

The Effect of Critical Language Awareness on EFL Learners' Writing Ability

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Abstract

The present study sought to investigate the effect of Critical Language Awareness (CLA) on upper-intermediate EFL learners' writing ability. Thirty-two EFL learners were selected based on their scores on a placement test and were randomly assigned to control and experimental groups. In addition to the placement test, prior to and after the treatment, a five-paragraph essay writing test was administered to assess the participants' writing ability through the use of a standardized rubric consisting of five categories of critical response, development of ideas, structure of response, word choice, and mechanics. The three-stage treatment which was based on the frameworks of Wallace (1992), Fairclough (1989) and Ivancic and Simpson (1992) was offered to the experimental group in twelve sessions. The result of independent samples t-tests did not show any significant effect of the treatment on the participants' overall writing ability; however, when the categories were considered separately, the result was statistically significant in terms of critical response. The major implication of this study is for writing instructors who need to consider critical attitudes of the EFL learners as an important factor in their instruction.

Keywords: Critical Language Awareness, Writing, Discourse, EFL

1. Introduction

In the current era, due to the advancement of technology and globalization, people are exposed to numerous lines of thought and ideologies. Based on Geuss (1981), ideology has descriptive, pejorative, and positive senses. The first sense, namely, descriptive sense, is not judgmental. On the other hand, pejorative and positive senses classify, criticize, and judge. This judgment in many circumstances might entice sources of power for inequality and injustice.

In language-related studies, a good example of inequality is the concept of linguistic imperialism. As Pennycook (1994, 1995), Ricento (1994), Crystal (1997) and

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Skutnab-Kangas (2000) accentuated(cited in Fernandez, 2005), the English language as lingua franca might unfairly privilege monolingual speakers of English in job recruitment, accessibility to educational system, or disappearance of many minority languages which are the mother tongues of the users of English language. Moreover, there might be some hidden ideologies that might lead to inequality, injustice, and naïve manipulation of learners. These transmissible ideologies can be conveyed by teachers, curriculum designers, policy makers, and coursebook designers' perceptions.

The importance of coursebook as a core and source of information in EFL context is highly significant and it can provide an efficient framework for syllabuses, teachers, and learners (Harlan, 2000; Hutchinson & Torres, 1994; Sheldon, 1988). On the other hand, Aliakbarian (2002) emphasized the cultural view of the authors in the textbooks and materials that they convey through spoken and written discourse. In addition, Wallace (1992) pointed out the importance of the sociopolitical factors of textbook publication and critically questioned different circumstances including the discrepancy between the claims of the West press, knowledge of authors, the company that runs the press or the person who owns the publication and their hidden intentions.

Since the English coursebooks are mainly imported and texts are not value-free, possible development of these conformed thoughts in the discourse of learners might be problematic. In other words, one of the main concerns is that texts are related to each other and learners in EFL context might not be aware of the hidden thoughts, ideologies, conventions, and beliefs beyond the imported texts; these thoughts might grow in the production of the texts subconsciously.

The awareness of EFL learners might be neglected by the authorities including policy makers, curriculum designers, teachers, and supervisors in favor of a traditional value-free view of education. Students may participate in classes without awareness over their rights on questioning texts and alternatives to their coursebooks. One reason might be that the authorities probably consider the learners to have limited knowledge. On the contrary, the students with limited linguistic knowledge are not necessarily limited in their worldview; moreover, by explaining their rights, obligations, and ways of facilitative criticism, teachers can pave the way for raising the EFL learners' intellectual levels. Also, the absence of critical appraisal may impede their progression in language skills. Among the language skills, writing is known for its gate-keeping characteristic (Leki, 2003). Additionally, numerous researchers believe in the difficulty of writing skill compared to other skills;

this complexity might be due to a plethora of factors including the distance between writer and reader, absence of suprasegmental features, body posture, or cultural factors (Brown, 2001; Chastain, 1988; Richards & Renandya, 2002; Rivers, 1981; Silva & Matsuda, 2002).

