



## EFL LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE USE OF CRITICAL READING STRATEGIES ON THEIR ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING PERFORMANCE

**Le Ngoc Han<sup>i</sup>**

MA Graduate,

School of Foreign Languages,

Can Tho University,

Can Tho City, Vietnam

English teacher at ILA Language Center,

Vietnam

### **Abstract:**

One of the primary language abilities that students of English as a formative language strive to gain for their academic success is writing. Critical reading is one of the crucial processes integrated into teaching writing that have proved their effects on the world. The aim of the current study was to investigate and examine their attitudes and perceptions towards implementing critical reading strategies on their argumentative writing performance. It was quasi-experimental research. The participants were 30 second-year university students in Can Tho. The data collection techniques of this study were questionnaire and interview. The results showed most learners' positive attitudes towards implementing the strategies to improve their argumentative performance.

**Keywords:** argumentative writing performance, critical reading, critical reading strategies, students' attitudes

### **1. Introduction**

In an increasingly interconnected global landscape, the capacity to communicate proficiently in written English has emerged as a paramount requirement for learners worldwide. In EFL contexts, the ability to write argumentatively is key, serving both academic pursuits and enabling participation in extensive discussions across multiple fields. Nevertheless, numerous EFL learners encounter challenges in argumentative writing stemming from multiple factors, including insufficient familiarity with critical reading strategies, which are essential for comprehending intricate texts and formulating coherent arguments.

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<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [hanle03@ilavietnam.edu.vn](mailto:hanle03@ilavietnam.edu.vn), [handaiuu@gmail.com](mailto:handaiuu@gmail.com)

Critical reading strategies (CRS) necessitate an active interaction with texts, thereby enabling learners to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information with efficacy. These methods feature practices such as highlighting key points, creating abstracts, and reviewing materials, which can effectively elevate learners' insight and enhance their critical analysis skills. Analysis of empirical data has shown a beneficial relationship between adopting critical reading strategies and advancing writing performance, underscoring that these strategies not only facilitate improved understanding but also enable learners to express their thoughts with greater lucidity and influence in their written expressions.

Despite the acknowledged significance of critical reading strategies, a notable gap persists in comprehending EFL learners' perceptions regarding their utilization of argumentative writing. Learners' attitudes are pivotal in determining their willingness to engage with and apply these strategies throughout their writing processes. Favorable attitudes towards critical reading strategies can catalyze increased motivation and superior writing outcomes, whereas unfavorable attitudes may impede learners' efforts to cultivate their writing competencies.

This study aims to explore EFL learners' attitudes towards the use of critical reading strategies and how these attitudes impact their performance in argumentative writing. By employing a mixed-method approach that includes quantitative assessments and qualitative interviews, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between learners' perceptions of critical reading strategies and their argumentative writing performance. Ultimately, the findings of this study may inform instructional practices and highlight the importance of fostering positive attitudes towards critical reading in EFL contexts.

## **2. Literature Review**

The skill to critically engage with texts is highly important for EFL learners, especially in the process of writing argumentative essays. The relevance of critical reading strategies (CRS) in the enhancement of writing performance has been substantiated by numerous empirical studies, indicating a robust correlation between reading proficiency and writing capabilities in the realm of second language acquisition.

### **2.1 Critical Reading Strategies and Writing Performance**

Critical reading strategies comprise a diverse array of skills, encompassing annotative practices, summarization, paraphrasing, and evaluative analysis of texts. These competencies not only facilitate an improvement in reading comprehension but also exert a beneficial influence on writing proficiencies. Jasim (2007) states that utilizing efficient reading strategies is key for students to learn how to tell apart factual claims from subjective views and to formulate clear arguments—competencies that are vital for mastering argumentative writing. Additionally, research conducted by Lien (2010) reinforces the concept that interaction with authentic texts through critical reading fosters

the development of higher-order thinking skills, thereby enhancing learners' efficacy in writing assignments.

## **2.2 EFL Learners' Attitudes Towards Critical Reading**

An understanding of learners' attitudes towards the employment of CRS is crucial, as these perceptions can substantially influence their engagement and success in both reading and writing activities. Empirical investigations suggest that students who harbor a positive outlook towards critical reading are more inclined to apply these strategies with efficacy. For example, Esleem (2012) discovered that learners who recognized the significance of critical reading exercises exhibited improved grammatical accuracy and overall writing quality. Conversely, negative attitudes towards critical reading may impede students' readiness to utilize such strategies, consequently resulting in diminished writing performance (Kafipour & Moinzadeh, 2011).

## **2.3 Challenges and Perceptions in Using Critical Reading**

Notwithstanding the advantages, numerous EFL learners encounter obstacles in the implementation of critical reading strategies. Research has delineated various impediments, including restrictions in vocabulary, insufficient time allocation, and challenges in comprehending intricate texts (Nguyen & Boers, 2020). These hurdles can adversely affect learners' self-efficacy and, by extension, their perceptions regarding the utility of critical reading in writing tasks. Any negative evaluation of the complexity or perceived difficulty of these strategies may induce avoidance behaviors, thereby exacerbating the disconnect between reading comprehension and writing performance.

## **2.4 The Role of Instruction in Shaping Attitudes**

Instruction plays a pivotal role in shaping learners' attitudes towards CRS. Studies have shown that explicit teaching of critical reading strategies can lead to more positive attitudes and increased use of these strategies in writing (Sadeghi, 2018). Teacher feedback and the incorporation of collaborative learning environments where students can practice CRS and receive constructive feedback further bolster positive learning experiences. Such instructional approaches not only engage learners but also help them understand the practical applications of critical reading in writing.

