
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Bridging Theory and Practice: E-learning Strategies for Strengthening Critical Reading

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ABSTRACT

Critical reading is that kind of reading which takes the reader beyond and beneath the surface meaning of what is written to the assumptions, arguments, and strategies behind them. The current study took place at Faculty of Education, Minia university, Egypt trying to explore the effectiveness of a blended e-learning program in improving English majors' critical reading skills. A sample from third year English majors consisting of 60 students were randomly assigned to two groups: a treatment and a control one, each consisting of 30 students. The treatment group was trained in a Blended E-Learning program based on genre discourse analysis, whereas the control group was taught the same content in a "Discourse Analysis" course through the conventional method of teaching. Tools of the study included two questionnaires, a Blended E-Learning training program, two pre-post-tests in the acquisition and use of critical reading skills, and the English Proficiency Examination for Egypt (EPEE). Equality between the treatment and the control groups was ensured by using t-value to analyze differences between the two groups on the control variables. The present study followed quasi-experimental research in an exploratory sequential mixed methods design. The treatment group and the control group were exposed to pre-post means of getting data. The treatment group was only instructed and trained through a Blended E-Learning program. The treatment lasted for one academic semester, six hours a week. Analysis of quantitative data obtained by students using (t-test - Point Biserial Correlation Coefficient - Pearson Correlation-- Eta-Squared) and the sematic analysis of qualitative data revealed that the treatment group significantly surpassed the control group on the post tests of the acquisition and use of critical reading skills. Discussion of these findings, recommendations and suggestions for further research are presented.

KEYWORDS

E-learning Strategies, Blended E-Learning, Genre Discourse Analysis, Critical Reading, English Majors,

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1- Introduction:

Education is a lifelong skill that each human being needs to live successfully. Education is defined as the process of studying in order to obtain a deeper knowledge and understanding of a variety of subjects to be applied to daily life. Education is not limited to just knowledge from books but can also be obtained through practical experiences in daily life activities outside the classroom (University of the People, 2025 and Tothova, 2002).

Technological innovations and digital technology are becoming an integral part of our daily lives. Technology plays a fundamental role nowadays in both teaching and learning. To meet all the requirements of the new generation of students, technology enables educational systems to provide a blend of both online learning and face-to-face one (Bonk & Graham, 2012 and Holden, 2012).

As the amount and genres of texts available to readers increase daily, the teacher educators have to develop skills that enable their students to view and question texts critically and to consider reading as a critical and a challenging activity in which their higher order thinking abilities must find their way. Many researchers asserted that college students need crucial advanced reading skills and strategies beyond entry level skills that help them see deeper layers of meaning in a text and promote analytic thinking and reflection (Kaufman, 1980; Handel, 1990; Erwin 1993; and Carter, 1996). It is obvious as assured by Ali (1990) and Abdel Aziz (1999) that learning information and content instead of fostering thinking abilities is still the focus of reading courses and despite the importance of critical reading for student - teachers, teaching reading does not lead them to think and read critically.

Discourse Analysis (DA) is concerned with the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used. It will enable readers to reveal hidden motivations behind a text or behind the choice of a particular method of research to interpret that text. Furthermore, it is nothing more than a deconstructive reading and interpretation of a problem or text. When analyzing discourse, researchers are not only concerned with "purely" linguistic facts; they pay equal or more attention to language use in relation to social, political, and cultural aspects. For this reason, discourse is not only within the interests of linguists; it is a field that is also studied by communication scientists, literary critics, philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, social psychologists, political scientists, and many others. (Juez, 2009)

The researcher observed that English majors of the Faculty of Education, Minia University lack the main skills of genre discourse analysis; students are unable to identify, analyze or evaluate any discourse. They are unable to identify either the form or the function of any discourse. The same was asserted by discourse analysis instructors through the informal interviews as they affirmed that their students were unable to acquire or use the skills of discourse analysis. Their students were unable to identify the genre of any given discourse, nor its context. They were unable to analyze any discourse to its roots, nor judge or evaluate it. The students themselves complaint about the difficulty of the course. They said it is a difficult course which needs to be studied more than one time to reach the desired level. Furthermore, the Egyptian teacher education programs do not cater for developing these skills. Only one course is offered to third year English majors to develop these skills which is not enough as asserted by discourse analysis instructors' and students.

1-1- Significance of the Study:

One of the main significant points can be considered as this study might be one of the few studies that attempted to investigate the effectiveness of a blended e-learning program based on genre discourse analysis in developing English majors' acquisition and use of critical reading skills in the Faculty of Education, Minia University as to the knowledge of the researcher. The present study will also offer:

1. a blended e-learning program for instructors of "reading 3" courses.
2. opportunities for English majors to use the internet to have access to the program.
3. an opportunity to develop students' awareness of blended e-learning, genre, discourse analysis, and critical reading skills.
4. and lastly, will provide language instructors with an online acquisition and use tests for critical reading skills.

The present study is, hopefully, expected to help: -

1. junior English Majors students improve their genre discourse analysis skills, and critical reading skills.
2. student teachers, during their practical training, transfer these skills to their students.
3. researchers to identify and enrich the assessment of the effectiveness of using a blended e-learning program based on genre discourse analysis in developing English majors' acquisition and use of critical reading skills.
4. curriculum experts, especially those who work as consultants in the field of developing E-learning and blended e-learning systems. (Learning Management Systems).
5. students through offering e - tests of critical reading skills (acquisition and use) for the first time.

