



Iranian EFL In-Service Teachers' Conceptions About Critical Thinking and Its Role in Foreign Language Teaching

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Abstract

Adopting a qualitative design, the present study investigated Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes toward critical thinking as well as its role in language teaching. To meet these objectives, 36 EFL teachers were selected through purposeful sampling as the participants of the study. For the purpose of the data collection, in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, and teachers' narratives were utilized. To assure the trustworthiness of the data, several measures have been taken. The lead author conducted the in-depth as well as focus group interviews and elicited teachers' narratives. The interviews were conducted in Persian language and the whole procedures were audiotaped. The data were transcribed verbatim and after member checking the data with the participants, they were translated into English. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To assure inter coder reliability, coding the data was done by the second and third authors independently. The third and fourth authors were involved in finding the potential themes and sub-themes. Finally, five themes of *efficiency*, *intelligence*, *change*, *success* and *initiation* were generated as a result of the data analysis. The present study revealed that the participants emphasized some fundamental building blocks of critical thinking. The participant teachers also advocated critical thinking - focused programs in teacher education as well as its application in language teaching. The study has a number of implications for language pedagogy, teacher education and policy makers.

Key Words: critical thinking, in-service teachers, teacher education, language teaching

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Introduction

Undoubtedly, professional development is crucial for any teacher coming to the teaching profession. It also aims at training highly qualified and effective teachers. One way to lead teachers to professional development is through enhancing or making changes through their attitudes and beliefs. Teachers' beliefs are usually defined as teachers' personal notions that can provide understandings, judgments, and evaluations of their practices (Ertmer, 2005). A number of scholars believe that teachers' *beliefs* have often been a deterrent in teachers' behaviors, such as planning lessons, decision making, and classroom practice (Borg, 2003). Empirical evidence suggests that teachers' belief is a strong element of teachers' behaviors (Vermunt & Endedijk, 2011). The present study focused on investigating teachers' beliefs about critical thinking and its role in language learning and teaching. The problem that arises here is the sharp contrast of traditional materials employed in language teaching with those of today's modern educational agenda. For instance, Alagozlu (2007) argued that since the traditional instructional procedures persuade the students to passively receive ready-made information without questioning the materials. Additionally, students are not fortified to think critically, which can be transferred into ELT classes. In contrast, a number of scholars asserted that learners should be capable of using creative and critical thinking while using the language (Kabilan, Adlina & Embi, 2011).

One of the most essential skills for everyday life is critical thinking. In today's educational circles, no one has reservations about its significance. Critical thinking (CT) is urged to be a necessary skill and a key to one's success in the twenty-first century (Luk & Lin 2015). The notion has been defined in a variety of ways. Because of its comprehensiveness, we adopt Halpern (1999) in this study. Critical thinking refers to employing the cognitive skills or strategies that enhance the probability of a desirable outcome. Critical thinking is assumed to be purposeful, reasoned, and goal-directed. It is the kind of thinking involved in solving problems, drawing inferences, calculating probabilities, and decision making (Halpern, 1999). Halpern (1999) rightly enumerates the qualities of the critical thinkers in the succinct manner; critical thinkers utilize these skills appropriately, without any type of prompting, and usually with mindful intent, in a variety of settings. That is, they are predisposed to think critically. When we think critically, we are evaluating the outcomes of our thought processes—how good a decision is or how well a problem is solved (Halpern, 1999). In the similar vein, Fairclough (1999) believes that critical thinking pedagogies are reinforced by the theory of critical language awareness. This theory explains the role of the learners' cognitive as well as metacognitive domains in developing his / her awareness of the new language and the world around him/ her. CT is constituted by six main cognitive strands (i.e., skills) – ‘interpretation’, ‘analysis’, ‘evaluation’, ‘inference’, ‘explanation’ and ‘self-regulation’ (Facione, 1990, pp. 16–22) – and also by seven main attitudinal strands (i.e., dispositions) – ‘truth-seeking’, ‘open-mindedness’, ‘analyticity’, ‘systematicity’, ‘self-confidence’, ‘inquisitiveness’ and ‘cognitive maturity’ (Facione, Sánchez, Facione, & Gainen, 1995, pp. 4–6).