In summary, the literature indicates a significant relationship between EFL learners' attitudes towards critical reading strategies and their performance in argumentative writing. Understanding and addressing the challenges learners face, alongside providing effective instruction, can enhance their engagement with critical reading, ultimately leading to improved writing outcomes. Continued exploration of this relationship will be crucial for developing effective teaching strategies that cater to the needs of EFL learners.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

The study aimed to clarify the effects of critical reading strategies on EFL students' academic writing performance. Also, the study measured the students' attitude towards the implementation of critical reading strategies on their academic writing performance. A mixed-method design was employed in this study, aiming to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between an independent and dependent variable. The design used in this research is a one-group pretest-posttest design, using mixed-method to collect quantitative and qualitative data (Fraenkel *et al.*, 2012) as the combination of both methods provided a more profound understanding of research issues.

In the first stage, an experimental design was employed to measure the mean scores of EFL students' argumentative writing performance. They had implemented critical reading strategies for improving their argumentative writing performance.

In the second stage, a descriptive study was designed with a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to determine EFL students' attitudes towards the use of critical reading strategies on their argumentative writing and get a deeper understanding of whether the strategies help them ameliorate their argumentative writing performance.

In particular, a writing test for before and after treatment was employed for the experimental group to collect data for quantitative analysis. The goal of the test was to evaluate learners' competency and differences in genders' competency before the intervention of the experiment. Analogously, they took the post-test to assess the level of their argumentative writing improvement after the experiment. From the two tests, the researcher made a comparison to conclude whether learners' argumentative writing performance was superior to learning by reading with the practice of critical reading strategies.

In addition to this, participants completed a questionnaire as a quantitative data collection tool and interviews as a qualitative data collection tool to identify the students' attitudes towards the effects of critical reading strategies on their writing performances after participating in the research intervention.

#### 3.2 Participants

##### 3.2.1 Participants for the Intervention

The participants comprised 30 students, including 15 males and 15 females, at universities in the Mekong Delta. They were second-year university students in Can Tho who had been learning English for over ten years. The participants were volunteers to the study with the need to improve their ARP. Their proficiency levels ranged from B1 to B2 of CEFR to ensure they could absorb the knowledge and take part in other class reading activities and had to commit that they would attend all the classes consistently for seven weeks.

**Table 1:** Number of participants

Groups	N	N of females	N of males
Experimental	30	15	15

### 3.2.2 Participants for the Questionnaire

After the intervention, the members of the experimental group who experienced learning with critical reading strategies for their argumentative writing participated in answering the questionnaire. In other words, 30 students from the experimental group of 15 males (50%) and 15 females (50%) were officially invited to take part in the survey after having a general view on learning English argumentative writing through applying critical reading strategies.

### 3.2.3 Participants for the Semi-structured Interviews

In the semi-structured interviews, three students (2 males and 1 female) from the experimental group were invited to participate to express their more profound views on the use of critical reading strategies for their writing performance. According to the writing post-test of the three students, one student gained the highest score, one student achieved the average score, and the last one got the lowest score. They were expected to provide various viewpoints on implementing critical reading strategies in their argumentative writing.

### 3.2.4 Treatment Description

#### Stage 1: Screening

A set of nine critical reading strategies was introduced to all participants and they were asked to indicate which one they were familiar with or had been using. The strategies which the participants did not choose would be intensively used during the treatment.

#### Stage 2: Treatment

The treatment was conducted by the researcher on the online platform, namely Zoom and the grading process was carried out by the researcher and another qualified teacher, whose name was anonymous, to ensure the reliability of the results. Due to time constraints and teaching conditions caused by deadlines and summertime, the lecture was only given in two sessions: learn the strategies and practice, in which the students were given a detailed description of the nature of the critical reading process and how it works. Furthermore, the students were introduced to a set of a certain critical reading methods specified by the researcher and a handout with guidelines to help them learn the skill in a lesson. For the practice section, the participants were given at least one text, and relevant writing teaching techniques and asked to apply critical reading strategies before writing.

The following strategies were used in the present study.

- 1) Annotating,
- 2) Paraphrasing,

- 3) Evaluating,
- 4) Outlining,
- 5) Summarizing.

### **3.3 Materials**

Materials play an integral part in the success of research goals, which were compiled meticulously from various authentic book collections, e.g. Cambridge for IELTS, and Mindset for IELTS, skills for success, pathways, and other online resources in an attempt to select outstanding contents, approaches, for learners to absorb with ease. Given that such books have their cons and pros that could be exploited and employed in the study, the compilation facilitates learners' inspiration and curiosity to get involved in the experiment. Regarding the writing class, students could learn how to write a completed essay. In addition, the students had the opportunity to reinforce or consolidate sentences or grammatical structures which could be used or applied in the topic-based - writing task. Because the chosen content for teaching was to learn how to write an argumentative essay with the use of critical reading strategies, the participants in this research had to perform their essay writing ability.

In particular, in this research, the reading passages selected for the experiment were sorted out as important parts for teaching reading and writing in each period (from about 250 to 300 words) with additional tasks from the teachers to facilitate learners' reading comprehension. Each passage picked up for students was related to each unit in lesson planning content. All the passages were taken from various authentic book collections, e.g. Cambridge for IELTS, Mindset for IELTS, Skills for Success, Pathways, and other online resources. Specifically, the first passage was taken from Cambridge 15 test 1, providing background knowledge and justifications for the use of driverless cars. By reading it, they are well-informed about the reasons for driverless cars' developments, challenges, and advantages that the means of transport can bring to life. The second passage provides views and facts about food and drinks in China, and the third one is about environmental problems. Moreover, vocabulary teaching and definitions were conveyed to make the lecturer's lessons understood. In the classroom, students enjoyed extra activities and tasks to foster comprehension and practice for critical reading strategies.

### **3.4 Research Instrument**

A good instrument should be valid. The valid data obtained in the field must be derived from valid tests. In this study, the researcher decides to use content validity. The content validity of the instrument is measured by relating the content of the instrument to the course objectives in order to make it valid in terms of the content of validity. Thus, the test must be in line with the content of the research.

