Critical Thinking in General English Coursebooks Taught in Iranian Universities

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Abstract

The present study aimed at providing an evaluation of General English Coursebooks taught at some Iranian universities. To this end, a retrospective evaluation was designed to examine the reading comprehension questions of 10 selected General English coursebooks to the extent to which they fostered critical thinking. Then, reading comprehension questions of all units in the CBs were analyzed based on Facione's (2011) critical thinking model (consisting of 6 features); the data were analyzed and the occurrence percentage of each feature was calculated in each CB. The results revealed the representation of critical thinking features of Facion's (2011) model and the extent to which the Coursebooks matched the criteria in fostering critical thinking. The findings of the study seem to suggest that Iranian university students are unlikely to become critical thinkers through the study of such coursebooks.

Keywords: coursebook evaluation, critical thinking, facione's (2011) critical thinking model.

Introduction

All of us as a teacher have observed that our educational system has been trying to stuff people's mind with pre-prepared information serving no function except storage of information just as a computer does it. The emphasis of Iranian educational system in learning is just on the memorization of coursebooks;

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actually, the major problem with this system is its product-centeredness rather than process-centeredness. Educational system is responsible for creating curiosity, creativity and critical thinking in students. Kennedy et al. (1991) point out that empirical research suggests that students of all intellectual ability levels can benefit from critical thinking instruction. Similarly, Lewis and Smith (1993) argue that critical thinking skills are for everyone, not just the gifted.

Since late 1970s, there has been a change of focus from teachers to the learners. In line with this shift, a great need was felt to design all instructional materials in a way to elevate the students' thoughts. As Sheldon (1988, p.245) mentioned, "learners are not taught, but come from somewhere and are proceeding towards specific educational goals and future training". In order to achieve such goals, educational materials, particularly coursebooks, should be evaluated because coursebooks are the fundamental materials in the learning process. According to Hutchinson and Torres (1994), the course book has a vital and positive role to play in teaching and the learning process. Litz (2005) holds that no matter whether one believes Coursebooks are too inflexible and biased to be used directly as instructional materials, there can be no denial that they are still the most valuable element in educational systems. In addition course book evaluation is of great importance to clarify the nature of teaching sources. Evaluation is significant because it (a) reveals the strengths and weaknesses of the coursebooks, (b) determines how well the coursebooks meets the standards of a good course book, and (c) provides guidance and feedback for CB revisions.

This study provides a retrospective evaluation of General English Coursebooks (GECBs) in Iranian universities. GECBs, like any other Coursebook, play a variety of roles in a particular program. The aims of teaching General English (GE) as a whole is to develop students' ability to use English accurately, appropriately, effectively and fluently for communication in various situations and to develop students' ability to read and understand texts in English on different subjects and topics with minimal help from teachers, but as it is clear, in Iranian universities, this course is prerequisite for technical courses. Actually, the purpose behind such courses is just preparing students for their technical courses, so according to this aim, the emphasis of this course and its books is on the reading skills. Different texts are followed by some reading comprehension questions and exercises to examine the extent to which students comprehend the text; therefore, such questions have a fundamental role in stimulating students' thought.

The GE course is an essential part in Iranian universities. University students pass such courses by reading a lot of passages with various topics in order to get ready for technical courses. It is expected especially from students at university level to go beyond the sentences, that is, they should get the intended meanings of the writer. Each passage has certainly hidden ideas and messages which should not be ignored. As Peterson (2008) mentioned, improving students'

ability to reason demands "finding information that is not directly stated in the passage" (p.124). In order to achieve this goal, each text needs some questions stimulating students' thought and forcing them to infer the hidden meaning of the passage, aiming at stimulating students' cognitive abilities in terms of problem solving, discovering and analyzing. Different GEBCs used in Iranian universities include a lot of texts followed by some questions. In answering these questions, it is observed that students just copy excerpts from the texts without any elaboration. In our classes, students are used to plagiarizing the ideas. Reading comprehension questions in such books do not permit students to reflect their viewpoints, so this may cause a fear of future because they think their ideas are not appreciated. These books teach students to be imitators, and students all agree with whatever the text says. The reading comprehension questions and other exercises after the passages do not foster critical thinking in students. The content of coursebooks must train critical thinker students. Such students make good decisions, improve their own future, are successful in education and are not dependent on the CB. The coursebook must help to sharpen the students' critical thinking skills. It is obvious that critical thinking instruction has not been embedded in GEBCs taught in Iranian universities. GEBCs do not help students acquire such a thinking style. The main reason for the present study stems from the fact that the notion of critical thinking, the essential factor for success in education, is absent in GEBCs employed at Iranian universities.

Therefore, this study intended to investigate the extent to which certain designed questions have been prepared based on critical thinking model, and to evaluate the presence of CT features in the GECBs. For this purpose, the content of a general English CB used at Iranian universities was analyzed based on Facione's (2011) critical thinking model.

