

Critical Thinking Skills through Literary and Non-Literary Texts in English Classes

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Abstract

The urge behind the current study was to argue for the development of critical thinking in language learners as an important element in EFL classes. A host of ways such as explicit teaching of critical thinking skills and using special programs have been hypothesized to improve learners' critical thinking ability. As a contribution to the current attempts to implant critical thinking in teaching and learning processes, the present study proposed employing literary texts in reading comprehension classes. To attain this goal, firstly, 34 learners were targeted as the participants of the study. Next, the pre-test of the study including a critical thinking test and a reading comprehension test was administered. Based on the results of the pretest, the participants were assigned into two homogeneous groups- experimental group and control group. Subsequently, both groups went through a 15-session reading comprehension course. The materials for the experimental group were literary texts extracted from different literary books and short stories. On the other hand, the materials for the control group were non-literary texts in the reading comprehension sections of books such as Interchange, Topnotch and Spectrum series. The same teaching method emphasizing critical thinking skills was used for teaching both groups. At the end of the course, a post-test including a

critical thinking test and a reading comprehension test was administered to assess learners' critical thinking and reading comprehension. The findings of the study revealed that literary texts, as they require imaginative and creative thinking and are rich in reasoning and inference, can serve teachers tremendously to improve learners' critical thinking ability. The results of the study have significant implications for teachers, researchers and material developers.

Keywords: Critical thinking, Literary texts, Reading comprehension

1. Introduction

It is of utmost priority for experienced teachers to train students' mind, and enable them to think critically and correctly. The most important questions here are the What and the How of such a crucial task. It is hard to formulate an encompassing definition for critical thinking, as it includes several levels of understanding. Paul & Elder (2001) believe that critical thinking is a mode of thinking about any subject, content, or problem. It is an ability with which students can improve their thinking quality by skillfully managing their thinking structures and intellectual criteria around them. Scriven and Paul (2003) defined critical thinking as an intellectually disciplined process in which students actively and skillfully conceptualize, apply, synthesize, and evaluate information generated by observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, and communication. Critical thinking does not expect students to answer the questions put in the class, but instead develops students' sound judgment for problem-solving, decision-making, and higher-order thinking (Case, 2002; Taylor & Patterson, 2000). Facione (2000) believes that critical thinking is a cognitive process of developing reasonable, logical, and reflective judgment about what to believe or what to do. In the same line, Watson and Glaser (2002), the authors of Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal, define critical thinking as a composite of attitudes, knowledge and skills. They point out that this composite includes: (1) attitudes of inquiry that involve an ability to recognize the existence of problems and an acceptance of the general need for evidence in support of what is asserted to be true; (2) knowledge of the nature of valid inferences, abstractions, and generalizations in which the weight or accuracy of different kinds of evidence are logically determined; and (3) skills in employing and applying the above attitudes and knowledge.

To make the concept of critical thinking more tangible some scholars in the field have devised some models of it. A case in point is the model developed by Anderson, Krathwohl, and Bloom (2001). The model includes knowledge, comprehension, inference, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. In the knowledge phase, students should learn how to experience, observe, intuit, and research. In the comprehension phase, students should learn how to internalize, recall, and to connect with other information. In the inference phase, students should learn how to make conjectures on something they do not have adequate data about. In the application phase, students should learn how to put to use what they know. In the analysis phase, they should know how to detect needed procedures and possible consequences. Besides, they should learn how to recognize parts and even subparts and put these parts together. Finally, they should render judgment based on their knowledge and experience.

2. Teaching Critical Thinking

As critical thinking is an indispensable part of teaching every subject, it is crucial for learners to master it. This very crucial ingredient of learning seems to be even more important when students enter higher education programs, because the responsibility of learning falls on their own shoulders with little help from outside. So it is critical for the learners to strengthen their critical thinking skills. To develop these skills in their mind and change their thinking habits learners need training. A host of methods have been proposed for implanting these skills in

learners. Paul, R. & Elder, L. (2007, p2) state that students are only able to think critically when “they are consciously and deliberately thinking through some dimension of the logic of the discipline they are studying”. Hence, we can conclude that there must be a formal instruction on How to be critical thinkers.