1-2- Delimitations of the Study:

1. The study sample is third year Faculty of Education English majors, as they are in a real need to acquire and use discourse analysis, and critical reading skills. This is obvious through the results of the questionnaires and the informal interviews the researcher administered to third year, Faculty of Education English majors. Third year students need these skills to succeed in language courses and all the other courses. They also need to cope with the age of globalization and the increasing attitude towards e-learning and blended e-learning trends.

2. The learning management system (LMS) utilized in the blended e-learning program is Moodle (an open e - learning source) as it caters for the prerequisites of teaching critical reading courses and generates interaction between the instructor and the learners.
3. After consulting experts of EFL, the critical reading skills list consists of the main skills most needed by third year English majors: - Discourse Analysis Skills, Contextualizing Skills, Previewing Skills, Skimming, Scanning and Annotating Skills, Analyzing Evidence & Reflecting Skills, Comparing & Contrasting Skills, and Summarizing& Outlining Skills
4. The presentation method used is Blended E-learning, which combines features of both the analytical and the synthetic methods. It combines both synchronous and asynchronous (online learning techniques and face –to-face instruction) to capitalize on the strength of each learning approach.

1-3- Research Questions

The present study is an attempt to answer the following question: -

How effective would a blended learning program based on genre discourse analysis be in developing English majors' critical reading skills?

This question can be split into the below sub-questions: -

1. How effective would a blended e-learning program based on genre discourse analysis be in developing English majors' acquisition of the cognitive aspects of critical reading skills?
2. How effective would a blended e-learning program based on genre discourse analysis be in developing English majors' use of critical reading skills?

1-4- Literature Review:

Dziuban et al (2005) confirmed that "Through blended learning, accreditation and high standards can be maintained while providing the additional flexibility that students require". If the goal of higher education is to meet the ever-changing needs of students, post-secondary institutions need to consider this teaching methodology. Smith (2010) added that blended learning offers faculty and students the ability to teach and learn in a variety of different modalities, potentially increasing the instructional effectiveness. Making blended instruction available in certain subjects in a community college or technical school setting may offer the adult student the "best of both worlds"—flexibility of online education and the social and instructor support commonly associated with a face-to-face class.

Lopez-Perez, et al (2011) presented the findings about a study that was conducted at the university of Granada utilizing a blended learning experience stating that a total of 17 groups took part, with 1431 students registered for the 2009-2010 academic year. In their study, they used objective outcomes and the students' perceptions regarding the blended learning activities performed. The study showed that the use of blended learning had a positive effect in reducing dropout rates and in improving exam marks. Moreover, the students' perceptions on blended learning were interrelated, with their final marks depending on the blended learning activities, and on the students' age, background, and class attendance rate.

Rogers (2011) stated that discourse analysts are concerned with how language both reflects and constructs the social world. As a field of study, there were scores of books, journals, and conferences devoted to the theoretical and methodological issues among the varieties of discourse analysis. Less discussed in the field of discourse studies was how one learns to become a discourse analyst. This question was the subject of her article that reported on a study of her teaching and her students' learning within the scope of a one-semester graduate discourse analysis course. In the study, she set out to describe, interpret, and explain the discursive patterns used by students throughout the course. Their learning was most profound in three areas: "exploring theories of meaning making," "using tools to locate patterns," and "making micro-macro- connections." Learning unfolded differently for students in each area, depending on their background, area of study, and experience with discourse analysis. She argued that becoming more aware of the sorts of issues and complexities that arise as people become discourse analysts can aid in the process of supporting their learning as well as keep the field fresh with insights.

Visser (2017) investigated the effects of the genre-based writing instructional module in a blended learning environment on English writing ability and thinking skills of Thai undergraduate students. The study was a single group design, data collection lasted for 12 weeks. Results revealed that there were significant improvements in students' writing and thinking abilities. Students also had positive attitudes towards genre-based writing instructional modules in a blended learning environment.

Mustafa (1994) conducted a study to investigate the effectiveness of oriented free reading in developing the critical reading and critical thinking skills of basic education students. The researcher designed a test of critical reading skills. The study also used Watson Critical Thinking Test to measure students' skills. The results revealed that: There is an effectiveness of the oriented free - reading in developing critical reading and critical thinking skills of basic education students.

Collins (1996) conducted a study to investigate first year college developmental reading students' use of elaboration as a strategy for developing critical reading, while reading a narrative and writing an essay in response to the narrative. Three developmental or remedial readers participated in thinking a loud reading protocol, a thinking aloud writing protocol and a retrospective interview. Analysis of students' reading protocols indicated that students made an average of 12 elaborations that had three main functions: to develop critical perspectives, to develop ideas in the source text further and to generate new ideas. An analysis of students' writing protocols showed that students made an average of elaborations which had the same functions as the elaborations in reading. They wrote quality essays containing personal life connections; the ideas established conceptual frames and gave supporting details in the development of their essays. Findings indicated that as students used elaboration during reading, their innate abilities to use information in memory enabled them to think analytically and critically in creating a structured body of knowledge.

Abdel Aziz (1999) designed an eight -session program to investigate the effect of a self - instruction strategy on developing fourth year English majors' critical reading skills. The skills included in this program are identifying the main idea, identifying supportive ideas and details, making inferences, distinguishing fact from opinion, and identifying the author's purpose and tone. Sixty student-teachers from fourth year of English Department in Women's College were randomly selected to be the experimental and control groups of the study. The researcher used 't' test, ANCOVA and ANOVA for statistical treatment. Results revealed that the experimental' group students had developed their critical reading skills through the instructional package more than the control group. There were also significant differences- in favor of the post application of the critical reading test - between means of scores attained by the experimental group before and after the treatment. When analyzing students' responses on the overall evaluation questionnaire, students were found to be satisfied with the package as it helped them understand what is meant by critical reading skills and gave them a good opportunity to participate and share in their learning.

