

## ARTICLE

# Critical Reading and Emergency Remote Education: A Discursive Textual Analysis of Research Articles

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## ABSTRACT

Between 2021 and 2023, emergency remote education had a significant impact on the development of critical reading skills among high school students in Latin America, with a particular focus on Ecuador. The objective was to analyze how this educational modality affected the acquisition of critical reading competencies and propose pedagogical strategies adapted to virtual environments. The methodology employed was a discursive textual analysis based on a qualitative bibliographic exploration and a hermeneutic study of 233 scientific articles retrieved from databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The findings indicate that ERE had a significant impact on the development of critical reading, highlighting the need to adapt pedagogical strategies to digital platforms. Challenges were identified, including unequal access to technology and insufficient teacher training, which hindered the effective learning of critical skills. The conclusions emphasize the urgency of addressing inequalities in access to digital education and the need to develop new pedagogical strategies that foster critical reading practices in virtual environments. The importance of creating innovative and accessible teaching resources to improve reading comprehension and critical analysis in this new educational context is also highlighted.

**Keywords:** Critical Reading Learning; Emergency Remote Teaching; Educational Setbacks

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# 1. Introduction

Research on critical reading in the context of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) has revealed that, despite access to digital platforms, significant barriers exist to the development of complex cognitive skills. The lack of synchronous interaction, limited immediate feedback, and insufficient collaboration between students and instructors have impeded the growth of critical thinking abilities <sup>[1]</sup>. Additionally, the absence of a physical learning environment that encourages deep analysis and collective reflection has diminished students' opportunities to build a critical understanding of texts. This gap is further exacerbated by the limited availability of teaching strategies tailored to the remote learning format that effectively support the development of critical reading.

COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented disruptions across various sectors, including education, leading to a shift toward Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) <sup>[2]</sup>. This abrupt transition forced teachers to adapt their teaching and learning processes outside traditional classrooms, prioritizing essential curricular objectives and selecting competencies that could be developed with the support of families. However, this alternative distance education model presented multiple challenges, particularly in developing complex skills such as critical reading.

Critical reading is a process that goes beyond decoding words; it involves analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating the underlying ideas and implicit reasoning within texts <sup>[3]</sup>. During ERT, pedagogical constraints prevented many students from achieving progressive development in this competency, limiting their ability to interpret information critically. Consequently, there has been a growing interest in studying the effects of ERT on the teaching of critical reading, as this skill is fundamental to preparing citizens capable of participating in modern democracies.

Currently, several Ibero-American countries have implemented specific initiatives to promote critical reading. In Spain, the Language and Literature curricula, along with programs like Leer.es, encourage the interpretation and evaluation of texts from an early age <sup>[4]</sup>. Portugal has prioritized critical reading through the Plano Nacional de Leitura (2024), promoting reflection and collaborative debate <sup>[5]</sup>. In Mexico, the National Reading and Writing Program (PNLE) has sought to integrate critical reading

into all areas of knowledge and facilitate access to digital content for communities lacking connectivity <sup>[6]</sup>. Colombia, meanwhile, implements the “Leer es mi cuento” plan, which fosters the development of critical thinking through specialized teaching strategies <sup>[7]</sup>.

Stewart and Lowenthal <sup>[8]</sup> present a comprehensive model for crisis-driven remote education, focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic. Their analysis examines various stages of remote teaching, including ERT and Sustained Remote Teaching (SRT), highlighting the adjustments needed at each phase. The findings indicate that while ERT was initially disorganized—educational institutions gradually stabilized their practices. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for proactive, long-term planning to effectively handle future educational disruptions.

Similarly, Antonova and Tyrkheeva <sup>[9]</sup> conducted a study on the effect of formative assessment on the development of critical reading skills in the context of emergency remote teaching at a university in Russia. They applied this assessment to students from various disciplines, including Economics, IT, and Humanities, using tasks and interviews. The results showed that formative assessment, combined with feedback, had a positive impact on critical reading performance compared to traditional methods that did not include feedback. However, students faced difficulties in identifying patterns and evaluating the credibility of texts. They concluded that formative assessment is crucial for improving critical competencies in distance learning environments.

A study conducted in Ecuador highlighted the need for a critical reading approach to digital resources and pedagogical strategies, not only as tools for content transmission but also as essential instruments to promote reflection, autonomy, and active student participation in their learning process, despite technological and connectivity limitations <sup>[10]</sup>. The lack of technological resources in rural areas and skepticism about the effectiveness of online classes are factors that must be carefully considered before assessing the feasibility of implementing long-term online education in Ecuador <sup>[11]</sup>.