Literature Review

One of the most essential skills for everyday life is critical thinking. In today's educational circles, no one has reservations about its significance. Recently, an ongoing tension exists regarding the nature of CT, namely whether it should be mainly understood as a generic or as a domain-specific skill (Davies, 2013). There are two competing perspectives regarding the nature of the critical thinking. The traditional generalist view that conceives of critical thinking as a broad ability to interpret information and approach problems correctly that can be applied across a wide range of domains (Pascarella, 1989). Recently, critical thinking has been conceptualized as a combination of three dimensions (Davies & Barnett, 2015; Santos Meneses, 2020): first a cognitive dimension centered on rigorous, logical reasoning skills, second a metacognitive dimension focusing on self-reflection, self-critique, and higher order thinking skills, and third an ethical dimension concerning morality, ethics and human values. Yet, another definition comes from other scholars in the following way: as one's competence in conducting systematic analysis, making inferences using inductive or deductive reasoning, developing appropriate judgment or evaluation, and making effective decisions as an individual interacts with the social and physical environment (Lai, 2011; Scriven & Paul, 1987). Finally, Abrami et al. (2008) defined critical thinking as "the ability to engage in purposeful, self-regulatory judgment" (p. 1102).

Critical thinking is an important aim of education (Davies & Barnett, 2015). The notion has gained momentum as a crucial component of general education (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Educators, policymakers, and employers have demonstrated a sustained interest in teaching critical thinking, as both an important life skill and an asset to the future workforce (Koenig et al., 2011). Teachers need to engage students in complex learning tasks that require them to use critical thinking skills (Helsdingen, van Gog, & van Merriënboer, 2011). Moreover, teachers need to develop students' critical analytical, reasoning, and decision-making capacity by involving them in observing, predicting, explaining, and making decisions about social and natural phenomena and assessing their influences critically (Lee & Thathong, 2017).

Investigating critical thinking has been the target of much research interest in education (Alnofaie, 2013; Shirkhani & Fahim, 2011; Thomas & Lock, 2015; Zhang, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). Likewise, the role of critical thinking in language learning has been widely investigated in the literature (Shirkhani & Fahim, 2011; Thomas & Lok, 2015). In an empirical study, Shirkhani and Fahim (2011) showed that language learners with CT skills are able to understand foreign language better with enhanced cognizance of their learning progress and higher degree of language learning autonomy. In another study, Thomas and Lok (2015) put forward a perspective of CT which involves three dimensions - knowledge, skills and disposition. According to the study, CT is impossible without knowledge, including general information and basic facts, specific content-based knowledge, and knowledge from life and work experience. This sort of knowledge can be viewed as a precondition for CT and its enhancement. CT also encompasses various cognitive

skills, such as reasoning, evaluation and reflection on the part of the learners. CT needs to be internalized as a disposition, i.e., a willingness to do something given certain conditions (Foss & Kleinsasser, 1996).

In an empirical study, Zhang (2019) examined 117 English language teachers' attitudes toward fostering students' critical thinking in their English subject-matter courses. The results indicated that the teachers were of the belief that CT should be incorporated as an indispensable part of subject-matter courses. In another study, Choy and Cheah (2009) studied the cognitions of 30 university lecturers from different disciplines about CT and its effect on higher education. The results indicated that though teachers believed that they were integrating CT with their subject teaching, in practice they were merely focusing on the comprehension of the subject matter. One of the possible limitations of these types of studies is that little research has examined university language teachers' attitudes and instructional practices about CT teaching. Recently, Zhang, Yuan and He (2020) investigated Chinese university EFL teachers' perspectives about critical thinking (CT) and its teaching via a questionnaire and follow-up interviews. The results suggested that Chinese EFL teachers strongly agreed that CT should be an indispensable part of the EFL curriculum and classroom teaching. The study also revealed that the participants lacked professional knowledge of CT and how to implement it in their classes.