Levine (2000) investigated the development of critical reading skills in English as a foreign language (EFL) in a computer-networked environment. Findings suggested that the computerized learning environment contributed to the development of EFL critical literacy skills more than the conventional learning environment did.

Polette (2002) used "RITE" Method for developing critical reading skills necessary for constructing meaning as students read an informational text. This method consisted of four steps: 1- Read 2- Interrogate 3-Tell 4- Explore. Polette concluded that the method was effective in developing all kinds of critical reading skills.

Macknish (2011) article reported on the understandings and practices of critical reading in a postsecondary English as a second language (ESL) reading class for mainland Chinese students in Singapore. Despite the challenges of defining critical reading in practice and overcoming assumptions about Chinese students' lack of criticality, as well as the lack of attention paid to critical reading in the ESL course, helping the students read critically was considered a meaningful and necessary endeavor- both for students' future academic studies and for their reading proficiency in general. To investigate what critical reading would look like in this context, and whether it could be developed, a small-scale action research study was conducted. The study focused on the emergence of critical reading discourse in peer group discussions of texts. Findings showed that, despite some limitations, the students engaged in critical reading discourse when they were provided with scaffolding and opportunities to practice .

Abd Allah (2004) investigated the effect of using a program of critical reading strategies in training pre-service teachers of English on their acquisition and use of these strategies and on their level of performance in reading comprehension. Subjects of the study included one hundred first year English majors of the Faculty of Education, Minia University. They were divided into two groups: the treatment and the control group. The treatment group received instructions in critical reading strategies while the non-treatment received no such instruction. Analysis of obtained data revealed that the treatment group significantly surpassed the non- treatment group in the post-performance of the acquisition and use of critical reading strategies and in reading comprehension.

Kumagai (2011) conducted action research and revised her advanced-level Japanese reading course at a university by incorporating some principles from critical literacy. The "critical reading" course aimed at developing students' ability to analyze linguistic features of texts and making students cognizant of the effects of the writer's language choices. This paper was based on interviews with six

students conducted after the course and reported on their perspectives regarding the critical approach adopted on the course. The data showed that all the students felt some challenge in engaging in critical reading activities, yet they found it to be intellectually stimulating and beneficial in many aspects. The positive effects and difficulties of implementing a critical approach were discussed.

Abdel Halim (2011) while surveying the existing situation and considering the pilot study conducted by him, it was clear that there is a problem concerning weaknesses in critical reading and translation skills aside from the lack of political awareness on the part of fourth year EFL majors at the Faculty of Education, Helwan University. Most students' problems laid in the fact that they do not approach critical reading and translation in a systematic, strategic way. Therefore, his study examined the effectiveness of a task-based translation program with a group of fourth year TEFL majors. Being rooted in theoretical foundations such as Decker theory of literary instruction, and Crismore's input hypotheses, the proposed program aimed at improving students' critical reading and translation skills of expository and argumentative political texts and raising their political awareness. The results of pre- and post-intervention tests and review of written reflections by students and the instructor revealed that this study project was successful in achieving its aim. Based on the results, certain recommendations were provided e.g. the relationship between translation and critical thinking/reading should be the focus in language learning.

In her study, Mahfouz (2019) examined the effectiveness of SCAMPER strategy in developing secondary school students' EFL critical reading skills. The study was a quasi-experimental pre-post one group design. The study participants were (22) first year secondary school students. To collect the data, a three-unit instruction reading comprehension program was designed. Results revealed that the study group mean scores on the post critical reading test surpassed that of the post-test. Accordingly, SCAMPER strategy was effective in developing EFL secondary school students' critical reading. However, teaching English critical reading should be an integral part of EFL secondary school curriculum.

Diab (2020) conducted a study to investigate the effect of a blended learning program based on cognitive apprenticeship to develop EFL pre-service teachers' critical reading skills and academic enablers. Two groups of second year EFL pre-service teachers were randomly assigned to the experimental group and the control group. The experimental group were trained through the blended program that is based on cognitive apprenticeship to develop their EFL critical reading skills and the academic enablers' dimensions while those in the control group received their regular instruction. Findings of the study revealed a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the control and experimental groups students in the post administration of the EFL critical reading skills and academic enablers in favor of the experimental group.

In their study Khallaf, N., Rasti-Behbahani, A., & Abugohar, M. (2024) investigated the effectiveness of blended learning in developing critical listening skills, their findings emphasized the importance of the use of both blended learning programs and genre analysis in developing critical listening skills. Developing critical listening skills requires the learners to be skillful analysts as they need to analyze, judge, and evaluate what is said. The learner can have a better understanding and training on mastering these skills through practicing genre analysis. The improvement of listening comprehension affected the development of critical listening skills.

Based upon the previously mentioned studies, it was concluded that there is a gap in relating blended e-learning to genre discourse analysis, and critical reading skills all in one study. Thus, the present study attempted to bridge this gap.

2- Materials and Methods

2-1- Study Context:

Reading is considered the cornerstone for successful and effective learning. While reading, the reader must be actively involved, must try to discover information and ideas within the text. In critical reading, a reader applies certain processes, models, questions, and theories that result in enhanced clarity and comprehension; the reader actually evaluates the text. There is more involvement, both in effort and understanding, in a critical reading than in a mere "skimming" of the text. If a reader "skims" the text, superficial characteristics and information are as far as the reader goes. Critical reading gets at "deep structure", that is, logical consistency, tone, organization, and several other very important sounding terms, (Kurland, 2000).

