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The Role of Critical Thinking in Reading Comprehension for Secondary School Learners in Algeria.

The Case Study of Ain Temouchent Secondary Schools.

An Extended Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for a Master's Degree in Linguistics

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Dedication

The verse **“Will you not, then, use your reason? ” “أفلاَ تَعقلُون”** has been mentioned in the Quran 13 times and has served as a great inspiration for this work, for that reason and many others, we would like to thank Allah Almighty for providing us with strength and unwavering determination to finish our research.

This work is dedicated to our beloved parents who have blessed us with their endless support and unconditional love. Thank you for accompanying us on this long, stressful journey. We would like to express our appreciation to all teachers who seek to develop their students’ critical thinking despite the struggles they constantly face. It is to you that we look up to.

Achouak & Oussama

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Abstract

The primary goal of education is developing students' critical thinking and building independent individuals. This study aims at exploring the relationship between critical thinking and reading comprehension for a successful teaching\learning process at the Algerian secondary school level context. It attempts as well to examine whether the curriculum encompasses critical thinking skills as an objective and the means set to achieve it. Furthermore, this investigation seeks to measure the responsibility and role of teachers in implementing critical thinking in reading comprehension in the classroom. To conduct this study and in order to achieve reliable results, we have used four research tools; a questionnaire, an observation, an experiment and a textbook evaluation. A questionnaire destined to ten EFL secondary school teachers, an experiment conducted at Saim Haddache secondary school with two classes during reading sessions, an observation that took place at Saim haddache and Abou Bakr Belkaid secondary schools in addition to a textbook evaluation investigating the content in respect to critical thinking. Among the findings of this research study, we note an alarming absence of critical thinking during reading sessions that might be due to the guidelines imposed by the Algerian education system. We note as well a need to enhance teachers' skills in nurturing students' critical thinking abilities. Moreover, the study results reveal that the curriculum designers have not delivered efficient methods to ensure the implementation of critical thinking and to ensure attaining successful results. Finally, this investigation has attempted to raise awareness among the different Algerian secondary school stakeholders as far as critical thinking is concerned and has attempted as well to provide some helpful recommendations to solve the problem in hand.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

EFL ….. English as a Foreign Language

CT ….. Critical Thinking

CEO ….. Chief Executive Officer

BBC ….. British Broadcasting Corporation

CBA ….. Curriculum Based Assessment

ICT's ….. Information and Communication Technologies

General Introduction

Introduction

It all starts with an illusive idea that crawls into the mind of the individual, building a web of lies based on deception and manipulation. In a world filled with *'weaponized lies'*, it is becoming increasingly important for students to call upon reason and logic in order to form decisions based on accurate evaluation and fair judgment.

Academically, the term that encompasses the elements mentioned is **critical thinking,** but since it is vast, we chose to narrow it down by focusing on one of the four main skills in learning any language: reading, more precisely: **reading comprehension**.

As students, we were not taught how to think critically and independently. We were not able to learn how to read between the lines or to decipher and understand the meaning of a particular text, we acted as passive learners who were satiated with their teachers' input, trapped in a relationship between an *'oppressed and an oppressor*', as Freire puts it.

As future teachers, we would like to provide our students with what we were deprived of, the opportunity to exercise those skills in a safe environment and the space to think, evaluate and judge by themselves.

The main purpose of this research is to raise awareness of the importance of critical thinking (henceforth CT), as it is to many scholars like *Michael Scriven (1985)* **"the primary task of education"** (p.11) since it boosts learners' creativity and provides them with meaningful insights.

This study attempts as well to examine the degree to which the Algerian curriculum incorporates critical thinking skills. Moreover, it investigates the role of EFL teachers as advocates of critical thinking in the classroom.

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1/ What could be the possible benefits of integrating critical thinking in reading comprehension sessions?

2/ Does the Algerian national education system and curriculum emphasize the development of critical thinking skills?

3/ Do ELF teachers implement critical thinking in their EFL reading classes?

Taking into account the questions at hand, we theorize that laying the groundwork for an active integration of critical thinking into English reading comprehension is of uppermost benefit for EFL students. Furthermore, we hypothesize that the curriculum failed to provide the necessary means to ensure the realization of critical thinking as an objective and that teachers do not take part in building critical learners.

In an attempt to test our hypothesis and ensure the reliability of our work, four research tools were selected:

- Classroom observation: as a starting point, an observation of two reading classes took place at at Abou-bakr Belkaid (Ain Tolba) and Saim Haddache (Hammam Bouhdjar) secondary schools in Ain Temouchent for two terms.

- Teachers' questionnaire: English teachers eight Secondary schools in Ain Temouchent were provided with a questionnaire that included multiple-choice and open-ended questions.

- Experiment: Two classes at Saim Haddache secondary school were given a passage that contains fabricated information in order to test their critical thinking abilities

- Textbook evaluation: in this study, the second-year textbook of English was explored in order to measure its inclusion of critical thinking elements or lack thereof.

This dissertation is composed of three chapters:

Chapter one lays the theoretical ground for the importance of critical thinking in relation to reading comprehension. Chapter two is devoted to the description of research methodology in addition to the different data collection tools that were used to explore the role of critical thinking in reading comprehension. Lastly, chapter three includes the analysis and the discussion of the results generated from the research methods.

Chapter One

Literature Review

Introduction

Considering that ***critical thinking*** and ***reading comprehension*** are the core concepts of our research study, this chapter aims to provide the theoretical background of critical thinking and seeks to explore different definitions that reflect the deep and thorough thoughts of its authors. Besides that, it highlights the most relevant skills that turn around critical thinking and their significant role in enhancing EFL learning. This theoretical chapter is as well devoted to reading types, the techniques and the relationship between critical thinking and reading comprehension while closely examining the interaction of the two in an EFL classroom. Furthermore, this chapter deals with the relationship between critical thinking and Bloom's taxonomy or what is referred to as "cognitive goals of education" that allow teachers to measure the effectiveness of their teaching and lessons.

1.1 What does critical thinking mean?

Systematic Doubt was founded by ***René Descartes*** with his insightful quote that goes **"I think therefore I am**". One of its impressive attainments is the use of doubt as an instrument to decide which beliefs are certain and true. Comparably, critical thinking also calls upon skepticism, questioning, seeking evidence, sharply analyzing, and tracing out convincing explanations of what is said and done.

There is no consensus about what critical thinking precisely is, yet, surprisingly all of the already existing definitions have one common theme: "questioning to form a judgment".

Ennis (1985, p. 45) defines critical thinking as: "a reasonable, reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do". This definition entails that critical thinking evokes one's reflection and judgment abilities.

According to Elder and Paul (1994) , critical thinking takes place when an individual is aware and in control of his/her own thoughts without external interventions, this requires that they develop sound criteria and standards in order to ameliorate their thinking quality. Likewise**,** Beyer (1995) maintains that critical thinking means reasoned judgments.

Besides that, Lohani (1998) believes that critical thinking is constantly observing, analyzing, reasoning, and evaluating. Similarly, Paul and Elder (2006) describe critical thinking as the art of analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it. Doig et al. (2012) emphasize critical thinking as an ability to reason out problems and form credible arguments by fine-tuning the reasoning process. In this context, Paul and Elder (2014, p107) argue that:

> "The basic principles of critical thinking represent activated knowledge of the parts of thinking, standards by which thinking can be assessed, and ways in which thinking can be improved."

In other words, critical thinking refines and elevates the quality of thinking in order to build critical citizens who are able to contribute in the long-term process of establishing democracy.

In brief, and based on the definitions listed above, critical thinking is a complex process , it is generally viewed to be the ability of individuals to question information with the purpose of finding rational conclusions.

1.2 Critical Thinking Skills:

Critical thinking is a pattern that is deeply rooted in logical thinking and careful examination of certain claims. Students are asked to form their opinions academically or in daily life based on deliberate reasoning rather than simply accepting things blindly or for the sake of conformity, even if the source was a Nobel Prize winner.

For better decision-making, emotions, intuition, and common sense should be carefully managed and often restrained in order to yield the floor to critical thinking.

However, critical thinking as an effective skill is not easy to acquire, for Doyle (2019) students need to develop skills such as:

- **Analysis:**

A critical thinker by default has an analytical mind that deconstructs information into parts that are thrown under the microscope of reasoning and logic. It is by casting a skeptical eye over any piece of information that we are able to reveal its hidden assumptions and implicit objectives to finally arrive at the stage where we are able to formulate thoughtful questions about the topic in hand.

- **Evaluation:**

Based on prior knowledge and dedicated research, the mind, in this stage, must be able to judge -without outside influence- the credibility of the information and determine the strength of the arguments presented.

- **Communication**:

The activity or process of expressing ideas and feelings or of giving people information. Speech is the fastest method of communication between people. There are several different ways we share information with one another. For example, you might use verbal communication when sharing a presentation with a group. You might use written communication when applying for a job or sending an email. Other than encouraging group work and collaboration, communication is a key when it comes to exchanging ideas and thoughts, discussing current issues, and looking for possible solutions.