The promotion of critical thinking into the FLT classrooms is of high significance for several reasons. Firstly, if language learners can take charge of their own thinking, they can monitor and evaluate their own ways of learning more successfully. Second, critical thinking expands the learning experience of the learners and makes the language more meaningful for them. Thirdly, critical thinking has a high degree of correlation with the learners' achievements (Rafi, 2009).

Although research suggests a close relationship between language and thinking, the integration of critical thinking into second language acquisition is under-investigated (Liang & Fung, 2021). Considering the significance of the role of CT in language learning and taking the fact that few studies in Iranian EFL context conducted to investigate language teachers' perspectives about CT and its role in language learning adopting discipline-specific perspective of CT.. the present qualitative study aimed to address the following two research questions:

1. What are the Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about critical thinking?
2. What are the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions about the role of critical thinking in language teaching and learning?

Methodology

Design

The design of the present study was explorative qualitative study (Cresswell, 2013). We used multiple data collection methods, including interviews, focus group

interviews, and participants' narratives on the issue under investigation. Each of these "makes the world visible in a different way" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 4), so a fuller, richer picture of the participants' perspective can be explored and represented. Adopting this design, we wanted to carefully use the participants' own words to augment the researcher's vivid description and clear interpretation (Heigham & Croker, 2009). In so doing, we believe that it will give readers a sense of entering the participants' worlds and sharing the experience of being there with them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

We adopted qualitative design because one of the advantages of this design is that the researcher is the primary instrument that means that they can be responsive and adaptive to the participants and research setting and can quickly begin to explore unanticipated avenues of research (Heigham & Croker, 2009).

Data Collection

To triangulate the data, focus group interviews, in-depth interviews were conducted and teachers' stories were sought. Stake (2010) noted that using multiple sources of data helps qualitative researchers to answer research questions more completely and deepens the meaning of the findings. As far as in-depth interviews are concerned, the participants took part in one-on-one condition with the first author. As Dornyei (2007) maintains, interviews are among the most suitable tools of data collection. The first author conducted the interviews and each interview lasted approximately 35 min. The participants were asked to answer five open-ended questions. The interviews were recorded and transcribed word by word into Persian and then they were translated into English again. To gain the inter-coder reliability, the translations were checked by the third author and a number of slight issues and problems were settled via negotiation with the first author.

To enhance the validity, the transcribed data were member checked with the participants via e-mail. The questions of interview should be followed up with new questions to help interviewees to illuminate themselves and give them autonomy to add what they thought is related to questions (Wood & Rosser, 2010). Accordingly, the first author posed follow-up questions where needs required. Another source of the data came from focus group interviews. To conduct focus group interviews, the participants were divided into six groups of six participants by the first author. The first author posed some ambiguous points about the interview questions and encouraged the participants to negotiate the questions in the groups they had been assigned. The logic behind using focus group interview was that it can facilitate discussion among the participants (Packer, 2011). The third source of the data was the participants' stories on teaching critical thinking and issues associated with the notion. The authors elicited participating teachers' narrative at the end of the in-depth interviews. Some of the participants narrated their own stories. however, few of them did not tell their stories concerning the issue under investigation.

Setting and Participants

The present study was conducted in Bonab, Iran. For the purpose of the data collection, 36 Iranian EFL English teachers participated in the present study. They were selected through purposeful sampling method from different public schools across the city. All of the participants held B.A in TEFL and their age ranged between 32 and 49. The sample size was based on the suggestion made by Morse (2015) that the sample size in a qualitative investigation should be roughly 30 to 50 participants, based on the subject and span of the examination. As far as focus groups were concerned, they were divided into six groups of six participants. All the participants

volunteered for the present study and they were free to withdraw from the reach at any phase of the study they wanted. However, none of them did so. All the participants were native speaker of the Azarbaijani Turkish language and 20 of them were male and the remaining were female teachers.