The researcher adopted the instruments from articles which have been validated by the experts. The instruments which were used by the researcher of the study for collecting data were a writing test for the first meeting and the final meeting, interviews,

and a questionnaire, which aimed to examine the effects of critical reading strategies on their argumentative writing performance and their attitudes after learning and implementing the strategies. Besides, a grading rubric adopted from Brown was employed to mark the learners' academic writing performance (see Appendix 1).

### 3.4.1 Writing Test

A test was a written task which required the participants to write an essay of at least 250 words to express their ideas about an issue. The task provided one topic without any suggestions. The researcher allotted time of 40 minutes for them to write as planned in the teaching plan of the writing lesson. The test focused on assessing students' argumentative writing ability, which is the required objective of the English course in teaching writing to the students in the research with the aim of boosting their writing performance. Learners had to write a test before and after treatment for the researcher to collect data. A grading rubric adopted from Brown was employed to mark the learners' academic writing performance. Analytic scoring breaks down different aspects of a piece of writing and awards them separately. The scale assessed the candidates' writing ability using five components: *content*, *vocabulary*, *grammar*, and *mechanics*. The scores allocated to each component are Content = 3.0, Vocabulary = 2.5, Grammar = 2.5, Mechanics = 2.0. The total score for writing a paragraph was 10 points. The first rater was also the researcher. Another rater was invited to score students' writing performance based on the above scoring criteria, and the average scores between the two test-raters were used as the final score of students' writing products.

Moreover, the raters had been trained before test marking took place. Both raters have had at least three years of experience in scoring the students' writing based on the rubric. The tests were marked independently by the two raters, which is a must.

### 3.4.2 Questionnaire

A questionnaire was designed to explore respondents' attitudes and opinions towards the use of critical reading strategies in their argumentative writing. The questionnaire comprised a series of statements utilized for the analysis of quantitative data (Babbie, 2020; Al Kilani & Kobziev, 2016). Hence, in this study, the questionnaire was designed and delivered to the participants in the experimental group in the week after the post-test.

Generally, the questionnaire includes 39 items, which were divided into three parts. The first part inquired about the names, gender, and number of years studying English. In this part, gender was one of particular interest because the researcher wanted to explore the difference between male and female participants in terms of attitudes toward the effects of critical reading strategies on their argumentative writing performance. The second part involved 39 close-ended items, responded with the Likert scale consisting of five points ranging from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree. The 26 close-ended items were divided into four clusters, as shown in Table 2, consisting of (1) learners' preferences of reading documents, (2)

learners' attitudes towards the impact of critical reading strategies on their reading, (3) learners' belief of their writing ability and challenges facing in writing, and (4) learners' attitudes toward the effects of critical reading strategies on their argumentative writing performance. The statements were designed based on the theories of attitudes.

In particular, Cluster 1, it totally consisted of 5 items, mainly on learners' preferences of reading documents to explore what documents they prefer. Cluster 2 included 10 items, mainly on the EFL learners' attitudes towards critical reading strategies on their reading. Specifically, students reflected on which critical reading strategy is beneficial for enhancing their reading ability. In cluster 3, there were 7 items mainly about the EFL learners' writing ability and challenges towards the use of critical reading strategies on their argumentative performance. Students expressed the levels of difficulty in writing argumentative essays. Last, Cluster 4 was composed of 4 items, which were mainly about the EFL learners' attitudes towards critical reading strategies in their argumentative writing. The cluster helped to explore the effect of each strategy in the critical reading ones and its efficacy for implementation later in life. The clusters were presented as shown in Table 2.

**Table 3.2: Summary of Items**

Clusters	N of items	Items
Learners' preferences of reading documents	5	(1), (2), (3), (4), (5)
Learners' attitudes	10	(6), (7) (8), (9), (10), (11), (12), (13)(14), (15)
Learners' writing challenges	7	(16), (17), (18), (19), (20), (21), (22)
Learners' attitudes	18	(23), (24), (25), (26), (27), (28), (29), (30), (31), (32), (33), (34), (35), (36), (37), (38), (39),

### 3.4.3 Semi-structured Interviews

After completing the questionnaire, interviews were used as a way to get profound information on the research topic, which could not be obtained from the questionnaire (Fraenkel *et al.*, 2012). The key questions for the interviews were designed based on the cluster of the questionnaire and sent to 30 students in another group of students to check the validity. Students also showed their comprehension of the questions. Consequently, three interviews with three learners (N=3) happened individually online to clarify their viewpoints about the effects of critical reading strategies on their argumentative writing. Among 3 participants, one was a representative of getting the highest achievement in the writing test in the post-test to explore how useful the critical reading strategies to their AWP are. Another participant was a representative of having the lowest writing score in the post-test among 30 students to clarify his attitude toward critical reading strategies. The last student was the student who gained the average score in the post-test, intending to explore her insight. The researcher aimed to explore the learners' attitudes in four main aspects, which seemed not to be gained from the questionnaire. In detail, learners were



asked about their material preferences while learning reading and writing with the aid of critical reading strategies. Then, their attitudes about the effect of authentic video on learning to write skills were determined as a major goal of the interview. Next, the students were asked about the challenges they encountered when they applied the CR strategies for reading and improving their writing performance. Last, the interviewer attempted to measure their attitudes towards the strategies and whether to use them in the future.

In addition to the recommended interview questions, the interviewer made follow-up questions based on the answers of the interviewees to collect sufficient data. Additionally, the researcher invited three interviewees based on their positive attitudes during the learning process and made them feel comfortable during the interviews. Moreover, in the interviews, Vietnamese people also used some time to help the volunteer interviewees freely express their views and feelings without difficulties.

Last but not least, interviews were audio-recorded after the participants' permission to make sure that no significant information was missed for later analysis during the interviews.

### 3.5 Research Procedures

The procedure of this study is a strategy to organize the background of the study to get valid data based on the characteristics of variables and the objective of the study. The experiment was conducted in the summer of the academic year 2022 when learners had no classes at the university. It involved nine weeks, commencing with surveying to select the target strategies and finishing with processing data and concluding the findings. The table below demonstrates the procedures of the research.

