



New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences



Issue 7 (2016) 100-106

Selected paper of 3rd Global Conference on Linguistics and Foreign Language Teaching (LINELT 2015) 16-18 November 2015, Istanbul University, Istanbul – Turkey

The Effects of Generating Questions and Raising Discussion on L2 Critical Reading

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Suggested Citation:

Arabian, N., Fazilatfar, A.M. & Anoshe, S.M. (2016). The Effects of Generating Questions and Raising Discussion on L2 Critical Reading. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*. [Online]. 07, pp 100-106. Available from: www.prosoc.eu

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Ali Rahimi, University of Bangkok
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Abstract

The current study seeks to explore the effects of generating questions and raising discussion, on the improvement of critical reading of English learners. 53 participants were divided into 3 groups, one control group and two experimental groups. For one experimental group the strategy of question generation was selected and for the other the strategy of raising discussion. After conducting the pre-test, the instructional session and the post-test, the writings of the learners were scored by two raters. ANOVA was the selected test. Result indicated that the two strategies have positive impact on the enhancement of critical reading of the participants ($F_{2, 50} = 26.491, p = .0001 < .05$). The study has some implications for language instructors and material developers to assist promoting critical reading and critical thinking of the EFL learners.

Keywords: critical thinking; critical reading; Questioning; discussion;

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1. Introduction

Thinking deeply and critically is an essential skill for educational and non-educational settings. There is desperate need for powerful thinking in this challenging, threatening and changing world (Paul and Elder, 2002; Halpern, 2003). Each person in any field should be able to think well and language learning is a field of study which is not an exception. In language learning, reading is one of the important skills, so it is very important to help the learners improve their ability to read and comprehend a text. In teaching reading different aspects should be considered, and among them is to teach learners how to get the most out of their reading, one way to accomplish this end is to ask students to read a text and respond to it critically. However unfortunately this great opportunity to raise the ability of thinking of students is ignored in the EFL classrooms by many teachers and instructors, one reason of this ignorance perhaps is that a few researches were conducted in this field and the importance of it was not proved to teachers and instructors of language learning. Or According to Akbari "critical idea is out of schools' curricula by social forces controlling education and society." (Akbari, 2008). Whatever the reason, the particular contribution of reading comprehension strategies towards critical thinking and also literally reading in the foreign and second language have remained unaddressed. This paper attempts to fill this gap, to this end the impact of reading literal short stories in the second language with two reading comprehension strategies on critical reading and critical thinking of learners is examined. The strategy of generating questions and raising discussion are chosen as two powerful strategies for conducting the research.

1.1. Research questions

1. Will reading strategy of generating questions result in the enhancement of critical reading of literal short stories of the EFL learners?
2. Will reading strategy of raising discussion and debate result in the enhancement of critical reading of literal short stories of EFL learners?
3. Which strategy is more effective in the enhancement of critical reading of literal short stories of EFL learners, generating questions or raising discussion and debate?

2. Review of literature

There are different definitions for critical thinking by different scholars, Paul and Elder (2008) claimed that critical thinking is an art which is very valuable, on the other hand Shoddy thinking has some negative consequences for the quality of life. Vallis (2010) put it more simply and defined it as the cognitive ability of paying attention to the way that thinking take place when questions are asked and answers are received. In these definitions critical thinking is an ability that should be acquired. Critical thinking is also important in education, Lu (2013) believed that critical thinking is an essential and needed competence that university students should acquire. He claimed that in a foreign language class including critical thinking is easy since "A foreign language is believed to empower students to expand their worldview and live in a more diverse society." (Lu, 2013). Khatib and Alizade (2012) in their study examined the type of reading material on the enhancement of critical thinking. They concluded that literary texts due to their richness in inferring and reasoning improve both critical thinking and reading comprehension ability. Paul and Elder (2005) mentioned that it is essential for a good thinker to be a powerful questioner; they believe that as much as fresh questions are generated, different fields of studies and disciplines survive to be alive and on the absence of questions they will die. Rosenshine, Meister and Chapman (1996) investigated through 26 studies that were conducted to see the effect of "cognitive strategy" of generating questions on improving the comprehension of students. The result of their review indicated that the studies showed a gain in comprehension when this strategy was used. Urlaub (2012) also conducted a research on the effect of generating questions on the improvement of critical thinking on 22 German learners. He divided them into two groups one experimental and one control group. The treatment for the control group was transmission of factual

knowledge. For the experimental group in order to help students to acquire questioning skills an e-learning tool was used. The result of his study indicated that question generation improved critical thinking of the participants. Halverson (2005) believed that Debate encourages students to think about the different sides of an issue and it also forces them to interact both with the details of a given topic and with one another. On researching the impact of teaching critical thinking on Iranian EFL learners Fahim and Sa'eepour (2011) tested the use of debate as one of the strategies of critical thinking. They selected some topics from different books and used them in the classroom as a debate tool, however the result of their study did not indicated a significance improvement in the critical thinking of the learners. On the other hand the reading comprehension of the learners did improved significantly.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

