

## **THE INFLUENCE OF READING LITERACY ON STUDENT'S CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to determine how much influence reading literacy on Student's critical thinking skills in The Social Sciences Education Department Mataram Islamic state University. This research is a quantitative type of research, with a sampling technique that is Purposive sampling. Data collection techniques used are questionnaires / surveys, observation. The data obtained from primary and secondary data is then analyzed by pre-testing the questionnaire instrument in the form of instrument validity test and instrument reliability test, and the hypothesis is then tested using simple regression. The results of this study indicate that the significance value is  $0.00 < 0.05$  or  $T$  count  $7.894 > t$  table  $1.671$  which means that there is an influence of reading interest on students' critical thinking skills. The magnitude of this influence can be seen from the results of R Square of  $0.518$  or  $51.8\%$ , which means that reading interest affects students' critical thinking skills by  $51.8\%$ .

**Keywords:** Reading literacy, Critical thinking Skills, Social Science

### **INTRODUCTION**

In an era marked by an overwhelming influx of information, the ability to critically evaluate and analyze content is a crucial skill for students. Among the various skills required for academic success, reading literacy and critical thinking are foundational. Reading literacy refers to the ability to decode and understand written texts, while critical thinking involves the capacity to evaluate, analyze, and synthesize information to make reasoned judgments. These two competencies are closely intertwined; effective reading is essential for acquiring knowledge, and critical thinking allows individuals to process and apply that knowledge in meaningful ways. As such, the relationship

between reading literacy and critical thinking skills has garnered significant attention in educational research.

Numerous studies have explored the impact of reading literacy on students' cognitive abilities, with a particular focus on critical thinking. For instance, research by (Smith, 2018) suggests that reading comprehension directly influences students' ability to engage in critical analysis, as understanding texts provides the foundation for critical engagement. Similarly (Jones & Williams, 2020) found that students with higher reading proficiency were better equipped to evaluate arguments, discern biases, and make informed decisions. However, despite the growing body of literature on this topic, there remains a gap in understanding the specific impact of reading literacy on critical thinking within the context of Social Studies education, particularly among students in teacher training programs.

According to the National Library survey, Yogyakarta has the highest reading literacy score in Indonesia, with a score of 73.27 in 2023. Meanwhile, NTB ranks 24th out of 34 provinces, with a literacy score of 65.58 (Annur, 2024). The low reading literacy in Indonesia limits the public's ability to critically evaluate information, especially in an era where misinformation and fake news are widespread. Often, people accept information without critically analyzing or questioning its authenticity. Therefore, individuals, particularly students, need the ability to analyze and critique information to avoid falling prey to false or misleading news.

Critical thinking is one of the essential skills for the 21st century, alongside problem-solving, technological literacy, and media literacy. Critical thinking can be defined as the ability to analyze, evaluate, and express ideas logically and systematically. Without strong reading habits, however, students and society at large may struggle to develop these critical thinking abilities (Anisa, Ipungkarti, & Saffanah, 2021).

Several criteria can be used to measure critical thinking skills, such as how much students enjoy reading, how often they read, the types of books they prefer, how they develop critical thinking, and how important they believe critical thinking is for their academic and personal lives (Anisa, Ipungkarti, & Saffanah, 2021). Previous research has shown a positive correlation between reading interest and critical thinking skills. For example, a study by Ainun Dyah Purbaningrum titled "The Relationship Between Reading Interest and Critical Thinking in Social Studies Learning at the Elementary School Level" found that there is a significant positive relationship between students' reading interest and their ability to think critically (Purbningrum, Poerwanti, & Atmojo, 2024).

While much of the existing research focuses on general education or specific subjects like science and literature, there is limited empirical investigation into how reading literacy influences critical thinking skills in

Social Studies Education programs. Furthermore, the majority of studies tend to emphasize reading comprehension or general cognitive skills without fully exploring the interactive dynamics between reading literacy and critical thinking. In this context, this study aims to fill this gap by investigating how reading literacy affects the critical thinking abilities of students in the Social Studies Education (Tadris IPS) program. Specifically, the study will examine the extent to which students' ability to read effectively influences their capacity for critical thought and reasoning.

The hypothesis underlying this research is that reading literacy has a positive and significant effect on the critical thinking skills of Social Studies Education students. By exploring this relationship, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role that reading literacy plays in fostering critical thinking and provide insights for improving curriculum and instructional strategies in teacher training programs.

