

Perceptions of Pre-service Teachers' in Developing Reading Comprehension Through Critical Reading Skills

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Abstract: This study is an attempt to explore the perceptions of pre-service teachers in developing reading comprehension through critical reading skills. The reason behind carrying out this research is that the most of pre-service teachers are very poor in critical reading skills. They are not critical enough to comprehend the underlying meaning of the text using the critical approaches. I conducted this study adopting action research design under qualitative approach to identify the attitudes of pre-service teachers on the importance of critical reading skills to develop their reading comprehension skills. Thirty students from English departments of seventh batch who have been studying in fourth semester were selected as the sample of this study. They were divided into 5 groups of 6 students of each group in order to make the class interactive. Convenient non-random sampling procedure was used to select the sample in this study. I administered in-depth interview to each group leader from every group. The findings of this study show that critical reading skills help to develop creative writing and critical thinking skills; readers can come up with multiple meaning through critical reading skills; there is the importance of reading strategies for critical reading skills; and academic writing can be promoted through critical reading skills. Critical reading skills are essential to make readers very dynamic and smart academically.

Keywords: Critical Reading Skills, Reading Comprehension, Creative Writing, Multiple Meaning, Academic Writing

1. Introduction

Reading is a dynamic and multifaceted process. In order to develop reading proficiency, the readers should have skill-based and knowledge-based competencies to make meaning from the text. To grasp the critical meaning from the text, the readers need relevant background knowledge related to the text's vocabulary, topic, and structure [13]. Students can make prediction, summarizing, and making inferences, if they are familiar with the relevant vocabulary and background knowledge of the text. Moreover, the more the students read, the better they become so they should be provided with adequate and ample reading materials which are to be pertinent to their curricula. However, the students of English education are being imposed on compulsory subjects regarding the foundation of Educations rather than the core specialization subjects in the curriculum of Master of Education (M.Ed.) in English education. However, they are supposed to provide more subjects in core areas of the study to develop the proficiency in academic reading and academic

writing; however, the curriculum of English education of M.Ed. has prioritized on pedagogy and theoretical knowledge on areas of non-core subjects instead of reading subjects to develop academic critical reading proficiency.

In this regard Gambrell [10] argues that we can help learners create a motivational reading habit by making reading more related to their real life situations and delivering real interests.

According to Wasik and Slavin [22], there are eight components of the reading process that are emphasized in their programs, such as perceptual analysis of print, knowledge of print conventions decoding, oral language proficiency, prior knowledge, lexical access, syntactic analysis of sentences and prose comprehension. In fact, reading is viewed as a psycholinguistic process in which the readers construct meaning from print [5, 18]. Reading is the message gaining and problem solving activities. In order to extract meaning from the text, the readers must have good control of oral language, and they must have developed perceptual skills, the physiological maturing and experiences

that allow them to coordinate what they hear in language and sees in print and enough hard eye coordination so they can learn the controlled and directional patterns required for reading [5].

Reading requires many strategies, such as visual information, the integrating of letter-sound relationships, feature of print and reader's background knowledge. The psycholinguistics model of reading has been in style through the ESL learners where they decode the phrases combining their meaning to shape phrases, then sentences and eventually constructing the meaning of the complete textual content in a very linear manner [11]. The interactive model of reading was developed by Rumelhart in 1977 [16]. In this reading model, there is combination and integration of both lower-level and higher level knowledge sources. Lower level knowledge refers to the analysis of words, phrases, and clauses based on the lexical and syntactic information available integration. Reading model integrate the lower level textual information with higher level semantic and contextual information. According to Rosenshine [19], the reading sub-skills are recognizing sequence, recognizing words in context, identifying the main idea, decoding detail, drawing inferences, recognizing cause and effect and comparing and contrasting.

Cooperative learning is also helpful to develop critical reading skills [15, 9]. Reading falls into literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, critical comprehension, and appreciation comprehension [14]. However, language teachers usually do not give any priority for critical reading skills while teaching reading skills. Instead, they focus on vocabulary skills, comprehension skills, and fluency skills. The critical reading skills are very necessary for the students at their teaching careers. They are imperative to teach and practice the critical reading skills in the language classroom. Reading strategies, metacognitive skills and critical reading skills are imperative to be learnt by the readers. In addition, cooperative learning also contributes to foster the development of critical thinking skills through discussion, negotiation, clarification of ideas and evaluation of others ideas [4]. There is a dearth of actual reading, deep reading and engaged reading of academic and disciplinary text. The learners are failure to develop critical reading skills [8]. In order to develop critical reading, the readers must practice the close reading techniques. In close reading, the text should be interpreted in terms of internal formal elements of circumstances, prosodic features, and grammatical features objectively and self-sufficiently [20]. The close reading encourages critical reading by probing who is communicating to whom about what and for what purpose as well as how the author delivers information infuses perspective, structure and arguments. To enhance reading comprehensive skills, the learners are required to grasp the content knowledge, vocabulary items, and grammatical structures of the text. There are different approaches to consolidate the reading comprehensive skills for ESL/EFL learners, such as phonics approach, whole language approach, language approach, linguistics approach, and