Bkumara (1992) argues that readers should no longer be regarded as passive. They are seen as active participants in the negotiation of meaning. In the study of English, reading has often been at the center of debate among teachers and scholars. It is the most important thing one needs for success in his/her study. Reading comprehension skills increase the pleasure and effectiveness of

reading as it plays an important role in one's life and this is a well-known fact as effective reading comprehension skills help in all the other subjects and in the personal and professional lives. (Time4learning, 2012)

Based on what is previously mentioned, developing reading comprehension skills is a must for success in acquiring and using a foreign language as reading is considered the main channel for linguistic input. We cannot speak, write, or communicate without being able to read the target language. Reading is the base for developing language skills. Developing critical reading skills is not an easy task as they require from the part of the instructor as well as the learner to exert too much effort. The instructor is responsible for creating the appropriate environment fit for learning, providing students with a variety of resources, using varied teaching methods and authentic resources of varied genres for reading. The learner also must utilize a great deal of effort in studying, reading, judging, and evaluating any written discourse he encounters to apply what the instructor teaches him.

Basic reading skills and strategies, including comprehension strategies, are needed before the reader is able to apply a more critical eye to a text. To be critical readers, adult learners need to develop their awareness of writers' different perspectives and purposes to gain deeper levels of meaning, to avoid being manipulated by writers and to gain insights and enjoyment from the texts they engage with. Critical reading includes the development of critical thinking, leading eventually to the reader being able to evaluate a writer's purpose, assess how well he has met that purpose, decide how valid and reliable the information is and identify the writer's attitude or bias. (National Centre for Literacy and Numeracy for Adults, 2012).

From what is mentioned above and through the researcher's observations and the informal interviews with both EFL instructors and learners, it became obvious that English majors of the Faculty of Education, Minia University lack genre discourse analysis skills and reading comprehension skills as well as their critical ability. In addition, there is a consensus among researchers that Egyptian teacher education programs do not cater for developing these target skills. Reading comprehension and critical reading skills in foreign language classes are hardly assessed in the appropriate way.

Observing some EFL classes led the researcher to agree with Reynolds (2002) that teachers were not aware of the complex nature of reading comprehension, and this led them to a situation in which they paid great attention to how to teach decoding and other literary level skills. Teaching reading comprehension focuses only on the surface structure level of comprehension and ignores comprehension at the deep structure level (critical reading skills) which is also asserted by (Sheng, 2000). In the absence of these skills, students are unable to achieve the great benefits of their learning and unable to read critically. Through a review of literature, the researcher found that these skills are very important for every learner who wants to be an independent learner and wants to enrich his learning experience. These skills help in developing learners' abilities to judge and evaluate any written text to cope with the global professionalism requirements. The researcher found that there are few studies investigating the effectiveness of using a blended e-learning program based on genre discourse analysis in developing students' critical reading skills.

The researcher's observations agree with Badrawi (1992) when he asserted that some teachers are reasonably skillful in teaching students how to identify and recognize words, but they fail to pay attention to comprehension skills. Varaprasad (1997) mentioned that teachers generally use texts primary to convey grammatical points, vocabulary, and content knowledge and rarely to enable students to listen, read, question a text's obvious and taken for granted information. Reviewing the literature, the researcher found that manipulating critical reading skills are essential for English majors as they will be prospective teachers.

2-2- The Quasi Experimental Design:

The present study followed quasi-experimental research in an exploratory sequential mixed methods design (a pre-post control group design). A treatment group and a control group were exposed to pre - post means of getting data. The treatment group was only instructed and trained through a Blended E-Learning program based on genre discourse analysis.

2-3- Participants of the Study:

The participants in the study were 60 male and female students sampled from the target population who were then divided into two groups. The selection of students in each group was done using a simple random allocation technique. In both groups, participants had studied English for eleven years; from elementary four till the study year. Their ages ranged between 19.3 and 20.3 years old, with approximately equal numbers in each group. The study employed simple random sampling techniques:

2-3-1 The Treatment Group:

Participants of the treatment group (30 male and female students) were randomly chosen from third year English majors. They were instructed and trained in some critical reading skills using a program designed by the researcher to develop their acquisition of the cognitive aspects and use of critical reading skills. This was performed through "Discourse Analysis Course" which is formally

assigned to be taught during the second semester. This course was chosen as it was concerned with teaching these skills, and the present program was built on the use of "Discourse Analysis Course" to develop students' critical reading skills.

2-3-2 The Control Group:

Participants of the control group (30 male and female students) followed the conventional procedures of teaching the "Discourse Analysis Course". They received the "Discourse Analysis course" through the conventional ways.

2-3-3 Data Collection Instruments and Tools of the Study

- A Blended E-Learning Program Based on Genre Discourse Analysis.
- A Test of the Acquisition of the Cognitive Aspects of Critical Reading Skills.
- A Test of the Use of Critical Reading Skills.

2-3-3-1 A Blended E-Learning Program Based on Genre Discourse Analysis:

A program based on genre discourse analysis for training third year English Majors of the Faculty of Education in some critical reading skills was designed by the researcher to develop students' acquisition of the cognitive aspects and use of these skills.

Designing the program went through the following procedures:

Reviewing the literature related to critical reading skills, Blended E-Learning, and genre discourse analysis to determine the most appropriate and needed critical reading skills for third year English majors.

