



Critical Reading Experiences by Emirati 11th Grade Students with Regard to Bloom's Taxonomy

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate critical reading as experienced by Emirati 11th grade students in public high schools. A quantitative study was utilized in order to answer both research questions posed in the study. A questionnaire was used to collect data from a large number of 11th grade students ($n=645$) concerning their critical reading experiences. The results of this study suggested that these students make use of some basic critical reading skills, but that they did not use any of the higher order critical reading skills. The study recommends a reconceptualization of teaching strategies and assessment in order to encourage and promote critical reading.

Keywords: Critical reading, Critical thinking, Bloom's Taxonomy, Higher order thinking skills

INTRODUCTION

Reading is the backbone of proficiency in any language. It is a basic yet vital skill for 21st Century learners, as academic success, whether locally or globally, depends on one's reading skills and ability. Fadlallah (2016) believed that, "all our knowledge is increased through reading" (p. 2). Several theories, models and guiding frameworks have emerged to explain reading processes in English, and how they operate from social, cognitive, cultural and psycholinguist standpoints. One of the most interesting views is that found under the umbrella of Critical Theory, which sees reading as an interactive process between the reader and the text during which the reader digs deeper and moves beyond surface level features to work out underlying assumptions or hidden messages. It is a process, in which higher-order thinking skills are involved as the reader attempts to evaluate, analyse, reason and judge textual meaning (Alvermann, Unrau & Ruddell, 2013).

Critical literacy is vital if students are going to function effectively in the digital age; an age where they are being exposed to an incessant flow of ideas and information, all of

which requires assessment, evaluation, questioning, and making judgments on the validity of information and/ or contradictory opinions. To do this, students need higher-order thinking skills and must continuously seek to build their critical thinking skills through reading and learning in different subject areas, from pre-school up to university level and beyond (Hughes, 2014). In the same vein, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners need to be critical readers, writers and thinkers. They must be able to apply their acquired knowledge, and not just memorize and regurgitate what they have learned. For example, Kabilan (2000) argued that proficiency in a language is not just using the language or knowing the meanings of the words, but being able to think critically and creatively in and through that language.

However, despite the advocacy of scholars, teachers and decision makers to better equip students with the key elements of critical literacy – so they can analyse, evaluate, synthesize and think deeply about any written text – EFL/ ESL students around the world appear to lack sufficient critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Unfortunately, students in the UAE are no exception (Abo Salem, 2016; Ridge, Kipples & Farah, 2017; Warner, Jonathan & Burton, 2017). Consequently, a large number of students get low marks for tasks, activities and in tests that require critical reading and higher thinking skills (Choy & Cheah, 2009; Macknish, 2011; Snyder & Snyder, 2008; Stapleton, 2008).

The purpose of this research is to determine the critical reading experiences of Emirati 11th grade students who are learning English as a foreign language. Therefore, we posed the following research questions:

1. What do 11th grade students report about their critical reading experiences in English?
2. Which type of reading practices do 11th grade students experience more often, with regard to Bloom's Taxonomy?

Context of the Study

This study was conducted in public high schools operating under a mandate from the UAE Ministry of Education and implementing an English curriculum designed by Cambridge University. The medium of instructions in all public high schools is Arabic, but English is promoted as a second language. Public education in UAE is free to all citizens under the age of 18. Recently the UAE Ministry of Education has integrated English medium instruction into Math and Science classes in public schools following the Al Nokhba program. This is an advanced science program, which was rolled out as part of a new education plan. It has been implemented in thirteen schools and encompasses 1,600 outstanding students (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Eleventh grade students in the UAE start to learn English in kindergarten, and thus it is to be expected that they will develop a good base in language competency. However, despite these educational reforms, aimed at improving student performance and preparing them for higher education institutions, research (O'Sullivan, 2004; Al Noursi, 2014; Ridge et al., 2017) has revealed that UAE high school students are not reaching a sufficient level of proficiency. This makes it difficult for them to enter higher education institutions as they lack the basic language skills and critical literacy skills required to

