Written Tasks through ESA Lesson Planning: Their Impact on Speaking Skill of Iranian EFL Learners

Hadi Mokarram

Department of English Language and Literature, Islamic Azad University, Urmia Branch, Urmia, Iran

Email: hadi.mokarram.n@gmail.com

Abstract

Teaching English in Iran faces challenges due to the environmental and interactive situations with which the language learners are facing outside the language learning classes. Considering the teaching methodology in Iranian schools and the insist of the governmental and private language institutes on CLT and TBLT, prerequisite conditions for effectiveness of such methodologies seem to be unavailable or not made available for the learners. CLT and TBLT methodologies mainly focus on speaking and oral activities in the classroom. In the domain of language learning and usage, speaking ability is considered as the most challenging among other three language abilities. Hence, an alternative approach for teaching and learning language seems to be needed. There are also criticisms on the mentioned methodologies; an important one among them is the increased amount of errors in learners' oral utterances. On the other hand, critical thinking and figurative thinking abilities' importance for using the language and the speaking ability are being focused and these thinking abilities are considered to have direct correlation with learners' speaking abilities. Writing activities in different pedagogical areas are used to improve learners' critical thinking, however utilizing such approach for learning language is a matter that is not studied. This quantitative quasi-experimental research studies a teaching approach with a focus on written language and aimed to help learners figure out and understand language elements clearly, and use them to excel their speaking proficiency. This approach includes written tasks defined to help learners "see" the language elements and argue about them. The session plan is, to guide students learn the language via the written tasks and use what is learned orally in a similar context, based on Harmer's ESA approach and TBLT methodology. In the end of the research, speaking achievement of the learners will be assessed to evaluate the teaching approach's efficiency.

Keywords: Critical thinking, ESA, lesson planning, speaking, task-based language teaching

Introduction

Languages being spoken around the world are common in four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Skills which are all linked together but different from each other (Hartley, 2007). Speaking being the main mean of communication for human (Lazaraton, 2001), is the most demanding among other skills when it comes to learning (Bailey & Savage, 1994). To learn speaking, one needs to deal with the phonological and pronunciational specifications of the target language. In other cases, dealing with slangs would be another problem. However, in an oral communication, the counterparts need to listen, analyze and respond at the same time. Such features are likely to be the reason which makes learning speaking skill a demanding task (Brown, 1994). On the other hand, compared to speaking, writing does not require the writer to think as fast as it is needed while speaking and the writer would be able to rethink the language that is needed to be uttered (Burns & Seidlhofer, 2012).

According to the mentioned features of writing skill and the tasks related to it, there are researches which defines the effect of written tasks. In psychology and humanistic studies, Wade (1995) mentions advantages of written work over oral discussion and implies that such activities improve students critical thinking skills and creative thoughts. Condon and Kelly-Riley (2004) studied the assessment programs conducted in Washington State University. The assessment program of writing is said to promote students' critical thinking abilities, however, the promotion is said to be achieved overtly. Abdullah-Al-Sharadgah (2014) implements a study over an internet-based writing program and at the end of the program he came up with the conclusion that the program improves students' critical thinking abilities. Considering mentioned studies and along with others, critical thinking seems to be a major subject of focus in pedagogical researches. Critical thinking, as introduced by Cottrell (2005), is an activity in which the mind is utilized to process a cognitive approach. She refers this activity to critical and analytical mental processing to judge and choose or act. Lau (2011) describes a critical thinker as someone who is able to infer from ideas, the connections in between and someone who analyzes and evaluates values and arguments. Utilizing such arguments in learning and figuring out language is called "figurative thinking" by Littlemore and Low (2006).