**Table 3.3:** Research Timeline

Timeline	Activities
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Designing the writing test.</li> <li>- Piloting the test.</li> <li>- Adjusting the test.</li> <li>- Delivering the test to the participants.</li> <li>- Training test-raters for marking the test.</li> <li>- Marking the test.</li> <li>- Preparing the questionnaire.</li> <li>- Piloting the questionnaire.</li> <li>- Adjusting the questionnaire.</li> </ul>
Week 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide an overview of critical reading strategies used in the research and structures of argumentative writing.</li> <li>- Teaching annotating and outlining for reading.</li> <li>- Teaching reading writing topic: transport.</li> <li>- Writing task 2: Write an essay to answer the questions: "In the future all cars, buses and trucks will be driverless. The only people traveling inside these vehicles will be passengers. Do you think the advantages of driverless vehicles outweigh the disadvantages?"</li> </ul>
Week 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Revise an overview of critical reading strategies used in the research and structures of argumentative writing.</li> <li>- Teaching evaluating for reading.</li> <li>- Teaching reading writing topic: food.</li> </ul>

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	- Writing task 2: Write an essay to answer the questions: "Many manufactured food and drink products contain high levels of sugar, which causes many health problems. Sugary products should be made more expensive to encourage people to consume less sugar."
Week 4	- Revise an overview of critical reading strategies used in the research and structures of argumentative writing. - Revising evaluating for reading. - Teaching reading writing topic: environment. - Writing task 2: Write an essay to answer the questions: "Explain some of the ways in which humans are damaging the environment. What can governments do to address these problems? What can individual people do?"
Week 5	- Revise an overview of critical reading strategies used in the research and structures of argumentative writing. - Further knowledge of applying evaluating for reading. - Teaching reading writing topic: tourism. - Writing task 2: Write an essay to answer the questions: "Some people think that cultural traditions may be destroyed when they are used as money-making attractions aimed at tourists. Others, however, believe that it is the only way to save these attractions. Discuss both views and give your own opinion."
Week 6	- Giving distraction test: Write an essay to answer the essay question "In many countries, traditional foods are being replaced by international fast foods. This is having a negative effect on both families and societies. To what extent do you agree or disagree?" - Teaching summarizing for reading. - Teaching reading topic: personality.
Week 7	- Teaching writing topic: personality - Writing task 2: Write an essay to answer the questions: "Some people could be naturally good leaders. Others believe that people can learn leadership skills. Discuss both views and give your opinion."
Week 8	- Delivering the post-test to the participants. - Retraining test-raters for marking the test. - Marking the test. - Delivering the questionnaire to the participants. - Interviewing 2 students. - Transcribing and translating the interviews into English. - Analyzing the test scores. - Analyzing the data from the questionnaire and interviews.
Week 9	- Writing up the research paper.

### 3.5.1 Data Collection Procedure

The research process underwent three phases. The first phase was a one-week pre-experiment. The second one was an experiment lasting seven weeks. Finally, learners had a week for post-experiment work. The forthcoming paragraphs below clearly demonstrate the stages:

#### Phase 1: Pre-experiment

The first phase was preparation; the researcher created a writing exam for use before and after the test. The exam was then piloted with 10 people who had been invited according to the goals of the study. The final writing exam for the research was completed after the test's validity and reliability were checked. Participants completed the writing exam for data collection.

This stage involved meticulously preparing to mark the writing test. The two test-raters who had prior teaching expertise in writing were asked to take part in the marking.

They got instructions on marking using the writing rubric and coordinated with one another to come to a decision.

Marking the writing test was prepared carefully at this stage. The two test-raters who had experience in teaching writing were invited to participate in the marking and received training on marking based on the writing rubric and communicated with each other to reach a consensus.

Finally, a questionnaire based on the theories of attitudes was created to assess students' attitudes towards the use of critical reading strategies for their argumentative writing. Prior to being used in formal research, the questionnaire was piloted with a group of students and then revised to ensure its validity.

### Phase 2: Experiment

In phase 2, students were officially put into the experiment period. The students were taught both "reading and writing" in 7 weeks. These 7 weeks were used to instruct 5 topic-based reading passages for five writing topics. In the first four weeks, the teacher instructed students overview of critical reading strategies, essay organizations, and four topic-based practices with five techniques of critical reading strategies to be familiarized with them. After that, they are asked to get involved in a distraction test in the first week before teaching the fifth topic and strategies used for improving their reading and writing. Finally, the post-test has the same content as the pretest was administered to learners.

As designed above, the participants were taught both "writing and reading" with the use of critical reading strategies in 5 topics from compiled documents. Each week, the learners had three 90-minute periods to learn both reading and writing. The students spent 7 weeks completing five units, as planned in the study. All the students were introduced to completing the writing product.

**Table 3.4: Writing Process**

Stage 1: Prewriting	Read the model passage from the previous lesson again. - Analyzing the mentioned structures, vocabulary, topic - Remind the outline of the passage - Read the essay question and analyze the questions asked for performing their argumentative writing.
Stage 2: Precomposing	- Refer to ideas from the passage - Ask learners to work in pairs to think of other ideas that can be feasible for answering the essay question. - Outline their thoughts under the frame of having a topic sentence and supporting ideas on their papers.
Stage 3: Writing	Present their ideas in paragraphs according to teachers' instructions.
Stage 4: Sharing	Work with another partner, exchange their ideas, give feedbacks.
Stage 5: Revising	To reflect and rethink about what was written.
Stage 6: Editing	Proofreading for errors in grammar.
Stage 7: Evaluating	"Assessment of the final written product" by using learners' scoring rubric adopted from Brown and edited to make it easier for learners to self-check themselves.

