

Relationship between Critical Thinking Ability and Listening Comprehension Strategies: Focus on Advanced EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

This study was an endeavor to explore the relationship between advanced EFL students' listening comprehension strategies and their critical thinking ability. To do this, 75 Iranian EFL learners of both genders were selected as the subjects of the study. All of them were advanced learners that were selected based on cluster sampling. The employed instruments were two related questionnaires, Critical Thinking Questionnaire (CTQ) and Listening Comprehension Strategies Questionnaire (LCSQ). On the first day, the researcher explained the instruction of this survey clearly and the participants were provided with CTQ to evaluate the strategies employed by them. On the second day, LCSQ were distributed among them. The participants had to respond all the questions in the limited time. Fortunately, none of the students were absent during the data collection procedure, and this factor would increase the reliability of the results. Findings of the study revealed a significant relationship between advanced EFL students' listening comprehension strategies and their critical thinking ability. Results can be significant since identifying the strategies that students apply, assist them to overcome the difficulties they might encounter in different language skills.

Keywords: Critical thinking, EFL learners, listening skill, listening comprehension strategies

رابطه بین توانایی تفکر انتقادی و استراتژی های درک شنیداری: تمرکز بر زبان آموزان پیشرفته

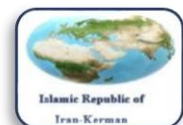
این مطالعه نالشی برای بررسی رابطه بین راهبردهای درک شنیداری دانش‌آموزان پیشرفته EFL و توانایی تفکر انتقادی آنها بود. بدین منظور 75 زبان آموز ایرانی از هر دو جنس به عنوان افراد مورد مطالعه انتخاب شدند. همه آنها دانش آموزان پیشرفته بودند که بر اساس نمونه گیری خوشه ای انتخاب شدند. ابزار مورد استفاده، دو پرسشنامه مرتبط، پرسشنامه تفکر انتقادی (CTQ) و پرسشنامه راهبردهای درک شنیداری (LCSQ) بود. در روز اول، محقق دستورالعمل آشنایی و توضیح تفصیح داد و به شرکت کنندگان برای ارزیابی راهبردهای به کار گرفته شده توسط آنها، CTQ ارائه شد. در روز دوم، LCSQ بین آنها توزیع شد. شرکت کنندگان باید به تمام سوالات در زمان محدود پاسخ می دادند. خوشبختانه هیچ نکی از دانش‌آموزان در فرآیند جمع آوری داده ها غائب نبودند و این عامل باعث افزایش باثباتی نتایج می شود. یافته های این مطالعه نشان داد که بین راهبردهای درک شنیداری دانش آموزان پیشرفته EFL و توانایی تفکر انتقادی آنها رابطه معناداری وجود دارد. نتایج می تواند قابل توجه باشد زیرا شناسایی راهبردهایی که دانش آموزان به کار می گیرند، به آنها کمک می کند تا بر مشکلاتی که ممکن است در مهارت های زبانی مخفی با آن مواجه شوند غلبه کنند.

INTRODUCTION

Most aspects of our life are affected by the way we think, and education is included. Recent movements in the educational system underline the remarkable of Critical Thinking (CT) skills for academic studies and life. It is highly identified that learning to think is one of the most important targets of educational environment. As an approach to learning, CT is regarded important in the field of education which gradually receives more attention from researchers due to its possible effects on language learning (Villavicencio, 2011). In most developed countries, inculcating critical thinking is considered as one of the goals of education (Nowroozi & Bakhtiari, 2005). Also, one of the important attributes of the present societies is the growth and advancement of the educational system. In developing countries such as Iran, particularly in recent decades, this has turned into a vital and sensitive issue. The most perceptible and effective character in the system, is the 'thinking' element. Thus, CT, as one of the new models in the educational system, is a required skill in improving students' thinking ability. This helps individuals to deeply reflect upon issues and criticize the system through true understanding of the existing issues. Among the different factors that may influence listening comprehension ability, CT is of utmost importance. However, most of the Iranian EFL learners are not effectively familiar with the idea of critical thinking. Accordingly, the present study makes an attempt to explore the relationship between critical thinking ability and listening comprehension strategies among advanced EFL learners.

According to Hashemi et al., (2010), most of the time Iranian educational system concentrate on filling the mind of learners with information instead of giving priority to educating thoughtful individuals. In some developing countries like Iran, improving learners' critical thinking is of value to educators, but there seems to be lack of emphasis on developing the necessary critical thinking skills (Khalili et al., 2004). Also, despite the emphasis on educating students who are able to think critically, it is not yet fully incorporated into the educational curriculum. In addition, success of learners in CT process is to question and decide over the methods and techniques that lead them to obtain the language learning objectives. At the beginning stages of learning; however, due to students' unfamiliarity with the strategies and approaches to language learning, they are mostly dependent on their teacher and try to avoid using their own thoughts. In the other place as Hashemi et al., (2010) said, individuals should explore freely and more attentively without force in a developed educational setting. The main reason for education should change individuals into thoughtful people and the achievement of education must be the reflective mind. Unfortunately, Iranian educational system ignored such responsibility and also head into different direction. Apparently, education is limited to memorization of materials that is due to curriculum planning and educational assessment. In other words, the emphasis of education is on the final assessment rather than students' process of learning during a semester. Many teachers spend most of their teaching time on talking and asking questions that need abstract meanings and only a few minutes is devoted to questions which require thoughtful answers (Fahim et al., 2010). Thus, learners would be directed to imitation and passive approval of the taught materials, without having the chance of thinking upon the questions brought up in class.

