# AUTHENTIC TEXTS FOR CRITICAL READING ACTIVITIES

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## Abstract

*This research takes an action research aimed at promoting critical reading ("thinking" while reading) skills using authentic materials among the students. This research also aims to reveal the students perception on using critical reading skills in reading activities. Nineteen English Education Department students who took Reading IV class, participated in this project. There were three cycles with three different critical reading strategies were applied. Meanwhile, the authentic materials were taken from newspaper and internet articles. The result revealed that the use of critical reading strategies along with the use of authentic materials has improved students' critical reading skills as seen from the improvement of each cycle - the students critical reading skill was 54% (fair) in the cycle 1 improved to 68% (average) in cycle 2), and 82% (good) in cycle 3.. In addition, based on the critical reading skill criteria, the students' critical reading skill has improved from 40% (nearly meet) to 80% (exceed). Meanwhile, from the students' perception questionnaire, it was shown that 63% students agreed the critical reading activity using authentic text could improve critical thinking and 58% students agreed that doing critical reading activity could improve reading comprehension. The result had the implication that the use of authentic texts could improve students' critical reading skills if it was taught by performing not lecturing them. Selectively choosing various strategies and materials can trigger students' activeness in responding to a text, that eventually shape their critical reading skills.*

Keywords*: Critical reading, authentic text, perception, critical reading skill*

## INTRODUCTION

Having critical reading skills is very important especially for university students. These skills are needed not only for learning the lesson but also for everyday life. Unfortunately, their skills are not adequate to meet the challenge they are facing. As one of the English skills, reading plays an important role for mostly university students, not only for understanding the materials given by the lecturers, but also for comprehending any informative texts that they find in their daily lives. Also it is becoming very important since the era of globalization and free market has demanded the students to be more competitive, competent, and critical. Reading and thinking is so important in this age of information. In today's job market, the type of job most graduates secure will be based on how well they can read and apply new information—how well they learn. Being an effective reader will give the graduates the upper hand. Having competency in English and the ability to read critically, will give benefit to the students to survive in the competitive world. In the academic life, students must have good skills in reading in order to successfully understand the subjects or lectures. Meanwhile, for non-academic

purposes, their reading skills are very useful for absorbing written information which is usually presented in the form of: text messaging, newspapers, magazines, advertisements, brochures, and many more.

At university level, especially at English Education and Teacher Training of IAIN "SMH" Banten, Reading is one of the English skills that is learnt by the student besides other skill such as, Speaking, Writing, and Listening. This lesson is taught from second semester until fifth semester. The students who take Reading lesson are assumed to have advanced reading skill since they are in the university level. In fact, during the two semesters the researcher taught Reading subjects, it seems that their reading proficiency is still low. It can be seen from the classroom activities which require students' participations. The students' respond to the text is mostly very slow and they have less initiative and participation when doing the more complicated reading task. It is because the students only do the surface reading or finding the information from the text not trying to understand or comprehend the text. So, whenever the students do not get the answers or solutions, they will stop reading. Having such problematic situation, the researcher intends to familiarize the students with reading activities that required more critical and analytical thinking skill that is critical reading.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical reading refers to careful, active, reflective and analytic reading. Critical reading has been defined as learning to evaluate, draw inferences and arrive at conclusions based on the evidence (Zintz, M. V., and Z. R. Maggart in Tabrizi, 2011). One method that promotes critical reading involves the use of authentic texts the class. Authentic texts such as newspapers, magazines, television, and radio can motivate students to develop critical listening and reading skills. By critical reading activities the students are engaged into more active or productive reading that is trying to interact with the text they are reading more deeply. Critical reading is a complex thinking technique that involves discovering and taking apart an author's meaning, evaluating the author's meanings based on established standards, and incorporating the meaning into the ideas that the readers already know (Zadina, et.al., 2014). Critical reading, as required for textbooks and other college reading material, is more complicated than reading done for pleasure, which is why college reading is more difficult and takes more time than pleasure reading. Critical reading goes beyond basic understanding and requires more strategies, such as:

- Understanding an author's ideas even if they are not stated directly
- Recognizing patterns of organization in what you read
- Using a questioning technique before, during, and after you read
- Prioritizing an author's ideas

