correlation between teachers' professional discerning and their critical thinking skills. The study examined whether there was any significant relationship between professional discerning of teachers and their critical thinking skills. The results of the Spearman correlation showed that there was a meaningful positive relationship between these two variables. This result indicates that when teachers' professional discerning is up to the mark, it predicts their critical thinking. In other words, those teachers, who have a higher level of professional discerning, are better and effective critical thinkers. The results are in line with Sheybani and Miri (2019), who discovered a positive and statistically significant relationship between teachers' professional identity and their critical thinking. The findings of the study emphasizes the critical role of critical thinking itself in shaping and developing teachers' professional discerning and professional dealings in their professional context of language teaching. This study is quite in line with Abednia (2012) who found a correlation between EFL teachers' critical thinking skills and their teaching identity.

Researchers have investigated different personality traits and several affective and cognitive aspects of teachers' pedagogical practices and their professional discerning. The findings of this study are entirely in line with the previous research studies (Parsi & Ashraf, 2020, Jalizadeh & Dastgoshadeh, 2011) whose proponents are of the belief that teachers retain a specific set of beliefs, which influence their teaching practices as well. The majority of critical thinking features are summarized by Scriven and Paul (1987) that critical thinking is dynamically a well-organized and disciplined procedure. This result is not just mere thinking but a rational evaluation that involves inquiring as well as reflecting on. The findings of the study also support Khodabakhshzadeh, Garmabi and Fayendari (2017), who concluded that depersonalization and emotionalism in professional discerning are strongly but negatively related to critical thinking ability. Usually, it is agreed upon that professional discerning is supposed to be the perception of teachers about themselves as teachers about their professional settings. The study indicates that various identities and professional discerning are formed in several ways.

### Conclusion

Examining the relationship between these two factors of English language teachers' professional identity and their critical thinking offers suggestions for EFL teachers and decision makers in this field in order to develop their critical thinking skills as well as the quality of professional identity for teachers to improve the quality of both teaching/learning environments in Pakistan. In addition, gathering data based on professional identity and critical thinking provides information for universities to evaluate their available main critical thinking skills programs as well as future needed packages. Besides, it is important to know about the relationship between teachers'



professional identity and their critical thinking to acquire whether critical thinking activities are worth attending and are available to teachers to attend in Pakistani context especially EFL teachers in universities in Pakistan.

Professional discerning of the teachers might also cause some changes towards teachers' thinking and their behavior. With the passage of time as their professional identity becomes smooth and robust, teachers' critical thinking ability is also improves and improvised. This issue can be made more explicit by adding a new body of research into it. Paying substantial attention to teachers' critical thinking will add to competence and their professional discernment. This study highlights teachers' professional discerning and their identity as teachers in enhancing their critical thinking. Teachers' professional identity has been found a powerful and significant predictor of their critical thinking skills.

The study suggests ways and methods to teachers to improve their learners' critical thinking skill along with their academic achievement. The study also recommends ways to enhance their professional development and their pedagogical experience with the help of their thinking abilities. The study would also serve the purpose of the pedagogical implication of teaching critical thinking skills in learners to build up their aptitude and to expand their perspective in learning English on one hand and on the other in the teaching perspective of EFL teachers.

The study has some limitations also. Professional discerning of teachers was measured by scale. Further studies can be conducted to measure teachers' professional discerning by focus group or structured interviews. Teachers' critical thinking can be evaluated by critical thinking test other than derived critical thinking inventory. Other research studies can be conducted on other variables i.e. correlation of professional discerning with other than critical thinking (students' achievement).

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