Hence, in the assessment process of comprehension questions used in university English CBs, the answer to the following research question was sought:

   1) To what extent are features of Facione's (2011) critical thinking model represented in each General English coursebook used?

Background

Significance of Book Evaluation

English language instruction has many important components but the essential constituents in many ESL/EFL classrooms and programs are the textbooks and instruction materials often used by language instructors. As McGrath (2006) mentioned, CBs are seen to have a tendency to dictate what is taught, in an intentional order, and they have a serious impact on how teachers use them. Although coursebooks are seen as an indispensable tool of language

instruction, they are hardly evaluated for their appropriateness to meet teachers and learners' needs and interests (Ajayi, 2005).

Littlejohn (1998) claims materials analysis and evaluation enable us to see 'inside' the materials and to take more control over their design and use.

Textbooks are the key component in all language programs and provide a variety of learning resources. They can offer effective language models and input, so the evaluation of such an important factor is vital for the learning system. The relation between textbooks and language teaching is not something which has only recently been commented on. It has a long history because the quality of teaching and learning has always been of interest to all people in general.

Studies addressing Book Evaluation

What follows is a brief review of some previously conducted textbook evaluation studies, carried out both in Iran and other countries.

In Iran

Concerning the Iranian attempts, Yarmohammadi (2002) evaluated the senior high school textbooks in terms of Tucker's revised model. He concluded his study by mentioning some shortcomings such as lack of authenticity, the interchangeable use of English and Persian names, and the ignorance of oral skills.

Amalsaleh (2004) examined the representation of social factors in three types of textbooks, including junior and senior high school textbooks, based on Van Leeuwen's model (1996). According to the results, generally, the textbooks demonstrated a deferential representation of social factors that tended to portray female as performers belonging to a home context and having limited job opportunities in society. In particular, high school textbooks tended to shape normative views of gender and class relations in which a middle-class urban male was considered tobe the norm.

Rahimy (2007) evaluated a reading comprehension textbook for the university students entitled *Reading Comprehension for the University Students* in Iran. Several schemes and checklists (e.g. Ansary & Babaii, 2002; Garinger, 2002; Harmer, 1998) were used which included features of content, layout, additional materials, unit grading, reading comprehension skills, etc.

Pishghadam and Motakef (2008) analyzed two texts (taken from New Interchange series and high school English books). Their study was conducted with the aim of making a connection between CDA, Critical Discourse Analysis, critical thinking, and ZPD, Zone of Proximal Development. The results of their study, which focused on reading texts, exhibited that most of the

texts were laden with hidden ideologies and power relations and teachers were responsible for making students aware of these hidden ideas.

Azizifar, Koosha & Lotfi (2010) carried out an evaluation of two series of ELT textbooks used for teaching English language in Iranian high schools from 1965 to the present. In this study, Tucker's (1975) textbook evaluation model was used. The results suggested that ELT textbooks were one of the fundamental factors in learners' English language achievement.

Karamouzian (2010) analyzed the content of a reading comprehension series entitled *Reading through Interaction* used at the university level in Iran. A newly developed checklist was applied. The results indicated that the overall quality of the three books was suitable, but there was a lack of materials on grammar and pronunciation.

Other EFL contexts

Al-Saif (2005) conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the textbook *English for Saudi Arabia,* which was taught in the 6th grade in Saudi elementary schools. The purpose of the study was to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the textbook with particular emphasis on its suitability to teachers, social contexts and young learners. It showed that the textbook was only "moderately adequate", and that it required constant and cyclical evaluation based on the changing circumstances of the program.

Al-Yousef's (2007) master thesis evaluated secondary level third grade intermediate English textbooks used in Saudi Arabia. The study used the checklist-method for evaluation based on the work of Cunningworth (1995). The study was designed to provide a comprehensive assessment of the overall pedagogical value of the textbook content. The results of the study revealed that both the teachers-supervisors and the students perceived the CB as moderately adequate.

A review of research on textbook evaluation revealedthat there was a lack of enough material evaluation studies addressing General English coursebooks.

In most evaluations, the researchers have used checklists in order to facilitate their evaluation and also precede their evaluation in a systematic way, but in the present study, a model was used as the criterion to evaluate the books from just one perspective (critical thinking).

However, we should remind ourselves that the process of book evaluation is ultimately a subjective practice (Angell, DuBravac & Gongleweski 2008; Sheldon, 1988).

Critical thinking

A review of literature in the field of critical thinking revealed a general lack of consensus on how critical thinking is best defined, what critical thinking

skills can and should be taught, and how we can determine the most appropriate framework for this teaching. As a whole, educational reformers have not even agreed on terminology.

Critical thinking has attracted the attention of educators over the past decades. The significance of critical thinking in education and particularly, higher education is now acknowledged by a large number of educators. Schafer man (1991) asserts that all education must involve not only "what to think", but also "how to think". Students should be assisted in engaging in a type of thinking that is reflective, reasonable and directed on what to believe or do (Ennis, 1962, as cited in Simpson, 2002).

