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ZEGHICHI Meriem

Investigating the Role of Reading Comprehension Strategies in Enhancing EFL Learner's Critical Thinking

The Case of First Year Master EFL Students at Mohamed kheider University of Biskra

Board of examiners:

Dr. TURQUI Barket	MCA	Biskra	Chairperson
Dr. TRIKI Manel	MCB	Biskra	Examiner
Mme. BENDAHMANE Massouda	MAA	Biskra	Supervisor

Academic Year: 2019-2020

Dedication

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

I thank Allah almighty for the strength and patience He has given me to do this work

and realizing my goals.

I would like to thank my family. Their unconditional love, and selfless support provided

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To my friends who supported me and all who knows & loves me Thanks a billion for

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Abstract

This present work is an attempt to investigate the role of reading comprehension strategies in developing EFL learners' critical thinking in English foreign language classes. This study aims at suggesting for both teachers and students some reading comprehension strategies that may serve for developing critical thinking skills. It explores how thinking abilities as manifested in some reading comprehension strategies that can improve students' critical thinking skills and their ability to think logically and intelligently. Therefore, we hypothesized that the more EFL students practice and use the different reading comprehension strategies, the more their critical thinking will be promoted. To test the validity of our hypothesis, an exploratory study is conducted with a qualitative approach to collect, analyse, and interpret data. To accomplish this, we designed two questionnaires and administered them; one was conducted to eight (08) EFL teachers at University of Biskra and another questionnaire was administrated to twenty-seven (27) Master One EFL students of Sciences of the Language Branch at Biskra University. As a result, the study findings proved that both teachers and students agreed upon the importance of critical thinking in learning English as a foreign language and the effective role of reading comprehension strategies in developing students' critical thinking. Thus, the study findings confirmed the validity of our hypotheses. The main findings of this research confirm the positive relationship between critical thinking and reading comprehension and assert that some basic reading comprehension strategies may contribute in developing learners' critical thinking.

Keywords: Critical thinking, reading comprehension, reading comprehension strategies

List of Abbreviations

CT: Critical thinking

EFL: English Foreign Language

EST: English Second Language

LMD: License, Master and Doctorate

RC: Reading Comprehension

ZPD: Zone of Proximal development

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General Introduction

Introduction

Nowadays, it is essential for everyone to be a good critical thinker in order to cope and succeed in dealing with the complexities of the modern world. Critical thinking is not related only to the capacity of thinking logically and reasonably, but also the capability to apply these skills in real-life situations. It can provide us with an opportunity to be objective, less emotional and more open-minded to other views and opinions.

Many researchers pointed out that the key purpose of education is learning to think. Enhancing critical thinking in learners occupies a high position in foreign language classrooms. However, teaching it has been a continuous issue among different research, therefore, it is very important to adopt the right techniques and approaches of teaching to inspire learners and make them more interested and motivated towards thinking critically.

Several factors are believed to affect language learners' critical thinking skills; among these factors are the reading comprehension strategies. Introducing learners to reading comprehension strategies that requires activating prior knowledge, relating ideas to text, and questioning will oblige learners to use a higher order of thinking, thus their critical thinking skills will get developed.

1. Statement of the Problem

Being a critical thinker is an essential quality in learning languages in general and in learning English as a foreign language in particular. The main feature of critical thinking is that it encourages active learning by teaching students how to think rather than what to think. However, most EFL (English Foreign Language) students seem to be incapable to think critically. They

accept any information they receive from the teacher without questioning or analyzing to draw conclusions based on critical judgments to achieve higher-order of thinking. This can be due to many reasons, such as the lack of background knowledge, the absence of good instruction, and both teachers and students seem to give less importance to developing critical thinking skills. The present study mainly focuses on the importance of critical thinking as a key to better achievement and the importance of reading comprehension strategies in enhancing learner's critical thinking.

2. Aims of the Study

The promotion of critical thinking is crucial in the EFL classrooms as it expands the learning experience of the learners in making decisions, solving problems, and understanding language or its content, thus making the language more meaningful for them. This study, then, aims to raise the EFL learners' awareness about the importance of being a critical thinker in learning a foreign language. And explore the role of reading comprehension in developing EFL students' critical thinking skills. Specifically, it seeks to shed light on the reading comprehension strategies used to promote EFL learners critical thinking.

3. Research Questions

This research seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent can critical thinking be effective in learning English as a foreign language?

2. How possible would it be to teach critical thinking skills in EFL classrooms?

3. What are the effects and the benefits of critical thinking as learning skill on foreign language learners' achievement?

4. How does reading comprehension contribute to enhancing EFL students' critical thinking?

5. What is the impact of reading comprehension strategies on EFL learners critical thinking skills?

6. What is the nature of the correlation between critical thinking and reading comprehension?

4. Research Hypothesis

To reach satisfactory outcomes concerning EFL learning and teaching, we hypothesize:

1. Critical thinking is effective in learning English as a foreign language.

2. Reading comprehension has a great impact on EFL learners critical thinking skills.

3. If students were exposed to different kinds of reading comprehension strategies, their critical thinking skills would be enhanced.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Method

The nature of any study imposes which research methodology need to be selected in carrying out the research. This research work attempted to collect data to investigate the role of reading comprehension strategies in enhancing EFL learners' critical thinking skills. Therefore, the nature of this research required the implementing of the exploratory method since it explores the effect of reading comprehension strategies in EFL learner's critical thinking. A qualitative approach will be conducted as it is the qualified method that might help us attain the needed results about determining the efficacy of our hypothesis.

5.2 Population and Sample

Following the research requirements, the population of this study includes both students and teachers of the Foreign Languages Department, Section of English at Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra during the academic year 2019/2020. We selected our (35) sample randomly; it contains twenty-seven (27) Master One LMD students of English besides eight (08) teachers from the same department.

5.3 Data Gathering Tools

Our research seeks to reveal the role of RC (reading comprehension) strategies in enhancing EFL learners' CT (critical thinking) skills; therefore, the researcher has chosen one main data collection tool which is a questionnaire for both students and teachers. In this study, the researcher uses the semi-structured questionnaire, which contains both open-ended, close-ended, and multiple-choice questions. On one hand, students' questionnaire is mainly designed to diagnose the students' points of views towards the importance of RC strategies in enhancing EFL learners CT. Also, it was used to check student's familiarity with CT and if they consider themselves as critical thinkers. Besides, it aimed to check what factors EFL students think they can enhance their learning. On the other hand, teachers' questionnaire aimed to obtain general data about RC and specific data about the use of RC strategies and their role in enhancing students CT skills. it was used to investigating whether EFL teachers are aware of the importance of CT as a learning skill and RC strategies in building students' knowledge and future careers.

6. Significance of the Study

This study may have a significant contribution to our domain of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. It attempts to represent what might be attainable solutions to help students

become good critical thinkers, better problem solvers and successful decision-makers. Learners may become proficient language users if they have the motivation and are taught ways to adopt and practice critical thinking in learning a foreign language. Indeed, this work deals with the characteristics of good critical thinker learners and seeks to identify how RC strategies enhance learners CT in learning the target language.

Chapter One: Critical Thinking

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Introduction

Thinking is one of the most influential tools that anyone can have. Nowadays, it is essential for everyone to be a good critical thinker in order to cope and succeed in dealing with the complexities of the modern world. CT is crucial in learning languages in general and English as a foreign language in particular, thus enchanting it in learners occupies a high position in foreign language classrooms. Accordingly, in this chapter, we will deal with a general overview of CT which includes historical background, definitions, skills, dispositions and process. Then, we will cast some light on bloom's taxonomy, metacognition, problem-solving and creative thinking in relation to CT. After that, we will tackle CT pedagogy which comprises critical thinking teaching, instructions, strategies and assessment. Eventually, we will deal with barriers to CT in addition to CT and RC.

1.1 General Overview of Critical Thinking

1.1.1 Historical Background

Critical thinking is not a new term; its roots can be traced back to Socrates and the Socratic Method 2,500 years ago. Paul, Elder and Bartell (1997) believes that Socrates' method of questioning, known as "Socratic Questioning", is equivalent to the present concept of CT in pedagogy. According to them, Socrates' method is used:

> To explore complex ideas, to get to the truth of things, to open up issues
> and problems, to uncover assumption, to analyze concept, to distinguish
> what we know from what we don't know, and to follow out logical
> implications of though (p. 2).

Socrates' point of view proves that all people are able to have the right knowledge about everything, they just need to ask questions before the acceptance of any idea happens around them and this took the name of "Socrates questioning theory".

Socrates work was followed by the CT of Plato and Aristotle. they emphasized that things are usually different from what they appear to be with the emphasis on the core idea that "only the trained mind is prepared to see through the way things look to us on the surface to the way they really are beneath the surface" (Paul, Elder & Bartell, 1997, p. 3).

During the 19th century, philosophers have shed light on the importance of learning thinking skills as they started to make investigations about the human brain and how it functions. By the 20th century, philosophers stated that CT has a major role in education because it helps in giving birth to many thinkers when applied in the classroom. Philosophers point of view marks the shift in the focus; from learning to thinking (Chun, 2010), drill and practice to problem-based learning (Savery, 2009), subject isolation to subject integration, output to process, what is convenient to what is needed, and now to the future (Peddiwell, 1990).

Dewey (1993) is one of the researchers who have introduced thinking skills into recent educational history. He portrays "reflective thinking" as consisting of mediating on a subject by giving it genuine maintained thought. He also conceptualized thinking skills as the ability to consider it as a certain reflection about an issue in order to produce a solution.

Many scholars have viewed CT from cognitive and psychological development perspectives. However, a useful and effective conception of critical thinking needs to base on both philosophy and psychology (Kuhn, 1992; Weinstein, 1995).

1.1.2 Definitions of Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is one of the most debatable and highly contentious skills in that researchers debate about its definition. According to Reed (1998), the broad term of CT has led researchers to different definitions and terminologies. He pointed out that the lack of consensus on how CT is best defined is due to the various theories and models in two distinct disciplines, psychology and philosophy. Philosophers have concentrated on the CT nature and products relying on logical reasoning to reach conclusions. However, psychologists have tended to focus more on the cognition process and seeking conclusions in empirical research.

Lipman (1988, p.3) defines CT as "skillful, responsible thinking that facilitates good judgment because it relies upon criteria, is self-correcting, and is sensitive context". CT appeals to a tradition of successful practice, addresses the community of competent inquirers, and offers rational support for the thinking outcomes that require judgments. These judgments are based on acceptable principles that take into account the details that the particular issue involves and is reflective in a fashion that supports the progressive change.

Moreover, Norris and Ennis (1989) explain that in any discipline, thinking critically means deciding what to believe and what to reason in order to harmonies these elements of CT. They also assumed that thinking critically involves a set of cognitive skills, such as identifying conflicting issues, gathering, evaluating and considering over information to make a decision.

Paul (1993) states that the way to define CT should not be regarded as mutually exclusive. He refuses to limit himself to one definition and was interested in developing an inclusive concept of CT that draws on insights from a variety of fields and perspectives. He argues that critical thinking requires an integration of cognitive and affective domains. He regards CT as "thinking about your thinking while you are thinking to make your thinking better" (Paul, 1993,

p. 91) That is, he focuses more on the thinking process believing that CT is a mean to improve one's thinking by providing the ability to take charge of one's thinking, developing one's knowledge and assuming the responsibility of one's learning.

Another definition is provided by Halpern (1996) wherein he considers CT as the "thinking that is purposeful, reasoned and goal directed. It is the kind of thinking involved, in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions" (p. 5). CT is not limited only to thinking about one's thinking or making judgments and solving problems but it is effortful and consciously controlled. It uses evidence, reason and strives to overcome individual biases. Decisions as to which outcomes should be desirable are embedded in a system of values and may differ from person-to-person.

Further, Elder and Paul (2008) define CT as "that mode of thinking- about subject, content, or problem- in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully taking charge of the structure inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual standards upon them" (para10). Moreover, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) summarize the various popular CT definitions and indicated that it's a skill that refers to an individual's ability to do some or all of the following: identify central issues and assumptions in an argument; recognize important relationships, make correct inferences from data; deduce conclusions from information or data provided; interpret whether conclusions are warranted based on given data; evaluate evidence or authority; make self-corrections; and solve problems.

1.1.3 Critical Thinking Skills

Skills in CT bring precision to the way we think and work. They help us be more accurate and specific in noting what is relevant and what is not making it one of the most important skills in learning and teaching.

Facione (1990) states that thinking skills are different from learning skills. The former focuses more on the process of using the necessary information to make a judgment before making any decision. The latter focuses on the process of transforming, storing and reproducing information to answer questions. He found a remarkable consensus on the descriptions of each of the skills and sub-skills of critical thinking and presented it as follows:

- **Interpretation**: To comprehend and express the meaning or significance of a wide variety of experiences, situations, data, events, judgments, conventions, beliefs, rules, procedures or criteria. Using the three sub-skills categorized, decoding significance, and clarifying meaning.

- **Analysis:** To identify the actual and intended inferential relationships among statements, questions, concepts, descriptions or other forms of representation intended to express beliefs, judgments, experiences, reasons, information, or opinions. Through examining ideas, detecting and analyzing arguments.

- **Evaluation:** To assess the credibility and the logical strength of the actual or intended inferential relationships among statements, descriptions, questions or other forms of representation.by assessing claims and arguments.

- **Inference:** To identify and secure elements needed to draw reasonable conclusions, form hypotheses, consider relevant information and to deduce the consequences flowing from representations. The three sub-skills of inference are querying evidence, conjecturing alternatives, and drawing conclusions.

- **Explanation:** To state the results of one's reasoning to justify that reasoning in terms of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological and contextual considerations

upon which one's results were based, and to present one's reasoning in the form of cogent arguments.

- **Self-regulation:** to self-consciously monitor one's cognitive activities, the elements used in those activities, and the results deduced, particularly by applying skills in analysis and evaluation to one's inferential judgments with a view toward questioning, confirming, validating, or correcting either one's reasoning or one's results.

Despite the differences in Ennis (1962, 1987) and Facione (1990) descriptions of sub-skills., their lists have in common the following component skills of critical thinking:

- Clarify meaning

- Analyze arguments

- Evaluate evidence

- Judge whether a conclusion follows

- Draw warranted conclusions

Furthermore, (Glaser, 1941, p. 6) gives the following list of thinking skills: 1) to recognize problems, 2) to find out workable means for meeting those problems, 3) to gather and marshal pertinent information, 4) to recognize unstated assumptions and values, 5) to comprehend and use language with accuracy, clarity and discrimination, 6) to interpret data, draw warranted conclusions and generalizations,7) to appraise evidence and evaluate statements, 8) to draw the existence of a logical relationship between propositions, 9) to put to test the generalizations and conclusions at which one arrives, 10) to reconstruct one's patterns of beliefs based on wider

experience and 11) to render accurate judgments about specific things and qualities in everyday life.

Due to the nature of the CT process of being precise, it may seem like a slow process. However, once one's good skills are acquired, learning to identify the most relevant information will be done more quickly and more accurately which would in return save time and effort.

1.1.4 Critical Thinking Dispositions

Possessing cognitive skills is not sufficient to be regarded as a critical thinker. One also needs to have the disposition to apply those skills when it is needed. (Facione, 1990). Yeh and Chen (2005) state that "to produce a critical thinker, dispositions toward critical thinking and cognitive skills of critical thinking must be thought and nurtured as early as possible" (p. 334).

According to Hitchcock (2011), Glaser (1941), Ennis (1996), and Facione (1990) have advanced the most developed published conceptions of the dispositional and attitudinal components of a critical thinker. Their lists have in common the following dispositional and attitudinal characteristics of a critical thinker:

- Open-minded

- Fair-minded

- Searching for evidence

- Trying to be well-informed

- Attentive to others' views and their reasons

- Proportioning belief to the evidence

- Willing to consider alternatives and revise beliefs

In addition, Halpern (2002) demonstrates that dispositions or attitudes to think critically can be defined as the willingness to plan, flexibility, persistence, willingness to self-correct, admit errors, and change your mind when the evidence changes, being mindful and consensus-seeking.

1.1.5 Characteristics of Good Critical Thinkers

Critical thinkers reflect several characteristics that distinguish them from those who lack CT. Paul and Elder (2012) wrote the following characteristics to describe a "well cultivated critical thinker":

- raises questions and problems and formulates them clearly and precisely.

- Gathers and assesses relevant information using abstract ideas for interpretation.

- Arrives at conclusions and solutions that are ell-reasoned and tests them against relevant standards.

- Is open-minded and recognizes alternative ways of seeing problems; and the ability to assess the assumptions, implications, and consequences of alternative vies of problems.

- Communicate effectively with others as solutions to complex problems are formulated.

Furthermore, Facione (1990) provided the following definition to illustrate the characteristics of a good critical thinker:

> The ideal critical thinker is habitually inquisitive, well-informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgments, willing to reconsider, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, diligent in

seeking relevant information, reasonable in the selection of criteria,

focused in inquiry, and persistent in seeking results which are as precise

as the subject and the circumstances of inquiry permit. (p. 3)

In the same vein, Halpern (2002) notes that critical thinkers are characterized by the ability

to recognize semantic slanting and guilt by association; seek out contradictory evidence; use the

metacognitive knowledge that allows novices to monitor their performance and to decide when

additional help is needed; generate a reasoned method for selecting among several possible

courses of actions; recall relevant information when it is needed; use skills for learning new

techniques efficiently and relating new knowledge to information that was previously learned;

present a coherent and persuasive argument on a controversial, contemporary topic; provide

complex instructions in the language that is appropriate for the audience; use matrices and other

diagrams for communication; synthesize information from a variety of sources; determine

credibility and use this information in formulating and communicating decisions.

1.1.6 Critical Thinking Process

The above-mentioned lists of skills and attitudes, even if accompanied by criteria for their

achievement, gives little guidance on how to deploy the skills and attitudes included in the list

when thinking critically.

Jenicek and Hitchcock (2005) identify seven components of the CT process, which they

describe as a form of problem-solving. They emphasize the idea that it should be regarded as a

checklist rather than a sequence because such a CT process can jump back and forth from one

point on the checklist to another.

- **Problem identification and analysis:** the central focus of our CT is identified. It may be a problem, a question, a hypothesis etc. and if necessary, broken up into parts.

- **Clarification of meaning**: The meaning of terms, phrases and sentences is clarified where necessary.

- **Gathering the evidence:** Evidence relevant to the problem is obtained

- **Assessing the evidence:** The quality of the evidence is judged.

- **Inferring conclusions:** Conclusions are drawn from the best evidence, or inferences drawn by others are evaluated.

- **Other relevant information is considered:** looking to other considerations which are not mentioned in a text being critically appraised or not explicitly part of the gathering and assessing evidence and drawing inferences from it.

- **Overall judgment:** the critical thinker must give some sort of overall judgment on the problem is reached, taking into account all the components of the CT process.

1.2 Importance of Developing Critical Thinking

The complexity of the modern world reflects the importance and the need for developing CT. Halpern (2003, p. 2), states that "the ability to think critically has always been important; it is vital necessity for the citizens of 21st century". CT does not only deal with logic and probability but also gives the ability to apply these skills to solve real-life problems. It boosts learner's creativity and enhances one's time management by providing a vast understanding of self as it offers an opportunity to be objective, less emotional and more open-minded others views and opinions (Hader 2005).

Scriven and Paul (2006, as cited in Barjesteh, Gholami and Vaseghi, 2012, p.404) state that "one of the most important abilities that a thinker can have is the ability to monitor and assess his or her thinking while processing the thinking of others". The equipment of critical competence is crucial in an information society. The enhancement of CT skills will provide future generations with the ability to generate new ideas as well as giving them the basis to provide reasoning for, and explanations of daily life events Halonen (1995)

"The main benefit of critical thinking is that it encourages active learning by teaching students how to think rather than what to think" (Barjesteh, Gholami & Vaseghi, 2012, p.401).In this regard, Meyer (1976), mentions that the main purpose of education is to nurture the individual and the already existing potential inside the people. Besides, schools' objectives should strengthen the child's thinking and not incidental results. Thus, qualified education should teach students the path through what are CT skills.

To sum up, CT can be seen to play a key role in academic education, as it is what students need to excel in both college and real-life contexts.

1.3 Bloom's Taxonomy and Metacognition

1.3.1 Bloom's Taxonomy

In 1956, Dr Benjamin Bloom headed a group of social psychologists who created a classification system for levels of cognitive skills and learning behaviour, familiarly known as Bloom's Taxonomy, to encourage higher forms of thinking in education. Bloom's Taxonomy is one of the most influential of the CT models. It provides educators with an important framework to use to concentrate on high order thinking. By providing a hierarchy of levels, this taxonomy can help teachers in their teaching as a reference to prepare learning objectives,

developing lesson plans, organizing class activities, preparing tests and examinations, all of which assess students' CT (Anderson, 1998).

