

Jordanian Female Ninth-Grade Students' Attitudes towards Using Questioning Strategies in Critical Reading

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Abstract

Students' attitudes towards questioning strategies play an important role for its implementation success or failure. This study aims to investigate the students' attitudes towards questioning strategies of critical reading skills among Jordanian female ninth-grade students in Al Qaser Directorate of Education. A semi-structured interview instrument was used to assess students' attitudes. Data were collected from students at three public schools located in Qaser, Karak, Jordan. A total of 85 students participated in this present study. The sample which includes interviewees was 15 students. Overall, students showed favorable attitudes towards questioning strategies. However, some students faced some challenges by using these strategies e.g. self-questioning strategy. In light of these results, several recommendations were suggested to the Ministry of Education, English teachers and other researchers. The researcher also suggested that further research should be carried out on other school levels for boys and girls in order to support or refute the results of this study.

Keywords: critical reading, Jordanian female students, questioning strategies, self questioning, students' attitudes

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Introduction and Background

Questioning develops critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Hervey (2006) poses this question "why don't students who are skilled at asking questions in general continue using this curiosity as a strategy for comprehending what they're reading?" (p. 68). Hervey (2006) replies by stating that the questions are presented most of the time by teachers. So, he assures the importance of guiding students to answer and generate questions so as to make students become critical readers. The reader should interact with the text to be a critical reader.

According to Toh (2011) some procedures should be taken into consideration to achieve that. First, reading texts should include topics that are related to the learners' home and drive direct responses from learners. Second, learners should be prepared to read critically. This would be fulfilled by providing learners with open-ended questions. Eventually, learners should use various tools to evaluate themselves by checking a wide range of reactions in relation to the particular topic.

Alwaeli and Abu-Alruz (2011) assure that teachers' practices in the teaching critical reading skills have their impact on students' desire to learn. They recommend in their study that pre-service and in-service teachers should be trained to teach critical reading skills by using modern methods of teaching. Moreover, teachers should focus on developing basic school students' critical reading skills.

The questions teachers ask can be classified according to the Revised Bloom Taxonomy in Cognitive Field as "remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, synthesizing and creating (evaluating)". Teachers are expected to ask higher-level questions for higher-level learning. However, most studies indicate that teachers generally ask lower level questions. It is obvious, based on the literature that critical reading is an essential part in shaping students' learning by using questioning strategies in the education field. Critical reading is also connected with higher levels of thinking according to Bloom's Taxonomy (Parker & Hurry, 2007; Seker & Komur, 2008; Zin, Eng & Rafil-Galea, 2014).

Wangru (2016) assures that there is little research in teachers' questioning, especially in which teachers' questioning and students' expectations are combined. Hence, the main purpose of this study is to measure the students' attitudes towards questioning strategies. In this study, questioning strategies include questioning, self questioning and mixed of questioning and self questioning.

Problem of the Study

Questioning is a powerful tool for prompting the teaching and learning process. Thinking is driven by question not by answers, this is why it is true that only students who are able to generate questions, are really thinking and reading critically (Elder & Paul 1998). Many students come to universities without prior schooling opportunities and experiences that encourage or require critical reading (Crismore, 2000). As an English teacher, the researcher has noticed that her students have difficulties in reading beyond the text and identify the author's purpose. Teaching English in the public Jordanian schools does not lead students to read critically (Khader, 2002). Based on the researcher's experience as an English teacher in public schools for nine years, she has noticed that English teachers teach reading traditionally by asking students to

read the text, give the meaning of new words, and then answer the comprehension questions without paying adequate attention to the students' skills and abilities to predict, question and evaluate texts.