Some Studies addressing Critical Thinking in Reading in EFL Contexts

In Iran

Eghtedari (2002), in a study of 200 English language learners, showed that there was also a strong relationship between participants' way of thinking and their reading comprehension ability.

Mirzai (2008) studied the relationship between critical thinking and lexical inferencing of Iranian EFL learners. The scores showed that those who gained higher scores in critical thinking outperformed those with lower scores.

Pishghadam and Motakef (2008) analyzed two texts (taken from New Interchange series and high school English books). Their study was conducted with the aim of makinga connection between CDA, Critical Discourse Analysis, critical thinking, and ZPD, Zone of Proximal Development. The results of their study, with the focus on reading texts, exhibited that most of the texts were laden with hidden ideologies and power relations, and it was the teacher's responsibility to make students aware of these hidden ideas and ideals.

In another study, Kamali and Fahim (2011) investigated the relationships between critical thinking ability, resilience- a measure of successful stress-coping ability, and reading comprehension of texts containing unknown vocabulary items. The results indicated that EFL learners' critical thinking levels had significant effects on their resilience levels. In other words, critical thinking as a cognitive ability and resilience as a personality factor were highly correlated. The study also revealed that learners' critical thinking levels had significant effects on their reading comprehension ability when faced with unknown vocabulary items.

Ashraf (2011) concluded a study aiming at investigating an effective approach to reading the articles critically for the English major Iranian students at post-secondary level. Most of the participants expressed positive changes in their thinking process, understanding and a critical look at researcharticles. He concluded that the experiment, including the introduction and practice of

critical reading instructions for articles, proved to be useful for these MA and BA participants.

On the relationship between critical thinking and language learning strategies among Iranian EFL learners, Nikoopour, Amini, and Nasiri (2011) investigated the relationship between critical thinking and the use of direct and indirect language learning strategies by Iranian college students. The findings revealed a statistically significant relationship between specifically direct and indirect language learning strategies such as cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies and critical thinking, while memory, compensation, and affective strategies appeared to have no relationship with critical thinking.

Some Other EFL Contexts

Temur and Bahar's (2011) study, which aimed at finding out the met cognitive awareness of the reading strategies of university students who learned English as a foreign language, came up with the findings thatuniversity students used PROB, GLOB and SUB strategies respectively. Problem solving strategies were used the most, and supporting strategies were the least used.

In another study, Yujong (2011) tried to support critical literacy in English as a foreign language (EFL) setting by analyzing one college EFL reading classroom in which students read and responded to articles from "The New Yorker". Results showed that when taught to be critical readers of the text, these EFL participants were able to actively use linguistic resources from the articles as well as their own cultural and personal experiences to support their ideas and raise questions. The study suggested that newspaper and magazine articles could be important pedagogical tools for promoting critical thinking in the EFL reading classroom.

Considering the above-mentioned issues and studies, the present research was intended to evaluate General English Coursebooks from critical thinking perspective at university level in Iran and investigate the teacher/learner interaction in these books.

To this aim, the researcher employed the Fcione's (2011) critical thinking model to evaluate the coursebooks and analyze the data.

Methodology

Materials

In order to conduct the intended research, 10 General English Coursebooks were selected from top universities in Iran. These coursebooks are currently taught in General English courses to prepare university students for reading technical texts. There are various General English Coursebooks offered by each

department or each professor of university. In this study, reading comprehension questions of each unit were evaluated based on Facione's (2011) critical thinking model. Six factors were considered through the evaluation. In addition, the introduction of each book was evaluated to find the role of teachers/students and their interaction.

The study was conducted in several phases to collect data for the present study. In the first phase, the materials of the study were selected. To select the coursebooks, 15 top Iranian state universities out of 50 were selected randomly. This method was used because Iran is a vast country with a large number of cities that might have one or more universities. So the researcher, based on correct statistics, selected 30% of universities. Nearly, all of these universities offered General English course. In the second phase, a survey was conducted in which students, instructors or heads of departments in target universities were asked for the Coursebooks they used in their General English classes. This survey was carried out through e-mails, phone calls, and personal contacts. Based on the obtained data, the Coursebooks with the highest frequency and popularity were chosen to be studied in the present research, but in cases the number of books was large and there were different GECBs, the researcher chose a course book among others randomly. According to the survey, some books used in those 15 universities were the same; therefore, at last 10 books were selected among different CBs in those universities. Every course book included several units (reading passages) followed by some reading comprehension questions. The number of units was different in each book. In stage 3, a critical thinking model was applied to evaluate reading comprehension questions separately. The model applied in this study was Fcion's (2011) critical thinking model, which included 6 factors: interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation and self-regulation. There were different critical thinking models with various factors, but as this model was the most relevant and recent, and it was completely matched to the process and goal of the study, it was employed in this study. Facione (2011) has defined the six features of his critical thinking model as follows:

Facione (2011) suggested six cognitive skills at the very core of his critical thinking model as follows:

- **Interpretation:** means comprehending the meaning of various questions, statements, judgments, and experiences.

