REVISTA ESPACIOS

Coherence of critical reading skills and teacher training development

Coherencia de las habilidades de lectura crítica y desarrollo de la formación docente

AFANASJEVA, Olga [1]
FEDOTOVA, Marina [2]
SMIRNOVA, Marina [3]

Abstract
The study presents critical reading as a specific type of learning activity in education. The focus of the research is on the content and structure of critical reading process aimed at the development of critical reading skills as one of the objectives of professional training in pedagogical universities with much attention paid to the ways students and teachers conceptualize this phenomenon. The authors advance some ideas concerning the scope of critical reading skills as part of teacher' professional competence.
Key words: reading, critical reading, critical reading skills, text, text analysis, teacher's professional competence.

Resumen
El estudio presenta la lectura crítica como un tipo especial de actividad en la educación. El objetivo principal del estudio es el contenido y la estructura del proceso de lectura crítica, dirigido a desarrollar habilidades de lectura crítica, como uno de los objetivos de la formación profesional en las universidades de formación de docentes, con mucho énfasis en cómo los estudiantes y los docentes conceptualizan este fenómeno. Los autores presentaron algunas ideas sobre el alcance de habilidades de lectura crítica como parte de la competencia profesional del maestro.
Palabras clave: lectura, lectura crítica, habilidades de lectura crítica, texto, análisis de texto, competencia profesional del maestro.

1. Introduction

 For the last several years, we have observed an upsurge of interest in the growth of the intellectual potential of learners and its impact on the professional competence development. Modern educational landscape determined by a great bulk of fast-changing information faces the problem what to learn and how to structure this knowledge. The best choice is to resort to effective means of processing information in order to transform it into new cognitive frames to support students' best learning outcomes.

[1] South Ural State Humanitarian Pedagogical University. Foreign Languages Faculty. Professor. E-mail: afanasevaou@cspu.ru
[2] South Ural State Humanitarian Pedagogical University. Foreign Languages Faculty. Associate Professor; South Ural State University. Foreign Languages Department. Associate Professor. E-mail: fedotovamv@cspu.ru
[3] South Ural State Humanitarian Pedagogical University. Foreign Languages Faculty. Associate Professor. E-mail: msmirnova_737@mail.ru

The following factors working in modern education justify our close attention to the coherence of intellectual progress and professional competence of a teacher:

a) the attempts to achieve a sustainable, effective and creative advantage in profession;

b) the existence of digital community which puts terrific pressure on the educational environment to increase its adaptability, innovation and efficiency;

c) the awareness of knowledge necessary to foster teaching activity resulting in shaping more efficient learning practices;

d) a broad usage of computer-based technologies and their methodological interpretation for online education, for students' collaborative and independent work;

e) the fusion of students' needs and learning trajectories enabling optimal growth of their professional competence, confidence and motivation.

We must admit that these factors are no doubt crucial, as we feel that the preponderance of information in modern world points to the importance of skills that help students reorganize a great amount of information into new frames of knowledge thus contributing to the extension of the scope of intelligences and capacities to form new modes of reflection and performance.

In the course of professional training this fact manifests itself in the desire of teachers and students to master intellectual skills, therefore a learner is recognized as a self-value, a bearer of individual experience who perceives educational influence as a disclosure of his intellectual potential and a source of individual development (Khutorskoy, 2003). This is sure to result in the formation of such professional qualities as erudition, critical thinking ability, openness to new ideas, which impart innovative character to both teaching and learning (Afanasjeva et al., 2019). This list of professional qualities can be supplemented with the abilities to think clearly and rationally, to understand logical connections between ideas, to arrive at the best possible solutions that can help students to be engaged in reflective and independent thinking, thus making teaching practices effective by avoiding potentially negative tendencies and introducing changes in teaching process. The totality of these qualities can be included into the scope of cognitive, instrumental, motivational and reflexive components of a teacher's professional competence.

With this emphasis on learners' intellectual potential, there naturally comes an explicit recognition by teachers and students that the development of critical reading skills is sure to be an essential source of professional success and prosperity and life-long achievement.