Teachers tend to ask factual and comprehension questions which are located at low-level of thinking according to Bloom's Taxonomy which require recalling information and focus on rote memorization, but they do not raise the level of their questions to a high-level of thinking that lead students to improve their critical reading skills. Several studies indicate that there is a weakness among students in reading in general and critical reading in particular. This weakness is due to the rigidity of teaching methods and not using modern teaching aids in teaching/ learning English language (Alwaeli & Abu-Alruz, 2011). Besides that, at least in the context where the researcher, teaches students are usually "trained" to answer, not to ask questions. For the improvement of critical reading, teachers should teach a variety of strategies that research has shown to be effective, like: generating questions and answering them.

Purpose of the Study

The present study aims to investigate the students' attitudes towards questioning strategies of critical reading skills among Jordanian female ninth-grade students in Al Qaser Directorate of Education.

Question of the Study

The present study attempts to answer the following question:

- 1- What are the students' opinions concerning the effectiveness of questioning strategies in developing Jordanian female ninth-grade students' critical reading skills? and what are their suggestions to improve the treatment?

Significance of the Study

An extensive review of the literature on questioning strategies has produced research conducted in other areas (e.g., Keeley, Ali & Gebirg, 1998; Miciano, 2004; Akkaya & Demirel, 2012). And few studies has produced in Jordan (Al-Shiekh, 2010). So, few research on the students' attitudes towards using questioning and self questioning strategies in the Jordanian classroom has been done. To my best knowledge, this study may very well be the first to examine the mixed of using questioning and self questioning strategies on critical reading and its potential gains in the Jordanian classrooms. The study may be significant because it helps many teachers and the curriculum designers who are looking for more effective teaching methods which may fit in such information age. Besides that, most of English teachers' use of questions is low-level, so, the study might help teachers develop the skill to design and use questions that engage students in higher-level instructional processes. Critical reading is a center of attention and an important part of the curriculum content in many countries. Thus, this study attempts to help Jordanian female ninth-grade students remedy the weakness in their critical reading skills by using questioning strategies in reading. The researcher hopes that these strategies can activate the students' role in the learning process so that students will be able to analyze, interpret, evaluate, enjoy, discuss what they read, answer and pose high-level thinking questions.

The present study may be significant to the researcher herself since it could present her a deeper understanding of the actual position of questioning strategies within the context of teaching in English As a foreign language (EFL) setting.

Literature Review

An extensive review of the literature has revealed a dearth of local and international empirical research on using questioning strategies in critical reading. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, this is one of the first attempts, in Jordan, to examine the students' opinions about using questioning strategies in critical reading.

Seker and Komur (2008) studied the relationship between critical thinking skills and in-class questioning behaviors of English Language Teaching students at Mugla University. Fifty three participants were examined using the Ennis-Weir Critical Thinking Essay Test after reading and other related courses in ELT program. The evaluation instruments of this study were E-Weir Critical Thinking Essay Test, the reading of a passage and structured interview. The participants generated questions based on the passage and then they are classified according to Bloom's taxonomy. The findings showed that students should be provided with tasks that involve questioning and searching while reading. Beside this, it helps students to generate data by working in peer-group collaborations.

Yesil and Korkmaz (2009) examined the elementary teachers' effectiveness based on using questioning strategies in their classrooms. The sample consists of 157 Teacher-Students who were asked to respond to a questionnaire. Their observations consisted of several categories related to teach challenge students' thinking skills and to help improve students' understanding. According to the observation of student-teachers, the majority of the teachers used mainly closed questions in their teaching experiences. Leading questions were rarely used. This result revealed that memory or fact questions were mainly used.

Shang and Chien (2010) evaluated the effect of self-questioning strategy on 118 EFL learners' reading comprehension at I-Shou University. They used two evaluation instruments: a reading comprehension test and a semi-structured interview. It evaluated a training program which was designed as a reading course. The result indicated that students' reading comprehension was enhanced significantly by self-questioning strategy training, especially for low achieving students. Students also had positive attitudes toward using self-questioning strategies in their future reading activities.

