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Critical reading for effective engagement with English literature: a critical reflective study

Abstract

In South African secondary schools, critical reading is encouraged by the CAPS policy document, but still some learners, even at university level, find it difficult to utilise critical reading, a skill that is believed by scholars to promote critical thinking skills. This alternative, valuable kind of text study called critical reading escalates basic knowledge of the text to applying it to everyday life experiences. This, in turn, makes teaching and learning interesting, meaningful and ensures that the desirable educational goals such as preparing learners to become solutions to societal challenges are achievable when teachers use the concept of critical reading as a teaching strategy. This qualitative study used a critical reflective theory to explore how critical reading can equip secondary school Further Education and Training (FET) learners with critical, creative skills to be truly able to tackle life challenges. The article further shows that critical reading is an ideal teaching method that uses learner-centred teaching strategies to promote critical reading and critical thinking skills.

Keywords: *critical reading, critical reflective theory, critical thinking, English literature, pedagogical methods, superficial reading*

1. Introduction

1.1 The concept of critical reading

In this contemporary era, the advent of technology in education has ushered in a paradigm shift, enabling the seamless dissemination of information to a vast multitude of individuals. Hence, it is highly recommended to impart upon learners the skill of critical and reflective discernment when engaging with written material, particularly information sourced from the vast expanse of the internet. Learners acquire the ability to exercise discernment in the realm of reading, as elucidated by the scholarly work of Harris and Hodges (1981). These proficiencies possess the potential to be effectively employed in the pursuit of various academic disciplines and in practical scenarios, enabling individuals to confront and surmount the exigencies of quotidian existence. Paul and Elder (2007) advocate the practice of critical reading due to its inherent and intimate correlation

with the cultivation of critical thinking skills. This implies that the utilisation of critical reading within the context of an English literature classroom, in conjunction with learner-centric pedagogical approaches and evaluative methodologies, endows learners with the capacity for critical thinking. Cognitive abilities facilitate the transference of acquired knowledge from the realm of English literary pedagogy to the practical realm of real-life circumstances, enabling individuals to address and overcome the myriad challenges encountered in their daily existence. The capacity to address intricate challenges encountered in daily life exemplifies a form of cognitive processing that embodies advanced analytical abilities, a manifestation of critical thinking aptitude. This cognitive prowess can solely be attained through the meticulous examination and interpretation of literary works, as posited by Wheeler (1998). Additionally, Muchsonah (2015) imparts invaluable insights regarding the intricate interplay between critical reading, metacognition, and critical thinking. These cognitive faculties are indispensable for learners as they endeavour to cultivate the necessary acumen to thrive as conscientious members of society. The inherent interconnectivity of these various elements renders critical reading an invaluable pedagogical technique that cannot be disregarded when instructing learners in the realm of English literature.

According to Harris and Hodges (1981: 74), critical reading as a concept is "(1) a decision-making process in reading; evaluating the relevance and adequacy of what is read; (2) the act of reading, in which inquiry, logical analysis, and inference are used to judge the value of what is read against an established standard; and (3) judging the validity or value of what has been read on the basis of reliable criteria of standards developed from previous experience." All the skills pointed out by Harris and Hodges (1981) above show how valuable the concept of critical reading of literary texts is in the teaching and learning of English literature. Therefore, upon encountering an English literary text, the reader must make a sound judgement based on a careful examination of the words. This stage is possible because critical reading enables the reader to ask relevant questions while reading to critique the author's message in the text. Colucciello (1997: 3) argues that critical reading of literary works has "an important influence on the development of critical thinking". He explains that this effect is evident in the reader's ability to recognise patterns in a text, fit details into those patterns, and then relate them to other texts and remembered experiences. This process shows the connection between reading literature and critical thinking. This is what the current article is about, to see if English literature (especially texts included in the FET education curriculum) can help learners become critical in their thinking. Critical reading, according to Colucciello (1997), is considered to be the ability to find details in literature, to remember and relate content to other literary works. The ability to compare and relate a text to other texts is a critical thinking skill called intercontextual reference, which can be possible through critical reading of literature texts (Zengin, 2016).

