Effectiveness of the Interactive Perusall Platform in Developing Critical Reading Skills of Middle School Students

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Abstract
The current study aimed to determine the effectiveness of employing the interactive online platform Perusall in developing the critical reading skills of seventh grade students in the State of Qatar. To achieve the goal of the study, the researchers applied a questionnaire to curriculum and teaching methods experts in order to determine critical reading skills appropriate for seventh graders, and then apply the critical reading test to measure six skills: interpretation skill, cause-effect skill, the skill of detecting the author's bias and prejudice, and reading evaluation skill. The study sample consisted of (36) students from the seventh grade. They were divided into groups: the experimental group included (18) students and the control group included of (18) students. The subject unit was taught the experimental group students using the Perusall interactive platform. The subject unit was also taught to the control group students using the common traditional school method.The results of the study showed that there were statistically significant differences in the critical reading skills test between the experimental group and the control group in favor of the experimental group that used the Perusall platform in teaching. Through the findings, the researchers recommended conducting similar studies on a sample larger than the current study. They also recommended using Perusall platform to develop critical writing skills.
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1. Introduction
Language is divided into two linguistic dimensions: reception (listening, reading) and production (speaking and writing). Reading skill is one of the language skills through which persons can see what others write. It is not important that the persons can read only; rather, they should be critical readers; So that can distinguish between facts and misleading opinions. The reading process is very important to the readers, as the readers evaluate the text while reading. Moreover, Critical reading is important for the reader's critical thinking. (Güneş & Güneş, 2017, 961). Critical reading is to evaluate the validity of various sources and determine their value based on clear criteria. Critical reading requires the use of four techniques: questioning, concluding, correlating and evaluating through questioning. (Razaghi et al, 2011, 1173). Critical reading is a high-level process. It includes the ability to read analysis and evaluate the readable text. It is not only analyzing the written text but also reading behind the written words and how the reading text was presented. (Huijie, 2010). The ability to read critically is essential in the twenty-first century as people now live in a world full of digital texts. Students must be empowered to evaluate what they read and must be aware that online published information is not always accurate. Therefore, students must be trained to deal with any text critically. (Varaporn & Sitthitikul, 2019, 81).

Critical reading plays an important role in students' academic life. Thus, in order to develop critical reading, we must use strategies for teaching critical reading to these students. (Suacillo, 2016, 611). Teachers need to develop teaching methods, methods, strategies, and electronic applications used in developing students' critical reading skills. Critical reading plays an important role in all subjects. It helps students in evaluating the readable text, distinguishing facts and opinions, draw generalizations from partial ideas, identifying contradicted ideas in the readable text, determine the writer's purpose, and evaluating some of the ideas contained in the text. (Zin et al, 2014; Akin, 2015; Thuy, 2015 Femilia, 2018).

2. Research Problem:
Many educational institutions have been affected by the current conditions related to COVID-19; as many

schools have tended to employ modern technologies. In addition, many of them are using various forms of e-learning in teaching different educational curricula. It provided all technical capabilities to facilitate communication with students anywhere. Modern educational technologies provided many technological tools that led to the development of teaching and attracting students' attention.

However, the field observations show that modern technologies are still neglected in teaching critical reading skills, some previous studies emphasized the importance of employing modern technologies in teaching critical reading to develop these skills. (Mulumba, 2016) (Mohammed, 2020). Reading skills are among language skills that need more study and attention. Despite the importance of critical reading, it was not given enough attention in schools. It is not directly emphasized in teaching practices that teachers use in classrooms. Some studies mentioned that students in different educational levels face many difficulties in critical reading skills while reading texts presented to them. Among these studies: (Oliveras et al, 2011) (Munawaroh, 2013) (Albeckay, 2014).

