

Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Islamic Education and Science Development (ICONSIDE)

Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan, Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, Indonesia

Mataram, 11-12 June 2024 Available online at <https://proceeding.uinmataram.ac.id/>

Critical Reading for Critical Thinking: The Urgency of Critical Reading in the Era of Technological and Information Disruption

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the significance of critical reading skills in enhancing critical thinking abilities. A comprehensive literature review was conducted, synthesizing findings from peer-reviewed journals, books, and credible online publications, focusing on studies from the past two decades. Critical reading involves the application of skills, strategies, and metacognition to understand and evaluate texts effectively. Key frameworks and empirical studies were analyzed to highlight the correlation between critical reading and critical thinking. The review indicates that developing a routine of critical reading fosters better comprehension, clarity, and critical thinking skills. The findings emphasize the importance of integrating critical reading into educational curricula to prepare students for the challenges of the information age. This study contributes to the understanding of how critical reading practices can cultivate a more analytical and informed generation, essential for navigating today's complex information landscape.

KEYWORDS: Critical Reading; Critical Thinking; Metacognition; Educational Pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

The responsibility of teaching Reading courses has fostered a deep interest in reading skills. Observing how students read and comprehend texts reveals a fascinating phenomenon. There is a strong relationship between their ability to read critically, their capacity to process and disseminate information, and how they communicate that information. Beyond the classroom, active involvement in both independent and collaborative research on reading has resulted in publications in reputable national and international journals. Before elaborating further on critical reading, consider these three reflective questions for educators: 1) Have you ever encountered a situation where students submitted identical assignments despite instructions to paraphrase from various provided readings, opting instead to copy-paste rather than read and analyze the information? 2) Have you ever been in a WhatsApp group where someone confidently shared dubious information, even adding provocative remarks to align others' assumptions with their

perspective? 3) Have you ever met someone who reacted to a news headline or reading without engaging with the actual content, displaying random thinking?

These phenomena are daily realities and reflect broader issues in the era of information and technology disruption, where over 73% of Indonesians freely access digital information via the internet. The root of the problem is multifaceted. Several studies, such as McGrew et al. (2017), have shown that students have low reading interest. More broadly, Indonesia's literacy level is ranked 62nd out of 70 countries, according to the 2019 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Christy, 2020).

UNESCO reported that Indonesia's literacy rate is 0.001%, meaning only one in 1,000 Indonesians has a reading interest. Of those, how many read critically? Certainly very few. This reality is compounded by comparative data indicating an increase in reading interest among Indonesians over the years. For example, a survey by The Digital Reader showed an increase in reading interest, with 36.48% in 2017, 52.92% in 2018, and 53.84% in 2019.

In higher education, should we focus the root cause on students? Previous research has confirmed that both schools and universities, as stakeholders, have not fully supported critical reading literacy activities. Misconceptions about literacy exist, with some teachers defining it as merely mechanical reading. Teachers often instruct students to read textbooks for 15 minutes before class, with no follow-up critical activities, as found by Fauzan et al. (2023) in a study of 19 schools in Java. Miller (2016) mentioned that our students do not lack reading interest; they spend hours on digital reading from social media (Miller, 2016). On these platforms, they read not only text but also multimodal texts, such as videos and images. A study revealed that nearly 50% of students, especially English majors at a university, spend most of their time reading on social media like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Milal et al., 2021).

This indicates that students have the potential to be guided to read various texts (Keller, 2014). Educators play a crucial role in enlightening students with strategies for reading so they can apply these strategies according to the needs of each type of text. Moreover, equipping them with critical reading skills fosters the construction of critical thinking (Carillo, 2017). This phenomenon also serves as a reminder for educators to keep up with information and technology developments, as often it is necessary to adjust strategies and pedagogy to align with students' learning styles.

