

The Effect of Teaching Critical Reading Strategies on Kurdish EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension

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پێکهوتی وه رگرتن: 3 ته مموز 2019، په سه ندردن: 29 ته مموز 2019، بلاوکردنه وه: 25 کانونی یه کهم 2019

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پوخته

خویندنه وه پرۆسه یه کی کارلیکه رانه ی بنیاتنانی ماناییه که چه ندین چالاکى له خو ده گریت. له هه ل و مه رجیکی نه کادیمیدا، گو مان نه کریت ئاخو هه موو نه و فیرخوازانه ی که فیری زمانی ئینگلیزی ده بن وه ک زمانیکی بیگانه ئاگاداری ستراتیجه کانی خویندنه وه ن یاخود نا. نه وتریت ته نانه ت نه گهر هه ندیک له فیرخوازانی ئاگاداری نه و ستراتیجه یانه ش بن ناتوانن پیداویستی یه کانی خویندنه وه ی نه کادیمی جی به جی بکه ن. ئامانجی نه م لیکۆلینه وه نه وه یه که ئاخو په یبردی نه و فیرخوازه کوردانه ی که فیری زمانی ئینگلیزی ده بن وه ک زمانیکی بیگانه به ستراتیجه کانی خویندنه وه ی ره خنه گرانه رۆلێکی کاریگه ری هه یه له باشکردنی تیگه شتنیان له و ده قانه ی که ده یخویننه وه. بۆ نه م مه به سته ش، په نجا خویندکار له کولێجی زمانی زانکۆی سلیمانی وه ک نموونه ی نه م لیکۆلینه وه یه وه رگیران. نه م خویندکارانه دوو تاقیکردنه وه یان نه نجا مده که به م شیوه یه بوو: له سه ره تادا تاقیکردنه وه یه کی پیش وه خته کران تاوه کو بزانیی تاج راده یه ک به ستراتیجه کانی خویندنه وه ئاشنان، هه رچی تاقیکردنه وه که ی تریشه له پاش ئاشناکردنی فیرخوازه کان بوو به سه رجه م ستراتیجه کانی خویندنه وه ی ره خنه گرانه. نه نجامه کانی نه م دوو تاقیکردنه وه ش به راوردکران تاوه کو جوړو کوالیتی نه و به ره و پیش چوونه بزانیی ت که له ده ره نجامی ئاشناکردنیانه به و رپگاو شیوازانه ی که وایان لی ده کات بینه خویندنه یکی ره خنه گرانه. ده ره نجامه کانیش به ره و پیش چوونییکی گه وه ی له نه دا و ده ربپینی فیرخوازه کاند پایشان ده دات که رپژه ی به راوردکاری نیوان هه ردوو تاقیکردنه وه که (%44) ه به تاییه تی له کاره کۆمه لایه تیبیه که دا که نه مه ش له نه دای ره خنه گرانه ی فیرخوازه کان خویندنه ی ره نگی داوه ته وه. هه ر بۆیه، به پپی پیشنیاره کانی توژیینه وه که، فیرکردن و ووتنه وه ی ستراتیجه کانی خویندنه وه ی ره خنه گرانه به خویندکارانی زانکۆ نه بیت یه کییک بیت له نه وله ویات و کاره سه ره کی یه کانی مامۆستایان.

الملخص

تعتبر القراءة عملية تفاعلية لبناء المعنى وتتضمن العديد من الفعاليات. في السياق الأكاديمي هناك شك في أن جميع المتعلمين ملّمين بهذه الاستراتيجيات. بالإضافة إلى ذلك حتى لو أن بعض المتعلمين لهم علم بهذه الاستراتيجيات، يعتقد بأنهم ضعيفين في معالجة متطلبات القراءة الأكاديمية. يهدف البحث الحالي إلى تفحص فيما إذا كانت معرفة المتعلمين الأكرواد متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية باستراتيجيات القراءة النقدية مهم في تطور استيعابهم للنص. 50 طالب من كلية اللغات/ جامعة السلیمانیة قد اختيروا ليمثلوا عينة الدراسة. خضع هؤلاء الطلاب لاختباري ماقبل ومابعد وذلك لتفحص نوعية التطور الذي قد يحصل بعد تعريف الطلبة بالطرق والوسائل الاساسية التي ممكن ان تجعل منهم قراء ناقدین جیدین. اوضحت النتائج بان تطور كبير حصل في انجاز الطلبة وذلك بتحقيق معدل مقارني 44% (بين اختباري ماقبل ومابعد) خاصة في المهمة الاجتماعية التي تعكس الانجاز النقدي للطلبة. توصي الدراسة الحالية بان يكون تدريس استراتيجيات القراءة النقدية لطلبة الجامعات واحدة من المهام الاساسية التي تقع ضمن النشاطات التدريسية للمدرس.