In this study there were 53 advanced and upper-intermediate language learners. The participants were randomly divided in three groups, two experimental and one control group, the learners took part in a pre-test and a post-test which were the same for all three groups. There was an instructional session applying the reading strategy of generating questions for one experimental group and the reading strategy of raising discussion and debate for the other experimental group. For the control group just some information about short stories and elements of them were given to the learners.

3.2. Materials

An oxford placement test was used to show the students' level and three short stories were given to students which were: The Ninny by Anton Chekhov, the story of an hour by Kate Chopin and the cat in the rain by Ernest Hemingway, which are critically challenging. For rating the scores of pre-test and post-test the Bloom's rubric was used, which was adopted from Urlaub (2012).

3.3. Data collection procedure

3.3.1. pre-test

The pre-test of the story was the same for all the participants in this study. In a 90-minute session the story The Ninny by Anton Chekhov was given to students and they read the story and then they were asked to write a short summary and a critical analysis of the story.

3.3.2. treatment

In the instructional session the short story the story of an hour was given to students but two different reading strategies were applied for the two experimental groups. However for both groups first some simple but crucial elements of short stories such as character, setting, plot and conflict were briefly taught. For the control group just some information about story reading and elements of short story was given.

3.3.3. post-test

The post-test was the same as the pre-test. The short story the cat in the rain by Ernest Hemingway was given to all three groups of learners and after reading it the students were asked to write a short summary and a critical analysis of the story.

3.4. Scoring and analysis procedure

For the scoring of the tests two raters who were familiar with the literally texts and how to criticize and analyze them scored the tests. The raters were not aware whether the interpretation of the stories were written before or after the treatment and also they were not informed if the subjects were a member of experimental groups or the control group. Raters were asked to score the writings according to the rubric introduced by Bloom and they were asked to score holistically according to their experience and intuition. An inter rater reliability analysis using the Kappa statistic was performed to determine consistency among raters. For the analysis of the data, the performance of all the tree groups in both pre-test and post-test and the scores received by the two rater were compared through One-Way ANOVAs. The independent variable was the three groups of the learners and the dependent variables were the scores of their pre-test and post-test.

4. Results

4.1. Inter rater reliability

Two raters scored 106 essays, 53 pre-test and 53 post-test essays. Each of the participants' two essays received a score between 0 and 3 based on the rating rubric. The inter-rater reliability was assessed through Cohen's kappa coefficient and it was found to be $K = 0.60$ with $p < 0.001$. According to the standards defined by Landis and Koch (1977) this value indicates substantial inter-rater reliability and suggests the design of the rating scale and the rater training was desirable.

4.2. Pre-test results

In order to check if there was any significance difference across the three groups of learners One-way ANOVA was conducted and the participants' scores of the pre-test were checked through it. The mean score of the three groups were not very different. Mean score of the first experimental group that was the group with the strategy of discussion and debate was the highest ($M = .28$, $SD = .461$). The mean score for the control group ($M = .26$, $SD = .452$), and for the second experimental group that was the group with the strategy of generating questions was the lowest ($M = .19$, $SD = .403$). There was no significance difference across the three groups, so the three groups of participants were homogeneous prior to the experiment. The result of the one way ANOVA revealed that all the three groups were homogeneous and there was not any significance difference among them ($F_{2, 50} = .202$, $p = .818 > .05$). table 1 indicates the result.

Table 1. ANOVA Results of the 3 groups in the pre-test

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Between Groups	.078	2	.039	.202	.818
Within Groups	9.733	50	.195		

4.3. Post-test results

After the experience and implementation of the post-test in order to see the performance of participants on the post-test another one-way ANOVA was performed and the differences across the

groups were examined. According to the Descriptive statistics the mean score for the experimental group with the strategy of generating questions was the highest (M= 1.88 SD= .619), the mean score for the experimental group with the strategy of raising discussion and debate was (M= .83 SD=.786), and the mean score for the control group was the lowest (M= .32 SD=.478). As it is illustrated in the below table it is clear that the experimental group with the strategy of generating questions outperformed the other two groups, it is also evident that the group with the strategy of raising discussion and debate acted better than the control group. The result of the post-test provided by one-way ANOVA indicated that there is a significance difference across the three groups of participants since the main effect of the groups is statistically significant ($F_{2,50} = 26.491, p = .0001 < .05$).

