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Amar Thelidji University, Laghouat
Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of English



Enhancing Critical Thinking Skills through Close Reading

**Case Study: Third Year EFL Students at the University of
Laghouat**

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By:

GACEM Ferial

Board of Examiners:

- Mrs. NOUIOUA Amira Hiba, University of Laghouat, Chairman
- Dr. NAOUMI Mohammed, University of Laghouat, Supervisor
- Mr. KOURDOULI Abd El Kader, University of Laghouat, Examiner

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my dear parents for their support and encouragement.

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Abstract

This research attempts to investigate the role of close reading in fostering critical thinking skills for foreign language students at Ammar Thelidji University. The study aims to bring to light an underlying issue which is the struggle of students with lower order of thinking and poor critical thinking skills; consequently, they face difficulties when performing at class as well as in real-world situations. In this regard, an analytical descriptive method was adopted through administrating a questionnaire to twenty third year students. The obtained findings from the interpretation of the received data yield that students are weak in applying effective critical thinking skills; besides, they lack the appropriate close reading strategies as they read. These results do not fully validate the research hypothesis which entails that close reading can enhance students' critical thinking skills, inasmuch as students remain dependent in their thinking only on available sources of knowledge and receiving the information without questioning it. Accordingly, it is recommended to implement the adequate close reading strategies at classes and to continuously provide motivation and inspiration to students in order to prepare them to become successful critical thinkers in a reasonable timeframe.

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List of Abbreviations

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

CCS: Common Core Standards

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General Introduction

General Introduction

General introduction

In the recent decades, critical thinking has gained a great importance as a major component in the educational field. Most educators insist on cultivating and promoting students' critical thinking skills in order to help them how to think instead of what to think, from solving classroom problems to real world situations. Furthermore, in the foreign language context teachers stress the need to develop critical thinking in their classrooms as the twenty-first century skill, besides the basic language skills such as reading, speaking and listening.

Promoting critical thinking in EFL (English as a foreign language) classroom is considered as a challenging process. Unfortunately, both teachers and students ignore the importance of critical thinking skills and its major role in the teaching-learning process. In fact, students often rely on copy and paste procedure in dealing with the information found on the internet; additionally, most of them remain dependent in their thinking on the teacher as the main source of knowledge, saving time and efforts. In addition to that, because of teaching load and time constraints, students are rarely given the opportunity to closely read, evaluate and question the texts provided by teachers in the classroom. This resulted huge weaknesses in students' cognitive abilities and a low order of thinking; thus, students have become ineffective thinkers at class as well as in their real-life settings.

The present study aims to investigate how EFL students can improve their critical thinking skills through close reading and to help students depend more on their own thinking abilities; besides, this work seeks to raise teachers' awareness of the importance of promoting critical thinking skills in their classes in order to produce successful thinkers in reasonable prospects.

The study aims to answer the following **research questions**:

- How can critical thinking be developed through close reading?
- What is the role of teachers in the improvement of students' critical thinking?
- What are the techniques used during close reading to better stimulate critical thinking?

According to the research problem, the following hypothesis serves as a temporary answer to the research questions:

General Introduction

Close reading can help EFL students enhance their critical thinking; hence, enabling them to act in the real-world situations effectively and teachers can play a major role in guiding their students to achieve this goal.

There exists a considerable body of literature on the importance of critical thinking in higher education. According to Behar and Niu (2011), it is very important to expose both teachers and students to critical thinking learning objectives explicitly in order to develop higher thinking skills. Also, Langer (1997) suggests that reading literary texts stimulates readers' abilities of understanding and thinking. Along with the same line, Chang (2009) reached the conclusion that it is very efficient to develop critical thinking skills through literature reading; by which consequently, the reader will be confident in adapting to new situations and bringing innovative solutions to new problems. Chang claims seem very plausible. Furthermore, the use of critical thinking strategies during the reading comprehension class can help EFL students faster their understanding and grasp meanings effectively (Fahim et al., 2012). Recently, a study was conducted by Shirvani and Fahim (2011) shed the light on the need for promoting critical thinking by foreign language teachers in their classes. Their study insists on the role of teachers in the development of such skill. All the reviewed works highlight the importance of critical thinking; however, only few studies have shown applicable ways to help students develop their critical thinking skills in real-world situations.

In order to investigate the research problem, an analytical descriptive method was opted for. Depending on the analysis of the already available studies and data, the analytical method is the most suitable to answer the research problem. Also, a descriptive method was followed through using the questionnaire tool in order to obtain original data for the research.

The present study is divided into three chapters. The first two chapters are theoretical; they review the previous studies and define relevant concepts to the research problem, where the first chapter is devoted to discuss the concept of critical thinking, its definitions, characteristics and its role in education. The second chapter tackles a detailed look at close reading, its features and its relationship with the first variable critical thinking. The third chapter is concerned with the research methodology, study sample and instrument. It also displays the obtained findings from the analysis of students' questionnaire with recommendations and future suggestions.

Chapter One : Critical Thinking

Chapter One: Critical Thinking

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a general overview about the concept of critical thinking. It investigates its definitions from a variety of perspectives in order to reinforce the understanding of the term; it also outlines its major features and skills. Furthermore, it sheds the light on the benefits of the educational implementation of critical thinking.

1. 1 Definition of Critical Thinking

According to Oxford dictionary, critical thinking is the ability to analyze information in order to form reasoned judgments and decisions. It is the process of questioning and viewing things in an open minded way, commonly defined as a skillful thinking. In fact, critical thinking has been variously defined, here are some prominent interpretations provided by famous scholars:

- Critical thinking is defined by the upper three levels of Bloom's Taxonomy of educational objectives, which are the ability to analyze, synthesize and evaluate. (Ennis, 1993)
- The ability of monitoring one's own thinking as a way of being rather than a method of thinking.(Paul & Elder, 1994)
- Making purposeful use of cognitive skills and techniques to produce well-reasoned conclusions, and make good decisions.(Halpern, 2013)
- The process of making clear judgments and evidences in order to determine beliefs and actions.(Facione, 2011)
- Critical thinking is thinking with good reason in order to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong in everyday life.(Wood, as cited in Fahim et al., 2012)
- The skill of making logical ideas properly.(Lai, 2011)
- "Critical thinking is a complex process of deliberation which involves a wide range of skills and attitudes." including: recognizing people's viewpoints, evaluating arguments, solving problems in an organized way, making reasoned thoughts and going beyond the surface meanings.(Cottrell, 2005, p. 2)
- it is the appropriate use of thinking and skepticism in finding solutions to problems.(McPeck, 1981)

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1. 2. The Three Different Views of Critical Thinking

All the aforementioned definitions and interpretations revealed how complex critical thinking is. In this regard, the concept of critical thinking has been viewed and developed according to three different perspectives.

1. 2. 1. The Cognitive Psychological Perspective

Psychologically, critical thinking has been defined as “mental processes, strategies, and representations people use to solve problems, make decisions, and learn new concepts” (Sternberg, 1986, p. 3). When defining critical thinking, psychologists tend to put more emphasis on types of actions or behaviors critical thinkers can perform. They focus on “how” people think under ideal circumstances. (Sternberg, 1986)

1. 2. 2. The Philosophical Perspective

The philosophical approach relies on the early writings of Socrates, Plato and newly the modern philosophers such as Richard Paul and many others. Socrates stressed the importance of questioning, seeking truth and possibility of things. This method was called “Socratic questioning” which triggers critical thinking. According to Paul and Elder critical thinking is “the art of analyzing and evaluating with a view to improving it.”, it is about raising clean precise questions to find logical conclusions, and these abilities are self-controlled (2008, p. 2). The philosophical view focuses on the criteria of a critical thinker rather than the behavior he/she perform (Lewis & Smith, 1993).

1. 2. 3. The Educational Perspective

Critical thinking has been the subject for many educators and those working in the field for its great importance and influence on the development of education. One of the highly valuable studies in assessing higher thinking skills is Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy (1956). His taxonomy of educational perspective has been viewed for a long time as an important method to measure intellectual improvements and categorize educational goals. The hierarchy involves a set of cognitive abilities and skills from simple to complex, these abilities are ordered after being reviewed in 2011 as follow: remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and finally the hardest and the most complex one is create.

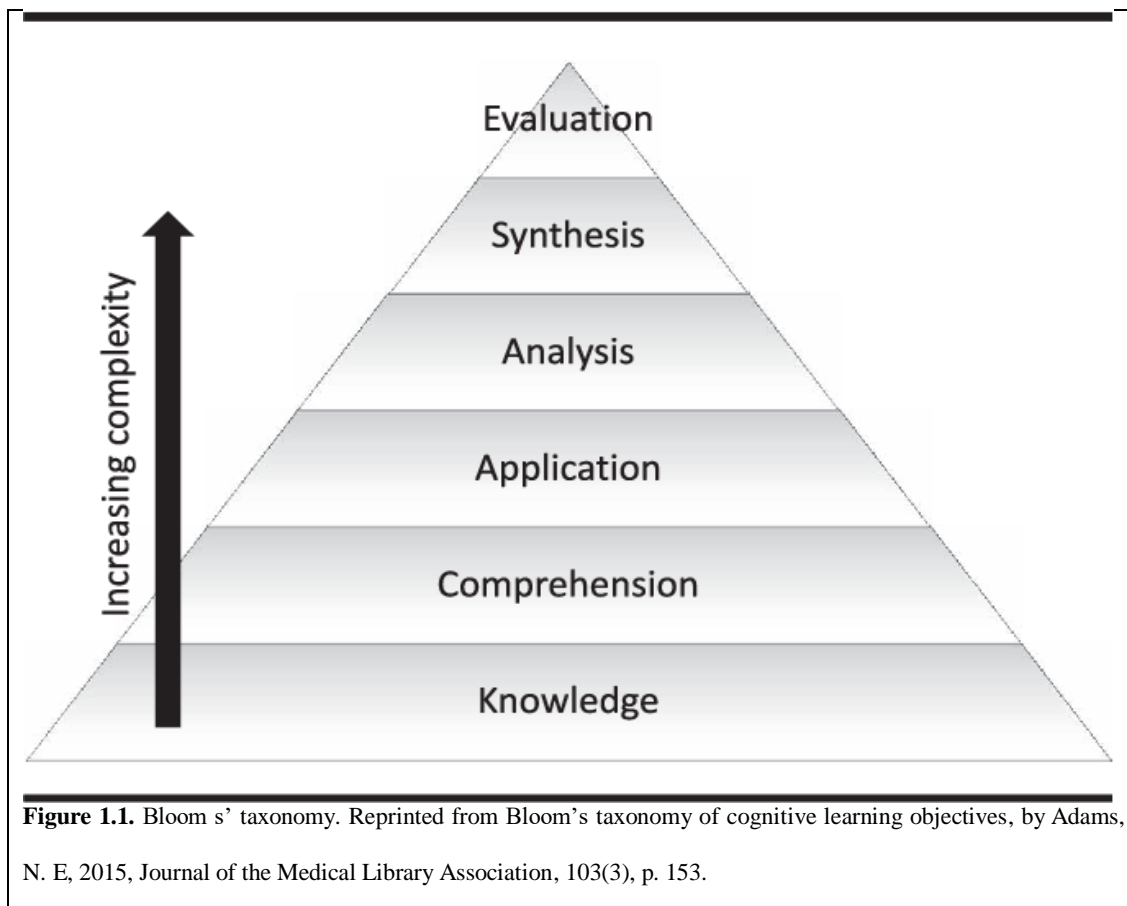


Figure 1.1. Bloom s' taxonomy. Reprinted from Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive learning objectives, by Adams, N. E, 2015, Journal of the Medical Library Association, 103(3), p. 153.

