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First Edition of the Symposium on English Language Teaching and Literature Studies (SELLS) : Disciplinary Debates and Emerging Research Perspectives

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Thème : Disciplinary Debates and Emerging Research

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The journal publishes only quality articles that have not been published or submitted for publication in any other journals. Each article is subjected to a double blind reading. The quality and originality of the articles are the only criteria for publication.
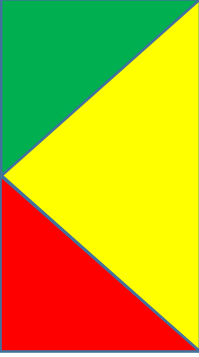
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Actes de la 1ere Edition du symposium sur l'enseignement de la langue Anglaise et les études littéraires à l'Université des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de Bamako, sise à Kabala sur le thème : " DISCIPLINARY DEBATES AND EMERGING RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES "

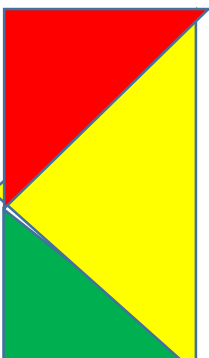*Sur le thème : DISCIPLINARY DEBATES AND EMERGING RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES*

Call for Abstract

First Edition of the Symposium on English Language Teaching and Literature Studies (SELLS): Disciplinary Debates and Emerging Research Perspectives

The Research Community of the English Department at Université des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Bamako (Arts and Humanities of Bamako) in collaboration with Ecole Normale Superieure, Bamako, Mali, organize **the First Symposium on English Language Teaching and Literature Studies (SELLS 2023) on the theme "Disciplinary Debates and Emerging Research Perspectives" at ULSHB located in Kabala campus on March 29th and 30th, 2023**. The Symposium aims to provide a platform to research scholars, graduate students, and doctoral students working in the fields of English language teaching and literature studies to share their experiences and knowledge and discuss new and emerging trends in research and pedagogy in English language teaching and literature written in English language.

The theme of this year, titled**: "Disciplinary Debates and Emerging Research Perspectives"** is an attempt to explore new directions and dynamism of the study and teaching of English language in Mali and other francophone countries. With English taught in a multilinguistic and multicultural environment, researchers and scholars from the English departments will consider through this symposium how English is impacting the social, political, cultural, and economic lives of learners and users at a larger scale. Further, through interdisciplinary junction this symposium will be an opportunity to question and rethink pedagogical modalities of English teaching to reach creative and emerging solutions. Scholars in the field will be offered exciting opportunities to discuss, collaborate and propose emerging linguistic, literary, and communication perspectives to enhance teaching and research in English in the Malian context while paying attention to Global trends.

Areas of Research Focus
Topics to be considered are but not limited to the following:
English Language Studies
Literature in English and criticism
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Applied Linguistics and English Language Education
English Language Curriculum and Teaching Methods
Cross-cultural Communication and English Language Teaching
English Language Policy
English language assessment
English Language and Globalization
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English Language Learning and Acquisition
English Language Testing and Evaluation
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Deadlines for submission of the abstracts
Sending of the call: January 28, 2022
Deadline for Submission: February 28, 2023
Notification of acceptance March 15, 2023

Date of the symposium: Thursday, March 29th and Friday 30th, 2023

Abstract Submission
The abstract should be between 200 and 250 words and a list of not more than five keywords. The format of the abstract should be New Times Roman, font size 12. It must have a clearly defined theoretical framework or approach. The abstracts should be sent to the following addresses: binette8fr@gmail.com or fkkeita5@gmail.com or niambeldio20@gmail.com

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Sommaire

Présentation des actes de la 1ère Edition du SELLS

IMPROVING THE TEACHING OF READING COMPREHENSION IN FRANCOPHONE UNIVERSITIES: THE CASE OF CHEIKH ANTA DIOP UNIVERSITY

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Abstract:

This paper analyzes students' interactions with written materials for thought production. It is found that some students in French-speaking countries meet hurdles when they are summoned to think critically in English to produce a research document, which according to some of them should result from a copy-and-paste strategy. This obstacle is due to several factors including literal reading which does not promote critical thinking. Even at the lower levels, the essay writing produced by some students is often a mere copy of a paragraph of the text. This indicates an inability to think properly in the learning language. Moreover, the environment in which the student evolves contributes to the fact that he struggles to find elements of analytical reading. Actually, foreign language learners are not exposed to critical thinking in the classrooms as such courses do not often focus on developing critical thinking skills. To help him settle in a professional environment, where the English language will occupy an important place, it is necessary to prepare the student during reading comprehension courses to develop his critical reading skills for critical thinking. The latter must be based on an analytical, thoughtful, and active reading that make it possible to fully understand a text. Therefore, this analysis surveys the importance of teaching critical thinking through reading comprehension to help students from the English Department build logical and clear reasoning from the text with which they are engaged, it proposes a theoretical approach to argumentation and presents some ways to enhance critical thinking.

Keywords: argumentation, critical reading, critical thinking, metacognition, reading comprehension

Résumé :

Cet article analyse les interactions entre les élèves et les documents écrits pour la production de la pensée. Il est constaté que certains étudiants du Département d'Anglais de l'UCAD rencontrent des difficultés lorsqu'ils sont appelés à penser de manière critique en anglais pour produire un document de recherche, qui pour certains devrait résulter d'une stratégie de copier-coller sans analyse. Cet obstacle est dû à plusieurs facteurs dont la lecture littérale qui ne favorise pas le développement de la pensée critique. Même aux niveaux inférieurs, la rédaction produite par certains étudiants aux évaluations de la compréhension écrite n'est pour la plupart du temps qu'un simple copier-coller d'un paragraphe donné du texte. Ce qui illustre une incapacité à penser correctement dans la langue d'apprentissage. De plus, l'étude de la langue anglaise comme langue étrangère fait que les étudiants ne sont pas exposés à la réflexion critique. Pour préparer ces derniers à s'insérer dans un environnement professionnel, où la langue anglaise occupera une place importante, il est nécessaire de les préparer lors des cours de compréhension écrite à accroître leurs compétences pour développer une pensée critique. Cette dernière doit s'appuyer sur une lecture analytique, réfléchie et active permettant de bien comprendre un texte. Par conséquent, cette analyse nous permet d'évaluer l'importance d'enseigner la pensée critique à travers la compréhension écrite pour aider les étudiants à construire un raisonnement logique et clair à partir d'un texte. Elle propose également une approche théorique de l'argumentation et présente quelques façons d'améliorer la pensée critique.

Mots clés : argumentation, compréhension écrite, lecture critique, métacognition, pensée critique**.**

Introduction:

With the advent of the LMD system at the English Department of Cheikh Anta Diop University, teaching English has become more challenging with the development of new

subjects such as Civilization, which is closely linked to social sciences. Research in Civilization requires a great deal of reflection and critical thinking to come up with a valuable scientific production. This remark added to the experience gained from teaching Reading Comprehension at undergraduate levels has prompted the need to turn this course into a more thought-provoking one to better stimulate student's abilities in dealing with their writings and their interactions with written material. In general, francophone students are learning English as a foreign language and as such, it is impossible to drive them into thinking in English at an early age. They may develop abilities in critical reflection in French and when it comes to doing it in English, only a few students manage to do so, whereas the others first think in French before translating their thoughts into English, and some others simply resort to copy-and-paste strategies. Thus, their productions are influenced by distortions and lack of knowledge. As the university is a privileged place for academia and in turn for critical thinking as well as critical reading, we find it necessary to bring in activities that could stimulate and develop such skills and devote time to them. The upshot of this paper is then to show through a theoretical approach the importance of promoting critical thinking skills in higher education and to propose a set of activities to integrate during reading comprehension courses in order to stimulate critical thinking abilities. Thus, to shed light on the necessity to better teach Reading Comprehension, this analysis uncovers the meaning of critical thinking first, then tackles the link between critical thinking and argumentation before coming to the last part of this work which deals with some ways to improve critical reading and by extension critical thinking.

