

# Exploring the Effect of Critical Reading Strategy in Undergraduate Students' Writing from the Point of View of Instructors in the City University College of Ajman

Saada AbdelGawad Khadragy

City University College of Ajman. United Arab Emirates. P.O.Box 18484, Ajman, UAE.

## Abstract

This study aims to define the level of exploring the effect of critical reading as a teaching strategy in undergraduate students' writing skills from the point of view of City University College of Ajman instructors. The article also aims to determine if there are significant differences according to gender, and the years of experience. In order to achieve the goals of this study, two instruments (observation and interview) were assigned to measure the level of exploring critical reading in students writing. The study revealed the following results: the implementation of critical reading technique has a high effect in students' writing. Also, there are significant differences in exploring critical reading according to the years of experience. Moreover, the results did not show any statistical differences according to the gender. As a result, it is highly recommended that instructors who used to teach such courses should have long experience in the field of critical reading.

**Keywords:** Critical reading, undergraduate students, instructor.

## 1. Introduction and literature review

Reading and writing acquisition became an essential goal for all practitioners and students and their societies in the recent decades. Therefore, the effective and productive implementation of knowledge requires clear understanding and interpretation besides keeping high level of accuracy. During the last two decades, there have been urgent needs to improve reading instructions (Mathes & Torgesen 1998). In this study the term "Reading" refers to a wide explanation of analyzing numerous written texts; these texts include both of social and cultural ideas such as where norms, beliefs, and values are constructed. In this regard, reading itself is not evaluated but the way of adaptation, reproduction and usage of reading is the assessed one. After that, a short outline and comments on the way of theorizing the issues about the guidance of practical reading would be provided (du Boulay 1999). Therefore, the article focused on critical reading through producing written texts by undergraduate students in the City University College of Ajman (CUCA). There is another emphasize on the importance of the written productions in university educational outcomes such as exams, written essays, and dissertations which affect students improvement (du Boulay 1999). Also the term of critical reading is essential to be defined and related to people's attempts to explain the reason of their clarification of one idea better than the other (Wallace & Wray n.d.).

Maltepe (2016) defined the Critical reading as students ability to consider and analyze what they read, evaluate what they have read, and implement their own assessment about what they have read. Therefore, teaching critical reading skill to students requires teachers with knowledge about text assortment, use of suitable ways, arrangement of practical learning and teaching processes. Also, teachers must introduce critical reading skills as well.

### 1.1 The nature of the Reading and content-based teaching approach:

Reading is defined and introduced in many studies and it has great interest. Cline, F., Johnstone, C., & King, T. (2006) defined reading as interpreting and realizing written text. Decoding needs interpreting the codes of writing systems into the spoken words they express. Therefore, realizing is introduced by the objectives for reading, the content, the nature of the text, and the readers' techniques and knowledge. In this regard, there are many presented strategies and ways to teach reading, one of them is content-based teaching which is expressed by many researchers as a valuable method to teach of critical reading and critical thinking as well. LIAW (2007) indicated that content-based approach allows students to improve their language skills and they become more aware about the world they live in.

### 1.2 Readers' awareness of self-efficacy

Karasakaloglu, Saracaloglu & Yilmaz Ozelci (2012) specified one of the most important aspects supporting critical reading is readers' awareness of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is presented as one of the main variables with reference to the social cognitive theory. Also, Bandura defined self-efficacy as it is valuable requirement to the configuration of behaviors and is explained as "the decision of a person about the ability of preparing and achieving the tasks which are important to reflect a specific operation profitably" (Bandura, 1986). The concept is introduced as self-efficacy insight, idea or judgment in the books concerning the concept of self-efficacy

(Karabay, Kayıran & Işık 2015).

