

Students' Perceptions of their Engagement with Critical Reading Strategies

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Abstract:

The present study explores master 1 students' self-perceived application of critical reading strategies. It aims to investigate the extent to which students apply critical reading strategies, drawing on their personal academic experiences. Data were collected from 30 students using a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire, and were coded and analysed using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS, version 27). The analysis revealed that while students showed relevance on lower-order thinking strategies, such as understanding vocabulary or identifying main ideas, they faced challenges in employing higher order thinking strategies in reading such as analysis, synthesis, inference and evaluation. The findings suggested that their difficulties stemmed from a lack of awareness and explicit training in critical reading. In addition, the research also uncovered the strategies that were least frequently employed, providing insights into the areas that needed pedagogical reinforcement. The study emphasizes the need for implementing critical reading instruction into EFL curriculum and calls for teacher training programs to support the development of learners' critical reading abilities..

Keywords: *Critical reading; reading strategies; critical thinking; reading comprehension; cognitive strategies; metacognitive strategies*

1.Introduction

The proliferation of content in today's digital era, ranging from political rhetoric, social media networks, and digital platforms has exacerbated the challenge of dealing with information overload. Among the primary goals of education is teaching children to develop their creative and critical thinking to enable them to assess information and evidence instead of passively repeating the same information

received by their teachers or authors without calling it into question. Thus, the advancement of true democracy depends on individuals' ability to critically assess printed and visual media intelligently and rigorously. This consists of developing the ability to distinguish between factual information and distorted content that might reflect editorial agendas (Kay, 1946). Stauffer (1977) maintains that people

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should be involved in addressing societal and political issues to be good citizens; to achieve this; this requires them to be able to critically assess the received information. A skill that must and can be taught to students. (as cited in Mize, 1978). In this light, Ofliant, Cekiso, and Ratenbach (2020) consider critical reading as a tool to foster learners' ability to recognize the social hierarchies; discrimination, inequality, and injustice in texts and to apply that knowledge in real life situations.

While Naidoo, Samy, and Reddy (2012), highlight that the ability to read critically enables learners to respond to the demands of the economic, social, cultural, digital and political challenges in an era shaped by the rapidly globalizing world. It is first crucial to train students to engage their critical thinking and skills within academic contexts; this preparation allows learners to transfer these skills beyond the classroom and engage them thoughtfully in broader societal, professional and personal situations. This aligns with the assertion that cultivating these skills in academic settings allows learners to deal with intricate arguments, interpret data, and evaluate the credibility and reliability of sources (Mc Laughlin & Devoogd, 2004). Critical reading stems from critical theory, pioneered by Frankfurt school, which highlighted the role of social theory as a tool for societal critique, in contrast to traditional theory that primarily sought to understand and explain social phenomena (Woodak and Meyer, 2009). In this light, Freire and Macedo (1987) suggest a shift from the act of decoding texts to the act of "reading the world", or focus on meaning embedded within social, cultural, contexts. So instead

of accepting texts as they are, A critical approach considers reading as a critical socio-political framework that advocates for justice, equality, and emancipation (Cervetti, Pardales and Damicoas cited in Thomas, Bean, Folkes and Coleman, 2020). Saco (1987) identified two key factors that hinder critical thinking in students: first, a passive-based learning which prioritizes rote learning or memorization. Second, a cultural tendency to blindly accept authority stemming from religious beliefs and teachings.

In the Algerian educational context, the teaching of critical reading is largely overlooked. Students are rarely guided to engage in higher-order thinking processes, such as assessing the credibility and soundness of the information presented in the classroom. This pedagogical gap becomes particularly evident in higher education, where learners are expected to take positions on debated issues, or to adopt well informed decisions regarding different perspectives. Often, their reasoning is shaped more by intuition and reflects personal bias rather than critical assessment. Consequently, their standpoints tend to lack analytical depth, revealing a limited capacity to substantiate their views with rigorous and analytical analysis.

The present study aims to explore students' perceptions regarding their engagement with critical reading strategies in light of their reading experiences.

To identify the specific strategies that present difficulties for them based on their self – reported perceptions

2. Literature Review:

2.1. Conceptualizing Critical Reading: Skills, Habits, and Thought Processes (Critical Thinking):

Gainsburg (1961) points out that the term critical reading is misunderstood as it suggests negative judgment or finding fault in authors' arguments and intentions. In fact, the term is more associated with critical thinking. Gainsburg suggests three alternative terms including reflective, active, interpretive, and most notably creative reading that better captures the concept and wherein the reader acts as a co-author by contributing to the meaning of the text, visualizing, activating and using schemata, evaluating claims, thereby, extending the original meaning of the text. Karlin (1963, as cited in D'Angelo, 1971) argues that critical reading and critical thinking are inextricably related to each other. The act of reading generates ideas, prompting multiple reactions to the text; these responses form the foundation of critical thinking. This suggests that thinking in general is critical in nature in the sense that critical thinking involves analysing and evaluating and this emerges through the critical engagement of the reader with the text, which means that the process of critical reading is a form of critical thinking. However, according to Russell critical reading involves not only the application of critical thinking but also other distinct cognitive processes, he argues that there are different forms of thinking that contribute to reading including associative thinking, creative thinking, critical thinking, perceptual thinking and problem-solving skills (1965).