Ethical Considerations

Principled reflections were approved in the completion of the research. Teacher participants were informed about the objectives of the present study, and they were guaranteed that the results would be kept confidential. Additionally, to guard their anonymity, research rules were given to each participant to symbolize their individuality, and no personal information was in print. Also, permissions were required to perform audio-recorded interviews.

Data Analysis

The first thing we have done with the data was coding. Coding is a process of early sense making of all the data. Coding is a process of annotating and disentangling a mass of data (Flick, 2009). Morse et al., (2002) pointed out that without some kind of ongoing methodological rigor and verification of the work - both the process and the findings - all research (including qualitative) may be undependable or useless. We also followed Cohen and Crabtree (2008) in that all research should attend to the following criteria in general: ethical conduct, choosing important research that advances knowledge, good writing, appropriate and rigorous methods, managing researcher bias, establishment of reliability (verification), and validity (credibility). We also utilized specific techniques such as making constant comparisons, being especially alert to negative instances, developing rival explanations, and continually posing questions about our data and to ourselves as we proceed analytically (Yin, 2011).

Additionally, we followed the guidelines suggested by Yin (2011). First, in compiling stage, we sorted the transcriptions of teachers' stories, in-depth interviews as well as focus group interviews. Following Yin (2011), in the second phase, we broke down the amassed data into pieces, which may be considered a *disassembling* procedure. In this procedure, we assigned new labels, or "codes," to the different pieces of the collected data. In the *reassembling* phase, to facilitate the

rearrangements, we depicted the data by arraying them in lists and other tabular forms. To ensure the accuracy of the data analysis, we also employed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initially, the first two authors read the entire data in order to get an overall picture and then re-read the data several times, searching for possible patterns. During this phase, all the data were transcribed and we proceeded with the creation of free codes. As we assured our familiarization with the data, we came up with the initial codes. Afterwards, we engaged in the organization of initial codes into potential themes. As the key themes emerged, the codes underpinning each of them were revised and further reorganized into sub-themes. Finally, we reviewed the emerged themes comparing themes and sub-themes.

To achieve data analysis triangulation, we also employed thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006). We went through the following stages one by one: first, familiarizing with data was done by the first author via transcribing the data and reading it three times. Second, generating initial codes was done by both first and third authors independently. Third, searching for themes was done by the first author. Afterwards, reviewing themes was performed by the two authors jointly. Finally, first and third authors named and defined the themes and prepared the final report of the study. It should be mentioned that the two data analyses yielded the similar results.

Results

Out of the analyzed data five themes were generated: *efficiency, intelligence, change, success, and initiation*. Each theme was supported by a number of different codes, and categories.

Table 1.

The Emerged Themes and Codes

Efficiency	Reaching goals sooner/easily, the most efficient trend, less cost, solving problems easily
Intelligence	Cognition, tact, thoughtfulness, critical evaluation, perception, thinking, supreme thought, active thinking,
Change	Decision-making differently, opposing traditions, avoiding imitation, challenging conventions, variations
Success	Achieving desired goals, escaping dangers, avoiding bankruptcy, enhancing abilities, progress, prosperous, having necessary skills for life,
Initiation	Production, new ideas, creation, invention, finding new solutions, novelty, creating new ways

Efficiency

The theme *efficiency* was supported by the following codes: *less cost, reaching goals easily, solving problems easily* and *reaching goals sooner*. Abbas, 45, responded to our question in the following way:

Critical thinking is about weighing ideas against each other. It is a prompt and informed decision – making in a specific situation. The decision that imposes the least cost and lead to the most efficient way. The decision that has no repercussions whatsoever. Without critical thinking, no one can attain success. As far as language teaching is concerned, it relates to using the most effective approaches for language teaching and for classroom management.

For Abbas, critical thinking is mainly tantamount to decision making in a logical manner that leads to utmost effectiveness to shareholders concerned and the less waste of time and energy. He largely views CT in teaching in terms of employing the most effective techniques in language instruction and every effort the teachers make in the classroom to put their students in peace.

