

Students' Foreign Language Anxiety: Its Effect on their Reading on Critical Reasoning Skills

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Abstract

Critical thinking is crucial for effective information seeking, learning, and cognitive development. Understanding, analyzing, and evaluating what they hear or read may help them find acceptable answers. This research aims to investigate if critical thinking skills in intermediate EFL students can predict essential reading and anxiety associated with foreign language reading. EFL students at a university were asked to take an English language competency exam, a critical thinking abilities assessment, and a critical reading scale. The reliability of surveys was re-examined utilizing KR-21 and Cronbach's Alpha, and the results were analyzed using multiple regression approaches. The capacity to think critically was a significant predictor utilizing various regressions. FLRAS also claims a correlation between cognitive skills and the anxiety associated with foreign language reading. CTS and FLRA statistics suggest that as students' CTS increases, their FLRA decreases.

Keywords: EFL student, critical reading skills, foreign language reading anxiety, critical thinking skills

INTRODUCTION

For several reasons, learning a new language may be difficult. Some students have a natural aptitude for learning a foreign language. Every person who has studied a second language in school or has taught someone who has studied a second language in school is aware of this. People who persevere and work hard to learn a language are successful. Internal and external components are categorized. Personality, drive (internal), experience, and intelligence are only a few of the internal aspects of the learner. External variables like the curriculum, teaching, motivation (exterior), culture, social position, and accessibility to native speakers all play a significant part in describing a unique language learning environment (Atabekova et al., 2021).

Critical Thinking Skills

It has been a hot issue since the days of ancient Greece. However, there has been no unanimity on the concept of critical thinking during the last several decades. As Hart et al. (2021) correctly point out, several essential thinking theories exist. These talents include the capacity to evaluate reasoning efficiently or spot erroneous arguments, according to Bezanilla et al. (2019). Critical thinking is an intelligent learning technique that stimulates and rewards the mind, according to D'Alessio et al. (2019). A higher-order thinking capacity that includes assessing arguments, critical thinking is defined by El Soufi and See (2019) as a conscious, self-regulating judgment that results in interpretation, analysis, and evaluation. Critical thinking is a

disciplined method of verification that may be utilized to get the best possible thinking in any given situation, according to Paul and Espey (2018). Seisenbayeva et al. (2019) say that experience is a fantastic teacher, but it can only teach us so much; it can only bring us to the same things again and over. Think about your experiences rather than merely reliving them. This will help you grow. Essentially, our lives are influenced by our thoughts. When it comes to critical thinking, Shavelson et al. (2019) agree.

It takes time and effort to improve critical thinking, according to O'Halloran et al. (2017). You cannot become an extraordinary thinker only by taking a beginner's course. Therefore, developing the necessary skills to be a critical thinker takes time. Consequently, Terblanche et al. (2020) propose four reasons for the increasing importance of critical thinking: "accelerating change, deeper complexity, growing reliance, and increased risk." If critical thinking is actively engaged, it may penetrate all aspects of human life, according to Leest and Wolbers (2021)." he contends that education and critical thinking are inextricably linked.

Critical Reading

Human communication relies heavily on reading to clear up any misunderstandings. Clearing up any misconceptions regarding a book and helping the text and reader understand each other better is the primary objective of reading. It's called reading when you must decipher the meaning of symbols (Din, 2020). According to Bezemer and Cowan (2021), "reading is an active, fluent action that involves the reader and reading material in making meaning." Understanding what you're reading is "crucial," according to Antonova & Tyrkheeva in 2021.

We read to find meaning."

They understand what a book means to a reader in the process of absorbing and deciphering both internal and external schemas (Moghadam et al., 2021). A critical reading method recognizes that all texts are manufactured artifacts created by individuals with distinct attitudes or orientations toward the facts (Heidari, 2020). As a result of the learner's involvement, essential reading is regarded as active reading (Hassanein et al., 2021). When it comes to critical reading, comprehension of the passage's stated substance

isn't enough. Creative thinking and problem-solving are also required. Many contexts, including educational, advertising, and media (Karakoc et al., 2021), have recently campaigned for improved fundamental reading skills (Rianto, 2021; Susani et al., 2021).

Anxiety Associated with Foreign Language Reading

Anxiety is a complex emotion to manage. For decades, language instructors and researchers have expressed concern over the second language (L2) acquisition anxiety. Numerous studies on this topic have been carried out, and it seems that anxiety significantly impacts second language acquisition (Jiang & Dewaele, 2020). It used to be thought that the more productive you were, the more anxious you were about learning a new language. Being worried about one's ability to read and listen is becoming more frequently accepted. There are many different types of reading anxiety. Still, the most common one is defined by a distressing emotional reaction to reading with physical and cognitive implications that are generally unstudied.

Reading is considered the most important of the four skills to acquire new information (Dryden et al., 2021). Saito, Chen et al. (2021) discovered that reading is a critical source of information, making people feel anxious. While reading second language literature, L2 readers must understand foreign scripts, writing systems, and cultural elements. If they have difficulty assimilating what they're reading, they may become unsatisfied and anxious. Students struggle to read, according to Aslan & Thompson (2021). However, they are still confused about what they have read after reading all the lines.

Statement of the problem

Experts and scholars largely agree on the essence of teaching critical thinking to kids in the classroom and at school. Research has demonstrated that critical thinking and academic success are closely linked (Cáceres, 2020). The Critical Thinking Skills Test (CTST) was utilized to find out the influence of critical thinking on the Student Aptitude Test (SAT) results of private university students. SAT verbal IQ was shown to be closely connected to CTST scores. According to Lim (2021), 220 engineering students were surveyed on their

critical thinking abilities and academic performance. Students' final grades have been demonstrated to correlate favorably with their ability to think critically.

Studying the link between academic accomplishment and critical thinking in elementary and high school learners was the focus of José Sá (2020). Test scores for critical thinking were highly connected to students' overall success levels by utilizing the Cornell Critical Thinking Test (CCT-X). Furthermore, Afdila and Sartika (2021) studied the correlation between critical reasoning abilities and academic accomplishment in 50 psychology learners. In the study, subscales of the WGCTA (Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal) that assess the capability to draw correct conclusions, evaluate, and analyze evidence were predictive of better performance results.

Significance of the study

For academic success, critical thinking is essential (Fong et al., 2017). Criticizers should engage actively in listening and reading to assist them in developing their capacity for critical thought. (Butler and colleagues, 2017)) Using critical thinking skills may help people understand, analyze, and evaluate the information presented to respond appropriately. As a result of these skills, people may better organize and comprehend the information they receive, understand its context, and identify implicit assumptions (Huang & Ning, 2021). On the other hand, concentrated listening and reading foster critical thinking and excellent communication by allowing people to collect information effectively.

Research Questions

The goal of this research is to seek answers to the study queries posed below:

RQ1: Which critical thinking subscale best predicts EFL students' quantity of reading required?

