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Research Article

The impact of critical literacy instruction on adult EFL learners' reading comprehension

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Abstract

This study aimed at unveiling the impact of genre-based critical literacy instruction on adult English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' reading comprehension. Twenty-three preparatory year students enrolled at a state university in the western part of Turkey volunteered to participate in this quasi-experimental study. The reading section of the Testing of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) was administered as the pretests and posttests. Following the pretests, a four-week genre-based reading instruction curriculum was implemented in both groups. In the experimental group, text critiquing activities were incorporated into instruction in addition to code breaking, text participating, and text using activities. In the control group, on the other hand, only code breaking, text participating, and text using activities were involved in the teaching process. At the end of the instruction process, the posttest was administered. The Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test and the Mann-Whitney U Test were used to analyze the data. The results of the study did not show a significant difference in the pretest and posttest scores of the experimental and control groups, which was not in line with the studies that have been previously conducted. This study implies that an extended intervention period is required to reach more definite results. Further research with a larger sampling is needed to examine the efficacy of critical literacy instruction.

Note(s) from the author(s)
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≫ The ethics committee approval was obtained from Dokuz Eylül University with a document number of 15563195-302.08.01-E.36224 on 08/05/2019. Also being part of a PhD study, it is ensured that the paper meets the principles of research ethics.

Eleştirel okuryazarlık öğretiminin İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen yetişkin öğrencilerin okuduğunu anlama becerilerine etkisi

Öz

Bu çalışma, tür odaklı eleştirel okuryazarlık öğretiminin İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen yetişkin öğrencilerin okuduğunu anlama becerilerine olan etkisini ortaya koymayı amaçlamıştır. Bu yarı deneysel çalışmaya Türkiye'nin batısında bulunan bir devlet üniversitesinde öğrenim gören 23 öğrenci gönüllü katılım sağlamıştır. Ön test ve son test olarak Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce Sınavı'nın okuma bölümü uygulanmıştır. Ön testlerin uygulanmasından sonra çalışmaya katılan her iki gruba 4 haftalık tür odaklı okuma eğitimi uygulanmıştır. Deney grubunun öğretimine kod çözme, metne katılma, metni kullanma ve metin eleştirme aktiviteleri dahil edilmiştir. Kontrol grup öğretimi ise sadece kod çözme, metne katılma ve metni kullanma aktivitelerini içermiştir. Öğretim sürecinin bitiminde okuma becerileri son testi uygulanmıştır. Veri analizinde Bağımlı Örneklem Wilcoxon İşaretli Sıra Sayıları Testi ile Mann-Whitney U Testi kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın sonuçları, daha önce gerçekleştirilmiş olan çalışmalardan farklı olarak, kontrol ve deney gruplarının okuma becerileri testi ön test ve son test sonuçları arasında istatistiksel olarak önemli bir fark ortaya koymamıştır. Bu çalışma, daha açık ve kesin sonuçlara ulaşmak için daha uzun bir süreci kapsayan eğitsel müdahale gerektiğini göstermiştir. Eleştirel okuryazarlık öğretiminin etkililiğini ölçmek amacıyla daha fazla katılımcıyla daha fazla araştırma yapılmalıdır.

Introduction

The term *literacy* has been defined as a purely cognitive and linguistic activity for decades. That is to say, socio-cultural contexts in which literacy is embedded have long been neglected. From a psycholinguistic perspective, reading is defined as "psycholinguistic guessing game"; however, from a critical literacy perspective, reading may be redefined "as a mode of second-guessing texts, discourses, and social formations" (Luke & Freebody, 1999, p. 3). In a skills-oriented approach to literacy, literacy has been defined as a set of decontextualized and discrete skills which are established and can be applied anywhere after being taught as a prepackaged set (Cho, 2015). In psychological and cognitive frameworks, it is stated that the literacy taught in schools is what students need and are required to use throughout their lives (Carrington & Luke, 1997). Thus, students are expected to master merely the basic skills, including encoding and decoding. This approach to literacy is referred to as an autonomous model, in which independent meanings of texts divorced from social contexts are highlighted (Street, 1984; as cited in Cho, 2015). This 'skills' conception of learning literacy is still the dominant conception in governmental and policy discourses (Curry, 2003). Despite the fact that critical literacy emerged in the 1970s as an alternative to the autonomous model of literacy (Ko, 2010), educational policy frameworks in many countries still portray a skills approach to literacy today (Rassool, 1999; as cited in Cho, 2015).

The ideology lying behind different forms of literacy affects the literacy curriculum and instruction. Based on different theoretical perspectives, notions of literacy are classified as functional literacy, cultural literacy, progressive literacy, and critical literacy in Manning's (1999) 'Literacy-as' Framework for Instructional Practice (as cited in Ko, 2010; Ko, 2013a). In functional literacy, literacy is viewed as skills, in cultural literacy, it is viewed as morality, and in progressive literacy, literacy is considered as personal growth. In critical literacy, however, literacy is regarded as a social transformation. The ideology of the marketplace is emphasized in functional literacy, which is reflected in a prepackaged curriculum with a restrictive scope and sequence. In cultural literacy, the focus is on the instruction of values through an elitist curriculum. Progressive literacy aims at personal growth. Thus, different from the curriculum of cultural literacy, the curriculum is open and pluralistic. Finally, critical literacy suggests unveiling the hidden agendas. This form of literacy requires an interrogated, situated, and counterhegemonic form of instruction, in which everyday world is accepted as a text, and learners are equipped with analytic tools to be able to deconstruct texts. Critical literacy enables learners to question "the who, what, why, and how" of the creation and interpretation of texts, that is, to go beyond the surface meaning of a text (Lohrey, 1998, p. 9).

