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FOSTERING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH EXTENSIVE READING IN UZBEKISTAN’S ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

Our country has established numerous opportunities for foreign language learning and instruction. English, in particular, facilitates communication, international relations, cultural exchange, and scientific advancement. In Uzbekistan, emphasis on English language acquisition has increased significantly to align with global integration and economic development goals. This necessitates developing critical thinking skills among language learners, with extensive reading strategies being one of the most effective methods.

This article explores the origins, development, and interconnections of critical thinking and extensive reading strategies. An online survey identified challenges in implementing extensive reading, its benefits, and its role in improving critical thinking. Participants suggested specialized training or workshops and incorporating extensive reading strategy instruction as a distinct unit or course in the current curriculum to highlight the importance of critical thinking in foreign language learning.

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O‘ZBEKISTONNING INGLIZ TILI TA’LIMIDA EKSTENSIV O‘QISH ORQALI TANQIDIY FIKRLASHNI RIVOJLANTIRISH

ANNOTATSIYA

Mamlakatimizda chet tillarni o‘rganish va o‘qitish uchun ko‘plab imkoniyatlar mavjud. Ayniqsa, ingliz tili kommunikatsiya, xalqaro munosabatlar, madaniy almashinuv va ilmiy taraqqiyotni ta‘minlaydi. O‘zbekistonda global integratsiya va iqtisodiy rivojlanish maqsadlariga muvofiq ingliz tilini o‘zlashtirishga e‘tibor sezilarli darajada oshdi. Bu til o‘rganuvchilar orasida tanqidiy fikrlash ko‘nikmalarini rivojlantirishni talab qiladi, bunda ekstensiv o‘qish strategiyalari eng samarali usullardan hisoblanadi.

Ushbu maqolada tanqidiy fikrlash va ekstensiv o‘qish strategiyalarining kelib chiqishi, rivojlanishi va o‘zaro bog‘liqligi tadqiq etilgan. Onlayn so‘rovnoma ekstensiv o‘qishni amalga oshirishdagi qiyinchiliklar, uning afzalliklari va tanqidiy fikrlashni rivojlantirishdagi o‘rnini aniqladi. Ishtirokchilar maxsus treninglar yoki seminarlar o‘tkazishni va chet tilini o‘rganishda tanqidiy fikrlashning ahamiyatini ta‘kidlash uchun joriy o‘quv dasturiga ekstensiv o‘qish strategiyasi ta‘limini alohida bo‘lim yoki kurs sifatida kiritishni taklif qildilar.

Bundan tashqari, o‘rta maktablar o‘quv dasturi

Additionally, an analysis was conducted on the curriculum of secondary schools and study programs specifically designed for students majoring in English at a higher educational institution (using Gulistan State University as an example). The analysis revealed that extensive reading is primarily taught theoretically, resulting in limited practical application of this strategy. The lesson plans for schools do not incorporate topics related to the utilization of extensive reading strategies. Only the 9th, 10th, and 11th grade textbooks contain specialized units at the conclusion of every two sections aimed at developing critical thinking skills. These units are designed to enhance students' critical thinking abilities by instructing them in analysis, survey conduction, and creation of presentations (e.g., books, articles, and advertising posters). The textbooks also include exercises that cultivate skills such as reasoning, analysis, and open expression of ideas. Research indicates that fostering critical thinking in Uzbek classrooms is feasible by providing teachers with the tools and materials needed to implement an extensive reading strategy effectively.

Key words: critical thinking, extensive reading, professional development, language proficiency, cognitive skills, analysis, argumentative reasoning, evaluation, academic advancement, reading comprehension.

va oliy ta'lim muassasasida ingliz tili bo'yicha mutaxassislik olayotgan talabalar uchun maxsus ishlab chiqilgan o'quv dasturlari (Guliston davlat universiteti misolida) tahlil qilindi. Tahlil shuni ko'rsatdiki, ekstensiv o'qish asosan nazariy jihatga e'tiborni qaratadi, oqibatda bu strategiyaning amaliy qo'llanilishi cheklangan. Maktablar uchun dars rejalari ekstensiv o'qish strategiyalaridan foydalanish bilan bog'liq mavzularni o'z ichiga olmaydi. Faqat 9-, 10- va 11-sinf darsliklari har ikki bo'limdan so'ng tanqidiy fikrlash ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirishga qaratilgan maxsus bo'limlarni o'z ichiga oladi. Ushbu bo'limlar o'quvchilarning tahlil qilish, so'rovnomalar o'tkazish va taqdimotlar (masalan, kitoblar, maqolalar va reklama posterlari) yaratish bo'yicha ko'rsatma berish orqali tanqidiy fikrlash qobiliyatlarini oshirishga mo'ljallangan. Darsliklar, shuningdek, mulohaza yuritish, tahlil qilish va g'oyalarni ochiq ifoda etish kabi ko'nikmalarni rivojlantiruvchi mashqlarni o'z ichiga oladi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko'rsatdiki, o'qituvchilarga ekstensiv o'qish strategiyasini samarali amalga oshirish uchun zarur vositalar va materiallar taqdim etish orqali o'zbek sinflarida tanqidiy fikrlashni rivojlantirish mumkin.

