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Using Content-Based and Task-Based Teaching in a Critical Thinking Setting to Improve EFL Learners' Writing

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to compare the effect of content-based and task-based instruction in a critical thinking setting on EFL learners' writing. Accordingly, 60 female learners out of a total number of 90 intermediate learners studying at a language school in Tehran were selected after taking a piloted sample of the Preliminary English Test (PET) for homogenization prior to the study. Subsequently, they were put into two experimental groups: 30 learners in the content-based teaching group and 30 learners undergoing the task-based teaching treatment. Both experimental groups experienced the two teaching approaches in a critical thinking setting. A sample PET writing was administered as the post-test of the study after 16 sessions of treatment spanning nine weeks. A comparison of the mean scores of the two groups on this post-test through an independent samples t-test revealed that there was no significant difference between the two groups at the post-test. The probable reason for this result together with the pedagogical implications of this study and the suggestions for further research are elaborated extensively in the paper.

Keywords: Content-based teaching, task-based teaching, critical thinking, writing.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ever since the emergence of English Language Teaching (ELT) as a discipline, the prime objective has been to search scientifically for highly efficient methods to boost the process and outcome of learning to master language skills. One such skill is of course writing which is “a process of generating text as a communicative bridge between the reader and the writer” (Marashi & Zargari, 2017, p. 80). With the indispensable learning to write and ELT circles increasing the focus on this skill (Seidlhofer & Widdowson, 1999), it is no wonder then that different methods have been developed to help EFL learners improve their writing. One such method is Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT).

Having evolved in the late 1980s and early 1990s, TBLT reflects real-world language use for purposeful communication (Willis, 2004) with tasks being classroom activities similar to those that learners might engage in outside the (second language) L2 classroom (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Innumerable studies have been conducted in the last two decades or so on the positive impacts of TBLT on language skills and components both internationally (e.g., Bruton, 2005; Carless, 2009; Cobb & Lovick, 2007; Nunan, 2006; Plews & Zhao, 2010; Tilfarlioglu & Basaran, 2007) and in the context of Iran (e.g., Baleghizadeh & Asadi, 2013; Fallahi et al., 2015; Nasiri & Atai, 2017; Rezaei, 2014; Shajeri & Izadpanah, 2016; Soleimani & Mahdavi-pour, 2014; Tajeddin & Hosseinpour, 2014; Zare-ee, 2012).

Alongside TBLT, another method which has been employed in different language teaching settings is content-based instruction (CBI) or “the integration of a particular content (e.g., math, science, and social studies) with second language aims...It refers to the concurrent teaching of academic subject matter and second language skills” (Brinton et al., 1989, p. 2). CBI has also been exhaustively studied in the ELT literature (e.g., Davies, 2003; Davison & Williams, 2001; Kavaliauskiene, 2004; Langman, 2003; Leung, 2001; Liaw, 2007; Marashi & Hatam, 2009; Stoller, 2004).

Perhaps closely related to the skill of writing is the practice of critical thinking as one benefits with varying degrees from the latter in the process of producing a written text (Pithers & Soden, 2000). Critical thinking may indeed signify a highly prevalent trend in education which is commensurate to the dynamic relationship between how teachers teach and how students learn (Mason, 2010) and naturally has been the subject of many studies worldwide (e.g., Alagozlu, 2007; Dixon et al., 2005; Fahim & Rad, 2012; Farralesli, 2009; Khabiri & Firooz, 2012; Mahmoodi & Dehghannezhad, 2014; Marashi & Jafari, 2012; Sabah & Rashtchi, 2016; Sendag & Odabas, 2009).

As noted above, ample studies on TBLT, CBI, and critical thinking have proven to be significantly effective in teaching different language skills and components. Furthermore, a previous study conducted by one of the researchers on TBLT, CBI, critical thinking, and reading (Marashi & Noochirwani Tehran, 2011) demonstrated that there was no significant difference between TBLT and CBI on learners' reading in a critical thinking setting. In other words, the element of critical thinking overcame the impact of TBLT and CBI (as discussed later in the discussion section). To this end, the researchers were interested to see whether the above result would also be produced when the dependent variable of the study is changed into another skill; in other words, whether critical thinking continues to be a more influential parameter compared to

TBLT and CBI or not when it comes to writing as well. Accordingly, the following research question was formulated:

- Is there any significant difference between the effect of content-based instruction and task-based language teaching in a critical thinking setting on EFL learners' writing?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Writing

Writing is the outcome of a complex process of planning, drafting, reviewing, and revising for which many procedures, decision makings, and planning are deployed by the writer (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). In effect, writing goes beyond serving as a feature of language acquisition and can thus be considered as a prerequisite for effective communication across a range of human activities (Sattayatham & S, 2007). Writing is a cognitive and dynamic process and cannot be memorized like the other static bodies of knowledge (Goddard & Sendi, 2008; Rao & Prasad, 2009).