RQ2: To what degree do critical thinking abilities predict anxiety associated with foreign language reading?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Thinking Capabilities

Second-language acquisition critical thinking research is in its early phases. Western academics have initiated many studies that have

embraced a universalist approach. Asian students are incapable of critical thinking since they are inexperienced with this thinking. Language skills (Tang et al., 2020), mainly writing and reading, benefit significantly from critical thinking abilities. Boso et al. (2021) sought to discover the link between critical thinking and linguistic skills. The Cornell Critical Thinking Test (CCTT) and an English language proficiency assessment were taken by over 230 students. According to the research, student's English language proficiency and critical thinking were linked.

The Ayçiçek (2021) evaluation exam investigates the association between resilience, critical thinking ability, and reading comprehension of texts that include complex vocabulary terms. Zare et al. (2021) administered the Resilience Scale, a vocabulary checklist, and a validated battery of four reading exams to 59 intermediate EFL learners. According to the results, stability, basic levels of thinking, and understanding of texts containing foreign vocabulary items are all substantially influenced participants' resilience ratings.

Critical Reading

A similarity or even an identity between critical thinking abilities described in textbooks for teaching critical thinking and those found in literature categorized as necessary reading skills is noted by Liang & Fung (2021). For example, essential books of reading may detect critical thinking abilities such as reserving judgment until further information is collected, questioning, flexibility, inferring, predicting outcomes, and identifying bias (Otoom, 2020). Similar points are made by Imran et al. According to her, "the premise that reasoning is an important component of reading is akin to the claim that critical thinking is directly linked to reading comprehension." The reader uses critical thinking to see whether the interpretations are consistent with the textual evidence and past knowledge. All three of these men concur with this sentiment.

According to his findings, Isik researched English and Turkish to investigate the (if any) link between basic reading skills, critical thinking dispositions, and reading frequency among high school students (Din, 2020). The Critical Thinking Dispositions Inventory and the

Critical Reading Scale were used to gather data. The findings revealed a clear and positive connection between critical reading levels and critical thinking dispositions. However, the correlation was not significant. According to the study, reading frequency was not correlated with children's core reading abilities. Learning language skills, particularly reading, necessitates cultivating critical thinking abilities, says Nurhayati (2021). According to studies, critical thinking and language learning, namely reading comprehension, go hand in hand. According to one research on the correlation between PBT reading performance and the test-takers cognitive ability, for example (paper-based TOEFL). The findings revealed a strong relationship between the two factors. Reading courses based on MDI (Measurement-Driven Instruction) were designed to assist students in improving their performance on high-stakes language competency examinations. The researcher also mentioned this (Edwards et al., 2021).

For example, Zare et al. (2021) examined the predictive value of critical thinking in the performance of inferential reading comprehension assessments for English language learners. She established a connection between inferential reading comprehension and critical thinking. In another research, Supriatna et al. (2020) discovered a link between reading skills and critical thinking. They contend that critical thinking is a powerful predictor of student performance. Hong et al. (2020) studied the effect of training core thinking abilities on EFL students' reading comprehension. The researchers administered a validated reading comprehension exam and a typical critical thinking assessment test to the participants, and they used classroom discussion as a critical thinking activity (Limeranto & Subekti 2021). The results demonstrated that reading comprehension might be improved by teaching fundamental thinking skills. Children who received structured reading sessions outperformed those who received standard reading instruction on a critical thinking skills assessment, according to Shao et al. (2020). Warsah et al. (2021) discovered that all students made considerable increases in reading comprehension, with no statistically significant

differences between control and experimental groups.

Foreign Language Reading Anxiety

Hamada & Takaki (2021) studied FLRA among Japanese, French, and Russian learners for the first time. Chow et al. (2021) used the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) in analyzing native English speakers of 170 Spanish, 90 Italian, and 60 Vietnamese learners, respectively. Their research looked at two factors of foreign language reading that had a substantial influence on evoking fear: new scripts of writing systems and unforeseen cultural components. Despite the best efforts of instructors, reading in a foreign language may cause anxiety in particular children. FLRA was shown to be associated with overall FL anxiety but distinct from it, according to Kiliçaslan (2018). According to the researchers, reading was a concern for some foreign language students. Some participants were more concerned about reading than learning a new language. Reading anxiety has also been demonstrated to lower students' final grades.

EFL students' use of reading methods was examined to assess their level of reading anxiety. A questionnaire was utilized to collect data about the participants' educational and reading backgrounds. The FLRA Scale was used to evaluate the participants' reading anxiety. Participants' broad usage of reading techniques was examined using the Survey of Reading Strategies. This research has a sample size of 108 EFL freshmen. A Survey of Reading Strategies, a questionnaire, and the FLRA Scale were all utilized to gather data on the participants' reading habits and background information. There was a negative connection between reading strategies and reading anxiety. It is theorized that anxiety disrupts critical thinking by causing mental instability and preventing the individual from participating in high-level contemplation (Goodsett, 2020). It has been shown that foreign language anxiety and incomparable required thinking research negatively correlate. (Azodi et al., 2020).

METHOD

Participants

The study's objectives were met with the help of 150 participants, with ages ranging from 18 - 22

years old. They were English majors at a university in the United Kingdom. The participants' Farsi skills revealed that they were in the intermediate range on a competency test. It was used to standardize the level of competence among the students by administering the TELP. Candidates were selected based on their proficiency exam scores, with 150 out of 230 selected. Eighty-three students were eliminated from the research because of excessive scores on the TELP.

Instruments

For the aim of this investigation, the following four instruments were used:

Test of English Language Proficiency (TELP):

TELP was utilized before the experiment to ensure that all participants had similar levels of language ability. Each portion of the 100-item multiple-choice test has 40 grammar questions, 35 vocabulary questions, and 25 comprehension queries.

Critical Thinking Skills Test (CTST):

The CTST-Form B in English assessed the participants' critical thinking abilities. Thirty-four multiple-choice questions are included in this test, each with a single valid answer. Analysis, inference, deductive reasoning, and inductive reasoning are assessed by the four or five alternatives that follow each question, each with five subscales (Yildirim & Soylemez, 2020). Overall and subscale scores: analysis, inference, evaluation, inductive and deductive reasoning are generated by the CTST. Individuals don't need to be specialists in any profession to answer these questions. One of the most often used exams in educational and psychological investigations is the CTST. This exam has grown naturally into a distinct general knowledge base, according to its creators. Content and reasoning are often intertwined in the test questions, and the time limit is 40 minutes, as stated in the questionnaire instructions.

