ABSTRACT

Critical thinking is an important and vital topic in modern education. It is a sophisticated process which includes skills, dispositions and metacognition. Critical thinking is disciplined, self-directed, reasonable and reflective thinking that one performs when deciding what to believe or do. It is purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation and inference.

All educators are interested in teaching critical thinking to their students. Many academic departments expect their professors and instructors to be well informed about the strategy of teaching critical thinking skills, identify areas in one’s courses as the proper place to emphasize and teach critical thinking, and develop and use some problems in exams that test students’ critical thinking skills.

In this regard, the present study endeavors to investigate the possible role of English language proficiency in critical thinking while reading. The subjects of this research were 574 learners of English both male and female without age limit. Their mother tongue was Persian and they were English students at Islamic Azad University. This project was implemented on the basis of the ex post facto method. The design was a 2 by 3 factorial design; that is the presence or absence of critical thinking at three levels of language proficiency.

There were three instruments of research manipulated in order to obtain information as valid as possible. The first instrument was a standardized proficiency test to put the subjects in three proficiency levels of elementary, intermediate and advanced. Based on the results of this test, the subjects were divided into three proficiency levels. The second instrument was the Critical Thinking Test with 52 items to elicit and guarantee critical thinking while reading on the part of the research subjects. To give a broader base and depth to this study, the subjects’ critical thinking abilities have been tested in Persian, their mother tongue, as well as in English. Thus, the third instrument was a Persian version of the Critical Thinking Test administered to the same subject in order to compare the critical thinking abilities of students in L1 and L2.

As a result, it must be concluded that proficient readers are much better at critical thinking than non-proficient readers both in the first and the foreign language. Moreover, the results indicate that the critical thinking abilities of EFL readers in their native language are better than their abilities in English.