- **Creativity:**

Critical thinking is considered as an outlet for the imagination. It opens doors to people with an innovative mind and a raging curiosity to observe, question, and generate new ideas and solutions. There is a common agreement that both critical thinking and creativity are essential in solving problems. They both lead to think deductively and rationally and henceforth to understanding the different meanings.

- **Open-mindedness**:

A critical thinker embraces diversity and welcomes constructive criticism. They are receptive to new ideas and actively explore the other's point of view. Critical thinkers are reflective people who are not rigid. They are flexible and they accept feedback and change and they even auto-evaluate they learning ways and methods. Applying open-mindedness opens the gate widely to comprehension and understanding.

- **Problem-solving:**

A critical thinker takes pleasure in tackling unresolved issues. They do not only raise problems but also make it a responsibility to look for practical solutions. Problem solving helps learners develop ways and methods in facing future challenges and difficulties.

1.3 The Art of Questioning:

Kids perceive the world as a path of inquiry and exploration. It is a beautiful story that recites their endless adventure towards the discovery of the surrounding environment. They are not intimidated in the slightest by the ambiguity of this world but they observe, question, and experiment. In 2013, a research conducted in the United Kingdom stated that the average four-year-old asks about three hundred and ninety questions a day, which means a question every two and half minutes. Unfortunately, kids start asking less and less questions as they grow, Richard Saul Wurman, the original director of TED conference, provided a plausible answer to this issue by pointing out that "in school, we are rewarded for having an answer not for asking the right question" (as cited in Berger,2011). He holds the deeply flawed education system accountable for the children's lack of questioning.

The situation continues to worsen as we grow older, the spark of curiosity starts to dim, the blaze of wonder that flooded the veins of the individual and filled his mind with an insatiable appetite for knowledge starts to fade away, leaving behind a stagnant mindset that avoids challenges, dreads failure and strives for compliments that would boost its self-confidence.

1.3.1 The Importance of Asking Questions:

Questions can provoke a change in our lives, it is of extreme importance to step back and question every step we take in life, every choice we make and every word we utter. If we took the time to observe our surroundings, we might come to the realization that we are living in a world that our questions produced, that the fancy car was once invented by someone who thought " what if there was a four-wheeled automotive vehicle designed to carry passengers and goods?".

According to Sloane (2010), our questioning nature instigated the transition from the caveman era to the modern world. It bears repeating that intellectuals and brilliant thinkers are interrogative, expressing doubts, and creating debates based on small questions that aroused their curiosity.

Eric Schmidt, the former CEO of Google, presents a living example of the significance of questions by declaring "we run this company on questions, not answers", explicitly proclaiming that great answers are only attained through constant questioning of competences and sincere desire to improve the performance. Another fascinating example is when Greg Dyke, former Director-General of the BBC, arranged a conference with his staff to ask whether there was anything he can do to improve the conditions of his employees. He took the time to listen and welcomed their opinions with open arms, and then he dropped another question on the table. This time it was on how the company can boost its performance to attract various audiences. The director was surprisingly impressed with the wonderful suggestions he received, not to mention the respect he gained for taking the time to listen to his keen employees.

Questions were the map that helped guide some of the world's greatest scientists and inventors. The physicist ***Isaac Newton***, for example, was an ordinary man captivated by the universe and in awe of its mysteries. He wondered once while sitting under an apple tree, "why does an apple fall from a tree and why does the moon not fall into the earth?" ***Albert Einstein***, the genius physicist, also asked " what would the universe look like if I rode through it on a beam of light?". A simple question gave birth to theories that profoundly altered ideas about space and time. Philosophers, on the other hand, had their own doubts prickling; they contemplated the meaning of life, religions and morals, drawing attention to some of the world's most controversial, often taboo, questions that people would not think twice of.

Questions, aside from their intellectual pursuits, develop self-reliance, serve as a guide for the conversation between individuals and strengthen their tentative relationship by finding common grounds and mutual viewpoints.

1.4 The Sponge and the Panning-for-Gold thinking styles:

After exploring the numerous advantages of asking questions, M. Neil Browne (2006) has come to the conclusion that a person can be classified according to his own thinking style. He was the one who introduced the idea of The Sponge and the Panning-for-Gold thinking styles.

One approach to thinking indicates that the function of the brain often resembles the absorption of water by a sponge. By adopting this approach, one may absorb more information that would certainly be of assistance in unraveling problematic often complex matters. Another benefit of the sponge approach is that it requires less mental efforts, stressing the importance of concentration and memorization. While this style has been the anchor of passive learners worldwide, it proved to be seriously unreliable in many cases: it delivers no method for an accurate evaluation of information, leaving a person at a crossroads, unable to distinguish between what is valid and what is not. If readers depended solely on this approach, they would believe whatever they read, becoming puppets in the hands of others. Hence, a new approach of thinking came into existence, allowing people to choose between what to absorb and what to avoid. In order to make this choice, readers must develop a question-asking attitude that requires a positive interaction with the writer through his writings.

The panning-for-gold approach supplies active readers and/or listeners with methods that seek to determine the value of what they read or hear. This task might seem daunting at first but it is very rewarding.

Despite the fact that these two thinking styles complement each other, their similarities are strictly limited. A reader who adapts the sponge approach tries to grasp the ideas of the author by carefully reading the sentences and summarizing the content. Their ultimate goal is to memorize facts or arguments with no evaluation whatsoever. However, a reader who follows the panning-for-gold style reads for the purpose of acquiring

knowledge and questions many claims and arguments put forward by the author. They evaluate the material for the sake of reaching a personal conclusion based on careful reasoning and evaluation.

Am I panning-for-gold? : If you suspect that you are an adherent of the second approach then you certainly ask the following questions from time to time while reading:

-Why does the author want me to believe this claim?

-What is the reason behind this claim? -Is it credible? Can I trust it?

-What conclusion have I come to in the end?

1.5 The Importance of Critical Thinking in Education:

Over the past years, education revolved around memorization, acquiring, retaining, and accepting knowledge without any second thoughts. Yet, rote learning and memorization are no longer appropriate for those who are hungry for knowledge and critical thinking (Marin & Halpern, 2011).

Teaching critical thinking to students will aid them to settle equivocalness, grasp, and adjust to ceaseless changes (Brookfield, 2012). Educators and pedagogy researchers are aware of their students' need to be critical thinkers due to the demands of the 21st century's society that is described by consistent changes (Crenshaw, Hale, and Harper, 2011). Corresponding to this, many scholars have advocated the urge of teaching critical thinking to help students make better judgments, take right decisions, improve their communication and problem-solving skills, and in the long term to prepare them to confront troubles and commitments. (Halpern qtd. in lui, frankel & roohr,2014)

Freire for instance encouraged students' ability to think critically which he claims enables them to recognize the connection between their individual problems and the social context they are embedded in, which justifies Galinsky's (2010) description of critical thinking as "an important life skill".

Critical thinking is of extreme importance in an educational setting because it fosters active learning, it teaches students *how* to think rather than *what* to think. Brown (2004, p. 25) states that in an ideal academic English program, "the objectives of a curriculum are not limited to linguistic factors alone, but also include developing the art of critical thinking.

Students must, therefore, be taught to doubt, question, and analyze which information to reject and which to believe.

We think that students who develop these skills are more likely to: Score better, create their own knowledge, become independent and self-directed. So critical thinking has to be fostered, promoted, and nurtured in every educational program

1.6 Critical thinking and bloom's taxonomy:

It bears repeating that in an educational setting, students should not be treated as information processors or a blank page to be filled, but rather as individuals who are able to construct their own learning experience in order to maximize learning opportunities. Educators ought to aid their students by stressing the importance of *how* to learn rather than *what* to learn in order to reach self-reliance and make vital contributions to social and economic developments.

Benjamin Bloom, one of the most influential theorists, made it his mission to organize human thinking skills and actively involve critical thinking in the classroom by giving birth to Bloom's taxonomy. Bloom's taxonomy or what is also called "cognitive goals of education" has been the ultimate guide to teachers in planning their lessons effectively and measurably. It is worth to mention that the significant achievement of this taxonomy lays in presenting critical thinking skills in a hierarchical order. Learners begin their journey by recalling previous *knowledge* that paves the way to *comprehension* and facilitates the process of *application*, according to Bloom, these are "lower order" cognitive skills. After that, students are encouraged to seek more information and take a step forward so as to *analyze* ideas by examining each part solely and unraveling the relationship that knots them together, this requires students to determine causes, affects and draw conclusions. Furthermore, students arrive at the stage of *synthesis*, where critical thinking takes a firm stand. In this phase, students have the space to set free their imagination, provide their own input, give their own production and solve problems. Lastly, the world with its vast challenges and numerous obstacles requires students to be self-dependent and self-directed to be able to avoid rushed judgements and false decisions, therefore, Bloom choose *evaluation* which is the highest level of thinking as a conclusion for his taxonomy. In this phase, students determine the value of the idea, material or item presented. They defend, criticize and judge by themselves the validity and credibility of certain information.

