Islamic Azad University
Shahreza Branch

Journal of LCT Language, Culture & Translation

JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND TRANSLATION

www.lct.iaush.ac.ir

Journal of Language, Culture, and Translation (LCT), 4(2) (2022), 130–143

Comparison of Iranian EFL Teachers at Public Schools and Private Language Schools: Critical Thinking Ability and Gender in Focus

Munes Masumizadeh[1], Shima Ghobadi[*2]

[1]*M.A. Gradute, Department of English, Islamic Azad University, Shahreza Branch, Shahreza, Iran*

[2]*Ph.D., Department of English, Islamic Azad University, Shahreza Branch, Shahreza, Iran*

DOI: 10.30495/LCT.2022.1971749.1071

Received: 25/01/2022 ***Revised: 15/03/2022*** ***Accepted: 21/03/2022***

Abstract

Critical thinking (CT), a basic survival skill in this fast-paced and ever-changing world we live in, has been the focus of many studies in recent years. Looking at the literature of studies, it can be clearly understood that an essential factor like gender has been ignored in the investigations conducted on CT. The present study examined the status of CT among Iranian EFL teachers and its relationship with gender in the private and public sectors. In other words, the study attempted to trace any difference between male and female EFL teachers in applying this vital skill. With these purposes in mind, 153 EFL teachers (male=57 and female=96) were selected according to a convenience sampling from 20 private language institutes and 20 public schools in Isfahan to participate in the study. The participants were requested to complete an eighty-item Watson-Glaser's Critical Thinking Appraisal questionnaire. The findings indicated a poor status of CT among the teachers; also, it was revealed that males and females were not significantly different from one another in applying CT skills. However, the private sector apparently has provided a better context for the development of CT among EFL teachers. The conclusion and implications of the study were further discussed.

Keywords: Critical thinking, EFL teachers, Gender, Public Schools, Private Language Schools

1. Introduction

The concept of critical thinking (CT) reflects a concept embedded not only in a core body of research over the last 30 to 50 years but also derived roots from ancient Greek. Etymologically, the word implies the

* Corresponding Author's E-mail address: Shimagh1987@yahoo.com

development of "discerning judgment based on standards" (Mayfield, 2009, p. 4). Some people have more knowledge or are more eloquent than others. Still, two equally intelligent people can be equally articulate and knowledgeable but not be equally good thinkers. If only one of them is thinking critically, that one will be better at analyzing and evaluating facts and opinions, sources and claims, options, and alternatives. The critical thinker will be a better problem-solver and better decision-maker (Carrol, 2004).

A shift has occurred from viewing learning primarily as rote training to conceptualizing learning as a constantly evolving process of discovering, questioning, and reformulating hypotheses (Pennycook, 1999). Knowing the degree to which people are critical thinkers can help them improve themselves and their CT potential, which, in turn, results in the enhancement of the quality of their lives and learning (Aliakbari, 2011, p. 2). Taking previous studies in the field as a starting point, the present study aims to depict the existing status of CT. The current study, more specifically, is interested in addressing the issues of whether Iranian EFL male and female teachers in the public sector and the private sector differ in such a vital skill.

The absence of suitable quality of thinking has changed into a real concern. The Iranian educational system is not an exception. The present study seeks not only to portray the current status of CT among Iranian EFL teachers at public and private language schools but also aims to investigate the contribution of gender in this context. The researcher attempted to illustrate the traces of CT residing at the heart of the study, applying the Watson-Glaser Appraisal Test (2002) as the basis of analysis.

In dealing with the mentioned issues stated above, the study purported to answer the following questions:

RQ_1: To what extent does CT exist among Iranian EFL teachers?

RQ_2: Is there any difference between Iranian EFL male and female teachers with regard to CT?

RQ_3: Is there any significant difference between Iranian EFL teachers at private language schools in terms of critical thinking?

2. Literature reviews

The field of CT is more vibrant than ever. In recent years, with the advent of the Information Age and the increased complexity of society, CT has been receiving attention as an ability that enables one to deal with myriad information, to make reasonable judgments, and to participate in society as competent citizens (Halpern, 2002; Paul, 1984).

According to Hashemi (2012), The Iranian educational system's emphasis on just transmitting information and limiting the learning to memorizing the materials is the result of the predetermined programs, contents of textbooks, and the method of codification and evaluation. In addition, this education system basically seems to be more product-oriented than process-oriented" (p.64).

