CHAPTER 1

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Background and Purpose

Students can learn to read more easily than they can acquire any other skills. It is a source of great pleasure for people all over the world. Through reading people can be informed and can increase their understanding of the globe. As Chastain (219) states, “Reading can serve as a vehicle for entering into the *belles lettres* of the country’s present and past civilization”. Reading is not only aimed at providing information and pleasure to the reader, but it also helps extend one’s knowledge of the language. Non-native speakers of English can use reading materials as the primary source of input as they learn the language. They not only gain rapid and easy access to the historical and cultural conventions of English native speakers but to the real and live language as well. However, foreign language learners of English often have problems in absorbing the written material and as a result reading becomes a laborious and painful task. Fortunately, reading has received more attention than any other language skills in recent times. Few things in education excite the public imagination more than reading. The nature of the concern and controversy reflects a more complex and deeply rooted dilemma about reading, its nature and its function. Individuals see reading depicted as a basic skill. As Chastain puts, reading is one of the four major skills in any language that involves mental processes employed in listening as both require the learner to first decode a message rather than encode it and then make use of a passive knowledge of the vocabulary and structure of the language. Rivers explains that reading is not only aimed at providing information and pleasure for the reader, but it also helps extend one’s knowledge of the language.

Based on the psychologist K. S. Goodman’s perspective, Grabe maintains that reading is not primarily a process of picking up information from the page in a letter-by-letter, word-by-word manner, but is a selective process. Goodman argues that there...
are some cycles involved in the reading process. Riley (75) declares that “Receptive language processes are cycles of sampling, predicting, testing, and confirming”. Regarding these cycles, good readers use knowledge they bring to the reading and then read by predicting information, sampling the text, testing the information which is already predicted and finally confirm the prediction.

Reading to see what a text says may suffice when the goal is to learn specific information or to understand someone else’s ideas. But people usually read with other purposes. They need to solve problems, build roads, write legislation or design an advertising campaign. The learner must evaluate what is read and integrate that understanding with the prior understanding of the world. He/She must decide what to accept as true and useful.

On the other hand, processing skills and transfer from the dominant language to the less dominant language are also issues in L2 reading. Samaniego and Pino (40) advocate “teaching reading strategies such as anticipating, predicting, scanning, skimming, reading between the lines, etc. to heritage speakers.” They (41) state, “Even when these students have already mastered these skills in English, they need to be made aware that the same skills can be used in Spanish”. They point out that reading is important to broaden their vocabulary, improve writing skills and grammatical accuracy, develop critical thinking skills and expand overall knowledge.

The need to teach higher order thinking skills is not a recent one. Education savants have called for renewed interest in problem solving for years. As far back as 1967, Raths, Jonas, Rothstein and Wassermann decried the lack of emphasis on thinking in the schools. They noted that memorization, drill, homework, the three Rs and the quiet classroom were rewarded while inquiry, reflection and the consideration of alternatives were disgraced. It is apparent that students are loitering in problem-solving and thinking skills at all levels of education. However, critical thinking courses and texts, in particular, may result in fragmentation of thinking skills. Thinking cannot be divorced from content. In fact, thinking is a way of learning content. In every course, especially in content subjects, students should be taught to think logically, analyze and compare, question and evaluate the content. Skills taught in isolation do little more than prepare students for tests of isolated skills (Spache and Spache).
As a reader, the learner wants to accept as fact only that part of the content which actually appears true to him. To evaluate a conclusion, one must evaluate the evidence upon which that conclusion is based. The learner does not want just any information; he wants reliable information. To assess the validity of remarks within a text, the language user must go outside a text and bring to bear outside knowledge and standards (Kurland). In other words, as people read more and hear more, they will gain knowledge and discover new contexts for their ideas. The learner will also come to think more critically. In this regard he can design and answer questions like: What information is most important to this argument? What might be left out? What is it that I think about this subject? How did I arrive at what I think? What are my assumptions and are they valid? How can I work with facts, observations, inferences and so on in order to convince others of what I think?

In order to help students answer these questions for themselves, teachers have to employ critical thinking pedagogy in the classrooms. When this researcher talks about critical thinking, pedagogy that challenges the students to think and reason more carefully than they do is not the only concern. Nor is he referring to instruction in the fundamentals of argument. Rather, the researcher is referring to a particular system of teaching that helps to break down a student’s critical thinking into discrete activities and then to show students how to reflect carefully on each of these activities in order to sharpen their thinking skills.

Critical partly means resisting the assumptions on which ‘rational arguments’ are based, by explaining and questioning how common-sense ‘logic’ establishes its categories in the first place. And this leads people to an even wider meaning for critical: “explaining how the world and our relationships within it and to it are constructed through reading and writing” (Goatly 1).

Another meaning of critical traces its derivation to crisis. The world and its inhabitants face a number of crises. For many, life is a day to day crisis, with either unemployment or persistent food storage threatening one billion. For others, perhaps women, it is becoming increasingly intolerable to handle the relationships within the family and the demands of conflicting social roles. Meanwhile, whole populations in modern urban society have been subjected to scientifically-based technological experiments. Some of these have turned out to have disastrous consequences and have led to a crisis of confidence in science and technology. Linked to this is the ecological
crisis, which calls into question the systems of economic and technological development prevailing in the last 200 years and the culture of the consumer of capitalism which has established itself in the last 50 years.

There are three levels at which individuals understand and analyze what they read and write (Fairclough 25-27). First of all, they decode the surface forms and meanings of a text and these meanings can be described. By text it means “the physical form which the writing (speaking) takes on the page (in the air) and the meanings which this physical form encodes”. This decoding depends upon semantics and answers the question ‘What does the text mean?’

At the second level, individuals have to interpret what they have decoded, as part of discourse and work out, for example, to whom it refers and guess what inferences they are expected to make. By discourse it means “the act of communication in which the writer intends to affect a reader and the reader attempts to work out the writer’s intentions”. This interpretation of intention depends upon pragmatics and answers the question ‘What does the writer mean by this text?’

The third level, which people often ignore, is explanation, the end of critical discourse analysis, showing why the discourse and text are the way they are. It asks the question ‘What social and ideological forces underlie or determine text and discourse meanings?’ By ideology J. B. Thomson means “the ways of thinking which (re)produce and reflect the power structures of society” or more briefly, “meaning in the service of power” (qtd. in Goatly: 3).

If there is one thing professors like to see in students’ essays, it is evidence of critical thinking. Students often do not know what critical thinking is, or what it looks like, or how to go about it and so their essays are a form of learning by trial and error.