1. 3. Critical Thinking Skills

Every ordinary person thinks, however few who think critically. So, what really characterize critical thinkers and make them different from normal thinkers?

1. 3. 1. Reasoning

One of the features that make a better critical thinker is reasoning. It is about giving logical evidence and cause for thoughts, actions or opinions, in other words it is the capacity to give solutions for problems on the basics of logic. Reasoning is a process of thinking where deductive conclusions are made for particular information, breaking an issue to sub-issues. Kelley views reasoning as a process of thoughts that shows how human abilities improve to grasp and give meanings to the world, this capacity is not something innate, and it can be developed and taught (Kelley, 2003). Thinking and reasoning cover every aspect of peoples' lives, people reason to give a sense to everything (Paul & Elder, 2014).

1. 3. 2. Problem solving

An effective problem solver requires the ability to tackle unexpected problems and solve conflicts through narrowing them down and bringing solutions easily. Problem solving involves identifying "... your goals, purposes and needs" to be able to find out and examine problems, then looking for the needed information to solve the problem (Paul & Elder, 2008, p. 7). The right way to face a problem is through reformulating it so that, the issue becomes more clear (Paul & Elder, 2014).

1. 3. 3. Analyzing Arguments

One of the significant features of a good critical thinker is the ability to analyze arguments. An argument is used to support conclusion, statement in order to convince and persuade readers to believe in a particular conclusion as true. So, what a critical thinker does is analyzing argument to know to what extent it is strong enough to believe in or not. In addition, according to Cottrel (2005) analyzing arguments helps us to identify "... the obvious and the hidden messages more accurately and to understand the process by which an argument is constructed", this process is very important for the student's development as a successful critical thinker (p. 2). Analyzing an argument goes through three major steps: understanding it, breaking it down to analyze its structure and how conclusions are made,

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evaluating these conclusions to determine whether they provide strong and logical evidence to trust in (Kelley, 2013).

1. 3. 4. Decision Making

Decision making is a very essential element in critical thinking, it is the process of making alternatives and determining choices between a set of options. People often find themselves in everyday life obliged to make the right decisions at the right moment intelligently. Problem solving requires defining and looking for solutions, while decision making is the next step to choose amongst the collected solutions the most logical and suitable ones. Hence, the more good decision are made the more desirable outcomes will be achieved (Halpern, 2014).

1. 4. Stages of Critical Thinking Development

Paul and Elder (2008) pointed out six main stages of critical thinking progress:

- 1. The Unreflective Thinker:** this kind of thinkers is cognitively weak, unable to solve problems.
- 2. The Challenged Thinker:** this type of thinkers recognize the importance of thinking in their lives, understand that thinking requires efforts and reasoning skills, however, they do not know how to perform.
- 3. The Beginner Thinker:** These thinkers have the intention to face problems using their thinking abilities, yet, they do not practice regularly.
- 4. The Practicing Thinker:** unlike the beginners, they are aware of the need to practice thinking and reasoning, they are self-controlled and self-assessed.
- 5. The Advanced Thinker:** these thinkers have a regular control over their thoughts they have a deep understanding of the major role of thinking in their lives.
- 6. The Accomplished Thinker:** this type of thinkers does not only have high intellectual qualities, yet, they regularly correct and improve their thinking where this process became a natural habit.

1. 5. The Traits of Mind of the Successful Critical Thinker

According to Paul and Elder (2014) there are eight interrelated traits of mind that are required to develop strong and effective critical thinkers.

Chapter One: Critical Thinking

- 1. Intellectual Humility:** being aware of the amount of knowledge that one possesses.
- 2. Intellectual Courage:** being ready to analyze, and to deal with controversial ideas, beliefs, and points of view.
- 3. Intellectual Empathy:** The ability to imagine oneself in the place of others in order to better understand their different viewpoints.
- 4. Intellectual Autonomy:** The capacity of monitoring one's beliefs, principles and assumptions in a rational way.
- 5. Intellectual Integrity:** Being fair to one's own thinking.
- 6. Intellectual Perseverance:** Making use of intellectual insights and truths no matter the difficulties are.
- 7. Confidence in Reason:** Encouraging people to think for themselves, and motivating them to be independent in making their own rational conclusions
- 8. Fair Mindedness:** Dealing with all viewpoints in the same way without referring to one's own feelings, or personal interests.

1. 6. Barriers to Critical Thinking

Developing critical thinking skills is often easier said than done. Many find it difficult to be critical thinkers; for the reason that there are barriers and obstacles at the personal level facing them. Cottrell (2005) highlighted and summarized the barriers to critical thinking development as listed below:

- a) Misunderstanding of what is meant by Criticism:** Misunderstanding the real meaning of criticism can be a barrier to a good and effective analysis. Some people view criticism as a negative act, where they have to show only the negative sides of things, which is totally a mistaken thinking. Criticism is rather a judgment that focuses on the negative aspects as well as the positive ones.
- b) Over-Estimating Reasoning Abilities:** Indeed, reasoning is a major element in critical thinking. It is also a positive thing when people confidently make their actions and beliefs based on good logic. However, sometimes people may have weak reasoning, so it is essential to recognize the fact that they are not necessarily always right.

- c) **Shortage in Methods, Strategies or Practice:** Some people lack the awareness of the required steps and techniques used in improving critical thinking skills. Besides that, they do not recognize the importance of practice in developing critical thinking.
- d) **Reluctance to Critique Experts:** Some students find it inappropriate to criticize the works or the ideas of those who are highly valued and experienced than them. Yet, judging experts is often a required activity by educators as a way to improve student's level of learning.
- e) **Affective Reasons:** Being able to control emotions and to be open-minded to view issues from different angles is very essential part in critical thinking. Accepting different beliefs and assumptions does not undermine the beliefs that one possesses. Being critical thinker may make people consider their points of view and strengthen their own beliefs.
- f) **Mistaking Information for Understanding:** Some students try to avoid critical thinking and think of it as a hard task to do. Instead, they prefer available facts and answers. Truly, critical thinking is a difficult practice, if it is not, then it would be useless for the student's improvement.
- g) **Insufficient Focus and Attention to Details:** Poor critical thinkers have a weak attention to details, while critical thinking emphasizes and demands accuracy and precision.

1. 7. Related Concepts to Critical Thinking

1. 7. 1. Critical Thinking and Intelligence

Intelligence has always been a debatable topic in psychology. In the recent years, many psychologists tried to draw connection between intelligence and critical thinking and to understand whether developing critical thinking abilities can produce smart individuals. In fact, both critical thinking and intelligence demand more than just “to think” (Allen, 2004, p. 2). Similarly, Paul and Elder (2006) point that both smart creativity and critical thinking are features of positive thinking, and they develop at the same time. Further, decision- making is an endless process in everyone's life. Practicing critical thinking in making rational decisions; consequently, will lead to a rational and successful life, so indeed good decision makers are intelligent people (Paul & Elder, 2014).

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1. 7. 2. Critical thinking and Creativity

For many researchers creativity and critical thinking go hand in hand. Actually, creativity is featured by two major aspects, which are quality and originality, and it is as simple as bringing solutions to problems, where both need the use of cognitive abilities (Halpern, 2003). In other words, creativity does not emerge out of nothing, it is rather a process of transferring the given into something entirely different and original (Lipman, 2003). “Good thinking requires the ability to generate intellectual products, which is associated with creativity” (Lai, 2011, p. 22), which means being creative demands practicing one’s own thinking.

1. 7. 3. Critical Thinking and Metacognition

Metacognition represents the knowledge that one’s hold and control to engage in new and more advanced learning activities. In fact, it has been proved that effective learners and thinkers are those who use frequently their metacognitive activities more than the poor learners do. In this sense, metacognition can be defined as the “... awareness of one’s own thinking”, and “the content of one’s conception,” (Hennessey, as cited in Lai, 2011, p. 5), it is also the monitor that guides time and efforts during critical thinking, which means thinking is being assessed and controlled (Halpern, 2014). What critical thinkers do is analyzing and evaluating ideas in order to make good decisions, to do so, they recall past experiences and problems to face current situations, and this shows what is meant by using metacognitive procedures during thinking (Flavell, 1979).

1. 8. The Need for Critical Thinking Skills

The emergence of technology age and digital revolution has made everything based on information and computerization. Moreover, internet has brought dramatic changes in people’s lives and made knowledge available and free to everyone. Any subject can be found with much ease, just through a quick search using computer or any other devices. Nevertheless, this open access to information has a negative aspect, people can no longer distinguish between credible and biased sources, this rose the question to what extent is the information found on the internet reliable to make “informed decisions”? (Halpern, 2014). So, living in this complex, rapidly changing world obliges us to think smart and develop our thinking in order to know how to deal with the massive existing information and knowledge (Allen, 2004).

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1. 9. Empirical Evidences That Critical Thinking Can Be Improved

Many important abilities that are needed to be applied in real world contexts including language skills and communication skills have witnessed great improvements by learners, what is more; critical thinking skills can also be developed and enhanced especially when courses are designated for this purpose. This belief has been proved and supported by numerous qualitatively different types of evidences.

Here is a concise summary of some studies and findings which reached the conclusion that critical thinking skills can be learned and improved in educational settings:

- 1) Earlier, Halpern (1998) gave evidence of two instructional programs which were designated to improve critical thinking skills and abilities of college students. In one study, students showed great advance in Piagetian-inspired measure of cognitive development as a result of general problem solving activities. In the other study, students who were taught a specific type of problem-solving strategies achieved mental math representations with proficiency.
- 2) After adopting a skill approach, Facione (2000) found that college students who were given course work in critical thinking achieved appreciably higher on a multiple-choice test of thinking skills than similar students who had not such a course.
- 3) Gelder (2001) taught college students how to determine the different components of an argument plus methods to both identify and construct good arguments. After one semester of training, he realized a huge gain in the multi-choice test of critical thinking and in the written test that was based on the graduate record. By the end he concluded that teaching students how to recognize the structure and the strength of arguments can accelerate critical thinking development more effectively than the indirect standard courses (just being at university).
- 4) Some researches were led in the Netherlands tested the effects of critical thinking instruction on training complex decision making skills. The studies examined two groups, one group received instruction while the other one did not receive training. The final results came with the conclusion that promoting critical thinking instruction can be an effective tool to generate successful decision makers in “complex and highly interactive dynamic environments.” (Helsdingen et al., 2010)
- 5) More recently, in 2018 a group of researchers conducted a study about fostering the skills of critical thinking and question-posing in a project-based learning environment.

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The aim of the study was to test the effectiveness of an innovative high school pedagogical model featured by constructivism. In this model students were taught how to develop independent learning skills through group work and peer work. In reverse, other students had a traditional classroom environment. The study lasted for two years, and the results revealed that students in the innovative learning environment showed a significant benefit in critical thinking over their peers in the traditional class. (Sasson et al., 2018)

1. 10. Implementing Critical Thinking in Foreign Language Context

Critical thinking has gained a high position in the educational field for its great importance and influence. Precisely, foreign language context is a new area where many language teachers and educators showed a huge interest and need to promote critical thinking in their classrooms. Because today, students need to learn critical thinking skills in order to adapt to the rapidly changing world (Crocker, 2003). To acquire a language effectively, learners should be critical in their production of thoughts, which means knowing how to think in the target language with logic (Mirman & Tishman, 1988). Furthermore, teaching cannot be transformed with proficiency without integrating critical thinking in the core of the designing process and before introducing any subject, student should be first taught how to think reasonably about that subject, this will lead to a successful teaching (Paul & Elder, 2014). Also, thinking skills can make language learning easier and faster through making deductions from the foreign language items (Al-nafiaie, 2013). For Lipman “the improvement of student thinking from ordinary thinking to critical thinking” relies strongly on “the ability of such student to identify and cite good reasons for the opinion they utter” (Lipman, 1987, p. 6).

Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed definition of critical thinking and a deep understanding of the concept through different lenses and perspectives, in order to cover all its different aspects. Besides that, the chapter shed the light on the various features and the skills that characterize the effective critical thinker. It also shed the light on the related concepts to critical thinking in order to understand better the meaning of the term and its effects in different contexts. Furthermore, this chapter gave sufficient evidences from different valuable studies and researches, which proved that critical thinking skills can be taught and improved.

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Finally, the end of this section was devoted to highlight the advantages of promoting critical thinking in the educational field with a focus on the foreign language context through reviewing the major findings and evidences provided by prominent and significant studies of different scholars and researchers. The next chapter will be devoted to discuss the second variable which is the concept of close reading and to highlight and examine its effect on the enhancement of critical thinking.

Chapter Two : Close Reading

Chapter Two: Close Reading

Introduction

This chapter is devoted to discuss the concept of close reading. It closely defines the term and its origins. Also, this section introduces the features of close reading and the different roles that characterize the successful close reader. More importantly, this chapter examines the implementation of close reading in the educational settings and highlights its great benefits and impact on the learning development. Precisely, it seeks to examine the relationship between close reading and critical thinking and to show the effects of close reading on the improvement of one's thinking.

2. 1. Definition of Close Reading

Close reading can be defined as the careful constant interpretation of a text, putting much emphasis on its details, and all the different aspects that constitute it. For Boyles (2012) close reading means “reading to uncover layers of meanings that lead to deep comprehension.”(p. 37). Snow and Connor (2016) define Close reading as “an approach to teaching comprehension that insists students extract meaning from text by examining carefully how language is used in the passage itself” (p. 1).

Additionally, Paul and Elder view close reading as a process of purposeful reading looking for interconnected ideas in a text and recognizing its systems of meaning (2004, p. 36). Furthermore, “close reading is a focused rereading of a text in which you go beyond a basic understanding of the text.”(Dalton, 2013, p. 643) So, close reading is more likely a deep interpretation of texts rather than a simple superficial way of reading.

2. 2. Origins of Close Reading

In the practice of literary criticism, the technique of close reading traces back to the 1920's, it was developed in the works of famous writers and critics most notably, I. A. Richards, William Empson and the poet T. S. Eliot. These new critics emphasized language and form, and supported close reading as a tool and method of understanding literary works autonomously. Under the objectives of the New Criticism this group of critics wanted to make readers embrace the ideas and words of the writer (Curtler, 2009), since literary works are means of communication between a writer and reader (Richards, 2001).

Moreover, new criticism came as a reaction against the historians and critics who abandoned the real value of literary works, and treated them as “dusty achievements”, their

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concern was heavily on understanding how literature functions rather than on constructing its meaning and significance. In reverse, the new critics celebrated literary work as art, and appreciated its effects on readers through the practice of close reading which revalued literature and how it was produced, also supported the individual interpretation of texts. (Smith, 2016)

2. 3. Features of Close Reading

Fisher and Frey (2013) identified six main features of close reading to be addressed when implementing close reading in classroom.

- **Short Texts:** Complex worthy text presents multiple themes, perspectives, and deeply implicit meanings. When readers engage with sophisticated materials, this will increase the challenge and their level of knowledge.
- **Short Passages:** Reading small portions from complex texts is very helpful for students to read the passage intensely, plus it makes reading more purposeful and focused.
- **Repeated Readings:** Close reading requires multiple readings which will lead to a good understanding of the given passage, the more students re-read, the better they make sense of the text and author's purpose.
- **Text-Dependent Questions:** Questioning is very significant step in the process of close reading, asking questions to students by pushing them to look back the text to find evidences to their responses. Questioning also makes reading worthy and purposeful, and strengthens conversation between teacher-student and student-student.
- **Annotation:** Annotating is about taking notes while reading such as underlying, circling or highlighting key words, ideas and unknown vocabulary. Annotating indicates that the reader is responding to the text and understanding it.
- **Limited Frontloading:** Close reading mainly focuses on the readers' independent engagement with text, so teachers' intervention is limited, instead they should provide the needed guidance, give opportunity to students to read freely and raise their confidence in tackling complex texts.

2. 4. The Roles of the Close Reader

To ensure the good understanding and interpretation of the text, Luke and Freebody's Four Resources Model (1999) was developed, it involves the four prominent roles of the close reader that emphasize the importance of the readers' engagement with literacy and reading skills.

As it is cited in Firkins (2016), the four roles outlined by Luke and Freebody (1999) are:

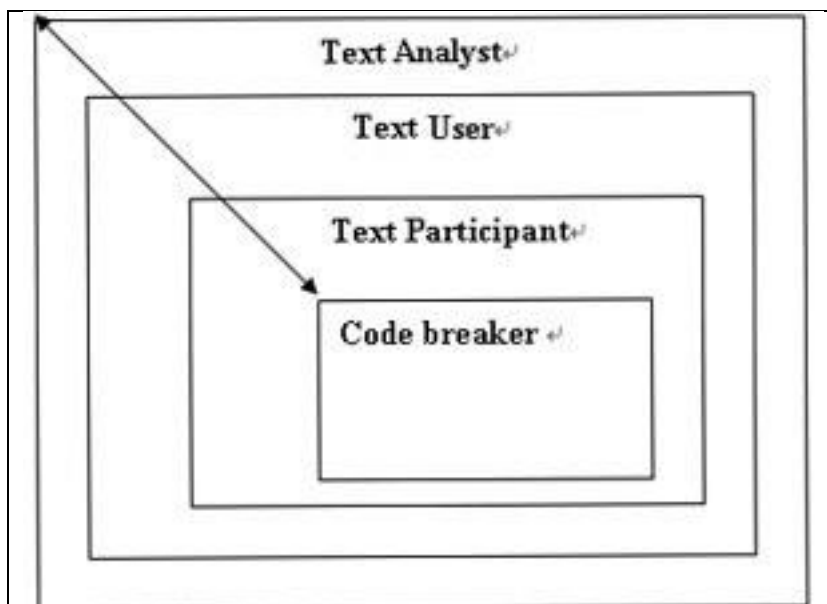


Figure 2. 1. The Four Resources Model: Adapted from Freebody and Luke, 1990. Reprinted from *The Four Resources Model: A Useful Framework for Second Language Teaching in a Military Context*, by Firkins, A. S, 2016, p. 3.

2. 4. 1. The Reader as Code Breaker

The skill of decoding words and meanings is the process of giving sense to the complex ideas and concepts embodied in the text. Code breaking involves the foundational abilities of reading such as the phonological awareness, phonics, alphabets, fluency and print concept. Mastering these abilities improves the level of understanding texts.

2. 4. 2. The Reader as Meaning Maker (Participant)

One of the important roles of the reader is constructing the possible meanings, ideas and the hidden messages within the text to figure out the purpose of the author. Simply,

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meaning makers try to understand what they read purposefully and carefully with an emphasis on language use.

2. 4. 3. The Reader as Text User

Being a text user means defining the purpose of the text and the aims of the author through analyzing its structure, style, and author's use of language. Text users also think intensely about the messages in the text and try to make use of them in order to negotiate the social and cultural factors that the text performs, and they understand that texts are shaped and structured by those social and cultural factors.

2. 4. 4. The Reader as Text Critic

The reader evaluates the text to determine the author's objectives and points of view, and at the same time question assumptions, beliefs, and biases. In addition, text analyst examines how well the author achieved his purposes and points of view; accordingly, the reader can determine to what extent the ideas in the text are true, and to decide what to believe in.

2. 5. Close Reading and the Common Core Standards

In the American educational system a set of goals and objectives were developed by educators and curriculum experts known as the Common Core Standards (CCS). The CCS was adopted ambitiously for the student's educational advance and professional improvement. CCS' instructions were implemented in education to ensure that students will achieve successfully knowledge and the skills they need in college and careers. One of these important skills is close reading. Therefore, promoting close reading has gained a huge interest as one of the aimed objectives by the CCS since it "can be an important strategy to accelerate and deepen [students] their own learning." as well as to increase their independent level of reading. (Brown & Kappes, 2012, p. 2)

2. 6. The Benefits of Implementing Close Reading in Educational Settings

The process of reading is well known for its great impact on the reader's mind development. It increases knowledge, enriches vocabulary, and triggers stronger thinking activities; besides that reading develops language skills such as writing and speaking. Hence, readers will certainly accomplish successful learning. Yet, if the reading process is deeper and

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more focused as it is known by close reading, the effects on readers will be even more than a simple reading does. Since close reading goes beyond the simple level of comprehension and emphasizes the deep understanding of the text. Paul and Elder view close reading as a monitor that activates students' use of intellectual skills, they add that close readers do not read "blindly", instead they put a purpose for their readings and they set objectives to reach.(2003)

Moreover, close reading complex texts is a challenging process for students that pushes their thinking forward, and enlarge their minds' perception. It also develops students' comprehension and encourages them to tackle and read complex texts (Dakin, 2013). What is more, Brown and Kappes point out that close reading leads to a good and effective understanding which is the "key to truly learning any subject.", and the tool of maintaining what have been learnt for lifelong use. Additionally, engaging students with rich sophisticated writings is an "exciting, thought-expanding experience" that can develop minds and shape beliefs; also it can be a source for improving knowledge of vocabulary and syntax. (2012, p. 5)

In 2009, the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor a feasibility study was conducted by Katz and Carlisle; these two researchers investigated the close reading program which was designated to teach students with reading difficulties in order to be close readers. The study involved tools of measurements to evaluate language and reading skills' progress before and during CR program instructions, the results revealed satisfying improvements of students' language and reading skills. These results gave new insights in helping struggling students with reading weaknesses to be better close readers. (Katz & Carlisle, 2009)

Recently, Beltramo and Stillman note that close reading can increase students' confidence and willingness in taking ownership of textual analysis, also they believe that integrating close reading in instructional units by teachers can really make broad conceptual knowledge easier for students to grasp (2015). Further, Alington and Wright (2013) found that close reading through a virtual learning environment enhances student's performance in examinations, i.e., whens students practice close reading activities, they will likely to be ready for examinations' questions. Similarly, Lassonde (2009) reached the conclusion that students who applied close reading strategies across their curricular requirement, fulfilled their high-takes tests with great competence, he also suggests that using close reading strategies by students can progress their both literary and personal lives.

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2. 7. Teacher’s Role in Motivating Students to Be Close Readers

Inspiring and engaging student for better educational achievements is the task and the desire of every educator. In fact, there have been serious efforts to integrate close reading in the curriculum and classrooms’ environment hoping for successful and advanced learning to the student. However, promoting close reading in classrooms is seen as a complex challenge that requires teachers’ guidance, instructions, and experiences. Brown and Kappes (2012) argue that:

The teaching of reading is a complex, multilayered effort that requires the orchestration of a myriad of intentional instructional decisions and a variety of instructional techniques. Close Reading of text is one important strategy for fostering independence and analytic skills. (p. 3, 4)

First, teachers are required to create appropriate instructions, and strong motivation to prepare the student to be independent close reader (Beltramo, 2015). Second, students by nature need prior knowledge to strengthen their understanding, so the teacher here has to provide background information of the text when appropriate. Nevertheless, close reading is an independent individual practice where students should be given the opportunity to struggle with the text productively (Snow & Connor, 2016).