1.6.1 An example of bloom's taxonomy:

We have opted for the speech of Martin Luther King 'I have a dream' (second year textbook *getting through* p.48) in order to demonstrate the use of the famous taxonomy.

To begin with, the teacher may stimulate his/her students' *knowledge* by asking for some general information about the leader of the American civil right movement and the year he delivered his great speech 'I have a dream'. After that, students are requested to provide the main purpose behind this speech , summarize its content or paraphrase it in their own words in order to test their *comprehension.* Furthermore, students make use of their knowledge and comprehension by determining the significance of the speech to the present American political and social systems in addition to the tremendous impact Martin Luther king's vision of equality had on the black community. Moreover, students can imagine and envision what other changes the American civil right activist would have contributed to if he were alive today in an analytical attempt. The taxonomy presents further challenges; at this step, the teacher can ask his/her students to put themselves in King's shoes*, "What would they do differently?*" "*Can they suggest possible solutions for racism*?" or "imagine *you are a black individual, what would you do to regain your liberty, fight racism and influence fellow blacks*?" Drilling such questions into the minds of young learners can be a daunting task at first, especially if they do not respond nor show positive interaction, however, as soon as their minds get used to being motivated, and simply pushed to *think,* there will be positive results. At the end, students finish their inspirational and rewarding journey by forming a debate that revolves around judging the value of Martin Luther King's arguments, revealing any contradicting opinions and defending what they believe is right in addition to learning how to accept the opinion of others, this is what bloom calls *evaluation*.

No one can deny that Bloom's Taxonomy has successfully aroused students' curiosity and awakened their critical thinking skills. It has transformed the learning atmosphere from a dull, agonizing process to a gratifying, dynamic one.

1.7 The reading skill and Critical Thinking:

Reading is believed to be the most important skill in the English language. However, there is no consensus among experts regarding its definition. Johnson (2008) views reading as a mere activity to reach the intended meaning of a text. Reading is often described as a self-discovery process. It allows readers to interact with written materials by making use of their existing knowledge in order to construct meaning. Reading is also seen as an interactive exercise that joins the reader and the text in a dynamic relationship (Hedge, 2007).

Birch (2002) has contemplated and pondered the meaning of interactive process and later on found out that interaction takes place when different strategies such as top and bottom along with the reader's knowledge ally in order to achieve the task of reading. In addition to that, the reader has some kind of a subtle, indirect communication with the writer across spaces so as to build meaning and infer the writer's message. This view was also embraced by Grabe (2009) who stated that "reading is also an interaction between the reader and the writer".

In brief, reading is best described as the interactive process of extracting information from a written material to reach the stage of comprehension. While comprehending, readers utilize their background knowledge to elevate their thoughts and enlighten their minds.

Researchers have brought forward two main types of reading: intensive reading and extensive reading.

1.7.1 Intensive reading:

Intensive reading is simply defined as reading for a purpose. It proved to be a great method to ameliorate students' vocabulary, grammar and comprehension. Aebersold and Field (2009) declared that intensive reading is "reading the text carefully and thoroughly to get maximum comprehension" in other words, it requires a careful and deliberate reading in order to obtain detailed comprehension of the text.

Correspondingly, Powell (2005) states that intensive reading involves "the careful reading of short, complex texts for detailed understanding and skills practice" It should be noted that texts that are intended for purposeful reading _intensive_ should not exceed 500 words (Broughton, 2003).

The above definitions have commonly shared that the objective of intensive reading is the in depth exploration of texts for the purpose of enhancing comprehension and solving tasks.

In the classroom, intensive reading can be put into practice with “true or false” exercises, answering questions in relation to the text and filling the gaps.

1.7.2 Extensive reading:

Extensive reading equals reading for pleasure. Students have the freedom to choose any book they wish to read whether novels or magazines that have managed to capture their interest and spike their curiosity. This type of reading can be a powerful method to improve students’ comprehension in addition to enriching their vocabulary.

Nation (2009) defines extensive reading as an activity to reach the general meaning of the text and grasp the writer’s message rather than focusing on isolated words and expressions. Powell (2005) notes that the primary objective of extensive reading is to change students ‘perspective of reading because students learn the most when they are reading for pleasure and not under coercion and that is the view that Alderson clearly adheres to when he states that reading should be “an enjoyable and private activity, from which much pleasure can be derived, and in which one can become totally absorbed.” (Alderson, 2000:13)

1.7.3 Reading techniques:

While reading, individuals implement two techniques, skimming and scanning which can facilitate and speed the task of acquiring information from the text.

1.7.3.1 Skimming:

Mikulecky & Jeffries (2009) state that skimming is "a form of rapid reading for finding the general idea, or gist of a message or a book" (p. 170). That is to say that skimming is commonly used among readers to discover the general meaning or gist of a text. Readers quickly inspect the text looking for relevant key words that may indicate the idea presented in significantly less time (Cohen, 2009). This reading technique encourages anticipation and allows for a quick interpretation of the written material.

1.7.3.2 Scanning:

Often, skimming cannot satisfy the reader nor quench his thirst for knowledge that is when scanning becomes relevant. Scanning is the careful examination of the text for specific information without taking into account its general idea (Brown 2001). Similarly, Maxwell (1970) refers to scanning as the capacity to pinpoint facts and gather details. Beale (2013) further explains that scanning requires a full comprehension of the written material in order to select and derive information easily.

These two techniques can be of great assistance for students, whether in academic researches or recreational reading.

1.8 Reading Comprehension:

The reading skill does not have a settled upon or direct definition; various researchers have offered unique points of view and definitions, some of which are quickly exposed here.

Reading and *reading comprehension* are two distinct things. While reading includes deciphering and interpreting, reading comprehension includes taking what was simply read and getting meaning from those words. In more straightforward terms, reading comprehension is the ability to read, comprehend, reflect upon and review what has just been read.

Reading was now and then wrongly called an *inactive skill*, since the reader does not create the message in the same sense as a speaker or an author does. However, many cognitivists contended against this description assuring that reading is not a passive skill, and this widely spread appellation was forcefully dismissed.

In this regard, reading comprehension is a complex cognitive process requiring the ability to incorporate content ideas with the pre-existing knowledge of the reader. (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Afflerbach, 1990; Meneghetti, Carretti, & De Beni, 2006). Or as Koda (2005, p.4) puts it: "comprehension is when the reader extracts and integrates various information from the text and combines it with what is already known".

1.9 Critical Thinking and Reading Comprehension:

The majority of people would concur that comprehension is the quintessence and the nucleus of reading (Rubin, 1982). Good thinkers are found to be great readers since reading involves intuition (Norris and Phillips, 1987).

Beck (1989) denies the possibility of reading without thinking. Also among the various researchers and theoreticians who see that reading unquestionably incorporates mind activities is Ruggiero (1984). He plainly stated that reading is a thinking act, similarly Yu-hui et al. (2010) state that reading is a thinking method of creating meaning. Applying critical thinking skills in a reading task is such a focal and a useful strategy to develop students' capability in retaining the meaning of the text as to also raise their awareness.

As mentioned before critical thinking and reading comprehension are so firmly related, we think that that a reader cannot completely comprehend without some sort of critical reasoning. Numerous teachers believe that students become critical thinkers and critical readers naturally as they read and become more experienced in life. However it has been proven by different experts in the field alike Stauffer (l977) who guaranteed the possibility of teaching critical thinking and assured that one of the schools' main objectives is to develop citizens who will have the ability to read and think critically, and the only way to get it done is through reading critically (Kadir et al., 2014).

1.9.1 Comprehension Skills Requiring Critical Thinking:

- Making Inferences and Drawing Conclusions
- Determining Cause and Effect
- Analyzing Character
- Determining the Author's Purpose

1.9.2 Critical Thinking vs. Critical Reading:

In present-day society, individuals always find themselves in constant need to manage, decide, and also find out solutions to different entangled and intricate life issues. For them to accomplish this task adequately and effectively, they should be able to judge and assess critically what they see, hear, and most importantly what they Read.

With the availability of tons of written materials in this so-called "information blast age", it is anything but difficult to feel overwhelmed by their enormity. Thus, they have to read critically and peruse selectively sifting through the odds and ends. To do so, critical reading and critical thinking skills are paramount (Morgan & Shermis, l989; Sanacore, 1994). One can distinguish between critical reading and critical thinking in the following way:

Critical reading: is a technique for finding data and thoughts inside a text.

Critical thinking: is a technique for assessing data and thoughts, to choose what to acknowledge and accept.

While reading, the reader utilizes critical thinking skills to *question* the content; this includes breaking down, deciphering, and assessing. Each of the stated processes helps the reader to interact with the text in various manners.

Critical reading is hence a systematic activity that alludes to cautious, dynamic, and intelligent sort of reading. While Critical thinking involves reflecting on the validity of what one has read in light of his/her prior knowledge and comprehension. So Critical thinking and critical reading work together.

Critical thinking enables readers to screen their understanding as they read, for example on the off chance that they sense that assertions are ridiculous and inconvenient (critical thinking), they would examine the text more closely to test their understanding (critical reading).