Some study has employed the Critical Thinking Skills Test, which is reliable and valid several times. Ghaani & Roslin's (2021) analysis indicated that the test's reliability was within acceptable limits ($=.69$ to $.70$). CTST has received excellent scores for reliability from other investigations (Azizi Abarghoui et al.,

2021). Suk (2017) found that every subscale construct validity was 0.60-0.65, with a high positive correlation, and the scale reliability index was 0.61. Alpha scores for this study were 0.81, according to Cronbach's.

Critical Reading Scale (CRS):

According to Maipoka and Soontornwipast (2021), a questionnaire was developed based on Facione's List of Core Six CT Abilities. There are two sections on the CT Ability for English Reading Questionnaire: personal history and CT abilities. Using a Likert-type scale, students are asked to describe their usual reading habits in the second part: 1 = disagree; 2 = not quite agree; 3 = difficult to determine; 4 = somewhat agree; 5 = agree.

Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS):

Chou (2018) designed it to "elicit" learners' self-reports of reading concerns, their views on reading in their preferred language, and assessments of reading's relative difficulty compared to other verbal skills. From "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," the Likert Scale of 5-point rates 15 items. It is possible to score between 25 and 100 on the FLRAS; Lesser scores imply a lower degree of reading anxiety. Since reading pressure has been established to be trustworthy and valid across studies, no FLRAS pilot research was conducted (Karakoç et al., 2021). Hazaymeh & Alomery (2022) obtained an alpha value of 0.83 for FLRAS internal consistency. An alpha value of 0.90 was obtained during this study for the reading anxiety questionnaire reliability.

Data Collection Procedure and Analysis

Sixty-five percent of the students were chosen to participate in the research, including 230 participants. Because of their high- or low-Test results, 72 subjects were withdrawn from the analysis. The following strategy was employed to accomplish the study's goal: The participants learned about the research method in the first phase. To ensure that the individuals were utterly homogenized, the TELP was next given to each of them. A 45-minute time restriction was in place for this test. Only moderate students were included in the research, excluding those with severe results. The participants were then tested on their critical

reading and listening skills. In the next step, the same subjects were given the reading and listening anxiety measures in their original versions. The analyst was always available to

address any participants' questions. Statistical analysis was performed on the data that had been acquired.

FINDINGS

Assuring the Research Instruments' Reliability

The descriptive data for the exam and the Critical Thinking Skills Scale are shown in Figures 1 and 2.

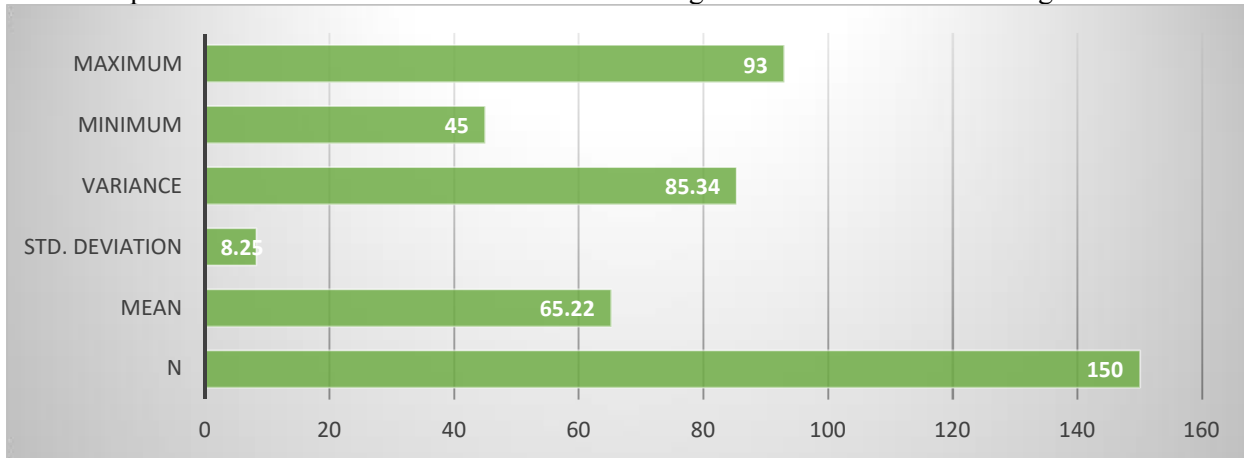


Figure 1. Test of English Language Proficiency Descriptive Statistics

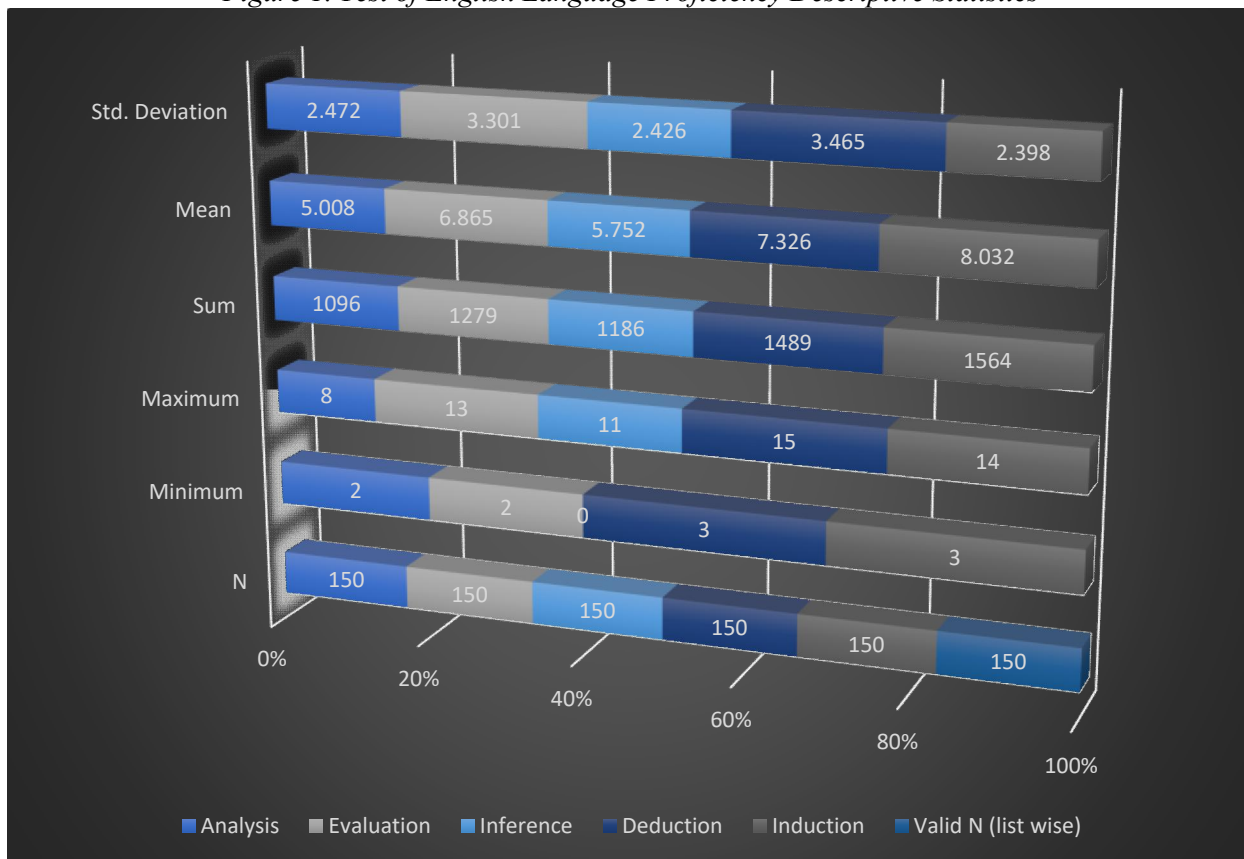


Figure 2. Critical Thinking Skills Scale: Descriptive Statistics

Calculating the instrument's reliability required a variety of methods. For the TELP's reliability,