Kalit so'zlar: tanqidiy fikrlash, ekstensiv o'qish, kasbiy rivojlanish, til bilimi, kognitiv ko'nikmalar, tahlil, argumentli mulohaza yuritish, baholash, akademik taraqqiyot, o'qib tushunish.

INTRODUCTION

In the global landscape of education English language holds a pivotal role since it is acting as a bridge for communication, cultural exchange, and academic advancement. Uzbekistan draws special attention to teaching and developing foreign languages in the educational system, which is a key factor of the socio-economic, political and cultural life of the country. Resolution of the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan I.Karimov No. PD-1875 "On measures to further improve of foreign language system" from December 10, 2012 and the resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh.Mirziyoyev No. PD-4199 "On measures for the formation of Presidential schools" on February 20, 2019 are the most important ones in teaching English. Almost all subjects are taught in English at Presidential schools and some specialized educational institutions in English.

President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh.Mirziyoyev chaired a video conference on measures to improve the system of teaching foreign languages on May 6, 2021. On this basis, the issue of attitudes to foreign language teaching is addressed in the resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated May 19, 2021 No. PD-5117 "On measures to bring the promotion of foreign languages

in the Republic of Uzbekistan to a qualitatively new level”: “... education in foreign languages. It is no coincidence that the need to develop as a policy priority, radically improve the quality of education in this area, attract qualified teachers to the field and increase the population’s interest in learning foreign languages” [PR-5117, 2021].

Uzbekistan is implementing various initiatives to enhance English language education, demonstrating its commitment to improving educational standards and enhancing global integration. The Ministry of Public Education in Uzbekistan has revised the national curriculum to emphasize English language instruction from an early age, with ongoing professional development for teachers. Uzbekistan collaborates with international organizations like the British Council, the American Council and other organizations, and teachers participate in international programs. The country has introduced the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) standards for English proficiency assessment and developed digital resources for learning.

In addition to focusing on English proficiency and global communication, Uzbekistan’s education reform aims to develop students’ creativity and critical thinking abilities to prepare better Uzbek specialists.

Developing future teachers’ thinking and teaching practices is crucial for their impact on students and their future learning. Teachers with strong critical thinking and problem-solving abilities are essential for educating a generation of critical thinkers and problem solvers, highlighting the need for proactive teaching methods.

Over the past three years, the number of international language certificate applicants has increased tenfold, from 7 in 2016 to 25 in our country [Mirziyoyev, 2021].

Turning to the current research topic, one of the effective methodologies to enhance English language proficiency while fostering critical thinking is through extensive reading strategies. The term “extensive reading” is often attributed to H.Palmer, an English linguist and educator, who popularized the concept in the early 20th century. H.Palmer was a key figure in language teaching, particularly in Japan, where he worked extensively on English language education. He distinguished between “extensive reading”, which involves reading large amounts of material for general understanding and pleasure, and “intensive reading”, which focuses on detailed comprehension of shorter text [Day & Bamford, 1998].

J.Dewey is often considered the father of critical thinking in education who emphasized reflective thinking as a core component of learning. His work, especially in “*How We Think*”, laid the groundwork for integrating critical thinking into education, including language teaching [Dewey, 1910; 3].

R.Paul and L.Elder are well-known for their extensive work on critical thinking. They have written numerous books and articles, including “*Critical Thinking: Tools for Taking Charge of Your Learning and Your Life*” (2001), which explores how critical thinking can be integrated into teaching. Their frameworks for critical thinking are often applied in ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms to develop learners’ analytical skills [Paul & Elder, 2001].

Another scholar, S. Brookfield, has authored several influential books on critical thinking, such as “Developing Critical Thinkers” (1987). He focuses on the role of critical thinking in adult education and its importance in empowering learners. His work is particularly relevant for English teachers working with adult learners, emphasizing the importance of fostering critical thinking in language learning [Brookfield, 1987].

This article explores the integration of extensive reading in English language teaching and its impact on developing critical thinking skills among learners in Uzbekistan.

Literature review

The word “critical” derives etymologically from two Greek roots: “kriticos” (meaning discerning judgment) and, “criterion” (meaning standards). Etymologically, then, the word implies the development of “discerning judgment based on standards” [Paul et al., 1997; 2].

“Oxford English Dictionary” defines critical thinking as “the objective, systematic, and rational analysis and evaluation of factual evidence to form a judgement on a subject, issue, etc” [Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.].

In the “Cambridge Dictionary” critical thinking is the process of thinking carefully about a subject or idea, without allowing feelings or opinions to affect you [Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.].

“Merriam-Webster” dictionary describes it as: “the mental process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information to reach an answer or conclusion [Merriam-Webster, n.d.].

