



Integrating Critical Thinking and Dynamic Assessment in Teaching Speaking and Writing Strategies: Iranian EFL Learners' Productive Skills in Focus

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the effect of teaching speaking and writing strategies based on critical thinking and dynamic assessment on the development of the speaking and writing abilities of Iranian language learners. For this purpose, among about 200 language learners of an accredited language institute with several active branches, 80 intermediate-level learners were selected through the OQPT test and were divided into a treatment and control group with an equal number of learners. The treatment group learned speaking and writing strategies through the application of critical thinking principles via dynamic assessment. The control group learned speaking and writing strategies based on the common school method without receiving critical thinking or dynamic assessment strategies. At the beginning of the research, a speaking and writing pre-test was administered to all the participants to check their performance, and at the end of the treatment, the same speaking and writing test was administered as a post-test. Also, appropriate statistical instruments were exploited to gauge the participants' speaking and writing development due to the applied treatment. The obtained results were finally analyzed using SPSS software and related statistical tests to answer the research questions of the study. The results revealed that the integration of dynamic assessment and critical thinking strategies significantly impacts the participants' performance in speaking and written communication. The findings obtained from this investigation have promising implications for EFL instructors and learners, designers of educational materials, and developers of curricula.

Keywords: Critical thinking, dynamic assessment, intermediate EFL learners, speaking and writing strategies

INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking presents a significant challenge concerning its precise definition. Due to the multifaceted nature of its constituent abilities, the definition of CT is a challenging process. Several scholars and intellectuals, including Dewey (1910), have endeavored to formulate a precise definition of Critical Thinking (CT). The concepts of critical thinking, critical reasoning, or higher-order thinking are commonly utilized

in a manner that allows these terms to be utilized interchangeably in various contexts. Dewey (1910) expands upon existing terminology in his work, *How We Think*, by characterizing critical thinking as reflective thinking. He defines reflective thinking as a cognitive process that involves vigilant, continuous, and meticulous contemplation of any conviction or hypothetical knowledge with supportive justification. It is important to note the significance of the issue at hand. The matter concerns a critical aspect of

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the subject matter and requires careful analysis and evaluation to arrive at effective solutions

The basis for critical thinking can be traced back to Socrates' theoretical framework. Socrates posited that an individual's argumentation cannot find grounding in unclear signification, insufficient substantiation, or self-contradictory convictions (Fahim & Eslamdoost, 2014; Carceres et al., 2020). In the year 2020, as per the contemporary academic writing convention. According to Kanik (2010), effective reasoning entails subjecting matters to critical scrutiny and refraining from subscribing to beliefs that are not irrefutably true due to the potential for acquired knowledge to be rendered unreliable under varying circumstances in life. Sorry, there is no text to rewrite. Please provide an appropriate text for me to rewrite. In his seminal work, Dewey (1910) expounds on the concept of critical thinking, characterizing it as a form of "reflective thinking" that involves engaging in "an active, persistent, and meticulous evaluation of a belief or proposed form of knowledge in the context of its underlying justifications, as well as its potential implications" (p.117). It is necessary to consider the implications of the current situation and to make decisions that are informed by empirical evidence and logical reasoning. Thus, a systematic approach should be taken to establish a solid foundation for any subsequent actions or policies. Additionally, it is essential to critically evaluate the available information and to prioritize relevant factors, to make sound and effective decisions. Therefore, careful analysis and considerate decision-making are integral components of achieving desired outcomes in complex situations.

According to Reed and Kromely (2001), critical thinking refers to the inclination and capacity to scrutinize intricate problems and circumstances, discern and assess suppositions and diverse perspectives using accepted standards, form rational judgments and conclusions founded on dependable information, and establish interdisciplinary associations and convey perceptions to unfamiliar settings (p.156).

Dynamic Assessment

Over the course of recent years, Dynamic Assessment (DA) has emerged as a noteworthy

focus of study for both researchers and theorists. The instructional approach, according to Lidz and Gindis (2003), is characterized by a focus on unique individual differences and their implications for instruction. The methodology incorporates intervention during the assessment process and employs suitable forms of mediation that are attuned to the individual's current abilities and subsequent performance. The ultimate objective of this approach is to promote the development of the learner. The present discourse concerns the interdependent association between appraisal and pedagogy. To be more precise, the focus of DA is centered on scrutinizing both the evaluative procedure and the outcome. This study endeavors to enhance the academic proficiency of students during testing through the implementation of appropriate instructions and learning materials that can elicit higher levels of achievement (Embretson, 1987). The primary aim of Discourse Analysis (DA) is to modify the performance of learners during the assessment process (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004). It is crucial to acknowledge the importance of effective communication in today's workforce. To succeed in a professional setting, individuals must possess the ability to clearly and articulately convey their thoughts and ideas. This entails not only an understanding of the topic at hand but also the appropriate use of language and communication mediums. For instance, written communication such as emails and reports should be concise and grammatically correct, while spoken communication should be delivered with confidence and respect. Additionally, individuals must be able to actively listen and accurately interpret the messages they receive to respond appropriately. Ultimately, effective communication skills can lead to better relationships with colleagues, improved job performance, and overall career success.