Recent studies have also proven a correlation between critical thinking skill and speaking skill (Soodmand Afshar & Rahimi, 2014). The more the students are able to critically and creatively think through the language they are using, the better they are able to understand and figure out that language's structure. As a result, students are more likely to communicate; a communication which is tangibly self-developed and understood (Soodmand-Afshar & Rahimi, 2014). Although, different approaches have been conducted and many other suggestions have been proposed to improve learners' critical thinking skills, but they are more applied for adult learners and ESP classes with the focus on one specific skill or a goal (Shirkhani & Fahim, 2011; Abdullah Al Sharadgah, 2014). Considering the importance of critical thinking in students' learning abilities, and its relation with speaking skill, the importance of implementing a teaching approach in which the students are trained to develop their critical thinking skill, seems mandatory.

With the recent changes in educational systems of ELT in Iranian schools and implementing CLT syllabus, textbooks put the pressure of oral language usage in a class environment which makes such syllabus neither feasible for students, nor for the teachers who have been teaching with traditional methodologies for several years (Foroozandeh & Forouzani, 2015). This study focuses on this fact that Iranian language learners, with the least possible contact with the target language (English) need to see and figure out the language structures, if it is to implement recent teaching approaches and methodologies in language teaching classes or environments. With this study, it is believed that expecting learners to obtain and infer the language, functionally, with mere focus on oral activities in the limited period of time of classes would be far from possible. Thus, a teaching plan with accurate tasks which engage students with written tasks, which would allow learners develop and utilize their critical thinking ability is required. That is a teaching plan with designed steps which leads students to self-aware speakers. Considering these issues, the present study tried to answer the following questions:

1. Do written tasks result in more frequent use of instructed structures and lexis in oral productions of female EFL learners?

2. Do written tasks result in more frequent use of instructed structures and lexis in oral productions of male EFL learners?

Method

Participants

Arvand Language Institute in Urmia, Iran accepted to cooperate with the research. All of the participating learners have been taking English courses in this institute. They had studied up to Level 2 of Pearson Longman's Top Notch series at the time of the research; starting Top Notch 3 designed for training learners to achieve proficiency level B1 of Common European Framework of References for Languages. The four chosen classes which are assigned by the institute consisted of 31 male and 25 female learners with the age average of 16 years and 1 month for boys and 15 years and 10 months for girls. Participants' records of studies confirm that they have been taking English courses for at least 3 years and at most 3 years and 6 months (3 years and 5 months in average). As for level of proficiency, learners had taken institute's progress tests throughout their courses summing up with a final achievement test, with the tests designed based on Pearson's Top Notch series provided question banks included in materials for instructors. Learners who have been selected for the study have passed their previous level of study with the GPA mean of 81.65% (37.19 / 46 for vocabulary & grammar achievement) for girls and 79.05% (32.68 / 46) for boys. The level of testing material confirms learners' level to be Pre-Intermediate or B1- according to CEFR.

Considering the requirements of a parametric study and to normalize the distribution of the samples in order to answer the research questions; for the purpose of homogeneity, some of the participants from both control and experimental groups of male and female learners were excluded in final assessment report of the research, although all participants took the final interview and experienced similar class environment and procedures. After a simple randomization via a computer-generated random number, considering the class schedules of the institute, 22 female and 28 male learners were assigned to two classes each. As for female classes, 11 learners were randomly sat in experimental and the other half were assigned for control group, and male ones were likewise in two groups of 14 learners for experimental and control classes respectively.

Assessments and Measures

The following measures were used in the present study:

Achievement Tests

These tests were designed to measure four main language skills (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking) along with the sub-skills (Vocabulary and Grammar) in a fashion that the average point equally evaluates test takers' performance in mentioned areas, as well as equally measuring test takers' performance in individual sections of the course. Learners take these tests along the semester and in the final session. The tests were designed under supervision of three Applied Linguists and TEFL graduate students, including the researcher, who are part of the instructors' team of the institute.

The tests were piloted and revised throughout years and level of difficulty, reliability and validity of the tests are being measured even until the present time. By the time of the research, the comprehensive achievement test which research participants – as the regulation of the institute requires – have passed, has been issued for 4 consecutive semesters. These tests are designed based on Norm-Referenced model and include binary-response items for listening, vocabulary, grammar and reading sections of the test. Writing and speaking evaluations are

based on controlled criteria to reduce the subjectivity of scorings to the minimum. Despite the fact that the tests are all designed based on provided question banks by the Pearson Longman publications, the validity of the final achievement test is confirmed by Dr. Hossein Kashef. Test reliability, as the test items difficulty was confirmed to be similar (0.69), was measured by Kuder-Richardson 20 (KR-20) with the result of 0.65. Being reliable enough for the study, this test was used to determine learners' homogeneity regarding their level of proficiency according to the level they had passed – here, it is Top Notch Level 2.

