Authorial Voice in Iranian EFL Writing

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For years, it has been observed that Iranian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students suffer from weaknesses in expressing their original thoughts in writing in a foreign language. According to Salmani Nodoushan (2016), part of this problem seems to be associated with critical thinking, defined as "making reasoned judgments to assessing the validity of something" (Beyer, 1995), and partly due to individual voice, defined as "authorial identity" (Bhatia & Salmani Nodoushan, 2015; Brown & Salmani Nodoushan, 2015; Hirvela and Belcher, 2001; Ivanic, 1998; Johns & Salmani Nodoushan, 2015). In this paper, two issues are investigated: firstly, whether Iranian EFL users in an English Language Teaching (ELT) department display elements of critical thinking and voice; and secondly, whether these students think they possess them. The argumentative essays of 76 EFL students were analyzed via Stapleton's (2001 p. 252) criteria which seek the elements of critical thinking (claims, kinds of reasoning, the extent of evidence, recognition of opposing arguments and refutation, and fallacies) and individual voice. Students' perceptions related to critical thinking and voice were elicited through a questionnaire administered to the same group of respondents. The analysis of the essays shows that there are too many unsupported claims in the essays; therefore, the students ignore constructing arguments comprising claims supported with reasons and evidence from the texts they read. The amount of evidence and reasons used to substantiate these claims is not sufficient to form healthy arguments, which implies that the students tend to write or copy what they read rather than filtering it through their judgment and reasoning. Opposing arguments in the texts do not seem to be recognized and refuted. Claims are not supported with logical and related conclusions. The questionnaire demonstrates that the students have a high level of critical thinking and individual voice in expressing themselves clearly and putting their own viewpoint into their writing, rather than sharing somebody else's viewpoint, which are not reflected in the essays. The results suggest that EFL students need to be supported in terms of critical thinking skills though they perceive themselves to be critical thinkers to overcome the difficulties in writing and to cope with the requirements of the multicultural world.

Key words: *Critical Thinking; Voice: L2 writing; Iranian EFL Education; Academic Writing; Fallacy*

1. Introduction

Recent research in the domain of EFL education in Iran has emphasized the importance of learner factors such as learners' knowledge of pragmatics, politeness, and target culture (Allan & Salmani Nodoushan, 2015; Capone & Salmani Nodoushan, 2014; Salmani Nodoushan, 1995, 2006a,b, 2007a,b,c; 2008a,b,c; 2012a; 2013a,b; 2014a,b,c; 2015a; 2016a,b,c; 2017; Salmani Nodoushan & Allami, 2011), learners' knowledge of genres and rhetorics (Bhatia & Salmani Nodoushan, 2015; Brown & Salmani Nodoushan, 2015; John & Salmani Nodoushan, 2015; Salmani Nodoushan, 1992; 1998; 2003; 2006c,d; 2007d,e,f; 2008d,e,f,g; 2009a,b,c,d,e,f; 2010a,b,c,d; 2011a,b; 2012b; 2014d; 2016d,e; Salmani Nodoushan & Khakbaz, 2011, 2012; Salmani Nodoushan & Montazeran, 2012), learners' psychological and personal states (Al Shalabi & Salmani Nodoushan, 2009; Karami &

Salmani Nodoushan, 2011, 2014; Nemati, Salmani Nodoushan & Ashrafzadeh, 2010; Salmani Nodoushan, 2006e; 2007g,h,i; 2008h; 2011c,d,e; 2012c,d; 2016f), and other random factors (Salmani Nodoushan, 2013c; 2014e; 2015a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h; Salmani Nodoushan & Alavi, 2004; Salmani Nodoushan & Birjandi, 2005; Salmani Nodoushan, & Daftarifard, 2011; Salmani Nodoushan & Garcia Laborda, 2014; Salmani Nodoushan & Mohiyedin Ghomshei, 2014). In a recent article, Salmani Nodoushan and Pashapour (2016) argued that critical thinking skills necessary for academic success and for life. Nevertheless, they argue that critical thinking skills are domain specific, and that the same skills cannot be used by students majoring in different fields of study or at different age levels. Critical thinking skills aid learners when they are going to question the validity of ideas in texts or judge the ideas of other people. Also, they are to filter knowledge of all sorts through their reasoning and to find logical flaws instead of accepting them as they are.

