Chapter One

Problem &Background

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Introduction

Critical reading is a matter of life and death. That is because of many reasons; that is because it is important to investigate timelines, it is dangerous to accept opinions as facts, and it is important to be a critical reader and some writings are honey coated. In addition, Many studies assert the necessity of using technology in education, such as Universidade (2008), Anonsh, Betty and Andy (2004), Doo and Micheal (2009), Randy and Heather (2004), and Norman (2007).

Many studies or reports referred to the importance of critical reading. Among these are Abu Laban(2012), Bahlool (2004), Younis (2000), Mosa(2001), Ebraheem (2000), Refaey (2011), Joan and James (2006), Jennifer and Michelle (2009), Marianne, Wim and Loak (2002) and Marianne, Wim and Loak and Richard (2003). Moreover, there are many studies that recommended teaching critical reading skills (2007), El Bohy(2003), Mosa (2001) and Refaey (2011), such as Mohammed (2010), Nassar (2009).

Blended learning is an alternative approach that enhances the academic context of education. Such approach may address at least some of the concerns about online learning, for example, lack of face-to-face contact with students. Blended learning provides students with increased flexibility, accessibility and depth of learning offered by internet-based education. Meanwhile, it keeps what is valued most about face-to-face educational opportunities for the professional education (Jessica, 2009, 282).

Richard (2013) sees 'critical reading' as a thoughtful disciplined reading of a text or other objects. It was advocated by the Roman rhetorician Quintilian in the Institutio Oratoria (c. 95 AD). It is commonly associated with New Criticism (a movement that dominated literary studies in the U.S. from the 1930s to the 1970s). He points out that good researchers and writers examine their sources critically and actively. They do not just compile and summarize their research sources in their writing but they create their own ideas, theories and their understanding of the topic. Such approach

means not taking the information and opinions for granted, but to investigate, test and doubt every claim, every example, every story, and every conclusion, i.e. to engage in active conversation with the authors .

Critical educational theories were developed by Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, and others (Siho,2010, 5). During his life, Paulo Freire (1921-1997) influenced educational philosophy. He believed that the role of education was to promote students' abilities to think critically about race, gender and social class. He be -lieved that in order for students to understand humanity and themselves better, they need to examine the connection between language and power (Yvonne,2007, 64). Thus, the philosophy that lies behind critical reading is to employ reading in developing the students' critical mind and accordingly their ability to formulate opinions of what they read. As a result, they will be able to criticize and evaluate what they read. Reading critically requires one to ask certain questions after one reads a passage and to think carefully about what one has read. Critical reading requires understanding implied meanings and taking time to reread and reconsider an author's message, so that one can make careful evaluations and judgments about what one is reading (Joe and Janet, 2002, 411).

Richard and Linda (2003) state that the fundamentals of critical reading are reading for a purpose, considering the authors' purposes, developing a map of knowledge, reading for understanding systems of thought, and reading within disciplines. The reader should understand that reading requires intellectual skills. A good reader does not simply decipher words but actively engages in dialogue with the writer. Thus, a good reader does not simply decipher words but actively engage in a dialogue with the author. In addition, the emergence of larger portable storage devices and media requires continued staff and student development. Students need to learn how to determine whether a text is worth reading or not and how to take ownership of a text's important ideas .This requires active use of intellectual skills(36- 39).

There is a strong relationship between technology and teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) .This is emphasized in many studies, such as Kuvy, Farrag, Badawi, Faisal, and Chen (Gheith, 2009, pp. 8-11).

There are many benefits of e-learning. It helps in the enhancement of educational competence, creating a dialogue between the teacher and student. It promotes technological skills of the teacher, provides teachers with ideas for using technology enhances their computerized skills, increases motivation, and it promotes students' independent learning (Beatric and Norma 2008, 58).

Blended learning leads to learners' self-confidence and security. It enhances skills and attitudes, respects multiple intelligence and cognitive styles, reinforces independent study habits, increases technology-mediated interactivity, and enhances inter-institutional dialogue and common framework. It also enhances the improvement of the international communication and academic interaction. Students can shift to open dialogue. Students can use its systems: (Synch) MSN messenger / Skype/ phone; (Asynch) e-mail, discussion forum (Beatric and Norma, 2007).Besides,   Beatric and Norrma (2007) state that using blended learning leads to learners' development, because of the comprehensive and critical use of the huge availability of online materials.Thus, The study made use of making discussion and cooperative learning as suitable strategies for developing the secondary stage students' critical reading in a blended learning context.

Gheith's opinion (2009) is adopted by the researcher .She says that children are not taught to live in a static world, but in one with increasing complexity. Most children are going to live in more complicated contexts, and education is not to give them ready-made solutions. It is evident that teaching critical reading is important in facing the challenges of the future.

The Pilot Study

A questionnaire was designed to determine to what extent students need to practice critical reading skills. It was administered to secondary stage teachers (n=49) in various zones, including (Dokki, Saray El Koba, Giza and Sohag). It was noticed that some teachers did not know what critical reading meant, see Appendix A. 73,5% of the teachers assured that students are in an urgent need for learning reading skills in a different way. In addition, a test was administered to the 2nd year of the secondary stage students (n=23). It consisted of 21 questions; 18 of them were MCQ and 3 were Wh ones, see Appendix B.