Pearson Longman's Top Notch 3 Course Book

Second edition of Top Notch series of course books for English language classrooms are published by Pearson Longman and written by Joan Saslow and Allen Ascher. These series for young adult and teenage learners include 4 books followed by Summit course books, cover English language learning from CEFR Level A1- to C1 (false beginners to advanced learners). The fourth book, Top Notch 3 from this series was the medium for both the experimental and control classes. Top Notch 3 course book is being printed in two sets titled "Top Notch 3 A" and "Top Notch 3 B". This printing approach has separated the study units to two 5-unit sections merely and with no significant changes. The course book includes Workbook exercises, Grammar Booster exercises, Writing Booster and is authored with Functional-Notional approach with the language leveled according to the complexity of the English language grammar. The course book series include ActiveBook software which interactively gives learners the access to electronic version of the book and the medium consists numerous extra activities to further guide learners with comprehension, critical thinking and checking learning process. All of these mentioned mediums were introduced and presented for both experimental and control groups, equally. Considering the leveling scheme of the institute and the research requirements, all learners took the course for the part one of Top Notch 3 book. The mentioned level covers Units 1 to 3 of the course book thoroughly.

Written Tasks

Written tasks are the tasks given to the learners of the experimental group and consist of any form of written language where learners clearly "see" the language and its elements. With the written tasks, considering the receptive aspect of language learning, learners are not required to do any further analysis regarding understanding the language except reading the language pieces. However, considering the productive side of the language learning, learners are required to work the given tasks out to comprehend the used language structures and elements by trying various critical and figurative analysis. These analyses may include teamwork or solo interactions with the given tasks via comparing and contrasting new language elements and structures in the tasks, with the predefined examples or structures familiar to their previous knowledge, so they can be guided through the process of correlation.

These tasks are given to the learners following an engagement procedure where learners are somehow exposed to the goal(s) of the session, therefore they tend to look forward to how implement the new language in their utterances. Given the fact that learners will deal with written form of the language in these tasks, the atmosphere would be calmer and learners will find sufficient pace in thinking the language pieces through.

Oral Interview

Speaking evaluations, based on the institute's regulations, are held after teaching sessions. This evaluation is done by holding a person-to-person interview with the interview items covering learners' personal abilities to produce language according to the contexts covered in their course books. The criteria and scoring rubrics are based on British Counsel's IELTS examination's speaking band which is provided as the "public version". However, considering the goal of the research, learners' utterances and responses including the instructed lexical and grammatical items are the main points of interest with these interviews.

Procedure

This study was conducted to see how well written tasks instead of spoken tasks will help learners identify and learn language elements (lexis and structures) by utilizing written language's feature which compared to spoken language, does not require rapid processing and learners study the language pieces thoroughly. With conducting this study, it is measured "how often" learners who experience such technique in class activities, use the learned language elements in their speaking utterances and responses. Following procedures were gone through in order to conduct the study.

After negotiating with the institute, two groups of male and female language learners were selected by the institute for the research purpose. Due to lack of time and the risk of losing the study group, the archived record of studies for the learners was acquired. To ensure the homogeneity of the participants, learners' age, period of exposure to language classes and the GPA of their previous achievement tests were studied. With computer assistance, learners were randomly assigned to a control group and an experimental group.

Learners in both control and experimental groups took classes at the same period of time. Assisted by a colleague, the control group experienced the normal pedagogical procedure defined by the institute. Experimental group experienced the classes similar to the control group with an exception that they received tasks in written language instead of spoken. With both groups studying Pearson Longman's Top Notch 3 Second Edition, the semester in which the study was conducted, both male and female learners covered units 1 to 3 of the course book according to the syllabus predefined by the institute's instructions. Learners took 100-minute classes of 16 sessions followed by two consecutive sessions for a spoken and a written final exam session, relatively.