The purpose of this article is to give critical reading conceptualization based on scientific literature analysis and to provide empirical evidence describing teachers and students' attitudes to the development of critical reading skills.

2. Methodology

We started our investigation with the analysis of the notion "critical reading" as it is considered one of the basic skills of a foreign language teacher (Wallace, 2006). It implies that foreign language students are viewed more as language users and less as learners. A special attention directed to critical reading skills is in many aspects caused by the following reasons:

- reading can create an authentic environment for learning a foreign language due to the texts studied;

- reading can stimulate cognitive skills, interpersonal sensibilities and cultural sophistication of people;

- reading can help students absorb such language material as vocabulary, grammar, text structure while they occur in authentic contexts, understand how the elements of language work together to convey meanings;

- reading can contribute to getting information about the subject the students are studying;

- reading can create the environment which gives students insight into the life styles and world views of the people whose language they are learning;

- reading, thanks to the variety of strategies and skills, can construct the basis for autonomous learning which raises the level of support for professional evolution through lifelong experience (Afanasjeva et al., 2020).

From the methodological point of view, reading is defined as a specially organized goal-oriented cognitive process aimed at obtaining information from the text. It exists as interaction between the reader and the text determined by social, contextual and cultural factors and is meant to reveal the author's message. This definition goes beyond the traditional interpretation of reading as a cognitive process of decoding symbols to derive meaning from them. The notion "reading" expands to include such components as background knowledge, communication, sharing ideas etc. It is well known that the result of reading is reading comprehension that consists of decoding meaning and language comprehension encompassing receptive vocabulary, grammatical understanding and discourse comprehension (Hoover and Gough, 1990).

The concept of critical reading can be interpreted as a mode of thinking about the meaning of the text, because it is a more complex engagement with the text through skillfully analyzing, evaluating and reconstructing its meaning.

While studying critical reading one should bear in mind parameters differentiating it from reading in general. Critical reading, active in its character, implies manipulating with arguments and not with facts as in the case with reading in general which is more passive by nature. Critical reading exists as skeptical being associated with inner questioning, while reading is gullible because it takes information at it face value. Reactive nature of ordinary reading, manifested in the processes of absorbing and understanding, aims at grasping the text with its plot and personages, which is contrasted to the purposeful critical reading resulting in forming judgements based on the mechanism of analyzing, interpreting and evaluating. To sum it up, ordinary reading focuses on what a text says, and critical reading is interested in what a text means.

Unlike reading comprehension, critical reading comprehension is understood as a complex of higher-level mental processes that includes thinking, reasoning, imagining and interpreting, all of them dependent on specific knowledge in the content area. The focus of critical reading comprehension on analysis, interpretation and evaluation promotes its self-directed, self-motivated and self-correcting nature. These characteristics of critical reading help students capture critical thinking skills to correct and improve their learning.

Critical reading involves our reflection on the subject and the proportion of the information we are ready to accept. This inevitably leads to argumentation and discussion, but not just statement of facts, which means communication in various cultural and social contexts. In other words, critical reading is the very foundation of true learning and personal development through evaluating and comprehending information, questioning its validity and figuring out deep meanings.

We see a great potential to develop critical reading skills in a number of academic courses such as Analytical Reading, Home Reading, Academic Writing, etc. In language learning, they open a way to critical reading strategies strongly connected not with memorizing linguistic units, facts and ideas but with the interpretation of

information based on the cognitive procedures of identification, analysis and interpretation leading to the acquisition of cultural values and expanding outlook on the social reality the students live in (Sosnovskaya, 1974).

The process of developing critical reading skills can be presented in the form of a six-dimensional framework (Table 1).

