Developing Critical Thinking Skill Through Extensive Reading: Uzbek Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

This article explores teachers' attitudes towards extensive reading, critical thinking skill, and more importantly, towards developing critical thinking skill through extensive reading strategies. students are facing different obstacles that may hinder their learning process and development. One of those problems can be the lack of sufficient processing of information, which may lead to misunderstanding and misinterpreting any given material. In other words, they lack the ability to think critically. In order to carry out this research, a quantitative study has been conducted. Specially-designed questionnaire was administered to thirty-four English teachers of different educational establishments. The analysis of the questionnaire revealed that teachers and are aware of the existence of critical thinking skill and stress the importance of extensive reading in developing cognitive skills. Moreover, they showed a positive attitude towards developing critical thinking skill through extensive reading, however, the majority of students tend to ignore reading and abandon it and they are not trying to develop their critical thinking skill neither through extensive reading nor through other tools. Following the research findings, it is recommended to raise students' awareness about the importance of extensive reading as well as critical thinking skill in foreign language teaching and learning. More importantly, to implement extensive reading programs that can help learners enhance their critical thinking skills.

Keywords: Extensive reading, critical thinking, teachers' percepctives, reading fluency, reading comprehension.

1. Introduction

The twenty-first century is characterized by the availability of different kinds and sources of information that are easily accessed. As human beings, we are required to analyze, evaluate, reflect on, and rationalize these data before believing in or rejecting it. However, being able to do so requires the possession of different cognitive skills such as the ability to think critically. This ability is needed in every domain of life, most importantly in the field of education. In a learner-centered class, students are the core of the teaching-learning process, in which the teacher acts mainly as a guide and monitor his/her students' learning process and progress. That is, learners are supposed to search for information to share with their classmates the same way their teachers used to do. But extensive reading supports self-regulation, self-monitoring and independent reading. As it is known as the most beneficial feature of extensive reading, reading a lot of books makes people see the world from different viewpoint. Like other countries, Uzbekistan is preparing its human resources to

The Am. J. Soc. Sci. Educ. Innov. 2026

80

be able to compete with those from other countries.

One of the first steps to create high quality human resources is to improve the quality of education. The skills in CT are not developed naturally since students need practice and experience by reading a large amount of materials. Reading a lot has many benefits since it allows the reader to obtain answers to specific questions.

2. Literature Review

The term "Extensive reading" was coined by British linguist Harold Palmer in 1917 to promote reading for pleasure, information, and general understanding. H. Palmer designed this approach to encourage language learners to read "rapidly, book after book" rather than focusing intensely on short texts. Unlike intensive reading, extensive reading is typically linked to reading a lot of literature in order to gain a basic comprehension of the reading materials. The meaning of the text is more important to readers than the meaning of individual words or sentences or the location of particular information. For example, Beatrice Mikulecky refers to extensive reading as "pleasure reading" while discussing the goal or result of teaching reading.

Some of the functions of substantial reading in language learning are listed by S. Krashen. These tasks can be fulfilled by engaging in a regular reading regimen that gives the reader the confidence to discuss a wide range of subjects in order to reinforce prior knowledge. Additionally, they make it easier for new words to convey ideas, forecasts, summaries, and other information about the material being read. In order to encourage readers to acquire them in order to fulfill their knowledge and needs as ESL students, Stephen Krashen lists ten benefits of comprehensive reading. These are the key principles of extensive reading by Stephen Krashen:

1.   It can provide "comprehensible input"

2.   It can enhance learner general language competence

3.   It increases the students' exposure to the language

4.   It can increase knowledge of vocabulary

5.   It can lead to improvement in writing

6.   It can motivate learners to read

7.   It can consolidate previously learned language

8.   It helps to build confidence with extended texts

9.   It encourages the exploitation of textual redundancy

10.   It facilitates the development of prediction skills

As a result of Extensive reading learners gain vocabulary growth, improvement in the other macros skills, motivation and attitude so students become eager readers and increase reading speed.

T.N. Fitria compared the benefits and problems of using extensive reading in teaching English. The analysis showed that extensive reading has several benefits in the teaching and learning process, especially in learning English as a foreign language, such as adding vocabulary, helping to understand grammar, building reading speed, and reading fluency, reading for getting pleasure, building confidence and motivation, increasing motivating to read English more. However, the author highlighted several drawbacks such as the level of reading material or difficulty in analyzing material related to literary works, different academic grades, learners paying less attention to the program, and the ER material selection.

Iranian scientists E.N. Mohammadi, F.Heidari, and N.D. Niry's article analyzed the reading strategies used by Iranian EFL learners, focusing on cognitive, meta-cognitive, and compensation categories, and the relationship between critical thinking ability and these strategies, excluding gender differences.

The study by J.H. Reed investigates the impact of a critical thinking model on student achievement in primary source document analysis, argumentative reasoning, essential disposition of thinking, and history content in a community college history course. A study by J.Yamashita further supports the connection between extensive reading and critical thinking, finding that students who engaged in extensive reading demonstrated improved reading comprehension and critical analysis skills.

