

## The Effect of Narrative Techniques on Cultivating Critical Thinking and Improving Oral Proficiency of Intermediate Iranian EFL Learners

**Azam Sedaghat \***

MA student of Sobh e Sadegh Institute of Higher Education, Isfahan, Iran

**Reza Biria**

Assistant Professor at English School of post-graduate studies, Department of Foreign Languages, Isfahan (Khorasgan) branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

### Abstract

This study is intended to examine the effectiveness of narrative techniques on cultivating critical thinking and improving oral proficiency of intermediate Iranian EFL learners. For these purposes, a number of 75 Iranian male and female learners, all at intermediate level, were randomly selected and participated in the study. The participants were randomly assigned into two experimental groups (EG1 and EG2) and a control group, each containing 25 participants. To elicit the relevant data, the California Critical Thinking Skills Test (CCTST) was administered to evaluate the level of critical thinking in all groups of the study and a course-based speaking pretest in the form of an oral interview was administered to decide on the participants' initial proficiency in speaking. Then, both experimental groups and the control group received instruction and were exposed to the same quantities of authentic speaking materials. The results indicated that in all three groups of the study, participants' level of oral proficiency improved in comparison with the status at the beginning of the study; however, the amounts of improvement were significantly greater in the experimental groups compared to those of the control group. Furthermore, the differences between two experimental groups was statistically significant in terms of the amount of oral proficiency improvement; so that, the participants in the EG2 who were exposed to both narrative techniques and critical thinking strategies together –as the treatment– showed on average higher amount of improvement in oral proficiency compared to those of the EG1 who received narrative techniques solely.

**Keywords:** narrative techniques, critical thinking, oral proficiency

### INTRODUCTION

It has been considered that narrative techniques as an effective way to transmit cultural knowledge, values and beliefs and educational subjects can be developed and taught

based on it (Campbell, 1999). The development of narrative design and oral narrative ability are pathways for developing literacy (Roth, Speece, & Cooper, 2002). Narrative skill has been associated with the development of decontextualized speech, identified as a major precursor to the development of literacy (Tabors, 2001). "Narration is used more frequently in lessons teaching vocabulary and spoken English than in lesson teaching English grammar (Yang, 2011, p. 27).

Narrative plays a central part in teaching method in the work of imagination and in learning (Eagan, 1999). He believed that young learners can understand much better in story form than they can in isolated abstract concept. As cited in Fludernik (2013), conversational narrative is the basic type of oral narrative. This reveals that narrative is produced in face-to-face exchanges in different contexts such as storytelling sequences at dinner parties, doctor/patient and lawyer/client exchanges. Labove and Waletzky (1967) stated that natural narrative has become the established term for this type of oral narration.

One of the most important matters in education around the world is critical thinking utilized in the classroom and the curricula as a way to train open-minded individuals with judgmental qualities referred to as cultivated critical thinkers (Paul & Elder, 2008). Paul and Elder believed that thinking is inevitable although much of this thinking can be distorted and partial. To access excellence in thought one must be cultivated. Therefore, one is not born with critical thinking skills and critical thinking can be taught fortunately. ELT has not ignored the critical thinking importance and teachers have long tried to use critical thinking strategies in English language classroom through asking questions, problem solving tasks and many more (Devine, 1962).

Palmer (2010) stated that oral language is an important way of communication for students. Palmer (2010, p. 38) said that "the students' language development is the first reason for why a teacher shall focus on oral communication in the class. It can be applied to all foreign language teaching, aiming for the students to develop their communication skills (Skolverket, 2011). They can send and receive information, process it and critically evaluate their own knowledge through communication. Nuan (2003, p. 84, as cited in Hong, 2010) said that "speaking is the productive oral skill; it consists of producing systematic verbal utterance to convey meaning. Chaney (1998) maintained that "speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal or non-verbal symbols in a variety of contexts (p.13).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Definition of Narrative**