1. Stages of critical reading. It is rather difficult to describe the components and sequences of the actions presenting critical reading process because of its varied and complicated character. There exist several views on the stages included in this process: analysis – comparison- interpretation; analysis – translation – identification – understanding, etc. (Wentworth, 2020). Perhaps the best way to conceptualize critical reading process is a checklist whose components can occur in a variety of orders selectively. In our opinion this checklist should include: 1) identification consisting in previewing (attaining pre-knowledge about the text) and contextualizing (exploring the historical, cultural and biographical frame of references of the text); 2) evaluation consisting in inquisition (questioning the content of the text to comprehend and clarify its message), synopsizing (identifying the central theme of the text, the main idea, supporting ideas and examples illustrating them); 3) interpretation (analyzing the deep meaning of the text, assessing arguments resulting in the emotional impact produced by its message). The above-mentioned components are open to criticism because they may seem too mechanical and procedural to fit the multidimensional and emotionally charged issues for which critical reading is needed. The continuity and consistency of critical reading stages allow a shift from surface reading (gathering facts) to deep reading (interpreting not only what is said but also what is implied taking into account the author's assumptions and perspective).

2. Perspectives of text meaning. Proceeding from our understanding of text perspective based on B. Bloom's hierarchy of cognitive levels, we distinguish three perspectives of text meaning (factual, conceptual, integral) (Bloom, 195). The factual perspective presupposes the analysis of the surface events, facts, i.e. the overt message. The conceptual perspective focuses on the interaction of leading and supplementary concepts reflecting the author' world outlook and disclosing the hidden message. At last, the dynamic interaction of the reader and the text against the background of the concrete sociocultural situation underlying this interpretative practice provides the integral perspective of text analysis.

3. Text aspects. As critical reading implies a dialogue between the text and the reader, the most important notion to define is text itself. The text is a unit of speech characterized by semantic, structural and communicative unity (Galperin, 2020). Its semantic unity is exposed in topical succession and coherence, structural unity is manifested in cohesion, and communicative integrity is revealed in the intention of the text producer (Khomutova, 2006). Taking into account the complex character of the notion "text", we agree that only complex analysis is able to disclose the nature of the text as a linguistic sign and describe its three aspects: form, meaning and function. We proceed from the assumption that for educational purposes in our teaching practice we mostly use media texts and fiction to widen social and cultural practices thus involving the readers in discussion (Elizarova, 2005). Consequently, critical reading results in cognizing and interpreting objective reality in the form of images where the addresser (the author) imparts his version of the world to the addressee (the reader) and both present a whole entity (Shechtman, 2018). Critical reading strategies consider a number of perspective ways of looking at a topic rather than just one, with the text admitting of many interpretations not necessarily coinciding with the author's viewpoint.

As a result, students learn to compare these perspectives and form opinions about them and thus to interpret reality, to gain factual and conceptual information for practical use by analyzing the author's message, his writing style, his motives etc. (Goatly, 2013). One also tries to see things from different angles avoiding one-sided approaches, to find "for" and "against" arguments, to meditate on ideas touched upon in the text, to incorporate new knowledge into his or her practice.

4. Content of text analysis. Types of analysis are distinguished based on its content on each stage. Accordingly, identification is associated with formal analysis (vocabulary, grammar, composition and genre), evaluation involves the analysis of text meaning (critical examination of the text concepts, ideas and assumptions) and interpretation is realized through analyzing the communicative intention of the author and pragmatic impact of the text (Van Diyk, 1993; Ennis, 2016; Schaffner, 1996).

5. Tasks. In order to analyze the text students interact with it through some learning activities including learning strategies and tasks. A strategy is a plan selected deliberately by the reader or the teacher to accomplish a given task. The set of tasks we propose stems from Bloom's taxonomy of assignments widely accepted in foreign language teaching practice (Bloom, 1956). We distinguish three types of task, the sequence of which reflects the principle "from simple to complex" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Pervova, 2018).

6. Critical reading skills. The educational goal of critical reading is to develop critical reading skills the totality of which may be regarded as a holistic activity aimed at extracting, evaluating and interpreting information from the text (https://sass.queensu.ca/learningstrategies, 2020). Table 1 presents universal critical reading skills manifested in any area of language **learning.**