Unfortunately, in the previous years, there were few attempts to integrate CLA and writing ability (See Talbot, 1992 and Clark, 1992). Maftoon and Sabbaghan (2010) also mentioned that “there is no published research concerning critical language awareness and EFL writing” (p. 822). Additionally, most noticeable studies, namely, Wallace (1992, 1999, & 2003), van Dijk (2001), Pirozzi (2003) and Cots (2006) focused on critical reading and understanding of the theoretical framework of practitioners on texts; therefore, the attention has been mainly on input and possibly intake, but not much on output. Another issue in CLA is the classroom implementation. Huang (2013) highlighted that “few studies have documented students’ learning as a result of actual classroom implementations of CLA” (p. 65). In fact, EFL learners in EFL context see their identity around the conventional approaches towards skills and components of language through teachers’ identity. Unfortunately, the rules of language and language learning, particularly writing, do not usually bring the identity of learners into consideration and these rules try to restate that example into “you have to be like that if you want to be that”. To this end, this study aimed at bringing some elements of CLA in the classroom and probed whether it had any impact on the writing ability of EFL learners. In particular, the awareness of EFL learners was raised through CLA-based instruction and their own identity was encouraged on realities of sexism and racism in terms of socio-historical context to reflect critically on their writing tasks.

2. Literature Review

There are different available branches of critical language studies in the literature. The major contribution of critical language studies is emancipation and empowerment of learners (Clark, 1992). Accordingly, they might differ in skeleton but the underlying constructions are more or less similar to each other. Three well-known theoretical models, namely, critical pedagogy (CP), critical discourse analysis (CDA) and critical language awareness (CLA) are explained here briefly.

Education and its systems are not static by nature and are rather dynamic and related to social changes. Therefore, they cannot be separated from society and the influential factors which affect societal phenomena. There are different theories on critical view toward societies and specifically schooling, in which CP, the world

foremost, tries to engage these thoughts with actual practice in the classroom. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, authored by Paulo Freire (1970), could be considered as a legacy for the proponents of this field who try to bring justice into their life, society and mainly their classrooms. Freire (1970) postulated the problem-posing model in contrast to the banking concept of education. The theory of Freire was in line with that of Carl Rogers who emphasized the mutual role and relationship between teacher and learner (See Williams & Burden, 1997). Breuing (2011) stated the main goals of CP from the viewpoint of the critical pedagogues as “democracy; emancipation and/or transformation; critical thinking; social justice; profound learning experience; empowerment; critical responders; social consciousness and activism; social change; and student-centeredness” (p.11).

Racism is one of the distorted realities of all times which has had direct and indirect effects on soul, mind, and heart of human and, overall, on humanity. vanDijk (1989) mentioned the spread of this dehumanized ideology after the World War II. Experiences of racism were divided into direct effects that encompass contempt, insults, physical aggression, as well as indirect ones such as assigning people into different racial groups, expression of racist comments and stereotyped jokes, and the accessibility of immigrants to the predetermined jobs (piecemeal/minimum wage jobs and as such) (Odina et al., 2007). Another dehumanized ideology is sexism. Glick and Fiske (1996) divided sexism into hostile and benevolent types. The hostile sexism, as the term presented, directly undermined and diminished women and minorities. This might occur in one’s action or perception. The other type, benevolent sexism, might sound appropriate, but the nature of that would still emphasize injustice and unequal rights for women. Sexism is manifested in feminism. Hoodfar (1992) brought some of the injustice topics related to feminism and anthropology through CP into the university classrooms. Being an anthropologist and researcher of inequality between genders, she expressed that anthropology had been driven and influenced by the geo-political aspects of colonial domination, particularly Britain in which a good possibility for reformation of anthropological conventions occurred by uncensored postmodernism.

The second theoretical view is CDA which is a branch of linguistics, and like other critical language studies has been influenced by theories of Foucault, Gramsci, Habermas, Frankfurt school, etc. (Fairclough, 1992a; Rogers, 2004; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). This field of study was proposed to compensate the shortcomings of discourse analysis. Discourse analysis developed as a response to the Chomskyan systematic notion of language (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Stubbs (1983) considered discourse analysis as a study above the sentence level and clause (cited in

Widdowson, 2004); based on this consideration, Widdowson criticized this view for being ambiguous and unkempt in definition and differentiation between text and discourse. In Widdowson's (2004) view, Stubbs differentiated text and discourse in terms of length and characteristics of spoken and written formats. To this end, Widdowson (2004) brought a more thorough explanation. In his view, text could be produced in any shape or size; it might embrace an indexical sign of P for parking, visual pictures, acronyms, clues, sentences, and units above sentence level. Based on this assumption, the index sign can also be considered as a text.

Widdowson's definition of text is in line with that of Fairclough (1995) who stated, for discourse analyst, studies of texts contributed to a broader area such as written or spoken discourse. However, this traditional perception had been criticized with analysis beyond written and spoken discourse through the multi-semiotic (Widdowson, 2004). This is when spoken language was used in combination with visuals, sounds, or graphs, and design of page which were salient features of prints (written texts) (Widdowson, 2004).