Listening comprehension ability is a complex process that lets students understand and interpret spoken messages in real time by making use of a variety of sources such as phonetic, phonological, prosodic, lexical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic (Lynch, 2009). Without listening, learners cannot effectively show themselves and receive attentions from speakers which is effective communication.



More importantly, listening is one part of the L2 learning that nearly most of L2 learners face and have problems in it. It is also one of the fundamental means of communication that can effectively be improved via raising learners' critical skill (Kamali & Fahim 2011). In many language learning classrooms, the priority is assigned to improving the other language skills, with little attention to basic premises of higher-level thinking (Geertsen, 2003). Further, he mentioned that the learners may receive a good command of the language itself, but they are most probably, unable to think effectively using that language.

Unfortunately, in Iranian educational system where teaching is based on a traditional teaching framework, students are not trained to be a critical thinker. In such a system, the teacher's task is primarily to cover all the instructional materials instead of leading the students to reflect on what they are learning. Teachers are considered to be the source of all the necessary information who train passive individuals that are loaded with various materials. Moreover, students' ideas are being ignored and they are not given a chance to express themselves (Fahim & Azarniوشي, 2011), thus, they never acquire the necessary thinking skills. Since Iranian teachers were trained in this system, they are not able to take their students beyond what they themselves are, therefore another generation of passive learners is brought up. Regarding the above-mentioned problems, the present study focused on students' critical thinking ability and their listening comprehension strategies in order to explore the possible relationship between them in Iranian educational system.

In such a developing country like Iran, some experts indicated their concerns about students' inability in thinking critically (Khalili et al., 2004). In Shabani's (2004) view, the primary goal of education should be fostering individuals with the ability to think critically, in other words, a 'mind probing' individual. Also, Weiler (2005) noted the importance of critical thinking in the process of learning and cognitive development. The role of critical thinking is emphasized in the domain of language learning, where the reasons behind the success and failure of EFL learners have stimulated some researchers to evaluate different aspects of this process. In addition, improving students' critical thinking ability and leading their ways of thinking, may have significant effect on learners' overall language learning. Furthermore, enhancing students' autonomy and critical thinking ability in the course of learning may help them to rely on their own decisions and thoughts regarding the strategies and techniques that they would want to use in learning a language.

Accordingly, the current study can help educational decision makers in identifying the extent to which students think critically, and also it can help teachers become aware of the importance of learners' critical thinking skill and teaching them how to use this skill to be successful in different procedures of education. More importantly, it can be beneficial and significant for both language instructors and students since it specifies the use of listening comprehension strategies of learners and the importance of these strategies in the process of learning a language will be highlighted more than before. The results can help language instructors to increase their teaching on listening skill and to change any misconceptions related to the students learning. Furthermore, students' awareness of the suitable strategies can develop their proficiency and competence. Besides, highlighting students' listening comprehension strategies may help them get over the challenges and problems they would encounter in listening comprehension skill and also improve the strategies to become more motivated and independent in learning a skill such as listening. Accordingly, being aware of learning the related strategies, the



students' proficiency and competence can improve. Simultaneously, evaluating students' listening comprehension strategies related to their thinking ability may help in finding out the different aspects about their language learning, because critical thinking affects learners' decision and choices of learning strategies in the process of learning.

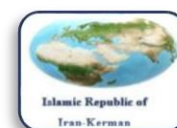
LITERATURE REVIEW

Following related studies carried out on learners' critical thinking ability and foreign language learning.

In Iranian context, Nikoopour et al., (2011), analyzed the relationship between CT and the use of direct and indirect language learning strategies. Findings showed significant relationship between CT and cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies, while no relationship was found between critical thinking and memory, compensations and affective strategies. Mohammadi et al., (2012) also studied on the relationship between CT ability and reading strategies of EFL learners. Findings demonstrated a dominant correlation between CT and overall reading strategy use. In the same vein, Hosseini et al., (2012) analyzed the relationship between CT ability, reading comprehension and reading strategy of students. Findings indicated positive correlation between students' CT and reading comprehension, as well as metacognitive and cognitive reading strategy use, as reading needs good thinking skills and various strategies in order to understand and withdraw information from a text.

In an experimental approach, Khodadady et al., (2011) analyzed the effect of applying brainstorming strategies on improving students' speaking proficiency and CT skills in an IELTS preparation course. Findings revealed positive correlation. In the next year, Fahim and Komijani (2012) analyzed the relationship between students' CT, vocabulary strategies and vocabulary knowledge. Findings revealed that students' knowledge of L2 vocabulary was significantly correlated with their CT, in other words, students with greater CT ability scored higher on the vocabulary test. Moreover, Keihaniyan (2013) examined CT ability of 100 undergraduate students and its relation to language proficiency. Results of ANOVA test showed a significant difference in the mean score of the four groups. Also, the mean score of the excellent group was significantly various from the other three groups.