language experience approach [2]. There is no a single discourse; but many discourses which readers could get from the text [7]. The readers need critical thinking skills to evaluate the text efficiently.

Reading is essential aspect to get content knowledge and the appropriate knowledge regarding language use. Nassaji [16] argues that reading is a diverse skill that involves complex combinations and integration of various cognitive, linguistic and non-verbal skills from the most basic low-level computational skills to high-level syntactic skills for decoding printing and coding visual attitudes, semantics and discourse and more about the integration of textual representations and ideas with readers' global knowledge. Reading is a lifelong skill which is actualized through five steps: obtaining knowledge, comprehension, continuity, critical and creative reading. Waltz [21] argues "critical reading means different things to different people" (p. 193). Critical refers to questioning, analyzing, evaluating and interpreting a text in depth and detail [3]. It aims to discover and evaluate what is beyond the text by means of objective and in-depth thinking [3]. The critical reading is necessary to find out the hidden meaning in between lines. The critical reading is main medium to access the right knowledge in which high cognitive processes are involved [3]. The readers grasp the meaning of the text differently. The text has surface and underlying meaning. The underlying meaning is the reflection of slanted point of view and a manipulation of the readers by various means or selective or even incorrect information. Critical reading is equivalent of multiplicity of interpretation of text which is known as reading between lines [12]. Critical reading is an in-depth investigation of a text that leads inferences about the text's likely interpretation. Most of the texts are written about multi-facets of the society which are required to be interpreted using critical reading skills. Critical reading is a process of reading intellectually, analytically and reflexively. According to Fairclough [7], there is no a single discourse but many discourses which readers could get from any text. The critical reading is an awareness of language. Discourse analysis provides useful tools to acquire the critical reading skills. The readers need critical thinking skills to evaluate the text analytically.

According to Aadali [1], the readers are expected to study the sources, identity of author's purpose, distinguish the truths and construct their own judgments. Critical reading is an active and participatory process of discovering of information and thoughts in a text. In the critical reading, the readers are expected to obtain high level comprehension through their interpretation and evaluation skills. Critical reading is one of the steps of creative reading. In creative reading, the readers analyze and interpret the text using their faculty of wonder [3]. Critical reading is a high-level reading activity in which the readers analyze not only what a text says; but also how it says. It demands to identify the strengths, weaknesses and implication of the text.

The language teachers usually do not give any priority for critical reading skills while teaching reading skills. Instead, they focus on vocabulary skills, comprehension skills, and

fluency skills. The critical reading skills are very necessary for the students to grasp the hidden meaning from the text. It is imperative to teach and practice critical reading skills in the language classroom. Reading strategies, metacognitive skills and critical reading skills are imperative to be learnt in the language classroom. The reading strategies are essential for the readers to analyze the text critically. There are three types of text processing strategies, such as pre-reading strategies, while-reading strategies and post-reading strategies [17]. Pre-reading strategies incorporate establishing a good physical environment, setting reading purpose, accessing prior knowledge, asking questions based on the title, semantic mapping, skimming for general idea, previewing the text, reviewing instruction, and identifying text structure. While reading strategies include identify the main idea, looking for discourse markers, monitoring vocabulary knowledge, predicting the main idea of each paragraph, skipping ahead and glossing. Post-reading strategies encompass reflect on text understanding, consolidate and integrate information, critical appreciation of the text using different criticisms, apply appropriate criticisms to analyze the text, and critique the text. Moreover, E-mapping, as a critical reading strategy is a scientific thinking which is essential to develop critical and creative reading skills. Mind mapping was introduced in 1960s by Buzan which represents thoughts or ideas in a visual manner [6]. Mind mapping is a type of developing reading strategy which helps develop critical reading skills. The main objectives of the study were:

- 1) to develop the critical reading proficiency of pre-service teachers through critical reading techniques;
- 2) to explore their techniques of reading proficiency to draw the hidden meaning of the literary text.