perform adequately in higher education. Al Noursi (2014) suggested that UAE students lack basic language skills such as reading, which makes it hard for them to pursue their higher education studies with any degree of success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Being a critical reader is not a choice anymore, but an imperative to function in the world today. Students with critical reading skills will be much better prepared for higher-level studies (Macknish, 2011). Similarly, Kabilan (2000) argues that proficiency in language is not just using words or knowing their meaning, but also being able to think critically and creatively in and through that language. Critical reading is an individual skill that allows for many different interpretations of a text, ideas or written passages (Wallace & Wray, 2016). It is a skill where the reader demonstrates an ability to analyse and evaluate a text, and relate what one reads to other information (Wallace & Wray, 2016). It is about questioning the facts, weighing evidence and assessing the meaning conveyed by the authors (Wallace & Wray, 2016). Critical reading is evaluating, inferring, and interpreting textual meaning to get a more in-depth understanding of the text and move beyond surface level meaning (Lewis, Macgregor & Jones, 2018). According to Freire (1983), "reading always involves critical perception, interpretation and rewriting what is read" (p. 11). For Freire (1983), critical reading enables students to read and understand the world, it also enables students to connect to their own world experiences at a deeper level, as well as explore their beliefs, fears, values and tastes. Critical reading goes beyond memorizing facts. Other scholars, such as Patesan et al. (2014), define critical reading as active engagement with a text, where the reader communicates with the text in order to understand the flow of information and so create a systematic schema of knowledge. Macknish (2011) defined critical reading as "a social practice that engages the readers' critical stance and is shaped by the different understanding people have of it in different contexts" (p. 445). There is a strong link between critical reading and critical thinking. Critical reading is a skill where the reader can apply critical thinking practices such as reasoning, questioning facts, and inferring meaning from a text (Junining, 2013, p. 10). Critical reading can only come about when the higher order thinking skills are engaged (Ciorcki, David, Gupta & Dala, 2008). Freebody and Luke (1990) asserted that in the critical reading process readers are mainly divided into four roles: 1) as a code breaker: this refers to the ability to access the sounds and written symbols of English. In other words, being able to decode the various elements of a sentence. 2) As a participant in the text: this refers to being engaged in the meaning system of a text by relating textual elements to background knowledge in order to draw new inferences. 3) As a user of the text: this refers to the reader developing the resources to participate in social activities related to the written text. 4) As a textual analyst: having the ability to analyse and uncover hidden ideologies, depositions and orientations from within the text.

With technology rapidly evolving, critical reading has become even more necessary for students who have to deal with a huge number of electronic resources as their primary source of information. Consequently, critical reading allows students to question what they are reading as well as evaluate the information for accuracy, clarity, depth and fairness (Chris, 2005). Kay (1956) contended that critical reading enabled students to

discriminate between true, completely fabricated or slightly coloured information. (Abd-Kadir, Subki, Jamal & Ismail, 2014) highlight the importance of critical reading. They believed that it helped students to analyse, synthesize, evaluate and draw references. It also enabled students to survive and perform well in the real world, real life and in their future territory. Additionally, it helped students to think more widely and become active learners who can challenge the author's views and come up with valid arguments by themselves instead of being merely passive learners. Moreover, Abd-Kabir et al., (2014) suggested that students, who developed a critical stance toward a text, gained a deeper understanding and comprehension of the overall meaning. In addition, critical reading can expand awareness and understanding of different genres and discourses that might be encountered in any written text.

These claims emphasize the importance of critical reading as a vital resource for students who must survive and seek to perform well in the world. Furthermore, critical readers have a more active role in creating and producing knowledge, instead of just being consumers of that knowledge.

Critical Pedagogy

A major figure who contributed most to critical pedagogy was Paulo Freire. He challenged what he called 'Banking Models' of learning, where knowledge and bits of information were 'deposited' in learners' minds (Wallace, 2003). Freire presented knowledge as collective and as being continuously created and produced through searching, reflecting and making sense of the world. He emphasized that knowledge was not individually owned but was a collective product (Wallace, 2003).