Abstract

Reading is an interactive meaning building process that involves numerous activities. In the academic context, it is doubtful whether all EFL learners are aware of the reading strategies. Moreover, even if some learners are aware of these strategies, it is assumed that they may be ill-equipped to handle the academic reading demands. The current paper aims at examining whether Kurdish EFL learners' awareness of the critical reading strategies improve their text comprehension. Fifty students from the College of Languages/ Sulaimani University have been chosen as the sample of the study. These students have been submitted to pre- and post-tests to check the kind of progress they may make after being acquainted with the main ways and methods that can render them good critical readers. The results illustrated a great improvement in the learners' performance as they achieved a comparison rate of 44% (between the pre-and post-tests) mainly in the social task that reflects students' own critical performance. The paper, then, recommends that teaching critical reading strategies to university students should be one of the basic tasks among teachers' teaching activities.

Key words: Critical readers, critical reading strategies, reading comprehension, critical discourse analysis

1. Introduction

Reading is mainly a process of recognizing and perceiving any written or printed material. Comprehension, on the other hand, is the understanding of the meaning of the written material and covers the conscious strategies that lead to understanding. Reading deals with language form, while comprehension, the end product, deals with language content (Sheng, 2000:13). For most teachers, reading comprehension is what they mean when they talk about a person's reading ability. It is the end result of the reading process and is what happens when all of the components interact successfully. The current paper tries to investigate the importance of reading critically for improving learners' reading comprehension of written texts. It seeks to show how different learners' comprehension is, when they critically (as opposed to non-critically) read any text. Cot's model (2006) will be adopted in analyzing the study's data since this approach is believed to cover the inside as well as the outside of the text and this issue forms the core critical nature of the model. The study hypothesizes that Kurdish EFL learners are ill-equipped in terms of skills and knowledge to handle the correct reading demands due to the lack of awareness of the efficient critical reading strategies. Moreover, it is assumed that learners' awareness of the critical strategies will help them improve their language, their thinking process and even their ways of evaluation. Consequently, learning improves in the process of reflective and active reading.

2. Major Reading Approaches

Different ways have been used by teachers to teach reading. Three main approaches have been proposed to explain the nature of learning how to read. These approaches will be surveyed in the coming sections.

2.1 The Traditional Approach

Traditional (literal) reading approach is the one that focuses mainly on the printed form of a text and takes in *only* ideas that are directly stated. Readers are required to match letters with sounds in a defined sequence. Their main task is to analyze a text word by word, linking the words into phrases and then sentences. In short, in quest of making sense of a given text, readers' main concern is to identify graphemes and convert them into phonemes (Nunan, 1991:30). Reading is, then, a matter of decoding a series of written symbols into their aural equivalents. The approach is considered as *a bottom-up process* by which learners describe the information flow as a series of stages that transforms the input and passes it to the next stage without any feedback or possibility of later stages of the process to influence earlier stages (Stanovich, 1980: 45). Accordingly, EFL learners are often marginalized as readers and they are not directed to interact with the written texts in meaningful ways. They are regarded as passive recipients of information in the text. Meaning resides in the text and the reader has to reproduce it. The teaching scheme of such an approach focuses on teaching vocabulary and giving relevant background knowledge to learners and then asking them post-reading comprehension questions (Gray and Rogers, Cited in Kucer, 1987:33).

2.2 The Cognitive Approach

The cognitive approach, considered as *a top-down process*, involves active participation on the part of the reader by going beyond literal understanding of a text and focusing more on the meaningful learning (Ausubel, Cited in Omaggio, 1993: 58). Meaningful learning occurs when new information is presented in a relevant context and is related to what the learner already knows,

hence it can easily be integrated into one's existing cognitive structure. Reading is not just extracting meaning from a text but a process of connecting information in the text with the knowledge that the reader brings to the act of reading. Accordingly, reading is not a passive mechanical activity but a purposeful rational process that depends on the reader's prior knowledge and expectations. It is not merely a matter of decoding print to sound (as the previous approach) but also a matter of making sense of written language (Smith, 1994: 2). In short, reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game, a process which involves readers in different activities like sampling the text, making hypotheses, confirming or rejecting them, making new hypotheses, and so forth (ibid).

2.3 The Critical Approach

A more prosperous reading comprehension approach is the one that concerns itself not with "*whether reading is a bottom-up language-based process or a top-down knowledge-based process*" (Block, 1992: 320) but with the control and manipulation that a reader can have on the act of comprehending a text. In other words, how readers utilize their critical thinking processes during the act of reading. Even being equipped with a variety of reading strategies, readers still need a higher-level ability to utilize their reading strategies. Consequently, reading is considered as a form of language analysis that does not take the given text at face value, but involves reading between the lines and drawing inferences about what is not explicitly stated in a text (Wallace, 1992: 65). The approach has been referred to by Block (1992) as the metacognitive approach as it involves thinking about what one is doing while reading. Block (ibid: 321) defines metacognition as the "ability that develops relatively late because it involves the ability to stand back and observe oneself"¹. The text, according to this approach, is considered as an active material that needs a spirit of inquiry toward the message conveyed, the underlying ideologies, the text characteristics as well as the hidden meaning (Wallace, 1992: 66).