METHOD

This study employs a comprehensive literature review to examine the significance of critical reading skills in enhancing critical thinking abilities. The review synthesizes findings from various academic sources, including peer-reviewed journals, books, and credible online publications, focusing on studies conducted over the past two decades. The selection criteria for the literature included relevance to critical reading and thinking, methodological rigor, and contribution to the field. Key sources such as Carter's (2011) framework on critical reading strategies, Bosley's (2008) insights on reading skills and strategies, Anderson's (2003) definition of metacognition, and empirical studies like those by Kohzadi et al. (2014) and Milal et al. (2021) were analyzed. This method ensures a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between critical reading and

thinking, and identifies best practices and pedagogical approaches for fostering these skills in educational settings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Critical Reading

Christine Evans Carter (2011), in her book *Mindscales: Critical Reading and Strategies*, explains that critical reading involves skills, strategies, and metacognition (Carter, 2011). Skills are developed through practice and repetition. In the context of reading, skills grow with increased reading intensity. Continuous practice can form a habit. However, skills alone do not lead to specific outcomes without strategies. Strategies enable individuals to know when, how, and why to use certain skills (Bosley, 2008). To determine which strategy to use in a given situation, metacognition is required. Anderson (2003) defines metacognition as the ability or knowledge to think about one's thinking. Metacognition allows contextualizing a text with existing knowledge and deciding which strategy to use to achieve reading goals (Anderson, 2003; Rianto, 2021).

Three common terms in the reading process are recording, decoding, and meaning. Recording involves understanding words and sentences at a basic level. Decoding is the process of reading data, numbers, or graphics and converting them into words or sentences. Meaning encompasses understanding, interpreting, creating, and evaluating the substance of the reading (Tjoe, 2013). Critical reading involves the meaning stage, where readers not only understand words but also interpret, conclude, and evaluate the content.

Ur (2012) explains that reading is not just recognizing and understanding vocabulary but also involves comprehensive reading and understanding in the context of language learning (Ur, 2012). Dechant (1982) further details that reading involves word identification and comprehension, where readers decode and associate words or sentences with more complete symbols or meanings (Dechant, 1982). Therefore, reading skills must be honed continuously, strategies must be learned and applied, and metacognition must be used to achieve complete and meaningful reading quality. Critical reading is essential in education (Mustadi et al., 2022).

Critical reading is recommended as a teaching approach to prepare future generations who are resilient, characterized, and not easily provoked by misinformation or low-quality reading sources from digital social media (Gobang, 2022). Professors Ellen C. Carillo from the University of Connecticut and Alice S. Horning from Oakland University emphasize in their book *Teaching Critical Reading and Writing in the Era of Fake News* that in the current era, it is challenging to find and evaluate claims of "fake news" and "facts" without critical reading skills. Educators must motivate students to read critically and thoughtfully to avoid misinformation and disinformation.

2. Critical Reading for Critical Thinking

Barnett (2015) argues for the relationship between critical reading and critical thinking through a framework: critical thinking as a skill, critical thinking as criticality, and critical thinking as pedagogy. Wilson (2016) expands on this framework in his article *Critical Reading, Critical Thinking: Delicate Scaffolding in English for Academic Purposes (EAP)*, describing reading as an active process involving finding ideas, identifying sentences or topics, summarizing, guessing

meanings from context, identifying assumptions, detecting bias, comparing and contrasting texts, and examining authors and publication dates. Constructivist pedagogy equates teaching reading with teaching dialogue, suggesting that critical reading involves a dialogue between the reader and the writer (Wilson, 2016). Din (2020) defines critical reading as critically reacting to what is read, building connections between reading material and personal values, attitudes, and standards (Lea & Street, 2006).

Several studies have found strong relationships between critical reading and critical thinking skills. Research involving 121 students in Iran confirmed a correlation between critical reading and critical thinking skills (Kohzadi et al., 2014). Din (2020) found that students in a higher education institution had a positive attitude toward critical thinking, with critical reading being a strong predictor of critical thinking skills. Paul and Elder (2006) argue that critical thinking is vital in learning reading skills. Boloori and Naghipoor (2020) discovered a significant correlation between critical thinking and reading comprehension. Another study concluded that test-takers with higher critical thinking abilities performed better on the reading comprehension section of the TOEFL (Fahim et al., 2010). Yildirim and Orsdemir (2019) found that reading and answering reading questions critically could significantly enhance critical thinking skills. Recent research in an Iranian university also found that critical thinking skills could predict critical reading abilities (Aghajani & Gholamrezapour, 2019).

