

## **CRITICAL READING STRATEGIES TO FOSTER STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING**

**Maslakhatin**

English Education Department of  
University of Adi Buana Surabaya

[maslakhatin@gmail.com](mailto:maslakhatin@gmail.com)

### **ABSTRACT**

*Students' critical thinking skills need to be developed, in particular in higher education to efficiently meet the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills. This can be undertaken when learning how to read. In this instance, the students should employ their critical reading strategies. To foster the critical thinking skills, the students can use critical reading strategies. Argumentative text is chosen in this study since students in higher education should be able to write scientific paper such as thesis and journal article. This library study aims to describe how critical reading strategies enhance the students' critical thinking. They include (1) Annotating, (2) previewing, (3) scanning and skimming, (4) fact vs. opinion, (5) drawing conclusion, (6) questioning, (7) summarizing, and (8) paraphrasing. The writers conclude that teaching critical reading strategies may be able to help the students to improve their critical reading, critical thinking, and higher order thinking skills (HOTS). Besides, by utilizing critical reading strategies, the students will be able to increase the deep understanding beyond the text.*

**Key words:** *critical reading strategies, critical thinking (HOTS), argumentative text.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Critical thinking has become a major topic in education over the world, especially Indonesia. High order thinking is a vital skill in the 21<sup>th</sup> century should be owned by the university students since many reference books uses English as the language of instruction. To understand well what the authors deliver on their books, critical thinking is an essential skill has to be owned by the students. Nevertheless, teaching critical thinking skill is not easy. Therefore, it requires a strategy or technique to build up and to get used to think critically when the teacher teaches Reading subject. For instance,

teacher should be able to teach critical reading skills.

Kadir et al (2014, p. 209) state that "Critical reading skills are skills that will help the students to be able to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate what is read." It means that when a student read critically, he or she will try to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate what he or she read for not only literally but also for deeper meaning. The students can develop their critical thinking by reading critically (Kadir et al., 2014). However, to be able to read critically, the students require a great and right strategy. Therefore, in this library study, the writer would focus on discussing some critical reading strategies which are able to foster the students' critical thinking.

### **Reading Comprehension**

Reading activity does not merely understand the meaning of word by word and sentence by sentence, or in other word understanding the language form, but a reader should understand and comprehend the language content as well. It means that reading comprehension requires understanding of the meaning in

context. To obtain this, the reader has to utilize his or her vocabulary, background knowledge, motivation to read the text, knowledge of text structure, and strategies to work out the meaning.

The first thing should be owned by the readers to obtain a good comprehension or fully understanding of the text they read is vocabulary knowledge. It is very important in reading comprehension and to be the determinant of how well the reader comprehending the text (Sedita, 2005 cited in Furqon, 2013). In other word, the reader has to know the meaning of word before he or she is able to work out understanding of the text.

Beside vocabulary knowledge, the reader should employ his or her background knowledge related to the text. It is also one of the factors influencing the reader's comprehension of the text. The reader tries to fit the information from the text and what he or she already knows about the text. Nuttall (2005) states that the reader's assumption in understanding the text depend on what the reader experienced and

how the reader organize the knowledge he or she obtained from his or her past experiences. It can be concluded that schema or background knowledge has a crucial role in reading comprehension.

It is not less important with vocabulary knowledge, motivation to read the text is necessary as well. It influences the students' reading comprehension (Seymour & Walsh, 2006 cited in Ahmadi, 2017). A reader will be willing and interested in reading when he or she has motivation to read. That motivation can appear from the reader's purpose in reading and his or her interest related to the title, genres of the text, and his or her need to read. The more motivation the reader has, the better comprehension he or she obtains.

Knowledge vocabulary, background knowledge, and motivation are not enough for the reader to obtain a good reading comprehension. Reading strategy to work out meaning is also important in comprehending the text.

According to Nuttall (2005), there are three reading strategies can be utilized a reader: (1) Top-down strategy, in this strategy the reader comprehends the content of text by connecting the information from the text with his or her background knowledge; (2) bottom-up strategy, the reader works out the meaning by translating word by word and sentence by sentence; (3) interactive strategy, the reader combines top-down and bottom-up strategies to comprehend the text (the reader employs top-down strategy to predict the meaning and bottom-up strategy is to check whether his or her prediction is really what the author's delivers or not.

Reading comprehension is a crucial thing for the reader. Nevertheless the deep understanding beyond the text is necessary as well for him or her to obtain a fully comprehension of text. It means that the reader is demanded to read critically. Therefore, employing critical reading strategies is really helpful for the reader to obtain the deep understanding beyond the text.

### **Critical Reading Strategies**

Critical reading strategies are the strategies which lead the students to read critically and then they would develop their critical

thinking. Many critical reading strategies which can be utilized by the reader have been recommended by the experts. Hudson (2007) states that critical reading requires the students to be able to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate what have been read. It means that the critical reading strategies can be employed by the reader are analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating the information from the text.

