



**SHEIKHBAHAE UNIVERSITY**

SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

**THE DIFFERENTIAL EFFECTS OF DEBATE AND MEDIA  
ANALYSIS AS RELATE TO ENHANCING EFL LEARNERS'  
CRITICAL THINKING ABILITY AND WRITING  
PERFORMANCES**

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN TEACHING  
ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

By

**SHIVA EZZATIAN**

Supervisor

**DR. A. ALIBABAE**

SEPTEMBER, 2013

## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text. This work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Here I thank my supervisor, Dr. A. Alibabae, who read my draft copies. His insightful comments, stimulating suggestions, and encouragement helped me throughout the time I was writing this thesis.

I thank my mother and sister who supported and accompanied me through the life and also my husband that helped me through the academic years.

## TABLE OF THE CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgment.....	i
Table of the Contents.....	ii
List of Tables.....	v
List of Figures.....	vi
Abstract.....	vii
<b>Chapter One: Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Preliminaries.....	2
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	4
1.3 Research Question.....	6
1.4 Significance of the Study.....	6
1.5 Definition of Key Terms.....	7
1.5.1 Critical Thinking Ability.....	7
1.5.2 Debate.....	7
1.5.3 Media Analysis.....	8
<b>Chapter Two: Literature Review.....</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 Overview.....	10
2.2 What is Writing? .....	10
2.3 The Importance of Writing.....	10

2.4 Forms of Writing.....	12
2.5 Argumentative Writing.....	13
2.5.1 Definition.....	13
2.5.2 The Process Approach to Writing.....	14
2.5.3 The Structure or Elements of Argumentative Writing.....	15
2.6 What Is Critical Thinking?.....	15
2.7 The Importance of Critical Thinking.....	18
2.8 Who Are Critical Thinkers?.....	18
2.9 Who Are Uncritical Thinkers?.....	18
2.10 Basic Activities in Critical Thinking.....	19
2.11 The Relationship between Critical Thinking and Writing.....	20
<b>Chapter Three: Methodology.....</b>	<b>25</b>
3.1 Overview.....	26
3.2 Participants.....	26
3.3 Instrumentation.....	27
3.3.1 Critical Thinking Test.....	27
3.3.2 Composition Test.....	28
3.4 Design.....	29
3.5 Procedures.....	29
3.5.1 Data collection.....	29

3.5.1.1 Instructional Treatment.....	30
3.5.1.1.1 Debate.....	30
3.5.1.1.2 Media Analysis.....	31
3.5.1.2 Control Group.....	32
3.5.2 Data Analysis.....	33
3.5.2.1 Scoring.....	33
3.5.2.2 Statistical Procedures.....	35
<b>Chapter four: Results.....</b>	<b>36</b>
4.1 Overview.....	37
4.2 Results.....	37
<b>Chapter five: discussion and conclusion.....</b>	<b>45</b>
5.1 Overview.....	46
5.2 Discussions.....	46
5.3 Conclusion.....	47
5.4 Implications.....	49
5.5 Limitations.....	50
5.6 Suggestions for further research.....	51
References.....	53
Appendixes.....	57
Appendix A.....	58
Appendix B.....	60

## List of Tables

<b>Table 3.1:</b> Jacobs et al .....	34
<b>Table 4.1:</b> groups' descriptive results on the pretest of writing.....	37
<b>Table 4.2:</b> T-test results for prewriting and precritical.....	38
<b>Table 4.3:</b> <i>Descriptive statistics for prewriting</i> .....	39
<b>Table 4.4:</b> <i>Descriptive statistics for precritical</i> .....	39
<b>Table 4.5:</b> Mean Scores of the Groups comparing Prewriting and postwriting ...	39
<b>Table 4.6:</b> Detailed T-Test descriptive results for pretest and Posttest of writing	40
<b>Table 4.7:</b> Mean Scores of the Groups comparing Precritical and postcritical.....	41
<b>Table 4.8:</b> detailed T- Test descriptive results for precritical and postcritical thinking tests.....	42