The difference between text and discourse comes in handy, when distinguishing between intention and interpretation should be considered. Additionally, Widdowson (2004) differentiated discourse by considering it as a process of negotiating meaning and text as its product. In Fairclough's (1992b) view, discourse constructs identity, social relations between people, and knowledge. This is a linchpin to act critically on text and discourse.

Due to vastness of CDA in practice, there is not a unified model for critical analysis of discourse; however, three well-known models belong to Wodak, van Dijk and Fairclough. Amongst CDA scholars, Wodak is mainly a linguistics-oriented scholar who studied spoken and written text/discourse in specific semiotic types (Meyer, 2001). Her discourse-historical model was designed chiefly based on the social and socio-philosophical critical theories to analyze political discourses critically. In this model, the focal attention is on politics. The discourse-historical aspects are related to cognition and action. On the other hand, van Dijk (2001) stated that the source of social representations was in mental models of daily speech; therefore, all the actions, knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies were included in his socio-cognitive model (van Dijk, 2001). This model was designed on three main elements of cognition, society, and discourse (micro-level) in which it tried to investigate inequality, power, and domination (macro-level) in groups and organizations (van Dijk, 2001). In a similar vein, Fairclough (1989) developed a three-dimensional model. The main elements of this model were text which was referred to both

written and spoken forms, discourse that was based on interpretation and production, and lastly, sociocultural practice (Fairclough, 1995). He emphasized the description of text (text analysis) beside interpretation of text and discourse (processing analysis) along with explanation of discourse practice and sociocultural practice, to be known as social analysis. Widdowson (1995) criticized CDA and particularly Fairclough's model based on the dual-interpretation in which, in the first step, it is judged by some preplanned ideologies and, in the second step, the analyst interprets the text or discourse based on his/her preferred and biased assumptions (cited in Meyer, 2001). Concerning this criticism, Fairclough (1996) pointed out the open-endedness result of CDA as an element of research in this field (cited in Meyer, 2001).

In CDA, analysts are chiefly involved in the process of analysis whereas CLA has been proposed to bring the aforementioned theories and practices directly into the classrooms, and make learners' aware of domination, segregation, manipulation, etc.

In the early stages of critical language study, Clark, Fairclough, Ivanic, and Martin-Jones (1987) described the principles of critical language study based on social dominant forces which shape discourse, language conventions, and historical orientation. In the similar vein, some comprehensive principles, expressed by Clark (1992), firstly focused on all three dimensions of discourse, and secondly, the awareness of students in real context, and lastly the main goals of CLA.

In line with Clark, Wallace (1999) distinguished CLA principles from critical pedagogy principles of teaching as emancipatory, difference-oriented, and oppositional. As a result, the principles of CLA were postulated to empower learners in a long-term project that chiefly focused on resistance. Furthermore, Wallace (1999) differentiated between macro and micro levels of CLA. These two levels are drawn on two strands such as macro-awareness of literacy practices in social contexts and, at the micro-level, the awareness of the effects on a particular context.

Wallace (2003), one of the prominent scholars in critical reading studies, determined and differentiated between the role of author, text, and reader via critical view. To this end, when teachers/researchers apply the critical strands in classroom, they ought to confront the author, the text, and the reader.

Based on applying CLA strands in EFL classroom, Wallace (1992) divided reader into submissive and assertive types. According to Wallace's (1992) point of view, "EFL students are often marginalized as readers; their goals in interacting with written texts are perceived to be primarily those of language learners" (p. 62). Consequently, Wallace tried to overcome the difficulties and gaps such as absence of

social context in reading, application of provocative texts along with a methodology for interpreting texts through ideological assumptions and propositional meaning. The analysis of descriptive questions resulted in unveiling the different perspectives of students toward critical study. This was explained by learners' different levels of language in second language and the critical awareness of the students in their mother tongue. Additionally, the range of different linguistic resources was argued to have a direct effect on the analysis of texts (Wallace, 1992).

In the study of critical reading in a Turkish high school context, Icmez (2005) investigated the impact of critical reading on students' reading and their motivation. The result of this study revealed the modification of students in approach and process of reading along with a high level of motivation in the new critical approach toward reading.