Literacy, then, cannot be merely defined as the traditional instruction of reading and writing skills. As Park (2012) puts it, "reading is not a set of free-floating skills, independent of social contexts and devoid of ideologies" (p. 631). In contrast, the social construction of reading, writing, and text production within political contexts should be emphasized because these all should be regarded as a social and critical practice (Luke & Freebody, 1997; as cited in Park, 2012). In other words, economic, cultural, political, and institutional structures in society should be deeply analyzed (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993).

Conceptualization of critical literacy

The term "critical" has derived from the Greek word *kriticos,* and it means "the ability to argue and judge" (Luke, 2011, p. 3). Dionne (2010) defines critical literacy as "a lens, or overlay, for viewing texts that becomes a regular part of classroom practice" (p. 3). To Janks (2013), "critical literacy is mainly about enabling young people to read both the word and the world in relation to power, identity, difference, and access to knowledge, skills, tools and resources. It is also about writing and rewriting the world: it is about design and re-design" (p. 227). Critical literacy has its roots in western thought and social activism, for individual consciousness and self-awareness are regarded as the core concepts to foster democratic social change becoming critical consumers and users of information (Beck, 2005). The term "critical literacy" has been coined by social critical theorists to tackle social injustice and inequalities in society. These theorists assert that unequal power relationships are ubiquitous, and those that are more powerful determine the truths which will be privileged (Beck, 2005). However, critical researchers employing different theoretical frameworks propose different definitions for critical literacy (Luke & Woods, 2009).

Luke (2012) defines critical literacy as "the use of the technologies of print and other media of communication to analyze, critique and transform the norms, rule systems and practices governing the social fields of everyday life" (p. 5). Coffey (2008) defines critical literacy as reading texts actively and reflectively to have a better understanding of power, inequality, and injustice in human relationships. In this sense, critical literacy is a lens to challenge societal norms. In Jones' (2006) terms, "critical literacy is like a pair of eyeglasses that allow one to see beyond the familiar and comfortable; it is an understanding that language practices and texts are always informed by ideological beliefs and perspectives whether conscious or otherwise" (p. 67). With a critical literacy approach to reading, readers are able to read underneath, behind, and beyond texts. Being aware of the fact that texts are biased, they also explore alternative readings. In addition, they seek to understand the authors' beliefs and values and work for social change and justice (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004).

Critical literacy is more than decoding letters and words, that is to say, it is a way of interacting with information presented in texts. It enables learners to engage with various sources of information and encourages them to question "the social contexts, purposes, and possible effects that they have on their own lives" questioning "their opinions, biases, and perceptions of reality" in comparison with others' (Duzer, Florez, & Cunningham, 1999, p. 6). Hence, critical literacy is of paramount importance in today's world since individuals are constantly being bombarded with different forms of information due to new information systems and rapid innovative changes. Therefore, developing learners' critical literacy skills is crucial in education.

Critical literacy has recently become an essential ingredient of particularly higher education, for learners are being exposed to instant and complex flow of information via the computer technologies and the Internet. Thus, it is imperative for learners to become literate critically by improving their high order thinking skills and problem-solving skills and by exploring multiple perspectives (Fajardo, 2015). Improving learners' critical consciousness is vital (Callison, 2006) because the primary purpose of education is "learning to think" (Dewey, 1933; as cited in Halpern, 1997, p. 5).