The experimental group who received the written tasks as a part of their learning process, unlike the control group, study the language elements trough tasks in written form of language. The tasks for the first 3 Units of their course book, Top Notch 3 Second Edition, cover studying and using past perfect tense, modals "must", "may" and "might" along with usage of will be able to, and causatives and passive causatives. These structures are studied within the "cultural discussion", "medical situations and medications" and "requesting or accepting services" contexts respectively, along the related lexis that the course book included in each lesson. Each session included the experimental group's learners following a non-written form of "engagement" into the context (a dialog or a listening from the class audio CD included with the course book) and then they were exposed to the lexis and the grammar items via the written form of language (printed handouts or slides designed by the researcher). These written inputs have the students work in solo or group of two/three to "study" and write down similar statements using the instructed items. After reviewing learners' written outputs for feedback,

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learners "activate" their learned lexis and structure by taking part in oral utterances in a form of free discussion or debate in the class room.

The spoken final examination after each semester in the institute includes learners being interviewed by four English language teachers in person. The examinee is assigned by a simple lottery system to each examiner. Neglecting the written final exams for them being irrelevant to the current study, the interview session for both control and experimental classes was the final step for assessing the learners. With the session being held in one day for both control group and the experimental group, the interview items which are designed by the researcher for the research's purpose are administered as the spoken final exam's assessment items.

Although the interview scoring criteria are based on IELTS Speaking band, scoring sheet for participants' responses, along with general IELTS-based rubrics, includes a "flag mark" where learners' use of language elements according to the level is marked. The marked items for the interview questionnaire per learner lead on to measure the extent to which each speaker has used learned materials throughout the teaching sessions. This is done by counting the elements in learners' utterances according to a reference sheet with a list of expected items. This is done for each test taker one-by-one. The reference sheet is used to eliminate any subjectivity in scoring or counting the used elements

Results

Normality of the Collected Data

This study employed an achievement test in order to assure participants homogeneity prior the study. Test was designed according to the institute's regulations however participants performance on vocabulary and grammar section was the sole focus of measuring homogeneity. Table 4.1 lists the raw scores for the achievement test's vocabulary and grammar section. In order to answer the research questions, an interview session was held. The scoring criteria for the interview items was based on IELTS scoring bands. However, speakers' vocabulary and grammar usage in their utterances was the focus for this study. Hence, the lexical and grammatical item usage was coded into grades. Table 4.2 illustrates the raw scores achieved by the participants.

The raw data collected in the beginning of the study from the achievement test only includes the score in grammar and vocabulary assessment section.

Table 1

Raw Achievement test Scores for Male and Female Participants

	N													
Female Participants	22	29	35	36	36	39	30	26	34	36	31	31		
		39	21	24	36	29	39	30	37	32	33	36		
Male Participants	28	36	30	21	21	28	25	33	36	36	34	37	31	26	30
		29	28	25	35	26	35	34	38	27	37	29	21	35	32
Total	50													

The scores, as illustrated in Table 1, has a range of 0 to 46.

As for the interview session, the number of expected lexical and grammatical items used by the speaker, based on a list of reference, was coded into numerical data as the interview score. These scores scaled from 0 to 20, are shown in the Table 2.

Table 2

Raw Interview Scores for Male and Female Participants

	N													
Female Participants	22	3 8 6 9 8 3 6 6 3 6 3												
		7 4 5 6 8 8 4 10 8 7 5												
Male Participants	28	3 8 4 6 5 4 6 8 8 9 10 7 7 6												
		4 5 3 6 3 6 6 4 3 8 5 5 9 8												
Total	50													

Shapiro-Wilk's test of normality, P>.05, was employed to ensure data normality. As female and male participants were included individually in the study, considering the time limitations posed by the presence of the students, the normality was also measured individually for both groups of the participants. Considering the conditions of the study, male and female participants cannot be compared to each other.