In modern times, writing has become even more important in the daily lives of much of the world's population due to the advent of various social media employing the written mode of language. Writing is a decisive and, at the same time, demanding activity, the possession of which is a mark of distinction but it can also indicate other attributes such as academic success (Graham & Harris, 2005; Kim & Kim, 2005).

As necessary as writing has evolved into being for a myriad of transactional and interactional purposes, it is regarded by many to be the most difficult skill for L2 learners to master (e.g., Charles, 2007; Cortes, 2004; Granger, 1998; Granger et al., 2003; Neff et al., 2004). Tribble (1996) describes the nature of this difficult process perhaps very lucidly by stating that, "learning to write is a difficult and lengthy process, one that induces anxiety and frustration in many learners" (p. 12). Taking into account the fact that even "the majority of native (English) students in their language fail to write a coherent, organized, academic essay" (Brown, 2002, p. 218), mastery over this skill becomes yet more challenging.

2.2 Task-Based Language Teaching

TBLT is an approach which is based on tasks as the essential unit of instruction (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). A task, Nunan (2004) asserts, "is a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning" (p. 4). Tasks are important in second language acquisition (SLA) research and pedagogy as SLA researchers recommend particular task types which have embodied the theoretical grounds to classroom practitioners from the 1980s onwards (Rezaei, 2014). Canilao (2009) argues that tasks seem to be a desirable construct to link the fields of SLA research and pedagogy and are important in helping learners to enhance their communicative competence by providing a language experience as it is used outside the class.

TBLT originally laid emphasis on fluency in communication at the expense of accuracy and complexity, as indeed did the Natural Approach (Krashen & T, 1983) and arguments against an explicit focus on grammar (Prabhu, 1987). Later on,

however, this position of an entire focus on meaning with a universal abandonment of focus on form was challenged.

Moving away from the aforementioned somewhat vehement stance, TBLT gained more popularity in language learning environments perhaps because it began offering a workable procedure to establish a balance between the form-focused and meaning-focused perspectives (Rezaei, 2014). TBLT has also managed to gain momentum within the ELT research community since – in the words of Ellis (2000, p. 197) – “the merits of the task-based approach do not only stem from the quality of tasks being clinical elicitation techniques for researchers and useful pedagogical instruments for practitioners, but also from its openness to various theoretical perspectives”. Ellis (2003) asserts that one of the pull factors of TBLT is its endeavour to eliminate the traditional borderline between syllabus and methodology and instead it involves the mixture of processes consisting of the specifications of what and how. As raised by Cobb and Lovick (2007), TBLT encourages learners' motivation, integrated language learning, and more mental efforts and processing of linguistic items by learners.

2.3 Content-Based Instruction

Another approach which has captured significant attention in ELT is CBI, which is believed to be “one of the Communicative Language Teaching spin-off approaches” (Rodgers, 2001, p. 2). According to Stryker and Leaver (1997, p. 3), “CBI is a truly holistic approach to foreign language education which at once can be a philosophical orientation, a methodological system, a syllabus design for a single course, or a framework for an entire program of instruction”. Crandall and Tucker (1990) point out that traditional teaching methods and modern approaches are contained in CBI. They further state that “this approach gives priority to learning about something instead of learning about language” (Crandall & Tucker, 1990, p. 190).

CBI is an SLA approach which highlights the importance of content “in contrast to other approaches or methods which are centered on the language itself. Nevertheless, the approach does aim to develop the students' language and academic skills but the skills are developed subconsciously through the content dealt with” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, pp. 204-205). El-Din (2007) also asserted that CBI puts forth the argument that students can acquire with efficiency both language and subject matter knowledge by receiving content input in the target language.