Lewis (1991) recommends to view critical reading as a two-dimensional critical

thinking operation. Following Ennis's (1985) critical thinking's definitions, the first stage of critical reading would involve making decisions about what to believe regarding a texts' meaning in a reasonable and reflective manner. The second stage would entail the evaluation of a text's ideas to decide what to accept and how to respond. Mc Laughlin and De Voogd (2004) contend that critical reading, as a key component of critical literacy entails responding to the text through questioning, analysing the underlying concepts and terminology, determining the structural elements of the author's argument, assessing the evidence and credibility of the information and situating one's stance in relation to the text .

Pauk (1965) highlights that effective reading requires both interpretive and evaluative skills. These include identifying bias, recognizing underlying assumptions, inferences and emotional language, distinguishing fact from opinion, analysing logical structures such as deduction, induction. In addition to this, readers must be alert to fallacies, inconsistencies, and verify the validity and reliability of data .

According to Bobkina and Stefanova (2016) " critical reading is mainly an act of interpretation, and adopting different methods of analysis can lead to different conclusions" (p.681) Therefore, critical reading requires the reader to analyse and interpret the text, rather than passively reading it at face value, or without considering the author's intent, or reflecting on the context that shaped it (historical and cultural setting of the text), and understanding the underlying messages it carries. In the same vein, Juel and Graves

(1998) maintain that critical reading involves interpreting the written language, constructing meaning of the text, understanding the author's intent, recognizing the text's theme, and utilizing language to achieve particular rhetorical and stylistic effects. (as cited in Olifant, Cekiso, & Rautenbach, 2020).

Flynn (1989) explains that in analysis, students are supposed to break down information into its relevant parts, then examining them. Synthesis, on the other hand, entails integrating relevant elements into a coherent whole, while evaluation requires establishing criteria to judge the soundness and validity of ideas by assessing them against these standards. Along similar lines, Crossen (1948) identifies the following skills for critical reading : " (1) Gaining a clear and correct grasp of the sense meaning of the selection read, (2) Gaining an accurate perception of relationships, both expressed and implied, in the selection read, (3) Evaluating precisely the content as to its validity, comprehensiveness, accuracy, and usefulness to the reader's purpose, and (4) Drawing correct conclusions, and making valid inferences about what is read". (p.289). Harris and hodes (1981) illustrate: (1) the process of making judgments in reading: evaluating relevancy and adequacy of what is read...; (2) an act of reading in which a questioning attitude, logical analysis, and inference are used to judge the worth of what is read according to an established standard.... Among the identified skills of critical reading involved in making judgments are those having to do with the author's intent or purpose; with the accuracy, logic, reliability and authenticity

of writing; and with the literary forms, components, and devices identified through literary analysis (p. 74).

To tackle the issue of the varying definitions put forward by different scholars, Pauk (1965) attempts to provide a specific definition of critical reading in a concrete manner, he suggests that the key to address this issue is to relate the definition to the specific task it is intended to fulfil, particularly in relation to the type of material being critically examined. For example, the critical reading of factual content as found in history books requires a different approach compared to that used for argumentative texts or creative works like prose, poetry, and drama. Juel and Graves (1998) allude to the fact that comprehension (that is, critical reading of text) involves the ability to interpret the written word, the ability to conceptualize meaning from the text, the ability to understand the intention of the author, being aware of the theme of the text, and the ability to use language to create special effects (as cited in Olifant, Cekiso, & Rautenbach, 2020). Kirsznner & Mandell (2016) point out that as a critical reader, you do not accept the information you read passively. Instead, you verify the accuracy of facts of your sources, check whether arguments are sufficiently supported by solid evidence. You assess the appropriateness and reliability of a writer's sources, evaluate the extent to which the evidence is relevant to the topic, and carefully weigh up counterarguments against those in your sources. Finally, you make sure you stay alert to potential biases in your sources and try to avoid being swayed or influenced by your own biases .

Pressly and Afflerbach (1995) note that proficient readers tend to read texts with a clear awareness of their reading objectives and the application of strategies to anticipate and monitor their comprehension. On the other hand, it was observed that unskilled readers' self-monitoring of their memory, comprehension and cognitive processes was very limited (Markman, as cited in Flavell, 1979). Such awareness and monitoring processes are often referred to in literature as metacognition, which can be thought of as the knowledge of the reader's cognition about reading and the self-control mechanisms they exercise when monitoring and regulating text comprehension (Mokhtari and Reichard 2002). According to Seyler (1984) to be a good critical thinker, a student must recognize how writers manipulate language, engaging in textual analysis allows learners to increase their awareness of how language functions. Similarly, Saco (1987) emphasizes that in order to guard against the influence of propaganda, emotional appeals and fallacious reasoning; students have to be aware of how writers use language to influence their audience. Furthermore, Paul and Elder (2008) assert that the lack of the metacognitive awareness impedes learners' ability to interrogate assumptions, evaluate arguments and recognize errors in reasoning. When this deficiency is linked to minimal exposure to critical thinking instruction, students are more prone to accepting unsound arguments and failing to judge the credibility and accuracy of written content. Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) confirm that skilled readers are good

