Critical Literacy: Performance and Reactions

Nizar Kamal Ibrahim

Languages Department, Faculty of Pedagogy, Lebanese University, Beirut, Lebanon

Abstract—**This study examined how the socio-political and socio-cultural backgrounds of Lebanese university students affected their critical engagement with texts and how these students reacted to critical reading. It also investigated the effect of critical reading instruction on the participants' performance in critical text analysis. It was a part of a broader research that employed the mixed research method. Twenty one participants majoring in Teaching English to Elementary Students at a university in Lebanon received instruction based on a critical reading model for three months. All the participants filled out a questionnaire. Eleven participants were interviewed, before which they filled out a survey. Also some class interaction was documented. Moreover, the One-group, Posttest Pretest design was employed. The data showed how the participants' socio-political and religious backgrounds affected their critical engagement with texts. Some participants were less critical or more critical depending on their ideological positions towards the topics of the texts. Interestingly, most participants said that they enjoyed questioning the texts' assumptions although it annoyed them that this questioning made them contemplate their long-held beliefs. In addition, T-test and Mann-whitney test showed a significant improvement in critical text analysis at the end of the course. However, a few participants resisted critical reading**

Index Terms—**critical reading in ESL contexts, reading with a questioning mind, exploring ESL texts from a critical viewpoint, Lebanese students engage texts critically**

I. INTRODUCTION

Critical literacy scholars view texts as culturally, historically, and politically situated, —malleable human-made works that reinforce stereotypes and marginalization. Thus, students should learn how to read critically, challenging the texts' authority and questioning the views they present (Luke & Dooley, 2011). Wallace (2003) and Zhang (2009) argue That EFL/ESL reading textbooks mainly repeat the same pattern of drills and exercises in every lesson, which frustrate students. This is due to the inappropriate implementation of the very famous "pre-reading, during reading, post-reading" formula, which addresses a narrow range of objectives and which certainly excludes critical literacy. While the study of English in native contexts has taken a critical turn, ELT has been characterized by a lack of criticality. Material developers in ELT, in their quest for neutrality, censor topics that initiate people to think (Wallace, 2003). Thus, some scholars call for adopting critical literacy approaches in L2 programs and have started exploring the impact of their implementation. However, there is little research in this area in Lebanon. It is particularly interesting to explore how Lebanese students engage texts critically and how they react to critical reading because of the several group identities the Lebanese have developed. Most of these identities, which transcend the national one, are formed on religious grounds although secular groups also exist. Major sectarian groups possess a strong influence on education in Lebanon in order to promote their conflicting interests. With these circumstances in mind, one asks: How would Lebanese students approach texts in a critical reading course? What role do their beliefs and ideologies play in critical text analysis? How would they perform in this kind of analysis? As a part of a broader research funded by the Lebanese University, the present study explores these questions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical Perspectives

Critical literacy has originated from Critical Pedagogy, which is rooted in the work of Paolo Freire. Its advocates view reading and writing as politically and culturally influential social acts that tremendously impact the social and material conditions of the learners and their communities (Freire, 1972; Luke & Freebody, 1997, as cited in Zhang, 2009). Criticality here does not only refer to critical thinking skills used in evaluating the credibility of texts or in problem solving, but mainly involves critical analysis of social, economic, and political implications of texts to promote a more just world (Gregory & Cahill, 2009; Pennycook, 2001; Wink, 2000). In this sense, critical reading is less concerned with specific strategies than with an overall stance or position, an orientation to the reading task. "If asked to verbalize their responses to texts, readers may reveal not just their strategies as readers at the micro level of response to individual utterances, but their stance both critically, conceptually and affectively, influenced by their personal and social histories as readers" (Wallace, 2003, p. 23). Thus, critical literacy capitalizes on schema not just as a cognitive structure that stores knowledge, but as a socially and culturally formed one. For example, the Brother schema differs among cultures and communities. While this concept shares core universals cognitively speaking across cultures, it differs in terms of social responsibilities and social advantages. For instance, in some Middle East cultures, the eldest

male in the family is given a degree of authority over his siblings, especially the females, while this is not the case in many Western cultures. Such cultural differences circulate in the discourses of different socio-cultural groups and lead to stereotypical ideas of what "the other" expects of brothers. This, according to Wallace, makes schemata stereotypical, reinforcing prejudices, unexamined judgments, and stock responses to the unfamiliar. The author contends that critical literacy aims to disrupt the functions of schemas so that readers do not conform to schema mandated stock responses. This invites "diverse interpretations of the same text in a social setting like the classroom. This does not mean that consensus will not emerge over time, but it will be rationally-based, reflected upon and open to critique, not founded on a given, unanalyzed common sense" (Wallace, 2003, p. 23).