In CBI, teachers use content topics as the framework for instruction rather than grammar rules, vocabulary spheres, and operative functions. Applying CBI to different situations, including English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms, indicates that the approach is appropriate in the broader principles of language learning and teaching (Kasper, 2000). Indeed, CBI has become increasingly popular around the globe as a means of developing L2 learners' linguistic ability since it encompasses mostly a wide scope being used in all stages of educational grades, from primary to tertiary; moreover, it is used both in first language (L1) and second language (L2) settings (Kavaliauskiene, 2004; Stryker & Leaver, 1997).

Another advantage of CBI is the motivational and cognitive basis it provides for learning which is of course generally interesting and important to the learners. Through creating a highly contextualized content, CBI can offer diverse opportunities to learners for learning the language (Crandall, 1987; Troncale, 2002). This is perhaps why the findings of different studies have mentioned the success of CBI in most

educational contexts since it provides learners with an authentic environment for language learning (Davies, 2003; Kasper, 2000; Kavaliauskiene, 2004; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

2.4 Critical Thinking

The term critical thinking has been defined by many different scholars throughout the years but the roots of the term may be as ancient as the time of Socrates – 2500 years ago – when he argued in favor of a method of probing questions that people could not rationally justify their confident claims to knowledge. This tradition of Socratic questioning, in the words of Paul et al. (1997) “is the best known critical thinking teaching strategy” (p. 3) subscribed to by Plato, Aristotle, and certain other philosophers who maintained that phenomena are often not really what they appear to be. Studies on critical thinking throughout the modern era have been hugely inspired by the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory (Rogers, 2004); naturally, a sizeable number of studies have aimed at expounding critical thinking on the premises laid by that school.

Marsh (2011) asserted that it is only in recent years that educational scholars have noticed the beneficial application of critical thinking in classrooms; however, critical thinking has had its roots in psychology and philosophy for many years. Paul (1985), as cited in Khodabakhsh et al. (2013), was one of the earliest scholars who defined critical thinking as learning how to ask and answer questions of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

More definitions have been put forth by philosophers who concur that critical thinking comprises different abilities such as identifying a problem and also its underlying assumptions, analyzing and understanding that problem, applying inferences and inductive and deductive logic in elaborating it, and assessing the veracity of the assumptions and sources of data (Pithers & Soden, 2000). All of the above definitions submit that the receiver of information should analyze the received information and comment on it; hence his/her role is very important. Paul and Elder (2006) define critical thinking very concisely by saying that it is the process of analyzing and evaluating thinking to ameliorate it.

The advocates of critical thinking argue that this modality should be the central goal of all educational institutions (Paul & Elder, 2006). In critical thinking, the design of a classroom moves away from a model that largely neglects thinking to one that prioritizes it as bearing paramount importance (Cohen, 2010; Tittle, 2010; Vaughn, 2009). Content from the standpoint of critical teaching is something alive only in the mind as modes of thinking driven by questions which appear in textbooks to be developed in the learners’ minds (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008).

3. METHOD

3.1 Participants

To accomplish the objectives of this study, 90 female students of a language school in Tehran, who were at the intermediate level and whose ages ranged from 15 to 25, were given a sample Preliminary English Test (PET); subsequently, 60 of them whose scores fell within one standard deviation above and below the mean were

chosen and divided into two equal groups of 30 students randomly for the two types of treatment. The sample PET had already been piloted among 30 students with almost the same language proficiency level as the main group prior to its administration. Furthermore, the two researchers who demonstrated inter-rater reliability ($r = 0.88$, $p = 0.0001 < 0.05$) scored the participants' writing papers.

3.2 Instrumentations and Materials

3.2.1 Preliminary English Test (PET)

A sample PET was administered for the participant selection process as described above. As this research was focused on the writing ability of the learners, the speaking section of the PET was not administered. For the assessment of parts two and three of the writing section, the researchers used the PET general mark scheme used as a rubric for a summative score. According to this scale, the criteria include language range, variety, and complexity of message communication, grammatical structure, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, content points, length, and target reader. The reliability of the test during the piloting and main administration stood at 0.89 and 0.93, respectively.

3.2.2 Writing Post-test

The writing paper of another sample PET was used as the post-test and administered to both groups at the end of the course.