On the other hand, many of the studies refer to the language proficiency level of the students. In Alderson and Urquhart’s studies (The Effect), for example, though a language factor was not built into the design of the experiments, it was noted that, according to earlier proficiency tests, liberal arts students were more proficient than development and finance students, who were in turn superior to the engineers. In Mohammed and Swales’ design, language (or general reading proficiency) was integrated more closely into the design, though the method of ascertaining it, by asking teachers to estimate reading scores, was, to say the least, subjective. Moreover, Ridgway argues that the level of language proficiency is crucial and differences in
level may have masked the background knowledge effect in some cases. Certainly, Alderson and Urquhart's (*The Effect*) group equaled the engineers on engineering texts in two out of three studies, presumably because of their higher language proficiency. Ridgway, like Mohammed and Swales, argues for a threshold linguistic level, below which any relevant background knowledge cannot be brought into play and this seems reasonable. Individuals have less sympathy with his claim that there is also an upper threshold level beyond which the readers' language ability is sufficient to allow them to read any text with equal success. This runs counter to experience of subject-specialized texts.

**Contributions to Individuals’ Thinking About Critical Thinking**

Various groups have made significant contributions to people’s understanding of critical thinking. Contributors from the area of cognitive psychology (such as Paul Chance and Richard Mayer) delineate the set of operations and procedures involved in critical thinking. They work to establish the differences between critical thinking and other important aspects of thinking such as creative thinking.

Contributors from the area of philosophy (such as Richard Paul) remind that critical thinking is a process of thinking to a standard. Simply being involved in the process of critical thinking is not enough; it must be done well and should guide the establishment of beliefs and impact one’s behavior or action.

Contributors from the area of behavioral psychology help to establish the operational definitions associated with critical thinking. They work to define the subtasks associated with final outcomes and the methodologies that teachers can use to shape the initial behaviors towards the final outcomes. They also demonstrate how educators can establish the proper contingencies to change behavior.

Content specialists (such as Hickey and Mertes) demonstrate how critical thinking can be taught in different content areas such as reading, literature, social studies, mathematics and science. This is an especially important contribution because it appears that critical thinking is best developed as students grapple with specific content rather than taught exclusively as a separate set of skills.

Huitt believes that Ennis's definition comes closest to the mark of a useful generic definition for critical thinking. He offers yet another definition to align more
closely the concept of critical thinking to the evaluation level as defined by Bloom, Englehart, Furst, Hill and Krathwohl and to include some of the vocabulary of other investigators. The following is his proposed definition of critical thinking:

- Critical thinking is the disciplined mental activity of evaluating arguments or propositions and making judgments that can guide the development of beliefs and taking action.

It is important to have a definition of critical thinking so that it can be compared and contrasted with other forms of thinking (i.e., non-critical thinking). Non-critical thinking can take the form of habitual thinking (thinking based on past practice without considering current data); brainstorming (saying whatever comes to mind without evaluation); creative thinking (putting facts, concepts and principles together in new and original ways); prejudicial thinking (gathering evidence to support a particular position without questioning the position itself); or emotive thinking (responding to the emotion of a message rather than the content). Each of these types of thinking may have advantages and disadvantages relative to a particular context. There are situations when one type might be more appropriate while the other types would be less appropriate.

Over and above, the variety of definitions made by several authors, one may conclude the following about the critical thinking:

Critical thinking means correct thinking in the pursuit of relevant and reliable knowledge about the world. Another way to describe it is that it is reasonable, reflective, responsible and skillful thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do. A person, who thinks critically, can ask appropriate questions, gather relevant information, efficiently and creatively sort this information, reason logically and come to reliable and trustworthy conclusions about the world, would be able to live and act successfully. Critical thinking is not as simple as being able to process information well enough to know to stop for red lights or check you have received the correct change at the supermarket. Such low-order thinking, which most individuals master, though it may be critical and useful, is sufficient only for personal survival. True critical thinking is higher-order thinking, enabling a person to, for example, responsibly judge between political candidates, serve on a murder trial jury, evaluate society’s need for nuclear power plants and assess the consequences of global
warming. Critical thinking enables an individual to be a responsible citizen who contributes to society and not merely be a consumer of society's distractions.

The power to think critically is neither inherent in children, nor developed naturally beyond survival-level thinking. Critical thinking is a learned ability that must be taught. Most individuals never learn it. Critical thinking cannot be taught reliably to students by peers or by most parents. Trained and knowledgeable instructors are necessary to impart the proper information and skills. Mathematics and science instructors have precisely this information and these skills.

Critical thinking can be described as the scientific method applied by ordinary people to the ordinary world. This is true because critical thinking mimics the well-known method of scientific investigation: a question is identified, a hypothesis formulated, relevant data sought and gathered, the hypothesis is logically tested and evaluated and reliable conclusions are drawn from the result. All of the skills of scientific investigation are matched by critical thinking, which is therefore nothing more than a scientific method used in everyday life rather than in specifically scientific disciplines or endeavors. Critical thinking is scientific thinking. Many books and papers describing critical thinking present its goals and methods as similar to the goals and methods of science. A scientifically-literate person, such as a mathematics or science instructor, has learned to think critically to achieve that level of scientific awareness. But an individual with an advanced degree in any university discipline has almost certainly learned the techniques of critical thinking.

Critical thinking is the ability to think for oneself and make the reliable and responsible decisions that affect one's life. Critical thinking is also a critical inquiry, so critical thinkers investigate problems, ask questions, pose new answers that challenge the status quo, discover new information that can be used for good or ill, question authorities and traditional beliefs, challenge received dogmas and doctrines and often end up possessing power in society greater than their numbers. It may happen that a workable society or culture can tolerate only a small number of critical thinkers, that learning, internalizing and practising scientific and critical thinking is discouraged. Most people are followers of authority; they do not question and are not curious to challenge authority figures who claim special knowledge or insight. They do not think for themselves, but rely on others to think for them. They indulge in
wishful, hopeful and emotional thinking, believing that what they believe is true because they wish it, hope it, or feel it to be true. Most people do not think critically.

Critical thinking has many components. Life can be described as a sequence of problems that each individual must solve for himself. Critical thinking skills are nothing more than problem solving skills that result in reliable knowledge. Human beings constantly process information. Critical thinking is the practice of processing this information in the most skillful, accurate and rigorous manner possible. The information has to be processed in such a way that it leads to the most reliable, logical and trustworthy conclusions, upon which one can make responsible decisions about one's life, behavior and actions with full knowledge of assumptions and consequences of those decisions.

**Critical Thinking and Decision Making**

In this age of almost infinite access to information made available through media and the Internet, where decisions are framed in the global environment, decision making is more complex and difficult than ever. People’s decisions not only affect themselves, but often have far reaching implications. They make individual decisions in their roles as consumers, voters, friends, family members, students, professionals and citizens. They contribute to the decision making of the groups to which they belong. Elected leaders, juries, industrial work teams, committees, governmental bodies and many other groups struggle daily with the task of resolving issues.