3. Definitions of Critical Reading

Critical reading is "a way of looking at a text and analyzing what the author is saying and the methods the author is using to communicate a message or idea" (Wall and Wall, 2005:18). It is the ability to take a more in-depth look at printed texts with the intention of formulating one's own opinions and conclusions. To read critically is to read analytically which means to question and to think about the written material at hand. The process does not end here but goes on steps of evaluating and passing personal judgment on the quality, value, accuracy, and truthfulness of what is being read. When learners question about something, it usually leads to finding answers. Critical readers should keep in mind that there are no *right* answers when one reads, there are only the author's intentions and the reader's interpretations (Wall and Wall, 2005: 4).

Critical reading as a branch of critical approach has attracted the attention of many researchers in recent years. It has been distinguished from critical thinking in that the former is used as a technique for **discovering** information and ideas within a text while the latter is a technique for **evaluating** information and ideas, for deciding what to accept and believe (Wallace, 1992: 67). Critical reading refers to a careful, active, reflective, analytic reading while critical thinking

involves reflecting on the validity of what one reads in the light of his/her prior knowledge and understanding of the world. Thus, critical reading would appear to come before critical thinking. Only once one has fully understood a text (critical reading) s/he can truly evaluate its assertions (critical thinking). This means that both work together in that critical thinking allows people to monitor their understanding as they read (ibid).

In the academic context, it is important for students to be capable of reading texts critically. Reasoning through reading is an ability widely needed in the educational curriculum. Critical reading not only empowers learners in EFL learning skills such as vocabulary and reading, but also teaches them how to reach real understanding of texts by questioning, organizing, interpreting, synthesizing, as well as digesting what they read (Jones, 2002: 221). Having these ideas and definitions (of critical reading) in mind, the researchers conducted the current study with the main aim of trying to raise learners' understanding and awareness of looking at the text not as mere letters on papers but as in-between-the lines' texts. The desire to read begins with curiosity, however, the act of reading is deeply entwined with one's process of self-exploration until one formulates his/her own specific judgments and evaluations about the text. The researchers try to consider the type of evaluations and judgments learners make when they read the text non-critically as opposed to their consideration of the text critically. This will be checked by submitting the learners to two different sessions of pre-and post-tests (See section 5.2).

4. Critical Reading Strategies

Defining critical reading might be an easy task. However, the most difficult task is teaching learners when and how to read critically. Teaching critical reading strategies to EFL learners is believed to enable them to visualize a task, to construct meaning from the text, and to find solutions when comprehension collapses (Block, 1986: 464). Critical Reading strategies are "those mental procedures that readers deliberately prefer to employ in accomplishing reading tasks" (Cohen, 1990: 30). Different strategies have been proposed by different scholars due to their different perspectives. The following sections survey some of the prominent models and strategies that are proposed for teaching reading critically.

4.1 Robinson's 1946

Robinson's model is a five-step reading model which is summarized in the acronym **SQ3R**. Francis Robinson presented his model in his book *Effective Study* in 1946. He tried to divide the reading process into sequential stages with the **S** (*Survey*) and **Q** (*Question*) as the pre-reading steps. In the **S** step the learner should not read the piece deeply but s/he has to have a look at the text to identify the main titles, subtitles, introductory and concluding paragraphs (Mitchell, 2003: 32). In the **Q** step, the learner asks himself/ herself questions about the piece in order to establish a purpose behind reading the text at hand. The questions are based on the headings and subheadings as the learner has to turn the title and other items of the "survey" step into questions (Ellery, 2014: 254). The first **R** of the 3Rs in the acronym reflects the reading step. It means to "Read". During this step, the learner reads the sections of the piece in order to find answers to the questions formulated in the previous steps by rereading the features of the piece. The nature of this step, therefore, requires an active and careful reading (Mitchell, 2003: 32). The last two Rs in the acronym reflect the post-reading step in which learners have to *Recall* (the second **R** in the 3Rs) what they have read by making a summary using one's own words. The last **R** is to "Reflect". Once

the subject matter of the piece has been recalled, the learner can set out to reflect it, Therefore, this step involves the combination of the learner's prior knowledge and the recent knowledge that s/he has already got through the reading (ibid).

SQ3R model has been used widely by learners as it is found beneficial to increase reading efficiency and comprehension. It helps readers to construct meaning during reading and to evaluate their understanding after reading. Although Robinson (1946) did not speak about critical reading in his book, his model falls within the critical domain due to the last two Rs (of his acronym) that render the reading process as critical and rational (Cervený and La Cotti, 2005: 36).

4.2 Bloom's 1956

According to Benjamin Bloom (1956), critical reading usually starts with the lowest steps of *knowledge* (the mere rote recall of previously learned material), *comprehension* (the ability to make sense of the material) and *application* (the ability to use learned material in new and concrete situations). These three levels describe a convergent thinking process whereby the learner recalls and focuses on what is known and comprehended to solve a problem through application. However, it is the highest levels of *analysis* (the ability to form an in-depth discussion about the text by taking it apart, piece by piece), *synthesis* (the ability to put parts together to form a new whole) and *evaluation* (the ability to judge the value of material for a given purpose) that reckon one's reading as being critical (Bloom, 1956: Cited in Xu, 2011: 138). These three high levels describe a divergent thinking process, because the learner's processing results in new insights and discoveries that were not part of the original information. When the learner is thinking at these upper levels, thought flows naturally from one to the other and the boundaries disappear (Sousa, 2001: 269).