Table 3

Test of Normality for Female Participants

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Achievement	.933	22	.143
Interview	.934	22	.150

Table 4

 Test of Normality for Male Participants

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Achievement	.934	28	.077
Interview	.943	28	.131

As illustrated in Table 3 and Table 4, the data collected for achievement test and the interview sessions for both male and female groups are considered normal.

Level of Homogeneity

To ensure homogeneity, participants level of grammar and lexical knowledge regarding their coursebooks was measured through an achievement test which was discussed before.

Female and male participants raw achievement scores in grammar and vocabulary section of the test are demonstrated in Table 5.

Considering the reliability score (KR-20 = 0.62), Levene's Test of homogeneity was applied to each participating group, individually.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics; Raw Scores for Achievement Test taken by the Female Participants

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Experimental	11	32.36	5.938	1.790	28.37	36.35	21	39
Control	11	33.00	3.873	1.168	30.40	35.60	26	39
Total	22	32.68	4.903	1.045	30.51	34.86	21	39

According to Table 6, as the Levene's test does not illustrate any significant differences between the groups, it can be assumed that there are equal variances in the groups. Therefore, the homogeneity assumption of the ANOVA test is also met.

Table 6

Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances for Female Participants

			df1	df2	Sig.
Female Group Achievement	Based on Mean	1.562	1	20	.226
	Based on Median	1.368	1	20	.256
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.368	1	17.041	.258
	Based on trimmed mean	1.483	1	20	.238

Furthermore, a one-way analysis of variance, $p<.05$, indicated that there weren't any significant differences in the performance of the groups and the result can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7

One-Way Analysis of Variances for Female Participants

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.227	1	2.227	.089	.769
Within Groups	502.545	20	25.127		
Total	504.773	21			

For male participants, the raw scores in the achievement test was analyzed similarly to the female participants.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics; Raw Scores for Achievement Test taken by the Male Participants

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Experimental	14	30.79	5.087	1.359	27.85	33.72	21	38
Control	14	30.29	5.469	1.462	27.13	33.44	21	37
Total	28	30.54	5.189	.981	28.52	32.55	21	38

As the Levene's test does not illustrate any significant differences between the groups, it can be assumed that there are equal variances in the groups (Table 9). Therefore, the homogeneity assumption of the ANOVA test is also met.

Table 9

Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances for Male Participants

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Male Group Achievement	Based on Mean	.005	1	26	.944
	Based on Median	.005	1	26	.944
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.005	1	24.677	.944
	Based on trimmed mean	.005	1	26	.944

Similar to the analysis of the raw scores for female participants, a one-way analysis of variance (p<.05) was also applied. As illustrated in Table 10, the test indicated that there weren't any significant differences in the performance of the groups.

Table 10

One-Way Analysis of Variances for Male Participants

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.750	1	1.750	.063	.804
Within Groups	725.214	26	27.893		
Total	726.964	27			

Therefore, relying on the findings of the applied tests, it can be concluded that both female and male participants were homogeneous by the time of the study conducted.

The Answers to The Research Questions

According to the findings of the research, there wasn't a statistically significant difference between female learners' control and experimental groups, in terms of usage frequency of the instructed structures and lexis in their oral productions. Hence, the answer to the first research question is negative which means that the instruction was not effective on female learners.

As for the second question, based on the results of the statistical analysis, considering the insignificant difference, male learners performed rather same in both control and experimental groups regarding instructed lexis and structures usage frequency in oral utterances.

Female Participants Data Analysis

To compare the performance of the learners in control and experimental groups, Independent Sample T-Test was employed. According to Table 12, with t-test (p<.05) significance of .27, it is indicated that there was not any significant difference between the performance of the two groups and therefore the performance level for both control and experimental groups are rather same.