From various previous studies, it can be concluded that critical reading skills are crucial in the current era, where critical and analytical thinking is necessary for reacting to various phenomena, both written and unwritten. These phenomena can come from various information sources, both online and offline. Moreover, critical reading and critical thinking have been proven to be valid predictors in achieving various educational goals.

3. Pedagogical Practices in Teaching Critical Reading

Several approaches, strategies, and pedagogical practices can be used to develop critical reading skills, especially in English language learning. Research suggests the flipped classroom model, where students receive preliminary input through technology before entering the classroom. This approach activates metacognition, which plays a crucial role in the critical reading process (Yulian, 2021). Other researchers found that Project-Based Learning (PjBL) allows critical movement in the reading process and positively correlates with increased critical thinking abilities (Sari & Prasetyo, 2021). Some studies maximize technology by creating Android applications that stimulate students' reading interest and, through various levels, enhance critical reading skills (Febrianti et al., 2021). Others use storytelling as a medium to improve students' critical reading and thinking skills (Al-Shaye, 2021). Some research focuses on specific text types, such as narrative texts, to develop students' critical reading and thinking skills (Fadhillah, 2017).

In 2021, a study published in the *Sinta 2* journal **Al Islah** explored the relevance of reading materials to the digital era, finding that multimodal text sources such as ebooks, YouTube, e-dictionaries, and videos were more engaging for students. This led to the development of various critical reading activities covering linguistic, microstructure, and macrostructure levels (N. L. Khusniyah, 2021). The effectiveness of the SQ4R strategy (Survey, Questions, Read, Record, Recite, Review) was also examined, demonstrating that this approach enhances comprehensive and critical reading comprehension through pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading stages (N. Khusniyah

et al., 2020). Another study found that metacognitive strategies and self-regulation positively impact critical text comprehension compared to relying solely on cognitive strategies (N. L. Khusniyah, 2020). Numerous other strategies, approaches, and reading pedagogies can be maximized.

Therefore, it is essential to reflect on whether students consistently sharpen their critical reading skills, use strategies, and apply metacognition in reading. This reflection poses a significant challenge, but it is necessary for nurturing a literate, critically constructive generation toward Indonesia's 2045 Golden Generation.

As a final note, here are some simple yet important tips for critical reading: 1) Be prepared to become part of the author's audience. Understanding the intended audience will help achieve the author's purpose. Learn about the author, the history of the author and text, the anticipated readers, and read introductions and notes; 2) Read with an open mind. Critical readers seek knowledge and do not rewrite works to fit their personalities. The task of an enlightened critical reader is to read what is on the page, give the author a fair chance to develop ideas, and reflect on the text wisely and objectively; 3) Consider the title. Titles can provide clues about the author's attitude, purpose, personal viewpoint, or approach; 4) Read slowly. This helps make more connections within the text; 5) Use a dictionary and other references. If a word is unclear or difficult to define in context, look it up; 6) Take notes. Annotate, underline, highlight, and write ideas in a notebook. Note the main ideas and the author's points to support theories. Writing while reading helps memory, especially by making unclear connections concrete in your writing; 7) Keep a "reading journal." Regularly noting responses and thoughts in a permanent place for review helps develop the habit of reading and writing simultaneously, enhancing both skills.

CONCLUSION

Critical reading is the ability to read content and understand the material while determining whether it is fact or fiction. It enables readers to go beyond merely understanding the text to evaluate the arguments presented within it. Readers should apply skills, strategies, and metacognition to achieve better comprehension and clarity. Developing a routine of critical reading will eventually become a habit and gradually enhance critical thinking skills.

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