Critical pedagogy in language teaching started to take shape in late 1970s with such approaches as 'Hallidayan linguistics' which was heavily inspired and influenced by Freire's critical approach. This new movement shifted the focus from how language is mediated or shaped through grammar, to looking at the content of the message in order to become more empowered and to better understand the social and political circumstances surrounding oneself (Wallace, 2003).

Through critical pedagogy, priority is given to experiential language, which is closer to the learner's everyday experiences, culture and background, than a purely theoretical approach. The main tools in critical pedagogy are the students' voice, their thoughts and opinions. These are re-contextualized to match the students' own experiences and influence their interpretation of different social acts (Wallace, 2003). The main principals of critical pedagogy aim to help students to reconceptualise and to appreciate different views and phenomena in new ways. That is why this pedagogy presents knowledge as global and not just local. Another principle of critical pedagogy is to empower students, and prepare them for a wider struggle. Critical pedagogy is aware of differing ideologies and allows learners to take action and respond in light of a critical stance rather than simply being passive consumers of different circumstances. Additionally, critical pedagogy is based on commonality and not on differences. Despite an emphasis on marginalized and oppressed groups and their rights, critical pedagogy seeks to bridge the gap between the oppressed and non-oppressed groups in any given society and seeks to

reconcile contradictory views by finding common ground. Thus, it is based on fixing boundaries rather than dismantling them (Wallace, 2003).

Bloom's Taxonomy

One valuable model, which has been drawn on, by a number of scholars (Airasian, Cruikshank, Mayer, Pintrich, Raths & Wittrock, 2000; Anderson, Krathwohl & Bloom, 2001; Krathwohl, 2002; Sousa, 2006) is Bloom's Taxonomy. This model is regarded as a useful "framework for classifying statements of what we expect or intend students to learn as a result of instruction" (Anderson et al., 2001, p. 212). Bloom's Taxonomy has been seen as more than a tool for measurement. It serves as a common language between educators as they define the learning goals necessary for developing and enhancing thinking skills. This taxonomy is a good platform for planning and evaluating classroom activities, instruction and assessments (Sousa, 2006).

As above, Bloom Taxonomy can be defined as a framework for classifying learning objectives by detailing what we expect our students to learn and acquire as the result of our instruction (Krathwohl, 2002). Benjamin Bloom developed this framework in 1956 (Sousa, 2006). The initial goal of this framework was to facilitate the construction of test items and create a bank of such items. Each item each measured a specific educational objective (Krathwohl, 2002). The framework consists of six major categories ordered from simple to more complex, and from concrete to more abstract. The categories are knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Krathwohl, 2002, p. 1).

Bloom's Taxonomy is a practical and easy model for teachers who wish to promote higher order thinking skills (Sousa, 2006). Several studies have found that teachers who used Bloom's Taxonomy as a basis for planning, instruction and assessment achieved better learning outcomes than those that did not. Thus, it is recommended that teachers use open-ended questions and continuously encourage their students to evaluate, analyse, and synthesize as they develop higher order thinking skills (Sousa, 2006). However, research shows that most teachers only work on one kind of cognitive processing during their instruction and assessment, and that is memorization. Memorization is represented on the lower level of thinking skills in Bloom's Taxonomy (Airasian et al., 2000). Thus, many teachers have difficulty in teaching and assessing such higher order thinking skills and do not encourage their students to analyse, evaluate and synthesize information, and so retard the ability to use the learned or acquired knowledge.

METHOD

A quantitative method was adopted in order to investigate the critical reading practices experienced by 11th grade students in UAE public high schools.

Participants

The participants in this study were 11th grade students (n=645) in UAE public high schools. They were informed about the purpose of the study and its procedures. Furthermore, confidentiality was guaranteed and identities were not revealed. In the

final report, pseudonyms were used for all the participants. Moreover, all the details and the purpose of the study were clearly explained.