Table 11

Female Participants for the Interview Session

Group Statistics

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Interview	Control	11	5.55	2.252	.679
	Experimental	11	6.55	1.916	.578

Table 12

Female Participants Interview Scores t-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Interview	Equal variances assumed	.349	.561	-1.122	20	.275	-1.000	.892	-2.860	.860
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.122	19.500	.276	-1.000	.892	-2.863	.863

Male Participants Data Analysis

Similar to female participants, an Independent Sample T-Test was applied (p<.05) and the results can be observed in Table 14. Based on the result of the t-test with the significance value of .14, it is indicated that the performance for both control and experimental groups for male learners is not statistically different. Therefore, both control and experimental group performed rather same in the interview session.

Table 13

Male Participants for the Interview Session

Group Statistics

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Interview	Control	14	6.50	2.029	.542
	Experimental	14	5.36	1.946	.520

Table 14
Male Participants Interview Scores t-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Interview	Equal variances assumed	.049	.826	1.521	26	.140	1.143	.751	-.401	2.687
	Equal variances not assumed			1.521	25.955	.140	1.143	.751	-.401	2.687

Discussion

Speaking proficiency refers to one's ability to understand and respond accordingly and meaningfully. How fast the speaker responses, using different kinds of fillers and with regard to this study, the ability to use acceptable amount of relatively high-level lexis and structures represents better proficiency. Speaking skill requires one's ability to listen and process what is being uttered simultaneously hence it is considered as the hardest skill out of the four skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. Therefore, instructing language elements such as new vocabulary and phrases along with new structures and grammar, might be too challenging if it is only conducted through oral tasks and class activities. This study focuses on how to improve learners' ability to use instructed language elements in their speaking when exposed to a similar context. To reduce the workload, intermediate level learners participated in the study who had an acceptable level of proficiency, generally speaking and only their usage of higher-level language items were measured.

The research questions for this study explored whether using written form of tasks help learners use newly instructed lexical and grammatical items in their utterances in their speaking and how frequent do they use them. To do so, the relationship between written form of language and critical thinking skill was utilized as for critical thinking skill has been found to have rather direct relation with speaking skill. Although the findings of this study do not represent any statistically significant difference between control and experimental groups, the research was conducted in the domain of compatible studies. Some of these studies which represent the relation between written form of education and critical thinking, and the relation between critical thinking skill and speaking skill, are mentioned below:

Condon and Kelly-Riley (2004) conducted a research on "The relationship between college-level writing and critical thinking abilities" and have utilized Washington State University's large-scale assessments to measure the drawbacks of their current assessment methodologies and another assessment methodology with measuring critical thinking skill. They indicate their findings in three distinctive sections and in their second section regarding critical skill promotion, they define that critical thinking "is a value that all disciplines want to promote, and it can be promoted through writing, but such promotion needs to be done overtly." By overtly, they promote writing assessments as a means of learning and as well as a teaching

assessment. They believe critical thinking can be improved by writing however learners need to be aware of the critical thinking concept itself and how to implement it throughout writing.

Liaw (2007) conducted a research in which the researcher examines the effectiveness of content-based teaching approach on learners' critical thinking skill as well as their EFL skills. The research believes that there are "little argument among theorists and educators regarding the interrelatedness between thinking and language development" however "in the tradition and transition of L2 teaching methodology, the integration of language and thinking has been peripheral. Language as a way of thinking and learning has been more of a pedagogical catchphrase than instructional practice." The findings for 5-syllabus content-based teaching with reading and writing activities, according to indicated five critical thinking elements by Yeh (2003), showed rather no significant change. However, exploring participants work samples in writing area, the cognitive domains which are categorized by Bloom (1956) were exercised and worked out throughout the instruction sessions. Hence, the activities done in the class room regarding written form of tasks to implement instructed items helped learners at least exercise the critical thinking skills.

Following the researches for improving critical thinking through writing, Abdullah Al Sharadgah (2014) develops critical thinking skill in an Internet-based environment with conducting writing activities. The idea was to observe critical thinking improvement comparing two groups of participants; one received Internet-based writing tasks and another with "ordinal method". Researcher's reference to different resources (Kupperman & Wallace, 1998) indicates "researchers in TESOL emphasize that students' critical thinking skills can be fostered through e-learning communication." In regard to writing activities and assignments, the researcher refers to Internet-based activities as "a real application of critical thinking skills as it involves collecting, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating information." Findings of the study indicates that learners treated with writing assignments via Internet performed significantly different regarding critical thinking and the difference represents improvements.

