ABSTRACT

Critical Thinking is of great significance in reading effectively. Reading is an inseparable part of a human being's life. Critical thinking has attracted the attention of educators over the past decades. Recognizing the pivotal role of learners’ critical thinking abilities in academic success, it is thought crucial to explore the factors that might have relationship with it. There exist enough reasons for ESL researchers and teachers to devote considerable attention to critical thinking and reading comprehension, which directly and indirectly influence, develop, and correlate with the process of learning Second or Foreign Language to aid learning. ESL learners are an increasing population in higher education. Developing programs that assist these students in academic proficiency is of great importance. Reading comprehension and critical thinking are two very important components of learning strategies in higher education. Understanding how critical thinking can open doors to improving second language learners’ reading comprehension according to the students’ needs will help teachers, curriculum designers and policy makers in promoting their goals and alleviating their class sessions.

The present study was initiated to examine the relationship between critical thinking and success in English reading comprehension in second language learners placing the science students in focus and

- To discover if there is any meaningful relationship between Critical Thinking skills (Inference, Recognition of Assumptions, Deduction, Interpretation, Evaluation of Arguments) and English Reading Comprehension ability in the second language learners at undergraduate level.
- To determine if there is any impact of Critical Thinking skills on English Reading Comprehension ability in the second language learners at undergraduate level.
- To see if gender moderate in relationship Critical Thinking skills and English Reading Comprehension ability in the second language learners at undergraduate level.
- To determine if there is gender and department wise significant difference in Critical Thinking skills and English Reading Comprehension ability in the second language learners at undergraduate level.
Survey design method was adopted to collect the data to empirically examine meaningful relationship between Critical Thinking skills and English Reading Comprehension ability in the second language learners at undergraduate level. Two different instruments were used to evaluate students’ Critical Thinking ability through the “Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal” (CTA) comprising of 80 items having 5 sub-tests of Inference, Recognizing Unstated Assumptions, Deduction, Interpretation and Evaluation of Arguments. Reading Comprehension test prepared by English Language Teaching (ELT) experts specific to reading scientific texts of different kinds with 40 different items on reading comprehension was employed. A sample of 208 science students at undergraduate level of Panjab University, Chandigarh, India, was chosen as participants of the study. The results revealed significant correlation between critical thinking and success in English reading comprehension in second language learners at undergraduate levels. The findings also demonstrated a significant positive correlation between the scores of all five dimensions of Critical Thinking (i.e. inference, recognition of assumptions, deduction, interpretation, evaluation of arguments) and reading comprehension. Regression analysis revealed Higher Critical thinking impacted the better reading comprehension ability of second language learners at undergraduate level, which resulted in significant positive relationship. Five dimensions of critical thinking contribute 64.4% variability in reading comprehension ability of learners depending on the level of critical thinking. All the dimensions of critical thinking also contribute significantly to predict the impact on reading comprehension ability of learners. Multiple regression analysis explain gender had no moderating impact in determining the relationship between Critical Thinking skills and Reading Comprehension ability of second language learners at the undergraduate level.

The analysis of data found significant differences in the level of critical thinging and reading comprehension among male and female in the second language learners at undergraduate level. However, this difference did not adversely affect the acceptance of this study’s hypothesis because the male and female students who had high Critical Thinking skills scores also had correspondingly high reading comprehension scores.

Considering the above results, the researcher strongly feels that a study relating to the field (as topic of this study), as discussed above, is of paramount importance in
today’s emerging world due to globalisation. Therefore, the study is significant to teachers, learners, syllabus designers, educational professionals, policy makers, and in those in other related fields since English is now an International language, and its teaching and learning is the need of the current era. It is similarly applicable to other languages also.

This empirical study evaluated the relationships between Critical Thinking and English Reading Comprehension in under-graduate ESL science students. It identified the relationship between variables of Critical Thinking and of its five individual dimensions, with Reading Comprehension variable. The pedagogical implications of the present research is to focus on Critical Thinking activities that different levels of language proficiency in English language classrooms which can increase learners’ level of thinking and simultaneously they help language learners to grasp the main meaning of the text.. This study encourages syllabus designers, materials developers and language teachers to consider Critical Thinking as one of the effective elements for academic and career success. In order to have educated students who are able to efficiently apply Critical Thinking skills, syllabus designers and material developers are recommended to make course books that consider Critical Thinking as one of the efficient elements for academic and career success. Designing courses which particularly focus on prompting students” Critical Thinking and increasing their strategic intent will result in educating students with analytical abilities that aid them to carry out successfully. Also, the present courses can be reorganized to challenge students to apply Critical Thinking skills to achieve academic success.

Within the constraints of social science methodology, this study could be safely recognized as a beginning with great implications for ESL learners and with tremendous further scope for research work, and greater possibilities to analyze and understand the relation between Critical Thinking and Reading Comprehension which will facilitate rather necessitate revising and formulating curriculum/syllabus and training of teachers using modern and latest technology tools, enabling aids, and adopting suitable approaches for better educational inputs by promoting higher level of Critical Thinking alongside developing Reading Comprehension skills.