Ghajar and Kafshgarsouteh (2011) highlighted the learners' self-reflection on individual/community and word/world concerns through critical understanding of texts. The participants were 50 female undergraduate English literature students at Al-Zahra University. The analyzed data included 400 concept maps and personal journals, as well as oral and written interviews. The results showed an improvement in the students' awareness and new perspectives towards the text and life. The students also gained the ability to deal with the text in new ways as which they started to convey the meaning, tread beyond the text, and to discover their personal meaning in the context.

Akkaya and Demirel (2012) found that 194 students who studied at Dokuz Eylul University were not at the desired level in asking questions at the higher cognitive levels during the process of using reading strategies. They identified the cognitive level of questions teacher candidates prepared while using reading strategies. The participants were also asked to prepare five questions related to two types of texts. They depended on frequency analysis to see the differences in terms of the levels of questions related to the texts among participants.

Davoudi and Sadeghi (2015) made a review of research on questioning as a high level cognitive strategy across different disciplines with a special focus on second or foreign language teaching and learning. It includes the questioning behavior of both teachers and learners. The researchers used Reviewing System which it is a comprehensive online software tool for research synthesis. Their methodology in conducting this study based on a review process which covered studies conducted on questioning from 1974 to 2015. The studies selected for the review were all in English language, used various research designs (quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method research), focused on student and teacher questioning, included both theoretical and empirical studies and covered all types of participants from elementary to advanced students. The findings of the in-depth review reveal the indispensable role of teacher and student questioning in facilitating critical thinking, writing ability, reading comprehension, subject matter learning, met-cognitive skills, and scaffolding learning process.

Dos, Bay, Aslansoy, Tiryaki, Çetin, and Duman, (2016) conducted a study to analyze teachers' questioning strategies from various aspects. The participants of the study were 170 primary school teachers in Turkey. The study's instrument was a semi-structured questionnaire, and were examined via content analysis. The findings of this study revealed that teachers asked divergent questions to draw attention and interest. They also have misunderstanding of divergent and convergent questions. Teachers mostly ask questions to entire class than individual. In addition, they asked most frequently questions aimed at uncovering operational knowledge and least frequently questions whose goal was to uncover metcognitive knowledge and they generally used probing questions, prolonged waiting time and did not ask vague questions.

Bulut (2017) carried out research to investigate reading comprehension skills when using the SQ3R reading comprehension strategy. The participants of this study were seven primary school 4th grade students. An action plan was prepared for three hours a day on three days a week for a period of 10 weeks. The researcher used the following methods to collect the data which are; "Teacher's Diaries" and three different written forms, namely the "Reading Comprehension Test", "Student Interview Form" and "Student Observation Form". The results indicated that that the SQ3R-based reading program increased students' reading comprehension level. In light of data obtained from this study, student's ability to analyze texts visually, and their predictive and note-taking skills were found to be improved.

Methodology

Sampling, Instrumentation, Data collection and Data analysis

The study utilized the case of Al-Qaser secondary schools, Jordan which enroll girls only and selected three classes in the ninth-grade from the schools to represent the sample population. The participants of this study are 85 female Jordanian ninth-grade students. The experimental group (n=67) was taught through questioning strategies, while the control group (n=17) was

taught conventionally per the guidelines of the Teacher's Book. The first experimental group was taught by questioning strategy. The second experimental group was taught by self-questioning strategy while the last experimental group was taught by using both self-questioning and questioning strategies. The researcher began collecting qualitative data using semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview is a technique to collect qualitative data. This interview aims to explore students' opinions towards the questioning and self-questioning strategies targeted in the research. The researcher interviewed 15 students from three experimental groups. The interview was structured and the researcher held individual meetings with the subjects at the school after implementing the program; each interview lasted from 10 minutes. The researcher analyzed the students' responses by identifying the frequent themes. (See Appendix A)

Finding and Results

To answer the present study question, which addressed the students' opinions towards using questioning strategies on enhancing their critical reading skills. In order to answer the question, the researcher grouped the students' responses on each question of the interview and draw a figure to show their responses as shown in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1. Results of the First Interview Question