2. Methodology

The research design of this study was qualitative approach with action research design to explore the perceptions of pre-service teachers on the importance of critical reading skills to interpret the literary text. Thirty students of English departments of seventh batch who have been studying in fourth semester were selected as the sample of this study. Thirty students were divided into 5 groups of 6 students of each group in order to make the class interactive. Convenient non-random sampling procedure was used to select the sample in this study. I administered in-depth interview to each group leader from every group. First of all, I introduced them what is critical reading skills and the way of analyzing the text using critical reading skills to generate the ideas and thoughts form the text in a four day intervention. I taught them how to analyze and interpret the prescribed text in the syllabus by applying different reading strategies and criticisms as tools to develop the critical reading skills of the students.

Phase I: In the first step, I studied the existing practices of developing reading skills of English in third semester of M.Ed. majoring English. The students were very poor to analyze and interpret the literary text to develop the critical

reading skills. I found that the students were very novice regarding the critical reading skills. Every student adopts literal reading skills by applying paraphrasing technique to find out the meaning. There was no practice of applying critical reading skills to interpret the text to find out the hidden meaning from the text. Afterwards, I developed the intervention to apply the critical reading skills to analyze and interpret the literary text.

Phase II: Intervention. In the second phase, I made a careful plan regarding the interventions of applying critical reading techniques to analyze and interpret any text. A four day workshop was conducted regarding the introduction of what are the critical reading skills for the enhancement of reading comprehension at the beginning of intervention phase. Subsequently, the learners were intervened with the broad knowledge of critical reading skills. They were oriented how to apply critical reading skills in this phase.

Phase III: Observation. In the third phase, I observed the effects of the intervention of different types of critical reading techniques and strategies. The sampled informants were asked to take participation in analyzing and interpreting the different prescribed short fictions to identify the effects of intervention of critical reading skills.

Phase IV: Reflection. In fourth phase, I administered in-depth- interview as well as group discussion to each group leader and other participants from each group since the respondents were divided into 5 groups with 6 respondents of each group to collect their reflections regarding the pros and cons of applying critical reading skills to analyze and interpret prescribed literary text.

3. Results and Discussion

This is an action research in which I employed in-depth-interview to each group leader to elicit their reflection regarding the intervention of critical reading skills on the development of reading comprehension. I developed 6 global themes out of more than a dozen of basic themes. The respondents were entitled as R1, R2, R3, R4, and R5 to maintain confidentiality and anonymity in this study.

3.1. Developing Creative Writing and Critical Thinking Through Critical Reading Skills

Reading skill is a powerful receptive skill which is essential to retain resources of knowledge. There is a symbiotic relationship between reading and writing skills. Creative reading skills help the readers develop their faculty of wonder which is a power of imagination. In creative reading, the readers analyze and interpret the text using their faculty of wonder [3]. If the readers develop their creative reading through the critical reading skills, they can improve their creative writing skills. In this regards, R1 argued that,

Extensive reading of short fiction, long fiction, essays, and dramas really facilitate them to develop their critical thinking and creative writing skills. The readers subconsciously acquire complex academic writing style through the reading of a huge quantity of academic

reading materials. They internalize massive quantity of vocabulary, grammatical structures, cohesive and coherent discourse in the authentic text.

It is found that reading and writing skills are independent to each other. Writing skills cannot be enhanced without critical reading skills. In fact creative reading and creative writing skills are reciprocal to each other. In his regard R4 stated that *"the reader of English as an EFL/ESL learner should adopt different reading techniques to develop their academic as well as general writing skills"*. The readers can write a criticism of any text in post-reading phase which can be a model of creative writing skills. The creative writing should be created using the genuine reflection of writer in his/her life. The writer can generate a unique artifact based on the readings of the dozens of such artifacts in his/her career. In this regard, R5 asserted that *"unless the author develops the critical reading skills, they cannot establish a creative writer in the society. Reading of specific materials is a must in order to develop the critical thinking in writing skills"*. In order to develop creative writing, critical reading should be taken consideration. Mind mapping is a type of developing reading strategy which helps readers develops their critical reading skills [6]. The prospective teachers should develop their creative writing skills through the critical reading skills.

