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## **IMPROVING EFL STUDENTS' CRITICAL READING AND WRITING SKILLS: A PROPOSED SYLLABUS AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS**

*Research article*

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# IMPROVING EFL STUDENTS' CRITICAL READING AND WRITING SKILLS: A PROPOSED SYLLABUS AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS

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## Abstract

The present study aims to suggest a syllabus for a critical reading and writing course for pre-service EFL teachers at the department of English language teaching, and to investigate its effectiveness. The syllabus was designed according to the frameworks of critical reading and writing, and needs analysis conducted with lecturers of reading and writing skill courses and their syllabi. In this quasi-experimental study, one-group pre-test/post-test design was used. Data were collected through pre and post-tests using argumentative essays and the Questionnaire on Critical Thinking Ability in English Reading and analyzed using a paired-samples t-test. The results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the pre and post-test scores of critical reading and writing. Consequently, it could be concluded that the suggested syllabus improved students' critical reading and writing skills. Accordingly, some suggestions were recommended for further studies.

*Keywords:* Argumentative essay, critical reading, critical writing, EFL, pre-service teachers

## 1. Introduction

Today, critical perspective apparently has come into prominence due to the abundance of information with the advancement of technology, but indeed gaining a critical view appeared when Socrates gave importance in questioning before accepting ideas as worthy to believe in. On the basis of Socrates's inquisition to adopt an idea, it can be seen that critical thinking is evaluating whether the claims are true to be convinced (Epstein & Kernberger, 2006). After Socrates, critical thinking was defined in a variety of ways. Ennis (1993) defines critical thinking as "reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do" (p. 180). This definition highlights the fact that critical thinking takes part in everyday life because people's behaviors rely on what they believe, and human actions depend on what human beings decide to do (Paul, Elder & Bartell, 1997). Apart from defining critical thinking in daily life occasions, Facione and other experts at Delphi panel defined critical thinking in an educational setting by referring to the core elements of critical thinking such as interpretation, analysis, inference, explanation, evaluation, and self-regulation to empower students' critical thinking ability (Facione, 2013). Conceptualization of critical thinking in this panel gained a markedly comprehensible frame. On the other hand, Sumner (1940) also accepted a need for critical thinking both in education and in life. He assumed that criticism helps learners to find if something corresponds to reality, so it is the main welfare in which human beings should be trained as he considered critical faculty as an outcome of training and education (as cited in Paul, Elder & Bartell, 1997). In that respect, classrooms are places where critical thinking (CT)

can be acquired and learned. There are many ways to acquire CT skills in the classroom. One of them is critical reading practices. According to Cottrell (2005) CT can be applied in written materials, like reading passages, as it can be used in any context (Cottrell, 2005). With that explanation, critical reading can be considered as a reflection and subordinate of critical thinking. Using reading passages like newspaper or journals bring real life into the classroom. Hence, it is a manifestation of applying analysis skills into people's life. In this respect, it can be distinguished from ordinary reading. Most of the time, readers just read the text without understanding its underlying messages. While ordinary readers focus on thesis sentences or central messages, critical readers go beyond (Jensen & Scharff, 2019) by questioning, analyzing, and evaluating information to draw a sensible conclusion about a text (Varaporn & Sitthitikul, 2019), and comprehending implicit meaning of a text (Aghajani & Gholamrezapour, 2019). Apart from analysing the text, another aspect of critical reading is to focus on writers. During the process of critical reading, the reader should be aware of what the writer's attitude is, why a text has been written, and how it has been written (Akyol, 2011). When understanding the writers' purposes, the reader does not stick to the writer's opinions. Instead, the reader evaluates, expresses personal judgment on the value, the quality, the accuracy, and the reliability of what is read (Smith, 1969). Similarly, according to Poulson and Wallace (2004), critical readers consider the purpose of the author in writing, have a sceptical stance to the author's opinions, and check whether the passage is relevant to their purpose. Hence, readers need to analyse the passage in detail and need to look at the whole picture including both sides in terms of the text and the authors.

Possessing critical reading skills may be considered as a need-to-improve among learners. According to the studies in the Turkish context (İçmez, 2005; Aslan, 2017; Köse, 2006), the reason why critical reading is not developed is due to the testing system in which students are expected to read and understand texts and find the best answer among the options as a negative backwash of the exams. It can be inferred that reading and writing courses do not have an important role in building a critical perspective towards a reading passage or writing an essay. Hence, in the literature, there are some studies revealing the need of critical reading and writing (Balıkçı, 2012; Ünal, 2014; Maltepe, 2016; Hairston-Dotson & Incera, 2022). Based on these studies, it can be understood that when learners begin to study at the department of ELT, they may need to improve their critical reading and writing thoroughly as they may not have acquired a critical perspective during high school times. Hence, some studies suggest that critical reading and writing courses should be included in the curriculum of ELT departments (Balıkçı, 2012; Ünal, 2014). Having such a course based on critical reading and writing is a chance for pre-service English teachers to gain the ability to read texts and write essays critically and to convey it to their students in the future. As a result of the lack of learners' critical reading and writing skills and the studies above which showed a necessity for teaching these skills, the main purpose of the current study is to suggest a syllabus for learners to acquire critical reading and writing skills and investigate its effectiveness.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Critical Reading and Writing