These efforts demonstrate that fostering critical readers not only contributes to academic performance but also supports personal and sociocultural development <sup>[12]</sup>. The existing studies on the impact of ERT on critical

reading skills vaguely assert the influence of the transition to online learning but fail to specify the exact gaps in the research. They broadly highlight challenges and advancements in teaching methods, yet they lack a detailed analysis of how ERT specifically affects the development of critical reading competencies. Further, these studies do not identify the pedagogical strategies that need to be adapted to foster critical reading in virtual environments.

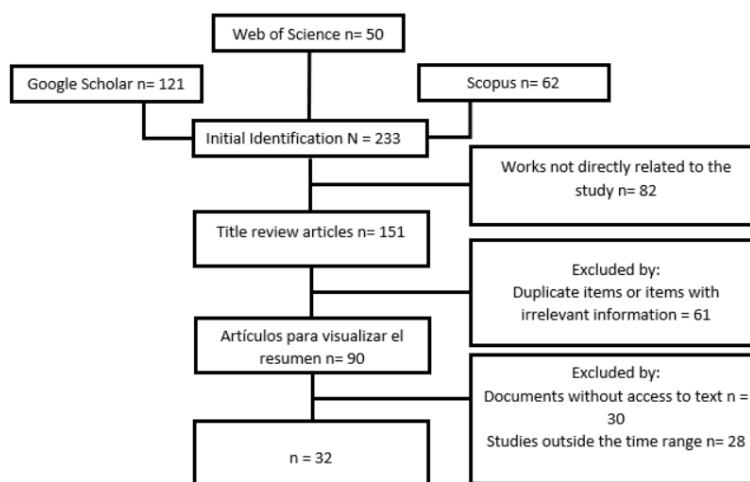
This context led to the following research question: How has ERT influenced the development of critical reading skills in secondary school students in Ibero-America, especially in Ecuador, with regard to the challenges and advances identified in recent research? Thus, this study seeks, on the one hand, to understand the influence of ERT on the teaching and learning of critical reading among secondary school students and, on the other, to contribute to the creation of didactic strategies for forming readers with conscious perspectives and choices that enable them to think and act as democratic citizens. A hermeneutic study was conducted based on the Discursive Textual Analysis (DTA) of selected research articles, highlighting the main setbacks, advancements, and challenges of remote education.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This research adopts a qualitative approach aiming to understand the advancements, setbacks, and challenges in the teaching and learning of critical reading during Emergency Remote Education (ERE) in Latin America between 2021 and 2023. The study employed DTA as a

methodological strategy, following the model proposed by Moraes and Galiazzi (2007). This approach facilitates a deep and structured understanding of the phenomenon through the interpretation of data from a critical and reflective perspective <sup>[13]</sup>.

DTA unfolds in three key phases: deconstruction of texts, establishment of relationships, and emergent understanding. The first phase involved fragmenting and thoroughly examining the selected texts, identifying relevant statements about the phenomenon under study—in this case, critical reading in the context of ERE. Subsequently, the categorization phase grouped the analytical units into systems of related categories or subcategories, enabling the identification of significant connections among the analyzed elements. Finally, the integration of these elements resulted in a renewed understanding, encapsulated in a metatext that reflects the new perspectives gained <sup>[13]</sup>. In addition, the methodology included a documentary and bibliographic review aimed at building a state-of-the-art on critical reading in ERT. This review covered research published over the last 10 years, evaluating both empirical and theoretical studies conducted in Ibero-America, especially in Ecuador. The selected articles were subjected to rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure their relevance, considering only works accessible through academic databases, peer-reviewed, and directly focused on the topic of study <sup>[14]</sup>. The review was conducted in databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science, ensuring the quality and relevance of the selected articles (**Figure 1**).