Similarly, Parsi (2017) investigated the relationship between EFL teachers' critical thinking and use of motivational strategies. 101 EFL teachers were selected randomly from private language schools and motivational strategies and critical thinking questionnaires were used to collect data. Findings revealed no correlation between critical thinking and motivational strategies. Additionally, Ghiasian and Shariati Rad (2019) analyzed the relationship between EFL students' critical thinking and their reading comprehension skill. A sample of 150 BA students were selected and results indicated that critical thinking has effect on reading comprehension skill. in other words, highly critical thinkers outperformed the lower ones. In a recent study, Arfae (2020) carried out a quasi-experimental study to analyzed the impact of teaching critical thinking on the speaking skill of EFL learners. 44 male and female intermediate students at a language school were selected and results showed a significant relationship between the promotion of critical thinking and EFL learners' speaking skill. Furthermore, in foreign context, Erkek and Batur (2021) have done a comparative study on critical thinking from critical reading attainments to critical listening attainments. They emphasized on the development of curriculums and materials to be prepared for Turkish course in order to serve the needs of the era by creating a critical



listening attainment list from the philosophy of the national curriculum and from the education programs of countries which are considered successful internationally.

In another recent work, Memari (2021) analyzed the effect of critical thinking skill on EFL learners' cause and effect essay writing and their attitudes towards it. 60 Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners were randomly divided into two equal control and experimental groups. The results indicated that the critical thinking instruction had meaningful consequences on the cause-and-effect essay writing, and the participants had positive attitudes towards the training. In the same year, Zare et al., (2021) explored the effect of critical thinking-oriented dynamic assessment on EFL students' reading comprehension performances. The results highlighted that CT-DA and DA groups outperformed the control group. The results signified the efficacy of the type of mediation, which was presented through dynamic assessment procedure on enhancing the learners' reading achievement. Also comparing results of critical thinking-oriented dynamic assessment and dynamic assessment revealed no statistical difference, which showed that both types of mediations had a similar impact on the students' reading achievement.

Most of the previous studied evaluated the relationship between CT and reading comprehension skill, and some of them considered the relationship between CT and speaking skill, writing skill, vocabulary knowledge, language proficiency, motivational strategies, etc. Although in the literature there has been little work on CT and listening skill, but none of them referred to analyze the relationship between advanced EFL learners' critical thinking and their employed listening comprehension strategies. Moreover, apart from the various factors such as motivation, age, language proficiency, gender, and learning style, which affect the choice of language learning strategies among EFL learners, critical thinking is also considered important in the field of education due to its possible effect on language learning (Villavicencio, 2011). In past, critical thinking was only considered important in L1 speaking contexts. More recently, however, the ways in which critical thinking can be taught and interpreted has become a major issue for L2 learning scholars (Thompson, 2012). Likewise, learning underwent a shift from rote training to a continuous process of discovering, questioning and reformulating hypotheses (Pennycook, 2014). In its underline reason, this research may fill the gap in the literature by employing listening comprehension strategies in other educational setting and levels, shed a light on using new method of learning language skills instead of conventional ways. After conducting this research, it is hoped that more educators interested in applying such strategies and provide new learning environment at anytime and anywhere.

Considering above discussion, this study considered two variables which are critical thinking and EFL learners' listening comprehension strategies. More specifically, the study tried to measure the EFL learners' critical thinking and the employed listening comprehension strategies. Moreover, study aimed at examining the relationship between advanced EFL students' listening comprehension strategies and their critical thinking ability.

To meet the research objectives, following questions were formed:

RQ1. To what extent do the Iranian EFL learners think critically?

RQ2. To what extent do the Iranian EFL learners employed listening comprehension strategies?

RQ3. Is there any significance relationship between the EFL learner's listening comprehension strategies and their critical thinking ability?



METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants of this study were the Iranian EFL learners who were studying English as a foreign language in a language institute of Kerman. A total number of 75 advanced EFL learners of both genders were selected as the participants of this research. The participants included 34 male and 41 female with the range of ages 20 to 24. The students had already studied English for five years at the institute. They received English for four hours a week and there were no opportunities of actual English use outside the classroom. All the participants were native speakers of Persian.

According to Orodho (2008), sampling is the process of selecting a given number of subjects from a defined population as representative of that population. The technique used for sampling of this study was "convenience sampling". That is to say, all the advance EFL learners were selected as the sample of this study. In other words, four intact classes consisted of 75 English learners of both genders who were the participants of the present project and were chosen based on cluster sampling.

Instruments

Questionnaire

In order to gather data, first, Oxford Placement Test was used to homogenize the students. Out of 80 students, 75 participants whose scores on the language proficiency test fell within ± 1 standard deviation of the mean score, attended in the present project. After that, two related questionnaires, Critical Thinking Questionnaire (CTQ) and Listening Comprehension Strategies Questionnaire (LCSQ) were employed in the present project. Both of the questionnaires consisted two parts that the first part explored the information about the students' age, gender, years of studying English, and the second part included some related items. Since all the participants were advanced EFL learners, it was not necessary to translate the questionnaires. It should be noted that the validity and reliability of the questionnaires were checked. The content validity of the individual items was determined by expert opinion in the area of language methodology. More specifically, three steps took place, which were;

Suitability of the items was investigated for the study population by referring to the similar studies in similar cases.

- a. Wording of the survey instruments was examined by two experts.
- b. The adapted research instruments were checked according to the research questions and objectives.
- c. Length of the questionnaire and the questions difficulty was modified by referring to the similar literature.