Human beings can receive much information with the advancement in technology where a high volume of information is presented in front of us. With the abundance of information, we should develop a critical perspective to understand whether the information is a fact or just an opinion; true or false. Hence, critical reading is crucial to diagnose true or false assumptions when people read a passage or news. Being critical may have a negative meaning among most people, so it should be defined thoroughly to draw more precise and accurate understanding about it.



Critical reading has been explained in many ways in the related literature, but there is no consensus about it. Wolf, King and Huck (1968) indicate that the total framework of reading includes critical reading as a sub-set of comprehension skills. According to them, critical reading “encompasses a set of skills which can be distinguished for the purposes of instruction and measurement, but it is not completely separable from other reading skills” (p. 440). It can be interpreted from this view that critical reading has its distinct features compared to other reading skills. It is the ability to recognize the author's purpose or point of view, distinguish between fact and opinion, and make inferences (Darch & Kameenui, 2014), and judge how a text is argued (Knott, 2012). Critical reading is a technique in which one discovers ideas and information within a text (Kurland, 2000).

Beyond critical reading definition, Poulson and Wallace (2004, p.7) propose the features of critical readers as they (1) consider the authors' purpose in writing the account; (2) examine the structure of the account to help you understand how the authors develop their argument; (3) seek to identify the main claims the authors make in putting forward their argument; (4) adopt a sceptical stance towards the authors' claims, checking whether they support convincingly what they assert; (5) question whether the authors have sufficient backing for the generalisations they make.

As critical reading is defined in multiple ways, it is required to take place how critical reading is explained in the study. In the light of the definitions given above, operational definition of critical reading for this study is that it is the ability to distinguish facts and opinions, to summarize and paraphrase, to make inferences in a text, to differentiate the kinds of reasoning, to find premises, arguments, and conclusion in the texts, to make an inference about background of a writer by considering writing styles, to figure out the mood of a text and the purpose of a writer, and to be aware of fallacies.

There are studies on critical reading in the literature (Sultan et al, 2017; Varapon & Sitthitikul, 2019; İçmez, 2009; Balıkçı, 2015; Küçükoğlu, 2008; Ünal, 2014; Bardakçı & Çakır, 2014; Ulu, Tuncay & Baş, 2017). Some studies cared for self-efficacy and self-sufficiency of the learners' critical reading without training the learners (Ulu, Tuncay & Baş, 2017; Küçükoğlu, 2008). It was found in both studies that the learners found themselves considerably sufficient about critical reading. Besides the research based on the perceptions of the learners, there are some studies the researchers of which gave the training and taught the strategies of critical reading skills, and they investigated its effect on the learners' critical reading skills (Ünal, 2014; Bardakçı & Çakır, 2014; İçmez, 2009; Sultan et al, 2017; Varapon & Sitthitikul, 2019). As the results of the studies, there was an increase in the ability to read the texts critically. Other studies were based on discourse analysis in critical reading skills (Balıkçı, 2015; Hazaea & Alzubi, 2017). The researchers determined criteria for the analysis, and during the course, they considered such criteria. The findings of the studies varied according to the discourse types in written works of the learners.

Apart from critical reading, critical writing is another skill that the researchers were willing to investigate. We need to support our personal view and develop an argument according to the types of writing. In this respect, critical writing enables us to support writing through concrete evidence, examples, and information from sources. There are limited definitions on critical writing. A simple definition is that it is a kind of writing which develops an argument as a result of analysing and evaluating more than one source (Smith, 2019). It is understood from the definition that only one source does not make your writing critical enough to support an idea because there may be more than one completely different ideas or evidence which should be considered, and critical reading is crucial in the process of evaluation and analysis of different perspectives to write something critically. In the literature, its types, especially

argumentative writing, are defined and studied more than itself. In this study, argumentative essay is used to develop students' critical writing skills.

Previous research on critical writing investigated mostly argumentative essay writing in the scope of analysis of written materials in terms of the discourse markers, organizational patterns, cohesion patterns or intertextuality without showing the teaching steps of argumentative essay writings (Ahangari & Sepehran, 2014; Schneer, 2014; Can, 2006; Koç, 2018). In the literature, the focus was on the linguistic aspects of the argumentative essays rather than its pedagogical implications in writing classes. On the other hand, there were two studies investigating the differences between the native English speakers and Turkish learners of English, which shared the similarities in terms of the participant (Can, 2006; Koç, 2018).