comprehends, who are distinguished from unskilled readers by their ability of using their prior knowledge to understand texts, their vocabulary and their ability to make inferences, and by their use of strategies in adjusting and monitoring their comprehension. Di Yanni (2017) claims that one of the goals of critical reading is achieving good understanding through text analysis, their comprehension is reflected through careful paraphrasing and summarizing. These tasks should be undertaken before engaging in any form of critical inquiry. Collins (1993) describes the critical reader as the one who demonstrates active involvement with texts throughout all the stages of the reading processes by questioning, evaluating to make well-informed decisions. Norris (1985) further asserts that to be a critical reader, a student must have the ability "to make reliable observations, produce sound inferences, and form reasonable hypotheses" (p.40). D'Angelo (1971) argues that Critical reading is not limited to developing particular skills, but adopting a critical attitude is important in reading. Since our attitudes influence our critical thinking ability. For instance, any bias or prejudice can impair the reader's ability to evaluate their readings with accuracy and fairness. Young learners do not possess a questioning attitude, but this can be nurtured by teachers and schools, both background knowledge and experience are the foundation of critical thinking and without such grounding – neither children nor adults can be expected to think critically. (Russell, 1963). Dewy (1933) explains that critical attitudes involve a willingness to listen to different viewpoints regardless of their origins by

giving full attention to facts and a readiness to admit that even our own convictions might be wrong.

In simpler terms, attitudes refer to the dispositions of the readers to react positively to any topic, group, organization, belief or behavior, and this reaction is expressed through spoken statements or actions (Crossen, 1948). Russell outlined three important dispositions that are fundamental to critical reading, an openness to accept new evidence that does not agree with the readers' prior beliefs, a readiness to reject hypotheses that have been proven wrong or inadequate and which were believed to be correct before, and a willingness to adjust new views based on factual realities, which contrast with the uncritical conformity to dominant societal trends that may be morally harmful. (Hare, 2001) .

2.2. Developing Learners' Critical Reading Ability:

Integrating critical thinking into subject – specific learning across the school curriculum through reading is one approach for developing critical thinking. The concept of critical reading refers to the application of critical thinking strategies to reading (D'Angelo 1971). Huey (1908) cautioned against the teaching of reading as "an end in itself" (p.300), and emphasized that reading can be taught as a tool "for putting the child into a vital relation to the materials to be read" (p.305), similarly, Paul (1985) claims that critical reading is mistakenly seen as the final product of a sequenced and separate skills , rather than viewing it as a dynamic process that engages the simultaneous use of these skills. Flynn (1989) explains that

the higher order thinking skills including analysis, synthesis, and evaluation do not appear automatically by simply following a structured sequence of skills, but instead, they are ongoing phases of the learning process.

Interpreting the author's intended message and responding analytically to textual signals with an open and reflective mindset can be challenging for inexperienced reader. Therefore, teachers' role is essential in developing students 'critical engagement with texts. (Bean, Folkes, Browne and Mc Ginn Luet, 2020). Several scholars have recommended strategies for enhancing critical reading skills. Suacillo et al. (2016) have observed a moderate positive correlation among critical reading strategies and reading comprehension, analytical writing performance and critical reading strategies, reading comprehension and writing performance. Similarly, Orlifant, Cekiso, and Rantenbach (2020) point out that critical reading is a form of comprehension through which readers can uncover their implicit personal and social implications within a text, without being overtly stated in the text .

According to Hoffman (1992), both critical thinking and reading can be developed through teaching, contributing to students' academic achievement. As noted by Roman, Sharma, and Collins (2013), enhancing reading proficiency is contingent upon the consistent and ongoing application of reading strategies. Saco (1987) proposed the following instruction principles to help promote students' critical thinking skills :

No printed verbal message is immune from the critical eye or ear.

No author or speaker, regardless of reputation, is exempt from scrutiny.

No institution (government, church, school, family) or authority is infallible. Reputation and experience are inadequate replacements for logical and supported evidence

No opinion can become a fact solely because of confident or loud tone of voice.

Independent judgment (supported by evidence) takes precedence over the voice of authority (p.59)

Barnes (1979) introduces the questioning classification system, a system designed to support students in building both critical reading and critical thinking which categorizes questions into four groups: those targeting memory and recall (cognitive memory), those requiring explanations and problem-solving (convergent questions), divergent questions for predicting, inferring, and hypothesizing, evaluative questions that involve defending positions and making judgment. Paul (1990) recommends the use of a set of classifying strategies aiming at improving learners' critical reading, these strategies engage learners in analytical, synthetic, and evaluative thinking, enabling them to organize their reading by identifying instances of problem solving and link ideas to historical contexts. These strategies, therefore, provide a structured approach that supports organized and clear thinking, reading and writing.