This is actually a big problem that is now facing the Iranian education system. Training and creating doubts in people stimulate curiosity, creativity, and CT in them. Therefore, CT is now considered as a factor that can cause individual, social, cultural, and scientific growth and development (Hashemi, 2014).

In a study, the relationship between critical thinking dispositions and critical thinking skills of selected youth leaders in the national FFA organization addressed by Ricketts (2004). The results indicated positive but low relationships between critical thinking skills and innovativeness, and engagement dispositions. Additionally, low but negative relationships were found between critical thinking skills and the maturity of critical thinking disposition. In another way, Bissell (2006) undertook an effort to learn how to assess critical-thinking skills in an introductory biology course. Using Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives to define critical thinking. As a result, students were more aware of the quality of responses expected for questions and could easily cross-reference their own responses with researchers' explicit guidelines.

Halpern (2012) used the operation ARA (Acquiring Research Acumen), a computerized learning game that teaches critical thinking and scientific reasoning. Early results showed that students who played operation ARA had higher proportional learning gains than students who did not play the game. There was no difference in proportional learning gains between the colleges, nor was there an interaction between the type of college and whether or not they played the game; All the *p*- values were not statistically significant.

In spite of the importance of CT, there is tertiary attention to this issue in the Iranian context. Athary (2009) evaluated CT skills and their relation with students ranking in the university entrance examination. They found no significant relationship between these two factors.

Moreover, their findings indicated that students do not possess CT skills when arriving at the university. In another work, Amini (2010) aimed to determine the CT situation of medical students and compare this with different clinical students. They found that the skills and abilities of Shiraz medical students did not improve by going to an upper year of

education. More recent research done by Hashemi (2012) investigated the impact of critical discourse analysis (CDA) on TEFL students' CT ability in Reading journalistic texts classes. The results of the posttest indicated that CDA has a positive and significant influence on learners' CT ability. CDA was also found to have the highest impact on two components of CT, interpretation and recognizing unstated assumptions. Some researchers have investigated the strength of CT in Iranian universities using questionnaires. What has been mostly proved in these studies is the poor condition of CT in our academic context (Barkhourdari, 2009; Sariolghalam, 2007; Sbabbani, 2008).

Hashemi (2014) sought to primarily probe the correlation between Iranian EFL learners' critical thinking ability and their argumentative writing achievement and investigate the predictability of the students' argumentative writing achievement based on their scores on the critical thinking scale.

3. Methodology

This study draws on a quantitative design and a descriptive method. One of the variables is critical thinking ability, and the other variable is Iranian EFL teachers' gender.

3.1. Participants

To conduct this research, 20 public schools at the high school level and 20 language institutes in Isfahan were selected based on convenience sampling. In order to make the sample size larger, all EFL teachers teaching at different language proficiencies were asked to take part in the study. Nearly 153 EFL teachers, 57 males, and 96 females, whose ages ranged between 22 to 46, were selected after they expressed their consent as the participants of this study. The EFL teachers from private language schools (N = 111) and those at public language schools (N = 42) were native speakers of the Persian Language, and on average, they had taught English for five years.

3.2. Instrument

Critical thinking is required to understand issues and situations, solve problems and reach appropriate decisions. The Watson-Glaser Appraisal Test questionnaire includes five subtests:

Subtest 1: Inference: Rating the probability of the truth of inferences based on given information.

Subtest 2: Recognition of Assumptions: Identifying unstated assumptions or presuppositions underlying given statements.

Subtest 3: Deduction: Determining whether conclusions follow logically from given information

Subtest 4: Interpretation: Weighing the evidence and deciding if generalizations or conclusions based on data are warranted.

Subtest 5: Evaluation of Arguments: Evaluating the strength and relevance of arguments with respect to a particular question or issue.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

After choosing participants of this quality, the researcher started distributing the questionnaires among them. The participants were required to take the questionnaires home, complete them, and during the following two weeks, submit them to their researcher. It was taken almost 45 minutes for each participant to fill out the questionnaire.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was done through investigation of the five subscales of WGCTA (i.e., inference, recognition of assumptions, deduction, interpretation, and evaluation of arguments). Such descriptive statistics as mean and standard deviation were measured for each of the subscales of the WGCTA and for the whole scale in order to uncover what the CT ability of Iranian EFL learners was like. In addition, to find out whether there was a difference between male and female EFL learners with respect to CT, an independent samples t-test was conducted. All the required analyses were run using SPSS version 26.