Halpern, (2003) discusses the notion of explicit instruction in how to think. She asserts that although many authorities in higher education do not agree that college students should receive explicit instruction in how to think, when thinking skills are explicitly taught for transfer, using multiple examples from several disciplines, students can learn to improve how they think. To do so, a Four-Part Model for explicit teaching of critical thinking is proposed which is as follows:

Part one- Dispositions for critical thinking: It explains that it won't be constructive to teach college students the skills of critical thinking, if they are not inclined to use them. A disposition for critical thinking is to be present in the learners or is to be cultivated.

Part two-Instruction in the skills: Critical thinking skills are to be instructed.

Part three- Structure training: It is a means of improving the probability that students will recognize when a particular thinking skill is needed, even in a novel context.

Part four: Metacognitive monitoring. Metacognition is usually defined as what we know about what we know. So metacognitive monitoring is determining how we can use the knowledge we already possess to direct and improve the thinking and learning processes. While engaging in critical thinking, students need to monitor their thinking process, check that progress is being made toward an appropriate goal, ensure accuracy, and make decisions about the use of time and mental effort.

Moreover, Schaefersman (1991) proposes that there are generally two methods for teaching critical thinking. The first method, according to him, is to simply modify one's teaching and testing methods slightly to enhance critical thinking among one's students. This can be materialized through lectures, laboratories, homework, quantitative exercises, term papers and exams. The second method makes use of formal critical thinking exercises, programs, and materials that have been prepared by specialists and can be purchased for immediate use by the teacher.

All of the methods and models have been tested and they've proved their usefulness in time, but what all these approaches seem to have failed to account for, is language. Language is the only thing that is common among all disciplines courses, so one should definitely take this very important point into consideration. This lack of attention gets even worse when we talk about language learning especially foreign language learning. English learning classes can be one of the places where learners' critical thinking abilities can be fostered. One of the avenues through which learners' critical thinking can be tapped in English classes is reading comprehension section. Traditionally, reading classes have been an opportunity for learners to enlarge their vocabulary repertoire. Learners in these classes mainly focus on the load of the information presented in the texts and accept the ideas prescribed there. The materials employed in the classes are mainly life stories, scientific articles and passages that lack the

potency to encourage learners to think critically. The reading exercises are often multiple-choice questions to test students' comprehension. To renovate the traditionally practiced methods in reading comprehensions classes and to implant critical thinking elements in the classes two areas can be worked on- the How and the What.

As for the How, students should be trained and encouraged to go beyond the surface meaning of the words engineered masterfully into texts. They should be instructed that meaning is not just the facts directly stated in the passage. According to Kurland (2000) to non-critical readers, texts provide facts. Readers gain knowledge by memorizing the statements within a text. However, according to Knott (2006), critical readers go two steps further. Having recognized what a text says, they reflect on what a text does by making remarks such as: Is it offering examples? Arguing? Appealing for sympathy? Making a contrast to clarify a point. Critical readers infer what the text, as a whole, means based on the earlier analysis. They look beyond the language to see if the reasons are clear. Critical readers thus recognize not only what a text says, but also how the text portrays the subject matter. Critical readers recognize the various ways in which each and every text is the unique creation of a unique author.

Landsberger (1996) argues that critical readers try to figure out the difference between facts, theory, opinion, and belief when they read. In the same line of argument, Starkey (2004, p. 96) differentiates between fact and opinion and states that critical readers ask themselves the following questions when they read a text:

- What is the topic of the book or reading?
- What issues are addressed?
- What conclusions does the author reach about the issue(s)?
- What are the author's reasons for his/her statements or beliefs? Is the author using facts, theory, or faith? Has the author used neutral words or emotional words?

Critical reading requires learners, according to Cottrell (2005), to focus our attention much more closely on certain parts of a written text, holding other information in mind. As it involves analysis, reflection, evaluation and making judgments, it usually involves slower reading than that used for recreational reading or for gaining general background information.

The model of teaching used in the current study was based on the model proposed by Jun Xu (2011). The model includes five steps that are as follows:

First step: Pre-reading--Introduction of background or cultural knowledge to students.

