

# Developing Critical Reading Skills Through Authentic English Texts

Barlikbaeva Gulayim Isabay qizi

High-Category English Teacher of School No. 36 Of Chimbay District, Uzbekistan

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**Abstract:** This article examines the methodological potential of authentic texts in developing critical reading skills among EFL learners. It analyzes the relationship between authenticity, linguistic competence, critical thinking, and reading strategies and discusses practical principles for selecting and exploiting authentic materials. Particular attention is given to pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities that transform reading from passive information retrieval into an analytical and evaluative process.

**Keywords:** Critical reading, authentic texts, EFL learners, reading comprehension, critical thinking, reading strategies, authentic materials, English language teaching.

**Introduction:** Reading in a foreign language is no longer understood simply as the ability to recognize vocabulary, identify grammatical structures, and reproduce information contained in a text. In contemporary English language education, learners encounter enormous amounts of information through newspapers, websites, social media, academic publications, advertisements, blogs, and other digital sources. Consequently, successful reading requires not only comprehension but also the ability to question the reliability, intention, evidence, and perspective of a text. Critical reading therefore represents a higher level of reading competence in which linguistic comprehension and analytical thinking operate simultaneously [2].

Critical reading can be understood as an active process of constructing, examining, and evaluating meaning. A learner reading critically does not automatically accept every statement as accurate or objective. Instead, the learner asks who produced the text, why it was produced, what position is represented, what evidence supports the claims, which information has been emphasized or omitted, and whether alternative interpretations are possible. This process requires the integration of several abilities, including identifying

main and supporting ideas, making inferences, recognizing argument structure, distinguishing fact from opinion, assessing evidence, identifying assumptions, detecting persuasive techniques, and drawing reasoned conclusions. Thus, critical reading develops at the intersection of language competence, reading comprehension, background knowledge, and critical thinking.

Authentic English texts offer a particularly productive environment for developing these skills. Authentic materials are generally understood as texts originally produced for real communication rather than specifically designed for language teaching. Newspaper reports, magazine articles, public announcements, reviews, advertisements, interviews, opinion columns, institutional websites, travel information, product descriptions, and other real-world materials can therefore serve as authentic reading resources. Unlike many pedagogically simplified texts, such materials preserve naturally occurring vocabulary, discourse structures, rhetorical choices, cultural references, and communicative intentions [4, 166-180].

The methodological value of authenticity lies not merely in exposing learners to more difficult language. Its

greater significance is that authentic texts contain genuine communicative problems that require interpretation. A newspaper article, for example, may present selected facts while giving greater prominence to one perspective. An advertisement may combine factual information with persuasive language. An opinion article may use evidence selectively to strengthen a particular argument. A public information text may appear neutral while reflecting institutional priorities. When learners examine these characteristics, they begin to understand that reading involves interpretation rather than simple extraction of information.

However, the presence of authentic material alone does not automatically produce critical reading. If students are given a newspaper article and asked only to find unfamiliar words or answer literal comprehension questions, the text may be authentic while the learning process remains largely mechanical. The decisive factor is therefore the methodological design of the reading task. Teachers need to construct activities that gradually move students from comprehension toward interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and response.

Before reading, learners should be encouraged to activate relevant background knowledge and develop expectations about the text. The title, source, publication date, images, author information, and introductory paragraph can be examined before the complete text is read. Students can predict the subject, intended audience, writer's purpose, and possible position. Such prediction activities are important because they make learners conscious of the assumptions they bring to reading. After reading, initial expectations can be compared with the actual content, helping students recognize how titles, visual elements, and contextual information influence interpretation [1].

During reading, attention should first be directed toward establishing an accurate understanding of the text. Critical evaluation without sufficient comprehension may result in unsupported judgments. Students should therefore identify the central argument, major supporting ideas, relevant examples, and relationships among different parts of the text. Vocabulary should preferably be interpreted through context whenever possible rather than translated automatically. This strengthens learners' ability to infer meaning and prevents excessive dependence on

dictionaries.

Once the basic meaning has been established, analytical questions can be introduced. Students may identify statements that function as facts, opinions, interpretations, predictions, or recommendations. They can examine what evidence is presented and whether that evidence is directly relevant to the writer's claims. For instance, statistical information may appear persuasive, but critical readers should consider its source, context, sample, and relationship to the conclusion being presented. Similarly, references to experts should be evaluated according to their relevance and credibility rather than accepted solely because an authority is mentioned.

The analysis of linguistic choices is another important dimension of critical reading. Language does not merely communicate information; it can also influence how information is perceived. Teachers can ask learners to identify emotionally loaded vocabulary, intensifiers, evaluative adjectives, modal verbs, passive constructions, generalizations, and expressions of certainty or uncertainty. Comparing expressions such as "may lead to," "is likely to cause," and "will inevitably cause" demonstrates how grammatical and lexical choices communicate different degrees of certainty. Through such analysis, learners become more sensitive to the relationship between language and persuasion [5].