For long, it has been observed that Iranian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students have great difficulties when writing essays in English as they cannot easily integrate their own ideas. The difficulty seems to stem from mere loyalty to texts given as course materials (course books, reference books, hand-outs, reports on the net and so on). Moreover, their hesitation to write what they really think also poses the problem of "judging" and "questioning". While writing essays, it is observed that students just copy excerpts from the texts without any elaboration. Beyond their limited English language knowledge, it is highly questionable whether this situation might be associated with critical thinking skills and voice, which are not emphasized explicitly within the Iranian educational system including language education (Salmani Nodoushan, & Daftarifard, 2011; Salmani Nodoushan & Pashapour, 2016).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Critical Thinking

Chance (1986, p.6) sees critical thinking as the ability to analyze facts, generate and organize ideas, defend opinions, make comparisons, draw inferences, evaluate arguments and solve problems. Beyer (1995, p. 8) defines critical thinking as ". . . making reasoned judgments", basically, seeing critical thinking as using criteria to judge the quality of something, from cooking to a conclusion of a research paper. In essence, critical thinking is a disciplined manner of thought that a person uses to assess the validity of something (statements, news stories, arguments, research, etc.). Critical thinking involves identifying, evaluating, and constructing arguments and the ability to infer a conclusion from one or multiple premises. To do so requires examining logical relationships among statements or data. Ambiguity and doubt serve a critical-thinking function and are a necessary and productive part of the process, urging the writer to continue the search until the correct conclusion is found (Beyer, 1985; Salmani Nodoushan & Pashapour, 2016).

Briefly, critical thinkers judge and question an idea or thought based on reliable evidence by establishing logical relationships among statements or data based on reliable evidence or source by establishing logical relationships. In a text, within the framework of critical thinking, students are to recognize the following aspects:

- the central claims or purpose of the text, its thesis, and its argumentation
- some judgements about context
- kinds of reasoning the text employs
- the evidence (the supporting facts, examples, etc.) the text uses
- the strengths and weaknesses of an argument

Accordingly, good writing should reflect the aspects of critical thinking. Therefore, a writer

should generate some content, to put forth assumptions, evidence, and arguments that he can then defend and from which he can draw conclusions (Knott, 2005; Kurland, 2000; Salmani Nodoushan & Pashapour, 2016). A thinking mind should be reflected in writing. Stapleton (2001, pp. 536-539) proposes the following:

1- Arguments: Arguments are claims supported by a reason. A claim consists of a statement whose truth is arguable, and is often advanced in answer to a problem or controversial issue. A claim which stands alone without a supported reason is an opinion and cannot be classified as an argument. Claims may be proposals, definitions, and evaluations.

2- Reasons: Reasons are statements used to support claims and generally answer why the claim should be believed. Reasons must show a direct logical link to the claim in order to be bound into a single proposition called an argument. Reasons need not be new; however if they are simple repetitions of those found in the prompt, without elaboration, they do not indicate critical thinking.

3- Evidence constitutes statements or assertions serving to strengthen the argument. It can be defined as support for the truth of a proposition, especially those that derive from empirical observation or experience (Kemerling, 2002). Forms of evidence are personal experience, research studies, statistics, citing authorities, comparisons and analogies, pointing out consequences, facts, logical explanations, and precisely defining words (Ramage & Bean, 1999).

4- Recognition of Opposition and Refutation: Opposing viewpoints constitute statements that run counter or offer alternative interpretations to those expressed in the claim. As with the arguments, these alternative viewpoints do not have to be original: they can be taken from the prompt. Refutations are statements in which the writer responds to the opposing viewpoint in a way that shows that it is inadequate in some way. Shortcomings in opposing viewpoints can include logical flaws, poor support, erroneous assumptions or wrong values (Ramage & Bean 1999, p. 117). Refutations must be logically linked to the opposing views which they profess to counter. They can also offer rival causes or solutions. In refuting an opposing or alternate view, the writer maintains his conclusion.