In summary, in the experiment phase. The teaching plan for the writing class of two groups was designed meticulously from various resources. The time for each lesson was 90 minutes and each writing topic was finished in three lessons. There are seven stages in the writing class: Prewriting, Precomposing, Writing, Sharing, Revising, Editing and Evaluating. In the experiment phase, the students were instructed in critical reading strategies for reading to get the gist of it. There were five critical reading strategies employed in reading, including analyzing, outlining, evaluating, summarising. The researcher collected the final writing in the next lesson to manage the students to ensure that students had done all the writing homework.

### **Phase 3: Post-experiment**

The post-experiment stage lasted 1 week; the post-writing test was conducted after the experiment. The researcher collected the quantitative data from the writing test results. Then, the two raters making for the test were again invited and trained thoroughly along with the marking rubric or criteria. The raters are believed to have experience in marking writing skills.

In the next step, the prepared questionnaire was delivered to all the participants in the experimental group after one week of the experiment to ensure that students still remembered what had happened in the experimental classes. Therefore, the data collected was more reliable. After that, the teacher invited three students from the experimental group for the semi-structured interviews. After completing the interviews, the researcher transcribed and translated the interviews into English for later analysis.

As a result, all the quantitative data from the post-test, and the questionnaire were collected, rechecked, and finally imported into the SPSS system to prepare for the data analysis later.

## **3.5.2 Data Analysis**

### **3.5.2.1 Analysis of EFL Students' Attitude Towards the Effects of Critical Reading Strategies on Their Argumentative Writing Performance**

Initially, a Scale test was used to analyze the quantitative data from the questionnaire for Cronbach's Alpha to identify the reliability of the questionnaire in general and the four clusters.

Then, a Descriptive Statistics test was applied to the overall mean score and the mean scores of each cluster, which were compared to check the degree of agreement of the students about the effects of critical reading strategies. Next, an independent samples *t*-test was run to identify the difference in levels of agreement with the effects of critical reading strategies in writing between male and female students. Finally, to get more detail about students' attitudes about critical reading strategies, the percentage of each level of agreement on each survey item was calculated. Additionally, qualitative data collected from the interviews was analyzed using thematic analysis after all the dialogues were transcribed and translated into English. Thematic analysis is widely used as an effective tool for analyzing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## 4. Finding and Discussion

### 4.1 Questionnaire

In collecting data, the researcher presents questionnaire results about “The Effectiveness of Critical Reading Strategies on Learners’ Argumentative Writing Performance” in this study, which has been given to respondents from 30 second-year students at universities in Can Tho. The result has been turned into the number of scores. The respondents’ initials list is in 39 items included in the questionnaire using the 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree*, *agree*, *neutral*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*. The questionnaires were both in Vietnamese and English language to avoid any misunderstanding the questionnaire might cause to respondents. In order to explore the learners’ attitudes after learning and implementing the critical strategies on their argumentative performance, the questionnaire was delivered to 30 participants in the experimental group. Prior to the analysis of the collected data, a Scale test was run to examine the reliability of the questionnaire for each cluster and in general. The reliability of the pilot questionnaire was tested by SPSS version 20.0. The result of the Scale test shows that the general reliability of the whole questionnaire was acceptable ( $\alpha = .97$ ); in particular, the alpha-value for four clusters was reliable ( $\alpha = .83$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ,  $\alpha = .91$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ) as described in Table 4.8. With an alpha of 0.97, the results from the survey were reliable for data analysis.

**Table 4.8:** Reliability of the Questionnaire

	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>N of items</b>	<b>N of population</b>
Questionnaire	.97	39	30
Cluster 1	.83	5	30
Cluster 2	.93	10	30
Cluster 3	.91	7	30
Cluster 4	.88	18	30

Then, a Descriptive Statistics test was run in order to identify participants’ attitudes in the experimental group towards the use of critical reading strategies on reading and their argumentative writing. According to the scoring range of the Likert scale of the survey. Learners express their agreement on the materials chosen for implementing the critical reading strategies, selected critical reading strategies, and their writing ability and challenges (Cluster 1 = Cluster 2 = Cluster 3 = 4.43).

In addition, they concurred with the perks of critical reading strategies on their argumentative writing (Cluster 4 = 4.3). It could be deciphered that students acknowledged the effects of critical reading strategies on their argumentative writing performance.

**Table 4.9:** Survey Clusters' Mean Scores

	N	Min	Max	Mean
Cluster 1	30	3.8	5	4.43
Cluster 2	30	3.8	5	4.43
Cluster 3	30	3.71	5	4.43
Cluster 4	30	3.88	4.71	4.29

#### 4.2 Learners' Attitudes Towards the Use of Critical Reading Strategies & Attitudes After Learning and Implementing the Strategies on Argumentative Writing

An independent t-test was run to compare the mean scores of males and females regarding their attitudes towards the implementation of CR strategies on reading. The results indicated that no difference between the two means was observed ( $t = .32$   $p = .75$ ). The students' attitudes between the two genders were not significantly different for Mean A, B, and C, while important differences in gender toward the effects of the strategies on their writing performance were seen in Table 4.10.

**Table 4.10:** Comparison of the Mean Scores of Males and Females Regarding Their Attitudes Towards the Implementation of CR Strategies on Their Argumentative Writing

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Cluster 1	Female	15	4.45	.45	.32	.752
	Male	15	4.4	.47		
Cluster 2	Female	15	4.45	.45	.32	.752
	Male	15	4.4	.47		
Cluster 3	Female	15	4.45	.48	.33	.746
	Male	15	4.4	.47		
Cluster 4	Female	15	4.4	.25	.89	.378
	Male	15	4.3	.24		

##### 4.2.1. Learners' Preferences of Materials for Their Reading

A large number of EFL students showed their enjoyment in using materials such as novels, and short stories, reading newspapers and magazines, research papers, and authentic papers for reading. The results of the first cluster, including five statements about the participants' preferences of materials for their reading, are shown in Table 4.11.