To foster a reflective environment, students can be taught to differentiate between good and poor thinking, set standards for incisiveness, coherence, and open-mindedness, maintain thinking journals, participate in reflective writing sessions, and engage in open-ended discussions. Thinking is often seen as an individual process, but new ideas emerge from collaborative processes. To foster creativity, it is important to teach students how to think collaboratively, using brainstorming, cooperative activities, and discussion techniques to submit ideas, build on each other, and reach consensus.

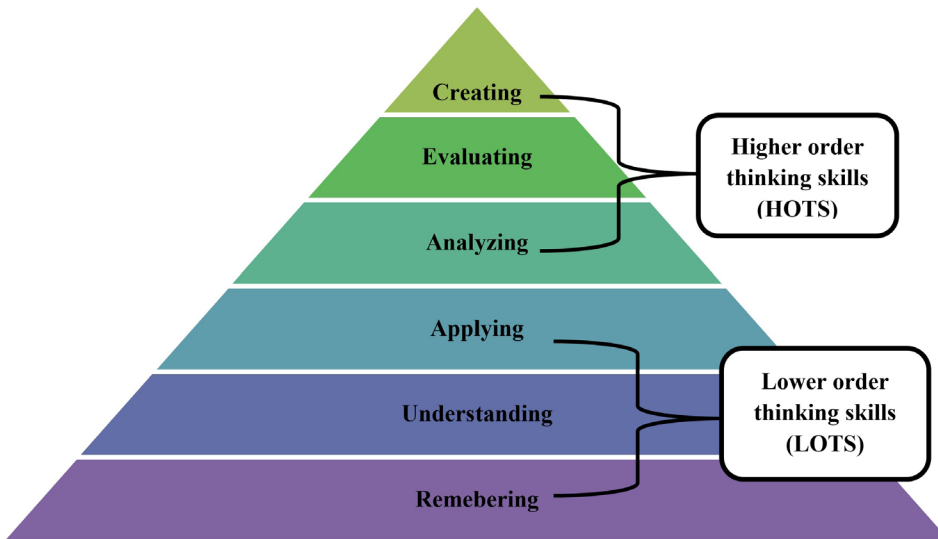
R.H. Ennis contributed significantly to defining and assessing critical thinking. In his work, “*Critical Thinking*”, R.H. Ennis outlines various components of critical thinking and approaches to teaching it effectively. The main components of critical thinking: are considered: clarification, analysis, evaluation, inference, reasoning, reflection and problem-solving [Ennis, 1985].

Several studies have focused on developing critical thinking skills in ESL/EFL reading classroom activities, assessing instructions and teachers’ commitment, examining its relationship with extensive reading, and examining its effect on other study elements. Initial steps for defining the notion of critical thinking started in 1960s. However, groundbreaking research was carried out by Bloom in the 1956. Bloom is famous for creating *Bloom’s Taxonomy* [Bloom, 1956], a classification of educational objectives that include higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and

evaluation of key aspects of critical thinking. Bloom defined critical thinking as mastery of skills like knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, with higher levels often reflecting critical thinking. Bloom's taxonomy divides thinking skills into hierarchical levels, ranging from lower-order thinking skills (remembering and understanding) to higher-order thinking skills (analyzing, evaluating, and creating) (See Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Bloom's taxonomy. Six levels of cognitive skills



While HOTS handle information processing, LOTs deal with information collection. By understanding these levels, educators and learners can identify where they are in the cognitive process and work towards higher levels of thinking.

R.W. Paul, a renowned critical thinking researcher, began his studies in the 1970s. He earned four degrees and lectured on teaching critical thinking globally. Paul's work included integrating formal and informal logic and critical thinking in study curriculum, emphasizing argument identification and evaluation. He also developed innovative teaching strategies for self-assessment. R.W. Paul, L.Elder, and T.Bartell focused on assessing critical thinking instructions and the teachers' commitment [Paul et al., 1997].

Another scientist, F.D. Halpern carried out research on developing college students' critical thinking skills that focused on widely applicable skills. According to F.D. Halpern, critical thinking refers to using cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome. Critical thinking is purposeful, reasoned, and goal directed. It is the thinking involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions. Critical thinkers use these skills appropriately, without prompting, and usually with conscious intent, in various settings. That is, they are predisposed to think critically. When we think critically, we are evaluating the outcomes of our thought processes – how good a decision is or how

well a problem is solved [Halpern, 1998].

B.N. Moore and R.Parker's research into critical thinking is more relevant, engaging and focuses on more student success. Students are actively and personally engaged in thinking critically while also discovering how to apply those thinking skills in everyday life. B.N. Moore and R.Parker's writing style is known for its freshness, balancing explication and example, and applying critical thinking skills to various areas like advertising, politics, media, and popular culture. Critical thinking involves making wise decisions and reaching correct conclusions, avoiding temptation, emotion, greed, irrelevant considerations, and bias. It involves critiquing the first kind of thinking, subjecting it to rational evaluation, and evaluating whether our thinking abides by good sense and logic. It involves thinking about thinking rather than blindly reacting [Moore & Parker, 2012].