5- Conclusion: A conclusion is a statement or series of statements in which a writer sets out what she wants the reader to believe. This belief is conveyed via an argument, evidence and other statements that the author uses to signal his belief. Conclusions are usually limited to agreeing, disagreeing or taking some middle ground with respect to the prompt.

6- Fallacies are errors in reasoning. Davis and Davis (2000) contend that thinking critically is to find logical fallacies. It occurs when the reason does not adequately support the claim in a number of ways (Kemerling, 2002).

Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999) imply that in order to think critically, one must have an individual voice (See also Salmani Nodoushan & Pashapour, 2016). Secondly, this voice should not be influenced by concerns of group cohesiveness or the status of those making alternative claims. In order to display critical thinking skills, students have to have the freedom to voice their ideas comfortably. It is reported that there is a strong bond between critical thinking and voice (Stapleton, 2001, 2002).

2.2. Individual voice

Individual voice in writing refers to authorial identity (Ivanic, 1998; Hirvela & Belcher, 2001) or authorial presence (Hyland 2001). Elbow (1981) describes it as writing that "captures the

sounds of the individual on the page" (p. 287). Voice is the speaking personality or the speaking consciousness (Holquist & Emerson, 1981 cited in Wertsch, 1991). An utterance can only be produced by a voice. An utterance, spoken or written, is always expressed from a point of view (voice). The notion of utterance is inherently linked with that of voice. It is concerned with the broader issues of speaking subject's perspective, conceptual horizon, intention and world view (Wertsch, 1991 pp. 51-52).

The identification of authorial voice in written discourse proves quite difficult as it involves voice appropriation which is not a straightforward citation of other people's ideas, but a rather complex set of linguistic strategies. In some cases, it is found related with the use of such linguistic means as the use of the first person and second person pronouns "I" and "you", vocative "hey guy" and explicit voice marker "in my opinion"(Scollon et al., 1998 p. 232). The study by Cummings et al. (2005 p. 32), in their categorization of utterances, the utterances reflecting "self" are defined as those in which the writer is the source of information or the writer expresses ideas or thoughts from his or her experience with the uses of "I".

Of great significance, here, is that Eastern education differs from Western education with respect to the role of critical thinking and voice. Given that critical thinking and voice are deemed to be peculiar to the western culture, although Eastern philosophy encourages independent thought, the issues of voice and critical thinking have been mostly investigated by Western-oriented second language researchers who concluded that they should be an integral part of both first (L1) and second language (L2) writing (Paul, 1990; Facione; 1990; Salmani Nodoushan & Pashapour, 2016; Scollon, et al., 1998; Park and Stapleton, 2003; Condon and Kelly-Riley, 2004). On the other hand, Asian societies labeled as "status-oriented," "hierarchical," "group-oriented," "collectivist," "interdependent" are contrasted with the individualistic, adversarial, horizontal and critically thinking patterns of their western counterparts. Asian students are thought not to display critical thinking skills and an individualized voice in their writing (Atkinson, 1997; Fox, 1994; Ramanathan and Kaplan, 1996; Salmani Nodoushan & Pashapour, 2016).

There is considerable research into Asian learners that claim Eastern education may be perceived by Western-oriented educators as something quite different, but this difference should not be taken as a "deficit". For example, Le Ha (2004; 2006) argues that it is not necessarily a must to conform to Western teaching standards in ELT classrooms and the difference does not mean "corruption". He believes that a harmonious combination of both standards will enrich language competence of Vietnamese language learners and teachers. Similarly, Liu (2005) argues against Sowden's (2005) idea that Chinese students tend to "plagiarize" rather than think due to cultural conditioning. To him, the use of memorized language patterns in writing is not plagiarism and different from plagiarism of ideas. Likewise, Carroll (2004) stands against stereotyping Japanese learners as individuals lacking critical thinking skills. The reason for their reticence in discussion, to her, is their limited language proficiency and resources, rather than critical thinking skills.

