

A Conceptual Evaluation on Critical Reading

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study which seeks answers to the question “What is critical reading?” is to research critical reading based on the data collected via document analysis – one of the qualitative methods. Content analysis is applied to the data collected to study the concept within the limits of the literature. In this context, in this study, some definitions of critical reading are given, the importance and the purposes of and the necessity for critical reading is mentioned and the differences between critical and non-critical reading are listed. Furthermore, the differences between critical and non-critical reading, the benefits of critical reading for the reader, the skills that a critical reader needs to have are mentioned. In this study, the strategies in order for critical reading to be carried out, and the barriers to critical reading are given and thus making a conceptual assessment on critical reading is targeted.

Key Words: Critical reading, critical reader, critical thinking.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Literacy is the ability to read literary texts, to have the ability to perceive and understand literary texts. But nowadays only writing and reading the name and surname, writing a letter and scanning newspaper headlines is not enough to be considered literate. In our society, literacy has become a fundamental human right as well as a phenomenon necessary for national development. The presence of readers who understand what they read in the information society and can use what they understand to improve the environment they live in and to practice in their own life and can communicate effectively with their environment has become important. In this context, critical reading emerges as an important concept. The “criticism” word in critical reading may sometimes be evaluated in the wrong and negative way as revealing its deficiencies by finding the negative aspects of the examined texts, but here the concept of criticism emerges as a concept that includes evaluation of the examination. Critical reading is an analytical process that requires reading in depth and active, asking questions about text, developing hypotheses and judgments, contrary to a textual superficial and mechanical reading. Critical reading, which can be described as an inquiry of knowledge, a questioning of individuals, an evaluation of skepticism, an evaluation through a critical filter through a prejudiced approach, a finding of a result from this new knowledge and previous knowledge, is the process of establishing and reacting. Critical reading plays an important role in individuals` accepting author`s arguments by developing a skeptical approach towards them, wondering, questioning, criticizing, investigating from reliable sources, using the mind and self-criticism, in distinguishing the facts, making judgments by making inferences, in understanding and interpreting themselves and the world, instead of accepting outside information or author`s point of view directly. Critical reading also emerges as a basic skill that enables the individual to acquire critical and free thinking skills, gain critical attitudes toward what is happening around them, and develop behaviors at the level of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, which also improves their multi-faceted thinking skills through different perspectives. (Akar, Başaran and Kara, 2016; Akyol, 2011; Akyol, 2015; Aşılıoğlu, 2008; Ateş, 2013; DeVoogd, 2008; Duran, 2013; Gündüz, 2015; Karadeniz, 2014; Karasakaloglu, Saracaloglu and Yılmaz Özelçi, 2012; Odabaş, Odabaş and Polat, 2008; Maltepe, 2016; Ogurlu, 2014; Özensoy, 2011; Sadioğlu and Bilgin, 2008; Şahinel; 2002; Wheeler, 2007).

There are many definitions of critical reading in the related literature. According to Arıcı (2008), critical reading is “The ability to make interpretations and evaluations of a text”, for Aşılıoğlu (2008), it is “Thinking, synthesis and evaluation activity”. Çifçi (2006) defines critical reading as “An effort to find better, more beautiful, truthfulness by passing through what is read, what is leaned by reading through their own knowledge and accumulation filters, and revealing better, more beautiful, more accurate mind products than what is read.” Darch ve Kameenui (1987) supports the previous definitions by stating that “Critical reading is the ability to reason on the text being read, to make inferences, to distinguish the difference between events and ideas, and to understand the author's intention and perspective.” For Kökdemir (2003) “It is to take into account

that alternative meanings may exist, instead of having an absolute conclusion about the information being read.” Özdemir (2017) explains critical reading as “The habit of thinking about the material that one reads, evaluating what they read, and using their own judgments about what they read.” From Yıldız (2008) 's point of view, critical reading is “The attitude of the reader to ask questions about the text, to think deeply about the content, to reach its own truth by evaluating the subject positively and negatively. ”