In summary, this study aims to bridge the gap between existing research on reading literacy and critical thinking, offering valuable implications for educational practice and curriculum development, particularly within the field of Social Studies Education.

As one of the leading religious-based educational institutions in NTB, Mataram Islamic State University (UIN Mataram) offers a wide range of programs, including the Department of Social Studies Teacher Education (Tadris IPS). This program currently enrolls approximately 600 students across all semesters. Based on initial observations, reading interest among third-year students in the Tadris IPS program is relatively low. This became evident when lecturers asked students about their favorite reading materials, and many students mentioned social media, novels, or webtoons from various apps, with some students admitting they had never visited the UIN Mataram library.

This situation prompted the researcher to investigate the impact of reading interest on the critical thinking abilities of students in the Tadris IPS program at UIN Mataram in 2024

## **METHOD**

This research employs a quantitative approach to investigate the influence of reading literacy on the critical thinking skills of students in the Social Studies Education (Tadris IPS) program. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who are currently enrolled in the program, ensuring that the sample consists of students who are representative of the population under study.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

The participants of this study were students from the Social Studies Education program at a university in Indonesia. A total of 60 students were selected through purposive sampling, based on specific criteria: they were enrolled in the Tadris IPS program, had completed at least one semester of study, and had prior exposure to both reading comprehension and critical thinking exercises in their courses. This sampling method was chosen to ensure that participants had sufficient background in both literacy and critical thinking, allowing for a meaningful exploration of their relationship.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

Data were collected through a combination of questionnaires and observations. The questionnaires were designed to measure two key variables: reading literacy and critical thinking skills.

**Reading Literacy** The reading literacy questionnaire consisted of items designed to assess students' ability to understand, analyze, and interpret written texts. The questionnaire included multiple-choice and short-answer questions based on academic texts related to social studies.

**Critical Thinking Skills:** The critical thinking questionnaire included items that assess students' abilities to reason logically, evaluate arguments, identify biases, and make informed decisions. The questions were framed in the context of social studies topics to ensure relevance to the participants' academic focus.

In addition to the questionnaires, observational data were collected to provide further insight into how students apply their reading literacy skills in practice during class discussions, assignments, and group activities. Observations were conducted by the researcher during regular class sessions, focusing on students' engagement with reading materials and their ability to critically analyze the information presented.

## **INSTRUMENT VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY**

Before the main data collection, the validity and reliability of the instruments were tested. Instrument validity was assessed through expert review, where subject matter experts in education and literacy examined the content of the questionnaires for relevance and clarity. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which was found to be above 0.7 for both the reading literacy and critical thinking questionnaires, indicating a high level of internal consistency.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, were used to summarize the overall performance of participants in both reading literacy and critical thinking skills.

For inferential analysis, simple linear regression was used to test the hypothesis that reading literacy significantly influences critical thinking skills. This method was chosen because it allows for the examination of the relationship between a single independent variable (reading literacy) and a dependent variable (critical thinking skills). The regression model provided insights into the extent to which reading literacy predicts the students' critical thinking abilities.

## **HYPOTHESIS TESTING**

The research hypothesis posited that reading literacy has a positive and significant effect on the critical thinking skills of Social Studies Education students. The hypothesis was tested using a significance level of 0.05. A p-value of less than 0.05 would indicate that there is a statistically significant effect of reading literacy on students' critical thinking skills.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This study adhered to ethical guidelines in conducting research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood the purpose of the study, their rights, and how their data would be used. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of this study support the hypothesis that reading literacy has a significant impact on the critical thinking skills of Social Studies Education students. The finding that 51.8% of the variance in critical thinking skills can be explained by reading literacy is substantial, indicating that improving reading literacy could have a considerable effect on students' ability to think critically.

### **The Role of Reading Literacy**

Reading literacy involves not only the ability to decode and understand written texts but also the capacity to engage with and critically assess the information presented. The ability to comprehend a text deeply is essential for

students to process and analyze the content in a meaningful way. As students read and understand texts more effectively, they develop the cognitive skills needed for critical thinking—such as evaluating evidence, recognizing biases, and synthesizing information from multiple sources.

