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A QUASI-TEACHING EXPERIMENT STUDY ON IMPROVING CRITICAL THINKING ABILITY IN ENGLISH READING AMONG SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN CHINA

Wen Jia^{1*}, Nor Hazwani Munirah Lateh²

¹ Faculty for Language Studies and Human Development, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia
Email: 2017103006@yibinu.edu.cn

² Faculty for Language Studies and Human Development, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia
Email: hazwani.l@umk.edu.my

* Corresponding Author

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Abstract:

This study tries to explore the possibility of improving critical thinking ability in English reading among senior high school students in China. The mixed research method is adopted in this research. The reading teaching technique IRAES is shaped. An 8-week teaching intervention is conducted in a Chinese senior high school. 50 students from the experimental class and 50 students from the control class are selected to participate in the quasi-teaching experiment. The reading comprehension part of English test of national college entrance examination will be used as the instrument to collect the quantitative data. A semi-structured interview outlines will be used to collect qualitative data. 2 students from the experimental class and 2 English teachers from the senior high schools are selected as the interviewees to get the qualitative data. The research results show the students' critical thinking ability can be improved in English reading teaching by using the IRAES reading teaching technique. Both students and teachers state a positive attitude towards the teaching intervention with the IRAES reading teaching technique.

Keywords:

Quasi-Teaching Experiment, Senior High School Students, Critical Thinking Ability, English Reading

Introduction

With the rapid development of artificial intelligence, individuals can be more easier to obtain all kind of information and answers by inputting the keyword than before (Malinka et al., 2023; Vilone & Longo, 2021). However, how to deal with those massive information appropriately

and do not lose ourselves in the facing so many different point of view, ones' critical thinking ability paly a very important role (Chatfield, 2022; Mitsea et al., 2021). Critical thinking ability is regarded as a necessary part for talents in 21st century, which helps people to think logically and independently in the information society, and also help us to discriminate information and to make quick decisions(Reinstein & Lander, 2008).

Throughout the cultural traditions of China, Chinese culture is different from both Western culture and other eastern cultures (Wang et al., 2021). For example, the tradition of debate in Indian culture is very popular in Indian (Tripathi, 2021). However, students try not to debate with their teachers in order to show their respect. Chinese cultural traditions emphasize obedience to authority and respect for teachers since the pre-Qin dynasties (Luo, 2023), which tend to inhibit critical thinking. Chinese cultural tradition also lacks empirical and logical reasoning to do analytical demonstration(Chen & Liu, 2023). None of these factors is conducive to critical thinking. Secondly, the influence of Soviet educational thought and system. Soviet education model attaches importance to class teaching system and classroom teaching, emphasizes the leading role of textbooks and teachers, and advocates uniform teaching standards and teaching plans(Avis, 2024). This bias also easily leads to one-sided emphasis on the imparting of knowledge and discouragement or even suppression of students' critical thinking. For Chinese senior high school English learners, they are subjected to academic pressure and standardized test requirements, and most of them are passive acceptance of knowledge, lack of curiosity, questioning spirit and active thinking(Li, 2021; Ma et al., 2024). What's more, their problem analysis and solving ability is not strong, resulting in serious deficiency of critical thinking(Chen & Lin, 2021). In this case, teaching critical thinking for Chinese senior high school English learners is very necessary.

What' more, from the perspective of language itself, English is a logical language that is easy to understand, while Chinese is relatively difficult to understand only from logical aspect (Hegel, 2024). Therefore, it is easier for English to train students' critical thinking. Hegel (2024) described this his book called *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*: there are no long sentences in Chinese, one pronunciation has more than 20 meanings, and the Chinese oral expression is short and quick, which is extremely easy to cause semantic ambiguity and misunderstanding. However, it must be admitted that English does have advantages over many other languages, like Chinese. in terms of logical expressiveness (Kintsch & Keenan, 1973).

Besides, cultivating students' critical thinking ability though English subject teaching is also the official requirement (MOE, 2017). MOE (2017) specifically points out that English teaching for senior high school students is no longer just focusing on students' language competence, students' cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability should also be paid to full attention. As students' language competence, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability are defined as the core literary in English language learning.

To sum up, for Chinese senior high school English learners, it is very necessary to teach them critical thinking in English reading. This study aims to answer the following three research questions:

- RQ 1: Can students' critical thinking ability be improved in English reading teaching?
- RQ 2: What are the students' attitudes towards the teaching intervention?
- RQ 3: What are the teachers' attitudes towards the teaching intervention?