Although there have been many definitions of narrative, it is not easy to define it in a single sentence. It is believed that narrative storytelling, the social and discursive practice of recounting and temporally ordering human experience and events, is a "universal function of language" (Hymes 1996, p. 112). As such, "narratives show storied ways of knowing and communicating" (Riessman 2005, p.1) from the sharing of

small stories and jointly made retellings at family gatherings to longer accounts of personal experience and ritually performed folklore that communicate the moral values of a community (Hymes, 1981; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2007; Ochs, et al., 1989; Hill, 1995). Yet, the way in which individuals narrate stories and the linguistic means by which they orient and highlight relevant details within these stories may differ significantly across speech communities. For example, the culturally normalized ways of introducing, interrupting, and jointly participating in the construction of tales can differ, as can the discourse strategies and rhetorical devices speakers employ to move through narrative time and plot development. These are sociocultural (pragmatic) features of language use and they are not always explicitly taught in the formal setting of the academic environment; rather, they are implicitly obtained through an individual's socialization and lived experience within a speech community (Blum-Kulka 1993; Heath 1982; Melzi 2000). Therefore, the competence to narrate a tale successfully is a sociolinguistic feature reflective of both language socialization and linguistic competence. Such a performance is particularly notable when the narrative is delivered in the storyteller's "second" or "foreign" language (L2).

Studies of narratives consider a range of topics and contexts of telling, such as small talk and chat (Coupland 2000), and gossip (Bergman 1993). These consist of aspects of conversational talk associated with the ways individuals align to the events of storytelling and the stories, the flow of talking in conversational discourse strategies for openings, closings, interruptions, the negotiation of interaction (the turns at talk) and the introduction and change of topics (Thornbury & Slade, 2006).

Critical thought, reflective thinking, and the awareness of one's own thought processes can be traced to ancient Greece where they are eloquently shown in Plato's *Theatetus*. It was Plato's teacher, Socrates, who described the act of thinking as "a discourse the mind continues with itself" and who described judgment to his students as "a statement pronounced...silently to oneself" (Plato, 1956). Socrates instructed Plato, his most prized student, to encourage his own students to recognize that things were often not what they appeared to be and to practice the art of questioning and thoughtful self-reflection. The Socratic Method used by many instructors today, stems from Socrates' principles of inquiry, dialectic discourse and argues with the aim of fostering healthy dialogue between people through the serious consideration of different points of view. Socrates' critical thinking approach was centered on asking and answering questions as the basis for examining and evaluating concepts and opinions (Frede, 1992). Plato's star student Aristotle would later coin his own maxim on critical thinking when he stated, "It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it" (Aristotle, 1941, p. 14).

While philosophers and scholars continued to expand on the insights provided by Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle for the next 2500 years, a central theme emphasized throughout the literature is the significance of reasoning and critical thinking abilities over content mastery (Frede, 1992; Mann, 1979). In 1605, philosopher and scientist Francis Bacon would advance the essential qualities of critical thinking as "the study of Truth; as

having a mind nimble and versatile enough to perceive the resemblances of things ... and at the same time steady enough to fix and recognize their subtler differences; as being gifted by nature with desire to seek, patience to doubt, fondness to meditate, slowness to assert, readiness to regard, carefulness to dispose and set in order” (Mann, 1979, p. 112). This description would eventually show other contemporary scholars’ reference to ‘habits of mind’, the positive dispositions of individuals toward critical thought (Facione & Giancarlo, 2000).

## **Oral Proficiency**

Speaking or oral proficiency is a productive oral skill which is known as the most difficult skill, in teaching English at a foreign language (EFL) since it occurs in real time (Nunan, 2003). Moreover, speaking consist of productive verbal utterances to convey meaning. Spoken language is auditory and temporary. Speaking can be defined as the people way to convey the message to others. The purpose of speaking is to make the receiver understand the topic being uttered.

Speaking is systematic articulation of verbal utterances to convey meaning. Speaking is “an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information” (Florez, 1999, p. 1). It is “often spontaneous, open-ended, and evolving” (p. 1), but it is not totally unpredictable. Speaking in second language has important value for individual language learners since their proficiency in language learning is often measured by productive skills specially speaking ability. Speaking is the primary skill for evaluating the efficacy of a course, since it is a medium to understand the proficiency in other language skills and sub-skills. Haung (2006) claimed that non- native speakers believe that speaking in the target language is one of the most demanding and crucial tasks in their everyday life. Moreover, Ferris and Tag (1996) stated that even highly proficient language learners are not satisfied with their speaking skills and are looking for opportunity to improve their speaking ability. Regarding these facts, speaking can be regarded as one of the most studied and discussed areas of applied linguistics.