Additionally, Sarigoz (2012) reported that the reliability of CTQ Questionnaire was calculated and Cronbach Alpha internal reliability coefficient of the survey consisting of 21 questions was counted 0.87. Also, the Cronbach Alpha internal reliability coefficient of the LCSQ including 20 questions was reported 0.85.

Placement Test



Before the treatment session began, all participants participated in Oxford Placement Test. It is the standardized, reliable, and valid test. It was used to check the homogeneity of the group in terms of their listening comprehension level. The test was comprised of 20 multiple-choice listening comprehension questions.

Critical Thinking Questionnaire (CTQ)

To explore the attitudes and thoughts of the participants on critical thinking, Critical Thinking Questionnaire (CTQ) was used. The questionnaires consist of two parts whose first part explored some information about the student's gender, age and years of studying English at institute. The second part of the survey includes 21 items of five-point Likert as (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) Often, (5) Always. The survey was adopted by Sarigoz (2012) after reviewing the relevant literature on critical thinking ability. Actually, the questionnaire checked respondents' inference, deduction, and evaluation.

Listening Comprehension Strategies Questionnaire (LCSQ)

A four-point Likert-scale questionnaire ranging from "Never" to "Always" was also adapted from Abdalhamid (2012) to analyze the participants' perceived use of listening comprehension strategies. The questionnaire was initially adapted from a combination of previous two studies: Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010) and Taguchi (2002). Listening Comprehension Strategies Questionnaire (LCSQ) was used to explore different listening comprehension strategies employed by the EFL learners in their classes. The questionnaire comprised 20 items related to Cognitive Strategies (inference, elaboration, imagery, translation, transfer, repetition and note-taking), Metacognitive Strategies (planning, monitoring, evaluation and problem-identification) and Socio-affective Strategies (questioning for clarification, cooperation, lower anxiety, self-encouragement and taking emotional temperature). The items asked the respondents to reflect their use of each listening comprehension strategy while listening in English.

Procedures

In order to investigate the relationship between critical thinking ability on Iranian students' listening comprehension strategies, two instruments were used to collect data i.e., Critical Thinking Questionnaire (CTQ), and Listening Comprehension Strategies questionnaire (LCSQ). As it was mentioned above, four intact classes included 75 EFL students were chosen based on the cluster sampling.

At first, all the students took part in Oxford Placement Test for homogenizing. Regarding the obtained scores, 75 of them were selected. In the following day, there was a conversation with students and they were told the instruction completely and obviously. In fact, the researcher informed them and explained them if there were any questions or concerns. Also, they were told that their participation was voluntary, and were asked to answer as honestly as possible. After their preparing, the selected participants were provided with Critical Thinking Questionnaire (CTQ) to evaluate the strategies employed by them. They were asked to answer the items within a quarter and writing their names was necessary. The selected students had to answer all the items carefully for analyzing their ability to think critically. The researcher



explained the instruction of this survey clearly and provided the learners with all the essential things on answering the questionnaire.

On the third day, Listening Comprehension Strategies Questionnaires (LCSQ) were distributed among them. The Participants had to read the instructions carefully and respond all the questions with limited time (20 minutes). The participants were asked to indicate if they used any particular strategy. In other words, it was employed for being aware which strategies were used by the advance EFL learners. Fortunately, none of the students were absent during the data collection procedure, and this factor would increase the reliability of the results. Eventually, all the questionnaires were gathered for analyzing and interpreting.

Design and Analyses

The research design is quantitative in nature. It was designed to investigate the relationship between the use of students' listening comprehension strategies and their critical thinking ability. According to Gay and Airasian (2003), research design is an approach to integrate different elements of a research project in a consistent and coherent fashion in order to address a predefined set of study questions. As stated earlier, this study seeks to answer the research questions formulated for educational purposes in language institute. Quantitative research method is kind of research method which deals with numbers and anything that is measurable in a systematic way of investigation of phenomena and their relationships. It is used to answer questions on relationships within measurable variables with an intention to explain, predict and control a phenomenon (Leedy,1993). Moreover, the questionnaire survey technique is a very effective quantitative technique since it enables large scale numerical data to be obtained over a short period of time. In this study the researcher gained numerical data to indicate the possible relationship between the mentioned variables; critical thinking ability and listening comprehension strategies among Iranian EFL learners.

Data analysis addressed quantitative data, including questionnaires. The collected data were analyzed by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, mean, and percentage were reported for respondents' answers on the questionnaires. Moreover, inferential statistics was applied in order to check the relationship between the variables, students' listening comprehension strategies and critical thinking ability.

RESULTS

As mentioned before, based on the objectives of this project, two related questionnaires were applied and the results are detailed by the following tables.

Analysis of Critical Thinking Questionnaire (CTQ)

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics analysis includes frequency and percentage of each item of critical thinking questionnaire. The questionnaire evaluated 21 items of five-point Likert as (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) Often, (5) Always. Frequency and percentage of all the items were shown by the following table.