The authentic context of language learning encompasses various phenomena such as movie, music, and image that hold numerous unveiled ideologies inside. Brown (2006) taught critical awareness of discourse and analyzed music, image, news, and everyday interaction. The result of this descriptive study showed that critical awareness of discourse had a great impact on students' interests. However, this study suffered from the absence of a clear investigation of predefined steps in method and centrality of subjective observation as the major reliable tool for the discussion, yet the case of adopting critical attitudes was satisfactory and had a direct effect on learners' thinking, awareness rising about the media, and accounting CLA in institutional policies.

In a study, Tarnopolsky (2000) applied strands of CLA to investigate their effect on communicative ability and accuracy. In this case, the experimental groups were guided to systematically compare passive voice of English in comparison and contrast to Russian. On the other hand, the absence of systematicity of grammar differentiated the control group. The systematic view of this study further led to language consciousness. As a consequence, critical language awareness-raising had a positive effect on the students' communicative skill and grammatical accuracy.

There are several views toward teaching writing. These views are plausibly considered as conventional approaches by Clark (1992). Clark investigated the tenets of CLA in academic writing in contrast to conventional approaches to writing. The observation of Clark showed that after the course, students acted as critical readers and they were more motivated in their writing in terms of empowerment and emancipation. Furthermore, the tension between rights and obligations was unveiled

in academic context. By obligation, Clark referred to conventions of academic writing (ideology of the experts), and rights were referred to as ability to express their identity as writers.

In a study in Iranian context, Maftoon and Sabbaghan (2010) investigated the possible effect of analysis of social practice on critical language awareness in writing course. The participants of this study included twenty-six male and female learners at institute and university level who were divided into two groups of advanced and competent learners. Furthermore, they received feedback on their writing within ten sessions of study. Their findings, based on regression analysis, revealed that the CLA level of the participants increased along with the improvement of cohesive devices, literacy devices, transitivity, and affinity.

To sum up, the aforementioned review is indicative of the importance of the role of CLA in EFL context. The review of the related literature also reveals the scant attention paid to CLA in writing instruction in particular. As such, the present study sought to examine the effect of CLA-based instruction on EFL learners' writing ability. To this end, the following research question was proposed to be answered:

- Does CLA have a statistically significant effect on EFL learners' writing ability at upper-intermediate level?

In line with this research question, the following null hypothesis was tested:

- H_0 : CLA does not have any statistically significant effect on EFL learners' writing ability at upper-intermediate level.

3. Methodology

This study used pre-test/post-test control group design and a quasi-experimental method to collect quantitative data. Concerning the variables of the study, the type of instruction (CLA-based vs. conventional types) was the main independent variable and the writing ability was the dependent variable. Gender and level of proficiency were the control variables of the study.

3.1 Participants

The participants of this study were 32 female upper-intermediate learners who were studying English for general purposes. A private language institute was selected based on convenience sampling. Based on the results of a placement test, the participants were selected from a larger group of learners in the language institute ($n = 70$). Next, they were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. Each group

consisted of sixteen participants whose age ranged between 18 to 35 years with a mean age of 24.8.

3.2 Materials and instruments

In order to collect the relevant data, the Mosaic series (Writing) was selected as the main textbook for both experimental and control groups. This textbook, authored by Pike-Baky and Blass (2008), can be considered as a good start for more thoughtful and academic writing. To this end, some materials were adapted and modified for the experimental group. In order to ensure that both groups would receive some texts of similar difficulty level, the readability statistics (number of passive sentences, Flesch reading ease and Flesch-Kincaid grade level) were checked by Microsoft Office 2010 and the result indicated that the texts used in the study were almost at the same level in terms of difficulty.

A standardized Oxford quick placement tests (version 2) was administered to determine the participants' level of language proficiency. In addition, a five-paragraph essay test was given to the participants to assess their writing ability prior to and after the experiment. The rubric used for the evaluation of the participants' essays was the rubric of City University of New York (CUNY); this rubric has been reported to be standardized and its internal consistency was already confirmed.

The rubric used in rating the written essays considers critical responses, development of ideas, structure of writing, word choice, and mechanics. To ensure the inter-rater reliability, two experienced EFL instructors participated in the scoring procedure. The consistency of the two raters' evaluations was computed through correlation analysis. The correlation coefficients for the two ratings in pre-test scores ($r_{\text{pre-test}} = .836$) and for the post-test scores ($r_{\text{post-test}} = .821$) were statistically significant and relatively high ($p \leq .05$).