## ***An overview of related research studies***

Ebrahiminejad, Azizifar and Jamalinesari (2014) aimed at investigating the effects of using short stories on English as a foreign language (EFL) learners’ speaking skill. Therefore, two groups of experimental (n=30) and control (n=30) were randomly chosen out of 100 pre-intermediate learners (chosen by taking part in a modified 1997 version of Michigan test) at Tarbiat language school in Sarableh, Ilam, Iran. Oral interview was the determined instrument for gathering the scores of pre-test. The control group followed its routine procedure in English classes. However, the task of using simplified short stories was applied for the experimental group members during their English classes as assignment. For example, they were supposed to use (read or listen to) short stories and retell them in front of the mirror at their home and in front of the class in next session and answer their classmates’ questions. This experiment occurred in eight weeks, three sixty minute sessions per week. Then, all students in both

groups answered the questions of the interviewer as post-test. The statistical analysis related to t-test was done on gathered raw scores. Data from this study demonstrated a significant role for using simplified short stories in improving the speaking skills of participants in the experimental group. The findings of this study may help the learners to enhance their independent English language learning and improve their speaking skills by using short stories. All steps of this study will also be beneficial for EFL teachers who are searching ways of improving speaking of their students.

Tarighat and Vadani (2014) investigated the impact of teaching critical thinking skills on the speaking proficiency of Iranian EFL learners in Tehran, how this impact is explained and the participants' attitudes towards explicit critical-thinking content. To achieve this goal, two groups of female Iranian intermediate EFL learners were compared on their speaking performance, with one group having been trained in critical thinking explicitly and the other as the control group. Both groups were tested prior to and after the training of the experimental group was performed. A mixed-method approach was employed in the analysis of the data. In the quantitative analysis, a quasi-experimental method was adopted to investigate the impact of teaching critical thinking skills on the speaking proficiency of the experimental group in comparison with the control group. The results indicated that teaching critical thinking explicitly has a significantly positive impact on the speaking proficiency of female Iranian adult intermediate EFL learners. Through the qualitative approach, the participants' attitudes towards their training in critical thinking were studied during in-depth interviews. Accordingly, explicit instruction of critical thinking in the English class could make a deeper impression of the language taught.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the aforementioned issues, the following research questions were posed.

1. Do narrative techniques influence EFL learners' oral proficiency?
2. Do narrative techniques and critical thinking strategies together enhance EFL learners' oral proficiency?
3. Is there any significance difference between using only narrative techniques and narrative techniques and critical thinking strategies together on oral proficiency of EFL learners?

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

As many as 75 male and female EFL learners from OMID Language Center in Shahrekord, participated in the current experimental study. The participants' English proficiency was controlled to be of intermediate level and their age ranged from 17 to 25 ( $M = 20$ ,  $SD = 2.79$ ). All the participants had Persian as their L1 and none of them had been to an English speaking country and, as studying English as a foreign language, they had no opportunity to speak English outside the classroom context. The participants were randomly assigned into two experimental groups and a control group as follows:

- 1) The first group, as the experimental group one (EG1), contained of 25 learners and was supposed to receive narrative techniques;
- 2) The second group, as the experimental group two (EG2), contained of 25 learners and was supposed to receive narrative techniques, together with critical thinking strategies;
- 3) The third class, as the control group, contained of 25 learners and received no specific treatment and was taught through conventional methods of speaking instruction (placebo).

## **Instrument**

The materials employed in the current study to assess the defined variables were a quick placement test (QPT) to check the participants' level of language proficiency, a California critical thinking skills test (CCTST) to decide on the participants' levels of critical thinking before and after the treatment, a course-based speaking test in the form of an interview (in two different but equivalent versions served as the pretest and posttest) to assess the learners' proficiency in speaking, the oral assessment scale of CEFR to decide on the participants' level of oral proficiency, and the short stories employed to implement the treatment of the study.