One crucial element in the training of language learning strategies is the implementation of speaking strategies. The present investigation concerns the categorization of speaking-related techniques utilized by students as effective mechanisms for addressing communication challenges encountered during spoken interactions in the English language. In the literature,

these language tools have been variously referred to as oral strategies, communicative strategies, communication strategies, conversation skills, or oral communication strategies. In the context of this study, the term "speaking strategies" is employed to denote the diverse methods employed by students to surmount communication barriers while engaged in English-speaking activities. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) posit the paramount significance of speaking strategies in facilitating communication for foreign language learners. These strategies are pivotal in navigating situations where there is a lack of shared linguistic structures or sociolinguistic norms between the second language learner and a speaker of the target language, as they enable learners to effectively negotiate meaning (p. 43).

The utilization of strategies for verbal communication is a critical component in foreign language learning as it enables learners to acquire valuable tools with which they may competently communicate within a range of contexts in their target language. A divergence of opinion exists concerning the efficacy of incorporating instruction on speaking strategies in education. According to Kellerman (1991), discouragement of formal instruction on the matter is advised, as learners are capable of transferring these strategies organically from their first language to the language they are acquiring. Conversely, Canale (1983) espouses the necessity of instruction regarding oral and written communication techniques, stipulating that learners must receive guidance on the practical application of such strategies within the context of their second language acquisition. Moreover, it is imperative to stimulate learners to employ such strategies and provide them with adequate opportunities for their utilization. It is widely accepted within academic circles that language classes should incorporate training that specifically addresses the transfer of skills from a student's primary language (L1) to their second language (L2). This is due to the fact that L1 skills do not necessarily equate to proficiency in L2, highlighting the need for targeted instruction in this area.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on Dynamic Assessment

Anton (2009) conducted a study examining the

discourse analysis procedures implemented in a Spanish diagnostic test for advanced-level students with a focus on both the writing and speaking domains. The study surveyed five participants. The writing procedures employed by the DA adhered to the model outlined by Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994), whereby the mediator provides a range of support, varying from implicit prompts to explicit corrections. The procedure implemented by the DA method involved the use of mediation techniques, which allowed for the observation of the language proficiency of learners in the context of dialogic interactions with their teachers. The individuals who took part in this study comprised five undergraduate students who are majoring in Spanish at an urban university in the United States. The study findings evinced that the incorporation of a mediation-driven diagnostic assessment (DA) process into the placement test augmented its potential to distinguish learners' writing and speaking competencies, thereby yielding more precise recommendations with respect to their academic requisites. The results uncovered that the aptitudes of the learners were considerably more advanced than anticipated in an unaided situation. The implementation of dynamic assessment in a combined fourth and fifth-grade Spanish classroom was investigated by Lantolf and Poehner (2011). The present investigation involved the utilization of standardized mediation prompts by the classroom instructor to undertake a dynamic evaluation of the agreement between nouns and adjectives in the Spanish language. Antón (2009) undertook an investigation where she implemented discourse analysis (DA) with third-year Spanish language majors at the tertiary education level. Through the analysis of learners' responses to mediation during the dynamic speaking test, Antón was able to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of their existing and developing abilities.

The results of the study have provided evidence to refute the null hypothesis posited by the researchers. Specifically, these findings suggest that the integration of DA as an adjunctive modality in standard testing had a salutary impact on learners, exerting a positive influence on their test performance and learning outcomes.

In their work, Shrestha and Coffin (2012) investigated the efficacy of tutor mediation in facilitating academic writing proficiency among undergraduate students pursuing business studies through open and distance learning modes. The study's authors arrived at the conclusion that the use of DA can aid in the identification and response to the learners' significant support requirements, particularly in the area of managing information flow. Notwithstanding, the authors acknowledged the limitations of the study, which confined its scope to a specific sociocultural environment in the realm of tertiary education (Open University), thus precluding any generalization of the findings to other contexts.

Sadeghi and Khanahmadi (2011) investigated the function of mediated learning experience in the acquisition of L2 grammar among Iranian EFL learners. The study involved a cohort of sixty learners of English as a foreign language, comprising thirty males and thirty females. These participants were selected from two educational institutes located in Iran. The findings of the study indicated a significant impact of the assessment approach - specifically, whether it was based on Direct Assessment (DA) or Non-Direct Assessment (NDA) - on the acquisition of grammatical skills among Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Pishgadam, et al. (2011) conducted a study to ascertain the efficacy of deploying a computerized dynamic reading comprehension test (CDRT) among Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners with a moderate level of proficiency. The present investigation evidenced a statistically significant improvement in learners' scores, and subsequently, their reading comprehension, as a result of the implementation of mediation in the form of hints. It was observed that the use of DA was more beneficial to individuals with lower levels of proficiency compared to those who possess higher levels of proficiency.