Cronbach's Alpha was employed, as shown in Figure 3, while KR-21 was used to assess

TELP's validity.

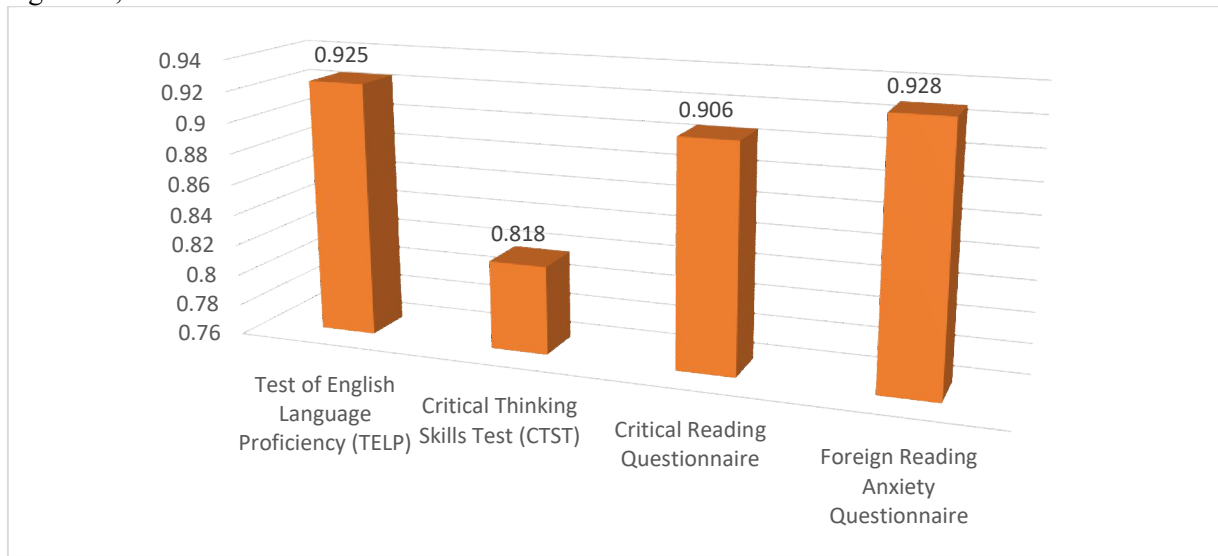


Figure 3. Reliability Statistics of Reading Anxiety Questionnaire

The First Question in the Study

The first study question is intended to determine if the subscale of critical thinking skills better predicts EFL students' core reading ability.

Analyzing, evaluation, inference, and deduction account for around 5 percent of the variation in critical reading (Figure 4). (25 percent).

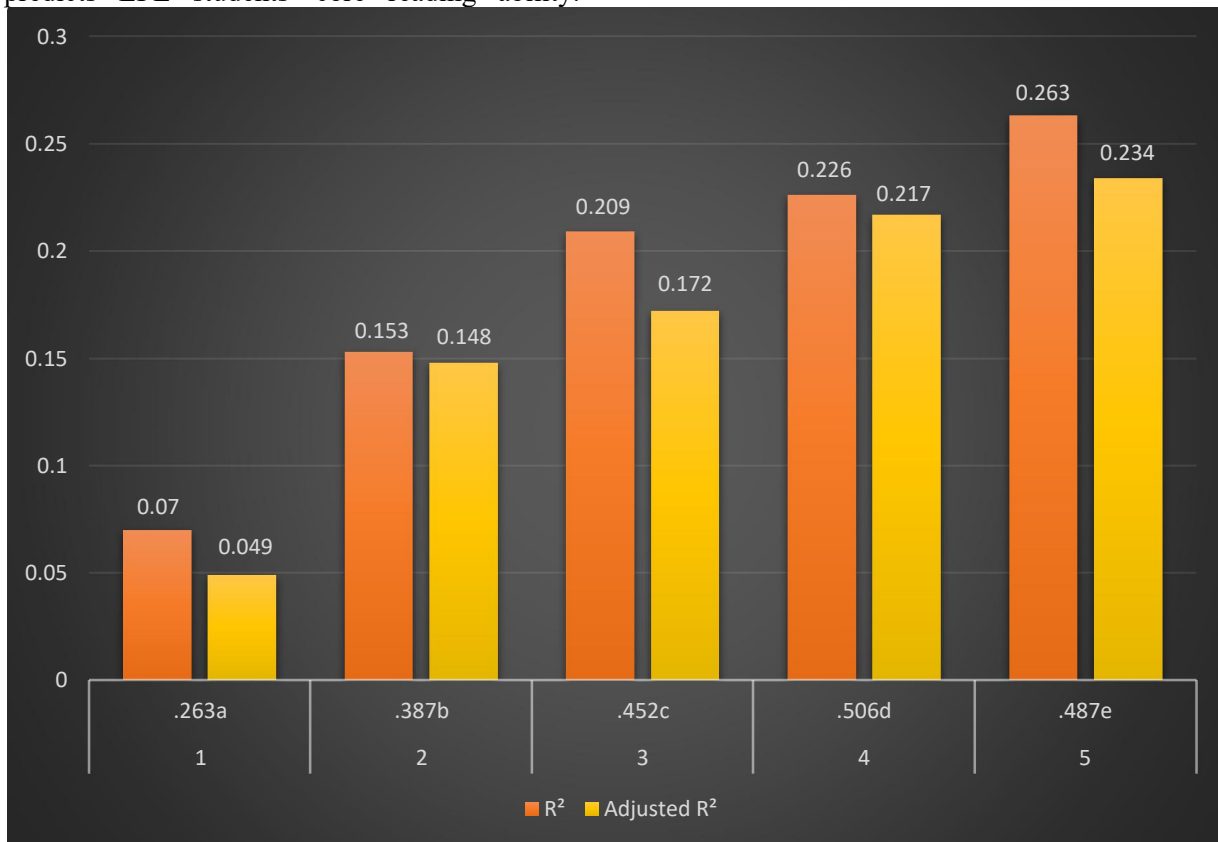


Figure 4. Model Summary Findings

- [1] Predictors: (Constant), Analysis
- [2] Predictors: (Constant), Analysis, Evaluation
- [3] Predictors: (Constant), Analysis, Evaluation, Inference
- [4] Predictors: (Constant), Analysis, Evaluation, Inference, Deduction

[5] Predictors: (Constant), Analysis, Evaluation, Inference, Deduction, Induction
 An analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the models yielded the findings reported in Figure 5. All five models are statistically significant based on the F-value and significance levels used. According to the data, the models offer a high degree of predictive power.