The importance of critical literacy in language teaching

Critical literacy is a vital skill in today's world, particularly in the field of language and literacy teaching (Brown, 1999). Wallace (2003) states that "understanding a text linguistically and conceptually must be a starting point for all reading positions, but readers may want and need to respond to texts in more diverse and complex ways than is generally acknowledged. All learners, whether reading in a first, second or other language, are, from the earliest stages, potentially both making meaning from texts, and engaging in critique" (p. 3). Thus, rather than solely focusing on the linguistic and conceptual aspects of texts, language and literacy instruction in the 21st century should also emphasize critical literacy. Today's students are exposed to and interact with a wider range of information sources owing to globalization and internationalization. Therefore, learners need to comprehend with a critical edge rather than reading academic texts for comprehension only (Janks, 2012; Janks, 2014; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004; Molden, 2007). It is important to engage learners in critical literacy, foster their reading from a critical stance, and help them become critically aware (Kaur, 2013) since critical literacy provides an active and a challenging approach to reading. Engaging in critical literacy leads to active, open-minded, and strategic readers. In other words, readers are able to view texts critically from multiple perspectives (Ko, 2013a; Ko, 2013b). Such readers can easily grasp the particular perspective(s) and particular purpose(s) while critically analyzing and interpreting the information presented in texts (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). That is to say, critical literacy helps learners expand their reasoning, seek multiple perspectives, and become active thinkers. Reading with a critical stance provides readers a new dimension of understanding (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004) because critical literacy practices encourage learners "to use language to question the everyday world, to interrogate the relationship between language and power, to analyze popular culture and media, to understand how power relationships are socially constructed, and to consider actions that can be taken to promote social justice…. These practices are substantively different from what are commonly referred to as *critical thinking* approaches. Although critical thinking approaches have focused more on logic and comprehension, critical literacies have focused on identifying social practices that keep dominant ways of understanding the world and unequal power relationships in place" (Lewison, Leland & Harste, 2015, p. 3). Therefore, critical literacy instruction enables learners to utilize language in order to question language and power relationships in the social practices they encounter. Anstey and Bull (2006) highlight the dangers learners will encounter if they are not taught how to read critically because "they can be marginalized, discriminated against, or unable to take an active and informed place in life. In short, the student will not be in control of his or her social future" (p. 37, as cited in Kaur, 2013). Reading critically helps individuals become active and informed citizens as a requirement of the emergence of new literacies in today's digital age and learners' changing literacy needs. Thus, critical literacy has a central place in pedagogy design to foster learners' becoming critical consumers of the information they interact with (Kaur, 2013), and it constitutes an essential component of language teaching.

As has been previously stated, providing learners with critical literacy perspectives allows them to examine the sources of texts, biases, and purposes hidden in texts, and challenge the legitimacy of the information presented in texts. Through critical literacy practices,

learners become capable of assessing societal messages about attitudes, values, and power relationships conveyed through the text. In this way, they are also able to reflect upon their own reactions, biases, and realities in relation to the text, which will result in a more complete understanding of texts (Brown, 1999; Lohrey, 1998).

A number of studies have recently been conducted on critical literacy. Some of these studies included instructors as participants and sought for teachers' critical literacy awareness levels (e.g., Cox & Assis-Peterson, 1999; Cho, 2015). In other studies (e.g., Abednia & Izadinia, 2013; Cho, 2014; Dal, 2012; Kuo, 2009; Potur, 2014), some critical literacy applications were incorporated into the teaching process, and the impact of intervention was revealed. In some other studies (e.g., Huang, 2011; Huh, 2016; Ko, 2013a), scholars aimed at the simultaneous instruction of conventional and critical literacy skills in a balanced way and the critical analysis of the language to enhance learners' critical literacy. Finally, some studies (e.g., Huang, 2011; Kumagai & Iwasaki, 2011) focused on critical literacy instruction with an emphasis on language analysis. These studies have confirmed that with adequate support and scaffolding of learning, through teachers' selection of texts that relate with students' personal/cultural experiences, and explicit instruction and guidance on how to critically interrogate texts in terms of power relations (Choo & Singh, 2011), English language learners are able to improve their critical literacy skills. The belief that "literacy solely entails reading words on a page and not critically analyzing how those words shape identities and influence readers' perspectives leads to a culture of acquiescence" should be critically questioned (Fajardo, 2015, p. 44). She suggests that "for educators who wish to respond to the literacy needs of the times, and teach learners about their responsibility toward building a just and humane society, critical literacy is worth teaching" (p. 45).

All in all, "it is imperative for educators, students, citizens and all of the people of the world to understand how to read the word and their world and enact critical literacy practices" (Gregory & Cahill, 2009, p. 13), for critical literacy is vital to human action and social transformation in today's dynamic and constantly evolving world (Beck, 2005). To prepare learners for this world, saturated with a lot of information, educators are obliged to take action. Language classrooms are of critical importance because critical literacy is mainly about the transformative power of language. Through critical approaches to language instruction, instructors can help learners explore the ways in which language can reproduce or challenge existing social power structures (Godley & Minnici, 2008). Luke (2004) points out the major role English educators play in the teaching of critical literacy: "We (English educators) risk becoming a profession involved in the systematic production and distribution of particular brands of linguistic capital without an ongoing critical appraisal of the force and consequences of our actions" (p. 87). In a nutshell, critical literacy is a core phenomenon in today's language teaching and learning contexts.

Different approaches to critical literacy exist in literature (Pennycook, 2001, as cited in Abednia & Izadinia, 2013); however, all of these approaches aim at "engaging with the possibilities that the technologies of writing and other modes of inscription offer for social change, cultural diversity, economic equity, and political enfranchisement" (Luke & Freebody, 1997, p.1, as cited in Abednia & Izadinia, 2013). To this end, a number of models have been adopted by critical scholars to encourage readers to become active meaning-makers, who critique texts and explore and respect multiple perspectives (Kuo, 2014). Luke and Freebody's

Four Resources Model was used in this study, for it is a model of reading which is compatible with a critical skills perspective of critical thinking, and which reflects a text analytic approach to critical literacy. The model is accomplished through the combination of skill-based literacy and critical literacy since it emphasizes both conventions of reading texts and critical analysis of ideological construction. To put it simply, it allows a balance between conventional literacy and critical literacy. Thus, it is appropriate for tertiary education. Finally, the model, which has been widely implemented in different educational contexts, is applicable in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, and it provides a practical design for teaching critical reading skills in experimental and control groups.