## **Procedure**

To select the participants of this study, all 104 learners enrolled in one of intermediate levels of Omid language center in Shahrekord were considered as the population of the study. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, simple random sampling was employed to select 75 intermediate learners. In order to make sure of the participants' proficiency level, a QPT test was employed. After selecting the participants, they were divided randomly into two experimental groups of study (EG1 and EG2) and a control group (each containing 25 participants) in the first step, the CCTST pretest was administered to evaluate the participants' level of critical thinking before the course of study. Then, the course-based speaking pretest was administered in order to assess their initial proficiency in speaking. The participants were required to answer five different questions about the topics they were supposed to discuss during the course within a timing of three minutes for each question. The participants were interviewed individually in a quiet room and the interviews were recorded on tape and then were transcribed. Then, the recordings and transcriptions were analyzed by the researcher and marks (scores) were given applying CEFR oral assessment scale.

After administering the pretests, all the participants attended a two-month English speaking course that met two times a week for one and a half hours each session. The experimental and control groups received the same amount of class instruction (over 24 hours) and were exposed to the same authentic language input and their course material were identical. Similar topics were proposed to discuss in all groups including crime, dream, marriage, money, and sport. The teacher played the role of a discussion leader who tried to make sure everyone got the opportunity to express his/her opinions on proposed topics. The only controlled variable was the varying emphasis given to the

speaking techniques and strategies (treatment) from one group to the other as the following:

- In the EG1, The students were asked to read the stories and summarize them in front of the mirror before coming to the class and be ready for answering questions related to the stories and discussing their views on them. They focused on group discussion as its main task for speaking improvement. The role of teacher was just monitor that each learner participates actively in the discussion. In each session, two participants were chosen to present a lecture about the story. The permitted time for the presentation for each learner was fifteen minutes.
- The participants in the EG2 in addition to receive all abovementioned narrative techniques were received critical thinking strategies during the class time by the teacher. In the first session, the teacher explicitly explained what critical thinking is and how significant it is to have a critical mind in modern life. Then, during the following sessions, teacher taught critical thinking strategies including involving learners in problem solving activities; such as summarizing, retelling the story in their own words, making judgments and forming opinions, ask and answer questions of clarification, and concept mapping; raising questions; teaching logical reasoning; evaluating others' arguments; etc. Meanwhile, some salient Dialogue-focusing strategies such as identifying direction, sorting ideas for relevance, and focusing on key points were practiced in the classroom as well.
- In the only control group of the study, participants received speaking instruction according to routine and traditional methods. Initially, the students were required to read on the topics before coming to the class and be ready for discussing their views on suggested topics at the same time as the experimental groups received the treatment.

At the end of the course (i.e., after 24 teaching hours of tuition), the course-based speaking posttest and CCTST posttest were administered to all the participants in order to gauge any potential change or progress in the speaking ability as well as critical thinking levels of the participants over the course of the program. The scoring method was the same as the pretest.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Do narrative techniques influence EFL learners' oral proficiency?

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics of the pretest and posttest oral proficiency (OP) scores in the EG1 and control group. As Table 1 indicates, the minimum OP score was 65 in the EG1, which was below the possible median score (125), on a scale ranged from 25 to 225, and the maximum OP score was 169 in the EG1 and control group, which was above the median score (125). The greatest range of pretest scores was 104 but the greatest range of posttest scores was 109, which showed a greater range for posttest scores. The skewness and kurtosis values for all data sets were between -2 and +2

indicating that the distribution of all data sets was rather symmetrical around the mean and the distributions tend to be mesokurtic (i.e., normal). The pretest speaking mean scores were 113.76, and 112.76 in the EG1 and control group respectively. That is, the difference between two groups was small in terms of the pretest OP scores. This supported the homogeneity of groups with regard to the initial oral proficiency. The posttest mean scores were 121.48 and 115.36 in the EG1 and control group respectively, means that both groups showed an increase from pretest to posttest to some extent, however the greater amount of improvement belonged to the EG1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics of OP Scores in the EG1 and Control Group

Group	Variable	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
EG1	Pretest OP scores	25	104	65	169	113.76	34.348	.083	-1.482
	Posttest OP scores	25	109	66	175	121.48	35.493	.038	-1.445
Control	Pretest OP scores	25	94	75	169	112.76	28.784	.322	-1.206
	Posttest OP scores	25	97	76	173	115.36	28.704	.365	-1.127

To address the research questions, the difference between the participants' performance on the speaking pretest and posttest was calculated and operationalized as the oral proficiency improvement (OPI) amounts.

