

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CRITICAL READING SKILLS IN ENHANCING ACADEMIC PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH

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Abstract. *This article explores the significance of critical reading skills in enhancing academic proficiency in English. It examines the concept of critical reading, its features, challenges in its development, and effective strategies. The article serves as a guide for students and teachers who can utilize it in academic activities.*

Keywords: *critical reading; academic skills; text analysis; logical inferences; pedagogical strategies; English language teaching.*

INTRODUCTION.

In today's academic environment, students are required not only to comprehend a text but also to possess the skills to analyze and evaluate it critically. From this perspective, critical reading skills play a vital role in achieving academic success. As [Gilroy, 2018: 45] states, critical reading is more than just reading words on a page; it is the process of understanding how ideas are structured and conveyed, which allows students to delve deeper into and assess scholarly materials.

According to Aristotle's philosophical perspective, the ability to evaluate ideas presented in texts is the mark of an educated person, and it is crucial for students in shaping their own views and critically receiving new knowledge. Furthermore, [Freire and Macedo, 1987: 35] in their critique of literacy emphasize the necessity of "reading the word" and "reading the world," compelling students to understand not only the language but also the broader context in which texts are situated.

Critical reading, unlike passive memorization of a text, involves systematic analysis, identifying the author's viewpoint, and logical justification of arguments. This process allows students to develop essential skills in questioning assumptions, formulating original ideas, and making informed decisions. Walden University's [n.d.] academic resources emphasize that evaluating a text is one of the main objectives of critical reading, which encourages students to actively participate in the reading process and compare various sources rather than passively accepting information. In this manner, students not only absorb the information they read but also analyze it critically and form their own informed opinions, which contributes significantly to effective academic performance and scholarly development. The process of critical reading consists of several key elements: determining the text's purpose, analyzing arguments systematically, evaluating evidence rigorously, and drawing logical conclusions. A student must not only memorize the content but also understand its internal logic and be able to evaluate the author's perspective and methodology. [Bacon, 1625/1999: 143] emphasized in his seminal works that the purpose of reading is not merely to confirm one's own opinion or refute another, but to weigh and assess information with careful justification and balanced reasoning. The University of Guelph Library [n.d.] resources further note that critical reading enables students not just to accept information at face value, but to deeply analyze and understand the text's underlying purpose, assumptions, and implications. A number of significant difficulties arise in the process of developing critical reading skills among students. [Tomasek, 2009: 128] highlights that insufficient development of text analysis and evaluation skills, along with limited vocabulary and the inherent complexity of academic texts, represent substantial barriers to mastery. [Paul and Elder, 2014: 110] argue that integrating writing and reading—that is, actively expressing an opinion

based on texts read—significantly strengthens students' critical thinking skills and deepens their engagement with academic material. This integration helps students move beyond passive reading to active intellectual engagement. The following evidence-based strategies are recommended for enhancing critical reading skills: Students should begin by surveying the text structure, headings, and key terms before detailed reading to establish a cognitive framework. Formulating questions before, during, and after reading helps maintain engagement and directs attention to critical elements. Marking key passages, noting questions, and recording reactions creates an interactive dialogue with the text. Condensing main ideas in one's own words demonstrates comprehension and facilitates retention. Collaborative examination of texts exposes students to diverse interpretations and strengthens analytical capabilities. Research by [Niculescu and Dragomir, 2023: 217] demonstrates that critical reading allows students to deeply understand academic demands and work effectively within scholarly contexts. Furthermore, [Gilroy, 2018: 233] points out that constructing well-reasoned arguments based on textual evidence develops students' analytical thinking and evaluation skills substantially. Teachers can significantly improve their students' academic skills by actively encouraging and modeling critical reading practices. Interactive exercises, structured question-and-answer sessions, and facilitated group discussions serve as effective pedagogical tools for skill development. [McLaughlin, 2002: 45] asserts that critical reading represents a powerful teaching strategy that enables students to think critically both in social contexts and within scholarly discourse. Educators should therefore integrate critical reading instruction explicitly into their curricula and provide scaffolded support as students develop these sophisticated cognitive skills. Critical reading skills constitute an essential tool for achieving academic success in English language learning and beyond. These skills enable students to deeply understand, rigorously evaluate, and systematically analyze complex texts. Consequently, students who master critical reading become more effective not only in comprehending English texts but also in conducting other scholarly activities, including research, argumentation, and academic writing. The development of critical reading abilities should therefore be prioritized in English language instruction, with explicit teaching of strategies and consistent practice opportunities provided throughout students' academic careers. As educational contexts continue to demand higher-order thinking skills, critical reading remains fundamental to student success.

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