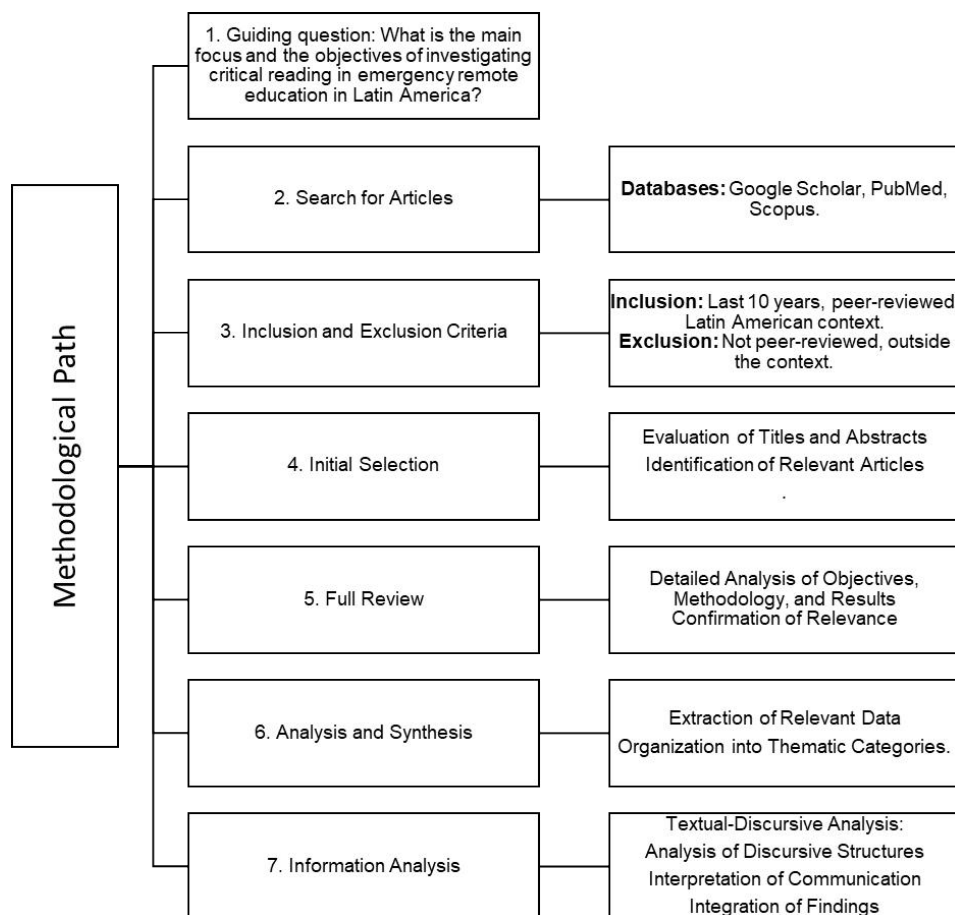
**Figure 1.** Inclusion and exclusion process.

To ensure the analysis was robust and reliable, a data triangulation process was applied, allowing us to validate the findings from different perspectives<sup>[15]</sup>. We compared our results with previous studies in education and consulted a group of experts in qualitative and educational research. In total, five specialists with extensive experience in their fields were involved.

Additionally, the process included a thorough review of the data to identify possible discrepancies in interpretations, ensuring that the results were consistent and truly represented the phenomena we were studying. When disagreements arose among the experts, periodic meetings were held to discuss and reach a consensus. This approach allowed us to resolve any discrepancies constructively, always based on evidence and agreement among the participants.

Another key aspect of the triangulation was inter-coder reliability. To ensure the coding was accurate and consistent, we used a double coding method, where two researchers independently coded the data. If significant differences in their interpretations occurred, the cases were reviewed together until an agreement was reached. This allowed us to measure inter-coder reliability, achieving an agreement index of 92%, which validates the strength of our analysis and strengthens confidence in the results.

This detailed triangulation approach not only made the results more robust but also minimized potential personal biases, creating a solid foundation for our conclusions. The complete process of selecting and analyzing research articles is shown in **Figure 2**.



**Figure 2.** Selection and analysis process of research articles.

This review was conducted to evaluate and synthesize existing information on critical reading in the context

of remote education in Latin America. Peer-reviewed articles and relevant studies from the past ten years were ex-

amined to understand how crucial reading is approached in these educational settings. The review included an evaluation of the objectives, methodologies, and results of the selected studies.

The corpus review was carried out using the inductive strategy of DTA<sup>[16]</sup> which focuses on deepening the understanding of a central category under investigation through rigorous and reasoned analysis based on a three-level cycle: 1) Deconstruction of the corpus texts: This process, referred to as "text dismantling," involves a detailed examination of the corpus, fragmenting it into statements related to the phenomenon under study to identify constituent units. 2) Establishment of relationships among unitary elements: This process, known as "categorization," involves building relationships between the units of analysis, combining and classifying them into sets of standard or closely related elements. These sets form systems of categories or subcategories related to the central category. 3) Emergent understanding: The deconstruction and combination of the corpus's unitary elements throughout the previous levels enable the emergence of a renewed understanding of the whole. This understanding contains the researcher's critical perspective and validation of the central phenomenon or category under investigation. The findings are communicated through a metatext.