Luke and Freebody's "Four Resources Model"

In Luke's (1995) and Luke and Freebody's (1990, 1999) conceptualization of literacy, literacy is addressed as a social practice which involves both conventions of reading texts and critical analysis of ideological construction. In this sociocultural literacy model, Luke and Freebody introduce four components in text engagement, which are code breaking (phonics, vocabulary), text participating (reading comprehension), text using (socialization with meanings created from texts), and text critiquing (critical reflection and analysis). Critical literacy has been defined as the dynamic integration of code breaking, text participating, text using, and critiquing in this model of reading. The early version (1997) of "the Four Resources Model" defines the reader as "the code breaker, text participant, text user, and text critic" (as cited in Flint et al., 2020, p. 210). In their revised account, however, Luke and Freebody (1999) suggest that literacy learning is understood more properly as a family of practices (Ko, 2010). Table 1 presents an overview of these practices (Ko, 2010, p. 22).

Table 1. Practices in literacy learning

Practices / Reader's Role	Sample Questions
Code-breaking practices / Code breaker	• How do the sound and marks relate, singly and in combinations? • How do I crack this text? • What are its patterns and conventions?
Text-meaning practices / Text participant	• How do the ideas represented in the text string together? • What are cultural resources that can be brought to bear on the text? • What are the cultural meanings and possible readings that can be constructed from this text?
Pragmatic practices Text user	• How do the uses of this text shape its composition? • What do I do with the text here and now?
Critical practices Text analyst & critique	• What kind of person with what interests and values, could both write and read this naively and unproblematically? • What is the text trying to do to me? In whose interests? • Which positions, voices and interests are at play? Which are silent and absent?

In code-breaking practices, the emphasis is on linguistic perspective. Code breaking is equivalent to basic or functional literacy. That is, these practices involve identifying letters in the alphabet and sounds in words, deciphering spelling and grammar conventions, such as sentence structure and text organization, and using graphics and other visuals to break the "code" of text. Text-meaning practices relate to cognitive and psycholinguistic perspectives. As a text participant, by actively approaching and deconstructing text, learners use their prior knowledge and experience when to interpret the author's intention. Pragmatic practices relate to sociolinguistic perspectives, which highlight the context in which a text is read and interpreted. Thus, learners are encouraged to become critical consumers of text by reading different text forms and questioning how these different uses shape the author's choice regarding the language, structure, and organization. Finally, critical practices are utilized to promote critical perspectives. Learners need to be encouraged to analyze and evaluate the author's motive, and consider fairness, accuracy, and reliability in the light of the idea that no text is neutral. They also need to recognize their own power as readers to uncover and challenge assumptions and ideas about the world. They need to be able to respond and take social action when they disagree with the ideas presented in the text.

Luke and Freebody (1999) state that only an integrated use of each practice results in effective literacy learning. As Luke (2000) notes, "the model does not propose a developmental hierarchy whereby one moves from coding to the critical; from the basics to higher order thinking; from initial reading to advanced literature study" (p. 454). Critical literacy strategies need to be taught explicitly, but they should not be taught sequentially or in isolation from one another (The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, 2009). This model has widely been used in EFL classrooms despite being originally developed for English as a Second Language (ESL) settings (Freebody & Luke, 1990).

Genre-based reading instruction

Reading plays a key role in English Language Teaching (ELT), therefore, a number of techniques and procedures to boost ESL / EFL learners' reading skills, including task-based and genre-based instruction in reading (Ellis, 2008) have been proposed. In a number of schema and genre studies (e.g., Carrell, 1985; Davis, Lange & Samuels, 1988; Grabe, 2002; Hewings & Henderson, 1987; as cited in Hyon, 2002), the role of instruction in developing L2 learners' understanding of the structure of genres and enhancing their effective reading skills has been foregrounded.

Genre-based approach and genre-based applications in the classroom emphasize the critical role of language and aim at helping learners attain specific purposes in context (Hyland, 2004). To Bakhtin (1986), "many people who have an excellent command of a language often feel quite helpless in certain spheres of communication precisely because they do not have a practical command of the generic forms used in the given spheres" (p. 80, as cited in Coe, 2002). Derewianka (2003) suggests that "learning new genres is seen as extending the learner's meaning-making potential" (p. 143). Johns (1997) also advocates that effective readers need to possess knowledge regarding genres, the names of genres, their formal features and communicative purposes, the roles of the reader and writer, content, and contexts (p. 21, as cited in Hyon, 2002). Thus, genre features should be explicitly taught to enable learners to have a better understanding of genres and richer of repertoire of genres (Johns, 2002).