Several other research works concentrate exclusively on writing within the realm of English as a second language. There are two noteworthy papers to consider, albeit within the context of English language acquisition as opposed to disciplinary education, such as biology. The primary areas of interest were the enhancement

of writing competency in terms of content and organizational techniques and approaches. This study adhered to a pre-test, train, and post-test experimental design and employed inferential statistical analyses to evaluate the efficacy of a training intervention on learner performance in essay composition. The study's authors observed that, consistent with prior research, the participants exhibited distinct zones of proximal development (i.e., capacity for learning) within the studied domains, and that the utilization of DA yielded beneficial outcomes for the learners. According to their assertion, the provision of explicit feedback by the teacher was the most efficacious approach during the mediation process. However, the present manuscript is deficient in providing comprehensive data about the precise mediation procedure or the extent of interplay taking place between the educator and the pupils. The procedures for digital annotation (DA) were implemented through both synchronous and asynchronous utilization of Google Docs technology. The present study conducted by the authors has revealed that the implementation of Discourse Analysis (DA) sessions within the academic writing curriculum has produced favorable outcomes for the participants in terms of general academic writing development, with particular emphasis on coherence and cohesion, lexicon, grammatical range, and accuracy. These aforementioned aspects are recognized as critical determinants in the evaluation process of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) examination. The researchers also conducted monitoring of the participants' transfer of learning, thus identifying the extent to which the individuals have developed their writing skills. The study recorded affirmative perceptions of digital assistance (DA), as communicated by the participants. Khorami Fardi and Zivar Derakhshi (2019) conducted a research endeavor based on the tenets of dynamic assessment, to enhance the linguistic precision of the writing proficiencies of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pupils. A cohort of 40 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners were categorized into two distinct groups based on the nature of their evaluation, namely dynamic and non-dynamic evaluation. Upon conducting an analysis

of the compositions, an examination of the errors therein yielded the identification of their respective types and frequencies. The study conducted by Zarrinabadi and Rezagadeh (2020) investigated the impact of interventional discourse analysis (DA) and interactive DA on the enhancement of writing proficiency and English language attitudes among students. The findings have corroborated the efficacy of the aforementioned methodology in revealing students' aptitudes with heightened precision, compared to conventional forms of conclusive evaluations in the realm of writing.

Tajabadi, et al. (2020) researched to investigate the effects of dynamic assessment on the development of grammar skills in adult EFL learners at an elementary level. In 2018, Kamali, et al. conducted a study that investigated the impact of Dynamic Assessment (DA) on the grammatical proficiency in a second language (L2) of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. After careful screening, a cohort of 23 male students was deemed suitable for inclusion within the confines of both the control group and the experimental group. The multivariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was employed for data analysis. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the group subjected to the experimental conditions exhibited markedly superior performance to that of the control group. The study by Zare, et al. (2020) aimed to demonstrate the fundamental principles and outcomes of interventionist dynamic assessment, cumulative group dynamic assessment, and static assessment about the grammatical proficiency and precision of EFL students' reports. A study employing a semi-empirical research design was conducted on a cohort of 75 female students, who were categorized into three distinct groups: intervention dynamics, cumulative group dynamics, and static assessment. Following the administration of the pretest, the experimental groups were solely provided with a reconciliation intervention. The data were compiled and subjected to statistical analysis utilizing one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Research on Speaking Instruction Strategies
Safrianti and Lina (2018) conducted a study that employed a descriptive research methodology. The

study aimed to investigate the pedagogical approaches utilized by educators to impart speaking proficiency and to ascertain the viewpoints of learners with regard to these techniques in the context of an English Education Department. The study focused on the examination of two English educators who instruct pupils of the 2016 cohort, alongside three enrollees of the Listening and Speaking for Daily Conversation course, who were selected according to specific criteria. Initially, the subjects under discussion were individuals who have been professionally engaged in the vocation of teaching oral communication for a duration of not less than one year, with a proficient background in enhancing the pedagogical methods employed. Secondly, the individuals identified for this role should possess the qualifications and expertise required to effectively instruct students from the 2016 cohort in the domain of conversational Listening and Speaking. Thirdly, the individuals in question were readily approachable and exhibited a desire to engage in dialogue, contemplation, articulation, and introspection of their thoughts, insights, and personal encounters. The results of the study indicate that English Education Department instructors employed distinct pedagogical approaches, namely group discussion, group presentation, brainstorming, and role-play, to enhance students' oral communication proficiency. Additionally, the implementation of a brainstorming technique facilitates the process of idea-sharing among students within a classroom setting. Thirdly, the implementation of the role-play strategy facilitates an increase in the acquisition of new vocabulary by the students. The implementation of group discussion as a pedagogical strategy facilitates the development of students' skills in effective team collaboration and teamwork.

Wijayanti (2018) investigates the pedagogical techniques utilized by educators to instruct seventh-grade students in full-day classes at the MTsN 6 Boyolali institution during the Academic Year of 2018/2019 with specific emphasis on the development of speaking skills. The current investigation utilizes a descriptive-qualitative research methodology. The pedagogical approaches employed for teaching the skill of verbal communication encompass the use of

collaborative activities, the utilization of simple language-based tasks, the provision of instruction or training in discourse techniques, and the consistent encouragement of students to engage in verbal expression using the target language. The data collection methodologies employed in this study consist of three observations and an interview with an English instructor. The present research employed the interactive model of analysis, specifically Miles and Huberman's model of data analysis. There are four essential steps involved in analyzing the data, namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and the process of concluding. This study has utilized a combination of data triangulation, sourcing, and theoretical frameworks to ensure the robustness and validity of the findings. This study aims to investigate the pedagogical approaches employed by instructors in full-day seventh-grade speaking classes at MTsN Boyolali. During the second meeting, the instructor employed three pedagogical approaches in the instruction of speaking skills: (1) designing activities oriented towards simplified language, (2) encouraging students to utilize the targeted language, and (3) furnishing explicit training in discussion proficiency. During the third session, the instructor implemented three distinct strategies to enhance the acquisition of speaking proficiency among the students. These included executing instructional activities that revolved around the use of simplistic language, facilitating student engagement with the target language, and delivering explicit guidelines or instruction on honing discussion skills.