Instruments Used for Data Gathering for the Program: two questionnaires were developed by the researcher to specify the main reading skills and the main critical reading skills that were most needed by third year English majors. Then, consulting EFL experts to identify the main and sub critical reading skills appropriate for the study sample. This was followed by judging the validity of the list of skills by a jury in terms of: -

- a. Stating the main and sub skills
- b. Belongingness of critical reading skills to language skills
- c. Trainability
- d. Appropriateness for the group of the study

After that, the researcher stated the general and specific objectives of the Blended E-Learning program and of each unit and stated the behavioral objectives of each lesson in each unit. The next step was building up the program framework, judging the program framework by a panel of eleven EFL specialists to decide how far the objectives, content areas, activities, methods of presentation, training techniques, and evaluating tools suit the group of the study followed by building up the whole program: the instructor's manual and the student's handout and judging the whole program by a jury of nineteen Egyptian and foreign EFL experts.

After completing the program, the researcher started constructing the website and choosing the LMS (Moodle) in loading the program because it allows the classroom to extend onto the web. This program allows a common place for students to go for many classroom resources. Using Moodle, help posting news items, assign and collect assignments, post electronic journals, resources, and more. Also, it caters for the prerequisites of teaching the discourse analysis course and generates interaction between the instructor and the learners. And the last step was judging the website by a jury of five IT foreign experts for its content and general form to approve its validity and suitability for the participants and the objectives of the program.

2-3-3-2 A Test of the Acquisition of the Cognitive Aspects of Critical Reading Skills:

Objectives of the test are to assess third year English Majors acquisition of the cognitive aspects of critical reading skills and to assess the degree of improvement in the performance of the participants of "the treatment and the control groups". It consists of four parts. It includes 51 items representing the most important and the most emphasized objectives of the program. The total score of this test is 51 points. The validity of the test was constructed based on the specific objectives included in the training program. The test was submitted to a jury of eleven highly qualified and experienced EFL specialists. They were requested to judge the linguistic stating of the items, appropriateness and fitness of the items, applicability for the participants, and how far the items measure the program objectives. Their suggestions were taken into consideration. Some of these suggestions included modifications and restarting some points. They confirmed the suitability and applicability of the test. Also, the validity of the test was determined by internal consistency. The internal consistency for each skill was calculated by using (Pearson Correlation) formula. The reliability of the test is 0.918. The reliability coefficient of the test was determined by the test – retest method. The testing time was 75 minutes.

2-3-3-3 A Test of the Use of Critical Reading Skills:

Objectives of the test are to assess third year English Majors use of critical reading skills and to assess the degree of improvement in the performance of the participants of "the treatment and the control groups". It consists of 47 items, divided into three parts. The items represent the most important and the most emphasized objectives of the program. The total score of this test is 66 points. The validity of the test was constructed based on the specific objectives included in the training program. The test was submitted to a jury of eleven highly qualified and experienced EFL specialists. They were requested to judge the linguistic stating of the items, appropriateness and fitness of the items, applicability for the participants, and how the items measure the program objectives. Their suggestions were taken into consideration. Some of these suggestions included modifications and rephrasing of some points. They confirmed the suitability and applicability of the test. The validity of the test was also determined by internal consistency. The internal consistency for each skill was calculated by using (Pearson Correlation) formula. The reliability of the test is 0.948. The reliability coefficient of the test was determined by the test – retest method. The testing time was 180 minutes.

2-3-4 The Control Variables: -

To ensure homogeneity and comparability between the treatment and the comparison groups, the researcher used the English Proficiency Examination for Egypt (EPEE) form (B), presented by the Center for Developing English Language Teaching (CDELT) in 1982. This test was used to assess and equalize the initial proficiency levels of participants in both groups. The EPEE consists of 100 items divided into four parts and aims to evaluate students' English proficiency. Its validity, calculated by CDELT, is reported to be 0.83. The reliability of the test, as calculated by CDELT, was 0.80 initially and 0.91 by the researcher due to updates over time. Additionally, in both groups, participants had studied English for eleven years, from elementary four through to the present year. The age range of third-year English majors was between 19.3 and 20.3 years old, with a roughly equal distribution between the treatment and the comparison groups.

2-4- Procedures of the Study: -

The current study went through the following steps:

1. Assessing students' needs through administering two questionnaires to third year English majors and EFL instructors.
2. Reviewing the literature to identify the Blended E-Learning techniques, genre discourse analysis skills and critical reading skills to design and build the Blended E-Learning program.
3. Designing the framework of the Blended E-Learning program based on genre discourse analysis for teaching critical reading skills.
4. Establishing the appropriateness and validity of the program framework by a Jury of eleven highly qualified and experienced EFL specialists.
5. Designing and building the whole program: an instructor's manual and a student's book.
6. Establishing the appropriateness and validity of the Blended E-Learning program based on genre discourse analysis by a Jury of nineteen highly qualified and experienced EFL specialists.
7. Constructing the tests (acquisition of the cognitive aspects and use tests of critical reading skills) and having them validated by EFL experts.
8. Conducting a pilot study to estimate the validity and the reliability of the tests.
9. Designing, constructing, and evaluating the website by IT experts. The researcher designed a private website for the purpose of the study; no one can have access to its content without permission.
10. Uploading the program on the website.
11. Judging the web site by a jury of five highly qualified and experienced IT specialists.
12. Choosing a sample of third year English Majors, Faculty of Education, Minia University.
13. Administering pre-tests to ensure equality between the treatment group and the control group.
14. Training (45) students of the treatment group on the use of the computer and Internet for two weeks before the experiment to make sure that they can use it and the program appropriately. After training, certain tasks guaranteed to make sure that 70% mastered the skills trained in. Those composed the study group "30 students".
15. Applying the Blended E-Learning program based on genre discourse analysis: The experiment lasted for one academic semester, six hours a week. The control group was taught only according to the conventional ways of teaching the "Discourse Analysis" course.
16. Administering post-tests to evaluate the effect of the program used.
17. Using the suitable statistical methods: Analyzing students' scores on the tests of acquisition of the cognitive aspects and use of critical reading skills statistically using (t-test – Point Biserial Correlation Coefficient - Pearson Correlation-- Eta-Squared).
18. Discussing the results.