Critical reading can help learners make connections between texts, and can use this skill to relate English literary content to other subjects studied in the English language and to their everyday lives, as well as apply theory to reality as a demonstration of critical thinking skill. While this argument about critical reading seems to make sense, some critics choose to differ with this view. This disagreement stems from the observation of teachers in English literature classes who overlook critical reading in favour of teaching fluency, metacognition, and word attacks (AbdKadir *et al.*, 2014). The argument is that learners in such classes do as well, if not better, than those whose teachers focus on critical reading, meaning that the non-critical reading-aloud strategy is also effective. My understanding is that learning goals such

as fluency, word attacks, and metacognition can still be achieved through critical reading. In support of this argument, Muchsonah (2015: 29) states that "although critical reading and critical thinking seem difficult to implement, many consider it useful to help learners not only to support learners' cognitive development, but also their knowledge of the cognitive and self-knowledge". With that said, critical thinking skills through critical reading is important, because the benefits are (among other things) the attainment of critical knowledge of content and metacognition, which is knowing how one learns.

Critical reading is further defined as the ability to "interpret symbols or distinguish relevant from irrelevant in problem solving" (Wheeler, 1998). This means that critical reading can equip learners with problem-solving skills because reading comprehension should be escalated using appropriate teaching and assessment methods to equip learners with skills such as problem-solving. Solving a problem involves distinguishing the "relevant from the irrelevant" (Wheeler, 1998). The concept of critical reading argues that instead of simply reading for pleasure, one must dig deeper to determine the meaning of English literary texts. In addition, critical reading promotes understanding through the study, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of a text to arrive at one's own opinion (Wheeler, 1998). I believe that forming an opinion about a text requires a critical thinking process. The enjoyment to be gained from reading English literary texts can only be possible when critical reading comes to the point of "appreciating" the content. This is supported by Facione (1992: 12) who states, "It is more than just helping readers to solve problems and develop critical thinking skills; a good work of literature aims to help readers learn to change and be better by challenging the text."

The transformation that Facione (1992) talks about can be in the form of language skills where learners can demonstrate improvement in the way they use language in communication and writing. It may also be in their way of thinking, as seen in the way they question the text to form their own opinions. Either way, critical reading brings about a transformative revolution. Paul and Elder (2007) define critical reading in the sense that it is connected with critical thinking. He argues that this is because, as an art, critical thinking is

> *completely different from one individual to another, as each individual has different background knowledge, different points of view, different levels of sensitivity, different interests and concerns towards a particular problem, resulting in different products of critical thinking with different quality and uniqueness (Paul & Elder, 2007: 17).*

The quote implies that critical reading levels are determined by the uniqueness of individuals based on the amount of interest and value of teaching and learning. This is true, but regardless of the level of skill (critical thinking skills), it depends on how teachers teach and evaluate literary texts, which can affect how learners engage with the content.

1.2 Research problem

The Department of Basic Education (2011), using the CAPS policy document, encourages critical reading of English literary texts to promote critical and creative thinking skills. According to the discussion in the introductory section, teaching English literature texts using critical reading has a variety of benefits, such as the promotion of critical thinking skills and social awareness and responsibility. However, the teaching of English literature seems to focus on superficial reading which promotes rote learning. The study wanted to determine the

pedagogical and assessment methods used while teaching English literature at secondary school level in South Africa. The study also wanted to determine whether critical reading is an applicable reading strategy used in the English literature classroom in South African secondary education.

1.3 Research questions

The study wanted to answer the following questions:

- What pedagogical methods are used to teach English literature at secondary school level in the western townships of Johannesburg, South Africa?
- Did the teaching methods used encourage critical reading of English literature?

2. Literature review

2.1 Differences between critical reading and superficial reading

Figure 1 below further draws a distinction between critical reading and superficial reading not just for comparison, but to highlight the value of using critical reading in teaching literature.

	READING	CRITICAL READING
Purpose	To get a basic grasp of the text.	To form judgements about how a text works.
Activity	Absorbing/Understanding	Analysing/Interpreting/Evaluating
Focus	What a text says	What a text does and means
Questions	What is the text saying? What information can I get out of it?	How does the text work? How is it argued? What are the choices made? The patterns that result? What kinds of reasoning and evidence are used? What are the underlying assumptions? What does the text mean?
Direction	With the text (taking for granted it is right)	Against the text (questioning its assumptions and argument, interpreting meaning in context)
Response	Restatement, Summary	Description, Interpretation, Evaluation

Figure 1: The difference between reading and critical reading

Source: University of Toronto (2006)

Of the many illustrations for critical reading, the chart above is considered the most informative, especially since there is an explanation of the audience's response, which is an act of inference, one of the characteristics of critical thinking skill and the critical reflective theory. According to the figure, normal reading results in "recasting" (explaining the content as stated) and summarising. In contrast, critical reading equips learners with critical skills to describe, interpret, and evaluate content. The evaluative part of the illustration means that learners learning to read critically can challenge the message of the text and offer their perspectives based on critical thinking and research. Accordingly, the study aimed to trace the actual teaching and learning experiences of Grade 12 learners at some South African schools to find out how prescribed English literature texts are taught and assessed, particularly to see if this leads to the transfer of critical reading skills for learners.