Question 1	Strategy	Sts Num	Yes	No
Is using questioning strategy improving your critical reading skills? How so?	Questioning	5	5	0
	Self- Questioning	5	5	0
	Questioning and Self- Questioning	5	5	0
		15	15	0

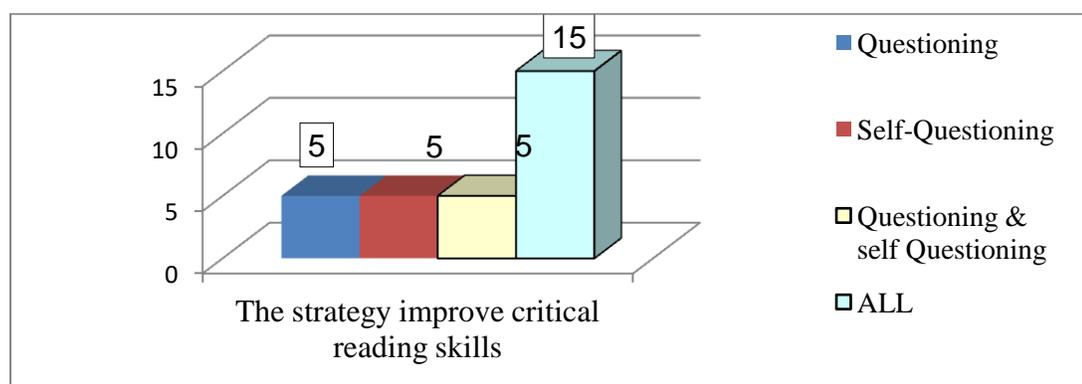


Figure 1. Results of the First Interview Question

Figure 1 shows that the results were classified within four categories, which are equal in their results. Three groups shows that the questioning strategies has improved their critical reading skills. Which means 15 students out of 15 (100%) has improved their critical reading skills. Some students has found that questioning strategies improved their abilities to engage with the text and understand beyond it. Besides this, some students stated that they summarize and write notes while reading which help them to be more active readers. Even though, some

students expressed that their self confidence increased by using questioning strategies that they are able to deal with different texts and they could analyze them properly.

The results of the second question that relates to the challenges that students face during reading. To answer the question, the researcher grouped the students' responses on each question of the interview and draw a figure to show their responses.

Table 2. Results of the Second Interview Question

Question 2	Strategy	Sts Num	Yes	No
What are the challenges, if any, you face with respect to questioning during reading?	Questioning	5	3	2
	Self- Questioning	5	3	2
	Questioning and Self- Questioning	5	2	3
		15	8	7

