

A Study Of The Relationship Between Critical Reading And Critical Thinking Abilities Of Undergraduate Learners

Sumaira Younis¹, Saman Naeem², Dr. Zahid Ali³, Nargis Yaqoob⁴, Dr. Noor Ullah⁵

¹Scholar, Department of Education, National University of Modern Languages, Karachi Campus
Email: sumairayounismughal@gmail.com

²Scholar, Department of Education, National University of Modern Languages, Karachi Campus
Email: saman.k.naeem@gmail.com

³Associate Professor, School of Education, American International Theism University Florida-USA
Email: drzahid.aly@aituedu.org

⁴Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Education, Sindh Madressatul Islam University, nargis.myaqoob9876@gmail.com

⁵Islamic Culture Center Oslo, Norway, Noorullahkhalid26@gmail.com

Abstract

Critical thinking skills are often emphasized in introductory university courses because of their importance in later levels of study. The primary purpose of this research is to examine and assess the relationship between reading comprehension and critical thinking. Students who plan on furthering their education after high school would benefit greatly from classes that teach them to read critically and assess texts. This study set out to quantify how much critical thought students put into their English reading. The research relies on a questionnaire administered to undergraduates at a single Karachi university as part of a qualitative investigation. Undergraduates still lack the abilities necessary for reading for pleasure, a problem that is highlighted by the study because of the importance of the link between reading comprehension and critical thinking. The results of this study reveal that college students have an optimistic view of reading comprehension, but that this view is not reflected in either their level of critical thinking or their aptitude to read critically. Reading a book instead of looking at a screen is better for your health, your mind, and your capacity to think critically. Instilling in children a lifelong love of reading is crucial to their academic achievement. Among the most significant recommendations provided by the current study are the refurbishment and expansion of libraries, the encouragement of students' use of higher order thinking skills to enhance their reading and comprehension in any context, and the revision of the English curriculum.

Keywords: Critical Reading, Critical Thinking Abilities, Undergraduate Learners'

Introduction

Critical thinking has a great amount of prominence in the learning objectives of introductory college courses. This is due to the fact that it is so important to the long-term academic performance of students. Students who choose to continue their education after high school should have the ability to grasp difficult texts and evaluate the significance of the information that they come across. Critical

reading is frequently addressed in great depth in English for Academic Achievements programs. The specifics may vary from school to school, but this is generally the case. In recent years, there has been a rise in both interest in and research into the subfields of cognitive psychology (Aloqaili, 2012). Some of these subfields include reading comprehension and critical thinking. Reading comprehension is backed up by a complex theoretical framework that was built by cognitive

scientists (Limbach & Waugh, 2010), Inference making, critical thinking, previous knowledge, and metacognitive abilities are some of the principles that are included in this paradigm. Because it is widely held that critical thinking is vital to both the teaching and learning of foreign languages, it is of the utmost importance that students develop their capacity for critical thinking. According to Din (2020), critical thinking requires the ability to analyze data and put such analysis to productive use. After giving some attention to one's own perspectives and several potential courses of action, the objective of critical thinking is to arrive at conclusions that are logical. It requires sorting through information, making inferences from that information, and resolving disagreements using logic and reason. According to Wilson, (2016) Active reading and critical reading are regular components of English classes aimed to increase academic achievement; nevertheless, the emphasis that is placed on these abilities varies greatly from course to course. Active reading and critical reading are both forms of reading.