One of the researchers participating in this study also used observation and analysis of test results; he observed students' weakness in critical reading skills. He also noticed a lack of motivation among the students when they attend the Arabic language classes, especially the classes with few modern technologies. This prompted the researcher to notice students in other subjects and found their interest in courses that employ various technological means such as interactive whiteboard, computer, mobile phone, portable tablet, and educational electronic websites and platforms. These teaching practices have led to students' weakness in many linguistic aspects, including critical reading skills. This is the reason that prompted researchers to conduct the recent study.

3. Importance of the study:
The recent study focused on employing modern technologies in teaching to develop critical reading skills, attract students' interest in language skills and enhance students' motivations towards education. As well as encouraging students to use interesting and exciting modern technologies to attract their attention and motivate them towards learning different language skills.

4. Study Questions:
The current study aims to answer the following two questions:
1- What are appropriate critical reading skills for seventh grader students?
2- What is the effectiveness of employing Perusall platform in developing critical reading skills for seventh-grade students?

5. Theoretical Framework:
5.1. Perusall Platform:
Recently, the world has now turned to change education patterns that prevailed before Covid19. Many studies emphasized the importance of developing education, relying on modern technologies, focusing on the learner role and making him more interactive with various educational sources. The rapid technological growth has revolutionized the world of education. In light of the rapid development of modern technology, people and studies' lives have undergone great changes and traditional teaching is no longer able to meet the needs of teachers and students. (Lu, 2016) (Zarouk et al, 2019). Therefore, educational platforms that are concerned with the interaction between students, and the development of their language skills have appeared.

Zaitoun defined interactive platform as The sites concerned with providing electronic educational content through computer-based media and its networks to the learners in a way that allows them to actively interact with this content, the teacher and with their peers, whether immediately or eventually, as well as the ability to complete this learning inappropriate time, place and speed that suits their conditions and capabilities, as well as the possibility of managing this learning through these media. (Zaitoun, 2005, 24).

Interactive platforms can be procedurally defined as educational websites that provide interaction between the learner and educational content through video clips, computerized questions, electronic exercises, and hyperlinks, where the teacher can interact with all these materials anywhere and anytime through the internet. These sites aim to enhance learners' educational skills in an attractive interactive environment.

Perusall platform is one of the most important educational platforms that keep pace with the various changes of our time. Teachers can use it in teaching to encourage students to interact with each other positively. Perusall is a free platform that encourages learners to write down various comments. It promotes social interaction among students. Perusall contains educational practices to develop students' active reading. These practices improve students' reading levels by recording student comments and providing a social learning environment among students. (Clarke, 2019) (Woodward & Neunaber, 2020) (Biro, 2021).

Teachers can upload documents, books, and various educational resources to Perusall for students to view. Although student grading is not the primary goal of Perusall, the grading system is highly developed. It gives

value to student engagement by gathering data based on students' activities. (Cecchinato & Foschi, 2020, 9:11). Liberator's study (2017) confirmed that scoring on the Perusall platform aligns well with a teacher's evaluation of student comments. Perusall includes an integrated assessment tool that provides students and teachers with continuous feedback on how students participate in reading assignments. (Miller et al, 2018). Perusall has two features in teaching reading. The first is helping students to critically read and think about the subject matter. The second is allowing teachers to observe and interact with students. It also allows students to respond to peers' comments and questions on the topic of study. (McFarlin, 2020, 364) (Lee & Yeong, 2018).

The results of Carroll`s study (2019) concluded that the more students interacted with one another, the better is their performance. Perusall platform provides students with digital books, in addition to encouraging them to write comments related to this e-book. The results mentioned in the (Suhre et al, 2019) study also confirmed that Perusall can be considered an effective learning tool as it encourages students to participate positively in the lessons. Moreover, the more students are engaged in commenting assignments on the Perusall platform, the better is their score on exams. Cecchinato & Foschi (2020) state that students studying habits have changed from a very isolated experience to be a social one due to the use of the Perusall platform in teaching. Students can share their questions and answers on the topics with each other and with the teacher they are studying easily. Adams & Wilson (2020) confirmed that Perusall allowed students to post comments, ask questions, and respond to comments of other students. This made students not only interacting with the existing texts but also with each other.