Iranian scientists E.N. Mohammadi, F.Heidari, and N.D. Niry's article analyzed the reading strategies used by Iranian EFL learners, focusing on cognitive, meta-cognitive, and compensation categories, and the relationship between critical thinking ability and these strategies, excluding gender differences [Mohammadi et al., 2012].

The study by J.H. Reed investigates the impact of a critical thinking model on student achievement in primary source document analysis, argumentative reasoning, essential disposition of thinking, and history content in a community college history course [Reed, 1998].

Critical thinking as a topic lurks intriguingly behind and about much of the thinking about higher education and professional development. J.Moon questioned the appropriateness of these terms in teaching [Moon, 2007]. Critical thinking, a term often associated with higher education and professional development, has gained prominence recently. While it is widely understood and heavily incorporated into educational descriptions, there is growing scepticism over other terms used in pedagogy and education environments.

Critical thinking is an essential skill for academic and professional success. It involves analyzing information, evaluating evidence, and making reasoned conclusions. Extensive reading can be a powerful tool in developing these skills in English language learners.

To enhance critical thinking, encourage open-ended questioning, summarizing and paraphrasing texts, fostering discussion and debate, connecting reading material to personal experiences, and assigning critical reviews to analyze the author's purpose, arguments, and evidence quality. This approach promotes deeper understanding and critical analysis.

Doctor G.M. Jacobs has published several articles and studies on the relationship between extensive reading and critical thinking, particularly in ESL/EFL contexts. He argues that extensive reading fosters critical thinking by exposing learners to diverse viewpoints, encouraging them to question and reflect on what they read. His research also highlights how engaging with a wide range of texts can help learners develop the ability to think critically [Lituanas et al.,1999].

Extensive reading involves learners reading independently and silently at their

own level, ideally around 200 words per minute (wpm). Reading aloud restricts learners to a slow speed, while speaking requires 100-150 wpm speed. Reading involves comprehension, ensuring learners gain comprehensible input and focus on understanding what they read [Nation & Waring, 2019; 3]. Adult native English texts require a vocabulary size of 5,000-9,000 words for ease of reading, while young native speakers face similar difficulty, requiring 98% coverage of running words [Hirsh & Nation, 1992].

A.J. Harris made contributions to the field of extensive reading. She focused on how extensive reading can improve language proficiency and literacy skills among learners. She explored various aspects of extensive reading, including its impact on reading fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and overall language development [Harris & Sipay, 2008].

N.Husna explored how an extensive reading (ER) program, when integrated with critical thinking tasks, can foster the development of students' analytical and reasoning abilities [Husna, 2019]. The scholar argued that extensive reading, which involves reading a large quantity of material for pleasure and general understanding, can be an effective tool for improving language skills and cultivating critical thinking skills in students.

The dissertation paper by students G.Jiménez, L.Haydee, O.Rosales, and E.A. Soraya focuses on the importance of developing critical thinking skills in ESL (English as a Second Language) students at the university level through extensive reading. Due to the global spread of English, students need to enhance their academic, professional, and personal skills. Extensive reading is highlighted as a technique that fosters critical thinking, helping students analyze problems, consider different viewpoints, and evaluate arguments. The paper aims to motivate students and teachers to integrate these skills into their learning. It outlines the research objectives, justification, and methodology and concludes with recommendations and sources consulted [Jiménez et al., 2010].

S.D. Krashen is known for his second language acquisition theories, including the Input Hypothesis, which has also touched on how extensive reading contributes to critical thinking. He explored how extensive reading improves language skills and develops critical thinking by allowing readers to engage with complex ideas and arguments. Moreover, he emphasized the importance of reading a wide variety of texts to engage with different ideas and viewpoints [Krashen, 2004].

P.A. Facione found out that through the extensive practice of reading critically, students can learn how to stimulate their thoughts to see various perspectives within the discourse core critical thinking skills include interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation, and can be conducted in reading classes with activities to empower the students' critical thinking ability [Facione, 2023]. Moreover, P.A. Facione and N.C. Facione suggest that core critical thinking skills such as interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation can be effectively taught in reading subjects [Facione & Facione, 2007].

P.L. Carrell and J.C. Eisterhold explored the intersection of reading

comprehension and critical thinking, particularly in ESL contexts. Her research suggests that when combined with critical reading strategies, extensive reading can significantly improve learners' critical thinking abilities [Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983].

C.Nuttall states, "the best way to improve your knowledge of a foreign language is to go and live among its speakers. The next best way is to read it extensively" [Nuttall, 1996; 123].