Schema changing rather than schema confirming constitutes an essential principle in critical reading. This happens through reading socially, economically, and politically coded texts, knowing how codification takes place, and gaining some critical distance from them as objects to be talked and written about. The process requires giving students the training and the opportunity to deconstruct and reconstruct texts, to question the authors' stances and subject their motives to critical analysis, and to explore the under-represented or marginalized views (Hawkins & Norton, 2009; Luke & Dooley, 2011). It aims "to equip readers for demystificatory readings of ideology-laden texts" (Fowler, 1996, p. 6, as cited in Wallace, 2003, p. 27), and it includes analysis, multiple interpretations, and moral reasoning (Kanpol, 1998).

B. Models and Research

The theoretical underpinnings of critical literacy have given rise to several critical literacy models. Wallace has developed a Critical Text Analytic Approach that consists of three phases. Wallace cites two other models developed by the New London Group (2000) and Lankshear (1994). The two models are similar except that the NLG attends to all modes of meaning, embracing spatial, gestural, and visual design, while Lankshear's model maintains a print literacy focus (Wallace, 2003). Luke and Dooley (2011) summarize other models with different pedagogical foci. Some of them work on analyzing community issues and political events and movements as well as engaging in political activism. This also "(has been) extended to include a focus on critical "media literacy", the analysis of popular cultural texts including advertising, news, broadcast media, and the internet" (Luke & Dooley, 2011, p. 892). Others focus on analyzing ideologies through lexicogrammatical text features, on uncovering gender discrimination, and on student empowerment. Although these different foci share the concept of critical analysis (Wallace, 2003), they have led to diverse pedagogical and research directions.

Studies done by Canagarajah (2004), Huang (2011), Moreno-Lopez (2005), Norton and Vanderheyden (2004), Jewett and Smith (2003), Sunderland (2004), Wallace (2003), Zhang (2009), and others illustrate the different research and pedagogical orientations in critical literacy. Most of these studies employ qualitative approaches, but none of the studies I am aware of explores critical literacy practices in the Lebanese context. The present study uses qualitative data supported by quantitative indicators to fill this gap.

C. The Lebanese Context

The Lebanese population consists of many ethnic and religious groups. Arabs constitute the major ethnicity, but Armenians and Kurds exist as minority groups. However, the Arab identity is contested among Lebanese due to complex political reasons that are intricately linked to the socio-political and religious conditions in the Middle East. In addition, three major religious groups exist in Lebanon and each one has several sects. Actually, the Lebanese Constitution officially acknowledges eighteen different sects. However, two or three main sects in each religious group form the majority and dominate the Lebanese socio-political life. Muslims are estimated to be the largest religious group in the country and are mainly divided into Sunnis and Shi'as. Christians form the second largest group and are mainly comprised of Maronites, Greek Catholics, and Greek Orthodox. The Druze makes the third religious group. The presence of Palestinian and recently Syrian refugees adds to this diversity. Since Lebanon's Independence in 1948, a sectarian political system dominates the country. For instance, the governmental and parliament posts are blocked for the different major sects, and this extends to most public posts and jobs. This political system has been causing political conflicts and wars along religious lines in the country since its independence. See "A House of Many Mansions" by Salibi (1988) for more on this.

The sectarian formation of the political system of Lebanon influences most social and economic walks of life and has a strong grip over both public and private education. Actually, it has strengthened the influence of religious educational institutions that had existed and enjoyed power long before the establishment of the Lebanese State. This influence is, for instance, evident in the history curriculum that has not been updated since 1968 because of the sectarian and political dispute about what history to teach. So schools use textbooks that suit their sociopolitical contexts. This, alongside the effects of the 1975-1990 Civil War, has weakened public education. Consequently, private schools of all kinds have flourished in all Lebanese districts. Although these schools follow the general guidelines of the Lebanese Ministry of Education, most of them have their own policies and curricula that promote their sectarian and political interests. Frayha (2009/2004) discusses in detail the divisive consequences of this sectarian educational system in the Lebanese society. The domination of sectarian, conservative education in both the private and the public sectors has led to the exclusion of critical approaches in all areas.