5.2. Critical Reading Skills:

Due to its importance to learners, many previous studies focused on critical reading. It helps them to understand and criticize ideas in the reading text well. The importance of interaction between readers and written sources is indispensable during reading because critical reading allows readers to interpret, analyze, and evaluate arguments that the author has stated in written sources. (Alem, 2018). Critical reading has important objectives in dealing with readable texts. Kurland (2000) states several objectives of critical reading: defining the author's purpose, understanding the language of the text, and identifying biases in the text. It must be emphasized that all goals associated with critical reading cannot be achieved in one activity. They must be included regularly throughout students' school life. (Oliveras, 2011, 105).

Critical reading is a dynamic process, you cannot avoid being influenced by your prejudices and past experiences while reading. It is also important to recognize that authors have their own biases and beliefs. All of these elements affect your understanding of the text. The most important critical reading skill is extracting the author's goals. So that the reader can take it into account while evaluating the readable text. (Wallace & Wray, 2016, 34). Previous experiences play an important role in comprehending the text. It helps readers to interpret the text's ideas and readers try to link new experiences in the readable text with previous experiences preserved in their minds. The critical reading skill provides students with self-confidence. It helps them explore new sources of information such as reading books and exploring topics that have not been taught before. Critical reading allows students to use previous experiences to gain better text understanding (Rosdiana, 2016, 24). Students should be aware of the importance of interacting with the text in a meaningful way, which develops students' critical ability and increases students' awareness of mental processes during reading. This enables them to evaluate and reconsider their views. (Kohzadi, 2014, 63).

Teachers do not always focus on critical reading skills while teaching reading Students need to acquire critical reading skills to be better critical readers. (Abd Kadir et al, 2014, 208) We need educational practices that focus on students' ability to read the reading text critically. We must also support and develop students' critical reading skills to encourage them to respond to the texts instead of just reading them and to build meaning from their point of view (Mickelson, 2018, 2). It is very important to train students to use critical reading skills while reading till it becomes a habit in students' daily practices while reading texts.

The critical reading contains several sub-skills and students need these skills to become critical readers. These skills are: Distinguishing truth from opinion, interpreting semantics of words, discovering the author's point of view, recognizing misleading thinking, identifying propaganda methods in the text, pointing out statistical deception, and preparing conclusions, in addition to other factors in the text such as defining the author's goal, knowing the publishing time and policies and recognizing the type of target readers (Parded, 2007, pp: 28:33). There is also a set of sub-skills within critical reading (arranged from easiest to most difficult): the ability to identify similarities and differences, evaluate inferences, determine facts and opinions, evaluate generalizations, assess arguments strength, identify biased data, know materials related to the text, identify the author's motives and recognize assumptions hidden within the text. (Abdullah, 1998, 34).

Critical reading skills include many sub-skills including distinguishing between opinion and truth, the ability to comprehend the readable text, choose the text and evaluate it, organize the text, summarize the text, determine the relationships between text paragraphs, deduce the ideas contained in the text and reveal the author's bias. Students should read the readable text critically; try to anticipate what the author says. They should

read the text's title and introduction and find out what's in the author's mind. They should also review the maps, graphs, and charts included in the text. (PATEŞAN, 2014, 64). Students should try to understand what is behind the words and interpret the ideas in the text through previous experiences they have.

Questions that measure critical reading skills vary. For example, the SAT exam measures students' level of critical reading skills through three types of questions:
1- Vocabulary Questions: It focuses on defining the meanings of vocabulary through context.
2- Literal Comprehension Questions: It is concerned with determining information contained directly in the text.
3- Extended Reasoning Questions: They require analysis, evaluation, and compilation of information from the text. These types of questions involve discovering causes, making inferences, and analyzing. Most critical reading questions involve extended thinking (Hammond, 2005, 119).