3.3 Procedure

It is to be noted that the textbook used in this study was specifically prepared for the Middle East and EFL context in particular. The first five lessons including six main texts of Mosaic series (writing) were taught and analyzed in twelve 90-minute sessions; all the steps were piloted before the main study. After the administration of Oxford quick placement test (version 2), thirty-two EFL students whose score fell within the range (40-47) were selected as the main sample for the present study ($M = 41.28$; $SD = 1.27$). Based on the test directions, the learners who score within this range are considered to be of upper-intermediate level.

Both groups received twelve sessions of instruction. The materials were almost equally taught to both groups. However, the salient difference between these two groups was the amalgamation of the frameworks of Wallace (1992), Fairclough (1989) and Ivanic and Simpson (1992) in three stages. In the first stage, the modified texts, which comprised of gender-biased language (sexist language) and race-segregated and marginalized language (racist language), were scrutinized through various critical questions.

The second stage utilized the model of CDA of Fairclough (1989) in which three main layers of CDA are delineated. The reason for the inclusion of all three sections of this model was based on the emphasis of Clark (1992) who stated that “critical language awareness should focus on all of the three layers of discourse” (p.123). Accordingly, this was the stage where both form and content of texts and discourses were under scrutiny.

Finally, the third stage of this experiment was designed to bring CLA into production (writing). The tenets of CLA by Ivanic and Simpson (1992) came in handy. By the end of the session four, when the students of the experimental group grasped the analysis of texts and the possible ideologies through reading between the lines, they received the instruction aggregated with the points on questions proposed by Ivanic and Simpson (1992).

The post-test consisted of writing a five-paragraph essay. The topic selected for this test was covertly ideological (pointing racist and sexist language). The participants were asked to hand in their essays within 60 minutes.

The data gathered through the writing essays were summed up and descriptive statistics (including frequencies, means, standard deviations, etc.) along with inferential statistics, namely, independent samples t-tests were utilized. The parametric independent samples t-test was run to determine if there was any statistically significant difference between the two groups in terms of their writing components after the completion of the treatment.

4. Results

Before running the main statistical analyses of the present study, namely, independent samples t-test, and Pearson correlation test (for inter-rater reliability analysis), normality of the distributions as one of the main assumptions of parametric tests was checked for all the distributions. To this end, skewness and kurtosis values were computed for the writing test scores to examine the normality assumption.

4.1 Examining the normality assumption of parametric tests

Skewness analysis was run to check the normality of the distributions. To this end, the statistic of skewness was divided by the relevant standard error. The results of the analyses are reported in Tables 1 and 2. The results revealed that the normality assumption was met in the distribution of the scores.

Table 1. Skewness and Kurtosis Statistics for the Pre- and Post-Test Scores

		Control	Experimental
Critical response (pre-test)	Skewness	1.278	1.025
	Std. Error of Skewness	.564	.564
	Kurtosis	1.036	.833
	Std. Error of Kurtosis	1.091	1.091
Development of writer's idea (pre-test)	N	16	16
	Skewness	.401	.843
	Std. Error of Skewness	.564	.564
	Kurtosis	-1.143	.191
	Std. Error of Kurtosis	1.091	1.091
Structure of the response (pre-test)	N	16	16
	Skewness	.961	.724
	Std. Error of Skewness	.564	.564
	Kurtosis	.366	.465
	Std. Error of Kurtosis	1.091	1.091
Language use: Sentences and word choice (pre-test)	N	16	16
	Skewness	.830	.808
	Std. Error of Skewness	.564	.564
	Kurtosis	1.107	.452
	Std. Error of Kurtosis	1.091	1.091
Language use: Grammar, usage, mechanics (pre-test)	N	16	16
	Skewness	-.343	1.554
	Std. Error of Skewness	.564	.564
	Kurtosis	-1.332	1.549
	Std. Error of Kurtosis	1.091	1.091
Critical response (post- test)	N	16	16
	Skewness	.319	.853
	Std. Error of Skewness	.564	.564

	Kurtosis		-.662-	.002
	Std. Error of Kurtosis		1.091	1.091
Development of writer's idea (post-test)	N		16	16
	Skewness		.547	.615
	Std. Error of Skewness		.564	.564
	Kurtosis		-.390-	-1.062-
	Std. Error of Kurtosis		1.091	1.091
Structure of the response (post-test)	N		16	16
	Skewness		1.804	.944
	Std. Error of Skewness		.564	.564
	Kurtosis		1.783	1.401
	Std. Error of Kurtosis		1.091	1.091
Language use: Sentences and word choice (post-test)	N		16	16
	Skewness		.191	1.616
	Std. Error of Skewness		.564	.564
	Kurtosis		-.945-	1.614
	Std. Error of Kurtosis		1.091	1.091
Language use: Grammar, usage, & mechanics (post-test)	N		16	16
	Skewness		.150	1.174
	Std. Error of Skewness		.564	.564
	Kurtosis		-.561-	.998
	Std. Error of Kurtosis		1.091	1.091

The findings all indicated that the distributions were symmetric and the normality assumption was met for the pre- and post-test scores. In other words, the values of skewness and kurtosis were within the range of ± 2 for all the distributions.