To support the teaching of critical thinking in reading, Thompson and Frager (1984) propose a framework for teachers to develop their own lessons, the model is built around five guidelines: capturing students'

interests, encouraging active and collaborative participation from all learners, activating learners' prior knowledge and experiences, supporting the transfer of skills, and extending instruction beyond the conventional 50 minute- lesson. Thistlethwaite (1990) offers a series of critical reading activities to help at-risk students improve their critical reading and thinking abilities using diverse texts, including news stories, editorials, advertisements, textbooks and novels. Similarly, Brueggeman (1986) advocates for the use of college newspaper editorials to stimulate students' critical thinking and writing, she contends that these editorials serve as relevant and effective tools for critical reading instruction, as they frequently address topics of great interest to students.

While the preceding perspectives on critical reading development focus mainly on the importance of equipping learners with the necessary critical reading strategies, Olifant (2024) argues that both learners' awareness of these strategies and teachers' explicit instruction are essential. Therefore to enhance CRS, teachers should provide guidance on when, why, and how different strategies can be applied effectively in English classrooms. Similarly Klapwijk (2015) indicates that the challenges learners face in understanding texts are partly attributed to ineffective reading instruction.

3.Methodology:

The present study was designed to explore students' perceptions of their engagement with critical reading strategies and to identify the strategies they struggle with the most, drawing on their perceptions of

how frequently they engage in particular tasks during reading. Given that the research aimed to gather learners' self-reported perspectives, an exploratory descriptive design was adopted. This design was selected because it enables the examination of perceptions.

The study took place in a higher education context, more specifically at the university of Setif2; department of English, and included a group of students enrolled in an English program. Due to limited access and attendance, a purposive convenience sampling technique was utilized, and 30 participants were selected. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire, aimed at investigating students' perceptions of their use of critical reading strategies in relation to their reading experiences.

This section presents the methodological framework of the study, it starts with a description of the participants and sampling techniques, followed by an explanation of the data collection instrument, and data collection procedures and concludes with the discussion of the data analysis of the results.

3.1. Research Approach and Design:

The study employed a quantitative approach of analysis. Maree (2007) describes quantitative research as a process that utilizes numerical data collected from a representative sample in an objective and systematic way with the goal of allowing researchers to generalize the conclusion to the broader population being examined. Leedy (1993) emphasizes that quantitative research involves data that are predominantly numerical in nature. This

study seeks to explore students' perceptions towards the application of their critical reading strategies during reading, to pinpoint which strategies are most frequently employed and which are rarely practiced. Thus, deriving a clearer understanding of their overall proficiency in critical reading.

3.2. Participants and Sampling Technique:

A total of 30 master 1 students were purposively selected from the department of English, Setif2 University. According to Foley (2018), purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which researchers purposively select participants who meet specific criteria relevant to the aims of the study. In other words, the researchers intentionally target a specific group because they think that they can best contribute to the aims of the study. In this study, the selected students were considered to be capable of providing relevant data regarding their perceptions of critical reading as well as the actual reading habits. The sample consisted of both male and female, aged between 20 and 22 years old.

This study also employed convenience sampling due to the restricted accessibility of students during the data collection process. Owing to the sparse lecture attendance and limited number of students available, the researcher selected participants from those who were both available and willing to participate. According to Bhattacharjee (2012) convenience sampling, also referred to as accidental or opportunity sampling, is a technique in which participants are selected

from that part of population that is easily accessible, readily available, or simply convenient. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) add that this technique of sampling often relies on readily available respondents, such as students or teachers, and researchers select participants who are most easily accessible. However, this sample is not intended to produce generalizable results because it represents only itself.

3.3. Data Collection and Instrumentation

Data collection was carried out through the administration of a survey questionnaire which was developed by the researcher based on a thorough review of existing literature concerning the fundamental elements of critical reading.

The questionnaire was designed to answer the following questions:

1-What are students' perceptions of their use of critical reading strategies in light of their reading experiences.

2-According to their self-reported perceptions, which critical reading strategies do students identify as most challenging to apply.

It comprised two sections. Section A gathered demographic information about the learners, whereas section B consisted of 38 items designed to address students' critical reading practices. This instrument was employed to obtain data regarding learners' self-perceptions of their ability to use critical reading strategies. To obtain clearer understanding of their critical reading practices, closed ended items addressing each critical reading strategy were administered, each measured on a five-point Likert scale (1) never (2) seldom

(3) sometimes (4) often (5) always. The questionnaire was administered to a total of 30 students. In total the questionnaire consisted of 38 items grouped into categories representing major critical reading strategies including: language analysis, argument analysis, inference and synthesis, contextualization and evaluation. Furthermore, a category on "annotation and comprehension" was included. Although they are not regarded as critical reading strategies, but they were added to the survey to ensure whether students could initially grasp the meaning of texts, this was important because if their responses regarding their use of critical reading strategies reveal limited mastery of such strategies, evidence of difficulties in basic comprehension would explain their inability to apply critical reading strategies.