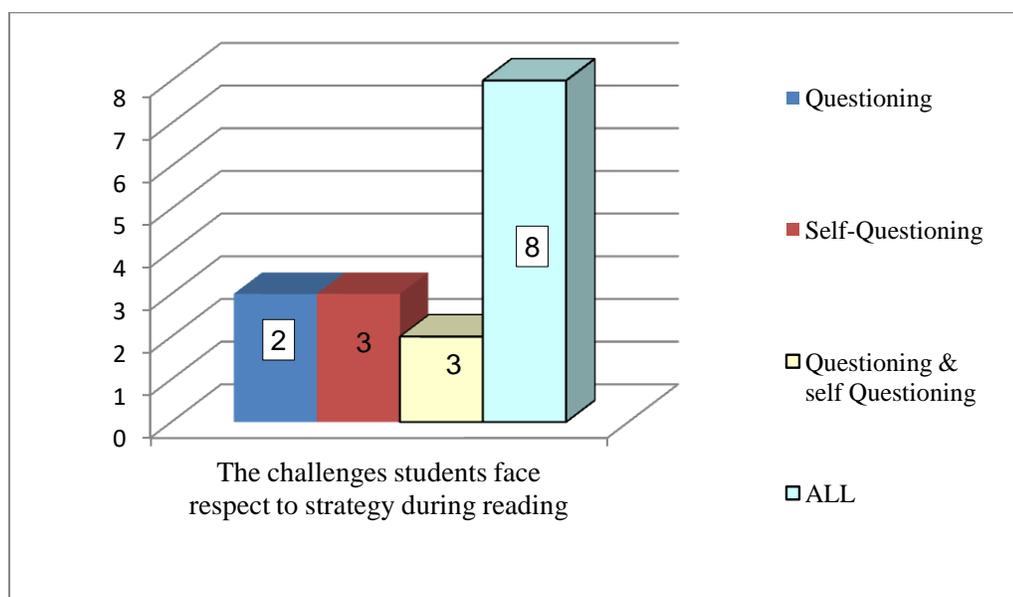


Figure 2. Results of the Second Interview Question

Figure 2 shows that the results were classified within four categories, which are not equal in their results. In the first group, two students (40%) faced challenges, while in the second and the third group, three students (60%) faced challenges in these strategies out of five. In total, eight students had found difficulties out of fifteen (53%). However, the rest of the students seven out of fifteen (47%) have not found any challenges during the study.

The results of the third question that relates to what students would do differently if they participate in a similar study. To answer the question, the researcher grouped the students' responses on each question of the interview and draw a figure to show their responses.

Table 3. Results of the Third Interview Question

Question 3	Strategy	Sts Num	Yes	No
If you were to participate in a similar study, what would you do differently? How so?	Questioning	5	3	2
	Self- Questioning	5	3	2
	Questioning and Self- Questioning	5	2	3
		15	8	7

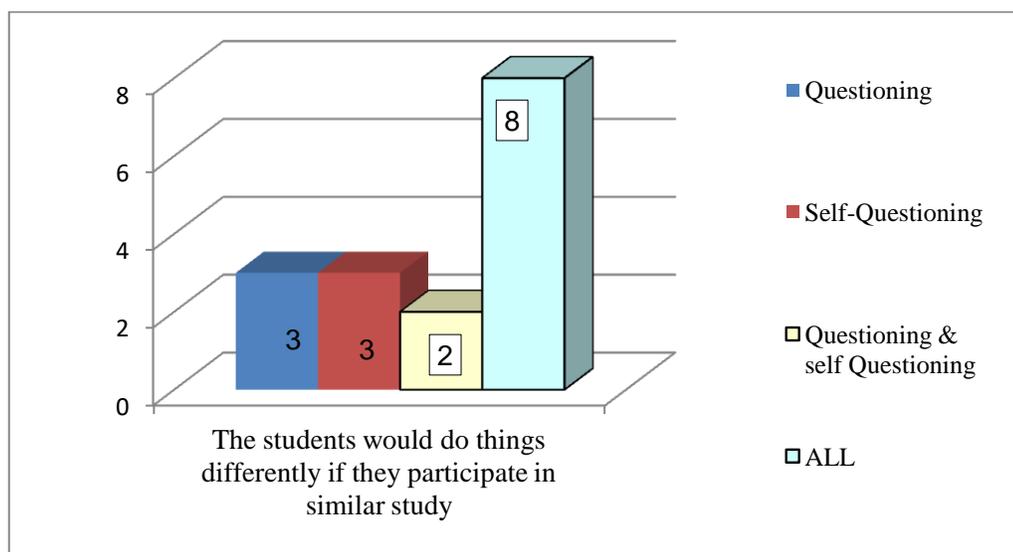


Figure 3. Results of the Third Interview Question

Figure 3 shows that the results were classified within four categories, which are not equal in their results. The results showed that 8 students (53%) would like to do the things differently if they participate in similar study. On the other hand, the rest of the students seven out of fifteen (47%) expressed that they would do the same.