Additionally, normality assumption was checked for the scores given by the two raters. Table 2 presents the results of skewness analysis for the scores assigned by the two raters.

Table 2. Skewness and Kurtosis Statistics for the Writing Scores Given by Raters A and B

GROUPS		Rater A pre-test	Rater B pre-test	Rater A post-test	Rater B post-test
Control	N	16	16	16	16

	Skewness	.860	1.076	.921	.844
	Std. Error of Skewness	.564	.564	.564	.564
	Kurtosis	-.107	.539	.547	1.355
	Std. Error of Kurtosis	1.091	1.091	1.091	1.091
Experimental	N	16	16	16	16
	Skewness	.732	1.496	.952	1.108
	Std. Error of Skewness	.564	.564	.564	.564
	Kurtosis	.521	1.627	.233	1.008
	Std. Error of Kurtosis	1.091	1.091	1.091	1.091

For the control group, the values of skewness and kurtosis for the writing pre-test scores were (.86, -.10) for rater A and (1.07, .53) for rater B, respectively. For the writing post-test scores, these values were found to be (.92, .54) for rater A and (.84 and 1.35) for rater B, respectively.

Besides, the values of skewness and kurtosis for the writing pre-test scores of the experimental group were (.73, .52) for rater A, and (1.49, 1.62) for rater B; for the writing post-test scores, these values were computed to be (.95, .23) for rater A and (1.10, 1.00) for rater B, respectively. Since the values were all within the range of ± 2 for all the distributions, the normality assumption for the scores given by the raters was established, too.

4.2 Descriptive statistics and independent samples t-test for writing pre-test scores

After being assigned into control and experimental groups, the participants were given a writing test to examine their possible initial differences in terms of their writing ability before introducing the treatment. For the writing pre-test that was administered at the beginning of the study, the mean scores for the control and experimental groups were $M = 15.71$ and $M = 17.06$, respectively. Furthermore, the standard deviation for the control group was somewhat lower than that of the experimental group ($SD_{\text{control group}} = 4.45$; $SD_{\text{experimental group}} = 4.99$). See Table 3 below.

Table 3. Group Statistics for the Participants' Performance on Writing Pre-Test

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test scores	Control	16	15.7188	4.45335	1.11334
	Experimental	16	17.0625	4.99958	1.24990

The output of independent samplest-test displays two tests of the comparison between the two groups (Table 4).

Table 4.Independent Samples T-Test for the Participants' Performance on WritingPre-Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig.	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Pre-test scores	Equal variances assumed	.018	.89	-.80	30	.42	-1.343	1.673	-4.762	2.074
	Equal variances not assumed			-.80	29.6	.42	-1.343	1.673	-4.764	2.076

The Levene's statistic examines the homogeneity of the variances. The significance value of the statistic amounted to be .89 (Sig.). Since this value was higher than alpha level (.05), it could be concluded that the two groups had equal variances and, as a result, the first test was considered. It was found that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups in writing pre-test ($t = -.80, p > .05$).

4.3 Descriptive statistics and independent samples t-test for writing post-test scores

To answer the research question, an independent samples t-test was run to compare the writing post-test scores of the control and experimental groups after introducing the treatment. Table 5 gives the results of descriptive statistics:

Table 5.Statistics for the Participants' Performance on Writing Post-Test

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post-test scores	Control	16	18.9375	3.70079	.92520
	Experimental	16	22.0625	5.44633	1.36158

Table 5 presents the values of means and standard deviations along with standard error of mean for the two groups on the writing post-test. The mean score of the control group (mean_{control group} = 18.93) was 3.12 points lower than that of the experimental group (mean_{experimental group} = 22.06). Table 6 shows the results of the independent samples t-test:

Table 6. Independent Samples T-Test for the Participants' Performance on Writing Post-Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig.	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Post-test scores	Equal variances assumed	1.97	.17	-1.89	30	.067	-3.125	1.646	-6.48	.236
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.89	26.4	.069	-3.125	1.646	-6.50	.256

The significance value of the Levene's statistic was .17 (Sig.). As this value was higher than alpha level (.05), it could be assumed that the groups had similar variances and consequently the second test was ignored and the first test (the first row) was considered. The results revealed that the writing post-test scores of the experimental and control groups were not statistically different ($t = -1.89, p \geq .05$). In fact, the participants' performance in the experimental group ($M = 22.06$) outweighed that of the control group ($M = 18.93$) in writing post-test, but this difference was not found to be significant.