In order to address the first research question and to determine if the difference in the means of OPI amounts between the EG1 and control group was significant, an Independent Sample *t* test was conducted at .05 level of significance. Table 2 below clearly illustrates the significance of the resulting difference.

**Table 2.** Results of Independent-Samples T Tests for the EG1 and Control Group

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	11.278	.002	5.779	48	.000	5.12000	.88604	3.33850	6.90150
Equal variances not assumed			5.779	32.905	.000	5.12000	.88604	3.31714	6.92286

As displayed in Table 2, the results of Independent Samples T-Test ( $t(48) = 5.779$ ,  $p = .000 < .05$ ), with an almost moderate effect size, indicated that there was a significant difference in the means of OPI amounts between the EG1 and control group. That is, the subjects in the first experimental group (EG1) who received narrative techniques showed a higher amount of improvement on the speaking posttest in comparison with those in the control group who used conventional instruction in speaking. Thus, the first null-hypothesis was rejected. It should be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of



variances was violated (Levene's  $F = 11.278$ ,  $P = .002 < .05$ ). That is why the second row of Table 2, i.e. "Equal variances not assumed" was reported.

### Do narrative techniques and critical thinking strategies together enhance EFL learners' oral proficiency?

Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics of the pretest and posttest OP scores in the EG2 and control group.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics of OP Scores in the EG2 and Control Group

Group	Variable	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
EG2	Pretest OP scores	25	104	65	169	110.04	29.433	.641	-.470
	Posttest OP scores	25	105	75	180	124.48	30.027	.409	-.884
Control	Pretest OP scores	25	94	75	169	112.76	28.784	.322	-1.206
	Posttest OP scores	25	97	76	173	115.36	28.704	.365	-1.127

As Table 3 indicates, the minimum OP score was 65 in the EG1, which was below the possible median score (125) on a scale ranged from 25 to 225, and the maximum OP score was 180 in the EG2, which was above the median score (125). The greatest range of pretest scores was 104 but the greatest range of posttest scores was 105, which showed a slightly greater range for posttest scores. The skewness and kurtosis values for all data sets were between -2 and +2 indicating that the distribution of all data sets was rather symmetrical around the mean and the distributions tend to be mesokurtic (i.e., normal). The pretest speaking mean scores were 110.04, and 112.76 in the EG2 and control group respectively. That is, the difference between two groups was small in terms of the pretest OP scores. This supported the homogeneity of groups with regard to the initial oral proficiency. The posttest mean scores were 124.48 and 115.36 in the EG2, and control group respectively, means that both groups showed an increase from the pretest to posttest to some extent; however the greater amount of improvement belonged to the EG2.

In order to address the second research question and to determine if the difference in the means of OPI amounts between the EG2 and control group was significant, an Independent Samples T-Test was conducted at .05 level of significance. Table 4 below clearly illustrates the significance of the resulting difference.

**Table 4.** Results of Independent Samples T-Tests for the EG2 and Control Group

	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	29.550	.000	7.718	48	.000	11.84000	1.53414	8.75540	14.92460
Equal variances not assumed			7.718	26.721	.000	11.84000	1.53414	8.69066	14.98934

As presented in Table 4, the results of the Independent-Samples *t* test ( $t(48) = 7.718, p = .000 < .05$ ), with an almost moderate effect size, indicated that there was a significant difference in the means of OPI amounts between the EG2 and control group. That is, the subjects in the second experimental group (EG1) who received narrative techniques and critical thinking strategies together showed a higher amount of improvement on the speaking posttest in comparison with those in the control group who used conventional instruction in speaking. Thus, the second null-hypothesis of the study was rejected. It should be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was violated (Levene's  $F = 29.550, P = .000 < .05$ ). That is why the second row of Table 2, i.e. "Equal variances not assumed" was reported.