Le Ha & Viete (2002), in a different study, explores the representation of 'self' and finds evidence for voice in her research writing. In the same vein, the presence of voice is demonstrated in Japanese written discourse (in L1) by Matsuda (2001), who claims that the practice of constructing "voice" is not foreign to "collectivist cultures, giving the evidence for voice in electronic texts through the use of language specific discursive features."

An assessment of critical thinking elements and voice in second language writing was conducted by Stapleton (2002). In his study, to find out whether Asian learners display elements of critical thinking and individualized identity, a nine-item questionnaire was issued to 70 second year students from five different faculties at a large university in northern Japan. In contrast to the established views that Asian students have hierarchical

tendencies, he found that Japanese students possessed a firm grasp of elements of critical thinking. The participants had little hesitation to voice opinions counter to authority figures.

In Iranian culture, such values as authority, social harmony and deference to the elders and teachers are much appreciated as in several Asian cultures like Japanese (Stapleton, 2001), Thai (Hongladarom, 2006) and Chinese culture (Liu, 2005). This is reported to have a significant influence on learner independence in Iranian context. Palfreyman (2001) contends that previous experiences and social context could influence learner independence because learners cannot be thought independent of their own culture. The observed problem is closely associated with the problem of autonomy of the learners in the Iranian educational setting. For example, Sert (2006) reports that Iranian EFL students lack the capacity for self-assessment in monitoring their own language learning process. There are several other studies that pinpoint many university students lacked necessary critical thinking and reflection skills to cope with the requirements of academic life such as skills of how to plan, conduct and evaluate research (Karasar, 1984; Buyukozturk, 1996; Karagul, 1996; Öner, 1999; Buyukozturk, 1999; Koklu and Buyukozturk, 1999). Additionally, Erdogan's (2003) study at a Iranian secondary school shows that teachers cannot resist traditional constructs of teaching as they are educated in the same society. Other descriptive studies in the Iranian context also confirm the relationship between learner dependence and social context in Iran (Iskenderoglu, 1992; Keskekci, 1995). Alpay-Altuğ et al., (2003) attempted to identify some factors that are to influence the development of critical thinking skills in a group of 1026 adolescents. As the previous studies revealed that age, gender, academic success have impacts on the development of critical thinking, their study aimed to find the relationship between critical thinking levels and parents' attitudes towards their children, their income and education levels. The findings indicated that critical thinking skills were positively correlated with mothers' liberal attitudes and they increased as fathers' education levels got higher.

Kökdemir's (2003) study provides clues about the dispositions of Iranian university students towards critical thinking skills. In his study, Kökdemir conducted a critical thinking module with freshman students in the course "An Introduction to Psychology" in the Economy, Administration and Communication Faculty, Başkent University. It was observed that students had difficulty on their first attempt, but later could achieve the tasks comfortably and felt open to critical thinking. It was reported that such a practice should be turned into a reflexive action and such thinking can be taught.

An additional number of studies which assess critical thinking in the classroom environment show that critical thinking instruction has not been embedded into the Iranian educational system and that students and teachers have not been guided in such a thinking style (Kaya, 1997; Gelen, 1999; Öner, 1999; Çokluk-Bökeoğlu, 2004). Furthermore, it is indicated that coursebooks are not selected or adapted to enhance critical thinking (Munzur, 1998). Critical thinking skills and voice as associated with EFL writing have not been investigated in the Iranian milieu yet.

The PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) Project, which was conducted by a collaboration of ministries of education of 41 countries in 2003 evaluated four reading comprehension strategies (PIRLS: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), among 150000 children of various ages in obligatory education in the European Union and candidate countries, in relation to their social environment, in terms of (a)Focusing on and retrieve explicitly stated information, (b) Making direct inferences, (c) Interpreting and integrating ideas and information, and (d) Examining and evaluating content, language, and textual elements (PIRLS 2001 Framework). The results showed that Iranian students along with students from Cyprus, Slovenia, and Norway appear to be towards the end of the scale. This situation might be open to any interpretation. Some may think that the use of a western scale in the measurement of literacy skills in Iranian context is not reliable;

however, it is worth investigating whether the problem lies in the rote memorization-based instruction in which Iranian students are involved. Since the traditional instructional process urges the students to receive ready-made information without questioning, they are not encouraged to think critically, which is probably transferred into ELT classes as well (Vancı-Osam, 1998; Dahmeroglu and VancıOsam, 2005; Salmani Nodoushan & Pashapour, 2016).