The framework elaborated by Bloom consists of six major levels in a successive hierarchy from simple to complex and from concert to abstract: (a) knowledge, (b) comprehension, (c) application represent lower-order thinking skill, (d) analysis, (e) synthesis, and (f) evaluation, which represent the higher-order of thinking skills. These levels can be relevant for understanding higher cognitive processes, namely, the three more advanced ones as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. These processes are linked to CT as they help to synthesize information from multiple sources in various ways, such as skimming for main ideas and keywords, identifying themes and purposes in different sources, constructing the argument and forming and stating conclusions. However, these steps will be often reached after passing the previous ones.
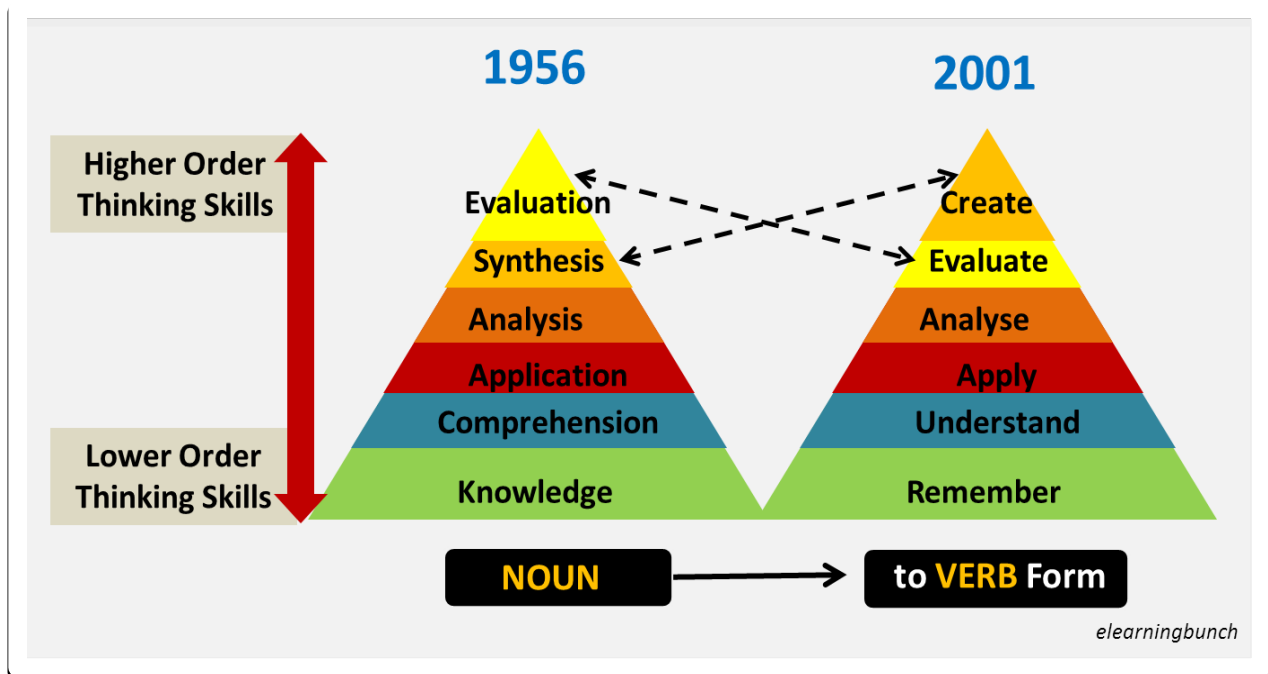
Figure 1: Original Bloom Taxonomy and Revised Bloom Taxonomy (Fareeza, 2013)

Despite the explanation offered by Bloom's taxonomy through the previous skills, teachers and learners find some obstacle in utilizing them. Hence, in 1999s', one of Bloom's former students, Lorin Anderson and a group of cognitive psychologists made some modification in the Blooms' Taxonomy of learning. The revisions they made appear fairly minor, however, they do have a significant impact on how people use the taxonomy as it explains the cognitive process of thinking (Karthwohl,2002). As it is presented in figure (1), the revised version renames the original skills to verb form. The major modifications were at the lowest level, knowledge and comprehension retitled to remembering and understanding, as we notice that the top two skills synthesis and evaluation have flipped to evaluate and create.

Kendall and Marzono (2008) argue that the new taxonomy is applicable in the academic context as it presents clear details about thinking skills within the educational context. Although Bloom's taxonomy is new in the education context, it is still recognized as an essential tool because it enables teachers to combine the appropriate strategies to improve the CT skills of students in their learning.

1.3.2 Metacognition

Beside the Bloom's taxonomy, metacognition is considered one of the major components of CT. So far, the concept of metacognition remains contentious. Flavell (1979) notes that metacognition is "Knowledge and cognition about cognitive phenomena" (p.906). He groups it into four categories: a) metacognition knowledge, b) metacognition experiences, c) goals and tasks, and d) actions or strategies. Marzano et al. (1988) state that metacognition is "being aware of our thinking as we perform specific tasks and then using this awareness to control what we are doing". Besides, Livingston (2003) characterizes metacognition as being "higher-order thinking that involves active control over the cognitive processes engaged in learning" (p.02).

Metacognition is defined as awareness and management conduct of one's thought, which requires the use of some elements in CT like analysis, inference, and management (Dean & Kuhn, 2003). Since metacognition is a process of thinking about thinking, people use it consciously or unconsciously in their daily life (Livingston, 2003). When it comes to the academic context, metacognition helps students and teachers to develop their thinking skills as most of the time takes place in planning or evaluating thought. Yet, teachers tend to neglect the concept of metacognition in classrooms often because the program generally leads teachers to concentrate on the subject matter rather than thoughts, in addition to the difficulty students or even teachers face while using metacognition process (Joseph, 2010). That is to say, metacognition performance requires proper planning and awareness of cognitive skills needed in learning and instruction.

1.4 Problem Solving and Creative Thinking

1.4.1 Problem Solving

The logical activities of CT are often associated with problem-solving. Kurfiss (1988, p.28) reports that "critical thinking is a form of problem solving, but a major difference between the two is that critical thinking involves reasoning about open-ended or "ill-structured" problems, while problem-solving is usually considered narrower in scope". That is to say, CT includes inductive reasoning that is not limited to one single solution. In contrast, problem-solving usually have a correct answer no matter how complex the problem is. Thus, in CT, the aim is not to discover and implement a response but to create a logical interpretation of the problem or issue that could be posed in a convincing argument. She goes on to state that CT is a large process that is not limited only to discovery but also justification while problem solving is often linked only with logical reasoning and inference.

Kurfiss suggests that this distinction may not be completely tenable as she wrote that "although critical thinking and problem-solving differ in important ways, the overlap between them is substantial enough to justify close examination of problem solving and related processes for insight regarding critical thinking". Paul and Elder (1997) argued that problem-solving requires CT because well-conceived CT invariably contributes to problems solution. Problem solving is also a significant usage of CT and CT a major tool in problem-solving, therefore, the two are best treated in conjunction rather than in disjunction.

1.4.2 Creative Thinking

Creative thinking is another important process worth exploring in relation to CT. Creativity has been defined from different perspectives. Halpern (1984, p. 324) claims that "creativity can be thought of as the ability to form new combinations of ideas to fulfill a need". However, as a process, creative thinking may be described as:

> The process of becoming sensitive to problems, deficiencies, gaps in knowledge, missing elements, disharmonies, and so on; identifying the difficulty; searching for solutions, making guesses, or formulating hypotheses about the deficiencies: testing and retesting these hypotheses and possibly modifying and retesting them; and finally communicating the results (Torrance, 1966; as cited in Kim, 2006, p. 3).

Although there may be an emphasis on the creative means to resolve dissonance, yet the process still strikingly similar to both CT and problem-solving previous descriptions. Obviously, this process overlaps considerably with CT and problem-solving. This point was supported by Marzano (1988, p.17) as he reports that "people tend to view critical thinking as primarily evaluative and creative thinking as primarily generative. But the two types of thinking are not

opposites; they complement each other and even share many attributes". In addition, Halpern (1984, p.162) states that "Many decisions are involved in solving a problem, and generating satisfactory solution paths often requires considerable creativity".

Perkins (1987) assumes that creativity is more of a thinking style than an ability. He characterized creative people for not accepting how others define and present problems, however, they often prefer to define problems for themselves. He believes that:

> If you're talking about really good critical thinking, you're talking about thinking that is insightful. It's not just nitpicking; it cuts to the heart of the matter - and that, rather plainly, is creative thinking. So, from a philosophical point, one has to acknowledge that the two are hand-in-glove and it can't be any other way (p.15).

That is to say, philosophically speaking, critical and creative thinking are interrelated and cannot be clearly separated. Passmore (1972) Points out that CT combines creativity and critique in a single form of thought. The critical analysis would not be possible without imagination and creative thinking to identify new ideas, alternatives, and potential solutions for a problem.

1.5 Critical Thinking Pedagogy

In the educational setting, it is widely accepted that learning to think is one of the most important goals of formal education. Dewey (1933) states that the central purpose of education is learning to think. As part of that education, learners need to develop and learn to apply CT skills to their academic studies effectively due to its association with abilities such as problem-solving, decision-making, self-regulation, and metacognitive.

The issue of incorporating CT skills in education has raised many contradictory ideas about whether it can be taught or not. A variety of approaches and models to teaching, measuring and assessing CT skills and abilities have been developed (Reed, 1998).

1.5.1 Critical Thinking Teaching

Teachers of English need to be aware that "knowledge, by its very nature, depends on thought…all knowledge exists in and through critical thought" (Paul, 1992, p. 5). Ways in which CT might be taught have become a highly debatable question for L2 learning scholars and practitioners (Thomposon, 2002).

Until recently, it was largely expected that students who attend college will develop CT skills by listening to lectures, participating in classroom discussion or by-passing exams. Yet, many studies show that improving students' CT skills requires more explicit teaching of CT skills (Bangert-Drowns & Bankert, 1990; Halpern, 1998).

Benesch (1993) reports that learners are more encouraged to participate actively and raise issues of concern in their daily lives when they are exposed to a classroom that features CT. Scholars asserted that the issue of transfer must be addressed either CT should be taught using the general or discipline-embedded approach. Nickerson (1988) clearly illustrates the risks involved in both approaches as follows:

> A risk of teaching a specific aspect of thinking only in a "content-free" way is that the student will acquire some understanding of that aspect but fail to connect that knowledge to the many situations in life in which it could be useful. A risk of teaching the same aspect of thinking only within the context of a [standard subject matter] course is that the student

will fail to abstract from the situation what is really context independent

and again will not transfer what has been learned to other contexts (p.

34).

Part of the difficulty in effectively teaching critical thinking rests in the fact that some students enter the classroom unprepared and even contra prepared to learn how to think critically. This can be due to the reason that nothing in their personal or academic backgrounds has taught them to think critically or even encouraged them not to think critically, especially in cases where students have learned to direct their actions relying on others advice and judgment. (Halpern,2007)

Despite all the contradictory ideas and beliefs on teaching CT skills, everyone agrees that thinking critically is the major goal of education.

1.5.2 Critical Thinking Instructions

Although there is a high agreement on the idea that CT is the major goal of education, still there is a little agreement concerning the conditions under which instruction may contribute to greater CT outcomes.

Ennis (1989) categorizes the various approaches to CT instruction as general, infusion, immersion, and mixed. First, in the general approach, CT is taught separately from the presentation of existing subject matter content. Second, the infusion approach seeks to integrate CT instruction into standard subject matter instruction and makes general CT principles explicit to the students. In this approach, students are encouraged to acquire critical thinking skills through profound and well-structured subject matter instruction and practice them explicitly. Third, the immersion approach also attempts to incorporate CT within standard subject matter

instruction. However, general CT principles and procedures are not made explicit to students with the assumption that they will acquire the skills of thinking as a result of engaging in the subject matter instruction. Finally, the mixed approach consists of a combination of the general approach with either the infusion or immersion approach together. In the mixed approach, there is a separate thread or course aimed at teaching general principles of CT, but students also participate in subject-specific CT instruction where CT objectives are either explicit or implicit (Ennis, 1989).

Regardless of the approach, CT instruction is mainly based on the assumption that there are identifiable and definable thinking skills which are domain-independent, and that students can be taught to recognize and apply them appropriately in situations of daily life and future careers. The goal of CT instruction is, therefore, to help students acquire and transfer those domain-independent thinking skills to solve everyday problems (Halpern, 1988).

1.5.3 Critical Thinking Strategies

Beyer (2008) argued that students CT skills and dispositions improvement hardly occur simply as an incidental outcome of subject matter classroom learning. Many of the students, being novices or having little experience, are less capable of acquiring and transferring thinking skills to out-of-classroom contexts. Beyer (2008) and Halpern (1993) have suggested that empirically supported teaching strategies that encourage, stimulate, and facilitate the acquisition and transfer of thinking skills among students are essential for developing CT.

Hitchcock (2011) provides three points need to be made at the outset in order to develop CT. First, it is not enough to regard CT as the goal of any educational program or institution. Rather, something needs to be done to see whether the provided education fosters CT. Second, any educational system, in practice, can only hope to make students close to the ideal critical thinker

because not every student can reach it.   Third, CT skills require both content knowledge of the domain by applying these skills to the domain knowledge in question.

1.5.4 Critical Thinking Assessment

Traditionally, the term "assessment" refers to the process of gathering information using quizzes or tests to make evaluative decisions. However, assessment is not just about testing and assessing student's knowledge, it is more about learning and teaching.

The end goal of teaching CT is to assist students in making correct judgments based on a careful evaluation of available evidence. However, most models of assessment still emphasize the student's performance rather than the student's ability in using the obtained knowledge. Stiggins, Griswold, and Wikelund (1989) report that the assessments based on the observations and judgments of teachers, and tests constructed by them are not commonly suitable for measuring high-order thinking skills.

Despite the lack of a comprehensive theory of CT, varied efforts have been made to develop assessment tools. Read (1998, pp.32-33) points out three main approaches that were commonly used for assessing critical thinking: 1) commercially available general knowledge standardized tests, 2) researcher or instructor designed assessments that attempt to capture aspects of critical thinking more directly related to the purposes of the research project or subject of instruction, and 3) teaching students to assess their thinking.

In teaching and learning EFL, researchers as Belachew et al., (2015, pp.7-8) show that most EFL teachers lack skills when it comes to assessing and teaching CT. Therefore, they suggest that teachers need to be trained in institutions, workshops, and seminars to raise their awareness

on how to practice assessment in EFL classroom because they only know the theoretical part about how-to asses.

1.6 Barriers to Critical Thinking

Achieving CT is not an easy task. Everyone will face some difficulties and barriers in their way to achieve that high order of thinking usually due to its complex nature. Cottrell (2005) provide some of these barriers that vary from one person to another and presented them as follows:

- **Misunderstanding of what is meant by criticism:** Some learners link criticism only to making negative comments. However, critical evaluation refers to identifying both negative and positive aspects. This misunderstanding leads learners to the idea that it is not good to engage in criticism leading them to avoid making any negative comments and make only positive ones which would block improvement.

- **Over-estimating our own reasoning abilities:** Some learners with poor reasoning tend to believe that their own belief and thinking system is the best and that they have good reasons for what they do. Winning arguments, for example, cannot be considered as having the best case. Some people would not recognize a poor argument or would simply yield the point to avoid conflict. Such behaviour does not help to develop mental abilities.

- **Lack of methods, strategies or practice:** Some learners do not know what steps should take to improve their critical thinking skills. In order to be critical thinker, leaners need to be familiar with different strategies and techniques as well as practicing them to develop their critical thinking skills.

- **Reluctance to critique experts:** Some learners find it strange and rude to criticize works of more experienced people without bearing in mind that it is a part of the way teaching works. Learners are expected to challenge and criticize even published materials.

- **Affective reasons:** In refers to the critical thinker acknowledgement of the different ways to look at an issue and his/her ability to provide the necessary arguments to convince others as all as considering others evidence based on his/ her own beliefs.

- **Mistaking information for understanding:** Some learners naturally resist to develop their thinking skills; they refuse to challenge and judge experts' answers by pursuing their own answers and prefer to be given the right answers directly.

- **Insufficient focus and attention to detail:** Critical thinking requires paying good attention to details of the exact task in hand without getting distracted by other tangents and avoiding making judgements based on the too general overview**.**

1.7 Critical Thinking and Reading Comprehension

EFL/ESL learners are continually exposed to different types of texts and exercises which oblige them to urge the capacity to use reading in parallel with thinking. Smith (1990) assumes that the term CT is a general concept employed in different fields of human activities, one of which is reading. The reader should develop his/her thinking about reading and not read blindly (Richard, 2004). Smith (2004) claims that thinking which occurs during reading is no different from that performed in other situations, no one can talk, understand without thinking. So, it is impossible to read and not to think.

Beck and Dole (1992, as cited in Barjesteh, Gholami & Vaseghi, 2012).) write that, "although thinking… is related to what has been traditionally called reading comprehension, it is

more than that" (p.3). According to Beck and Dole (1992), CT cannot be considered the equivalent of what has been traditionally called reading, including only the literal comprehension of words in the text. Nevertheless, it is more accepted today to view reading as going more beyond the surface meaning of the written words. In such a process, the reader needs to reflect, analyze, evaluate, and thus to think critically to comprehend the written words.

Commeyras (1990, p.201) explains that "The claim that critical thinking is closely related to reading comprehension is similar to the view that reasoning is an integral part of reading". She also states that "Critical thinking, which involves reasoning, is the process the reader uses to determine which interpretations are consistent with textual evidence and background knowledge". In the same path, Beck (1989) claims that ''there is no reading without reasoning'' (p. 677).

In addition, Facione (1992) assumes that there is a significant relationship between CT and RC (reading comprehension) making them go hand in hand since improving one of the two leads to the improvements of both processes as he states that the "improvements in one are paralleled by improvements in other" (p.18).

Conclusion

To conclude, through this chapter we have presented a theoretical background about CT. Firstly, we dealt with a general overview of CT which includes historical background, definitions, skills, dispositions and process. Then, we cast some light on bloom's taxonomy, metacognition, problem-solving and creative thinking in relation to CT. After that, we tackled CT pedagogy which comprises CT teaching, instructions, strategies and assessment. Finally, we dealt with barriers to CT in addition to CT and reading comprehension.

Chapter Two:
Reading and Reading
Comprehension

Table of Contents

Introduction

Reading is essential at all times as life becomes more complex and the knowledge explosion increases rapidly. It is accredited to be the most important language skill as it improves other language skills and thinking ability. Reading helps learners to process and evaluate information to build their knowledge and offers them an opportunity to see how language is used by native speakers. This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, we will introduce the term reading providing its different definitions, types and models. The second part will be devoted to RC. We will provide its definition then we will shed light on the strategies of RC, as well as, discuss RC instruction and assessment.

2.1 Section One: General Overview of Reading

2.1.1 Definition of Reading

Reading has long been investigated by many researchers who tried to provide a conceptual view about the notion of reading, yet no research seems to be comprehensive enough to include all the aspects of the actual reading activity. Smith (1985) states that due to the complexity of the reading process, it is impossible to provide a specific definition to the term in fear of an "oversimplification". Instead, he prefers to look for a description and an analysis of the term as it has a "multiplicity of meanings" depending on the situation in which the reading event takes place.

Baudoin et al (1994, p.1) describe reading as a: "complex activity that involves both word recognition, the processor perceiving how written symbols correspond to one's spoken language;

and comprehension, the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected paragraphs".
In other words, Reading is a complex process that involves working to build up a sense from a text. As soon as the reader sees the text, s/he starts to perform a visual activity to recognize the language s/he is reading. Then, the brain starts to process the information given by the eyes to make sense of it, not just a sense from the written words and sentences, but also ideas, memories, and knowledge triggered by those words and sentences.

Further, Goodman (1971) argues that reading cannot be merely a word-by-word deciphering until meaning is reached. He emphasizes text comprehension through using knowledge of the world during the process of reading. He states that "reading can be understood as an active, purposeful and creative mental process where the reader engages in the construction of meaning from a text" (p. 135). He believes that reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game and an active mental process in which the reader makes sense of the written text based on the prior knowledge he brings to the task of reading. Grellet (1981, p.7), in concord with Goodman's view, wrote that reading is "a constant process of guessing and what one brings to the text is often more important than what he finds in it". According to Goodman and Grellet, the importance of guessing is promoted at the expense of word recognition. However, sometimes, any slow or inaccurate word recognition is proposed to affect comprehension. Badrawi (1992) assumes that:

> "Reading is both a process and a product. It is more than just receiving a literal sense. It involves bringing an individual's entire experiences and thinking powers to bear to understand what the writer has encoded. Thus, prior sensory experiences provide the basis for comprehending what is read" (p.16).

Reading is more than just seeing or pronouncing words correctly, it's more than just recognizing the meaning of isolated words. Reading requires you to think, feel, and imagine to understand the encoded meaning (Strang, 1978).

To sum up, it can be said that reading is an active process of reconstructing an author's ideas. To read effectively, the reader must be able to see, decode, perceive, comprehend, and react to what is written.

2.1.2 Types of Reading

2.1.2.1 Intensive Reading

According to Harmer (2001), intensive reading is concentrated and less relaxed. It concerns shorter texts and aims at attaining learning goals with close guidance from the teacher. During this type of reading, the learner gains text comprehension to make critical judgments about the text he is reading by offering his/her interpretation. Thus, be able to state a well-founded opinion about the content, the intention, the arguments, and the language used in the text.

Intensive reading is generally done at a slower speed; however, it requires a higher degree of understanding because it focuses on details and analysis. According to I.S.P National (2009) "Intensive study of reading texts can be a means of increasing learners' knowledge of language features and their control of reading strategies. It can also improve their comprehension skill." (p.25). Thus, it can be said that intensive reading aims to help students obtain a detailed meaning from the text, to develop reading skill, and to enhance vocabulary and grammar knowledge (Renandya & Jacobs, 2002; as cited in Barjesteh, Gholami, & Vaseghi, 2012, p. 205)

2.1.2.2 Extensive Reading

Extensive reading refers to the slow careful reading of long written materials such as novels and books in which the learner is interested in for comprehension. It is mostly performed outside the class time and its main purpose is to build reader confidence and enjoyment. According to I.S.P National (2009)" During extensive reading learners should be interested in what they are reading and should be reading with their attention on the meaning of the text rather than on learning the language features of the text".