Khabiri and Pakzad (2012) adopt eight steps of critical reading strategies from Sousa (2004), they are previewing, contextualizing, questioning, reflecting, outlining and summarizing, evaluating an argument, and comparing and contrasting some related texts. In previewing, the reader previews the text before reading it and predicts the content of the text from the heading and subheadings. Contextualizing requires the reader to work out the meaning of the text by considering its historical, biographical, and cultural contexts and make inferences and synthesizing. In questioning, the reader ask question about the content of the text he or she read. Meanwhile, in reflecting, the reader

observes his or her own responses and ponders his or her beliefs and values and involves annotating, highlighting, and note taking. In outlining and summarizing, the reader identifies the main idea and restates and paraphrase. In evaluating an argument, the reader finds fact and opinion, cause and effect relationships, claim and support, premise and conclusion, and analyzes, interpret, and argue about the text. The last step is comparing and contrasting some related texts to know the similarities and differences among the texts to obtain a better reading comprehension.

Meanwhile, Axelrod and Cooper (2002) cited in Nasrollahi et al. (2015) suggest the steps of critical reading strategies are annotating, previewing, contextualizing, outlining, analyzing opposition, summarizing, paraphrasing, synthesizing, questioning, and reflecting. Axelrod, Cooper, and Warriner (1999) cited in Nasrollahi et al. (2015) said that the basic critical reading strategies include annotating which means circling key words and writing comments or questions about the material. In

addition, Tovani (2000) cited in Nasrollahi et al. (2015) mentions that critical reader needs to analyze and then interrogating a text.

The critical reading strategies suggested by Tovani (2000) cited in Nasrollahi et al. (2015, p. 10) are (1) Before reading, the students should determine the aim of reading, then preview the text, and pay attention to the generic structures and the language features of the text; (2) While they are reading, they write some notes and connect the information from the text they read to their prior knowledge or experience, then they monitor their comprehension; and (3) After reading, they should make a summary of the key points. Meanwhile, Nasrollahi et al. (2015) suggest that there are ten critical reading strategies, they are: annotating, previewing, scanning and skimming, fact versus opinion, drawing conclusions, monitoring, summarizing, paraphrasing, synthesizing, and questioning. This library study adapts the critical reading strategies suggested by Nasrollahi et al. (2015). Nine critical reading strategies which are used in this library study are: previewing,

annotating, questioning, scanning and skimming, fact versus opinion, summarizing, paraphrasing, synthesizing and making conclusion.

### **Critical Thinking**

Critical thinking is defined as the ability of someone to be responsible for his or her own thinking (Paul & Elder, 1994 cited in Duron et al., 2006). More clearly Elder and Bartell (1997) cited in Karimi and Veisi (2016, p. 1869) defined critical thinking as "The intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information which gathered from observation, experience, reflection, reasoning or communication as a guide to belief and action."

Some characteristics of critical thinker have been mentioned by some researchers. Duron et al. (2006) state that critical thinking requires someone to not only understand but also analyze and evaluate the information. On the other hand, critical thinker should be able to not only understanding but also analyzing and evaluating

the information from the text. In addition, Elder and Paul (1994) cited in Duron et al. (2006) said that someone who are critical thinkers usually bring out some important questions and problems while they are reading, then they state them clearly, collect and evaluate some relevant information, use the ideas which are abstract, think open-mindedly, and making communication with the other effectively. Lipman (2003) cited in Thompson (2011) views the characteristics of critical thinking are self correcting, sensitive to context, provide intellectual empowerment.

Moreover, Mason (2008) said that a critical thinker should have some skills such as: reasoning, asking probing questions, evaluating arguments and evidence, critical attitude or orientation, moral perspective, deep and wide knowledge of a particular discipline and its epistemological structure (Mason, 2008).” Critical thinking requires evaluating reasons and factors which need to be considered in making decisions. Critical thinkers solve the problem by rising probing question, identifying

relevant information, evaluating arguments and evidence, and communicating effectively. Pithers & Soden cited in Thompson, (2011, p. 1) said that “Critical thinking in any area involves being able to pursue one’s questions through self-directed search and interrogation of knowledge, a sense that knowledge is contestable, and being able to present evidence to support ones’ arguments.”

### **Argumentative Text**

Argumentative text is a text which aims to persuade the reader to think the way the author does. It provides evidence and facts to prove whether the thesis is true or not. It also requires some relevant arguments to persuade the reader. It can be concluded that argumentative text is a process of forming reasons, justify beliefs and drawing conclusion which aims to influence or persuade the reader’s thoughts or action (Nordquist, 2017).