A variety of texts are used in academic settings, and it is crucial that learners are instructed on the organizational patterns of different texts and the features of different genres for enhanced reading skills and levels of comprehension (Grabe & Stoller, 2001). When provided with genre knowledge, language learners are able to grasp an understanding of the social and cultural contexts in which genres occur and analyze the ways these factors affect the language choices in different genres (Paltridge, 2002). Hence, genre-based reading instruction has been proposed by many scholars (e.g., Bhatia, 1993; Devitt, 2009; Hyland, 2007; Hyon, 1995, 1996; Johns, 1995, 2002; Swales, 1990) to enhance language learning, for genre-based instruction is "explicit, systematic, needs-based, consciousness-raising, critical, empowering, and supportive" (Hyland, 2007, p. 150).

The studies on the use of genres in reading instruction in the EFL context, however, (e.g., Adelnia & Salehi, 2016; Haria & Midgette, 2014; Kalali & Piskhar, 2015; Karbalaei & Hajezi, 2016; Minaabad & Khoshkholgh, 2012; Rozimela, 2014; Sadeghi, Hassani, & Hemmati, 2013; Shishehsaz, 2006) are scarce. Genre studies that aimed to enhance learners' reading comprehension skills in various language teaching contexts have only recently been conducted. Most of these studies (e.g., Al Gurkosh, 2015; Haria & Midgette, 2014; Kalali & Piskhar, 2015; Minaabad & Khoshkholgh, 2012; Sadeghi, Hassani & Hemmati, 2013; Shishehsaz, 2006) have been conducted as experimental studies to investigate the impact of genre-based reading instruction on learners' reading comprehension. The results have indicated the supremacy of the treatment groups that received genre-based research instruction. There was a statistically significant difference between the reading comprehension of the participants who underwent genre-based instruction. In sum, the results have indicated the effectiveness of genre-based reading instruction on students' reading comprehension and revealed the importance of genre-based instruction.

Ko (2013a) asserts that critical literacy studies have mostly been conducted in ESL classrooms (e.g., Morgan, 2004; Wallace, 2003); there are only a few studies conducted in EFL settings (e.g., Kuo, 2009; Petek, 2018). Namely, "a critical literacy approach to EFL teaching is still under-explored" (Ko, 2013a, p. 92). The critical component is one of the essential ingredients of 21st century language education, which requires language instructors to equip learners with the language skills of critical literacy (Bacon, 2017). In addition, critical literacy has not been investigated in combination with a genre-based approach in ELT at the tertiary level. Hence, to fill this gap, this study aims to reveal the impact of critical literacy instruction and conventional literacy instruction on EFL adult learners' reading comprehension. The research questions of the current study are as follows:

1. Does the explicit instruction of critical literacy skills with a genre-based approach affect adult EFL learners' reading comprehension?
2. Does conventional literacy instruction with a genre-based approach affect adult EFL learners' reading comprehension?
3. Is there a significant difference between the reading posttest scores of the Critical Literacy Group and Conventional Literacy Group?

Methodology

This study adopted a quasi-experimental design with a nonequivalent (pretest and posttest) control-group design. Quasi experiments are frequently used in educational research since researchers conduct research with the participation of intact groups, which are available in the research setting, and participants cannot be randomly assigned as in true experiments (Creswell, 2012). In this design, only the experimental group receives the treatment, and both of the study groups take a pretest and posttest (Creswell, 2014). Figure 1 displays details regarding the research design.

Figure 1. Nonequivalent (pretest and posttest) control-group design (Creswell, 2014)
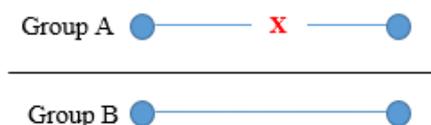
Setting and participants

The setting for the study was the School of Foreign Languages (SFL) at a state university. In the SFL, an English proficiency exam is administered at the beginning of the academic year. The students who fail to obtain a passing score (i.e., ≥ 60/100) are required to study English at the SFL. They can attend classes at the SFL maximum for two years.

This study adopted the convenience sampling approach. Thus, participants who were available and willing to be studied (Creswell, 2012; Dörnyei, 2007) were involved in the study. The participants of the study, being taught by the first researcher, were remedial students (N = 23) from Remedial 2 and Remedial 3 classes, who were studying their second year of English in the SFL, during the 2018-2019 Academic Year. As part of the preparatory school program, they were offered a B1 level Integrated Skills course.

The experimental group, which received critical literacy instruction, was assigned randomly, and the control group received conventional literacy instruction. There were 11 students in the experimental group, and 12 students from the control group volunteered to take part in the study. The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 24. Twelve females and eleven males participated in the study. The participants were prospective students of the basic science and engineering departments. Table 2 presents detailed information regarding the demographics of the participants.