According to Widyaningsih and Robiasih (2018), the pedagogical techniques employed by instructors to enhance the speaking competencies of eleventh-grade pupils at SMA Bopkri 2 Yogyakarta are a subject of investigation. The aims of this investigation are twofold: firstly, to outline the pedagogical techniques that are employed by the English instructor of the 11th-grade students at SMA BOPKRI 2 Yogyakarta when teaching the skill of speaking, and secondly, to ascertain the extent to which these strategies are implemented in the classroom. The present study employs a descriptive qualitative research design that specifically takes the form of a case study. This study entailed the collection of data

through the means of observation and video recording, specifically of the students belonging to XI IPA 1, XII IPA 2, and XI Bahasa groups. The present dataset was subject to transcription, identification, description, and analysis through the application of Shaun Killian's theoretical framework on pedagogical approaches related to the enhancement of oral communication skills. The findings suggest that the English instructor failed to implement all of the pedagogical approaches for teaching oral communication. The instructional approaches implemented by the teaching faculty in XI IPA 1 and XI IPA 2 were comprised of six distinct strategies. In contrast, the pedagogical facilitating practices exhibited by the teacher in the domain of speaking instruction in XI Bahasa were limited to a total of four techniques. The educator employed instructional techniques aimed at fostering student engagement throughout the educational endeavor. The employment of the aforementioned strategies could potentially encourage the students to increase their level of engagement in the teaching and learning process. This can be attributed to the adequate execution of said strategies. This study adopts a descriptive approach in delineating the English language learning strategies utilized by students enrolled at SMAN 1 Curup. It also endeavors to explicate the pedagogical approaches employed by educators in teaching English-speaking skills to their students. From a population of 833 classes and 7 English teachers, a sample of 47 third-year students was selected. The research instruments involved in this investigation comprised a questionnaire containing diverse items administered to both students and teachers. Additionally, interview guidance was employed. The pedagogical techniques employed by the English instructor to facilitate the learning of students encompassed a diverse range of activities such as role-playing, group presentations, group discussions, speech contests, dialogical exchanges, direct correction, collective speaking, debating competitions, interactive games, and musical listening sessions.

Research on Writing Strategy Instruction

Torrance, et al. (1994) as well as Peeravudhi (2006), employed questionnaires in their inves-

tigations of the writing strategy instruction utilized by students in the fields of social science and English for Careers Programme, respectively. The individuals who participated in the planning and strategizing process of the project were categorized into three distinct roles, Planners, Revisers, and Mix Strategists. During the process of cluster analysis, the distinguishing characteristic among the groups was found to be their respective thought processes. The productivity of The Planners was observed to be significantly greater than that of the remaining two groups. The efficacy of planning as a writing strategy was found to be remarkable, yet it cannot be regarded as a definitive measure of success.

During the writing process, the participants were queried regarding the writing strategy instruction they employed. The results indicated that students with lower levels of proficiency reported a greater utilization of writing strategy instruction compared to their more skilled counterparts. In a study conducted by Mohite (2014), an examination was carried out on the strategies utilized by students while composing a draft in a foreign language. The application of Likert scale questionnaires functioned as a means to buttress the postulate that adept writers made use of numerous tactics. Additionally, the utilization of open-ended inquiries during interviews was aimed at acquiring comprehensive particulars. The hypothesis is corroborated by the findings obtained through the administration of the survey. Furthermore, it has been determined that the students' difficulties concerning writing can be attributed to deficiencies in their understanding and implementation of the compositional elements of writing, coupled with an inadequate grasp of the significance of writing as a discipline. In a study conducted by El-Aswad (2002), a comparison was made between the strategies employed by a group of 12 Arab university students in both their first language (Arabic) and second language (English). In addition to responding to the administered questionnaires, data was collected through a triangulated case study methodology involving both participant observation and individual interviews with a group of twelve individuals. The findings indicate that the

majority of participants established writing objectives without taking into account the intended audience. The study findings indicate that the participants were provided with similar instructions on writing strategies in both their first and second languages. Moreover, the students employed their native language (L1) as a facilitative tool to accomplish their tasks in their second language (L2), relying on the process of translation from L1 to L2.

Based on the above-mentioned issues, the present study aimed to investigate whether the implementation of critical thinking-oriented instruction focused on speaking and writing strategies through dynamic assessment holds any noteworthy impact on enhancing the speaking and writing proficiencies of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Iran. Thus, the following research question and hypothesis were addressed.

***RQ.** Does integrating critical thinking and dynamic assessment in teaching speaking and writing strategies have a significant effect on improving these two skills of Iranian EFL learners?*

***Ho.** Integrating critical thinking and dynamic assessment in teaching speaking and writing strategies has no significant effect on improving these two skills of Iranian EFL learners.*

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

This investigation is quantitative in nature. Quantitative research is conducted in a controlled environment and relies on objective measurement to collect numerical data that may be used to answer questions or test hypotheses. There are two main types of quantitative research: experiments and theoretical studies. The present study is classified as quasi-experimental since it doesn't use randomization but instead relies on alternative methods to adjust for extraneous factors. It is used in situations when participants are chosen based on their performance on a homogeneity test, or when whole classes are utilized as the experimental and control groups. Participants were chosen for this research based on their scores on a homogeneity test, rather than being drawn at random.