People’s success or failure in life is largely determined by their ability to make wise decisions for themselves and to influence the decisions of others in a way that is beneficial to them. Much of their significant and purposeful activity is concerned with making decisions. Whether to join a campus organization, go to graduate school, accept a job offer, buy a car or house, move to another city, or invest in a certain stock, are just a few of the thousands of decisions they may have to make. Often, intelligent self-interest or a sense of responsibility will require them to win the support of others, e.g. they may want a scholarship or a particular job for themselves, a customer for their product, or a vote for their favored political candidate.
Some people make decisions by flipping a coin. Others act on a whim or respond unconsciously to ‘hidden persuader.’ If the problem is trivial – such as whether to go to a concert or a film – the method used is unimportant. For more crucial matters, however, mature adults require a reasoned means of decision making. Decisions should be justified by good and valid reasons based on accurate evidence.

Deciding what you will do with your life is an example of a personal decision with far-reaching consequences. This decision could affect where you live, how much money you make and who your friends are. Whenever an individual controls the dimensions of a problem, he or she can solve the problem through a personal decision. For example, if the problem is whether to go to the basketball game tonight, if tickets are not too expensive and if transportation is available, the decision can be made individually. But if a friend’s car is needed to get to the game, then that person’s decision to furnish the transport must be obtained.

The stress and anxiety of decision making are due to an important characteristic of decisions and that is uncertainty. Medlin and Ross (395) define decision making as “generating, evaluation, and selecting among a set of relevant choices”. If the person had only one option or course of action, rather than a set of choices, he would feel no uncertainty, since no decision would be necessary. Similarly, if he did not care about the outcome of a decision, that decision would cause little anxiety; but Yates (3) defines a decision as “an action taken with the intention of producing a favorable outcome.” Because people desire a favorable outcome and because they cannot immediately discern from the alternatives their best course of action, their decisions necessarily involve some risk and may lead to some stress and anxiety. Decision making is a mental process leading to an outcome that is typically uncertain.

Although there are different ways to describe the decision-making process, the following divides the decision making process into six components. These components are similar to some of the parts found in Beyth-Marom, Novik and Sloan; Halpern; and Zechmeister and Johnson.

1. Recognizing the need to make a decision.
2. Thinking about your objectives and what a good decision would look like – defining the problem.
3. Generating alternative courses of action or options.
4. Listing the relevant dimensions for evaluating alternatives.
5. Evaluating the alternatives or options.
6. Selecting an option or deciding.

The Relationship Between Decision Making and Critical Thinking: While scholars sometimes make distinctions between decision making and critical thinking, there are actually many similarities. Recall the definition of critical thinking, as involving the evaluation of evidence relevant to some claim so that a sound conclusion about the claim can be drawn. Decision making also involves evaluating alternative courses of action and reflecting upon the evidence supporting one course of action versus another. Ennis’s definition of critical thinking – as “reasonable, reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do” – emphasizes the similarity between critical thinking and decision making (qtd. in Bensley: 132).

Both critical thinking and decision making are purposeful activities. People usually assume that the choices they make in decisions are conscious. An important aspect of critical thinking is its deliberate nature – they spend time and mental effort in evaluating evidence and alternatives. Much research shows that hasty decisions and premature conclusions lead to ineffective thinking and action. All the alternatives and evidence should be considered before committing to a decision or a conclusion. In addition to this conscious, deliberate and purposeful nature of both critical thinking and decision making, both processes also share the assumption that people should be rational.

Another important similarity between critical thinking and decision making is that both are done under conditions of uncertainty. Just as an individual is unsure of an outcome of a decision he makes, so is he frequently unsure of a conclusion or an inference he makes using critical thinking. Both involve generalizing beyond the available evidence and beyond what he knows. Because he is uncertain about the outcome, decisions also usually involve some degree of risk.

Because decision making always involves uncertainty, people use probability to estimate the risks associated with a particular decision of judgment. It should be noted that probability is the quotient of the number of times a particular event of interest occurs and the total number of ways in which that event can occur. People often think of probabilities in terms of the odds that something will happen.
Critical Thinking Vs. Critical Reading

Reading critically precedes thinking critically. Readers discover information and ideas when they analyze and reflect on the ideas they read. However, when they later evaluate these ideas by questioning their validity (based on their own previously accumulated background knowledge), then and only then are they thinking critically.

Critical reading is based on textual analysis, which depends on knowing what to look for when reading any text. Critical thinking, on the other hand, is based on making inferences from texts based on prior evidence.

One can distinguish between critical reading and critical thinking in the following way:

- Critical reading is a technique for discovering information and ideas within a text.
- Critical thinking is a technique for evaluating information and ideas, for deciding what to accept and believe.

Critical reading refers to careful, active, reflective and analytic reading. Critical thinking involves reflecting on the validity of what people have read in light of their prior knowledge and understanding of the world.

For example, consider the following sentence:

> Parents are buying expensive cars for their kids to destroy them.

As the terms are used here, critical reading is concerned with figuring out whether, within the context of the text as a whole, ‘them’ refers to the parents, the kids, or the cars, and whether the text supports that practice. Critical thinking would come into play when deciding whether the chosen meaning was indeed true and whether or not the reader, should support that practice.

If critical thinking is basically thinking that attempts to criticize or analyze itself, then it is a complex process, consisting of a wide combination of skills. It includes a number of thought processes: interpreting, reasoning, evaluating and analyzing. But for critical thinking to be successful, readers need to rely on evidence, consider a variety of viewpoints and recognize relationships between various parts of text.

Too often, people find that they are automatically saying the words while reading to themselves without comprehending their meaning. This kind of reading is
passive and leaves them saying, ‘I just finished reading this but I don’t know what it
said.’ This passive kind of reading is ineffective and will not allow thinking critically
about what they read.

The topic of teaching students to think while reading – critical reading –
should be central to any discussion of thinking skills, in part because the reading of
textbooks plays such a prominent role in the content fields. Critical reading has been
defined as learning to evaluate, draw inferences and arrive at conclusions based on the
evidence (Zintz and Maggart).

To avoid passive reading, after someone has read over the critical thinking
questions, he should carefully read over the passage, check for his comprehension as
he goes along. As he reads, he should ask himself frequently, ‘Am I understanding the
words I am reading? Am I following the arguments being made? Am I finding the
information I need to answer the questions?’ Questioning in this manner will ensure
active reading. If he thinks that he understands the passage after he has read it once,
he should go through the questions again and try to answer them as he reads through
the passage a second time. Then he should try to write answers to the questions.

It should be emphasized that because critical reading of the passages requires
inductive reasoning, one must take into account the quality of the sources of evidence
in his/her reading. In some cases, looking at the titles of the references in the
reference section at the end of the chapter may help him/her to determine what kind of
evidence is being used.

Active reading involves making sure that one understands the words, ideas and
arguments of a passage. He should monitor his own reading by asking himself
whether he understands, while keeping his attention on his reading. One can improve
his critical reading of a passage by asking himself questions that will help him
identify the main question and claims, identify and organize the relevant evidence and
label such information in a way that enables him to evaluate it and draw a sound
conclusion based on the quality and quantity of the evidence.