Vahdani Sanavi and Tarighat (2014) focused on the impact of teaching critical thinking skills explicitly on Iranian female EFL learners' speaking performance. The researchers, referring to Paul and Elder (2008) indicate that "thinking is inevitable, and all people think, although much of this thinking can be biased, distorted, partial, uninformed or down-right prejudiced, and to achieve excellence in thought one must be cultivated. Therefore, one is not born with critical thinking skills and needs to be trained to learn the skills and fortunately critical thinking can be taught." Their finding indicates a statistically significant improvement regarding learners' speaking proficiency when they were explicitly instructed with critical thinking. This study indicates the importance of implementing critical thinking in the curriculum syllabus and the fact that instructors need to learn to convey this skill not only embedded with the content but also the skill explicitly as well.

Soodmand Afshar and Rahmani (2014) had a different approach and their study explored through the connection of critical thinking and emotional intelligence. Referring to different sources, the researchers believe that "EFL/ESL learners are usually judged on their speaking abilities at first glance" hence improving speaking by enhanced approaches toward teaching speaking and instructions seems mandatory (Bora, 2012). They also refer that among different "areas of study" critical thinking and emotional intelligence are the components considered as major for speaking abilities of EFL/ESL learners. In regards with current study, Soodmand Afshar and Rahimi (2014) answer this research question among other questions in

their research: "Between critical thinking, and emotional intelligence which one is a stronger predictor of Iranian EFL learners' speaking abilities?" The findings indicate that the critical thinking skill and the speaking skill of the participants was correlated and with the correlation result, despite the fact that emotional intelligence showed stronger correlation compared to critical thinking, the correlation between speaking ability and the critical thinking is far too bigger than to be neglected. Hence, critical thinking affects learners' speaking ability, and as indicated by the researcher, "teachers should encourage their critical thinking skills which manifest themselves in speaking classes by learners asking questions and challenging the learning task, so that the message is completely conveyed and negotiated which provides the learners with more opportunities to speak."

At the time of conducting current research, the only similar study found was the work of Fathali and Sotudehnama. One of the research questions for their study was as the following: "Is there any significant difference in EFL elementary students' speaking proficiency who practice guided writing and those who do not?" Their findings however indicate that "guided writing practice" significantly improves learners speaking proficiency where the learners were EFL Elementary students. Despite the fact that the findings of current study contrast with those of Fathali and Sotudenama, their treatment was to direct participants in writing where current study used written form of language –being any form of language which is visible to learners- to help learners observe goal language items clearly and easily.

Conclusion

According to Brown (1994), for a successful turn taking in conversation, learners must acquire grammatical and discourse competence. These terms regarding speaking, include grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, discourse markers and structures. It is also mentioned that acquiring speaking skill does not merely require semantic and grammatical knowledge. Understanding how native speakers utilize mentioned rules in their conversations is a mandatory and hence makes learning to speak appropriately, difficult. For further increase learners' awareness of mentioned rules, critical thinking approach in the field of education was taken into account of the research. With this approach, information processing skills taxonomy is a hierarchical set with which only the analysis, synthesis and evaluation levels are referred to be representing the critical thinking triggers. It is believed that with improving critical thinking skill, speaking proficiency also improves (Vahdani Sanavi & Tarighat, 2014). Studies show that approaching learning materials using written form of language helps learners have enough time to think thoroughly and deeply to understand the items; in other words, help them improve critical thinking skill hence written tasks are designed to help learners improve their speaking proficiency by interacting with them which are designed with critical thinking in mind. Through answering research questions and the findings of this research, learners' performance regarding implementation of instructed grammatical and lexical items in their utterances does not significantly change compared to other learners in control groups who received normal TBLT method without written tasks.

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