## 2.2. Syllabi

As syllabus design is one of the core components of the current study, the definition of the term syllabus must be stated clearly. According to Lewis (1993), a syllabus explains the content of a teaching programme, and what is to be learned is involved in the syllabus. In other words, it summarizes the contents that learners will be taught (Yalden, 1987) and the selection and grading of content (Nunan, 1988). Syllabi can be seen as guides to meet the educational needs and goals, and they comfort teachers about teaching because they prepare themselves for the course.

In designing syllabus, some procedures must be followed. For instance, Nunan (1988) suggests four major points to be taken into consideration while a syllabus is being prepared: needs analysis, goal and objective setting, the selection and grading of content, and the selection and grading of learning tasks. The starting point of the syllabus design is needs analysis because designers need to gather information about the learners and the subjects. After getting the information, the next step is to determine the goals and aims of the course that are suitable for the students and the course. It is also important to specify the syllabus type as it helps us decide the materials and the activity types related to the course objectives and goals. There are different kinds of syllabus types such as grammatical/structural syllabi, functional syllabi, lexical syllabi, situational syllabi, topic-based syllabi, skill-based syllabi, content-based syllabi, and task-based syllabi. The focus points of the course for which a syllabus was designed through the present study are skills of reading and writing. Therefore, among the syllabus types, the researchers chose skill-based syllabus which is used to teach specific language skills (Reilly, 1988).

## 3. Statement of the Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of the present study was to prepare a suggested syllabus for the Critical Reading and Writing course. As this course was lectured for the first time in the fall semester in the 2019- 2020 academic year, the suggested syllabus which the researcher designed could be the first example syllabus for the lecturers who would give this course. Especially, as critical reading and writing have a range of subtitles, the syllabus would guide the lecturers to find their path during this course. Moreover, some studies (Balıkçı, 2012; Ünal, 2014) suggest a revision in the curriculum in ELT to include Critical Reading and Writing course, and their suggestion has turned into a reality, therefore; this suggested syllabus for Critical Reading and Writing course would help for those who are interested in.

Considering the purposes mentioned above, research questions are generated for the study.

- 1) Does the suggested syllabus for critical reading and writing course improve the students' critical reading skills?





- 2) Does the suggested syllabus for critical reading and writing course improve the students' critical writing skills?

#### **4. Method**

The present study applied one-group pretest-posttest design as quantitative method since there was only one group for the course. According to Frankel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012), one-group pretest-posttest design is a quasi-experimental research design where a single group is measured or observed not only after but also before a treatment. Both pre and post tests were implemented to the participants who attended the class regularly in order to understand the effectiveness of the suggested syllabus.

This study includes two phases in which the former part is the process of designing a syllabus and the later part is to test the syllabus to understand whether it increases the participants' critical reading and writing skills. Hence, in the method part, the researchers also clarify how to design a syllabus by focusing on needs analysis, the strategies, and the rationale behind the course content. In the other phase, the implementation of the syllabus and its evaluation are investigated and explained.

##### **4.1. Participants**

The target population in the study was students in the department of English Language Teaching. 57 sophomore students were chosen for the research because the course Critical Reading and Writing is a second-year course. However, the population decreased to 51 as six outliers were removed from the study in the analysis of critical reading, which constituted 30 females and 21 males. On the other hand, as for critical writing, while the researchers were collecting the data for the pre-test, some of the students did not want to write or some of them wrote only one paragraph, so the population of samples in essay writing was 26 students, 24 females and two males.

Non-random sampling model was used in this study. Under the title of non-random sampling, convenience sampling was selected. Frankel, Wallen, & Hyun (2012) states that "a convenience sample is a group of individuals who are available for a study" (p. 99), only those who attended the class regularly and were volunteer to participate to the study were included in the process of data analysis.

##### **4.2. Instruments**

Two data collection tools were used for critical reading and writing. The questionnaire for critical reading and argumentative essay for critical writing was used as pre and post-test and in an argumentative essay, a holistic rubric was used to evaluate students' pre and post writing scores.

###### **4.2.1. The Questionnaire on Critical Thinking Ability in English Reading**

One data collection tool used in this research was the questionnaire on Critical Thinking Ability in English Reading which measures critical thinking ability in English reading including explanation, inference, evaluation, interpretation, analysis, and self-regulation. The questionnaire was designed on the basis of Facione's List of Core Six CT Skills by Jie, Yuhong, Yuan (2014). The questionnaire has 22 items with a five-point Likert scale (5=agree; 4=basically agree; 3=hard to say; 2=not quite agree; 1=disagree). According to a previous study (Aghanjani & Gholamrezapour, 2019), the Questionnaire on Critical Thinking Ability in English Reading has good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .91. In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .88 in the pre-test and .80 in the post-

test. Acceptable values are above .70, but values above .80 are preferable and good (Pallant, 2010); therefore, the reliability of the test was good and preferable.