Second step: comprehension of the text and explicating the main idea of each paragraph.

Third step: analyzing the logic of the text.

Fourth step: evaluating the logic of the text.

Fifth Step: Writing.

As for the what, one of the most effective ways which instructors can tap learners' critical thinking is through the materials and particularly the texts they employ. Nuttall (1982) lists some useful guidelines in selecting a text:

1. Tell the students things they do not already know.
2. Introduce them to new and relevant ideas; make them think about things they have not thought about before.
3. Help them to understand the way other people feel or think.
4. Make them want to read for themselves.
5. Does the text challenge the students' level of foreign language?
6. If there are new lexical items, are they worth learning at this stage and not too numerous?
7. Are some of them understandable by means of inference from the context?
8. Does the text lend itself to intensive study?
9. Does it enable you to ask good questions or devise other forms of exploitation?

One of the text types that aptly fits this categorization is literature in general and literary texts in particular. Therefore, the researchers in this study employed this type of texts in reading comprehension classes to measure its influence on learners' critical thinking ability.

3. Merits of Employing Literature in EFL Classes

The literature on the applicability of literature in general and literary texts in particular in language learning classes is rich. Van (2009), for instance, enumerates the gains of employing literature in the EFL classroom as follows:

- It provides meaningful contexts;
- It involves a profound range of vocabulary, dialogues and prose;
- It appeals to imagination and enhances creativity;
- It develops cultural awareness;
- It encourages critical thinking;
- It is in line with CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) principles.

As for the last point he argues for the contribution of literature to the main tenets of CLT. He discusses that in CLT:

- *Meaning* is the outcome of the interaction between the reader's experience on the one hand, and the text's language, the reading context and the ideological assumptions underlying the text on the other. Accordingly, literature can enhance meaning.

- Learning is facilitated through *involvement and joy*, which can be created by literary style. Moreover, reading literature makes for more *active and critical thinking* and learning.
- Learning is facilitated through *authentic communication* and active involvement. As such, literature can be particularly useful as it provides opportunities for student-centered activities and collaborative group work.
- The *role of learners* as active and autonomous participants is emphasized, and as literature reading creates individual meanings, this goal is achieved.
- The *role of teachers* as facilitators, guides and active planners is embodied in the process of literary work and analysis.

Moreover, Nasr (2001) asserts that utilizing literature in EFL/ESL classes has the potential to consolidate the four language skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. As for cognitive skills, he argues that literature requires learners to think out and put into practice special reading strategies to deal with the idiosyncratic characteristics of verse and prose. As a result, it broadens learners' intellectual perspectives, and boosts their cognitive maturation. McKay (2001) also stresses that since certain syntactic patterns and certain stylistic word order inversions occur more frequently in literature, it can be an ideal reading content for EFL classroom because it involves the integration of four language skills, it also promotes students' close reading of texts, and it is an ideal source for extensive reading programs in L2 classroom because becoming engaged with literature will certainly increase students' interest in reading.

Finally, in the same line of arguments, Zoreda and Vivaldo-Lima (2008) discussing the significance of connecting culture to the language learning process state that "literature modules would be a great way to incorporate U.S. and British cultural elements while strengthening English reading abilities" (p.22). Elaborating on the benefits of literature in EFL/ESL classes, they emphasize that literature helps language teachers foster their own cultural, linguistic and interpretive skills, involves students overcome negative attitudes, if any, toward the target culture, and introduces variety into the language classroom.

4. Statement of the Problem and the Purpose of the Study

The problem addressed in the present study is not something local, in other words one cannot say that this is a problem that is characteristic of one particular group of students or society. Every human being, anywhere in the world, aspiring to be an efficient communicator in a language other than his /her native language or even in his/her mother tongue, will face it. Surely, the problem is not that serious for the beginners because the lack of vocabulary, grammatical structures and unfamiliarity with the new culture surpasses this problem. However, for advanced students who have little problem with vocabulary and grammar, something always seem to be lacking. The problem is that they simply cannot be like native critical readers of the target language. The learners are unable to read, write, listen, or speak as native speakers do. For instance, they cannot look for false arguments in a piece of writing and speak in a way to influence their listeners (or their readers if they plan to write

something). But when they are listening to a speech they are easily influenced by the speaker. The interesting point is that they can do these same activities in their own native language to some satisfactory extent, so one cannot argue that this is because of a general disability in a person. They know the forms of the language, but they are unfamiliar with the way it is used. Another problem is that the content of the material employed in reading comprehension classes mainly lack the potency to trigger the critical thinking skills in learners or they weakly do so. Still another problem is the questioning strategy in the passage employed in reading classes. The questions are hardly ever challenging. They only tap learners' surface knowledge about the passages.