1. What is Critical Thinking?

The various interpretations of critical thinking typically center around the idea of robust thinking skills. The term "critical" underscores a focus on thinking about thinking itself, and employs philosophical analytical methods to assess statements and supporting data. When looked at as a "movement" rather than a distinct field, critical thinking can be perceived as an informal assortment of educational approaches designed not just to refine overall thinking capabilities, but also to heighten consciousness regarding the development of knowledge within specific disciplines or subjects. Exemplary critical thinkers remain receptive, impartial, well-informed, and considerate of differing viewpoints and rationales. They ground their beliefs in evidence and are open to contemplating alternatives and adjusting their convictions. The process of critical thinking involves problem identification and analysis, meaning clarification, evidence gathering and assessment, inference of conclusions, consideration of other relevant information, and overall judgment. Critical thinking surpasses the mere logical evaluation of arguments; it stretches its boundaries beyond individual arguments, encompassing a creative

facet and entailing the meticulous evaluation of evidence. Every educational system must strive to impart the expertise required to cultivate these abilities and nurture the mindsets and tendencies of an individual who can engage in critical thinking, applying it suitably and proficiently. This goal can be realized either by integrating it into subject-specific curricula or by offering it as an independent course. A critical thinker not only possesses critical thinking skills but also exercises them only when appropriate. Such tendencies are called dispositions, and they are reflected in a person's mental attitudes. According to Hitchcock (2017, p.482), a critical thinker must be endowed with the following dispositions and attitudes:

- Open-minded
- Fair-minded
- Searching for evidence
- Trying to be well-informed
- Attentive to others' views and their reasons
- Proportioning belief to the evidence
- Willing to consider alternatives and revise beliefs

The capacity to engage in critical thinking is a valuable life skill. Everyone confronts uncertainties about what to believe or what action to take, both in daily life and in specialized professions. According to Hitchcock (2017), thoughtful critical thinking is inherently "more likely to lead to a satisfactory resolution of such uncertainties than inadequate reflection or a knee-jerk reaction" (p.488). He further provides a disposition to respond to perplexities with skillful critical thinking, which is beneficial for anyone managing their life. Moreover, although individuals tend to naturally cultivate a certain inclination for critical thinking and acquire a degree of proficiency in this aspect as they mature, especially within the realm of education, focused efforts directed towards nurturing the awareness, abilities, and mindsets of a critical thinker can greatly amplify these attributes (Hitchcock, p.488). Individuals who possess critical thinking skills are preoccupied with ensuring the accuracy and justification of their beliefs and decisions; they prioritize the coherence, integrity, and openness of their stances, while also valuing the respect they show toward the viewpoints and emotions of others (Andrews, 2015, p.51). Richard Andrews (2015) carries on his analysis of critical thinking and states "In terms of abilities, critical thinkers have the skills to clarify; justify the basis for decisions; infer both deductively and inductively; make suppositions, and approach problems with equanimity, due

sequence, and rhetorical propriety" (p.51). Besides, critical thinking skills comprise "categorizing situations", and restating statements, in addition to the more common skills of developing "testing strategies", "formulating alternative solutions or hypotheses, judging the acceptability of premises and inferences, and drawing conclusions" (Hitchcock, p.480). In short, a good thinker should take into account in his thinking process the following approach highlighted by Paul and Elder (2014):

-Raising "vital questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely"

-Gathering and assessing "relevant information, and effectively" interpreting "it"

-Coming "to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards"

-Thinking "openmindedly within alternative systems of thought, recognizing and assessing, as need be, their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences"

-Communicating "effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems" (p.7).

2. Critical Thinking Implies Argumentation

Proficiency in effective argumentation, whether in spoken discourse or written communication, is intricately linked to achieving success in higher education. This competency has gained increasing prominence in the evaluation of undergraduate endeavors and holds even greater significance in advanced studies, especially at the graduate level where the capacity to construct persuasive arguments is frequently mandated. Notably, at the doctoral tier, the thesis itself can be viewed as the principal contention.

A parallel pattern exists, albeit to varying extents, for both master's and undergraduate's assignments, often culminating in substantial projects such as Master II dissertations, essay writing, or topic presentations that contribute significantly to the overall grade. Central to this proficiency is articulation, encompassing the lucid presentation and coherent arrangement of ideas, as well as the alignment of the student's stance with existing knowledge. Additionally, a disposition for critical analysis is essential, entailing the skill to evaluate diverse viewpoints, discerning assertions from substantiating evidence, interrogating established presumptions, and maintain a skeptical attitude toward presumed truths.