- **Analysis:** is identifying the actual relationship among different information statements, questions, ideas, and experiences.

- **Evaluation:** is evaluating the credibility of various opinions, questions, beliefs, etc.

- **Inference:** refers to the use of elements needed to form hypotheses and make logical conclusion.

- **Explanation:** is to be able to make a coherent result out of others' reasoning.

- **Self-regulation:** is consciously controlling and monitoring one's cognitive activities.

Totally, in the present study, 10 General English Coursebooks from 15 state universities all around Iran were evaluated. The name of coursebooks and the universities in which they have been taught are as follows:

Book Title	University
English for students of sciences	Tehran University/ ShahidBeheshti U
English for the students of Engineering	Amirkabir University of Technology/Sharif U
Reading for General English	Shiraz University
General English Focus, A book for University General English Course	Kashan University / Shahrekord U
English for University students, An orientation course	ShahidChamran University of Ahvaz
Basic English for University students	Gilan University
General English: for university students	Arak University
Select Reading (Intermediate)	Khalije Fars University of Bushehr
Concepts & comments	Yazd University/ Ferdosi U of Mashhad / Isfahan U
Thoughts & Notions	Isfahan University/ Isfahan U of Technology

The specifications of the selected books are as follows:

1. Akhavan, B., Behgam, P., Faghih, E. & Haghani, M., (2001). *English for Students of Science,* (13th Ed.). Tehran: The Center for Studying and Compiling University Books in Humanities, (SAMT).

2. Birjandi, P., Fallahi, M., Haghani, M., & Maftoon, P., (2009). *English for the Students of Engineering,* (25th Ed.). The Organization for Researching and Composing University Textbooks in the Humanities (SAMT), The Center for Research and Development in Humanities.

3. Pourgive, F., Tajalli, Gh., Sadighi, F., & Yamini, M., (2006). *Reading for General English,* (13th Ed.). Tehran: The Organization for Reading and Composing University Textbook in the Humanities (SAMT).

4. Ketabi, S., & Sheikhi Darani, A., (2009). *General English Focus: A Book for University General English Course,* (1st Ed.). Isfahan: Chaharbagh Publication.

5. Jalilifar, A., Abdollahzadeh, E., Mohmedi, F. & Mir Tabatabai, M., (2009). *English for University Students: An orientation course,* (1st Ed.). Tehran: Parayab Publishing Company.

6. Birjandi, P., (2007). *Basic English for University Students,* (13th Ed.). Tehran: The Organization for Researching and Composing University Textbooks in the Humanities (SAMT).

7. Barahimi, A., Farahani, H. B., Hamze, A., Lohrasbi, M., Rostampoor, A., Seidirad, M., Soufali, F.A., &Vasigh, Gh., (2010). *General English for University Students,* (6th Ed.). Arak: Arak Islamic Azad University.

8. Lee, L., & Gundersen, E., (2001). *Select Readings Intermediate.* New York: Oxford University Press.

9. Ackert, P., & Lee, L., (2005). *Concepts and comments,* (3rd Ed.). USA: Adult and Academic ESL.

10. Ackert, P., & Lee, L., (2005). *Thoughts and Notions*, (2nd Ed.). USA: Adult and Academic ESL.

From now on, in order to prevent redundancy and to save space, the researcher refers to GECBs with the name of universities to which they belong.

Data analysis procedures

In order to analyze the collected data, all comprehension questions were evaluated according to these six features to show the extent to which these features are emphasized. To make the results more manageable, it was possible to show them in the form of tables and graphs that would facilitate making judgments and comparing Coursebooks in terms of different features. In each table, raw frequencies as well as the percentage of the features have been illustrated. This was the first stage in the analysis procedure. The precise analysis of the data drew upon a quantitative method calculating percentages, which were interrelated with a qualitative method. The total results, but not the detailed ones related to each feature, as they were clear enough, were open to interpretation. The overall quality of each course book was revealed by matching the total scores and their quality descriptions. The rationale behind the selection of the model and framework was their comprehensiveness and recency.

Findings

To address the research question and investigate the extent to which features of Facione's (2011) critical thinking model are represented in the Coursebooks, primarily, the frequency of CT features in reading comprehension questions of each course book was presented and their percentage was computed and shown in the tables. But, for the sake of brevity and a clear view of CT features in each CB, the reader is referred to appendix I wherein the results are provided in separate tables (1-10) with more details. This section mainly deals with the frequency of CT feature in each CB as presented briefly in Table11, representation of sum of items

in each Course Book and the percentage of non- CT-featured Qs as shown in table1.Comparison of CBs based on the number of occurrence of CT features is presented in table 13 and comparison of CBs according to the presence of each CT item in each CB which is shown in table 14.