The results of the fourth question that relates to effect of using questioning strategies on students' ability of asking/answering high-order questions. In order to answer the question, the researcher grouped the students' responses on each question of the interview and draw a figure to show their responses.

Table 4. Results of the Fourth Interview Question

Question 4	Strategy	Sts Num	Yes	No
Has participation in the study improved your ability to answer high-order questions? How so? Give examples.	Questioning	5	5	0
	Self- Questioning	5	5	0
	Questioning and Self- Questioning	5	5	0
		15	15	0

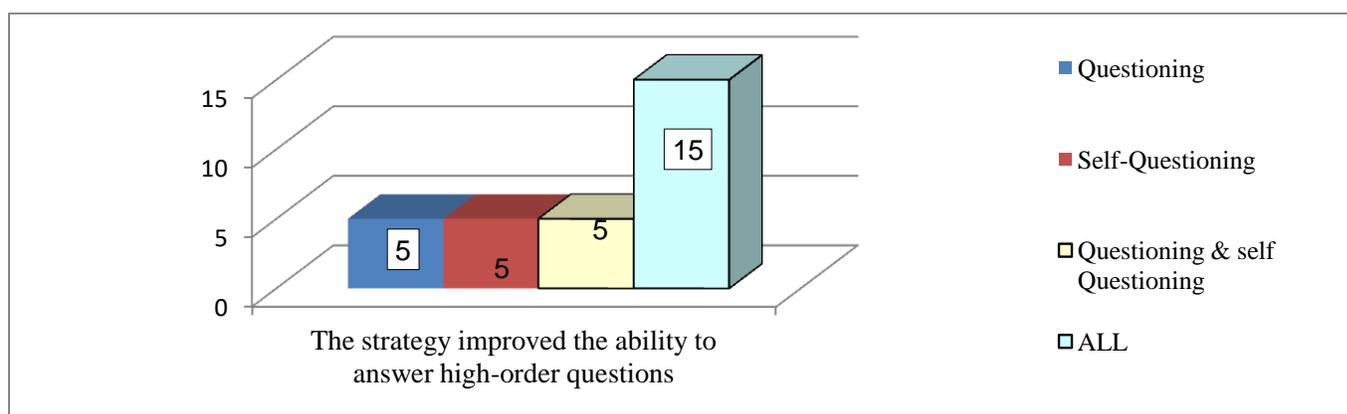
**Figure 4. Results of the Fourth Interview Question**

Figure 4 shows that the results were classified within four categories, which are equal in their results. The results showed that (100%) of the students have improved their ability to answer and pose high-order questions. Students stated that they ask/ answer high order question by asking about the causes, effects, opinions, and justifications of their answers. Moreover, they could now answer the teacher's questions which require thinking about the text by explaining some points and justifying their answers accordingly. They feel now that they differentiate between low-level and high-level of thinking questions. The researcher thinks that this helps students to be prepared to answer critical thinking questions. Especially in second secondary grade, most students face challenges in answering the critical thinking question.

Discussion

The question of the study focuses on the opinions of students on the effectiveness of questioning strategies in developing Jordanian female ninth-grade students' critical reading skills. The discussion in this case is based fully on the views of students. Most of students assured that they had got benefit of using questioning strategies in the three experimental groups. Student 4 said, "it improved my reading skills and it helps me to summarize the text very quickly by answering the teacher questions." Summarizing of text quickly is an important part of critical reading. Joseph, Alber-Morgan, Cullen, and Rouse (2015) say that the most critical skill for academic success is the ability to comprehend reading material. Student 9 also confirms "it enhanced my level in thinking and it helps me to summarize the text by concluding the main ideas and gives my opinion." Student 15 added that "I become more active reader who comprehend the text easily." Nathan (2010) recommends teaching comprehension strategies and

critical thinking, such as analyzing, summarizing main ideas, and having students ask themselves questions about what they have read.