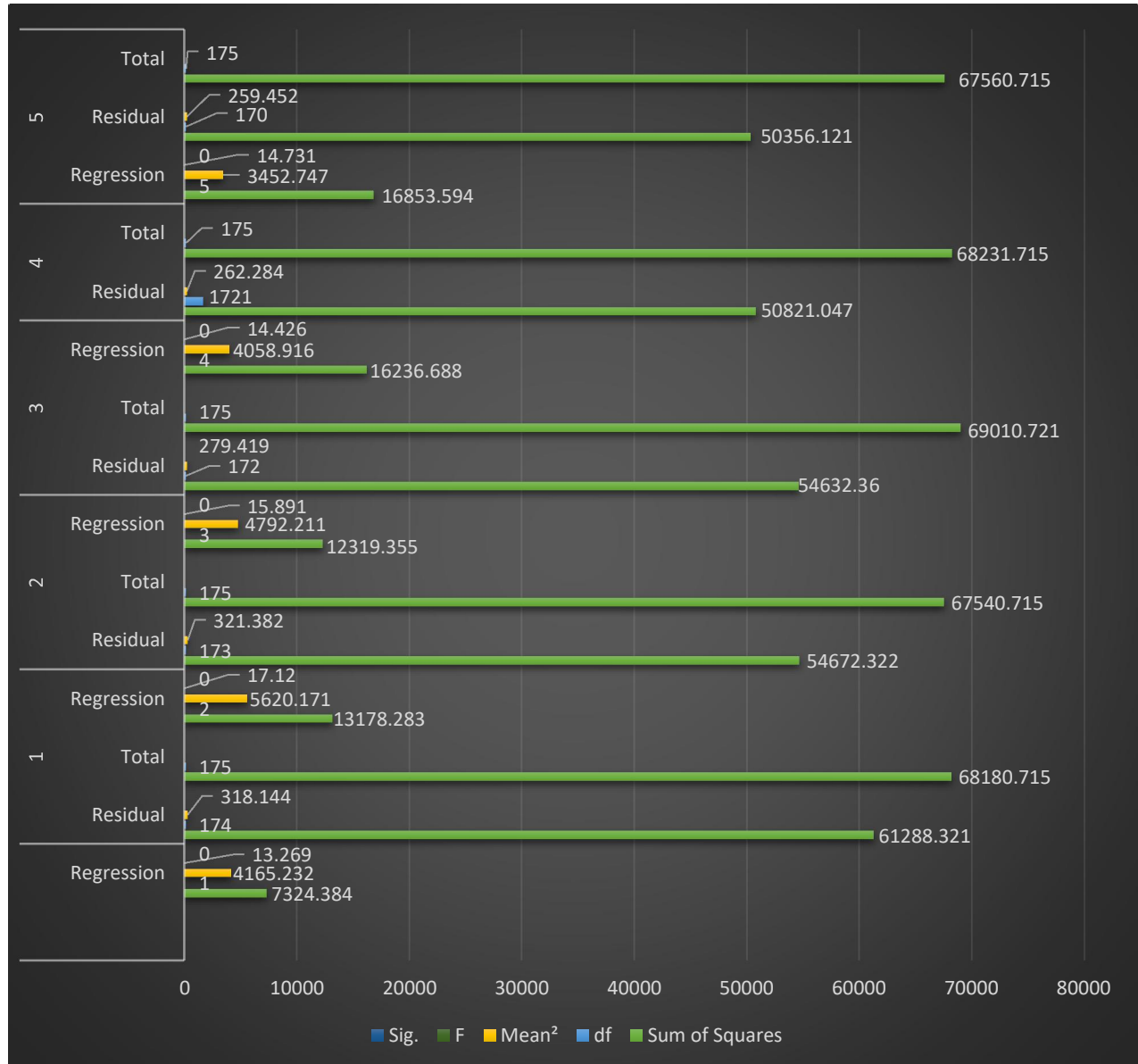


Figure 5. Results of ANOVA Performed on the Models

Dependent Variable: CR

- [1] Predictors: (Constant), Analysis
- [2] Predictors: (Constant), Analysis, Evaluation
- [3] Predictors: (Constant), Analysis, Evaluation, Inference
- [4] Predictors: (Constant), Analysis, Evaluation, Inference, Deduction
- [5] Predictors: (Constant), Analysis, Evaluation, Inference, Deduction, Induction

The five factors were assessed to determine how much variation in critical reading was explained by every one of the five variables. If you change your critical reading by 0.21 SD for every standard deviation (SD) in your analysis, you'll notice a difference in your critical reading in Figure 6. Model two combines research and assessment, resulting in a shift in critical reading standard deviations of 0.17 and 0.29 for every usual variation in analysis and evaluation. For

each SD change in one's study, evaluation, and inference in model three, one may expect a change in critical reading of 0.16%, 0.29%, and 0.21%, respectively. For every SD change in the critical reading, there will be a change of 0.14, 0.29, 0.21, and 0.017 SD in the analysis, evaluation, speculation, and deduction in model four when they are all combined. Each SD change in one's study, evaluation, inference, elimination, and induction will be 0.6, 0.27, 0.22, 0.18, and 0.22 of an SD change in critical reading. There is a strong correlation between these parameters and critical reading abilities. Developing one's core reading skills seems to be linked to growing one's critical thinking skills. When the Beta value is more than 0.05, they are not statistically significant (analysis in model four, analysis and deduction in model five).