Table 1*Descriptive Statistics of Critical Thinking Questionnaire*

Critical Thinking Questionnaire (CTQ)							
N	Items	F/P	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	When I encounter a matter, I consider it with prejudice without thinking.	F	7	10	17	26	15
		P	9.3%	13.3%	22.7%	34.7%	20%
2	When I encounter a matter, I realize whether the subject is from first hand or second hand.	F	3	11	29	22	10
		P	4%	14.7%	38.7%	29.3%	13.3%
3	I deduce regarding the explained matter and I can evaluate the reasons of these deductions.	F	6	11	23	28	7
		P	8%	14.7%	30.7%	37.3%	9.3%
4	I can understand pale in the matter and obscurities from explanations regarding the matter.	F	5	11	22	30	7
		P	6.7%	14.7%	29.3%	40%	9.3%
5	I can detect the problems in a matter, explain and define them.	F	2	12	30	21	10
		P	2.7%	16%	40%	28%	13.3%
6	When I encounter a problem, I can solve it, and make deductions.	F	4	20	20	25	6
		P	5.3%	26.7%	26.7%	33.3%	8%
7	While a matter is explained, I can analyze it by thinking the data regarding that matter.	F	7	8	31	21	8
		P	9.3%	10.7%	41.3%	28%	10.7%
8	By means of my thoughts regarding a matter, I can improve hypostasis regarding the matter.	F	7	18	18	28	4
		P	9.3%	24%	24%	37.3%	5.3%
9	I can pass an accurate judgment on the matter, and I can come to a conclusion with my thoughts.	F	2	15	18	29	11
		P	2.7%	20%	24%	38.7%	14.7%
10	When I read a matter, I can understand the main idea and intention of the writer.	F	1	13	34	18	9
		P	1.3%	17.3%	45.3%	24%	12%
11		F	5	14	21	27	8



	By means of my thoughts, I can make comments and can judge the matters.	P	6.7%	18.7%	28%	36%	10.7%
12	When I encounter a matter, I can Express my thoughts regarding matter and I can defend my opinions.	F	7	9	29	24	6
		P	9.3%	12%	38.7%	32%	8%
13	I can explain my thoughts regarding a matter convincingly and logically.	F	6	15	23	24	7
		P	8%	20%	30.7%	32%	9.3%
14	By means of explanations regarding a matter, I can predict the ideas unexplained.	F	1	24	23	21	6
		P	1.3%	32%	30.7%	28%	8%
15	From the explanations regarding a matter, I can find the contradiction between reason and result.	F	6	18	24	22	5
		P	8%	24%	32%	29.3%	6.7%
16	While a matter is explained, I can concentrate on the matter together with my thoughts.	F	5	10	20	28	12
		P	6.7%	13.3%	26.7%	37.3%	16%
17	By means of explanations regarding a matter, I can establish striking connections regarding the matter.	F	4	9	26	29	7
		P	5.3%	12%	34.7%	38.7%	9.3%
18	When I encounter a matter, I can think critically, reasoningly and analytically.	F	4	9	29	24	9
		P	5.3%	12%	38.7%	32%	12%
19	When I encounter a matter, I can visualize it and can feel as the main character of the matter.	F	4	11	25	26	9
		P	5.3%	14.7%	33.3%	34.7%	12%
20	When I encounter a matter, I can be more elaborative thanks to my thoughts.	F	2	13	31	21	8
		P	2.7%	17.3%	41.3%	28%	10.7%
21	When I encounter a matter or an action, my thoughts do not misguide me.	F	4	13	31	24	3
		P	5.3%	17.3%	41.3%	32%	4%

Data analysis of the critical thinking questionnaire indicated 34.7% of the students often, followed by 22.7% sometimes, 20% always, 13.3% rarely, and 9.3% never declared when they encountered a matter, they considered it with prejudice without thinking. After that, 38.7% of the participants sometimes, and 29.3% of them often sated when they encountered a matter, they realized whether the subject is from first hand or second hand. Then, a great percentage of the subjects (68%) sometimes and often deduced regarding the explained matter and they could evaluate the reasons of these deductions. 14.7% of them rarely agreed, and 8% of the participants never agreed on the proposed statement. Besides, most of the EFL teachers (40%) often understood pale in the matter and obscurities from explanations regarding the matter. Also, 29.3% of them sometimes agreed, and 14.7% rarely agreed on this item. Once again, (40%)



were sometimes able to detect the problems in a matter, explain and define them. While 28% were often able, and 16% were rarely able to detect the problems.

Based on the data analysis, most of the EFL teachers (33.3%) often solve a problem and made deductions. The same percentage of the (26.7%) rarely and sometimes agreed on the mentioned item. Moreover, most of them (41.3%) could often analyze a matter by thinking the data regarding that matter, and the low but the same percentage (10.7%) indicated their agreement by choosing "rarely" and "always" options. One more time, the same percentage (24%) of the respondents agreed that they can sometimes and rarely improve hypostasis regarding the matter. In addition, most of them (38.7%) agreed that they could often pass an accurate judgment on the matter, and they could come to a conclusion with my thoughts. 24% of them noted that sometimes, and 14.7% stated they could always pass an accurate judgment. Furthermore, most of the subjects (45.3%) mentioned that when they read a matter, they could understand the main idea and intention of the writer, 24% of them declared often, and 17.3% said rarely understood the intention of the writer.