Literature Review

Facione (1990) and his research team figured that critical thinking ability could be divided as critical thinking dispositions and critical thinking skills. For critical thinking dispositions, it includes 7 parts, they are truth-Seeking, open-mindedness, analyticity, systematicity, self-confidence, Self-Confidence, Inquisitiveness and maturity respectively. While, for critical thinking skills, it includes 5 parts, they are interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation respectively. In this study, the definition and understanding of critical thinking ability is taking Facione's perspective as a reference.

Besides, Facione (1990) declared that individuals' critical thinking ability won't be improved automatically with the passage of time but can be acquired by learning. This study also holds the view that critical thinking ability can be improved by designed instructions. This study shapes a teaching technique named IRAES to improve students' critical thinking ability through English reading teaching. The reading teaching technique is shaped on preliminary analysis parts of Zhao Tao (2021), and based on the testing of students' critical thinking disposition from Yao Xiaohong (2018), and the three stages division of reading process Brown (1982), the layout of online and offline teaching forms of blended teaching of Cao Peisheng (2020), the five English reading teaching processes by Shi nan (2021), and the key steps of English reading proposed by Liu Wei and Guo Haiyun's (2006) and key steps of critical thinking ability pointed out by Wu Yajie et al. (2015), combined with the important steps proposed by Li Huijie (2010). the IRAES is shown in Figure 1 below:

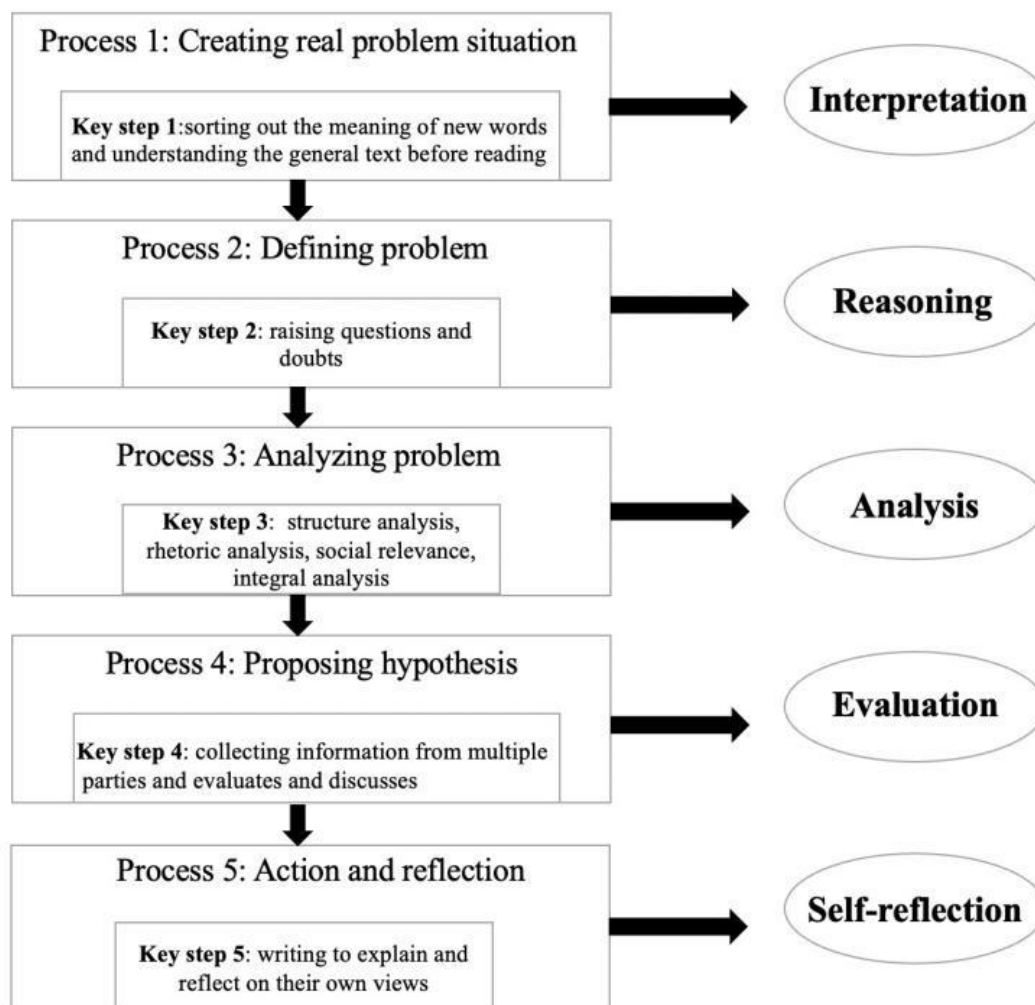


Figure1: The IRAES Reading Teaching Technique

Methodology

Setting and Participants

Most senior high schools are not open for visitors. The author contacts a senior high school she is familiar with doing the research. The senior high school choose in this study, is a public school in the southwest of China. There are three grades in this senior high school. For senior grade 1, there are 18 classes. For senior grade 2, there are 20 classes. For senior grade 3, a total of 24 classes. Normally, for each class there are about 45-50 students. Considering that student from senior grade 3, they need to prepare for the college entrance examination and students from senior grade 1 are freshman, and some of them may not get used to senior high learning life, this study chooses students from senior grade 2 as the research objects.

This study randomly chooses two natural classes in senior grade 2 to conduct an 8-week quasi-teaching experiment. A pre-test will be conducted to make sure the two classes do not have any significant differences. If the pre-test result shows the randomly choosing natural classes have a significant difference, that means the two classes do not meet the requirement of conducting the quasi-teaching experiment, and then this study will randomly choose another two classes until two classes from the 20 classes have no significant differences are selected.

Once the two classes are tested without a significant difference, one class will be appointed as the experimental class, and the other will be appointed as the control class randomly. The two classes will be used to conduct the 8-week quasi-teaching experiment. Five Senior high school teachers and the author of this study will form a team to conduct the teaching experiment. The author of the study will guide all the senior high school teachers to make full preparations of conducting the teaching experiment. Everyone in the team is responsible for making the teaching plan. One teacher is selected to conduct face-to-face classroom teaching. When the teacher conducts face-to-face classroom teaching in the quasi-teaching experiments, the other teachers are required to do the class observation and teaching reflection.

After second rounds of searching, this study successfully picks out the experimental class and control class. In the experimental class, there are 50 students. In the control class, there are 50 students too. What's more, two students from the experimental classes are selected from the experimental class. A purposive sample method is used to choose the two students for interview. The profile of the students who are participants in the interview is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Basic Information Of The Students Interviewed

No.	Grade	Gender	Age
Student 1	Senior grade 2	Female	16
Student 2	Senior grade 2	Male	17

There are two English teachers who participate in the teaching team are invited by purposive sample method to be interviewed, including the one who conducts the face-to-face classroom teaching. The profile of the senior high school English teachers is shown in table 2.

Table 2: Basic Information of The Teachers Interviewed

No.	Qualifications	Gender	Teaching experience
Teacher 1	MA in China	Female	7 years
Teacher 2	MA in China	Male	19 years

Research Instrument

For the 8-week quasi-teaching experiment, mixed methods will be used to collect both quantitative data and qualitative data. For instruments to get quantitative data, the reading comprehension part of the national college entrance examination in the year of 2020 will be used as the research instrument in pre-test. The reading comprehension part of the national college entrance examination in the year of 2021 will be used as the research instrument in post-test.

The national college entrance examination is a standard test for evaluating students' English ability, but not a standard test for evaluating students' critical thinking ability. Before using the national college entrance examination in formal research, the expert validation is conducted.

Two experts are invited to conduct the expert validation. The two experts points out that even the national college entrance examination is not a specific instrument used to evaluate students' critical thinking ability, but to answer all the questions right in the reading comprehension parts needs to use all the ability in critical thinking dispositions like, truth-seeking, open-mindedness, analyticity, systematicity, self-confidence, maturity, and inquisitiveness, and the ability in critical thinking skills like, interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation. To sum up, the reading comprehension part of the national college entrance examination in the year 2017 has a good validity in evaluating students critical thinking ability.

There are 4 reading passages in the reading comprehension part. For passage one, there are 3 multiple choice questions for students to answer. For passage two, there are four multiple choice questions for students to answer. For passage three, there are another four multiple choice questions for students to answer. For passage four, there are the last four multiple choice questions for students to answer. A total of 15 questions for students to answer. For each of the questions there are four choices marked A), B), C), D), and only one choice is right. Students will get two points when they choose the right answer and get zero points when they make the wrong choice.