- ▪ Translating an author's ideas into visuals

- • Identifying and evaluating an author's arguments

- ▪ Creating new ideas using an author's ideas

Adapted from Critical Thinking Across The Curriculum Project, Longview Community College (1996), there are at least nine techniques for applying critical thinking in reading. These techniques can be adopted by teachers in teaching critical reading in the classroom. So, the students will be familiar with the skills. The techniques will be explained briefly in the following:

- • Annotate: Underline key words, or sentences; write notations in the margins; diagram ideas with flow charts, lines and arrows; and order related points in logical sequence. Write a brief descriptive overview of the content and key concepts.

- • Preview: Review the preface or other introductory material. Skim the table of contents and chapter organization, and identifying the theme or thesis of the material.

- • Contextualize: Note the historical, biographical, and cultural contexts of the material. Identify the differences between students' current personal and societal values and the context that existed for the author, represented in the text.

- • Question: Ask questions of instructors and colleagues about the content. As the students read, write a question for every paragraph or brief section, with focus the main idea.

- • Evaluate an Argument: Test the logic, believability, and emotional impact of an idea. Do not accept anything on face value but evaluate every assertion. (Analyze both parts: a claim and support.) The claim asserts an idea, an opinion, a judgment, or a point of view. The support includes reasons (shared beliefs, assumptions, and values) and evidence (facts, examples, statistics, and authorities) to influence readers to accept the hypothesis.

- • Compare and Contrast: Seek related readings; explore similarities and differences between texts to understand them better.

- • Reflect: Consider if the reading caused any challenges to the students' beliefs and values.

- • Outline: Identify the main ideas and arguments, and restate them in students' own words. This is a more structured format than the annotation. Distinguish between the main ideas and the supporting ideas and examples.

- • Summarize: Write a synthesis of the content. This may lead to potentially new ideas. Putting ideas together in condensed form, in students' own words, can lead to new perspectives.

Based on the explanation above, having these skills is very important for the students. It

is based on the consideration that almost in everyday activities require some of the basic skills that involved in critical reading. In academic study, especially at the university level, requires very high levels of critical analysis at every level of study. In this research the researcher wants to see the improvement of the students reading skills into more critical skills by using authentic texts and critical reading strategies. The texts are assumed to convey issues that are interesting for the students because they reflect situation in real life. By engaging the students into the real-life condition, it is hoped that their motivation to read is also improved. Based on the above explanation, the writer conducts a research on how to promote or develop critical reading skills among the students of English Education Department by using authentic texts material. Specifically, the purpose of the research is: (1) To know the use of authentic text materials in improving students' critical reading skills in EFL class, and (2) To know the students' perception of the using authentic text in improving their critical reading skills.

## METHODOLOGY

This research used action research as research method. Basically there are four major steps in action research design. There are planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The four steps are in the form of a cycle. The first cycle becomes a continuing, or iterative, spiral of cycles which repeated until the action researcher has achieved a satisfactory outcome and feels it is time to stop. Below is the action research design proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988).
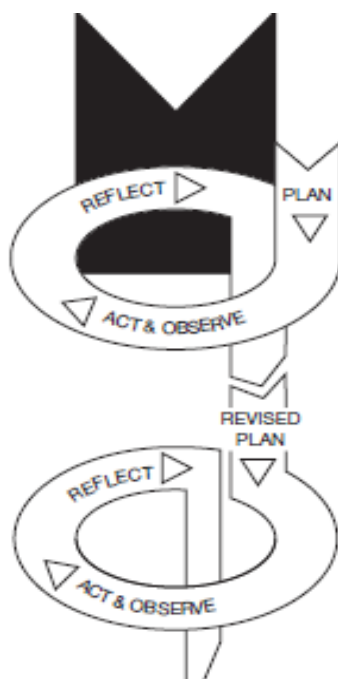