4. Results

4.1. CT and the Extent to Which Iranian EFL Learners Enjoy CT

Upon the administration of the questionnaire and collection of data, the scores were calculated. Then descriptive statistics regarding the raw data were measured. The results of descriptive analyses are summarized in Tables 1 and 2 and illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 1. shows that in the questionnaires, the scores the learners obtained ranged from the minimum score of 20.00 to the maximum score of 63.00. The lowest frequency belonged to the score 20 (f = 1), while the highest frequency was that of 38 (f = 18). More detailed information regarding the descriptive statistics can be found in Table 2.

Table 1. *The CT Scores Shown by Frequency and Percentage*

Score	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
20.00	1	.53	.53	.53
23.00	3	1.6	1.6	3.2
29.00	4	2.1	2.1	4.8
31.00	3	1.6	1.6	6.5
32.00	2	1.0	1.0	8.1
33.00	3	1.6	1.6	9.7
34.00	3	1.6	1.6	11.3
35.00	6	3.2	3.2	14.5
36.00	15	8.1	8.1	22.6
37.00	15	8.1	8.1	30.6
38.00	18	9.7	9.7	40.3
39.00	15	8.1	8.1	48.4
40.00	6	3.2	3.2	51.6
41.00	12	6.5	6.5	58.1
42.00	3	1.6	1.6	59.7
43.00	6	3.2	3.2	62.9
44.00	3	1.6	1.6	64.5
45.00	3	1.6	1.6	66.1
46.00	12	6.5	6.5	72.6
47.00	3	1.6	1.6	74.2
48.00	12	6.5	6.5	80.6
50.00	3	1.6	1.6	82.3
52.00	9	4.8	4.8	87.1
53.00	7	3.7	3.7	90.3
54.00	9	4.8	4.8	95.2
56.00	6	3.2	3.2	98.4
63.00	3	1.6	1.6	100.0
Total	**153**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Taking a quick look at Table 2. reveals that, as mentioned above, the lowest score obtained in the CT questionnaire was 20.00, and the highest score was 63.00, giving rise to a range of 43.00 and a cut-off score of 41.50. As for measures of central tendency, the mean in the distribution was found to be 41.82, while the median was 40.00, and the most frequently occurring score (the mode) was 38.00. With respect to measures of variability, a standard deviation of 8.10 and a variance of 65.72 were obtained.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics of the CT Scores*

N	**Valid**	**153**
	Missing	**0**
Mean		41.82
Median		40.00
Mode		38.00
Std. Deviation		8.10
Variance		65.72
Skewedness		.10
Std. Error of Skewedness		.17
Kurtosis		.24
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.35
Range		43.00
Minimum		20.00
Maximum		63.00

Regarding skewness (which could be an indication of the symmetry of the distribution) and kurtosis (which shows the peakedness of the distribution), the relevant indexes were 10 and 24, respectively. If the distribution is perfectly normal, a skewness and kurtosis value of 0 would be obtained. Positive skewness values indicate positive skew (scores clustered to the left at the low values). Negative skewness values, on the other hand, indicate a clustering of scores at the high end (right-hand side of a graph). Positive kurtosis values indicate that the distribution is rather peaked (clustered in the center), with long thin tails. Kurtosis values below 0.00, however, indicate a distribution that is relatively flat. The distribution here is, although to a very small extent, positively skewed, and it is not very peaked. This is also graphically shown in Figure 1.