3.2. Come up with Multiple Meaning Through Critical Reading Skills

The readers are usually from diverse communities so they come up with different experiences and cultures in the language classroom. In this regards, R4 argued that *"the pre-service teachers can apply different criticisms, such as new criticisms, Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis, postmodernism, post-structuralism, reader-response theory, post theory, and deconstruction as means of critical readings skills to analyze and interpret the literary texts"*. The analysis and interpretation of texts cannot be homogeneous in this postmodern epoch since the readers are equipped with different criticisms through which they attempt to find out hidden meaning of the texts. In this regard, R3 stated that,

the same text can be interpreted through different lens, I mean using different criticisms as a result there could be plural meanings of the same text. Sometimes, same text can be interpreted using feminism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, post-structuralism criticisms etc. The readers can develop their critical reading skills through the practices of applying different criticisms which are essential for the advanced readers.

The critical reading skills are to be promoted through the applications of different criticism in the language classroom. According to Fairclough [7], there is no a single discourse but many discourses which readers could get from any text. Critical reading skills play a vital role to excavate the underlying meaning from the text so the readers should use appropriate criticisms as much as possible in order to find out novel meaning from the text. In this regard, Waltz [21] argues that "critical reading means different things to different

people" (p. 193). One of the respondents, R1 asserted that *"post-modern readers are from diverse cultures and with huge exposures with prior knowledge which are very supportive to analyze the text critically. I sometimes interpret the texts based on my own phenology; I mean my experiences and mental consciousness which can be beyond the main idea of the text"*. The critical reading skills are very essential in order to generate plurality of meaning from the text so readers can be very dynamic and smart. The readers can be very dynamic and smart in reading skills through the help of critical reading skills.

3.3. Importance of Reading Strategies for Critical Reading Skills

Reading strategies play a vital role in developing critical reading skills. The readers adopt various type of reading strategies in order to comprehend the text in detail. They apply cognitive, metacognitive, and social learning strategies in order to analyze the text. In this regard, R5 stated that,

If we share our comprehensions in group, they can be comprehended much better than they contemplate themselves. Collaborative reading also helps us develop our critical reading skills. When we discuss the text in post-reading phase, the confusing and ambiguous issues are clear. Collaborative reading is inevitable in college level.

There should be sharing and feedbacks from the peers in order to develop the critical reading skills. There should be different types of pre-reading activities, while reading activities and post-reading activities to promote critical reading skills. The learners can hold a discussion on the contentious issues of the text in the group collaboratively. In the similar vein, R2 argued that *"while reading and post-reading strategies are very productive for us to comprehend the text properly. We usually keep on practices the post-reading strategies to discover the hidden meaning of the text"*. The application of reading strategies is useful to get additional underlying meaning out of the text. In this regard, Meyers [15] and Flynn [9] argue that cooperative learning is also helpful to develop critical reading skills. In this context R4 argued that *"if the readers share their understandings and insight to one another, they can mystify some of the controversial issues in the text"*. In this regard, Charles, Lester and O'Daffer [4] assert that cooperative learning also contributes to foster the development of critical thinking skills through discussion, negotiation, clarification of ideas and evaluation of others ideas.

3.4. Promoting Academic Writing Through Critical Reading Skills

Extensive reading of short fiction, long fiction, poetry, essays, and drams is essential for the all-round language development for ESL and EFL learners. In this regard, the respondent R2 argued that,

We should need extensive reading materials beyond our syllabus to develop content knowledge as wells as vocabulary and grammar on the target language.

Particularly, we require authentic academic reading materials to develop academic writing without which we cannot be acknowledged internally. I think we students should read latest relevant articles in order to develop knowledge writing complex sentences which are used in academic writing.

The pre-service teachers should carry out at least two assignments on an average of each subject in each semester. In this regard, one of the respondents R4 stated that “*I think the subject tutors are not providing us additional and relevant reading material while providing assignment. We are not instructed with proper reading materials and assignment simultaneously while providing assignment*”. The tutor should provide the pre-service teachers with appropriate reading materials to develop their academic writing skills. In fact, academic reading skills contribute to enhance academic writing skills. The R2 argued that “*critical reading skills help us grasp the main essence of text and it is very helpful to paraphrase and summarize the text with the help of the knowledge of critical reading skills which we got from our tutors*”. Critical reading is a high-level reading activity through which the readers can analyze not only what a text says but also how it says [3]. Critical reading skills help the readers to avoid colloquial, casual and controversial issues in academic writing.

4. Conclusion

The pre-service teachers are very positive towards the development of reading comprehension of ESL/EFL readers through critical reading skills which help them develop creative writing and critical thinking skills. The readers can interpret the text using critical reading skills as a result they can come up with multiple meaning from same text. Moreover, they can employ various reading strategies to develop critical reading skills. Furthermore, academic writing skills can be promoted through the critical reading skills which are very essential to enhance the comprehensive abilities of the ESL and EFL readers for their academic careers.

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