For instruments to get qualitative data, this study tries to use semi-structured interviews to investigate both teachers and students' attitude and feelings towards the teaching experiment. The same two experts will do the validation before using the interview questions to formal research. According to the experts' feedback, the interview questions are related to the research topic, and all the statements in the questions are clear and easy for students to know the purpose of interview. What's more, all the statements are neutral. The interviews in comprehensive and get all the information wanted the research needs. The interview questions do not have any sensitive topic or words. The instruments for collecting qualitative data are also verified with good validity.

Data Analysis

For the quantitative data collected in this study, SPSS will be used to analyze the mean value and Independent Sample T-test. Qualitative data are collected to do thematic analysis.

Results From The Pre- Test And Post-Test Of The Teaching Experiment

Before the quasi-teaching experiment, a pre-test is conducted in both experimental class and control class. All the 50 students in the experimental class and all the 50 students in the control class take part in the pre-test. Table 3 below illustrates the number of students in each score.

Table 3: Numbers Of Students In Each Score Of Pre-Tests

Score Points	0	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24	26	28	30
Experimental class Students	1	2	0	1	2	2	3	6	8	10	6	4	1	2	1	1
Control class Students	0	1	1	2	1	3	4	5	6	12	7	3	1	3	0	1

Table 3 present the distribution of student scores in an experimental class and a control class based on teaching experiment for English language learning. The Score Points row represents different possible scores, ranging from zero to 30 in increments of two. Below it, the two rows

show the number of students who achieved each score. In that table, the experimental class has a better consistent distribution around middle to high score that is range between 10 to 20 points. While the control class has a disperse spread of score points that cling around middle range of the scores. Moreover, the highest frequencies in this table for the experiment class scored 18 points with 10 students, and for the control class stated also at 18 points among 12 students. Thus, based on these results, this has suggested that the experimental teaching intervention has helped the students to achieve more stable and higher score in English reading for critical thinking, compared to control class.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistic of Students' English Reading Scores (Pre- test)

Pre-test	Classes	N	Mean	S.D	S.E Mean
	Experimental class	50	16.16	6.072	.859
	Control class	50	16.48	5.737	.811

As is shown in table 4, the mean value of the students in experimental class is 16.16, while students from the control class get the mean value of 16.48. The average scores in control class are slightly higher than in the experimental class.

Table 5: T-test for Experimental Class And Control Class (Pre- test)

Test	F	Sig.	t	df	p (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	SE Diff.	95% CI (Lower–Upper)
Equal variances assumed	0.002	0.961	-0.271	98	0.787	-0.0320	1.181	-2.664 to 2.024
Equal variances not assumed			-0.271	97.69	0.787	-0.0320	1.181	-2.664 to 2.024

Based on the results of the independent sample T-test of the experimental class and control class, it can be found that the Sig. value is 0.961, which is higher 0.05. What's more, the value of Sig. (2-tailed) is 0.787, which is higher than 0.05, indicating that the experimental class and the control class do not have a significant difference, and meet the requirement of conducting the quasi-teaching experiment.

Table 6: Numbers of Students In Each Score (Post-test)

Score Points	0	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24	26	28	30
Experimental class	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	5	6	14	4	2	5	5	4
Control class	0	2	1	2	1	3	3	5	3	15	2	5	2	4	2	0

Table 6 presented the distribution pattern score points among the students for the post-test. There are two teaching classes for intervention, that is experimental and control class with score points ranging from 0 to 30. The experimental class score distribution has more concentrated, with the highest number of students scoring 20 points for 14 of them. The control class started at 18 points with 15 students. Thus, in that table, the experimental class has fewer students scores with low points, and a high peak at 20 points scored at that level. This condition

has indicated that the experimental class has better for overall performance. Compared to control class students, most of them score at the lower range and with peak points at 18. By comparing those two groups, this has suggested that the intervention have positively impact for experiment towards student performance.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistic Of Students' English Reading Scores (post-test)

Post-test	Classes	N	Mean	S.D.	S.E. Mean
	Experimental class	50	20.84	5.744	.812
	Control class	50	16.80	6.440	.911

As is shown in Table 7, the mean value for experimental class is 20.84, while the mean value for control class is 16.80. The mean value in experimental class is 4.04 higher than the control class.