Bloom's taxonomy maintains the gradual steps of reading. It claims that gaining a bigger picture of the text and evaluating it effectively are the major steps within the critical reading process. The taxonomy influences educators most in their teaching and thinking. Teachers often use Bloom's taxonomy to design their lessons, make up test questions and assignments (Xu, 2011:137).

4.3 Block's 1992

Block (1992) devised a metacognitive model which concentrated on the control executed by readers on their trial to understand a text. He claimed that, in the context of reading critically, reading comprehension involves thinking about what one is doing while reading. Strategic readers involve many activities along the process of reading. These activities may be divided into three main stages, i.e, *before reading*, *while reading*, and *after reading*. The main activities that the readers involve before reading are to identify the purpose of the reading as well as to identify the form or type of the text. In the while-reading stage, readers think about the general character and features of the form or type of the text, such as trying to locate a topic sentence and follow supporting details toward a conclusion, project the author's purpose for writing the text, choose, scan, or read in detail, make continuous predictions about what will happen next based on the given information, the prior knowledge, and the conclusions obtained within the previous stages. Finally, in the last stage of after reading, readers attempt to form a summary, conclude, or make inference of what was read (Block,1992: 39).

Block's model has attracted many researchers who have gone even further to define the control readers execute on their ability to understand a text. Utilizing one's critical thinking processes prove to enhance one's reading comprehension (ibid).

4.4 Sousa's 2004

In a similar vein, David Sousa (2004) identified different strategies for the effective reading process. These are *previewing*, *contextualizing*, *questioning*, *reflecting*, *outlining*, *summarizing*, *evaluating*, *comparing* and *contrasting* the text (Sousa, 2004, 105). Previewing is learning about a text before reading it and entails prediction based on the heading and subheadings as what happens when one performs the task of scanning and skimming. Contextualizing requires placing a text in its historical, biographical, and cultural contexts and includes making inferences and synthesizing. In the questioning step, the readers should ask questions about content while in the reflecting step they should examine their own responses and reflect upon the challenges to their personal beliefs and values and entails annotating, highlighting, and not-taking. The other activities require the readers to identify the main ideas and to restate and paraphrase (ibid). The last steps in the model include evaluating, comparing and contrasting the text with other similar materials. In evaluating an argument, readers are often asked to determine fact and opinion, find cause and effect relationships, determine claim and support, determine premise and conclusion, and finally analyze, interpret, and argue about the text. Ultimately, comparing and contrasting the related readings encompass exploring the likeliness and differences among texts for a better understanding (ibid: 106).

The most evident benefit of this model is its provision for a strong foundation that can be utilized by learners and that can move them, in turn, toward higher-level critical thinking as a regular part of their learning practice (Khabiri and Pakzad, 2012: 79).

4.5 Cot's 2006 (The Current Study's Model)

Josep Cots (2006) proposed a critical teaching method that can be applied in EFL classrooms. He maintained that teaching should be "*with an attitude*". This idea has been borrowed from prominent critical scholars such as Fairclough (1992), van Dijk (2001), and Pennycook (2001). They suggest that the introduction of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in language classes does not necessarily involve a change in teaching method or techniques. It, rather, offers a new perspective on language in which *language use* is considered as questionable and problematic. Language use reflects social ideological processes as well as constitutes a resource to act upon those processes (Cots, 2006: 336).

In his article "Teaching 'with an attitude': Critical Discourse Analysis in EFL Teaching", Cots proposed an analytical framework for teachers to refer to when designing and adapting teaching activities from the perspective of CDA. His ultimate goal was to clarify that the choices teachers or material developers make in selecting or adapting texts to represent language use can be *critically* analyzed (ibid: 337). Following Fairclough's (1992) analytical framework, Cots organized an activity to be presented to his learners with the main aim of giving them a view of language use as a situated phenomenon in which speakers make linguistic and non-linguistic choices according to their goals and circumstances. Cots' task involves a comparative analysis of a passage from the original version of Forster's novel "*A Room with a View*" (Forster, 1908: 23) with another passage from a simplified version of the same novel produced for EFL learners (Forster, 1988: 5). The critical orientation of the task is based on the fact that it focuses on the *social practice*

of teaching-learning a foreign language through the communicative situation of reading a text (*discourse practice*) which has been previously simplified to fit the level of the audience (*textual practice*) (Fairclough, 1992: 39).

In a similar vein, the current paper arranges its test items according to three phases (taking into account the questions proposed by Cots at the end of his article). It has considered two different passages² to constitute the data for the study. The three phases that have been followed to arrange the test items are adopted from Cots (2006: 339-340) and are as follows:

1. Textual practice: The textual dimension focuses on formal and semantic features of text construction involving different levels of linguistic analysis and contributing to a global interpretation of the text. The questions suggested as examples focus on connectors, vocabulary and grammar.

2. Discourse practice (also called the contextual phase): The contextual dimension centers on the specificity of the communicative situation of which the text forms part, taking into account whether learners can comprehend the text in relation to its situational context. Issues like the contribution of the different propositions in the text to the overall impression of coherence as well as the readers' knowledge of the world and experience of other texts that the author draws upon are taken into consideration while designing the test items.