Instruments

The study was quantitative in nature, and a critical reading questionnaire was used to investigate 11th grade students critical reading experiences in English. Questionnaires are quantitative research instruments that gather data as well as describe human interests, concerns, behaviors and preferences about a particular issue (Ponto, 2015). The questionnaire was self-developed and intended to explore student experiences with critical reading in English Language class. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert Scale, ranging from a high score of 5 (= always) to a low of 1 (= never). Other responses were 2 (= rarely), 3 (= sometimes) and 4 (= usually). The questionnaire incorporated six levels from Bloom's hierarchical taxonomy. These were, from lower to higher levels, knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Each part of the questionnaire had five statements aimed at reflecting the reading practices experienced by these students in their English Language reading classes. This is illustrated in Table1:

Table 1. The questionnaire

Category	Items	Alpha
Knowledge: My teacher asks us to:		
K1	Recall what we have already read.	
K2	List some ideas or information of what we have read.	
K3	Name some processes in expository text.	
K4	Find some information from our reading.	0.71
K5	Describe events in narratives.	
Comprehension: My teacher asks us to:		
C1	Explain some terms, events, theories, phenomenon, etc. in text.	
C2	Interpret some terms, key concepts and deep ideas in text.	
C3	Highlight and outline some major ideas in text.	
C4	Restate texts information in our own words.	0.86
C5	Demonstrate our comprehension by choosing true/ false options.	
Application: My teacher asks us to:		
A1	Find some solutions for problems found in texts.	
A2	Illustrate major concepts in texts by using graphic organizer.	
A3	Classify information found in the texts in categories.	
A4	Construct general understanding and relate it to other readings.	0.75
A5	Fill in missing information in closed text.	

Analysis: My teacher asks us to:		
N1	Identify and devise the underlying themes in a text.	
N2	Explain relationships among ideas in a text.	
N3	Investigate other possible and alternatives ideas in a text.	
N4	Compare and contrast information from our reading text.	0.76
N5	Analyze, examine and scrutinize some ideas in a text.	
2. Synthesis: My teacher asks us to:		
S1	Create a whole conceptual map from our reading.	
S2	Predict or imagine a thread of possible ideas or events from a text.	
S3	Design creative writing materials gleaned from our reading.	
S4	Juxtapose ideas or information in text to form a major concept.	0.69
S5	Formulate a creative or innovative concept of reading materials.	
6. Evaluation: My teacher asks us to:		
E1	Assess different arguments in expository text.	
E2	Justify and come up with evidences to support our argument.	
E3	Verify sources of information in texts to validate our ideas.	
E4	Evaluate and scrutinize different contradictory ideas.	0.82
E5	Deliberate and discuss issues/opinions in a text to find solutions.	
All Items Cronbach's Alpha		0.90

Reliability and Validity

In order to ensure the validity of the questionnaire it was clear with easily readable questions. The layout and sequence of questions made it comparatively easy for participants to read, understand and respond. The items were formulated in order to match the stated aims of the research questions. This is important, as the validity of the research instrument depends on the extent to which the instrument can provide answers to the research questions (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Moreover, a pilot study was administered to 48 participants (20 males; and 28 females) who met the demographic criteria required.

The accuracy of the translation was confirmed via a back translation from Arabic to English. This was reviewed by Arabic, translation and linguistics professors at UAE University, as well as by the research advisor.

As we used a Likert scale, it was necessary to calculate a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to ascertain the internal reliability of the various scales and sub-scales included on the questionnaire (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Thereafter, reliability was addressed through the Cronbach's Alpha degree of significance, which we measured through the Statistics

Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The Cronbach's Alpha internal reliability coefficient demonstrated an internal reliability of 0.9, thus suggesting a high degree of reliability. Additionally, the means for each category ranged from 0.68 and 0.82 (see Table 2).

