

CRITICAL READING SKILLS IN ENGLISH TEXT ON ISLAMIC TOPICS

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Abstract: A crucial academic ability is critical reading, which allows readers to analyze, assess, and interpret texts in ways that go beyond simple comprehension. Because of the complexity, sensitivity, and variety of viewpoints surrounding Islam in international discourse, critical reading is essential when it comes to English books on Islamic subjects. This study investigates the growth and use of critical reading abilities when interacting with Islamic writings written in English. Data were gathered from university students enrolled in English education and Islamic studies programs using a qualitative descriptive research design. According to the results, students who use critical reading techniques—like recognizing author bias, assessing sources, and contextual interpretation—show greater understanding and more impartial viewpoints. The study emphasizes how crucial it is to incorporate critical reading education into English courses that deal with In order to foster academic rigor, intercultural understanding, and informed interpretation, the study emphasizes the significance of including critical reading teaching into English classes that deal with Islamic topics.

Keywords: Critical Reading, English Texts, Islamic Studies, Discourse Analysis, Higher Education

Introduction

Critical reading skills are now essential in higher education, especially in situations where texts are influenced by intricate cultural, religious, and ideological factors. English-language texts on Islamic subjects hold a unique place in these situations. These books, which are created in a variety of academic, political, and media contexts, frequently represent different perspectives on Islam, Muslim society, and Islamic philosophy. Because of this, readers are regularly exposed to depictions that can be biased and reductionist or scholarly and balanced. This circumstance emphasizes how important it is to have good critical reading abilities while interacting with Islam-related English texts.

Critical reading goes beyond simple language decoding and comprehension. It entails challenging presumptions, assessing the evidence, spotting hidden meanings, and placing texts in larger historical, social, and ideological contexts. Critical reading is a protective and empowering academic skill for students studying Islam through English sources, especially in non-native English circumstances. It empowers students to confront preconceptions, reject simplistic narratives, and interact with literature in an intellectually responsible way.

In many educational contexts, general comprehension and vocabulary development are given priority over critical analysis in English courses that incorporate Islamic subject. This method could lead to passive reading habits, in which pupils take in information without giving it enough thought.

Given the sensitive nature of religious discourse and the prevalence of contested perspectives on Islam in global literature, such passivity can lead to misunderstanding or internalization of biased viewpoints. Therefore, integrating critical reading instruction into English learning contexts is not merely a pedagogical preference but an academic necessity.

This article seeks to examine how critical reading skills can be applied to English texts on Islamic topics and how these skills contribute to deeper comprehension, academic independence, and intercultural awareness. By focusing on students' experiences and reading practices, the study aims to demonstrate the value of critical reading as both a linguistic and intellectual competence.

Literature Review

Theoretical Underpinnings of Critical Reading

Constructivist and critical pedagogy approaches, which see students as active creators of meaning rather than passive consumers of knowledge, are the foundation of critical reading. According to this viewpoint, reading is a socially situated activity that is impacted by power dynamics, ideologies, and cultural context rather than being a neutral activity. Texts are never value-free, according to academics; rather, they represent the author's presumptions, goals, and sociopolitical stance.

Critical reading is frequently linked to discourse analysis, critical thinking, and metacognitive awareness in academic literacy studies. It is recommended that readers examine texts by posing queries like: Who is the author? What does the text aim to achieve? Whose opinions are heard or not? Which presumptions form the basis of the argument? When reading works on religious subjects, where belief systems, identity, and authority are crucial, these concerns are especially pertinent.

Critical Reading in the Teaching of English

Traditional comprehension-based methods of teaching English have given way to more analytical and reflective models of critical reading. Previous teaching methods focused on literal understanding, vocabulary acquisition, and decoding abilities. Even if these abilities are still crucial, recent studies emphasize that they are not enough for academic achievement, particularly in higher education.

According to studies conducted in EFL and ESL situations, students frequently find it difficult to interact critically with texts because of language barriers, a lack of prior knowledge, or teacher-centered teaching methods. On the other hand, students show an enhanced capacity to recognize key points, assess supporting data, and integrate knowledge from various sources when critical reading techniques are explicitly taught.

As students gain confidence in communicating their interpretations, critical reading training has also been demonstrated to increase learner autonomy and motivation.