*Figure 1. Action Research Design*

The participants of this action research consisted of the 4th semester of English Education Department students. They were 30 students. The actual participants who were involved in the project were 19 students. This research was conducted at English Education Deperment of Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, IAIN "Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin" Serang, Banten Province. To meet the research questions, there were several data collection methods that the researcher used in this study. Among of them were: class/group discussions, pre-test and post-test, questionnaires, observation, field notes, and documentation.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this research is to promote students critical reading in EFL class. The researcher used action research as the research method. There were also some interventions or strategies to make the teaching learning more effective. This Action Research method was carried out in the form of cycle, which consisted of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. There were three cycles with three different interventions or strategies. The research findings will be described as follows:

*Pre-test*

Before doing the cycles, the researcher did the pre-test. That was to know the students' present condition on responding to a text. The researcher wants to know whether the students use critical thinking or not in responding or answering the questions. In the pre-test the students were given a text and some reading comprehension from The Jakarta Post newspaper with the title "Beware the toxic effects of vitamin supplement". From the result of pre-test, it could be seen that the students nearly used their critical reading skills as much as 45% in reading activity. It meant that students' critical reading skill was still below the expectation. Based on this result, the researcher would like to improve their critical reading skill by using authentic text and critical reading strategies until it reached 50-74% moreover 75-100%.

*Post-test*

After finishing all the cycles, that indicated good improvement, the researcher tried out the post test. The post-test was done to get the information about the students' critical reading skills after they got several interventions through action research. It was also used to support the result of the observation that had shown improvement from "fair" level into "good" level. From the result of post-test, it could be seen that the criteria for students' critical reading was 80%. It means that they had used critical reading skills in reading activity as much as 80%. In other word, based on the criteria, students had already exceeded the critical reading criteria. The

students were also already familiar with critical reading strategies that required their critical thinking. This result of post-test was also in accordance with the result of the observation, which indicated positive improvement. The overall result of the tests is shown in the following table.

| No. | The Test | Total Score | Percentage (%) | Critical Reading Criteria |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Pre-test | 9 | 45 | Nearly meet |
| 2. | Post-test | 16 | 80 | Exceed |

*Table 1. Result of Pre-test and Post-test*

*Cycle 1*

In cycle 1, the researcher began the teaching process by introducing about the critical reading. Then the researcher explain how important it was to have critical reading skills for students study or in real life situation. In the first cycles the researcher implemented the annotating strategy. That was to analyze the text through key words, phrases, and sentences. The topic of the text was choosen to stimulated students' background knowledge since it talked about current issue of the nation about presidential election. The title was *"Jk-Jokowi most qualified Candidtes"*. The topic was choosen since almost every day the newspapers and tv stations reported about this issue. So, it would give the benefit for students to develop their critical thinkin by relating the topic with the real situation. The students also were encourage to give comments and underlined any questionable words or sentences. In this activites, the students had not yet familiar with the critical reading skills because it was quite new strategy for them. As the consequence, almost the researcher who dominated the talk in the class. Based on the observation sheet, the total percentage was 54%. It had the implication that the activeness and critical reading skills of the students was still in the level of "fair". But in this cycle the students started to enjoy working in a group. They answers and responds to the researcher's questions had not yet reflected the critical reading skill. It was still in the level of "fair". Only few students who were active in the class. Based on this condition, the researcher would like to change the learning situation into more attractive and interactive in the cycle 2.

*Cycle 2*

In cycle 2, the focus of activity was still in the group work. The strategy that was implemented in his cycle was previewing. Through the strategy, the students explored and understood the text by examining the title, sub titles, or pictures. The researcher still focused on group work since the students could give best contribution only if they were put in groups. Also, for the authentic text, the researcher choose "*e-cigarrette phenomena*", which was quite new

topic but familiar to them. Some of the students, espesially male students, had been familiar to smoking and almost one of the family mambers of the students had been smoking too. So, the topic of the text was quite powerful to trigger students' background knowledge. It can be seen in the pre-reading, where many students looked interested to respond to the teachers' questions about the topic. Also, when they had to complete the reading comprehension through group work, the students looked very enthusiastic. The discussion also run interactively since more students got involved and participated. The result of the observation sheet also showed a good result. There was improvement of the students activeness and critical reading skills into 68%. It meant, in the second cycle the students' critical reading skills had reached "avarage" level. So far, the giving of the authentic text and the critical rading strategy had effectively improved the students critical reading skills. Eventhough, there was improvement, the researcher felt that the result had not yet succsessful enough. So, the reasercher planned to continued the cycles with another different text and reading strategy.