Table 2. Demographics of participants

CLG (Experimental Group)	N	%	CoLG (Control Group)	N	%
Gender			Gender		
Female	6	54.54	Female	6	50
Male	5	45.45	Male	6	50
Total	11	100	**Total**	12	100

Age			Age		
19-20	7	63.63	19-20	8	66.66
21-22	3	27.27	21-22	4	33.33
23-24	1	9.09	23-24	0	0
Total	11	100	Total	12	100
Dept.			Dept.		
A	0	0	A	0	0
C	4	36.36	C	1	8.33
CE	1	9.09	CE	1	8.33
ChE	0	0	ChE	0	0
CRP	1	9.09	CRP	2	16.66
ECE	0	0	ECE	2	16.66
FE	2	18.18	FE	1	8.33
M	2	18.18	M	3	25
MBG	0	0	MBG	1	8.33
ME	0	0	ME	1	8.33
P	1	9.09	P	0	0
Total	11	100	Total	12	100

Note: CLG: Critical Literacy Group; CoLG: Conventional Literacy Group; Dept.: Department; A: Architecture; C: Chemistry; CE: Civil Engineering; ChE: Chemical Engineering; CRP: City & Regional Planning; ECE: Electronics & Communication Engineering; FE: Food Engineering; M: Math; MBG: Molecular Biology & Genetics; ME: Mechanical Engineering; P: Physics.

Instruments

Eight reading texts which were selected from different genres (i.e., narrative, descriptive, argumentative, comparison and contrast) were used as the instruction materials in the study. The central theme of the texts chosen was culture as learners were highly interested in learning about the related topic, and it would provide learners with an opportunity to develop their intercultural competence. Participants' age, interests, departments, needs, and language proficiency levels were taken into account in text selection. To determine the difficulty level of the texts, Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level formula was used. The same texts (N= 2 for each genre / week) were used in the teaching process of both groups.

In order to measure participants' reading comprehension, the reading section of the Testing of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) test (The official guide to the TOEFL test, 2012) was used as the pretests and posttests because according to Educational Testing Service (2005), TOEFL, as an English-proficiency test, has reliability coefficients between .70 and .95 on a scale of .00 to .99. Also, the participants were familiar with the test format, which involved multiple choice questions on identifying synonyms, the main idea and specific details of a given text, and the author's purpose, inserting sentences into texts, and identifying the most important information provided in a given text. There were three texts (*Feeding Habits of East African Herbivores, Loie Fuller, Green Icebergs*) in the exam, each of which was accompanied by 14 multiple choice questions. The total number of questions in the test was 42, and the maximum score was 45. The Cronbach's Alpha value was calculated as .713 for the reading test.

Data collection procedures

The ethics committee approval for the study was obtained from Dokuz Eylül University on 08/05/2019. First, consent forms were obtained from the participants. Next, pretests were administered. The participants were not informed that they would take a posttest. Both the pretests and posttests were administered in a proctored environment, and the same test conditions (i.e., the same exam room / day / time / physical conditions / seating / duration etc.) were provided. After the administration of the pretests, participants were asked to participate in a four-week genre-based reading instruction program.

Eight lesson plans which had two variations (i.e., critical literacy and conventional literacy versions) were prepared by the researchers. That is, 16 lesson plans were prepared in total. The lesson plans prepared to teach critical literacy skills (e.g., interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation) involved critical reading questions as well as comprehension questions. In the lesson plans prepared for the Conventional Literacy Group, the focus was on conventional literacy skills. In the Critical Literacy Group, the same curriculum was implemented with a focus on critical literacy skills. Participants were asked to respond to critical reading questions, identify facts and opinions, discuss causes and effects, solve problems, compare and contrast, categorize advantages and disadvantages, make evaluations based on what they had read, analyze the language used in the text and identify the author's viewpoint, and reflect upon the text. Different groupings, such as dyads and triads, were used to ensure participants' active in-class participation. On the other hand, tasks with a focus on the comprehension of the selected texts were utilized for the Conventional Literacy Group throughout the teaching process. The focus was on conventional literacy skills; therefore, activities related to "code breaking, text participating, and text using" were involved in the instruction (Luke & Freebody, 1999). Overall, each group received a 720-minute training on the selected genres and texts. The first researcher, who was the instructor of the participants, implemented the lesson plans. All the lessons were videotaped for future reference. At the end of the four-week instruction process, the posttest was administered.

Data analysis

The researchers recorded the results on an Excel document after grading the pre/post reading tests. A colleague who had been teaching English for 29 years cross-checked the assigned scores for the randomly selected tests. The statistical analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM, Version 22). Non-parametric statistical tests were used due to the small sample population. Since the study had a repeated-measures designs with an intervention (experimental group) and repeated-measures designs without an intervention (control group), the Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used to analyze the data. Participants' pretest and posttest scores were compared. In addition, the Mann-Whitney U Test was used to investigate the difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the participants in the two groups.

Findings

The impact of critical literacy instruction on adult EFL learners' reading comprehension

The first research question of the study aimed to determine whether the explicit instruction of critical literacy skills with a genre-based approach affected adult EFL learners'

reading comprehension or not, and it was addressed using the Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. The data analysis indicated that the explicit instruction of critical literacy skills through a four-week genre-based reading instruction did not elicit a statistically significant change in the Critical Literacy Group's posttest scores. That is to say, the posttest scores were not statistically significantly higher than their pretest scores, $Z = -.318$, $p = .750$, $p > 0.05$. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics regarding the pretest and posttest scores of the participants in the Critical Literacy Group.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics regarding Critical Literacy Group's pretest and posttest scores

Test	N	*M*	*SD*	Min.	Max.	*p*
Pretest	11	9.00	3.89	0	13	
						.475
Posttest	11	7.90	5.08	2	18	

Note: *p<0.05

As can be seen in Table 3, the mean for the pretest was 9.00 ($SD = 3.89$). However, the posttest mean was 7.90 ($SD = 5.08$), which was slightly lower compared to the pretest. There was an increase in the posttest scores of three participants; however, there was a decrease in six participants' posttest scores. Two of the participants' posttest scores remained the same (See Table 4).