A critical thinker can be described as a skeptical, suspicious reader. This
means that s/he also needs to be both active and analytical while reading. A critical
reader recognizes not only what a text says, but also how a text represents its subject
matter.
Facts are facts produced in a text, but how one interprets them may vary from one reader to another. Critical readers make their own inferences by recognizing the writer’s purpose, understanding tone and recognizing bias, all of which are implied or mentioned indirectly in a text.

By these definitions, critical reading would appear to come before critical thinking: Only once people have fully understood a text (critical reading) can they truly evaluate its assertions (critical thinking).

The Two Together in Harmony: In actual practice, critical reading and critical thinking work together. Critical thinking allows people to monitor their understanding as they read. If they sense that assertions are ridiculous or irresponsible (critical thinking), they examine the text more closely to test their understanding (critical reading).

Conversely, critical thinking depends on critical reading. You can think critically about a text (critical thinking), only if you have understood it (critical reading). Individuals may choose to accept or reject a presentation, but they must know why. They have a responsibility to themselves, as well as to others, to isolate the real issues of agreement or disagreement. Only then can they understand and respect other people’s views. To recognize and understand those views, they must read critically.

The Usefulness of the Distinction: The usefulness of the distinction lies in its reminder that people must read each text on its own merits, not imposing their prior knowledge or views on it. While they must evaluate ideas as they read, they must not distort the meaning within a text. They must not allow themselves to force a text to say what they would otherwise like it to say – else they will never learn anything new!

Enquiry-based Learning: The Benefits of Acquiring Enquiry Skills

The term ‘enquiry’ describes a situation where there is curiosity and a desire to find something out by exploration, investigation and research. Enquiries involve questions being raised, challenges to thinking and problem-solving activities. Enquiries usually require cooperative behavior and communication with others. Such skills develop self-control and confidence in one’s ability to adapt to a changing environment. Conscious awareness of skills and attitudes frees an individual from the
original context and affects his view of himself and his world, i.e. how he reacts and learns.

The enquiring child is an inquisitive learner who has some control in decision making about the strategies and skills used to learn as well as the objectives and outcomes of learning (Menmuir and Adams). Enquiry skills are particularly important in certain areas of the curriculum such as science, but enquiry skills and attitudes are generic, transferable skills and equip children for effective lifelong learning. Enquiry methods can be applied to the acquisition of knowledge and to the ways of acquiring knowledge and positive attitudes towards learning (Johnsey).

T. S. Kuhn declares that critical reflective thinking is necessary to the development of mature thinking. Critical or reflective thinking is concerned with one’s ability to assess the effectiveness of one’s thinking rather than the ability to evaluate one’s methods of investigation or conclusions. The latter is more involved in problem solving. Reflective thinking can exert a controlling influence over the thinking process itself (Norris).

Critical thinking is unlikely to occur spontaneously during the primary school years (Piaget and Inhelder; T. S. Kuhn) although research into teaching children to think (R. Fisher) suggests that young children can use such metacognitive processes. They have “the capacity to reflect on [their] own acts” (Bruner and Haste 91). Critical thinking “can be taught successfully as a skill” (Bruner and Haste 91) and in particular, hypothetical thinking, leads to critical thinking. Awareness of ideas as ideas stimulates the beginnings of critical thinking (Baron; Norris).

As Boo (65) asserts, the children’s ability to think critically is dependent on:
- experience;
- the development of self-control and self-awareness;
- linguistic and reading abilities (Donaldson);
- subject knowledge (McPeck; R. Fisher)

Reading for information involves critical and creative thinking (R. Fisher) as children try to make sense of the text and illustrations and reflect on the ideas. Problem solving is closely related to creative thinking and reasoning but differs in that it involves the application of these as well as critical, reflective thought (McPeck; Siegel).

Concerning the crucial impact of language and thinking on lifestyle, the emphasis is on how psychologists use critical thinking when engaged in professional
activities involving scientific thinking: analyzing situations to determine causation, generating hypotheses, clinical decision making and especially critical thinking, critical reading of literature reviews and critical writing.

Critical thinking in each discipline is a complex set of cognitive skills and dispositions, some of which are shared and many of which are specific to the discipline. It is assumed that knowledge and thinking skills are often context-specific. Critical thinking skills are taught as you learn the concepts of and do the work of a particular discipline. Further, people use their own beliefs and commonsense theories to try to explain behaviors they observe. Bensley (Critical Thinking in Psychology xi) claims that: “Research on science education suggests that these everyday theories should be taken into account when the effort is made to think critically about scientific questions”.

Language Proficiency

One of the difficulties in identifying students with limited English proficiency is the lack of agreement among theorists on a definition of proficiency. At a minimum, theorists tend to agree that the ability to use a language is related to the context in which it is used. Meanwhile, it is known how problematic the definition of the native speaker is. There are various dialects to consider, national and international, social and cultural variations, professional jargon and so on. People have different competence in various domains of the language and native speakers’ mastering of their own language is highly different. One’s goal would not be that the learner speaks like a native or has native-like command of L2. One argues that for the second language user, fluency was more important than correctness. When people gain more experience in living in a multicultural or intercultural society, they grow more tolerant of speakers who do not have native-like command of the language.

To put it in other words, language proficiency is the level of competence at which an individual is able to use language for both basic communicative tasks and academic purposes, i.e. the degree of ability to understand, speak, read and write a given language. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) defines proficiency as what an individual can and cannot do with a foreign language, regardless of where, when or how the language has been learned or
acquired. In part, because proficiency exams are time consuming, require trained professionals and lack clearcut data for analysis, they have not been the focus of many research studies. Oral proficiency exams also have been criticized for a lack of systematic investigation of their reliability and validity (Bachman & Savignon; Lantolf & Frawley).

The search for measures of foreign language proficiency and prediction of foreign language proficiency dates back to the 1950s and 1960s when the armed forces became interested in language training outcomes for the purpose of selecting foreign service persons for language training and assigning these individuals to specific languages (e.g., Lett & O'Mara). ACTFL has been involved in the promotion of proficiency-based foreign language teaching and learning since the early 1980s. Grants from the Department of Education enabled ACTFL and the Educational Testing Service to build on the early work of the Interagency Language Roundtable and Foreign Service Institute to develop the proficiency Guidelines for use in academic settings (Lowe). The ACTFL proficiency Guidelines are statements that describe the level of performance of a student in each of the four skill areas of speaking, listening, reading and writing a foreign language. The proficiency levels are categorized as novice, intermediate, advanced and superior; these levels are further divided into nine subcategories (novice-low, novice-mid, novice-high, intermediate-low, intermediate-mid, intermediate-high, advanced, advanced plus and superior). The levels refer only to the level of performance in each separate skill regardless of how the proficiency was gained or the length of time involved in attaining it. As one advances in a foreign language, more language skill is required to attain the next level.