Table 1. *Frequency of CT features in all Coursebooks (books and Items cross tabulation)*

Item	Book										Total
	ShahidChamran	Amirkabir	Arak	Bushehr	Gilan	isfahan	Tehran	Shiraz	Shahrekord	Yazd	
Analysis	2	2	0	1	1	6	1	7	0	0	20
Evaluation	1	0	0	3	2	3	0	0	0	2	11
Explanation	24	47	2	0	17	53	29	3	13	58	246
Inference	0	0	2	10	0	36	1	0	0	9	58
Interpretation	34	20	22	38	15	40	12	35	15	30	261
None	47	64	48	25	111	152	66	95	50	103	761
Self-regulation	0	0	0	0	0	19	0	0	0	3	22
	108	133	74	77	146	309	109	140	78	205	1379

As shown in Table 11, totally, the most frequent CT feature is the Interpretation factor and the least frequent CT item is the Evaluation Factor. According to this table, there are 761 Qs without CT features.

Table 2. *Representation of sum of Items in each Course Book and the percentage of non- CT-featured Qs*

Book	Sum of Items without None		None		Number of
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Questions
Yazd	112	69.9	103	56	184
ShahidChamran	61	68.54	47	52.81	89
Bushehr	52	68.4	25	32.9	76
Isfahan	157	61.33	152	59.4	256
Amir kabir	69	60	64	55.6	115
Tehran	43	43	66	66	100
Shahrekord	28	38.3	50	68.5	73
Arak	26	36.1	48	66.6	72
Shiraz	45	32.4	95	68.3	139
Gilan	35	24.6	111	78.2	142

The Data in table 12 indicate that Gilan CB contains the most non-CT feature Qs (78.2%) and Bushehr CB has the least non-CT feature Qs (32.9%); finally, Yazd CB with 69.9% contains the most CT featured Qs.

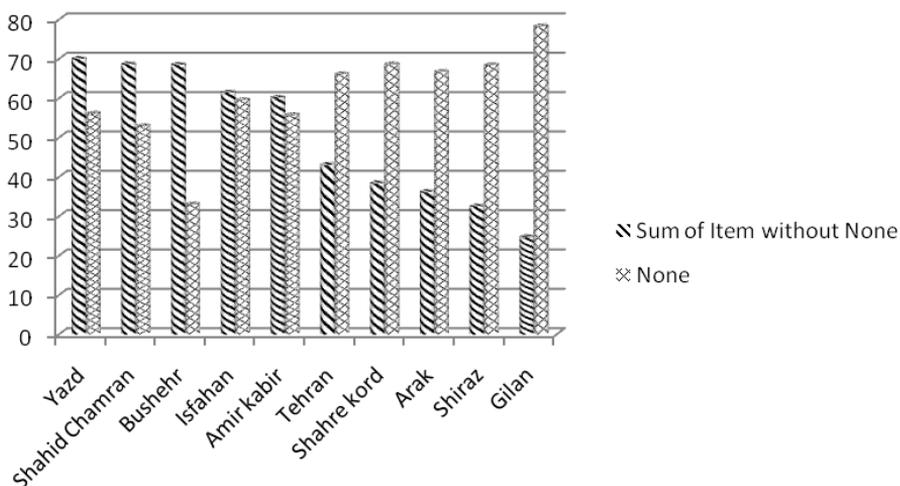The following figures represent the data in Table 12.

Figure 1. **Representation of sum of CT features in each CB**
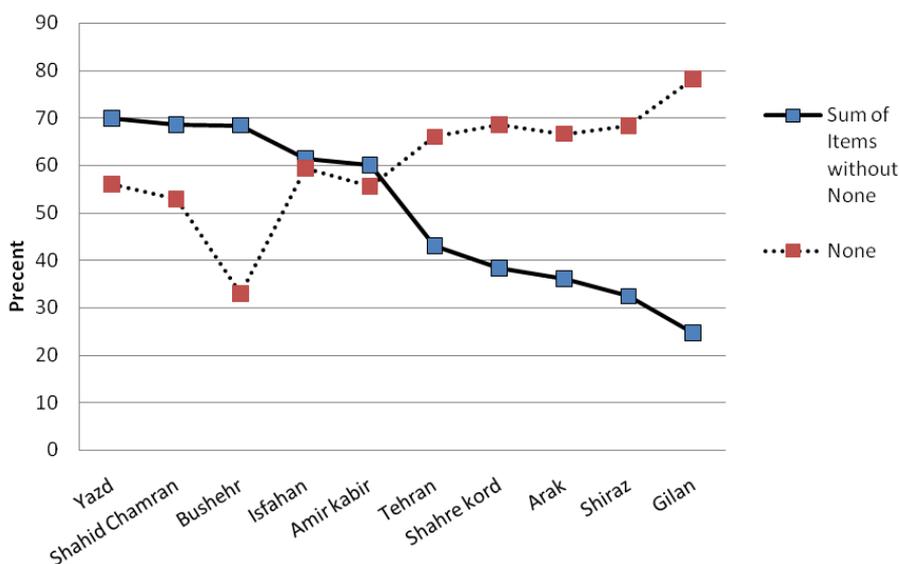

Figure 2. **Comparison of CBs based on the sum of CT items and non-CT items** Qs

The following table displays the frequency and percentage of occurrence of Qs with 1 CT feature, Qs with 2 CT factors and Qs with 3 CT items separately.