3.2.3 English Result Intermediate for the TBLT Group

English Result Intermediate (Hancock & McDonald, 2009) contains 12 chapters each of which contains five sections. Sections A to D focus on reading, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation skills. The last section (E) is writing illustrating one type of writing in each chapter. A total of four lessons with their tasks from this book were taught in the TBLT group. These lessons were: *Narrating a Story*, *A Report*, *An Opinion*, and *A Website Recommendation*.

3.2.4 Essay Writing for the CBI Group

Essay Writing by Kasrayian and Fakhar-Rohani (2005) is basically made up of two parts. Part one deals with some basic methods of development. Chapters 1-2 (*Outline and Thesis* and *The Main Parts of Essay*) deal with the skeleton of almost any type of academic paper. Chapters 3-8 (*Narration*, *Description*, *Exemplification*, *Comparison and Contrast*, *Cause and Effect*, and *Definition*) are concerned with a variety of methods of development. Finally, Chapters 9-10 (*Book Reports and Reviews* and *Abstracts: How to Write Them*) are devoted to two commonly-neglected subjects. Each of these 10 chapters explains its subject with some exercises. Writers included them to fill a gap. Whereas Part One is pedagogical by nature, Part Two is a reservoir of essays, a collection included for the students' further practice. A total of four content-based lessons which were chosen from the book were taught to the CBI group. These lessons were: *The Main Parts of Essay*, *Narration*, *Comparison and Contrast*, and *Cause and Effect*.

3.3. Procedure

Once the two experimental groups were in place (as described above), the treatment commenced. Both groups were taught by one of the researchers to minimize the impact of teacher variability during the 16 sessions of treatment which lasted for eight weeks (two sessions a week). Each of the four lessons described in the instrumentation section was taught through certain critical thinking exercises in both groups. They were used to provide interactions and small group cooperation through the following critical thinking strategies: making inferences, challenging the ideology of the text, annotating, comparing and contrasting, evaluating, contextualizing, reflecting, summarizing, questioning, and previewing.

The teaching strategies included asking students to summarize the reading, write their ideas about the topics discussed in their groups, choose the best topic for writing, and write the differences and similarities of the topics. While the passages and their follow-up tasks and exercises were different in the two groups, the critical writing pedagogy remained the same. Furthermore, the same writing post-test was administered to both groups at the end of the instruction.

3.3.1 Task-Based Language Teaching group

On the first session, the teacher explained the main parts of an essay and read some paragraphs as an example. When she was certain that they understood it, she started to teach the first lesson *A Website Recommendation* by asking them to explain the picture. Then the students were given some time to read the passage working in groups and choosing a title for it. After they read their titles each, they had five minutes to think about all the titles presented. Ultimately, the students compared the titles and chose the best one. The teacher next asked them to do the tasks: the first task was to put the paragraphs in order and make an essay, while the second one was a paragraph which they had to select a title for and discuss and challenge with each other and the teacher about their selected title.

Their homework was writing a recommendation about a place which they liked to visit. The next session, the teacher collected their papers and asked one of them to read her essay. The others listened and wrote down her mistakes. After they read her mistakes and corrected them, the teacher corrected the remaining ones. She also corrected the others' papers and gave them back to the students. The critical thinking activities which were thus employed through this lesson were interaction, doing small group cooperation, evaluation, comparison and contrast, and questioning.

For the next lesson, *Narrating a Story*, the teacher explained what narration is. Then the students narrated a story and she asked them to write a story in groups. Each group read their story and the other students challenged how it could be made better and asked, for example, why they did not start or end it with another sentence. The teacher read a text aloud and asked the students to read it individually and write the purpose of the text. The students read their sentences and compared them with other sentences.

For the next phase, they did the task of putting the events in the order that they happened. In the end, they read their sentences and chose the best order. They wrote a story for it with different endings in their groups. The students read what they wrote and the teacher collected their papers. The last task was an open-ended question.

The teacher gave the students their papers back and explained their mistakes to them. The critical activities for this lesson were doing group work cooperation, interaction, questioning, open-ended questions, and reflections. The same procedure was applied for the other texts throughout the term.

3.3.2 Content-Based Instruction group

In the CBI group, the first text was *The Main Parts of Essay*. At first, the teacher asked the students to define an essay. She explained it after the students gave their ideas. She then read an essay about fast food. The teacher asked them if they understood it or not. They noted down the history of fast food in small groups and read what they had written and challenged each other's writings.