The purpose of this study is to target the inability of advanced language learners to function as native critical readers in reading comprehension classes and to find a solution for it. As was mentioned, this study, particularly, focuses just on reading skill. It is preferred over the other skills because it is assumed to be a passive skill and learners are mostly passive when they are reading. In other words, they just receive the information without being consciously involved in it. So in order to train critical learners and foster critical thinking, it seems plausible to start with reading. This research, then, on the one hand, focuses on the influence of the literary texts in comparison to commonly practiced texts in language institutes on the level of the learners' level of critical thinking. On the other hand, the impact of this enhancement on the performance of the students in reading comprehension is investigated. It hopes to investigate the possibility of applying this new technique in language teaching and to anticipate a better performance of language learners in reading comprehension. With respect to the above-mentioned purposes, the following questions were formulated:

Question 1: Does employing literary texts in reading comprehension classes improve learners' critical thinking ability?

Question 2: Does a teaching model based on critical thinking regardless of the material employed for teaching improve learners' reading comprehension ability?

5. Methodology

5.1 Participants and Setting

To determine the truth or fallacy of our hypothesis which is the positive effect of using literary texts on the enhancement of the students' level of critical thinking and reading comprehension an experiment was conducted. A total number of 46 students were volunteered to participate in the experiment. They were all advanced students regarding their English proficiency. After the administration of the pretest, 34 subjects whose scores were within one standard deviation below/above the mean were chosen for the study. There were 20 female and 14 male participants. The experimenter was willing to have the same number of males and females, but the actual situation would not allow that. Then they were randomly assigned into two groups namely, control and experimental. They were informed that the course was going to be a reading comprehension course to improve their reading comprehension skill to enter IELTS or TOEFL course.

5.2 Instruments

The instruments used in this study were the Watson and Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal Form A, and the reading comprehension section of the 2005 TOFEL test.

5.2.1 The Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (WGCTA)

Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (WGCTA) measures CT using broad, nonspecific terms in five subsets:

1. Inference: discriminating among degrees of truth or falsity of inferences drawn from given data.
2. Recognition of assumptions: recognizing unstated assumptions or presuppositions in given statements or assertions.
3. Deduction: determining whether certain conclusions necessarily follow from information in given statements or premises.
4. Interpretation: weighing evidence and deciding if generalizations or conclusions based on the given data are warranted.
5. Evaluation of arguments: distinguishing between arguments that are strong and relevant and those that are weak or irrelevant to a particular question at issue (Warrell & Profetto-McGrath, 2007).

5.2.2 The 2005 TOFEL Test

In this study, the reading comprehension section of the 2005 TOFEL test was chosen. This section consisted of five reading comprehension passages and fifty multiple-choice items.

5.3 Procedure

The experiment was commenced by the administration of a pretest comprised of 2 parts:

- 1) The Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (WGCTA)
- 2) a test on reading comprehension (The 2005 TOFEL Test).

To administer the pre-test on critical thinking the participants were given 45 minutes to complete the test, with the additional of 5 to 10 minutes for the instructions. Therefore, it took about an hour to administer the test. As for the 2005 TOFEL Test, the participants were given 55 minutes to complete the test.

After administrating the tests and determining the students' levels, the homogeneity of the subjects was assured by ruling out the learners whose scores were not within one standard deviation below or above the mean. Furthermore, since the reliability of these tests was measured before, the resulting scores were assumed reliable.