According to Zubaidah, Corebima, & Mahanal, (2018), the 21st century has sparked calls for an increase in the quality of education across the board in order to better prepare students for their futures. Students need to be able to think critically in order for them to be able to evaluate arguments, come to sound judgments, and see flaws in what they are reading. Students who cultivate their ability to think critically have an advantage in their ability to grasp and function effectively in the world. The skills that they acquire in this environment are transferable to a wide variety of other settings. Students learn to solve problems more successfully by relying on evidence and facts rather than on preconceived assumptions, which is one of the many benefits of teaching critical thinking. In addition to this, it encourages students to diversify their perspectives and think critically about topics by

approaching them from a variety of perspectives. Students who are able to think critically will have a significant advantage in both their academic endeavors and in the professional world of the future. Reading is one of the most effective ways to expand one's knowledge since it can improve one's analytical thinking skills, broaden one's viewpoint, and bring new insights into both one's personal life and the larger world in which one lives. According to Karadeniz (2015), reading can also assist pupils in making sense of the world around them and in making plans for the future.

Reading is a challenging activity because it needs the reader to make use of their own prior knowledge and skills in conjunction with the information that they get from reading the text. According to Shihab (2011), the reader, along with the authors, is responsible for providing the meaning and interpretation of the text based on their own prior experiences and knowledge. Utilizing mental schemas and engaging in critical thinking are two very effective ways to significantly improve one's ability to form conclusions and draw inferences based on prior knowledge. Reading for fun, in the sense that Clark and Rumbold (2006) describe it, Reading for enjoyment is something that we do in our own time and at a moment that is most convenient for us; it is a pleasant activity that is optional. Around the age of thirteen and a half, the students' enthusiasm for reading for the simple pleasure of it begins to decline. The decrease in leisure time available for reading had, unfortunately, a negative effect on academic performance as a whole. When a person has a positive emotional reaction to reading as well as a strong and passionate interest in reading, that person will read on their own initiative. This is because having a positive emotional reaction to reading and having a strong and passionate interest in reading go hand in hand. According to Sharma and Singh (2015), this type of excitement shows a desire to give one's complete attention to and

enjoyment in an activity that was voluntarily picked. Reading requires mental work on the part of the reader, and the skill of developing a habit of reading is one that can be perfected with time and effort throughout the course of one's lifetime. Reading preferences can be used to gain some understanding of a person's personality. Reading is a habit that, according to studies in developmental psychology, needs to be nurtured from a young age. Children who make reading a habit can reap several benefits, one of which is the opportunity to improve their academic performance to that of great students. It is important for parents to encourage their children to read and to ensure that there is easy access to books in the home. The production of books for children is a collaborative endeavor that includes parents, teachers, book distributors, as well as authors and illustrators. It is argued that reading is a method of acquiring knowledge because it involves interaction with and examination of written text. A fervent interest in reading has also been suggested as a defining characteristic of a person's personality. Reading on a consistent basis is beneficial to not just one's reading comprehension but also one's reading fluency.

When compared to the rest of the world, the literacy rate of Pakistan's population is slipping more and further behind. Pakistan is a developing nation. This is primarily due to the fact that its younger population has performance levels that are below average in terms of reading comprehension. The lack of adequate educational opportunities is a problem that needs to be addressed and fought against on multiple fronts since it puts the future of today's children in jeopardy. In an effort to enhance the standard of education offered throughout Pakistan, the government of that nation has disseminated its education plan for the academic year 2011-2012. The government of Pakistan has taken an interest in the education sector due to the fact that young people in Pakistan tend to have weaker reading

skills than their counterparts in other nations. How well a country takes care of its young people will determine how successful that country will be in the future. It is impossible to overestimate the significance of conducting exploratory research on the reading behaviors and interests of Pakistani students who live in metropolitan areas in this context. Even though the vast majority of students still favor paper books over electronic ones, Soroya and Ameen (2016) found that less students are reading books. This is despite the fact that the majority of students still prefer paper books. The vast majority of students still prefer reading from traditional books than electronic reading devices. Reading is a skill that can be improved greatly by encouraging children to pursue their interests. This implies that authors, publishers, parents, and schools can all work together to ensure that children have access to the highest-quality books and reading resources that are available.