Children in Lebanon start learning either English or French as the main second language in kindergarten. Thus, parents decide on the second language they want their children to learn and choose the school accordingly. The English Language textbook developed by the Lebanese Ministry of Education and used in public schools is mainly dominated by comprehension questions, fill-in and matching activities. It occasionally includes some interesting authentic reading activities, but it certainly does not target critical literacy.

III. PURPOSE

This study explored the roles that the Lebanese students' socio-cultural and socio-political backgrounds play in engaging texts critically as well as these students' reactions to critical reading. It also examined how well the participants performed in critical text analysis. For this purpose, the study employed a Critical Reading Model I have developed.

The Critical Reading Model

The Critical Reading Model employed in the study consists of four phases:

1. Accessing the text. In this phase, students do authentic tasks and pedagogical activities that involve them in meaning construction. These tasks are selected purposefully so that students practice a variety of micro skills and modes of reading set as lesson objectives in authentic situations.

2. Direct instruction. Mastering the micro skills of reading and possessing control over the linguistic features of texts constitute, besides critical reading, major objectives in the Model. This requires, in addition to reading for authentic purposes, direct instruction. This phase provides learners with strategy training, vocabulary activities, and grammar instruction. It aims to support them in accessing texts in order to read these texts critically.

3. Problematizing the text and responding to it. In this phase, teachers and students raise issues related to the text or embedded in it. These issues can be highlighted through questioning the perspectives that the texts assume, the stance of the authors, the credibility of the arguments, and the relationship of the texts to real life. In this phase, students express their responses, in which they will reveal how they connect to the text.

4. Going beyond the text. This refers to a critique of the text through analyzing and synthesizing. If we want students to read critically, we need to help them distance themselves from the initial reactions and from the claims that a text makes. In this phase, students examine the social, economic or political implications of ideas and/or reasons of events and situations that a text presents. They explore what and whom the text represents and what and whom the text marginalizes. And they analyze whether or not the values embedded in the text promote a better life.

Principles of the critical reading model.

• The Model is non-linear. The different phases of the Model are not meant to be performed in sequence. Sometimes direct instruction should be provided before accessing the text or during the process. Students might need modeling after or before the Going Beyond the Text phase. Problematizing the text might take place after accessing it, or it might be a stimulus to access the text. These phases are passed through depending on some factors including the objectives of the lesson, the nature of the tasks students have to accomplish, and the students' needs to perform these tasks.

• The ultimate goal of the Model is to help students become autonomous, critical readers. Students of all ages and at all levels can do critical reading activities of different kinds on the basis of:

• Visionary incorporation of transactional, entertainment, and intellectual purposes in teaching. Transactional purposes refer to reading in order to use the ideas and information in performing a certain activity. For example, people in marketing read information about a movie in order to use it in advertising. Intellectual purposes include analyzing, synthesizing, etc… Entertaining purposes include things like reading poetry for enjoyment. These purposes can be employed in accessing the text, in problematizing it, or in going beyond it.

► The use of authentic tasks and pedagogical activities should be systematic and enjoyable, taking into account the students' cognitive maturity and reading proficiency, the complexity of the skill to be targeted, the topical familiarity and linguistic difficulty of the texts, task demands, and the degree to which the targeted objectives empower learners to become independent, critical readers. A skill that has already been mastered does not need to be targeted in instruction or to be set as an objective for a lesson. Higher-order skills need more practice than lower-order ones. Consequently, critical reading should be given appropriate instructional time.

► Instruction should gradually and simultaneously enable students to produce sophisticated and well-developed analysis and synthesis as well as to make them proficient strategic readers. This demands the inclusion of critical reading as a major objective for instruction, the specification of the micro skills of critical reading, the design of instructional plans to address these micro skills, the incorporation of critical reading in assessment, and the use of assessment data in planning for instruction.

• Time spent in any phase of the Model depends on the students' cognitive maturity, degree of mastery of the targeted micro skill, and the pre-determined objectives.