Islam's Representation in English Texts

There has been much scholarly discussion over how Islam is portrayed in English-language literature. Scholars observe that Islam is often presented through prevailing Western discourses that may highlight cultural differences, political strife, or security issues. Even while academic writing frequently strives for neutrality, institutional, historical, and ideological biases may nonetheless have an impact.

In particular, popular literature and the media frequently oversimplify difficult Islamic ideas, which can lead to the reinforcement of prejudices or preconceptions.

Certain interpretations may be prioritized while others are marginalized in scholarly texts. Lack of critical reading abilities can lead to students' unquestioning acceptance of incomplete or skewed narratives when they interact with such books.

By analyzing language use, framing techniques, and source selection, scholars contend that critical reading enables students to dissect these representations. Developing knowledgeable and impartial perceptions of Islam as a varied and dynamic religious tradition requires this approach.

Reading Critically in Islamic Studies Environments

Reading in Islamic studies has historically placed a strong emphasis on understanding canonical books, including the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical academic writings. Although Islamic intellectual heritage has always included interpretive reasoning, contemporary educational methods occasionally place more emphasis on memory and material mastery than critical engagement, especially when working with secondary sources in foreign languages.

Critical reading should be incorporated into Islamic studies courses, according to recent research, particularly when students interact with English materials. Students can assess academic arguments, contextualize current discourses of Islam, and differentiate between original Islamic sources and foreign interpretations through critical reading. The growth of academically demanding and intellectually autonomous learners is aided by this integration.

Research on the critical reading of English Islamic texts is still scarce, despite its significance. The majority of current research focuses on critical reading in either religious education or general EFL contexts. This disparity emphasizes the necessity for empirical studies that connect Islamic studies, English education, and critical literacy.

Method

Design of Research

In order to investigate how students use critical reading techniques when interacting with English texts on Islamic subjects, this study used a qualitative descriptive research approach. To fully capture the experiences, perceptions, and interpretive processes of the participants, a qualitative technique was chosen. Rich, contextualized understanding of reading practices is made possible by this design, which is not possible with just quantitative measurements.

Participants

The participants were undergraduate students at a university where English is taught as a foreign language who were enrolled in Islamic studies and English education programs. These pupils were chosen because they frequently come across English writings that address Islamic topics in academic and linguistic contexts. The participants had a range of educational backgrounds and English skill levels.

Tools for Gathering Data

Three primary methods were used to gather data: semi-structured interviews, reflective reading diaries, and classroom observations. During guided reading exercises, classroom observations concentrated on how students engaged with texts and employed critical reading techniques. Students were able to record their analytical reactions, difficulties, and changing viewpoints in reflective diaries. Students' attitudes toward critical reading and its perceived advantages were better understood through semi-structured interviews.

Analysis of Data

An inductive method was used to analyze the data thematically. To find recurrent themes of understanding, assessment, bias awareness, and interpretative confidence, transcripts and written thoughts were analyzed. The investigation focused on trends in how students' reading habits evolved over time and how critical reading affected their comprehension of Islamic subjects.

Result and Discussion

The results of the study are presented and interpreted in this section by looking at how students used critical reading techniques when interacting with English materials about Islamic subjects. To give a thorough grasp of the function of critical reading in this situation, the conversation combines pertinent theoretical viewpoints with empirical findings.

Students' First Interaction with Islamic Texts in English

When the study first started, the majority of participants used a surface-level reading method to English books about Islamic subjects. Their involvement was concentrated on detecting information that was explicitly expressed, comprehending sentence structure, and decoding language. This method is similar to the conventional reading techniques sometimes used in EFL settings, where linguistic precision is frequently given precedence over in-depth analysis.

Students' willingness to challenge arguments and assess sources was often constrained by their perception of academic English books as authoritative and impartial. Many interviewees stated that they believed published works had undeniable academic credibility, especially those written by Western or non-Muslim professors. This belief led to less critical engagement and passive reading habits, particularly when texts offered delicate or contentious interpretations of Islam.