3. Social practice: In this phase of the activity learners reflect upon aspects like how the text contributes to a particular representation of the world and whether this representation comes into conflict with their own representations. Learners' own ideologies, judgments and evaluations of the text reflect their critical thinking and their real comprehension of the text. This is the main phase within the study that shows the real critical thinking of learners.

Examining different critical approaches to reading, one can feel that most scholars agree that reading is considered critical if it takes into account the inside as well as the outside of the text. That is, trying to relate the text to the outside world with an eye of evaluating its status according to the reader's perspective is an intriguing step for being critical. Cots' model (2006) is considered as one of the best models for analyzing language use and for designing language learning activities, one of which is the reading activity. The 'critical' nature of the model is that it relies on the learners' capacity to interpret a text within a specific communicative, social, and ideological context and react to it taking into account their personal experience and values (Ebrahimi and Rahimi, 2013: 6). The critical aspect of the model as well as its easy applicability among university students were the main reasons behind choosing it to be the study's model. It is expected that this model will suit the aim of the study and achieve the ultimate goal of raising students' consciousness about how to read thoroughly and critically.

5. Research Methodology

The study employed a quantitative research design using pre- and post-tests. A questionnaire (Appendix 1) has been submitted to learners which included three items about their age, status (prior teacher or not) and background knowledge (enrolled in some previous English courses or not). The aim behind submitting such a questionnaire before enrolling the learners in any lecture jzsb.univsul.edu.iq

or test is to equalize the sample. As far as the validity of the tests' items, they have been shown to a jury of experts (Appendix 2) who gave their comments and ideas that have been taken into consideration when designing the final versions of both tests. After the data was collected from the learners' answers in both tests, they have been checked and then compared to get the final results and conclusions.

5.1 Sampling

The participants of the study were 50 learners selected from the third stage at the College of Languages/ University of Sulaimani. The reason behind choosing this stage is that learners are thought of as being qualified enough in English language. The main aim of the current study is to check the performance of such learners at such a level in evaluating and judging texts using their reading skills. The researchers selected the participants randomly from the list name by choosing every even number to have a total of 50 learners as the whole population of the stage was 118. All the selected learners have been given a questionnaire and a consent form to assure the homogeneity of the group as well as their readiness to take the two tests (pre- and post) besides the lectures. Accordingly, some learners have been excluded due to three variables of age, knowledge and interest³. Male learners were 34 and female were 26, however gender distinction is outside the scope of the current study. So, it will not be considered as a factor while analyzing the results.

5.2 Data Collection Instruments

After assigning the sample and trying to exclude any incompatible member, the learners have been submitted to a test in which a passage "*the weight of the glass*" (Appendix 3) is presented to them and they were asked to answer several questions. The passage has been given to learners without any prior explanation or classification of critical reading strategies. The aim behind conducting this pre-test at this level is to check learners' knowledge, and examine their mechanisms in reading and evaluating a text.

The pre-test has been designed according to Cot's model in which 12 items have been given with a consideration that the first four items should be 'textual' and the other four 'contextual' while the last four cover the 'social' practice part (See section 4.5). It is this last part that needs more investigation as it is the one that shows learners' evaluation and judgment for what they have read. The test has been given in the 30th of January 2016. After a week from submitting the pre-test, learners began their lectures. Critical reading and its strategies have been presented to them. The aim is to acquaint such a group with the strategies and urge learners to apply them while reading any text. Cot's model (2006) has been presented to college students and some practices within different passages have been given to them to check their use and application for the effective critical reading strategies. The teaching task lasted for one month, February- 2016 with three lectures a week. So the total was 12 lectures. Each lecture lasted for 45 minutes as any normal lecture. The researchers try to examine the effect of teaching such a topic on learners' performance without any kind of load or extraordinary conditions.

Given such extensive lectures, students are now ready for the post-test. Hence in the 4th of March. "*The Acre of Diamonds*" passage (Appendix 4) has been presented with its questions. It has taken the same design of the previous-presented passage. The three levels of Cot are also put into consideration while organizing the items of the test. The data of the two tests are analyzed accordingly.

5.3 Scoring Scheme

The scoring scheme for the first two tasks in both the pre- and post-tests will be (1) mark for each item with a total (12) for the whole test. A special scheme has been designed for the purpose of analyzing the students' answers. Each item has been checked and given a number, then counting the right and wrong answers for each item. Left items have also been counted as these may prove students' disinterest in the text. The last four items within the third task have been checked according to the two variables of "I Do not Know" and "I Know".

6. Data Analysis

6.1 Data Analysis and Results of the Pre-test

After checking the papers and scoring each item, the following results have been arrived at:

Table (1) Results of the Pre-test (Task 1 and 2)

Item No.	Correct Answers		Wrong Answers		Left Answers	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
1	45	90	5	10	-	0
2	42	84	8	16	-	0
3	40	82	10	18	-	0
4	39	82	11	18	-	0
TOTAL	166	83	34	17	-	0
5	35	17.0	15	7.5	-	0
6	31	15.5	18	9	1	0.5
7	25	12.5	24	12	1	0.5
8	33	16.5	15	7.5	2	1
TOTAL	124	62	72	36	4	2

From the table above, it seems clear that the **textual** task achieved the best results with 166 total-correct answers. The rate of this task proved to be 66%, of which the first item appeared to be the easiest and the fourth as the most difficult as it scored the least correct answers.