Student 5 in the same way said that *"this strategy helps me in answering questions and deepen my understanding of the text. In addition, I learnt to write notes while reading which helps me to answer the teacher's questions."* Howard (2016) shows that taking of notes aids in organizing of thoughts. Student 12 confirms, *"using questioning strategies during reading helps me to read beyond the text and to add my own ideas. I become a good reader that I defend any idea that I suggest."*

Eight students (53%) assured that questioning strategies need thinking and practicing. Student 2 asserted, *"there is a challenge in answering questions which required deep thinking."* And student 5 felt that *"there are many challenges that I faced such as how to answer questions while reading the text. And, some reading passage are required high level of understanding. Anyway, by practice, I gained many skills which help me to summarize and understand the text."* This may be because they are not used to ask high-order questions. Improving students' critical reading skills requires first; establishing a ground of critical reading in the class by encouraging and supporting students to read critically and express their opinions freely. Second, teachers should face students with real life situations by asking them open-ended questions. Third, teachers need to prepare students to think and read critically enabling them to comment and interact with various representations of knowledge and content (Toh, 2011).

There is need to focus on dialogue rather than debate in asking effective questions. Student 6 on the other hand said, *"there is a challenge in new vocabulary that I did not know its meaning."* This is a genuine concern in different kinds of questioning. Failure to understand the vocabulary can become a barrier. 47% of students prefer to have the same experience without any modification. However, (53%) prefer to have things done differently.

Student 1, for example, said *"I would practice answering more and more question to improve my critical reading skills."* Practice improves critical reading skills. Practice in this case is in the form of answering more and more questions. According to Rouse, Alber-Morgan, Cullen and Sawyer, (2014) generate questions during independent reading is an advanced skill that requires a synthesis of several sub-skills, such as identifying key information, making connections to background experiences, and phrasing ideas in the form of questions. Therefore students need to practice during independent reading to make sure that they develop critical reading skills. Student 5 in the same way said, *"I need more examples on questioning from the teacher."* Student 10 claims, *"I think we need to take extra text to improve our reading skills not just Action Pack textbook."* Rouse et al. (2014) emphasize that self-questioning requires readers to monitor their own comprehension by asking themselves a series of self-generated or teacher-provided questions before, during, and after reading a passage. Teacher generated questions have great influence on the development of critical reading skills by students.

All students (100%) have confirmed that their participation in the study improved their ability to pose/answer high-order questions. Student 11 said, *"Now I can answer all high level questions. I could ask very good questions. I gained new critical reading skills."* And student 12 asserted that *"when I read any passage, I did not take care of taking notes or summarize the main*

ideas. But now, I wrote my thoughts and feeling by using mind maps during reading." Student 14 said, "I ask my classmates good question about the passage such as is the author subjective or objective and how did you know that." Student 13 said, "I could read the text with a critical eye, giving opinions and defending them."

The opinion of these students therefore shows that exposure to the right questions and the right reading skills makes it easy for them to develop critical reading skills. Student 10 said, "This strategy requires from us to ask and then we answers our classmates questions which help me to justify my answers and give my opinion. All this help me in improving my reading skills and deepen my thinking". Student 8 said "I start to ask good questions instead of answering my teacher questions all the time." Student 7 said, "after I participated in this study I realized that I was using self-questioning without knowing that. I also improved the level of my questions which helped me to be a good reader."

In the study, the third experimental group which was taught by using questioning and self-questioning strategies was asked an extra question; that which questioning strategy did they find most beneficial. There were different responses by the students with regards to the three strategies. Two students out of five (40%) preferred self-questioning strategy. Student 11 said, "self- questioning because I have not posed high level questions before. It is a good technique that I gained many skills." And student 12 said, "I suppose that self-questioning which requires from students to understand and analyze the text. And then, students pose a question which shows their understanding of the text." Joseph et al. (2015) assured that there was sufficient evidence to support students' use of self-questioning strategies to help them comprehend text.