Table 3. *Comparison of CBs based on the number of occurrences of CT features*

Book	Sum only one Item		Sum Two Item		Sum Three Item		None		Number of Questions
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	
ShahidChamran	24	27.0	17	19.1	1	1.1	47	52.8	89
Amir kabir	33	28.7	17	14. 8	1	0.9	64	55.6	115
Arak	22	30.6	2	2.8	0	0.0	48	66.6	72
Bushehr	50	65.8	1	1.3	0	0.0	25	32.9	76
Isfahan	59	23.0	44	17.2	1	0.4	152	59.4	256
Gilan	25	17.6	6	4.2	0	0.0	111	78.2	142
Shahrekord	19	26.0	4	5.5	0	0.0	50	68.5	73
Shiraz	43	31.0	1	0.7	0	0.0	95	68.3	139
Tehran	25	25	9	9	0	0.0	66	66	100
Yazd	60	32.6	21	11.4	0	0.0	103	56	184

As illustrated in Table 13, most Qs in all 10 CB have 1 CT features and the frequency of Qs with 3 CT items is very low. There are just 3 Qs with 3 CT factors (1 in Ahvaz CB, 1 in Amirkabir CB & 1 in Isfahan CB). According to the data in this table, Isfahan CB contains the most 2 CT-featured Qs (44), but Bushehr & Shiraz CBs have just 1 Q containing 2 CT features simultaneously.

The following figure represents the data in Table 13.
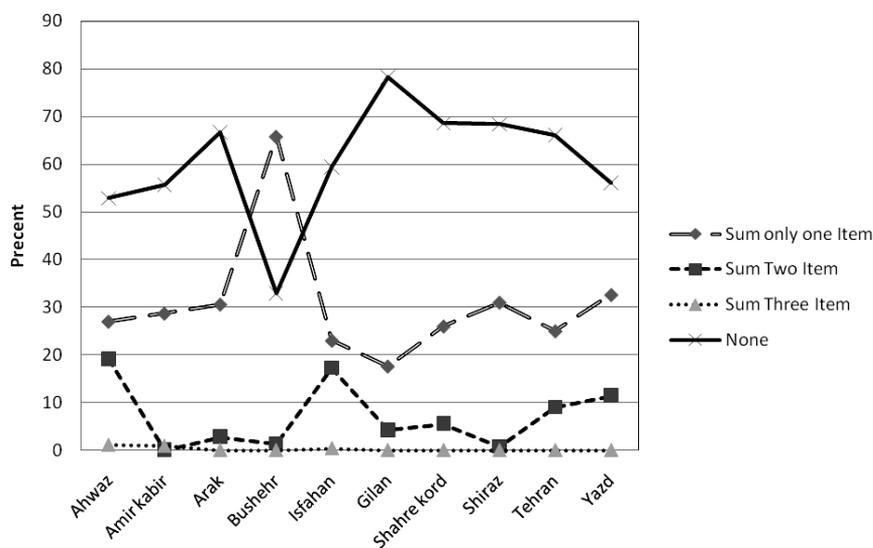
Figure 3. **Comparison of CBs based on the number of occurrences of CT features**

The following table indicates the representation of CT features in each CB; it shows that each CB contains many factors of those 6 CT factors. It is simply realized that Shahrekord CB's Qs have just 2 CT features out of 6 features of Facion's CT model and Isfahan CB contains all 6 CT features.

Table 4. *Comparison of CBs according to the presence of each CT item in each CB.*

Questions	Interpretation	Analysis	Evaluation	Inference	Explanation	Self-regulation	Sum
Ahwaz course book	✓	✓	✓		✓		4
Amirkabir course book	✓	✓			✓		3
Arak course book	✓			✓	✓		3
Bushehr course book	✓	✓	✓	✓			4
Isfahan course book	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Gilan course book	✓	✓	✓		✓		4
Shahrekord course book	✓				✓		2
Shiraz course book	✓	✓			✓		3
Tehran course book	✓	✓		✓	✓		4
Yazd course book	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	5

Discussion

The research question was formulated to investigate the extent to which features of Facion's (2011) critical thinking model are represented in the GECBs. In this respect, the frequency and percentage of each CT item in each unit and then in each CB were explored. In this study, the focus was on critical thinking.