#### **4.2.2. Argumentative Essay**

At the beginning of the course, the learners were asked to write an argumentative essay as a pre-test, and after they took instruction about both critical reading and argumentative essay, the post-test of argumentative essay was administered. The topics students wrote on included “First language usage in English teaching” and “Non-native or native English teachers in teaching English”. The scores of the essays were evaluated by using a holistic rubric.

In order to check the inter-rater reliability of the scores of argumentative essays, the intraclass correlation coefficient was used. According to Field (2009), the intraclass correlation assesses the consistency between the ratings. If intraclass correlation values are between 0.75 and 0.9, it indicates good reliability (Koo & Li, 2015). The results of inter-rater reliability are .807 in pre-test and .885 in post-test, so it shows good inter-rater reliability of argumentative essay scores.

#### **4.3. Data Analysis**

Data analysis was performed using SPSS statistical software program. Normality statistics was implemented to understand whether the analysis was going to be done through parametric or non-parametric tests. As the data of the pre and post-tests were normally distributed, the statistic was parametric. According to the research design, paired-samples t-test was used to interpret the data since it is used when the comparison of the mean scores of the same group of people on two different occasions is done (Pallant, 2010). In addition, as the scores of argumentative essays were evaluated through a rubric by two raters, the inter-rater reliability was measured. The results of the present study are discussed in the following section.

#### **4.4. The Procedure of Designing the Suggested Syllabus**

The key part to design a suggested syllabus was to collect data from needs analysis. For needs analysis, the researchers had an interview with the instructors of reading and writing courses in the previous year, which the learners were the participants in this study. Also, the lecturers’ lesson plans were investigated to have an understanding about how reading and writing courses were lectured, and which strategies or essay types were used. In accordance with the results from needs analysis, the content of the course, the topics and terms related to critical reading and writing were determined to be included in the lesson. The results of the needs analysis are given below.

##### **4.4.1. Needs Analysis on Critical Reading**

The participants took a reading skill course through both fall and spring terms in the first year of the university. To understand whether they learned terms or did some practices related to critical reading, the researchers had an interview with the instructor, and the syllabus of the reading skill course was analysed. The course aimed to enable students to understand the topic of the text, summarize, find thesis and supporting sentences, improve selective reading skill, reinforce critical thinking skill, and identify odd sentences in the paragraphs. After all these objectives were taken into consideration, it was found that the terms related to critical reading skill were not even included in the course content; however, inference questions took part during the course, which aimed to foster critical thinking skill. Besides, finding or evaluating the arguments in the passages was not the focus of the course, so critical reasoning and fallacies

were not included in the syllabus. The following excerpt exemplifies that the focus of the course was not on improving learner's critical reading skills.

The excerpt 1 explained that

*"I just practiced inference questions to improve learners' critical thinking skill and most of the activities were based on comprehension questions."*

Analysing the lesson plan and the interview with the lecturer showed that there were few activities pointing to critical thinking skill, not specifically critical reading skill. Hence, the learners have not received any courses to improve critical stance during reading.

#### **4.4.2. Needs Analysis on Critical Writing**

The participants took a writing skill course through both first and second terms in the first year of the university. The information for the course was taken by doing an interview with the lecturer of the course. The main purpose of the interview was to find out whether the essay writings included critical writing in the class. Expert opinions were received for the questions in the interview. During the interview, the lecturer talked about the course content and the learners' academic success.

The excerpt 2 said that

*"We studied the argumentative essay writing. However, the learners were not successful in writing the argumentative essay. Especially, they had difficulty in giving an opposing idea and refuting it."*

The lecturer told about the techniques that she used while teaching argumentative essay writing by explaining that

*"I showed an example argumentative essay, and we looked at every paragraph. Then, I expected them to write."*

After the interview, it was noticed that argumentative essay was taught in terms of critical writing for two weeks. The lecturer told the teaching method of argumentative essay writing.

As a result of the needs analysis, it was found that the learners did not practice critical reading and they were not successful in learning argumentative writing. Hence, some basic and crucial terms in terms of critical reading and writing should be included in the lesson plans. As a result of the needs analysis, the suggested syllabus was designed, and the researchers received expert opinions before the implementation of the syllabus.

Another point in designing a syllabus is to decide what syllabus type should be chosen. According to Kranche (1987), the ability to use language in specific ways is partially dependent on the need for specific skills. It is understood that the aim of the course was to improve the specific skills in reading and writing as the course name suggests. Regarding this notion and the name of the course, the researchers chose skills-based syllabus that was highly based on critical reading and writing skills.