Long and Richards (1971, p.216) identify extensive reading as "occurring when students read large amounts of high-interest material, usually out of class, concentrating on meaning, "reading for gist" and skipping unknown words." That is to say, the core belief for an extensive approach to teaching reading is that when students read large quantities of the text of their selection and in which they are interested in, with the aim of global understanding, their reading ability will consequently be improved (Barjesteh, Gholami, & Vaseghi, 2012, p. 205).

2.1.3 Models of Reading Process

Scholars and educators suggested several reading models to help explain the nature of reading, as well as, to describe what occurs during the act of reading. The different models of reading include Bottom-up model, Top-down model, and Interactive model.

Before we start discussing the different models of reading, we first introduce the concept of a model. A model of a reading process is considered by (Davies, 1995, p.57) as "a formalized, usually visually represented theory of what goes on in the eyes and the mind when readers are comprehending (or miscomprehending) text". In other words, an information processing model

of 'reading' is mainly an attempt to visualize what happens in the eyes and the brain of the person who is reading the graphic display.

2.1.3.1 Bottom-up Reading Model

This model emerged as a consequence of the development of Behaviourist Psychology in the 1940s and 1950s. The bottom-up model views reading as the process of building letters into words, words into phrases, sentences and then proceeds to the overall meaning. According to its principles, to build up the meaning and the sense of texts, in a gradual way, the reader start processing the smallest linguistic units and, bit by bit, builds up these units to decode the higher ones (Dechant, 1991). In the words of Davies, the bottom-up models are "Models of the reading process that describe the process as a sequence of discrete 'steps', in which the direction of processing is from 'bottom-level' features of text to 'higher levels', that is, from the identification of letters to sounds, to words, to sentences and finally to meaning and thinking" (Davies, 1995, p.169).

The bottom-up models of reading have been criticized by some researchers. Stanovich (1980) stated that this reading model lack feedback among its different stages preventing the low processing stages to interact with the higher ones to decode meanings. This makes it difficult to consider the influence of the sentence-context and the role of prior knowledge of the text topic in promoting word recognition and comprehension (Stanovich, 1980; as cited in Samuels and Kamil, 2002, p.212)

2.1.3.2 Top-down Reading Model

The top-down Reading model builders were influenced by the emergence of cognitive psychology after the mid-1960s. They focused on the background knowledge that a reader uses

to comprehend a text. Davies (1995), states that this model "predict that the processing sequence proceeds from predictions about meaning to attention to progressively smaller units, for example, letters, visual features" (p.175). That is to say, unlike the bottom-up model, the top-down model pays minimal attention to letter-sound correspondences and assumes that a reader uses prior knowledge, experience, and expectations in relation to the writer's message during reading in order to process information. Wolf and Vellutino (1993) believe that the Top-down model is holistic and considers linguistic context the primary importance in the process of word-recognition. In the process of comprehending written text when reading, the reader continuously build hypothesizes about what is read and checks these expectations and predictions for confirmation using text information.

The top-down model has also been criticized by some research. Paul (2009) states that one of the major weaknesses in this model is the dependency on the context for comprehension. It has been demonstrated that context does not accelerate the identification of words or the derivation of word meanings. Another weakness in the top-down model is the fact that readers may have little knowledge about the text topic so they will not be able to generate hypotheses (Samuels and Kamil, 2002, p. 212)

2.1.3.3 Interactive Reading Model

This model incorporates both top-down and bottom-up processing models. It has been introduced by Rummelhart due to the deficiencies of the two mentioned models in covering the full RC process. Rumelhart (1985) put forward the view that "Reading occurs through both bottom-up and top-down processes. Information such as letter shape and orthographic, syntactic and semantic knowledge interact within the short term or "working memory" to contribute to comprehension" (as cited in konza 2003, p.9). He regards reading as an interactive process which

includes various components from letter-level knowledge, letter-cluster knowledge, lexical-level knowledge, syntactic-level knowledge, and semantic-level knowledge. This model of reading devoted less attention to decoding skills which are generally thought of as mainly involving the initial components so that more attention is freed to examine comprehension issues which involve the higher-level components.

Readers become proficient when they make a balance between the initial and the higher-level components to interpret the written text meaning. Gunning (2006) states that "the efficient readers simultaneously uses background knowledge, facility with language, ongoing comprehension and decoding skills" (as cited in konza 2003, p.9). Furthermore, Davies (1995) illustrates that this model, unlike in bottom-up and top-down models, does not pre-select or expect any direction for processing. Instead, the reader may engage in parallel processes relying on a range of information sources.

2.1.4 Characteristics of an Effective Reader

Research, in general, illustrate that an effective reader can use different reading strategies while reading to grasp and comprehend the meaning of the written text. Wassman and Rinsky (1993, p.5) writes that an effective reader needs "an understanding of the reading process and an understanding of how to go about reading different types of printed information. According to Hulan, Layune and Mclntyre (2011 p.116), studies of "think-aloud protocols" (Pressley, 2000), illustrate many characteristics of good readers. We mention some:

- They are aware of their purpose (whether to enjoy a book or find information) for reading the text.

- They evaluate and revise their predictions about the text as they read.

- They revise their schemas when they are inconsistent with ideas in the text.

- They figure out the meanings of words

- They underline, reread, and make notes in efforts to remember points of the text.

- They interpret the text.

- They evaluate the text.

- They think about how they will use the information from the text in the future

2.2 Section Two: Reading Comprehension

2.2.1 Definition of Reading Comprehension

Defining RC is a controversial process. However, the various definitions yielded to RC have all stressed the importance of understanding the written text. According to Pressley (2006, p.35), "reading comprehension is about getting the meaning out the text". Similarly, Snow (2002), defines reading comprehension as "The process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction, and involvement with written language. It consists of three elements: the reader, the text and the activity or purpose for reading" (p. 7).

That is to say, it is a process by which learners can derive and construct meaning through the reader's interaction and involvement with the written text. Therefore, the accomplishment of RC requires the active participation of a reader, the presence of the text, achievability of the activity, and the social context (Chisamba, 2014). Greenal and Swan (1988) consider RC as an effective reading in which the reader can accurately and efficiently understand what s/he reads, as well as, successfully discusses the main ideas or write a summary of the text.

Furthermore, Vacca et al (2006) identify RC as "one of the essential components of an effective reading program" (2006, p. 289). They emphasized on the role of the teacher to develop student's comprehension abilities by considering multiple levels of reading instructions and instructions about comprehension strategies based on what skilled readers do when they read. In return, the reader has to show that s/he is able to re-express the content of a text by writing sentences or paragraphs as answers to comprehension questions or by writing a summary of the text as a sign of comprehension (Swan, 1988).

2.2.2 Reading Comprehension Strategies

In English language learning classes, most learners often rely on teachers and dictionaries to read effectively. Such a routine makes it challenging for learners to comprehend all that they read without receiving any external help. In contrast, learners with strong comprehension skills read selectively. To establish goals, they use a large number of comprehension strategies as they read to help them make sense of what they are reading. Block (1986) defines reading strategies as a set of methods and techniques used by readers to achieve success in reading. In concurrence, Cohen (1986) believes that reading strategies represent a mental process, consciously chosen by readers, to achieve certain reading tasks. They choose these strategies logically and use them intentionally.

There are several different RC strategies used by readers to get a better understanding and outcome of a text. These strategies range from the simple to the complex and their usage depends on how strong are the learner comprehension skills. Some of the most important and commonly used RC strategies are:

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2.2.2.1 Activating and Using Background Knowledge

This strategy involves readers' activation and using their background knowledge to understand and make sense out of what they read. Kucer (2005) explains that readers acquire knowledge from their experiences and retain them in their long-term memory. This stored information is referred to by what cognitive scientists term "schemata". The letter is defined by Kucer (2005, p.125) as "complex structures of information that represent the individual's past encounters with the world".

According to Schema Theory, "a reader comprehends a message when he is able to bring to mind a schema that gives a good account of the objects and events described in the message" (Anderson, 1994, p. 469). When reading is initiated, proficient readers search for prior ground knowledge relevant to the text's topic or structure, they make connections to lives, other books, and the world as they read, and they think about these connections after they finish reading. That is to say, they activate background knowledge before, during, and after reading a text (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997; as cited in Serravallo, 2010, p.45).

2.2.2.2 Asking Questions

Proficient readers continuously ask themselves questions about what they read. Asking questions helps readers acquire a deep understanding of what they read as it allows them to integrate information, identify main ideas, and summaries information. Corroborating this, Willoughby et al. (1995) argue that when readers ask the right question, they will be able to focus on the most important information in a text.

Furthermore, according to Raphael, in the words of Hulan et al (2011, p.124), "comprehension instruction is about getting students to ask questions instead of answer them".

Self-questioning before, during, and after reading gets readers to become more engaged in the purpose of reading and can even help them to monitor their understanding. Learners can be taught to question themselves, the authors, and the texts they read (Hulan et al., 2011, p.124).

2.2.2.3 Guessing the Meaning of Unfamiliar Words

Unknown words often create obstacles to EFL learner's comprehension. However, they always try to find some sort of solutions to deal with such an obstacle. Smith (1971) states that the best way used to identify unknown words in texts is to draw inferences from the rest of the text rather than chucking it up in a dictionary. Readers guess the meaning of unfamiliar words by using the text surrounding.

2.2.2.4 Predicting

This strategy involves readers ability to make informed predictions in order to get meaning from the written text. Duffy (2009) states that "good readers anticipate meaning. They do this by predicting what they think is going to happen in the selection and by revising their predictions as they read" (p.101). Good readers use predicting as a way to connect their existing knowledge to new information from a text to get meaning from what they read (Gillet and Temple, 1994). Before reading, readers usually sub-consciously ask themselves what they know about the text and predict what it will be about. The title of a text, for example, may evoke memories of texts with similar content, allowing them to predict the content of the new text. According to Duffy (2009, p.101), "predicting is fundamental to comprehension". Corroborating this, Smith (1988), stresses on the importance of predicting and claimed that it is the core of RC.

2.2.2.5 Making Inferences

This strategy requires readers to draw conclusions from information in a text. Jeffries and Mikulecky (1996, p.150) believe that to infer is basically to look "for clues in the passage in order to understand what it is about". This view was supported by Duffy when he wrote that "Inferring is the ability to "read between the lines" or to get the meaning an author implies but does not state directly" (2009, p. 122). In other words, writers do not always provide complete or clear explanations of what they write about. yet, they often provide clues or hints that readers may use to "read between the lines" and draw inferences that connect the text information with their background knowledge.

Roe (2008) asserts that this approach enables learners to relate the text information to previous knowledge, as well as, to be able to draw their own conclusions in order to interpret the text. (as cited in Merchan, 2010, p.38). Thus, teaching readers how to make inferences will help them to improve their abilities to construct meaning (Anderson and Pearson, 1984).

2.2.2.6 Summarizing

This strategy involves readers ability to explain what they read in their own words. Jeffries and Mikulecky (1996, p.167) state that "summarizing is the re-telling the important parts of a passage in a much shorter time". In the same path, Diamond, Gutlohn and Honig (2000) stress on the importance of summarizing strategy as it enables readers to be aware of text organization, of what is important in a text, of how ideas are related, and also be able to recall text quickly.

Furthermore, Hulun et al (2011) believe that summarizing is not merely a retelling of the text, learners have also to be able to analyze events, interpret vocabulary, and dispense with unnecessary information. They view summarizing as one of the most challenging strategies to be

taught. According to them, "teaching readers to summarize requires explicit demonstration and thinking aloud and much practice by the children with feedback from the teacher" (Hulan et al., 2011, p.128).

2.2.2.7 Visualizing

This strategy involves the readers' ability to establish mental images of a text in order to develop a clear understanding of events or processes they face while reading. Duffy (2009, p.115) states that "good readers respond to the descriptive text they read, especially when reading narrative text. They create pictures in their minds or images". In narrative texts, readers visualize the setting, characters, or actions in the plot in order to develop a clear understanding of what is happening. This strategy can also be applied to expository text in which readers create an image to help them remember abstract terms, names or visualize steps in a process or stages in an event. Pressley (1976) claims that readers who visualize as they read are more able to recall what they have read than are those who do not visualize.

2.2.2.8 Skimming

Skimming is considered as the most useful technique used by learners to make a quick assessment when they have a lot of material to read in a limited amount of time. Skimming as defined by Grellet (1981, p.04) is "quickly running one's eyes over a text to get the gist of it." According to (Williams, 1984, p. 96), when skimming "the reader goes through the text extremely quickly, merely dipping into it or sampling it at various points." In other words, it is the process of glancing quickly through written materials in order to get the main ideas without examining the text thoroughly. The reader achieves this by looking at the text and setting his eyes over the beginning and end of paragraphs where information is generally summarized.

2.2.2.9 Scanning

Scanning involves moving eyes quickly through the text seeking specific information of particular interest. This mainly occurs in the words of (Nuttall, 1982, p. 34) when she said that scanning is "glancing rapidly through a text whether to search for a specific piece of information or to get an initial impression of whether the text is suitable for a given purpose." That is to say, when scanning, the reader already knows what they are looking for therefore, they concentrate mainly on finding a particular idea or an answer that serve their needs.

In general, good readers use a variety of strategies as they flexibly switch from one strategy to another when reading. However, not all learners are good readers. Some of the learners need explicit instruction to teach them how to use these strategies in order to understand what they are reading. Therefore, Researchers have suggested that EFL teachers have to be aware of the different RC strategies and that they have to teach readers how to use them (Chamot et al 1999).

2.2.3 Reading Comprehension Instruction

Reading comprehension has a major role in EFL classes as it affects learners' chances of academic success. Some learners take RC quite naturally, while others may encounter some barriers in their way to comprehension. The explicit instruction to teach learners how to use comprehension strategies to understand what they read is believed to be one of the most effective means to help them overcome such an obstacle of RC (Pressley, 2000).

According to U.S Department of Education (2014), Struggling readers need a direct and explicit instruction in comprehension strategies to improve their RC. This means that teachers are also involved in teaching learners how to effectively and appropriately use these strategies in different content-area texts. Corroborating this, Fisher and Ivey (2006) argue that teachers can

make a difference for struggling readers by incorporating RC strategies in their teaching. Teachers are required to introduce to learners these strategies in order to develop their RC skills. They (teachers) are concerned to describe the strategy and its purpose to learners by giving examples and explaining how to perform it in order to develop their ability to use it, as well as, encouraging them to use it in different situations (Beckman, 2002).

Hulan et al (2011), in their book entitled "Reading Instruction for Diverse Classrooms", states that "Good comprehension instruction includes demonstration, explanation, and guidance in how to read". They share some general principles for teaching comprehension that teachers should keep in mind as they plan. We mention some:

- Consider the reader, the activity, and the text when planning instruction.

- Teach comprehension strategies through explanations, modelling (of thinking and actions), and guided practice. Repeat them often.

- Help learners understand when and why particular comprehension strategies are useful.

- Use a range of text genres.

- Conduct deep conversations about the meanings of texts.

- Whenever possible, employ paired or group learning.

- Plan for plenty of practice opportunities, especially in authentic contexts with real texts.

- Give lots of feedback.

- Design instruction that provides just enough scaffolding for students to be able to participate in tasks that are currently beyond their reach; that is, teaching within their ZPD (Zone of proximal development).

Finally, it can be said that through this type of explicit and scaffolded instruction, teachers can guide struggling readers to become confident, competent, and independent users of RC strategies (Lewis, 2008).

2.2.4 Assessing Comprehension

One important aspect of teaching any foreign language is the assessment of students' progress. Assessment is the process of collecting information and making inferences about a student's ability and the quality or success of a teaching course. It helps teachers determine why students have comprehension difficulties, so they can develop appropriate instruction to meet their students' individual needs (Carlson, Seipel, & Mcmaster,2014). However, assessing RC is not easy to achieve. Unlike speaking and writing, the reading process and product cannot be seen and observed. the complicated interaction of RC skills requires teachers to opt for suitable assessment tools that contain a multifaceted method with a comprehensive evaluation of individual learning needs (Woolley, 2011). Therefore, efficient RC assessment must be available to educators to ensure an accurate, fair and comprehensive assessment of the student.

There are numerous assessment tools and tests available to measure learners' RC. One of them is the Classroom-based assessment. It is a type of assessment that is most commonly used by classroom teachers (Ortlieb & Cheek, 2012) and it includes: Cloze procedure, informal reading inventory, retelling procedure and think aloud (as cited in Almutairi, 2018, p.64).

2.2.4.1 Cloze procedure

Cloze Assessment is a cognitive task that measures RC by providing students with a text which certain vocabulary is missing and the student is asked to supply the words that have been deleted by recognizing the contextual information surrounding it (Spinelli, 2012; as cited in Almutairi, 2018, p. 64). This require them to engage in a variety of cognitive activities, such as word prediction, making an inference, and making a connection between information in the text, which all are necessary skills for comprehending a text (Kibui,2012).

2.2.4.2 Informal Reading Inventory

Informal Reading Inventory is another type of classroom-based reading assessment that has been commonly used to measure students' RC. It measures students' RC by requiring them to either provide a summary about the text or answer different comprehension questions about it. It is individually developed and administered based on each student learning abilities (Serafini, 2010; Spinelli, 2012; as cited in Almutairi, 2018, p. 66).

2.2.4.3 Re-telling Assessment

Retelling is another assessment method that has been widely employed to measure students' comprehension. It involves students demonstrating their understanding and what they have learned through retelling and summarizing, in their own words, the major ideas from a selected text. This activity allows teachers to determine students' RC by assessing the accuracy of the information that they are retelling when compared to the original text (Spinelli, 2012; Serafini, 2010 as cited in Almutairi, 2018, p.68).

2.2.4.4 Think-aloud

This assessment method requires students to verbalize their thinking before, during, and after the process of reading a selected text. Teachers can assess students' comprehension by frequently stopping them while reading at different points and ask them several questions to encourage them to think aloud about the process and strategies they use in order to construct meaning out of a text while reading (Klingner, Vaughn, & Boardman, 2014; Serafini, 2010; as cited in Almutairi, 2018, p.70). This will allow teachers to determine the students' ability to control their thinking processes as well as determining whether they use the appropriate strategies while reading to gain the meaning of a text (Spinelli, 2012).

Overall, it must be noted that teachers should use the most appropriate type of assessment based on students' educational needs and abilities to ensure an accurate, fair and comprehensive assessment of the student.

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter was an attempt to review the essentials of reading and RC. It was divided into two sections; through the first section, we attempted to introduce the term reading providing its different definitions, types, models, and the characteristics of an effective reader. The second section was devoted to the basics of RC. We provided its definition and shed light on some of its strategies. Finally, we discuss RC instruction and assessment.

Chapter Three: The Fieldwork

Table of Content

Introduction

This chapter is devoted to present, elicit, and analyse the obtained data and its findings. we have selected one research tool to come up with our objectives, to answer the research questions, and to validate our hypothesis, which supposes that using RC strategies would enhances EFL learners' CT skills. The data was collected via a questionnaire in which the fieldwork will be sustained by evidence from two perspectives; Master One EFL students and EFL teachers at Biskra University. Finally, we discuss the research findings and conclusion.

3.1. Review of Research Methodology

3.1.1. Research Method

The nature of any study imposes which research methodology need to be selected in carrying out the research. This research work attempted to collect data to investigate the role of RC strategies in enhancing EFL learners' CT skills. Therefore, this study took part in the exploratory method since it explores the effect of RC strategies on EFL learner's CT. A qualitative approach will be conducted. we have chosen the exploratory method because it was the qualified method that helped us to attain the needed results to determine the efficacy of our hypothesis. Thus, measurement tools will be questionnaires.

3.1.2. Population and Sample of the Study

Following the research requirements, the population of this study includes both students and teachers of the Foreign Languages Department, Section of English at Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra during the academic year 2019/2020. We selected our sample randomly. It contains twenty-seven (27) Master One LMD students of English besides eight (08) teachers from the same department.

3.1.3. Data Gathering Tools

Our research seeks to reveal the role of RC strategies in enhancing EFL learners' CT skills; therefore, the data gathering tools were based primarily on the questionnaires. There are two questionnaires, one for students and another one for teachers. On one hand, students' responses are fundamental data resource because they are the primarily concerned individuals, and they will provide us with their perspectives about the role of RC strategies in promoting their CT skills. On the other hand, teachers' responses are also fundamental data resource because they are the experts and have a long experience in this domain which allow them to be the best resource to feed our research.

3.2. Students' Questionnaire

3.2.1. Aim of Students' Questionnaire

This questionnaire is mainly designed to diagnose the students' points of views towards the importance of RC strategies in enhancing EFL learners' CT. Also, it was used to check student's familiarity with CT and if they consider themselves as critical thinkers. Besides, it aimed to check what factors EFL students think can enhance their learning. Master One LMD students were the appropriate sample to achieve deep results since they have been exposed to a lot of readings during their academic career and have achieved an advanced level allowing them to understand the nature of CT. We selected the questionnaires intending to enrich the current study with useful and needed data.