The deconstruction phase involved a meticulous and detailed reading of the selected documents<sup>[17]</sup>, identifying relevant analytical units related to critical reading and the teaching-learning process during ERE. Subsequently, relationships were established among the unitary aspects of the corpus. Connections and emerging patterns among the various units of analysis were examined to understand the underlying relationships and trends present in the corpus.

Finally, an emergent understanding of the themes and concepts present in the corpus was achieved. Discussions focused on critical reading, teaching-learning strategies during ERE, and the challenges faced in this context. The aim was to gain a detailed understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and discourses present in the analyzed texts. The main categories of analysis were critical reading, teaching and learning during ERE, and the transition from confinement to in-person learning in this context. Each of these categories was examined in depth, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the topics addressed in

the analyzed texts.

To validate the analysis, data triangulation was conducted by comparing and contrasting the findings with those of previous studies and consulting experts in the fields of education and qualitative research. This approach helped ensure the reliability and validity of the results obtained in the study, thereby strengthening the robustness of the methodology used.

### 3. Results

This section presents the results obtained from analyzing the data collected during the research. The main findings are detailed, and an interpretation of the results is provided in relation to the study's objectives and the reviewed literature. The results are organized around the key aspects identified in the research, including the qualitative insights that emerged from the analysis.

#### 3.1. Teaching and Learning in Emergency Remote Education (ERE)

In recent years, ERE has emerged as an essential solution in unforeseen situations, such as public health crises or natural disasters. A notable example is the impact caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This modality has transformed the interaction between teachers and students into a pedagogical and social imperative. Emergency measures have broken down socioeconomic and geographic barriers, requiring the optimization of teaching through recorded lessons, organized content, and interactive activities. The implementation of these strategies directly impacts the learning process, demanding agile adaptation and effective use of technology<sup>[18-20]</sup>.

In Latin America, where inequality in access to education and technology is a deeply rooted reality, implementing education in emergencies has become both indispensable and challenging. The gap in access to these resources has widened disparities in learning, particularly among students who lack adequate devices or stable internet connections, significantly affecting disadvantaged communities. To address this challenge, concrete measures are essential, such as equitable distribution of devices, improving internet access in these communities, and providing training for both teachers and students in the

effective use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). However, the lack of clear proposals from political leaders underscores the urgency of developing strategies to close these gaps and ensure equal educational opportunities for all students<sup>[21, 22]</sup>.

In countries like Uruguay, where there is a wide range of devices, virtual platforms, and a significant number of teachers with basic knowledge of digital technology, the transition to online education has been successful<sup>[23]</sup>. Conversely, in Ecuador, inequality in access to technology has left many students, particularly in rural and low-income areas, excluded from education<sup>[24]</sup>.

Thus, the use of ICTs is crucial for closing existing gaps and improving access to ERE for all socioeconomic sectors. Recognizing the importance of reading habits for students' cognitive and academic development is fundamental, as is promoting motivational learning strategies that foster a positive attitude toward reading. Developing skills such as reading autonomy, text comprehension, and note-taking is essential, given the deficiencies in students' reading strategies<sup>[25, 26]</sup>.

The urgency of fostering reading habits among students becomes evident when considering the lack of in-depth exploration into the underlying causes of these behaviors and the absence of specific strategies to address them. Additionally, the limited participation of students in scientific readings within their professional fields highlights the pressing need to implement actions that promote specialized reading and the development of critical skills in both academic and professional contexts. In this regard, the introduction of the Virtual Reading Club emerges as a novel and effective strategy to strengthen essential reading using virtual platforms and address the particular challenges teachers face when incorporating technology<sup>[27, 28]</sup>.

In response to the educational crisis triggered by the pandemic, emergency remote teaching strategies have been implemented to support high school students. In this context, platforms like Wix have emerged as fundamental tools for presenting innovative pedagogical practices. Their impact on improving reading instruction in remote settings has been significant, facilitating greater interactivity and adaptability. However, the implementation of the "Learn at Home" strategy has highlighted the urgent need

to address basic and upper secondary education levels effectively. Moreover, it has underscored the limitations of traditional media such as radio and television, which lack the updates and adaptability of contemporary technological possibilities<sup>[29, 30]</sup>.

The topic of ERE in Latin America at the high school level has recently been studied, with a particular focus on critical reading and the use of ICTs to close educational gaps. It is and it is well known that remote education has transformed teacher-student interaction, necessitating agile adaptation and the effective use of technology. However, in Latin America, inequality in access to education and technology has widened learning disparities, particularly among students who lack adequate devices or stable internet connections.