The second **contextual** task achieved 124 correct answers and this, in turn, rendered the task as more difficult than the previous one. The seventh item received the least correct answers. The rate for this task was 24%. There are four items left within this task as students left the answers blank.

Items 9,10,11 and 12 within the third task, were subjective as they asked about students' evaluations and judgments (which forms the core of critical thinking process). Accordingly, they have been measured in different tables according to the variables of "I know" and "I do not Know". Through these variables, the researchers can measure students' abilities and awareness of how to relate a text to the outside world by giving their own opinions and evaluations as to how much a writer excelled in presenting his/her own topic. The results of the third task within the pre-test were as the following:

Table (2) Results of the Pre-test (Task 3)

Item No.	I Do not Know		I Know	
	No	%	No	%
9	30	15	20	10
10	35	17.5	15	7.5
11	37	18.5	13	6.5
12	44	22	6	3
TOTAL	146	73	54	27

The greatest discrepancies in students' answers appeared in items within the "I Know" variable, examinees proved to answer and evaluate the text from different perspectives. Since this task was a free writing one, students have made mistakes in grammar, spelling and even ideas. Grammar and spelling mistakes were overlooked (if not impeding the total understanding of the answer), however, mistakes in comprehending the questions and presenting one's ideas were counted within the "I Do not know" variable. Four answers (from the total 44) of item number 12 found wrong as students answered by maintaining different ways for teaching rather than adhering to ways of presenting the moral in the passage. This supported the claim that students were unable to answer correctly due to their poor vocabulary and their weak background knowledge. One answer read as *"I will give students credit and encourage them to participate in the class"*. Such answers have been counted wrong and hence put within the "I Do not Know" variable. The rate of "I Do not Know" variable to "I Know" in this test proved to be 46 %. The "I know" variable reported very weak performance from the students' sides as their responses have been corrected by the two researchers objectively and have proved to get humble ways of evaluating and judging a text. This, in turn, renders the **"social"** task as the hardest at this level. The last item within this task received the least answers. While this task is the one that matches with the critical thinking processes, learners' weak achievement prove their weakness to evaluate and comprehend a text critically. This finding validates the current study's first hypothesis in that students are ill-equipped to handle the correct reading demands.

6.2 Data Analysis and Results of the Post-test

The post-test has been also measured and checked by the two researchers using the same previous method followed in the pre-test. The results reported the following:

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Table (3) Results of the Post-test (Task 1 and 2)

Item No.	Correct Answers		Wrong Answers		Left Answers	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
1	40	20	10	5	-	0
2	47	23.5	3	1.5	-	0
3	39	19.5	11	5.5	-	0
4	41	20.5	9	4.5	-	0
TOTAL	167	83.5	33	16.5	-	0
5	40	20	10	5	-	0
6	43	21.0	6	3	1	0.5
7	45	22.5	5	2.5	-	0
8	30	15	18	9	2	1
TOTAL	158	79	39	19.5	3	1.5

The first "**textual**" task in the post-test received a total of 167 correct answers and the rate for the whole task was 67%. The second item within this task got the highest correct answers and the third item scored the highest wrong answer. This, in turn, rendered the former item as the easiest and the latter as the hardest.

The second "**contextual**" task's rate proved to be 60.5% with the seventh item as the easiest as it scored the highest number of correct answers and the eleventh item as the hardest as it received only 30 correct answers. The results of the third task within this test were as follows:

Table (4) Results of the Post-test (Task 3)

Item No.	I Do not Know		I Know	
	No	%	No	%
9	24	12	26	13
10	29	14.5	21	10.5
11	21	10.5	29	14.5
12	28	14	22	11
TOTAL	102	51	98	49

The "**social**" task within this test received a rate of 2%. The tenth item proved to be the hardest as 29 answers were within the "I Do not Know" variable. Checking the question showed that it asked about one's opinion about one's life. It reads as: (*Do you think you are in the middle of your own acre of diamonds?*). It seems that learners were conservative about such questions and avoided talking about their own selves. This may be due to their inability to comprehend the question, their weak language, their poor vocabulary as well as their flimsy background knowledge. All (or even some of) these obstacles prevented the examinees from expressing themselves accurately. As a result they adhered to the easiest solution by ticking the "I Do not Know" variable. The eleventh item proved to be the most interesting as it received 29 answers within the (I Know) variable and only 21 learners avoided answering such a question attaching themselves to the (I don't know) variable.