Table 2. ANOVA Results of the 3 groups in the post-test

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Between Groups	21.569	2	10.785	26.491	.000
Within Groups	20.355	50	.407		

To see where the differences lay the Bonferroni post-hoc test was employed. The results of this analysis are shown in table 3.

Table 3. Bonferroni test results of the 3 groups post-test

	(I) group	(J) group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Bonferroni	experimental-debate	experimental-questioning	-1.042*	.219	.000
		control	.518	.210	.051
	experimental-questioning	experimental-debate	1.042*	.219	.000
		control	1.559*	.216	.000
	control	experimental-debate	-.518	.210	.051
		experimental-questioning	-1.559*	.216	.000

According to the post-hoc results the difference between the two experimental group is significant ($p = .000 < .05$), the difference between the question generation group and control group is also significant ($p = .000 < .05$), however the difference between the debate group and control group is not very significant ($p = .051 > .05$).

5. Conclusion and discussion

The results of the quantitative analysis indicate that the performance of all participants improved between the pre-test and the post-test stages. The treatment of both experimental groups and the control group led to enhancement of the critical thinking of the participants. The similarity between

the pre-test and post-test design may had some effect on the better performance of the participants in the post-test, however the improvement was not equal for the three groups. The experimental groups outperformed the control group and this is indicative of the effectiveness of the reading strategies. According to the results of data analysis, strategy of question generation will improve critical thinking and reading of the learners. This finding is in line with Urlaub (2012). When students ask questions about a text and try to answer these questions they are involved with the text, the more they ask questions, the more they get involve and this involvement with the text engage them to the process of thinking. Discussing about short stories and having debate about them also ends in the enhancement of critical reading of the EFL learners. Fahim and Sa'eepour (2011) also concluded that the debater has a small improvement in their critical thinking. Discussing about things and hearing different ideas on them will help opening the mind even if one has got a dogmatic personality that is close to different opinions. As it was shown in the previous chapter the strategy of question generation has led to a better result than the strategy of raising discussion and debate. The reason can be that, questioning is an activity that involves more thinking than discussing. Questions usually lead to more questions and the process of answering them needs more thinking and involvement, besides when learners try to ask questions for both asking and answering questions they should refer to the text and read some parts of it and this rereading may lead to more understanding, some unknowns or hidden parts or details that were ignored in the first reading may be revealed in rereading a text, however when learners discuss a text they do not refer back to it a lot and try to discuss the parts they understood in the first reading and ignore the details and the parts they have difficulty reading. They just try to give some personal ideas about the texts and do not involve in reading beyond the text so they do not engage in thinking as much as the questioning group do. Using literary texts also, as Khatib and Alizade (2012) concluded in their study, can promote critical thinking. Both strategies had some positive impact on the improvement of critical reading of the learners, however the use of question generation is more recommended since it was proved to be more effective. So language instructors and material developers can take these result into consideration and by merging these strategies and also literal short stories into books and classrooms help learners in enhancing critical reading and critical thinking.

Appendix

Rating Rubric by Bloom

0 The essay is a summary of the text. The essay paraphrases the text's content. The learner shows no motivation or ability to analyze the meaning of characters, items, events, locations or formal features of the text.

1 The essay is an interpretation, but the interaction between text and reader lacks depth. It only presents one possibility to understand the text, and it understands this interpretation as the only right answer. The learner may also argue based on ideas that have been rehearsed in the classroom many times before. Obvious misreadings occur due to linguistic difficulties and the lack of cultural background knowledge.

2 The essay is an interpretation that provides a thoughtful analysis of the text. Multiple positions are considered. The interpretation is based partly on the student's original thoughts and does not merely reproduce previous classroom discussions. However, the writer neither compares or contrasts the multiple perspectives nor makes a commitment to one interpretation. Fewer obvious misreadings occur, and these are rarely due to linguistic difficulties, but rather to the lack of cultural background knowledge.

3 The essay is an interpretation that provides a thoughtful analysis of the text. Multiple perspectives are assumed, which are partly based on the student's original thoughts. The writer is also able to contrast these perspectives and shows commitment to his interpretation. Very few or no obvious misreadings occur.

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