In the second phase, the learners were divided into the experimental group and control group, consisting of 17 participants each. The participants in both groups attended reading comprehension class twice a week for 70 days at a private language institute. Both groups

received the same instruction based on the teaching method proposed by Jun,X. (2011). In the first phase of the instruction, the instructor activated students' knowledge about the topic. Before reading, the instructor asked students to read the title, the first or last paragraph or topic sentence of each paragraph. Then, the instructor asked the students to talk about their knowledge about the topic, and predict the content. In the second phase of the instruction, the instructor encouraged the students to guess or infer meaning by contextual clues. In this phase the instructor encouraged the learners to elicit the main idea of each paragraph based on their own thinking of the content rather than explaining word by word and sentence by sentence. In the third phase of the instruction, learners were encouraged to find out the key questions the author/poet is trying to answer, author/poet's fundamental purpose, author/poet's point of view with respect to the issue, author/poet's assumptions, the implications of the author/poet's reasoning, information the author/poet uses in reasoning through this issue, and author/poet's most basic concepts. In the fourth phase, the learners were pushed to evaluate the logic of the text. They were asked to see whether the author clearly states his or her meaning, is accurate in what he or she claims, is sufficiently precise in providing details and specifics when specifics are relevant, introduces irrelevant material thereby wandering from his/her purpose, and considers other relevant points of view. The last stage of instruction was writing. In this stage, learners were required to write summaries, commentaries, create similar stories or compose similar style argument of their own. Overall, the participants were not instructed to learn any new vocabulary or grammatical structures explicitly but they were persuaded to read some extracts from the books, magazines, newspapers, speeches and novels. The focus of the instructor was to make them understand the text.

What made the two groups different was the type of the text used. The texts used for the control group were mainly extracted from the books commonly used in English institutes in Iran such as English files series, interchange series and Top-notch series. On the other hand, the texts used for the experimental group were mainly poems, stories and literary extracts taken from magazines, newspapers, speeches and novels. When the 70 days of instruction finished, the posttests were administered. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS.

6. Findings

Once the data were obtained, SPSS were employed to analyze them. T-test and pair t-tests were run in order to see whether learners performed significantly different. To see how each group performed on posttests, paired t-test was utilized to compare the means of each group on its posttest. The goal behind this test was to see whether the students' performance in each group was significantly different on posttests or not. The results are presented in tables 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Table 1. Paired t-test for the performance of group A on comprehension pretest and posttest

VARIABLES	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
comprehension pretest	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
comprehension posttest	8.70588	3.47787	.84351	10.49404	6.91773	10.321	16	.000

As the results in table 1 show, the t-value (10.321) exceeds the t-critical (2.042) implying that group A performed significantly better on the reading comprehension posttest.

Table 2. Paired t-test for the performance of group B on comprehension pretest and posttest

Variables	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
comprehension pretest	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
comprehension posttest	1.27059	2.33893	.56727	11.50332	13.90845	22.398	16	.000

The results in table 2 show that the t-value (22.398) exceeds the t-critical (2.042) indicating that group B performed significantly better on the reading comprehension posttest.

Table 3. Paired t-test for the performance of group A on critical thinking pretest and posttest

Variables	Paired Differences							
Critical Thinking pretest	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Critical Thinking posttest	6.8823	5.4415	1.3197	-9.6801	-4.0845	5.215	16	.000

As can be seen in 3, the t-value (5.215) exceeds the t-critical (2.042) signaling that group A outperformed on the critical thinking posttest.

Table 4. Paired t-test for the performance of group B on critical thinking pretest and posttest

Variables	Paired Differences							
Critical Thinking pretest	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Critical Thinking posttest	1.96471	8.02295	1.94585	-23.77208	-15.52204	10.097	16	.000

As is shown in table 4, the t-value (10.097) exceeds the t-critical (2.042) implying that group B outperformed significantly on the critical thinking posttest.

In order to compare the performance of the experimental group and control group on comprehension and critical thinking skills independent t-test was run. The results of the posttest for comprehension and critical thinking are given in tables 5.

As the results in table 5 indicate the t-value (5.522) for the posttest on comprehension exceeds the t-critical (2.042) implying that group B performed significantly better than group A on the comprehension posttest. The table also depicts that the t-value (7.019) for the posttest on critical thinking exceeds the t-critical (2.042) implying that group B outperformed group A on the critical thinking posttest.