Generally speaking, language proficiency refers to the degree to which the student exhibits control over the use of language, including the measurement of expressive and receptive language skills in the areas of phonology, syntax, vocabulary and semantics and including the areas of pragmatics or language use within various domains or social circumstances. Proficiency in a language is judged independently and does not imply a lack of proficiency in another language. Richards, J. Platt and H. Platt (204) define language proficiency as: “a person’s skill in using a language for a specific purpose.” And Stern claims that in the study of second language learning, conceptualization and description of proficiency is an important step. But McLaughlin
believes that an operational definition for language proficiency is the score a learner achieves on a test designed to measure language proficiency. Moreover, Cummins describes two faces of language proficiency which individuals encounter:

Surface proficiency: What individuals observe during language interactions. It means that everyone acquires Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) in a first language, regardless of IQ or academic aptitude.

Vs.

Underlying proficiency: What people assume about the speaker/listener’s ability to think and understand. It implies that Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) is strongly related to IQ and other academic achievement. Verbal intellectual skills are strongly related to reading.

**Statement of the Problem**

Reading is one of the basic skills acquired during a language course which grants the learners the greatest ability at the end of the language course. It stays with them and they encounter many situations to use it and most of all, it is solitary by nature and needs least of teaching. While most of the information people receive from their environment is acquired through reading, some researchers claim that foreign language learners who seem to suffer from imperfect knowledge of language are more likely to have problems in their reading processes. Numerous research studies have already been conducted to shed light on the hidden dimensions of the reading process; however it is the least understood process in education today.

To find out what reading is, one should turn not only to linguistics but also to psycholinguistics and psychologists who have long been involved in investigating the reading process. Reading is a psycholinguistic process and it starts with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with a meaning which the reader constructs. Thus, Goodman (qtd. in Carrel, Pharis and Liberto) asserts that there is an essential interaction between language and thought in reading.

Widdowson (*Explorations*) one of the first, in the world of English language teaching at least, defines reading as the processes of getting linguistic information via print. This definition is probably too general and embracing to be of much practical
value. There are so many different kinds of information, so many purposes for reading that a general definition is in danger of being trivial or banal. In most contexts, then, it would seem necessary to specify what sort of reading is being considered and for what purpose.

As such, Chastain defines the reading process as communicative or conversion process, which implies that the reader activates his background knowledge and knowledge of the world to recreate or to convert the writer’s encoded meaning into thought.

Wallace (qtd. in Fairclough (Critical Language): 67) regards reading as a social process. She assumes that people read not only as individuals but as members of social groups. She asserts that “our interpretations of text are socially determined, dependent partly on previous social experiences and social context which we are reading”. It follows that reading is not a self-contained activity which takes place in the classroom, i.e., the experience of the first language inevitably influences second/foreign language.

Experience shows that many EFL learners fail to read effectively and efficiently. Results of research also advocate the view that reading in a language which is not a learner’s first language is a source of considerable difficulty. On the other hand, some researchers report that poor reading in a foreign language is due to poor reading ability in the first language. They further maintain that poor foreign language reading is due to the fact that strategies for reading the foreign language differ from the strategies employed in reading the native language.

It follows that reading is a complex activity, that the study of reading must be inter-disciplinary. If the ability involves so many aspects of language, cognition, life and learning, then no single academic discipline can claim to have the correct view of what is crucial reading. Cognitive and educational psychology are clearly involved; sociology and sociolinguistics, the study of communication systems and undoubtedly other disciplines all bear upon an adequate study of reading.

On the other hand, when authors speak about reading they usually have in mind the reading of a particular kind of text. Critical reading involves challenging the ideological content of texts as evidenced in their salient discourse. These discourses are indicated through the linguistic choice of the writer. Wallace (qtd. in Fairclough (Critical Language): 69) assumes that “Central to the idea of critical reading is an
awareness of the role that language plays in conveying not just a propositional message but an ideological one.” Critical reading has not been generally encouraged in the English as a foreign language classroom in either the wider or the narrow sense, whether it is aimed at those with very limited English language proficiency or those who are quite advanced learners of English.

Meanwhile, Critical thinking is an important and vital element in modern education. 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 the areas in their courses as the proper place to emphasize and teach critical thinking, develop and use some problems in exams that test the students’ critical thinking skills.

Conversely, critical reading and writing is an ambiguous title. The term critical is used to mean many things in an educational context. To some, critical thinking simply means the ability to see logical flaws in arguments or to weigh the evidence for explicit claims.

At each educational level, thinking must be practised in each content field. This means hard work for the teacher. It’s much easier to teach students to memorize facts and then assess them with multiple-choice tests. In a course that emphasizes thinking, objectives must include application and analysis, divergent thinking and opportunities to organize ideas and support value judgments. McMillen notes that it really boils down to whether teachers are creating an environment that stimulates critical inquiry.

Moreover, critical thinking is a sophisticated process which includes skills, dispositions and metacognition. Specifically, critical thinking is disciplined, self-directed, reasonable and reflective thinking that one performs when deciding what to believe or do. It is a purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation and inference as well as advocacy of one’s position. It is the art of thinking about one’s thinking in order to make it better, clearer and more accurate. Critical thinkers are open-minded, flexible and persistent. It is evidenced by the ability and disposition to improve one’s thinking by systematically subjecting it to intellectual self-assessment.
How Colleges Encourage Critical Thinking

The search for academic perfection is often the enemy of practical education. Anyone who produces material is always conscious of the armchair user, who is going to compare it with the imagined perfection of what could and should be rather than the practical nature of what can be used. Hearing teachers’ talk at a philosophical level about a teaching program is very different from listening to teachers who actually use the lessons.

Teachers often know the practical impossibility of doing something new and in order to avoid facing this they erect a dilemma: If you give students something simple, they will not be impressed by it because they will claim they do it anyway. If you give them something complicated, they will be impressed by its seriousness but will be unable to use it because it is complicated.

Many college students believe that their teacher will have all the answers and all they need to do is to gather and remember the information. Unfortunately, most important questions do not have simple answers and there are always numerous ways to look at important issues. It is important to be willing to challenge assumptions and conclusions, even those presented by the experts.

Critical thinking depends on the ability to evaluate different perspectives and challenge assumptions made by others. A good college teacher will challenge the way you think and may insist that how you solve a problem is as important as the solution. Because critical thinking depends on discovering and testing connections between ideas, the instructor may ask open-ended questions of Why? How? or What if? and such questions may not have simple answers.

The instructor may ask you to break a larger question into smaller ones. He or she may insist that there is more than one valid point of view. An instructor may require you to explain concretely the reason for any point you reject: ‘You think this essay is wrong. Well, what are your reasons?’ Or an instructor may challenge the authority of experts: ‘Dr. Fleming’s theory sounds impressive. But here are some facts he doesn’t account for ….’ He or she may reinforce the legitimacy of your personal views and experiences: ‘So something like this happened to you once and you felt exactly the same way. Can you tell us why?’ And, most likely, an instructor will let
you know that you can change your mind: ‘When the discussion started, you thought the opposite. What happened in the last half hour that changed your mind?’