19. Reporting recommendations and contributions.

3- Results:

Analyzing data collected during the study went through three different phases as the following:

3-1- Phase 1:

Pilot Study During Phase 1, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to observe target learners' critical reading skills through observation checklists, informal interviews and questionnaires. Then, the results of the questionnaires and the informal interviews the researcher administered to third-year English majors and to the instructors of genre analysis, and reading courses showed that third-year students needed to acquire and use the following skills: genre analysis skills, and critical reading skills. All observation noted remarks and questionnaires results were polled together as depicted in the inventory Table 1. These data were collected during the inventory in the pilot study which represents the first cycle of data collection, attempting to investigate the current status

Table (1)

Inventory (1) Instructors' and Students' Frequency of Responses to Questionnaires Items

Skill	Objects	Responses	Frequency	%
Genre Discourse Analysis Skills	Instructors	Rarely used	10	100%
	Students	Rarely used	30	100%
Critical Reading Skills	Instructors	Rarely used	10	100%
	Students	Rarely used	30	100%

3-2- Phase 2: Pre-Testing:

3-2-1 Pre-Testing of the Acquisition of the Cognitive Aspects of Critical Reading Skills:

Comparison of the mean scores of both the treatment and the control groups on the test of the acquisition of the cognitive aspects of critical reading skills showed that they were very close, and t-value (1.034) is not significant at 0.05 level.

Table (2)

t-value of Mean Scores Obtained on the Pre - Test of the Acquisition of the Cognitive Aspects of Critical Reading Skills of both the Treatment and the Control Groups

Group	No.	Means	Std. D	D.F.	t- value
Pre /Exp.	30	21.4000	2.2221	58	1.034
Pre/Con.	30	20.8333	2.0186		

Not significant at 0.05 level; Total score of the test is = 51 points.

Thus, both groups performed at a similar level in this aspect (Table 2)

3-2-2 Pre-Testing of the Use of Critical Reading Skills:

Comparison of the mean scores of both the treatment and the control groups on the test of critical reading skills showed that they were very close, and t-value (0.253) is not significant at 0.05 level.

Table (3)

t-value of Mean Scores Obtained on the Pre - Test of the Use of the Cognitive Aspects of Critical Reading Skills of both the Treatment and the Control Groups

Group	No.	Means	Std. D	D.F.	t- value
Pre /Exp.	30	26.3000	7.0180	58	0.253
Pre/Con.	30	25.8333	7.2449		

Not significant at 0.05 level; Total score of the test is = 66 points.

Thus, both groups performed at a similar level in this aspect (Table 3)

3-3- Phase3: Post Testing

After the implementation of the experiment, post testing was conducted to compare the treatment and the control groups in the acquisition of the cognitive aspects of critical reading skills and use of critical reading skills.

3-4- Data Analysis:

To answer the research questions, the researcher collected quantitative data and used t-test, Point Biserial Correlation Coefficient, Pearson Correlation, and Eta-Squared formula for analyzing the obtained data on the acquisition of the cognitive aspects and use tests of critical reading skills.

3-4-1 Data Analysis Related to Research Question1:

Analysis of data obtained using t – test shows that participants of the treatment group achieved a higher degree of improvement than those of the control group on the acquisition test of the cognitive aspects of critical reading skills since t- value (20.903) is significant at (0.01) level and beyond. Table (4) presents a summary of the analysis of the data obtained on the post test of both the treatment and the control groups of the acquisition of the cognitive aspects of critical reading skills.

Table (4)

t-value of Mean Scores Obtained on the Post - Test of the Acquisition of the Cognitive Aspects of Critical Reading Skills of both the Treatment and the Control Groups

Group	No.	Means	Std. D	D.F.	t- value	Eta- Squared
Exp.	30	46.3000	2.1520	58	*20.903	**0.939
Cont.	30	29.5333	3.8303			

*Significant at .01 level

** Significant

Total score of the test = 51 points

To ensure the effectiveness of the Blended E-Learning program based on genre discourse analysis in achieving its prescribed objectives, Eta – Squared formula is used. As shown in table (4) Eta – Squared value (0.939) is highly significant. Nassar (2006) citing Cohen (1988) mentions that when Eta – Squared value (η^2) is less than 0.1 it means that the significance is weak, when (η^2) is more than 0.1 and less than 0.6 it means that the significance is medium, and when (η^2) is more than 0.6 it means that the significance is high.

3-4-2 Comparison of the Treatment and the Control Groups' Performance in the Pre – Post Test of Acquisition of the Cognitive Aspects of Critical Reading Skills:

Comparison of the results of the treatment group on the pre – posttest of the acquisition of the cognitive aspects of critical reading skills shows that the treatment group achieved a significant degree of improvement in post testing than on pretesting. The obtained t – value (41.140) is significant at (0.01) level and beyond as shown in table (5). On the other hand, the control group

achieved significant improvements but less than the treatment one as t- value (13.159) is significant at 0.05 level. Table (5) presents a summary of the analysis of data obtained in the pre- and post-performance of the treatment and the control groups on the test of the acquisition of the cognitive aspects of critical reading skills.