Bahman, 43, answered our questions as follows:

As human being, we need critical thinking to attain our desired goals sooner and easily. It is a way of thinking sharply. Common people do not possess it to a large extent. Having critical thinking means not being an ordinary guy. Having CT means you are a singular person. In language teaching the notion will help teachers to assess which method is better than the other. CT will help teachers to spend less time and energy and achieve their educational objectives in a logical time.

For Bahman, CT is to do with saving time and resources. It is thinking sharply and it helps human beings to achieve their desired objectives sooner and with ease. Bahman has a product-oriented view of CT. He does not think of the processes and procedures governing mental tasks of critical thinkers. In addition, he relates thinking critically to thinking logically.

Intelligence

In the similar fashion, the theme *intelligence* was supported by the codes of; *smart in finding ways; sharp in deciding, thoughtful, perception, and supreme thought*.

Taher, 38, had his voice in the following manner;

Critical thinking is best associated with intelligence. It drives us to be sharp and to do sharply in specific circumstances. Through critical thinking, one will become quick in uptake. He/she will have profound perceptions. As far as language teaching is concerned, the notion will let you to make informed decisions in language teaching. You will do sharply in finding appropriate techniques to teach language

and you will employ appropriate and rational ways to deal with critical incidents in the classroom.

Taher establishes association between CT and intelligence in a logical manner. To him, CT drives people to act logically under unpredictable situations and handle them fruitfully. Taher relates possessing CT to effective language teaching and classroom management.

Parvin, 35, had her response in the following fashion;

One of the key and vital skills in normal life and in language teaching in particular is making decisions. You make decisions day in day out and these decisions will determine your course of life. CT will provide you with tools to decide in a rational way. It is a safeguard for people to avoid unwanted and negative repercussions of hasty decisions. In language teaching, you will capitalize on your critical thinking to choose most effective methods out of less effective ones. To act based on thoughtful perceptions.

Parvin considers CT as a vital and indispensable skill of life and education. In a sense, she tacitly believes what works for life, it will work for education too. She recognizes the significance of the decisions made by human beings in their own lives. She believes that CT will aid teachers in opting for the most effective ways of teaching language skills.

Sara, 34, pointed out that:

To me CT is like a superb thought. It is a different way of thinking both in terms of process and product. In terms of process, it is a profound and prolonged pondering on phenomena. With regards to product, CT, will attain you otherwise you cannot get there. CT is like an illumination of the brain and our mental ability. In language teaching, teachers can benefit from it in a variety of ways; in teaching the grammar, the lexical items, etc. You can educate your students to grow in critical thinking.

Parvin considers CT as a vital and indispensable skill of life and education. In a sense, she tacitly believes what works for life, it will work for education too. She recognizes the significance of the decisions made by human beings in their own lives. She believes that CT will aid teachers in opting for the most effective ways of teaching language skills.

Change

The codes collaborating the themes were: *opposing conventions, avoiding imitations, challenging traditions, and finding novel solutions in language teaching.*

Ahmad, 37, pointed out that;

Critical thinking will let people use their own thought and mental resources. It means finding logical solutions out of alternative solutions. It means finding novel strategies to approach problems. It is about challenging conventions and traditions. With respect to language teaching, I think CT is of help solely in defining instructional objectives in a sensible manner. In other words, it relates to the theoretical facet of foreign language teaching. To sum up, when you plan your lessons.

Ahmad would like to put conventions and traditions into acid test against logical thinking. Thought thinking critically, one can make changes in his/her environment. Critical thinking is what Ahmad believes that will lead to making difference in the world.

Zeinab, 36, answered;

CT means evading habits and conventions imposed by the society on people. It means making difference in the world. To me, it is challenging the state quota and planning for new and novel ways. In language teaching, it means not sticking to prevalent and common teaching techniques. You should compare and contrast different ways of teaching different areas of language to find a novel one in a rational way.