Teaching critical reading is an important aspect of language teaching programs. It aims to develop comprehension and expression skills. Teachers need to be able to teach students critical reading. Critical reading practices (reading learning, teaching methods) should be incorporated into teacher preparation courses to teach it to students (Maltepe, 2016, PP: 170,180). They should employ modern technologies, teaching methods, and modern methods in teaching critical reading skills (Mohammed, 2020,17). Critical reading questions require a higher level of thinking, in addition to a higher level of language. It focuses on the skills of deduction, distinction, analysis, criticism, and evaluation.

Oliveras et al (2011) aimed to identify the critical reading difficulties that high school students face when they read newspaper articles that contain scientific content. The study emphasized the importance of critical reading in learning science throughout life. Munawaroh's (2013) study also emphasized the importance of critical reading in eleventh graders. The study stated that a set of measures must be taken to overcome the difficulty of understanding the text and that students spend a long time understanding the text well. Albeckay (2014) proposed a program to develop undergraduate students' weak skills in critical reading. The study confirmed that critical reading is closely related to students' proficiency in reading comprehension. The study recommended preparing training courses for teachers to help them teach critical reading skills to students.

Mulumba (2016) focused on the factors that impede students' ability to deal with readable text critically. It is interested in employing modern technologies to help students understand the text better. The study emphasized that the employment of modern technologies led to the development of students' understanding of the readable text, and the development of students' knowledge while learning the language. The results of Aghajani & Gholamrezapour (2019) also confirmed the existence of a relationship between critical thinking and critical reading. The study recommended giving students more opportunities to develop their critical thinking during the language learning process.

6. Methodology:
6.1. Research Design:
The researchers have taken into account the nature of the research and the objectives they are trying to achieve. They used the mixed approach. This mixed approach relies on collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data to provide convincing logical explanations and answers to research questions. Qualitative research methods include personal interviews, observation of the participants in the study sample, and taking notes. Quantitative research methods also include pretests, posttests, and questionnaires. The researchers combined the descriptive approach with the quantitative approach.

6.2. Study Sample:
The study sample is intermediate school students from Qatar Foundation for Education, Science, and Community Development in the State of Qatar, which is a quasi-governmental educational institution. It includes several schools teaching international curricula, in particular the IB Diploma. Approximately 700 male and female students, both Qatari and foreign students from Qatar Sidra Academy were selected. This study is concerned with students who study Arabic as a first language. The experimental sample included (18) students, while the included sample contained (18) students.

6.3. Study Procedures:
The researchers applied the critical reading skills pre-test to the two groups: experimental and control. To find out the significance of the differences between the two groups. The teaching was done using the Perusall platform on the students of the experimental group, while the students of the control group used the traditional method. Teaching took place from the first week of October 2020 AD until the first week of December 2020 AD; where the experiment lasted two full months.

The researchers used the Independent Samples T-Test to test the validity of this hypothesis and to determine the significance of the differences between the mean scores of the control group students and the experimental group students in the pre-test of critical reading skills. The pre-test was also applied after using the Perusall

platform with students of the experimental group and using traditional teaching with the control group.

7. Results

The researchers found that there is a convergence between the average scores of the students in experimental and control groups in the critical reading skills pretest. The average scores of the experimental group in the pretest were (3.39) and the average scores of the control group were (3.61). T-Test value was (- 0.396) which is a non-significant value at a significance level (0.05). This indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the students of the control group and the experimental group. The average scores of the students of the experimental group in the pre-test of critical reading skills. Accordingly, the null hypothesis was accepted. There are no statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \geq 0.05$) between the mean scores of the control group students and the average scores of the experimental group students in the pre-test of critical reading skills. By analyzing the results of the questionnaire on critical reading skills, the researchers found five appropriate skills for seventh-grade students: Interpretation, cause-effect, deduction, detecting the author's bias and prejudice, and reading evaluation skill.

8. Finding Interpretation

How effective is Perusall in developing the critical reading skills of seventh graders?