The syllabus has its content according to the books on critical reading and writing (Barnet & Bedau, 2014; Poulson & Wallace, 2004; Carter, 2011), and researchers' explanations (Darch & Kameenui, 2014; Valle, 2014; Knott, 2014) like distinguishing facts and opinions, summarizing and paraphrasing, making inferences in a text, differentiating the kinds of reasoning, finding premises, arguments, and conclusion in the texts, making an inference about the background of a writer by considering writing styles, figuring out the mood of a text and the purpose of a writer, and being aware of fallacies. These features include in the questionnaire



based on Facione's (2013) critical thinking skills, which shows us that critical reading and thinking is inseparable. A part of the suggested syllabus is given Appendix 1.

Basing on the needs analysis, the schema below illustrates the contents of every week.

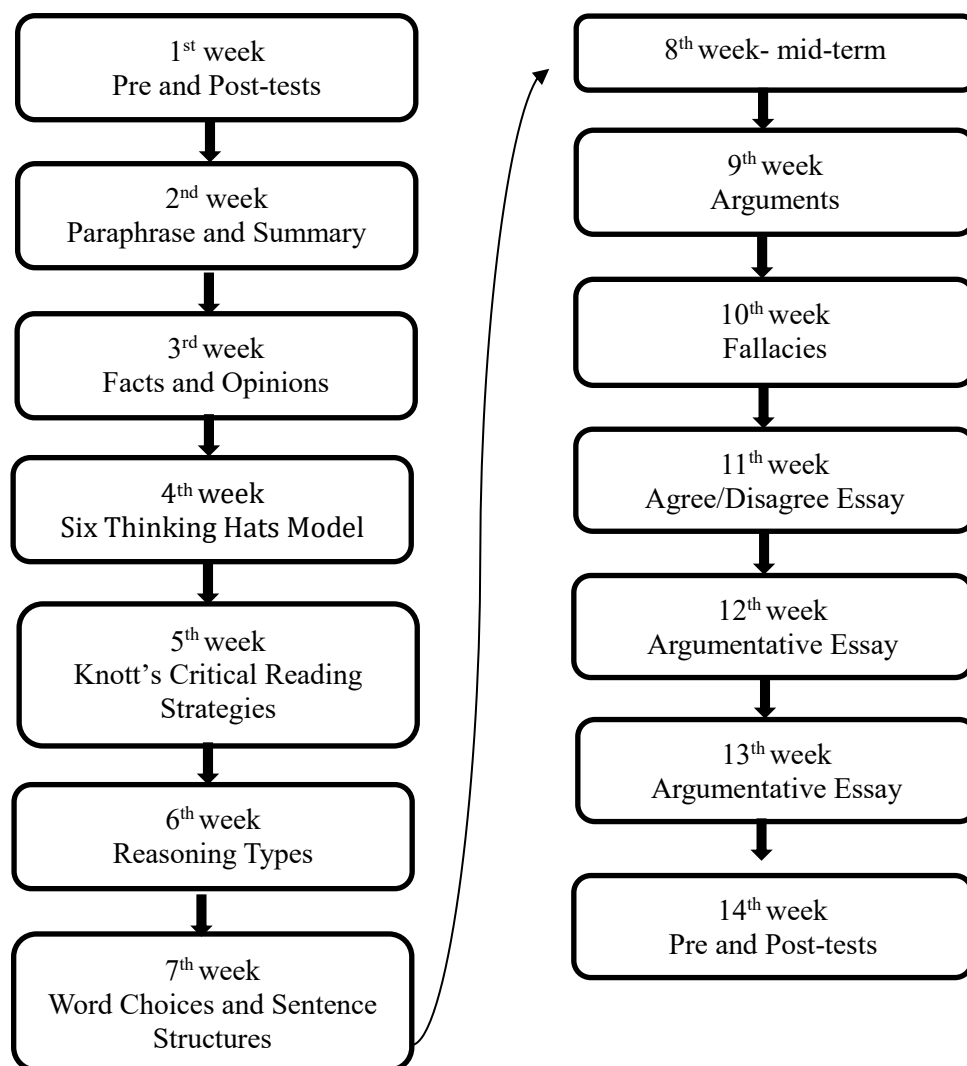


Figure 3. The procedure of the course

In the first week, it was aimed to remind the learners of basic reading skills such as scanning, skimming, finding a thesis statement and supporting ideas. Then, the participants improved the critical reading skills in the remaining seven weeks. Firstly, students were able to distinguish fact and opinion by practicing in a reading text. In the fourth week, the lesson focused on having a different point of view by considering an event, so six thinking hats model was presented in the classroom. In the next week, the lesson was organized according to Knott's (2012) critical reading strategies which were shown to the students by explaining how they can analyze a text step by step and what kind of questions should be asked to analyze. In the following week, the learners learned types of reasoning, inductive and deductive reasoning, by giving examples. Then, the aim of the seventh week was to understand the author's background knowledge in choosing words and in producing sentences like the author's nationality. After this lesson, one week was allocated to the mid-term exam. In the upcoming week, the focus was on argumentation, which the learners read and answered the questions by finding and

outlining the arguments in the given text. The subject of the last lesson as for critical reading was fallacies which were shown and the learners were asked whether they know or not, and then, the fallacy types were taught. As there are many fallacy types, the researchers chose the most popular ones and the ones related to the text discussed in the class. All subjects taught in critical reading courses were supported by reading passages. As for critical writing, as the previous teacher of the participants in the writing class told that the learners were not successful in writing an argumentative essay, two weeks were the practice to support their ideas by writing an agreement and disagreement essay, and in the last two weeks, the participants dealt with writing a classical argumentative essay. In the last week, the post-test was administered for the last stage of course.