From the opinions of the students in this case there is information to show that self-questioning improves the comprehension of students. Two students out of five (40%) preferred questioning strategy, student 13, for example said, "I preferred questioning strategy that my teacher asked us very good questions which helped me to summarize the text and think about it." Student 14 added, "Questioning strategy. I felt that I got it more than self-questioning and I could answer almost all the given questions from my teacher."

And one student out of five (20%) preferred both she asserted, "I think I prefer both. I gained new skills by practicing them." Those that prefer both think that they have similar benefits. For those that preferred questioning strategy they show that the teachers asked effective questions. Looking deeply on the results, one can notice that students' level of critical reading was improved. However, students need to master all the three higher skills to be critical readers and thinkers.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from the findings of the present study:

1. Students showed positive attitude toward using questioning strategies in reading.
2. Using questioning strategies enhanced students' thinking according to Bloom's Taxonomy levels (analysis, synthesis and evolution).
3. Training teachers to ask high level questions is a requirement in teachers' Training (pre-service and in-service).

Pedagogical Implications

In the light of the findings of the present study, certain pedagogical implications may be put forth. For instance, questioning strategies should be taken into consideration so EFL teachers should focus on practicing various questioning strategies in the class such as asking high level questions, pose high level questions and summarize the text. Additionally, using questioning strategies should be taught to students from the early phases of teaching English as a foreign language since they help students to think and read critically. Teaching critical reading is vital in guiding students to use the modes of inquiry, kinds of evidence, hypotheses and assumption and showing them how to apply these directly to their reading by using questioning strategies. Teachers need to take a step in encouraging students ask high level questions to lead them read critically.

Recommendations

In light of the results of this study, the researcher feels that it is essential to submit a number of recommendations for textbook authors, English teachers, the Ministry of Education and other researchers who are interested on Critical reading and Questioning Strategies.

- Teachers have to make balance between the cognitive levels of the questions he/she uses while teaching critical reading. They should include close-ended questions that have one correct answer, and open-ended questions that accept more than one answer.
- Teacher training courses are essential for teachers' professional development. Teachers accordingly should enroll in in-service training courses that give more in sight on the changes of the curriculum and courses that work on developing the questioning skills.
- The in-service training courses designers should be aware of the importance of giving more time in the course syllabus for the How not the what. Teachers should apply what they learn and get feedback on their work during the course.
- In-service training course should be held to teach English teachers about the questioning techniques in which they practice how to ask genuine questions that require higher-order thinking skills, and make learners generate more complex answers and responses.
- A good textbook can be an important agent to implement the change in the curriculum, but it cannot work alone. The teacher should decide what to take from the textbook and what to add by using other sources. They should also prepare well in order to manipulate the textbook content to serve his/her goals and not vice versa.
- Having a small number of participants make it difficult to generalize the results. Thus, conduct similar studies, but on other classes at other educational levels and in other educational settings in different Jordanian basic and secondary schools for male and female students.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview

Group 1: Questioning Strategy

1. Is using questioning strategy improving your critical reading skills? How so?
2. What are the challenges, if any, you face with respect to questioning during reading?
3. If you were to participate in a similar study, what would you do differently? How so?
4. Has participation in the study improved your ability to answer high-order questions? How so? Give examples.

Group 2: Self Questioning Strategy

1. Is using self-questioning strategy improving your critical reading skills? How so?
2. What are the challenges, if any, you face with respect to self-questioning during reading?
3. If you were to participate in a similar study, what would you do differently? How so?
4. Has participation in the study improved your ability to pose high-order questions? How so? Give examples.

Group 3: Questioning & Self questioning Strategies

- 1- Is using questioning strategies improving your critical reading skills? How so?
- 2- What are the challenges, if any, you face with respect to questioning during reading?
- 3- If you were to participate in a similar study, what would you do differently? How so?
- 4- Has participation in the study improved your ability to pose/answer high-order questions? How so? Give examples.
- 5- Which questioning strategy did you find most beneficial? How so?