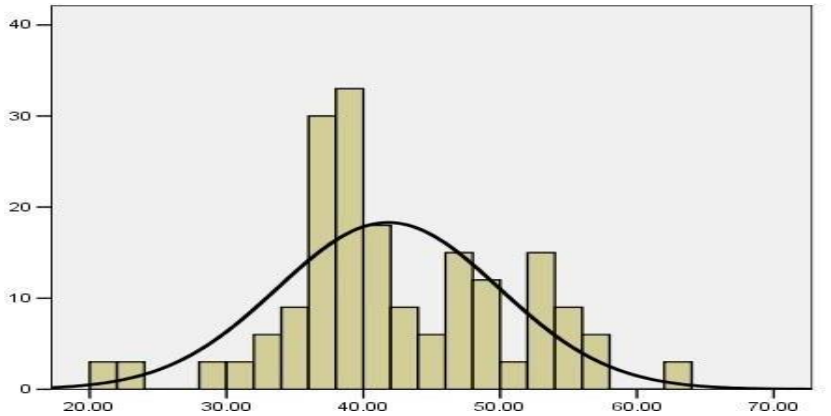

Figure 1. Bar Graph Representation of the Frequency of CT Scores

As could be seen in the histogram in Figure 1, the hypothetical line, which represents a normal distribution, did not perfectly correspond to the pattern of dispersion of the data obtained for the CT scores of Iranian EFL learners. However, the distribution of scores was not enormously different from a normal distribution.

Comparing the cut-off score (41.50) of the sample with the mean score of the sample (41.82), it is revealed that there is a marginal difference between the sample mean score and the cut-off score, indicating that critical thinking is not satisfactory among Iranian EFL teachers of the current study.

4.2. EFL Teachers' Gender Differences Regarding the CT Scores

In order to find an answer to this research question, an independent samples t-test was conducted after ensuring all assumptions required for running a t-test were fulfilled. Table 3 shows the results of descriptive statistics for this comparison.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics of CT Scores of Iranian Male and Female EFL Teachers*

	Gender	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**
Critical Thinking	Female	96	43.20	9.07	1.06
	Male	57	40.94	7.33	.68

As Table 3. shows, the CT mean score of females (M = 43.20) was more than the mean score of males (M = 40.94). To check the statistical significance/insignificance of this difference between the CT scores of the two groups of learners, one needs to consult the Sig. (2-tailed) column in the t-test table, which follows (Table 4).

Table 4. *Independent-Samples t Test for Comparing the CT Scores of Male and Female EFL Teachers*

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**
Critical Thinking	Equal variances assumed	2.92	.089	1.86	152	.064	2.26	1.21	-.13	4.65
	Equal variances not assumed			1.77	127.998	.078	2.26	1.27	-.25	4.77

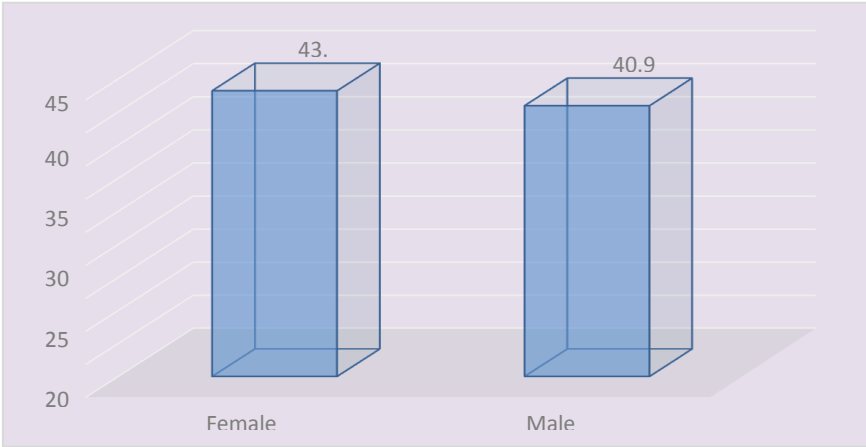

Figure 2. Comparing the Mean Scores of Males and Females EFL Teachers

According to Table 4, there was not a statistically significant difference in CT scores for females (M = 43.20, SD = 9.07) and males (M = 40.94, SD = 7.37), t (184) = 1.86, p = .064 (two-tailed). This is so because the p-value was greater than the specified level of significance (i.e., .05). The conclusion to be drawn would be that gender did not affect the CT level of the learners. The result of this comparison is graphically shown in Figure 2.

4.3. Comparing EFL Teachers' CT at public and private Sectors

In order to answer the third question, after ensuring all assumptions required for running a t-test are fulfilled, an independent samples t-test was carried out on the CT mean scores of the EFL teachers at private language schools (N = 111) and those at public language school (N = 42), whose descriptive data are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5. *Groups Statistics on CT*

	Groups	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
EFL Teachers	Public schools	37.0728	42	1.88590	1.17006
	Private schools	42.3596	111	1.9276	2.17006

The EFL teachers at private schools outperformed those in public schools on critical thinking, according to table to Table 5. However, in order to make sure the difference is not incidental and the difference between the group's performances on CT is significant, an independent sample t-test was run.