Zeinab wants to see CT though the novelty it carries with itself. The building blocks of critical thinking is finding novel ways to our issues and problems. Zeinab rejects sticking to the most common teaching methods. Instead, she believes that the efficacy of each teaching method should be judged via thinking critically.

Hamid, 42, replied our question:

Critical thinking paves the way in how we think, we do, we aspire and we plan. CT aides us to adopt to the context. To evaluate the factors affecting the environment and to revise and modify our plans in the face of unpredictable conditions.

Hamid reclaims that critical thinking will assist human beings to adopt to their milieu and revise their own plans and programs accordingly. CT will help people to take the contextual factors into account dealing with their own problems.

Success

The sub-themes underlying “success” were; *achieving desired goals, escaping dangers, avoiding bankruptcy, enhancing abilities, and progress.*

Esmail, 44, responded our interview question as:

Critical thinking is a key to success and prosperity. With that in mind, you will find a series of tools available to you throughout your life time and beyond that it will highlight some of the innovative and meticulous analyses in your life that you

will engage into address some of the difficulties and challenges. In language teaching, CT makes you a highly qualified and effective teacher. To define educational objectives and find ways to meet those goals.

For Esmail, the milestone of critical thinking is success. He believes that critical thinkers are successful in their lives. Tactility stated is his remarks that CT is associated with both success and innovation. He assures the fact that CT in language teaching will make you a highly qualified and effective teacher.

Another participant, Javad, 41, is of the belief that:

Critical thinking is a path toward success. It helps people to ascertain their own strengths and weaknesses. CT will let people to decrease their weaknesses and in so doing move towards success. CT will assist people to attain self-awareness and know the barriers to achievement. In language teaching, teachers can help their students to find the most appropriate learning strategies suitable for each learner.

Javad believes that achieving goals and succeeding has a number of barriers. CT will act as a flashlight that sheds light on the barriers of success. He believes that CT arms you with some sort of self-awareness to ascertain the barriers of success.

Leila, 36, answered that:

Criticizing different solutions for solving a specific problem will be of help for you in succeeding and meeting your own goals. Critical thinking will assist you to evaluate accessible options for meeting a need and finding the most efficient way. That is why I believe that having CT will permit everyone to succeed at least in the long run. In language teaching and learning, it makes us not to stick solely to parrot fashion learning; rather it will be able us to analyze every material we are going to master.

For Leila, critical thinking and success goes hand in hand. He believes that CT provides people with assets and capabilities to achieve their own desired goals. She also assumes a higher position for CT in language learning as well.

Initiation

Jalal, 42, an experienced teacher of high school asserted that:

Critical thinking is to think about finding a novel way of answering your questions. It is closely related to your own creativity and initiates. Everybody, more or less, possess the construct. A farmer working on his farm, a housewife doing home chores presumably think critically. Critical thinking means you think in a critical manner to be the first to do things differently and to be the first to think differently. Sometimes, it means putting your own thoughts into acid test and to criticize your own way of thinking.

Jalal's perception of the notion of critical thinking is in line with definition and conceptualization of novelty and initiation. It seems that his view of the construct is largely a product-oriented one. He also believes that questioning the common and conventional way of doing things can be attributed to critical thinking.

Akbar, 41, pointed out that;

In my opinion, CT is best associated with innovation and initiation. You have critical thinking skill to the extent that you are well versed in the agreements binding the different thoughts and solutions. If you come up with a novel alternative out of available different ones, you are inevitably a critical thinker. Make sure! I think, CT makes a difference in education and language teaching. Capitalizing on it, teachers will be able to enhance their teaching quality.

It can be inferred from Akbar's remarks that he is mainly concerned with the notion of CT as a means to get the desired results in a novel manner. He largely makes connections between CT and initiation.

Nahid, 32 answered our question in the following manner:

No doubt, CT is related to the novelty and finding novel ways of tackling problems. In language teaching and learning, with respect to the individual differences, it can aid both learners and teachers to achieve their own goals.