Participants

The present research included 80 Iranian EFL learners who were enrolled at an intermediate level in several branches of a well-established language institute called Gooyesh located in Isfahan. The participants consisted of female individuals within the age range of 16 to 25 years. All the learners had Persian as their first language and had little exposure to English-speaking countries, save for brief visits. They were chosen from a larger sample size of 200 EFL learners, based on their performance on a standardized homogeneity exam known as the Oxford Quick Placement exam (OQPT). The rationale for selecting the intermediate level was its significant representation among the institute's population. The participants were assigned to two groups, each consisting of 40 learners. One group was subjected to distinct treatment, while the other served as a control group.

Materials

The speaking topics for this study came from the *Topnotch Series*. They are three-level (*Top Notch 1, 2, and 3*) English courses for adults and young people developed. Each textbook has ten modules. Each student's book ends with a link to a workbook and a fantastic CD-ROM.

The primary writing source for this study was Bailey and Powell's (2015) *The Practical Writer with Readings*, 9th edition, published in 2015. This book has three sections and 411 pages. Section one is titled "A Model for Writing," section three is titled "Improving Your Punctuation and Expression," and section two is titled "Beyond the Model Essay." Section two has two parts: Part one is titled "More Patterns of Development," Part two is titled "The Research Paper," and Part three is titled "Improving Your Punctuation and Expression." Since one of the goals of every writing lesson is to help EFL students write better five-paragraph essays, the researcher chose this source to help teach writing to EFL students step-by-step. This book, which is a straightforward textbook, helps EFL students in improving their writing skills, particularly in the area of five-paragraph essays.

Instruments

The following instruments were utilized to achieve the purposes of this study:

Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT)

A general test of language proficiency, that is, Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT), version 1, was administered to select a homogeneous group of participants. The test consists of two parts; part one contains 40 questions: testing situations (five questions), cloze passages– testing prepositions, grammar, pronouns, and vocabulary– (15 questions), and completion questions (20 questions). The second part contains 20 questions; 10 questions on cloze passages and 10 questions on completion type. All questions are multiple-choice items.

Speaking Pre- and Post-tests

To examine the speaking ability of the participants, a pre-test was run prior to the treatment. The test was designed based on the speaking module of IELTS. It took between 20 to 30 minutes and consisted of an interview between the test taker and the examiner.

In part 1 of the interview, test takers answered general questions about themselves and on a range of familiar topics, such as their home, family, work, studies, and interests (4-5 minutes). Part 2 consisted of speaking about a given topic. The examiner gave the participants a task card. The card asked the examinee to speak about a particular topic. They had one minute to get prepared and speak for one to two minutes. Part three consisted of a longer discussion related to the topic in Part 2. They needed to go into depth and provide reasons, examples, and analysis. The speaking performance of each participant was recorded, transcribed, and scored based on the criteria of fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation.

To calculate inter-rater reliability, two experts and experienced raters listened to the recorded materials and reported their scores and Pearson-product moment correlation was applied to determine the degree of agreement between the two raters.

Finally, to uncover the degree of the participants' speaking improvement after the treatment,

a speaking post-test similar to the pre-test was designed, and the same procedures were followed.

Writing Pre- and Post-tests

To measure the writing ability of the participants prior to the treatment, the following prompt was given to them to write an essay on:

Many people welcome the opening of movie theatres near their homes. On the other hand, some people strongly oppose the construction of such facilities. If the opening of a large movie theater in your neighborhood were announced, would you support or oppose its construction?

The topic was taken from *NTC TOEFL* (2021) and the essay was not to exceed 300 words.

To measure the writing improvement of the participants after being exposed to treatment, another writing prompt taken from the same *TOEFL* book was given to them:

We all have favorite activities that we enjoy. Write an essay convincing the reader to try the activity that you enjoy most.

Since writing tests are subjective, the standard rating scale suggested by Brown and Bailey (1984, cited in Brown, 2004) was used in the study. The criteria of this scale are classified into five individual parts: content (30%), organization (20%), vocabulary (20%), language use (25%) and mechanism (5%). The scale was given to two experts in writing and assessment, both Ph.D. holders teaching at the institutes for more than 20 years, to score the writing of the participants. Inter-rater reliability coefficients were, then, calculated to unravel the degree of agreement between the raters.

Procedures

At the outset of this study, to select homogeneous participants, OQPT was administered to 200 EFL learners. Then, 80 EFL learners were selected as intermediate based on the rating scale of OQPT and were assigned to two groups, experimental and control. To measure the speaking and writing abilities of the participants prior to the treatment, speaking and writing pre-tests as characterized earlier were administered. Then, the experimental group received the treatment as outlined below:

The experimental group was taught speaking strategies through principles of critical thinking: The following strategies were taught to the participants: cooperative activities, role-play, creative tasks, and drilling. Cooperative activities can encourage the negotiation of language items (Nation, 2009). Role-plays are activities where students are asked to pretend to be in various social contexts with various social roles (Harmer, 2001; Thornbury, 2005; Solcova, 2011). Creative tasks resemble real-life tasks, and as Šolcová (2011) asserts, students develop their fluency best, if engaged in these tasks where all their concentration is focused on producing something, rather than on the language itself. Drilling, as Thornbury (2005) argues, is a strategy to improve pronunciation by imitating and repeating words, phrases, and even whole utterances. It functions to make students pay attention to the new materials and emphasize words, phrases, or utterances, move new items from the working memory to long-term memory, and provide means of gaining articulatory control over language (Thornbury, 2005).