Table (5)

t-value of Mean Scores Obtained on the Pre-Post Test of the Acquisition of the Cognitive Aspects of Critical Reading Skills of both the Treatment and the Control Groups

Group	No.	Means	Std. D	D.F.	t- value
Pre /Exp.	30	21.4000	2.2221	29	**41.140
Post/Exp.	30	46.3000	2.1520		
Pre/Cont.	30	20.8333	2.0186	29	*13.159
Post/Cont.	30	29.5333	3.8303		

** Significant at .01 level

*Significant at.05 level

To show that the Blended E-Learning program has achieved its objectives in developing students' acquisition of the cognitive aspects of main critical reading skills, the following table shows these results.

Table (6) presents a summary of the analysis of the data obtained on the post test of both the treatment and the control groups on the main critical reading skills measured by the acquisition test of the cognitive aspects.

Table (6)

t-value of Mean Scores Obtained by the Treatment and the Control Groups in the Post Testing of the Main Critical Reading Skills Measured by the Test of the Acquisition of the Cognitive Aspects of These Skills

Group	No.	Means	Std. D	D.F.	t- value
Total	Exp. 30	46.3000	2.1520	58	*20.903
	Cont. 30	29.5333	3.8303		
Discourse Analysis Skills	Exp. 30	16.2000	1.2703	58	*13.241
	Cont. 30	10.6333	1.9205		
Contextualizing Skills	Exp. 30	4.6333	0.6686	58	*7.665
	Cont. 30	2.8000	1.1264		
Critical Reading Introductory	Exp. 30	1.8000	0.4068	58	*3.304
	Cont. 30	1.2667	0.7849		
Previewing	Exp. 30	4.5333	0.6814	58	*10.060
	Cont. 30	2.7667	0.6789		
Skimming, Scanning, and Annotating	Exp. 30	7.2333	0.8172	58	*12.036
	Cont. 30	4.5000	0.9377		
Analyzing & Reflecting Skills	Exp. 30	7.2667	1.0806	58	*7.806
	Cont. 30	4.7667	1.3817		

Summarizing and Outlining	Exp.	30	4.6333	0.6149	58	*8.575
	Cont.	30	2.8000	0.9965		

*Significant at .01 level

3-4-3 Data Analysis Related to Research Question2:

Analysis of data obtained using t – test shows that participants of the treatment group achieved a higher degree of improvement than those of the control group on the use test of critical reading skills since t- value (16.156) is significant at (0.01) level and beyond. Table (7) presents a summary of the analysis of the data obtained on the post test of both the treatment and the control groups of the use of critical reading skills.

Table (7)

t-value of Mean Scores Obtained on the Post - Test of the Use of Critical Reading Skills of both the Treatment and the Control Groups

Group	No.	Means	Std. D	D.F.	t- value	Eta- Squared
Exp.	30	53.8667	3.9281	58	*16.156	**0.904
Cont.	30	29.6000	7.2283			

*Significant at .01 level

** Significant

Total score of the test = 66 points

To ensure the effectiveness of the Blended E-Learning program based on genre discourse analysis in achieving its prescribed objectives, Eta – Squared formula is used. As shown in table (7) Eta – Squared value (0.904) is highly significant. Nassar (2006) citing Cohen (1988) mentions that when Eta – Squared value (η^2) is less than 0.1 it means that the significance is weak, when (η^2) is more than 0.1 and less than 0.6 it means that the significance is medium, and when (η^2) is more than 0.6 it means that the significance is high.

3-4-4 Comparison of the Treatment and the Control Groups' Performance in the Pre – Post Test of Use of Critical Reading Skills:

Comparison of the results of the treatment group on the pre – posttest of the use of critical reading skills shows that the treatment group achieved a significant degree of improvement in post testing than on pretesting. The obtained t – value (19.666) is significant at (0.01) level and beyond as shown in table (8).

On the other hand, the control group achieved significant improvements but less than the treatment one as t- value (2.190) is significant at 0.05 level. Table (8) presents a summary of the analysis of data obtained in the pre- and post-performance of the treatment and the control groups on the test of the use of critical reading skills.

Table (8)

t-value of Mean Scores Obtained on the Pre-Post Test of the Use of Critical Reading Skills of both the Treatment and the Control Groups

Group	No.	Means	Std. D	D.F.	t- value
Pre /Exp.	30	26.3000	7.0180	29	**19.666
Post/Exp.	30	53.8667	3.9281		
Pre/Cont.	30	25.8333	7.2449	29	*2.190
Post/Cont.	30	29.6000	7.2283		

** Significant at .01 level

*Significant at.05 level

In order to show that the Blended E-Learning program has achieved its objectives in developing students' use of the main critical reading skills, the following table shows these results.

Table (9) presents a summary of the analysis of the data obtained on the post test of both the treatment and the control groups on the main critical reading skills measured by the use test.

Table (9)

t-value of Mean Scores Obtained by the Treatment and the Control Groups in the Post Testing of the Main Critical Reading Skills Measured by the Test of the Use of These Skills

Group		No.	Means	Std. D	D.F.	t- value
Total	Exp.	30	53.8667	3.9280	58	*16.156
	Cont.	30	29.6000	7.2283		
Discourse Analysis Skills	Exp.	30	3.2667	1.2299	58	*4.143
	Cont.	30	1.8667	1.3829		
Previewing	Exp.	30	6.8000	1.7100	58	*6.222
	Cont.	30	3.9333	1.8557		
Skimming, Scanning, and Annotating	Exp.	30	20.4667	2.5560	58	*9.854
	Cont.	30	11.7333	4.1267		
Analyzing & Reflecting Skills	Exp.	30	8.1333	1.9605	58	*6.505
	Cont.	30	4.6000	2.2376		
Comparing and Contrasting	Exp.	30	5.2000	1.2429	58	*7.821
	Cont.	30	2.4667	1.4558		
Summarizing and Outlining	Exp.	30	10.000	2.2283	58	*8.601
	Cont.	30	5.000	2.2742		

*Significant at .01 level

4- Discussion:

Results obtained on the post tests of the acquisition of the cognitive aspects and use of critical reading skills reveal that there are statistically significant differences favoring the treatment group. The degree of improvement reflected students' abilities to acquire and use the intended critical reading skills: Critical Reading Introductory, Discourse Analysis Skills, Contextualizing Skills, Previewing, Skimming, Scanning, and Annotating, Analyzing & Reflecting Skills, Comparing and Contrasting, Summarizing and Outlining. Thus, the two study questions are answered and confirmed.