The ethos of being critical draws inspiration from the European tradition of critique, involving a stance of suspicion and skepticism rather than uncritical acceptance of purported

truths. It entails appraising the soundness of claims and propositions, scrutinizing the underpinnings that bolster them, and cultivating a critical standpoint through extensive engagement with literature and introspection within the subject area.

Critical thinking encompasses both the evaluation of a claim's validity or an argument's cogency and the construction of potent arguments. An argument comprises a conclusion, which represents the particular assertion under discussion, and premises, which supply the rationale buttressing the conclusion. Arguments constitute a sequence of statements designed to persuade an audience to embrace a specific perspective or conclusion. To achieve validity, an argument must exhibit logically interconnected premises that are themselves accurate or plausible. Arguments are conventionally harnessed in academic writing, dialogues, and debates to bolster or challenge a particular viewpoint or assertion.

To foster the development of compelling and convincing arguments, students can adhere to a series of strategic steps. Initially, they should precisely delineate the assertion or standpoint they intend to advocate for or against, which serves as the argument's ultimate conclusion. Subsequently, they should amass pertinent and trustworthy substantiating evidence, encompassing data, facts, figures, illustrations, and expert opinions. Moreover, considering the beliefs, values, and attitudes of the intended audience facilitates the tailoring of the argument for maximum impact. Methodically organizing the evidence through logical methods such as deductive reasoning, inductive reasoning, or analogies bolsters the argument's potency. It is equally crucial to anticipate potential counterarguments or objections that the audience might raise and address them adeptly within the argument. The adept utilization of clear and persuasive language, including rhetorical devices like metaphors and analogies, contributes to the argument's compelling nature. Ultimately, succinctly summarizing the argument and reaffirming the claim in a compelling manner aims to sway the audience toward accepting the claim's validity. This educational endeavor underscores that a potent argument transcends mere possession of accurate information; its efficacy is rooted in the skillful and engaging presentation of that information. To help students identify the features of an argument, the following guidelines should be considered following the same reasoning as Stella Cottrell (2005):

-"Find the sentence(s) that express the main argument

-Look for the author's introduction to the argument

-Identify the concluding statement that summarizes the argument

-Identify the overall logical conclusion

-Find the main reasons given to support the logical idea

-Identify any intermediate conclusions used as reasons

-Look for evidence given to support reasons

-Identify words that signal the development of either the main argument or arguments leading to intermediate conclusions

-Look for any counterarguments put forward by the author

-Identify any arguments used by the author to address counterarguments" (p.208).

3. Ways to Extend Critical Thinking Skills

3.1. Through Exercises

Enhancing critical thinking requires consistent practice and engagement with exercises that challenge student's analytical and evaluative skills. Here are some exercises that can help them develop and strengthen their critical thinking abilities:

Socratic questioning: Push students to engage in discussions with themselves or others using Socratic questioning techniques. Ask open-ended questions that prompt deeper thinking, encourage exploration of assumptions, and challenge underlying beliefs. To illustrate the importance of such an exercise in framing the quality of analysis, Paul and Elder (2007) affirm:

> Socratic questioning teaches the importance of questioning in learning (indeed Socrates himself thought that questioning was the only defensible form of teaching). It teaches the difference between systematic and fragmented thinking. It promotes digging beneath the surface of ideas and valuing the development of questioning minds to cultivate deep learning.
> The art of Socratic questioning is intimately connected with critical thinking because the art of questioning is important to excellence of thought. What the word "Socratic" adds to the art of questioning is systematicity, depth, and an abiding interest in assessing the truth or plausibility of ideas (p. 36).

Paul and Elder emphasize the significance of Socratic questioning in fostering deep learning and the development of critical thinking through this quote. It underscores the importance of inquisitiveness, methodical thinking, and truth assessment in the quest for knowledge.