In today's societies, where in many ways the physical boundaries have disappeared, the communication possibilities have increased and the lifelong learning have gained more importance, it is possible to reach the knowledge produced elsewhere in the world, with the help of technology, in a few seconds. While written, audiovisual means of communication such as books, magazines, newspapers, radio, television, and internet can ease people's lives, they may cause people to face unnecessary, incomplete and incorrect information. It is crucial that individuals have critical reading skills that increase the quality of reading activities so that they can correctly understand what they are reading and who can distinguish among those written, printed and visual elements in the constant flow of information that can improve their knowledge and skills, to reach effective learning, solve problems in the light of these knowledge and decide which content is most accurate and reliable, that is, by examining the validity and reliability of information, by distinguishing inconsistent and contradictory expressions and gain qualified information. In addition to this, critical reading is also important in taking measures against adverts, propaganda and other adverse effects produced by the media and mass media such as the internet and in recognizing them (Akar et al., 2016; Arıcı, 2008; Aşılıoğlu, 2008; Duran, 2013; Gündüz, 2015; Karasakaloğlu et al., 2012; Özensoy, 2011, Sever, 2015).

In critical reading, the aim is not to develop an opposition to writing. On the contrary, the aim is of the reader is to make decisions that are based on the applicability of the author's ideas, develop the problem-solving ability and seek evidence to develop alternative ideas by understanding the views expressed by the author (Wheeler, 2007). Another purpose of critical reading is to make the reader to think actively by asking questions about the text, to evaluate the text with positive and negative aspects, to gain different perspectives and to direct them to find their own truths. When the differences between reading and critical reading are examined, it is observed that the activities for the meaning in reading are preliminary while the activities for analyzing, interpreting and evaluating are in the foreground in the critical reading. In addition, while the information in the text is assumed to be unquestionably accurate in reading, the text is questioned critically and the information is investigated in what ways the information is supported by the evidence and ideas in critical reading. In this respect, critical reading is an active process in which the reader is in dialogue with the writer. Questions such as "What does the text say ?, What does the author say ?, What will I learn from this text?" are about reading while questions such as "What is the meaning of this text, What is the conclusion? What kind of reasoning is applied and How ideas are supported, What evidence is used? What is the underlying assumptions, What does this text say?, Is the text effective?, Are they persuasive ?, How can I use it to develop my own dissertation? " are the questions about critical reading.(Aşılıoğlu, 2008; Ateş, 2013; Duran, 2013; Karabay, 2012; Karadeniz, 2014; Kurland, 2000; Maltepe, 2016; Özensoy, 2011).

In critical reading, the reader approaches the text with a critical, skeptical, and inquisitive point of view, questions the credibility and validity of the text with questions such as "Are the narratives correct," "Can these views be accepted?", "Are they reasonable?", and reads the text taking into account the relationship between the text, the writer and the reader and makes inquiries, and searches for evidence. However, non-critical readers are readers who are willing to accept the views and thoughts of the author as they are without evaluating what they read. Critical readers are those who try to distinguish relevant and irrelevant information with questions such as "Is the content consistent with the subject?" and are careful not to take into account what is irrelevant, make inferences and try to identify differences between events and ideas, whereas non-critical readers are those who are inclined to memorize the information as it is. Critical readers are those who accept texts as instruments, not only content with what the author wants to give, develop research and analytical thinking skills by not depending on single source of reference and evaluate them by taking advantage of past experiences; non-critical readers are the ones who are satisfied with the text at hand, are ready to accept those written without research, do not struggle to expand their perspective, and do not make connections between their new and past experiences. Bu nedenle eleştirel okuyucunun analiz, sentez ve değerlendirme düzeylerindeki davranışları kazanması söz konusu olabilmekteyken, eleştirel olmayan bir okuyucu bilişsel öğrenme bakımından kavrama düzeyini aşamamaktadır. In addition, the critical reader can be more selective, recognize the problems, discuss whether the proposed solutions are correct, and whether there are other alternatives; non-critical readers do not seek alternative. (Akar et al., 2016; Aşılıoğlu, 2008; Ateş, 2013; Duran, 2013; Gündüz, 2015; Karabay, 2013; Karasakaloğlu and Bulut, 2012; Karasakaloğlu et al., 2012; Özdemir, 2017; Şahinel, 2002). Critical reading occurs when the reader learns many subordinate skills, develops them, and applies them during reading. These sub-skills can be listed as follows. (Akar and et al., 2016; Aşılıoğlu, 2008):