## 6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 6.1 The Results of the Normality Statistics

The first step in the data analysis was to check whether the test had normal distribution in the scores. Normality statistics is done to check whether the data is distributed normally, that is to say, if the majority of scores are placed in the middle of the distribution (Frankel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). To check the normal distribution of the data of the present study, values of skewness and kurtosis were utilized, skewness value was found as .025 in the pre-test and .376 in the post-test in critical reading, and as .277 in the pre-test and -.551 in the post-test in terms of critical writing; Kurtosis value was found as -.806 and -.721 in the post-test in critical reading, and as -1.030 in the pre-test and -.177 in the post-test with regard to critical writing. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2012), the acceptable range for kurtosis and skewness is between +1.5 and -1.5. In the current study, therefore, the data of the study showed normal distribution. In accordance with the results of the normality statistics, the data analysis followed through parametric statistic and was explained by answering the research questions below.

### 6.2. The Findings of the Research Questions

#### 1) *Does the suggested syllabus improve the students' critical reading skills?*

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the syllabus on students' critical reading on the data obtained through The Questionnaire on Critical Thinking Ability in English Reading. Table 1 presents the pre and post-tests results of the Questionnaire on critical thinking skill in English reading.

Table 1.

*T-test results of the scores of pre and post-test in questionnaire*

	N	Mean	Sd	df	t	p
<b>Pre-test</b>	51	85.94	7.58	50	-6.20	.000
<b>Post-test</b>	51	90.74	6.67			

**p<.01**

The results revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in students critical reading skills as their scores increased from pre-test ( $M = 85.94$ ,  $SD = 7.58$ ) to post-test ( $M = 90.74$ ,  $SD = 6.67$ ),  $t(50) = -6.19$ ,  $p < .01$  (two-tailed). When we look at the mean scores, the mean at pre-test was 85.94 and the mean at post-test was 90.74. Therefore, there was a significant increase in the scores from pre-test (prior to the instruction) to post-test (after the instruction).

The questionnaire includes six sub-categories which are interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation. The results enable us to evaluate the impact of the syllabus on these components.

**Interpretation:** As seen from Table 2, a paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the syllabus on students' interpretation.

Table 2.

*T-test results of the scores of pre and post-test in interpretation*

	N	Mean	Sd	df	t	p
<b>Pre-test</b>	51	20.15	2.04	50	-2.46	.017
<b>Post-test</b>	51	21.00	2.17			

**p<.05**

For the first sub-category which is interpretation, the t-test scores showed that there was a statistically significant increase from pre-test ( $M = 20.15$ ,  $SD = 2.04$ ) to post-test ( $M = 21.00$ ,  $SD = 2.17$ ),  $t(50) = -2.46$ ,  $p < .05$  (two-tailed).

**Inference:** Table 3 illustrates the impact of the syllabus on students' inferencing skill.

Table 3.

*T-test results of the scores of pre and post-test in inference*

	N	Mean	Sd	df	t	p
<b>Pre-test</b>	51	19.27	1.76	50	-2.72	.01
<b>Post-test</b>	51	20.19	2.30			

**p<.05**

According to the result, although there was a slight difference between mean scores of pre and post-test, there was a statistically significant increase from pre-test ( $M = 19.27$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ ) to post-test ( $M = 20.19$ ,  $SD = 2.30$ ),  $t(50) = -2.72$ ,  $p < .05$  (two-tailed).

**Analysis:** In order to understand whether the scores have differences in analysis, Table 4 presented to indicate the comparison between pre and post-test results.

Table 4.

*T-test results of the scores of pre and post-test in analysis*

	N	Mean	Sd	df	t	p
<b>Pre-test</b>	51	15.84	2.06	50	-3.07	.003
<b>Post-test</b>	51	16.84	1.92			

**p<.01**

The results of the analysis showed that there was a statistically significant increase in analyse from pre-test ( $M = 15.84$ ,  $SD = 2.06$ ) to post-test ( $M = 16.84$ ,  $SD = 1.92$ ),  $t(50) = -3.07$ ,  $p < .05$  (two-tailed). When the mean scores were compared, the learners improved analysis skills more than the other skills.