7. Results Comparison and Discussion

The data was analyzed quantitatively. The descriptive statistics for learners' perceived use of critical strategies and the overall rates of each of the three tasks were given in tables. The two tests were scored by the researchers who are English teachers at the College of Languages/ English Department and for more objective results, any confusing answers have been shown to the jury (Appendix 2) to check, correct and give any comments. Comparing the three tasks in both tests reported the following results:

Table (5) Results Comparison in the Pre-and Post-tests

Task No.	Results in Pre-test	Results in Post-test	Comparison of both Results
Task 1	66	67	1
Task 2	26	60.5	34.5
Task 3	46	2	44

The above table reported the least progress in task one as only 1% is rated between the two tests. It seems that this task is well-known to learners and they perform well in both the pre- and post-tests. The second task received 34.5% as a comparison rate between the two tests. It showed a progress in the learners' performance and a progress in the post-test. This means that contextual factors are improved when raising learners' awareness of the critical reading techniques. The most important progress in learners' performance is found in the third task as it was 46% in the pre-test, then 2% in the post-test to get a comparison rate of 44%. This means that learners' progress in this task is ascribed to their awareness and ability to express themselves by applying the critical reading strategies while reading a text. This, in turn, validates the study's second hypothesis that learners' awareness of critical reading strategies will help them improve their language, thinking and even ways of evaluations. Hence, a necessity arises for including critical strategies within different classes and at different stages of students' study periods.

8. Conclusion

Developing critical thinking skills of language learners needs a lot of efforts and practice. In the pre-test, students prove to be ill-equipped in their application of the critical thinking processes while reading a text. The main barriers, students face, seem to be their limited vocabulary and lack of background knowledge. After being acquainted with the main critical reading strategies, the post-test illustrate a great improvement with a comparison rate (between pre- and post-test) of 44%. In the post-test, students utilize a wide array of the critical reading strategies which guarantee them a better understanding and comprehension of the text.

In the light of the results obtained, teaching critical reading comprehension strategies is found to be useful as an instrument in the teaching of the required thinking skills and communication. It can be considered as a major source for enriching students' vocabulary, broadening their understanding and reasoning, as well as empowering not only their language skills (like reading and writing) but also widening their horizon as far as their stance towards society and their perspectives about the outside world. Consequently, language teachers have to exert more efforts to handle their classes in a critical way. They need to make learners conscious of the need to employ critical reading strategies while reading any text. The outcome of these classes will be students who think critically and can be successful in dealing with the complexities of the modern world.

Notes

¹ For more details on Block's concept of *metacognition*, consult his article (1992) "See how they read: Comprehension monitoring of L1 and L2 readers".

² Cots' model (2006) has been adopted as far as the phases and questions suggested. The data in the current study differs from Cots' in that the former takes two different passages with somehow similar level of complexity rather than two versions (with different levels of complexity) of the same passage.

³ Some learners were not interested in taking the tests and lectures. Some were teachers in high schools, others were taking courses in English language and its skills. Such people have been excluded after giving them a questionnaire about these three factors.

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Appendix (1) Questionnaire

1. What is your age?	Between 20-25	Between 25-30
2. Are you a teacher? (have you taught before?)	Yes	No
3. Have you taken any course in English language (in private institutes)?	Yes	No

Appendix (2) The Scientific Jury

1. Dr. Azad Hassan Fatah	College of Languages/ University of Sulaimani
2. Dr. Ibrahim Mahmoud	College of Humanities/ University of Sulaimani
3. Dr. Israa Burhanalddin	College of Education for Women/ University of Tikrit
4. Dr. Zana Mahmoud	College of Languages/ University of Sulaimani
5. Ms. Soma Nawzad	College of Languages/ University of Sulaimani
6. Ms. Iman Jabur	College of Education/Ibn-Rushd/ University of Baghdad

Appendix (3) The Passage of the Pre-test

The Weight of the Glass

Once upon a time a psychology professor walked around on a stage while teaching stress management principles to an auditorium filled with students. As she raised a glass of water, everyone expected they'd be asked the typical "glass half empty or glass half full" question. Instead, with a smile on her face, the professor asked, "How heavy is this glass of water I'm holding?"

Students shouted out answers ranging from eight ounces to a couple pounds.

She replied, “From my perspective, the absolute weight of this glass doesn’t matter. **It all depends on how long I hold it.** If I hold it for a minute or two, it’s fairly light. If I hold it for an hour straight, its weight might make my arm ache a little. If I hold it for a day straight, my arm will likely cramp up and feel completely numb and paralyzed, forcing me to drop the glass to the floor. In each case, the weight of the glass doesn’t change, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it feels to me.”

As the class shook their heads in agreement, she continued, “Your stresses and worries in life are very much like this glass of water. Think about them for a while and nothing happens. Think about them a bit longer and you begin to ache a little. Think about them all day long, and you will feel completely numb and paralyzed – incapable of doing anything else until you drop them.”