Evaluating the items of critical thinking questionnaire showed that 36% of the advanced learners could often make comments and could judge the matters. Whereas, 28% of participants stated sometimes, and 18.7% rarely made judgments. Also, most of the EFL learners (38.7% and 32% said when they encountered a matter, they could sometimes and often express their thoughts regarding matter and they could define their opinions. Moreover, 32% and 30.7% of the students could often and sometimes explained their thoughts regarding a matter convincingly and logically. After that 28% of the students often, and 30.7% of them could sometimes predict the ideas unexplained. Once again, most of the students (32%) believed they could sometimes and 29.3% though they could often find the contradiction between reason and result.

After examining the critical thinking items, 37.3% of the participants often agreed that while a matter is explained, they could concentrate on the matter together with their thoughts, and 26.7% sometimes and 16% always agreed on the mentioned statement. In addition, 38.7% and 34.7% stated they could often and sometimes establish striking connections regarding the matter. One more time 38.7% of the students highlighted that when they encountered a matter, they could sometimes think critically, reasoningly and analytically. Also, 32% of them could often think critically, etc. most of the students with the near percentage, 34.7% and 33.3% could often and sometimes visualize a matter and could feel as the main character of the matter. Based on the outcomes, exactly the same percentage of the students (41.3%) noted that when they encountered a matter, they could sometimes be more elaborative thanks to their thoughts and their thoughts do not misguide them. while, a low percentage of the learners (2.7% & 5.7%) agreed on the mentioned items. Surprisingly, the same percentage of them (17.3%) could rarely be more elaborative thanks to their thoughts and their thoughts did not misguide them.

Analysis of Listening Comprehension Strategies Questionnaire (LCSQ)

Table 2 illustrated descriptive statistics analysis includes frequency and percentage of each item of listening comprehension strategies questionnaire. The questionnaire evaluated 20 items of five-point



Likert as (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) Often, (5) Always. Frequency and percentage of all the items were shown by the following table.

Based on the careful analysis, the same percentage (32%) sometimes and often focused on the meaning of every word to understand the whole text. However, 20% always, and 16% % of them rarely agreed on the mentioned statement. Also, nearly 41% sometimes, and 37% often tried to picture the setting of the conversation to understand what the speakers were talking about. Once again, the same percentage (about 33%), before listening, they sometimes and often think of similar texts that they may have listened. In addition, most of the respondents (68%) sometimes and often used the words they understand to help them guess the meaning of the words they did not understand. Besides, about 41% and 37% sometimes and often used the main idea of the text to help them guess the meaning of the words that they didn't know, and a low percentage (12%) rarely agreed on this item.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Listening Comprehension Strategies Questionnaire

Listening Comprehension Strategies Questionnaire							
N	Items	F/P					
			Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	I focus on the meaning of every word to understand the whole text.	F	0	12	24	24	15
		P	0%	16%	32%	32%	20%
2	I try to picture the setting of the conversation to understand what the speakers are talking about.	F	1	12	31	28	3
		P	1.3%	16%	41.3%	37.3%	4%
3	Before listening, I think of similar texts that I may have listened to.	F	2	16	25	25	7
		P	2.7%	21.3%	33.3%	33.3%	9.3%
4	I use the words I understand to help me guess the meaning of the words I don't understand.	F	5	7	23	28	12
		P	6.7%	9.3%	30.7%	37.3%	16%
5	I use the main idea of the text to help me guess the meaning of the words that I don't know.	F	3	9	31	28	4
		P	4%	12%	41.3%	37.3%	5.3%
6	I use my knowledge and personal experience to help me understand the topic.	F	2	10	23	32	8
		P	2.7%	13.3%	30.7%	42.7%	10.7%
7	As I listen, I compare what I understand with what I already know about the topic.	F	5	7	24	33	6
		P	6.7%	9.3%	32%	44%	8%
8	Before I start to listen, I have a plan in my head for how I am going to listen.	F	3	9	29	22	12
		P	4%	22.7%	25.3%	30.7%	17.3%
9	While listening, I translate in my head.	F	1	12	22	29	11
		P	1.3%	16%	29.3%	38.7%	14.7%



10	As I listen, I adjust my interpretation if I realize that it is not correct.	F	3	17	19	23	13
		P	4%	22.7%	25.3%	30.7%	17.3%
11	As I listen, I occasionally ask myself if I am satisfied with my level of comprehension.	F	7	13	25	17	13
		P	9.3%	17.3%	33.3%	22.7%	17.3%
12	While listening, I try to relax.	F	5	10	22	23	15
		P	6.7%	13.3%	29.3%	30.7%	20%
13	I try not to feel nervous as I listen to English.	F	4	16	25	25	5
		P	3.7%	20.3%	33.3%	33.3%	9.3%
14	As I listen, I have a goal in my head.	F	7	5	23	28	12
		P	9.3%	6.7%	30.7%	37.3%	16%
15	When I don't understand something, I try not to worry so much about it.	F	4	9	31	28	3
		P	5.3%	12%	41.3%	37.3%	4%
16	When I guess the meaning of a word, I think back to everything else that I have heard, to see if my guess makes sense.	F	6	11	23	28	7
		P	8%	14.7%	30.7%	37.3%	9.3%
17	I always try to enjoy listening.	F	5	11	22	30	7
		P	6.7%	14.7%	29.3%	40%	9.3%
18	After listening, I think back to how I listened, and about what I might do differently next time.	F	5	14	21	27	8
		P	6.7%	18.7%	28%	36%	10.7%
19	I focus harder on the text when I have trouble understanding.	F	7	9	29	24	6
		P	9.3%	12%	38.7%	32%	8%
20	I feel that listening in English is a challenge for me.	F	5	14	24	26	6
		P	8.7%	12.00%	38.00%	32%	9.3%