**Evaluation:** As is seen in Table 5, the students' evaluation skills were investigated.

Table 5.

*T-test results of the scores of pre and post-test data in evaluation*

	N	Mean	Sd	df	t	p
<b>Pre-test</b>	51	11.33	1.64	50	-3.25	.002
<b>Post-test</b>	51	12.17	1.50			

**p<.01**

By considering the results of mean scores and Sig. (2-tailed) value, it was found that there was a statistically significant increase from pre-test ( $M = 11.33$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ) to post-test ( $M = 12.17$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ),  $t(50) = -3.25$ ,  $p < .05$  (two-tailed).

**Explanation:** Table 6 indicates the impact of the syllabus on students' explanation.

Table 6.

*T-test results of the scores of pre and post-test in explanation*

	N	Mean	Sd	df	t	p
<b>Pre-test</b>	51	11.68	1.96	50	-2.76	.008
<b>Post-test</b>	51	12.43	1.48			

**p<.01**

Based on the results, there was a statistically significant increase from pre-test ( $M = 11.68$ ,  $SD = 1.96$ ) to post-test ( $M = 12.43$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ),  $t(50) = -2.76$ ,  $p < .05$  (two-tailed).  
P<.05

**Self-regulation:** As Table 7 shows, the results showed the impact of the syllabus on students' self-regulation.

Table 7.

*T-test results of the scores of pre and post-test data in self-regulation*

	N	Mean	Sd	df	t	P
<b>Pre-test</b>	51	7.64	1.23	50	-2.12	.038
<b>Post-test</b>	51	8.10	1.10			

**p<.05**

According to the analysis, there was a statistically significant increase from pre-test ( $M = 7.64$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) to post-test ( $M = 8.10$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ),  $t(50) = -2.12$ ,  $p < .05$  (two-tailed).

## 2) Does the suggested syllabus improve students' critical writing skills?

Paired samples t-test was used to identify the differences between the scores of students from the pre and post-test. Table 8 shows the results of scores obtained from the argumentative essays of the learners.

Table 8.

*T-test results of pre and post-test data in argumentative essay*

	N	Mean	Sd	df	t	P
<b>Pre-test</b>	26	40.76	22.96	25	-6.70	.000
<b>Post-test</b>	26	70.76	21.33			

**p<.01**

There was a statistically significant increase in argumentative essay scores from pre-test ( $M = 40.76$ ,  $SD = 22.96$ ) to post-test ( $M = 70.76$ ,  $SD = 21.33$ ),  $t(25) = -6.70$ ,  $p < .01$  (two-tailed). It can be understood that students improve their critical writing skills.

## 7. Discussion

Teachers should possess critical reading and writing skills when they practice reading activities in their classroom because learners need the help of their teacher to read texts critically (Correia, 2006). In order to acquire these skills, the curriculum of ELT departments should include critical reading and writing skills. A study conducted by Balıkçı (2012) supported the alteration of the Council of Higher Education in her study by recommending a revision in the curriculum of ELT departments to include a critical reading course. In accordance with this view, a critical reading and writing course was included in the curriculum of ELT departments in 2018 by the Council of Higher Education, so the present study tried to provide a syllabus for this revision and innovation in the curriculum.

The study not only suggested a syllabus for critical reading and writing course but also investigated its effectiveness. The contents of the syllabus were prepared by considering the needs analysis done with lecturers from the first year and by taking the procedures into consideration. The syllabus was implemented to 57 second-year students in the department of ELT, and the learners took a 12-week instruction based on critical reading and writing skills. One-group pretest-posttest design was applied in the current study. In order to collect the data, pre and post-tests were administered and analysed. The data analysis was interpreted in terms of two aspects which are critical reading and argumentative writing in response to the research questions. Since no similar studies suggesting a syllabus for the course were found, the discussion of the results was done by considering the course effectiveness with the previous studies on critical reading and writing.

The results of the current study showed that there was a statistically significant increase from pre-test to post-test. It can be concluded that the learners improved themselves in terms of critical reading, so the course had a positive impact on students. A similar impact of critical reading course was observed in a study (Ebrahimi & Rahimi, 2013) which indicated that the learners perceived the classroom learning environment more positively by implying critical reading materials. Another study carried out by Correia (2006) indicated that critical reading improved the level of students' participation and considered the result as the major benefits of the lesson on critical reading. In addition, Aslan (2017) found in her study that training students in terms of critical reading strategies enabled the learners to learn how to approach and analyse



a text. Similarly, research (Xiao-mei, 2009) indicated that by teaching critical reading, students improved their reading skill as well as argumentation in writing. Another similar study on critical reading done by Bardakçı and Çakır (2014) investigated the development of critical reading skills by raising awareness of reasoning fallacies which is one of the critical reading terms. After the instruction, when it was compared to see the differences between pre and post-test scores, the result showed that there was a significant increase in critical reading skill.