The process may not be easy for you. It is natural for college entering students to find this mode of thinking difficult and to discover that answers are seldom entirely wrong or right but more often somewhere in between. Yet the questions that lack simple answers are the most worthy of study.

Furthermore, a growing number of colleges and universities are requiring their students to study critical thinking and the importance of such study is widely recognized. The executive order establishing California’s requirement states:

Instruction in critical thinking is designed to achieve an understanding of the relationship of language to logic, which would lead to the ability to analyze, criticize, and advocate ideas, to reason inductively and deductively, and to reach factual or judgmental conclusions based on sound inferences drawn from unambiguous statements of knowledge or belief. The minimal competence to be expected at the successful conclusion of instruction in critical thinking should be the ability to distinguish fact from judgment, belief from knowledge, and skills in elementary inductive and deductive processes, including an understanding of the formal and informal fallacies of language and thought (qtd. in Freely and Steinberg: 1).

Over and above, this researcher has been influenced by the feasible role of language proficiency in critical thinking when reading. Thus, the problem tackled by the upcoming research is the relationship between language proficiency and critical thinking pertaining to reading processes.

### Research Questions

According to the study, this research has tried to find answers to the following questions:

1. Is there any meaningful relationship between the levels of language proficiency of EFL students and their performance in English Critical Thinking Test?
2. Is there any meaningful relationship between the levels of language proficiency of EFL students and their performance in Persian Critical Thinking Test?

3. Is there any meaningful difference between the performance of EFL students in English and Persian Critical Thinking Tests?

**Research Hypotheses**

On the basis of the research questions mentioned above, the following null hypotheses have been proposed:

1. There is no meaningful relationship between the levels of language proficiency of EFL students and their performance in English Critical Thinking Test.

2. There is no meaningful relationship between the levels of language proficiency of EFL students and their performance in Persian Critical Thinking Test.

3. There is no meaningful difference between the performance of EFL students in English and Persian Critical Thinking Tests.

**Significance of the Study**

In the history of education, few topics have sparked such public debate as the teaching of reading. Because reading is at the heart of every child's learning, it has been a principal educational focus for more than a century. Research on reading dates as far back as 1879, when a paper was published on eye movements in reading (Samuels & Kamil). In the mid-1960s, discussion of appropriate reading instruction gained prominence as a result of published research on models of reading instruction and comparative studies of the U.S. Office of Education's Cooperative Research Program in First Grade Reading Instruction (Venezky (*The History*); Samuels & Kamil). Both of these research efforts sparked widespread interest in all aspects of the reading process, particularly at the beginning stages of learning to read.
Reading is an essential skill for EFL students as a source of information and as an enjoyable activity. In many countries, foreign language students might never get a chance to use the language for conversing with the native speakers; the only authentic input they can be exposed to is the written material in the target language. However, these students will definitely have access to a large number of scientific and technical publications, which they use in their study or work. Moreover, they might even wish to read a foreign language for pleasure or for being in contact with what goes on around the globe. Thus reading in such situations assumes higher status as an input.

In the beginning of the twentieth century because of the necessity for international communication, foreign language teaching and learning achieved a prominent role in man’s everyday life. Hence, in Iran too, reading in a foreign language has been the focus of attention in the pedagogic curriculum. It is demanded by the education system. Travers (qtd. in Brindley: 92) maintains “Not only does our education system demand a lot of reading in the process of learning, it also tends to use the capacity to read fluently as an indicator of more general intellectual ability”. Future success in school and later is contingent upon a well-established reading ability; so there is small wonder that early instruction is organized around the skill to read. Furthermore, reading is closely linked to the other language learning skills. Usually in a communicative process, the participants either convert the linguistic message to thought or convert their own thought to written or spoken codes. Chastain (218) describes the relationship of reading to other language skills in the following words: “Reading for meaning is a communicative process and as such involves mental processes similar to those of the other three language skills. Thus, all reading activity serves to facilitate communicative fluency in each of the other language skills”.

Additionally, one of the most important reasons of why reading is the main and fundamental skill in learning a foreign language is that it is the easiest and the most effective of all other skills. Rivers (260) states:

The reading skill, once developed, is the one which can be most easily maintained at a high level by the students themselves without further help from a teacher. Through it they can increase their knowledge and understanding of the culture of the speakers of the language, their ways of thinking, their contemporary activities, and their contributions to many fields of artistic and intellectual endeavor.
According to Coleman’s report in the “Teaching of Modern Foreign Languages in the United States” the major conclusion of the modern language study includes the recommendation that the primary objective of language teaching should be reading fluency (qtd. in Stern). Coleman also concludes that the only practical and useful approach for teaching the high school students in America is the reading skill. He reported that during two years of constant reading, the language learners were able to learn the foreign language. Krashen uses the ‘Input Hypothesis’ in learning a language and claims that through the input of reading for pleasure or interest, one can use this input and monitor himself in writing and is able to acquire the writing style.

In this connection, Carrell (Introductive Approach) maintains that for at least three groups of students – those in EFL situations, those at advanced levels of proficiency and those with a need for English for academic purposes – effective reading ability in a second language is crucially required.

Furthermore, before planning learner’s instruction, the instructor should think carefully about what reading really is because research has shown that a teacher's beliefs directly influence instructional design. For example, if he believes that reading is limited to translating letters into words and words into sentences, his teaching might reflect this in a mechanistic curriculum which is limited to students sounding out combinations of letters to decode words. If, on the other hand, he believes that reading is a basic form of communication in a highly social world and students learn to read by actively interacting with text, his instruction would probably involve much literature response and reading in social contexts.

Alternatively, critical thinking deals with the use of reason in the pursuit of truth. While there is serious doubt about the power of reason to discover any new truth, the rules of logic concern the ways truth can be preserved as individuals make inferences – one or more statements to support or justify another statement. In this regard Miller and Connelly state that if people are interested in knowing the truth, then the answer is obvious: logical reasoning extends their grasp of the truth, from the information they have to what can be inferred from that information.

According to Kurland, critical thinking enables people to recognize a wide range of subjective analysis of otherwise objective data and to evaluate how well each analysis might meet their needs. Facts may be facts, but the ways people interpret them may vary.
By the same token, critical thinking of any kind is never universal in any individual. Scriven and Paul explain that everyone is subject to episodes of indisciplined or irrational thought; hence its quality is usually a matter of degree and dependent on the quality and depth of experience in a given domain of thinking or with respect to a particular class of questions. For this reason, the development of critical thinking skills and dispositions is a life-long endeavor.