In order to examine the possible differences between the two groups in terms of the five elements of the writing post-test, independent samples t-tests were run. Table 7 reports the results of descriptive statistics.

Table 7. Group Statistics for the Participants' Performance on the Five Sections of the Writing Post-Test

CATEGORIES	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Critical response	Control	16	2.3125	.60208	.15052
	Experimental	16	3.2813	.77392	.19348
Development of writer's idea	Control	16	2.5938	.49054	.12263
	Experimental	16	2.7500	.77460	.19365
Structure of the response	Control group	16	2.3438	.70045	.17511
	Experimental	16	2.6250	.78528	.19632
Language use: Sentences and word choice	Control group	16	2.2188	.51539	.12885
	Experimental	16	2.5000	.70711	.17678
Language use: Grammar, usage, & mechanics	Control group	16	2.2188	.68237	.17059
	Experimental	16	2.2500	.73030	.18257

Table 7 presented the values of means and standard deviations along with standard error of the mean for the control and experimental groups in terms of different categories of the writing post-test. The mean score of the experimental group was higher than that of the control group in all of the five categories. Additionally, with respect to the dispersion of the scores around the mean score, the writing scores of the control group were found to be more dispersed than that of the experimental group in all of the five elements of the writing test. Table 8 reports the results of the independent samples t-test:

Table 8. Independent Samples T-Tests for the Groups' Performance across Different Categories of the Writing Post-Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Critical response	Equal variances assumed	.97	.33	-3.9	30	.00	-.96	.24	-1.46	-.46
	Equal			-3.9	28.2	.00	-.96	.24	-1.4	-.46

	variances not assumed									
Development of writer's idea	Equal variances assumed	5.3	.02	-.68	30	.50	-.15	.22	-.62	.31
	Equal variances not assumed			-.68	25.3	.50	-.15	.22	-.62	.31
Structure of the Response	Equal variances assumed	.09	.76	-1.06	30	.29	-.28	.26	-.81	.25
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.0	29.6	.29	-.28	.26	-.81	.25
Language use: Sentences & word choice	Equal variances assumed	.001	.97	-1.2	30	.20	-.281	.218	-.72	.16
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.2	27.4	.20	-.281	.218	-.72	.16
Language use: Grammar, usage, & mechanics	Equal variances assumed	.001	.97	-.12	30	.90	-.031	.249	-.541	.47
	Equal variances not assumed			-.12	29.8	.90	-.031	.249	-.54	.47

As Table 8 revealed, there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in terms of their *critical response* only ($p \leq .05$); that is, the participants' writing performance in the experimental group ($M = 3.28$) after the treatment outweighed that of the control group ($M = 2.31$) as far as critical response was concerned. However, the differences between the two groups were not statistically significant in terms of other categories of the writing post-test.

5. Discussion

One of the main goals of CLA is to bring the attention of the learners to the issues of domination, segregation, and manipulation in language studies. Considering the context of learning, Kumaravadivelu (2006) distinguished among three main phases of learning including input, intake, and output. In this study, CDA and CLA frameworks were used as the input for further investigations on the output. This might raise the question of how it is possible to achieve writing proficiency via the tenets of CLA and CDA. The idea was mainly sparked by considering the dimensions of Fairclough (1989), framework of Wallace (1992), and tenets of Ivanic and Simpson (1992) which were operationalized as treatment that could enhance the writing ability of EFL learners. In fact, Fairclough's (1989) model was designed to scrutinize text, interaction, and context in which the values of words and grammatical features along with the textual structures were subjected to investigation. The assumption was that through these analyses the learners might grasp more thoughtful angles of texts and it might be a highly effective practice of writing accuracy and fluency.