Teaching critical reading to promote critical thinking skills, according to Indah (2012: 7), includes encouraging learners to

> annotate directly on the page: underlining key words, phrases, or sentences; writing comments or questions in the margins; bracketing important sections of the text; constructing ideas with lines or arrows; numbering related points in sequence; and making note of anything that strikes you as interesting, important, or questionable.

This, according to the above author, is the basis of mastering critical reading and acquiring critical thinking skills. Some scholars such as Freire (1992) posit that teaching learners critical reading using the critical pedagogy method is ideal. This enables learners to critique the texts and, more importantly, becomes aware of the injustices in communities, as literature is believed to be the reflection of real-life situations.

2.2 Critical reading as an educational goal

Critical reading is considered one of the best practices used to promote critical thinking in secondary schools. According to Norris, Lucas and Prudhoe (2012: 12), critical reading teaches learners how to "think, read, and write critically about themselves, their situations, and their classroom environment". This connection between the school environment and real-life situations that can be made through critical reading, an attribute that makes the concept even more valuable. The fact that this concept can be used to promote analytical and critical thinking in learners makes it one that guides instruction to achieve educational goals (Kurland, 2000; Fleming, 2020; Janks, 2010).

According to the Department of Basic Education and Vocational Training (2011), the teaching of English literature is focused on equipping learners with creative critical skills. This shows that the department is aware of the potential value of critical reading and engagement with English literary texts to achieve a level of appreciation, which is the highest form of engagement with literary content (Waltz, 2001). Manarin *et al.* (2015) also indicates the investigative nature of critical reading where readers can examine the validity and even credibility of both the text and the author. These scholars (Manarin *et al.*, 2015: 6) also continue to outline the concept's possibilities as follows:

- Discussing different forms of rhetoric
- Recognising power relations
- Challenging assumptions
- Engagement with the world
- Constructing new possibilities

What Manarin *et al.* (2015) declare about critical reading above summarises what these concepts are about and describes the valuable possibilities needed in teaching and learning English literary content. The reading or study of English literary texts is compulsory as part of South African Secondary Education and Training (FET). It is therefore crucial that teachers employ a reading strategy that can equip learners with the skills to explore the various forms of rhetoric that the aforementioned scholars have enthused about. Continuing with the five points used to explain it, critical reading has the ability to transform learners into agents of change (Freire, 1972) by engaging critically with knowledge and creating new possibilities. This construction of new possibilities, as Manarin *et al.* (2015) posit, requires creativity which,

as previously stated, is one of the main aims of teaching English literature in secondary schools in South Africa (DBET, 2011). Being creative, in turn, helps learners to engage with the world, question all elements of human existence, and offer solutions to problems.

To continue the discussion on the reasons this kind of reading should be considered in the study of English literary texts, critical reading practices require of learners to approach literary texts with a questioning attitude that is likely to promote their interpretation, evaluation, and acceptance or rejection of the text (Olifant, Cekiso & Rautenburg, 2020). These researchers (Olifant *et al.*, 2020) also recommend that teachers and learners be exposed to critical reading strategies and that teachers support critical reading programmes for English First Additional Language (EFAL) learning. In other words, if critical reading is applied effectively, learners will achieve the highest form of understanding in terms of agreeing or disagreeing with the author and message of the text. This level (called appreciation in Bloom's taxonomy) is the highest level that depicts higher order thinking (HOT) (Krathwohl, 2002). More importantly, Olifant *et al.* (2020) recommend a teacher-parent partnership in critical reading. These kinds of partnerships are essential to foster a relationship between teachers and parents (Sibanda, 2021). If such partnerships can encourage parental participation in learners' critical reading practices, as Olifant *et al.* (2020) argue, the result can benefit learners to become critical citizens of their countries and the world.

The concept of critical reading is therefore central to understanding the strategies required for teaching and learning reading skills that enable the reader to critically engage with literary content to achieve a higher level of understanding.