**List of figures**

**Figure 4.1:** Graphical representation of groups' performances on pre/posttest of writing.....41

**Figure 4.2:** Graphical representation of groups' performances on pre/posttest of critical thinking.....43



## **Abstract**

Critical thinking ability has an important role in education. Accordingly, scholars around the world are searching for new ways for teaching and improving students' critical thinking ability. In line with the studies in EFL contexts supporting the positive relationship between critical thinking and writing performances, this study investigated the differential effects of Halverson's critical thinking techniques Debate and Media Analysis on intermediate EFL learners' writing performance. For this purpose, 60 male and female participants were selected randomly from among 200 students in a language institute in Esfahan. They were divided into three groups, two experimental and one control groups. Before the instructional treatment, the experimental and control groups' writing and critical thinking abilities were assessed to ensure that they were at the same level of the two constructs. After the treatment, the participants' critical thinking ability and writing performances were assessed again. The results of performing *t*-test procedure showed that the experimental groups outperformed the control one. More specifically, the experimental group, receiving Halverson's "Debate" treatment outperformed another experimental one, receiving "Media Analysis" treatment. Findings of this study can help EFL teachers and program designers to use these techniques to improve the EFL students' critical thinking ability and writing performances.

# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

## 1.1 Preliminaries

Writing is important in any academic setting. It is also important, because a growing number of works want the employees to communicate clearly and precisely through print. So writing is a “threshold skill” for both employment and promotion” (National Commission on Writing, 2004). In a recent survey, academic staff at the university identified the interrelated skills of essay-writing and reasoning as the two most important skills for success in higher education. So writing is very important in academic writing. Good writing makes good students (burnett, 2011).

When writing is taught it usually consists of mechanics such as punctuation, spelling, sentence construction and grammar. These are important skills, but there is another more important area of writing that is often ignored -the communication of ideas. The more critical thinking skills of comprehension, fluency and verbal expression and also creativity- often leads to better writing skill.

With writing students can participate and become involved and use their personal experiences, feelings and observations and it is an active process. Besides, with writing students can reinforce other skills, specially reading. Good writers are almost always good readers and vice versa. Writing can help students how to read critically and to evaluate the massive amount of information they receive both in and out of school (Elder, 2007).

Finally to write about something, people need to think. Perhaps most importantly in today's information age, thinking skills are viewed as crucial for educated persons to cope with a rapidly changing world (Cumming, 1989). Many educators believe that specific knowledge will not be as important to tomorrow's workers and citizens as the ability to learn and make sense of new information (Gough, 1991).

Actually all writers on this subject discuss thinking skills in connection with the two related phenomena of modern technology and changing world. Robinson, for example, states in her 1987 practicum report: “teaching children to become effective thinkers is increasingly recognized as an immediate goal of education....If students are to function successfully in a highly technical society, then they must be equipped with lifelong learning and thinking skills necessary to acquire and process information in an ever-changing world” (p. 18).

The general benefit of teaching critical thinking to the classroom is twofold. Firstly, classes with elements of critical thought in it are generally more interesting and engaging. Consider for example, two possible discussion topics related to a unit. Topic one asks students to summarize the main issues discussed in the class for doing a final writing activity and topic two asks students to outline the draft of a letter to be sent to the city's mayor discussing their concerns about environmental issues in the city (Facione, 1990).

Although both approaches facilitate language use in class, it is clear that the latter topic will encourage a greater degree of participation and interest from the students. Secondly, using issues that encourage critical thinking helps the classroom to have a more meaningful environment. Students who feel that they are working together will attend more to the classes and will be more involved in it. These skills in critical thinking are not only vital for students to perform well in school, but also needed in their future workplaces, social and interpersonal contexts, because in these settings making decisions carefully and independently are very important.

This thesis aims to study how to teach critical thinking and to use Halverson's techniques "Debate" and "Media Analysis" to improve students' critical thinking

ability and writing performances and to know what the differential effects of these two techniques are.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Everyone thinks; it is our nature to do so. But much of our thinking is biased, distorted, partial or uninformed (Halpern, 2003). Yet the quality of our life and that of what we produce, make, or build depends on the quality of our thought (Norris, 1989).