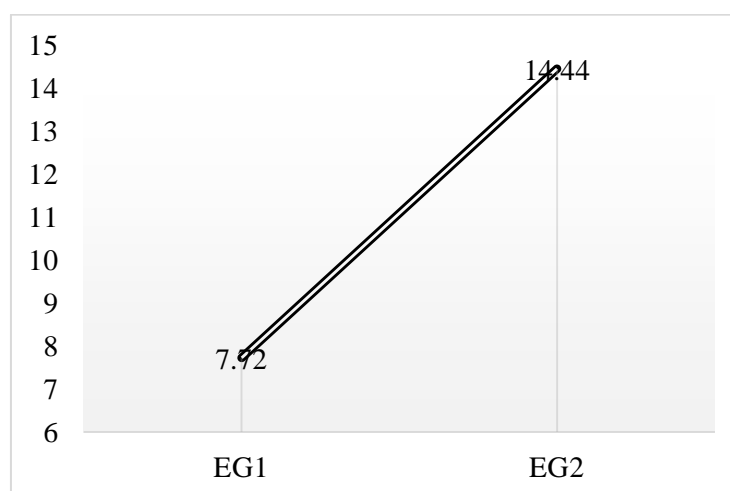
### Is there any significance difference between using only narrative techniques and narrative techniques and critical thinking strategies together on oral proficiency of EFL learners?

The descriptive statistics of RCI for both experimental groups of the study (EG1 and EG2) are presented in table 5 below.

**Table 5.** Descriptive Statistics of OPI amounts in the EG2 and EG1

Group	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
EG1	25	14	1	15	7.72	4.057	.017	.599
EG2	25	28	2	30	14.44	7.461	.490	.315

As can be observed in the Table 5, the RCI mean score in the EG2 ( $M=14.44$ ) was greater than the RCI mean score in the EG1 ( $M=7.72$ ). The results are shown graphically in figure 1.



**Figure 1.** RCI mean scores in both experimental groups

As illustrated in Figure 4.3, the OP scores of the participants in the EG2 who received both narrative techniques and critical thinking strategies together improved more in comparison with the OP scores of those in the EG1 who received narrative techniques solely.

The third research question of the study intended to seek whether there was any significant difference among the oral proficiency of those EFL learners who received narrative techniques and those who received narrative techniques and critical thinking instruction together or not. To address this question, an Independent-Samples t test was actually conducted to explore if there was any significant difference in the means of OPI amounts between the EG1 and EG2. The results of running this test are reported in Table 6 below.

**Table 6.** Results of Independent-Samples T Tests for the EG1 and EG2

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	9.118	.004	-3.956	48	.000	-6.72000	1.69863	-10.13532	3.30468
Equal variances not assumed			-3.956	37.051	.000	-6.72000	1.69863	-10.16159	3.27841

The results of the *independent samples t test*, ( $t(48) = -3.956$ ,  $p = .000 < .05$ ), indicated that there was a significant difference in the means of OPI amounts between the EG1 and EG2. Thus, the third null hypothesis of the study was rejected. It should be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was violated (Levene's  $F = 9.118$ ,  $P = .004 < .05$ ). That is why the second row of Table 2, i.e. "Equal variances not assumed" was reported.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed at exploring the effectiveness of narrative techniques for cultivating critical thinking strategies and improving oral proficiency of intermediate Iranian EFL learner. With the help of the data analysis and discussion went above, a number of findings were obtained which are presented as the following.

- In all three groups of the study, participants' level of oral proficiency improved in comparison with the status at the beginning of the study.
- The participants in the EG1 who received narrative techniques as well as the participants in the EG2 who were exposed to both narrative techniques and critical thinking strategies together –as the treatment– showed on average higher amount of improvement in oral proficiency compared to those of the control group who received traditional instruction in speaking.

- A significant difference was found between the critical thinking level of the participants in the EG2 before and after the treatment, however the differences in critical thinking levels between pretest and posttest results were not statistically significant within the EG1 and control group.
- A significant positive correlation was found between the amounts of improvement in critical thinking and oral proficiency improvement amounts, means that raising the level of critical thinking of the learners had a significant role in improving the oral proficiency scores of the learners.
- The differences between two experimental groups were statistically significant in terms of the amount of oral proficiency improvement. In other words, higher amounts of improvement in the participants' level of oral proficiency in the EG2 compared to those of the EG1 were not due to chance variation at all and the difference can be safely and significantly attributed to the type of treatment.