Richard Paul states on his website called Critical Thinking Community a definition of critical thinking which is the art of thinking about thinking in an intellectually disciplined manner because it is a process which involves a wide range of skills to be developed. Critical thinking involves following proofs, thinking about all the possibilities, relying upon reasons instead of

feelings, considering different points of view, taking into account the effects of prejudices, and not refusing popular opinions. Consequently it entails being able to identify other people's arguments as well as their conclusions on a particular topic. This means critical thinking is an important skill ESL student need to develop from extensive reading materials which are books of their pleasure to become analytical and conscious people about the environment that surrounds them.

W. Glaser provided an additional description of CT that borrowed concepts from J. Dewey describes critical thinking components as followings: a disposition to think carefully about issues and topics that are within one's area of expertise; familiarity with logical inquiry and reasoning techniques; some proficiency in using those techniques. CT demands that any belief or purported body of knowledge be continuously examined in light of the evidence supporting it and the conclusions it tends to lead to.

According to the view of Diana Halpern, an American psychologist and former president of the Association of American psychologists, thinking is a change or transformation of the inner image. She says that as soon as we begin to think, we begin to apply our knowledge to achieve our goal. Therefore, the ability to think is important for our existence, since each person has goals, and these goals form the interaction of people in society, so no one is ever alone. According to Descartes, reason is a series of elementary concepts connected by strict logical principles, and thinking is a logical process.

A well cultivated critical thinker raises vital questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely; gathers and assesses relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively; comes to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards; thinks openmindedly within alternative systems of thought, recognizing and assessing, as need be, their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences; and communicates effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems.

3. Methods

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate Uzbek teachers' perspectives on developing critical thinking skills through extensive reading. The quantitative approach was selected as it allows for the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data in order to identify patterns, tendencies, and relationships among variables related to teachers' beliefs and practices.

Research Design. The research followed a descriptive survey design, which is appropriate for examining attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of participants within a specific context. This design enabled the researcher to gather standardized data from a group of English language teachers and to analyze their views on extensive reading and critical thinking development.

Participants. The participants of the study consisted of 34 English language teachers working in different educational institutions in Uzbekistan, including secondary schools, academic lyceums, and higher educational establishments. The participants were selected using a convenience sampling method, as they were readily accessible to the researcher. The diversity of teaching contexts contributed to obtaining a broader understanding of teachers' perspectives.

4. Results and Discussions

The survey results indicate that the majority of participants belong to the 25-34 age group (47.1%), making it the most represented category in the study. This suggests that most respondents are relatively young professionals who are likely to be active in adopting modern teaching approaches and innovations such as extensive reading strategies. The second largest group is 35-44 years old (35.3%), indicating a significant proportion of experienced teachers who may have well-established teaching practices. Meanwhile, 8.8% of respondents are under 25, representing early-career teachers, and another 8.8% fall within the 45-54 age group, reflecting more experienced educators. Notably, there are no participants aged 55 and above. The age distribution shows a concentration of participants in the young and middle-career stages, which may positively influence openness toward implementing new pedagogical strategies like extensive reading for developing critical thinking (see figure 1).
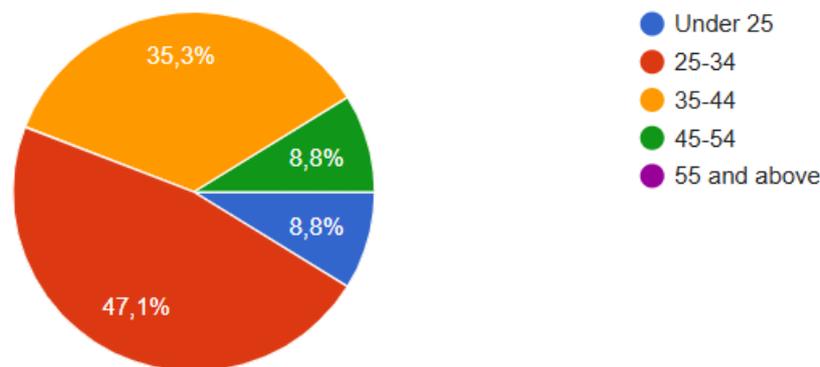
Figure 1. Respondents' age groups indicator