2. 8. Close Reading and Critical Thinking

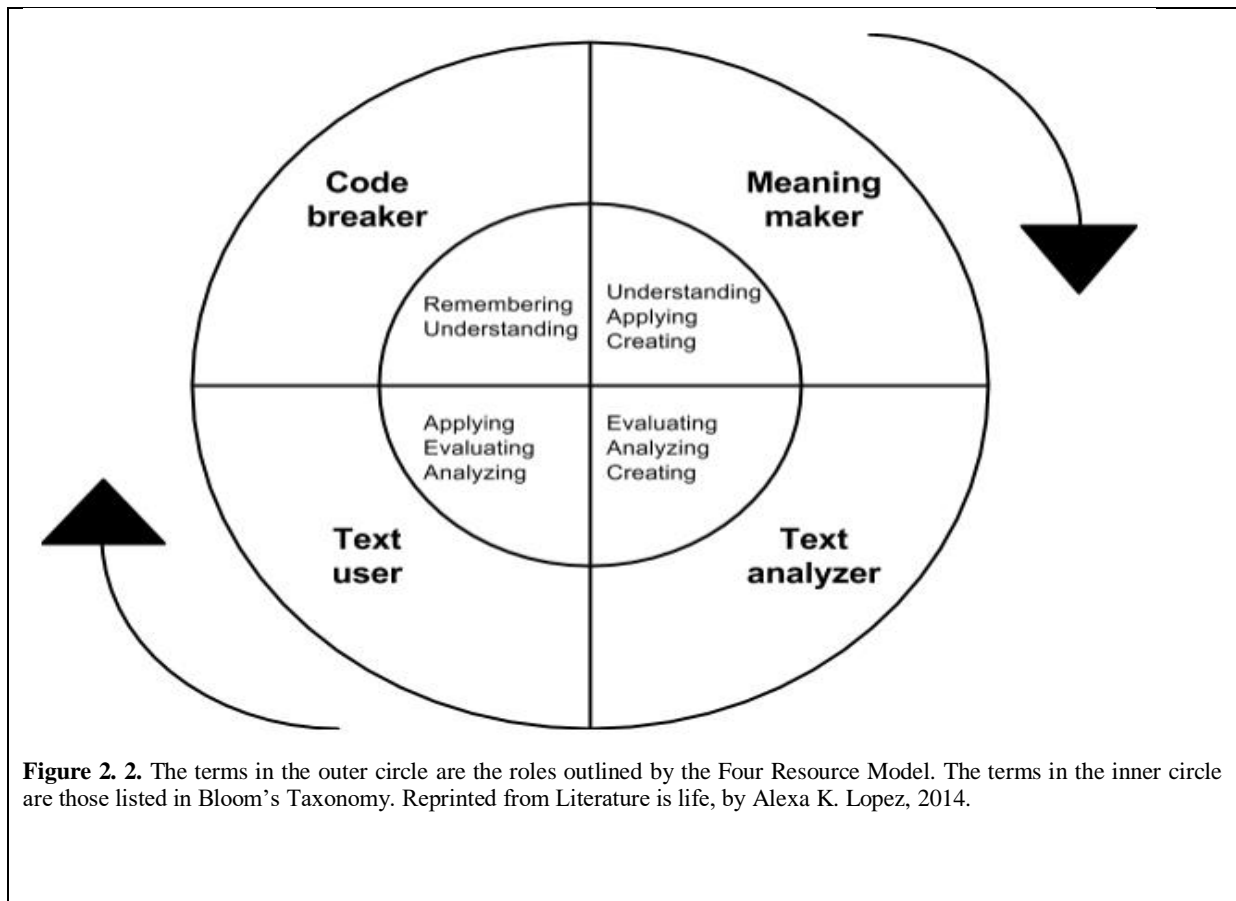
Close reading is a reading strategy that depends strongly on ones’ own critical thinking, and the deep engagement with the text. In parallel, close readers’ interaction with texts stimulates their cognitive abilities and thinking skills; hence, close reading and critical thinking are interrelated processes, where each one affects the other. Paul & Elder (2003) explained that “To read well requires one to develop one’s thinking about reading and, as a result, to learn how to engage in the process of what we call close reading” (p. 36).

Likewise, Paul and Elder (2008) explained the idea of how thinking is stimulated during the process of close reading by stating that:

When you can effectively move back and forth between what you are reading and what you are thinking, you bring what you think to bear upon what you read and what

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you read to bear upon what you think. You are able to change your thinking when the logic of what you read is an improvement on what you think. And you are able to withhold accepting new ideas when you cannot reconcile them with your own. You realize that you may be wrong in some of your beliefs. (p. 9)



Furthermore, Flemming (2011) view reading as a mean for our mental progress, and believe that it can develop one's thinking and problem solving. In this view, it can be said that both close reading and critical thinking have an influence on each other. As it is demonstrated in figure (2.2), the roles of the close reader are interrelated with the different abilities and skills of the learning objectives hierarchy, where the highest order of these abilities including "evaluating", "analyzing" and "creating" correspond to the most complex role of the close reader "text analyzer". According to Lopez (2014), the four resource model that represents the roles of the close reader leads readers to acquire higher level of thinking where each role demands the application of a certain critical thinking skills.

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Conclusion

This chapter discussed the concept of close reading with an emphasis on its significance in the educational field; precisely, its impact on learners' development. It aimed to provide a detailed interpretation of the term, its roots and its major characteristics. In addition to that, this section highlighted the main roles of the effective close reader and the applied close reading strategies in the reading process. It also outlined the great benefits of the practice of close reading to the student's improvements including their thinking abilities and language skills. Moreover, this chapter stressed the importance of teacher's motivation for the engagement of the student with close reading. Finally, the last part focused on examining the relationship between close reading and critical thinking and their effects on each other through demonstrating how the application of close reading strategies stimulates the use of the one's cognitive capacities.

Chapter Three: Field Investigation

Introduction

The present study aims at investigating the role of close reading in enhancing EFL students' critical thinking. It sheds the light on the benefits of close reading strategies that stimulate students' thinking and develop their reasoning abilities; hence, this will generate successful and efficient learners and will improve their language learning.

This chapter is first devoted to describe the adopted methodology in the research including research tools, research design, and the selected sample. Second, this section deals with the detailed analysis and interpretations of the gathered data; also, it displays the obtained results of this study. Finally, the end of this chapter reveals the limitations of the research with suggestions for future studies and recommendation.

3. 1. Research Sample (Participants)

The participants of this study are third year EFL students at the department of Letters and English Language at Amar Thelidji University of Laghouat. This population consists of 113 students divided in three groups, from which 20 students of mixed gender were selected randomly to answer the research questionnaire. The reason behind this selection is that students at the target level are expected to have a good conception about the subject matter under investigation; thus, their participation and contribution to the study are consistent and useful.

3. 2. Research Tools

3. 2. 1. Students' Questionnaire

The questionnaire was administrated to 20 students in the 3rd level of English language at Amar Thelidji University of Laghouat. It was designated to have a deep insight into the students' perception toward close reading, and critical thinking. The questionnaire consists of 16 questions divided in three sections; the first section is concerned with the personal information of the participants while the other two sections are concerned with students' attitudes toward critical thinking, and close reading. The type of questions is a mixture of both close-ended (multiple choice and yes/no questions) and open-ended questions.

3. 3. The Analysis of Students' Questionnaire

Section One: Personal Information

Q 1: Gender:

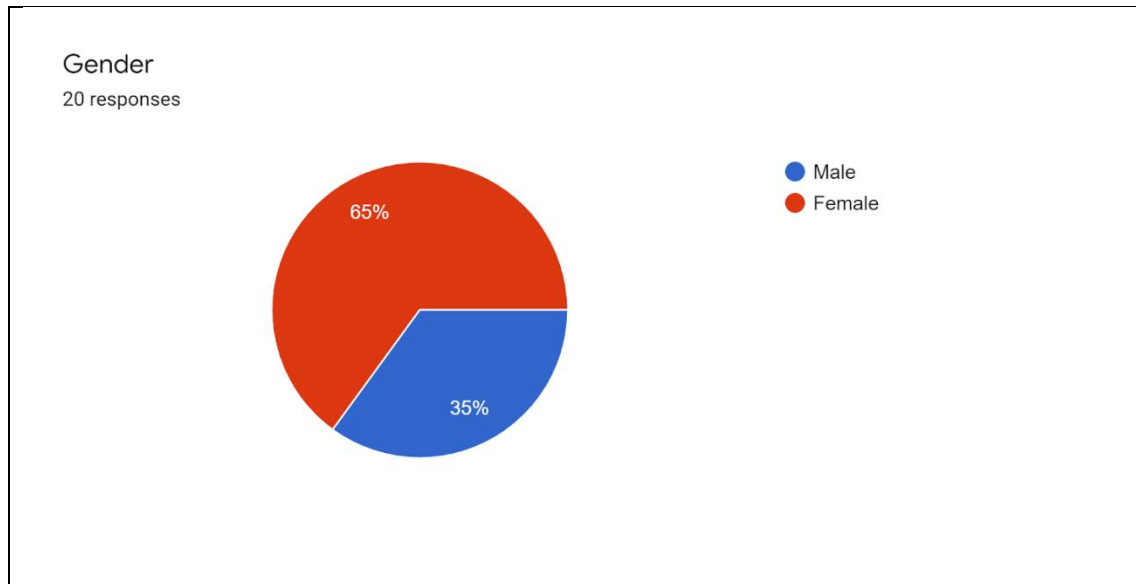


Figure3.1. Students' Gender

The results above reveal that the majority of the participants in the study are females (13) from 20 participants with (65%). Only 7 of the participants are males with a percentage of (35%). This indicates that girls may tend to prefer studying English language more than boys do.

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Q 2: Age:

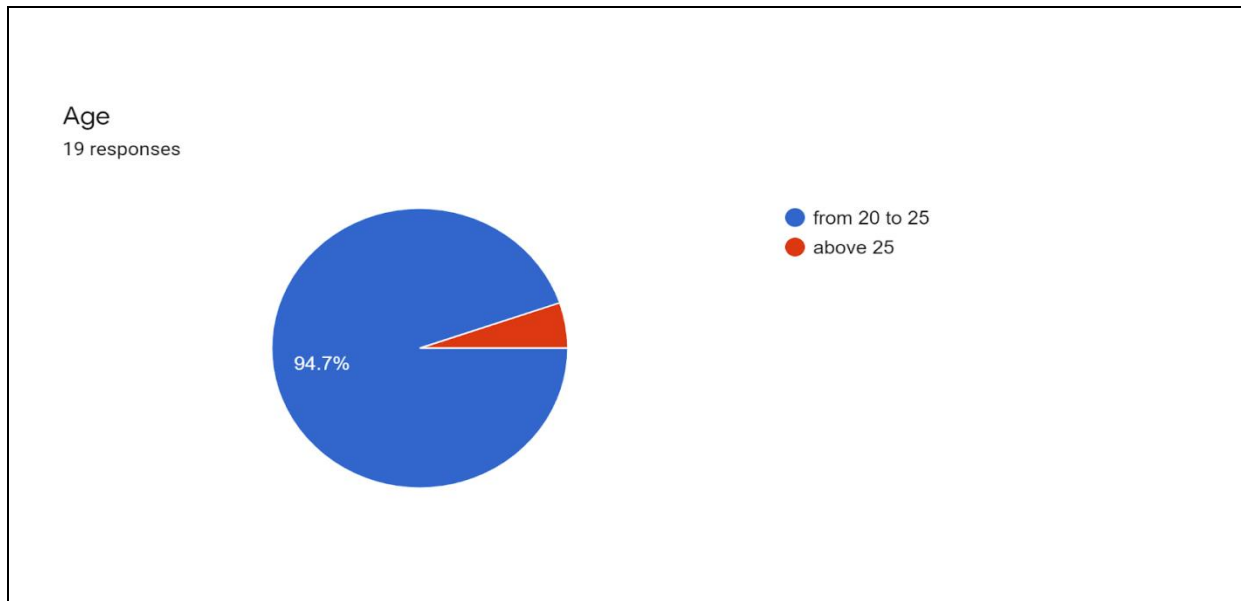


Figure3.2. Students' Age

The results in figure (3.2) show that most of students are aged from (20-25) with a percentage of (94.7%), which is the ordinary age of third year. The rest of the participants are aged above 25 presenting (5.3%) of the whole sample. This indicates that the participants are matured enough.