### **1.3 Reading-Writing relationship:**

Historically, the main responsibility of reading-writing researchers is to identify the interaction between reading and writing. Also, the interaction between the two skills has a direct relation to students acquiring both of L1 and L2 (Grabe 2016). Hiebert & Fisher (2007) listed that writing skill remains tricky for the majority of college students with a great focus on its importance as an academic skill especially for those students who used to learn L2 writing. However, L2 specialists focus on the importance of reading for writing which is considered as the basic role of them to enhance reading-writing connection. Additionally, there are many shared sub-skills between reading and writing, vocabulary is one of them which make strong relation between both of reading and writing. As the relation between reading and vocabulary is crucial, the relation between vocabulary and writing is important too. We can say that vocabulary has a great impact on both of reading and writing knowledge (Karakoç & Köse, 2017).

### **2. The study problem:**

While many world countries extremely highlight the importance of ESL learning in general, there is a restricted stress on the integration between the way of reading and writing skills. The policy of new reading platforms, exploration of existing platforms, and their running in classrooms has caused the design of diversity of indexes for illustrating the level, difficulty, or approachability of the passages (Hiebert & Fisher 2007). Despite of the pervious explanation about the importance of reading, few are understood about critical reading implementation in the classrooms. The capacity to read and learn from reading is not only essential academic skill but it is also a need for educational success in all levels of education (Cox, Friesner & Khayum 2003). This study provides a clear exploration of the critical reading skill through the written texts of undergraduate students to bridge the gap of literature in this regard. Interviews with students in the City University College of Ajman reveal their concepts of critical reading, writing and how they can be connected together, would be a beneficial provision because they provide valuable information. Actually the study tried to answer the following questions:

- Is there a significant relation between the critical reading skills and students' written work?
- How is critical reading reflected in students' written work?
- How is critical reading skills reflected in undergraduate students' social skills?

### **3. The study objectives:**

The goal of this article is to explore the critical reading technique and its importance in developing writing and social skills of undergraduate students. Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to:

- Determine the importance of critical reading technique in developing academic and social achievement of undergraduate students.
- Investigate the critical reading skills of students through their writing.
- Explore the relation between reading and writing in general.

### **4. The importance of the study:**

This study focused on the impact of reading technique which becomes a strong indication of students' writing improvement. Also, it is important to understand that writers have influences, norms and ideas. All of these have a tendency to affect our interpretation of a text. Consequently, a crucial critical reading skill is to recognize writers' main objectives and outlines, and then you can take them into consideration in your assessment of the passage in hand. (Wallace & Wray n.d.). From the other hand Critical reading program targets undergraduate students to confront the problem of the existed gap between the way of learning and the way of practicing. As the gap concerning the language learning theories and pedagogical methods has turned out to be the emphasis of concentration of language educators (LIAW 2007). Additionally, the study focused on the relation between reading and writing. Reading-writing relations have to then establish some theories and provide a framework that distinguishes the methods in which reading and writing together support language, literacy, and content learning. Also, the capacity to read is predictably suggested in many sessions of reading-writing relations (Grabe 2016). Moreover, the recent study emphasized the major effect of a certain reading technique "Critical Reading Technique" (CRT) in the writing achievement of undergraduate students in the City University College of Ajman (CUCA). Therefore, this study presents recommendations to enhance the reading-writing relations and improve students writing through reading.

### **5. Method:**

#### **5.1 Study design:**

The data of this study is collected and analyzed qualitatively. Historically, the qualitative inquiry approach came popular from many decades when anthropologists and sociologists used to ask people about their lives in

different ways, such as observing them and interviewing them as well (Merriam & Tisdell 2016). The Qualitative research is defined as an umbrella group that covers different types of papers (Brantlinger et al. 2005). This study follows a qualitative case study method, a case study is considered as one of the most important methods that considers individuals to give appropriate answer for a particular question and provides different types of indications, and the evidence for this study is a case (Gillham 2010). The researcher emphasized this approach while conducting a set of semi-structured interviews to measure students' experiences and abilities to read critically in order to improve their writing skill.

