



**Faculty of Education
Curriculum & Instruction Department**

**The Effect of a Critical Literacy-Based Program on Enhancing EFL
Learners' Reading of Fictional Texts**

*A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the M.A.
Degree in Education
(Curriculum & Instruction: TEFL)*

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed at enhancing EFL learner's critical reading of fictional text skills using critical literacy. The study used a quasi-experimental method. The study participants were a group of 30 students from grade 3 (an American Education system). The researcher employed the critical reading of fictional texts pre-post-test and reading of fictional texts rubric as research tools. Results revealed that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study participants in the pre and post-test in terms of critical reading of fictional texts as the main skill in favor of post testing at the level of 0.01. Moreover, results showed that the students were able to challenge the texts and explore identities presented or marginalized in the text effectively. However, they showed limited ability in going beyond bias and creating whole new parallel texts.

Key words: critical literacy, critical reading, fictional texts.

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Chapter one

Background and problem

Chapter one

Background and problem

Introduction

Teaching literature is an indispensable part of teaching language arts due to its close connection to enhancing the awareness of the societies it came from. Literary texts do not usually serve as the image carrier, but they may deliver messages that may implicitly or explicitly subsidize changes according to certain agendas. For this reason, the treatment of the text, even in the early grades, should go from the levels of the literal comprehension to the deeper understanding of the structural part of the texts including ideologies, attitudes, identities, and so on.

Fictional texts are part of the various literary genres in which themes like power, prejudice, justice, and equality are introduced. The role of Critical reading of fictional texts, in this case, involves analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of these themes. It is a process of active reading against the text to question its assumptions and arguments rather than restating them or taking them for granted. To this effect, Douglas, (2000) states that critical reading is reading the text "suspiciously and analytically and then evaluating it". It means that a reader applies certain processes, models, questions, and theories that result in enhanced clarity and comprehension.

Different researchers and authors mention the importance of learning literature such as: Bodden, (2006) A. Costello, (2006) Dupre, (2006), not only because it increases the artistic taste but also, as Eliot, (1922) stated, because reading literary texts is equivalent to reading the chain of humanity. However, EFL learners lack a clear understanding of how to tackle fictional texts critically the matter which hinders the skills of critical thinking in general. The laziness towards going beyond the text and leaving the meaning aside concentrating on the ready-made interpretations of the given texts may narrow the reader's thoughts and expectations and paralyze working on the text in a close and sustained reading process to analyze and synthesize the text.

Garro (2014) introduced several benefits to reading fictional texts. She stressed that the students who read more fiction are able to understand complex texts as they acquire a range of vocabulary from the simple to the difficult. Also, she highlights that the moral dilemmas presented in the fictional texts increase the reader's emotional intelligence and critical thinking. Sejnost & Thiese (2010) add that the uniqueness of the narrative texts that include universal ideas make a link between what the reader can not experience in the real-time and his own experience. They add that understanding these universals would increase the reader's critical thinking skills in general. While Abdelrasoul's study (2014) revealed that reading

using literature circles enhances student's social skills and certain other critical reading skills.

Another study conducted by Bitetti & Hammer Carol (2016) revealed that using narratives in teaching kids using a home literacy program enhanced the kids' bilingual abilities. They also found that there is a strong positive correlation between the frequency of reading to the children and the children's scores on Narrative Scoring Scheme scores.

Abdelhalim's study (2017) revealed that by the end of a reading-based program, the students were able to think collaboratively using different habits of mind. Also, they were able to develop some problem-solving skills and other social skills like the tendency to share information and opinion during the classes.

Moreover, Al-Mansour & Al-Shorman (2011) found that storytelling has a positive effect on the students' performance in terms of building interest, enhancing discussion, and enhancing self-confidence. Furthermore, they added that storytelling creates a healthy classroom environment with engaged students.

To conclude, Fisher(2014) affirms that stories as a medium for enhancing thinking in general and critical literacy in particular. He states that stories are an ideal medium of stimulating the philosophical discussion due to its ability in creating parallel worlds that can be subjected to a free

and democratic discussion and even criticism. Moreover, he adds that literature should answer the philosophical questions in our lives.