In relation to the study's objective, a lack of research specifically addressing the topic of critical reading in ERE in Latin America has been identified, as well as the impact of virtual platforms and remote teaching strategies on reading comprehension and student participation in scientific readings within their professional fields. Regarding the limitations of similar reviews, it has been noted that many of them have focused on the use of ICTs without specifically addressing the critical reading aspect.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap in the literature, focusing specifically on critical reading in ERE in Latin America and exploring how virtual platforms and remote teaching strategies can enhance reading comprehension and student engagement in scientific readings.

### **3.2. Development of Interpretive and Critical Comprehension in Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT)**

The contrast between geographical and gender differences in access to culture and education presents significant challenges in promoting reading and critical comprehension in the classroom. Studies identify key factors influencing the reading habits of secondary school students, offering a robust review of the background on critical reading comprehension while also highlighting significant gaps. The lack of perception of reading as a leisure activity underscores the need to investigate further students' attitudes toward reading to inform more comprehensive and practical educational policies<sup>[31, 32]</sup>.

Critical reading comprehension in the classroom represents a significant challenge related to unmet social and academic needs. Limitations in pedagogical approaches and the scarcity of educational resources negatively impact the development of critical competencies in students. It is essential to implement instructional strategies that not only promote lexical acquisition but also strengthen reading comprehension and critical thinking skills. However, there are still gaps in research, such as the lack of analysis regarding socioeconomic inequalities and the impact of lexical development on reading performance. Addressing these aspects more comprehensively is necessary to improve educational outcomes and close existing gaps <sup>[33, 34]</sup>.

The deficit in critical reading is a global issue that affects both students and teachers, evidenced by the tendency of young people to engage in superficial reading without delving into text comprehension and evaluation. This issue is particularly severe in Latin America and the Caribbean, where it is estimated that four out of five children cannot understand a simple text <sup>[35]</sup>. This problem is exacerbated by a generation of young people who tend to settle for a superficial reading of the realities they study and rarely delve into higher levels of comprehension and evaluation. This is partly due to the high consumption of digital content without critical analysis and a weak preference for reading among young people <sup>[36–38]</sup>.

Research indicates that various factors contribute to this deficit. Among them are the lack of effective pedagogical strategies that encourage critical reading in the classroom and the limitations of schooling strategies during the pandemic <sup>[37–39]</sup>. Many students struggle with conducting inferential and critical analyses, which restricts their ability to interpret and evaluate information adequately. This neglects the development of reading comprehension, as critical reading has lost importance in learning management <sup>[39]</sup>. Furthermore, it has been observed that teachers often fail to create suitable environments for developing these skills in their students, worsening the situation <sup>[40]</sup>.

To address this challenge, it is essential that linguistic competencies support the development of proper habits in reading, writing, speaking, and listening among students. In this way, disciplinary content should focus on strengthening these four skills, promoting a deeper and more critical understanding of information, and encouraging

reflective analysis among young people <sup>[41]</sup>. Similarly, the development of logical-verbal thinking through reading will enable students to be critical and reflective in all areas of knowledge and to enjoy classes in harmony and active participation <sup>[37, 38]</sup>.

### **3.3. Transit from Confinement to Presence in ERE**

This category of transition from one state to another was a fundamental aspect that shaped teaching and learning processes in general and critical reading in particular. The shift from ERE to in-person schooling represented a multifaceted challenge in the educational field. Initially devised as an improvised solution to maintain teaching continuity during confinement, ERE faced technological, pedagogical, and emotional limitations. The lack of adequate infrastructure and training hindered the quality of learning, while isolation and workload negatively impacted the mental health of teachers and students. This transition process highlighted the need for adaptation, self-care, and a balance between in-person and virtual education—challenges that remain relevant in the pursuit of a new educational normality <sup>[42, 43]</sup>.

The abrupt transition to remote education during the COVID-19 pandemic profoundly transformed how the educational community interacts with the school environment. This shift led to a redistribution of sensitivity, where technological tools became mediators of new socialization practices. However, upon returning to in-person education post-pandemic, difficulties in acquiring basic writing skills among middle school students became evident.

The lack of mediating processes by teachers exacerbated these difficulties, underscoring the urgent need for creative strategies and more detailed pedagogical attention to strengthen students' cognitive capacity and writing skills. Emphasizing mental and emotional health, as well as activities that stimulate critical thinking and artistic expression, is revealed as an essential component to address these shortcomings and promote integral development during the return to in-person education <sup>[44, 45]</sup>.

In this transitional category, the importance of collaborative work is emphasized, as it supports each other in building a path toward a more inclusive, equitable, and student-centered education that aligns with their needs

and realities.