So critical thinking is the best choice, but it is not an easy concept to define because it has quite different meanings to different people in different contexts and cultures. Generally, to think critically about an issue means to consider that issue from various perspectives, to look at and challenge any possible assumptions that may underlie the issue and to explore its possible choices (Soden, 2000). This type of thinking is not always easy, but well-informed teachers can help to encourage its development in their students (Pithers, 2000).

Critical thinking includes the ability to analyze and evaluate one's own thinking processes and it is self-directed thinking and a self-monitored process that requires effective problem solving abilities (Colby, 2009). For improving student's problem solving abilities, good critical thinking is not an innate or natural ability for most students but they can learn through effective pedagogical methods to learn to think critically and to improve their problem solving abilities. Students need the ability to question, reason, and consider other perspectives and to learn how to evaluate their own biases, values, claims, and belief systems (Huff, 2000).

Today students have different beliefs and values. They also live in an information-driven society. The challenge for them is to learn how to evaluate and use that

information so the best result can successfully be applied to new situations (Bekurs, 2011). Educational psychologists, such as Thomas and Smoot (1994) and Huitt (1998) have stated that critical thinking is a very important element of education in the 21st century. Huitt stated that in the information age, “thinking” plays a significant role in one's success in life. He says that the movement toward the information age has shifted attention to good thinking as a significant element of life success. These changing conditions require new outcomes, such as critical thinking, to be included in education. Similarly, Chaffee (1985) and Paul (1995) stated that enhancing students' critical thinking abilities is the core of meaningful education.

For equipping students with these tools, research findings suggest that integrating instruction of critical thinking with instruction in a discipline or with writing leads to greater gains in critical thinking than teaching an exclusive course in critical thinking (Chapman, 2001; Gammill, 2006; Girot, 1995; Hatcher, 2006; Kennison, 2006; Miller, 1992). Association of American Colleges & Universities (2007) suggest that essential learning, including critical thinking and writing, must be integrated throughout undergraduate education. Critical thinking is used in academic writing to help students to participate in a discussed topic in class or to a particular reading assignment (Aaron, 2007). Accordingly, implementing research studies on the effectiveness of writing instruction is a need of ELT field.

Regarding students' lack of critical thinking ability and their difficulty in writing and in line with the studies in EFL contexts confirming the positive relationship between critical thinking ability and writing skill, the current study aims to investigate the effectiveness of teaching Halverson's critical thinking techniques (Debate and

Media Analysis) and their differential effects in enhancing EFL learners' critical thinking abilities and writing performances.

### **1.3 Research Question**

The focal point of the study was to investigate whether teaching of critical thinking could impact the learners' writing skill and critical thinking ability compared to those who did not receive any critical thinking instruction. Therefore, the following research question was posed:

1) What are the differential effects of "Debate" and "Media Analysis" on improving EFL learners' critical thinking ability and writing performances?

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

Educators and scholars are researching about "critical thinking" nearly half a century, because it is very important in human life (Price, 2004). Students must learn critical thinking and they should not agree with everything presenting to them. There should be reasons for accepting everything around them especially in education environment, such as schools, universities, and language institutes.

One important aspect of education is learning how to write. Writing is one of the most authentic and reliable ways of getting thoughts to others. Learning to write is regarded as a basic skill that without it further education may be largely impossible.

Writing and critical thinking are seen as closely linked, and experts in writing show that students have mastered the cognitive skills required for their work. In other words, lack of writing expertise shows that students do not possess the appropriate thinking and reasoning skills that they need to succeed (Shangarffam & Mamipour, 2011).

So because of their reciprocal effects, this thesis wants to improve both writing skill and thinking skills, using Halverson's critical thinking techniques of "Debate" and "Media Analysis". It uses argumentative genre to test students thinking and reasoning by writing a text and explain their opinions about the topic.