According to R.R. Day and J.Bamford extensive reading aims to encourage students to read large amounts of material for information or pleasure independently. So, extensive reading promotes learner autonomy, as students select texts that interest them, leading to more engaged and motivated reading. This autonomy encourages learners to take ownership of their learning process, a critical aspect of developing critical thinking skills [Day & Bamford, 1998; 238]. The book "Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom" by R.Day and J.Bamford outlines the following key components of a successful Extensive Reading (ER) program:

1. Students read large amounts of printed material.
2. Students read a variety of materials in terms of topic and genre.
3. The material students read is within their level of comprehension.
4. Students choose what they want to read.
5. Reading is its own reward.
6. Students read for pleasure, information and general understanding.
7. Students read their selection at a faster rate.
8. Reading is individual (students read on their own).
9. Teachers read with their students, thus serving as role models of good readers.
10. Teachers guide and keep track of student progress [Day & Bamford, 1998].

Moreover, extensive reading exposes learners to a wide range of ideas, arguments, and worldviews, which are crucial for developing critical thinking. According to B.Mason and S.Krashen, extensive reading helps learners become better at recognizing and evaluating arguments, as they are repeatedly exposed to different rhetorical strategies and points of view [Mason & Krashen, 1998]. This exposure is particularly important in Uzbekistan, where students may have limited opportunities to engage with diverse perspectives outside of the classroom.

T.N. Fitria compared the benefits and problems of using extensive reading in teaching English. The analysis showed that extensive reading has several benefits in the teaching and learning process, especially in learning English as a foreign language, such as adding vocabulary, helping to understand grammar, building reading speed, and reading fluency, reading for getting pleasure, building confidence and motivation, increasing motivating to read English more. However, the author highlighted several drawbacks such as the level of reading material or difficulty in analyzing material related to literary works, different academic grades, learners paying less attention to the program, and the ER material selection [Fitria, 2023].

A study by J.Yamashita further supports the connection between extensive reading and critical thinking, finding that students who engaged in extensive reading demonstrated improved reading comprehension and critical analysis skills [Yamashita,

2008]. These findings suggest that extensive reading not only enhances language proficiency but also equips learners with the cognitive tools necessary for critical engagement with texts.

METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods design, incorporating triangulation through a literature review, an online survey, and an analysis of university and school curricula to investigate the implementation of extensive reading strategies in fostering critical thinking among English language learners in Uzbekistan. The research aims to determine whether extensive reading is being actively implemented to develop critical thinking among English learners in Uzbekistan. A literature review was conducted to critically analyze relevant research and relate the findings to this study. The findings shed light on the extent to which extensive reading is integrated into the current educational practices and whether it effectively contributes to the cultivation of critical thinking skills, particularly in philology students. The curriculum analysis includes a study plan for philology students at Gulistan State University and an English curriculum for secondary school students. The rationale for selecting two different educational settings was to assess whether extensive reading is implemented to improve critical thinking in different academic environments. In the context of this study, it is essential to recognize the significant deficiency in the incorporation of extensive reading practices within school textbooks and curricula. School curricula primarily emphasize intensive reading, which focuses on detailed comprehension of shorter texts, often prioritizing rote learning over the development of higher-order thinking skills. This reliance on intensive reading limits students' exposure to diverse genres and extended narratives, crucial for fostering critical engagement, analytical skills, and independent thought.

The online survey was also carried out to check whether English learners and teachers use extensive reading to foster critical thinking skills and what materials are used to apply the extensive reading strategy. Quantitative research helped to explore participants' perspectives, experiences, and practices using purposive sampling, including philology specialists, educators, and students from diverse academic institutions. The online survey was carried out with the help of the online platform "Google Forms". A survey of 17 participants aged 18-45, including 29,4 % students and 70,6 % teachers, aimed to understand the role of extensive reading in promoting critical thinking skills.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Ministry of Preschool and School Education of Uzbekistan oversees the development and approval of textbooks for primary and secondary education, ensuring alignment with national educational standards. The process involves collaboration between educators, curriculum developers, subject matter experts, and linguists to produce materials that are pedagogically sound and culturally relevant. Since the 2022-2023 academic year, new textbooks have been introduced: "Guess What!" for grades 1 to 6 and "Prepare" for higher grades. These textbooks incorporate various themes and

strategies aimed at enhancing critical thinking skills within the school curriculum. For example, after every two units, students engage in “Life Skills” or “Culture Lessons”. “Culture Lessons” introduce aspects of English-speaking countries’ cultures, while “Life Skills” lessons help students develop skills such as critical thinking, which are essential for everyday life. Critical thinking skills are regularly assessed through essays, presentations, and discussions, providing opportunities for students to reflect on and improve their analytical abilities.