Cognitive and Linguistic Obstacles to Critical Reading

The results show that critical reading was significantly hampered by linguistic complexity. Students found it challenging to go beyond literal comprehension due to abstract theoretical notions, dense academic jargon, and new rhetorical structures. Students who experienced cognitive overload frequently concentrated on comprehending individual sentences rather than evaluating more comprehensive arguments.

These difficulties align with earlier studies that indicate low language skills may impede critical participation. But the study also discovered that the absence of critical reading was not entirely explained by linguistic difficulty alone. Instead, pupils' early passivity was mostly caused by the lack of clear training in analytical techniques. This result emphasizes how crucial instructional support is for developing critical literacy.

Effects of Teaching Explicit Critical Reading

Students' reading habits showed a noticeable change after receiving comprehensive teaching in critical reading techniques. Key analytical skills, such as detecting author perspective, identifying thesis statements, assessing evidence, and separating fact from opinion, were the main focus of instruction. Additionally, students were urged to think about the socio-historical setting in which works were created.

Participants started to approach books with more purpose and intellectual curiosity as a result. They reported feeling more comfortable challenging claims and evaluating the reliability

of sources. Students actively compared interpretations and contested opinions using textual evidence, making class discussions more participatory. This change is consistent with constructivist ideas, which place a strong emphasis on students actively participating in the process of creating meaning.

Acknowledgment of Bias and Authorial Perspective

Students' improved capacity to identify authorial perspective and probable bias was one of the study's most important results. Participants gained the ability to recognize linguistic cues that indicated subjective placement, such as modal verbs, evaluative adjectives, and generalizations. Additionally, they started paying closer attention to what was left out of literature, such as different interpretations and perspectives from Muslim communities.

Students were able to critically assess how Islam was presented in English texts thanks to this awareness. They looked at underlying presumptions and ideological orientations rather than taking representations at face value. This result validates critical discourse analysis methods, which contend that language serves as a vehicle for ideology and power.

Handling Delicate and Contentious Subjects

Sensitive topics like women, politics, extremism, and religious authority are frequently covered in English works on Islamic subjects. Students initially handled these subjects cautiously and, in certain situations, with emotional distress. Critical reading techniques, however, offered a methodical framework for approaching contentious matters analytically as opposed to defensively.

Critical reading, according to students, helped them distinguish between academic analysis and personal convictions. They were able to interact with difficult material in a more thoughtful and balanced way by concentrating on evidence, argument structure, and source reliability. In religious studies, where emotional reactions can affect interpretation, this skill is especially crucial.

Growth in Metacognitive Awareness

Participants' reflective journals demonstrated an increasing degree of metacognitive awareness. Pupils became more aware of how they read, identifying instances in which they relied on preconceived notions or made assumptions. To improve comprehension, they described techniques like rereading, annotating, and cross-referencing materials.

This finding implies that self-regulated learning is promoted by critical reading. Students had more control over their academic reading habits as they became conscious of their cognitive processes. Scholarly independence and lifetime learning depend on this kind of insight.

Combining Language Development with Critical Reading

Additionally, the study discovered that students' general English language development benefited from critical reading. Deeper language processing was necessary for critical engagement with texts, which improved discourse competency, syntactic awareness, and vocabulary retention. Students improved their ability to summarize arguments, paraphrase concepts, and articulate critical points of view both orally and in writing.

This result casts doubt on the notion that critical reading might be too difficult for EFL students. Rather, the findings imply that critical interaction promotes both verbal and cognitive development when it is properly scaffolded.

Ethical and Intercultural Aspects of Critical Reading

Critical reading had important cross-cultural ramifications in addition to academic results. Students become more aware of cultural variety and discursive power by examining how Islam is portrayed in English texts. They grew more conscious of the ways that prevailing narratives might influence how the world views Islam and Muslim societies.

Fairness, empathy, and intellectual responsibility are traits of ethical reading practices that were promoted by this awareness. Students showed a greater dedication to searching out fair viewpoints and refraining from making snap decisions. These results demonstrate how critical reading fosters polite scholarly discourse and intercultural understanding.

Comparison with Earlier Research

The results of this study are consistent with other studies on critical reading in higher education and EFL settings. Analytical abilities, learner autonomy, and academic confidence have all improved after receiving critical reading instruction, according to similar studies. However, by concentrating on English writings pertaining to Islamic subjects—an area that has gotten little scholarly attention—this study expands on earlier studies.

