

# CRITICAL THINKING AND MINDFULNESS AS PREDICTORS OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AMONG IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS

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## Abstract

In contemporary second language education, cognitive and affective variables have been increasingly recognized as crucial determinants of academic success. This study examines the predictive roles of critical thinking and mindfulness in academic achievement among Iranian learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Adopting a quantitative correlational design, data were collected from 120 university-level EFL learners in Iran using standardized measures of critical thinking and mindfulness, alongside official academic records. Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses revealed significant positive relationships among critical thinking, mindfulness, and academic achievement. The findings indicate that critical thinking and mindfulness jointly account for a substantial proportion of variance in learners' academic performance, with critical thinking emerging as the stronger predictor. The study underscores the importance of integrating higher-order thinking skills and mindfulness-oriented practices into EFL pedagogy.

**Keywords:** Critical thinking, mindfulness, academic achievement, EFL learners, Iranian context.

## Introduction

The landscape of foreign language education has undergone a paradigmatic shift from a purely structural focus toward a learner-centered, cognitively informed approach. In this regard, academic achievement in EFL contexts is no longer viewed as the outcome of linguistic competence alone but as a multifaceted construct shaped by cognitive, metacognitive, and affective factors. Among these, critical thinking and mindfulness have attracted growing scholarly attention due to their potential to enhance learning quality and academic outcomes. Critical thinking equips learners with the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information, thereby fostering deeper engagement with language input. Mindfulness, defined as present-moment awareness characterized by attentional control and non-judgmental acceptance, has been associated with improved concentration, emotional regulation, and academic resilience. Despite extensive research on these constructs independently, their combined contribution to academic achievement in EFL settings remains underexplored, particularly within the Iranian educational context.



Accordingly, the present study aims to investigate the relationships among critical thinking, mindfulness, and academic achievement among Iranian EFL learners and to determine the extent to which these variables predict academic success.

### **Theoretical Background and Literature Review**

Critical thinking is widely conceptualized as a higher-order cognitive ability involving analysis, inference, evaluation, and reflective judgment. In EFL learning, critical thinking enables learners to move beyond surface-level comprehension toward deeper meaning construction and autonomous learning. Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated that learners with higher critical thinking ability outperform their peers in reading comprehension, academic writing, and problem-solving tasks.

However, in many EFL contexts, including Iran, instructional practices remain predominantly exam-oriented and teacher-centered, which may hinder the development of critical thinking skills. This pedagogical constraint highlights the necessity of empirically examining the role of critical thinking in academic achievement.

Rooted in cognitive psychology, mindfulness has recently gained prominence in educational research. Mindful learners demonstrate enhanced attentional regulation, reduced anxiety, and greater emotional balance. In EFL environments, where learners frequently experience language anxiety and cognitive overload, mindfulness may serve as a protective factor that facilitates sustained attention and effective learning.

Previous research suggests that mindfulness positively correlates with academic engagement and performance. Nevertheless, its role in EFL academic achievement remains insufficiently documented, particularly in non-Western contexts.

Academic achievement in EFL settings is typically operationalized through course grades, standardized test scores, or cumulative academic performance. It is influenced by a constellation of cognitive, affective, and contextual variables. Investigating how critical thinking and mindfulness interact to shape academic outcomes can provide valuable insights for pedagogical innovation and curriculum development.

### **Methodology**

A quantitative correlational research design was employed to examine the relationships among the variables without experimental manipulation.

The sample consisted of 120 undergraduate EFL learners (68 females and 52 males) enrolled in English-related majors at Iranian universities. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 24 years. All participants had completed at least four semesters of academic English coursework.

Data were collected using three instruments:

- A standardized Critical Thinking Questionnaire assessing analysis, evaluation, and inference.
- A validated Mindfulness Scale measuring present-moment awareness and attentional regulation.
- Academic achievement data obtained from official university records, represented by final course grades.



All instruments demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha > 0.80$ ).

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine bivariate relationships. Multiple regression analysis was performed to assess the predictive power of critical thinking and mindfulness on academic achievement.

## Results and Discussion

The results indicated statistically significant positive correlations between:

- Critical thinking and academic achievement ( $r = 0.46, p < 0.01$ )
- Mindfulness and academic achievement ( $r = 0.39, p < 0.01$ )

Multiple regression analysis revealed that critical thinking and mindfulness jointly explained 34% of the variance in academic achievement ( $R^2 = 0.34, F = 29.12, p < 0.001$ ). Critical thinking emerged as the stronger predictor, although mindfulness also contributed significantly to the model.

The findings demonstrate that both critical thinking and mindfulness are significant predictors of academic achievement among Iranian EFL learners. The stronger predictive role of critical thinking suggests that higher-order cognitive skills play a central role in academic language learning. At the same time, the contribution of mindfulness underscores the importance of affective regulation and attentional control in sustaining academic performance.

These results support integrative models of learning that emphasize the interaction between cognitive and affective domains. The findings also extend existing literature by providing empirical evidence from an underrepresented educational context.

The results have important implications for EFL pedagogy:

- Instructional practices should explicitly integrate critical thinking tasks such as analytical discussions, reflective writing, and problem-based learning.
- Mindfulness-based strategies, including brief awareness activities, can be incorporated to enhance learners' focus and emotional regulation.
- Teacher education programs should emphasize cognitive-affective integration in language instruction.

## Conclusion

This study investigated the relationships among critical thinking, mindfulness, and academic achievement in an Iranian EFL context. The findings revealed that both constructs significantly predict academic success, highlighting the need for pedagogical approaches that transcend traditional language instruction. Future research may adopt experimental or longitudinal designs to further explore causal relationships and instructional interventions.

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