This Model shares with other critical literacy models (see Wallace, 2003 and Luke & Dooley, 2011) the idea that helping students access the text and comprehend it is important for critical reading. However, the Model incorporates comprehension strategies in its instructional cycle and gives them more space than the other models do. For example, Wallace stresses that she is not concerned with reading strategies and that her interest in her research was less in

comprehension as shown in cognitive and meta-cognitive responses than in the nature of stance taken in scrutinizing the text and materialized in critical and meta-critical responses. The Model used in the present study aims at developing students' critical responses to texts, but it also assists them to solve comprehension problems through cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies. Thus, it incorporates both criticality and proficiency.

IV. PARTICIPANTS AND CONTEXT

Twenty one female students majoring in teaching English as a Foreign Language in elementary classes at a university in Lebanon participated in the study. The participants were enrolled in a course titled "Rhetorical Analysis" of which I was the teacher/researcher, and they were diverse in terms of their socio-political backgrounds. They also included strictly religious, moderately religious, and non-religious persons. However, most of them belonged to low income families. Their ages ranged between 19 and 22 years old. All of them started learning English in kindergarten, but evidently, some of them had difficulties expressing themselves in English. Most of them pursued a degree in teaching because it is a socially accepted job for females in their communities. Rhetorical Analysis, one of the required language courses for the participants' major, aimed to develop the students' analytical reading and writing skills. After data collection was over, I gave the same group of students other courses, including how to teach critical literacy.

V. METHODS

The study employed the mixed method (qualitative and quantitative). The participants read texts about global warming, political texts including texts about the Investigation of Hariri assassination (Lebanese ex Prime-minister), texts about religious issues, and texts tackling economical problems. I selected these texts because they tackle issues of concern to the participants and could be looked at from a variety of angles. Instruction aimed to enable students to produce critical text analysis characterized by what Wallace calls "intellectual inquiry". The participants practiced critical analysis with several texts and received feedback before they finalized their two critical analysis papers about the texts they chose.

In intellectual inquiry, students should make a fairly tightly constructed argument that moves beyond observation to a consideration of implications. They need to justify their claims, support their points of view through elaboration and clarification, and make the grounds of opinions and judgments explicit. Their reasoning should be clearly visible, coherent, and systematic (Wallace, 2003). These characteristics have formed the criteria for assessing the participants' performance in the graded analysis assignments.

Data Collection Tools

In the qualitative part which constituted the bulk of the study, all 21 participants filled out a questionnaire at the end of the course, explaining how the approach used affected them positively and negatively. Ten participants were interviewed for an hour each, during which they explained their performance in the posttest. Towards the middle of the semester, a class discussion about critical reading employed in the course was documented. In addition, two volunteers assisted me in documenting class interaction during five critical analysis sessions. These qualitative data were categorized according to themes that emerged from them. These categories had been reviewed several times before they were finalized. A thematic analysis examined the implications of the participants' responses.

The quantitative part utilized the One-group Pretest Posttest Design (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). The pretest aimed to assess the participants' ability to analyze texts critically. On the basis of the pretest, the participants were divided into less skilled readers and more skilled readers. They also took a posttest that aimed to determine the effectiveness of instruction in critical literacy. The T-test and The Mann-Whitney test were used to analyze the quantitative data.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants did well in critical text analysis at the end of the course, as the data shows later on in the discussion, and most of them reacted positively to critical reading. In their responses to the open-ended questionnaire, nineteen students said that they enjoyed and benefited from critical reading. Fifteen said that analytical reading and reading for debates taught them "how to read with a critical eye". Many participants emphasized that critical reading motivated them and helped them develop their reading skill. The participants gave insightful detailed accounts about how critical reading influenced them.

A. A Critical Stance

Most participants stressed that critical analysis made them develop a critical stance towards texts. For example, Participant 1 stated that training her in analysis impacted her approach to texts significantly. In her own words: "Analyzing opened doors for thoughts we never might think of." Many participants shared this idea with Participant 1, implying that they developed a critical position and a new orientation towards reading, which constitutes one of the main goals of critical literacy (Wallace 2003). Many participants referred to "a new way of thinking" that they acquired in the course. For example, Participant 10 explained: "This course access me to a new way of thinking while I read any article." Participant 19 elaborated on this idea saying: "What I liked about the course is that it is thinking stimulus. It is

something new that taught us how to read critically and think as well. It revealed for us that there is a certain aspect in our way of thinking towards many aspects of life is still unrevealed." As these participants' comment that critical reading incurred "a new way of thinking" imply, many participants transformed their ways of approaching texts. This critical orientation led not just to understand the writers' perspectives, but also to question these perspectives, as Participant 3 asserted. This questioning stance made many participants look at texts from different angles, as they stated.