Table 1
Six-dimensional framework for analytical reading

Stages of critical reading	Perspectives of text meaning	Text aspects	Content of text analysis	Tasks	Critical reading skills
Identification	Factual	Form	Vocabulary, grammar, composition, genre characteristics	Reproduce, describe, determine, recognize, identify, recall	Grasping the main idea; finding associations and sequences; distinguishing facts/opinions; understanding details; reorganizing and integrating with existing knowledge; underlying assumptions; building up arguments; evaluating arguments
Evaluation	Conceptual	Meaning	Text concepts, value and relevance of ideas and assumptions	Summarize, arrange, organize, compare, examine, discuss	
Interpretation	Integral	Function	Communicative intention of the text producer, analysis of real-world settings and social environment	Create, make up, imagine, recommend, evaluate, formulate	

Source: authors' elaboration

To sum up, students who have critical reading skills can understand the complexity of links between ideas, determine the importance and relevance of arguments, approach problems in a systematic way, reflect on the justification of their own assumptions, beliefs and values.

At the next stage of research, we conducted a survey among teachers and students to find out their attitudes to critical reading activities.

3. Results

 The purpose of the survey conducted in 2019 was to identify the students and teachers' perception of critical reading and its role in both professional development of a teacher and professional competence development of students. Fifteen most qualified teachers whose work experience is more than ten years took part in the survey. The survey revealed that nine teachers (60%) interpreted critical reading as one of the goals of

professional training. At the same time, 13 teachers (about 86%) believed that development of critical reading skills was an integral result of many subjects studied. About 46% of the surveyed teachers noted the role of critical reading in the development of professional thinking.

Proceeding from the analysis of scientific literature and the results of our survey, we compiled a list of basic skills related to critical reading (Table 1). When proposed a list of skills required for students to be efficient in their future professional activity, the teachers ranked them in the following way (Graph 1).

Graph 1
Ranking critical reading skills
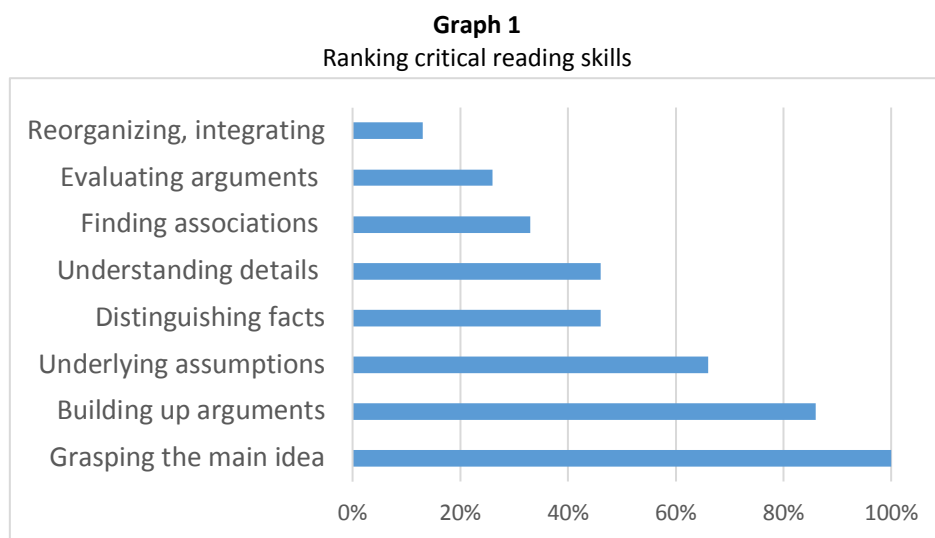
Source: authors' elaboration

Answering the question whether they use critical reading strategy in their everyday teaching practice, about 67% of respondents said that they did not use it systematically because of the lack of methodological support.

The second stage of the survey, in which 40 students participated, aimed at identifying students' perception of critical reading and its role in training process. They were offered a questionnaire consisting of six items, and their answers were summed up in Table 2.

Answering the first question 37.5% of respondents admitted the positive impact of critical reading skills on their professional competence, the majority of the students (52.5%) giving negative answers. Moreover, only 45% against 42.5% of students knew what critical reading means and about 12.5% said that they had a vague idea about it. Among the surveyed who gave positive answers to this question, there was an opinion that critical reading is closely connected with the evaluation of the information received, and only a small part of the students pointed to creativity, flexibility and autonomy in their learning.