The gender distribution reveals that female teachers constitute the majority (73.5%), while male teachers account for 26.5% of the respondents. This imbalance reflects the general trend in many educational contexts, where teaching, particularly in language education, is predominantly represented by female professionals (see Figure 2). The higher proportion of female participants may influence the findings in terms of attitudes and perceptions; however, both genders are represented, allowing for a broader understanding of teachers' perspectives. The sample is mainly composed of young to mid-career female teachers, which suggests that the findings of the study largely reflect the views of an active and professionally engaged group. This demographic profile is particularly relevant, as such teachers are often more adaptable to innovative instructional methods and may play a key role in integrating extensive reading practices to enhance students' critical thinking skills.
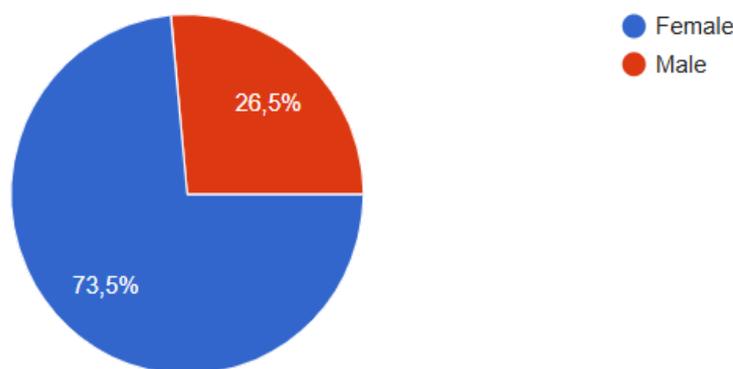

Figure 2. Gender distribution of participants

The results of the survey indicate that a significant majority of teachers (73.5%) believe that their students understand the difference between reading for pleasure and academic reading. This finding suggests that most learners are aware of the distinction between extensive reading (focused on enjoyment and general understanding) and intensive or academic reading (focused on detailed analysis and learning outcomes). Such awareness is an important prerequisite for successfully implementing extensive reading practices in language learning. However, 14.7% of respondents reported that students do not understand this difference, while 11.8% were unsure. These figures highlight that a notable proportion of students either lack clarity or demonstrate inconsistent understanding of different reading purposes. This may negatively affect their ability to engage effectively in extensive reading activities, as they might approach all reading tasks in the same way often focusing too much on detail rather than overall meaning and enjoyment. From a pedagogical

perspective, these results suggest that although the general level of awareness is relatively high, there is still a need for explicit instruction and guidance. Teachers should clearly explain and model the differences between reading types and incorporate activities that emphasize reading for pleasure, fluency, and global comprehension. While the majority of students appear to understand the distinction between reading for pleasure and academic reading, the presence of uncertainty among some learners indicates the need for further instructional support. Strengthening this understanding can enhance the effectiveness of extensive reading programs and contribute to the development of students' critical thinking skills.

The findings of the study reveal that most teachers believe their students are able to distinguish between reading for pleasure and academic reading. This suggests that, at least at a theoretical level, learners possess a certain degree of awareness regarding different reading purposes. However, the presence of respondents who answered "no" or "not sure" indicates that this understanding is not universal and may vary depending on students' experience, proficiency level, or exposure to reading practices.

This raises several important questions. Do students truly understand the difference, or do they only demonstrate superficial awareness? Even if they claim to know the distinction, are they able to apply appropriate reading strategies in real classroom situations? It is possible that students still approach all texts in the same way, focusing on translation and detailed comprehension rather than reading fluently for general meaning.

Another important issue concerns teaching practices. Are teachers explicitly teaching the difference between reading types, or is this knowledge expected to develop naturally? If students are not guided properly, they may fail to benefit fully from extensive reading activities. Moreover, how often are students given opportunities to engage in reading for pleasure within the curriculum? If extensive reading is treated as optional or secondary, students may not take it seriously.The results also lead to broader pedagogical considerations. What role does motivation play in students' reading habits? Even if they understand the concept of extensive reading, do they actually enjoy reading, or do they see it as an academic obligation? Additionally, are suitable and engaging reading materials available to support extensive reading practices? The data suggest that while awareness of reading types exists, there is still a need to strengthen

both practical implementation and instructional support. Addressing these questions can help educators design more effective strategies to integrate extensive reading into language learning and to enhance students' critical thinking skills.

5. Conclusion

This study examined Uzbek teachers' perspectives on developing critical thinking skills through extensive reading. The findings indicate that teachers generally demonstrate a positive attitude towards both extensive reading and its potential to enhance students' cognitive and analytical abilities. Most respondents recognize the importance of critical thinking in modern education and acknowledge that extensive reading can serve as an effective tool for fostering such skills. At the same time, the results reveal several challenges. Although students appear to have a basic understanding of different reading purposes, their engagement in extensive reading remains limited. Many students tend to neglect reading for pleasure and do not actively use it as a means of developing critical thinking. This suggests a gap between awareness and actual practice, which may reduce the effectiveness of extensive reading programs. The study also highlights the need for more structured and consistent implementation of extensive reading in the educational process. Teachers play a crucial role in guiding students, selecting appropriate materials, and creating a supportive reading environment. Without clear instructional strategies and regular practice, students may fail to benefit fully from extensive reading activities. In conclusion, extensive reading has significant potential to contribute to the development of critical thinking skills among EFL learners in Uzbekistan. However, to achieve this potential, it is essential to raise students' awareness, increase their motivation, and integrate extensive reading more systematically into language curricula. Future efforts should focus on designing effective reading programs and providing methodological support for teachers to enhance both reading habits and higher-order thinking skills.

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The Am. J. Soc. Sci. Educ. Innov. 2026

84

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