The following critical thinking principles were used to teach the above strategies: problem-solving activities, raising questions, teaching logical reasoning, and evaluating others' arguments. In every session (total sessions), the learners had to debate, analyze some media, and solve specific problems. Speaking occurred in pairs, in small groups, and the whole class. To carry out the treatment, after the ice-breaking activity in the first session, the researcher introduced the concept of critical thinking to the learners and informed them of what was expected of them throughout the course. The researcher made a list of challenging and interesting ideas that could arouse debates. As for debates, an example of strong opinions asserted on a given topic was presented. The students then discussed how the debates were to be held. Then, the sub-groups in every debate group had to confront each other and present their arguments. The learners were asked to take notes to be able to recap the strengths and weaknesses of their arguments. As the debate was concluded, one member of every group presented the class with the points made in the debate and

the teacher helped with an assessment of the debate. Throughout the debates, every group was monitored and advised as required. Debates occurred in every session of the class as a major element of the treatment. In every session, before the debate, the learners were presented with a topic of debate, and the previously-mentioned procedures were followed.

The experimental group was also taught the strategies described above via the principles of dynamic assessment. For this purpose, the Interventionist model of DA was used. Interventionist DA concentrates on individual and group improvement by consecutive hinting for treatment, which in this research was a sequence of eight tips suggested by Lantolf and Poehner (2011). The mediating moves were arranged in stages in the order of most implicit (pause) to most explicit (explanation). As part of the assessment materials, these hints were taken into account as well. The eight stages were: pause, questioning the entire phrase, repeating only the section of the sentence with the mistake, pointing out that there was an error in the statement, asking a question, identifying the right response, and finally, explaining the reason (the last three by the teacher). Using this mediation inventory, the instructor was able to be quite systematic in the relationships with her learners. Her initial answer to students' problems was to interrupt. This gave a clear signal to some learners that something was wrong with their performance, and they, therefore, endeavored to work through the problem, frequently with a beneficial consequence. For some learners, the pause either produced an incorrect answer or did not produce any answer at all. When this happened, the teacher moved on to the next command, in which he would recur the students' sentences with rising intonation as a way of demonstrating that something is incorrect but without identifying the nature

of the problem (e.g., lexical, syntactic, morphological) or clearly where the problem is situated in the construction.

In this second group, the main tasks and strategies that the teacher used were interaction, formative tests, feedback, scaffolding, cooperation, collaboration, and mediation to be explained briefly in the following section. The teacher taught strategies one to four. The teacher also required the learners to make conversations based on the given topics through collaboration with each other, with the teacher providing corrective feedback, assistance, and lexical and grammatical scaffolding to the whole members of one group. At the end of each session, a formative test was administered to the learners and was evaluated in the class. The learners were given feedback either directly or indirectly concerning their performances on the test. They were allowed to cooperate and collaborate when they faced difficulty. The learners were also given some prompts to repeat correctly the statement they heard. If they were not successful in repeating the statement correctly, mediation would start. Mediation was done in terms of implicit and explicit feedback, and cooperation and collaboration from implicit to explicit support were provided by both the teacher and other learners.

The above-mentioned stages were followed for teaching writing strategies as well. The only difference was that the learners were given topics to write on and mediation was provided during the written performance.

RESULTS

The results obtained from the analysis of the collected data are presented and described below.

Results of the OQPT

To ensure the participants' homogeneity, descriptive statistics were calculated. Tables 1 and 2 below present the obtained results.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics Comparing the Two Groups on the OQPT

Groups	N	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Std. Error	Std. Deviation	Mean	Min	Max
		Upper Bound	Lower Bound					
		EG1	40					
EG2	40	39.0803	26.1197	.43333	1.37032	37.1000	25.00	39.00
Total	80	37.5295	26.6205	.22471	1.42122	37.0750	25.00	40.00

In Table 1, the means and standard deviations of the four groups are displayed as descriptive statistics. The means of the four groups, EG1 ($M = 37.05$), and EG2 ($M = 37.10$,

were reasonably close to one another (all within the range of 37). However, a one-way ANOVA was used to examine the p -value to demonstrate the homogeneity of the groups.

Table 2
One-Way ANOVA Results Comparing the Two Groups on the OQPT

	F	Mean Square	Df	Sum of Squares	Sig.
Between Groups	.521	1.092	3	3.275	.671
Within Groups		2.097	116	75.500	
Total			119	78.775	

On the test of OQPT, Table 2 demonstrates that there was no statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group. The fact that the p -value exceeded the threshold for significance (i.e. .05) indicates that there was no significant difference between the groups and that they were all homogeneous.

integrating critical thinking and dynamic assessment in teaching speaking and writing strategies have a significant effect on improving the speaking and writing ability of Iranian EFL learners? the experimental group was compared with the control group to see whether there existed differences between them in relation to speaking and writing improvement. To this end, descriptive statistics were conducted, as shown in the following tables:

Results for the Research Question

To answer the research question, i.e. *Does*

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics Comparing the Four Groups on the Speaking Test