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha Reliability

Category	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Knowledge	0.71	5
Comprehension	0.86	5
Application	0.75	5
Analysis	0.76	5
Synthesis	0.69	5
Evaluation	0.82	5
All items	0.90	30

Data Collection Process

In order to answer the research questions a sample of 645 student participants completed the questionnaire. This was from an initial pool of 800 students in public schools (cycle 3) across the nation. The participants were chosen via random selection. Random selection ensures that whatever you find out about the sample can be generalized to the population from which it was taken, as well as allowing for a set possibility of potential error (Creswell & Clark, 2011). The Ministry of Education sent the questionnaire to 30 public high schools under its supervision. Around 14 out of the 30 schools responded to this request and distributed and returned the questionnaire. Nevertheless, some schools did not take part. Consequently, in order to improve the response rate, the researcher personally distributed (and collected) the instrument in 16 other schools in different Emirates. All the participants were briefed on the purpose of the research, and given the opportunity to ask any questions they may have had. Therefore, in the end, the questionnaire was distributed in six of the UAE's seven Emirates: Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Um Al Quwain, Ras Al-Khaima, and Fujairah.

The participants were all 11th grade students enrolled in public high schools. The questionnaire was distributed almost equally among male and female students, with 311 (48%) male students compared to 334 (52%) female.

Data Analysis

The data received was analysed via a descriptive analysis using the SPSS software. Since the questionnaire was divided into six categories, all according to Bloom's Taxonomy, the mean and standard deviations for each respective category were calculated. The minimum score for each questionnaire item was (1=never), and the maximum score was (5= always). The overall results are illustrated in Table 3 (below), and Figure 1. This

included the mean scores and standard deviation for each of the six hierarchical categories of Bloom's Taxonomy.

RESULTS

The questionnaire used Bloom's Taxonomy in order to analyse six hierarchically arranged levels of cognitive ability. These started from the lower level and ascended to the highest. Thus, going from knowledge through comprehension, application, analysis and synthesis to, ultimately, evaluation.

Table 3. Student Reports on General Categories on the CR Questionnaire (n=645)

Category	M	SD
Knowledge	3.63	1.10
Comprehension	3.78	1.08
Application	3.10	1.23
Analysis	2.98	1.14
Synthesis	2.53	1.27
Evaluation	2.74	1.24
Total Mean	3.12	1.18

Table 3, and Figure 1, show the mean scores and standard deviation for the six levels of Bloom's taxonomy, in terms of the 11th Grade students self-reporting of their critical reading practices.

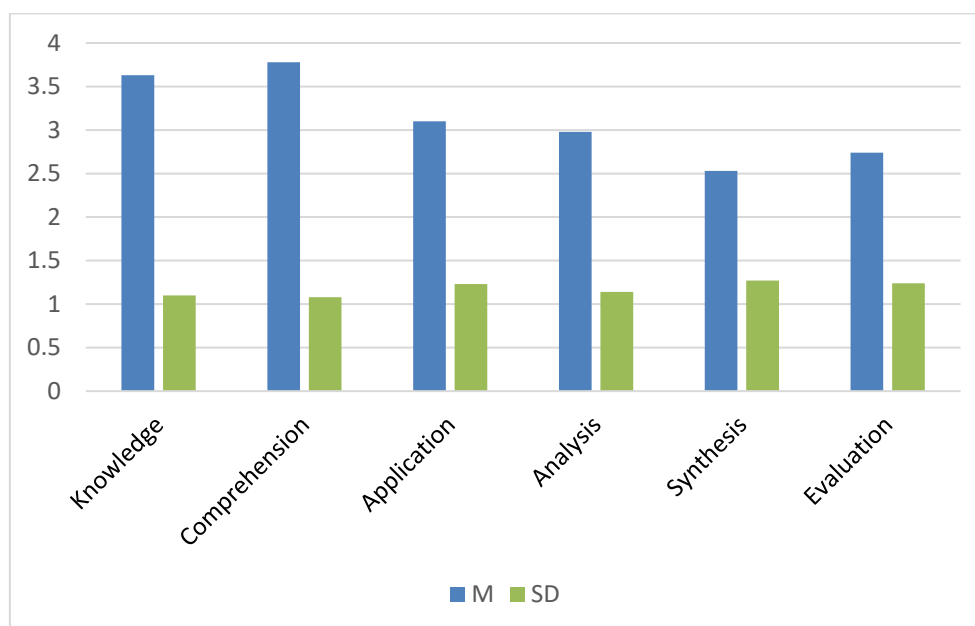


Figure 1. Student Reports on General Categories in the CR Questionnaire (n=645)