Questioning was used in the course to involve students in critical analysis. The questions were exploratory and interactive and aimed to make students share their views about texts as a community of readers (see Wallace (2003) for an explanation of categories of questions). In an informal, oral evaluation of the course in the first quarter of the semester, some participants mentioned that this type of questions created some confusion. Some attributed confusion to the idea that raising critical questions about their understanding of texts made them reflect about their long-held beliefs, which was unusual in the least to some of them and disturbing to others. It annoyed some participants that questioning the assumptions made in the texts caused them to change their minds regarding the views that these texts adopt. One of these texts was an investigation report about Hariri's assassination, the Lebanese ex Prime-minister. This report was issued by "the International Tribunal Special for Lebanon" formed by the United Nations. The Hariri assassination in 2005 was a critical turning point in Lebanon's political life. It sharpened sectarian divisions in the country and led to drastic events, including the withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanon after a long period of occupation. During a critical analysis discussion of the investigation report, one of the participants expressed her discontent because she felt she needed to change her views about the investigation. She felt that what was solid ground was made shaky when she explored how the language of the investigators' report guided the readers to believe in what might not be true. Exploring questions concerning marginalized groups versus over-represented ones as well as the underlying assumptions of the report caused her to rethink what was firm evidence. She started questioning the texts related to the assassination and started reading them from different angles. This caused her to be disturbed because she wanted to have confidence that she could find the truth. She did not feel comfortable to find out that institutions have interests and assumptions that guide their work.

Moreover, many participants were annoyed because they wanted straightforward answers to questions they ask. They did not like it that the instructor was asking questions about which they had to think, and that every time they answered, they were faced with additional questions. Yet, others said that they were confused because they were not used to analytical reading, during which the instructor was just the facilitator. They wanted the instructor to tell them whether their ideas were correct or incorrect. However, this resistance to questioning as a stimulus for critical reading changed drastically in many participants at the end of the course. Actually, in their responses to the questionnaire, many participants stressed that they enjoyed this same questioning strategy that annoyed them at the beginning. Some participants stressed that they started raising questions about what a text presents. Participant 1, for example, stated: "Simply, this course made us ask how and why. While reading, I always ask myself: Why? Why did this happen? For what reasons? What are the advantages and disadvantages? As you have taught us to always ask ourselves questions." The participant added that critical reading caused her to explore new dimensions of questions about texts. Participants 2 and 3 also maintained that they started questioning the truthfulness of information and ideas in the texts they read and dissecting the arguments presented to them. Questioning engaged the participants in the process of meaning construction, as explained by Participant 3: "scratching our brain to know every single detail written in the articles we have discussed in class". This constructive process involved "searching" or scanning the text and "thinking" about its weaknesses and strengths", as Participant 12 confirmed. These participants' idea that questioning initiated a different way of thinking about texts implies that Analytical and thought-provoking questions enabled many participants to scrutinize the texts from different perspectives and made them feel that they are independent readers able to challenge the authority of the writers.

B. Resistance and Appreciation

Critical reading brought competing stances towards texts to the forefront, especially with the religiously-committed students. The religious backgrounds of some participants created conflicting feelings towards critical reading. These feelings were strongly voiced by some religious students. They expressed an appreciation of critical text analysis when the text did not deal with a religious issue, but they had strong reservations when the topic of the text was religious or was religiously banned. One of these texts was about Islamic legislation regarding women's rights. Also the text in the posttest discussed egg-freezing about which some students had religious reservations. One of the analysis questions in the posttest required students to discuss the social implications of a portion of the text which stated that any woman has the right to egg freezing irrespective of any medical case. While many students developed interesting implications of this part of the text, a few participants did not do well. Three of them, who happened to be religiously committed, included stereotypical judgments in their analysis. For example, Participant 6 wrote: "so the women in 20s freeze their eggs to another time such as which is the suitable time to have children of their own, but this technique maybe used for women who has problem not for women who can give birth." This judgmental answer was caused by the religious views of the participant. In the interviews, Participants 6 and 7 clarified that what they believed about the topic influenced their analysis unconsciously. Participant 6 explained this influence stating: "Maybe because I am not with this idea of egg freezing, that's why my points are judgmental." However, both Participant 6 and Participant 7 insisted that they enjoyed critical reading because it made them think differently. Participant 6 clarified the conflict between her