On the other hand, critical literacy's importance is seen as being the process of reading and writing critically with the conscious of being historically constructed amongst particular power-relations (BISHOP, 2014). Jowallah's study, (2015) investigated the effectiveness of critical literacy intervention in changing the students' attitudes and motivation towards using critical literacy. Moreover, the study highlights the use of critical literacy within ELT sessions using the work of the participants, teacher's narratives and questionnaires. The study considers critical literacy as a way of changing the world and the word by the students' involvement in the reading process. The study found that critical literacy is needed in children's education due to its effectiveness in enhancing their understanding of the text whatever it is.

Keyes' study, (2009) described the critical literacy practices in a middle school classroom with the aim of observing the emergence of critical literacy in the curriculum. The researcher has observed a development in the critical consciousness of the students upon the application of critical literacy tents in one teacher instruction, materials making and choice, and narrative meaning-making. This development has been reflected in the critical consciousness of racial tension. Also, this development was apparent in the process of conscientization which

empowered the African-American students and other minorities in a white majority society.

Maloy, (2016) explored how critical literacy worked in an upper-middle-class high school in terms of authority, privilege, curriculum, and pedagogy. The researcher used narrative inquiry with the aim of tracing the dominant ideology in the school community. The study aimed at privileging the students to adopt multimodal, multiliterate, and transcultural learning experiences as a medium of equity for all based on critical literacy principles. The study revealed that the participant students were able to question the prominent status-quo even when it comes to local laws by recontextualizing their modalities, learning, and literacies as part of their learning experience. The researcher claimed that when the participants did so they were able to produce and consume their own texts as they acquired the power with which they became aware of social justice for all regardless of their language, race, and/or socio-economic background.

Liu, (2017) concluded that critical literacy practices are an indispensable part of EFL learning due to its effect in enhancing the learners' motivation and the effectiveness of the presented materials. Also, the study noted that during implementing critical literacy in the class, the students are involved in reconstructing their knowledge about the world. Moreover; the study tracked the effect of critical literacy on critical reading

from the perspective of shaping, reshaping and understanding identities introduced in the texts; this ability of self-empowering and supporting of social justice led to sensitive learners to bias and prejudice that they may encounter in the text and life too.

Hassan, (2015) investigated the effectiveness of a reading-based strategy to enhance critical literacy. The results revealed that critical literacy is an asset that enables the students to consider different perspectives while reading the world around them in the fields of politics, economy, and even social life. In addition, Critical literacy helps the students to be better learners as it requires more than the simple literacy skills of reading and writing.

Despite the variety of literature that tackles the subject of reading in general, the researcher found that there is a lack of literature in terms of reading fictional texts using critical literacy as an approach of criticism for EFL learners in Egypt, especially with the lower grades' students.

Context of the problem

In the Egyptian EFL context, reading is meant for Comprehension i.e., to restate the writer's opinion rather than reading against the text and its ideology which is another aspect of the problem that leads to the inability to read what is not explicitly written. As an EFL teacher, the researcher noticed that the students give an authority to what is written and what is delivered to them in the form of the school's books. They tend to take the

texts regardless their content as for granted which is against the nature of education itself as a mean of transporting an experience that is merely modified as human. This textual treatment is applied to fictional texts too and the to the values and implied messages that they carry between its lines. Reading these texts, especially in the international schools, without considering the cultural and social filters of the readers would change the whole role of international education from being a sort of quality education that enhances the delivery of human experience across generations to a channel of producing assimilationists to a culture whose cultural products, namely fictional texts, are unquestionable.

Studies Such as Abdullah, (2012) stressed that critical reading does not receive enough attention in classroom practices especially while teaching novel. Abdullah asserts that Reading novels is superficially practiced resulting in 1st-year secondary school students' inability to read between the lines; The results of her study showed that 95% of English teachers are not familiar with critical reading skills, and 86% of the students are weak in some critical reading skills.

Abdelrasoul's study, (2014) aimed at enhancing some critical reading skills and social skills of the EFL learners in Egypt using literature circles. The study sample was 44 preparatory school students. The researcher used some study tools including a social skills questionnaire (SSQ), a pre-/post critical reading skills test (CRST), reading circles role