3.2.2. Description of Students' Questionnaire

The study questionnaire is designed to collect data from the Master one EFL students at Biskra University. The students' questionnaire begins with a brief introduction that describes the

aim of the study with a focus on the importance of the respondents' answers. It was composed of (16) mixed questions that require answers with dichotomies (yes/no question) or picking up the most appropriate answer from a series of options, or open questions asking the students to explain or justify their choices. The questionnaire was divided into three main sections each focusing on a particular aspect. First of all, section one aimed at finding out the personal background information of our sample through three (03) simple independent questions. Section two comprised of seven (07) questions related to CT and its importance in EFL learning. Lastly, Section three composed of eight (08) questions which try to reveal the students' attitudes towards RC. Besides, it aims to check if students think that RC and CT are interrelated and what kind of relationship exists between them. Finally, we gave them the opportunity to add their comments or suggestions.

3.2.3. Piloting and Validation

After designing the first draft of the students' questionnaire, the researcher pre-used it to verify its validity before the administration stage. Fundamentally, the piloting drafts were submitted hand by hand to five (5) students from our population of Master one EFL students of Sciences of the Language at Biskra University. The main aim of the piloting stage of the questionnaire was to check if there are any difficult or ambiguous questions for students, to verify if students answers for the questions will serve the study, and to check if there were any repeated questions. We handed them the questionnaire on February, 26st, 2020. All students agreed that the questions were comprehensive, there was no ambiguity, and there were no repeated questions.

3.2.4. Administration of Students' Questionnaire

Students' questionnaire was administered to the selected sample that consists of master one LMD students at Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra. For the administration phase, we decided to distribute the questionnaire online to students from the sciences of languages branch through "Fecebook.com" due to the current circumstances of the lockdown, However, only twenty-seven (27) participated and gave their answers.

3.2.5. Analysis of Results

Section One: Background Information

Item 01. Specify your Gender

Gender	Number	Percentage %
Male	07	26%
Female	20	74%
Total	27	100%

Table 1: Students Gender Distribution
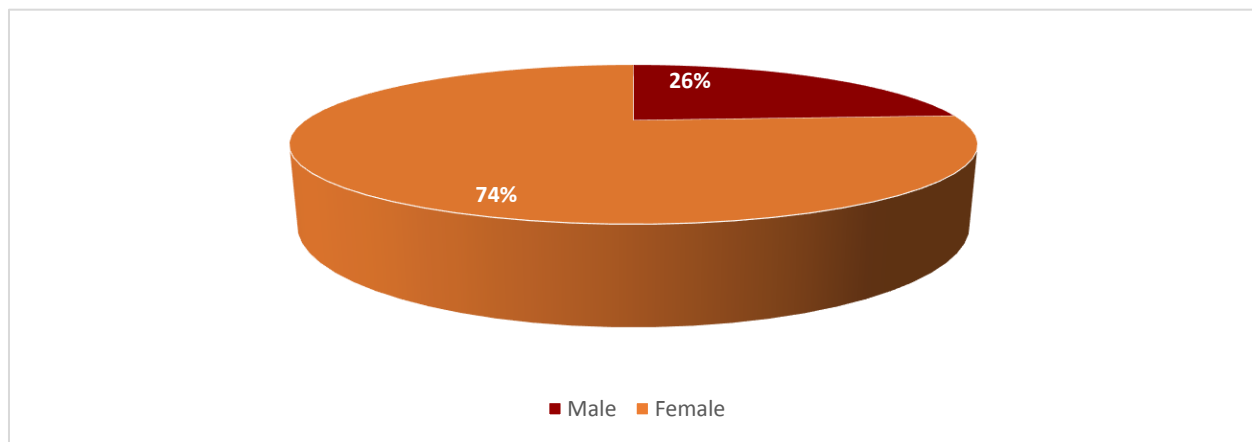
Graph 01: Students Gender Distribution

We observe from the table above that out of twenty-seven (27) participants, seven (07) with a percentage of (26%) were males. However, twenty (20) with (74%) are females. We notice that girls are more than boys. This may be because females are more interested and motivated to learn foreign languages than boys, especially at the Master level.

Item 02. How do you find learning the English language at university?

This question sought to see EFL students' evaluation of learning at university.

Option	Number	Percentage %
Easy	15	56%
Difficult	12	44%
Very difficult	00	00%
Total	27	100%

Table 2: Students' Evaluation of Learning at University
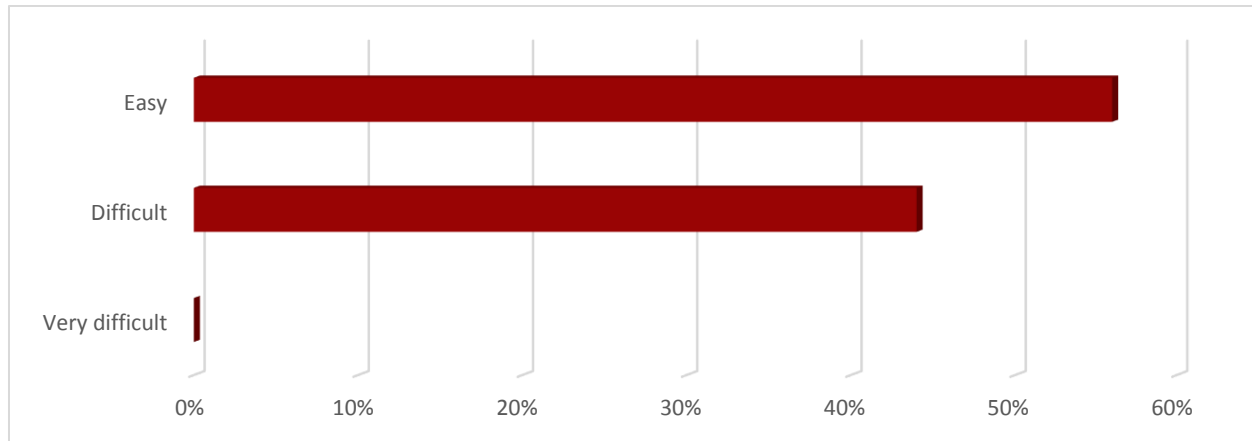
Graph 02: Students' Evaluation of Learning at University

As the table demonstrates, the majority of respondents (56%) noted that learning at university is easy. They justified their answer by pointing out that English is easy to learn and not as complicated as other specialities because there are no hard or new things that need to be given; students just need to attend and follow teachers' instructions. In the same path, others assume that it is easy because it depends on memorization in college. Teachers already provide

all the important information, so students are just required to be serious in their learning process and work hard. However, others simply stated that they already have a very good level in English and they enjoy learning it, so they did not face any difficulties.

Furthermore, twelve (12) respondents with (44%) considered learning at university as difficult. They justified their answers by highlighting the environment, the setting, and the conditions under which students are studying. Moreover, a big number of students limited the difficulty of learning at university to the difficult modules and a lot of research papers required. Additionally, the other justifications denoted that the reason behind the difficulty of the learning process is the timetable and that classes take most of their time so no time for further research. finally, no respondent (0%) think that learning at university is very difficult.

Based on these results, we extract that learning at university for EFL students requires memorization, seriousness, working hard, and attending sessions.

Item 03. How did you find learning in master level?

This question aims to see student's opinion about learning at the master level compared with licence level.

Option	Number	Percentage %
Easier than it was in license level	04	15%
The same as it was in license level	05	18%
More difficult than it was in license level	18	67%
Total	27	100%

Table 3: Students' Evaluation of Learning in Master Level
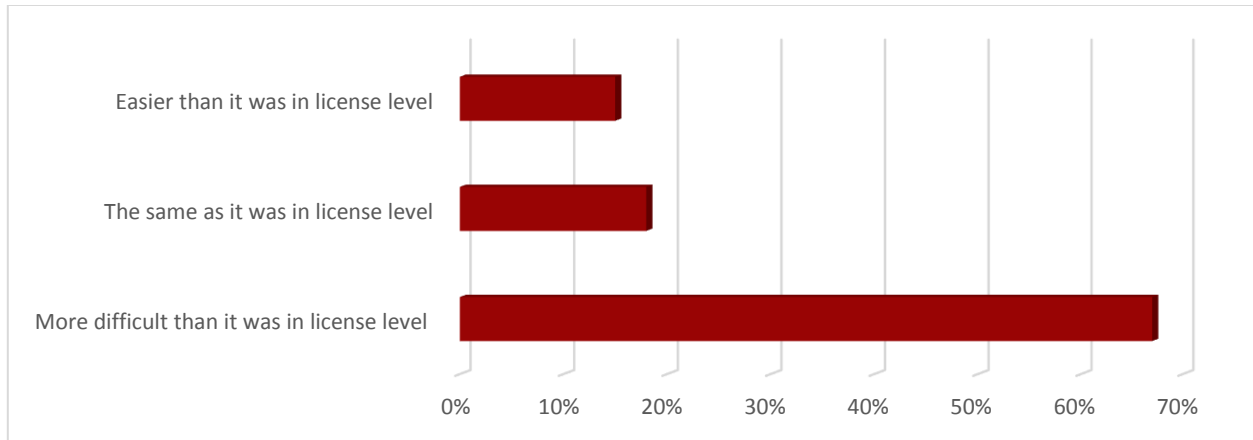
Graph 03: Students' Evaluation of Learning at Master Level

Through this table, we can distinguish between students' points of view towards learning at Master level. The majority of respondents (64%) determine that it is more difficult than it was in license level. Their justifications stressed the following points: a big number of homework and modules, studying in large groups, timetable organization, and the changes in the way of teaching. However, (18%) of the sample agreed that it is the same as it was in the license level, the same pressure and same method of teaching. For the rest of the respondents (15%), they assumed that it is easier than it was at the license level. They believe that through their three years in licence level they got more used to the way of teaching allowing them to know the best method for them to learn and get a good degree.

Hence, we can deduce that learning English at master level is more difficult than learning at the license level. This reveals that EFL Master One students at the University of Biskra are in need for some changes in their timetable, arrangement of classes, and the way of teaching.

Section Two: Critical Thinking

Item 04: In your opinion, what are 21ˢᵗ-century most important learning skills?

This question aims to know students' opinions about 21st-century most important learning skills. (some participants chose more than one option).

Option	Frequency	Percentage %
Communication	11	27%
Critical thinking	12	29%
Creative thinking	04	10%
Innovation	01	02%
All of them	13	32%
Total	41	100%

Table 4: the 21st Century most Important Learning Skills
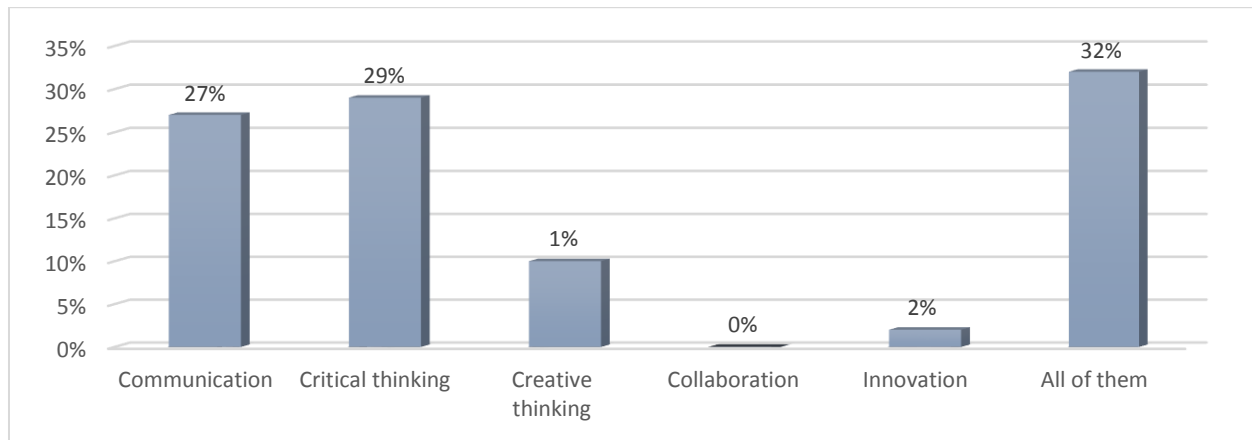
Graph 04: the 21st Century most Important Learning Skills

Statistically speaking, findings in the table (4) reveals that (32%) of participants, presenting the highest percentage, considered all of the mentioned skills to be the 21st century most important learning skills. Critical thinking has been selected by (29%) of students while communication got the percentage of (27%). A percentage of (10%) refers to those who have selected creative thinking, yet only one participant representing (2%) choses innovation. This reflects the students' awareness of the importance of all these learning skills, especially critical thinking.

Accordingly, critical thinking got the biggest number of selections; hence, we can conclude that our respondents are aware of the importance of critical thinking in learning.

Item 05. Do you think that thinking critically is important in the English language learning?

The aim of this question is to see students' points of views about the importance of thinking critically in the English language learning.

Option	Number	Percentage %
Yes	05	19%
No	00	00%
To some extent	06	22%
To great extent	16	59%
Total	27	100%

Table 5: The Importance of Critical Thinking in English Language Learning
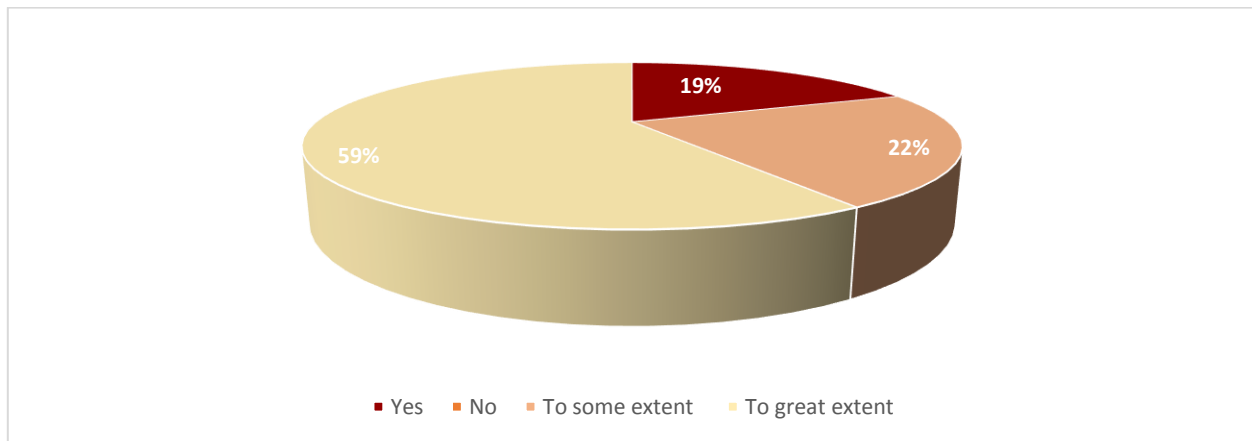
Graph 05: The Importance of Critical Thinking in English Language Learning

It can be noticed from the table above that sixteen (16) participants making up (59%) of our sample agreed to a great extent on the importance of the thinking critically in the English language learning, six (06) participants (22%) agreed to some extent to its importance, whereas five (05) participants (19%) admitted that thinking critically process is important in the learning

process. however, no participant said no. As a result, it can be said that the majority of students are aware of the importance of the critical thinking process while learning the English language.

Item 06. Are you familiar with the term Critical Thinking?

This question sought to investigate EFL students' familiarity with the term critical thinking and whether teachers already did introduce them to the term.

Option	Number	Percentage %
Yes	23	85%
No	04	15%
Total	27	100%

Table 6: Students' Familiarity with the Term Critical Thinking
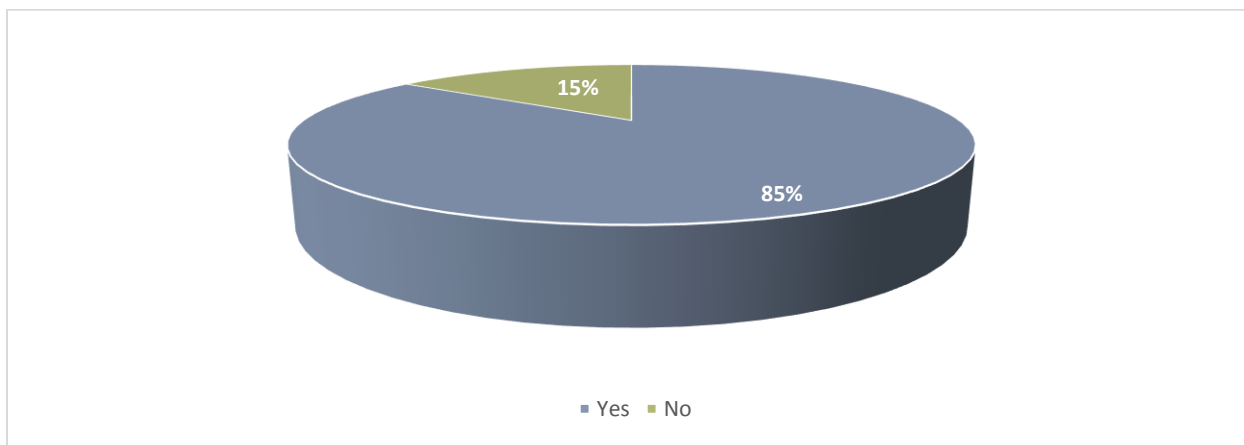
Graph 06: Students' Familiarity with the Term Critical Thinking

As it is shown in the table above, (15%) of students assume that they do not know the term critical thinking. However, the majority (85%) claims that they are familiar with it. Thus, we asked them to provide a definition and here some of their answers:

- Critical thinking is the ability to think clearly and rationally about what to do or what to believe.

- It is the ability to analyse, evaluate and use reasoning and logic to make sense of what u read or see. It is not like criticizing or making a judgement but a tool that shows you your standpoint.

- The analysis and evaluation of any context we are exposed to through questioning.

- It is the process in which the information is judged and not directly accepted i.e. we do not just receive ideas but we discuss and check them.

- It is to interpret ideas more than one interpretation according to the situation and then opt for the one you think is the right one according to you.

From the results above we can deduce that the majority of respondents are familiar with the real meaning of critical thinking as a concept. They agreed that it is a set of a skill that comprises the ability to analyse, evaluate, criticize, question, and make judgments. Therefore, it can be said that the respondents of our sample are aware to some extent of the real meaning of critical thinking as a concept.

Item 07. Do you know the difference between thinking and Critical Thinking?

This question aims to check if the participants are aware of the differences between the two terms thinking and critical thinking.

Option	Number	Percentage %
Yes	17	63%
No	10	37%
Total	27	100%

Table 7: Thinking and Critical Thinking Differences
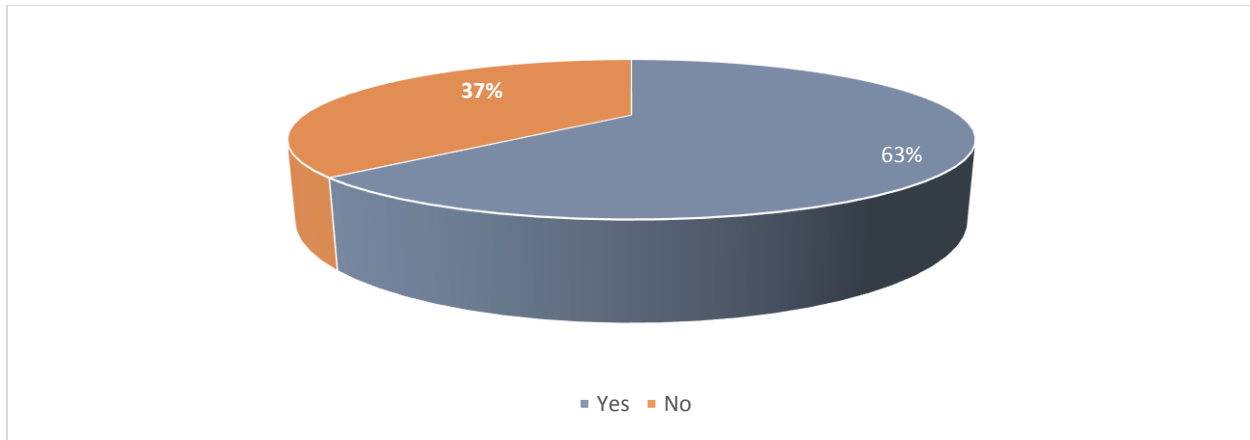
Graph 07: Thinking and Critical Thinking Differences

It can be noticed from the table above, that ten (10) participants making up (37%) claimed that they do not know the differences between the two terms. However, the majority (85%), asserted that they do know the difference, and they gave various answers and justifications, it includes the following:

- Critical thinking is deeper and more focused than thinking; it needs more creativity and more analysing, we can say that critical thinking is the second stage of thinking.

- Thinking is to make ideas/thoughts about someone or something without getting any results while in critical thinking we think about those thoughts we analyse them we question about them and find solutions.

- Critical thinking is a more advanced level than normal thinking in which you can analyse and discuss topics and situations rather than looking at the surface of what is given only.

- Thinking can be classified as an action, while critical thinking can be said to be a skill. Critical thinking is used with caution, while thinking can be spontaneous.

From students' responses, we deduce that thinking is something innate and natural, whereas critical thinking is more advanced, deeper and more focused. It depends on reasoning, analysing, questioning, and other sets of skills.