interest in critical reading and her religious commitment as follows: "The discussions which happened give me how to think in some issues far from religious." This highlighted the idea that we cannot speak of critical or uncritical readers, but we could rather describe less critical or more critical readers. The degree of personal commitment to a certain idea determined how critical some participants were in approaching the text. Participants 6, 7 and 8 rejected taking a questioning stance in reading any text or discussing any idea related to their religion, but their religious reservations did not spoil their interest in critical reading. Participant 6 emphasized this in the following quote: "Really, I liked the topics and the debatable issues happen in the class. Group work its also something good. Moreover, the thing that I did not suffer from it is I never feel boring." The participants' religious ideology shaped their approach to reading religious texts and texts about topics on which religions have a say. They even misunderstood some ideas in the text about egg freezing because of what their religion says about the issue. However, a critical stance was more present in approaching texts about political or social issues that did not bear a clear relationship to their religious beliefs. For example, Participant 7, who resorted to silence during a discussion of a text on women in the Islamic legislation and who expressed her anger at the end of the discussion, was actively involved in questioning a report about the Hariri crime although she was pro-Hariri. She could shift her stances based on the strength of her commitment to the ideas discussed.

Participant 8 illustrated the process of changing stances depending on one's belief system. After a class discussion around a story that narrates what happened to Satan from different perspectives which challenge the religious version, she approached me and objected to raising religious issues in class. During the conversation with me, she wondered whether analysis of religious stories was allowed at the university. It was hard for her to question a religious text. However, in the interview, she said that she started analyzing critically when reading magazines and commercials. Interestingly, Participant 8 justified her weak analysis in the posttest in that it was the first time that she did this kind of analysis. She said: "after several works on several texts, we would be able to analyze more … we need more exercise on analysis." This implied her readiness to develop her critical orientation in reading texts to which she is emotionally attached with more exposure to such an orientation. Although it was difficult for her to critically analyze texts about religious matters, she could apply critical analysis in voluntary reading of other types of texts. This reflected her ability to shift her position from more critical to less critical, depending on her attitude towards texts and on her ideological views. Adopting a critical stance in voluntary reading or in reading for other courses was also mentioned by other non-religious participants. For instance, Participant 2 emphatically twice repeated the sentence: "I do really now analyze when I read."

C. Views on Reading Improvement

Many participants asserted that critical reading did not only develop a new approach to texts, but it also improved their reading skill. Seven participants explained that critical reading provided them with an interesting purpose that "made (them) search for details" to support their analysis, which led to thorough understanding of some texts. Participant 3 supported this conclusion stating: "This course was based on our analysis and thinking in a critical way, or in other words scratching our brain to know every single detail written in the articles we have discussed in class." According to her, critical analysis improved her reading skill, for she now knows how to determine the main ideas and to analyze the author's purpose. Interestingly, this participant talked about varying her mode of reading and shifting her attention to details to get what she needed for analysis. She said that she now knows how to read and when to re-read certain texts. Critical analysis provided the participants with a purpose that helped them determine how to read and what to focus on. Participant 7 illustrated this process saying that reading between lines made her "focus, concentrate". Participant 12 agreed saying: "(It) made us search and think, and find the weak and strong points in every article, and put notes on what we are reading in English." In addition, some participants considered analysis as the basis for a skilled reader. For instance, participant 2 clarified: "if a learner isn't able to analyze a text, he/she won't be reading and all the reading strategies will be useless." She added that this is because critical analysis makes the reader understand the text and conclude the purpose behind it. She described a long-term effect of training in critical reading as follows: "for the final, I didn't study anything because during the semester, I have worked (effectively), and I have in mind a good idea about the whole course." In a study about the effectiveness of training in critical reading, Fahim, Barjesteh, and Vaseghi (2012) found a positive correlation between critical thinking and reading comprehension, supporting the participants' remarks in the present study that critical reading made them read better. In the present study, reading for intellectual purposes (analysis and debate) required the students to read in a connected way, to engage in comprehensive detailed reading when needed, to skim and scan when the purpose calls, etc... Because the participants read to achieve intellectual and transactional purposes, the appropriate micro-skills were used in the unitary process of reading. Many interviewees preferred this kind of reading to answering skimming, scanning, or other comprehension questions the purpose of which is only to practice one micro skill at a time. The interviewees' explanations implied that critical reading helped them use different strategies necessary to access the texts and critically analyze them in a flexible manner.