3.4..Data Analysis:

In order to address the research objectives, data analysis was performed using SPSS 27. The overall mean, rank, and standard deviations were calculated for the learners' self-reported perceptions of critical reading from the survey questionnaire. To ensure the reliability of the instrument, internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha; a coefficient of 0.980 was obtained, indicating excellent reliability. Consequently, the questionnaire's items consistently measured the intended constructs.

3.5..Results:

The data for this study were collected through a questionnaire, divided into 6 strategies as shown in the tables (reading comprehension, language analysis, argument analysis, inference and synthesis,

contextualization, evaluation), consisting of 38 items in total. The responses were analysed using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS, version 27). The analysis involved descriptive statistics, including mean scores, standard deviation, frequencies, and ranking, in order to determine which strategies were commonly practiced and which were less frequently employed by students.

The findings as reported by the questionnaire are presented in the following section:

3.5.1. Reading Comprehension strategies

A preliminary examination of students' reading comprehension was necessary prior to delving into critical reading strategies. To ensure that difficulties in applying critical reading strategies were not stemmed from issues with understanding the text, since reading comprehension forms the foundation of all other strategies.

Table 1

Reading Comprehension Strategies

N	Item	Mean	STD. Deviation	R Level	Rank
Q 1	I make notes on the important elements of the writer's arguments or propositions such as the topic, author's thesis and main points.	4,47	0,900	Always	1
Q 2	I summarize what I have read to ensure I have understood properly	3,87	1,106	Often	2
Q 3	I put material I have read or seen into my own words to help me understand it.	3,77	1,073	Often	3
Q 4	I discover meaning of unfamiliar words through text organization, context and author's tone.	3,27	1,081	Sometimes	6
Q 5	I identify the author's purpose or motif in writing his material.	3,43	1,040	Often	4
Q 6	I identify the nature of audience for whom an author's writing is intended	3,43	1,040	Often	4
Total		3,71		Often	

Source: The Researchers' Own Data

As shown in table1, participants 'responses regarding their use of comprehension strategies indicated a generally favourable perception of their engagement with basic reading comprehension. The strategy that received the highest mean score was" note taking on the key points of the writer's argument", suggesting annotation as a commonly and frequently used strategy by students. Furthermore, summarizing (M=3.87) and paraphrasing (M=3.77) emerged as commonly employed strategies, indicating learners' ability in processing and rephrasing textual materials for better comprehension. Conversely, strategies that demand more inferential thinking, such as using context clues to deal with the meaning of unknown words, were employed less consistently with a mean of 3.27.

Although students occasionally identified the author's purpose, the intended audience (both averaging 3.43), but were less frequently employed compared to direct comprehension strategies. Overall, the findings suggested that learners showed more reliance on basic comprehension strategies, with limited engagement with more complex strategies. Thus, this emphasizes the need for instructional methods to enhance students' inferential competencies in reading.

3.5.2..LanguageAnalysis:

The second component of critical reading is analysis, which includes five items that focus on the ability to deconstruct the text into smaller units to gain better understanding of its structure and underlying ideas.

Table 2

<i>Language Analysis</i>						
N	Item	Mean	STD. Deviation	R Level	Rank	
Q 7	I break down material so that I can see how ideas are ordered and arranged as a whole.	4,63	0,718	Always	1	
Q 8	I distinguish between facts, opinions and inferences in a text	2,87	0,973	Sometimes	3	
Q 9	I examine if important words (key words) are satisfactorily defined	2,17	1,206	Seldom	4	
Q 10	I determine the author's underlying attitudes about the issue or topic from his or her choice of words	3,00	1,174	Sometimes	2	

	(connotative meaning) and writing style.				
Q 11	I detect deceptive and manipulative uses of language such as: euphemism, false appeals, fallacies, loaded language	1,97	0,999	Seldom	5
Total		2,93		Sometimes	

Source: The Researchers' Own Data

The data from table2 reflecting students' perceptions of their capacity in language analysis revealed considerable difference in the use of strategies. the top ranked item in this category was the ability break down information into parts to understand how ideas are structured, with an average rating of 4,63 and a standard deviation of 0.718. in contrast, their ability to distinguish between facts, opinions, and inferences was rated lower, as reflected by a mean of 2.87, implying that learners only occasionally employed it. The strategy of examining whether key words are clearly defined, appeared to be rarely practiced with a mean rating of 2.17, reflecting minimal focus on lexical clarity and precision. Likewise, the strategy of determining the author's implicit attitudes through language and tone was moderately employed with an average

score of 3.00 and a standard deviation of 1.174. Meanwhile, spotting manipulative or deceptive techniques were among the least reported, with a mean value of 1.97 and a standard deviation of 0.999. Although students displayed strength in recognizing patterns of text organization, but they were less adept and less engaged with linguistic features such as; tone, biases, rhetorical persuasion. This discrepancy necessitates instructional strategies to enhance linguistic awareness and foster their interpretive capacities.