As the above table highlighted a high percentage of the learners (42.7%) often, and 30.7% sometimes used their knowledge and personal experience to help them understand the topic. Once again, most of the EFL learners (44%) often and 32% sometimes compared what they understood with what they already know about the topic as they listened. Additionally, exactly 68% of the learners sometimes and often translated in their head while listening, and 30.7% of the students adjusted their interpretation if they realize that it is not correct as they listen. The results of the above table indicated, more than half of the students (56%) sometimes and often ask themselves if they were satisfied with their level of comprehension, and the same percentage (17.3%) rarely and always agreed on the mentioned item. After that, exactly 60% of the participants sometimes and often tried to relax while listening, and the same percentage (33.3%) sometimes and often tried not to feel nervous as they listened to English. moreover, 68% of the EFL learners sometimes and often had a goal in their head as they listened, and exactly 79% of the students stated When they didn't understand something, they sometimes and often tried not to worry so much about it.

Once again, data analysis illustrated 68% of the EFL students sometimes and often agreed that when they guessed the meaning of a word, they thought back to everything else that they had heard, to see if



they guess makes sense. In addition, most of the EFL learners (40%) often, and about 30% sometimes tried to enjoy listening. Besides, 64% of the participants stated that after listening, they often and sometimes thought back to how they listened, and about what they might do differently next time. Also, 70.7% of the students often and sometimes focused harder on the text when they had trouble understanding. The last item of the questionnaire displayed that most of the participants (68%) of this study sometimes and often felt listening in English is a challenge for them.

Data Analysis of Correlation Test

By analyzing data of the two questionnaires, correlation test was used for finding the possible relationship between the variables, critical thinking and listening comprehension strategies. More specifically, the study evaluated the possible relationship between the EFL learner's listening comprehensions strategies and their critical thinking ability.

Table 3

Data Analysis of Correlation Test

		Critical Thinking	Listening Strategies
Critical Thinking	Pearson Correlation	1	0.72
	Sig./P-value (1-tailed)		0.01
	N	75	75
Listening Strategies	Pearson Correlation	0.72	1
	Sig./P-value (1-tailed)	0.01	
	N	75	75

In this part the possible relationship between the students' listening strategies and critical thinking in an English institute was investigated. In table 3, Sig. or p-value is obtained as 0.01 and it is less than 0.05. The Pearson test is meaningful if the amount of Sig. / P-value is less than 0.05. Also, the correlation coefficient of critical thinking and listening comprehension strategies is 0.72 that shows the correlation between the mentioned variables. In the other place, the amount of 1, shows the positive relationship between two mentioned variables. It means that by increasing the level of one variable, the other one will also increase. Therefore, it can be said that there is a positive relationship between students' listening strategies and their critical thinking.

DISCUSSION

Measuring students' listening comprehension strategies and critical thinking, and then finding the possible relationship between them were the objectives of this study. According to the statistical achieved results, three research questions were evaluated and answered completely.

Revisiting the Research Questions

Q1. To what extent do the Iranian EFL learners think critically?

Data analysis of the critical thinking questionnaire indicated more than half of the EFL students often/sometimes considered a matter with prejudice without thinking, realized whether the subject is from first



hand or second hand, and solved a problem and made deductions. Also, more than half of them could often/ sometimes made comments, judge the matters, understood the main idea and intention of the writer. Once again, more than half of the participants could often/ sometimes explain their thoughts convincingly and logically, concentrate on the matter, predict the ideas, think critically and analytically, and finally find contradiction between reason and result.

Evaluating the items of critical thinking questionnaire illustrated that most of the EFL learners often/ sometimes deduced the matter, evaluated the reasons of these deductions, and understood pale in the matter and obscurities from explanations. Also, most of them were able to detect the problems, explain, analyze and define them. One more time, most of the respondents agreed that they could often/ sometimes pass an accurate judgment on the matter, express their thoughts, come to a conclusion with them, and defined their opinions. Eventually, most of the participants of this study often/ sometimes visualized a matter, felt as the main character of the matter and they were more elaborative thanks to their thoughts and their thoughts did not misguide them. According to the careful analysis most of the students' responses were often/ sometimes agreed on the items of critical thinking survey.

Q2. To what extent do the Iranian EFL learners employed listening comprehension strategies?

Measuring the listening strategies employed by the advanced EFL learners was done and the results indicated more than half of the students often/ sometimes focused on the meaning of every word to understand the whole text and thought of similar texts that they may have listened to. Also, more than half of them often/ sometimes used the words they understood to help them guess the meaning of the words they didn't understand. Besides, the same percentage translated in their head while listening, adjusted their interpretation and asked themselves if they were satisfied with their level of comprehension. Additionally, more than half of the participants often/sometimes tried to relax, not to feel nervous, enjoy and had a goal in their head as they listened.