Another approach is applied in this study is the Phenomenological approach which aims to examine, explain, and identify the idea of person lived experience; it is coming from the German philosophy of phenomenology which has different types of interviews with persons who have both experience and interest in the concerned phenomena (Marshall & Rossman 2011). The researcher emphasized this approach while conducting a set of observations to measure students' social skills. Also the formation of research questions, the principles of the grounded theory were adapted, research questions best tackled by grounded theory structure involve those that investigate new areas, try to reveal processes, explore weekly recognized phenomena (Shah & Corley 2006).

### 5.2 participants

Six of nine students who registered in the Critical Thinking module in the City University College of Ajman volunteered to participate in this study. Four participants are males and two are females. All participants reported that they did not join such a program before except one, he came from USA to complete his study in the UAE and he joined a program of reading writing interaction before. All participants signed a consent form about their knowledge of all parts of this study.

The duration of this study lasted in four to five weeks, all students received a task from their instructor to write a story, situation, or explanation about any topic each week (see appendix 4), and then they discussed what they wrote with their teacher. The teacher explained the written discourses in a different way using the technique of the hidden curriculum as a sort of critical reading, one of the written studies addressed that the term of a hidden curriculum indicates the unspoken or implicit ideas, behaviors, and norms that are found in the educational environments (Alsubaie, 2015). After that, the participants were asked to rewrite about same and different topics following the teacher's advices and instructions. The second written tasks was analyzed by the teacher and discussed with students through a set of individual semi-structure interviews.

### 5.3 Instruments:

This study has two instruments; both of them are considered to be tools of qualitative case study. The first tool is participants' observation and the second tool is semi-structured interviews. (see table2). The implementation of observation and interview is popular in controlling research studies, some research studies follow only observation and some others follow only interviews while some else follow a mixture of both same as the recent study.

Shah & Corley (2006) defined both of interviews and observations as followed; The term of interview refers to the technique of asking some structured and open-ended questions about the experience of the interviewees including personal and historical components. While the term of observation refers to investigating social situations and understanding how social aspects influence people's behavior and how people's behavior affects the social aspects. Also, qualitative observation is basically realistic in its meaning; it happens in the real situation of incidence, among the persons who would basically be joining.

### 6. Study findings and their discussion:

The data was collected within four to five weeks. During this period, participants used to receive a weekly writing task from their teacher (see appendix 4), then discussed what they wrote under the observation of their teacher. Through this discussion sessions, teacher gave her students the chance to read, analyze, and evaluate the written texts critically. After that, second writing tasks were assigned to students. After the end of the course, a set of semi-structure interview was conducted individually with each student to discuss what they wrote. As it is shown in table1, the study focused on investigating the effect of critical reading in the achievement of college students' writing skills.

Students skill	Critical Reading	Writing
instrument	Observation	Interviews

Table1

The ascertained themes center the importance of critical reading technique in improving college students' academic writing and social skills. The study instruments were designed to cover the research questions (see appendix 2&3). The researcher designed two checklists; the first one is participants' observation checklist and the second is participants' interview checklist. Each checklist is divided into three sections; each section covers

one of the research questions.

- *Observation checklist:*
- The first research question: *Is there a significant relation between the critical reading skills and students' written work?*