Item 08. In your opinion, being a critical thinker means

Through this question, we sought to explore students' characteristics of critical thinkers by providing a series of critical thinking characteristics. (some participants chose more than one option)

Option	Frequency	Percentage %
You are open minded	04	05%
You debate with others	07	09%
You analyse everything you see	13	17%
You read a lot	06	08%
You have a sense of curiosity	12	15%
You have different points of view	03	04%
Your mind if full with questions	12	15%
You look for evidence	10	13%
All of them	11	14%
Total	78	100%

Table 8: Characteristics of Critical Thinkers

To sum up the above-yielded data, the highest percentage (17%) agreed that critical thinkers are those who analyse everything they see, (15%) consider critical thinkers as those who look for evidence and have a sense of curiosity. While a percentage of (14%) refers to those who stressed that all the mentioned characteristics make a person a critical thinker, (13%) consider critical thinkers as those who look for evidence. whereas, (9%) chose to debate with others, (8%) chose reading a lot, (5%) choose open-minded and only (4%) referred to critical thinkers as having

different points of view. All in all, the above results confirmed that critical thinkers are characterized by all the mentioned characteristics.

Item 09. Are you a critical thinker?

This question sough to investigate students' opinion of themselves as critical thinkers**.**

Option	Number	Percentage %
Yes	16	59%
No	00	00%
I do not know	11	41%
Total	27	100%

Table 9: Students' Views about Themselves as Critical Thinkers
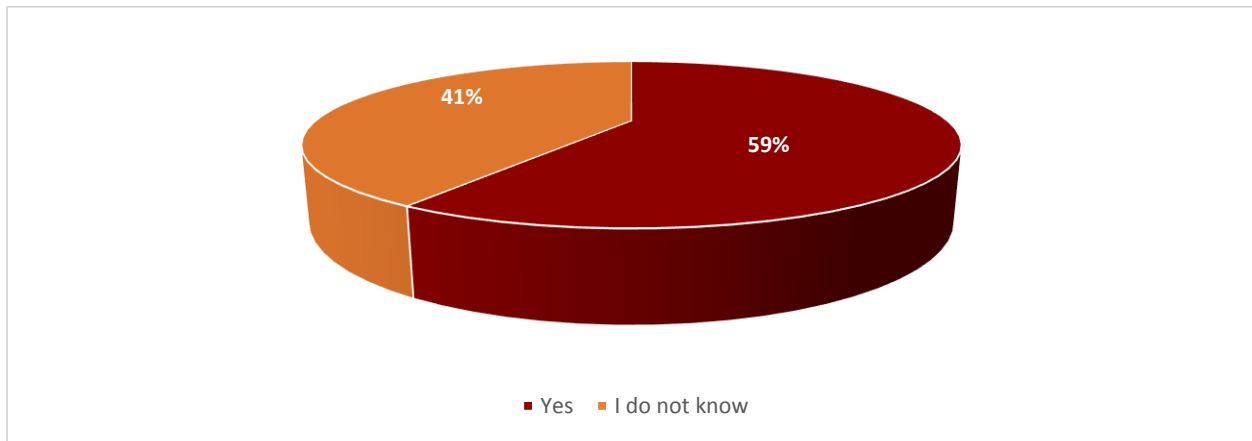
Graph 08. Students' Views about Themselves as Critical Thinkers

The above table results indicate that a big percentage (59%) refers to those who asserted that they are critical thinkers. Nevertheless, a percentage of (41%) refers to those who have selected "I do not know". However, no respondent (0%) provided negative answers about themselves as a critical thinker.

As a result, it can be said that Master One EFL learners at Biskra University are familiar with the term critical thinking because the majority of students consider themselves as critical

thinkers while a big number of students are in need to get a clear idea about this concept as a process and set of skills to guarantee a successful learning and provide them with the necessary information to decide whether they are critical thinkers or not.

Item 10. What kind of learners do you think you are?

This question sought to see what type of learners the students' think they belong to.

Option	Number	Percentage %
An active learner	18	67%
A passive learner	09	33%
Total	27	100%

Table 10: Students' Personality
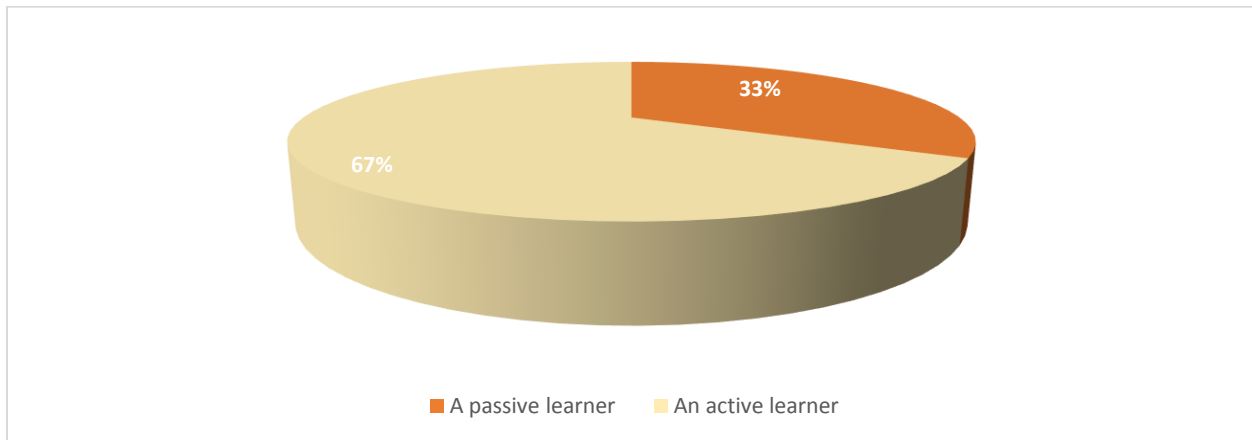
Graph 09: Students' Personality

Most of the obtained responses (67%) show that students are active learners who take part in building their knowledge. However, (33%) of the sample considered themselves passive learners who just receive information from the teacher and do not try to get involved in the teaching-learning process. Although a considerable percentage is thought to be active learners still there

are some students who are in need for some changes in their way of learning, that is to say, they need to develop their critical thinking skills to achieve that successful independent learning.

Section Two: Reading Comprehension

Item 11. Which of the four language skills do you like to master more?

This question seeks for obtaining information on what language skills learners focus more on promoting in their learning. (some participants chose more than one option)

Option	Frequency	Percentage %
Listening	03	10%
Reading	05	15%
Writing	07	21%
Speaking	10	30%
All of them	08	24%
Total	33	100%

Table 11: Language Skills Students Want to Master more
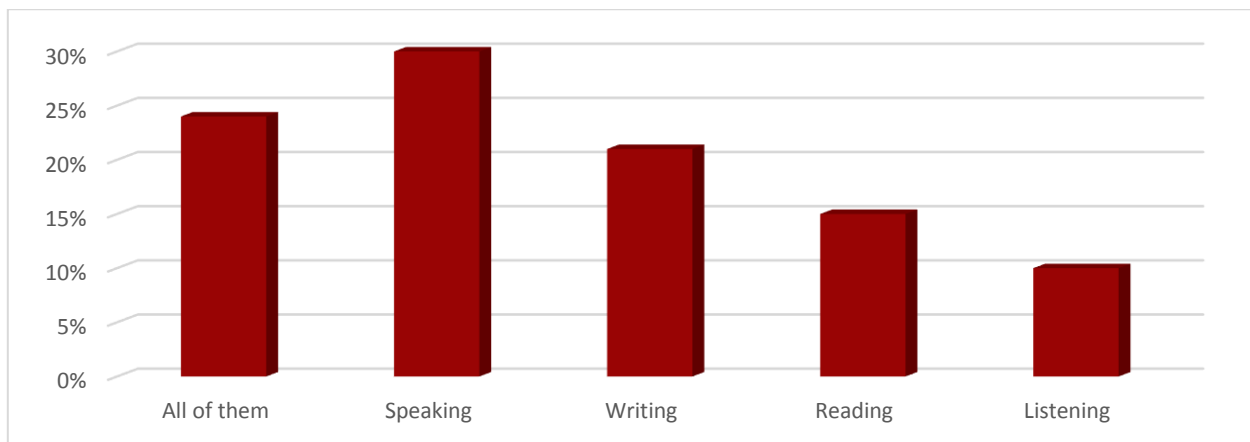
Graph 10: Language Skills Students Want to Master more

The results show that Master One EFL learners at Biskra University have more interests in learning how to speak (30%) as they want to communicate without facing any problems or difficulties, especially in public speaking. However, (24%) preferred to master all the language

skills since they are interrelated, there must be a balance between mastering them because language is a combination of all these skills and mastering them leads to mastering the language. Furthermore, (21%) preferred to improve how to write especially the style of writing and be able to write well cohesive and coherent texts. Nevertheless, (10%) opted for mastering the receptive skill reading. They believe that reading allows them to grasp new information and help them to understand better. Listening got the lowest percentage (8%). According to those who chose this option, listening is essential because it allows learners to get a better idea about how language is used and pronounced by native speakers with different accents which in return will facilitate understanding and communicating with others.

As a result, it can be said that a considerable number of Master One EFL students at Biskra university are aware of the importance of developing all language skills. However, many students seem to be less interested in mastering the receptive skills reading and listening and focus more on developing productive skills speaking and writing. This can reflect students' unawareness of the importance of receptive skills and how they help in improving productive skills.

Item 12. In your free time you prefer to

The aim behind this question is to see what students are attached to do in their free time to obtain information to see what's the purpose behind their choices. (some participants chose more than one option)

Option	Frequency	Percentage %
Write texts or diaries	04	12%
Read books	13	39%
Listen to recordings	11	33%
All of them	05	15%

Total	33	100%

Table 12: Students Free Time Preferred Activities
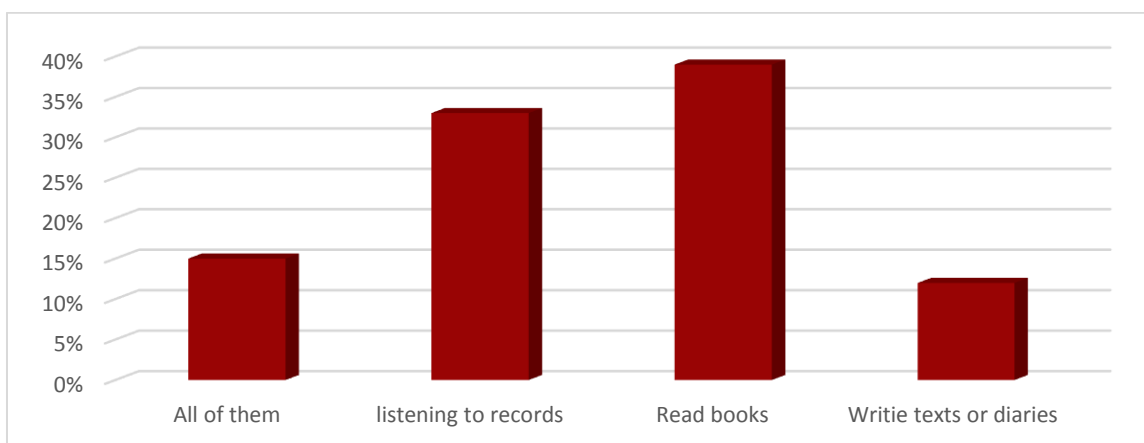
Graph 11: Students Free Time Preferred Activities

Participants responses show diversity in what students prefer to do in their free time, revealing that (39%) of the participants are more attached to reading books, while (33%) like listening to recordings, (15%) prefer to do all the mentioned practices, whereas (12%) likes writing texts or diaries. We asked students to state some other and too many different answers were received, however, the most repeated ones were gaming, watching or chatting through social media.

From the results above we can deduce that master one EFL students at Biskra university are interested in reading and practice it in most of their free time. that is to say, they do not read just because they were asked to, but they like and enjoy reading.

Item 13. In your opinion, what is effective reading?

Through this question, we sought to investigate the students' opinions about what effective reading for them is. (some participants chose more than one option)

Option	Frequency	Percentage %

Reading that involves understanding	13	29%
Reading that involves asking questions	22	49%
Reading that leads to better writing	10	22%
Total	45	100%

Table 13: Effective Reading
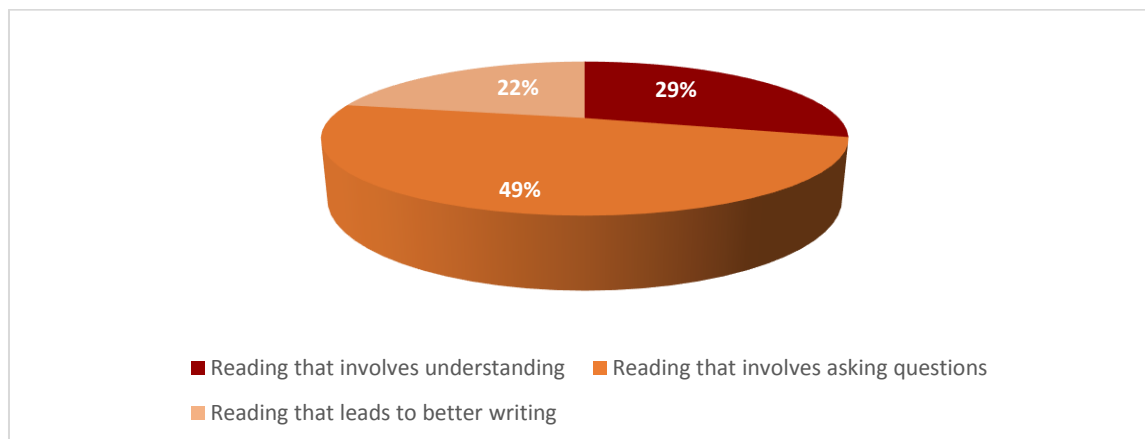
Graph 12: Effective Reading

The above table indicates that (49%) of the sample view effective reading to involve asking questions is a suitable choice to take. Meanwhile, (29%) of the participants consider effective reading to involve understanding. Whereas (22%) view it to lead for better writing.

From the above results, we can deduce that students are aware of what effective reading is. Asking questions, which is considered as one of the main critical thinking skills, got the highest percentage. Yet we notice that only a small percentage think that effective reading to lead for better writing. The letter shows the student's unawareness of the impact of reading on their writing skill, and how the quality of reading influences the writing process especially the style which was considered as one of the skills they want to improve (as seen in item.11)

Item 14. What steps do you follow to solve problems successfully?

We asked students this question in order to know the steps they follow in their path to solve problems. (some participants chose more than one option)

Option	Frequency	Percentage %
Thinking	16	32%
Read about the problem	23	46%
Ask others for help	11	22%
Total	50	100%

Table 14: Steps to Solve Problems
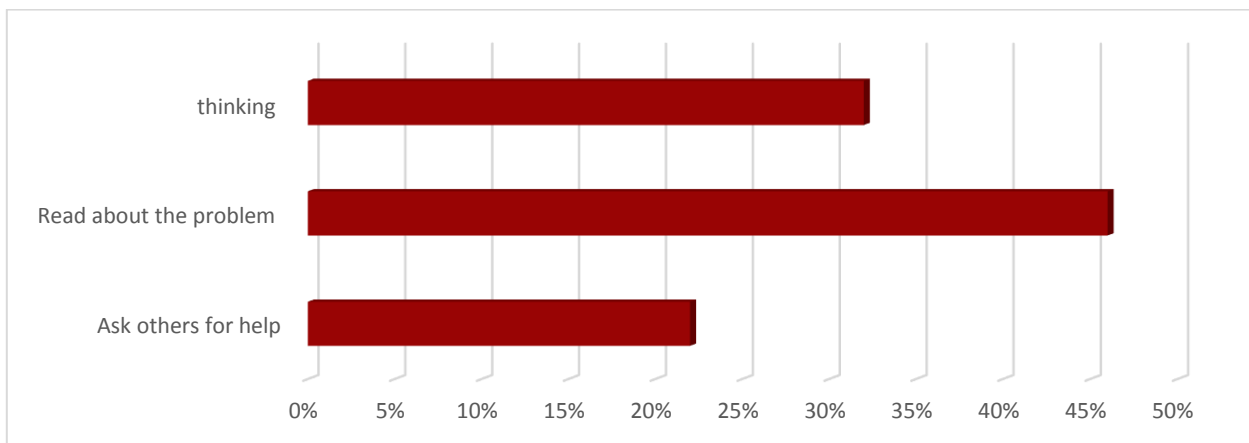
Graph 13: Steps to Solve Problems

According to findings in the table above, (46%) of the participants believe that solving problems usefully depend more on reading about the problem. While (32%) think that thinking about the problem is the best solution. Whereas (22%) stated that asking others for help would be a better choice to take.

Consequently, we deduce that students are aware of the importance of reading skill in their daily lives. Students who frequently read have a large amount of previous information because each time they read; they gain new information which in turn will help them solve problems successfully.

Item 15. which of the following reading comprehension strategies you often opt for to comprehend what you are reading?

This question seeks for obtaining information on which reading comprehension strategies students often opt for to comprehend what they reading. (some participants chose more than one option)

Option	Frequency	Percentage %
Activating back ground knowledge	15	18%
Skimming	11	13%
Asking questions	09	11%
Guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words	11	13%
Predicting	04	05%
Scanning	05	06%
Making inferences	06	07%
Summarizing	06	07%
Visualizing	10	12%
All of them	07	08%
Total	84	100%

Table 15: Reading Comprehension Strategies used by Students

According to students' answers, activating background knowledge (18%) is the most used strategy among the students, then comes skimming and Guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words with the same percentage (13%), visualizing strategy with (12%), asking questions strategy (11%), (8%) choose all of the mentioned strategies, then comes scanning (6%), making inferences and summarizing share the same percentage (7%), and finally, the least used strategy (5%) is prediction.

Based on these results, students are using all the mentioned and the most commonly used reading comprehension strategies that their teachers very probably have taught them or they learnt them on their own.

Item 16. Do you think that there is a relationship between critical thinking and reading comprehension?

This question designed for the sake to discover EFL students' opinions about the existence of relationship between critical thinking and reading comprehension.

Option	Number	Parentage %
Yes	27	100%
No	00	00%
Total	27	100%

Table 16: The Existence of Relationship between Critical Thinking and Reading comprehension

100%

▪ Yes
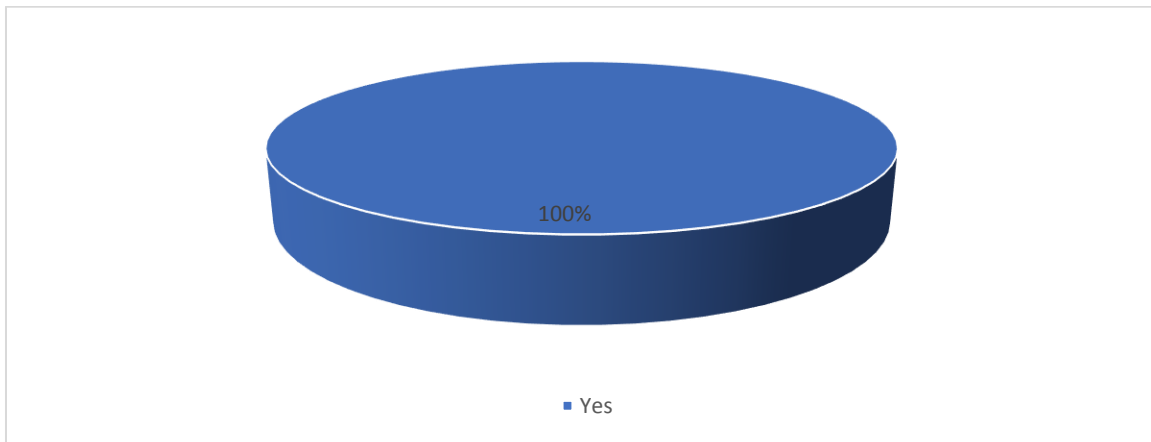
Graph 14: The Existence of Relationship between Critical Thinking and Reading Comprehension

As it is clearly shown in the above table, all the participants (100%) agreed that there is a relationship between critical thinking and reading comprehension. Thus, the existence of a

relationship between critical thinking and reading comprehension has been validated. Therefore, we asked them about what kind of relationship exists between them.