The students did the tasks of this lesson. The first one was to put the paragraphs in order and select the introductory one with reason. The second one was writing an essay without a concluding paragraph. They read their paragraphs and compared them with those of each other. The teacher told them their mistakes.

She then asked them to write an essay for homework about fast food and its impact on health. They brought their essays the next session and two of them read theirs one by one in the class. The others wrote down their mistakes. The teacher together with the students corrected their mistakes and explained them to the students. The critical activities in this chapter were doing group cooperation, questioning, contextualizing, interaction, open-ended questions, and comparisons.

The next chapter was *Narration*. At first, the teacher asked the students to read it individually. Then one of them explained what she understood and the others completed her. In the end, the teacher explained it totally and completed the students. She read a passage for them and asked them to listen carefully and paid attention to its structure. The students summarized it. They read it in their groups and completed what they wrote.

The teacher asked them to speak about Saadi – a renowned Iranian poet of the 13th century whose works have been translated into many languages – and at the end, wrote one concluding sentence about him. They read their sentences and explained them to the others. The students and the teacher engaged in a question and answer (Q & A) phase. For the next phase, the students did the tasks. At first, they had to put the sentences in a chronological order and the teacher did the remaining ones. Then they completed the open-ended story about a bird's life. One of them read it while the others asked her about the ending paragraph. Then they negotiated with each other.

In the end, she asked them to write their journals about this session and brought it to class the next session when she collected and corrected them. One of them read her diary voluntarily and explained her ideas and feelings to others. The teacher used previewing, open-ended questions, doing small group cooperation, challenging, annotating, and making inferences as for the critical activities with this chapter.

Comparison and Contrast was the next chapter. At first, the teacher asked them to contrast the two fruits: apples and oranges. She wrote what they said on the board. Then she explained how they should write a comparison and contrast essay. One of the students read a book while the others listened. She asked them to select a sport and wrote about it in their groups. The two groups read what they had written and the others asked them questions. In the end, they compared these two sports and read what they had written.

The students read the activities and wrote some similarities and differences between English and other languages. The students read what they had written and spoken about in class. In the end, the teacher asked them if they liked to live in a big or small city. They answered with different explanations and subsequently wrote an essay about it and brought them to class the next session. One of them read her essay and the others asked her questions and expressed their ideas about the similarities and differences between big and small cities. The teacher and the other students wrote her mistakes and discussed them. The critical thinking activities employed for this lesson were challenging, doing group cooperating, contextualizing, comparing and contrasting, interacting, and questioning.

The last chapter was *Cause and Effect*. The teacher wrote some sentences on the board and asked the students to write their effects. Each student read what they had written and spoken about. The students read the page individually and summarized it and then read what they had written. The teacher asked them about the effect of smoke. They spoke about it in small groups. One of the students in each group explained what her group had collected and all of the students and the teacher negotiated about it.

The students did some exercises, they were open-ended activities and ordering the sentences and cause and effect paragraphs. The teacher asked them about the cause and effect of water pollution. The students answered and challenged each other's ideas and further discussed the ways of preventing them.

The students wrote an essay for homework about it based on what they had said in class and the new information they had collected from others. The next session, one student read her essay and the other students and the teacher took note of her mistakes and shared them with the student. The teacher corrected the others' papers and returned them to the students. The critical thinking activities were doing group cooperation, summarizing, making inferences, annotating, questioning, comparing and contrasting, and cause and effect.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Participant Selection

4.1.1 Descriptive statistics of the PET administration

As discussed earlier, the piloted sample PET was subsequently administered for participant selection. Table 1 below shows the descriptive statistics of this administration with the mean being 46.70 and the standard deviation 24.50, respectively.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the PET administration.