Nahid is of the belief that novelty can be generated out of engaging in CT. To cultivate someone between the concept of individual differences in language teaching and indulging in nurturing CT of learners and teachers. CT means to lead him/her to generate new thoughts and ideas. Nahid, furthermore, makes association

Discussion

The current qualitative study shed illuminating light on the Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs and perceptions of critical thinking and its role in language teaching. Like other similar qualitative studies conducted to elicit Iranian in-service teachers' cognitions on certain teacher-related issues the present qualitative study raised our understanding on the way Iranian EFL teachers view the notion of CT and its role in foreign language education.

Concerning the theme of *efficiency*, critical thinking is mainly tantamount to decision making in a logical manner. Applying and capitalizing CT, will lead people to achieve their desired objectives sooner and easily. It also means to consume lesser mental resources and physical resources while solving problems. The theme of *efficiency* means the participants conceive of CT in teaching in terms of employing the most effective techniques in language instruction and every effort the teachers make in the classrooms to put their students at ease. The theme reveals that a product-oriented and outcome-based view of CT. The theme provides us with less or no information about processes and procedures governing mental tasks of critical thinkers.

Regarding the theme of *intelligence*, the participants established association between CT and intelligence in a logical manner. They believe that CT drives people to act logically under unpredictable situations and handle them fruitfully. The theme indicates that CT is a vital and indispensable skill of life and ingredient of education. The theme also suggests that critical thinkers are intelligent people that can make a difference in both their personal and professional lives. With respect to the role of CT in language teaching, the theme shows that possessing CT can be related to effective language teaching and classroom management. Furthermore, CT will aid teachers in opting for the most effective ways of teaching language skills.

Regarding the theme of *change*, the participants mentioned that through thinking critically, people can make changes in their environment. Critical thinking is making difference in the world. The theme also demonstrates novelty is associated with the notion of CT. The building blocks of critical thinking is finding novel approaches and solutions to our issues and problems. The participants postulating and generating the theme rejected sticking to the most common teaching methods. Instead, they mentioned that the efficacy of each teaching method should be judged via thinking critically.

With respect to the theme of *success*, the participants pointed out that achieving goals and succeeding has a number of barriers. CT will shed light on the barriers of success. The theme indicates that CT arms you with some sort of self-awareness to ascertain the barriers of success. For the participants, critical thinking and success goes hand in hand. The participants pointed out that that CT provides people with assets and capabilities to achieve their own desired goals.

The theme *initiation* referred to critical thinking is in line with definition and conceptualization of novelty and initiation. It seems that his view of the construct is largely a product-oriented one. The participants believe that questioning the common and conventional way of doing things can be attributed to critical thinking. The theme also revealed that novelty can be generated out of engaging in CT. To cultivate CT means in language education, teachers are required to pay due attention to individual differences in language teaching and indulging in nurturing CT of learners and teachers.

It was made clear that the participants emphasized some fundamental building blocks and components of the construct. The teachers involved in this research advocated critical thinking - focused program of teacher education as well as the application of CT – centered tasks and activities for the purpose of teaching foreign languages including English. The participants pointed out that some teachers are, by nature, critical thinkers; whereas, critical thinking skills and strategies are teachable to other language teachers. The results show that based on the teachers' conceptions, novelty can be generated out of engaging in CT nurturing strategies. To cultivate someone CT means to lead him/her to generate new thoughts and ideas. The results of the present study are similar to Zhang, Yuan and He (2020) in that they found that Chinese EFL teachers contented that CT should be an important part of the EFL curriculum and classroom instruction. The study also revealed that the

participants appeared to lack professional knowledge of CT and how to implement it in their classes.

The present qualitative study examined the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of CT in general and its role in language teaching in particular. Generally speaking, seen from the perspectives of the language teachers participated in the current study, different themes were behind their beliefs including success, intelligence and efficiency. The results of the current study suggest that the participants are of the belief that "change" is mainly associated with processing critical thinking. To their minds, critical thinkers, to a larger extent, tend to make changes in their environment and critical thinker teachers do so in their own teaching milieu. Critical thinkers also approach the problems differently from other people. Based on the results of the study, it is recommended that curriculum developers and syllabus designers should leave room for teachers' critical thinking merit.