In the current study, writing an argumentative essay was reinforced by improving critical reading skill, and before the learners wrote an argumentative essay, they learned how to support their view by writing agreement and disagreement essays. The result of the data analysis showed a statistically significant increase in argumentative essay scores from pre-test to post-test. This finding is in line with the findings of similar studies mentioned in the literature part. For example, the study by Kolour and Yaghoubi (2015) investigated the impact of teaching critical thinking tasks, cause and effect relationship and divergent thinking, on coherence in argumentative essay writing among EFL learners, and they found that critical thinking tasks had a significant effect on learners' coherence in argumentative essay writing. Similarly, Alagözlü (2007) conducted a study on critical thinking and writing in L2, and it indicated that critical thinking skills overcame the difficulties in L2 writing. Bacha (2010) taught argumentative writing through five steps and at the end of the study, this way of teaching indicated improvement in students' argumentative structure and in argumentative writing. Similar to Bacha's study, the present study followed a step-by-step procedure to teach how to write an argumentative essay by supporting their opinions in writing agreement and disagreement essays.

## **8. Conclusion**

This study suggested a syllabus for a critical reading and writing course regarding the strategies indicated in the books of Nunan (1988) and Davis (2009). The course was designed through 12 weeks in the way that eight weeks were spared to integrate both critical reading and writing and four weeks were allotted to focus on essay types of critical writing. As the first step in designing a syllabus was needs analysis, the interviews with the lecturers of reading and writing skill courses from the previous year were held by the researchers. After the establishment of the syllabus, one-group pretest-posttest design was applied to test the syllabus' effectiveness. Considering the results from Questionnaire on Critical Thinking in English Reading, it is found that there was a statistically significant difference between the scores of pre and post-test of the questionnaire in general and its sub-categories. For critical writing, the learners wrote an argumentative essay in which the students added an opposing idea and refutation. When the results of scores in argumentative essays were considered, it was found that there was a significant increase in writing argumentative essays. In conclusion, the results of the current study showed that there was a significant increase in the scores of both critical reading and writing.

There are some limitations in the study. First of all, there was not a control group to identify the differences between two groups. However, in order to identify the effectiveness of the study and the differences between groups, a control group may be arranged in the further studies. The other limitation is that needs analysis done through the interviews with the lecturers of reading skills and writing skill courses, so the syllabus did not include learners' opinions. In the further research, before designing syllabus, the needs and notion of the learners may be included in the preparation of the syllabus. Although critical reading and writing were integrated during the treatment, four lessons were allocated to critical writing only. Thus, the learners could not have a chance to practice other critical writing types.

Critical reading enables professional ability and learning skills (Sultan et al., 2017). By looking at the overall results of the study, it can be concluded that the improvement of the learners' critical reading and writing skills may make contributions on teaching reading and writing skills by arranging the activities according to the levels of their learners when they become English teachers. As critical reading and writing is a need in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, such skills may be included in course books in EFL classes. Furthermore, this study may be thought that the syllabus may be a suggestion about the procedures and techniques for the course and it may be an example for further studies.

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## Appendix 1

### Week 2

Themes	Online Education
Time Duration	2 hours
Population	57
Integrated Skills	Reading, writing, speaking, listening
Materials	Power point and a reading passage
Objectives	Students will be able to, <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. find thesis and topic sentences and supporting ideas in a text.</li> <li>2. learn how to summarize a text and make a summary of the given text.</li> <li>3. learn what paraphrasing is and how to paraphrase sentences and paraphrase the given sentences and paragraphs.</li> <li>4. distinguish between summary and paraphrase.</li> </ol>
Pre-reading	The learners describe the pictures and state their opinions about the education types.
While-reading	There is a paragraph that students read and answer the questions and using the paragraph students find the thesis statements, main ideas and supporting ideas apart from answering the questions.
Post-reading	The student are given short paragraphs and expected to paraphrase and make a summary of the sentences.

### Week 3

Themes	Fact and Opinion
Time Duration	2 hours
Population	57
Integrated Skills	Reading, writing, speaking, listening
Materials	Power point and a reading passage
Objectives	Students will be able to; <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. distinguish the differences between opinion and fact and find the differences at the sentence and paragraph level.</li> <li>2. figure out the transitions used for facts.</li> <li>3. produce fact and opinion sentences.</li> </ol>
Pre-reading	There are some sentences based on fact and opinions. It is asked to learners to distinguish. The learners are asked about social media and they share their point of views.
While-reading	The text including the fact and opinion will be given to the students. First, students will skim and scan the text The text has written on a magazine the topic of which is about fact vs. opinions on social media. Students encounter with the real-life situation in terms of facts and opinions

	Students answer the question to judge the comments typed on the social media.
Post-reading	Students write 5 sentences including both fact and opinion statements on social media and then, they will check them with their pair.