This means that critical thinking would come into play when deciding whether the meaning was for sure evident and whether the reader bolsters that practice. (Collins, Brown & Larkin, 1980). Newton (1985) goes further than that, she explicitly affirms: "To read critically is to think critically" (p.26).

1.10 Integrating Critical Thinking Skills in Reading Comprehension:

Students listened absentmindedly to their teacher as he read a short passage from the textbook, they were familiar with it since they had to undergo the same process for years. The teacher explained the meaning of some difficult words and provided students with different synonyms that he expected to be written down. After that, students were asked to answer comprehension questions and do some activities concerning the passage. Correct answers guaranteed to the teacher that the lesson was grasped and his mission was fulfilled.

The scenario mentioned above is not a fragment of imagination but a stark reminder of how dull and overly predictable the teaching and learning process has become.

The fact that theoretical knowledge became the sole focus of teachers and memorization is perceived by the majority of students as a road of salvation, is a clear indication that our education system has been inflicted with corruption and in serious need of reformation. In addition to that, education nowadays is seen by scholars as a

procedure of disposition and has managed to mold the relationship of teachers and students into depositors and depositories (Freire, 2000). Freire had expressed his disapproval of this kind of education and referred to it as **'the banking model'** which creates an oppressive structure in the classroom since teachers are granted full authority over students and are regarded as 'most knowledgeable'. Not only that, but the banking model also promotes passive learning and disregards the higher objectives that lay in education. It also prevents students from having an effective role in society and stifles any voice that is raised to oppose ideas and protest against rules and strict forms that are established in a given society. This 'culture of silence' is viewed by Freire and many other scholars as the result of poor education and the fertile ground in which oppression continues to grow, as he puts it "the awakening of critical thinking consciousness leads the way to the expression of social discontent, precisely because these discontents are real components of an oppressive situation" (Freire, 2000, p.37).

Reading -as a salient skill in the learning process- is not only the most common way to gain knowledge but also the best method to capture individuals in an endless web of lies and deception. When reading, students who have developed critical thinking skills take nothing for face value, they are not easily swayed by the opinion of others but rely on their abilities to determine the value of what they read.

It is worth mentioning that writers' sole aim is to convince the reader of the validity of their writings, being able to detect errors in their arguments and assess the solid ground on which their ideas and statements are built, is truly the implementation of critical thinking in reading. Furthermore, critical thinking instructs students to look for reliable sources and not delve directly into a sea of information that may be poisoned. According to Levitin (2017) even quotes, which are to some of us the wellspring of knowledge, can be twisted and wrangled to people's advantages. One example of that is the famous quote attributed to Mark Twain and which has been featured as an opening of the two films The Big Short and An Inconvenient Truth before:" it ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble, its what you know for sure that just ain't so". However, according to oxford's dictionary of quotes, this quote belongs to Josh Billings. This is a proof that quotes can be sometimes fabricated in addition to definitions and even statistics.

In EFL classrooms, for example, critical thinking is a crucial component for the successful teaching *of reading comprehension* since it makes learners decode, analyze, and reflect upon what the text describes and means, therefore it moves them from being informed to being enlightened. To ensure the attainment of these

objectives, the EFL teacher has to be the critical thinking agent who guides his students to become better critical thinkers throughout different teaching techniques (Halpern, 1999). Moreover, the efficiency of a given text is maximized by the integration of critical thinking skills into it; it supplies students with different methods that would help uncover ambiguous meanings by suggesting other interpretations or relying on real-world experiences. The proper use of reasoning skills would serve as a link that would connect the information presented in the text and the reader's background knowledge.

The implementation of critical thinking skills in the classroom will result in an effective performance in both secondary school and the real world, a person with a critical mind would be able to make decisions independently and without constant handholding.

Conclusion

Therefore and as a conclusion to this theoretical chapter, critical thinking has been defined by various scholars as the needed skills in thinking logically and rationally in order to understand and comprehend a given context and that it has a big contribution in enhancing EFL learning. This chapter has as well dealt with reading types, the techniques and the relationship between critical thinking and reading comprehension. This theoretical chapter has also dealt with the link between critical thinking and Bloom's taxonomy that gives teachers a tool to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of their teaching. Consequently this chapter has revealed the importance of critical thinking for students who want to improve their educational performance and to enhance their level of knowledge and learning skills. Critical thinking, then, leads to the success of educational programs.

Chapter Two

Research Design & Methodology

Introduction

This chapter deals with the methodology of the research. It sets a framework for the study being conducted by describing the samples, settings, and target populations. This chapter clarifies as well the procedures that we have followed and the tools used in collecting and analyzing the findings data.

2.1 Aim of the Research

This study aims to unveil the important role of critical thinking in reading comprehension for secondary school learners and to measure the degree to which it is integrated in the national curriculum. Furthermore, it aims to produce a set of guidelines and recommendations for Algerian EFL teachers in secondary education that can be used in designing and adopting reading material and activities that develop critical thinking skills in their learners.

2.2 Research Design

Due to the nature of the research, it was more conventional to target a population of both secondary school teachers and pupils in Ain Temouchent Province, Algeria. In order to achieve reliable results that lead us to logical conclusions, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in conducting our investigation. These methods comprise:

A- Observation:

Extended sessions have been dedicated to observing the participants to finally collect data.

B- Experiment:

An experiment has been conducted order to test pupils' critical thinking abilities and to prove the value of this work.

C-Questionnaire:

In order to understand EFL teachers' opinions with respect to Critical thinking in reading comprehension**,** a questionnaire of different sections has been used.

C- Textbook evaluation:

Evaluation of the textbook so as to measure how much its content promotes and develops critical thinking skills.

2.3 Sampling:

2.3.1 Teachers' profile

This questionnaire was presented both virtually and physically; online through email using Google forms and in presence to ten (10) EFL teachers in eight Secondary schools across the province of Ain Temouchent.

Most teachers are females holding a master's degree with a total average experience of 10 years. For the sake of achieving reliable quantitative dataset and results that are representative of the whole population, cluster sampling was used.

2.3.2 Pupils' Profile

As both classroom observations and an experiment were done at Saim Haddache and Abou-bakr Belkaid secondary schools in which more than 70 pupils who belong to both the scientific and the literary stream were targeted.

2.4 Research methods and tools

As previously mentioned, the three main instruments that were used are classroom observation, classroom experiment and the questionnaire to gather both quantitative and qualitative data that would expose patterns and results with respect to the research.

2.4.1 Classroom Observation

Classroom observation is a significant tool that scrutinizes teachers' interaction with pupils, in addition to identifying the weaknesses and strengths of the teaching-learning process.

In an attempt to witness the implementation of critical thinking in reading comprehension in relatively uncontrolled conditions, a structured observation was conducted at Abou-bakr Belkaid (Ain Tolba) and Saim Haddache (Hammam Bouhdjar) secondary schools in Ain Temouchent, Algeria in which we had the opportunity to attend, as observers-participants, reading sessions of third-year literary and second-year scientific streams for two terms.

The observation checklist (see appendix A) reports step by step the procedure followed by teachers in a reading class. It consists of three main phases: pre-reading, while reading, post-reading (PDP).

2.4.2 Classroom Experiment

During the following experiment, which was conducted at Saim Haddache secondary school with both second-year pupils of the scientific stream (42 pupils) and third-year pupils of literary stream (37 pupils) , aged 16 to 18, were asked to read a text we have written (see appendix B) to test their ability to examine, evaluate and judge data.

The experiment also endeavors to describe pupils' temperaments while receiving more details, regardless of whether they show any sort of opposition or worry.

2.4.3 Teachers' Questionnaire

The questionnaire (see appendix C) was presented both online and in presence to secondary school teachers in Ain Temouchent, Algeria in the period between 12th and 30th of April 2021. It is divided into two sections:

- **Section one:** Personal background information

The first section is dedicated to background information about the informants. Moreover

- **Section two:** Teachers' perspectives and pedagogical approach.

The second section contained questions that examine reading activities found in the textbook from a critical thinking perspective besides the teachers' views as contributors, positively or negatively, in the process of critical thinking in reading comprehension, and finally, identifying the series of problems that prevent learners from being critical thinkers.

This research instrument consisted mainly of close-ended questions, making it easier to collect statistical data.

2.4.4 Textbook evaluation

Textbooks are vital to language teaching as they provide teachers and learners with "in context" content that is widely used by teachers and regarded as a guideline to execute the National Curriculum for English which claims to promote the development of critical thinking skills. Therefore, we found it critical to review and evaluate one of the three levels' textbooks used in Algerian secondary schools. The Algerian secondary school textbook for the 2nd year English course, *Getting Through* (*Ch. Azouaoui*, 2005) was selected for evaluation.

2.5 Methods of Data Analysis

The Questionnaire was analyzed semi-manually by downloading the answers from the Google Forms website in an excel file and manually entering those answered on paper in an organized database. Next; the database was uploaded and analyzed using a software called SPSS for statistics by IBM.