Maximum	Minimum	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Std. Error	Std. Deviation	Mean	N	
		Upper Bound	Lower Bound					
		20.00	15.00					
20.00	15.00	16.8210	13.5790	.49554	1.56702	15.7500	30	EG2
19.00	13.00	17.9250	14.3750	.67412	2.13177	17.9000		EG3
19.00	14.00	13.9584	12.6416	.51208	1.61933	13.3000	30	CG
20.00	13.00	17.7496	12.5504	.29645	1.87494	17.1500	120	Total

As can be seen in this table, there exist small differences among the groups. The mean scores of the EG1 ($M = 16.85$), EG2 ($M = 15.75$), EG3 ($M = 17.90$), and CG ($M = 13.30$) were more or

less different from one another on the speaking test. Based on the obtained statistics, EG3 with a mean score of 17.90 performed best in comparison with CG with a mean score of 13.30 on

the speaking test. After EG3, EG1 with a mean score of 16.80 performed better than CG, and finally, EG2 with a mean score of 15.75 had a poor performance in comparison to the other

two experimental groups. To find out whether the differences among these mean scores were significant or not, one had to examine the *p-value* under the *Sig.* column in the ANOVA table below.

Table 4
One-Way ANOVA Results Comparing the Four Groups on the Vocabulary Test

Sig.	F	Mean Square	Df	Sum of Squares	
.025	3.492	10.300	3	30.900	Between Groups
		2.950	56	106.200	Within Groups
			59	137.100	Total

As is shown in Table 4, the *p-value* under the *Sig.* the column is lower than .05, which indicates that there exist differences among groups (i.e. $.025 < .05$). One-way ANOVA revealed that the

means of the four groups were not all the same. A post hoc Scheffe test was run to go back through the data and shed light on these differences. Table 5 presents the differences among groups.

Table 5
Post hoc Scheffe Test Comparing the Four Groups on the Speaking Test

(I)Groups	(J)Groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
EG1	EG2	.50000	.76811	.935	-1.7524	2.7524
	EG3	2.30000*	.76811	.044	.0476	4.5524
	CG	1.40000	.76811	.359	-.8524	3.6524
EG2	EG1	-.50000	.76811	.935	-2.7524	1.7524
	EG3	1.80000	.76811	.159	-.4524	4.0524
	CG	.90000	.76811	.714	-1.3524	3.1524
EG3	EG1	-2.30000*	.76811	.044	-4.5524	-.0476
	EG2	-1.80000	.76811	.159	-4.0524	.4524
	CG	-.90000	.76811	.714	-3.1524	1.3524
CG	EG1	-1.40000	.76811	.359	-3.6523	.8524
	EG2	-.90000	.76811	.714	-3.1524	1.3524
	EG3	.90000	.76811	.714	-1.3524	3.1524

The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

From this table, by comparing groups together, it can be found that there exists a significant difference between EG1 and EG3 by a mean difference of 2.30000. Asterisk (*) shows the difference in this table. There are also other differences among groups which are as follows:

It was found that among the four compared strategies, DA plus CT has more power in improving speaking among the learners. The table indicates that it was better than the common way of speaking (CG). It also has a significant difference with EG2 and a slight difference with EG1.

Table 6
Descriptive Statistics Comparing the Four Groups on the Writing Post-test

Maximum	Minimum	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Std. Error	Std. Deviation	Mean	N	
		Upper Bound	Lower Bound					
31.00	27.00	30.2899	28.9101	.52599	1.66333	29.1000	30	EG1
32.00	28.00	31.2899	29.9101	.52599	1.66333	30.5000	30	EG2

It can be seen that there is a difference between EG1 ($M = 29.10$) and the control group ($M = 28.93$), It can be understood that CT+DA ($M=31.10$) had a better effect on

speaking and writing. Actually, the DA and CT concepts appeared to be effective. A one-way ANOVA showed whether these differences were significant or not (Table 7).

Table 7
One-Way ANOVA Results Comparing the Two Groups on the Writing Post-test

Sig.	F	Mean Square	Df	Sum of Squares	
.090	2.334	6.892	3	20.675	Between Groups
		2.953	56	106.300	Within Groups
			59	126.975	Total

The *p-value* under *Sig.* the column is larger than the alpha level (i.e. $.09 > .05$); therefore, it shows that the two groups were not significantly different from each other. A bar chart was also drawn to show the slight differences

DISCUSSION

In this section, the obtained results for speaking and writing variables are discussed separately below.

For speaking, One-way ANOVA and Sheffe-post hoc tests were performed. The statistical analysis of the data revealed that the means of the four groups were not all the same. It was found that among the four compared strategies, DA plus CT has more power in improving speaking among the learners.

As it was mentioned earlier CT principles have several advantages that contribute to the improvement of speaking ability. DA also has some merits leading to the enhancement of speaking ability. Thus, it is quite axiomatic that their combination would lead to a stronger improvement in speaking ability. By developing suitable strategies that provide students with additional chances to practice speaking, develop their speaking skills, and gain confidence, students' speaking abilities will be enhanced thanks to the use of critical thinking in ELT, and the program's objectives will be fulfilled. Critical thinking helps learners build their problem-solving and idea-generation capabilities in addition to supporting the teaching of speaking abilities. Teachers must create a set of classroom activities that can include certain speaking skill components to integrate critical thinking into the teaching of speaking. The interesting point is that when these principles are

added to the techniques of mediation and exchange of feedback which are the features of DA, this improvement is stronger (Shen & Chiu, 2019).

