

Undergraduate EFL Students' Perspective on Critical Reading

Rahmah Julianti¹, Sinta Dewi Anggung², Nur Ima³

¹²³ STKIP YPUP Makassar, Indonesia

*Correspondence: nurima27@ypup.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study explores students' perspectives on critical reading, a crucial skill for academic success and intellectual development, focusing on fourth-semester undergraduates at STKIP YPUP Makassar. By analyzing their responses, the research identifies key factors influencing their engagement with critical reading practices. Although students reported a degree of confidence in their critical reading skills, they encountered significant challenges, including limited vocabulary, difficulty understanding complex texts, and inadequate resources. These findings highlight a disconnect between students' perceived abilities and their actual performance, suggesting that their confidence may not fully reflect their competencies in critical reading. The study underscores the need for improved teaching methods to address these challenges effectively. It suggests that educators should develop more targeted instructional strategies and provide additional resources to support students in overcoming their difficulties with critical reading. Given the students' reliance on teacher guidance, enhancing instructional practices is essential for helping them build stronger critical reading skills. The implications of these findings are significant for curriculum development and instructional practices in higher education, offering valuable insights for creating more effective approaches to foster critical reading skills and support students' academic success.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Published June 29th 2024



KEYWORDS

Critical reading; EFL Students; Students' perspective.

ARTICLE LICENCE

© 2024 Universitas Hasanuddin
Under the license CC BY-SA
4.0



1. Introduction

Reading is a foundational skill essential for both academic achievement and personal growth. Within English for Academic Purposes (EAP), reading serves as the central component of English instruction (Yulian, 2021; Rahman, 2018; Rahman & Amir, 2019). It sharpens cognitive functions, expands vocabulary, and deepens comprehension across various subjects. In higher education, reading is not just a way to gather information but also a key tool in fostering critical thinking abilities. As a vital 21st-century learning skill, critical thinking has become a standard expectation for students.

Critical reading is a vital skill that goes beyond simply understanding a text. It entails analyzing, evaluating, and integrating information from different sources, prompting readers to critically assess the credibility, reliability, and potential biases in the material. Recent studies highlight the significance of critical reading in cultivating advanced thinking skills, which are essential for both academic achievement and professional growth (Ozensoy, 2021; Ridzuan et al., 2023). Critical reading helps individuals develop a deeper understanding of content. This will enable them to form reasoned arguments and make judgement. Encouraging students to develop a regular reading habit is the initial step toward enhancing their critical reading skills (Younis et al., 2023).

In University, critical reading is a requirement as it is important to prepare students to engage with complex academic texts, conduct thorough research, and contribute meaningfully to scholarly discussions since it involves skills such as identifying the author's purpose, evaluating the evidence presented, and distinguishing between fact and opinion. This skill enables students to form reasoned arguments and make informed judgements based on their reading.. For university students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), critical reading holds significant importance (Wilson, 2016). EFL students often face additional challenges in comprehension and analysis due to language barriers. Engaging in critical reading allows EFL students to improve their language skills by analyzing texts more deeply. This process helps them expand their vocabulary, grasp complex grammar, and enhance overall language proficiency, which in turn leads to better comprehension of course materials and improved academic performance (Niculescu & Dragomir, 2023;

Ozensoy, 2021; A. Al Roomy, 2022). Furthermore, in the digital age, EFL students interact more frequently with authentic materials, making critical reading increasingly crucial (Hamuddin et al., 2020; Hasnia et al., 2022; Rasyid et al., 2023). With the vast amount of information available online, students need to develop the ability to discern credible sources from unreliable ones.

Understanding students' perspectives on critical reading is crucial for educators aiming to enhance reading instruction. Some students view critical reading as a challenging but necessary skill, while others may see it as an arduous task that detracts from the enjoyment of reading. Investigating these perspectives can provide insights into the barriers students face and inform strategies to foster a more positive attitude towards critical reading. By investigating these areas, the research seeks to contribute to the development of effective educational strategies that promote critical reading among students.

2. Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative research approach to investigate the perspectives of students on critical reading. Qualitative research involves selecting participants based on their relevant characteristics and knowledge related to the research question, as outlined by Lodico et al. (2006). In this case, the study focused on a sample of 15 students from the fourth semester English education program at STKIP YPUP Makassar. Data collection was conducted using a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire aimed to gather information about the students' profiles and their habits related to reading in English. This was complemented by semi-structured interviews, which provided deeper insights into the students' views and experiences with critical reading.

The combination of these methods allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the students' engagement with critical reading practices. The survey provided a broad overview of the students' reading habits and backgrounds, while the interviews offered nuanced perspectives on their experiences and challenges with critical reading. This methodological approach was designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the students' reading behaviors and attitudes. The findings from these data sources are expected to inform recommendations for enhancing critical reading instruction and addressing the specific needs of students in academic settings.

3. Results and Discussion

The results should summarize (scientific) findings of the study. It should be written in clear and concise. The separation or combination of Results and Discussion is accepted. If the result is separated into some subheadings, the subheading should be numbered as following example:

Students' profile and reading habit

This study included 15 participants who were fourth-semester English education students. Of these, 14 (or 93%) were female, with the remaining participant being male. In terms of age, the participants were fairly similar. Thirteen students were between 18 and 22 years old, while two participants were in the 23-27 age range.

Table 1. participants' profile

Item	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	1	7%
Female	14	93%
Age		
18-22 years old	13	87%
23-27 years old	2	13%

The questionnaire examined the students' English reading habits, as illustrated in Table 2. Six students reported reading English daily, seven read several times a week, and the rest read either once a week or rarely. The time they dedicated to reading English each week varied. Five students spent approximately fourteen hours per week reading, seven students spent around seven hours, and the rest spent four hours or less.

Table 2. Students' reading frequency and the length of time spent on reading in a week

Time spent on reading per week	Number	Percentage
±14 hours	5	33%
±7 hours	7	47%
≤ 4 hours	3	20%

Concerning the types of materials, most of the students read social media post (48%), followed by novels/storybooks (22%), textbooks (14%), online articles/blog (11%), academic journal (4%) and newspaper (4%) as shown in table 3 below:

Table 3. Types of English materials students read

Item	Number	Percentage
Textbooks	4	14%
Academic journal	1	4%
Novels/storybooks	6	22%
Newspapers	1	4%
Online articles/blog	3	11%
Social media post	13	48%

Regarding the preferred reading format of the students, the majority of them lean toward digital resources while the remaining participants expressed an equal preference for digital and printed materials.

Table 4. students' format reading materials preference

Item	Number	Percentage
Printed materials	0	0
Digital materials	10	67%
Both equally	5	33%

When asked about their primary reason for reading in English, the students generally gave similar responses. Most of them selected improving their language skills as their main motivation while two students chose personal interest as their main reason.

Students' perceptions on critical reading

Students involved in this study were familiar with critical reading. They were fourth semester students and taking critical reading class. Based on the questionnaire, the students stated that they found critical reading is important or even very important. However, their confidence in their critical reading skill varied as shown in the table 5.

Table 5. students' confidence on their critical reading skill

Item	Number	Percentage
Very confident	2	13%
Confident	8	54%
Somewhat confident	5	33%
Not confident	0	0

As for how often students engage in critical reading, most indicated that they did so only occasionally. Three students reported that they frequently read critically, three others said they did so rarely, and only two students stated that they always engage in critical reading.

Table 6. students' frequency practicing critical reading

Item	Number	Percentage
Always	2	13%
Often	3	20 %
Sometimes	7	47%
Rarely	3	20%
Never	0	0

I do read critically to challenge whether the text is line with the facts today and to understand the English text deeper (AVD)

Yes, I read critically to understand the writer's point of view and to develop my critical thinking (KR)

I do not read critically because my goal to read English is just to practice my pronunciation. I just read for fun (FFF)

No (I do not read critically), because I have difficulty when I do critical reading (AJA)

When discussing the challenges of engaging in critical reading in English, most students cited limited vocabulary as the main issue. This was followed by difficulty understanding complex texts, a lack of resources, and a lack of interest.