Option	Number	Percentage %
Critical thinking develops comprehension performance	**04**	**15%**
Reading comprehension develops critical thinking	**05**	**18%**
They are inter-related	**18**	**67%**
Total	**27**	**100%**

Table 17: Relationship between Critical Thinking and Reading Comprehension
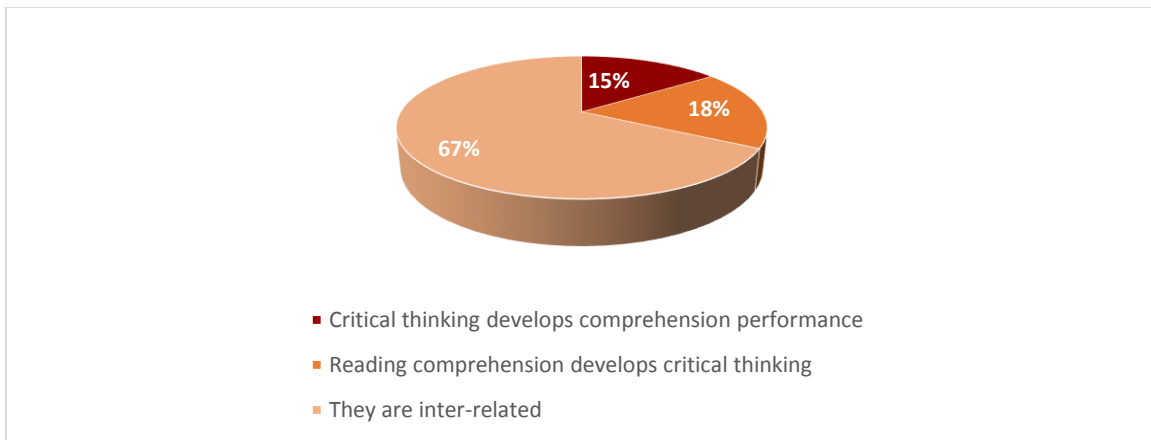
Graph 15: Relationship between Critical Thinking and Reading Comprehension

The above table reveals that the majority of participants (67%) agreed on the idea that critical thinking and reading comprehension are interrelated. This confirms that critical thinking enhances comprehension performance and vice versa. However, a percentage of (18%) referred to those who have selected that reading comprehension develops critical thinking; in other words, critical thinking can be developed through training by performing different reading comprehension strategies. Yet, only (15%) who pointed out that critical thinking develops reading comprehension performance.

Accordingly, the majority of the participants stressed on the idea that critical thinking and reading comprehension have an exchangeable kind of relationship in between; each one is crucial for the other and each one develops the other.

Students' suggestions or comments:

Through this item, we demand from students to comment or add any suggestion. Apart from the good luck wishes, two participants gave the following comments:

- Without reading comprehension, it would be difficult to promote our critical thinking, and in the meantime, thinking critically is so essential to be a good reader.

- Reading is an underrated skill that needs more focus and needs to be introduced theoretically and practically in our classrooms.

2. Teachers' Questionnaire

3.2.1. The Aim of Teachers' Questionnaire

Teachers' questionnaire attempted mainly to obtain general data about RC and CT and specific data about the use of RC strategies and their role in enhancing students CT skills. It was mainly addressed to teachers of English who teach different specialities. The total numbers of the questioned teachers were eight (08). It was used to investigate whether EFL teachers are aware of the importance of critical thinking as a learning skill and the role of reading comprehension strategies in enhancing learners' critical thinking skills and in building students' knowledge and future careers.

3.2.2. Description of Teachers Questionnaire

The study questionnaire is designed to collect data from EFL teachers at Biskra University. The teachers' questionnaire begins with a brief introduction that describes the aim of the study with a focus on the importance of the respondents' answers. It is a semi-structured questionnaire made up of twenty-one (21) questions that vary from open-ended, closed-ended and multiple-choice questions. The questionnaire was classified under three main sections each focusing on a particular aspect. First of all, section one aimed at finding out the teachers' professional career through two simple independent questions. Section two comprised eleven (11) questions seeking teacher's awareness of students' needs and abilities and spotting the light on what does critical thinking mean to them and how do they evaluate their learners' level of critical thinking. Lastly, Section three was composed of eight (08) questions about teachers' perception of the RC skill and to what extent their students need RC courses. In addition, we intended to gather teachers' opinions about the use of RC strategies to develop EFL learners' critical thinking. Besides, the purpose of the questionnaire was to check if teachers think that RC and critical thinking are interrelated and what kind of relationship exists between them. Finally, we gave them the opportunity to add their comments or suggestions.

3.2.3. Administration of Teacher's Questionnaire

Teachers' questionnaire was administered to the selected sample that consists of EFL teachers at Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra. For the administration phase, we decided to distribute the questionnaire online to teachers through email due to the current circumstances of the lockdown.

3.2.4. Analysis of Results

Section One: Personal Background Information

Item 01. Would you like to specify the degree you have achieved?

The aim behind this question is to identify the degree held by the different chosen teachers. It helps us to collect data from teachers with different high degrees.

Option	Number	Percentage %
Magister degree	02	25%
Master degree	00	00%
Doctoral degree	06	75%
Total	08	100%

Table 18: Teachers' Academic Degree
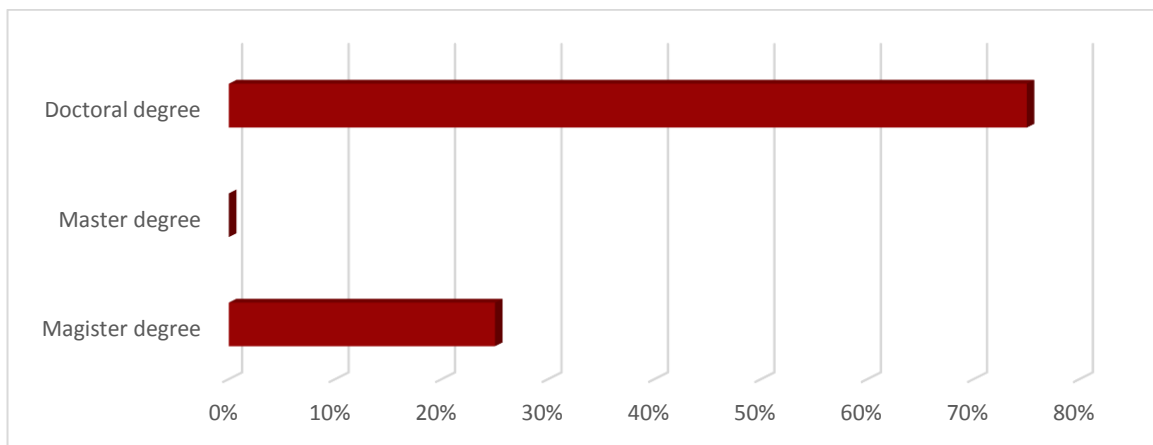
Graph 16: Teachers' Academic Degree

The above table shows that the majority of teachers (75%) have a Doctorate while two teachers (25%) have a Magister degree; however, there is no teacher with a Master degree. Therefore, we qualify data only from doctoral to Magister degree teachers.

Item 02. How long have you been teaching EFL at university?

Teaching experience is an important cue that may inform about the efficiency of the teaching process on the part of the teachers. The second question is concerned with the period teachers been teaching EFL at university by giving them choices (1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15, 16-20, or more than 20 years).

Option	Numbers	Percentage %
1 - 5 years	02	25%
6 - 10 years	01	12.5%
11 - 15 years	01	12.5%
16 – 20 years	04	50%
More than 20 years	00	00%
Total	08	100%

Table 19: Experience in Teaching English
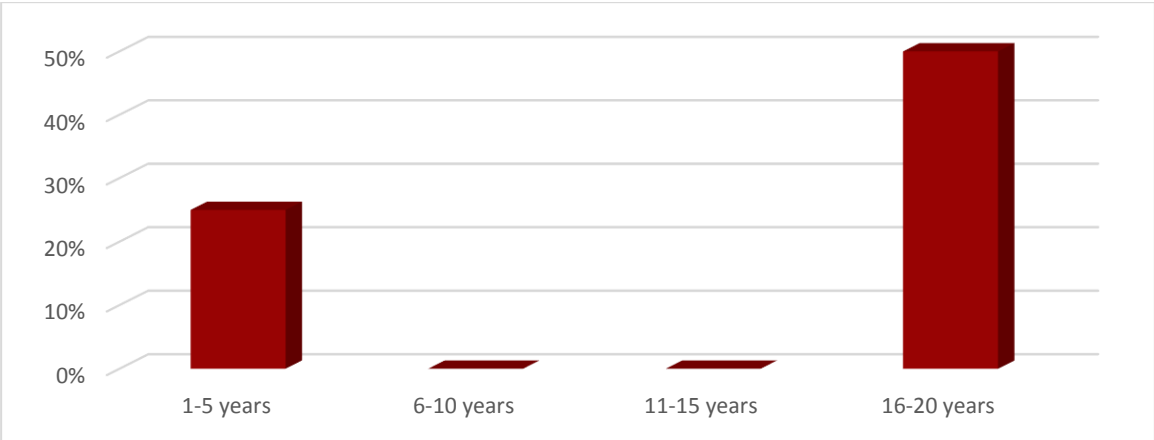
Graph 17: Experience in Teaching English

The results shown in the table reveal that half of the sample (50%) are expert teachers with an experience of (16-20 years) which will give our research more validity, rationality and reliability. Two teachers (25%) have experience (1-5 years). Whereas, teachers with (6-10 years) and (11-15 years) experience shared the same percentage, which is (12.5%). However, no teacher has more than 20 years' experience.

The variety of teachers' experience in EFL teaching was intended when we selected the sample because it guarantees that the next responses will be gathered from teachers from different generations, with different experiences, perspectives, and teaching strategies.

Section Two: Critical Thinking

Item 03. How do you consider your students' proficiency in English language?

The teachers are asked here to state their attitudes toward the level of their students in reading.

Option	Number	Percentage %
Good	01	12%
Average	07	88%
Low	00	00%
Total	08	100%

Table 20: Students' Proficiency in English Language
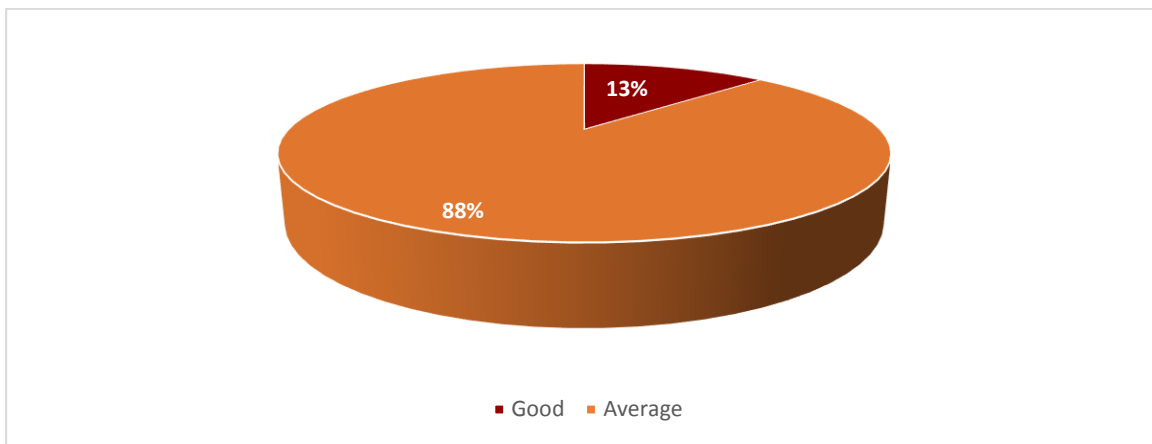
Graph 18. Students' Proficiency in English Language

The table above demonstrates that the great majority of teachers (88%) assumed that the level of their students in the English language is average whereas a percentage of (12%) represents one teacher who claimed that their level is good. However, no one of the respondents considers their students' proficiency in the English language low. From these results we notice that most students have an average level; a fact which implies that the students have an acceptable proficiency in the English language.

Item 04. Which 21st-century learning skill do EFL learners need the most in learning?

This question aims to investigate teachers' opinions about which 21st-century learning skills EFL learners need the most in learning.

Option	Number	Percentage %
Communication	00	00%
Critical thinking	01	12.5%
Creative thinking	00	00%
Innovation	00	00%
All of them	07	87.5%
Total	08	100%

Table 21: the 21st Century most Important Learning Skills
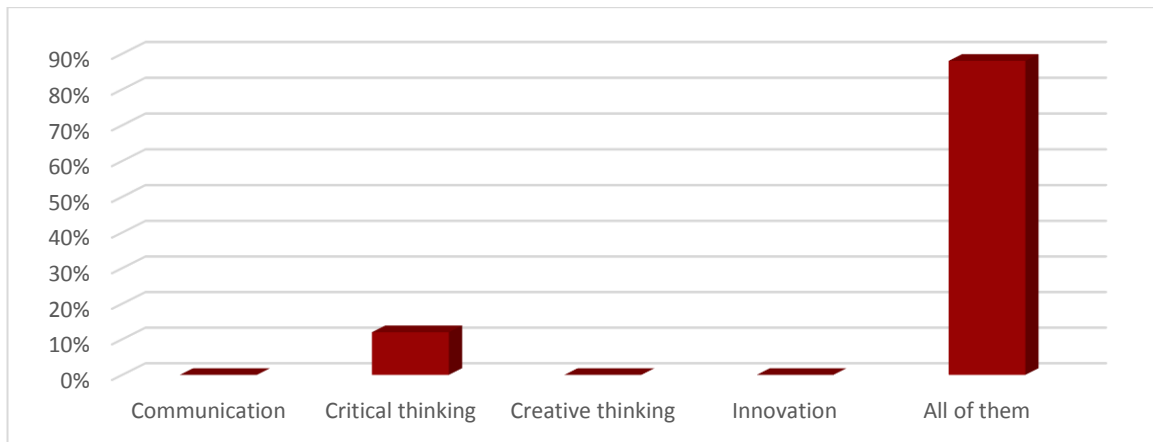
Graph 19: the 21st Century most Important Learning Skills

Statistically speaking, findings in the table above reveals that a great majority of the respondents presenting (87.5%), consider all of the mentioned skills to be the 21st-century learning skills EFL learners need the most in learning. Whereas, a percentage of (12.5%) selected critical thinking. This reflects that EFL teacher's in Biskra university stress on the importance of all these learning skills for EFL learners to succeed in their academic field, especially critical thinking.

Item 05. Is there any relation between learning English language and thinking critically?

This question seeks to see teachers' points of views about the relationship between thinking critically and English language learning.

Option	Number	Percentage %
Yes	08	100%
No	00	00%
Total	08	100%

Table 22: Relationship between Thinking Critically and English Language Learning
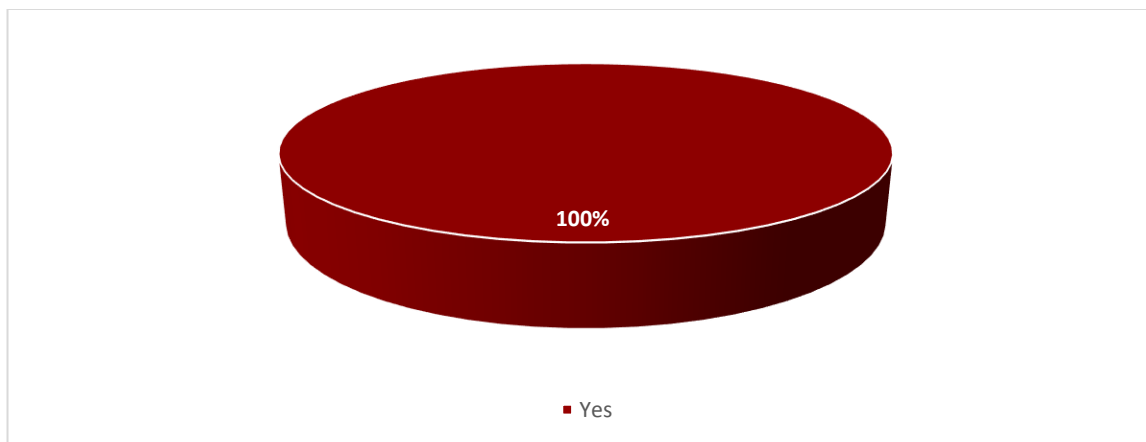
Graph 20: Relationship between Thinking Critically and English Language Learning

As it is clearly shown in the above table, all the participants (100%) agree that there is a relationship between critical thinking and English language learning. Thus, the existence of a relationship between critical thinking and English language learning has been validated.

We asked teachers to explain according to their answers. The most important and repeated ones are the following:

- The level of critical thinking enables learners to be distinctive and perform better in English

- It is considered as a tool that helps to reach higher levels in most domains.

- Learning a language could foster the learner's critical thinking.

- Advanced learners in particular need to evaluate the content they receive and try to classify it according to their own needs and priorities.

- Reading needs extensive data treatment of information

Item 06. In your words, what is meant by Critical thinking?

The following question aims to find the definition of the term critical thinking according to each teacher. In this open-ended question, we asked teachers to define in their own words the term critical thinking. They gave the following definitions:

Teacher 01: To be able to think logically

Teacher 02: Balancing logic and further knowledge

Teacher 03: Find out solutions to problems and be able to overcome difficulties.

Teacher 04: wise analytical thinking

Teacher 05: To use your mind in the right way in any topic

Teacher 06: The process of questioning and evaluating any information or content for the sake of evaluation and judgement.

Teacher 07: The ability to treat information in a balanced way

Teacher 08: It is the ability to think clearly and rationally about what to do or what to believe.   It includes the ability to engage in reflective and independent thinking.

All teachers provided different definitions according to their point of view. From the above definitions, we deduce that critical thinking is the process of questioning, evaluating, analysing, thinking logically and rationally, and problem-solving.

Item 07. To what extent is Critical Thinking implemented in your classroom?

The aim behind this question is to see to extent teachers implement critical thinking in their classrooms.

Options	Number	Percentage %
Frequently	05	62%
Sometimes	03	38%
Rarely	00	00%
Never	00	00%
Total	08	100%

Table 23: Critical Thinking Implementation in the Classroom
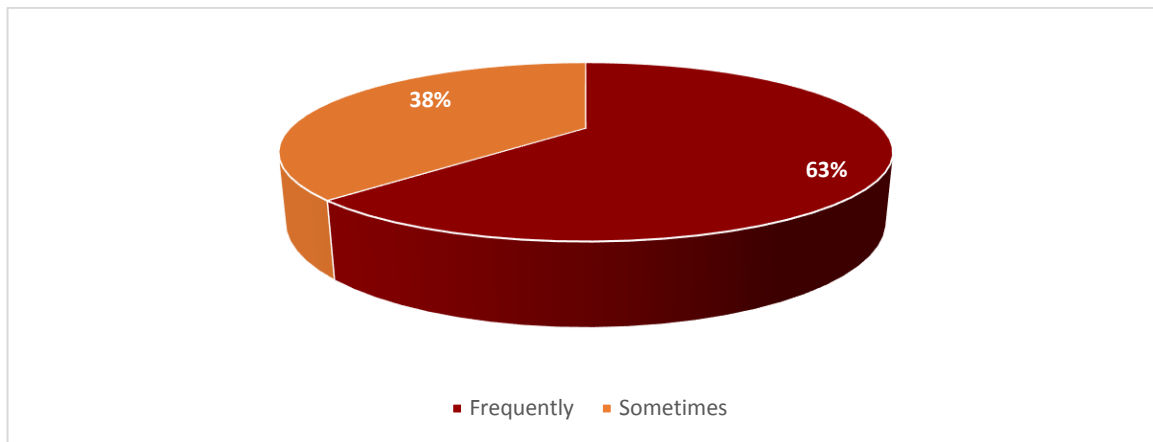
Graph 22: Critical Thinking Implementation in the Classroom

The above table indicates that (62%) of the respondents admitted that they frequently implement critical thinking in their classroom. They believe that any instructional activity should be realised through critical thinking. In all the subjects they teach, they encourage their students to analyse interpret and provide an opinion gap to help them see their mental ability. Furthermore, the other (38%) said that they implement it sometimes because it depends on the course itself; the task's objectives designed in the lecture in which some lessons require other skills. However, no one chose rarely or never.

As a result, it can be said that a considerable number of EFL teachers at Biskra university do value the importance of critical thinking for EFL students as they implement it frequently in their classrooms.

Item 08. Why do students need critical thinking skills?

From this question, we aimed to see the reason why students need critical thinking. Teachers provided the following reasons:

Teacher 01: To improve their way of receiving knowledge.

Teacher 02: To be creative and progress in learning.

Teacher 03: To allow them to make better decisions and choices not only in their studies but also in their lives.

Teacher 04: It can develop their solving abilities and judgement and also enhance their performance.

Teacher 05: To learn better.

Teacher 06: To improve their learning as well as their thinking.

Teacher 07: To learn efficiently.

Teacher 08: To be creative.

From the answers above, teachers provided a list of the benefits of critical thinking for EFL learners. The most repeated ones are to be creative and improve the way of thinking to learn more efficiently. It also develops their judgement and solving abilities which allows them to make better decisions to solve problems not only in their studies but also in their lives. hence, we

infer from teachers answers that critical thinking has a great impact on EFL students learning, which proves its requirement in EFL learning process.

item 9. In your opinion, what characterizes critical thinkers

From this item, we sought to investigate teachers' point of view about critical thinkers' characteristics. Teachers' answers were as follow:

Teacher 01: Creativity and innovation.

Teacher 02: Active, dynamic, self-dependent.

Teacher 03: Questioning, reasoning and decision making.

Teacher 04: observation, analysis, interpretation, evaluation, problem solving and decision making.

Teacher 05: Being hungry for knowledge and asking the right questions.

Teacher 06: Objectivity and factual.

Teacher 07: Dependant, confident and creative.

Teacher 08: sharp eye and wise judgement.

From the answers demonstrated above, teachers provided a list of skills that characterises critical thinkers. The most repeated characteristics are creativity, questioning, reasoning, analysing, evaluation, problem-solving, and decision making. On the other hand, some teachers gave the characteristics of critical thinkers' personality. According to them, critical thinkers tend to be more active, dynamic, self-dependent, and self-confident. Consequently, these characteristics guarantee a high level of critical thinking. All in all, it can be said that critical thinkers are differ-

ent and unique. Their characteristics allow them to perform better in their learning, thus, guarantee academic success.

Item 10. How can you evaluate your students' critical thinking?