Observation statement.	Y	N
1	5	1
2	4	2
3	3	3
4	3	3
5	2	4

Table2

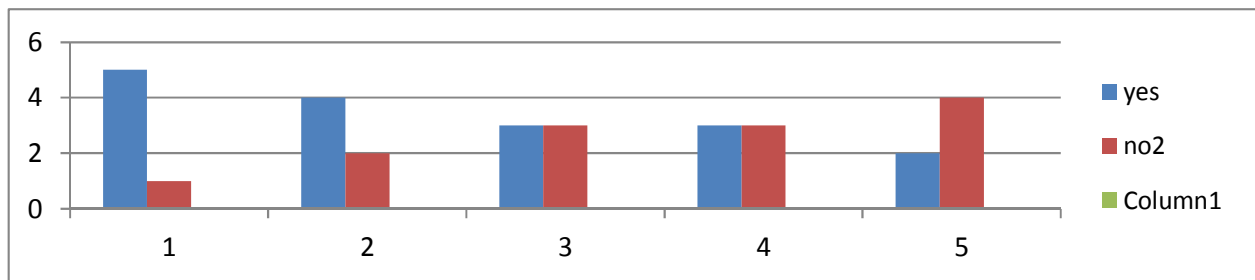


Figure1

Table 2 introduces the main points of teacher's observation according to students' writing. Five students used to bring their writing tools which indicate their tendency towards writing, while only one student did not have the same tendency. Also four students expressed their ability to evaluate their partners' writing which shows their readiness to acquire the critical reading skills. Equally, three students could write argumentatively and expressed their thoughts through ideas while the other three could not. Lastly, four students could not write their opinions as a conclusion while two students did. The educational process of writing helps in achieving a high level objective which is to allow students to write their emotions, opinions and tendencies for specific topic (Sengul 2015).

- The second research question: *How is critical reading reflected in students' written work?*

Observation statement.	Y	N
1	3	3
2	2	4
3	4	2
4	4	2
5	1	5

Table 3

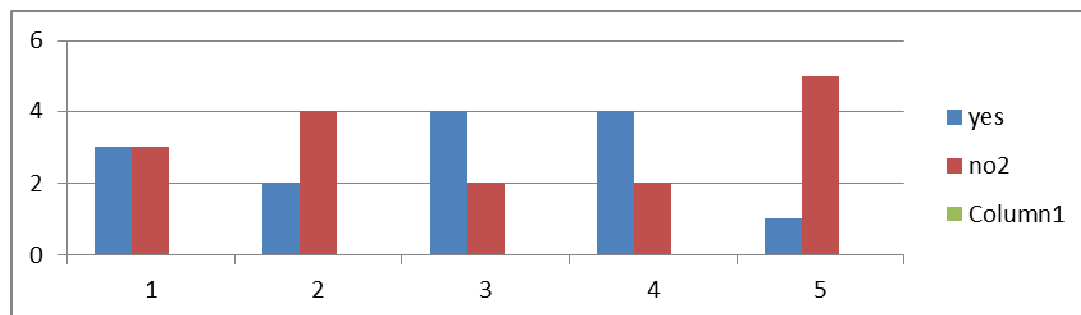


Figure 2

Table 3 covers the research second question. The number of students was equal in writing notes and comments about teacher's discussion and explanation on how to read critically. Four students used to write their comments before participating in the discussion which shows their social and cognitive disabilities to share their ideas with others. Equally, four students prefer to read aloud and follow all of teacher's instructions. Lastly, five students could not organize their writing to use arguments which indicate their lack of knowledge about how to write argumentatively.

- The third research question: How is critical reading skills reflected in their social skills?

Observation statement.	Y	N
1	2	4
2	3	3
3	5	1
4	4	2
5	1	5

Table 4

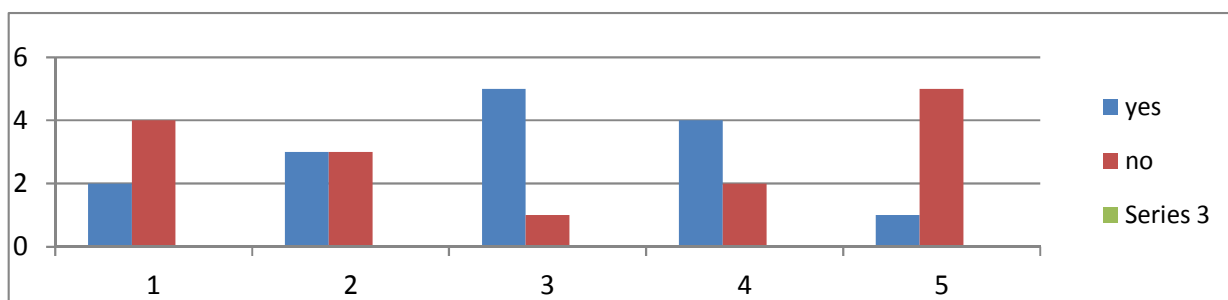


Figure 3.