3.5.3..Argument Analysis:

The third key aspect of critical reading is argument analysis, which consists of 8 items that emphasize analysing the logic, and evidence, writers' credibility and uncovering weaknesses or fallacies in the arguments.

Table 3

<i>Argument Analysis</i>					
N	Item	Mean	STD. Deviation	R Level	Rank
Q 12	I identify the types of support for argument (evidence) offered on behalf of the claim (fact, reasons,	2,97	1,159	Sometimes	2

	testimony, counterarguments, analogy ...).				
Q 13	I play devil's advocate in order to improve my grasp of an argument or proposition.	2,03	1,245	Seldom	6
Q 14	I establish the assumptions that an argument rests upon	2,40	1,102	Seldom	3
Q 15	I check whether counterarguments are adequately considered and addressed	1,83	0,950	Seldom	7
Q 16	I distinguish between inductive and deductive arguments	3,10	1,494	Sometimes	1
Q 17	I analyze propositions to see if they follow logical reasoning	2,40	1,037	Seldom	3
Q 18	I identify the types of appeals used in arguments such as appeals to fear, sympathy, pity and flattery	2,20	0,887	Seldom	5
Q 19	I recognize common logical fallacies used as deceptive techniques to persuade readers such as hasty generalization, ad hominem, straw man, red herring, bandwagon	1,77	0,898	Never	8
Total		2,34		Seldom	

Source: The Researchers' Own Data

The results in table3 concerning students' self- perceived ability to analyse arguments demonstrated an overall deficiency in the use of higher order thinking strategies. The most frequently applied strategy was identifying the types of evidence which fell within the "sometimes" category, indicating a moderate familiarity with argument structure. The task of distinguishing

between deductive and inductive arguments received a mean score of 3.10 (STD= 1.494), the wide spread of scores suggested a notable variability in responses. Most of the other strategies in this section were rated considerably lower. "Playing devil's advocate" had an average rating of 2.03. Likewise, "identifying assumptions and analysing logical consistency" both averaged 2.40 (STD= 1.102 and 1.037

respectively), this indicated poor engagement with evaluative and reflective thinking.

The data revealed an alarming weakness in students' use of critical argumentation strategies, checking for counterarguments was rated at a mean of 1.83, identifying appeals scored slightly higher with a mean of 2.20, while recognizing logical fallacies scored the lowest of all items with a mean of 1.77. These results showed that while students might grasp basic aspects of argument analysis, their capacity for deeper analytical and evaluative strategies remained weak, these findings call for more explicit instruction to address the

identification of fallacies, assumptions, and analysing persuasive techniques to improve their critical reading competence.

3.5.4..Inference and Synthesis:

As part of the analysis process, inference and synthesis involve drawing logical conclusions and the integration of information from diverse sources or sections of a text. The purpose of exploring students' use of this strategy was to assess their awareness of the significance of connecting information from multiple sources to form a broader understanding of the author's intentions.

Table 4

<i>Inference and Synthesis</i>						
N	Item	Mean	STD. Deviation	R Level	Rank	
Q 20	I make relevant inferences about ideas that are not explicitly stated in the text	3,77	1,135	Often	2	
Q 21	I make an inference about the writer's political and social position, level of education, worldview from the sort of language that he or she uses.	1,87	0,973	Seldom	6	
Q 22	I search for differences and similarities between different viewpoints.	2,37	1,245	Seldom	3	
Q 23	I compare the information given in the text (present reading) with other sources (previous reading).	2,27	1,015	Seldom	5	
Q 24	I compare my own schemata (prior knowledge) with what the text says.	3,93	0,944	Often	1	

Q 25	I question my own assumptions and compare them with the writer's assumptions.	2,37	1,299	Seldom	3
Total		2,76		Sometimes	

Source: The Researchers' Own Data

As indicated in table 4, the findings for inference and synthesis reflected variation in students' reported use of higher order reading strategies. comparing prior knowledge with the text's content emerged as the item receiving the highest rating ($M=3,93$ / $std=0,944$), this reflected students' habitual use of personal schemata, their familiarity with this strategy might be attributed to prior exposure to schema activation techniques in earlier school years and at university as well. Responses indicated that making relevant inference from implicit ideas in the text achieved a mean value of 3,77 with a std of 1,135, suggesting some competence in interpreting meaning beyond the surface level and competence in deductive tasks. However, other strategies in the same category scored lower. For instance, inferring the writer's political or social stance from their language choice ($M=1,87$ / $STD=0,973$) was reported as rarely utilized, which might reflect students' limited exposure to politically oriented texts. Likewise, strategies such as comparing differing perspectives ($M=2,37$),

cross checking information with the sources ($M=2,27$), and questioning or contrasting one's own assumptions with the writer's position ($M=2,37$) were also rarely employed. Such low engagement can be attributed to students' lack of awareness of the necessity of validating information by verifying it against other sources. And their mistaken belief that authors' viewpoints should not be challenged and scrutinized. The average score for these items ($M=2,76$) fell into the "sometimes" category, which denoted a moderate engagement with inference and synthesis strategies. The data suggested that although students readily used their prior knowledge and simple inferring strategies, but engaged far less with complex and higher order strategies such as comparative and analytical thinking.