Consequently, in every course, students should be taught to think logically, analyze and compare, question and evaluate. At each educational level, thinking must be practised in each content field. This means hard work for the teacher. It may be easier to teach students to memorize facts and then assess them with multiple-choice tests. In a course that emphasizes thinking, objectives must include application and analysis, divergent thinking and opportunities to recognize ideas and support value judgments. Without this ability, students cannot go beyond the mere collection of information to weave information threads together in the creation of knowledge (Laverty).

**The Need for Critical Thinking**

Humans are conditioned from birth to follow authority figures and not to question their pronouncements. This conditioning is done by parents and teachers using a wide variety of positive and negative reinforcement techniques. Most individuals reach adulthood in this conditioned form. The result of such conditioning is the antithesis of both scientific investigation and critical thinking; individuals lack both curiosity and the skills to perform independent inquiry to discover reliable knowledge. Individuals who think critically can think for themselves: they can identify problems, gather relevant information, analyze information in a proper way and come to reliable conclusions by themselves without relying on others to do this for them. Critical thinking allows one to face and comprehend objective reality by gaining reliable knowledge about the world. This, in turn, allows one to better earn a living, achieve success in life, better solve life's problems and be reconciled to existence, mortality and the universe. If a person is happier possessing reliable knowledge and living in objective reality, rather than living in ignorance and
possessing false or unreliable beliefs, this is as good a reason as any other for teaching and learning critical thinking.

Adopting a critical stance involves being open to all sorts of opinions and ready to evaluate them to decide what beliefs best meet the standards people develop. It also involves the creative development of explanations that increase understanding of their world and an active search for information that would cast doubt on explanations that are offered. It also involves the organization of information to make decisions more effective.

In reading and listening, being critical means taking an active role rather than being a passive absorber of information. Individuals don’t merely take in what people say and they go beyond merely deciding whether they agree or disagree. They consider whether good reasons have been given for the claims that are made and they try to base their own judgments on adequate reasons.

In writing and speaking, being critical requires that people make their justifications explicit, comprehensible and persuasive. They can do much more than just state their opinions. They try to use their knowledge of others in developing reasons that fulfill two conditions: that others will understand those reasons and that those reasons will convince them that the claims are justified.

A critical stance helps people to move beyond sheepish acceptance of influences, beyond bare disagreement and beyond dogmatic assertion, to the discovery of resources that can help in evaluating arguments and in advancing a discussion if there is a disagreement. A critical stance opens the possibility of substituting learning and discussion for unreflective belief, unconsidered action, or irresolvable disagreement.

Critical thinking can challenge individuals’ most dearly held beliefs and it can sometimes make them aware that they are not able to justify any position at all on a subject that they would like to make a decision about.

Critical thinking is greatly needed, but much evidence suggests that students’ thinking skills are not adequate to meet the challenges they face. Many educational reports including the National Assessment of Educational Progress have argued that the U.S. educational system is failing to teach many of its students how to think effectively. Langer and Applebee found that students often have difficulty in persuasive and analytic writing; two kinds of writing that require critical thinking.
Using developmental tests of reasoning, McKinnon and Renner found that only one quarter of all first-year college students they tested showed the ability to reason logically and abstractly. Although, Keeley, Browne and Kreutzer found some improvement in critical thinking resulting from students’ having attended college, but this improvement was not substantial. Similarly, Perkins found that schooling had some impact on students’ abilities to reason about everyday questions, but not the improvement that people would hope for if students are to become proficient at critical thinking. While no one probably wants to admit that he or she does not think critically, according to Bensley the abundance of everyday examples and the research evidence suggest that many people need to work on developing these skills.

On the whole, critical thinking:

- underlies reading, writing, speaking and listening, the basic elements of communication.
- plays an important part in social change; institutions in any society – courts, governments, schools, businesses – are the products of a certain way of thinking.
- helps people uncover bias and prejudice.
- is a path to freedom from half-truths and deceptions.
- is the willingness to change one point of view as one continues to examine and re-examine ideas that may seem obvious. Such thinking takes time and the willingness to say three subversive words: I don’t know.

Critical Thinking can be understood from the following quotation from Edward Glaser, co-author of the world’s most widely used test of critical thinking, the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal: “critical thinking calls for a persistent effort to examine any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the evidence that supports it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (Glaser 5). This Critical Thinking tradition, which derives from both philosophy and education, originated in the USA. Some of its foremost American proponents were John Dewey, Edward Glaser, Steven Norris, Robert Ennis, Richard Paul and Michael Scriven; in Britain, the name most closely associated with Critical Thinking is that of Alec Fisher (A. Thomson).

In summary, extensive research shows the need to improve critical thinking. Many everyday examples reveal that a failure to think critically is quite common.
Moreover, unsubstantiated New Age and paranormal phenomena are widely credited as believable. This evidence suggests that people need to improve their ability to think critically and that this should be an important goal for teachers and students.

Teaching thinking is as difficult as walking on a tightrope. That is to say, it is easy if you do not fall off. Thinking is intangible. It is awkward. It gets into so many places that it is never in any one place. Yet, over the years, people have faced certain concepts of what thinking is all about. Boo (17) declares that the difficulty lies in keeping one’s balance and avoiding falling into and being trapped by these concepts.

Moreover, as Boo (15-16) explains, critical thinking allows people to work in the comfortable self-contained environment of the available data without having to worry about getting fresh data: They look for internal validity, internal consistency. Furthermore, education for a long time was under the control of the ecclesiastical authorities who founded most of the people’s elite educational establishments and so established the traditions of education. “Critical thinking is of paramount importance in the ecclesiastical world since it is the only weapon against heresy and deviation and since that world consists of concept edifices which must have internal validity if they are not to collapse.” But that is very far from the practical, messy world in which people have to think in order to solve problems and bring things about. “Critical intelligence is very valuable. Critical thinking is an essential part of thinking. But it can never be the whole of thinking.”

As Steinberg and Kincheloe (30) assert teachers, as well as modeling and introducing critical thinking and thus critical literacy into the child’s curriculum, must also withdraw from controlling the questioning opportunities of young children. If teachers consistently model critical literacy both spontaneously and planned, and in collaboration with parents and others, then young children begin to reclaim their initial wondering about the world. What has been added is a consciousness that is shaped and directed toward critical literacy. Besides, they classify nine specific emancipatory concepts drawn from these broad characteristics to use when examining pedagogy from which the critical thinking is the fourth one. They define critical thinking as the pedagogy that asks students to answer open-ended, critical questions and requires them to use higher levels of thinking (e.g. interpretation, analysis, synthesis). Relying on only recall and ‘right-wrong’ questions is avoided because it
creates students passivity and alienation from the learning process (Steinberg and Kincheloe 120).

In this manner, Saphier and Gower (qtd. in Hall and Hewings: 182-3) list five kinds of objectives of a course, all interrelated. The first three concern what students will do; the last two, what they will have mastered. The fifth objective is critical thinking objectives. They propose that critical thinking objectives articulate which learning skills students will develop; e.g. students will be able to determine characteristics of a good paragraph and say why they think a paragraph is good.