One notable example from the 9th-grade curriculum focuses on the theme “Accepting Other People’s Opinions”, which teaches students the importance of considering and respecting diverse viewpoints. Social and cultural factors, such as nationality, gender, and age, also influence the development of students’ critical thinking skills. For instance, in many cultures, younger individuals are expected to respect elders’ opinions, which can impact how freely they express their thoughts or engage in critical analysis. These contextual factors are considered in the educational process to foster an environment where students can respectfully express differing viewpoints. During the project stage, students design a timetable for a visit from foreign students, encouraging collaboration and critical thinking in planning and intercultural communication [Kosta & Williams, 2021; 28]. Although the theme emphasizes the development of critical thinking skills through project-based learning and intercultural activities, the use of extensive reading as a strategy for fostering critical thinking is not explicitly incorporated. The lessons primarily focus on class discussions and collaborative projects rather than engaging students in deep, independent reading experiences that could further enhance their analytical and reflective abilities. Thus, despite critical thinking being a focus, there is a lack of integration of extensive reading practices that have been shown to be effective in supporting students’ critical thinking development.

The Grade 10 textbook includes a unit on “Identifying Reliable News” which guides students in distinguishing between reliable and fake news. Students conduct research on widely shared false news stories, write summaries, and present their findings, further developing their critical thinking and media literacy. Additionally, students are prompted to answer open-ended questions during reading tasks, such as “Why did the character act this way?” or “What are the implications of this event?” These questions help deepen their engagement with the text and foster critical analysis [Styring & Tims, 2021; 116]. Despite the emphasis on critical thinking, there is no explicit use of extensive reading either in the curriculum or in the themes. For example, the activities in theme stated above primarily focus on intensive reading, where students engage with shorter, carefully selected texts in great detail. While intensive reading helps improve comprehension and analysis of specific content, the absence of extensive reading limits opportunities for students to engage with a broader range of materials that could foster deeper, independent critical thinking through sustained and self-directed reading experiences.

The 11th-grade curriculum also incorporates project-based learning inspired by the Minddrive program, which began in Kansas City in 2010. This approach

encourages students to collaborate on creative projects that improve problem-solving and critical thinking skills. For example, students convert readings into practical projects, such as creating presentations and developing innovative responses to texts, making the learning process more engaging [McDonald, 2021; 106]. Although project-based learning is highly effective in fostering critical thinking through collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving, there is no direct focus on improving critical thinking through extensive reading in this textbook either.

Each analyzed curriculum lacks opportunities for students to engage with a wider range of texts in an extensive reading format, which could offer deeper, independent exploration of ideas and perspectives. As we learned extensive reading is known for enhancing critical thinking through long-term engagement with diverse materials. However, extensive reading remains underutilized in these examined contexts. As a result, students' exposure to broader reading experiences is limited, which may hinder further developing their analytical and reflective skills.

In higher educational establishments in Uzbekistan, extensive reading can be used to improve critical thinking skills among students. However, the extent to which it is implemented may vary depending on the institution and the educators' awareness and adoption of this teaching strategy. Extensive reading helps students encounter diverse perspectives and complex ideas, which can stimulate critical thinking. It encourages them to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information from different sources, improving their critical thinking ability. Encouraging students to engage in extensive reading can be achieved through activities like book clubs, reading journals, and discussions that promote critical thinking. Providing various reading materials that cater to different interests can also motivate students. Some universities and institutes have already incorporated extensive reading programs into their curriculum to enhance language proficiency and critical thinking. This often involves students reading various texts outside their prescribed textbooks, including novels, journals, and articles.

We reviewed various curriculums from the Philology faculty of Gulistan State University. Curriculums for Philologist students, including "Independent Study Skills" and "Reading and Writing" courses aim to enhance critical thinking skills and encourage students to use extensive reading strategies.

There are two special modules (17-18) in the "Independent Study Skills" course: "Preparation for the Exams and the Tests". The teaching approach involves various types of exams and tests, encouraging students to use self-study methods and prepare independently or as a team, to develop critical and analytical thinking. Modules 23-24, "Developing Critical Thinking Skills," aid in accurately evaluating information and presenting arguments while also countering prejudices and cognitive biases that hinder our ability to reach our full potential.

Students are encouraged to utilize modern multimedia tools and interactive methods to foster critical thinking through various tasks and appropriate pedagogical and information technologies. Using relevant educational and information technology in active and interactive teaching techniques enhances students' critical thinking skills.

The module “Improving Critical Thinking Skills with the Help of Printed and Media Materials” is very crucial for enhancing students’ analyzing, evaluating, comparing and inferring skills. Another module, “Tasks for Developing Critical Thinking Skills”, is an independent work for students to enhance their critical thinking abilities. Chosen materials offer diverse perspectives and contexts that challenge learners to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information. Here are some tasks designed to develop critical thinking skills using printed and media resources (See Tables 2 and 3):

Table 2.