Q 3: How do you find studying English language?

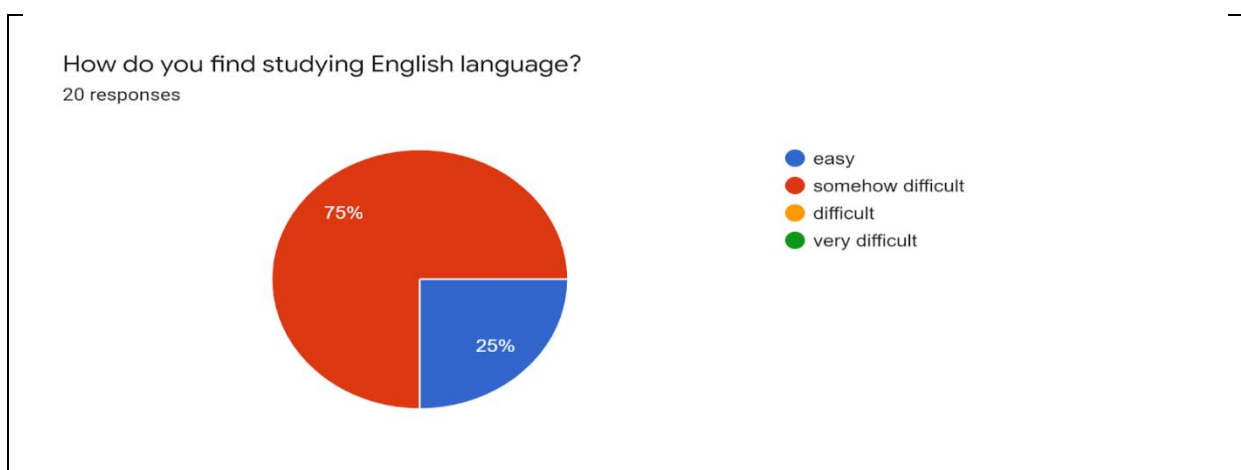


Figure 3.3: Students' View toward English Language

As it is shown in figure (3.3), almost the majority of those surveyed (75%) find studying English language somehow difficult. In contrast, (25%) of the sample find it easy to study English. These results mean that there are a significant numbers of students who are facing difficulties during their language learning process.

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Section Two: Students' Attitudes toward Critical Thinking

Q 1: Are you given tasks that require your own thinking?

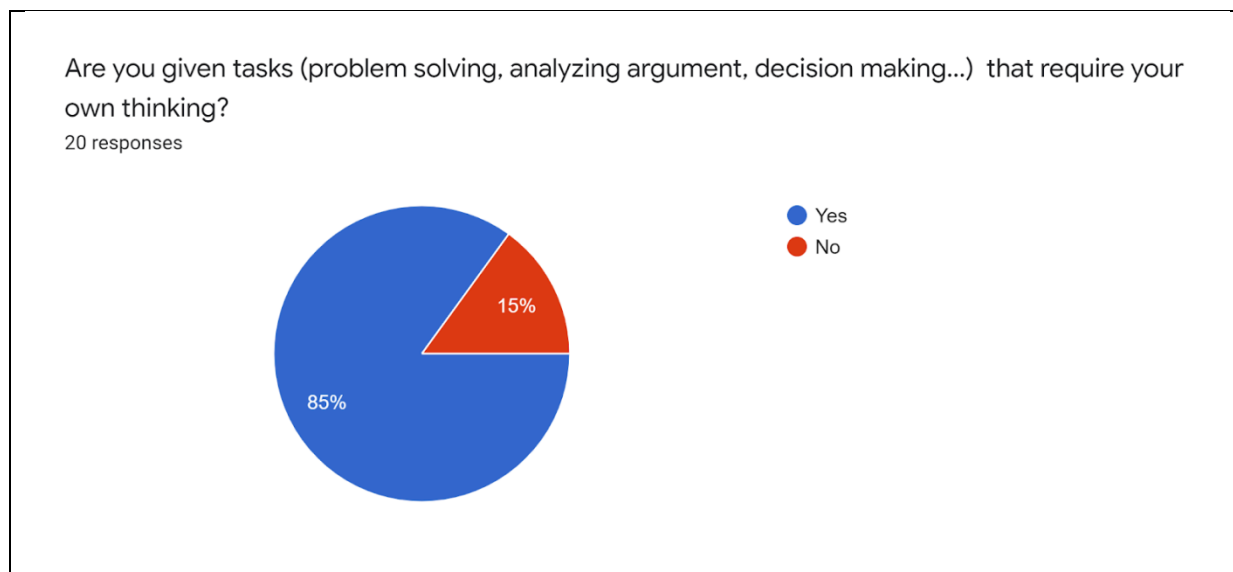


Figure3.4. Students and Thinking Tasks

In response to question (01) in section (02), nearly all the participants with a percentage of (85%) answered by “yes”; when they were questioned if they are provided with activities that require their own thinking and interpretation. Few students with a percentage of (15%) answered by “no” to the question. This result demonstrates that language teachers are encouraging their students to use their own thinking abilities.

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Q 2: Do you find these tasks easy to solve?

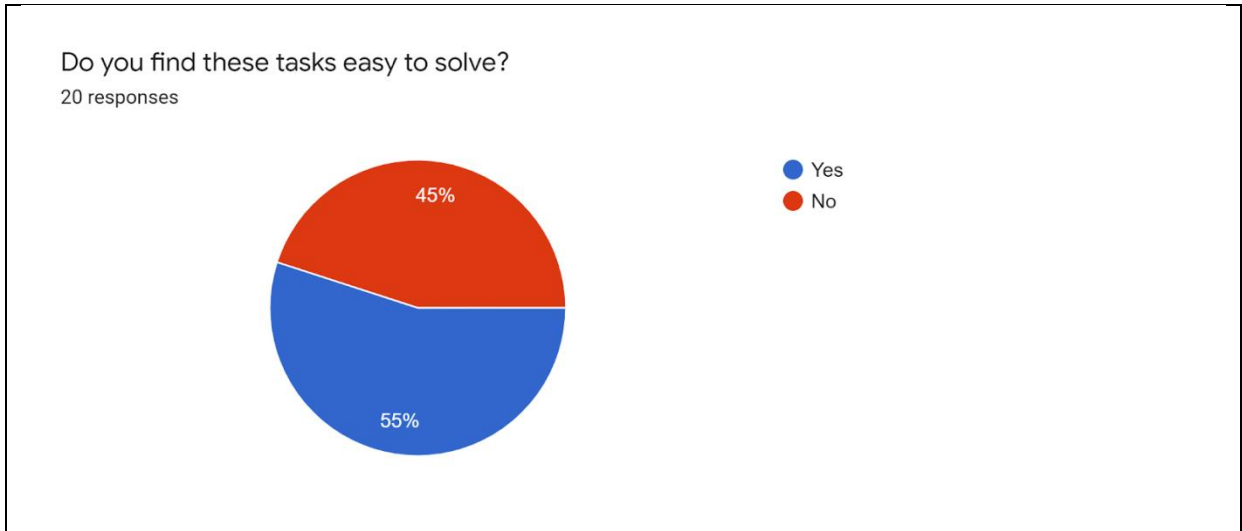


Figure3.5. Students and Complexity of Tasks

As it is apparent from the results in figure (3.5), the percentages were almost equal where (55%) of the sample view the activities that depend on their own thinking easy to solve. However, a considerable number of the students with a percentage of (45%) do not find those tasks easy to do. This entails that nearly half of the students struggle with thinking disabilities.

Q 3: Are these tasks solvable in: short time/ medium time/ long time?

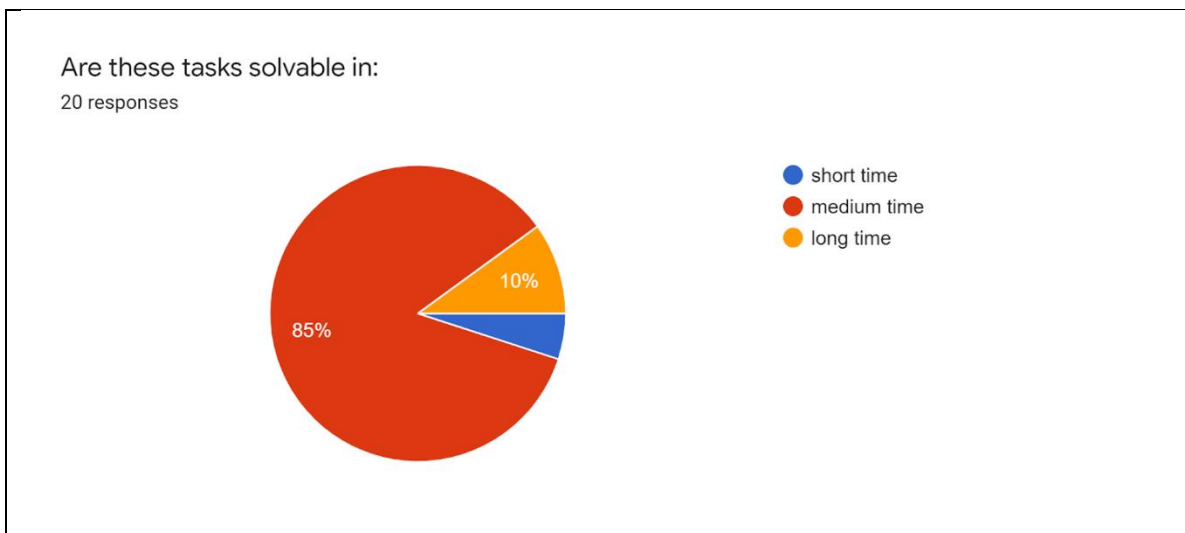


Figure3.6. Students' Speed in Solving Tasks

The apparent results in figure (3.6) show that the majority of the participants (85%) stated that they take medium time to solve the tasks based on their own use of thinking. (10%) of the sample asserted that they take a long time in solving those tasks, while the

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remaining (10%) represent the few students who could accomplish their tasks in a short time. These results suggest that a great majority of the students are slow in solving activities that require the use of one's own cognitive abilities.

Q 4: Are you able to apply what you learn at class in real life situations?