The research revealed a growing difficulty among students in interpreting and synthesizing ideas, exacerbated by a preference for digital content over traditional texts. This change in reading habits negatively affects their critical analysis skills. To address this situation, the need for teachers to adopt innovative methodologies that integrate technology is emphasized, as this motivates students and strengthens their comprehension and analytical skills. Additionally, the importance of developing reading habits is underscored, as these are essential for academic performance and students' personal and emotional development.

There is also a need to transform students' limited perception of new technologies, which are often seen merely as entertainment tools. The implementation of virtual learning environments has proven effective in improving students' communicative and critical skills. However, a lack of suitable didactic materials for critical reading has been identified, suggesting the design of interactive resources as a solution.

The transition to a more dynamic education adapted to technologies and home-based didactic methods has been fundamental during the COVID-19 pandemic. This transformation has allowed the exploration of new strategies to facilitate online learning. However, the ERT model has also revealed significant challenges, including digital infrastructure gaps, generational divides, and economic disparities that impact learning quality, particularly in vulnerable sectors. Despite these challenges, opportunities to improve the national educational system have been identified, highlighting the need for inclusive and accessible solutions that leverage virtual tools for all participants.

## 4. Discussion

Undoubtedly, teaching and learning in ERE have permeated the current educational field, generating strong demands related to the need to prepare children and young people to face the transformations brought about by the expansion of digital technologies. In this regard, Cassany emphasizes that in the digital age, critical reading becomes even more necessary due to the proliferation of misleading and false information<sup>[46]</sup>. Cassany proposes that teaching critical reading skills is essential to equip

students with the tools needed to discern between verified information and misinformation, thereby strengthening society's democratic capacity.

In this context, the proposal by Cassany to introduce the concept of the "reader's laboratory" as an innovative approach to teaching critical reading is particularly relevant<sup>[47]</sup>. It highlights the importance of creating educational spaces where students can actively and reflectively practice and develop these skills. This approach is innovative as it integrates physical and digital resources to promote and consolidate these communicative and technological competencies.

Establishing learning strategies that foster reading habits among students and analyzing how these relate to current subject objectives is essential. Furthermore, in adapting to distance education, it is crucial to provide intellectual tools that enable high school students to continue their classes remotely, overcoming obstacles such as a lack of study habits, low levels of communicative expression, and digital fatigue.

Therefore, it is essential to broaden students' limited perception of new technologies, often viewed as mere tools for entertainment or superficial communication, without fully exploring their potential. This is especially relevant in the context of critical reading comprehension, which has been neglected in learning management. However, the successful implementation of a Virtual Learning Environment, utilizing tools such as Microsoft Office 365, has strengthened students' communicative competencies in critical reading and writing over the past four years, both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The development of logical and verbal thinking through critical reading is essential for first-year high school students, allowing them to acquire meaningful and functional knowledge. Although there is a weak preference for reading among adolescents, particularly in virtual environments, successful strategies have been identified during the pandemic, such as the use of digital texts and collaborative work with ICTs. These methodologies promote active participation and reading comprehension, preparing students to be critical and reflective in both academic and everyday contexts<sup>[37, 38]</sup>.

ERE was the educational approach adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure the continuity of ed-



educational processes in times of crisis. The use of digital technologies characterized this form of teaching as a means of communication between students and teachers, as educational institutions were forced to close their physical facilities<sup>[43]</sup>.

ERE differed from conventional distance education in several aspects. First, it emerged as an improvised response to the crisis, without prior planning or a defined strategy, resulting in extensive but not consistently effective use of digital technologies.

The abrupt shift from in-person education to a dynamic modality adapted to technologies and home-based didactic methods has been widely questioned, particularly because the ERE model significantly impacted some educational sectors. It also offered opportunities to improve the national educational system, highlighting the need to adapt to virtual demands and find inclusive, accessible solutions for all participants<sup>[48, 49]</sup>. However, in other educational contexts, it revealed severe difficulties due to precarious digital infrastructure and generational and economic gaps.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the educational community faced various challenges in implementing ERE. These challenges included the need for teacher training in the use of ICTs, the role of teachers within the community and in remote education, and the type of assessment most suitable for this context. Additionally, results from the first year of ERE revealed significant gaps in connectivity and limited interactivity, particularly among public sector students, which negatively affected learning quality<sup>[50, 51]</sup>.

The analysis of teachers' uses of educational applications and platforms revealed a tendency to rely on familiar tools, facilitating their use and implementation, particularly in the context of ERE during the COVID-19 pandemic. Conversely, students' perceptions of the application of flipped and traditional classrooms suggest slight advantages in analysis and evaluation skills within the flipped classroom approach. Data collected from implementing flipped classrooms stands out as a strength of this study, contributing to the growing body of research on this topic during the pandemic<sup>[52, 53]</sup>.