The findings confirmed the null hypothesis as far as the overall writing performance of the participants was under investigation. However, when the elements of the writing ability were considered independently, the result partially rejected the null hypothesis. The significant difference was only in critical response component. This finding was indicative of the critical awareness of the participants of the experimental group. The raised awareness is in line with the findings of Wallace (1992). The importance of his model was the amalgamation of learners' autonomy in the pre-, while and post-reading activities. In this case, learners could freely express their opinions and critical response based on the analysis of texts. Moreover, if we relate the critical response to the improvement of the level of thinking, the findings related to critical response are also congruent with those of Brown (2006). In other words, the improvement of the level of thinking could be considered as an important factor to respond critically.

A number of practitioners believe that CLA is a must in classrooms. Chaparro (2014) claimed the same assumption; however, the findings of this study restrict the application of this statement. Based on the findings of the present study, when the discussions about proficiency (especially writing) come into account, CLA has less to say. Although various angles on accuracy and fluency might scaffold this field, the main tenets of CLA have been designed and developed on recognition of the conventions, cultural diversity, emancipation, and empowerment.

Similarly, Clark (1992) mentioned the crucial aspects of CLA as empowerment and emancipation in writing skill; however, the findings of the current study revealed that these two elements did not significantly influence the writing ability of the participants. In fact, language proficiency has many facets in which accuracy in skills might be considered as a linchpin. The findings of Tarnopolsky (2000) revealed the positive effect of CLA on increasing speaking and grammatical accuracy. Considering writing as a productive skill, the findings of this study reject those of Tarnopolsky (2000) in terms of the improvement in writing accuracy.

With regard to the improvement of CLA, the findings of this study are in line with those of Maftoon and Sabbaghan (2010). In addition, their finding revealed the enhancement of constructive elements of journal writing such as cohesive devices, discourse markers, and affinity which is not congruent with the findings of the present study.

6. Conclusion and Implications

This study examined the effect of CLA on EFL learners' writing ability at upper-intermediate level. The research question was proposed based on the models of Fairclough (1989), Wallace (1992) and Ivanic and Simpson (1992) in which the critical attitude toward word choice, grammatical points, and textual structures are discussed.

The main result of the study was obtained via the sum of the scores of the categories of writing ability. The categories were critical response, development of writer's ideas, structure of the response, sentences, and word choice along with grammar and mechanics. In the first category, critical response, the critical discussions of the ideas were sought. In the development of writer's ideas and the structures of the responses, summarizing, evaluating, and narrating along with the progressions of ideas was investigated. Finally, in the last two categories, preciseness and sophistication of word, grammar, and mechanics were evaluated. The result of overall writing ability of the participants did not show a statistically significant difference across the experimental and control groups.

On the other hand, when each scoring category was separately analyzed, the result conversely showed the significant effect of CLA on critical responses of the participants. Therefore, it can be concluded that CLA has a significant effect on critical response of the EFL learners.

Since critical response was significant compared to other writing categories, various writing programs should take an advantage of that in order to raise the EFL learners' critical awareness. The results of this study are directly applicable to the essay writing in particular; furthermore, teachers can use critical perspectives in different types of writing such as descriptive, narrative, persuasive types, or even different writing genres. This might improve both the quality of teaching and learners' intellectual level.

As a whole, English teachers might take an advantage of the findings of this study and try to apply strands of CLA in their classes. The absence of critical discussions in class could prioritize the dominant ideas of teachers and academically strong students. By applying strands of CLA, teachers might pave the way for more democratic classrooms especially in EFL context. In addition, by integrating critical approaches in the class activities, teachers might enhance the chance of critical thinking of the learners and direct their attention to both the surface and depth of utterances. Ali (2011) stated that "teaching CDA is the opposite of rote learning, memorization like parrots, and superficial comprehension strategies" (p. 34). Accordingly, based on the findings of this study, teachers can decrease rote learning and increase meaningful learning of their students.

Test makers can also take the findings of this study into account. They can utilize critical response in addition to other criteria in their rubrics and design language tests which are more in line with the tenets of CDA.

Critical language awareness might be a good fortification against possible manipulative thoughts in commercial textbooks. The selection of the textbooks is usually done by supervisors of language centers; nonetheless, it is also worthwhile to evaluate these books through a critical lens. The textbook designers, particularly those who work on writing textbooks, should pay more attention to critical lessons and activities to enhance the quality of learning materials in general and raise students' critical awareness in particular. In addition, they need to take the role of hidden curriculum into consideration.

As far as other aspects of CLA are concerned, researchers can study the impact of emancipatory discourse in education. For example, Janks and Ivanic (1992) stated the dimensions of emancipatory discourse. These dimensions can be used as a method for further investigation of the strands of CLA in English language studies.

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