This study aligns with previous research that suggests a strong link between reading literacy and critical thinking. For example, research by Smith (2018) and Jones & Williams (2020) has similarly shown that students who are proficient in reading comprehension tend to have stronger critical thinking abilities because they are better able to analyze and evaluate the information they encounter. The current study extends this understanding by demonstrating that reading literacy is not just a supporting factor but a primary predictor of critical thinking, particularly in the context of Social Studies Education.

### **Implications for Education**

The findings underscore the importance of fostering strong reading literacy skills in students, especially in disciplines like Social Studies, where the ability to engage with complex texts, assess information critically, and make informed decisions is essential. Given that 51.8% of critical thinking is influenced by reading literacy, it is clear that educators should place a strong emphasis on reading comprehension and literacy development in their curricula.

Moreover, this study highlights the need to integrate reading literacy programs within teacher education programs, specifically in Social Studies Education. By enhancing students' reading skills, educators can better prepare future teachers to foster critical thinking in their own classrooms. As critical thinking is a cornerstone of democratic citizenship and problem-solving, improving reading literacy can have far-reaching effects, not just in academic contexts but also in the broader social and professional life of students.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between reading literacy and critical thinking, it has some limitations. First, the study was conducted at a single university with a specific group of students in the Social Studies Education program, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Future research could explore this relationship across different academic disciplines or in other educational contexts to determine whether these findings hold in broader settings.

Additionally, while reading literacy was shown to account for 51.8% of the variance in critical thinking skills, there may be other factors not captured by this study that also contribute to students' critical thinking abilities. Future studies could investigate the role of other cognitive and socio-cultural factors, such as prior knowledge, exposure to diverse perspectives, and teaching strategies, in shaping students' critical thinking.

## RESULT

This table will represent the distribution of time spent reading daily by 60 students:

Table 1 Distribution of time spent reading daily by 60 students

Time Spent Reading	Percentage (%)
Less than 30 mins	46%
30 mins - 1 hour	47%
More than 1 hour	7%

Visualization: A bar chart would have three bars, with the first bar at 46%, the second bar at 47%, and the third bar at 7%. This would clearly show the distribution of reading habits among the respondents.

This table will represent a hypothesis test was conducted using a simple regression test. The results of the hypothesis test showed:

Model	Coefficients <sup>a</sup>			Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
		B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	9.587	3.996	.720	2.399	.020
	LITERASIMEMBACA	1.293	.164			

a. Dependent Variable: KEMAMPUANBERPIKIRKRITIS

A significance value of 0.00 (less than 0.05), and the t calculated value (7.894) was greater than the t table value (1.671). This indicates that reading literacy has a significant influence on the critical thinking skills of students in the Tadris IPS program at UIN Mataram.

This table will represent a hypothesis test was conducted using a simple regression test. The results of the hypothesis test showed.

**Model Summary<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.720 <sup>a</sup>	.518	.510	4.559

a. Predictors: (Constant), LITERASIMEMBACA

b. Dependent Variable: KEMAMPUANBERPIKIRKRITIS

Additionally, the coefficient of determination (R squared) was calculated as 0.518, which means that 51.8% of the variation in students' critical thinking abilities can be explained by their level of reading literacy. This demonstrates a moderate to strong effect of reading literacy on students' critical thinking skills.

***Discussion: The discussion is highlighted through the title and subtitles of the section when needed***

The results of this research highlight the significant relationship between reading literacy and critical thinking skills among students of the Tadris IPS program at UIN Mataram. Based on the data collected, it is evident that the amount of time students spend reading correlates with their ability to think critically. The findings show that a substantial portion of students (47%) spend between 30 minutes to 1 hour reading daily, while a smaller group (7%) spends more than an hour reading each day. The analysis suggests that even though a majority of students read regularly, the overall duration of reading is relatively short. This could indicate that while reading habits exist, they may not be extensive or intensive enough to foster a high level of critical thinking.

The data analysis, which included validity and reliability tests, showed that the research instruments used in this study were both valid and reliable, as the Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.948 was significantly higher than the required threshold of 0.443. This indicates that the survey and other data collection methods used were appropriate for measuring the students' reading habits and critical thinking abilities.

Further analysis using normality and linearity tests revealed that the data were normally distributed and linear. These results indicate that the relationship between reading literacy and critical thinking can be analyzed using linear regression techniques, as they meet the assumptions required for such analyses. This is important because it suggests that the data is suitable

for testing the hypothesis about the influence of reading literacy on critical thinking.