## **1.5 Definition of Key Terms**

### **1.5.1 Critical Thinking Ability**

Critical thinking means the process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, or evaluating information that gathered from observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, and it leads to belief and action. It needs to examine the structures or elements that are implicit in all reasoning: purpose, problem; assumptions; concepts; reasoning that leads to conclusions; implications and consequences (Atkinson, 1997).

### **1.5.2 Debate**

Debate is a kind of discussion and a formal contest of argumentation between two teams or individuals. Debate forces students to think about the multiple sides of an issue and it also forces them to interact not only with the topic, but also with one another. Also debates are varied in the range of topics possible and the format that the debate may follow (Halverson, 2005). An important point of debate is that it rarely ends in agreement, but rather allows for analyzing the given question (Popper, 2011). Perhaps this is what French philosopher Joseph Joubert meant when he said: "It is better to debate a question without settling it, than to settle a question without debating it" (2003).



### **1.5.3 Media Analysis**

**Media Analysis** means using different media types (such as printed newspapers and television) to see which medium is best for promoting a certain product (Hall, 2009). Analyzing different forms of media, either in an ESL or EFL environment, helps students to think about important issues like media bias and censorship. The media is all around us so finding material for classroom use needs only to open a newspaper or to watch the news (Halverson, 2005).

## **Chapter two**

### **Literature Review**

## **2.1 Overview**

This chapter is devoted to a concise description of research relevant to the field of critical thinking and writing skill. This review is divided into three parts. The first part takes focus on writing: its importance, definition, forms and one of its major categories: argumentative writing including its definition, the process approach and elements. The second part of this chapter takes focus on critical thinking, again: its definition, importance, critical and uncritical thinkers and activities for critical thinking. At last, the third part dedicates to the relationship between these two subjects: critical thinking and writing, moreover the pitfalls of previous studies and the goal of this study are explained in concluding mark.

## **2.2 What Is Writing?**

Writing is language in a textual medium through the use of a set of signs or symbols (known as a writing system). It is distinguished from illustration, such as cave drawing and painting, and non-symbolic preservation of language via non-textual media, such as magnetic tape audio (Wiegand, 2012).

Writing most likely began as a consequence of political expansion in ancient cultures, which needed reliable means for transmitting information, maintaining financial accounts, keeping historical records, and similar activities (Wikipedia).

## **2.3 The Importance of Writing**

Writing a text is the most difficult skill to accomplish for most students, whether they are first or second language speakers of English. Writing requires complex, integrated processes in order to compose a logical, coherent text suited for its purposes (Yan, 2011). Nunan describes it as an 'enormous challenge' to produce an

elaborated text (1999). This is due to the rhetorical conventions of English texts - structure, style and organization - that prove to be quite a challenge for learners to grasp. Yan (2011) points out that in most countries, the focus of writing is for test/exam purposes - purely to convey subject knowledge. This diminishes learners' interest in the writing process, as it is viewed as a means to an end, rather than a meaningful, extended process of development. Writing thus becomes decontextualized and irrelevant' to learners, who have no sense of purpose or real audience (Yan, 2011).

Writing may be used for either of two broad purposes: to discover ideas or to communicate them. Most of the writing you have done in school is undoubtedly the latter kind. But the former can be very helpful, not only in sorting out ideas you've already produced, but also in stimulating the flow of new ideas. For some reason, the very act of writing down one idea seems to generate additional ideas (Norris, 1989).

Whenever you write to discover ideas, focus on the issue you are examining and record all your thoughts, questions, and assertions. If ideas come slowly, be patient. If they come suddenly, in a rush, don't try to slow down the process and develop any one of them; simply jot them all down. (There will be time for elaboration and correction later). Direct your mind's effort, but be sensitive to ideas on the fringe of consciousness. Often they, too, will prove valuable. If you have done your discovery writing well and have thought critically about the ideas you have produced, the task of writing to communicate will be easier and more enjoyable. You will have many more ideas—carefully evaluated ones—to develop and organize (Andriessen, 2007).