Results of such a test revealed the following:

- 49,3%   of the students were unable to identify the purpose of the writer out of writing a text.
- 45% of the students were unable to construct the meaning provided in a given context.
- ٥٠,٧% of the students were unable to compare things or characters.
- ٥٠,٧% of the students were unable to evaluate the text.
- 77 %of the students were unable to show their opinion or whether they agree or disagree with the author.
- 77 %of the students were unable to show why they agree or disagree with the author.
- Observations were also triangulated with this data to substantiate findings as follows:
  - While conducting the pilot study the researcher noticed that the students did not know the meanings of (clear-precise-irrelevant-significant-relevant) are. It means that they depended on guessing, as the test was MCQ with only two distractors. Frequently, they kept asking about the meaning of these words. Thus, in fact the students did not have the skill of evaluating a text based on any criteria.

   It was also noticed that the students kept asking about what was required from them in the question of agree/disagree with the author. It means that they were not taught to answer such questions. Hence, they had neither the skill of agree/disagree with the author nor had they the skill of giving alternatives. They were not even trained to give their opinions Going through the previous study, it can be easily concluded that a study of critical reading skills is badly needed**.** Thus, the following is the statement of the problem

Statement of the Problem

   Bearing on what studies is mentioned and the previous studies and pilot study shown in the previous studies and the pilot study, according to the secondary stage students' inability to read critically,
 it is evident that there is an urgent need for developing these skills for matching the current worldwide challenge through the application of a program based on blended learning .

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following main question:
What is the effect of a program based on blended learning on developing critical reading skills for the secondary stage students?

This question can be subdivided into the following sub-question:

> What is the effect of the program on developing the dominated critical reading sub-skills (identifying the main idea and sub-ideas of a text, identifying the author's purpose of writing a text, constructing the meaning of a given text, determining he cause-effect relationship, comparing things or characters, evaluating the text by using some criteria (clarity, precision, relevance, significance, depth, consistency and fairness), agree/disagreeing with the author and the skill of finding alternatives)?

Purpose of the study

The current study attempted to:

- find out the relationship between critical reading and blended learning,
- enable the secondary stage students to read critically so that they can cope with the age requirements and
- enable students to apply these skills to their daily life in order to increase the scope of democracy so that they will be able to say their opinions based on a solid reasons.
- Investigate the relationship between critical reading skills and blended learning.
- Suggest non-traditional methods for teaching English language.

Hypotheses

- There is no statistically- significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the overall critical reading skills test.

This hypothesis can be divided into the following sub-hypothesis:

a. There is no statistically- significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group in the dominated critical reading sub-skills(identifying the main idea and sub-ideas of a text, identifying the author's purpose of writing a text, constructing the meaning of a given text, determining he cause-effect relationship, comparing things or characters, evaluating the text by using some criteria (clarity, precision, relevance, significance, depth, consistency and fairness), agree/disagreeing with the author and the skill of finding alternatives).

Significance of the Study

The study would presumably be of some importance to all individuals involved in the educational process;
- It is important for students in developing their own technological skills and their critical reading skills,
- It is important for researchers in suggesting other future researches,
- It is important for teachers in helping them find other methods of teaching

Delimitations

Participants of the study were delimited to first year secondary stage students in Akhmim secondary school for girls in Sohage Governorate .Lessons were extracted from their own curriculum. The skills required to develop are 8 critical reading skills; identifying the main idea and sub-ideas of a text, identifying the author's purpose of writing a text, constructing the meaning of a given text, determining he cause-effect relationship, comparing things or characters, evaluating the text by using some criteria (clarity, precision, relevance, significance, depth, consistency and fairness), agree/disagreeing with the author and the skill of finding alternatives.

Definition of Terms

Critical reading

Richard (2009) sees that critical reading is an active, intellectually engaged process in which the reader participates in an inner dialogue with the writer. Critical readers actively look for assumptions, key concepts ,ideas, reasons and justifications, supporting examples, parallel experiences ,implications and consequences, and any other structural features of written texts, to interpret and asses it accurately and fairly.

Daniel (2010) states that critical reading is an analytic activity. In it, the readers reread the text to identify patterns of elements, information, values, assumptions, and the language use. Critical reading involves bringing outside knowledge and values to evaluate the presentation and decide what to accept as true.

Grace (2011) states that critical reading means reading with the goal of finding deep understanding of a material, whether it is fiction or nonfiction. It is the act of analyzing and evaluating what the reader is reading as s/he progresses, or as s/he reflects back.

Critical reading skills according to this study can be referred to as the skill of identification of ideas ,constructing the meaning of a text, determining the cause and effect relationship, identifying the author's purpose of the text, comparing things or characters, evaluating the text by using some criteria(clarity, precision, relevance, significance, depth, consistency and fairness),agree/disagreeing with the author and finding alternatives through the use of a blended learning strategy.

Blended Learning

Blended learning is any combination of learning delivery methods, including most often face -to- face instruction with asynchronous and/or synchronous computer technologies. Another term of blended learning is hybrid learning (Hyo-Jeong and Thomas, 2007, 321).

According to Beatric and Norrma (2007) 'blended learning' is a planned combination of teaching approaches that includes a diversity of media and online and face-to-face teaching strategies in order to improve the teaching and learning mediated processes .

Benlihan, Buket, and Serap (2011) see 'blended learning' as the mix of different didactic methods and delivery formats, which are independent. They define 'blended learning' as a tool of integrating online and face-to-face formats to create a more effective learning experience than either medium can produce alone.

In this study, blended learning can be defined as an effective strategy for developing the secondary stage students' critical reading skills through face –to –face and electronic contexts.

The following chapter deals with the theoretical part of the study .Thus it deals with critical reading skills, blended learning and related studies. The third chapter deals with the research design and procedures, the fourth chapter deals with the results and the discussion and the fifth chapter deals with the summary and conclusion of the study.