**Table 4.11:** Learners' Preferences of Materials for Their Reading

Statements	Scale					Mean
	SD	D	N	A	SA	
1. Critical reading is a crucial skill for my academic achievement.	0%	0%	3.3%	50%	46.7%	4.43
2. I prefer reading short paragraphs to long paragraphs.	0%	0%	6.7%	43.3%	50%	4.44
3. I prefer reading newspapers and magazines with practical content.	0%	0%	13.3%	50%	36%	4.23
4. I prefer reading documents from online resources.	0%	0%	0%	46.7%	53.3%	4.53
5. I prefer reading authentic textbooks.	0%	0	0	50%	50%	4.50

\* N = 30; SD: Strongly Disagree; D: Disagree; N: Neutral, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree

The results in Table 4.11 showed that the majority of them believed critical reading strategies are crucial to obtain (Mean > 4). Most learners recognized the crucial roles of critical reading strategies in their academic achievement (M = 4.43; N = 3.3%; A = 50%; 46.7%). Stood at the highest mean (M = 4.53), 53.3% and 46.7% of strong agreement and agreement. Also, the figures for agreements and strongly agreed with reading authentic textbooks were 50%, which was the second dominant figure with a mean score of 4.5. With a mean score of 4.23 (N = 13.3%; A = 50%; SA = 36%), the preference for reading newspapers and magazines with practical content was the lowest mean in the table. In other words, there were a minor number of them who held neutral opinions about reading using newspapers and magazines with practical content. The rest had a mean of 4.44 (N = 6.7%; 43.3%; 50%).

#### 4.2.2 Learners' Attitudes Towards the Use of CR on Reading

**Table 4.12** Learners' Attitudes Towards the Use of CR on Reading

Statements	Scale					Mean
	SD	D	N	A	SA	
1. I often apply to annotate in reading.	0%	0%	3.3%	50%	46.7%	4.43
2. I often apply to outline in reading.	0%	0%	6.7%	43.3%	50%	4.44
3. I often apply summarizing in reading.	0%	0%	13.3%	50%	36%	4.23
4. I often apply paraphrasing in reading.	0%	0%	0%	46.7%	53.3%	4.53
5. I often apply evaluating in reading.	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%	4.50
6. Annotating helps me a lot in reading performance.	0%	0%	3.3%	50%	46.7%	4.43
7. Outlining helps me a lot in reading performance.	0%	0%	6.7%	43.3%	50%	4.44
8. Summarizing helps me a lot in reading performance.	0%	0%	13.3%	50%	36%	4.23
9. Paraphrasing helps me a lot in my reading performance.	0%	0%	0%	46.7%	53.3%	4.53
10. Evaluating helps me a lot in reading performance.	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%	4.50

\* N = 30; SD: Strongly Disagree; D: Disagree; N: Neutral, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree

Over 45% of strong agreements were for most of the items, except for items 8 and 13 (SD = 36%, which was 1,6 higher than that of the neutral opinion. This could be inferred that summarising was often used in reading and several barriers drive learners' neutral opinions. Paraphrasing and evaluating were used regularly and obtained a huge number of agreements and strong agreements from the participants. (A = 46.7%, SD = 50%).

#### 4.2.3 Learners' Attitudes Towards the Effects of Critical Reading Strategies on Their Writing Performance

It is noteworthy that the majority of them showed their agreement on their weaknesses in writing: problems in academic writing, lack of coherence and cohesion, lack of accuracy, knowledge of writing topics, time, and materials to improve their writing. Meanwhile, no percent of disagreement and strong disagreement were observed from items in the table. In addition, standing at 53% of strong agreement, lack of accuracy was the most dominant figure in the column of SD. Less background knowledge of writing topics accounted for 100% of agreements (A = 50%; SA = 50%). The highest percentage of

neutral opinion was for lack of cohesion and coherence (13%), which doubled that of lack of materials and 4.2 times higher than that of inadequacy of time.

**Table 4.13:** Learners' Attitudes Towards the Effects of critical Reading Strategies on Their Writing Performance

Statements	Scale					Mean
	SD	D	N	A	SA	
1. I do not have good writing performance	0%	0%	3.3%	50%	46.7%	4.43
2. I encounter many problems in academic writing	0%	0%	6.7%	43.3%	50%	4.44
3. My writing is the lack of coherence and cohesion	0%	0%	13.3%	50%	36.7%	4.23
4. My writing is the lack of accuracy (word choices, grammar mistakes, spelling)	0%	0%	0%	46.7%	53.3%	4.53
5. I have less knowledge about the topic)	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%	4.50
6. I have inadequacy of time to write	0%	0%	3.3%	50%	46.7%	4.43
7. I lack materials when writing compositions, essays, reports, or research papers	0%	0%	6.7%	43.3%	50%	4.43

\* N = 30; SD: Strongly Disagree; D: Disagree; N: Neutral, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree

#### 4.2.4 Learners' Attitudes Towards the Use of CRT for Their AW Performance

**Table 4.14:** Learners' Attitudes Towards the Use of CRT for Their AGW Performance

Statements	Scale					Mean
	SD	D	N	A	SA	
1. Critical reading strategies can enhance my writing performance.	0%	0%	13.3%	50%	36.7%	4.53
2. Annotating helps me a lot in my writing performance.	0%	0%	0%	46.7%	53.3%	4.53
3. Outlining helps me a lot in writing performance.	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%	4.5
4. Summarizing helps me a lot in my writing performance.	0%	0%	3.3%	50%	46.7%	4.43
5. Paraphrasing helps me a lot in my writing performance.	0%	0%	6.7%	43.3%	50%	4.43
6. Evaluating helps me a lot in my writing performance.	0%	0%	13.3%	50%	36.7%	4.23
7. After treatment and implementing the strategies, I can enhance my coherence and cohesion.	0%	0%	0%	46.7	53.3%	4.53
8. After treatment and implementing the strategies, I can enhance my accuracy (word choices, grammar mistakes, spelling).	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%	4.5
9. After treatment and implementing the strategies, I can have more knowledge about the topic.	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%	4.5
10. After treatment and implementing the strategies, I can have adequate time to write.	0%	0%	13.3%	60%	26.7%	4.13
11. After treatment and implementing the strategies, I can enhance my confidence in writing the learned topics.	0%	0%	16.7	66.7	16.7	4
12. I will apply critical reading strategies before writing.	0%	0%	6.7%	83.3%	10 %	4.03
13. I will apply annotating before writing.	0%	0%	6.7%	86.7%	6.7%	4
14. I will apply an outline in before writing.	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%	4,5
15. I will apply summarizing before writing.	0%	0%	0%	93.3%	6.7%	4.06
16. I will apply paraphrasing before writing.	0%	0%	0%	80%	20%	4.07
17. I will apply evaluation before writing.	0%	0%	0%	80%	20%	4.2