3.5.5..Contextualization:

The next crucial component in critical reading is contextualization which plays a significant role in helping students expand their understanding and develop solid criteria for evaluation, by placing a text within its wider historical, cultural, or disciplinary contexts.

Table5

<i>Contextualization</i>						
N	Item	Mean	STD. Deviation	R Level	Rank	
Q 26	I explore how social, economic, political or cultural conditions influence the author's perspectives on the issue in a significant way.	3,77	1,085	Seldom	2	
Q 27	I situate the material or issue under dispute within the relevant context through research in historical, cultural, or philosophical fields.	1,87	0,983	Seldom	5	
Q 28	I try to explore how the writer's analysis of the issue fits into a larger discussion about the topic (how does it contribute to how other writers should go about analyzing the issue).	2,37	0,964	Sometimes	3	
Q 29	I look for the circumstances under which the author wrote his text.	2,27	0,932	Sometimes	4	
Q 30	I recognize how contexts shape meaning, use and distribution of texts.	3,93	1,003	Often	1	
Total		2,37		Seldom		

Source: The Researchers' Own Data

The data from table 5 indicated that students demonstrated differing degrees of involvement in contextualization strategies. the highest recorded average (M= 3,93/ STD= 1, 003) demonstrated that they regularly recognized how the context

shaped meaning, purpose, indicating an awareness of its interpretive role. Similarly, the results revealed that students sometimes investigated the influence of social, economic, political or cultural settings on authors' positions (M= 3,77/ STD= 1, 085). However, when it comes to more advanced contextualization

strategies, students' engagement was limited and infrequent. For instance, placing the text within its historical, cultural or philosophical settings through research scored a mean of 1,87, while determining the conditions under which a piece of writing was produced rated at 2,27. Such results reflected both a lack of historical and political knowledge and lack of awareness about the importance of investigating the circumstances surrounding a work and the role they played in uncovering how an author's perspective was shaped. Attempts to relate a writer's analysis to broader academic discussions were rare ($M= 2,37/$

$STD= 0,964$). In general, students appeared to have moderate understanding of the role of context, yet they engaged less with contextualization strategies requiring the exploration of historical, cultural, or political background information to interpret the author's perspective.

3.5.6..Evaluation:

The final strategy is evaluation which encompasses 8 items. The purpose of investigating the use of this strategy is to determine whether students use the established evaluation criteria.

Table 6

Evaluation

N	Item	Mean	STD. Deviation	R Level	Rank
31	I use a set of criteria against which to evaluate the strength of the argument or proposition.	2,30	1,022	Seldom	7
32	I evaluate the credibility of my own assumptions when reading a text.	1,83	0,874	Seldom	8
33	I double-check facts for accuracy	3,83	0,913	Often	1
34	I weigh up the reliability of writers' opinions.	3,03	1,159	Sometimes	4
35	I determine the trustworthiness of sources in a text.	3,80	1,126	Often	2
36	When I evaluate a writer's claims, I set aside emotive language to avoid being swayed by bias or opinionated statements.	2,63	1,189	Sometimes	6

Students' Perceptions of their Engagement with Critical Reading Strategies

37	I reach my own conclusions rather than let myself be swayed by the opinions of others or even mine.	3,10	0,995	Sometimes	3
38	I state my reasons for accepting or rejecting arguments and propositions	2,70	1,149	Sometimes	5
Total		2,90		Sometimes	
The Tool as Whole		2,85		Sometimes	

Source: The Researchers' Own Data

As illustrated in table6, students' perceptions of their use of evaluation strategies in critical reading reflected a combination of strong and weak areas. Frequent use was noted for verifying factual accuracy (mean score of 3, 83 / STD of 0,913), and assessing the trustworthiness of sources (M= 3,80/ STD = 1,126).

Their ability in such areas stemmed from earlier exposure in related skills. Students' responses indicated that they occasionally assessed the reliability of writers' opinions (M= 3,03/ STD= 1,159), and forming their own conclusions, suggesting an average level of autonomy in critical assessment. However, students appeared less inclined toward the application of a set of criteria to judge the strength of arguments (M= 2.30/ STD= 1.022), and fewer questioned the credibility of their own assumptions (mean score 1.83/ STD= 0.874). Students' limited ability to judge authors' claims using standard criteria might be attributed to lack of explicit instruction about these criteria, inadequate exposure to critical reading activities, and lack of knowledge on the topic being discussed.

Abilities such as stating reasons for accepting or refusing claims (M= 2.70/ STD= 1.149), and deliberately setting aside emotive language to minimize bias (M= 2.63/ STD = 1.189) were reported as being occasionally practiced. The findings could point to a gap in students' metacognitive and cognitive understanding of how these strategies enable the development of sound, objective and unbiased evaluation in reading.