Table 4. Critical Literacy Group's pretest and posttest scores

Test	Rank	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	*z*	*p*
Pretest	Negative Ranks	6	4.75	28.50		
Posttest	Positive Ranks	3	5.50	16.50	-.715	.475
	Ties	2				
	Total	11				

Note: *p<0.05

A four-week genre-based reading instruction designed to teach critical literacy skills did not result in a statistically significant change in the Critical Literacy Group's posttest scores. The posttest scores of the Critical Literacy Group were not higher than their pretest scores. More than half of the participants (54.54%) had a decrease in their reading comprehension scores. 27.27% of the participants, on the other hand, had improved reading comprehension scores in the posttest. 18.18% of the participants' posttest scores remained the same as the pretest scores.

The impact of conventional literacy instruction on adult EFL learners' reading comprehension

The second research question sought to answer whether conventional literacy instruction with a genre-based approach affected adult EFL learners' reading comprehension or not. The Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test indicated that the Conventional Literacy Group's posttest scores were not statistically significantly higher than their pretest scores, $Z = -1.334$, $p = .182$, p>0,05. Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics regarding the pretest and posttest scores of the participants in the Conventional Literacy Group.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics regarding Conventional Literacy Group's pretest and posttest scores

Test	N	*M*	*SD*	Min.	Max.	*p*
Pretest	12	9.58	2.39	6	13	.182
Posttest	12	12.25	6.32	4	24	

Note: *p<0.05

As Table 6 displays, the mean for the pretest was 9.58 (*SD* = 2.39) while the mean for the posttest was 12.25 (*SD* = 6.32). Seven participants received higher scores on the posttest. However, three of the participants' posttest scores were lower. Two of the participants' posttest scores remained the same as the pretest (See Table 6).

Table 6. Conventional Literacy Group's pretest and posttest scores

Test	Rank	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	*z*	*p*
Pretest	Negative Ranks	3	4.83	14.50		
Posttest	Positive Ranks	7	5.79	40.50	-1.334	.182
	Ties	2				
	Total	12				

Note: *p<0.05

The data analysis yielded similar results for the Conventional Literacy Group regarding the effect of conventional literacy instruction with a genre-based approach on adult EFL learners' reading comprehension levels. Although the posttest mean score (*M* = 12.25) was higher compared to the pretest mean score (*M* = 9.58), participants' posttest scores were not statistically significantly higher than their pretest scores. More than half of the participants (58.33%) received improved scores on the posttest, whereas there was a decrease in the posttest

scores of the three participants (25%). Furthermore, two (16.66%) of the participants' posttest scores remained the same as their pretest scores.

The difference between the posttest scores of the Critical Literacy Group and Conventional Literacy Group

The final research question aimed to answer whether there was a significant difference between the posttest scores of the Critical Literacy Group and Conventional Literacy Group or not. To this end, the Mann-Whitney U Test was administered. The data analysis indicated that the experimental group participants' pretest scores were not statistically significantly different than the control group participants' pretest scores, $U = 65.50$, $p = .975$. The test also indicated that the experimental group participants' posttests scores were not statistically significantly higher than the control group participants' posttest scores, $U = 37.00$, $p = .072$ (See Table 7).

Table 7. Comparison of Critical Literacy Group's and Conventional Literacy Group's pretest and posttest scores

Test	Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	*SD*	*U*	*p*
	CLG	11	11.95	131.50			
Pretest	CoLG	12	12.04	144.50	3.13	65.50	.975
	Total	23					
	CLG	11	9.36	103.00			
Posttest	CoLG	12	14.42	173.00	6.05	37.00	.072
	Total	23					

Note: CLG: Critical Literacy Group; CoLG: Conventional Literacy Group.
*p<0.05

As can be seen in Table 7, the posttest mean rank for the experimental group was 9.36 while the posttest mean rank for the control group was 14.42. The sum of ranks for the experimental group in the posttest was 103.00, whereas the sum of ranks was 173.00 for the control group. The Critical Literacy Group obtained a lower mean rank (9.36) regarding the posttest scores. Indeed, this group had a lower pretest mean rank (11.95) as well.