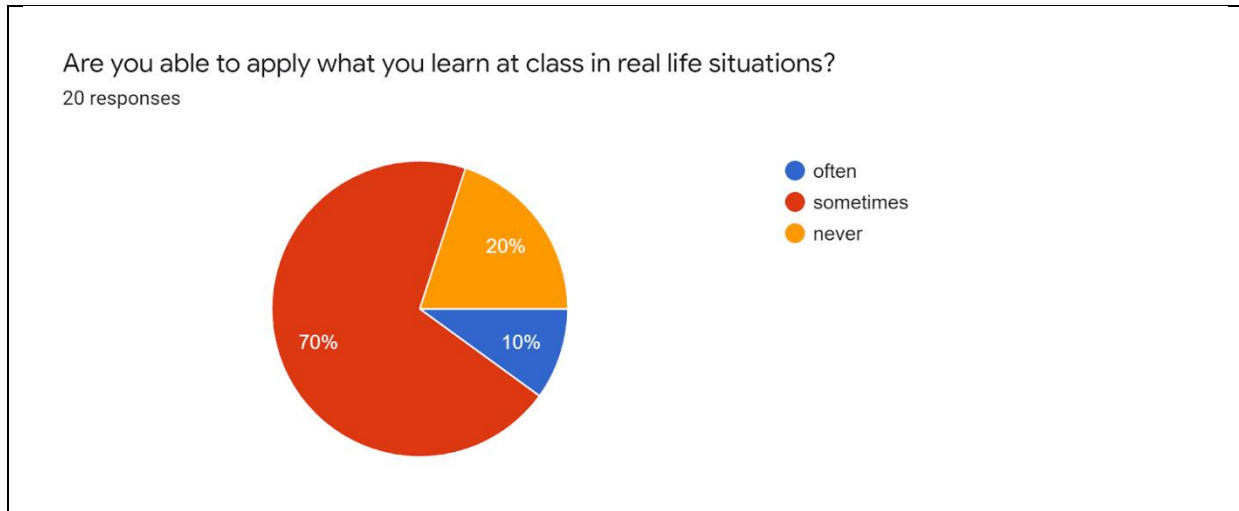


Figure3.7. Students' Ability in Real Life Situations

The findings in figure (3.7) demonstrate that (70%) of the respondents sometimes find themselves unable to apply what they have learnt at class in real world experiences. (20%) of the participants declared that they can never apply that. Yet, very few (10%) who affirmed that they are capable of practising what they acquire at class in their real-life situations. The findings may suggest that most students struggle with difficulties in applying what they learn and this can infer that students do not understand what they learn effectively, plus they do not practise regularly.

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Q 5: Do you face problems concerning the learned content?

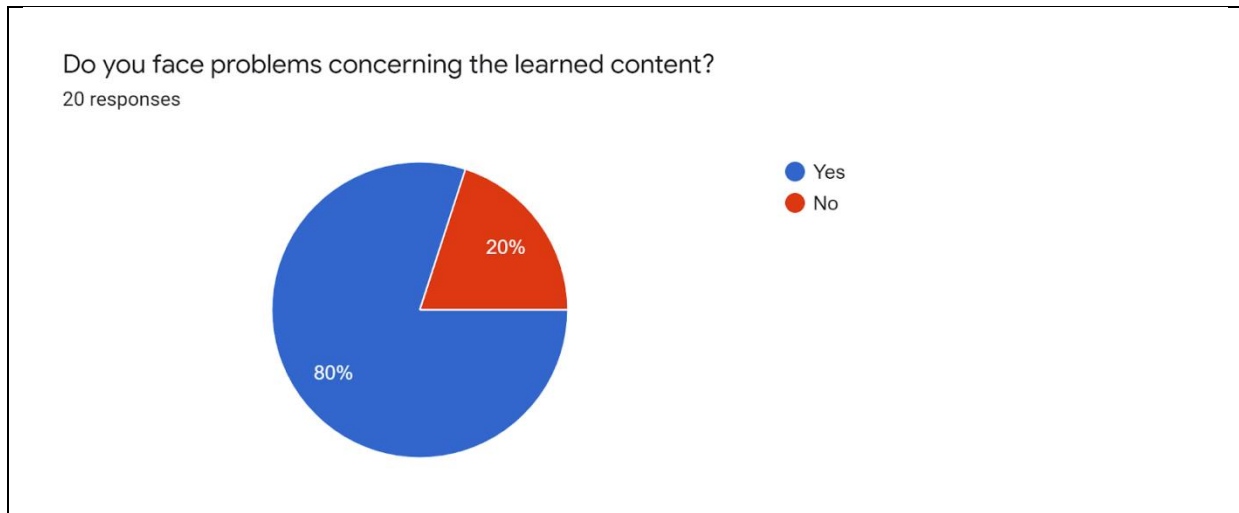


Figure3.8. Students' view about Learning Content

As it is displayed in figure (3.8), the majority of the sample with a percentage of (80%) declared that they are meeting challenges about the learned content. However, few students (10%) answered by “no” to the question. These results mean that most of the students are not satisfied with the learned content. Additionally, this may suggest that they may have difficulties in grasping what their teachers try to convey.

Q 6: As you face these problems, do you try to overcome them through practice?

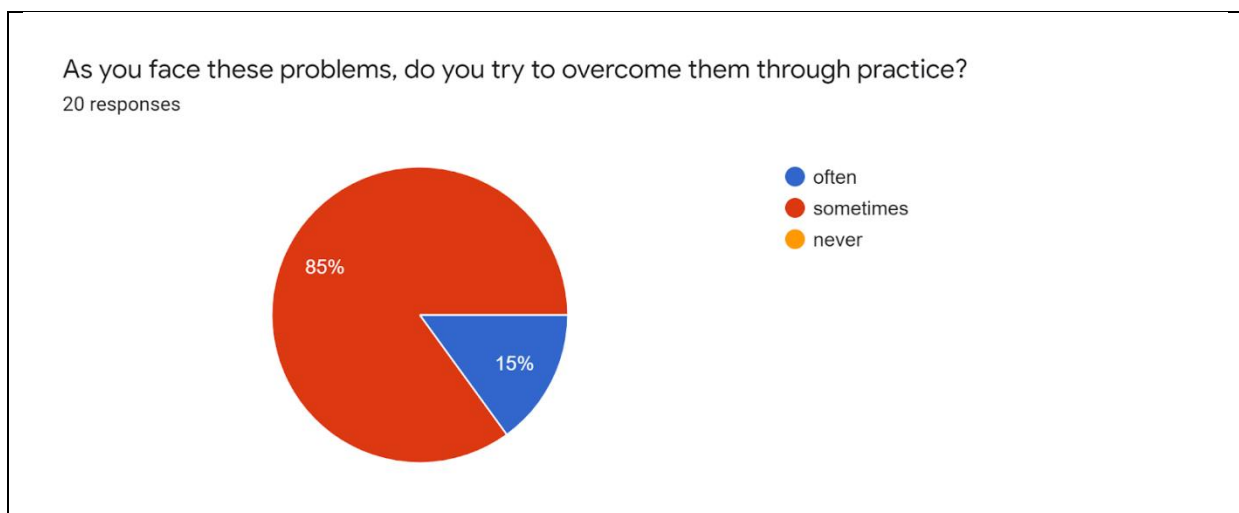


Figure3.9. Student's Practice

Remarkably, the results in figure (3.9) show that most of the students (85%) do not practise regularly to overcome the problems they face during their learning process. While a small number of the students (15%) affirmed that they practice frequently to ameliorate their

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learning progress. These results entail that most students lack the awareness about the importance of regular practise for the efficiency of learning.

Q 7: Are you familiar with the term “critical thinking”?

If yes, what is it?

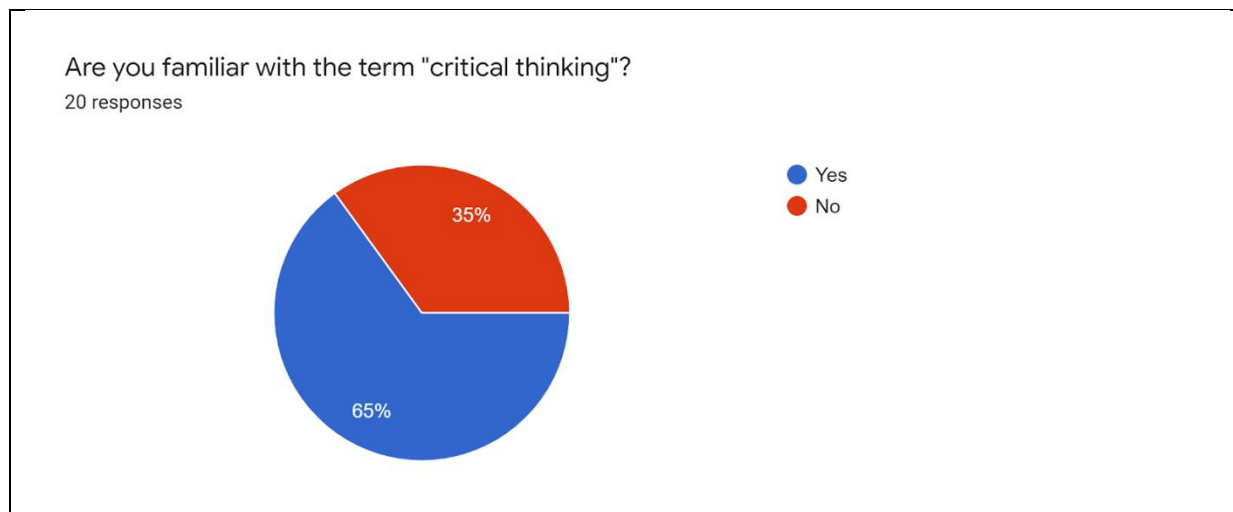


Figure3.10. Students’ Understanding of Critical Thinking

As it is presented in figure (3.10), the results show that (35%) of the participants declared that they do not know what is meant by the concept of “critical thinking”; however, over half of them (65%) claimed that they are familiar with the concept and justified their answers by providing different interpretations quoted as follow:

- “For me, critical thinking is an advanced state of thinking in which a person thinks of ideas that are outside the box and try to implement analytical skills to link these ideas with the ones given to the subject matter.”
- “A critical thinker is able to deduce consequences. The ability to make use of information in solving problems and to seek relevant sources of information to inform himself.”
- “I think that critical thinking is the ability to think differently than the others do.”
- “It is the analysis of facts to form a judgment.”
- “Is to think clearly and rationally and [to] make logical connection between ideas”
- “Playing with the idea and looking at [analysing] it from different angels[perspectives]”
- “Analyze facts to form a judgment.”

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- “Critical thinking is how we understand the topic and give our point of view whether positive or negative”
- “Observe, analyse ,interpret and evaluate the topic/subject idea or whatever is presented or stumbled upon with rational and logical matter putting aside your biases and looking at it with critical lenses”
- “Critical thinking is the ability to think clearly and rationally in order to draw logical connection between ideas.”

These results suggest that a significant number of students have a good knowledge about the term “critical thinking”; their definitions prove their awareness and understanding of the major components of the term and what characterize a critical thinker from skills and abilities.