Following the findings, the concluding remarks are as follows:

- Receiving narrative techniques as an introductory strategy would activate the relevant concepts existing in EFL learners' minds and help them develop the relevant background required to manage any type of communicative tasks including answering the related questions, discussing on the topic, and etc. Moreover, receiving narrative techniques would promote students' motivation to actively take part in class activities. The activated schemata on a given topic in addition to the participants' willingness to take an active role through communication would foster EFL learners' level of the oral proficiency in turn.
- Benefiting from narrative techniques together with critical thinking strategies may be served as an effective strategy to exploit the activated background on a given topic as well as eagerness and motivation of EFL learners toward that topic and lead them to more successful articulation through a well-defined procedure of critical thinking instructions. In other words by integrating narrative techniques and critical thinking strategies, EFL learners' level of oral proficiency may improve significantly.
- The critical thinking ability of intermediate EFL learners would be fostered by receiving narrative techniques and critical thinking strategies. In other words, those EFL learners who are better critical thinker would be a better English speaker owing to the fact that a learner who thinks critically can ask appropriate questions, can activate relevant information, efficiently and creatively sort through this information, reason logically from this information, and come to reliable and trustworthy conclusions about what other people have said that helps her/him to arrange what she/he wants to say in the best way.
- High amounts of improvement in intermediate EFL learners' levels of critical thinking would correspond to high amounts of improvement in their levels of oral proficiency.

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study might have several implications for all concerned individuals involved in the process of language learning and teaching in Iran. First, the findings of this study would be helpful for EFL learners since they are involved in learning process and this will pave the way for becoming a more successful speaker instead of being silent and reticent in the classroom. Second, the findings might also be informative for EFL teachers who are interested in mixing educational tools with their teaching procedures in school classrooms or institution classes. Referring to this study, foreign language teachers can benefit from the positive effects of critical thinking instruction together with narrative techniques and convey this to their students when they teach English language skills. Furthermore, applying narrative techniques to cultivate critical thinking in classrooms will help the teachers to decrease their role of participating in classroom as addressors and stop the role of students in classrooms as the mere listeners or addressees; and will make the learners many times more interactive than before. In addition, by integrating narrative techniques and critical thinking strategies in classes, there would be a good balance between fun (applying simplified and easy to understand short stories) and instructional load (teaching critical thinking strategies). The next group of people who benefit from the results and findings and procedures of conducting this study are the material and textbook designers and developers in educational system. By using the results of this study they can for example put new exercises in English textbooks which involve the use of short stories as well as critical thinking enchantment exercises. Finally, Dual speaking courses of critical thinking and narrative techniques could be held in English language institutes or at universities in order to equally improve critical thinking abilities and the speaking proficiency of the learners as they are interchangeably effective in learning one another. The integration of critical thinking strategies and narrative techniques in language learning, particularly in speaking, not only creates a more profound impact on the students in learning English more effectively, but can be more intriguing and motivating for the students as they may find the instruction and the material more attractive, and they may find the classes more useful as more than one subject is being taught.

## REFERENCES

- Aristotle, D., & McKeon, R. (1941). *The basic works of Aristotle*. New York: Random House.
- Bamberg, M. (2004). Talk, small stories, and adolescent identities. *Human Development*, 47, 366-369.
- Bamberg, M. (2007). Talk, small stories, and adolescent identities. *Human Development*, 47, 366-369.
- Bergmann, J. R. (1993). *Discreet indiscretions: The social organization of gossip*. J. Bednarz, Jr. (Trans). New York: Aldine de Gruyter. Originally published in 1987 as *Klatsch: Zur Sozialform der diskreten Indiscretion*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.