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
PET administration	90	10	90	46.70	24.500
Valid N (listwise)	90				

4.1.2 Dividing the participants into two groups

As the students in the language school came from intact groups and the researchers did not have the luxury of random sampling, they had to make sure that

the 30 learners in each group bore no significant difference in terms of the dependent variable (writing skill) prior to the treatment. Hence, the mean scores of the two groups on the writing section of the PET administered earlier were checked for any significant difference. First, the descriptive statistics appear below (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the writing scores of the two groups on the PET administration

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. deviation</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	
	<i>statistic</i>	<i>statistic</i>	<i>statistic</i>	<i>statistic</i>	<i>statistic</i>	<i>Statistic</i>	<i>Std. error</i>
CBI pre-writing	30	12	20	15.00	2.623	.534	.427
TBLT pre-writing	30	12	20	15.42	2.389	.100	.427
Valid N (listwise)	30						

According to Table 2, the skewness ratios of both groups (1.25 and 0.23) fell within the acceptable range of ± 1.96 , thus, indicating that the score distributions in both groups represented normality. Therefore, running an independent samples t-test was legitimized.

As Table 3 below indicates, with the F value of 0.101 at the significance level of 0.751 being larger than 0.05, the variances between the two groups were not significantly different. Therefore, the results of the t-test with the assumption of homogeneity of the variances were reported here. The results ($t = -0.643$, $p = 0.523 > 0.05$) indicate that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups at the outset; consequently, any probable differences at the end of the treatment could be attributed to the effect of the treatment.

Table 3. Independent samples t-test of the mean scores of both groups in their writing prior to the treatment.

	<i>Levene's test for equality of variances</i>		<i>t-test for equality of means</i>						
	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Mean difference</i>	<i>Std. error difference</i>	<i>95% confidence interval of the difference</i>	
Equal variances assumed	.101	.751	-.643	58	.523	-.417	.648	-1.71	.880
Equal variances not assumed			-.643	57.5	.523	-.417	.648	-1.71	.880

4.2 Post-Test

Table 4 displays the descriptive statistics of the post-test.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for the post-test in both groups.

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	
	<i>statistic</i>	<i>statistic</i>	<i>statistic</i>	<i>statistic</i>	<i>statistic</i>	<i>Statistic</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>
CBI post-test	30	12	20	16.33	2.489	-.195	.427
TBLT post-test	30	11	20	15.72	2.413	-.001	.427
Valid N (listwise)	60						

The mean and the standard deviation of the CBI group were 16.33 and 2.50 while those of the TBLT group were 15.72 and 2.41, respectively.

4.3 Testing the Hypothesis

To test the null hypothesis of the study, the researchers intended to conduct the independent samples t-test. Going back to Table 4, the skewness ratios of both groups fell within the acceptable range of ± 1.96 (-0.23 and -0.002), thus running a t-test was legitimized.

Table 5. Independent samples t-test on the mean scores of both experimental groups.

	<i>Levene's test for equality of variances</i>		<i>t-test for equality of means</i>					<i>95% confidence interval of the difference</i>	
	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Sig. (2- tailed)</i>	<i>Mean difference</i>	<i>Std. error difference</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>
Equal variances assumed	.176	.676	.974	58	.334	.617	.633	-.650	1.884
Equal variances not assumed			.974	57.9	.334	.617	.633	-.650	1.884

As Table 5 indicates, with the F value of 0.176 at the significance level of 0.676 being larger than 0.05, the variances between the two groups were not significantly different. Therefore, the results of the t-test with the assumption of homogeneity of the variances were reported here. The results ($t = 0.974$, $p = 0.334 > 0.05$) indicate that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups at the post-test. It can thus be concluded that the presupposed null hypothesis was not rejected meaning that CBI and TBLT in a critical thinking setting bore no significantly different impact on the writing of the participants in this study.

5. DISCUSSION

In recent years, there have been numerous studies such as Liaw (2007), Marashi and Hatam (2009), Birjandi and Malmir (2009), Marashi and Jafari (2012), and Rezaei (2014) showing that using TBLT and CBI improves students' writing. Accordingly, the result of this research indicates that both approaches are equally contributory to

writing and is very much congruous with the finding of [Marashi and Noochirwani Tehran \(2011\)](#) who indicated that CBI and TBLT in a critical thinking setting bore no significantly different impact on learners' reading comprehension. However, there are studies which revealed that TBLT has been more effective than CBI in teaching reading comprehension to Iranian ESP learners ([Malmir et al., 2011](#)).