Critical reading of argumentative text is important for higher education students, especially university students. They need it for comprehending literary text, debate, and writing a scientific

paper such as thesis and journal articles. Nevertheless, comprehending argumentative text critically is not easy for the students (Chambliss, 2015 cited from Haria et al., 2010). They should be able to identify, analyze, and evaluate the arguments conveyed by the author. On the other hand, the reader has to employ many skills to comprehend well. Haria et al. (2010) view the reader should integrate many skills to obtain a fully comprehension of argumentative text such as: (a) ability to classify the author's argument whether it is claim, supporting reasons, or evidence; (b) ability to elucidate presupposition information and interpret the authors' argument with an open mind; and (c) ability to evaluate, ask question, and give criticism on a written argument (i.e., whether the reason is relevant or not, really support the position, what makes it a good reason, etc.).

Those needed abilities unconsciously will lead the students to read and think critically since before they are able to evaluate the author's arguments, they should pass the following steps: comprehending what the text said ,

analyze it and synthesize the authors' arguments and evidences found in the text. These steps are higher-order thinking skills which should be owned by critical reader and thinker.

### **How to Use Critical Reading Strategies in the Teaching of Reading Argumentative Text**

The writers adapt critical reading strategies suggested by Nasrollahi et al. (2015). The nine steps of critical reading strategies that can be implemented in the teaching of reading to foster the students' critical thinking are as follow:

#### **1. Previewing**

In this strategy, the teacher tries to build or activate the students' prior knowledge or experience related to the topic going to be discussed. Most researchers have the same opinion that background knowledge is a vital thing to foster critical thinking. Clarke and Silberstein (1977) cited in Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) said that a reader will have a better comprehension if they are able to relate the information they get from the text to their prior

knowledge. Therefore, schema is very necessary to get a better reading comprehension. The reader will have a better reading comprehension, if he or she has more background knowledge linked to the information from the text.

## 2. Annotating

Students circle key words and write a comment or question about the information they read. Axelrod, Cooper, and Warriner (1999) cited in Nasrollahi et al. (2015, p.10) said that one of the basic critical reading strategies is annotating, it means that students are asked to give circle on the key words and writing comments or questions about the text they read while they are reading.

## 3. Questioning

The students are asked to make a question for each paragraph while they are reading. Khabiri and Pakzad (2012, p.80) state "The readers should ask questions about content." In addition, Combs (1992) cited in Nasrollahi et al. (2015) also states that a critical reader will automatically ask

some questions about the text he or she read while they are reading.

## 4. Scanning and skimming

The teacher makes some questions which lead the students to do scanning and skimming about the information from the text. Three questions adapted from Wallace cited from Kadir et al. (2014, p. 216) which are considered as a starting point for critical reading are as follow:

- a. Why is this argumentative text being written about?
- b. How is this argumentative text being written about?
- c. What other ways of writing this argumentative text are there?

## 5. Fact Vs. opinion

The students are divided into some group discussion and then they give their opinion about some facts from the text they read. In this step, the students should identify, analyze, and evaluate the author's arguments before they deliver their opinion in order that they are able to give a good and right opinion.

## 6. Summarizing



The students make a summary by analyzing the information they got from each paragraph; mention the main idea of each paragraph. Tovani (2000) cited in Nasrollahi et al. (2015) explains that critical reader need to analyze and then interrogate a text. Khabiri and Pakzad (2012) mention one of the critical reading strategies is summarizing, the reader should identify the main ideas and restate them.

#### 7. Paraphrasing

The students make a paraphrase of a few sentences from the text with their own word. Paraphrasing is not simply changing a few words, but it should provide the same information as the original and be written in their own word choice and sentence structure.

#### 8. Synthesizing

The students combine the ideas and information from the text they read and another text from other resources. Duron et al. (2006) said that in synthesizing, the students should be able to connect information from some resources, and then write a new or original sentence.

#### 9. Drawing conclusion

The students write a conclusion of the whole content of the text by evaluating the author's arguments and evidences found in the text and combining it with the information from other resources. Hall (2004) cited in Nasrollahi et al. (2015) claim that an effective reader should be able to evaluate his or her own practices, working to develop his or her critical reading skills. Duron et al. (2006) claim that in evaluation, the students should be able to make a judgment from evidences based on reasoned argument.

### CONCLUSION

In this library study, the writer has discussed critical reading strategies to foster students' critical thinking. As a university student, he or she are demanded to read the

reference book critically. When they are reading critically, they will try to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate what he or she read for not only literally but also for deeper meaning. It means that they have to own critical thinking skills (analyze, synthesize, and evaluate) in order to be able to read critically. Besides, they have to be able to choose the great and right strategy to get a better comprehension and be able to read critically. The alternative strategies which can be implemented are previewing, annotating, questioning, scanning and skimming, fact versus opinion, summarizing, paraphrasing, synthesizing, and drawing conclusion.

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