Table 5. T-test for the performance of both groups on critical thinking and comprehension posttests

Variables	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Posttest comprehension	5.52	32	.000	4.05882	5.5559	2.5616
Posttest critical thinking	7.01	32	.000	11.82353	15.254	8.3924

7. Discussion

The findings of the current study can be of much interest for language instructors and material developers. As was indicated, the learners in both experimental group and control group, despite working on different materials, experienced development in reading comprehension and critical thinking posttests. It can be argued that learners in both groups traditionally used to just focus on language mechanics in the reading comprehension classrooms. Conventionally, there is a prevailing misconception among learners and even teachers that reading comprehension class provides the best opportunity for focusing on grammar and vocabulary. This misconception takes teachers and learners' attention away from one of the most essential potentials of reading comprehension classroom that is working on the meaning implicit in the text and moving beyond the text. In traditional reading comprehension classes, the focus mainly is on the facts raised in the texts and learners rarely go beyond the text. In addition, in these classes learners are hardly encouraged to question the idea presented in the text. The traditional teaching method of reading comprehension hardly ever hints to the learners that there can be different interpretations of a text. As a result, it can be safely claimed that one of the reasons for learners' outperformance was owing to the introduction of the new teaching model in reading comprehension classes. The model of teaching itself helped the learners get rid of the shackles of the traditional practices in the reading comprehension classes. The new model opened new windows for learners and broadened their horizon through introducing techniques that help them comprehend, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the text. It encouraged the learners to apply the concepts at hand to other situations and contexts and to see the text from different perspectives and through different lenses. Experiencing this new model itself stimulated learners to read differently and actually modified their passive techniques. Pirozzi (2003) defines critical reading as “very high-level comprehension of written material requiring interpretation and evaluation skills”(p.325) and “it also entails using reference to go beyond what is stated explicitly,

filling in informational gaps, and coming to logical conclusions”(p.325). He further stresses that critical reading emphasizes the active nature of reading. The readers are not simply receiving the facts and knowledge in the text, but try to form their own opinions and viewpoints about what they read from the texts. According to Wallace (1999), in language teaching critical means both a preparedness to question and reflect on the meaning and uses of language and it argues for the need to draw attention to the ideological bases of discourses as they circulate both in everyday life and within specific texts. Paul (1995) argues that the reading class should train critical readers. He, therefore, emphasizes that critical readers should question, organize, interpret, synthesize, and digest what they read.

Another finding of the study, which was more revealing than the previous one, was the outperformance of learners in the experimental group, who experienced literary texts, on both reading comprehension and critical thinking posttests in comparison with the learners in the control group who experienced non-literary texts. This signals that in addition to the teaching method, the materials employed for teaching can play a pivotal role and directly or indirectly assist learners in the formulation of their thoughts as critical thinkers.

Learners in the experimental group enjoyed literary texts which are mainly rich and lend themselves to a host of purposes. One of the reasons that can be put forward to support the potency of literary texts to contribute to learners' critical thinking and reading comprehension is that these texts bring about desirable motivation on the part of the learners. If motivated, learners pursue the reading text more enthusiastically and pay more attention to the ideas introduced. Ghosn (2002) and Van (2009) argue that literary texts are very motivating due to their authenticity and the meaningful context they provide. Shrestah (2008) also highlights the paramount significance of motivation and authenticity that short stories bring about.

Another line of argument that supports the constructive role of literature in fostering critical thinking and reading comprehension is that it invites learners into the world of problem solving. Problem solving requires analysis, synthesis and evaluation of different aspects of the same or different issues. Literary texts involve learners in problem-solving tasks through resolving conflicts. According to Ghosn (2002), children's stories are replete with perceptible conflicts for readers to identify with, and that empower learners to commiserate with characters experiencing challenging conflicts in hazardous situations. Having elaborated on the themes, plots, characterizations, points of view, symbols and allegory, the teacher will definitely empower the learners to conceive their world better, to discover their own solutions, thus boosting the skills and insights they are in need of while dealing with conflicts themselves (Schomberg, 1993).

