

From Reading to Reasoning: The Interrelationship between Critical Reading and Critical Thinking

Chiranjeevi Jakkani

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Agricultural College, Polasa, PJTSAU

Abstract

Reading is an essential part of academic learning, but reading at higher levels involves more than understanding the information presented in a text. Students are expected to examine arguments, evaluate evidence, recognise assumptions, consider different perspectives and form reasoned responses. These processes bring critical reading and critical thinking closely together. Although the two concepts have been widely discussed in educational literature, they are not identical and are often treated as separate abilities. This paper reviews selected literature on critical reading and critical thinking and examines how the two are interrelated. It argues that critical reading provides a context in which learners encounter claims, evidence, arguments and perspectives, where as critical thinking provides the reasoning processes required to examine and evaluate them. The relationship is therefore reciprocal: critical thinking enables deeper engagement with texts, while critical reading provides opportunities to practise critical thinking. The paper also discusses the roles of prior knowledge, questioning, evidence evaluation, assumptions and reflection. It proposes an integrated framework in which reading moves from comprehension to questioning, analysis, evaluation, reflection and judgement. The paper concludes that integrating critical reading and critical thinking can contribute to academic learning, independent learning and more thoughtful engagement with information.

Keywords: critical reading, critical thinking, reading comprehension, reasoning, higher education, language education

1. Introduction

Reading is one of the primary ways through which students acquire knowledge. At the university level, students are expected to read textbooks, research articles, reports, essays and other academic materials and use information from these sources in assignments, examinations, discussions and research. However, academic reading cannot be limited to understanding words and identifying the main idea. Students are also expected to examine arguments, evaluate evidence, compare viewpoints and develop their own responses to what they read.

This becomes particularly important because readers encounter information from a variety of sources. Newspapers, websites, social media and other forms of public communication often present different interpretations of the same issue. Readers therefore need to do more than understand what a text says. They need to consider whether the claims are adequately supported, what assumptions are being made and whether other interpretations are possible.

This deeper engagement with texts is generally associated with critical reading. Critical reading involves questioning and examining a text rather than simply accepting the information it presents. Critical thinking, on the other hand, is concerned more broadly with the processes through which people analyse information, evaluate evidence, make inferences and reach reasoned judgements.

The connection between reading and thinking has been discussed for several decades. Dewey (1933) associated reflective thinking with the careful examination of beliefs and the grounds on which they are based. Ennis (1985, 1987) described critical thinking in terms of reasonable and reflective thinking concerned with deciding what to believe or do. Facione (1990) identified interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation and self-regulation as important components of critical thinking.

Several scholars have also examined the relationship between reading and critical thinking. Aloqaili (2012), for example, discussed the relationship between reading comprehension and critical thinking and argued that the two are closely connected. Wallace (2003) examined critical reading within language education and highlighted the social and critical dimensions of reading. Wilson (2016) specifically examined critical reading and critical thinking in English for Academic Purposes and showed the importance of classroom scaffolding in helping learners engage critically with texts.

Despite this overlap, critical reading and critical thinking should not simply be treated as synonyms. Critical thinking is a broader cognitive ability that can be applied to problems, decisions and arguments in many situations, where as critical reading refers specifically to the critical engagement of a reader with a text.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how these two processes are related and how their relationship can contribute to learning. The central argument is that critical reading provides the material and context for reasoning, while critical thinking provides the cognitive processes through which that material is examined. The relationship is therefore reciprocal rather than one-directional.

2. Critical Reading and Critical Thinking

2.1 Critical reading

Reading comprehension involves constructing meaning from a text. Readers identify information, understand relationships between ideas and interpret the writer's message. These processes are fundamental to reading. Critical reading, however, goes beyond understanding the surface meaning of a text.

A critical reader may ask:

- What is the author's main argument?
- What evidence is provided?
- How relevant is the evidence?
- What assumptions does the author make?
- What perspective does the author represent?
- Are alternative viewpoints considered?
- What information may have been left out?
- Does the conclusion follow from the evidence?

These questions make reading an active process.

Wallace (2003) is particularly relevant to language education because she considers reading not merely as a technical process but as an activity connected with discourse, society and interpretation. A critical reader therefore considers not only the information contained in a text but also how the text constructs its message.

Critical reading should not, however, be understood as simply finding faults with a text. A critical reader does not automatically reject what an author says. Instead, the reader examines the claims and evidence before deciding whether the argument should be accepted, questioned or rejected.