It is obvious from table 4 that majority of students are updated with the recent social topics and freely accept all opposite views which allows us to understand the nature of college students in the UAE. While the majority of students could not share their ideas with the group which reflects their disability to communicate with others or they are shy. Social aspects may introduce one of the most important mechanisms that motivate the relationship between self-regulation and academic achievement (Montroy et al. 2014).

- Interview checklist:

- The first research question: Is there a significant relation between the critical reading skills and students' written work?

1. As an ESL learner, what is your favorite skill? Why?
2. Do you remember when your last reading and writing tests were?
3. How was your achievement in both of reading and writing tests?
4. Are you a good reader, writer, listener, or speaker?
5. Do you think that if you do well in reading, will you do the same in writing?
6. If you would be given the chance to write a story, will you read about the topic before starting to write?
7. If you would be given the chance to criticize a written text, what are the most important points would be focused by you?
8. Did you try to write some comments when reading a text?

Table 5

Table 5 has eight questions were assigned to each student through a set of semi-structure interview. The answers of the students were homogeneous, but what was noticed is all students did not determine writing as their favorite ESL skill which reflects their struggle with this skill. It was also noticed that all of them recommended reading to writing as a positive technique. Five students stated their disabilities to criticize any written texts. Three students suggested critical reading as a tool to improve writing. Similarly to Boakye (2017) all students' answers on this part reflected the positive effect which could be achieved by reading in students writing.

- The second research question: How is critical reading reflected in students' written work?

1. Do you prefer to read novels, poetry, politics, or magazines?
2. If you would be given the chance to write, will you write novels, poetry, politics, or magazines?
3. Did you use to read daily magazines? Which kind of them?
4. While reading any passage, did you use to ask questions beyond the written words?
5. Did you use to evaluate any written text? How?
6. Did you use to analyze the written text background? How?
7. Did you use to divide your reading passages into reasons and claims?
8. Did you use to divide your written texts into reasons and claims?

Table 6.

Table 6 has eight questions to cover the second research question. The answers of the first question are

varied; some of them prefer to write novels, some prefer to write poetry, politics and magazines. While they were asked about their favorite field of writing, most of them said novels and they explained the reasons as this kind of writing does not require more efforts to be done which assures their writing weaknesses. Moreover, majority of students stated their disabilities to evaluate, analyze, and divide the written passages.

- **The third research question:** *How is critical reading skills reflected in their social skills?*

1. Do you remember when your last discussion about reading text with your friends was?
2. If you have an opposite view about any topic, will you share it with your friends?
3. Do you prefer reading, analyzing, evaluating any text loudly?
4. Do you prefer to read about social or personal issues?
5. Do you prefer to read about any personal decision in your life before deciding to accept or reject it?
6. Do you prefer to read about natural science or social science?
7. Are you a good reader about famous social issues?
8. Did you use to share what you read with your family members?

Table 7.

Table 7 questions refer to the relation between critical reading and social skills. Students' answers on all questions show big difference between their social skills in the beginning of the study and during their interview. It is significant that students acquired some social skills which allow them to discuss, share ideas, argue, and take decisions which are supposed to be aspects of critical reading. However, the answer of the sixth question came totally different than it was expected; five students stated that they prefer reading about natural science but what was found is that all students do not know the difference between social and natural science. While the last couple of the questions reflected students' capability on communicating with their family members and read about updated social topics.