D. An Interest in Critical Reading?

Many participants developed a positive attitude towards critical reading because, as they said, the course challenged them to think and reflect on the texts and on their beliefs. Participant 1 viewed it as "one of the best courses (she) enjoyed (because) it is a challenging course". She added: "we really enjoyed the essays we wrote that we have to prove

whether the writer is credible or not. We really enjoyed working on that." According to her, this enjoyment made her and two other mates work hard and cooperate on their analysis project. She explained: "When Lara and I worked on the essays, it took us like a whole day to do the 1st draft and used the internet to look for synonyms of words and hard vocabulary, and we really enjoyed it." Participant 2 raised the same point, saying: "I really enjoyed working, and especially it really was a challenge because we really analyzed and used our brains." This enjoyment resulted from the critical stance that students developed when they practiced critical reading. Participant 2 referred to this point as follows: "We enjoyed it because it really depended on me. On how can we analyze understand not only that we have a booklet and copy paste." She complained "…that the hours were short and every time we used to discuss an issue, it was cut in the middle of the discussion." Participant 3 recognized one of the reasons that made the "discussions very interesting: The topics were new and debatable". She added that she liked a lot "that even though the topics were too debatable, we end our debate in a respectable way, and every one respect the counter view point". This "respect" came about by critical analysis, which made the participants' language less emotional. They started contemplating alternative explanations of issues and events and began to distance themselves from their immediate reactions that are usually overloaded with emotions and stereotypes. The participants' comments emphasized that they enjoyed critical analysis because it initiated reflective thinking not just about texts, but also about their world views that are shaped by what they read and hear. A few participants, however, did not show any interest in critical reading. Participant 9, for instance, was very clear that critical reading did not mean anything to her. In the posttest, she did not analyze at all. She just copied the ideas or paraphrased them. When asked why she did not analyze, she replied "Why bother? The writer knows more than I do." She added: "maybe I didn't find something to analyze. I understood it, so I felt there isn't a need to analyze. I felt it was the answer and it was clear, I understood it. When you see the answer in front of you, you think this is it. You don't need to think of it. You just copy it. It's there." Participant 9 was one of the very few students who resisted thinking beyond the text and challenging the authority of the writers. This did not only show her lack of motivation, but also indicated a habit of accepting every thing a writer says. However, many participants started to disrupt being oriented to texts by their authors and enjoyed deconstructing and reconstructing these texts.

E. The Test Performance of the Participants

Statistical analysis shows that students benefited significantly from training in critical analysis. The table below presents the mean difference between the pretest and the posttest.

TEST RESULTS OF CRITICAL ANALYSIS			
Groups	Pretest average (total 30)	Posttest average (total 30)	Mean difference
The whole class	6.5	13.5	7
More skilled readers	9.5	19.5	10
Less skilled readers	5.5	10.5	5

The T test critical value is:

T critical value (Df 20) = 2.84 at P 0.01

The obtained T value for analysis (4.6) significantly exceeds the critical value at p < 0.01. This means that the participants have improved significantly in analysis at the end of training.

The Mann-Whitney U-test is: Obtained U = 27.50, Z = 1.615, P = 0.1064. This shows that there are no significant differences between less skilled and more skilled readers. Thus, both groups have improved to similar degrees in critical analysis.