In this sense, critical reading is evaluative rather than simply negative.

2.2 Critical thinking

Critical thinking has been defined from different perspectives. Dewey's (1933) concept of reflective thinking provides an important foundation. He emphasised the careful examination of beliefs and the reasons or evidence supporting them.

Ennis (1985) described critical thinking as reasonable and reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do. This definition is particularly relevant to reading because readers constantly make judgements about information.

Facione (1990) identified several cognitive skills associated with critical thinking, including interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference and explanation, together with self-regulation.

These processes are clearly relevant when students read academic texts. A student may interpret an author's argument, analyse the evidence, evaluate its strength, draw an inference and explain why a particular conclusion appears justified.

Paul and Elder (2008) similarly emphasise the importance of examining elements of reasoning such as purpose, information, assumptions, points of view and conclusions.

Critical thinking is therefore broader than critical reading. A person can use critical thinking when solving a problem or evaluating a spoken argument without reading anything. Critical reading, however, provides one important context in which critical thinking can be applied.

3. The Interrelationship between Critical Reading and Critical Thinking

The relationship between critical reading and critical thinking becomes clearer when we consider what happens when a reader encounters a claim.

Consider the statement:

Modern agricultural practices have significantly improved the lives of rural farmers.

A reader concerned mainly with comprehension may understand the statement and move on.

A critical reader may ask:

What agricultural practices are being discussed?

What does "improved" mean?

Is the claim referring to income, productivity, health or quality of life?

What evidence supports the statement?

Does the evidence apply to all farmers?

Are there alternative explanations?

These questions move reading beyond comprehension. The reader is identifying a claim, examining its meaning, considering evidence and questioning possible assumptions.

At this point, reading has become a form of reasoning.

This demonstrates the overlap between critical reading and critical thinking. Critical reading provides the text and the claims to be examined, where as critical thinking provides the processes of analysis, evaluation and inference needed to examine them.

Aloqaili (2012) similarly identifies a close theoretical relationship between reading comprehension and critical thinking. His discussion suggests that reading is not simply a passive process in which information moves from the text to the reader. Readers use prior knowledge and cognitive processes to construct and evaluate meaning.

The relationship is therefore better represented as:

Critical Reading ↔ Critical Thinking

rather than:

Critical Reading → Critical Thinking

Critical thinking helps a reader approach a text more carefully, while critical reading provides repeated opportunities to apply critical-thinking skills.

4. From Comprehension to Analysis and Evaluation

The first important movement from ordinary reading towards critical reading is the movement from comprehension to analysis.

Comprehension asks:

What does the text say?

Analysis asks:

How does the text construct its argument?

This distinction is especially important in higher education.

A student reading a research article may identify its topic, research question, methodology and findings. A critical reader goes further by examining how the evidence is connected to the conclusion.

A useful way of examining an argument is:

Claim → Evidence → Reasoning → Assumption → Conclusion

The claim tells the reader what the author wants to establish. Evidence provides support for the claim. Reasoning explains the relationship between the evidence and the claim. Assumptions are ideas on which the argument may depend but which are not always explicitly stated.

For example, a study may report that farmers who adopted a particular agricultural practice achieved higher yields. A critical reader may ask whether the higher yield was necessarily caused by the practice or whether other factors may have contributed.

This requires the reader to evaluate the reasoning rather than merely understand the finding.

Andrews (2015) emphasises the importance of argumentation in the development of critical thinking in higher education. This is relevant to reading because academic texts frequently present information through arguments.

Critical reading therefore requires learners to recognise the structure of arguments, while critical thinking helps them determine whether those arguments are convincing.

5. Evidence, Assumptions and Perspectives

One of the strongest connections between critical reading and critical thinking is the evaluation of evidence.

Written texts often contain claims supported by statistics, examples, research findings, expert opinions or references to other sources. However, the presence of evidence does not automatically make a claim convincing.

A critical reader may ask:

- Is the evidence relevant?
- Is it sufficient?
- Is the source credible?
- Does the evidence actually support the claim?
- Are there alternative explanations?
- Is the conclusion stronger than the evidence allows?

Bråten and Braasch (2017) highlight the importance of source evaluation when readers encounter information from multiple sources. Readers need to consider not only what a source says but also information about the source itself.

This is particularly important when different sources provide conflicting accounts.

Critical reading also involves identifying assumptions. Authors do not always state everything on which their arguments depend. Some assumptions remain implicit.

For example:

Online learning is more effective than classroom learning because students can access learning materials at any time.