\* N = 30; SD: Strongly Disagree; D: Disagree; N: Neutral, A: Agree, SA: Strongly agree



As has been described in the table, it is concluded that critical reading strategies are efficient to learners thanks to the assistance of annotating, paraphrasing, outlining, summarizing and evaluating in critical reading strategies.

### 4.3 Interviews

A thematic analysis was run to measure the learners' attitudes after learning and implementing the strategies in their writing. The interview included three main questions measuring learners' attitudes towards the implementation of CR strategies in argumentative writing. The interview was conducted with three students in the class.

As could be seen from the first and second interview questions, which asked them about how useful they think the strategies are, they witnessed positive feedback. Most of the interviewees perceived that CR strategies were helpful to them, and they would apply them in the future because they assisted them in having more ideas to write.

*"The strategies provide me with authentic resources and references which I can utilize to cite into my writing as a specific example to convince the readers as well as my professor. I have implemented a lot of ideas from that." (S1)*

S1 believed he obtained numerous authentic and worthy ideas from passages to cite as a typical instance to induce readers in his argumentative essay. Also, S2 stated

*"The strategies are good which I can have more ideas to write in my writing. I have used a lot of ideas from that; sometimes I develop further ideas based on the ideas given in the reading passages." (S2)*

In other words, she proved the effectiveness of applying CR strategies is beneficial to her rich ideas and the advancement of them from the reading texts to put on her AG essay. S3 continued:

*"Hmmm, I think this is the idea. I often get stuck at finding the ideas but when I read, I can have more ideas to develop. It's good because I can write a lot from what ideas I have read." (S3)*

As S3 elaborated, the deficiency of notions has frequently put pressure on her writing development. However, she now could write with great confidence and deliver more perspectives. In addition to this, they all agreed that they could boost their coherence and cohesion in writing.

*"ah. I. I often write too many words and bland ideas. I can improve a lot in writing with cohesion and coherence because the strategies help me see how main ideas are developed in the academic written works" (S2).*

To explain, the student's trouble conveying words and less persuading points of view has shown significant progress in maintaining coherence and cohesion because of understanding how academic written essays are delivered. When asked about the argumentative writing, S3 responded:

*"Before I just knew that I needed to write and explain anything I write but when I know about the strategies, I also need to consider whether the ideas are sensible or not. I am not good at writing but now I know that my ideas need to be clear and coherent".*

That means the author's argumentative writing has now been improved by reading scholarly texts. S3 knew how to present the argumentative text more logically and coherently after treatment.

When considering whether to apply the strategies in the future, most of the learners presented an optimistic response. In particular, S1 mentioned in his answer that CR strategies are a practical approach to comprehending the development of main ideas after the analysis of the targeted passages, which facilitates an understanding of the native writing language and essay coherence and cohesion.

*"The strategies contribute a part to helping me see how main ideas are developed. I analyze a lot of passages. I somehow know how native experts develop their own ideas." (S1)*

*"Definitely yes. hmmmmmmmm the strategies foster my critical thinking, which is useful to have compelling evidence and explanations for my argumentative essay." (S1)*

Thus, the learner could convey notions with certainty at ease. Besides, one of them believed that the strategies could help improve his grammar ability because he sometimes was unaware of the use of some grammar structures. He often imitated grammar structures from what he had read.

*"Hmmm, when I write, I often make grammar mistakes and am not sure what I should use. But the more passages I read, the better understanding I get." (S2)*

The results from the third interview question indicated that two of them shared annotating as the biggest hurdle for them to understand the main ideas, the topic sentence of the passage:

*"Well, I think the biggest challenge is finding the subject and main ideas of some reading passages when I do not know the topics well. Consequently, it took me ages to make myself completely understood. That's time-consuming." (S2)*

By analyzing what S2 replied to the third interview question, the author was aware of the challenge of applying annotating, which might hinder their interpretation of the

main ideas and subject in the passage, consuming a great deal of time for comprehension. The type of difficulties could be detrimental potential to the purposes of the research given that learners would not benefit from their ultimate goals of idea and grammar enrichment. For such justifications, S2 added another dilemma, which was the inadequacy of lexical resources, hampering her from predicting the subject and main points of the targeted texts.

*"Well, as you know, I have a humble vocabulary repertoire and annotating was a nightmare for me. How can I find the subject and main ideas of the reading passage when I do not know most of the words? Consequently, I could not pick up anything from reading texts. If I can get knowledge from that, I must look it up in a dictionary, which is time-consuming." (S2)*

Despite knowing how to solve the difficulties in applying "annotating" because of their own lack of vocabulary by using the dictionary to look up new words, S2 was still deterred by the waste of time in dictionary search. This also occurs in other students if asked about the prediction of the researcher, and smarter text selections are required to ensure learners can interpret 80% of reading resources if they implement the strategies later in life.

The second hurdle was summarizing that given that they have inadequacy of time and vocabulary resources. If time was given further, they would utilize them better. S3 showed his discouragement in summarizing due to his struggle to find the main ideas in a short duration.