In the present study, as tables 1-10 (in appendix) indicate, the representation of CT features in 10 GECBS is low and the percentage of non-CT-featured Qs is high. In 9 CBs, the percentage of non- CT-featured Qs is more than 50%, except one CB (Bushehr CB [Select Reading]), which contains the fewest number of non-CT-featured Qs.

The data show that students are able to answer more than half of those Qs of the CBs easily, without any need for interaction, discussion and or assistance by teachers. They can answer the RCQs just by referring to the text and highlighting the sentences.

Regarding the data in table 11, the most frequent CT feature is **Interpretation** by the frequency of (261), and the least one is **Evaluation** by the frequency of (11), and the other two CT factors with low frequency are **Analysis** and **Self-regulation,** respectively. After Interpretation factor, the other high frequent feature in CBs is **Explanation**. Based on table 11, the focus of most Qs in CBs is on Explanation and Interpretation factors. It is clear that the material designer in designing such RCQs has focused more on

explanation, description, paraphrasing, copy, etc., not on deep, creative and critical thinking. It is very important to know their definition of comprehension. Such Qs do not even stimulate students to think, let alone to think critically.

In table 12, the researcher tried to compare the 10 CBs based on the total percentage of each CB. According to this table, if the CBs were ranked, the first place was for Yazd CB (69.9%) and the other places in ranking were for Shahid Chamran CB (68.54%), Bushehr (68.4%), Isfahan (61.33%), Amirkabir (60%), Tehran (43%), Shahrekord (38.3%), Arak (36.1%), Shiraz (34.2%) and Gilan (24.6%). It can be concluded that in comparison to each other, Yazd CB has the best condition based on critical thinking perspective among other CBs and Gilan CB has the worst condition.

In table 13, there is another comparison between GECBs from different points of view. As data display, the percentages of Qs with just one CT feature, Qs with 2 CT features and Qs with 3 CT factors are presented. It is clear that Bushehr CB has the largest number of one-CT-featured Qs (65.8%) and Gilan has the smallest number of one-CT-featured Qs (17.6%). It is shown in this comparison that ShahidChamran CB has the largest number of two-CT-featured Qs (19.1%) and Shiraz CB has the smallest number of two-CT-featured Qs (0.7%), and 7 CBs out of 10 have no three-CT-featured Qs. Only Shahid Chamran CB (1.1%), Amirkabir CB (0.9%), and Isfahan CB (0.4%) have three-CT-featured Qs. This indicates that the CBs with their RCQs cannot advocate or foster critical thinking in students. They donot even teach students to think critically.

Table 14 presents the CT factors included in RCQs in each CB. As shown, 6 CT factors are represented in Isfahan CB whereas just 2 CT items (Interpretation & Explanation) are represented in the Qs of Shahrekord CB. It is obvious that in this comparison, from this point of view, Isfahan CB has the best quality based on critical thinking perspective among the other CBs. All 10 CBs contain **Interpretation** factor and 9 CBs except one (Bushehr CB) have **Explanation** factor. Moreover, just 2 CBs have **Self-regulation** factor (Isfahan & Yazd CB); therefore, as mentioned before, the emphasis of those 10 GECBs is more on Interpretation and Explanation. These CT factors are important, but not separately and lonely. So they should be followed by some other CT factors such as Inference, Self-regulation, Analyses, etc.

The low presence of CT factors in the GECBs indicates that the designers should move toward reinforcing critical thinking in CBs.

Training creative and thoughtful people should be the major goal of education in universities. In fact, we face the deficient methods in fostering CT. Today, most countries all around the world are looking for the best method in instructing people and arranging the educational system to develop critically thinking people.

Considering the emphasis of our educational system in lecturing, the students are used to memorizing lots of information and storing those things studied by rote. So, today, memorizing, exercising, doing assignment and having silent classes are considered as a dominant educational style; however; this does not lead to critical thinkers. The development of thought should be based upon the analysis and interpretation of information.

The teachers can act as a guide and allow students to express their ideas and opinions, and also investigate and create something new; in such a system CT will be formed.

There is no place for CT growth in teacher-centered and single voiced classes in which teachers speak and students just listen; the end product of such classes is consumer and dependent individuals who suffer lack of creative and critical ideas. Unfortunately, by passing the time, such characteristics will become part of their personality.

It is better for teachers to make an opportunity for students to ask questions about whatever they have read and give different responses. Teachers should give them a chance to express their ideas. It is recommended to design Qs after the reading passages that would require interpretation and analysis of characters and elements of the texts by students. Of course every kind of Qs is not appropriate and useful to foster and enhance CT. To achieve this goal, the authors and designers should design Qs which contain CT features such as interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, etc.

Conclusion

Carrying out the evaluation and investigating the GECBs from the critical thinking perspective, the researcher drew the following conclusions:

In General English courses, the focus was on reading comprehension and the goal of the CBs was to improve the students' understanding of details and specific information but evaluation of these CBs indicated that such CBs did not improve students comprehension and CT; on the contrary, these CBs taught them to get used to imitating, copying and accepting everything without thinking. During such courses the energy and time of the students werewasted. Critical thinking cannot be learnt by itself and in isolation, rather it should be taught within a process.