Table 8: T-test for Experimental Class And Control Class (post-test)

Test	F	Sig.	t	df	p (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	SE Diff.	95% CI (Lower–Upper)
Equal variances assumed	0.586	0.446	3.311	98	0.001	4.040	1.220	1.618 to 6.462
Equal variances not assumed			3.311	96.75	0.001	4.040	1.220	1.618 to 6.462

According to the results of the independent sample T-test of the experimental class and control class, it can be found that the Sig. value is 0.446, which is higher 0.05. What's more, the value of Sig. (2-tailed) is 0.001, which is lower than 0.05, indicating that the experimental class and the control class have a significant difference. Students' scores in experimental class are significantly higher than in control class.

Table 9: Descriptive Statistic Of Students' English Reading Scores In Experimental Class

Experimental class	Classes	N	Mean	S.D.	S.E. Mean
	Pre-test	50	16.16	6.072	.859
	Post-test	50	20.84	5.744	.812

As shown in Table 9, the mean value for students in the experimental class was 16.16 in the pre-test and increased to 20.84 in the post-test, indicating an improvement of 4.68 points. This increase suggests that the intervention had a positive impact on student performance. The noticeable rise in the mean score implies that students in the experimental class benefited from the applied teaching method or strategy, leading to enhanced learning outcomes. Further analysis may be needed to determine the statistical significance and effect of this improvement.

Table 10: T-Test for Experimental Class in Pre-Test and Post-Test

Test	F	Sig.	t	df	p (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	SE Diff.	95% CI (Lower–Upper)
Equal variances assumed	0.002	0.967	-3.959	98	0.000	-4.680	1.182	-7.026 to -2.334
Equal variances not assumed			-3.959	97.70	0.000	-4.680	1.182	-7.026 to -2.334

As is shown in table 10, the Sig. value is 0.967, which is higher than 0.05. What's more, the value of Sig. (2-tailed) is 0.00, which is lower than 0.05, indicating that the results in post-test of experimental class have a significant difference with the results in pre-test. The results in the post-test are significantly better than results in the pre-test.

Table 11: Descriptive Statistic Of Students' English Reading Scores In Control Class

Control class	Classes	N	Mean	S.D.	S.E. Mean
	Pre-test	50	16.48	5.737	.811
	Post-test	50	16.80	6.440	.911

From table 11 we can see, the mean value of pre- test of control class is 16.48, while in post-test is 16.80. The mean value in post-test is 0.32 higher than pre-test.

Table 12: T-Test For Experimental Class In Pre-Test And Post-Test

Test	F	Sig.	t	df	p (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	SE Diff.	95% CI (Lower–Upper)
Equal variances assumed	0.600	0.441	-0.262	98	0.794	-0.320	1.220	-2.740 to 2.100
Equal variances not assumed			-0.262	96.72	0.794	-0.320	1.220	-2.741 to 2.101

From table 12, it could be found that the Sig. value is 0.441, which is higher than 0.05. What's more, the value of Sig. (2-tailed) is 0.794, which is higher than 0.05, indicating that the pre-test and post-test do not have any significant difference. To sum up, the quantitative results show that before conducting the teaching intervention, the experimental class and control class do not have any difference in critical thinking ability. What's more, after 8-week teaching intervention, the scores of students in experimental class and control class have a significant difference. The scores of students in experimental class are significantly higher than students in control class. Besides, comparing the scores of students in both pre-test and post-test of experimental class, the scores of post-tests are significantly higher than pre-test. However, for control class, the scores in pre-test and post-test do not have a significant difference. We can conclude that, using the teaching intervention can improve students' critical thinking ability.

Results From The Interviews

According to the interview, we can see that both Student 1 and student 2 from the experimental class have a very clear idea about the purpose of teaching intervention is to improve their critical thinking ability, like student 1 said, "all the teaching procedures are very clear, and all the designed steps are gradually directing improving our critical thinking ability." students 2 also points out that every question the teacher asked and every task the teacher assigned have a direct purpose of which part of our critical thinking ability will be guided to improve".