*"I think that summarizing is too difficult because I need to fully understand the main ideas of the passage first before summarizing. I don't have enough time to do that."*

This result would encourage the researcher and others to modify more classroom reading practice duration to enhance learners' reading competency, together with skillful reading technique utilization for producing more compelling argumentative writing. S3 was discouraged from applying for evaluation because of his humble knowledge:

*"I think that's evaluating. Because I don't have much knowledge. I'm not sure whether the ideas are sensible or whether I can apply them or not. Maybe I need more time to practice and apply. (S3)*

The response from S3 depicts his little background knowledge about the target topics, which leads to his confusion in trusting the authenticity of perspectives from the reading texts and leaves a part for the researcher to not only grasp the learner deterrent but also come up with further amendments in teachers' lesson planning. In other words, many instructions and mother tongue language should be intervened to facilitate

learners' acquisition and ensure points of view accumulated from such texts are reliable to employ in their argumentative writing.

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1 Summary of Main Findings

The results of the questionnaire witnessed learners hold positive attitudes toward the use of critical reading. They all admitted to the practice of short paragraphs, magazines, selected online materials, and authentic books. On top of that, they gave significant interest in selected online materials and authentic ones. The outcome resembled the result of Lien (2010). Most participants prefer to select authentic texts in extensive reading despite their difficulty. Furthermore, most of them agree that the five critical reading strategies: annotating, outlining, summarizing, paraphrasing, and evaluating were effective for their reading comprehension. Additionally, when implementing these strategies for their argumentative writing, learners confessed optimistic views.

The interview was conducted to exploit further information that could not be interpreted thoroughly via the questionnaire. The interview consists of three major questions that gauge how learners believe about using CR techniques when writing argumentative essays. Three of the students in the class were interviewed. The results from the first interview questions revealed that the majority of interviewees stated that CR strategies were beneficial to them and they would use them in the future since they helped them generate more writing ideas. They all concurred that by utilizing the techniques, they could improve the coherence and cohesiveness of their writing work to some extent. Their answers also resembled what Jasim (2007) stated in his study "*the impact of using critical reading strategies in EFL reading courses*", in which he concluded that effective strategies should be an integral part of advanced reading as it plays a crucial role in the process of students' reading comprehension and helps to develop their capability to separate facts from opinions, make inferences and evaluate the text with different perspectives. By contrast, one in three of them perceived that the techniques could help them become better at grammar because they occasionally do not know how to apply certain grammatical structures. They frequently replicated grammatical structures from books they had read similar to the statement from Esleem (2012) about the usefulness of critical reading activities in improving learners' grammar accuracy. The answers to the third interview question witnessed that two of them agreed that annotating was the largest barrier to their comprehension of the passage's core concepts and topic phrase. The second challenge was summarizing since they lacked the necessary time and vocabulary resources; if they had more time, they would have made greater use of them. A student claimed that, due to his limited understanding, evaluation was also a challenge for him. The responses to the third interview question required further research to seek measures to facilitate learners' acquisition.

## 5.2 Implication

Based on the conclusions which have been explained by the researcher above, there are viable several implications for researchers, teachers, and students:

First, educational programs can incorporate critical reading strategies explicitly into their curricula. This can include dedicated lessons on how to effectively use annotating, summarizing, outlining, paraphrasing, and evaluating texts. Such integration can improve both reading comprehension and writing skills, making learners more proficient in these essential academic tasks.

Second, workshops or training sessions focused on how to apply critical reading skills to enhance writing, specifically for argumentative essays, could be beneficial. Providing students with practical exercises on generating ideas and improving the coherence and cohesion of their writing will support their development as writers.

Third, although students reported challenges with summarizing due to time constraints and vocabulary limitations, it is important to incorporate skills training that focuses on time management strategies for reading and writing tasks.

Additionally, vocabulary-building activities can help students better express their ideas in writing and improve their understanding of complex texts. Besides, implementing collaborative learning activities where students can discuss and practice critical reading strategies together can enhance their learning experience. Peer discussions can facilitate the sharing of ideas and strategies, allowing students to support one another in overcoming challenges related to comprehension and writing.

Furthermore, further research is needed to better understand the specific barriers learners face when employing critical reading strategies. This research could lead to the development of targeted interventions that address these challenges, ultimately helping students to more effectively engage with and comprehend complex texts. Finally, establishing systems for providing feedback on how students apply CR strategies in both reading and writing can encourage ongoing improvement. Offering constructive feedback can help learners understand their strengths and areas for development, fostering a growth mindset.

By considering these implications, educational stakeholders can create a more supportive learning environment that enhances students' critical reading and writing skills, ultimately leading to better academic outcomes.

## 5.3. Limitations of the Study

Some limitations were found in the study. First, the timetable distributions were in line with summer, which resulted in a low proportion of students attending the entire session, with the expectation of 60 students for experimental and control. As a result, the number of treatment sessions and the outcomes were affected. Another drawback was that because critical reading required a high degree of thinking abilities and experience, learners struggled to master the methods as a consequence of insufficient practice. Although the researcher collected the writing homework and observed how they performed their writing after implementing critical reading strategies, it could not

guarantee that they could employ ideas, structures, and writing performances of native authors from the reading passage. Moreover, the total number of participants for the research was only 30 students in the universities of Can Tho, which could not become representatives of a large area. Besides this, only three participants are involved in the interviews, which seemed to be inequivalent to the sample size. As a result, the student's responses in the semi-structured interviews could not be generalized for the large study sample. Last, the researcher applied the same writing test for the pre and post-test in the experimental group, which only aimed to check the writing achievement of the students, not their proficiency level. 7

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### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

### **About the Author**

Ms. Le Ngoc Han is an English teacher at the ILA Language Center in Vietnam. She recently completed her Master's degree in Principles and Methods of English Language Education at Can Tho University (CTU) in 2023. Her primary areas of interest in research include information literacy, information management, teaching methods, writing techniques, and English literature. She can be reached at [hanle03@ilavietnam.edu.vn](mailto:hanle03@ilavietnam.edu.vn).

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