However, the present study is different from the reviewed literature in many perspectives. It aimed at investigating the effectiveness of a Blended Learning program based on genre discourse analysis in developing English majors' acquisition and use of critical reading skills. Thus, it incorporates Blended E-Learning, Genre Discourse analysis, and Critical Reading Skills together and this couldn't be found in any other study. Moreover, the sample of this study is third year English majors, Faculty of Education, Minia University, Egypt. Finally, two important dependent variables have been measured in this study, level of performance in the acquisition of critical reading skills and level of performance in the use of critical reading skills.

Bewilderingly, the findings of this study were similar to most literature findings. The study findings coincide with the results of Mustafa's (1994) study which revealed that there is an effectiveness of the oriented free - reading in developing critical reading and critical thinking skills of basic education students. Collins's (1996) findings indicated that students used elaboration during reading, their innate abilities to use information in memory enabled them to think analytically and critically in creating a structured body of knowledge. Abdel Aziz's (1999) findings revealed that the treatment group students had developed their critical reading skills through the instructional package more than the control group. There are also significant differences- in favor of the post application of the critical reading test - between mean scores attained by the treatment group before and after the treatment. Polette (2002) concluded that his method used in the study was effective in developing different kinds of critical reading skills. Macknish's (2011) findings showed that, despite some limitations, the students engaged in critical reading discourse when they were provided with scaffolding and opportunities to practice. Abd Allah's (2004) study revealed that the treatment group significantly surpassed the non- treatment group in the post-performance of the acquisition and use of critical reading strategies and in reading comprehension. Abdel Halim's (2011) results of pre- and post-intervention tests and review of written reflections by students and instructor revealed that this study was successful in achieving its aim. Kumagai's study (2011) showed that all the students felt some challenge in engaging in critical reading activities, yet they found it to be intellectually stimulating and beneficial in many aspects. Finally, Diab (2020) study revealed that using the blended learning program based on cognitive apprenticeship led to the development of critical reading skills among EFL pre-service teachers.

5- Conclusion, Recommendations, Contributions, and Implications:

The present study suggests several recommendations. Using Blended E-Learning in our teaching should be highlighted as a means of teaching English and a basic for developing the four language skills at university level. Moreover, the objectives of teaching the English language should emphasize critical reading skills as a means of getting, using, judging, and evaluating information. The use of Blended E-Learning should be emphasized as a means of teaching other language courses like semantics, contrastive analysis, and syntax. Instructors should recognize that reading is an active skill not a passive one. Reading and critical reading skills are more challenging tasks. These skills need training and can be developed. Finally, reading materials must be authentic and systematic as much as possible.

In Egypt, preparation programs for teachers are advised to integrate critical reading skills as part of reading courses taught to English majors and pre-service teachers of English who ought to be trained to use discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis skills. College courses in discourse analysis, for example, should include these skills. They should also be trained in the new trends of e-learning techniques such as mobile learning, learning nuggets, semantic search engines, and social networks to use them. As well as, in -service teachers of English should receive their training courses through Blended E-Learning techniques as they are more fruitful than the traditional ways and they should have training courses from time to time to master critical reading skills so that they can help students acquire and use these skills. They also should be trained in using the available electronic sites, magazines, and journals for their academic and professional development.

The distinguished benefits obtained by the participants of the treatment group on post measures might be accredited to the use of the Blended E-Learning training program which is basically centered on the idea of developing some critical reading skills. These skills are: Critical Reading Introductory, Discourse Analysis Skills, Contextualizing Skills, Previewing Skills, Skimming, Scanning, and Annotating Skills, Analyzing & Reflecting Skills, Comparing and Contrasting Skills and Summarizing and Outlining Skills. Such skills were developed through accessing the website designed specifically to present a program based on genre discourse analysis skills.

It is apparent that reading is considered a receptive skill. However, it involves active participation on the part of the reader. It was noticeable during the implementation of the Blended E- Learning program that the improvement of reading comprehension affected the development of critical reading skills. When students became able to read clearly it gave them a sense of confidence and this as well helped them while reading to use pre reading strategies such (brainstorming – semantic mapping...etc.); which affected the improvement of their critical reading skills.

It is worth mentioning here the effect of discourse analysis on developing critical reading skills. Discourse analysis plays an important role through the linguistic and pedagogical domains, as its main concern is to investigate and analyze "language in use" through analyzing any kind of texts or discourse type to its linguistic roots, recognizing the genre, form, function, discourse content, the message, tone, manner, setting, scene, context of the discourse, and the sociolinguistic elements. This happens according to a set of standardized pedagogical steps. Developing these skills requires on the part of the learner to be a skillful analyst as she/he needs to analyze, judge, and evaluate what is said. She/he can have a better understanding and a better training on mastering these skills through practicing DA.

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