## 7. Conclusion and recommendations

The reading skill is an essential skill for all languages; also writing is a fundamental keystone of a fruitful college vocation. Additionally, new employees are required to have this skill to join career work and their writing skill is supposed to be already developed. However, learners, employees, and practitioners alike know that the writing skill is not developed as it is expected to be. This research paper introduced the effect of critical reading technique in college students writing skill through the Critical thinking course which was modified to allow students to analyze, learn, and read critically. The indication advocates that critical reading technique was certainly successful in its objectives. While students writing skill was improved by the end of the course, also the communicative and social skills were developed too. Furthermore, the participants themselves stated that the program was beneficial in improving a number of cognitive "writing" and social "communication" skills. Another indication is that all participants were new in joining such programs in reading-writing interaction, if these students have taken such programs in the last years, they would be affected by their prior experiences. Additionally, those students joined the college and they are supposed to produce and develop research papers and thesis which require high level of the academic writing, the first written task which was assigned to students reflected their struggling with their writing skills to cover the task. Furthermore, the first written task followed a lesson with the same explanation and the same components of the required task. Unfortunately, students could not analyze, clarify, and cover the first written task as it was expected from them. Therefore, I suggest that if students keep practicing the critical reading skills, they will develop their writing skills. Consequently, in the discussion class which assigned after the first written task, and through the observation time some students were getting shy and did not have the ability to share their writing with their colleagues or even their teachers.

Moreover, the program of critical reading could not be the same for all subjects but it emphasized the subject content, objectives, and teaching methods. Therefore, the writing outcomes should also match the same points. So, the results of this study should be generalized with caution. The particulars of this college and its students might cause the specific effectiveness of this program; however, students' struggle with the writing skill was clearly noticed so it is argued that some types of this program could be beneficial in a lot of colleges. Under the same idea, the sample of this study was small but mixed which refers to a type of conceptual reproduction which strengthened the results validity.

Consequently, the best efforts were made to design the observation checklist for students to allow observing as much as skills of participants. Also, the design of the interview questions was clearly determined to measure and evaluate students' tendency toward reading, writing, and social communication. Lastly, this study introduced a suggested reading technique came out of the observation that the college learners do not have the ability to write properly. This thing was noticed when our students were required to write their assignments or thesis. Paul & Elder (2006) suggested that well educated people normally read thoroughly and write independently to acquire new knowledge to extend their sympathy of ideas, and to assess conceptual misunderstanding, also they defined the meaning of read normally as to build accurately the meaning of what you read. This assured the importance

of this program and it is considered as a valuable one to help students acquiring new discipline by giving them specific comments on their writing and specific instructions on how to read and analyze the ideas. Also Smith (2010) emphasized that writing could be acquired through reading by mentioning that he had been learned that no ones can write without knowing what they should say and before organizing their ideas. This is what is resulted from this study, that writing could be a production of reading. There are some essential suggestions for future papers that should be emphasized. Firstly, the critical reading program was only designed from the Critical Thinking text book. I suggest it to be modified in other disciplines and subjects to help students from different majors.

Secondly, I encourage all researchers and specialists from different subjects to think about applying similar programs in their majors. In the same context, the content of the program will be different which matches the nature of their subjects