Section Three: Close Reading

Q 1: Do your teachers provide you with helping texts or textbooks in:

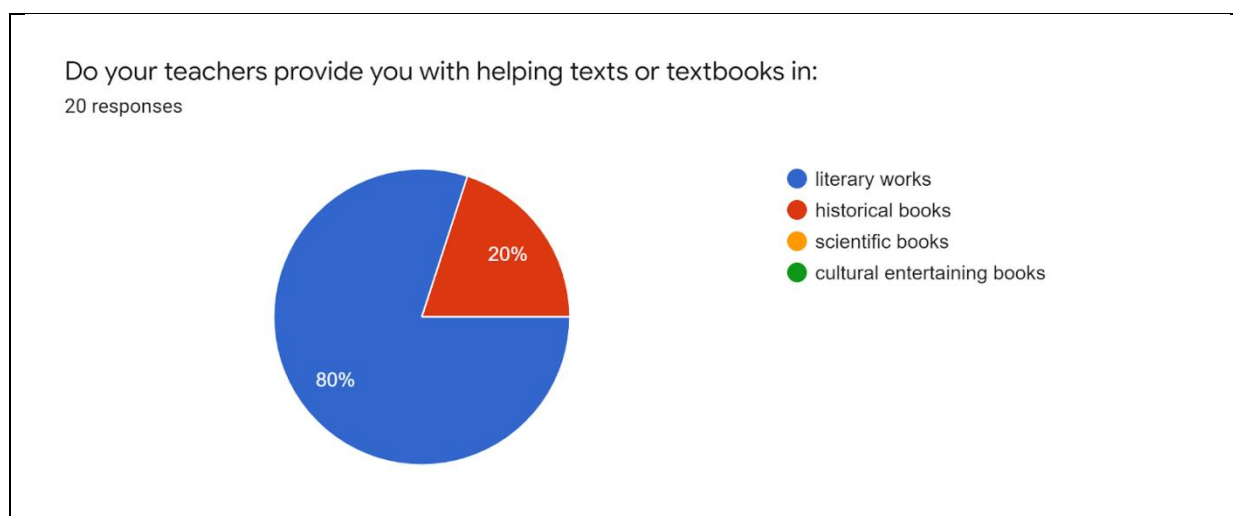


Figure3.11. Types of Texts

The result in figure (3.11) reveals that the majority of the sample (80%) asserted that they are provided the most with literary texts by their teachers, while (20%) of the participants selected historical texts as the main type of books and helping texts adopted by their teachers. Concerning the other two options which are cultural entertaining books and scientific books no one of the respondents chose them. These findings can be interpreted as that students are not exposed to the other different types of texts; their teachers rely mostly on literature and history as the main sources for their language teaching; hence, they neglect the

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other kinds of texts that may be interesting and pleasing subjects for the student and they can motivate them to read in the target language.

Q 2: Do you find these texts: complex/moderate/simple?

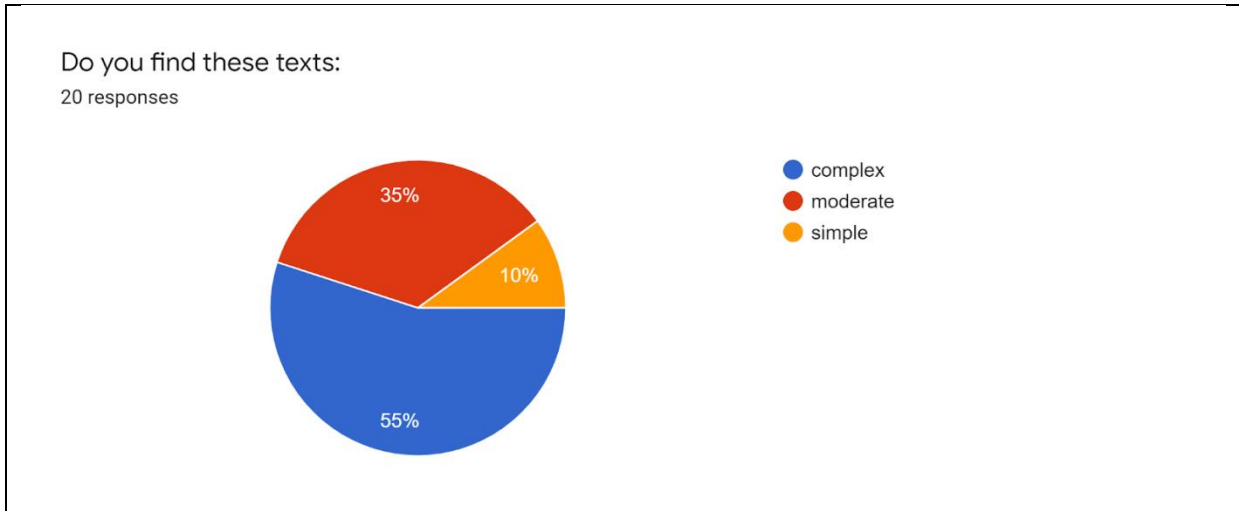


Figure3.12. Texts' level of complexity

Figure (3.12) demonstrates that over half (55%) of the respondents stated that the texts provided by their teachers are complex. (35%) of the sample viewed those texts moderate, while few (10%) who find the texts easy. This result implies that students are being exposed to challenging texts; also this may indicate that their teachers are trying to go beyond the simple level of students' understanding.

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Q 3: Do you annotate as you read these texts?

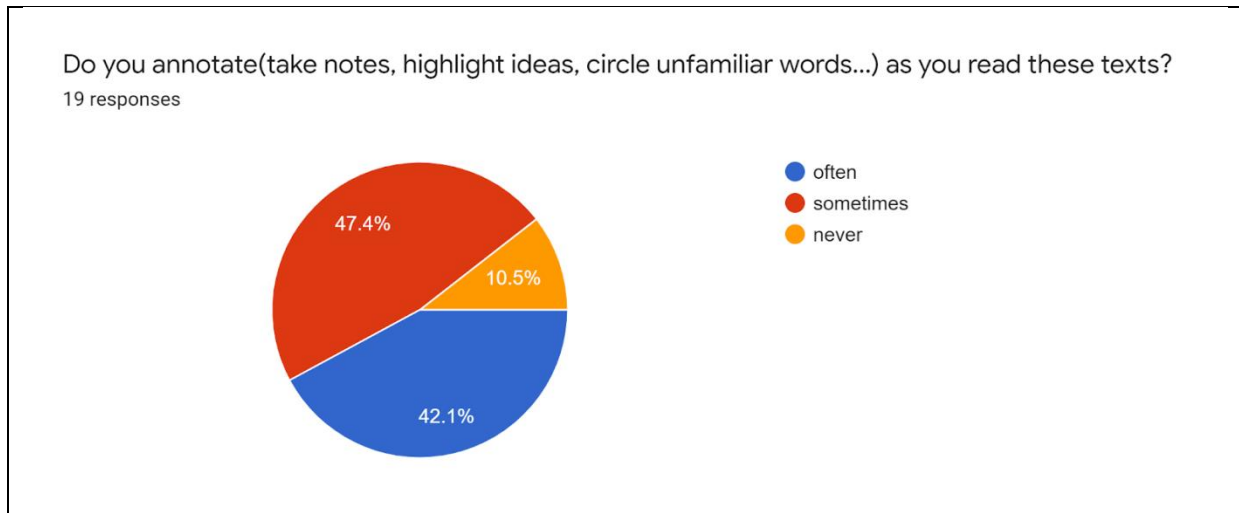


Figure 3.13. Students' Use of Annotation

As it is displayed in figure (3.13), the results show that (42.1%) of the participants frequently annotate the provided texts as they read. (47.4%) of the students affirmed that they annotate texts during reading from time to time. However, very few (10.5%) stated that they read without annotating the text. Remarkably, this result denotes that not all of the students are aware of the importance of the annotating process during reading, in other words, they do not read closely the text and they do not react to it; therefore, their readings are quite superficial.

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Q 4: How many times do you read the same texts?

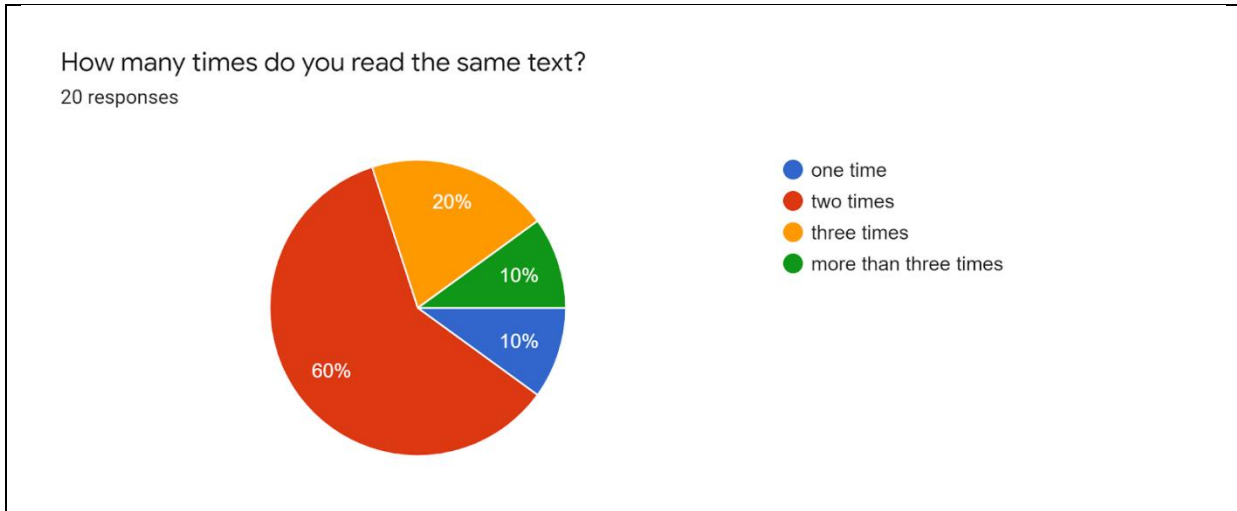


Figure3.14. Students Attitudes toward repeated readings

The results in figure (3.14) demonstrate that over half of the students (60%) get satisfied with only two readings of the same text, while few students (10%) do not limit themselves reading the same text more than three times. These results may indicate that not all of the students give importance to the repeated readings of texts; thus, their reading may lack good comprehension and accuracy.

Q 5: Do teachers inquire about specific ideas on these texts?

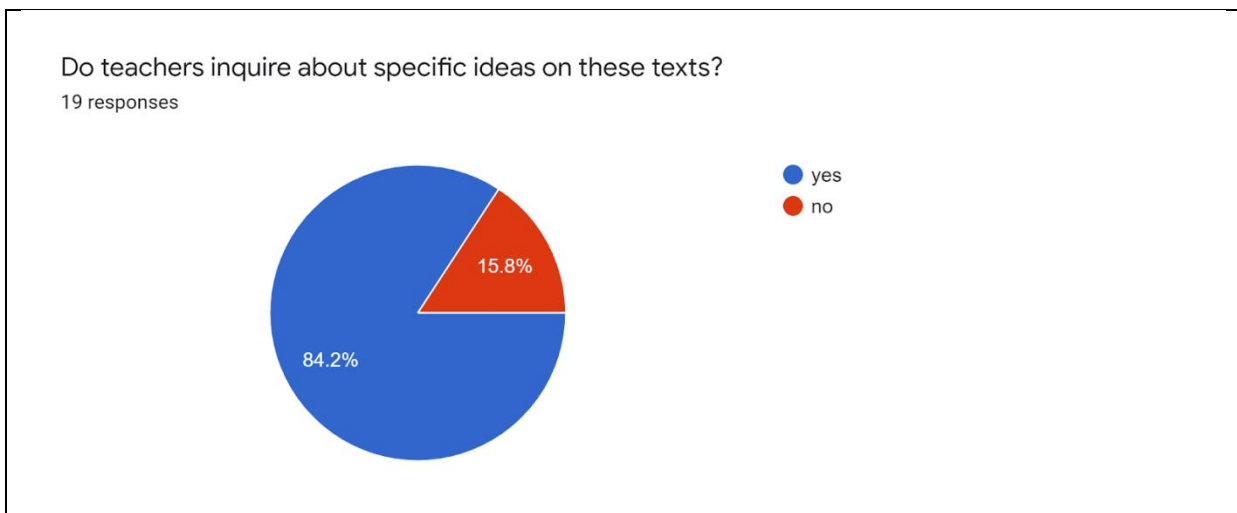


Figure3.15. Students and Teachers' Questioning

As it is shown in figure (3.15), a considerable majority of the respondents (84.2%) confirmed that their teachers ask for specific ideas from the texts they provide, while few (15.8) answered by “no” to the question. This finding may suggest that students are being

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engaged with texts provided to them and they are encouraged to their close reading. Since, text-dependent questions make students turn back to the text, urging them to reread it frequently in order to answer the questions.