Data analysis of the listening strategies highlighted that most of the EFL learners of this study often/sometimes focused harder on the text when they had trouble understanding and tried to picture the setting of the conversation to understand what the speakers were talking about. They also used the main idea of the text to help them guess the meaning, used their knowledge and personal experience to understand the topic, and compared what they understood with what they already know about the topic. Furthermore, most of the students often/ sometimes tried not to worry when they didn't understand something and they thought back to everything else that they had heard to see if they guess makes sense. Finally, most of them often/sometimes felt listening in English is a challenge for them and they focused harder on the text when they had trouble understanding. Based on the received data, the average of the proposed items demonstrated that a high percentage of the EFL advanced students were often and sometimes agreed on the statements related to the listening comprehension strategies.

Q3. Is there any significance relationship between EFL learner's listening comprehensions strategies and their critical thinking ability?

Regarding the above question, correlation test was used for finding the possible relationship between the variables, critical thinking and listening comprehension strategies. In the related table (3), Sig. or p-



value obtained as 0.01 that is less than 0.05. It should be noted that the Pearson test is meaningful if the amount of Sig. / P-value is less than 0.05. Also, the correlation coefficient of critical thinking and listening comprehension strategies is 0.72 which proved the correlation between the mentioned variables. In the other place, amount of 1 shows the positive relationship between two mentioned variables. That is to say, by increasing the level of one variable, the other one will also increase. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a positive relationship between students' listening comprehension strategies and their critical thinking.

As mentioned earlier, this study was an attempt to investigate the relationship between Iranian students' critical thinking ability and listening comprehension strategies. The findings revealed a significant difference between the two variables under study. In spite of the obtained results, teaching the elements of critical thinking is considered important in modern education (Ku, 2009). Notwithstanding the fact that critical thinking provides learners with the ability to deal efficiently and successfully with the fast-paced changes of the new technological world. To cultivate such competency, learners must go beyond focusing on textbook knowledge and develop the necessary cognitive skills to make valued judgments, rational arguments, and evaluations. Moreover, critical thinking is not only important for students to succeed in school or higher education, but it is also considered essential in the society where rational decisions should be made every day.

The results of this study are in line with the findings of Fahim et al., (2010); Hosseini et al., (2012); Nikoopour et al., (2011). In these studies, the results indicated a significant relationship between critical thinking ability of students and different aspects of language learning. Nikoopour et al., (2011), investigated the relationship between critical thinking and the use of direct and indirect language learning strategies. The results showed a statistically significant relationship between critical thinking and indirect language learning strategies. They found that the use of language learning strategies can improve students' way of thinking, thus, critical thinking should be implemented into language learning textbooks. In the study by Fahim and Komijani (2010), the researchers aimed at identifying the relationship between learners' critical thinking ability, vocabulary strategies and vocabulary knowledge. The results indicated that learners' CT was found to be positively correlated with their use of determination, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies. This reveals that critical thinkers act more independently in decision-making and problem solving, and they more or less rely on their own capabilities. In other words, critical thinkers are more creative in generating new ideas for solving problems and making use of these ideas in relevant tasks.

CONCLUSION

Exploring EFL students' attitudes towards listening comprehension strategies and measuring their ability of critical thinking were necessary to find the possible relationship between the mentioned variables of this research. Rating the students' opinions towards listening strategies and critical thinking indicated that the participants of this study often regarded the listening comprehension strategies while listening that is to say, the participants involved in applying listening strategies in the EFL classes. Also, the EFL learners of the research were remarkably able to think critically. More importantly, by carrying out this study, a positive relationship between the critical thinking ability and the listening comprehension strategies of Iranian EFL learners was proved. The findings of the study can be significant since



identifying the strategies that students apply will assist them to overcome the difficulties, they might encounter in different language skills, and also improve those strategies that motivate them and lead to becoming independent learners. Simultaneously, investigating students' language learning strategies in relation to their thinking ability helps in realizing different aspects about their language learning as critical thinking influences students' decision and choices of learning strategies in the process of learning.

This study may reveal the important role of critical thinking in improving learners' autonomy in managing their own process of learning, as well as emphasizing the role of language teachers in creating opportunities for students to actively participate in activities which promote their critical thinking skills. Although, relying on textbooks is not supported in the communicative language learning context, implementing aspects of critical thinking skills in language textbooks can foster these abilities which can be beneficial for both teachers and students. For instance, certain activities should be designed at the end of each chapter or unit to guide the students towards discussing, questioning and reflecting upon what they learnt throughout the unit. Therefore, teachers have the most effective role in turning the language classrooms into a thought-provoking context where learners find the opportunity to reflect upon different issues, raise questions, take part in discussions along with managing and evaluating their process of learning. Regarding the strategies of language skills, it is advisable that different educational setting specialized course for EFL students in different kinds of strategies' training. It is also advisable for students to familiarize themselves with the concept and types of strategies and their usages in order to utilize them during the process of listening. Also, it would be very beneficial for students if instructors could teach the theory and the use of listening comprehension strategies.

All in all, this study may show the importance of listening strategies by providing reasons for learners' choices of certain strategies which they find important in enhancing their listening skill. Therefore, language instructors should provide learners with the necessary language learning strategies and help them in becoming more responsible to achieve their language learning objectives. Also, the teachers should design useful activities and assign relevant tasks for students to improve their language skills. Thus, learning objectives can be achieved when students are provided with strategy-based training and teachers would be able to train students to choose the suitable strategies that best suits their language needs. Finally, learners will gain independence in dealing with the target language.

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Biodata

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