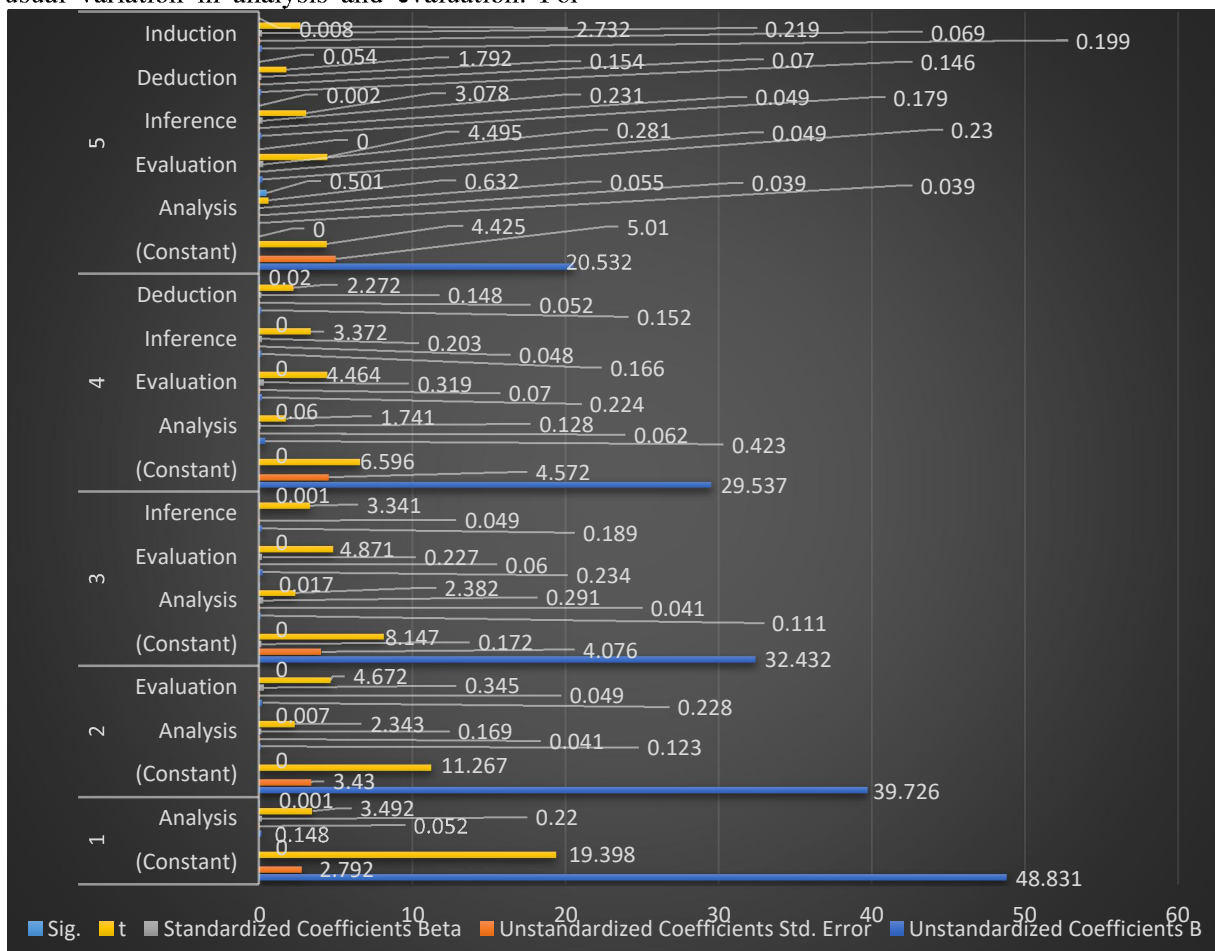


Figure 6. The Importance of the Observed T-Value and Standard Coefficients

The Second Research Question

Anxiety over foreign language reading was examined in the second research question. Foreign language reading anxiety was associated with about 9% of the model's variance, analysis, and evaluation taking up 14% of that total. The

rest of that variance was accounted for analysis, assessment, and inference (14%) as well as analysis (15%), speculation, and deduction (25%) (Figure 7).

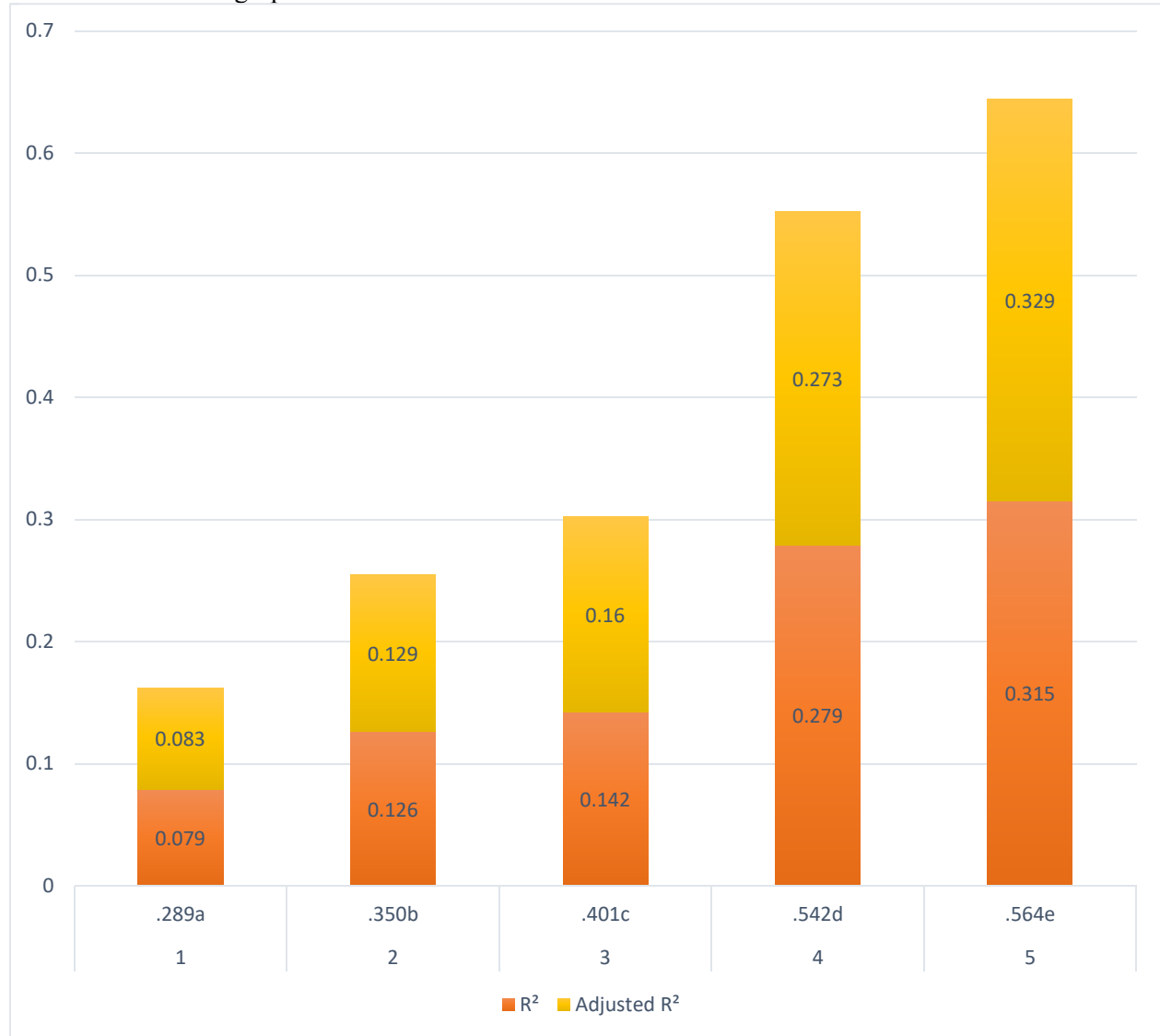


Figure 7. Critical Thinking Skills Model Summary

The results of the ANOVA conducted on the models are shown in Figure 8. The findings reveal that all of the models have solid predictive potential. According to the F-value and significance thresholds, the statistical significance of all five models is high.