On the other hand, Thompson (15) declares that more recently, especially in response to the increased enrollment of international students in higher education, ways in which critical thinking might be interpreted and taught have become highly debated questions for L2 learning scholars and practitioners, not only in Australia, but also in the United States and the United Kingdom.

When people turn to a search for an appropriate aim for teaching, the quest moves them to a consideration of thinking. Acceptable to everyone as an element of the teaching-learning process, thinking is perhaps alone in its own exalted position. Some educators consider thinking the ultimate end of all teaching, its final aim; others say it is but a vital part of the total learning process; all agree that it is important (Wellington, Burleigh and Wellington 12).

The notion of cultivating good thinking is as old as Socrates. But a systematic examination of how to go about it is a very new enterprise. In language teaching people often believe that thinking develops by itself. If students are able to speak, ergo they must already be good thinkers. If teachers offer their students tasks with an extra-linguistic focus, such as discussion or essays, they are supposed to be cultivating ‘thinking’ task. On the other hand, it is known that some people are better thinkers, as they tend to solve their problems more efficiently and can arrive much more reliably at new ideas. As teachers, individuals also know that some discussions and essays turn out to be extremely thought-provoking, while others are merely dull (Sokol 23).

Competence in critical thinking is a prerequisite to participating effectively in human affairs, pursuing higher education and succeeding in the highly competitive world of business and the professions. Since classical times, debate has been one of the best methods of learning and applying the principles of critical thinking.
Contemporary research confirms the value of debate. Allen, Mike, Berkowitz, Hunt and Louden in a recent study concluded that the impact of public communication training on the critical thinking ability of the participants is demonstrably positive.

People are under constant pressure to make unreasoned decisions and they often make decisions carelessly. But which method is most likely to lead to wise decisions? To make wise judgments, they need to rely on critical thinking. In many situations argumentation’s emphasis on reasoned considerations and debate’s confrontation of opposing sides give them their best opportunity to reach reasoned conclusions. In any case, it is in the public interest to promote debate and it is in their own intelligent self-interest to know the principles of argumentation and to be able to apply critical thinking in debate.

Hence, by means of the current research, the attempt is to assess the role of language proficiency in critical thinking when reading. If it proves to be useful to apply the different critical thinking strategies in reading passages, it might highlight why some passages are more readable to the students and how this research can assist the readers to figure out the real message of a piece of writing and as a result enhance their proficiency level. This could also have important implications for the differences between language acquisition versus learning as critical thinking affects both.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Acquisition:** The term is used for the learning and development of a person’s native language. It is mostly applied for the process of learning a native or first language (First Language Acquisition) but sometimes it is used for the process of learning a second or foreign language (Second Language Acquisition).

**Bottom-up Process:** It makes use of information which is already present in the data (i.e. the words, sentences etc.). As applied to reading comprehension for example, bottom-up processing would be understanding a text mainly by analyzing the words and sentences in the text itself.
**Critical Reading:** The term is used for reading in which the reader reacts critically to what he or she is reading, through relating the content of the reading material to personal standards, values, attitudes or beliefs.

**Critical Thinkers:** Critical thinkers distinguish between fact and opinion; ask questions; make detailed observations; uncover assumptions; and define their terms; and make assertions based on sound logic and solid evidence.

**Critical Thinking:** Critical thinking is best understood as the ability of thinkers to take charge of their own thinking. This requires them to develop sound criteria and standards for analyzing and assessing their own thinking and routinely use those criteria and standards to improve its quality.

**Foreign Language:** It is a language which is not a Native Language in a country. It is a language taught as a school subject but which is used neither as a medium of instruction in school nor as a language of communication within a country, e.g. in government, business, industry, etc. It is usually studied either for communication with foreigners who speak the language, or for reading printed material in the language.

**Language Proficiency:** language proficiency is the level of competence at which an individual is able to use language for both basic communicative tasks and academic purposes, i.e. the degree of ability to understand, speak, read and write a given language. Language proficiency refers to the degree to which the student exhibits control over the use of language, including the measurement of expressive and receptive language skills in the areas of phonology, syntax, vocabulary and semantics and including the areas of pragmatics or language use within various domains or social circumstances.

**Learning:** The term is applied for the development of a person’s second or foreign language but not the first or native language. The term acquisition is often preferred to learning because the latter term is sometimes linked to a behaviorist theory of learning.

**Reading:** Reading is a process which involves the activation of relevant knowledge and related language skills to accomplish an exchange of information from one person to another, i.e., the reader uses his/her background knowledge and skill to recreate the writer’s intended meaning. To put in other words, reading is a process of perceiving a written text in order to understand its contexts.
**Reading Comprehension:** The purpose of reading is comprehension, i.e., it can be utilized as a primary source of a comprehension input in the process of language learning. When one understands the writer’s intention and is able to relate the intended message to the system of knowledge one has, the comprehension has taken place.

**Second Language:** It is a language which is not a native language in a country but which is widely used as a medium of communication, e.g. in education and in government etc., and which is used alongside another language or languages.

**Top-down Process:** It makes use of previous knowledge, expectations, experience, scripts and schemes (“higher-level knowledge”) in analyzing and processing information which is received (words, sentences, etc.)

## Delimitations of the Study

This study just like many other studies, suffers from a number of delimitations imposed by the researcher.

The study is focused on some particular critical thinking strategies. This focal study naturally distracts one from paying attention to other probable strategies concerning the nature of critical thinking. Critical thinking is a highly subjective and abstract phenomenon and no claim can be made firmly upon the exactness of the tests as the instrument of this research to elicit the genuine aspects of critical thinking.

The study is only concerned with the reading ability of the subjects. The question whether critical thinking had an effect on other language skills, remained unanswered.

Furthermore, the learners’ age, gender, social classes, cultural beliefs and religious attitudes, as well as the differences between circumstances of the various classes together with potential obstacles or advantages they may come across, were certainly ignored. Moreover, the subjects’ cognitive styles in intelligence quotients as well as learning strategies and tactics cannot be controlled despite the fact that these individual differences are presumed to be of great influence in the nature of such an investigation.
Basically, the current study has covered only and only non-native university students majoring in English. Thus, it is not apparent whether the captioned critical thinking strategies chosen for this study would work with students of other majors or not.

Additionally, the current investigation is limited to Iranian subjects with Persian as their mother tongue and it’s not clear whether the change of mother tongue would interfere with the research results. So, due care should be taken not to overgeneralize the results of this research beyond its scope.

At the end, in the present study the researcher has just endeavored to scrutinize the role of language proficiency in critical thinking while reading in EFL context. It is not perceivable whether the same results may be obtained in ESL context such as in India where the students are exposed to target language and likewise, in comparison with EFL learners, bear higher levels of language proficiency.