## References

1. Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundation of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
2. Boakye, N. (2017). *Extensive reading in a tertiary reading programme: Students' accounts of affective and cognitive benefits*. Reading & Writing, vol. 8 (1).
3. Brantlinger, E., Jimenez, R., Klingner, J., Pugach, M. & Richardson, V. (2005). *Qualitative Studies in Special Education*. Exceptional Children, vol. 71 (2), pp. 195-207.
4. Cline, F., Johnstone, C., & King, T. (2006). *Focus group reactions to three definitions of reading (as originally developed in support of NARAP goal 1)*. Minneapolis, MN: National Accessible Reading Assessment Projects
5. Cox, S., Friesner, D. & Khayum, M. (2003). *Do Reading Skills Courses Help Underprepared Readers Achieve Academic Success in College?*. Journal of College Reading and Learning, vol. 33 (2), pp. 170-196.
6. Davis, K. (1995). *Qualitative Theory and Methods in Applied Linguistics Research*. TESOL Quarterly, vol. 29 (3), p. 427.
7. Du Boulay, D. (1999). *Argument in Reading: what does it involve and how can students become better critical readers?*. Teaching in Higher Education, vol. 4 (2), pp. 147-162.
8. Elfrieda H. Hiebert & Charles W. Fisher (2007) *Critical Word Factor in Texts for Beginning Readers*, The Journal of Educational Research, 101:1, 3-11, DOI: 10.3200/JOER.101.1.3-11
9. Gillham, B. (2008). *Case study research methods*. London: Continuum.
10. Gillham, B. (2010). *Case Study Research Methods (Real world research)*. Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd.
11. Grabe, W. (2016). *Current Developments in Second Language Reading Research*. TESOL Quarterly, vol. 25 (3), p. 375.
12. Hasani, A., Hendrayana, A. & Senjaya, A. (2017). *Using Project-based Learning in Writing an Educational Article: An Experience Report*. Universal Journal of Educational Research, vol. 5 (6), pp. 960-964.
13. Hiebert, E. & Fisher, C. (2007). *Critical Word Factor in Texts for Beginning Readers*. The Journal of Educational Research, vol. 101 (1), pp. 3-11.
14. Karabay, A. (2012). *The effect of critical reading-writing education on pre-service teachers of Turkish of academic achievements and reading-writing levels, (Unpublished doctoral thesis)*. Çukurova University, Adana.
15. Karabay, A., Kayıran, B. & Işık, D. (2015). *The Investigation of Pre-service Teachers' Perceptions about Critical Reading Self-Efficacy*. Eurasian Journal of Educational Research, vol. 15 (59).
16. Karakoç, D., & Köse, G. D. (2017). *The impact of vocabulary knowledge on reading, writing and proficiency scores of EFL learners*. Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 13(1), 352-378.
17. LIAW, M. (2007). *Content-Based Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking Skills in an EFL Context*. ReCALL, vol. 19 (02), p. 224.
18. Maltepe, S. (2016). *An Analysis of the Critical Reading Levels of Pre-service Turkish and Literature Teachers*. Eurasian Journal of Educational Research, vol. 16 (63), pp. 168-184.
19. Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. (2011). *Designing qualitative research*. Los Angeles: Sage.
20. Mathes, P. & Torgesen, J. (1998). *All Children Can Learn To Read: Critical Care for the Prevention of Reading Failure*. Peabody Journal of Education, vol. 73 (3), pp. 317-340.
21. Merriam, S. & Tisdell, E. (2016). *Qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
22. Montroy, J., Bowles, R., Skibbe, L. & Foster, T. (2014). *Social skills and problem behaviors as mediators of the relationship between behavioral self-regulation and academic achievement*. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, vol. 29 (3), pp. 298-309.
23. Paul, R. & Elder, L. (2006). *The international critical thinking reading & writing test*. Dillon Beach, CA: Foundation for Critical Thinking.

24. Sengul, M. (2015). *The Relationship between Writing Dispositions and Intelligence Domains of Gifted Students*. International Journal of Higher Education, vol. 4 (4).
25. Shah, S. & Corley, K. (2006). *Building Better Theory by Bridging the Quantitative?Qualitative Divide*. *Journal of Management Studies*, vol. 43 (8), pp. 1821-1835.
26. Shanahan, T. & Lomax, R. (1986). *An analysis and comparison of theoretical models of the reading-writing relationship*. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 78 (2), pp. 116-123.
27. Smith, A. (2010). *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*. Charleston, SC:BiblioBazaar.
28. Wallace, M. & Wray, A. (n.d.). *Critical reading and writing for postgraduates*.
29. Zamel, V. (1992). *Writing One's Way into Reading*. *TESOL Quarterly*, vol. 26 (3), p. 463.