About 25% of students thought that they had actively used critical reading strategies, and almost 22.5% agreed that the development of critical reading skills presented one of their educational goals. According to 52.5% of respondents, these technologies are not effective because they are time-consuming and require additional information. This answer is in keeping with the result obtained from students answering question six: 57.5% of the surveyed noted that critical reading strategies are used from time to time in teaching academic disciplines with the exception of such special courses as Analytical Reading and Home Reading.

Table 2
A survey of students' attitudes
to critical reading

№	Question	NO (% of respondents)	Rather NO than YES	YES	Rather YES than NO	Difficult to answer
1	Do you think that critical reading skills can make your teacher training independent?	25%	27.5%	22.5%	15%	10%
2	Do you know what critical reading means?	17.5%	27.5%	30%	12.5%	12.5%
3	Do you use critical reading strategies in your learning?	35%	22.5%	15%	10%	17.5%
4	Is critical reading one of your educational goals?	45%	17.5%	10%	12.5%	15%
5	Do you think that critical reading skills can make your learning at the university effective?	22.5%	30%	12.5%	7.5%	27.5%
6	Do you use critical reading strategies in your everyday learning?	40%	17.5%	17.5%	5%	20%

Source: authors' elaboration

Another goal of our research was to find out what the students think about the role of critical reading skills in their future professional performance. Their opinions were reflected in ranking those skills from the point of view of their significance for professional career. The obtained results are given in Table 3.

Table 3
Ranking critical
reading skills

Skills	Grasping the main idea	Underlying assumptions	Building up arguments	Finding associations and sequences	Reorganizing and integrating with existing knowledge	Evaluating arguments	Understanding detail	Distinguishing facts/opinion
Rank	90%	82.5%	67.5 %	60%	57.5%	52.5%	37.5%	22.5%

Source: authors' elaboration

At the next stage of research we asked the students to give a self-esteem of their critical reading skills development on a scale from 0 to 2 (0 – skills are not manifested, 1 – poorly manifested, 2 – fully manifested).The results of the survey are presented in Table 4.

This survey shows that the majority of the students consider themselves to have poorly manifested critical reading skills, which we can account for by the insufficient level of the teachers' competence in the methods of critical reading teaching.

The results of the research presented in this study show that critical reading skills have a significant impact on the development of critical thinking in general and teacher's professional competence in particular.

The survey demonstrates that both teachers and students have a deep understanding of the role of critical reading skills in the development of professional competence. However, one can observe a discrepancy between the theoretical conceptualization of critical reading as an indispensable component of educational process in pedagogical universities and objective educational reality in which critical reading skills are often neglected. This

state of things finds its reflection in the results of students' self-esteem and the analysis of the teachers' attitudes to the deficit of the related methodology and technologies.

Table 4
The students' self-esteem of critical reading skills

	Skills	The skill is not manifested (% of respondents)	The skill is poorly manifested (% of respondents)	The skill is fully manifested (% of respondents)
1	Grasping the main idea	15%	67.5%	17.5%
2	Finding associations and sequences	32.5%	52.5%	15%
3	Distinguishing facts/opinions	22.5%	57.5%	20%
4	Understanding details	10%	47.5%	42.5%
5	Reorganizing and integrating with existing knowledge	17.5%	52.5%	30%
6	Underlying assumptions	27.5%	40%	32.5%
7	Building up arguments	15%	60%	25%
8	Evaluating arguments	10%	77.5%	12.5%

Source: authors' elaboration

Another reason for inefficiency of critical reading skills techniques lies in the fact that the teachers focus on the development of each skill separately while ignoring critical reading as a holistic activity.

4. Conclusions

Teaching critical reading skills is profitable for both future teachers and community because it helps raise the quality of teacher's training through developing intellectual skills that may favorably affect not only people, but also social and cultural progress.

In university education, the development of critical reading skills should be adopted as one of top goals since they allow manipulating and interpreting texts of all types in order to extract information necessary for efficient learning performance.

Such skills may build up individual educational platforms that students will use to develop and manage their individual thinking and learning modes in pursuit of educational goals and self-realization.

Critical reading skills can be productively employed in educational practice if they are interpreted within the frame of a whole activity with its motivational, cognitive, instructional and reflective components taken together.