Q 6: As you read a text, do you try to come up with your own understanding?

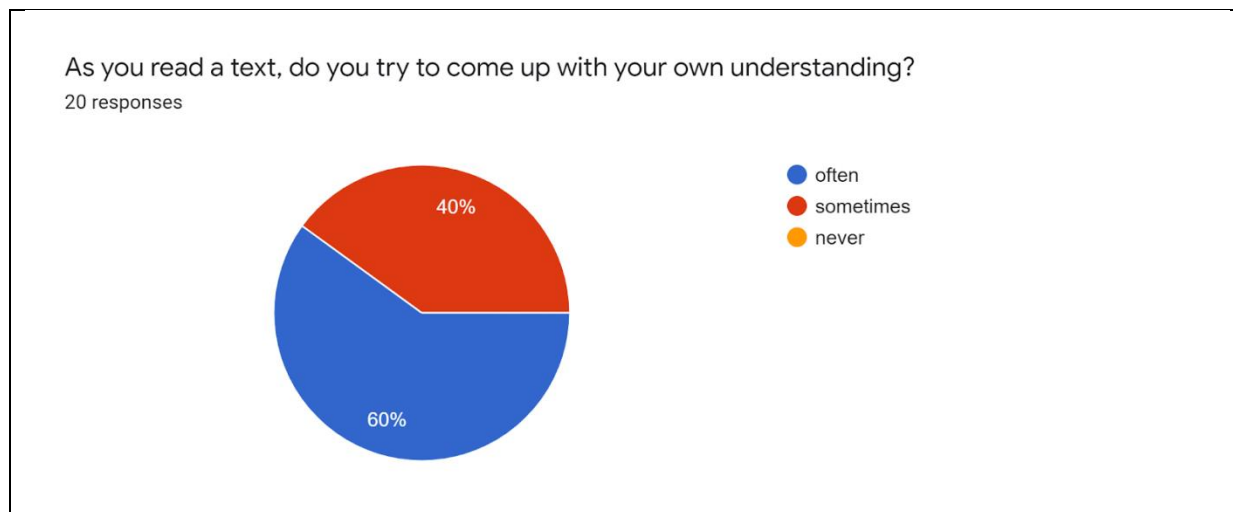


Figure3.16. Students' Interpretation of Texts

As it is demonstrated in figure (3.16), the findings reveal that over half of the students (60%) construct their own interpretation of texts regularly. Besides, a significant number of students (40%) admitted that they do not often try to come up with their own understanding as they read a text. This result may lead to the conclusion that over half of the students become critical thinkers as they read; in other words, they reason and analyse the different elements of text in order to reach its meanings according to their own perception. Additionally, this may also entail that those students practise close and sustained reading of texts, which means that they read with a purpose.

3. 4. Discussion of the Results of Students' Questionnaire

The gathered data and results from students' questionnaire that was administrated to third year students provided a clear understanding about students' attitudes toward close reading and gave a good insight into how students use their critical thinking abilities. Accordingly, conclusions were drawn about the role of close reading in enhancing students' critical thinking skills.

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First, in section one (personal information); the results indicated that most students view studying English as a foreign language uneasy. This proves that there are some constraints, and issues affecting the language learning process of many students.

In section two, the questions were designated to address students' use of reasoning abilities and to see if they acquire good critical thinking skills or poor ones. Notably, the interpretation of students' answers revealed the efforts of their teachers in motivating and encouraging them to develop their level of thinking. However, the analysis of the results also uncovered that most students are poor critical thinkers. They admitted that they find activities based on their own use of thinking difficult and take time to be solved. Add to that, the findings identified that most students are weak in applying what they acquire as knowledge and skills at class in their real-life situations, this result consolidates the fact that most students are weak critical thinkers.

In section three, the questions addressed students' attitudes toward close reading. The results revealed that most students do not read purposely, and they lack good and effective close reading strategies including repeated readings and annotating process. Furthermore, a considerable number of the students affirmed that they do not often try to come up with a reasoned interpretation of texts during reading. This findings show that students take the information as they read without evaluating it.

Based on the discussion of the obtained findings from students' questionnaire, the results do not completely support the research hypothesis, which entails that close reading can enhance EFL students' critical thinking. In this regard, there is a possible explanation for this result; with few exceptions, students remain dependent in their thinking on different sources of knowledge including teachers. Further work should be done to fill the gaps related to the lack of motivation and adequate strategies promoting effective close reading.

3. 5. Recommendations for both teachers and students

- Teachers are required to encourage students to regularly use and improve their thinking skills.
- Teachers should provide more instructions to their students on how to practise effective close reading.
- Teachers are required to motivate students to read independently challenging texts.
- Teachers should raise students' confidence in making decisions and solving problems in order to encourage them to depend more on their own abilities of thinking rather than relying on the other available sources of knowledge.
- Teachers should engage students with critical thinking activities that relate to their real-life experiences.
- Students should think critically as they read, i.e., set a purpose for reading.
- Students should select complex and sophisticated texts to read as a way to increase their level of understanding.
- Students should apply critical thinking strategies and skills as regular habits.

3. 6. Limitation of the Study

Every research has limitations, where different constraints may affect the obtained results of the study. In this present research, the findings have to be seen in light of two limitations. The first limitation is concerned with sample size, due to Corona virus crisis; inevitably, time was not suitable to make enough students participate in the questionnaire, so the number of students was small. Otherwise, the data of the study would be gathered from sufficient individual results. Add to that, the sample used to fill the questionnaire showed some reluctance at the beginning. The second limitation is the shortage of references related to the topic.

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Conclusion

This chapter introduced a detailed description of the research population, sample and the adopted instrument in investigating the research problem. Moreover, it displayed the gathered data from students' questionnaire that provided deep insights into students' perceptions toward critical thinking and close reading. A thorough discussion and analysis of the findings revealed that students are facing weaknesses when depending on their own use of critical thinking, what make them unable to perform well at class as well as in their real-life experiences. In addition to that students' answers showed that they do not acquire good close reading techniques. Accordingly, the drawn conclusion from the interpretation of the results entails that students are in need to reinforce effective close reading strategies in order to foster their critical thinking skills. Furthermore, the chapter highlighted some recommendations to both students and teachers that stress the importance of cultivating critical thinking skills and the regular practise of adequate close reading strategies without neglecting the role of motivation in achieving these goals. Finally, this section presented the limitations of the study that influenced the research results.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to investigate the effects of close reading on the improvement of critical thinking skills for EFL learners. Particularly, it seeks to analyse how the practice of close reading strategies can enhance students' thinking abilities. It also tries to highlight how much it is significant for EFL students to develop effective critical thinking for better language learning and efficient performing in real-world situations.

In this respect, the study deals with two main phases. First, the theoretical one discusses the two concepts of "critical thinking" and "close reading". Then, it highlights the important notions related to them in order to build a well-reinforced field of investigation. Second, the practical phase aims to provide valuable insights into students' perceptions and application of close reading strategies in their attempt to develop their critical thinking. To provide better views concerning the subject under investigation a questionnaire to third year students was elaborated and used.

In summary, this study has reached comprehensive results demonstrating that third year EFL students need to work both on developing their thinking capacities and on acquiring good critical thinking skills. Additionally, the findings revealed that students should learn how to individually adopt adequate strategies related to their actual cognitive competences. Thus, these results do not fully support the research hypothesis.

Regardless, future research could continue to explore more the implementation of close reading strategies for the encouragement and the development of the students to promote higher level of critical thinking. Equally important, further studies could emphasize more the role of motivation in raising students' confidence to depend more on their own thinking abilities.

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DEPARTEMENT : Département d'anglais

RESUME DE MEMOIRE DE MASTER

Domaine : lettres et langues étrangères

Filière : Anglais

Option : Littérature Anglaise

Thème : Le rôle de la lecture attentive sur le développement des compétences de la pensée critique

Présenté par: Gacem Ferial

Encadré par : Mr. Mohammed Naoumi

Cette recherche a pour objectif d'enquêter sur le rôle de la lecture attentive sur le développement des compétences de la pensée critique pour les étudiants en langues étrangères à l'université Ammar Thelidji, Laghouat. Cette étude vise à démontrer un problème éminent, qui est l'ordre de pensée inférieur des étudiants, qui ne possèdent pas les bonnes compétences de la réflexion critiques. En conséquence, les étudiants font face à des difficultés lorsqu'ils participent en classe ainsi qu'en situations réelles. A cet égard, une méthode analytique descriptive a été adoptée dans laquelle un questionnaire a été utilisé et administré à vingt étudiants de troisième années langue anglaise. Les résultats obtenus lors de l'analyse de données reçues indiquaient que les étudiants sont faibles dans l'application effective de leur capacité critique ; de plus, ces étudiants manquent les stratégies appropriées pour la lecture attentive. Donc, ces résultats ne valident pas complètement l'hypothèse de la recherche, vu que les étudiants comptent sur les sources d'information qui sont facilement accessible sans les évaluer. En ce sens, il est recommandé d'implémenter les stratégies adéquates de la lecture attentive dans les classes et de régulièrement motiver et inspirer les étudiants afin de les préparer à acquérir une bonne pensée critique dans un laps de temps raisonnable.



الجمهورية الجزائرية الديمقراطية الشعبية
وزارة التعليم العالي و البحث العلمي



جامعة عمار ثليجي - الأغواط

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التخصص: ادب وحضارة انجليزية

عنوان المذكرة: تأثير القراءة الدقيقة على تطور مهارات التفكير النقدي

تقديم الطالبة: قاسم فريال

الأستاذ المؤطر: الاستاذ محمد نعومي

ملخص

يسعى هذا البحث إلى استكشاف تأثير القراءة الدقيقة على تطور مهارات التفكير النقدي لطلاب اللغة الأجنبية على مستوى جامعة عمار ثليجي بالأغواط. حيث تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى إبراز مشكلة أساسية تتمثل في الصعوبات التي يعاني منها الطلاب في ما يخص ضعف مهاراتهم الفكرية وعدم اكتسابهم استراتيجيات التفكير النقدي اللازمة، مما يؤثر سلباً على أدائهم في الدراسة وكذا على ارض الواقع. بناءً على ذلك، تم اعتماد اسلوب تحليلي و وصفي من خلال توجيه استبيان لعشرين طالب سنة ثالثة لغة انجليزية. بعد تحليل البيانات المحصل عليها، اظهرت النتائج المستسقة الى ان الطلاب لديهم ضعف في تطبيق مهارات التفكير النقدي الفعالة، بالإضافة الى افتقارهم استراتيجيات القراءة الدقيقة. و عليه، هذه النتائج لا تؤيد بشكل كامل فرضية البحث، مادام الطلاب لا يزالون يعتمدون في تفكيرهم على مصادر المعرفة المتاحة دون تقييمها. تبعا لذلك، يوصى بتنمية استراتيجيات القراءة الدقيقة اللازمة في المجال التعليمي، و كذا توفير التحفيز و الالهام باستمرار للطلاب، سعياً لجعلهم مفكرين نقديين ناجحين في فترة زمنية معقولة.