A study on Junior High School Students' Critical Reading Skill in Surakarta

Elizabeth BD Untari, Joko Nurkamto, Nunuk Suryani, Gunarhadi

Universitas Sebelas Maret Surakarta

ebungadu@gmail.com, jokonurkamto@gmail.com,
nunuksuryani@fkip.uns.ac.id, gunarhadi@fkip.uns.ac.id

Abstract. Critical reading has become an important aspect in education due to the open information accessibility. Students have to be critical in reading since there were texts which implicated various writers' aims and intentions. The study was aimed to find out the students' critical reading competence in Surakarta. This study was descriptive-quantitative research with grade 8 students in Surakarta as the subject of the research. The research was done through giving a critical reading test to 96 grade 8 students of 5 junior high schools in Surakarta both private and state. The test consisted of Multiple-Choice test, Complex-Multiple Choice test, and Matching test. The questions were built based on the critical reading indicators, they were: Understand (U), Integrate (I), Reflect (R), and Evaluate (E). Each question and answer were then analyzed statistically using descriptive statistics to find out each indicator tendency. The result showed that the students are moderate at understanding the text (68.92%), poor in Integrating text and real-life experience (52.31%), moderate in Reflecting the text (62.27%) and poor in Evaluating the text (47.22%). It could be concluded that Junior High Schools students in Surakarta have a moderate critical reading skill (57.68%) which indicates that it needs to be improved. Based on the result, the next researcher could develop their research focused on finding out the reasons causing the inadequate skill and the alternatives to improve the students critical reading skill.

Keywords: Critical Reading, Descriptive Quantitative Research, Social Studies

1 Introduction

In today's increasingly open world of information and telecommunications, people are easier to access information through various media [1]. The internet provides a very wide range of information that will answer the readers' curiosity, but with varying quality of writing. Sources of information presented on the internet must be evaluated in terms of authority, reliability, objectivity, accuracy, and novelty. Thus, the ability to recognize reliable sources and critique a reading appears to be an important skill [2]. Various writings circulating in various media are presented not only to provide information in a straightforward manner, but also to carry the author's intention, for example aimed at influencing readers' views, persuading, or instilling certain beliefs/ideologies

to anyone who reads them. Each text is built and written with a certain point of view [3]. Seeing the high influence of reading in shaping the views of readers, critical reading skills are important. The importance of having critical reading skill seems undeniable. Critical reading skills are important for students to learn to be better critical readers in life. Students to be successful in life, need to have critical reading skills [4]. This research was aimed to find out the Indonesian Junior High School students' critical reading skill. By understanding the condition of the students' critical reading skill, it could be used to find out the next step to solve the problems. Thus, it is important to conduct the research.

There are a number of ideas proposed to define critical reading that have evolved over time. From a number of definitions offered since the mid-19th century, critical reading has been defined from a limited range of reading abilities to a wider range. [5] defines critical reading as the ability to judge the truth, validity, or value of what is read, based on good criteria or standards developed through previous experience. [6] revealed that critical reading ability is the ability to analyze and evaluate certain types of arguments presented in the text. Meanwhile, [7] defines it as the ability to evaluate and assess the accuracy of statements and the truth of reasoning that leads to conclusions. [8] offers another definition of critical reading: according to Zhang critical reading means a social process, in which the social context, the social role of the writer, the text and the reader, the identity of the L2 reader, the different schemas that the reader and writer bring to the reading event and the way the text is read. are responded to, interpreted and analyzed, all of which have an important role in helping the reader understand the text.

[9] reveals that critical reading skills lie in assessing the extent to which writers have provided adequate arguments for the claims they make. This judgment depends partly on what has been communicated by the author and partly on the knowledge, experience, and other relevant conclusions that the reader can bring to the frame of the reading. Simply put, critical reading involves active engagement in what we read by: (1) developing a clear understanding of the author's ideas, (2) questioning and evaluating the arguments and evidence provided to support those arguments, and (3) forming opinions [9]. In other words, critical reading requires us to develop skills that allow us to get more from what we read, rather than passively accepting the information that is given.

Critical reading is a technique for finding information and ideas in a text [10]. This identifies that each text is a unique product of a unique author. Critical reading recognizes not only what the text says, but also how the text views the issues raised in the text. It can be concluded that critical reading generally aims to identify the point of view, arguments, and evidence presented by the author of the text. In critical reading, the reader evaluates what has been read using prior knowledge. Critical reading means being able to reflect on what the text says, what it explains and what it means by examining the style and structure of the writing, the language used and its content.

Critical reading means reacting critically to what is being read. It is the act of establishing a connection between reading content and personal values, attitudes and standards. In other words, it is an understanding of something beyond what has been said. Critical reading is not just finding facts and memorizing them. It is the capacity to read for the reader's own purposes, to use their skills to integrate their own knowledge with

others and to assimilate their experiences of the world more effectively. Critical reading is fast and efficient and serves as the basis for lifelong reading for personal and work purposes as interested readers go beyond their immediate needs [11].