Tasks for using printed materials		
Name of the task	How to do the task	Developing skills
Compare and contrast essays	Students are provided with two articles on the same topic but with different viewpoints. They are asked to write an essay comparing and contrasting the arguments, evidence, and conclusions presented in each article.	analyzing, evaluating, synthesizing
Summarizing and questioning	Students read a short story, article, or chapter from a book. Then, they summarize the main points and develop a list of open-ended questions about the text.	comprehension, interpretation, questioning
Debate preparation	Students read articles with opposing viewpoints on a controversial topic. Then, a class debate is organized where students must use evidence from the readings to support their positions.	argumentation, critical evaluation, public speaking
Critical reading journals	Students are encouraged to keep a journal where they respond critically to readings. They should note key arguments, question assumptions, and reflect on the implications of the text.	reflection, critical reading, analysis
Project-based learning	Students make projects that require to research a topic using both printed and media resources. They must present their findings, highlighting their critical analysis and the connections between different sources.	research, synthesis, presentation

Table 3.

Tasks for using media materials		
Name of the task	How to do the task	Developing skills
Media analysis	Students watch a news report or documentary. Then, they analyze the content, considering the source, potential biases, and the evidence presented. They should then discuss the credibility and reliability of the information.	media literacy, critical analysis, evaluation
Video response essays	Students watch a film or a series of video clips on a specific topic. Afterward, they should write an essay responding to the content, focusing on the arguments made, the evidence used, and their own critical reflections.	critical thinking, writing, interpretation
Podcast discussions	Students are assigned to listen to a podcast episode. In class, a discussion is facilitated where students must analyze the arguments, question the perspectives, and draw connections to other knowledge or experiences.	listening, analysis, discussion
Ad analysis	Students are shown a series of advertisements. They are asked to analyze the techniques used to persuade the audience, the underlying messages, and any potential biases or stereotypes.	critical thinking, media literacy, evaluation

Similar to the school curricula previously analyzed, the “Self-Study” course offered to philology students also lacks a dedicated module or unit specifically focused on extensive reading practices. Although the course aims to enhance students’ critical thinking skills, there is no structured emphasis on extensive reading as a tool for achieving this objective. This omission is notable given the growing body of research that highlights the benefits of extensive reading in promoting deeper cognitive engagement and analytical thinking, particularly in the context of language acquisition and critical thinking development.

“Reading and Writing” course curriculum includes following topics for encouraging students to use extensive reading strategies (See Table 4):

Table 4.

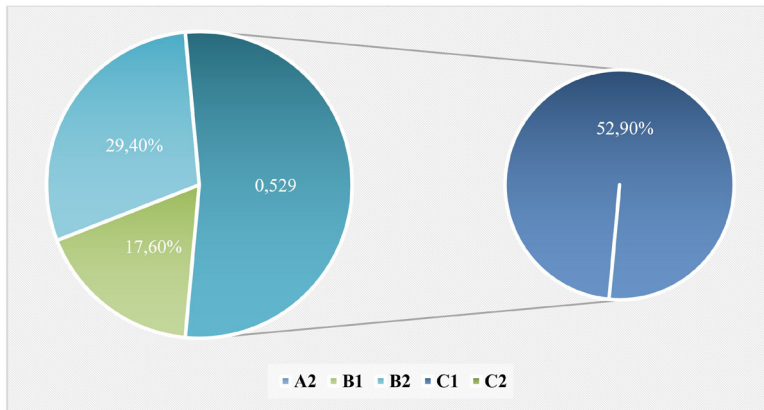
Theme	Objective
What is extensive reading?	to know about intensive reading and its structure
Techniques of reading (extensive and intensive)	What is extensive reading? What is intensive reading, talking about the techniques of them?
Intensive and extensive reading	to learn how to distinguish the difference between intensive and extensive reading and their structures

In the “Reading and Writing” module students naturally pick up new words and phrases in context through exposure to a wide range of texts. Regular reading practice helps students read more quickly and smoothly. As students read more, they become better at understanding and interpreting texts. The “Reading and Writing” course also aims to create a holistic and enjoyable language learning experience integrated with extensive reading strategies that go beyond traditional classroom activities. However, it would be better if more practical sessions were conducted to implement extensive reading and foster critical thinking skills independently.

Overall, curriculum analyses show that extensive reading strategy is not utilized for developing critical thinking skills neither at higher educational establishment nor at schools. They are taught separately.

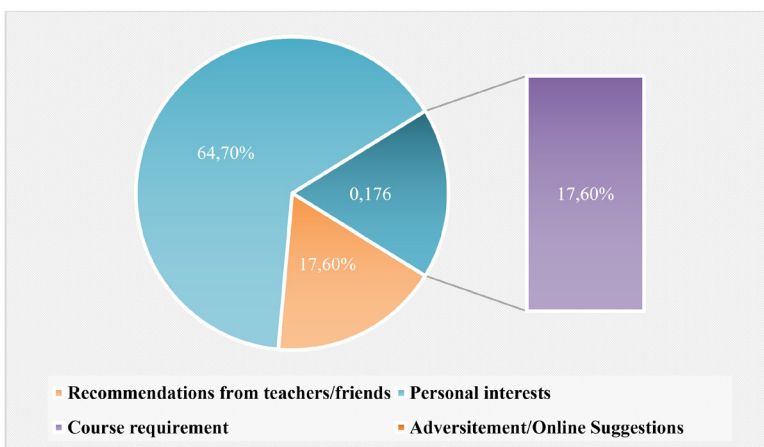
The Survey was a data collection tool used in this research. It aimed to investigate participants’ reading habits and perceptions regarding extensive reading, primarily focusing on their English proficiency levels, types of reading materials preferred, and the importance of critical thinking in learning English. 17 respondents, including teachers and students from various age groups, participated in the survey. The pie chart illustrates the distribution of language proficiency levels among the participants in the study (See Figure 2). Specifically, it shows that 52.9% of the respondents have attained a C1 proficiency level, indicating an advanced command of the language. Meanwhile, 29.4% of the participants possess a B2 proficiency level, reflecting an upper-intermediate proficiency. Additionally, 17.6% of the respondents are classified at the B1 level, representing an intermediate level of language competence. This breakdown provides a comprehensive overview of the participants’ various degrees of language mastery.