The results of the current study revealed that for Iranian EFL teachers, CT is associated with logical decision making, achieving efficiency, success and intelligence. In other words, the study suggests that Iranian EFL teachers hold a product-oriented view of CT. They are relatively unaware of the processes and procedures governing mental tasks in critical thinkers. The participants of the present study view and judge critical thinkers in terms of their achievements and accomplishments. The study also revealed that EFL teachers do not possess the due knowledge of how to furnish their students' critical thinking skills and how to incorporate CT-based instruction in language learning and teaching. The findings of our study also show that Iranian EFL teachers stress the significance of teaching CT to their students and teaching them how to capitalize on their CT skills to learn foreign languages including English.

The findings of the present study give countenance to Lipman (2003) in that he believes that teachers are responsible for cultivating critical thinking in the learners other than helping them to go from one educational level to the next. The results also indicate that English teachers should design critical thinking-focused tasks in their syllabi, both speaking and writing tasks which lead to critical thinker language learners. The results of the current are similar to Liang and Fung (2021) in that they offer suggestions for critical-thinking cultivation in the English-as-a-second language context and contribute to scholarly understanding of the need to integrate instructional strategies for critical thinking into language classrooms. The present study also confirms the idea postulated by Zhao, Pandian, and Singh (2016) in that they highlighted the significance of fostering such thinking in language classrooms.

Conclusions

The results of the current study show that the participants of the study claim that language teachers armed with critical thinking are better able to provide inspiration and motivation for their learners. They also believe that these teachers will be good

at defining both short-term and long-term objectives for their learners to master foreign languages. The tentative results of the study suggest that teachers can also provide their students with directions not only on how to grow in their CT, but also as how to learn foreign languages effectively and efficiently. According to the results of the current study, it can be claimed that teachers with higher levels of CT skills will look for optimum use of resources. The participants pointed out that critical thinkers conduct trial and errors in their minds prior to implementing their programs including teaching techniques and methods. One of the main challenges encountering teacher educators is teaching and measuring critical thinking in language learning and language teaching among both in-service and pre-service teachers. Future studies are suggested that to look at the relationship between teachers' critical thinking skill and teachers' self-efficacy.

The current study was conducted with lower number of participants. The adopted research design was exploratory qualitative design which limited the generalization of the findings. Future studies can adopt mixed methods designs to add rigor and robustness to their findings. Future quantitative studies are recommended to compare language teachers' perceptions of CT with than those of subject matter teachers to find the similar and different patterns of thoughts among them.

Implications

The current qualitative study has a number of pedagogical implications for language teachers, applied linguists, curriculum developers, teacher educators and policy makers. First, the study recommended that language teachers to mobilize their own critical thinking skill in their own instructional practices and their teaching methodology, to apply in their classes and in the evaluating students' language development. Teachers are also suggested to capitalize on their learners' critical thinking and find ways to nurture it. Second, with respect to theory development in language teaching profession, applied linguistics are recommended that pay due considerations to the central role critical thinking plays in human learning in general and language learning in particular. Third, curriculum developers can benefit from the findings of the present study as an integral skill of life and significant construct in education. It is strongly recommended that critical thinking should find its way to curricula in general and classroom activities and tasks in particular.

Fourth, policy makers are recommended that critical thinking should be taken into consideration in selection and recruitment of language teachers. No doubt, language teachers with higher levels of critical thinking ability can educate critical thinking learners. Finally, the participants emphasized the integrative role of CT both in language teaching and language learning. They highlighted the fact that CT-based instruction should be incorporated both in language teaching and teacher education curricula.

Teachers need to design complex learning tasks to engage students in learning so that students can develop critical thinking skills through analysis of

complex tasks and transfer what they learn to the new tasks and learning situations (Helsdingen et al., 2011). Future studies are also recommended that to investigate the role of creative thinking and creativity in teachers' professional development.

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