Furthermore, all replies from close-ended questions; Yes or No questions and Multiple-choice questions were automatically clustered into tables with auto-calculated percentages and frequencies from which Bar charts and Pie charts were automatically generated as well.

Therefore, statistical data was achieved and analyzed. Furthermore, the findings of the observation were documented throughout the process as well as those of the experiment.

Conclusion

This chapter consists mainly of the steps followed by the two researchers while collecting primary data. It describes the adopted research plan and the specific procedures for the used sample to get satisfying answers in regards to the research questions. The researchers go to describe the participants' profiles and the employed instruments to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data.

The next chapter introduces and analyses the findings of each research instrument. In addition, it highlights the main results and discusses it according to the research hypotheses.

Chapter Three

Results & Discussions

Introduction

This chapter deals with the practical part of the study i.e. data analysis. It exposes the findings from the data sources by clustering and displaying it in tables and charts to be later discussed according to the research questions and hypotheses.

3.1 Findings of the study

3.1.1 Findings from the Classroom Observation

After observing EFL reading classrooms, we came up with the following results: In ***the pre-reading phase***, it is noticed that there was no variety of materials, as learners were only subjected to illustrations provided in the textbook, which appears to be outdated. Consequently, learners seemed to be detached from the reading process and unmotivated.

From our perspective, this is plausibly due to the theme of texts and the absence of creative materials. Often, the teacher succeeds in capturing the attention of students by activating their prior knowledge and connecting the issue presented in the text with the real world.

In ***the while-reading phase***, most teachers require students to read silently the text and answer the questions that follow, which deliberately corresponds to the formula of questions found in the baccalaureate exam (BAC). This indicates that exams remain the ultimate objective of learning rather than the construction of a critical mind that provides students with tools useful for their daily life.

Furthermore, students were able to skim and scan the text looking for answers. However, the absence of thought-provoking questions was quite boring, rendering the process of reading almost mechanical. To illustrate, a student from the scientific stream, during a reading session about scientific inventions, asked :*"are we studying English or science?"* and the answer of the teacher was *to "ask the ones who designed the textbook."* This shows that the spark of curiosity continues

to exist despite some teachers' attempts to harness and confine their students' thinking within narrow boundaries.

In ***the post-reading phase***, students were asked to showcase their productivity either in oral or written forms with the intention of testing learners' comprehension. Nevertheless, it was palpable that only competent students were able to make valuable contributions to the class, whereas the others remained in their own bubble, engrossed in their thoughts.

As a conclusion, teachers should practice diversity in terms of materials implemented and choose contemporary, up-to-date themes that are linked with the daily life of students for the purpose of attracting their attention and spurring their motivation. Moreover, we have observed that nearly all questions put forward by the teacher were (Wh- or yes/no questions), discarding inference questions, or those that require deep reflection. Thus, we advise teachers to present poems, stories, or texts with a controversial flavor to enhance their mental abilities and elicit their critical thinking, a mixture of reading that is not promoted in the Algerian syllabi.

3.1.2 Findings from the classroom experiment

3.1.2.1 Literary stream:

The participants listened intently when the teacher read out the passage, they were overwhelmed by the information and showed symptoms of sudden adrenaline rush, as the classroom got noisy. They demonstrated signs of euphoria and excitement. However, they did not ask questions, request details nor inquire about the source.

3.1.2.2 Scientific stream:

The participants were disciplined and listened attentively. Although they displayed signs of enthusiasm and curiosity to know more, none of them asked for the source. One student stopped the teacher saying that the said procedure is "unfeasible" while another one -*from a religious perspective*- stated that it was "forbidden".

As displayed in the experiment, students are constantly exposed to disputable matters, which constitute an enormous danger of getting indoctrinated and controlled deftly.

It is apparent that the grains of critical thinking exist inside students and if found in a nurturing environment that does not suppress it, students will be able to judge by themselves "what to believe" and "what to dismiss".

3.1.3 Findings from the teachers' questionnaire

As previously mentioned, the teachers questionnaire (Appendix C) consists of mainly close-ended questions divided into two sections. The replies provided us with statistical data that enabled us to detect patterns, which backup the research hypotheses and answer the research questions. High percentages were detected in answers that directly and/or indirectly highlight the importance of critical thinking skill in reading comprehension and indicate to what degree they are incorporated in the National Curriculum.

3.1.3.1 Section One: Personal Background Information

This section of the questionnaire covers personal background information about the participants.

Table 3.1 the gender of teachers

Gender	Frequencies	Percentages
Female	8	80%
Male	2	20%
Total	10	100%

According to (Table 1.1), the questionnaire was answered by ten (10) EFL teachers in different secondary schools in Ain Temouchent. 80% of them are females; eight (8) females and two (2) males

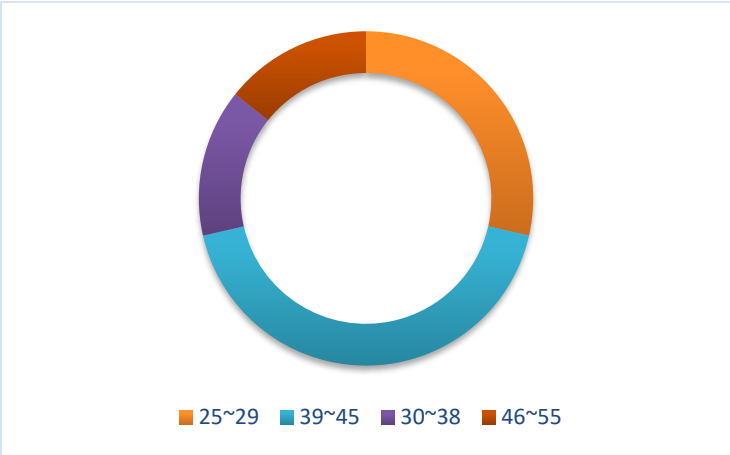

Figure 3.1 the age range of teachers

Meanwhile, their ages range between 20 and 55 years with most of them in their thirties according to (Pic chart 3.1)

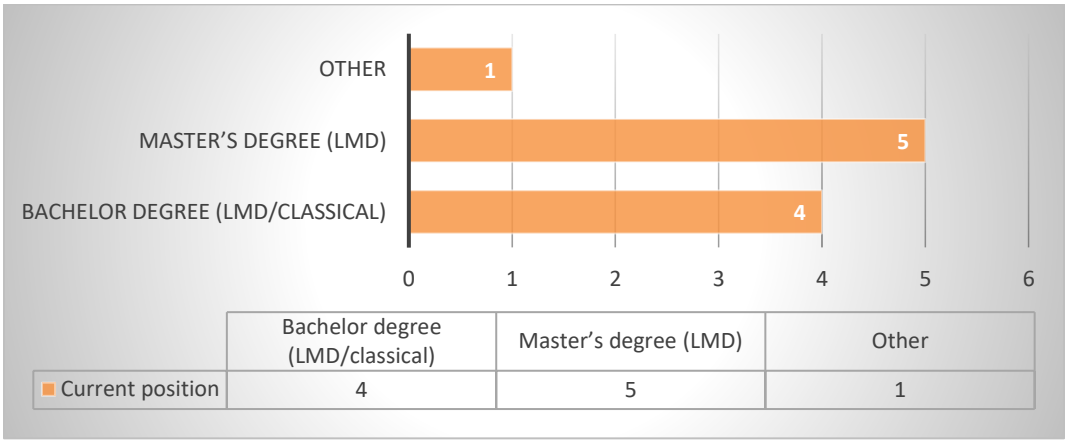

Figure 3.2 current position (rank) as a teacher

Question 3-4-5: According to question 4 (figure 3.2), it shows that most teachers hold decent academic qualifications as 50% of them hold a master degree and the rest at least a bachelor degree.

Table 3.2 Teachers' rank and experience

Rank	Frequency	Percentage	Experience	Frequency	Percentage
Trainee teacher	4	50%	Under five years	3	30%
Substitute teacher	1		3 to five years	2	20%
Principal teacher	3	30%	6 to 10 years	1	10%
			10 to 15 years	2	20%
Trainer teacher	2	20%	15 to 25 years	2	20%

Furthermore, question 3 and 5 demonstrate the rank and the experience of every participant. The results show that 50% of participants are either trainees (4) or substitute teachers (1) with under 5 years of experience in teaching (see table 3.2).

3.1.3.2 Section two: Teachers' perspectives and pedagogical approach

Question 1: How often do you use the textbook's content for reading lessons with your learners?