The reader may identify an assumption behind this argument: that greater access to learning materials necessarily results in better learning.

The critical reader identifies the assumption. Critical thinking helps determine whether the assumption is reasonable.

Perspectives are another important consideration. Two writers may discuss the same issue but focus on different aspects of it. One may emphasise economic benefits, another environmental concerns and another social consequences.

Critical reading requires recognition of these perspectives. Critical thinking enables the reader to compare them and evaluate the evidence supporting them.

Wallace (2003) is useful here because her approach to critical reading draws attention to the relationship between texts and the social contexts in which they are produced.

Thus, critical reading involves asking not only “What is being said?” but also “How is it being said, from what perspective, and on what basis?”

6. Prior Knowledge, Reflection and the Reader

Reading is also influenced by the knowledge that readers already possess.

Readers bring their experiences, beliefs and expectations to a text. Aloqaili (2012) discusses schema theory as one way of understanding the relationship between prior knowledge, reading comprehension and critical thinking.

Prior knowledge can help readers understand new information. At the same time, it can influence interpretation. A reader who already strongly believes something may be more likely to accept information that confirms that belief.

This makes reflection an important part of critical reading.

A critical reader needs to ask not only:

What assumptions has the writer made?

but also:

What assumptions am I bringing to this text?

This introduces a metacognitive dimension to critical reading.

The reader becomes aware of how previous knowledge and personal beliefs may influence interpretation. Lau (2015) highlights the importance of metacognition in critical thinking and argues that awareness of one's own thinking processes is an important part of developing critical judgement.

Critical reading therefore operates at two levels. The reader examines the text, but also examines the reader's own response to the text.

This is one reason why critical reading and critical thinking reinforce one another. Critical thinking encourages self-questioning, while critical reading provides opportunities for such reflection.

7. Critical Reading and Critical Thinking in Higher Education

The relationship between the two skills is particularly important in higher education. University students are expected to engage with research articles, theoretical arguments and discipline-specific texts. They are also expected to use these sources to construct arguments in their own writing.

These activities require students to do more than locate information.

They need to:

- understand arguments;
- compare sources;
- evaluate evidence;
- recognise different perspectives;
- identify gaps;
- synthesise information; and
- develop reasoned conclusions.

Davies and Barnett (2015) identify critical thinking as an important concern in higher education and discuss its relationship with curriculum, pedagogy and disciplinary learning. Andrews (2015) similarly highlights the connection between critical thinking and argumentation.

Reading is therefore one of the main contexts through which students encounter the kinds of reasoning expected in higher education.

The relationship is particularly relevant to English language education. Students learning English may be able to understand a text at the linguistic level while still finding it difficult to evaluate the argument presented in it. Language proficiency and critical thinking are related, but they should not be assumed to develop automatically at the same rate.

This is where critical-reading pedagogy becomes important.

Wilson (2016), in examining critical reading and critical thinking in English for Academic Purposes, found that the extent to which students engaged critically with texts was influenced by the ways in which reading activities were structured and supported.

This suggests that students should not simply be given difficult texts and asked to “read critically”. They need opportunities to practise the processes involved.

For example, instead of asking only:

What is the main idea?

a teacher can ask:

What is the author's main claim?

What evidence supports it?

What assumption does the argument make?

Is the evidence sufficient?

What alternative explanation is possible?

Such questions move students from information retrieval towards reasoning.

8. An Integrated Framework for Critical Reading and Critical Thinking

The literature discussed above suggests that critical reading and critical thinking can be brought together through a simple integrated framework:

1. Comprehend

What does the text say?

The reader establishes the basic meaning.

↓

2. Identify

What are the main claims, reasons and evidence?

The reader identifies the components of the argument.

↓

3. Question

What assumptions and perspectives are present?

The reader examines what is stated and what may have been taken for granted.

↓

4. Analyse

How are the claims connected to the evidence?

The reader examines how the argument is constructed.

↓

5. Evaluate

How strong and credible is the evidence?

The reader considers the quality and relevance of the evidence.

↓

6. Reflect

How might my own knowledge or assumptions influence my interpretation?

The reader examines personal responses and prior beliefs.

↓

7. Judge

What should I accept, question or reject—and why?

The reader reaches a reasoned conclusion.

This framework illustrates the central argument of the paper. Reading begins with comprehension, but critical reading moves beyond comprehension towards analysis and evaluation. Critical thinking provides the reasoning processes that make this movement possible.