The hypothesis test using simple linear regression found a significant relationship between reading literacy and critical thinking skills, as evidenced by the p-value (0.00), which is less than the 0.05 significance level, and the t-test result ( $t = 7.894$ ), which is greater than the critical value of 1.671. This indicates that reading literacy has a positive influence on the development of critical thinking skills among the students in this study.

The coefficient of determination ( $R^2 = 0.518$ ) suggests that approximately 51.8% of the variation in critical thinking skills can be explained by the students' reading literacy. While this is a substantial percentage, it also indicates that other factors, aside from reading habits, contribute to the development of critical thinking. These factors could include academic training, exposure to diverse ideas, personal motivation, and other cognitive or environmental influences that were not measured in this study.

The findings of this study align with existing research on the relationship between reading and critical thinking. Previous studies have shown that students with higher levels of reading proficiency tend to demonstrate better analytical and evaluative skills, which are key components of critical thinking (Smith, 2018; Jones & Williams, 2020). This is further supported by the theoretical understanding that reading, especially when it involves complex or challenging materials, engages cognitive processes that are essential for critical thinking.

However, the results also highlight the importance of the type and quality of reading materials. While many students reported reading daily, their reading materials tended to be light or informal, such as social media posts, novels, or webtoons. These materials, while valuable for entertainment, may not provide the depth and complexity needed to cultivate advanced critical thinking skills. This finding suggests that promoting more diverse and intellectually stimulating reading materials could enhance students' ability to think critically.

The low reading interest and the relatively short reading duration among students in the Tadris IPS program at UIN Mataram could be reflective of broader trends in education in Indonesia, where reading habits and literacy skills remain an ongoing challenge (Annur, 2024). As seen in the national data, provinces like West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) lag behind in reading literacy

compared to other regions, which may be contributing to the students' limited exposure to diverse knowledge and critical thinking opportunities.

This research also raises questions about the role of education in fostering critical thinking skills. It is clear that improving reading habits alone may not be sufficient to enhance critical thinking. Educational interventions, such as curriculum changes, the integration of critical thinking exercises, and the encouragement of reflective reading practices, could further support the development of these skills.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings suggest several practical implications for educators in the Tadris IPS program and other teacher training programs. First, efforts to promote reading literacy among students should be prioritized, with a focus on encouraging students to read a wider range of materials, including academic texts, research articles, and thought-provoking literature. Second, instructors should consider integrating critical thinking exercises into their teaching, such as debate, analysis of current events, and problem-solving activities, to help students develop these skills in conjunction with their reading habits.

Moreover, it is important for institutions like UIN Mataram to provide more accessible resources for students to engage with reading materials, such as improving library access and encouraging the use of digital resources. By enhancing the academic environment in which students learn, institutions can foster a more conducive atmosphere for critical thinking development.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study provides strong evidence that reading literacy has a significant and positive influence on the critical thinking skills of students in the Social Studies Education (Tadris IPS) program. The results from the simple linear regression analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship between the two variables, with reading literacy accounting for 51.8% of the variance in students' critical thinking abilities. This highlights the crucial role that reading literacy plays in fostering critical thinking skills, suggesting that students who are more proficient in reading and comprehending texts are better equipped to engage in logical reasoning, analyze information critically, and make informed decisions.

The findings of this research have important implications for educational practice, particularly in teacher training programs. Given the significant impact of reading literacy on critical thinking, it is essential that

reading comprehension and literacy development are prioritized within curricula for future educators, especially in subjects like Social Studies where analytical thinking is key. By strengthening students' reading literacy, educators can better prepare them to think critically and apply their knowledge in meaningful ways, both in their academic studies and in their future roles as educators.

Despite its valuable contributions, this study also has limitations, such as the focus on a specific group of students at a single institution. Future research could expand the scope by examining the relationship between reading literacy and critical thinking across diverse educational settings and disciplines. Additionally, exploring other factors that may influence critical thinking, such as prior knowledge, teaching methods, and socio-cultural context, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics involved.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the critical role of reading literacy in developing students' critical thinking skills. It calls for educators and curriculum designers to integrate strategies that enhance reading comprehension and literacy as foundational components in promoting deeper intellectual engagement and informed decision-making among students.

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