

CRITICAL READING IN EFL TEACHING

Teachers of English language

for lawyers **Azizbek Mavlonov**,

Behzod Kundibayev Navoi school of law

At the beginning of the 21st century, many educational institutions started to change their attitude toward teaching reading skills. They emphasized reading using critical thinking skills instead of traditional content-oriented reading. It became clear that, in English Language Teaching, developing students' critical thinking skills improves their target language proficiency and nurtures their effective literacy in English.

This article briefly defines the meaning and importance of critical reading in the classroom as well as highlights the main differences between critical reading from other types of reading strategies. The main aims of this article are to synthesize the literature about the challenges of critical reading in the classroom and to analyze suitable suggestions to overcome these challenges.

Critical reading is defined differently as a term in various sources. Critical reading, i.e. "deep reading", is the process of receiving information by predicting, analyzing, questioning, and searching (Pirozzi, 2003). Wallace (2003) wrote that critical reading is reading at a high level in which specific processes are applied. Summarizing all the definitions, critical reading may be defined as the type of reading in which critical thinking skills are used and it involves producing reasoned arguments after reading and analyzing the text.

Critical reading differs from other types of reading because of some features. This type of reading is different from basic reading by the level or degree of engagement with the text. Jensen (2019) noted that while noncritical readers try to comprehend the main message or narrative of the text, readers who use critical thinking skills probe deep into the text. Ordinary readers aim at facts and the external meaning of the text, but critical readers read the information with a critical eye by previewing, analyzing, and re-reading. The basic reader reads the text and tries to find the details or information, however, the critical reader dives into the text and creates their ideas which may or may not be similar to the authors' ideas (p. 47).

This information proves that in critical reading, the difference between the author's and the reader's views is accepted. The reader is not asked to produce the same idea or conclusion as the author's ideas.

The use of critical reading can offer several advantages for English language learners. Firstly, many students read the text as passive consumers, but critical reading enables the use of critical thinking and reading skills simultaneously which activates the passive process. Furthermore, acquiring critical reading strategies turns students into text analysts. As Wallace (1995) wrote, they can read the material "with a suspicious eye" and can identify manipulations e.g. emotive, feminist language used by the author (Wilson, 1999). Moreover, critical reading helps to improve other areas of literacy and language learning. According to the study conducted by Anuar&Awang (2020), ELT learners reported that the use of critical reading in the classroom helped to improve their overall knowledge (92%), English language (81%), and creativity (34%). It is clear that use of critical reading in the classroom is beneficial and educational establishments have to apply critical reading skills in teaching process.

The use of critical reading in the classrooms may cause some challenges and challenges related to students' backgrounds occurred frequently in ELT classrooms. These challenges may be related to educational, cultural or social backgrounds. Firstly, some students may be from different educational backgrounds where reading critically is not valued, and much emphasis is laid on memorizing and surface reading. Wilson (2016) pointed out that some universities design their materials only to develop memorization, and the use of critical thinking skills is not accepted. In addition, some establishments do not have appropriate books and teachers to develop critical reading. According to Jensen (2019), teaching critical reading requires special knowledge from the teacher, and it is impossible to teach reading critically without proper training. Another challenge may be related to cultural differences and some cultures or traditions may have different cultural capital which does not support critical thinking. Moreover, students who are from some political backgrounds which do not foster critical debate are sometimes not prepared to comprehend critical thinking in the classroom.

These challenges can be solved by effective scaffolding which means providing support for students to improve learning and help students to succeed in difficult tasks. Wilson and Devereux (2014) claimed that EFL teachers are sometimes passionate about teaching critical reading and do not regard students' backgrounds and their passion may cause tiredness, confusion, and ignorance in learners. For example, Wallace (2003) used critical reading tasks for Arabic students to whom she introduced some challenging texts on Islam and as a result, students refused to attend the course

because the author disregarded cultural differences and the importance of delicate scaffolding. In the study which was conducted by Wilson (2016), the teacher wanted to teach critical reading tasks with great enthusiasm and wanted transformation in students' dispositions, but she chose inappropriate materials for her students' backgrounds. As a consequence, despite the teacher's enthusiasm, the course did not produce effective results but led to boredom and ignorance of learners. According to Wilson (2016), the process of developing critical reading should not be daunting for students and teachers should not disturb learners' worldviews. Instead, ELT teachers should suggest "delicate scaffolding" where learners acquire new skills feeling security and enough support. Teachers and institutions may offer different approaches for improving reading critically, but Moore (2013) noted that the main aspect is to enhance the extra level of consciousness of texts.

Critical reading is a complex process of reading and students sometimes do not know how to use critical reading techniques because of not being familiar with this type of reading, and they may face challenges in the process of reading. Bilki (2022) wrote that critical reading is the process of engaging with the text actively and learners have to engage in an interactive dialogue with the text and an author. This process is not simple and it consumes much time and energy of English language learners. In many cases, learners read the text but do not know how to go beyond it, or how to use critical reading strategies i.e. how to analyze, question, interpret, and summarise. As a result, learners get confused and abandon the process of critical reading. Learners skip the reading and take some notes instead.