It can be concluded that critical reading ability is the ability to assess the validity and truth of a text by understanding, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating by involving previous understanding and knowledge. The critical reading indicator synthesized from the expert definitions shows that critical reading skills involve the ability to understand, apply (integrate), analyze (reflect) and evaluate (assess), where these four components are components in the bloom's taxonomy. Bloom's Taxonomy provides an overview of the stages of thinking that lead to high order thinking skills (HOTS) which include critical thinking skills. In Bloom's taxonomy which has been revised by [12], there are six stages of thinking: (1) remember, (2) understand, (3) apply, (4) analyze, (5) evaluate, and (6) create. Critical reading indicators used in this research includes Understand (U), Integrate (I), Reflect (R), and Evaluate (E).

Several researches have been conducted related to finding out the students' critical reading skills in Indonesia. [13] researched reading literacy for undergraduate students in Jakarta. The results showed that the students' reading literacy skills were still unsatisfactory. Inline with Wijayanti's research result, [14] examines the ability to think critically in reading for EFL undergraduate students in Indonesia with research subjects in Yogyakarta. The results of his research stated that students have sufficient declarative knowledge related to critical thinking in reading, but their procedural and conditional knowledge is still insufficient. From the results of his research, Mbato also stated that it is important for teachers and researchers to be able to find the right learning process so that they can improve students' critical thinking skills in reading. [3] in his research found that in the reading process, students still focus on knowing and understanding every word in the reading, and have not put their point of view on broader things including criticizing the reading. This shows that the level of students' ability is still limited to literal reading and interpretive reading, and has not yet reached critical reading. Understanding that having a critical reading skill is important, while the Indonesian students in the level of undergraduate students are still in the low level, it is important to plant critical reading skill in the lower-level students. The research conducted by the writer was intended to find out the students' critical reading skill in Junior High School level.

2   Methods

This research was descriptive quantitative research aimed to find out the critical reading skill level of the Junior High School Students in Surakarta, Indonesia. The purpose of descriptive studies is to describe and interpret the current status of indiviuals, settings, conditions, or event [15]. Test was used as the instrument to gain the data. The instrument consists of 10 items of multiple-choice test, 10 items of complex-multiple-choice test, and 5 items of matching. The test has been content validated by two critical reading experts and distributed to 95 Junior High School students in Surakarta consisting of 61 girls and 34 boys from five state and private schools. Data gained then was analyzed

using descriptive statistics to find the distribution and tendency of each indicator. Descriptive statistics are brief informational coefficients that summarize a given data set, which can be either a representation of the entire population or a sample of a population.

3   Result and Discussion

To gather data related to the students' critical reading, a test instrument was developed based on the indicators and sub-indicators which were derived from several experts' definition. The indicators consist of Understand, Integrate, Reflect, and Evaluate [8]-[11]. The result in this article will be discussed based on the indicators in which the sub indicators were taken from [12].

3.1   Text Understanding

Text understanding is related to how good the students understand the text given. It is correlated to understanding meaning of the text both explicit and implicit meaning. There are three sub-indicators; (1) understanding explicit meaning of a word/phrase/sentence/paragraph, (2) understanding implicit meaning of a word, phrase, sentence or paragraph, and (3) drawing inferences or conclusion of a word/phrase/sentence/paragraph. The result of this indicator could be seen in the following table

Table 1. Students' text understanding

Indicator 1: Understand understanding meaning of the text both explicit and implicit meaning	Item number	Percentage
a. understanding explicit meaning of a word/phrase/sentence/paragraph	MC1, MCM11	87.5
b. understanding implicit meaning of a word, phrase, sentence or paragraph	MC6, MCM12, M21	56.8
c. drawing inferences or conclusion of a word/phrase/sentence/paragraph	MC2	62.5
	Average	68.92

The test result for indicator 1 showed that 68,92 % of the students were good at understanding text, and mostly on understanding explicit meaning. The result was then compared to the Indonesian minimum criteria of mastery learning (KKM) for English learning which was different from one school to the others; however minimum score of 70 was drown as it is the minimum national standard. Interval measures were used in which the intervals between each measure are exactly equal [16]. Thus, the following criterion was used as the basis of this research:

Table 2. criteria interval

Interval	Criteria
85% - 100%	Very Good
70% - 84.9%	Good
55% - 69.9%	Moderate
40% - 54.9%	Poor
0% - 39.9%	Very Poor

Thus, it could be stated that the students were very good in finding the explicit meaning of the text (87.5%); however, their ability on understanding implicit meaning and drawing inference and conclusion were still in moderate level (56.8% and 62.5%). As an average, the students' level of indicator 1: Understand was still in moderate level since the average was 68.92%

Lexical comprehension which is corelated with the understanding of word or words both explicitly or behind text were the most basic comprehension which can be related to the cognitive process of decoding [8]. [17] that middle school students were finding difficulty in understanding lexical comprehension due to lexical aspect as merely does not understand the meaning of the word. In this research, the similar problem was found as well. As the students do not understand the meaning of 'pupils' which has similar meaning as 'students'. It was also hard for the students fo draw inference from the sentences. There was statements in the text:

Edo: "My younger sister is Elsa, she is a student of SD Bunga Menur. My little brother brother, Erick, does not go to kindy yet"

Students easily understood that Elsa is Edo's younger sister; however, it is hard for them to realize that Erick is even younger than Elsa. The superlative lexical statement such 'youngest' trapped the students in complex-multiple-choice type of question.