3. Theoretical framework

The critical reflective theory is the framework used as a theory that guided the study. The theory, according to Sutherland (2013), is used to analyse society, culture and power dynamics. It is a theory that is based on the idea that humans are influenced by the social structures and systems that often manifests power struggles and inequality. The critical reflective theory is critical, because it questions and challenges ideas and practices that are oppressive to the majority of the people in society. The theory is also reflective, as it encourages self-retrospection on beliefs, behaviours and actions, which are some of the themes and messages in English literature (Shandomo, 2010). Critical reflection is not only for teachers only but learners as well. Learners need to critically reflect on knowledge gained in the classrooms to utilise as skills for the betterment of struggling communities.

The struggling communities is a direct result of the dominance of the powerless by the powerful, often minority people and this power dynamics is what the critical reflective theory needs to expose and discourage (Alm & Guttormsen, 2023). Another crucial aspect of the theory is the idea of intersectionality, which explains the fact that people are shaped by many intersecting identities such as gender, race, class, sexuality and potentiality. According to Caruthers and Carter (2012), intersectionality issues need careful attention as they play a crucial role in an individual's life and capabilities. Additionally, the critical reflective theory accentuates the importance of self-reflection and introspection, which can be compared to the inference or reflection as one of the important features of critical thinking skill. This is more evidence that critical reading, critical thinking and the critical reflective theory are connected entities of critical knowledge that South African education system needs to produce individuals capable of resolving the challenges around their communities.

4. Methodology

4.1 Contextual background of the study

The study was conducted in Soweto, a township located in the southwestern part of Johannesburg in the Gauteng province of South Africa. The focus was on 12th-graders at three secondary schools. The secondary schools where the data were collected are a purposive sample of the public secondary education system that caters for the majority of pupils in South African municipalities. The study needed to explore the way in which teachers at such schools teach and assess English literary texts to see if there is one that informs the reasons for critical engagement with content at institutions of higher learning. As researchers such as Samuel (1995) claim that even at university level, there is a tendency towards a superficial reading of literary texts. Furthermore, the history of education in South Africa is characterised by marked differences in that learners in areas such as Soweto were affected by the disabling effect of Bantu education.

4.2 Research approach and design

The research approach used for this study is qualitative. A qualitative research approach allows the researcher to discover facts and phenomena through interpretive inquiry to find out if critical thinking is one of the objectives of teaching and studying English literature in secondary schools in Johannesburg West. Qualitative research responses are, according to Miles and Huberman (1984: 24), "an investigative process whereby the researcher makes sense of social phenomena". A qualitative approach is relevant to data collection and to the use of data analysis to provide meaningful insight into how teachers use literary texts to inspire and promote critical thinking. For this reason, a qualitative approach was chosen to help study phenomena, describe and interpret the collected data.

Although this article is a critical reflection, a theory-driven case study, also called an interpretive case study, was used to collect data for the original PhD thesis, because it is guided by the study's theoretical framework and literature to interpret and explain the data. The original study used a multiple-case-study approach because three cases needed to be examined. Each case study was treated as an isolated case and as a representative sample of other schools in the same area or category.

4.3 Data collection

After obtaining permission from the authorities of the three schools, consent forms were distributed to all participants and the elements of anonymity and confidentiality were explained. Participants included one teacher per school whose lessons were observed and videotaped and who was also interviewed. The permission of parents of Grade 12 learners was requested from the parents of 12 learners, 4 from each of the three selected secondary schools. The teachers were asked to help with the sampling of learners to be interviewed, preferably two top-performing learners and two average learners in each group. These learners were interviewed as three separate focus groups. The advantage of focus-group interviews is that they allow the researcher to collect multiple perspectives on the research topic in one session. Semi-structured interviews were used due to their characteristic nature to encourage respondents to speak freely and openly about the importance of their school improvement practice, and participants' engagement in the interviews was recorded. Field notes were also

taken as supplementary data to the interviews and observations. These data were used to support data from interviews (focus groups of learners and individual teachers), observation and document evaluation.

4.4 Research sampling

The researcher determined that probability sampling (also called random sampling) was appropriate for this study. The population for this study was schools that have all the elements necessary for this study to be investigated, namely the Grade 12 teachers and learners of English literary texts, teaching and learning pedagogy in the classrooms and the location of the school in the neighbourhoods of Johannesburg West. Three schools were selected from this population based on their representativeness and not on the specific special pedagogy that teachers used to teach literary texts. Each school was selected to represent the public schools in the area. Participants were Grade 12 learners (four at each secondary school) and teachers (one at each school) who were selected for observation and interviews. The researcher observed the entire Grade 12 class at each school.