The study advances a more sophisticated understanding of academic literacy in multicultural and multilingual contexts by placing critical reading inside religious and cultural discourse.

Conclusion

The function and importance of critical reading abilities in interacting with English literature on Islamic subjects in a higher education setting have been investigated in this study. The findings, which are based on qualitative data from student interviews, reflective journals, and classroom observations, show that critical reading is an essential part of meaningful and responsible participation with complex religious discourse rather than just a supplementary academic skill. The study demonstrates how when critical reading skills were explicitly taught and methodically implemented, students' reading practices changed from surface-level comprehension to deeper analytical, evaluative, and reflective involvement.

The fact that English literature on Islamic subjects require a particularly high degree of critical awareness is one of the research's most significant findings. These books are frequently incorporated into historical, cultural, and ideological contexts that affect how Islam is portrayed and understood. Students who lack critical reading abilities are more likely to accept biased, incomplete, or simplistic narratives without question. The results show that critical reading gives students the ability to identify the author's position, evaluate the reliability of sources, and place texts in larger intellectual and sociopolitical contexts.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the study affirms that teaching critical reading methods explicitly is crucial, particularly in EFL settings. Because traditional teaching methods emphasize linguistic precision over analytical depth, many students originally lacked the self-assurance and methodical skills necessary to challenge academic literature. Students showed greater intellectual autonomy, enhanced analytical abilities, and higher confidence in addressing delicate and contentious Islamic issues when critical reading was incorporated into classroom instruction. This shift emphasizes how crucial it is to switch from comprehension-based reading instruction to more critical and reflective pedagogies.

The study also shows that pupils' language development is greatly aided by critical reading. Students' vocabulary use, discourse awareness, and academic expression all increased when they engaged analytically with texts because it forced them to process language more thoroughly.

These results cast doubt on the notion that critical reading is excessively difficult for EFL students. Rather, the findings imply that critical engagement improves cognitive growth and language proficiency when properly scaffolded.

The study emphasizes the ethical and multicultural aspects of critical reading in addition to academic results. Students' awareness of cultural variety, power dynamics, and discursive framing increased as a result of their critical analysis of English depictions of Islam. This knowledge encouraged more educated, courteous, and balanced participation in international scholarly discourse. In this way, critical reading serves as a tool for developing ethical responsibility and intercultural understanding in a world that is becoming more interconnected, in addition to being an academic talent.

Curriculum and Instructional Implications

The results of this study have significant ramifications for instructional practice and curriculum design. Critical reading objectives should be expressly included alongside linguistic goals in English courses that contain Islamic or religious content. Teachers are urged to provide reading assignments that challenge presumptions, examine speech, and contrast various viewpoints. Critical literacy pedagogy should be emphasized in teacher preparation programs so that teachers are prepared to help students navigate difficult and delicate texts.

Additionally, cooperation between the departments of Islamic studies and English education could improve the efficacy of critical reading training. These interdisciplinary methods can give students both subject-matter expertise and linguistic tools, allowing for more sophisticated and knowledgeable textual interpretation.

Study Limitations

This study has limitations even if it offers insightful information. The study had a comparatively modest sample size and was carried out in a single institutional setting. The results might therefore not be entirely applicable to all educational contexts. Furthermore, the study's qualitative design prioritizes depth over breadth, which can make it more difficult to quantify the statistical effects of critical reading training.

Future Research Directions

By using mixed-method or quantitative methodologies to investigate the long-term consequences of critical reading education, future study may expand on this findings. Studies that compare different institutions, cultural settings, or ability levels may shed more light on how critical reading abilities evolve and transfer throughout academic fields. Given the increasing impact of online discourse on perceptions of Islam, researchers may also investigate the usage of digital and multimodal texts.

Concluding Remarks

This study concludes by confirming that critical reading is an essential ability for students interacting with English materials on Islamic subjects. Critical reading helps students negotiate complicated discourses with intellectual integrity and ethical responsibility by promoting analytical awareness, academic independence, and intercultural sensitivity. Therefore, it is not only academically advantageous but also socially and culturally necessary to incorporate critical reading into the teaching of English and Islamic studies.

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