Regarding pedagogical quality, while educational continuity was maintained, it did not always reach an

optimal level. Teachers faced challenges adapting and maintaining interaction with students in this new context. Furthermore, access to and proficiency with digital technologies were crucial for ERE's success, but disparities in these aspects negatively affected some students<sup>[54]</sup>.

Studies highlight the complexity and importance of various factors in developing reading habits and comprehension, including the influence of attitudes, motivation, reading interests, parental involvement, and the cognitive demands of different text types. While these studies provide valuable contributions to the educational field, they also point to gaps and areas for future research, such as the need for validated instruments to measure specific aspects of reading habits and comprehension, and exploring additional factors that may influence academic performance<sup>[55–57]</sup>.

In the context of teaching and learning in ERE, addressing connectivity gaps, promoting teacher training in the effective use of technological tools, and designing pedagogical strategies that foster interactivity and student engagement in virtual environments are essential. This approach aims not only to overcome the immediate challenges of the pandemic but also to lay the groundwork for a more inclusive and adaptable educational system that meets the evolving demands of the 21st century.

Research has revealed that students face significant difficulties in interpreting and synthesizing ideas, a problem exacerbated by their preference for digital content over traditional texts<sup>[58, 59]</sup>. This trend negatively impacts students' critical analysis abilities, highlighting the urgency for teachers to adopt innovative methodologies that integrate technology to motivate students and strengthen their comprehension and analytical skills.

Moreover, transforming students' limited perception of new technologies—often viewed solely as entertainment tools—is essential. According to Carpio<sup>[60]</sup> implementing virtual learning environments has proven effective in improving students' communicative and critical competencies, however, as Davila et al.<sup>[61]</sup> noted, the lack of adequate didactic materials for critical reading remains a significant challenge.

The transition to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic was a fundamental shift, but also revealed significant difficulties, such as gaps in digital

infrastructure and economic and generational inequalities that affect learning quality <sup>[62, 63]</sup>. Despite these challenges, the situation created opportunities to improve the national educational system, emphasizing the need for inclusive and accessible solutions that leverage virtual tools for all participants. Training teachers in using ICTs is essential to address these challenges and improve the quality of distance education <sup>[64]</sup>.

Finally, the return to in-person education has highlighted difficulties in basic writing skills, which have been exacerbated by the lack of teacher mediation during remote education. This underscores the urgent need to implement creative strategies and detailed pedagogical attention to enhance students' cognitive abilities and writing skills. Addressing mental and emotional health, as well as stimulating critical thinking and artistic expression, is crucial for students' integral development. Collaboration and the adaptation of educational strategies to students' realities and needs are crucial for building a more inclusive and equitable education in the post-pandemic era.

## 5. Conclusion

Research on critical reading learning during ERE in Latin America reveals that high school students faced various obstacles that limited their development in this area. These challenges include unequal access to technology, lack of direct interaction with teachers, and inadequate teaching materials that offer minimal feedback and assessment. These factors contributed to a subpar educational experience, affecting not only the formation of critical readers but also the development of students' critical thinking skills. This raises a key question: What do studies reveal about critical reading learning during ERE in Latin America, particularly for high school students?

During the pandemic, the teaching of critical reading was primarily conducted through virtual learning environments, utilizing technological tools to foster active participation and reading comprehension among students. Despite connectivity gaps and the lack of direct teacher-student interaction, innovative strategies were implemented, such as utilizing digital texts and collaborative work, to motivate students and enhance their critical thinking and analysis skills. Subsequently, with the return to in-person education, efforts to integrate technology into

classrooms intensified, and hybrid methodologies were promoted to consolidate these competencies, addressing challenges such as digital fatigue and the need for teacher mediation.

The study achieved its objectives by identifying the setbacks, progress, and challenges in teaching and learning critical reading among secondary school students. The key findings were as follows: unequal access to adequate technologies limited participation and the development of essential skills of reading; teachers needed training in using digital tools to improve the quality of instruction; and progress was made in adopting innovative methodologies, such as virtual learning environments and interactive digital resources. However, persistent challenges include gaps in digital infrastructure and the need for pedagogical strategies that promote more active and meaningful student participation in critical text analysis.