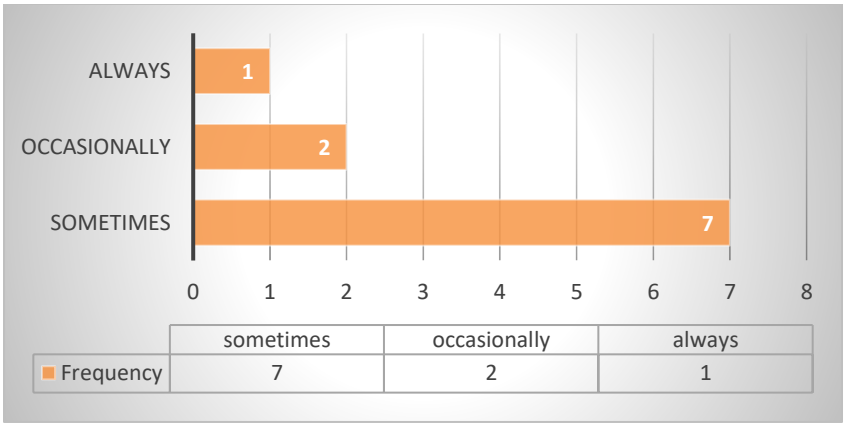

Figure 3.3 frequency of using the textbook for teaching reading

The results show that only (10%) of participants always use the reading comprehension tasks that are often derived from the textbook, while (20%) of them tend to occasionally rely on it and (80%) claim to sometimes use it with their learners.

Question 2-3: Do you rather adapt texts and design reading comprehension tasks or adopt those of the textbook? And Do you think that reading comprehension tasks found in the textbook exploit the texts to a good extent?

(100%) of participants don't seem to find the textbook's activities as an effective tool that fosters learners' critical thinking. However, they prefer to adapt texts and design reading comprehension tasks.

Question 4: Are the majority of your learners familiar with the different reading techniques and their functions?

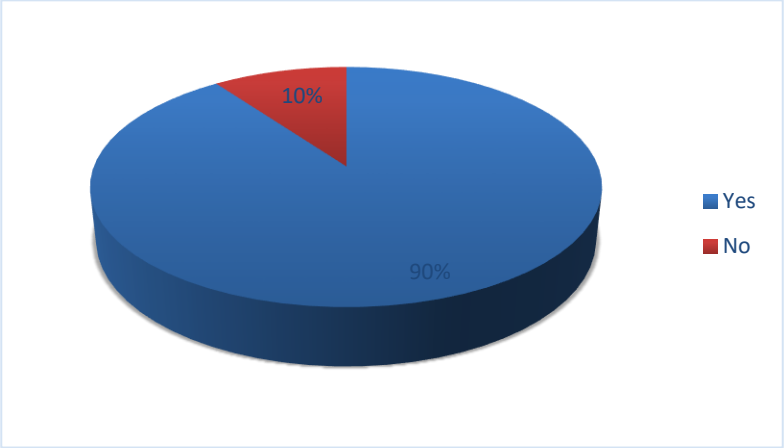

Figure 3.4 Learners' familiarity with reading techniques

According to (figure 3.4), (90%) of teachers seem to have learners that are not familiar with reading techniques and their functions while only (10%) do.

Table 3.3 Teachers' encouragement of learners' questioning and opinion sharing.

Questions	Yes	No
Question 5: Do you allow students to ask questions during the reading phase?	**6**	**4**
Question 6: Do you value good questions as much as correct answers?	**5**	**5**
Question 7: Do you welcome students' opinions that are different from your own?	**7**	**3**

According to (Table 3.3) it is apparent that (60%) of the participants allow their learners to question, and ensure a safe-questioning environment even during the reading phase and (40%) admitted their dereliction of such a skill, which can be due to the restriction of time.

In addition, (50%) of teachers expressed their appreciation of students' inquisitive nature. Moreover, it is also displayed in (Table 3.3) that (70%) of the participants are advocates of independent minds and diverse perspectives; they do not establish a rigid authority but rather a safe learning space that exudes comfort and liberty.

Question 8: How often do your learners show any sort of skepticism when provided with a piece of information?

Table 3.4 Learners level of skepticism

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Rarely	**8**	**80%**
sometimes	**2**	**20%**

The data provided is a working example of learners' repressed sense of curiosity and skepticism, (80%) of teachers have stated that their students are rarely skeptical when a piece of information is presented and (20%) said they sometimes do. However, this can be due to many reasons, one of them being blind trust in the teacher. (see table 1.4)

Question 9: Is your talking time more than your learners' during reading lessons?

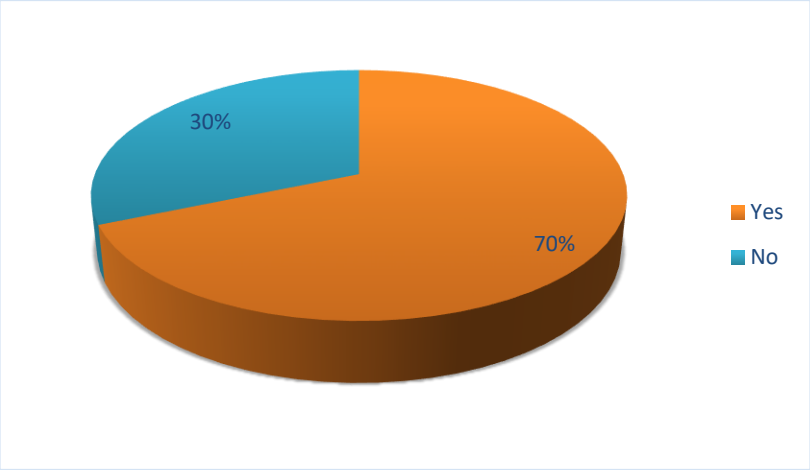

Figure 3.5 Teachers' talking time

70% of the teachers find themselves talking more than their learners do in reading lessons. Only (30%) seem to either have a balance or do less talking when teaching reading as it is a receptive skill. (see figure 3.5)

Question 10: When it comes to comprehension activities, your learners' abilities are:

Table 3.5 Learners' abilities in reading comprehension

Options	Frequency	Pecentages
Weak	2	20%
Average	7	70%
Good	1	10%

70% of the participants mentioned that they have learners with average comprehension skills while only (10%) of them appear to have learners that do good in comprehension tasks and (20%) that seem to be weak when it comes to those kind of activities. (See table 3.5)

Question 11: Do you think that weak performance in the comprehension part of tests and exams is due to lack of critical thinking skills?

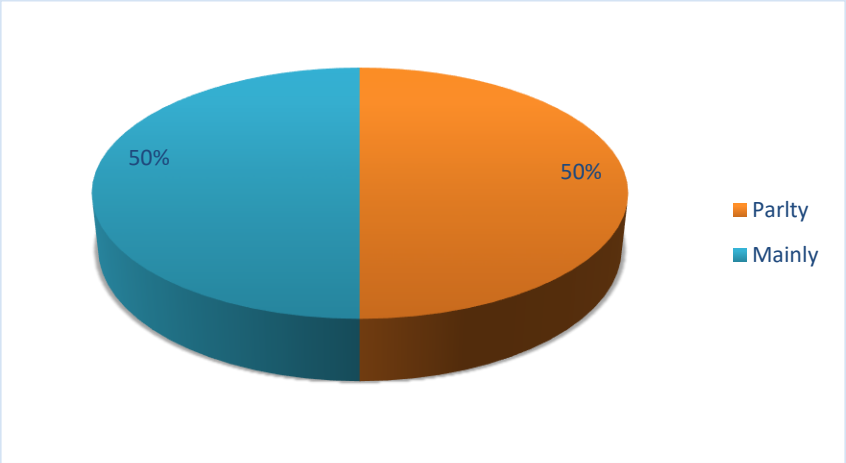

Figure 3.6 weak performances due to lack of critical thinking skills

According to (figure 3.6), (50%) of teachers that weak performance in the comprehension part of tests and exams is partly due to lack of critical thinking skills while the other (50%) thinks it is mainly because of the lack of those skills.

Question 12: Do you think that the Algerian curriculum is successful at pushing learners to think critically as it aims?

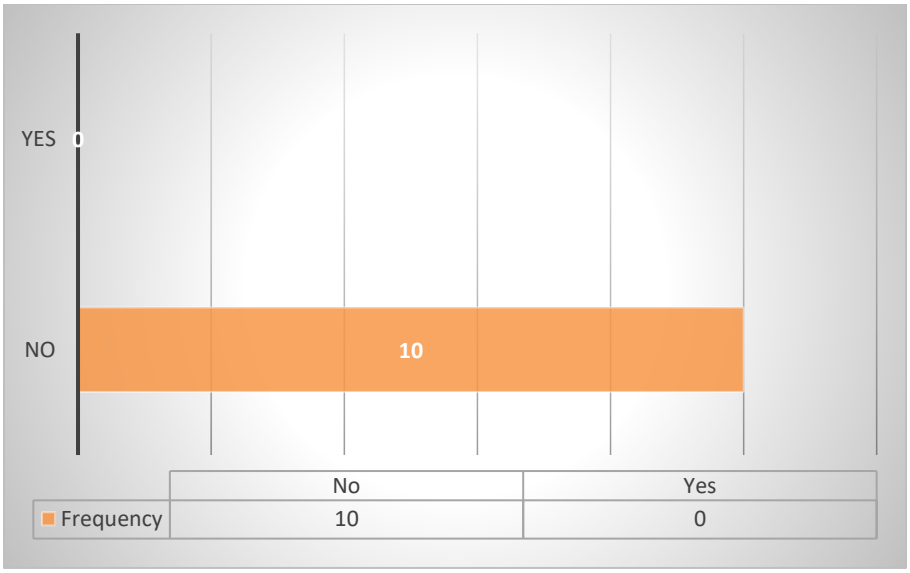

Figure 3.7 The Algerian Curriculum's successfulness in promoting critical thinking

According to (figure 3.7), all participants (100%) believe that the Algerian curriculum is not successful at pushing learners to think critically as it aims.