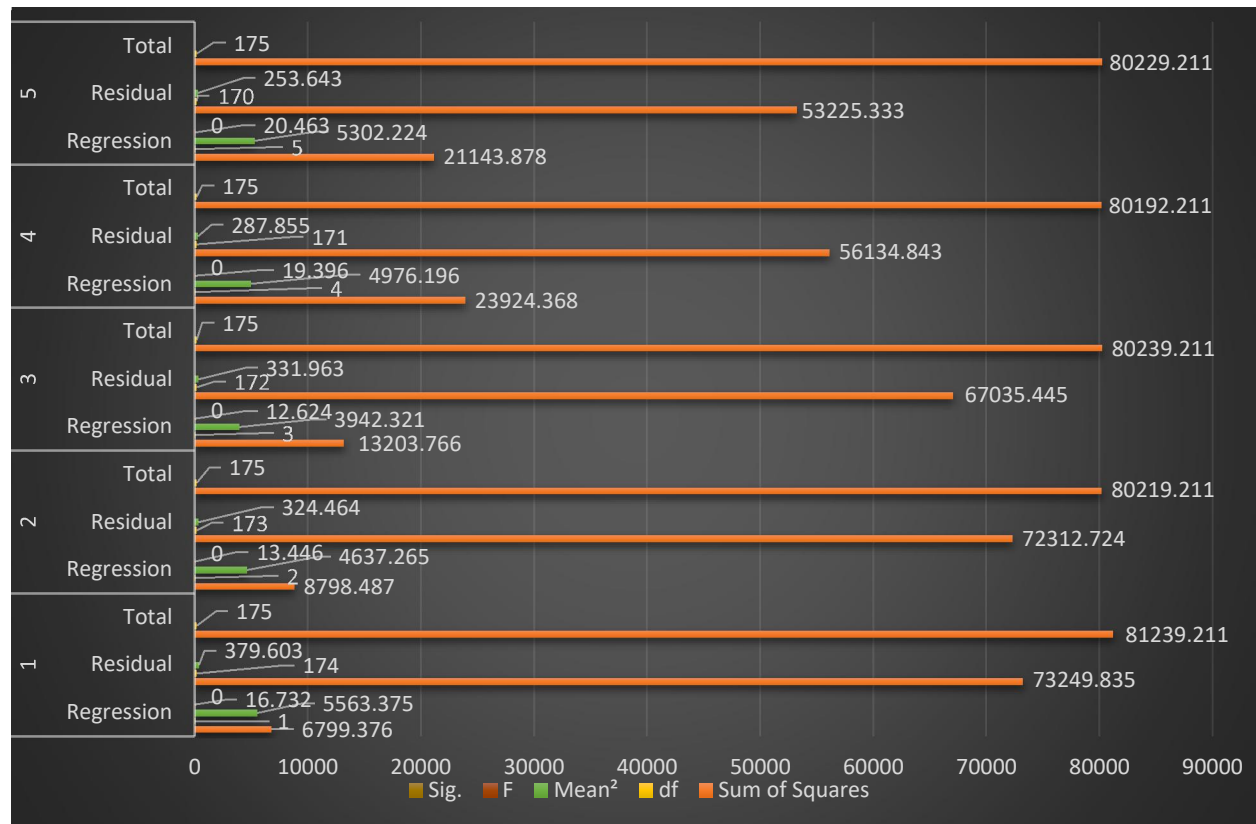


Figure 8. Results of ANOVA Performed on the Models

- [1] Predictors: (Constant), Analysis
- [2] Predictors: (Constant), Analysis, Evaluation
- [3] Predictors: (Constant), Analysis, Evaluation, Inference
- [4] Predictors: (Constant), Analysis, Evaluation, Inference, Deduction
- [5] Predictors: (Constant), Analysis, Evaluation, Inference, Deduction, Induction

For every one of the five predictors, the standard coefficient and significance of the observed t-value were analyzed. Suppose you adjust your analysis by 1 SD, your FLRA changes by 0.25 SD. This is seen in Figure 9. The standard deviation of one's FLRA will alter by 0.25 and 0.22 standard deviations for every usual variation in analysis and assessment in model two when research and evaluation are conducted together. According to model 3, for each SD

change in an individual's analytical evaluation and inference, there would be a 0.21, 0.23, 0.24, and 0.32 SD change to one's FLRA. According to model 4, a change in one's FLRA may be expected to have a range of 0.013 to 0.021 SDs for each SD increase or decrease in the FLRA's analysis, evaluation, and deductive reasoning abilities. FLRA will alter by 0.03, 0.14, 0.16, 0.22, and 0.34 for each SD change in one's analysis, evaluation, deduction, and induction combined in model 5. There is a negative correlation between FLRA and these parameters. This indicates that reading anxiety decreases as one's critical thinking skills develop. When the Beta value is greater than 0.05, they are not statistically significant (analysis in model four, analysis in model five).