Literature review

The development of students' critical thinking skills, as stated by Davies and Barnett (2015), has become an increasingly significant focus of both research and policy in the field of higher education. The value of teaching students the abilities that will help them succeed in their careers, as active members of their communities, and as lifelong learners has been the subject of a number of studies. They continued by talking about the three separate but interconnected ways of critical thinking that have been revealed by the studies. There is a great deal of common ground between these ideas, despite their frequent disagreements. It is possible that instructors of English for Academic Purposes might profit enormously from adopting Davies and Barnett's paradigm in order to make sense of all of this intricacy. The first is Skills' perspective on critical thinking, which contends that logical fallacies, contradictions, and the weight of supporting evidence may be identified and

evaluated by dissecting arguments and giving them significant consideration. Skills' position on critical thinking maintains that logical errors, contradictions, and the weight of supporting evidence can be identified and evaluated. This method is fantastic for locating weaknesses in a line of reasoning and determining the overall persuasiveness of an argument. The second way of thinking is referred to as the "criticality perspective," and its proponents are supporters of the criticality movement. This movement lays an emphasis on instructing students how to think critically. The critical pedagogy movement offers a third perspective on the topic of teaching critical thinking by highlighting the significance of making students aware of the power dynamics that are responsible for the formation of our social environment and the constraints that are placed on individual liberty. This piece of work is referenced by two different authors (Barjesteh and Vaseghi, 2012). The question of whether or not critical thinking skills can be taught has been brought to the forefront of the debate brought about by the adoption of these skills into the educational system. Teaching, assessing, and performing analyses on critical thinking capabilities can make use of a wide variety of different models and approaches. Problems that arise in terms of culture, emotions, and generalizability in relation to acquired abilities have all been taken into consideration by specialists. Critical reading, along with critical thinking, has been identified as a crucial talent for today's college grads to have as they enter the workforce (Brten & Braasch, 2017).

The primary purpose of education should be to cultivate critical thinking notwithstanding the wide range of opinions that exist regarding the methods that are most likely to be successful in accomplishing this aim. Reading comprehension can be defined in a variety of ways and operationalized in a few different ways. Reading is a social activity in which the reader

collaborates with the text to produce meaning by making use of a variety of mental processes. Reading takes place in a social setting. The reader must actively engage with the material in order to comprehend it; a passive reading method will not suffice. When someone reads a text, their previous knowledge acts as a foundation upon which a new understanding can be constructed. This new understanding is called "new understanding." According to Shihab (2011), the structure is created by linking new information from the text, such as sentences, to information that was previously obtained. They are able to represent any sort of experience or knowledge due to their flexibility, which enables them to store information in their memories and retrieve it with minimal effort whenever it is required. This allows them to represent any kind of experience or knowledge. Because of this, one can use schemas in order to make sense of the various pieces of information that they come across. Imaginative schemas foster critical reading and urge readers to actively interact with the text by symbolizing a wide range of reader experiences and knowledge. This encourages readers to actively engage with the text. A method for bridging the gap between the past and the present. In order to perform an in-depth analysis of a piece of writing, one needs to be able to weigh the facts, draw inferences, and come to conclusions.

In today's increasingly globalized society, the ability to communicate effectively in multiple languages is absolutely necessary. In order for students to be able to communicate effectively, they need to have a solid understanding of the English language across all four competencies. Reading comprehension is a vital skill, so these preparatory sessions place a significant emphasis on developing students' capacity in this area. Reading instruction and study for EAP students has mostly concentrated on developing students' reading comprehension skills. Even while

advanced reading abilities are essential for higher education, they nevertheless need to be taught as part of the curriculum (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). Comprehension skills can be operationalized as the ability to understand not just the literal meaning of a word or sentence, but also its inferred meaning, information across sentences, paragraphs, or the entire text, as well as the ability to synthesize information from a variety of sources. Applicants to colleges are expected to demonstrate a high level of reading comprehension ability. This requirement has been in place for some time. When readers read to learn from texts, generate information, compose, and analyse texts, they engage in more cognitively demanding activities. Zubaidah, Corebima, and Mahanal (2018) found that students' ability to engage in critical analysis improves the more frequently they read the text. Reading calls for more than just taking in information in a receptive manner; it also necessitates an active mental processing of the material that is read. Deciphering confusing sentences and providing an explanation for their meaning calls for the application of critical thinking. Critical thinking is defined as the process of inferring meaning from a piece of written material by Aloqaili (2011). According to the assertions that were made by a number of experts before, it would appear that reading and the development of one's capacity for critical thought go hand in hand with one another.