In learning such CBs and answering such Qs, students can proceed from deep and critical thinking and become dependent on what is mentioned in CBs. Developing imitating people who suffer from lack of an open mind and thought is harmful for the future of our society. According to Facione (2011), failures of critical thinking contribute to job loss, gullible voters, family violence and academic failure.

Reading passages included comprehension questions at the end of each text. In order to have balanced multilevel questions, some low-level as well as high-

level questions should be included. To foster critical thinking, one needs some kinds of questions, like inference questions, analysis questions, logical reasoning questions, etc. Hereby, it is suggested to ask hierarchical questions with a philosophical basis. The example may include cases like "is there any hidden and specific idea in the text? If yes, do you agree or disagree with it? If agree, why? If disagree, what is the reason?" and so on. In addition to the hierarchical Qs, it is good to design some polyhedral or multimode Qs to make challenge in students' mind.

According to what was observed in university students, it is something abstract and descriptive and we cannot express exactly what a high quality we can get from CT perspective, but based on the computed percentage, the present CBs have a major distance from our criteria (Facione's (2011) CT model); therefore, the end product of such educational materials and systems are danglers, followers, imitators and thoughtless people who are not able to make good decisions in different situations and cannot be successful in various aspects of their life like education, job, etc., because they have not learnt to use the gift granted to them.

In the world the evolutions are so fast, there is no option except thinking critically. It helps people to find the truth and involve themselves in solving social problems actively. Finally, it is better to find a way to change the biased policy of our educational system.

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Appendix A

Table 1. *Representation of each feature of Facione's (2011) critical thinking model in ShahidChamran course book*

ShahidChamran course book	Frequency	Percent
Analysis	2	2.2
Evaluation	1	1.2
Explanation	24	26.96
Interpretation	34	38.2
Sum of Items without None	61	68.54
None	47	52.81
Number of Items	89	

Table 2. *Representation of each features of Facione's (2011) critical thinking model in Amir Kabir course book*

Amir Kabir course book	Frequency	Percent
Interpretation	20	17.4
Analysis	2	1.7
Explanation	47	40.1
Sum of Items without None	69	59.2
None	64	55.7
Number of Questions	115	

Table 3. *Representation of each feature of Facione's (2011) critical thinking model in Arak course book*

Arak course book	Frequency	Percent
Explanation	2	2.7
Inference	2	2.7
Interpretation	22	29.7
Sum of Items	26	35.1
None	48	64.9
Number of Questions	72	

Table 4. *Representation of each feature of Facione's (2011) critical thinking model in Gilan course book*

Gilan course book	Frequency	Percent
Analysis	1	0.7
Evaluation	2	1.4
Explanation	17	11.9
Interpretation	15	10.6
Sum of Items	35	24.6
None	111	78.2
Number of Questions	142	

Table 5. *Representation of each feature of Facione's (2011) critical thinking model in Shahrekord course book*

Shahrekord course book	Frequency	Percent
Explanation	13	17.8
Interpretation	15	20.5
Sum of Items	28	38.3
None	50	68.5
Number of Questions	73	

Table 6. *Representation of each feature of Facione's (2011) critical thinking model in Shiraz course book*

Shiraz course book	Frequency	Percent
Analysis	7	5
Explanation	3	2.2
Interpretation	35	25.17
Sum of Items	45	32.37
None	95	68.34
Number of Questions	139	

Table 7. *Representation of each feature of Facione's (2011) critical thinking model in Tehran course book*

Tehran course book	Frequency	Percent
Analysis	1	1
Explanation	29	29
Inference	1	1
Interpretation	12	12
Sum of Items	43	43
None	66	66
Number of Questions	100	

Table 8. *Representation of each feature of Facione's (2011) critical thinking model in Bushehr course book*

Bushehr course book	Frequency	Percent
Analysis	1	1.3
Evaluation	3	3.9
Inference	10	13
Interpretation	38	50.0
Sum of Items	52	68.4
None	25	32.9
Number of Questions	76	

Table 9. *Representation of each feature of Facione's (2011) critical thinking model in Yazd course book*

Yazd course book	Frequency	Percent
Evaluation	2	1
Explanation	58	31.5
Inference	9	4.7
Interpretation	30	16.3
Self-regulation	3	1.6
Sum of Items	112	59.26
None	103	54.5
Number of Questions	184	

Table 10. *Representation of each feature of Facione's (2011) critical thinking model in Isfahan course book*

Isfahan book	Frequency	Percent
Analysis	6	2.3
Evaluation	3	1.17
Explanation	53	20.7
Inference	36	14
Interpretation	40	15.5
Self-regulation	19	7.4
Sum of Items	157	61.07
None	152	59.4
Number of Questions	256	