Through this question, we aimed to investigate the level of EFL students' critical thinking at University of Biskra from teacher's perspective. Teachers answers were as follow:

Teacher 01: Average

Teacher 02: Not very considerable.

Teacher 03: It needs improvement. Many students are not aware of its importance as they focus more on conventional language skills.

Teacher 04: a critical test to assess the way to solve problems

Teacher 05: Average

Teacher 06: not enough

Teacher 07: below average

Teacher 08: I cannot generalize but it is improving

As it is illustrated in the responses above, the majority of teachers evaluated their students' critical thinking to be average. (teacher 03) believes that students are not aware of the importance of this skill as they focus more on developing conversational skills. This point was supported by students answer in students' questionnaire in item 11 (table 11). Therefore, teachers stressed on the need for the improvement of this skill to guarantee successful learning. However, one teacher

(Teacher 04) understood the question as the methods used to evaluate students' critical thinking and s/he suggested a critical test to assess the way to solve problems.

From the results, we deduce that the level of EFL students' critical thinking needs more improvement. Therefore, teachers as guiders should motivate students to promote their critical thinking by giving them tasks and activities to make them practice and show their creativity.

Item 11. Do you think that Critical Thinking can be taught?

This question seeks for obtaining information on whether teacher think that critical thinking can be taught as an educational field.

Option	Number	Percentage %
Yes	04	50%
No	01	12%
To some extent	03	38%
Total	08	100%

Table 24: Teaching Critical Thinking
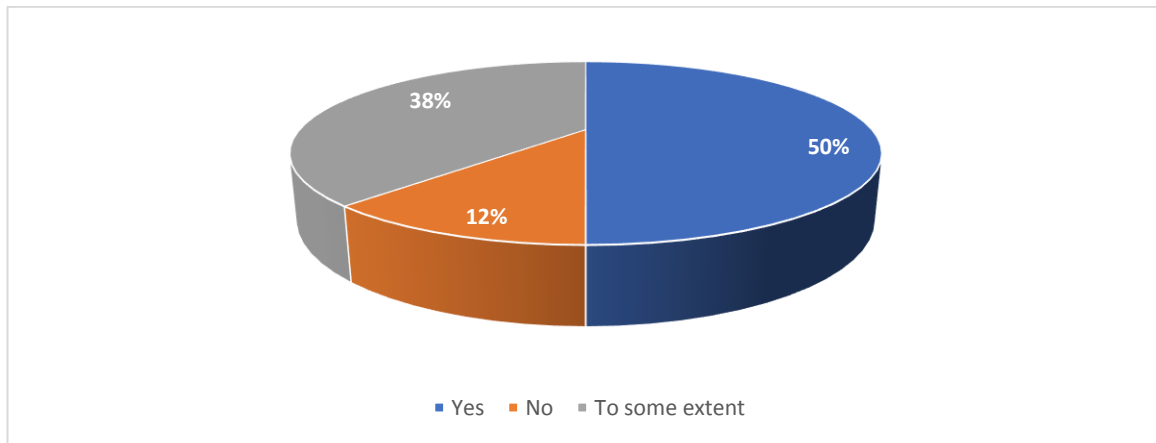
Graph 22: Teaching Critical Thinking

As it is shown in the table above, half of the sample (50%) admit that critical thinking can be taught. While a percentage of (38%) believes that it can be taught but just to some extent. Yet only one teacher (12%) claims that it cannot be taught but developed.

Those who have chosen that critical thinking can be taught justified their choice as follows:

- By implementing it in every language practice.

- We need just a type of activities that relies on criticism comparison opinion gap and personal interpretation.

- With limitations/ implicitly.

Teachers who say it can be taught but just to some extent justified their answer as follows:

- It can be implemented and practised within other skills like reading.

- It can be sharpened.

- I prefer to say that it can be more learnt and less taught.

From the results above, we deduce that the majority of EFL teachers at Biskra university believe in the possibility of teaching critical thinking by choosing the appropriate activity and implementing it within different language practices and skills.

Section Two: Reading Comprehension

Item 12. Which skills do you focus more on developing in your lessons?

These questions seek to investigate in which skills teacher are more attached and focus to develop during their lessons.

Option	Number	Percentage %
Listening	00	00%
Reading	00	00%
Writing	01	12%
Speaking	00	00%
All of them	07	88%

Total	08	100%

Table 25: Skills Developed during the Lesson
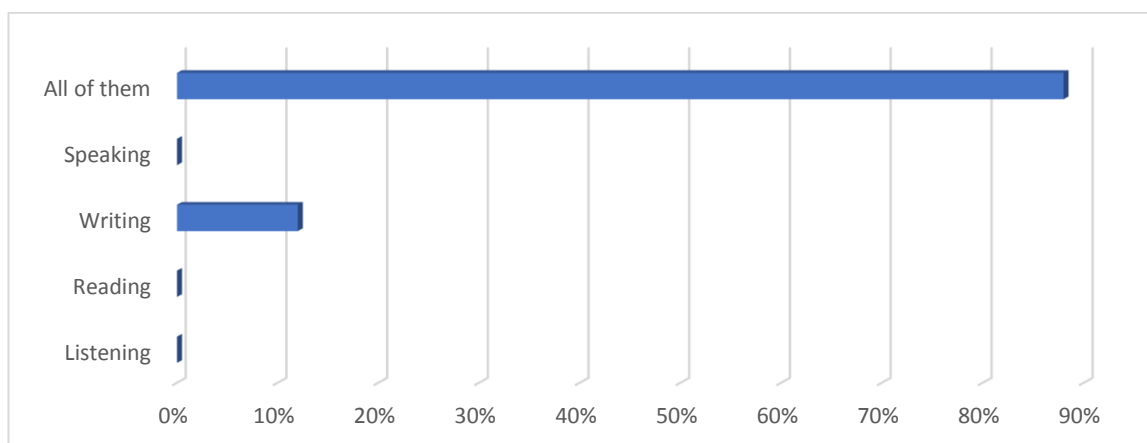
Graph 23: Skills Developed during the Lesson

The data in the table reveals that most teachers (88%) focus on developing all the common four language skills i.e. teachers try to include all the four skills in their lessons regularly, where-as (12%) of the respondents focus on developing the writing skill. As a result, it can be said that EFL teachers believe in the importance of all the four language skills to master the language as they focus on developing all of them during the lesson.

Item 13. What is the purpose of reading?

In this question, we sought to know the purpose of reading to EFL teachers according to their beliefs.

Option	Number	Percentage %
Entertain	00	00%
Persuade	00	00%
Inform	01	12%
All	07	88%
Total	08	100%

Table 26: The Purpose of Reading
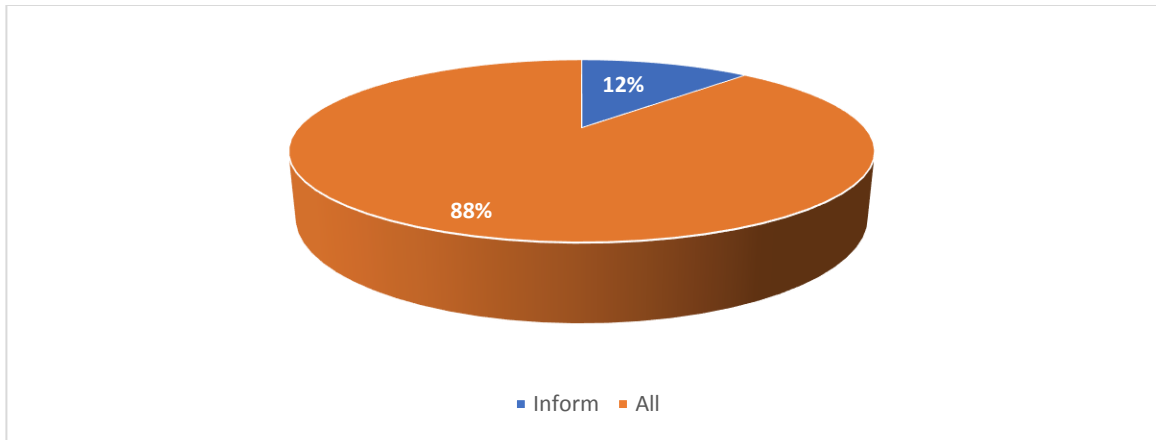
Graph 24: The Purpose of Reading

It can be noticed from the table above that a considerable percentage (88%) of the sample stated that the purpose of reading is to entertain, persuade and inform. However, a small percentage (12%) of the total participants sparked that reading purpose is to inform.

This result reveals that reading cannot be limited only to one purpose; however, it has many purposes and benefits for readers.

Item 14. According to your experience of teaching, to what extent do you think students value the importance of the reading skill?

Option	Number	Percentage %
A lot	01	12.5%
A little	06	75%
Not at all	01	12.5%
Total	08	100%

Table 27: Students Value to the Importance of Reading
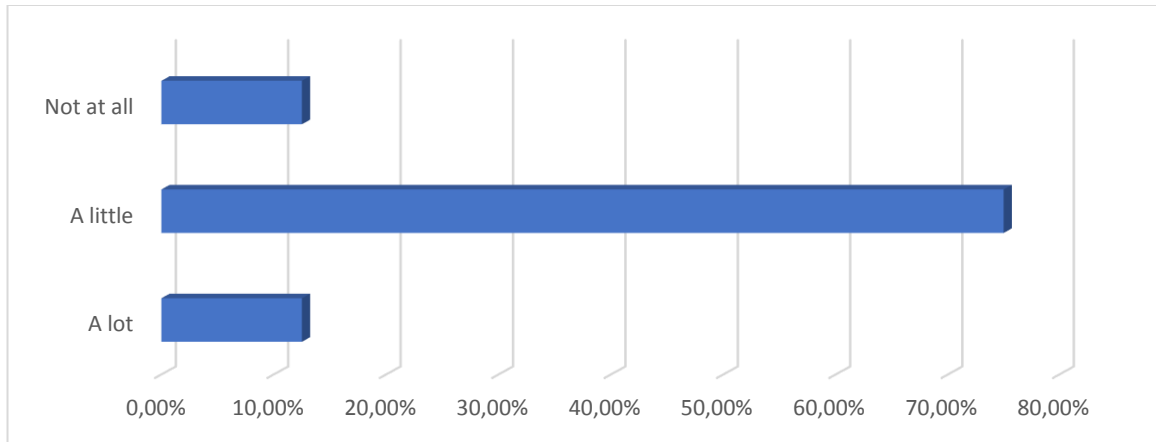
Graph 25: Students Value to the Importance of Reading

It is clear from the results that the majority of teachers (75%) think that students value the importance of reading only a little, while (12.5%) believe that students value the importance of reading skill a lot, whereas (12.5%) declare that students do not value the importance of reading at all due to their poor linguistic level.

Teachers who think that students value the importance of reading only a little gave the following explanations:

- They are lazy and poor readers.

- Many of them do not have the reading habit they only read when it is assigned or required for an evaluation or a test.

- Most of them have not been trained in reading.

- They lack motivation because the whole environment is not encouraging.

- Technology lessened their will to read.

85

The results reveal that it is very important for teachers to warn students and try to motivate them to read more through choosing interesting topics that stimulate student's needs, create an encouraging environment for reading, and train them how to read because reading is an essential source of knowledge.

Item 15. In your opinion, which of the following reading comprehension strategies have a relationship with critical thinking?

We estimated from this item to collect teachers' opinions about the existence of relationship between reading comprehension strategies and critical thinking. (some teachers chose more than one option).

Option	Frequency	Percentage %
Activating back ground knowledge	01	7.5%
Skimming	00	00%
Asking questions	02	14%
Guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words	02	14%
Predicting	01	7.5%
Scanning	00	00%
Making inferences	02	14%
Summarizing	00	00%
Visualizing	00	00%
All of them	06	43%
Total	14	100%

Table 28: The Existence of Relationship between Reading Comprehension Strategies and Critical Thinking

The data in the table reveals that (43%) of the sample believes that all the mentioned reading comprehension strategies have a relationship with critical thinking. Then comes asking

questions, Guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words, and making inferences with the same percentage (14%), and finally, activating background knowledge and predicting with the same percentage (7.5%). From this, we conclude that all the mentioned RC strategies have a relationship with critical thinking, yet some may have a stronger one than the others.

Item 16. To what extent is these strategies implemented in your classroom?

This question sought to investigate the extent in which teachers implement the given RC strategies in their classrooms.

Option	Number	Percentage %
Frequently	06	75%
Sometimes	02	25%
Rarely	00	00%
Never	00	00%
Total	08	100%

Table 29: Reading Comprehension Strategies implementation in the Classrooms
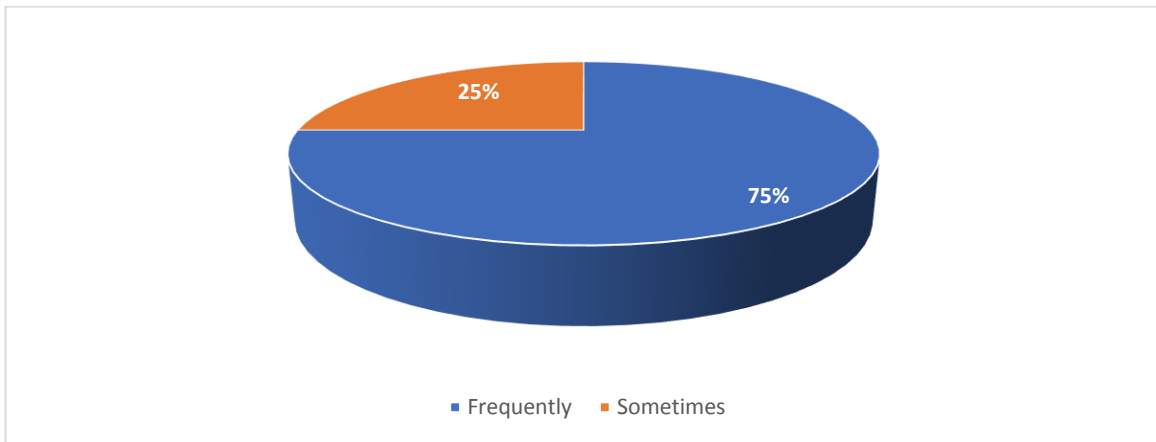
Graph 26: Reading Comprehension Strategies implementation in the Classrooms

The results illustrated above show that the majority of teachers implement the given reading comprehension strategies frequently in their classrooms. They believe these strategies are all important to be good readers, hence develop critical thinking. They are necessary to create more

interesting teaching materials and procedures. Accordingly, varying strategies is a must. (25%) implement them only sometimes because it depends on the objectives set and the tasks at hand, however, all teachers do their best to implement as many as they can.

We conclude that the implementation of reading comprehension strategies is crucial as it helps students review and relate what they are learning to what they already know.

Item 17. What kind of challenges teachers may face in teaching reading comprehension?

The purpose of this item is to see what kind of challenges teachers may encounter in teaching reading comprehension. Teachers provided the following challenges:

Teachers 01: Students laziness.

Teachers 02: Reluctant learners.

Teachers 03: Unfamiliar text and context. Difficult lexis and high-level structures in the text. Lack of interest in some topics.

Teachers 04: Students lack the will to read as most of them weren't accustomed to read.

Teachers 05: It is the general challenge of teaching which is meeting individual preferences and needs of learners.

Teachers 06: Crowded classes.

Teachers 07: Many like students' disinterest and vocabulary difficulty.

Teachers 08: Use of methodology

From the above answers, we can conclude that teachers encounter some difficulties in teaching students how to grasp and comprehend the text they read. Teachers' answers were varied depending on their experiences. The most repeated ones are that they were not accustomed to reading due to the lack of motivation from the part of the students. Also, the difficulty of meeting students individual preferences and needs; students do not all have the same level or the same interests, therefore, we infer that teachers should be very careful and accurate in choosing the targeted texts to guarantee that students are interested in what they read and not facing many difficulties while reading.

Item 18. In your opinion, how to overcome these challenges?

This question aims to know teachers' different opinions about how to overcome the challenges they encounter when teaching reading comprehension. They suggested the following solutions:

Teacher 01: Motivation and marks.

Teacher 02: Sensitive the learners and adopt effective reading strategies.

Teacher 03: Frequent sessions of reading inside and outside class.

Teacher 04: Reading needs to be introduced as a subject in all the levels/ Reading tasks will continuously be given in most of the modules.

Teacher 05: By diversifying teaching methods and tactics.

Teacher 06: To reduce the students' number.

Teacher 07: students have to read every day it must be a continuous process it is a matter of familiarity that breaks all types of problems.

Teacher 08: follow methodology.

In this question, we asked teachers to suggest some solutions to overcome the challenges they encounter in teaching reading comprehension. They all agreed on the need for frequent sessions of reading in which (Teacher 04) suggested to introduce it as a separated module for all levels to make students more engaged and familiar with reading. In addition, the need to adopt effective methods and strategies of teaching depending on the type of learners and their needs.

Item 19. Do you think that there is a relationship between reading comprehension and critical thinking?

This question designed for the sake to discover EFL teachers' opinions about the existence of relationship between critical thinking and reading comprehension.

Option	Number	Parentage %
Yes	8	100%
No	0	0%
Total	8	100%

Table 30: The Existence of Relationship between Critical Thinking and Reading comprehension

100%

■ Yes ■ No
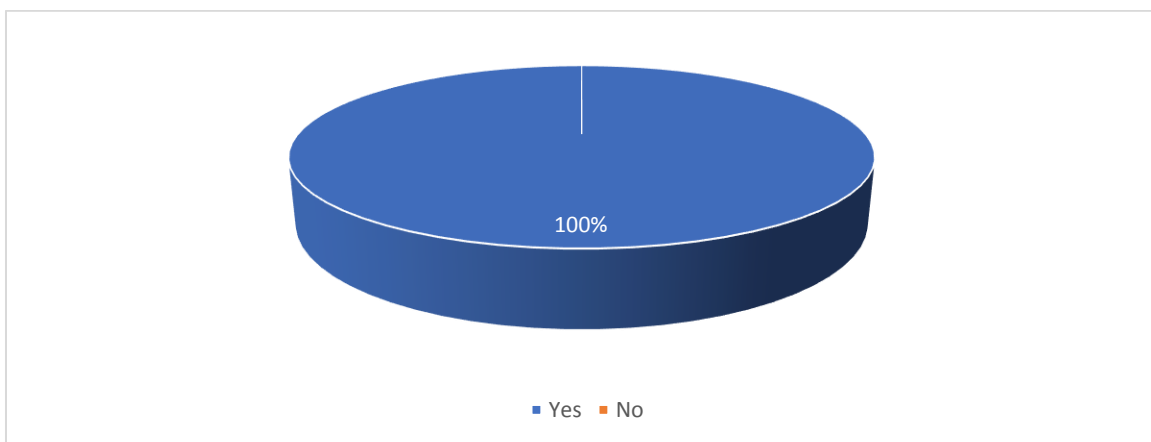
Graph 27: The Existence of Relationship between Critical Thinking and Reading comprehension

As it is clearly shown in the above table, all the participants (100%) agree that there is a relationship between critical thinking and reading comprehension. Thus, the existence of a relationship between critical thinking and reading comprehension has been validated.

Option	Number	Percentage %
Critical thinking develops comprehension performance	00	00%
Reading comprehension develops critical thinking	01	12%
They are inter-related	07	88%
Total	08	100%

Table 31: Relationship between Critical Thinking and Reading Comprehension
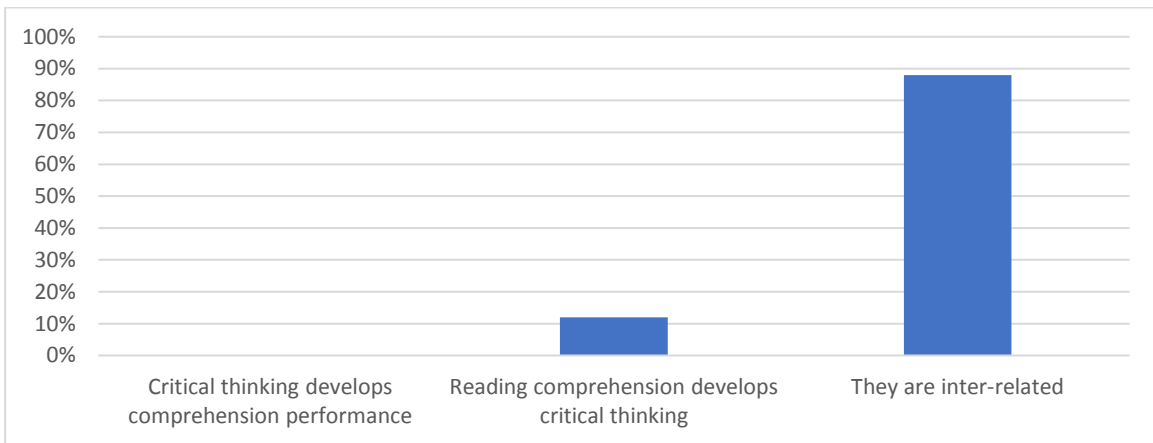
Graph 28: Relationship between Critical Thinking and Reading Comprehension

The above table reveals that the majority of the respondents (88%) agreed on the idea that critical thinking and reading comprehension are interrelated. This confirmed that critical thinking enhances comprehension performance and vice versa. According to them, they occur simultaneously most often, some strategies in reading comprehension are found in critical thinking and they are used more often for better understanding and evaluation of any text. A percentage of (12%) referred to those who have selected that reading comprehension develops

critical thinking; in other words, critical thinking can be developed through training by performing different reading comprehension strategies.