Figure 2. Language proficiency indication



The majority read English textbooks daily, with non-fiction and academic texts being the most valuable. The data regarding participants' methods for selecting books highlights three key factors influencing their choices. 17.6% of participants reported that they select books based on recommendations from teachers or friends. This indicates that interpersonal influence plays a notable role in guiding some learners' reading preferences. The majority of participants, 64.7%, indicated that they chose books based on their own personal interests. This dominant factor reflects the importance of intrinsic motivation in the reading selection process. Learners are more likely to engage with material that aligns with their individual preferences and passions. Finally, an additional 17.6% of participants noted that course requirements determine their book selection. It shows that academic obligations also have a significant impact on reading habits as structured curricula often dictate the materials students need to read in order to meet educational objectives. The data underscores the importance of personal interest as the primary driver for book selection, while social influences and academic requirements also contribute significantly to participants' reading choices. None of respondents read advertised or online suggested books (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. Reading material selection aspects



Most respondents were aware of extensive reading strategies and considered critical thinking crucial for learning English. They believed that improving critical thinking through extensive reading was helpful. Nearly all of the participants incorporate extensive reading into their teaching. The most effective activities for promoting extensive reading among students were listed as follows: group discussions, debates, inferential questions, essay writing, and book reviews. Textbooks, personal libraries, and internet resources were demonstrated as comprehensive reading options in the classroom. However, the survey also highlights challenges, such as the need for teacher training and access to free online resources. These factors are essential for the successful implementation of extensive reading programs. The expressed interest in organizing such programs suggests a demand for structured support and resources to integrate extensive reading into English teaching.

Although extensive reading is currently recognized as a valuable and widely practiced pedagogical approach, the analysis reveals a need for further resources and professional development opportunities to fully harness its potential in fostering critical thinking skills among English language learners. Its role in promoting higher-order cognitive skills, such as critical thinking, remains underexplored and underutilized in many educational contexts. To maximize the impact of extensive reading on critical thinking development, it is essential to provide educators with targeted training that equips them with strategies for integrating analytical reading tasks, reflective discussions, and critical inquiry into extensive reading programs. Moreover, access to a wider range of reading materials, including texts that challenge students to evaluate, synthesize, and critique information, is necessary to create an environment conducive to cognitive growth. Therefore, addressing these gaps by enhancing both the resources available to learners and the pedagogical tools available to educators will be crucial in optimizing the benefits of extensive reading for critical thinking development in English learners.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion implementing extensive reading strategies in the English language curriculum in Uzbekistan holds significant potential for fostering critical thinking skills among learners. Literature review shows that extensive reading enhances language acquisition and plays a crucial role in developing higher-order cognitive skills, such as critical thinking. In Uzbekistan, where the demand for English proficiency is rising, integrating extensive reading into teaching practices can provide students with valuable opportunities to engage with diverse perspectives and deepen their understanding of the world. Moreover, students learn to analyze, evaluate, and interpret texts, as a result they enhance their critical thinking abilities. Combining information from different texts helps them develop summarizing and synthesizing skills. Reading various texts exposes students to different cultures, perspectives, and ideas.

However, in Uzbekistan, the implementation of extensive reading strategies faces both opportunities and challenges. The government's recent educational reforms emphasize the importance of English proficiency for academic and professional

success, creating a favorable environment for integrating extensive reading into the EFL curriculum. However, challenges such as limited access to appropriate reading materials, a lack of teacher training, and insufficient resources for extensive reading programs pose significant barriers.

To overcome these challenges, several strategies can be employed. First, building classroom libraries with a diverse range of texts at varying difficulty levels is essential. Teachers should be trained in the principles of extensive reading and how to facilitate discussions and activities that promote critical thinking. Activities such as group discussions, debates, and inferential questioning can help students engage more deeply with the texts they read, encouraging them to think critically about the content. Additionally, integrating technology, such as online reading platforms and digital libraries, can provide students with greater access to reading materials and allow for more individualized learning experiences. Given the widespread availability of smartphones and the internet in Uzbekistan, digital resources can be crucial in supporting extensive reading.

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