Besides, all the interviewees are satisfied with the new teaching intervention used in English reading and have a high degree of recognition of the reading teaching technique. First, they think this new teaching technique is more interested than before and can keep them focused on English reading. As student 1 says, this new teaching technique makes the English reading no more like a monotonous work, and it makes reading like a journey to find out the truth. What's more, student 1 also highlights, this reading journey can always make me focused on the

reading materials. Student 2 believes this new teaching technique makes the English reading class more interesting than before, and he does not want to miss one minute in the class.

Second, they agree this new teaching technique help them have a better understanding about the nature of reading. As student 1 points out, “It give me a new insight into how to learn to read. To think critically is like a debate with the author. After several round of debate, the structure and writing purpose become clear, and I am totally standing on the authors’ side, to think what the author thinks and to express what the author wants to express.”

Student 2 indicates that the literal meaning is only a small part of what the author wants to convey. By reading critically, we can explore the whole world that the author wants to tell us. The details of the words, the structure, and the perspective the author used can help us find the real destination in the vast logical maze. Third, they all states that their awareness of cultivating critical thinking ability have been raised and their critical thinking ability are also improved through English reading teaching intervention. Like student 1 says, she thought that critical thinking ability is only related to science subjects like physics, math and so on. This intervention gives her an unforgeable experience to figure out the importance of critical thinking ability in learning reading. From now on, she will make a conscious effort to improve her own critical thinking ability. Besides, she believes that her critical thinking ability has improved during the 8-week teaching intervention, especially in self-confidence and inference part.

For student 2, he also states that his awareness of cultivating critical thinking ability has been raised. For one thing, once he reads critically, his scores are improved a lot. He adds that in the pre-test he gets 16 points, while he gets 26 points in the post-test. Besides, he points out that his critical thinking ability has been improved, especially the truth-seeking and explanation. Fourth, they express a strong desire to continue using this teaching technique. As student 1 says, this is the first time for her to experience a reading class that could be taught in this interesting way, and she really hopes that the teacher can use the teaching technique in the furfure reading teaching. Student 2 believes that if he can be guided the teaching technique any longer, he can make a huge progress in English reading.

This study also interviews two senior high teachers. One is the teacher who conducts face-to face teaching intervention. The other one is the teacher who participates in teaching design and classroom observation. Initially, the two teachers point out that students in the experimental class have a better teaching and learning atmosphere than students in the control class. What’ more, students’ enthusiasm towards English reading are obviously higher in experimental class than in the control class. Students are more motivated in experimental class than in the control class. Teacher who conducts the teaching intervention (teacher 1) points out that the interaction between teachers and students, students and students in the experimental class are so much better than in the control class. Teacher 2 says a lot of silence moment in the control class that makes the English reading class seems long and makes me keep looking at the clock and waiting for the class to end, but in the experimental class, everyone participant in the activities, that makes every second in the class is precious.

Besides, the two teachers believe that students’ critical thinking ability are improved by the new teaching technique. Like teacher 1 says, at the very beginning, most students don’t know what critical thinking ability are, but now, a lot of students can actively read critically. Teacher

2 gives an example in the classroom observation in experimental class, two students during the break time are inferring about the deep meaning of a reading passage from the usage of the words.

What's more, the willingness to use this new technique in further teaching are expressed. Teacher 1 points out that even though using the new technique needs a lot of preparation before class, she is satisfied about the effect of improving students' critical thinking ability, and she will use this new teaching intervention in future teaching. Teacher 2 also states that he participates in the whole teaching design and classroom observation, and he knows the hardworking of the teaching design and he is also impressed by positive teaching atmosphere and the students' improvement of the critical thinking ability in the experimental class. To sum up, both students and teachers speak highly about the teaching intervention.

Conclusion

The quantitative data getting from the pre-test and post-test can be used to answer research question 1. In the pre-test, students' scores getting from both the experimental class and control class do not have a significant difference. While students' scores in the experimental class that adopts the new teaching technique are significantly higher than students in the control class. The new teaching technique can improve students' critical ability. Students' answers from the interview can be used to answer the second research question. Students are students who have a good understanding of the purpose of the intervention, and the new technique used in the intervention helps them get closer to the nature of reading. Their awareness of cultivating critical thinking ability has been raised and their critical thinking ability has also been improved. What's more, they express the hope of continuing to use the new teaching technique.

Teachers' answers from the interview could be used to answer the third questions. Teachers believe that the new teaching technique can better the teaching environment. Teachers can perceive an increase in students' critical thinking ability. Besides, they have the willingness to use the new teaching technique.

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