*Cycle 3*

In cycle 3, the researcher continued the activity by using paraphrasing strategy. This strategy allowed the students to translate the author' ideas into their own words. This is one of the most essential skills in reading since it related to the students general comprehension. Only if students understand the author's purpose, then they could draw conclusion and paraphrased it into another words or sentences. For the beginning activity, the researcher focused on vocabulary building since paraphrasing needed appropriate word choise. The students were allowed to open their dictionary to find new words that would be used in paraphrasing. The topic choosen was "*The Mystery of The May Tragedy*" that was taken from the Jakarta Post newspapers. The choice of the text was also based on the consideration that it was one of the current issues of the nation. The paraphrasing activity was done in the groups, so the students had many opportunity to share ideas and to discuss the text for completing the paraphrasing process. Every group only paraphrased one-two different paragraphs of the same text. So, each group would have different paragraphs to be paraphrased. At the end of activity, the representative of each group should present the paraphrasing result in front of the class by using power point slides. While presenting the result, the researcher asked the other students to respond to the text and give comments. The comment could be in the form of suggestion of word choice, agreement, or disagreement. So, finally the researcher and the class concluded the paraphrasing activity after each group presented their result. From the observation result it was shown that the activeness and students' critical reading skills had improved from "avarage" into "good" level. The score was 82% and it was indicated that the students had already

implemented critical thinking in their reading activity. According to the researcher observation, the improvement was due to the students had alredy familiar with the critical reading strategies. Besides, the students gave best contribution if they were put in groups. In group discussion, the students were free to express and shares their ideas without feeling afraid of making mistakes. The choice of topic or text also played an important role in the teaching critical reading skills. As long as the text was meaningful, that was the students could corelate the text with their real life, the discussion would run smoothly. Also, it would trigger the students critical analytical tinking if the reading text interesting and challenging to them, whether from the content or from the form of the text. The overall result of the cycles is shown in the following table.

| No. | The cycles | Score | Percentage (%) | Critical Reading Criteria |
|-----|------------|-------|----------------|---------------------------|
| 1. | 1st cycle | 19 | 54 | Fair |
| 2. | 2nd cycle | 24 | 68 | Avarage |
| 3 | 3rd cycle | 29 | 82 | good |

*Table 2. Observation Result of The Cycles*

*Students' Perception of Critical Reading Avtivities*

To get the data of students' perception, the researcher used a questionnaire. Close-ended questionnaire was used to reveal students' perception on critical reading skill activities using authentic text. Meanwhile, open-ended questionnaire was used to know the advantages and disadvantages of critical reading skill activities. Meanwhile, the result of questionnaire also showed positive response from the students about the use of authentic text in promoting their critical reading skills. It can be seen from the questionnaire that most of the students, 12 out of 19 students (63%) agreed that using authentic text in reading activities could improve their critical thinking. It was due to the content of the text that conveyed some interesting and challenging topic. This challenging topic could trigger students' critical and analytical thinking or analysis, especially when the topic was about the current issue in everyday life. Besides, most of the students, 10 out of 19 students (53%) agreed that doing critical reading could improve students' reading comprehension. It was because by doing reading actively, i.e. reading critically, students could fully examine and analyze the text. They were not only read the surface information, but moreover the meaning or the interpretation of the information they were reading. This process could intensify their understanding on the topic, which meant heighten their reading comprehension.

**CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

Critical reading is the ability to think, examine, analyze and evaluate texts. Critical

reading cannot be taught by lecturing. It can only be presented or emphasized in all classroom areas: lecture, homework, term papers and exams. These skills must be learned by performing them. Classroom instruction, homework, term papers and exams should emphasize active intellectual participation by the student. In the instructional process, it is necessary for the teachers/lecturers to apply certain techniques in order to obtain students' successfulness in using critical reading. Selectively choosing various techniques or materials can trigger students' activeness in responding to a text and familiarize these techniques through the teaching learning process. The giving of various strategies or techniques in the teaching process was very effective in engaging students into activities, especially in problem solving based activity. So, the teachers/lecturers should be creative and innovative in creating new teaching strategy.

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