4.5 Data analysis

The researcher used an inductive data analysis technique where the collected data were coded and categorised to identify recurring patterns and themes. The researcher used Open A line analysis and coding of the original data were done, and the data were categorised into codes that the researcher determined to be valuable. That is, all the data collected were coded in the form of different themes and sub-themes to guide the methodological organisation of the data collected in the field.

5. Reflective data analysis

5.1 Critical reading as a teaching method

Judging by the information about the concept of critical reading and its value as discussed in the introductory section above, it is crucial to read English literary texts to truly understand the message. The Department for Basic Education and Training's Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (2011) encourages teachers to read English literary texts as best they can, but not necessarily to complete the text with learners in class. It should be noted that the department here promotes reading, not critical reading, so it was not surprising that the observed teachers used reading aloud (RA) as a teaching strategy in teaching English literature. However, the CAPS policy statement also encourages English teachers to "identify and explain figurative language and rhetorical devices as they appear in a variety of texts, e.g. climax, symbol, euphemism, pun, understatement" (Department of Elementary Education, 2011: 31). The above attributes embody the practice of critical reading, which the researcher observed minimally. In another explanation, some of the participants inquired about the pedagogical approaches used and stated that the usual practice is to read aloud together with the learners, in which they view the narrative next to them. In the initial stages, reading aloud appeared to be the pedagogy of choice, as supported by the policy statement. However, the follow-up questioning elicited participation from some learners, while the majority of the learners did not take it well because they felt that the pace was slow in the sense that they might not complete the syllabus before the end of the annual summative assessment. This situation therefore dictates the pedagogy that teachers use in teaching English literature.

The use of read-aloud (RA) as an instructional technique serves the dual purpose of engaging learners in the narrative while facilitating their acquisition of knowledge. According to the scientific work of Laminack and Wadsworth (2006), the implementation of reciprocal learning, commonly referred to as RA, is believed to be effective when supplemented with interactive dialogues facilitated by the art of inquiry. This pedagogical approach has the potential to promote a heightened level of cognitive engagement with the subject matter that goes beyond the mere act of understanding. The above authors hypothesise that when learners are given the opportunity to engage in activities such as oral recitation, discourse, or reflection on a subject, the different perspectives expressed in them have the potential to promote the cultivation of cognitive skills associated with critical thinking. According to Sanacore (1992: 1), "it is necessary to recognise that this particular motivational strategy has significant relevance not only in the context of elementary school children, but also extends its applicability to upper elementary, middle, and high school learners". According to Sanacore (1992), in his study, educators have the ability to use the RA strategy as a distinct alternative to critical reading to expand learners' vocabulary and enhance their conceptual understanding. Additionally, this strategy is particularly suitable for learners who do not have English as their primary language. Contrary to the above perspective formulated by Laminack and Wadsworth (2006), Sanacore (1992) holds the view that the pedagogical approach used by the English literature teacher failed to create an environment conducive to the cultivation of critical thinking skills.

The previous paragraph has so far only focused on the opinions expressed by the participants, specifically the teachers. However, it is also necessary to take into account the perspectives of the learners being observed. The aforementioned question regarding pedagogical approaches was answered by one of the erudite individuals who indicated that the only way to study literary texts with a teacher in class was to read the text aloud, with a persuasive explanation by the teacher and subsequent contextual questions.

The participants' feelings from the previous paragraph further add to the body of evidence suggesting that learners were instructed using a read-aloud pedagogical approach. As explained in the previous discourse and evidenced by empirical observation, it is clear that this particular teaching method has failed to create a climate that encourages critical analysis and thoughtful engagement with English literary material. The responses from the learner also offered key insights that indicated the existence of efforts aimed at promoting cognitive analysis, specifically promoting critical thinking. This means that learners are encouraged to look at texts independently and then formulate their opinions among their peers during class discussions. The act of sharing knowledge is referred to by Totten *et al.* (1991) as shared learning, which is a strategic approach that supports the development of critical reading and critical thinking skills (Krathwohl, 2002). According to the findings of these esteemed researchers, shared learning refers to the joint dissemination of knowledge among learners, where individuals, under the auspices of support, actively exchange subject-related information, especially autonomously acquired knowledge. When learners are given the opportunity to participate in discourse or knowledge exchange, they take responsibility for their own knowledge acquisition and how they acquire it (a phenomenon known as metacognition), demonstrating the cultivation of critical thinking skills. Unfortunately, a clear absence of joint knowledge acquisition was observed during the instructional sessions. On the contrary, it was the educator who largely took responsibility for clarifying the subject, rather than actively engaging learners, or asking for their opinions.