One of the skills of critical thinking ability is application. Literature helps the learners to apply the concept they experience in the reading comprehension classes to real life situations. Ghosn (2002) stresses that since different stories encompass diverse themes, students can be familiarized with these insightful themes which can be extrapolated to the real-world situations. Moreover, Bettelheim (1986) puts forth that through literature learners come to appreciate and perceive themselves and others more thoroughly so that they can sympathize

and empathize with the characters in the stories and then they can generalize the feelings and emotions to the real-world contexts.

Creative and imaginative capacities of learners are the key elements pushing them toward thinking critically. As critical thinkers, learners are required to devise different solutions to the problems and develop different pictures of the same issue in their mind. As Ladousse - Porter (2001) postulate, on top of its appeal to creativity and imagination, reading a work of literature activates and enhances the reader's emotional intelligence (EQ), and this makes literature particularly suited to the language classroom where the constituents of emotional intelligence, namely self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills (Goleman, 1998), all contribute to more effective language learning.

Learners in the control group, on the other hand, experienced non-literary texts in their reading comprehension classes. As the findings of the study revealed, learners in this group were not as successful as the learners in the experimental group on reading comprehension and critical thinking posttests. As the teaching method for both groups was the same, it can be argued that the weaker performance of this group can be due to the material employed for this group. The texts used for this group lacked the potency to trigger learners' higher order thinking. These texts mainly dealt with issues which were handled superficially and artificially. The lacked the naturalness and authenticity of literary texts. Moreover, the ideas and concepts included and discussed in these texts did not lend themselves to deep processing and reflection. To put it more simply, they were not rich enough to be questioned critically and most of the questions proposed based on the critical model of teaching in the reading comprehension class were left without convincing answers. Learners in the control group frequently complained about the vagueness of the work they were doing. They objected that the texts hardly lend themselves for further elaboration and evaluation. They also used to complain that the texts lack the fertility to raise critical questions.

8. Conclusion

So far many language teaching methods and techniques have been developed and many different types of materials have been proposed by great figures in the field of English language teaching. The How and What questions of language learning have been central to most of them. However, regarding the ways that one can produce and/or receive information through language in such a critical way that native critical readers do less has been done. The art and the science of narration and composition have developed and people mostly mean more than the words they produce. In order to read between lines, the old tools and techniques are not beneficial anymore and much more advanced equipment is required. Here it is to be emphasized that the ability to express your idea fluently and accurately is not the peak for language learners. In addition to being competent, learners should learn how to produce and receive information through language critically. Based on what mentioned and lots of other reasons, one can conclude that in the process of language learning and teaching, foreign language learners lack some essential elements in their methods and techniques. These vital elements in teaching and learning language are critical thinking skills. The task at this juncture is to integrate these elements to the whole teaching recipe. By introducing and

teaching critical thinking in the classrooms and materials and improving students' critical thinking faculty, teachers not only help them communicate more purposefully, but also help them to be more thoughtful.

The current study targeted two main elements - the instruction method and the material employed - responsible for learners' inability to go beyond the mere facts stated in the texts utilized in reading comprehension classes and their lack of critical thinking ability. It had two questions to answer:

Question 1: Does employing literary texts in reading comprehension classes improve learners' critical thinking ability?

Question 2: Does a teaching model based on critical thinking regardless of the material employed for teaching improve learners reading comprehension?

According to the findings of the study, we can safely claim that employing a teaching method based on critical thinking regardless of the type of the material used in the class improves learners' critical thinking ability. Literary texts, however, much more properly lend themselves to critical thinking and reading comprehension development. Although this study advocates the employment of literary texts in reading comprehension classes, it never downgrades the importance of non-literary texts. Instructors can use a mixture of both in their classes, if it's not feasible to use only literary texts.

This study has a number of implications for instructors and material developers. According to the findings of the current study, material developer can include more literary texts in the reading comprehension sections of the books to help learners become better readers. Instructors can also employ teaching methods based on critical thinking in their reading comprehension classes, even if they are using non-literary texts to improve learners' critical thinking potency and reading comprehension ability.

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