Table 6. *Independent Samples t-Test for CT of the two groups*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		**t-test for Equality of Means**						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	**Sig.**	**t**	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**	**Mean Difference**	**Std. Error Difference**	**Lower**	**Upper**
CT Scores	Equal variances assumed	1.491	.227	2.735	152	.007	-5.2868	3.972	.418	12.039
	Equal variances not assumed			2.735	150.478	.007	-5.2868	3.97	.418	12.041

As Table 6 reports, statistical analysis of the data reveals that the difference between the two group's performances on CT is significant: t (152) = 2.735, $p < 0.007$. It is inferred that the EFL teachers at private language schools outperform the EFL teachers at public schools, as the mean difference between the groups' performances on CT indicates a value of 5.28.

5. Discussions

According to the data analysis, it can plausibly be concluded that some signs of CT skills do exist among EFL teachers. All of the studies done in this domain acknowledge the existence but poor condition of CT among participants. Hoseini (2002) conducted a study, and his findings showed a low mean score of CT for freshman and senior students in four schools. Alipour (2009) attempted to find out whether Shiraz University education, especially its higher education, makes any difference with regard to developing students' CT skills or not. The results were similar to Hosseini's (2009) studies showing that students did not gain the necessary skills of critical thinking desirable at the end of their educational period. They advanced that one reason for this inefficiency is inappropriate teaching methods applied by university professors as they are not encouraging students' CT skills. In other words, in line with the findings of this study, they came to the conclusion that CT is currently in a poor status in the Iranian educational setting.

The next element is politeness. In Iranian culture, being polite means well-nurtured, and in other's ideas, a person who keeps silent is regarded as a polite one. Yarmohammadi (1995) describes Persian speakers as more

indirect, lengthy, obscure, and ambiguous than their English counterparts. All these maxims are in contrast with the principles of CT (Bowell, 2014). On the contrary, CT emphasizes directness and clarity. It seems that the students become silent and do not ask any questions just because this notion has been interpreted in the wrong manner. Silent people would be mistakenly regarded as having a high quality in thinking treasure. Students deeply want to be polite, and they should know that everything is good in their season (Sariolghalam, 2008).

The next issue to be discussed is the patrimonial family. A family where the only and absolute authority is someone who is responsible for the financial affairs of other members. Father is that authority who must be obeyed anyway. Iranians have grown up in such families and used to have someone who was superior and told them what to do or what not to do. Students have generalized this way of thinking in their academic situations and always need a person who tells them everything. Ghanbari (2011) posited that "as with the father, the professor is thought of as an error-free source of information whose ideas should be fully and unconditionally followed to the best effect" (p. 93).

The final point worth mentioning is the low self-esteem of Iranian learners. Barkhourdari (2009) asserted that a significant prerequisite of CT is decision-making power relying on which thinkers put their legs into action, stop dangling, and make a final decision. To be empowered with CT ability, a learner should believe in her/himself and her/his capabilities. Barkhourdari (2009) in research found that there is a strong correlation between self-esteem and CT disposition. The students should boost their self-esteem in order to reach rational conclusions, to make precise decisions. Sariolghalam (2007) blames the education system and argues that "we push many sciences into our students' minds before they enter a university, yet not even lip service is paid to teaching how to think, analyze, criticize, or evaluate" (cited in Ghanbari, 2011, p.102).

As for another research question, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The result of descriptive statistics for this comparison reveals that there was not a statistically significant difference in CT scores for females and males. The conclusion to be drawn would be that gender did not affect the CT level of the participants. The findings of this study are in line with the findings of Pienaar's (2000) study, which was conducted in a South African study of adolescents' CT in the context of political issues, and found that gender had no significant relationship with CT ability.

Ghanizadeh (2011) examined the relationship between EFL university students' CT and emotional intelligence (EI). The roles of gender and age as moderating factors in the relationship between students' CT and EI were investigated as well. The results revealed that age and gender did not moderate the relationship between CT and EI.

6. Conclusion

This research study set out to indicate and describe the current status of CT in EFL teachers with the contribution of gender to see if there is any difference between male and female EFL learners at the public and private sectors. Taken together, some conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study. First, an alarming absence of CT skills was quite evident in this context. Second, there was no significant difference between male and female learners in applying CT skills. However, the private sector apparently has provided a better context for the emergence of critical thinking among EFL teachers.