- Blum-Kulka, S. (1993). You got to know how to tell a story: Telling, tales, and tellers in American and Israeli narrative events at dinner. *Language in Society*, 22(3), 361-402.
- Campbell, J. (1999). *The Power of Myth*. Sydney, NSW: Doubleday.
- Chaney, A. L. (1998). *Teaching Oral Communication in Grades k-8*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Coupland, J. (2000). *Small Talk*. London: Longman.
- Devine, T. G. (1962). Critical thinking in the English class. *Peabody journal of education*, 39(6), 359-365.
- Ebrahiminigad, S., Azizifard, A., & Jamalinesari, A. (2014). Effects of Using Short Story on Speaking Improvement of Iranian PRE-Intermediate EFL learners. *International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World*, 7, 42-56.
- Egan, K. (1999). *Teaching as storytelling: An alternative approach to teaching and the curriculum*. London: Rutledge.
- Facione, P. A., Facione, N. C., and Giancarlo, C. A. (2000). The disposition toward critical thinking: Its character, measurement, and relationship to critical thinking skill. *Informal Logic*, 20, 61-84.
- Fahim, M., Saeepour, S. (2011). The Impact of Teaching Critical Thinking Skills on Reading Comprehension of Iranian EFL Learners. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2(4), 867-874.
- Florez, M. A. C. (1999). *Improving adult English language learners' speaking skills*. Washington, DC: Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education.
- Fludernik, M. (2013). Conversational Narration \_ Oral Narration. In P. Hühn et al. (eds.), *the living handbook of narratology*. Hamburg: Hamburg University.
- Frede, M. (1992). Plato's arguments and the dialogue form. In J. C. Klagge, and N. D. Smith (eds.), *Methods of interpreting Plato and his Dialogues*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Ferris, D., & Tagg, T. (1996). Academic oral communication needs of EAP learners: What subject-matter instructors actually require. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30(1), 31-58.
- Georgakopoulou, A. (2007). *Small stories, interaction and identities*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Heath, S. B. (1982). What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and at school. *Language in Society*, 11, 9-7.
- Huang, K. (2006). *Metacognitive strategies in academic oral presentation*. TESOL Paper. Province University Taiwan.
- Hymes, D. (1981). *In vain I tried to tell you: Essays in Native American Ethnopoetics*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Hymes, D. (1996). *Ethnography, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality: Toward an understanding of voice*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Labov, W., & Waletzky, J. (1967). Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7, 3-38.
- Mann, L. (1979). *On the trail of process: A historical perspective on cognitive processes and their training*. New York: Grune & Stratton.

- Melzi, G. (2000). Cultural Variations in the Construction of Personal Narratives: Central American and European American Mothers' Elicitation Styles. *Discourse Processes*, 30(2), 153-177.
- Nunan, D. (2003). *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ochs, E. (1989). Narrative. In T.A. van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as structure and process* (pp. 185-207). London: SAGE Publications.
- Palmer, A. (2010). *Language Testing in Practice*. Oxford University Press.
- Paul, R. (1990). Bloom's taxonomy and critical thinking instruction. *Educational Leadership*, 42(8), 36.
- Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2008). Critical thinking: strategies for improving student learning. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 32(2), 34-35.
- Plato. (1956). *The collected dialogues of Plato*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Riessman, C. (2005). *Narrative, Memory & Everyday Life*. University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield.
- Roth, F., Speece, D., & Cooper, D. (2002). A longitudinal analysis of the connection between oral language and early reading. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 95, 259-272.
- Skolverket (2011). *English*. Retrieved July 14, 2015 from [http://www.skolverket.se/polopoly\\_fs/1.174543!Menu/article/attachment/English.pdf](http://www.skolverket.se/polopoly_fs/1.174543!Menu/article/attachment/English.pdf)
- Tabors, P., Snow, C., & Dickinson, D. (2001). Homes and schools together: Supporting language and literacy development. In K. K. Dickinson & P.O. Tabors (Eds.), *Beginning literacy with language* (pp. 313-334). Baltimore: Brooks.
- Thornbury, S., & Slade, D. (2006). *Conversation: From description to pedagogy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Umiker-Sebeok, D. J. (2000). Preschool children's intra-conversational narratives. *Journal of Child Language*, 6, 91-109.
- Vahdani Sanavi, R., & Tarighat, S. (2014): Critical thinking and speaking proficiency: A mixed-method study. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 4(1), 79-87.
- Yang, J. (2011). Story telling as a teaching method in ESL classrooms. Kristianstad University School of Teacher Education.
- Yusel, G., & Alc, B. (2012). Self-Efficacy and Critical Thinking Dispositions as Predictors of Success in School Practicum. *International online Journal of Educational Science*, 4(1), 81-90.