Accordingly, the majority of the participants stressed on the idea that critical thinking and reading comprehension have an exchangeable kind of relationship in between; each one is crucial for the other and each one develops the other.

Teachers' suggestions or comments

Through this item, we demand from teachers to comment or add any suggestion. However, they merely supported us and showed their admiration towards the topic.

3.3 Discussing the Findings

The main aim of this study is to investigate the role of reading comprehension strategies in developing EFL students' critical thinking. Besides, the study attempted to know the meaning of critical thinking, its position, and its role in teaching-learning EFL from EFL teachers and students' perspectives. Therefore, to have credible research results the researcher dealt with a tool to gather feedback that feeds the study which is a questionnaire administrated for EFL teachers and master one EFL students at Biskra university.

Students' questionnaire

The analysis of the students' questionnaire has revealed much information about students' perceptions of reading comprehension strategies and critical thinking skills that supported our hypothesis. First, from the analysis of students' responses in the first section, we deduced that learning EFL at university is somehow easy because it depends more on attendance, seriousness, and memorization. The latter effects students' performance negatively because they just copy and paste the received information, which in turn will limit their thinking, productivity, and

creativity to express their thoughts towards given information. However, it gets more difficult in master level due to many challenges students face, namely, the big number of homework and research to be conducted and the full timetables which hinder students to make a balance between studying in the classroom and doing further research at home.

The responses of students related to the term critical thinking were surprising as the majority are aware of it. To define it, students agreed that it comprises the ability to analyse, evaluate, criticise, and question. Consequently, they showed awareness about the importance of critical thinking in English language learning as they consider it the most required 21st-century learning skill for better success in EFL learning. Accordingly, the majority of students consider themselves as critical thinkers, however, a big number of them are in need to get a clear idea about the concept critical thinking as a process and set of skills to guarantee successful learning which in turn will provide them with the necessary information to decide whether they are critical thinkers or not.

When the results of learners' questionnaire were analysed about the difference between thinking and critical thinking, students clarify that there is a difference but they were unable to detect it accurately. Some students suggested that thinking is something innate and natural, whereas critical thinking is more advanced and focused, depends on the reasoning and other different sets of skills. Besides, students show awareness about the importance of reading skill in their daily lives as they practice it in most of their times. That is to say, they do not read just because they were asked to but they like and enjoy reading. However, they demonstrate clear unawareness of the big role played by the receptive skills in language learning and developing thinking and how they help in improving the productive skills. As most of them were more

interested in mastering speaking and writing skills and gave less attention to reading and listening.

It has been noticed that the majority of students tend to use all the most commonly used reading comprehension strategies that their teachers very probably have taught them or they learnt them on their own. In addition, respondents agreed upon the exchangeable relationship between critical thinking and reading comprehension; they insisted on the role of reading comprehension strategies in developing critical thinking by performing its different strategies.

Teachers' questionnaire

The analysis of the teachers' questionnaire has revealed much information about teachers' perspectives toward critical thinking skills and the importance of reading comprehension strategies in enhancing it. First, the analysis of the first section reported that the majority of teachers are experts and differ in their experience as teachers of EFL. This fact allowed the researcher to consider various views from teachers from different generations, with different experiences, perspectives, and teaching strategies that would be of great value for the study.

The questionnaire findings showed that teachers insisted on the great impact of all the learning skills we mentioned for EFL learners to succeed in their academic field. Also, they gave priority to critical thinking which they prove its strong relationship with English language learning. They considered it as a tool that helps learners to be distinctive and perform better in English and reach higher levels in most domains.

When the results from the teachers' questionnaire were analysed, teachers set different definitions for the concept of critical thinking. What has been noticed in the teachers' responses to this question is that critical thinking is the process of questioning, evaluating, analysing,

thinking logically and rationally, and problem-solving. Additionally, they reported that the level of EFL students' critical thinking needs more improvement. Therefore, teachers as guiders should motivate students to promote their critical thinking by giving them tasks and activities to make them practice and show their creativity.

The responses to the teachers' question were not surprising as the majority believe in the possibility of teaching critical thinking in the educational fields by choosing the appropriate activity and implementing it within different language practices and skills. However, there was an exception; only one teacher, who stated the uncertainty of teaching it. In exploring to what extent critical thinking is implemented in the classroom, teachers' responses were approximately admitting that critical thinking is implemented in their lessons frequently or sometimes depending on the course itself and the task's objectives designed in the lecture.

From the analysis of the results, the researcher found that the majority of teachers focus on developing all the four known language skills, this proves the importance of all the four skills in process of learning and the mastery of the language. Teachers' questionnaire results sparked that the reading cannot be limited only to one purpose, but it has many purposes and benefits according to the needs of learners. Note that most of teachers select reading to entertain, persuade and inform purposes. However, they reported that students need more motivation to read as they give less importance to reading because they do not read often.

In the same vein, the conducted questionnaire showed that the majority of teachers agree on the fact that reading comprehension strategies are useful for EFL learners. They stressed on the importance of implementing these strategies frequently in the classroom as it helps students review and relate what they are learning to what they already know and most importantly develop thinking to ensure a fruitful output. Consequently, they reported that they encounter

some difficulties in teaching students how to grasp and comprehend the text they read, therefore, they suggested as a solution the need for frequent sessions of reading or introducing it as a separated module for all levels to make students more engaged and familiar with reading

Moreover, the obtained results from the interview presented that critical thinking and Reading comprehension have an exchangeable relationship that makes critical thinking enhances the quality of reading comprehension and vice versa. Besides, the results proved that the good level of critical thinking and reading comprehension contribute to facilitating EFL students learning through acquiring more knowledge more efficiently. This latter can be considered as a positive point for the validity of our hypothesis

Conclusion

This chapter was entirely devoted to the fieldwork of the study that consisted of two parts. The first part focused on a review of the research methodology of the study; namely: research method, population and sample of the study, and data gathering tools. The second part aimed to check whether the use of reading comprehension strategies develops EFL learners' critical thinking from EFL teachers and students' perspectives. Besides, it dealt with detailed data analysis, interpretation, and discussion of findings. The data gathering tools were based on the questionnaires for both EFL teachers and students to prove the validity of our hypothesis. The analysis of the results revealed that there are some factors that may affect the teaching process. Raising the awareness of students about the importance of critical thinking skills is a big contribution to the success of the learning process and the necessity of reading comprehension as it has a big part for developing the thinking process. Despite students' awareness of critical thinking skills, they still exhibited poor knowledge about the importance of reading comprehension in their learning.

Limitation of the Study

In conducting the present study, we face some obstacles that obstruct the research process progress. Initially, the lack of sources about critical thinking; precisely, in finding books and articles, because they were rare on the net and absent at the local library. Furthermore, due to the current circumstance of the lockdown and being obliged to post the questionnaires online, make it hard to get enough number of participants. This was the main obstacles that affected our research progress because this research has been conducted only on a small sample of students. Thus, to get more reliable results, the study should have involved more participants. Consequently, even the study has been affected by the aforementioned limitations, the researcher has collected the feedback which helped her to confirm the validity of her hypotheses.

Suggestions and Recommendations

The findings of this research urged the researcher to establish and suggest some recommendations directed to teachers, students, and syllabus designers, they are as follows:

For Teachers

➢ Teachers should change the ways of teaching and assigning methods and base them on all students' mental capacities not only on memorization.

➢ Teachers should make their students aware of the concept of critical thinking and its skills.

➢ Teachers should stimulate their students' thinking by adopting strategies that develop their critical thinking

➢ Teachers should give more importance to the neglected skill of reading and the vital role it plays in students' academic success.

➢ English teachers should create an interesting atmosphere during reading sessions, and urge learners to use appropriate strategies in accordance with students' needs.

➢ Teachers should train students on the different RC strategies tasks and activities which build up their reading comprehension skill.

➢ Teachers should plan lesson structure which includes clear and effective instructions by select adequate text materials based on learners' preferences to make them more interested, motivated and get them involved in the reading process.

For Students

➢ Students should learn more about critical thinking to be aware of its effectiveness; precisely, in EFL learning.

➢ Student are no longer passive; they have to be involved in the process of learning. They should come up with creative ideas, think about problems than find solutions from different perspective and being free to express their point of view.

➢ Students should not accept any information they receive from teachers, they should analyse, ask questions, and draw conclusions for better understanding.

➢ Students should train their minds through reading and using different RC strategies to comprehend what they read and develop their critical thinking skills.

➢ Students should be more encouraged to develop their reading abilities because it is considered to be the major source of knowledge.

➢ Students should read more often in order to strengthen their cognitive, fluency and comprehension skill.

➢ Students should be aware that their educational success is related to their reading performance and reading comprehension as well.

For Syllabus Designers

➢ Critical thinking is one of the most important learning and thinking skills that provide a high leap in the field of learning foreign languages. Therefore, it is recommended to spread its culture among students from early levels due to its effective role for successful EFL learning.

➢ University lectures should cope with the accelerating change of the world by adopting up to date materials, strategies and providing the needed practical knowledge rather than only theoretical one.

➢ Reading comprehension is crucial in the teaching and learning process; syllabus designers should give it more interest and importance by introducing it as a new separated module for all levels and integrating it in our educational syllabus as a practical not theoretical part in order to improve students' reading comprehension skills.

General conclusion

General conclusion

This study is an attempt to investigate the role of reading comprehension strategies in developing EFL learners' critical thinking in English foreign language classes. For this, the ultimate aim of the current research is to attempt to answer the research questions and to confirm the research hypothesis, which states that if students were exposed to different kinds of reading comprehension strategies, their critical thinking skills would be enhanced.

This study consists of three chapters, the two first chapters are devoted to the theoretical background of this study, while the third chapter represents the fieldwork. Through the first chapter, we attempted to highlight the most important elements related to critical thinking. Initially, we have presented a theoretical background about critical thinking which includes historical background, definitions, skills, dispositions and process. Then, we cast some light on bloom's taxonomy, metacognition, problem-solving and creative thinking in relation to critical thinking. After that, we tackled critical thinking pedagogy which comprises critical thinking teaching, instructions, strategies and assessment. Finally, we dealt with barriers to critical thinking in addition to critical thinking and reading comprehension.

The second chapter dealt with the essentials of reading and reading comprehension. It was divided into two sections; through the first section, we attempted to introduce the term reading providing its different definitions, types, models, and the characteristics of an effective reader. The second section was devoted to the basics of reading comprehension. We provided its definition and shed light on some of its strategies. Finally, we discuss reading comprehension instruction and assessment.

The third chapter of this study is devoted to the fieldwork which represents the practical part of our study in which we attempted to analyze and interpret the data collected through the data

collection tools; namely teachers and students' questionnaire; in addition to a thorough discussion of the findings.

To check the validity of the research hypothesis and to attain our aims, an exploratory study is conducted with a qualitative approach to collect, analyze, and interpret data. To accomplish this, we designed two questionnaires and administered them to eight (08) EFL teachers at University of Biskra and a questionnaire which is administrated to twenty-seven (27) first-year Master EFL students of sciences of the language from the same university which were randomly given a questionnaire to fill it up to collect data.

From the analysis and interpretation of the data collected; as well as the thorough discussion of the findings, the collected findings confirmed the validity of our research hypothesis which proposes that if students were exposed to different kinds of reading comprehension strategies, their critical thinking skills would be enhanced. As a result, the study findings proved that both teachers and students agreed upon the importance of critical thinking in learning English as a foreign language and the effective role of reading comprehension strategies in developing students' critical thinking.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Students' Questionnaire

Dear students,

This questionnaire is an attempt to collect data for the accomplishment of a master dissertation on "investigating the role of reading comprehension strategies in enhancing EFL learners critical thinking skills". Therefore, you are kindly requested to answer the given questions in a matter of honesty. Tick (✓) the most appropriate choice(s) close to you and write full statement(s) whenever it is necessary.

Thank you for your time, effort, and collaboration.

Section One: Background Information

Q1. Gender:　　　　Male ☐　　　　Female ☐

Q2. How do you find learning English language at university?

 a) Easy ☐

 b) Difficult ☐

 c) Very difficult ☐

-Justify your answer please: ……………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………………...

Q3. How did you find learning in master level?

a) Easier than it was in license level ☐

b) The same as it was in license level ☐

c) More difficult than it was in license level ☐

-Justify your answer please: …………………………………………………….....................

....

Section Two: Critical Thinking

Q4. In your opinion, what are 21st century most important learning skills? (you may choose more than one option)

a) Communication ☐
b) Critical thinking ☐
c) Creative thinking ☐
d) Innovation ☐
e) All of them ☐

Q5. Do you think that thinking critically is important in the English language learning?

a) Yes ☐

b) No ☐

c) To some extent ☐

d) To a great Extent ☐

-Explain please: ....

....

Q6. Are you familiar with the term Critical Thinking?

a) Yes ☐   b) No ☐

-If yes, what do you think it is? ....

....

Q7. Do you know the difference between thinking and Critical Thinking?   Yes ☐ No ☐

-If yes, what is it...

....

Q8. In your opinion, being a critical thinker means: (you may choose more than one option)

a) You are open minded ☐

b) You debate with others ☐

c) You analyze everything you see ☐

d) You read a lot ☐

e) You have a sense of curiosity ☐

f) You look for evidence ☐

g) You have different points of view ☐

h) Your mind is full of questions ☐

i) You look for evidence to support assumptions and beliefs ☐

j) All of them ☐

Q9. Are you a critical thinker?

a) Yes ☐   b) No ☐   c) I do not know ☐

Q10. What kind of learners do you think you are?

a. An active learner who takes part in building his/her knowledge. ☐

b. A passive learner who just receives information from the teacher. ☐

Section Three: Reading Comprehension

Q11. Which of the four language skills do you like to master more? (you may choose more than one option)

a) Listening ☐

b) Reading ☐

c) Writing ☐

d) Speaking ☐

Q12. In your free time you prefer to: (you may choose more than one option)

a) Write texts or diaries ☐

b) Read books ☐

c) Listen to recordings ☐

d) All ☐

e) Others…………………………………………………………………………………………..

Q13. In your opinion, what is effective reading? (you may choose more than one option)

a) Reading that involves understanding. ☐

b) Reading that involves asking questions. ☐

c) Reading that leads to better writing. ☐

d) Other ……………………………………………………………………………………

Q14. What steps do you follow to solve problems successfully? (you may choose more than one option)

a) Thinking ☐

b) Read about the problem ☐

c) Ask others for help ☐

d) Other……………………………………………………………………………………

Q15. which of the following reading comprehension strategies you often opt for to comprehend what you are reading? (you may choose more than one option)

a) Activating and using background knowledge (to understand the text) ☐

b) Skimming (looking *only* for the general or main ideas) ☐

c) Asking and answering questions (throughout the reading of a text to integrate information and identify main ideas)

d) Guessing the meaning of the unfamiliar words (using context clues) ☐

e) Predicting (the meaning of a text by making informed predictions) ☐

f) Scanning (look *only* for a specific fact or specific information) ☐

g) Making inferences (evaluating or drawing conclusions from information in a text) ☐

h) Summarizing ☐

i) Visualizing (making mental images of characters, settings, situations in the text) ☐

j) All of them ☐

k) Others…………………………………………………………………………………………

Q16. Do you think that there is a relationship between critical thinking and reading comprehension?

a) Yes ☐   b) No ☐

-If yes, what kind of relationship exists between them?

a) Critical thinking develops reading comprehension performance ☐

b) Reading comprehension strategies develops critical thinking ☐

c) They are inter-related ☐

Any further comments or suggestions: …………………………………………………………..............

……

……

Thank you for your time, effort, and collaboration.

Appendix 2: Teachers' Questionnaire

Dear Teachers,

We would be so grateful if you sincerely answer this questionnaire which is an attempt to collect data needed for the accomplishment of a master dissertation on "investigating the role of reading comprehension strategies in enhancing EFL learners' critical thinking skills". Your answers are extremely crucial and will be of much help for the completion of this work. Therefore, you are kindly requested to tick (✓) the appropriate choice(s) and write full statement(s) whenever it is necessary. Feel free to add any comments. Be sure that the answers you provide will certainly remain confidential and will only be used for research purposes.

Thank you for your time, effort, and collaboration.

Section One: Personal Background Information

Q1. Would you like to specify the degree you have achieved?

a) Magister degree

b) Master degree

c) Doctoral degree

Q2. How long have you been teaching EFL at university?

a) 1 - 5 years

b) 6 - 10 years

c) 11 - 15 years

d) 16 – 20 years

e) More

Section Two: Critical Thinking

Q3. How do you consider master one students' proficiency in English language?

   a) Good ☐

   b) Average ☐

   c) Low ☐

Q4. Which 21st century learning skill do EFL learners need the most in learning?

   f) Communication ☐

   g) Critical thinking ☐

   h) Creative thinking ☐

   i) Innovation ☐

   j) All of them ☐

   k) Others …………………………………………………………………………………

Q5. Is there any relation between learning English language and thinking critically?

   a) Yes ☐   b) No ☐

-Please explain …………………………………………………………………………………….

………………………………………………………………………………………………………

Q6. In your words, what is meant by Critical thinking? …………………………………………..

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Q7. To what extent is Critical Thinking implemented in your classroom?

a) Frequently ☐   a) Sometimes ☐   c) Rarely ☐   d) never ☐

-Please justify your answer …………………………………………………………………………...

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Q8. Why do students need critical thinking skills? …………………………………………………..

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Q9. In your opinion, what characterizes critical thinkers?..

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Q10. How can you evaluate your students' critical thinking? ....

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Q11. Do you think that Critical Thinking can be taught?

a) Yes ☐   b) No ☐   c) To some extent ☐

-Please justify your answer..

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Section Three: Reading Comprehension

Q12. Which skills do you focus more on developing in your lessons?

a) Speaking ☐
b) Writing ☐
c) Listening ☐
d) Reading ☐
e) All of them ☐

Q13. What is the purpose of reading?

a) Entertain ☐
b) Persuade ☐
c) Inform ☐
d) All ☐

e) Other………………………………………………………………………………………

Q14. According to your experience of teaching, to what extent do you think students value the importance of the reading skill

a) A lot ☐　　　　　　b) A little ☐　　　　　　c) Not at all ☐

- Please explain …………………………………………………………………………...

…………………………………………………………………………………………………

Q15. In your opinion, which of the following reading comprehension strategies have a relationship with critical thinking:

l)　Activating and using background knowledge ☐

m)　Skimming ☐

n)　Asking and answering questions ☐

o)　Guessing the meaning of the unfamiliar words ☐

p)　Predicting ☐

q)　Scanning ☐

r)　Making inferences ☐

s)　Summarizing ☐

t)　Visualizing ☐

u)　All of them ☐

v)　Others…………………………………………………………………………………

Q16. To what extent is these strategies implemented in your classroom?

a) Frequently ☐　　b) sometimes ☐　　c) rarely ☐　　d) never ☐

-Please justify your answer …………………………………………………………………...

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Q17. what kind of challenges teachers may face in teaching reading comprehension?....................

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Q18.   In   your   opinion,   how   to   overcome   these   challenges?
…………………………………………………

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 Q19. Do you think that there is a relationship between reading comprehension and critical
thinking?   a) Yes ☐   b) No ☐

-If yes, what kind of relationship exists between them?

   a) Critical thinking develops reading comprehension performance ☐

   b) reading comprehension strategies develops critical thinking ☐

   c) They are inter-related

We would really appreciate any suggestions or comments from your part. Please feel free

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Thank you for your time and for your collaboration.

الملخص

العمل المقدم هو محاولة للتحقيق في دور استراتيجيات فهم القراءة في تطوير التفكير النقدي لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو اقتراح بعض استراتيجيات الفهم القرائي لكل من المعلمين والطلاب والتي قد تفيد في تنمية مهارات التفكير النقدي حيث سنستكشف كيف يمكن لقدرات التفكير كما تظهر في بعض استراتيجيات فهم القراءة أن تحسن مهارات التفكير النقدي لدى الطلاب وقدرتهم على التفكير بمنطقية وذكاء. و منه فقد افترضنا أنه كلما قام الطلاب باستخدام مختلف استراتيجيات فهم القراءة ، سيتم تعزيز تفكيرهم النقدي بشكل أكبر. للتأكد من صحة هذه الفرضية قمنا بإجراء دراسة استكشافية عن طريق إتباع منهجية بحث نوعية لجمع البيانات وتحليلها وتفسيرها. لجمع البيانات استعمل الباحث استبيانين تم تقديمه الى ثمانية (08) معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة بسكرة و اخر لسبعة وعشرين (27) طالبًا من طلاب السنة الأولى ماستر تخصص علوم اللسان من نفس الجامع حيث تم اعطاء الاستبيان عشوائيا لكلا العينات لملئه لجمع البيانات. أثبتت نتائج المتحصل عليها أن المعلمين والطلاب متفقين على أهمية التفكير النقدي في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية والدور الفعال لاستراتيجيات فهم القراءة في تنمية التفكير النقدي لدى الطلاب. وبهذا فقد أكدت نتائج الدراسة صحة فرضياتنا. النتائج الرئيسية لهذا البحث هي وجود علاقة إيجابية بين المتغيرين ، التفكير النقدي وفهم القراءة ، وان هناك بعض استراتيجيات فهم القراءة الأساسية التي قد تساهم في تطوير التفكير النقدي لدى المتعلمين.