The result of this study, which shows no significant difference between CBI and TBLT on EFL learners' writing, may perhaps indicate that it is not necessarily either of the two teaching approaches (i.e. CBI or TBLT) which present an advantage compared to the other in improving learners' writing ability but the necessity of employing a critical thinking setting in teaching writing. In this study, a series of different texts were used in two different groups; yet, the same procedure of critical thinking initiatives was employed as identically as possible in the two groups. Hence, as elaborated by [Marashi and Noochirwani Tehran \(2011\)](#), the only possible explanation as far as the researchers are concerned given the fact that both groups resembled homogeneity in terms of not only their overall language proficiency but also specifically their writing ability is that similar critical thinking strategies and exercises prevailed the difference between the two groups, thus resulting in similar outcomes. In other words, the weight of critical thinking activities perhaps functioned more of an independent variable in this study compared to the application of CBI and TBLT.

Accordingly, the researchers observed in the course of this study what [Marashi and Noochirwani Tehran \(2011\)](#) has reported that using critical thinking activities and exercises granted the opportunity to learners to adopt a more in-depth understanding of different texts. This was very much manifest in the kind of comments and questions that the learners raised in both the TBLT and CBI groups since the way they interacted both among themselves and also with the teacher was considerably different beyond from the common discourse of a typical ELT classroom. It is of course part of the procedure of a classroom for the learners to ask the meaning of a word or about a certain structure. Nevertheless, the learners in both groups would actively engage in understanding issues which were beyond the text and, in a sense, reading between the lines. Furthermore, the learners in both groups were very much enthused and took a proactive role in writing the texts during the critical thinking activities and exercises. One such example of this proactive role was that they would challenge their peers' views both in small groups and the whole class in general during the group work activities. In short, this study reaffirms yet again the well-documented notion in ELT that it is primarily not about what you teach but how you teach.

Overall, good writing skills are important in today's world of technology where people want to share ideas and communicate over the internet. Written communication requires students to focus, organize, and extend their thoughts; thus, they need to learn critical thinking. One major challenge that many teachers face is over the how of teaching writing and indeed critical thinking as often their focus is how to teach the new vocabularies and how to teach the grammatical structures of the text and not beyond.

Thus, teachers can help learners acquire critical thinking skills through effective use of questions which would thus engage learners in discussions on challenging and motivating topics. Furthermore, they could nurture various modalities of reflection which in turn would engage learners in meaningful critical thinking processes. [Inayah and Nanda \(2016\)](#) say that comments from teachers are among the influential contributions for the students in developing their writing ability. Moreover, a context and a teaching and learning atmosphere are crucial in facilitating students' critical

thinking development. It may be difficult for teachers to teach writing and critical thinking at the same time because they do not know what critical thinking is. So critical thinking could be emphasized in teacher training workshops and teachers need to have a handbook to know how to teach writing critically and what they should use to have effective teaching.

6. CONCLUSION

The results of this study revealed that the use of CBI and TBLT in a critical thinking setting bore no significantly different impact on the writing of the participants in this study. Writing critically is a somewhat new strategy in teaching and learning writing. Teachers could have a handbook to know critical thinking better and teach them how to teach critical thinking and what they should do in their classes. Students need more exercises on critical thinking to learn and understand this process; otherwise, they may face problems in writing critically. Moreover, syllabus designers and materials developers play perhaps an equally important role just like teachers in the learning process. They could provide the content of the books that teachers use to teach and critical thinking exercises for learners to achieve writing critically. Syllabus designers and materials developers can supply the content of the books and the exercises which are more effective and attractive for learners to follow the lessons, learn them, and motivate learners to write critically.

Finally, in the process of conducting this study, certain suggestions for other studies in line with the one at stake came to the researchers' minds. First of all, this research was carried out among adults; the same study could be implemented among other age groups to see whether age is a factor in comparing the impact of CBI and TBLT in a critical thinking setting on writing. Secondly, only female students participated in this research; it could be interesting to see whether gender is also a factor. Thirdly, the study could also be conducted in coeducational contexts to see whether the togetherness of male and female participants in a critical thinking setting would bring about different consequences. Subsequently, this study focused on two teaching approaches; also, the interaction of these two approaches in one (i.e. content task-based teaching) in a critical thinking setting on writing could be another topic for research. Finally, in this study, the critical thinking strategies used were making inferences, challenging the ideology of the text, annotating, comparing and contrasting, evaluating, contextualizing, reflecting, summarizing, questioning, and previewing; other studies could be done through the approach of segregating these strategies.

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