Iranian EFL students frequently struggle in writing essays in L2 literature classes as they are expected to judge, evaluate the literary texts and express their thoughts freely. Essays are argumentative in nature, therefore they should be conscious of the major tenets of argumentation, which is a renewed pedagogical interest in the form of critical thinking (Birjandi, Alavi & Salmani Nodoushan, 2004; Rottenberg, 1991 p. v).

Specifically, in writing essays, the students seem to have difficulties in producing claims of their own, which is related to the probable lack of voice. They do not reflect their viewpoint for fear that their ideas are not validated or appreciated. Therefore, in the exams, the students just report what they have been taught, rather than produce critical comments. They all agree with whatever the text says and with whatever the teacher says. They appear to be unaware of their importance and the value of their ideas. Students also seem to be prone to receive any information without questioning. Meanwhile, their attempt to question or comment on what is taught and read is vain as such an attitude is not acceptable in the traditional educational system in which the learners are not encouraged to think critically and independently. Students might have certain dispositions for critical thinking at the very beginning of their education, but, later on, their disposition seems to be spoilt by the existing educational system.

Integrating critical thinking at all levels of education might help address the problem indicated above and might make students aware that they are important as individuals. Such an integration will make them believe that their ideas/thoughts, decisions, evaluations are of great value in their education both in the mother tongue and in a foreign language. Therefore, the first step to compensate for this inadequacy in education is to indicate the existence of the problem.

Therefore, in this paper, we aim to measure critical thinking levels of EFL students in order to gain insights into the problem mentioned. The research questions addressed in this paper are as follows:

1- Do Iranian EFL students in ELT departments display elements of critical thinking and individual voice as manifested in their essays?

2- How do they perceive themselves in terms of critical thinking elements and individual voice as a component of critical thinking?

3. Methodology

3.1. Instruments

76 essays of sophomore undergraduate students in a literature class in an ELT department were analyzed in terms of the elements of critical thinking and voice. The essays were written in their final exams. A set of literary works studied during the term in *An Introduction to English Language Literature Course* served as the prompts for the essays. The students had been assigned to collect information about them on the internet and returned homework, which familiarized them with the content as in Stapleton's study (2001).

Interrater reliability percentage was calculated (above 0.90) out of the independent assessments of the essays by two raters, one of whom is the researcher and the other was a colleague. The number of agreed-on elements were identified and divided by the total

number of agreements and disagreements and multiplied by 100 (as suggested by Hall & Van Houten, 1983).

Additionally, a questionnaire was administered to the same group of students (*N* = 76) to probe their perceptions as to whether they show critical thinking and individual voice. The items related to harmony and clarity in the questionnaire were adapted from Stapleton (2001, p. 252), but the remaining items directly sought for the elements of critical thinking and voice perception.

The questionnaire sought for the perceptions of students about clarity (Item 1), evidence, reason, opposing arguments conclusion, harmony (Items 2, 3, 4, 5) and voice (Item 7). A Likert scale was used. The answers were scored on a five-point scale in which "1" corresponded to "strongly disagree" and "5" to "strongly agree". Item 1 checked "clarity", whether they can produce claims clearly stated. In piloting, the questionnaires were delivered in English, but later, to support comprehension, it was decided that they should be translated into Persian and back translated.

The internal reliability of the questionnaire with seven items including clarity, evidence, reason, recognition, conclusion, harmony and voice was found to be 0.68. The sixth item was dropped to increase the overall consistency. With six items, the reliability coefficient was found to be 0.74. The analysis was done with the remaining six items.