In their study, Safrianti and Lina (2018) used descriptive research. The English Education Department's instructors' methods for teaching speaking skills were investigated using CT and DA, as well as the views of students regarding such methods. Three students enrolled in the Listening and Speaking for Daily Conversation course as well as two English teachers who teach students from the 2016 batch were the subjects of this study. They were selected based on a set of criteria. The findings showed that group discussion, group presentations, brainstorming, and role-playing were some of the tactics employed by several English Education Department teachers along with principles of CT and DA to enhance their students' speaking abilities. The results pointed to significant improvement in students' speaking ability.

Additionally, Wijayanti (2018) investigated the method of teaching speaking strategies to seventh graders using CT and DA principles. The instructor and students of the full-day seventh-grade junior high school class were the study's subjects. There was only one teacher present, and the entire class was the study's sample. The methods used to teach speaking included group work, activities that used simple language, instruction or practice in conversation skills, and maintaining students' usage of the target language. They received instruction via DA and CT. Consistent with the results of the present study, The findings uncovered the positive effects of mixing DA and CT principles on speaking skill enhancement.

As for writing, to check if there were any differences among the three experimental groups and the control group in terms of writing improvement, they were compared using one-way ANOVA. The statistical analysis of the results uncovered that the differences among the groups were not significant, and the writing ability of EFL learners in CT, DA, and control groups improved almost equally.

The justification for such a finding is that CT principles and DA techniques can independently offer sufficient advantages for the improvement of writing and when they are combined not a considerable improvement is obtained. Maarof and Murat (2013) looked into the essay-writing techniques utilized by Malaysian ESL high school pupils who were instructed to use CT and DA. A 33-item, 5-point Likert scale questionnaire, adopted from Petric and Czarl's (2013) writing techniques, was provided to the 50 participants after they were split into high and low-proficiency groups to help determine the writing strategies they utilized. The results showed that the while-writing methods were more commonly employed, but revision strategies were less frequently used. In general combination of CT and DA was very effective for their writing improvement.

Alnufaie and Grenfell (2012) ran a survey on 121 Saudi Arabian undergraduate ESL students who had received both DA and CT instruction in developing writing skills. They divided the teaching of writing techniques into two categories: teaching of writing strategies that are process-oriented and teaching of writing strategies that are product-oriented. The majority of participants admitted employing both types of tactics. However, students preferred the process-oriented writing approach training, especially when it was delivered using both DA and CT.

CONCLUSION

The current research aimed to investigate the effect of critical thinking and dynamic assessment for teaching strategies on Iranian EFL learners' speaking and writing skills. The obtained results indicated that teaching speaking and writing strategies via CT and DA has a

positive effect on the speaking and writing performance of EFL learners

Speaking and writing are considered to be higher forms of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities where a variety of talents are honed via CT and DA practice. Gaining higher-order level thinking and reasoning abilities is necessary for writing and speaking effectively. For learners to cultivate critical thinking, Freely and Steinberg (2000) emphasized the need for discussions, debates, and problem-solving activities in the form of action learning. According to Khorasani and Farimani (2010), conventional methods of instruction are still used in Iran as a foreign English language teaching context. In other words, students see their instructors as knowledge sources, whereas teachers see their students as mere knowledge recipients, similar to a black box, neglecting crucial ideas like encouraging critical thinking and exchange of feedback in EFL students and adhering to student independence. In addition to the issues mentioned above, teaching materials still do not emphasize critical thinking as a learning goal, and abilities are not assessed dynamically.

Dynamic assessment is the process of integrating teaching and evaluation. Learning entails assessment. Given that DA argues that we may best conquer any unknown task by collaborating with others who have a similar goal and try to exchange feedback, its development should be established and released collaboratively by individuals who intend to benefit from it. Continuous learning requires an open, inquiring mind, and the capacity to listen, question, and examine ideas. EFL learners had the ability to combine various writing and speaking strategies and materials within the same settings to work through problems, communicate thoughts, and confront beliefs in a trusted and encouraging setting via the use of DA approaches and strategies as an independent variable in this study. As a result, they developed a critical thinking-based model as the dependent variable, the findings of which could be inferred from the DA techniques.

Critical thinking is necessary for speaking and writing; it is not sufficient for learners to only explain or summarize facts; they must also analyze and assess the data in order to utilize it

to support their own ideas. Because the learner presents his own ideas based on the data at hand in this section, critical thinking is crucial for receiving higher ratings. Combining critical thinking and DA increases independence, stimulates curiosity, fosters creativity, strengthens problem-solving skills, and is a kind of multi-faceted exercise. It is also a skill for life, not simply for learning.

The findings of this study have positive implications for EFL instructors, students, content creators, and syllabus planners. When utilized effectively, critical thinking and dynamic assessment shape a collection of traits and skills that increase the likelihood of coming up with a logical solution to a conundrum or a successful outcome to a problem (Stewart, 2015). When students are taught the fundamentals of critical thinking and assessed dynamically, they will exercise sound judgment, question the unlikely, seek challenges, develop alternatives, employ strategies, take into account various viewpoints, and try to be impartial.

To increase their students' willingness to learn about a variety of topics, interest in learning more and knowledge, love of looking for opportunities to apply critical thinking skills, confidence in their ability to reason, willingness to consider opposing viewpoints, adaptability in weighing options and viewpoints, and promotion of a keen awareness of potential unexplained phenomena, EFL teachers should try to make their students cognizant of the principles of critical thinking and assess them critically.

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