The methodology of interdisciplinary   interaction may serve as the ground of critical reading skills formation through the integration of knowledge, skills, capabilities obtained from learning different subjects to broaden the students' intellectual potential and to foster their motivation to realize their professional functions. This means that it is necessary to coordinate programs of all the disciplines entering the academic curriculum of foreign language teacher training.

Acknowledgement

Bibliographic references

Afanasjeva O., Fedotova M., Smirnova M., Vozgova Z. (2020). Critical Thinking and Teacher Training Development. Revista Espacios. Vol. 41 (09), pp. 7 – 14.

Afanasjeva, O., Vozgova, Z., Fedotova, M., Smirnova, M. (2019). Leadership competence of the teacher as a factor in the development of professional skills Espacios. Vol. 40 (39), pp. 15 – 22.

Bloom, B., Englehart, M. Furst, E., Hill, W., & Krathwohl, D. (1956). Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals. Handbook I: Cognitive domain. New York and Toronto: Longmans, Green.

Critical reading for graduate. Learning strategies, Student Academic Success Service. Queen's University, Kingston, ON. Retrieved May 29, 2020, from https://sass.queensu.ca/learningstrategies

Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, Ch., Barron, B., Osher, D. (2020). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. Applied developmental science. Vol. 24 (2), pp. 97 – 140.

Elizarova, G.V. (2005). Culture and teaching foreign languages. St. Petersburg: KARO, 352 p.

Ennis, Robert H. (2016). Definition: A three-dimensional analysis with bearing on key concepts. OSSA Conference Archive. 105. Retrieved May 15, 2020, from https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive/OSSA11/papersandcommentaries/105

Galperin, I.R. (2020). Text as an object of linguistic research. URSS, 144 p.

Goatly A. (2013). Critical reading and writing: An introductory coursebook, 1st edn. London: Routledge, 364 p.

Hoover, W. A., & Gough, P. B. (1990). The simple view of reading. Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 2(2), pp. 127 – 160. Retrieved April 8, 2020, from https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00401799

Khomutova, T. N. (2007). Khomutova, T. N. (2006). Theory of English Grammar. South Ural State University, Chelyabinsk, 297 p. Retrieved June, 19, 2020, from https://www.elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=26390938

Khutorskoy, A.V. (2003). Key competences as a component for personality-oriented education. Narodnoye obrazovaniye [Public Education], 2, pp. 58 – 64. Retrieved May, 25, 2020 from http://narodnoe.org/journals/narodnoe-obrazovanie/2003-2/klyuchevie-kompetencii-kak-komponent--lichnostnoorientirovannoiy-paradigmi-obrazovaniya

Pervova, G.M. (2018). Technology of multilevel text comprehension as a form of philological teacher's training. Tambov University Review. Humanitarian Sciences. Vol. 23 (175), pp. 7 – 13. Retrieved June, 2, 2020 from

https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/tehnologiya-mnogourovnevogo-vospriyatiya-teksta-kak-forma-filologicheskoy-podgotovki-uchitelya

Schäffner, C. (1996). Editorial: Political Speeches and Discourse analysis. Current Issues in Language and Society. Vol 3 (3). Retrieved May 10, 2020, from https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13520529609615471?needAccess=true

Shechtman, N.A. (2018). Understanding text and hypertext. SamaraOrenburg State Pedagogical University, Orenburg, 168 pp. Retrieved May 10, 2020, from https://www.elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=37159448

Sosnovskaya, V. (1974). Analytical Reading. Moscow: Higher School, 184 pp. Retrieved April, 9, 2020, from https://urss.ru/cgi-bin/db.pl?lang=en&blang=en&page=Book&id=27714

Van Dijk, T.A. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. Discourse and Society. No 4(2), 249–283 pp.

Wallace, C. (2006). Critical reading in language education. 1st edn. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 217 p.

Wentworth, H. (2020). Critical reading for analysis and comparison. Retrieved May 10, 2020, from
  https://waldenacademicskills.wordpress.com/2020/02/20/reading-for-analysis-comparison-and-
  evaluation/