3.2. Procedure

To analyze the questionnaire, the mean scores of the responses were first calculated and later evaluated. In analysing essays, some solid linguistic indicators in addition to criteria given above are taken into account:

1- Knowing that **claims** consist of proposals, definitions and evaluations the analysis of claims in the essays was as follows: For proposals, modals like "may", "might" and verbs like "suggest" ,"show" "demonstrate" "indicate" and so on were considered. The use of simple present tense, and verb "to be" mostly indicated definitions. Evaluations are deemed to require an extensive use of adjectives as well as subjective judgments.

2- In the essays, **reasons** are often identified by indicator words and phrases such as "because", "for this reason" and "for one thing" and such similar conjunctions showing cause and effect relationships. Additionally, although the essays include many repetitions of the reasons taken from the prompts, all logical reasons are tallied.

3- **Evidence** may be of many forms irrespective of language use whether it be personal experience, research studies, statistics, citing authorities, comparisons and analogies, pointing out consequences, facts, logical explanations, precisely defining words (Ramage & Bean, 1999; Birjandi, Alavi & Salmani Nodoushan, 2004).

4- **Opposing viewpoints and refutations** are identified by indicator phrases and words such as:

> *It may be argued that ..*
> *It might be asserted/contended/maintained/claimed that ..*
> *It is said that …….but,….*
> *Some people claim that….however.*
> *Conjunctive devices like "although", "despite" and "even though"*

5- In evaluating **conclusions**, first, we examined whether the essays had a conclusion or not. Secondly, it was considered whether the main premise was concluded

properly through reasoning. Explicit conclusions containing declarations such as "I agree", "I disagree", "I am undecided" or indicator words or phrases including "therefore", "instead" and "as a result" or "in conclusion" were taken into account in addition to implicit conclusions

To examine "voice" in the essays, first, the essays were divided into the smallest terminable units, which are the shortest units which a sentence can be reduced to (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Cummings et al., 2005). The total number of T-Units and the number of T-Units representing "self" per essay was calculated, which was taken as the indicator of the extent to which the student writers displayed authorial voice in their essays.

4. Results

Of the essays, 60 were on Seven Deadly Sins in Dr Faustus by Christopher Marlowe, while 6, on love in The Flea by John Donne, and 10 on the limitations of human beings in Dr. Faustus by Marlowe. Each essay was attentively elaborated in terms of critical thinking elements and agreed elements are recorded in Table 1.

Table 1
Critical Thinking Elements in the Essays

	Claims	Reasons	Evidence	Opposing Arguments & Refutations	Fallacies	Irrelevant Conclusion
Rater 1	310	44	33	4	111	24
Rater 2	320	44	30	4	111	24
Percent Interrater Reliability	97	100	90	100	100	100

• Critical Thinking Elements and Individual Voice in the Essays

Arguments: Claims-Reasons-Evidence: There are a huge number of claims, most of which are in the form of definitions in the essays. However, the number of reasons and evidence is not as large as that of the claims. Students remain unable to obtain evidence from the texts to back up their claims. Additionally, Arguments are weakly supported due to the inadequacy of evidence and reasons. Some claims are as follows:

"Dr. Faustus' pride results in his personal catastrophe".
"Step by step, his morality corrupts and salvation becomes inevitable"
"All the properties of ancient tragedy are reflected in Dr. Faustus".
"It (the story of Dr. Faustus) has full of moral lessons for human beings."
"The story (Dr. Faustus) aims to make people learn from others' mistakes by observing"
"The poem (The Flea) focuses on a conceit, flea biting is likened to sexual intercourse"
"The poem (The Flea) is woven with metaphorical uses."
"The poet (in The Flea) and his lover are restricted with the social norms as intercourse before marriage is not acceptable"

Recognition of Opposition and Refutation: Interestingly, though the students had already studied the texts and read the commentary/criticism provided, no previously stated commentary or view about the characters, plot, conflict or setting in the literary works was mentioned and/or refuted. When all the statements are considered, it is seen that they narrated what they read in a plain and non-responsive way, showing no emotion or reaction. As the students preferred to report pre-established and previously constructed

arguments, they obviously neglected to form a new argument by stating a claim and to support it. They did not try to refute what has been said before.