F. The Participants' Interpretation of the Results

Most participants got lower grades in the posttest than in the pretest on comprehension questions although they received training in answering such questions. Many interviewees compared this poor performance with their good performance in critical analysis. Some of them attributed the weak performance in answering comprehension questions to the purposeless, discrete manner of identifying isolated pieces of information, while referring the good performance in analysis to the holistic reading it requires. Participant 5 explained this contrast as follows: "you do not do well in comprehension questions if you misunderstand something, but in analysis, you may have some wrong and (some right ideas)." Similarly, Participant 6 stated: "Comprehension needs more specific ideas from the text, but analysis depends on what we had understood as a whole." Participant 4 agreed clarifying: "Comprehension needs specific idea from text. Analysis depends on what we have from whole reading." Some participants explained that the disconnected reading operative in answering comprehension questions caused their poor performance in this part of the posttest. For instance, Participants 1 and 4 stressed that the answers to such questions depended on a small portion or one idea in the text that they get either right or wrong. Participant 7 explained how this differed from meaning-making in text analysis as follows: "In comprehension, you have certain ideas that you should be stuck to. In analysis questions, you can analyze and write what you understood." The participants' insights indicated that, unlike comprehension questions, critical analysis involved them in meaning-construction.

The participants' comments above imply that questions that target bits and pieces of information do not reflect the students' understanding of the text while analysis questions provide strong evidence of their comprehension. Critical

analysis provides readers with an intellectual purpose that, like other authentic purposes, makes the identification of relevant details more significant. Students skim, scan and read certain portions of the text in detail for their purposes, and they know when to use each of the sub-skills. Bell (2003) has found similar results in a study that compared working on short texts through comprehension questions and other pedagogical activities and working on long texts for aesthetic purposes. She stresses that the latter approach led to significantly better results in reading comprehension and reading speed. In the present study, most participants have indicated that challenging them intellectually stimulates them to dialog with the text and indulge in the comprehending process, while questions that require finding isolated bits and pieces of information for no clear purpose limit them to a small portion of the text and do not help them to establish overarching connections among its ideas (Leki, 2001). In other words, they fail to recognize the significance of textual details to the text's overall meaning because of the purposeless, mechanistic fashion of locating them.

VII. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Although a few participants resisted critical reading, most said they enjoyed questioning the texts' assumptions and arguments and thinking differently about them. Some of them could shift stances from less critical to more critical depending on their social and religious views towards the raised issues.

Although this is a small-scale study and relatively new in the Lebanese context, the results have serious implications for education in Lebanon. Critical literacy can help the ideologically diverse Lebanese students approach divisive issues in their communities analytically and react to each other's views with less tension. Critical analysis can make them see issues of concern to their communities from a variety of angles, which may contribute to a more cohesive society. For education to play this role, critical literacy should be implemented systematically and with a clear vision about its aims. This requires considerable changes in the Lebanese educational policy, curricula, teacher-training etc.. Moreover, critical literacy should be explored on a large scale in Lebanon because class dynamics change from one setting to another.

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Nizar Kamal Ibrahim was born visually impaired in 1965. Professor Ibrahim has earned the following degrees: (1) Ph.D. in second language acquisition and teaching (SLAT), The University of Arizona (U of A), Tucson, Arizona, U.S., August 2002. (2) Masters in teaching English as a foreign language, The American University of Beirut (AUB), Beirut, Lebanon, July 1995. (3) Bachelors in English Literature, AUB, Beirut, Lebanon July 1991. (4) Teaching Diploma, AUB, Beirut, Lebanon, July 1991.

He is currently an associate professor of TESL at the Lebanese University, Faculty of Pedagogy, Beirut, Lebanon. He also has occupied the following positions: (1) Project Manager in disability NGOs, (2) Researcher in disability NGOs, (3) Trainer in quality education, (4) Program Developer Specialist, leading a team that developed a textbook to teach Arabic as a foreign language at U of A, (5) Writing Instructor At U of A.. In addition, he published a book entitled Children's literature for second language learners (Beirut: The Lebanese University, 2008) and two articles: (1) The effect of whole-class conferencing on Revision (*Feuilles Universitaires* 36, Beirut: Lebanese University, 2011). (2) Dynamic Diversity: Some New Dimensions to Mixed Composition (*ELT Journal* 59. 3, Oxford University Press, 2005), as well as a few other publications. His research interests currently are in critical literacy and in feedback to ESL writing students.

Prof. Ibrahim is a member in the Program Development Committee at the Lebanese University. In 2012-2013, he was elected as a member in the League of Professors at Lebanese University. He also was a member in TESOL, U.S. and AAAL, U.S. In addition, he received 2 research grants from the Lebanese University in years 2011 and 2013, 1 research grant from U of A in 2002. Besides, he got from the U of A The Outstanding Awards (SLAT, 2001), The Herbert Karter Award (2001), and PEEL grant for faculty development (2001).