Moreover, paired samples t-tests were carried out to look for statistically significant differences between these ratings. Significant differences were obtained between all the levels. The t-test results are shown in Table 4. When we examine the mean scores, it is clear that there is a significant difference between the lower level categories and the upper level categories. For instance, Table 3 indicates a significant difference between the knowledge category ($M=3.63$; $SD=1.10$), the analysis category ($M=2.98$; $SD=1.14$); ($t=17.56$, $df=636$, $p<0.001$), the synthesis category ($M=2.53$; $SD=1.27$); ($t=29.48$, $df=639$, $p<0.001$), and the evaluation category ($M=2.74$; $SD=1.24$); ($t=21.53$, $df=643$, $p<0.001$).

At the same time, significant differences could be observed between the comprehension category ($M=3.78$, $SD=1.10$), the analysis category ($M=2.96$; $SD=1.14$); ($t=21.75$, $df=635$, $p<0.001$), synthesis ($M=2.53$; $SD=1.24$); ($t=32.75$, $df=638$, $p<0.001$), and evaluation ($M=2.74$; $SD=1.27$); ($t=24.65$, $df=642$, $p<0.001$).

Finally, significant differences were also obvious between application ($M=3.10$; $SD=1.23$), analysis ($M=2.96$; $SD=1.14$); ($t=4.43$, $df=633$, $p<0.001$), synthesis ($M=2.53$; $SD=1.24$); ($t=19.23$, $df=636$, $p<0.001$), and evaluation ($M=2.74$; $SD=1.27$); ($t=11.62$, $df=640$, $p<0.001$).

Table 4. Results of a T-test Analysis Examining Differences between the Six Levels

Level Comparison	T-test
Knowledge cf. Comprehension	$t=6.23$, $df=643$, $p<0.001$
Knowledge cf. Application	$t=16.13$, $df=641$, $p<0.001$
Knowledge cf. Analysis	$t=17.56$, $df=636$, $p<0.001$
Knowledge cf. Synthesis	$t=29.48$, $df=639$, $p<0.001$
Knowledge cf. Evaluation	$t=21.53$, $df=643$, $p<0.001$
Comprehension cf. Application	$t=20.66$, $df=640$, $p<0.001$
Comprehension cf. Analysis	$t=21.75$, $df=635$, $p<0.001$
Comprehension cf. Synthesis	$t=32.75$, $df=638$, $p<0.001$
Comprehension cf. Evaluation	$t=24.65$, $df=642$, $p<0.001$
Application cf. Analysis	$t=4.43$, $df=633$, $p<0.001$
Application cf. Synthesis	$t=19.23$, $df=636$, $p<0.001$
Application cf. Evaluation	$t=11.62$, $df=640$, $p<0.001$
Analysis cf. Synthesis	$t=15.23$, $df=632$, $p<0.001$
Analysis cf. Evaluation	$t=8.08$, $df=636$, $p<0.001$
Synthesis cf. Evaluation	$t=7.00$, $df=639$, $p<0.001$

In summary, the quantitative results can be seen in Tables 3, 4, and Figure 1. The category with the highest mean score overall was comprehension ($M=3.78$, $SD=1.10$), followed by knowledge ($M=3.63$; $SD=1.08$), application ($M=3.10$; $SD=1.23$), analysis ($M=2.96$;

SD=1.14), synthesis (M=2.53; SD=1.24) and evaluation (M=2.74; SD=1.27). T-tests were carried out on all the levels in order to look for statistically significant differences between these ratings. We discovered significant differences between all the respective levels.