Comparative reading is especially effective when authentic texts are used. Two reports discussing the same event can be compared in terms of headline, vocabulary, selected information, source attribution, organization, and conclusion. Students may discover that texts can describe the same event differently without necessarily containing direct factual contradictions. One source may emphasize economic consequences, while another focuses on environmental or social implications. Such activities help learners understand perspective and framing and reduce the tendency to treat a single text as a complete representation of reality.

Authentic texts also contribute to the development of inferential reading. Real-world texts frequently leave information unstated because writers assume shared cultural, social, or contextual knowledge. Learners must therefore infer relationships, attitudes, intentions, and

implications from textual evidence. Teachers can support this process by asking students to justify each inference with specific words, sentences, or structural features from the text. Requiring textual evidence is crucial because it distinguishes critical interpretation from unsupported personal opinion.

Post-reading activities should extend analysis into evaluation and independent response. Students can assess the strength of an argument, write a short response supporting or challenging the writer's position, reconstruct an argument from another perspective, or identify information required before reaching a conclusion. They can also create alternative headlines or rewrite a paragraph in more neutral language. These activities demonstrate that critical reading is closely connected with critical writing because learners must transform their interpretation into a logically supported response [3].

One productive classroom procedure is to organize analysis around a sequence of questions: What does the text say? How does the writer communicate the message? Why might the writer present the issue in this way? What evidence is provided? What is missing? How reliable is the source? What alternative interpretation is possible? What conclusion can be justified? This progression prevents learners from moving directly from surface comprehension to subjective judgment. Instead, evaluation becomes an evidence-based process.

The selection of authentic texts requires careful pedagogical judgment. Authenticity should not be confused with uncontrolled difficulty. A text may be linguistically authentic while remaining unsuitable for a particular group because of excessive technical vocabulary, cultural assumptions, length, or syntactic complexity. Teachers should consider learners' proficiency level, educational background, interests, learning objectives, and familiarity with the topic. For intermediate learners, shorter news reports, reviews, advertisements, interviews, and public information texts may provide appropriate challenges. More advanced students can work with editorials, analytical articles, essays, reports, and selected academic texts.

Task difficulty can also be adjusted without substantially modifying the original text. Rather than simplifying every linguistic feature, teachers can provide contextual

information, gloss only essential vocabulary, divide the text into meaningful sections, or design questions of increasing complexity. This preserves exposure to authentic discourse while providing sufficient instructional support. Scaffolding should gradually decrease as learners become more independent readers.

Another important advantage of authentic materials is their contribution to motivation. Learners are often more willing to engage with texts when they recognize a connection between classroom reading and real communication. Reading an actual review, news story, university webpage, or public announcement gives students a practical reason to interpret English. Nevertheless, authenticity alone does not guarantee motivation. The topic must be meaningful to learners, and the task should provide a clear intellectual purpose. A carefully selected short text accompanied by a challenging analytical question may generate deeper engagement than a long authentic article without a focused task.

Digital literacy has made critical reading even more important. Online readers encounter sponsored content, algorithmically promoted information, misleading headlines, edited images, unverified claims, and texts in which factual reporting and personal opinion may be difficult to distinguish. Consequently, critical reading instruction should include source evaluation. Students need to examine authorship, publication context, evidence, references, date of publication, and consistency with other credible sources. These practices connect English reading instruction with broader information literacy while remaining closely related to language learning.

The teacher's role in this process changes from explaining the meaning of every sentence to facilitating inquiry. Instead of immediately providing interpretations, teachers can ask learners to explain how they reached a conclusion and what textual evidence supports it. Classroom discussion becomes particularly useful because students may produce different interpretations of the same authentic text. When these interpretations are compared and evaluated against textual evidence, learners discover that disagreement can be academically productive when arguments are justified.

Assessment should similarly reflect the multidimensional nature of critical reading. Traditional multiple-choice comprehension tests can measure certain aspects of understanding but may not adequately demonstrate a learner's ability to evaluate arguments or justify interpretations. Assessment can therefore include short analytical responses, evidence-based questions, source comparison, identification of assumptions, argument evaluation, and reflective writing. Criteria should consider accuracy of comprehension, relevance of evidence, logical reasoning, awareness of perspective, and clarity of justification.

The systematic use of authentic English texts can therefore transform reading instruction from a predominantly receptive activity into an intellectually active process. Its effectiveness depends on the interaction between appropriate text selection, purposeful questioning, linguistic analysis, comparative reading, source evaluation, and structured opportunities for independent judgment. Authentic materials provide learners with genuine examples of how language operates in social contexts, while critical reading strategies teach them how to approach those examples analytically rather than passively.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, developing critical reading skills through authentic English texts is both a linguistic and educational necessity in contemporary EFL teaching. Authentic materials expose learners to real language, diverse perspectives, natural discourse patterns, and genuine communicative intentions. More importantly, when supported by carefully designed activities, they encourage learners to move beyond understanding what a text says toward examining how, why, and with what evidence it communicates its message. Effective instruction should therefore combine comprehension with inference, linguistic analysis, evaluation of evidence, comparison of perspectives, and source assessment. Through regular and progressively challenging engagement with authentic texts, EFL learners can become more independent readers who are capable not only of understanding English-language information but also of questioning, evaluating, and using it responsibly.

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