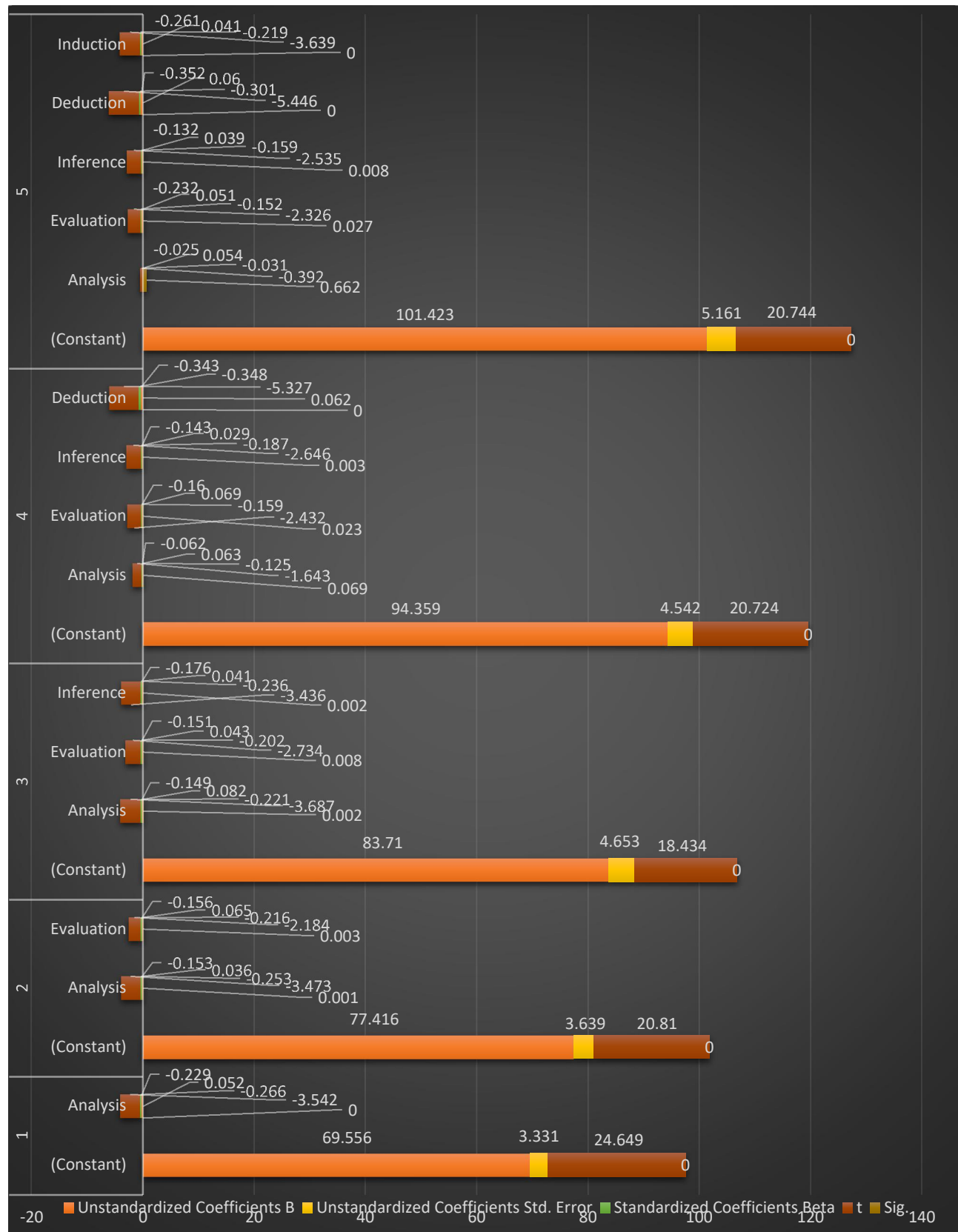


Figure 9. The Importance of Observed T-Values and Standard Coefficients for Each Predictor

DISCUSSION

Anxiety over reading crucial texts and those in a foreign language was associated with all five subscales of critical thinking ability. The evaluation had the most (positive) impact on anticipating essential reading (Wang et al., 2021). On the other hand, the most significant (negative) effect on reading anxiety was caused by deduction and induction. These results suggest that if we wish to improve the critical reading skills of EFL students or lessen their stress, we should work on their thinking skills as a result of these findings. The outcomes of this investigation are consistent with earlier research. The study's first finding demonstrated that the capability to think critically might predict critical reading. Critical thinking is essential to reading development. According to Bharathi (2021), there's a connection between reading comprehension and critical thinking. TOEFL reading comprehension test scores were higher for test-takers with exceptional essential abilities of thinking, according to ISMA GUSTIN (2021). Arifin's (2020) findings show that critical reading levels and critical thinking dispositions are directly linked. Text comprehension was significantly affected by participants' ability to reason at a fundamental level, as Kilicaslan (2018) reported. According to Hazayma and Alomery (2022), critical thinking training may assist readers in better comprehending what they are reading.

According to VaN Peppen et al. (2021), the relationship between CTS and CR indicates that critical thinking talents are comparable to, if not identical to, reading ability. According to them, Warsaw et al. (2021) concurred that criticizing one's reading ability is an essential part of critical thinking. However, these findings contrast those of ANGGALYA (2021), who found that all students improved their reading comprehension and noted that no changes between the control and experimental groups were found to be statistically meaningful. This study's findings on the predictive effectiveness of CTS and FLRA also support Kim's conclusions (2021). It was shown that students who were more anxious about reading retained less information than those who were less anxious, according to a study by Mardianti et al. (2021). It believed that anxiety disrupts critical

thinking because it agitates the mind and makes it difficult to think at a high level. According to Tunjungsari & Takwin (2021), anxiety is linked to a preference for critical thinking.

CONCLUSION

According to the outcomes of this study, all five critical thinking subscales predicted essential reading and foreign language reading anxiety in this study's two research questions. The conclusion is that teachers and students should look at all abilities equally instead of focusing just on a few select ones. Teachers should teach critical thinking skills in the early years of school and continue to enhance them throughout the school year since they are tough to learn. "Developing critical thinking is more than just mastering a specific ability in a given context. To be able to realize when you need new talent and put in the mental effort to learn it, you must have a certain mentality or temperament" (Sunani et al., 2021). Critical thinking may be challenging to teach even under normal circumstances. When teaching critical thinking, students should be given several opportunities to practice each ability to improve all areas significantly. This may be accomplished by minimizing the number of faculty members engaged and providing more time for every subject.

IMPLICATIONS

Researchers' results may be helpful to EFL educators and students, as well as content writers and syllabus designers alike. Conclusions: There are several opportunities for teachers to help their students develop critical thinking abilities in their classrooms, provided they know the concept and importance of this development. According to most seasoned educators, if you better understand your students' histories and interests, you can create more engaging and relevant lessons for them. Courses that encourage critical thinking place an even greater emphasis on this issue. Even though a competent teacher can create a stimulating learning environment nearly every session, students' reactions to various lectures and topics vary widely. As an illustration of a grammatical unit, consider the future tense usage. Questions on the ethical dilemmas that

underlie expected a teacher might increase their students' life expectancy to foster critical thinking among their charges. It might be a big success if the lesson is appropriate for the student's age, prior knowledge, and language proficiency. A slew of other questions would be suitable for a class of 12-13-year-olds studying ESP engineering. Making classes more relevant to students' particular interests is one strategy to improve student engagement, is necessary to develop critical thinking abilities (Sun et al., 2021).

People must think critically and effectively to be successful members of society and enhance their capacity for self-education. EFL students might benefit from developing critical thinking skills to learn a new language more quickly. On the other hand, students may be affected by the present research findings. There should be additional opportunities for students to improve their critical thinking abilities when learning a new language "uniquely situated, emergent interactions" based on the aspirations of the participants rather than task objectives. Consistent task methodologies are critical to keep in mind while using tasks to encourage essential reading (Vnenchak et al., 2019).

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