DISCUSSION

The questionnaire data indicated that the majority of 11th grade students had a very shallow experience of critical reading practices. They did little in terms of higher order thinking skills such as those at the upper end of Bloom's Taxonomy. For example, the 11th grade students reported higher mean scores for activities and practices on the lower levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (M=3.50, SD=1.09). Furthermore, the results of the T-tests revealed significant differences between all the different rating scales. This indicates that reading practices in their English classes tended to engage only lower order thinking skills, requiring nothing more than the recognition of facts and the identification of specific information through memorization and rote learning. This finding is in line with a study by Taleb and Chadwick (2016) who posited that education in the Middle East still emphasized rote learning and viewed critical literacy as challenging and problematic, especially in English language classes. Therefore, teachers preferred to use conventional learning strategies within a conventional education system, with an emphasis on more traditional pedagogic approaches. Additionally, Mozafari and Brajesteh (2016) found that despite the emphasis placed on the importance of developing critical reading skills, English teachers tended to focus on lower level question types, which served to activate only lower level cognitive skills (see Bloom's Taxonomy). These skills were restricted to remembering, understanding and application. Similarly, Choy and Cheah (2009) conducted a study investigating teacher perceptions of critical thinking in the language classroom and found that the majority of teachers were solely focused on the comprehension of subject content, and appeared to lack a clear understanding of critical thinking approaches to education.

In the context of the UAE, studies by Abo-Salem (2004), Dakkak (2010) and Ridge et al., (2017) have asserted that teachers in the UAE tend to focus on lower level thinking skills and that assessment procedures emphasize memorization and rote learning. Thus, they do not develop their students' critical thinking skills.

These 11th grade students recorded low mean scores for practices on the upper levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (M=2.75, SD=1.21), and a significant difference was also apparent between the lower levels (knowledge, comprehension and application) and the upper levels of analysis, synthesis and evaluation). This indicates that reading practices requiring analysis, synthesis and evaluation are mostly ignored in English class and that the students had, at best, a superficial experience of critical reading approaches. This is in line with studies by Coirki et al. (2015), Dakkak (2010), Stapleton (2008d), Rezaei, Derakhshan and Bagherkazemi, (2011), Ridge et al., (2017) and Yee (2007) that have studied the implementation of critical reading in different parts of the world. For instance, a study by Stapleton (2008) investigating the implementation of higher order thinking skills by Japanese ESL students found that the students were successful in

identifying facts but less successful in extracting big ideas, or thinking about content critically. Similarly, Yee (2007) conducted a study in Hong Kong secondary schools and found that critical literacy was neglected in ESL classrooms. Additionally, Rezaei et al., (2011) found that teachers in language classrooms rarely used inferential questioning to stimulate thinking processes.

These claims emphasize that critical literacy is still neglected in English language education as the focus of the ESL/ EFL field is on developing basic language skills such as vocabulary development and grammar knowledge through a bottom-up approach, rather than aiming for critical literacy and a top-down approach to reading.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of such studies, it is recommended that teachers seek a balance between low-level and high-level questioning when teaching reading. They should use more open-ended questions to provoke analytical and critical reading and also promote higher order thinking skills. Moreover, this study has suggested a variety of strategies for introducing critical literacy practices into English language classes regardless of the students' level. Nam (2013) stated that, "teachers can apply practical strategies taking in to account factors such as grade level, student interests or English proficiency levels" (p. 201). Similarly, Macknish (2011) and Taglieger (2003) have suggested that critical thinking must, and can, be taught to students, and it is the responsibility of schools and teachers to develop the ability of students to read and think critically.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Throughout this study, female students were observed as employing more critical reading strategies than their male counterparts did. Therefore, a comparative study investigating the different implementation of critical reading strategies by both male and female students (perhaps in gender-segregated schools) could well prove to be a fruitful avenue for research. Moreover, a qualitative, rather than quantitative, study could help us to gain a deeper understanding of critical reading experiences in a UAE context, and explore students', as well as teachers', views on critical reading practices in English.

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