Debates and discussion: Get students to participate in debates or structured discussions on various topics. Practice presenting logical arguments, defending their viewpoints, and respectfully challenging others' perspectives. In an article published in 2007, Oros stresses the significance of debates when he writes:

> On the surface, classroom debates would appear to focus on the development of speaking skills, but in fact a successful debater cannot succeed with rhetorical flourish alone. More important are the lines of argument advanced, the evidence used to support one's case, the organization of one's argument, and one's ability to rebut the claims of the opposing team (p.297).

Classroom debates serve a multifaceted educational purposes. They extend beyond the mere enhancement of speaking abilities and, instead, help students in cultivating critical thinking, research, and the art of effective argumentation, all of which are essential for success in academia and beyond.

Problem-solving: Work on complex problem-solving exercises that require analyzing situations, considering multiple solutions, and evaluating the pros and cons of each option. This exercise is important in the sense that it introduces students to diverse situations to stimulate their thinking abilities. Flynn (1989, p.664) thinks that problem-solving helps students "learn to analyze, synthesize and evaluate ideas". In short, this activity is an essential tool that surpasses the mere identification of solutions to specific issues. It nurtures advanced cognitive abilities that hold significance in various academic and professional settings.

Comparative analysis: Compare and contrast different viewpoints, theories, or solutions related to a particular issue. Identify similarities, differences, and the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective.

Furthermore, explore ethical scenarios and dilemmas. Analyze the moral implications of different choices and consider the consequences of each decision, by applying the three philosophical approaches to ethical reasoning: utilitarian ethics, deontological ethics, and virtue ethics. By theorizing the link between ethical reasoning and student argumentation, Griswold and Chowning (2013, p.65) are proposing an approach to addressing barriers to teaching ethics in order to embed quality in thoughts.

Additionally, when encountering information online, evaluate the credibility of sources and verify claims through fact-checking. Fact-checking is a crucial process of verifying and confirming the accuracy of information, claims, or statements presented in various sources. In an era of abundant information and misinformation, fact-checking helps ensure that you are making informed decisions based on reliable and truthful information.

Along with concept mapping: teachers should create concept maps to allow students to visually organize and connect ideas. This exercise enhances their ability to see relationships

between concepts. Basing their research on works previously carried on, Romero and al. (2017) put forth:

> When students apply this technique, the new knowledge is assimilated by establishing links to previous, pre-existing knowledge, which acts as an anchor for the new concepts that are included in the cognitive structure and become defined and differentiated knowledge that enriches the network of meanings and expands the learning matrix (p.315).

Concept mapping offers a rapid and straightforward grasp of novel concepts, encourages the examination and fusion of ideas, and enables us to articulate our understanding in personal terms. This significantly enhances comprehensive learning, stimulates the growth of thoughtful thinking, integrates concepts, and fosters collaborative engagement (Romero and al., 2017, p.328).

Not only concept mapping but also argument mapping: map out the structure of arguments by identifying premises, conclusions, and supporting evidence. This exercise helps analyze the logical flow of reasoning. Dealing with the prominence of argumentation and its structures in enhancing critical thinking skills, Dwyer and al. (2011), assert based on previous research:

> Argument maps and argument mapping may be a useful pedagogical aid, particularly in situations where students are working to analyse and evaluate complex arguments. The current research is part of a larger set of studies designed to examine the effects of argument mapping on memory for arguments (…) and growth in critical thinking skill and reflective judgment. (p.109).

And summarizing and paraphrasing: drive students to summarize each section or paragraph in their own words. This practice helps them process the information and identify key concepts.

3.2. Through Critical Reading Skills

Discerning between factual assertions and opinions: It involves recognizing that facts consist of information verifiable through objective evidence, such as tangible proof or credible witness accounts (Langan, 2008, p.400). Opinions encompass beliefs, assessments, or conclusions that lack objective verifiability and are susceptible to differing perspectives. The inclusion of value-laden vocabulary often characterizes opinions, signifying subjectivity, and disagreements can arise concerning matters of what is right or advisable to do (Langan, p.400). Stella Cottrell (2005) simply puts it when it comes to opinions and facts: "An opinion is a belief that is believed to be true, but which is not based on proof or substantial evidence. An opinion may be a personal point of view or held by a large number of people, even if it runs contrary to the evidence" (p.141).