The primary causes of these setbacks and advancements stemming from ERE include inequalities in access to devices and connectivity, which hindered participation and created learning gaps; insufficient teacher preparation and training in effectively utilizing digital technologies, which impacted instructional quality; and the rapid adaptation to new teaching methodologies without adequate planning, resulting in inconsistent implementation of pedagogical strategies. Nonetheless, significant progress was observed, including the development of digital skills among both teachers and students, the creation of innovative educational resources, and the utilization of virtual platforms that enabled greater flexibility and personalized learning.

This research sheds light on the influence of ERE on teaching and learning critical reading among secondary school students in Ibero-America. It calls for envisioning the conditions necessary to create instructional strategies that aim to form readers with conscious perspectives and choices, enabling them to think critically and act democratically. Some proposed techniques include:

- Teaching critical reading as a practice is fundamental for academic development, daily life, and personal and emotional growth, as it enables students to analyze and evaluate information reflectively, discern between verified data and misinformation, and develop autonomous and critical thinking. Furthermore,

critical reading fosters essential communication and argumentative skills that contribute to academic and professional success, as well as to building a more informed and participatory society. In daily life, these skills are crucial for making informed decisions and understanding complex contexts, thereby strengthening democratic capacities and individual well-being.

- Educators must adopt innovative methodologies that leverage technology to motivate students and empower their learning. This requires adapting educational policies and pedagogical practices to effectively integrate new forms of digital communication and learning, ensuring that students acquire the skills needed in today's world.
- Designing instructional materials to adapt critical reading to the management of meaningful learning within the studied institution is essential. Therefore, it is proposed to develop teaching materials that aim to improve students' participation and reading comprehension, thereby fostering an interactive and collaborative approach. These materials will include digital and physical resources, such as reading guides, critical analysis activities, and group discussion exercises. Additionally, technological tools such as online learning platforms and interactive applications will be integrated, enabling students to engage dynamically with the texts. This approach seeks to enhance reading comprehension and develop critical and reflective skills essential for students' academic and personal success.

To address these issues, it is essential to implement innovative and adaptive pedagogical strategies that incorporate emerging technologies. These strategies should not only mitigate technological deficiencies but also provide a more interactive and personalized approach to compensate for the lack of face-to-face interaction with teachers. Furthermore, the development of specific and adequate instructional materials for remote education is crucial to meet students' needs and promote more effective learning.

Regarding the evolution of critical reading, it has transitioned from being viewed solely as a cognitive process to being recognized as an essential skill for civic engagement and understanding the contemporary world. However, significant challenges remain in its teaching

and practical application. Remote education, despite its shortcomings, has facilitated the implementation of virtual learning environments that, when effectively used, can enhance students' communicative and critical competencies.

ERE has also catalyzed the adoption of new technologies and pedagogical methodologies that, with proper integration and refinement, could offer long-term benefits to the education system. Continued exploration and enhancement of these virtual learning platforms are crucial to ensure universal accessibility and include tools that foster the development of critical skills.

Despite the challenges posed by ERE, this period has been an opportunity to drive educational innovations with the potential to strengthen critical learning in the future. It is imperative for future research to address the limitations identified in this study, adopting more comprehensive methodological approaches and considering the cultural and contextual specificities of Latin America. This will optimize remote education and enhance the development of critical skills among high school students in the region, ensuring more equitable and effective education.

## Authors Contributions

Conceptualization: E.J.V.C., M.Y.G.R., and L.D.A.V.; Methodology: E.J.V.C., M.Y.G.R., and L.D.A.V.; Drafting the original manuscript: E.J.V.C., M.Y.G.R., and L.D.A.V.; Review and editing of the manuscript: E.J.V.C., M.Y.G.R., and L.D.A.V.; Data investigation and collection: E.J.V.C., M.Y.G.R., and L.D.A.V.; Data curation: E.J.V.C., M.Y.G.R., and L.D.A.V.; Management of software used for data analysis and development of technological tools: E.J.V.C., M.Y.G.R., and L.D.A.V.; Overall supervision of the project: E.J.V.C., M.Y.G.R., and L.D.A.V.; Validation of results: E.J.V.C., M.Y.G.R., and L.D.A.V.; Formal analysis: E.J.V.C., M.Y.G.R., and L.D.A.V.; Supervision: M.Y.G.R., and L.D.A.V.; Visualization of results: L.D.A.V.; All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Institutional Review Board (or Ethics Committee) of the Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja.

## Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

## Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the results of this research are not publicly available due to participant privacy concerns. However, interested parties can request the data directly from the corresponding author via [ejvera12@utpl.edu.ec](mailto:ejvera12@utpl.edu.ec). The data will be provided under specific conditions, provided the applicable restrictions are respected, ensuring compliance with current regulations and the protection of information.

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## Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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