Question 13: To what extent do you integrate the Curriculum Based Assessment (CBA) in your teaching?

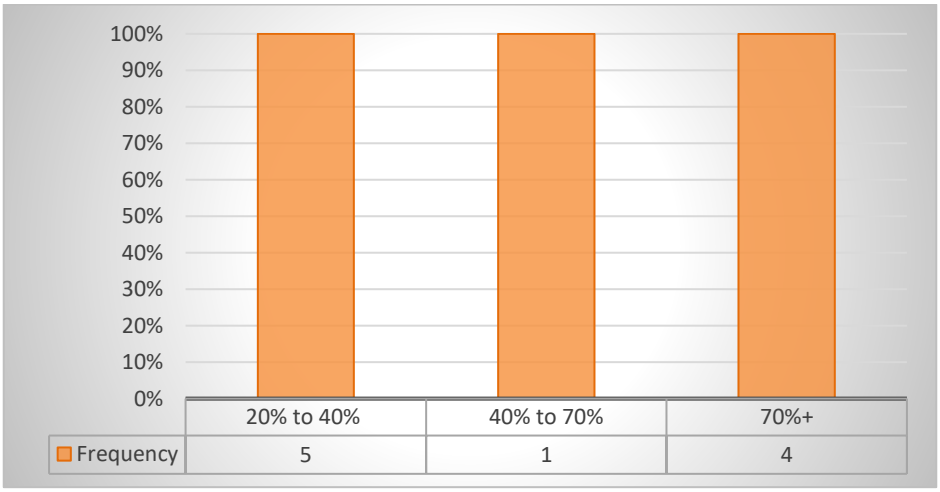

Figure 3.8 Integration of CBA (Curriculum Based Assessment)

The results reveal that (40%) of teachers believe to have integrated CBA (Curriculum Based Assessment) for more than 70% while only (10%) believe to have incorporated it from 40% to 70% in their teaching. However (50%) of the teachers believe to have only reached 40% in doing so. (see fig. 3.8)

Question 14: In your opinion, what needs to be re-evaluated and reformed for its lack of critical thinking skills?

Table 3.6 areas of re-evaluation

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Curriculum	2	20%
Educational system	2	20%
Teachers' competencies	1	10%
All of the above	5	50%

The process of problem-solving requires first acknowledging the existence of the problems in hand. The table above indicates that (50%) of teachers are not happy with all the curriculum, teachers' competencies and education in Algeria and they see a need for reevaluation and reforms. (20%) of participants declare that the curriculum is the fault, . another (20%) of participants declare that the educational system is the fault. However only (10%) of them point finger on teachers' performance.

3.1.4 Textbook evaluation

Textbooks are pivotal tools in the language teaching arsenal. Henceforth, we cannot envision the future fate of teaching without taking them in the lead in EFL classrooms.

The Algerian secondary school textbook for the second-year English course, *Getting Through,* was designed by *Ch. Azouaoui* and published in 2005. It executes the National Curriculum for English regarding the competency-based approach and it expounds in detail the content to be covered.

However, as Grant claims, "impeccable textbooks do not exist", *Getting Through* deficiencies with reference to critical thinking and reading comprehension are briefly exposed:

- The reading texts found in the textbook appear to be obsolete **(**Getting Through**, 2005, p.16, p.139, p.170)**
- The type of language used is overcharged, complex, and strenuous (Getting Through**, 2005, p. 89, p.97)**
- Illustrations viewed in the textbook are not appealing to students (Getting Through**, 2005, p. 16, p.69, p.120, p.139, p.170)**

3.2 Discussions

The results of this research clearly indicate that critical thinking barely makes an appearance in the process of teaching and learning. The different research tools have provided us with new insights into the challenges that await our learners.

Through the experiment, we have discovered that our learners possess fragile minds that can easily be molded. When exposed to the text of the experiment, students from both streams showed signs of awe and dread, presumably frightened with the development scientists have made, yet, none of them asked questions or hinted to a glimmer of doubt. For this reason, we believe that our hypothesis about the great importance of critical thinking for EFL students have been confirmed.

Moreover, our observation sessions have shown that teachers tend to skip the warm up session or lightly pass through it, although the warm up stage is immensely significant in piquing learners' interest and preparing them for the upcoming phases. In addition, we have noticed that teachers tend to over rely on the textbook, which has been repeatedly criticized for its outdated texts and complex language that neglects the poor level of our learners. It also fails to implement Bloom's Taxonomy by emphasizing the two lower cognitive skills 'knowledge' and 'comprehension'. Another element that we found its absence disturbing was thought provoking questions, teachers were unsuccessful in delivering questions that would make learners reflect or engage in fruitful debates concerning the reading passage.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, appreciating and developing students' inquisitive nature is of immense importance in order to build critical individuals, however, it was revealed through the questionnaire that some teachers tend to neglect empowering this side of learners.

60% of teachers spur their learners to ask questions during the reading phase, by triggering their curiosity, raising controversial ideas and delivering praises, however, 40% of teachers seemed to prevent their students from asking questions mainly due to the restriction of time (see table 3.3).

Not only that, 50% of teachers seemed to acknowledge the salience of students' eagerness for inquiry and appreciated their curious and speculative personality while, 50% of them were in favor of 'correct answers', failing to value the myriad advantages of questions in the learning process (see table 3.3).

70% of teachers claimed to embrace their students' diverse opinions with open arms, whereas the remaining 30% showed open hostility towards distinct opinions without further elaboration. (see table 3.3) open-minded teachers are willing to consider their students' beliefs, perspectives and experiences even if it contradicts their own. Some teachers certainly spread open-mindedness so as to create a creative climate.

Critical thinking requires active learners who feel the need to inspect groundless information under the telescope of skepticism. When presented with new information, 80% of teachers stated that their students rarely show signs of skepticism. However, 20% of the participants have insisted that their students are dubious, calling into question certain claims and statements (see table 3.4). This indicates that the majority of students are simply consumers of information and only there to absorb their teachers' disposition while a small minority still possess an unrelenting sense of curiosity and deep-rooted skepticism.

In order to reach sustainable solutions, we sought to shed light on some obstacles that stand in the way of developing critical individuals, one of these problems is the 'teacher centered approach'.

70% of the participants refuse to release their clutch on the 'teacher' position, opting instead for a 'teacher-centered' traditional approach, yet, the remaining 30% utilize a combination of approaches, mainly for the purpose of fulfilling students' needs and reaching the desired objectives (see figure 3.5). If teachers do not yield the floor to their learners by allowing them to act as active participants rather than passive recipients of knowledge, then communication-which is a prominent skill of critical thinking- will remain absent from the scene.

Further, we chose to ask teachers about the performance of their students in relation to reading comprehension activities and their answers were as follow:

70% of teachers rated their learners' abilities as average, 10 % confirmed their satisfaction with their students comprehension skills, while 20% of them seemed to be discontent with the achievement of their learners so far (see table 3.5). Undoubtedly, the reason behind learners' weak performance in reading comprehension activities ought to be detected. Therefore, when probed for

a logical justification, 50% of participants deemed critical thinking as the main factor behind the failure of their students in comprehension, while the other half 50% thought that critical thinking , in addition to other elements, no less significant, should be held accountable, one of them is the Algerian Curriculum.

Our participants for once shared a mutual agreement concerning the futility of the curriculum in building critical individuals. All of them stated that the curriculum has not been successful in reaching its aim. If one was to cast a critical eye on the Algerian curriculum, for example, many loopholes will be exposed.

First, the Algerian curriculum aims at establishing *"good citizens".* However, one may put into question the qualities of said *good citizens;* are they obedient, compliant, apathetic ones, or educated critical intellectuals?

Second, the curriculum lays emphasis upon the development of reflective individuals, yet, it presents no effective methods or solid plans to attain that objective, is it just a façade? Existing for the sake of existence?

It is worth mentioning that teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with the Algerian educational system as well. 40% of them indicated that both the curriculum and the educational system as a whole need to be reformed, only 10% criticized their teaching capacities, whereas the majority 50% stated that all elements mentioned previously are in need of serious evaluation (see table 3.6). Throughout this research, we have come to the conclusion that the Algerian education system merely aims at enforcing conformity and promoting obedience as schools serve mainly to direct students' thinking and behavior, preventing it from drifting astray. There is a need henceforth to review the curriculum taking into considerations the different critics mainly those related to critical thinking skills integration.

As for the discussions from the textbook evaluation findings, we can conclude that students tend to see learning through the textbook merely an aggregation of correct answers since the tasks available do not require much thinking effort. It is notable that the textbook stresses on two skills

mainly: **"*Knowledge"*** and ***"comprehension*"**. This negates outrageously the aim of the *Competency-Based Approach* which promises to equip students with necessary competencies.