Academic success in higher education requires both an advanced degree of reading comprehension and reading fluency on the part of the student. Skills such as critical reading (Moore, 2017), comparing and contrasting concepts within a text or across texts and incorporating knowledge from texts into assignments (Weir et al., 2012) were revealed. Undergraduate students may find it challenging, for a variety of reasons, to fulfil the reading requirements of their universities. (St Clair-

Thompson et al., 2018) some of the most frequently encountered reading difficulties that have been reported by teachers as well as pupils. Reading course materials, reading strategically, reading journal articles, reading thoroughly and extensively, and identifying issues and arguments in texts are all important reading skills. Reading journal articles is another important reading skill. Undergraduate academics have observed that English as a Second Language (ESL) students view reading as a tool of memorization rather than an outlet for application, evaluation, and integration of knowledge. Participants in the study who were undergraduates reported having difficulties with both critical reading and academic text comprehension. Students who participated in the research conducted by Weir et al. (2012) described the challenges they had in completing their assignments due to time restrictions and the length of the required reading materials. The findings of these research demonstrate how difficult it is for pupils to complete reading tasks that require analytical thinking.

College students in Pakistan are reading fewer books than in previous years, which is cause for concern. Because the traditional academic model does not allow for it, teachers are unable to encourage their pupils to read or emphasize the significance of reading books that are not necessary for class. According to Dilshad, Adnan, and Akram (2013) and Shah and Saleem (2010), the fall in students' reading habits is driven by a number of concerns that are prevalent in society. The low rate of literacy, the absence of a reading culture, the lack of discretionary income, an inadequate education system, an inadequate library, an unattractive reading atmosphere, and an unenthusiastic staff are all factors that contribute to Pakistanis' and notably students' lackluster reading habits. A shift in the way that individuals think about and engage with reading can lead to an improvement in the

situation. Reading and doing schoolwork on mobile devices such as smartphones, tablets, and e-readers is becoming more and more common among today's college students. Paperback books published in the traditional format, on the other hand, are still widely used as an important educational and recreational resource. In the modern world of education and employment growth, it is essential for college students to maintain a strong relationship with literature and read a wide variety of texts. Students can take a mental health break from their classes, assignments, and note-taking by reading, which is an excellent method to relax and unwind at the same time. In the same vein, students who read on screens should be taught that these devices are merely supplemental tools and should not be seen as replacements for printed literature. Din, (2020) stated that students need to develop their critical thinking abilities in order for them to be successful in school (Zivkovic, 2016) This is necessary for students to be able to make meaningful contributions to society through effective communication, strong leadership, and teamwork, as well as an awareness of various cultures and countries. The development of students' abilities and skills in critical thinking is widely regarded as one of the most desirable outcomes of educational programming.

Methodology

This qualitative research was carried out at one of the educational institutions located in Karachi, Pakistan. Undergraduate students, most of whom were affiliated with the Department of Education, constituted the sample for this study. These individuals come from a variety of educational backgrounds and have chosen distinct fields of study. The undergraduate students from all four years were included in the sample for this inquiry, which had a total size of 46 participants. During the even semester of the school year 2022-2023, the sample was taken using a random sampling method.