The process is also not strictly linear. A reader may return to an earlier stage after encountering new evidence. For example, evaluation may lead the reader to reconsider an initial interpretation, which may lead to renewed analysis.

Critical reading and critical thinking can therefore be understood as a dynamic and reciprocal process.

9. Educational Value and Implications

The relationship between critical reading and critical thinking has several implications for education.

First, reading instruction should not stop at comprehension. Understanding the text is necessary, but students should also be encouraged to examine arguments and evidence.

Second, students should be given opportunities to justify their interpretations. Asking students simply whether they agree with an author may produce personal opinions. Asking them to explain why they agree or disagree encourages reasoning.

Third, critical reading can be connected with writing and speaking. After evaluating a text, students can write a response, compare it with another source or discuss the strength of the author's argument. In this way, reading becomes connected with other language skills.

Fourth, teachers can gradually transfer responsibility to students. Wilson (2016) emphasises the importance of scaffolding in helping learners engage more critically with texts. Initially, teachers may model how to identify a claim or evaluate evidence. Later, students can perform these processes independently.

Finally, these skills are useful beyond academic study. People encounter claims through newspapers, websites and social media and often need to make decisions based on competing information. The ability to examine evidence, recognise assumptions and consider alternative perspectives can therefore contribute to informed decision-making.

Critical reading and critical thinking are consequently not only examination skills. They are part of becoming an independent learner and an informed reader.

10. Conclusion

Critical reading and critical thinking are closely connected but distinct processes. Critical reading refers to the active and evaluative engagement of a reader with a text, while critical thinking refers more broadly to the processes through which information, arguments and beliefs are analysed and evaluated.

The literature reviewed in this paper suggests that the two processes reinforce one another. Critical reading provides learners with claims, evidence, arguments and perspectives that can be examined, where as critical thinking provides the cognitive tools required to question, analyse, evaluate and interpret those elements.

The relationship can therefore be represented as:

Reading → Comprehension → Questioning → Analysis → Evaluation → Reflection → Reasoned judgement

However, this should not be understood as a simple one-way progression. Critical thinking also influences the way readers approach texts. A reader who has developed a questioning and reflective approach is more likely to engage actively with what is being read.

The central argument of this paper is therefore that critical reading provides an important context for the application and development of critical thinking. Treating the two as interconnected rather than completely separate abilities can help teachers design reading activities that move students beyond information retrieval towards analysis, evaluation and independent judgement.

Reading, in this sense, does not end with understanding what the author says. It continues with asking why the author says it, how the argument is supported, what assumptions are involved and what conclusions can reasonably be drawn.

The movement from reading to reasoning is therefore not a movement away from reading; it is a deeper form of reading.

References

1. Aloqaili, A. S. (2012). The relationship between reading comprehension and critical thinking: A theoretical study. *Journal of King Saud University – Languages and Translation*, 24(1), 35–41. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jksult.2011.01.001>
2. Andrews, R. (2015). Critical thinking and/or argumentation in higher education. In M. Davies & R. Barnett (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of critical thinking in higher education* (pp. 49–62). Palgrave Macmillan.
3. Bråten, I., & Braasch, J. L. G. (2017). Key issues in research on students' critical reading and learning in the 21st century information society. In E. M. Forzani & L. Correnti (Eds.), *Improving reading and reading engagement in the 21st century* (pp. 77–98). Springer.
4. Davies, M., & Barnett, R. (Eds.). (2015). *The Palgrave handbook of critical thinking in higher education*. Palgrave Macmillan.

5. Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*. D. C. Heath.
6. Ennis, R. H. (1985). A logical basis for measuring critical thinking skills. *Educational Leadership*, 43(2), 44–48.
7. Ennis, R. H. (1987). *A taxonomy of critical thinking dispositions and abilities*. W. H. Freeman.
8. Facione, P. A. (1990). *Critical thinking: A statement of expert consensus for purposes of educational assessment and instruction: The Delphi Report*. California Academic Press.
9. Lau, J. Y. F. (2015). Metacognitive education: Going beyond critical thinking. In M. Davies & R. Barnett (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of critical thinking in higher education*. Palgrave Macmillan.
10. Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2008). *The miniature guide to critical thinking concepts and tools*. Foundation for Critical Thinking Press.
11. Wallace, C. (2003). *Critical reading in language education*. Palgrave Macmillan.
12. Wilson, K. (2016). Critical reading, critical thinking: Delicate scaffolding in English for Academic Purposes (EAP). *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 22, 256–265.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2016.10.002>