Discussion

The findings of the present study did not confirm the results of the studies recently conducted in different EFL contexts (Abbasian & Malaee, 2016; Hazaea & Alzubi, 2017; Rashidi & Asgharzadeh, 2012). The findings did not corroborate the findings of Abbasian and Malaee's (2016) study which investigated the effect of explicit teaching of some Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) techniques on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension. The results showed that the experimental group instructed to read critically obtained higher scores compared to the control group. The present study did not support the findings of Hazaea and Alzubi's (2017) quasi-experimental study conducted in a Saudi Arabian tertiary context to explore the effect of CDA instruction on EFL analytical reading practices as well since the results of this study indicated significant effects on the analytical practices (i.e., description, interpretation and explanation). In other words, a fourteen-week discourse-based instruction enabled the participants, who were preparatory year students, to improve reading skills to go beyond the text rather than merely reading the text. In addition, the critical reading approach that Rashidi and Asgharzadeh (2012) adopted in their empirical study based on CDA had a significantly positive effect on female high school students' reading comprehension.

In the present study, the emphasis was on the instruction of both conventional literacy skills and critical literacy skills. Thus, the lesson plans were designed in accordance with Luke and Freebody's Four Resources Model (1999). Skill-based literacy was combined with critical literacy skills to accomplish the model (Exley & Dooley, 2015). In other words, four components of text engagement, which are code breaking, text participating, text using, and text critiquing, were used in the instruction of the experimental group. During the four-week genre-based instruction, two class hours were allocated for each reading text. This short intervention process may have been perceived to be insufficient and may not have permitted learners to practice the targeted literacy skills effectively.

The results indicated that the genre-based reading curriculum with an emphasis on conventional literacy skills aided most of the participants to enhance their reading comprehension skills. Through the tasks implemented to break the codes, participate in texts, and use texts (Luke & Freebody, 1999), learners could engage more with the texts and, thus, could boost their comprehension. In other words, the dynamic integration of code breaking, text participating, and text using enabled learners to become better readers.

As for the difference between the posttest scores of the two groups, focusing merely on the conventional literacy skills, thus, having a more effective instructors' guidance and scaffolding throughout the instruction, and learning actively through pair work / group work may have contributed to and facilitated the learning process for the participants in the Conventional Literacy Group. As a result, this may have led to enhanced levels of reading comprehension. Scaffolding, or in Donato's (2000) terms, "instructional conversation" (as cited in Ellis, 2008), derives from Sociocultural Theory (Ellis, 2008). According to Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), scaffolding entails recruiting interest in the task, simplifying the task, maintaining pursuit of the goal, marking critical features and discrepancies between what has been proposed and the ideal solution, controlling frustration during problem solving, and demonstrating an idealized version of the act to be performed (as cited in Ellis, 2008, p. 235).

Thus, through 'pedagogic interaction' (Ellis, 2008, p. 528), the instructor and learners could negotiate on meaning for curricular purposes, which promotes the targeted learning

outcomes. The results of the present study were in line with Koç's (2007) study, which investigated the effect of the use of active learning, indicating that active learning methods used in the instruction had a positive impact on participants' reading comprehension.

Conclusion

This small-scale study aimed at unveiling the impact of genre-based critical literacy instruction on adult EFL learners' reading comprehension. A genre-based reading instruction with different foci did not reveal a significant difference in the reading test scores of the experimental group, which received critical literacy instruction, and the control group, which received conventional literacy instruction. A relatively short instruction process may have led to these findings. In addition, as the learners were remedial students who were studying their second year at the preparatory school, they were not highly motivated to improve their critical literacy skills and did not find the target skills being taught relevant.

Although the results did not produce statistically significant results, the findings showed that a critical literacy approach to the instruction of reading through a variety of genres not only led to enhanced comprehension of texts but also to increased critical awareness for some of the participants. Hence, this study has a pedagogical significance in terms of an EFL reading curriculum which places critical literacy at the core. The EFL instructors should design curricula with an emphasis on the development of learners' critical literacy as well as the development of discrete language skills (Luke & Freebody, 1999).

The study was limited to twenty-three preparatory year students studying English at the School of Foreign Languages, at a state university. Therefore, the results of this quasi-experimental study cannot be generalized to all EFL learning contexts. In addition, due to the strict curriculum and time constraints, the treatment is limited to only four weeks.

Suggestions

EFL practices should not solely aim at improving four language skills, they should also develop learners' critical awareness skills and reasoning abilities (i.e., examining authors' intentions and viewpoints, questioning, juxtaposing, reconstructing and exploring multiple perspectives) (Alagözlü, 2006; Papadopoulos & Griva, 2017). When they practice critical literacy skills, learners are also able to develop their ability in English (Kuo, 2013). That is to say, both conventional and critical literacy practices should be incorporated into the curriculum in order to provide the learners who have lower levels of proficiency with assistance. Huh (2016) suggests that a holistic approach between critical literacy and conventional skill instructions would assist EFL learners to cope with the cognitive challenges as it has been reported to help ESL learners in previous research studies (e.g., Exley & Dooley, 2015; Lau, 2013). However, more time should be allocated for the instruction of texts since the curriculum emphasizes both conventional and critical literacy skills. Also, rather than an "instructional" approach, a "programmatic" approach should be adopted in the design of the instructional intervention in order to teach critical literacy skills (Behar-Horenstein & Niu, 2011). In other words, critical literacy skills should be integrated into the school curriculum. Finally, further research with a larger sampling and an extended intervention period may yield more definite conclusions.

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