Instrumentation

The reading comprehension exams that were used as the study instrument in this analysis were extremely distinct from one another in terms of the amount of difficulty, the level of complexity, and the types of questions that they asked. Reading Passage 1 featured some terminology that was difficult to understand and was somewhat lengthy, whereas Reading Passage 2 had vocabulary and phrases that were easier to understand and had questions with multiple choice answers at the end of the passage. Both of the reading passages were worth the same amount of point's total. The participants were given a choice between the two comprehensions and were instructed to solve whichever of the two comprehensions they felt most comfortable with first. This was done before the participants were asked questions regarding their reading understanding. The questionnaire was divided into two sections that were completely separate from one another. The first section of the test consisted of nine questions and addressed both demographic information and certain comprehension questions to which the participants had already provided their answers. The second portion of the survey consisted of a total of 29 questions that covered a variety of subjects. Some of these subjects included cognitive vocabulary, academic writing and learning abilities, the incorporation of technology into the classroom, and the development of skills for reading for pleasure. It was decided to perform an initial run-through of the reading comprehension passages as well as the questionnaire.

Discussion

According to the findings, out of a total of 46 participants, 39 of them selected Paragraph 1 to solve first because they judged the passage to be easier, more engaging, and equipped with multiple choice questions at the conclusion of the

reading. Forty out of the forty-six participants felt the need to consult either a dictionary or the internet in order to finish the task of finding the appropriate responses to the passages, particularly for the questions that were considered to be more difficult. Inadequate cognitive vocabulary, poor academic writing and learning skills, a lack of classroom technology integration, and a lack of skills in leisure reading were found to be detrimental to university students in this study. Additionally, the findings of this study demonstrate the critical relationship that exists between reading comprehension and critical thinking. In addition, the findings of this research point to the negative consequences that are caused by the aforementioned elements. Even while students have positive attitudes towards reading comprehension, the data demonstrate that there is a significant disparity between those attitudes and their levels of critical thinking and reading comprehension. This dichotomy is concerning because it suggests that students' reading comprehension and critical thinking skills are not on par. This void requires filling in some way. These findings underscore the requirement for educators to concentrate on developing students' critical thinking and comprehension skills, as well as utilizing technology and building a culture of reading for enjoyment in the classroom. In addition, these findings emphasize the significance of the role that educators play in fostering a culture in which people read for the sheer enjoyment of it. If these concerns aren't addressed, it's likely that students' academic performance will suffer, which would, in turn, hinder their ability to engage in critical thinking in both their personal and professional life. If this scenario plays out, no one wins.

Recommendations

It has been suggested that educators should encourage students to make reading a habit by urging them to hunt for opportunities to read in their day-to-day life. This would help students

develop reading as a habit. Getting students into the routine of reading on a consistent basis is the first step in improving their critical reading skills. Reading books can help students develop their cognitive vocabulary and critical thinking skills since books often feature better writing and more content than what is displayed on a computer. Students can improve their cognitive vocabulary and critical thinking skills by reading books. Students should be allowed to use screens when reading, and they should be taught that screens can be used as a tool, but that they should not be considered as a replacement for books. However, students should not be allowed to use screens while writing. The English course material ought to be brought up to date and modernized with the use of technology. Reading for pleasure is one of the best methods to increase vocabulary, attention span, and critical thinking skills, and it should be a priority for both teachers and parents. Reading helps build vocabulary, attention span, and critical thinking skills. It is necessary to offer students with higher-order thinking skills that they may use to any circumstance in order to boost their critical thinking abilities when reading and comprehension. These approaches should be applicable to a wide variety of contexts. It is important that pupils be able to quickly recall and implement the tactics that are being taught to them. Because they are the ideal place to encourage kids to read, libraries should always be kept current and filled with quality books. This is because they are the best place to inspire students to read. Changes in reading habits and mentalities are going to need to take place if traditional teaching methods employed by university instructors are going to be made more successful.

References

1. Ahmadi, D., & Reza, M. (2018). The use of technology in English language learning: A literature review. *International Journal of Research in English Education*, 3(2), 115-125.