To continue with the discussion from the preceding paragraph, the learners were deprived of the opportunity to engage in information sharing because the level of participation was limited to those learners who had the opportunity to answer the question posed. As a result, participation was limited to a select few learners who had the courage to articulate their opinions, while shy individuals were unable to participate in the discourse. There was an apparent absence of any discernible exchange of ideas or joint acquisition of knowledge among the learners during class, making it impossible to characterise their learning experience as one of shared learning. This means that the conventional way of reading used failed to promote dialogic engagement (Freire, 1972) or effective communication within English literature classes. From this, it can be easily deduced that in such a pedagogical environment, learners did not acquire any demanding reading skills through the teaching of literary texts because the focus was on the teacher rather than on the active involvement of the learners.

5.2 Critical reading and evaluation

This task requires engaging in a process of critical reading and evaluation. The symbiotic relationship between pedagogy and assessment is undeniable. According to the scholarly work of Harris and Hodges (1981), critical reading involves a different questioning approach aimed at promoting the development of critical thinking skills. The Department of Basic Education and Vocational Training's Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (2011) states that teaching and assessment practices relating to the discipline of English Literature should be managed in a way that supports the cultivation of creativity effectively, which is a distinctive intrinsic attribute to the cognitive process of critical thinking. According to a comprehensive tabulation of data presented by the esteemed University of Toronto in 2006, with respect to the field of critical reading, it is recommended that inquiry questions asked during instructional sessions adhere to the following delineation:

- Could you please clarify the mechanics of how the above text works? How is the argument presented?
- What decisions were made? What are the discernible patterns that emerge as a result?
- What kinds of logical inferences and supporting data are used in the argumentation process?
- What are the basic assumptions underlying this investigation?
- Could you kindly clarify the intended meaning of the above text?

Based on the questions above, the following set of questions can be considered the usual interrogations associated with the practice of critical reading. This particular form of assessment goes beyond the mere acquisition of basic knowledge and reaches a level of cognitive capacity where learners are able to analyse an author's work critically (Walz, 2001). During a closely watched instructional session, an inquisitive participant asked the following question during pedagogical discourse: "Please tell me who might be the main characters that fill the story called 'The New Tribe'?" The subject asked learners whether they retained knowledge typical of the act of reading associated with the use of questions that elicit lower-level cognitive processes (Goldman, 1984; Yang, Newby & Bill, 2005). The Comprehensive Assessment Programme for English language study delineates between the act of questioning, which serves as a means of evaluation, and is conducted on a daily

basis during instructional sessions, known as formative assessment. Additionally, there exists a distinct form of questioning that transpires at the culmination of a learning unit or term, referred to as summative assessment, as outlined by the Department of Basic Education in 2011. The practise of critical reading is intrinsically linked with the process of assessment for learning, as it stimulates the cognitive faculties necessary for critical engagement with literary material, ultimately fostering the development of independent and innovative thought processes. The aforementioned CAPS policy document posits that the utilisation of both interrogative (evaluative) methodologies serves the purpose of fostering the cultivation of cognitive faculties conducive to originality and ingenuity within the educational milieu.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

Based on the aforementioned discourse and discussions, it has been deduced that the pedagogical approach employed at the three secondary schools where data were collected primarily revolved around the oral recitation of English literary material and subsequent elucidation of said content. Additionally, intermittent inquiries were made to foster active engagement and involvement among the learners. The conventional approach to interpreting literary texts, commonly referred to as "superficial reading" (in contrast to the critical reading discussed in the aforementioned table), has been found to lack the ability to foster critical examination of knowledge, as indicated by literature and the gathered data. The peril associated with the unreflective perusal of written works lies in its propensity to foster rote memorisation of rudimentary textual information, a commendable endeavour in its own right. However, this approach precludes the cultivation of critical cogitation regarding the substance of the text, thereby impeding the application of acquired knowledge and skills in the resolution of commonplace predicaments. It is highly advisable, given the perceived worth and possibilities inherent in the notion, to employ the practise of critical reading whilst instructing English literary texts, so as to furnish learners with the aptitude for critical analysis literacy, as well as the faculties of critical thinking and creativity, as per the authoritative recommendation of the Department of Education and Training (2011). The concept of critical reading, as elucidated in the aforementioned points, is intrinsically linked to pedagogical and assessment approaches that prioritise learner engagement and participation throughout the instructional process.

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