Fallacies: Fallacies are the most challenging and intricate part of the analysis (Birjandi, Alavi & Salmani Nodoushan, 2004; Salmani Nodoushan, 2016e). Most students tended to oversimplify complicated aspects of the texts. This may be due to the inadequacy of textual knowledge and limited English language knowledge.

A great deal of students attempted to write about a topic closely related to the topic required, which averts the direction of the argument (Straw Man fallacy—See Salmani Nodoushan, 2016e). This may be associated with the fact that they have already prepared the essays and have not gone to the bother of writing a new one during the exam. It might also be related to the easy access to the internet resources and ready-made essays.

Drawing an irrelevant conclusion was quite the most frequent fallacy committed by the students. It is seen that most of the arguments had irrelevant conclusions. Out of 76 essays, 24 had an irrelevant and not fully developed conclusion. Two had no conclusion at all.

Hasty generalization, in which students jump to conclusions without evaluating reasons and evidence, was detected as well (See Salmani Nodoushan, 2016e). Moreover, along with the fallacy "begging the question" a kind of circular reasoning, ad hominem fallacy, which is an attack against the source of an argument, not against the idea in the argument, was also seen in the essays (see Rottenberg, 1991 pp. 223-233, and Foldop Online Dictionary of Philosophy; See also Salmani Nodoushan, 2016e).

The number of fallacies observed were: Oversimplification (41), Straw Man fallacy (36) and Irrelevant conclusion (24), Hasty generalization (8), Begging the question (1), and Ad hominem fallacy (1), some examples of which are shown below:

> 1-"Dr. Faustus is a short play which was written by C. Marlowe. Of course, in this play the most important point is seven deadly sins" (oversimplification).
>
> 2-" People who made one of these seven deadly sins would be killed (oversimplification)
>
> 3- "In this century poems are written in metaphysical genre "(hasty generalization)
>
> 4- Fleas were a popular subject for humourous and love poetry in all countries at Renaissance"(hasty generalization).
>
> 5.Even (?) in our life, there are always sins which we avoid doing or if we did by mistake, we try to get rid of them.(the essay continues with sins in real life) (Straw Man fallacy)
>
> 6-From a student essay about "How is love viewed in The Flea" (Straw Man fallacy)
>
> John Donne in the 17th Century
>
> The 17th Century begins with the death of the Elizabeth Tudor. Then James I in 1603 enthrones the England. So it gives rise to some social, economical, religious, political events.
> These important events are that appearing the Catholics and Puritanists.
> In these period, Puritanism is seen at the high level even though many people who don't accept Puritanism. Puritanists are the purer Christianity than the protestantists. They think protestanists are not real Christian. They have many strict rules However as some people could not accept it, the secularism, is seen in that period.
> Oliwer Cromwell is the founder of a government which is commonwealth. It is very important event in order to show their existence. As the society begin to understand

the realities. Scientific interests are seen in that period.
Some examples of metaphysical poets are seen. It is lyric poet. Metapysical poets are related to two things which don't show the realities. In the 17th century is the age of the prose. So economical writing are seen even though some conceits are seen. But they are not the high rate as in the 16th century.
The most prominent writers are John Donne and John Milton. John Donne who writes the Flea is metaphysical poet . The fundemantal aim shows the love in the poet. It includes many conceits.

7-Dr Faustus is a different example of tragedy ……………it is a tragic story. It is an example of tragedy. (Begging the question)

8-From a student essay about Dr Faustus that was to be written about Dr Faustus and his seeking for knowledge) (Straw Man fallacy)
Within the text of Christopher Marlowe is Doctor Faustus as a reader recognizes the struggle between super ego and id. In the play, Faustus struggles with himself while Lucifer and Mephistopher struggle with him. It is represented the constant struggle between id and superego . . .

- **Critical Thinking and Individual Voice as perceived by the students**

In terms of individual voice in the essays, out of 1267 T-Units, there were only 14 utterances representing 'self' in the essays. The questionnaire shows that almost all the respondents perceive that they display a high level of critical thinking (Table 2).