The researchers found that there were statistically significant differences at the level of ($\alpha \geq 0.05$) between the mean scores of the control group students and the average scores of the experimental group students in the post-test of critical reading skills for the benefit of the experimental group students. The researchers used Independent Samples T-Test to test the validity of this hypothesis and order to determine the significance of the differences between the mean scores of the control group students and the experimental group students in the post-test of critical reading skills, the results came as in the following table:

Table 1: T-Test values and the significance levels of the differences between the scores of the control group students and the experimental group students in the post-test of critical reading skills (n = 36).

Skills	experimental group (n=18)		control group (n=18)		T-Test values	Significance		Differences
	M	f	M	f				
Interpretation skill	2.33	0.594	1.28	0.575	5.419	0.000	Significance	in favor of experimental group
cause- effect skill	2.28	0.461	1.22	0.428	7.122	0.000	Significance	
deduction skill	2.39	0.502	1.28	0.752	5.215	0.000	Significance	
detecting the author's bias	2.33	0.686	0.89	0.583	6.807	0.000	Significance	
reading evaluation skill	2.39	0.608	1.11	0.583	6.438	0.000	Significance	
Post-test Total score.	11.72	1.904	5.78	1.927	9.311	0.000	Significance	

F = 34, 2.04 at a significance level of 0.05, 2.75 at a level of significance 0.01, 3.65 at the significance level of 0.001

Table (1) shows the difference between the average scores of students in the experimental and control groups in the post-test, where the average scores of the experimental group in the post-test reached (11.72), while the average scores of the control group reached (5.78), and the value of (T) was (9.311), which is a value that have a function at the level of significance (0.05) and also a function up to the level of significance (0.001); Which indicates the existence of significant differences between the mean scores of the students of the control group and the experimental group, and the average scores of the students of the experimental group in the post-test of critical reading skills, and accordingly, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted that: There are statistically significant differences at (α (0.05) Between the average scores of the control group students, and the average scores of the experimental group students in the post-test of critical reading skills for the benefit of the experimental group students.

The reason for these differences is due to the improvement that appeared on the experimental group, as a result of using the Perusall platform, which led to better critical reading skills in the experimental group which combined the new platform, in addition to collaborative work provided by the Perusall platform used in teaching with the experimental group. The platform allows students to exchange experiences and cooperation between

them. This led to an increase in comprehension and a higher mastery of the targeted skills. These results are in agreement with the studies of Carroll (2019), Suhre et al (2019), Adams & Wilson (2020), Biro (2021).

The researchers used Eta Squared (η2) to illustrate the effect value of using the platform on the students' degrees in the post-test. The following table illustrates the values of (1η2) and the effect value.

Table 2: (η2) values and effect of using the platform on students' degrees in post-test (n = 36).

Skills	Experimental group average degrees	Control group average degrees	T values	η2	Effect degree
Interpretation skill	2.33	1.28	5.419	0.68	Great
cause- effect skill	2.28	1.22	7.122	0.77	Great
deduction skill	2.39	1.28	5.215	0.67	Great
detecting the author's bias	2.33	.89	6.807	0.76	Great
Reading evaluation skill	2.39	1.11	6.438	0.74	Great
Post-test Total score.	11.72	5.78	9.311	0.85	Great

F= 34

Table (2) shows the greater impact of using Perusall platform on the different grades of students in the experimental group than their peers in the control group, as the Eta Squared (η2) value in all skills was greater than 0.14. The value in the total score of the test reached 0.85, which indicates a very large impact of using the platform. It is noticeable that despite the very large impact of using the platform that Eta Squared (η2) values show, there is a difference between skills in effect degree. The deduction skill is the lowest in terms of the Eta Squared (η2) value, which amounted to 0.67, while the skill of cause- reason skill is the highest, with Eta Squared (η2) value of 0.77.