First of all, it can be asserted that all teachers, let alone the levels or places in which they are teaching, must pay attention to the poor condition of CT in the Iranian context; because, as Davidson (2012) states, "empowering learners with CT skills is even more essential for L2 teachers than L1 teachers as it is their duty to prepare students to communicate with native speakers "who value explicit comment, intelligent criticism, and intellectual assertion" (p.121). So, teachers should learn how to think and how to be equipped themselves with CT skills. In this way, surely they will be able to teach this vital and everlasting skill to their students in order to enable them to be powerful critical thinkers who possess a sharp analytical minds. The weak status of CT definitely must raise the alarm for material designers and authorities in the educational system. There is a dearth of well-qualified CT training courses in the Iranian education system for teachers in general and for EFL teachers in particular. It goes without saying that teacher trainers should develop some truly useful CT courses, and decision-makers in the educational system must open their eyes and then pave the way for such courses to be included in the whole system. This is absolutely an important step towards an ideal educational system.

Funding: This research received no external funding from any agency.
Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

Aliakbari, M. &. (2011). *Investigation of the relationship between gender, the field of study, and critical thinking skill: the case of Iranian students.* In The 16th Conference of Pan-Pcific Association of Applied Linguistics (pp. 5-6). Hong Kong: The chinese University press.

Alipour, A. M. (2009). Evaluation of critical thinking of the students in Shiraz, southern Iran. *Iranian Red Crescent Medical Journa*, 466-467.

Amini, M. &. (2010). Critical thinking skill in Shiraz University of medical sciences students. *Bimonthly Journal of Hormozgan University of Medical Sciences,* 213- 218.

Athary, Z. S. (2009). Evaluation of Critical Thinking Skills in Isfahan University of Medical Sciences' Students and Its Relationship with Their Rank in University Entrance Exam Rank. *Iranian Journal of Medical Education,* 5-12.

Barkhordary, M. J. (2009). The relationship between critical thinking disposition and self-esteem in third- and fourth-year bachelor nursing students. *Iranian journal of medical education,* 13-19.

Bissell, A. N. (2006). A new method for assessing critical thinking in the classroom. *BioScience,* 66-72.

Bowell, T. &. (2014). *Critical thinking: A concise guide*. Routledge.

Carroll, R. (2004). *Becoming a critical thinker: A guide for the new millennium.* Washington: Pearson Custom Publication.

Davison, R. C. (2012). Critically thinking about the brain and gender differences. *Applying research to practice (ARP) resources*, 45-47.

Ghanbari, A. (2011). *A pathological inquiry into the limits and howness of critical thinking in Shiraz university post graduate classroom discourse.* Unpublished MA Thesis. Fars: Shiraz University. Iran.

Ghanizadeh, A. &. (2011). The relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' sense of self- efficacy and their pedagogical success in Language Institutes. *Asian EFL Journal,* 249-272.

Halpern, D. F. (2002). *Thought and knowledge: An introduction to critical thinking.* New York: Routledge.

Halpern, D. F. (2012). *Halpern critical thinking assessment: Test manual.* Mödling, Austria: Schuhfried GmbH.

Hashemi, M. R. (2012). Critical discourse analysis and critical thinking: An experimental study in an EFL context. *System,* 33-47.

Hashemi, M. R. (2014). A Critical Look into Iranian EFL University Students' Critical Thinking and Argumentative Writing. *Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics,* 71- 92.

Hoseini, A. &. (2002). Comparison of critical thinking between freshman and senior BS students. *Iranian journal of medical education,* 21-26.

Mayfield, M. (2009). *Thinking for Yourself: Developing CT Skills Through Writing.* Belmont: Wadsworth Press.

Pennycook, A. (1999). Introduction: Critical approaches to TESOL. *TESOL quarterly*, 329-348.

Ricketts, J. C. (2004). The relationship between critical thinking dispositions and critical thinking skills of selected youth leaders in the national FFA organization. *Journal of Southern Agricultural Education Research, 21*-33.

Sariolghalam, M. (2008). Iran in search of itself. *Current History, 425*.

Yarmohammadi, L. (1995). *Fifteen Articles in Contrastive Linguistics and the Structure of Persian: Grammar, Text and Discourse.* Tehran: Rahnama Press.