Table 7. students' frequency practicing critical reading

Item	Number	Percentage
Limited vocabulary	10	42%
Difficulty understanding complex text	9	38%
Lack of interest	2	8%
Limited resources	2	8%
Culture difference	1	4%

My problem is the lack of vocabulary and the complex grammar (WOS)

My problem is difficult vocabulary, complex text or unfamiliar phrases (WN)

My difficulty in reading critically is that I lack English vocabulary and I get bored easily (AVD)

Regarding with the types of supports they found most helpful for improving their critical reading, most of the students selected the guidance from the teachers which followed by access to quality reading materials, structured reading activities, use of digital tools and resources, peer discussion and group work and others which two students included intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Table 8. the types of supports for improving critical reading

Item	Number	Percentage
The guidance from teachers	8	38%
Access to quality reading materials	4	19%
Structured reading activities	3	14%

Use of digital tools and resources	2	9.6%
Peer discussion and group work	2	9.6%
Others	2	9.6%

I need motivation from myself because sometimes I am not enthusiastic enough (YS)

Support from my parents and someone to remind me to improve my skill daily (KR)

Related to the resource they typically used to improve their reading and critical reading, most students relied on online application and websites. Some stated that they used book and critical reading text and exercises)

I learn from online for example BBC and CNN and New York magazine (KN)

Education apps and websites (AN)

Book and website online (YS)

Usually when I read, I use books and online sites (HN)

Critical reading texts and the exercise (AVD)

Regarding the recommendation they would give to the educator to better support EFL students in developing their critical reading, they stated that they need more reading materials and practices, guidance from the teacher, the use of technology in learning, group reading and discussion.

I would say, educators need to give more texts for practice critical reading (FFF)

Can provide guidance to help me master it (LY)

Educational Apps for critical reading (AN)

Using technology to improve learning (NP)

Read together, discuss, discuss (SR)

The findings from this study revealed that most EFL students felt confident in their critical reading skills. They rated their abilities as ranging from fairly good to very good. This confidence may stem from their regular reading habits, as consistent reading can improve critical reading skills (Younis et al., 2023). Most students reported spending about an hour a day reading English texts, with some who were particularly interested in reading spending even more time daily. A survey by (Dorji, 2020) similarly found that English students typically spent an average of one hour per day reading. However, there is some concern, as a few students reported spending only thirty minutes or less on reading.

The students' perception on their critical reading ability was not as positive as the way they engaged in critical reading. While some mentioned that they frequently read critically to challenge facts and understand different perspectives, the majority admitted to doing so only occasionally. Interestingly, despite some expressing confidence in their critical reading skills, interviews revealed that they struggled with it. This aligns with the findings of Shamida et al. (2023) who noted similar perceptions among students regarding their critical reading abilities. This is one of the problems students face when they do not know the purpose of critical reading and its importance to them, and it could be included in the problems pointed out by Suzanne (2011). Another thing that could explain this condition was the profile of the students who were mostly female which was so related to the reading for pleasure (Clark & Douglas, 2011). The interviews also revealed that their primary motivation for reading English texts was to improve their English skills, and they seemed to prefer a more relaxed approach. This preference was reflected in the types of materials they read, which were mostly casual and did not require deep comprehension, such as social media posts, novels or storybooks, and online articles or blogs.

In terms of the support, they found helpful for improving their critical reading, most students relied on teacher guidance, followed by access to quality reading materials, structured reading resources, digital tools and resources, peer discussions, and motivation. It appears that teachers still play a crucial role in guiding students to read critically. However, independent learning can still be effective with good teaching and learning strategies, especially with the aid of

technology. Moreover, students show interest in digital reading materials and peer discussions, which can be an excellent way to practice independent critical reading under the teacher's guidance. Given the important role teachers play, training for teaching critical reading is quite important. A study by Yunus & Ubaidillah (2021) emphasized the need for practical training in teacher education programs to help teachers understand the fundamental perspectives of critical reading, the philosophical ideas behind the practice, and the learning needs of students in a critical reading class.

5. Conclusion

The students' perspectives on their critical reading abilities do not align with their actual engagement in reading critically. Despite most of them reading for about an hour a day, they seldom practice critical reading. The main issue they face is limited vocabulary. Teachers should guide them to adopt a different approach, viewing vocabulary limitations as an opportunity to expand their vocabulary. Additionally, since students expressed a strong need for teacher guidance to enhance their critical reading skills, teachers can plan appropriate teaching strategies and reading activities tailored to students' profiles, utilizing technology to support critical reading activities.