3.6..Discussion:

The findings revealed that while students exhibited proficiency in strategies linked to basic reading comprehension., they showed limited use of critical reading strategies, including argument and language analysis, synthesis, contextualization, and evaluation. Only a minority of students reported occasional use of these strategies, indicating a broader lack of background knowledge necessary to approach texts with a critical eye due to insufficient classroom instruction. One factor contributing to the lack of emphasis on teaching critical reading in educational settings results from the widespread belief among educators that such abilities will naturally emerge and evolve, as children

mature and gain more experience in different areas of knowledge through academic reading. (Taglieber, 2003)

Moreover, the results indicated that nearly all students rarely interrogated either the assumptions found in the text or their own assumptions, they seldom compared their own viewpoints with those of the author, and showed little interest in examining or considering opposing arguments. This behavior suggests a limited openness to alternative viewpoints and that learners are passive, who either accept or reject information based on intuitive evidence. Not questioning their own assumptions reflects a degree of "egocentrism". In this regard, Paul and Elder (2020) posit that individuals tend to rely on self-centred psychological standards to decide what ideas to accept or refuse. He argues that this tendency is part of human nature and human beings are generally unaware of the needs and rights of others due to egocentrism thinking which leads them to prioritize their intuitive perceptions over others. A disposition that requires deliberate training to raise their awareness of their egocentrism tendencies. Russell (1963) stresses that attitudes are not innate but should be developed in schools through learning, and among the various components of critical thinking, fostering a questioning attitude should a primary focus in schools. A disposition that seeks evidence before drawing conclusions and teachers are responsible for the development of this attitude in their learners, as it does not emerge naturally.

Another key observation was that most students struggled to recognize manipulative devices in texts such as;

fallacies, propaganda, emotional appeals commonly used by writers to influence readers. This inability is attributed to the absence of explicit instruction on these techniques, which leaves students susceptible to accepting distorted information without their conscious awareness. According to D'Angelo biases and prejudices influence the reader's ability to evaluate and judge information accurately. (1971). So, it is quite essential to develop an understanding of standard techniques employed by propagandists, whose main goal is to advance their own interests rather than to genuinely inform in order to serve the needs of their audience (Pauk, 2010).

3.7.Recommendations:

In light of the study' findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance learners' critical reading ability and to inform future practice and policy:

The teaching of critical reading should begin at an early stage. For instance, implementing such instruction at the primary level enables young learners to distinguish between factual statements and opinions and recognize that not all printed content is necessarily true. The use of story-based instruction at this level can effectively help learners to reflect on characters' actions, thereby introducing them to the process of evaluation.

It is recommended to integrate a critical reading program into the foreign language curriculum to enhance learners' autonomy and support the development of higher-order thinking skills including: decision-making and problem solving.

Teachers need training to develop their inquiring attitude to enable learners to

engage deeply with texts, to promote critical discussion among learners, and to guide learners in defending their own interpretations of texts.

Learners should be regularly exposed to a wide range of persuasive and argumentative texts that necessitate the activation of their critical reading strategies to stimulate active and intellectual engagement with texts.

Explicit instruction on both cognitive and metacognitive strategies is essential to enhance learners' awareness of the strategies involved in critical reading for more reflective reading practices, and prior to engaging them in critical reading activities.

The teaching of critical reading strategies should not be limited to reading courses, instead critical reading should also be employed across other disciplines such as history, literature, the teaching of English as a foreign language, dissertation writing. This grants them the opportunity to immerse in a wide spectrum of literary texts such as newspaper articles, historical documents, and academic texts. Such an interdisciplinary strategy promotes the application of CRS across learning contexts, by creating a learning environment that supports open exchange of ideas through debates, structured discussions and cooperative tasks. These activities promote attitudes of open mindedness, perspective taking, intellectual humility, intellectual integrity, intellectual empathy and perseverance. Attitudes essential for critical thinkers.

4. Conclusion:

This study seeks to explore students' application of CRS during reading tasks, drawing on their academic experience. A structured survey using a Likert- scale offering five response options was employed to gather data. Subsequently, analysis of their responses also prompted the identification of a second complementary objective; uncovering the critical reading strategies that posed the greatest difficulties for learners as reflected in their survey responses. The results of this research revealed that a considerable proportion of university students exhibited limited ability to apply CRS thereby, restricting their capacity to comprehend and evaluate texts critically. This deficiency impacts significantly their intellectual development particularly their capacity for making informed decisions and solving problems. At the university level, such a gap is particularly alarming, because at this stage, students are expected to demonstrate a critical approach to their reading, yet many remain dependent on basic reading comprehension strategies. The evidence suggests that this issue results from insufficient instruction on critical reading. Teachers often rely on traditional learning that does not encourage learners to go beyond the level of comprehension, neglecting deeper cognitive involvement. The study was limited by its small sample size involving 30 students in higher education, further studies should include broader and varied samples including both teachers and students to gain a fuller picture of the issue, shedding light on instructional and pedagogical constraints. Additionally, teacher training programs are recommended to equip educators with the

tools needed to foster critical literacy in their learners.

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