Table 2
Mean Scores in the Questionnaire

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Clarity	76	4.06	0.85
Evidence	76	3.69	0.98
Reason	76	4.07	0.76
Recognizing others' viewpoints	76	4.28	0.78
Conclusion	76	4.14	1.0
Voice	76	4.39	0.80

5. Conclusions

The phenomenon found in this study of essays implies that the Iranian EFL students under investigation still retain a sense of loyalty to the texts and are reticent to isolate themselves from the arguments within them. Primarily, the vast number of the claims confirms their dependence on the texts. The claims are not supported with adequate evidence from the texts in the form of facts, experience, citing authorities, comparisons and analogies, consequences, and logical explanations. This idea is strengthened with the small number of causal relations and the frequency of irrelevant conclusions, most of which pave the way for fallacies. The existing cause and effect structures reflect perfect grammaticality, which gives the feeling that they are copied or memorized. The phenomenon shows that students tend to memorize and write what they read rather than filter it through their judgment and reasoning. Copying the parts of the texts which do not contain the arguments, reporting just claims in the form of proposals, definitions, and evaluations might indicate that texts are handled for their informativity rather than the source of evidence and the bases of their arguments. This situation fits into the didactic approach or concept-based instruction in the classic educational system where learning is centered on the retention of previously learned information and where no thinking is required (Çokluk-Bökeoğlu, 2004, p.29; Salmani

Nodoushan & Pashapour, 2016). In this particular study, the analysis of essays in terms of voice indicates that the students are frightened to add their comments into the essays The number of T-Units reflecting "self" were quite few when compared with the total number of T-Units. This aspect of the present study supports the views reported in the studies into learner autonomy and independence in Iran (Salmani Nodoushan, 2013c; 2014e; 2015a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h; Salmani Nodoushan & Alavi, 2004; Salmani Nodoushan & Birjandi, 2005; Salmani Nodoushan, & Daftarifard, 2011; Salmani Nodoushan & Pashapour, 2016).

To our surprise, the results of the questionnaire are not in conformity with the phenomenon in the essays. The former shows that the students desire to express their points of view freely and that they do not want to reflect the text or the teacher's ideas in their writing. However, in the essays, it is observed that they seem to be hesitant to write their ideas explicitly. They are restricted to the texts they read as was seen in the essays, which indicates a contradiction. This contradiction may suggest that there are some other factors influencing the success of Iranian EFL learners in writing other than the lack of critical thinking (Kazemi, 2016; Salmani Nodoushan & Pashapour, 2016). As Carroll (2004) asserted, language proficiency levels and resources may play a role in hindering them from reflecting what they really think.

The results of this study are important in the following aspects: First, they partly indicate that critical thinking is not emphasized in the Iranian educational system. Since language learning is regarded as part of a memorization-based system of education in Iran and learners are not independent enough (Kazemi, 2016; Salmani Nodoushan & Pashapour, 2016), EFL students fail in expressing their own ideas with their own words and thinking critically in content-based courses. Their failure might be interpreted respective of how the students have been educated till they attend university, since their previous education most probably shapes the observed code of behavior along with other personal and social factors.

Second, it gives an idea about thinking patterns of a group of Iranian language learners. Therefore, this study is important as it may contribute to the continuing discussion regarding cultural constructs of language learning with specific reference to Asian foreign language learner profile as it shows that Iranian learners seems to share similar thinking behavioural patterns as those mentioned in the studies of Fox (1994), Ramanathan and Kaplan (1996), and Atkinson (1997). Further studies might be conducted to design more suitable curricula to meet the cognitive needs of Iranian learners so as to help them compete with their peers in the western countries. As Le Ha (2004) contends, there are many cultures through which the world is perceived differently, and so the difference does not mean a "deficit". Critical thinking can be integrated into the educational practices and taught (Kazemi, 2016; Salmani Nodoushan & Pashapour, 2016) as such a thinking style is not totally "foreign" to Asian learners (Matsuda, 2001; Stapleton, 2002). Amalgamated curricula might serve Iranian students better.

This study should be taken as an attempt to identify an educational problem and to pinpoint the existence of a recoverable defect in Iranian educational system. A further step will be to seek remedies to integrate critical thinking into the classroom and the curricula.

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