Questions:

1. The word *typical* in paragraph No. 1, is closest in meaning to:
 - A. Common
 - B. Important
 - C. Ordinary
 - D. Main

2. In paragraph 2, what type of sentence the bold one is? "**It all depends on how long I hold it**"
 - A. Compound
 - B. Complex
 - C. Simple
 - D. Compound-Complex

3. In paragraph no.3, the word *numb* is closest in meaning to:
 - A. Unable to hold anything
 - B. Unable to see anything
 - C. Unable to feel anything
 - D. Unable to comprehend anything

4. In paragraph No 3., the personal pronoun *them* (Think about them.....) refers to:
 - A. Teachers and students
 - B. Time and weight
 - C. Heads and arms
 - D. Stresses and worries

5. Why was the teacher holding a glass of water in front of her class?
 - A. To explain a certain issue
 - B. To show that she is thirsty
 - C. To prove that the glass is heavy
 - D. To demonstrate an experiment on water weight

6. Physically speaking, how much water is there in the glass?
 - A. Full
 - B. Occupied
 - C. Empty
 - D. Half

7. In paragraph no. 3, on what things do students agree so that they shook their heads?
 - A. It is how heavy the glass weighs that matters
 - B. It is how long one carries the glass that matters
 - C. It is how the professor explains the lesson that matters
 - D. It is how they help each other that matters

8. Why is it necessary to solve problems quickly?
 - A. In order to feel relaxed with no problems
 - B. In order not to complicate them
 - C. In order to feel more important
 - D. In order to have much free time

9. In paragraph no.1, what does the saying "glass half empty or glass half full" remind you of (can you think of any similar saying)?
 - A. I Do not Know
 - B. It reminds me of

.....

10. From the previous passage, which stress management principle do you deduce for stress management?

A. I Do not Know

B.

11. To which level, in your opinion, does the professor excel in presenting the moral in the passage?

A. I Do not Know

B.

12. If you are in the teacher's position, what other way(s) will you adopt to present to your students?

A. I Do not Know

B.

Appendix (4) The Passage of the Post-test

Acres of Diamonds

One of the most interesting Americans who lived in the 19th century was a man called Russell Herman Conwell. He was a lawyer for about fifteen years until he became a clergyman. One day, a young man went to him and told him he wanted a college education but couldn't **swing** it financially. Dr. Conwell decided, at that moment, to devote his life to help other people and to build a university for unfortunate, but deserving, students. He did have a challenge, however, he would need a few million dollars to build the university. For Dr. Conwell, and anyone with real purpose in life, nothing could stand in the way of his goal.

Several years before this incident, Dr. Conwell was tremendously intrigued by a true story - with its ageless moral. The story was about a farmer who lived in Africa and through a visitor became tremendously excited about looking for diamonds. Diamonds were already discovered in abundance on the African continent and this farmer got so excited about the idea of millions of dollars' worth of diamonds that he sold his farm to head out to the diamond line. He wandered all over the continent, as the years slipped by, constantly searching for diamonds, wealth, which he never found. Eventually he went completely broke and threw himself into a river and **drowned**. Meanwhile, the new owner of his farm picked up an unusual looking rock about the size of a country egg and put it on his mantle as a sort of curiosity. A visitor stopped by and in viewing the rock practically went into terminal convulsions. **He** told the new owner of the farm that the funny looking rock on his mantle was about the biggest diamond that had ever been found. The new owner of the farm said, 'Heck, the whole farm is covered with them' - and sure enough it was. The farm turned out to be the Kimberly Diamond Mine . . . the richest mine the world has ever known. The original farmer was literally standing on 'Acres of Diamonds' until he sold his farm.

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Dr. Conwell learned from the story of the farmer and continued to teach its moral. Each of us is right in the middle of our own 'Acre of Diamonds', if only we would realize it and develop the ground we are standing on before charging off in search of greener pastures. Dr. Conwell told this story many times and attracted enormous audiences. He told the story long enough to have raised the money to start the college for underprivileged deserving students. In fact, he raised nearly six million dollars and the university he founded, Temple University in Philadelphia, has **at least** ten degree-granting colleges and six other schools.

Questions

1. The past form of the verb "swing" in line 10, paragraph 1, is:
 - A. swong
 - B. swunged
 - C. swung
 - D. swang
2. The personal pronoun "he" in paragraph 2, refers to:
 - A. the lawyer
 - B. the farmer
 - C. the visitor
 - D. the clergyman
3. The opposite of the word "drowned" in paragraph 2, is:
 - A. rescued
 - B. submerged
 - C. hid completely
 - D. drained
4. The word "at least" in paragraph 3, is closest in meaning to:
 - A. at most
 - B. just
 - C. wholly
 - D. slightly
5. Why did a young man go to the lawyer, Russell Conwell?
 - A. to take some money
 - B. to help him achieve one of his life's goal

- C. to give up his college education
- D. to strengthen their relationships

6. Paragraph no. 2 starts with "several years before *this incident*", which incident does the writer mean?

- A. his becoming a clergyman
- B. his decision to help the unfortunate
- C. his challenge to get money
- D. his need for a few million dollars

7. How can you describe 'the farmer' in the story?

- A. unlucky
- B. happy
- C. rich
- D. impatient

8. Why was Conwell successful in his challenge?

- A. he told the farmer's story to everyone
- B. he has got much money
- C. he challenged the world to achieve his goal
- D. he built a university

9. What does the phrase "*Acres of Diamonds*" mean to you?

- A. I Do not Know
- B.....

10. Do you think that you are in the middle of YOUR own "Acre of Diamonds"?

- A. I Do not Know
- B.....

11. Is the true story presented an ageless moral for you too, why?

- A. I Do not Know
- B.....

12. If you were in Russell Conwell's position, how do you help others?

- A. I Do not Know
- B.....