The researchers also found that there are statistically significant differences at (α≥ 0.05) between the mean scores of the experimental group students in the pre and post-tests of critical reading skills in favor of the post-test. They used the Paired Samples T-Test to test the validity of this hypothesis and to determine the significance of the differences between the mean scores of the experimental group students in the pre and post-tests of critical reading skills. The results were as in the following table:

Table 3: "T" value and the significance levels of differences between the scores of the experimental group students in the pretest and posttests of critical reading skills (n = 18) and Cohen's kappa coefficient and the effect degree.

Skills	Post test		Pre-test		T values	Significance	Difference	(Cohen's d)	Effect degree
	M	f	M	f					
Interpretation skill	2.33	0.594	0.72	0.57	8.04	0.000	S		1.90	Great
cause- effect skill	2.28	0.461	0.56	0.62	12.72	0.000	S		3.00	Great
deduction skill	2.39	0.502	0.94	0.73	8.69	0.000	S	In favor of post-test	2.05	Great
detecting the author's bias	2.33	0.686	0.67	0.49	9.22	0.000	S		2.17	Great
reading evaluation skill	2.39	0.608	0.5	0.51	11.85	0.000	S		2.79	Great
Total Degree	11.72	1.904	3.39	1.79	19.14	0.000	S		4.51	Great

F = 17, 2.11 at a significance level of 0.05, 2.90 at a level of significance 0.01, 3.97 at a significance level of 0.001

Table 3 shows the difference between the average scores of the students in the experimental group in the pre and posttests, where the average total score in the pretest was (3.39), while in the post-test it reached (11.72), and Eta Squared (η2) was (19.141), which is a significant value at a significance level (0.05) and also a function up to a significance level (0.001); This indicates the existence of significant differences between the average scores of students in the experimental group in the pretests and post-tests of critical reading skills. Accordingly, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted as there are statistically significant differences at the level of (α≥ 0.05) between the average scores of the experimental group students in critical reading skills pretests and posttests in favor of the post-test.

It is evident through these differences, the extent of the clear influence and the vast difference between the traditional teaching method and the proposed teaching method. It was a clear reason for increasing the impact on student's performance, the extent of the change caused by the Perusall platform, and the emergence of differences indicating the validity of the hypothesis. The researchers used Cohen's index to clarify the effect

degree of using the platform on the scores of the students of the experimental group in the post-test. The table shows the great impact of using the platform on the difference in the scores of the experimental group students in the post-test compared to their scores in the pre-test. Cohen's index value of all skills is greater than 0.8, but its value in the total score of the test reached 4.51. This which a very significant impact on the use of the platform. It is noticeable from the table that despite the very significant impact of using the Perusall platform, which is shown by the Cohen's index values, there is a difference between skills in effect degree of the platform. The skill of interpretation is the lowest in terms of Cohen's index value of the, which was 1.9. While cause-effect skill is the highest as Cohen's index value is 3.0.

The researchers believe that this improvement in the performance of the experimental group in the critical reading skills post-test compared to the pre-test is due to the effectiveness of employing the Perusall platform in teaching. The platform helped students to analyze words easily. It also helped students to distribute the words in equal groups, gave them cooperative group work, and allowed them to study remotely; this made them more communicative with their classmates outside the classroom. As for the use of the traditional method, it allowed students to communicate inside the classroom only within a specified time, and restricted by specific circumstances, which stop as soon as students left the classroom. While Perusall platform allows students pre and post communication between students, group pre-reading, and group post-reading. This produced growth of critical reading skills among students of the experimental group. The results of the recent study are consistent with those of the studies by Lee & Yeong (2018), Adams & Wilson (2020), Cecchinato & Foschi (2020), McFarlin (2020).

9. Recommendations

Arabic language textbooks should focus on critical reading skills as it helps students excel in academic achievement. Preparing a Teacher's Guide illustrating how to use modern technologies effectively to teach critical reading skills. Preparing training courses for teachers on an ongoing basis to Foschini use modern technologies in teaching critical reading skills. Paying attention to preparing Question Banks that focus on assessing students 'level of critical reading skills.

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