The key consideration to remember is that statements of fact might ultimately prove to be false, and expressions of value frequently convey personal viewpoints. Be cautious and assess how concepts can vary from different standpoints. Students who think critically should strive to ascertain the maximum amount of objective truth achievable and steer clear of manipulation, in which subjective opinions are presented as objective facts.

Students should be taught propaganda techniques to avoid emotional manipulation. The latter actually refer to various methods and strategies employed to manipulate or influence people's beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors in a way that serves a particular agenda or interest. These techniques often rely on psychological, emotional, or logical appeals to shape public opinion and promote a specific point of view. They can be used in various forms of communication, such as advertising, politics, and media, to sway individuals' perceptions and decisions. Among these techniques, one can name bandwagon which encourages people to follow others because they are doing it, testimonial which uses the endorsement of famous people to influence viewers, transfer which associates a product or cause with something people admire (Langan, 2008), and appeals to emotion which go counter to appeals to reason. In that line of thought, Cottrell (2005, p.117) considers that emotions drive the body into action rather than using the mind for reasoning.

Students should be also taught how to recognize errors in reasoning: fallacies are essentially flawed arguments lacking substantial support, arising due to inattentive reasoning. Fallacies like hasty generalization, red herrings (changing the subject), and ignoring the main point, oversimplify complex issues. Circular reasoning, also known as begging the question, entails employing irrational evidence to support a claim, while personal attacks ignore the issue and concentrate on the character of the opponent. Describing this precise flaw in argumentation, Stella Cottrell (2005) declares "Attacks on the person rather than the argument are often used to undermine the credibility of an opposing point of view - but it is not a valid method of critical reasoning" (p.117). The straw man fallacy is a form of informal logical fallacy happening when an individual distorts or misrepresents his opponent's argument, aiming to make it simpler to criticize or refute. Instead of tackling the genuine argument presented by the other party, the one employing this fallacy constructs a distorted or straw man representation of the argument. Typically, this misrepresented version is less robust, more vulnerable to critique than the original argument. When one criticizes this altered version rather than engaging with the authentic argument, they are committing the fallacy. The false cause fallacy known as post hoc fallacy arises when someone erroneously claims that because two events or phenomena are

correlated or happen simultaneously, one must have caused the other. In essence, it entails establishing a cause-and-effect relationship between two elements without adequate evidence or reasoning to substantiate such a connection. While the false comparison fallacy also referred to as the false analogy fallacy, takes place when an argument incorrectly draws a comparison between two things or situations. In this fallacy, the comparison is misleading or faulty because the two items being compared lack sufficient similarity in relevant aspects to establish a valid conclusion. It typically involves finding similarities between two situations that might appear similar on the surface but are fundamentally distinct in ways that render the comparison invalid and unsuitable for the argument's intended purpose. The last informal logical fallacy is the either-or fallacy also known as the false dichotomy. This fallacy arises when an individual portrays a scenario as if it only offers two conceivable options or results, when a multitude of alternatives and intricate possibilities exist in reality. This error oversimplifies intricate matters by condensing them into a binary decision, frequently with the aim of making one option appear significantly more favorable or unfavorable than it actually is. It overlooks the existence of middle ground or multiple potential solutions and can lead to excessively simplistic and deceptive conclusions. All these reasoning errors should be introduced to students in order to avoid misleading paths as they engage with texts.

Conclusion:

The LMD System is definitely a way to push through more research and the latter is inexorably connected with critical thinking, persuasion, and the ability to convince. Grading students' essay writings, topic presentations, reports, and master dissertations shows a real need to insist on the acquisition of skills that can help students think critically in English which is a foreign language. This study has shown how far critical thinking and argumentation are linked, and that improving critical thinking skills is the sole pathway that can help students from the English department of Cheikh Anta Diop University to better produce research documents and essay writings. To acquire these tools, it is a must to integrate reflective practices and other reading skills to drive students to develop clear and logical thoughts in English. This presents three advantages: first, it helps students to be better professionals when using the English language, then fosters in them the need to be in close contact with books, with written materials so as to widen their knowledge. And finally, it enables them to provide arguments to convince their audience since the more they read, the more they develop skills for critical analysis.

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