- Determination of the places where the readers participate in the comments
- Establishing cause-effect relationships between feelings, thoughts and events in the text

- Discrimination of cases and interpretations
- Use of high level cognitive processes (analysis, synthesis, evaluation) during reading
- Assessment of information in the light of existing information
- Questioning the information presented in the text
- Criticism and self-criticism
- Use of other mental functions in the reading process
- Analysis of text
- Use of different interpretations of the text
- Determining questions about the subject before reading and finding answers to these questions during the reading process
- Referring to various sources related to the subject

At this stage, it is necessary to talk about the various strategies that the reader who wants to read critically must follow the above skills in order to gain critical skills. These strategies can be listed as follows. (Aşlıoğlu, 2008; Karasakaloğlu and Bulut, 2012; Özensoy, 2011; Sadioğlu and Bilgin, 2008):

- Preliminary examination and asking questions
- Asking questions
- Paying attention to key concepts
- Comparing with previous readings
- Identifying and summarizing the main idea
- Taking notes at the edge of the page
- Evaluation of thesis and main idea in the text
- Finding the author's point of view and purpose
- Distinguishing between cases and opinions
- Being aware of bias and pattern judgments
- Supporting the arguments with proofs
- Establishing cause-effect relationship
- Completing the text to be left incomplete for the reader

In addition to these skills and strategies above, an individual also needs to have the ability to read and think critically. In order to have critical thinking ability, it is necessary to provide a democratic environment for the individuals. For this reason, the provision of this democratic environment must begin at the early ages of individuals, and the necessary training should be given to the individuals. Critical readers who acquire and apply these subordinate skills and have a democratic atmosphere can become independent while leading a judgment or guiding their minds using logic principles and reach their original minds without being dependent on the author's opinions. In addition, individuals who have gained critical reading skills have no difficulty in establishing links between their experiences. While reading the text presented to them, they are not only satisfied with what the author wishes to give, but they also take advantage of past experiences and create meaning for themselves. Therefore, with the reader acquiring this characteristic, reading is used not only as a means of receiving and recording information, but also as a means of constructing it. (Akar et al., 2016; Aşlıoğlu, 2008).

There are also various obstacles for the ones who want to read critically, succeed in the modern world, and to realize lifelong learning. These obstacles can be listed as follows. (Akyol, 2011):

- The greatest obstacle in critically reading the proof that everything that has been printed, entered the house, is true.
- Being conditioned to obedience "without criticism" is another obstacle when an individual is young.
- Criticisms made without any scientific support are also obstacles to critical reading. Evaluations that start with "I think ...", "I believe ..." should definitely have a support.
- Avoiding the civilized discussion of different views in schools, in families, in associations and in different social groups and depending on a single view, a single leader, a single point of view also prevent critical thinking.

II. CONCLUSION

As a result, the individual who wants to read critically should evaluate the text by questioning it with a critical eye and with strong skepticism, leaving the prejudices to one side and subjecting them to certain questions and certain criteria, without forgetting that the writer may be mistaken as everyone else can be mistaken in all printed texts or be subject to bias. Critical reading that allows such an assessment goes beyond being a concept that gives you the ability to understand what you read. That is to say, do not believe blindly to everything written in the individual, critical thinking, inquiry, research and know-how, keeps the mind of the individual alive constantly, contributes to the development of reading taste, habits and language skills. (Çiftçi, 2006; Darch ve Kameenui, 1987; Odabaş and et al., 2008).

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