Students' challenges that occur due to the lack of practice in critical reading can be solved with the help of special reading prompts which are designed to question and analyze any type of reading material. Tomasek (2009) suggested the use of reading prompts which can be useful to realize the meaning of critical reading and may help to improve critical reading skills. The prompts serve to facilitate the connection between the reader and the text (Tompkins, 2006). These basic questions can orient learners with a stance in critical reading by guiding them while they are reading. The goal of the prompts is not to aid learners to gather facts or to complete some assignments, but to help them to synthesize information and to collect the ideas of the material. While Wallace (2003) introduced prompts as critical synopsis questions and according to her five questions learners may know what to achieve after reading, Tomasek (2009) created six sets of prompts that target to development of specific critical reading skills. In the following list, two sets of reading prompts which are suggested by these two authors are compared.

Critical synopsis questions offered by Wallace (2011):

- Why am I reading the text?

- What are the authors of the text trying to do by writing it?
- What are the relevant ideas to what I want to find?
- How convincing are the authors' ideas?
- To conclude, what use can I find after reading?

Tomasek's (2009) reading prompts to make connections:

- What do I know about the topic?
- What is the difference between my previous knowledge and the ideas in the text?
- What are the new ideas that are suggested by authors?
- Which principles in the text can be compared with the other courses?
- What information can contribute to my interest and knowledge in this topic?
- What connections can be made with the other topics?

It can be concluded that these prompts offered by different authors are similar and Tomasek's questions focus on a specific context. The challenges causing confusion in learners may be solved by introducing these reading prompts that help to analyze reading material critically.

Critical reading, compared to basic reading, takes more time, effort, and sometimes money which students are not prepared to invest in. According to the study conducted by Hobson (2004), more than 70 % of students were not able to complete the task of reading critically on time. Moreover, Jensen (2019) added that critical reading sometimes requires the use of extra resources such as money, and books because students are asked to mark, highlight, and take notes while doing the critical reading. These techniques are often used in critical reading and students should be ready to spend some money on books or printing.

Currently, e-readers are being suggested as an alternative for paper books and this causing a debate among scholars about the use of electronic technologies to enhance critical reading. Recently, some researchers are suggesting to develop critical reading with the help of a shift from reading on paper books to reading on the screen. Jensen and Scharf (2014) advocated the use of e-readers and emphasizes that doing a critical reading on screen can create some benefits. Students never run out of room and can insert any highlights or annotations. E-readers enable learners to bookmark, underline, outline, comment, or cross-reference with great flexibility. On the other hand, Jabr (2013) stated that paper format and pages are important, and critical reading tasks should be done on paper. To test these two theories, Jensen (2019) conducted research and analyzed the academic performance of participants who use e-readers comparing them to paper-format readers. According to the results, the students who used Kindle for critical e-reading could develop greater

familiarity and showed a positive shift in academic performance (Jensen, 2019). The benefits of e-readers for reading critically can surpass the benefits of a paper environment.

Summary

Critical reading is a complex reading process that is different from other types of readings according to its purpose, form, and procedure. Using critical reading in ELT classrooms may offer many advantages. It helps learners to turn their knowledge into wisdom and to develop analytical reading skills. However, using critical reading in the classroom may be difficult for both teachers and learners. They may face challenges related to their background, the process of reading, or lack of resources. These problems can be addressed by organizing effective scaffolding, teaching special techniques, or using e-readers.

References

1. Anuar, N., & Awang, Z. (2020). An explanatory factor analysis of elicited students' salient beliefs toward critical reading. *International Journal Of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics*, 4(4), 101-115.
2. Bilki, Z., & Irgin, P. (2014). Towards becoming critical readers and writers: ELT students' perceptions on the effectiveness of critical reading and writing instruction. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching*, 9(2), 987-1003.
3. Jabr, F. (2013). The reading brain in the digital age: The science of paper versus screens. *Scientific American*.
4. Jensen, M. N., & Scharff, L. F. (2019). Improving critical reading with e-texts: A controlled study in a collegiate philosophy course. *Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 19(3), 49-64.
5. Moore, T. (2013). Critical thinking: Seven definitions in search of a concept. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(4), 506-522.
6. Pirozzi, R. C. (2003). *Critical reading, critical thinking: a contemporary issues approach*. Longman.
7. Tomasek, T. (2009). Critical reading: Using reading prompts to promote active engagement with text. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 21(1), 127-132.
8. Tompkins, G. E. (2006). *Literacy for the 21st century: A balanced approach* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ.
9. Wallace, C. (2003). *Critical reading in language education*. Springer.
10. Wallace, M., & Wray, A. (2011). *Critical reading and writing for postgraduates* (3rd ed.). SAGE, London.

11. Wilson, K. (2016). Critical reading, critical thinking: Delicate scaffolding in English for academic purposes (EAP). *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, (22), 256-265.
12. Wilson, K., & Devereux, L. (2014). Scaffolding theory: High challenge, high support in academic language and learning (ALL) contexts. *Journal of Academic Language & Learning*, 8(3), 91-100.

Wolf, M. (2010). The importance of deep reading. *Educational Leadership*, 66(6), 32-37