References

- A. Al Roomy, M. (2022). Investigating the Effects of Critical Reading Skills on Students' Reading Comprehension. *Arab World English Journal*, 13(1), 366–381. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol13no1.24>
- Clark, C., & Douglas, J. (2011). *Young People's Reading and Writing* An in-depth study focusing on enjoyment, behaviour, attitudes and attainment.
- Dorji, R. (2020). A Survey study on the Reading habits among English Major Students of Sherubtse College: Issues and Perspectives. In *International Journal of Information Technology and Language Studies (IJITLS)* (Vol. 4, Issue 3). <http://journals.sfu.ca/ijitls>
- Hamuddin, B., Rahman, F., Pammu, A., Sanusi Baso, Y., & Derin, T. (2020). Cyberbullying Among EFL Students' Blogging Activities: Motives and Proposed Solutions. *Teaching English with Technology*, 20(2), 3-20.
- Hasnia, H., Andini, C., Tahir, M. D., Hunaeni, H., Zulfikariandi, Z., & Muslimin, M. T. (2022). The Ability of 1st Class Students of SMAN 11 Enrekang to Arrange Verbal and Nominal Sentences. *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 5(3), 539-550.
- Lodico, M. G., Spaulding, D. T., & Voegtle, K. H. (2006). *Methods In Educational Research From Theory to Practice*.
- Niculescu, B.-O., & Dragomir, I.-A. (2023). Critical Reading - A Fundamental Skill for Building 21 st Century Literacy . *International Conference Knowledge-Based Organization*, 29(2), 215–220. <https://doi.org/10.2478/kbo-2023-0060>
- Ozensoy, A. U. (2021). The Effect of Critical Reading Skill on Academic Success in Social Studies. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 21(93). <https://doi.org/10.14689/ejer.2021.93.15>
- Suzanne, N. (2011). Being Active Readers By Applying Critical Reading Technique. <https://dx.doi.org/10.31958/jt.v14i1.197>
- Rahman, F. (2018). The constraints of foreign learners in reading English literary works: A case study at Hasanuddin University. *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 7(2), 01-12.
- Rahman, F., & Amir, P. (2019). Trends in Reading Literary Fiction in Print and Cyber Media by Undergraduate Students of Hasanuddin University. *International Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(2), 66-77.
- Rasyid, M. N. A., Rauf, M., Junaid, S., Nur, S., & Syukur, H. (2023). Assessing Listening Comprehension Skills in Indonesian Islamic Higher Education EFL Classrooms: Current Practices, Challenges and Solutions. *Indonesian TESOL Journal*, 5(2), 321-338.
- Ridzuan, A., Soffiq Saripin, M., & Zaidi Mat Saat, M. (2023). Higher-order Thinking Skills and Employability Skills among Students at Pahang's Higher Education Institutions. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i5/16849>
- Shamida, A., Sidhu, G. K., Kamil, S., & Du, R. (2023). EFL Students' Perspectives and Challenges in Critical Reading Skills for Postgraduate Study. *Environment-Behaviour Proceedings Journal*, 8(25), 21–26. <https://doi.org/10.21834/e-bpj.v8i25.4867>
- Wilson, K. (2016). *Critical reading, critical thinking: Delicate scaffolding in English for Academic Purposes (EAP)*.

Thinking Skills and Creativity, 22, 256–265. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2016.10.002>

Younis, S., Naeem, S., Ali, Z., Yaqoob, N., & Ullah, N. (2023). A Study Of The Relationship Between Critical Reading And Critical Thinking Abilities Of Undergraduate Learners. In *Journal of Positive School Psychology* (Vol. 2023, Issue 4). <http://journalppw.com>

Yulian, R. (2021). The flipped classroom: Improving critical thinking for critical reading of efl learners in higher education. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 8(2), 508–522. <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v8i2.18366>

Yunus, M., & Ubaidillah, M. F. (2021). EFL teacher educators' experiences in teaching critical reading: evidence from Indonesia. *Journal on English as a Foreign Language*, 11(2), 422–441. <https://doi.org/10.23971/jefl.v11i2.3133>