2. Aloqaili, A. S. (2012). The relationship between reading comprehension and critical thinking: A theoretical study. *Journal of King Saud University-Languages and Translation*, 24(1), 35-41.
3. Awais, S., & Ameen, P. (2013). The reading preferences of primary school children in Lahore. *Pakistan Journal of Information Management and Libraries*, 14(1).
4. Barjesteh, H., & Vaseghi, R. (2012). Critical thinking: A reading strategy in developing English reading comprehension performance. *Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Translation Studies*, 1(2), 21-34.
5. Bråten, I., & Braasch, J. L. (2017). Key issues in research on students' critical reading and learning in the 21st century information society. Improving reading and reading engagement in the 21st century: International research and innovation, 77-98.
6. Clark, C., & Rumbold, K. (2006). Reading for Pleasure: A Research Overview. National Literacy Trust.
7. Davies, M., & Barnett, R. (Eds.). (2015). *The Palgrave handbook of critical thinking in higher education*. Springer.
8. Dilshad, M., Adnan, A., & Akram, A. (2013). Gender differences in reading habits of university students: An Evidence from Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 33(2), 311-320.
9. Din, M. (2020). Evaluating university students' critical thinking ability as reflected in their critical reading skill: A study at bachelor level in Pakistan. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 35, 100627.
10. Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. L. (2019). *Teaching and researching reading*. Routledge.
11. Karadeniz, A. (2015). An examination of critical reading self-efficacy perceptions among the students of the faculty of education over different variables.
12. Karakoç, A. I., Ruegg, R., & Gu, P. (2022). Beyond comprehension: Reading requirements in first-year undergraduate courses. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 55, 101071.
13. Li, C. S., & Wan, R. (2022). Critical reading in higher education: A systematic review. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 101028.
14. Limbach, B., Waugh, W., 2010. Developing higher level thinking. *Journal of Instructional Pedagogies* 3, 1-9, Retrieved July 21, 2010
15. Moore, T. J. (2017). On the teaching of critical thinking in English for academic purposes. Essential competencies for English-medium university teaching, 19-35.
16. Sehar, N., & Ghaffar, A. (2018). Reading habits among undergraduate students of NED university of engineering and technology, Karachi, Pakistan: a pilot study. *Library Philosophy & Practice*, 1-8.
17. Shah, S.M.H., and Saleem, S. (2010). Factors conducive for the purposeful use of libraries among university's students in Pakistan. *International Journal on New Trends in Education and Their Implications*, 1 (2), 46-57.

18. Sharma, A. K., & Singh, S. P. (2005). Reading habits of faculty members in natural sciences: a case study of university of Delhl.
19. Shihab, I. A. (2011). Reading as critical thinking. *Asian Social Science*, 7(8), 209.
20. Soroya, S. H., & Ameen, K. (2016). Reading trends of youth in Pakistan: A pilot study. *Pakistan Journal of Information Management and Libraries*, 17, 86-96.
21. St Clair-Thompson, H., Graham, A., & Marsham, S. (2018). Exploring the reading practices of undergraduate students. *Education Inquiry*, 9(3), 284-298.
22. Weir, C., Hawkey, R., Green, A., & Devi, S. (2012). The cognitive processes underlying the academic reading construct as measured by IELTS. *IELTS collected papers*, 2, 212-269.
23. Wilson, K. (2016). Critical reading, critical thinking: Delicate scaffolding in English for Academic Purposes (EAP). *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 22, 256-265.
24. ŽivkoviL, S. (2016). A model of critical thinking as an important attribute for success in the 21st century. *Procedia-social and behavioral sciences*, 232, 102-108.
25. Zubaidah, S., Corebima, A. D., & Mahanal, S. (2018). Revealing the Relationship between Reading Interest and Critical Thinking Skills through Remap GI and Remap Jigsaw. *International Journal of Instruction*, 11(2), 41-56.