Concerning **"analysis"**, textbook designers can suggest questions that request learners to find out causes and sources of certain issues or to have them compare and contrast ideas. As for "**synthesis",** jigsaw activities could be a perfect remedy for learners since they push them to alter and combine pieces of information. When considering **"evaluation"**, teachers can simply ask students to evaluate arguments, innovate solutions, and reflect upon pictures.

We also believe that **balanced thinking** and **multiple perspective-taking** are poorly executed in the textbook. As a palliative, EFL teachers can inject different instructions in reading comprehension sessions that require students to list evidence that contradicts or supports a given idea and to consider analytically opinions of other learners.

The utility of the textbook is undeniable, yet, EFL teachers should not overly depend on it as the sole asset for knowledge but rather use it as a means to reach the objectives and achieve critical thinking.

General Conclusion

To conclude this research, it can be stated that little attention was paid to critical thinking before the 20th century. However, now it is one of the main objectives of education systems and institutions around the globe. Developing learners' basic reasoning is the ultimate goal schools are striving to achieve. Teaching critical thinking has become indispensable; though integrating it in language teaching is not widely explored and requires in-depth reflection.

In this research, we have focused on investigating the extent to which critical thinking is applied through reading comprehension with EFL learners at both Saim Hddache and Abou-Bakr Belkaid secondary schools.

The study has revealed the teachers' poor awareness and practice of critical thinking skills since reading classes mainly concentrated on silent reading and identification of correct answers. During our presence with the sample of pupils, we were able to see signs of eagerness and curiosity that needs to be cultivated. Furthermore, the experiment we have conducted served to confirm the hypotheses advanced in this Introduction. We attempted also to probe into the second year school book of English "*Getting Through"*, along with the national curriculum, to identify their deficiencies in terms of critical thinking in order to suggest remedies.

a. Recommendations and Suggested Solutions:

Throughout multiple observation sessions, it is notable that Algerian classrooms suffer from a shortage of materials and endure a lack of ICT equipment. Therefore, the Algerian government should increase substantially its financial support and make education a top priority. Furthermore, the emergence of many pedagogical approaches has been of great service to foreign countries that seek to enhance the process of teaching and learning. However, Algeria is still content with being an outside observer of the development in these countries.

One of the approaches is **inquiry-based learning** that balances responsibilities between the two parties (teachers/pupils) and activates curiosity. This approach stresses the significant role of students as independent individuals, eager to receive knowledge through deliberate reasoning and constant questioning.

Another successful approach is **critical pedagogy** that drives learners to challenge and put into question myths, traditions, and ideologies to decipher meanings and investigate the roots and backgrounds of notions that construct the cultural industry which advocates conformity in an attempt to reach «cultural consciousness».

Teaching reading should better be done according to the **pedagogy of discovery** that places students in problem-solving situations where they interact with their environment and wrestle with different questions and controversies. This might further increase their engagement and impulse them to utilize their critical thinking abilities. Teachers should also frequently exploit the learners' prior knowledge by asking them to form hypotheses about the reading content with the help of titles and pictures associated.

One final suggestion is what Freire has introduced as **"problem-posing education".** This approach obligates teachers and pupils to become equal participants in the educational process by withdrawing authoritarianism and allowing intellectualism. In other words, teachers should be more flexible and less authoritarian.

In one of his most outstanding works «Hamlet», Shakespeare praised individuals' mental abilities: **"What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty!"** (Hamlet, act 2, scene 2). However, the act of thinking is considered as one of the most demanding skills which compel people to look for alternatives (Henry Ford, 1928). For that reason, teachers and students should work hand in hand with the assistance of the education system to maximize students' critical abilities.

b. Limitations of The Study:

One of the qualities of good researchers is to acknowledge the numerous flaws of their work. Some of the main limitations of this study are concerned with the methodology.

First, during observation, there remains a possibility that the teacher was brought to alter her behavior because of the observer. This is mainly due to the 'Hawthorne effect' which is defined as a response to the fact of being observed, by amending some aspects of one's attitude.

Second, it was noticed in the questionnaire that some teachers might have adopted a conformist attitude, selecting answers they thought they 'should' select rather than the ones they really believed in, something which might have distorted the results. This can be remedied, in a future study, by expanding the number of respondents to receive varieties of answers.

Third, the results we have obtained from the experiment may not exceed the borders of Saim Hddache and Abou-Bakr Belkaid secondary schools at *Ain Temouchent*, thus, they are not to be generalized. If the same experiment was to be conducted at other secondary schools in other regions, whether in urban or rural districts, it might well generate different results.

c. Perspectives

This study has allowed us to explore the level of integrating critical thinking in EFL teaching at two secondary schools in Ain Temouchent Algeria. The conclusions of this research motivate us to continue conducting future studies related to critical thinking but in other secondary schools and covering a bigger number of them in order to generate reliable results and conclusions. In the perspectives as well we envisage to involve a bigger number of EFL teachers in order to avoid subjectivity.

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Appendices

Appendix A:

Observation checklist :

Time	stages	Process
10 minutes	**Pre-reading**	• **Exposing students to pictures/figures from the textbook in relation to the passage.** • **Students make an attempt to predict the theme of the text.** • **The teacher asks some questions so as to elicit prior knowledge.**
30 minutes	**While-reading**	• **Students read silently the text from the textbook then answer questions.** • **The teacher explains some difficult words found in the text** • **Students are able to skim and scan the text, often with the assistance of the teacher.**
10 minutes	**Post-reading**	• **Students are asked for their own production, often in written or oral forms.** • **It enables the teacher to assess his students' comprehension.**

Appendix B:

The text:

Note that this passage is utterly fabricated and is used solely for research purposes.

Zombie science is a new science that attempts to bring people back to life. The procedure consists of taking out genes from a dead body and implanting them in the belly of a pregnant woman. When the baby is born, he will have the exact features of the dead individual. And as he grows, he will look precisely like the person who died. A group of Japanese researchers in ***the "fuji-Nihongo"*** laboratory went far with this science already and revived a mouse that had been dead for 16 years. The zombie science is now banned all over the world and the process of reviving the dead is now considered illegal.

Appendix C:

EFL Teachers' Questionnaire

This questionnaire is addressed to all **Secondary Education EFL practicing teachers** in the province of Ain Temouchent, Algeria.

The objective of the questionnaire:

The main objective of this questionnaire is to investigate the role of critical thinking in reading comprehension for secondary education learners in Ain Temouchent, Algeria.

You are kindly requested to answer the following questions by putting a tick (✓) or commenting when necessary. Get assured that any information provided is going to remain anonymous and serve solely for research purposes.

Part one: Personal background information

1. What is your age?

20~24 ☐ 25~29 ☐ 30~38 ☐ 39~45 ☐ 45~55 ☐ 55+ ☐

2. What is your gender?

Male ☐ Female ☐

3. You are currently a:

A Substitute teacher ☐ A teacher trainee ☐

A principal teacher ☐ A teacher trainer ☐

4. What is your academic qualification?

Bachelor degree (LMD/classical) ☐ Master's degree (LMD) ☐

5. **You have been teaching EFL for:**

Under 2 years ☐ 3 to 5 years ☐ 6 to 10 years ☐ 10 to 15 years ☐

15 to 25 years ☐ more than 25 years ☐

Part two: Teachers' perspectives and pedagogical approach

1. How often do you use the textbook's content for reading lessons with your learners?

Always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Occasionally ☐ Never ☐

2. Do you rather adapt texts and design reading comprehension tasks or adopt those of the textbook?

Yes ☐ No ☐

3. Do you think that reading comprehension tasks found in the textbook exploit the texts to a good extent?

Yes ☐ No ☐

4. Are the majority of your learners familiar with the different reading techniques and their functions?

Yes ☐ No ☐

5. Do you allow students to ask questions during the reading phase?

Yes ☐ No ☐

6. Do you value good questions as much as correct answers?

Yes ☐ No ☐

7. Do you welcome students' opinions that are different from your own?

Yes ☐ No ☐

8. How often do your learners show any sort of skepticism when provided with a piece of information?

Always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never ☐

9. Is your talking time more than your learners' during <u>reading lessons</u>?

Yes ☐ No ☐

10. When it comes to comprehension activities, your learners' abilities are:

Weak ☐ Average ☐ Good ☐ Very good ☐ Excellent ☐

11. Do you think that weak performance in the comprehension part of tests and exams is due to lack of critical thinking skills?

Never ☐ Hardly ☐ Partly ☐ Mainly ☐

12. Do you think that the Algerian curriculum is successful at pushing learners to think critically as its aims?

Yes ☐ No ☐

13. To what extent do you integrate the Curriculum Based Assessment (CBA) in your teaching?

0% to 20% ☐ 20% to 40% ☐ 40% to 70% ☐ 70%+ ☐

14. In your opinion, what needs to be re-evaluated and reformed for its lack of critical thinking skills?

Curriculum ☐ Teachers' competencies ☐ Education system ☐ All of the above ☐

Thank you for answering the questionnaire.