3.2   Integrating Text with Real-World Experience

In order to be critical reader, students were asked to be able to integrate their experiences in real world with the text to give more understanding. There are three sub-indicators, they are: (1) use the real-world experience to understand the text; (2) find the example of text application in the real world; and (3) apply the information in the text to the real world. The result of this indicator could be seen in the following table.

Table 3. Students' text integration

Indicator 2: Integrate	Item number	Percentage
Integrating the real-world experience with the text		
d. use the real-world experience to understand the text	MC3, MCM13, M25	46.52
e. find the example of text application in the real world	MCM17, M23	22.92
f. apply the information in the text to the real world	MC7, M22	87.5

	Average	52.31

Integration of the text with the real-life experience relates to the students' background knowledge. Background knowledge have several impacts toward the students' reading comprehension. Students' background knowledge gave the students the background situation of the text needed, the nature understanding of the text, and reduce the text misconception [18]. To improve the students' critical reading, the abilities to relate the background knowledge with the text and the text with the real life are crucial.

Table 3 showed that students were poor in integrating the real-world experience with the text given. Though they were very good at applying the information in the text to the real word (87.5%), they were still struggling in using the real-world experience to understand the text (46.52%) and find the real-world examples of the text given (22.93%). It could be seen that the students did not have enough background knowledge to understand the text. One of the conditions found in the research was on the matching question. There was a statement: "Indonesia also has many volcanoes". From the statement, students were expected to relate the statements with the needs of the people around volcano mountain to understand disaster risk management by choosing the "People around them need to understand eruption disaster risk management" statement. In fact, most of the students were trapped with the deception statement "One of them is Menoreh mountains". Students does not understand that mountain and mountains are different in nature in which mountains are not volcanic. It could be stated that the insufficient background knowledge impacted the students' critical reading.

3.3   Reflecting the Text

Reflecting is the other indicator of critical reading. To reflects means defining the value of the text based on the point of view and biases. A Critical Reflection is a process of identifying, questioning, and assessing an assumptions, issues, beliefs, feelings, and actions to examine biases, compare theories with current actions, search for causes and triggers, and identify problems at their core [3]. In this stage, the students need to analyze the text deeply and critically in order to understand the authors' ideas. Questioning one of the important actions in this stage. There are three sub-indicators of reflecting: (1) understanding the background reason of an author writing a text, (2) knowing the aim of the author writing a text, and (3) knowing the positive and negative value of the text. The research result could be seen in the following text:

Table 4. Students' text reflection

Indicator 3: Reflect defining the value of the text based on the point of view and biases	Item number	Percentage
g. understanding the background reason of an author writing a text	MCM19	72.92
h. knowing the aim of the author writing a text	MC4, MC8	64.58

i. knowing the positive and negative value of the text	MC9, MCM15, MCM 20	49.3
	Average	62.27

Table 4 showed that the ability of the students to reflect text was adequate (62,27%). Students were able to understand the author's background of writing the text (72.92%) and knowing the aim of the author writing the text (64.58%). However, students were still got some difficulties in mentioning the positive or negative value of the text (49.3%). The main problem in reflecting positive or negative value of a text in this research was found in complex-multiple-choice items, in which the students did not realize that the statements need to be analyzed and considered one by one to decide whether it is included or excluded. As in item number MCM20:

The question is: *What are the positive values we can draw from the dialog above?*

Students needs to decide whether or not the statements following are included as the positive values. The statements are:

> *We have to have a good relationship with our father*
> *It's good to be curious*

Try to give the clearest explanation to the one asking you question
Don't be shy to ask if you don't know

The text showed a conversation of a father and his son in which the son curiously asked to the father the building around them. From the statements given, it was expected that the students thick all the statements as the four statements showed the positive value driven from the text. In fact, most off the students excluded the statement "it's good to be curious". Lexical problem related to the understanding of the word 'curious' meaning was seen as one of the reasons. The other reason was the cultural problem that the students were not common with the complex-multiple-choice question in which the students need to choose more than one statements. Psychologically, the students will be doubtful to choose all the statements given [19].

3.4   Evaluating Text

Evaluating text were the last step of critical reading in which the students are asked to evaluate the text based on several criteria and standards. As stated by [20]:

Critical reading enables readers to go beyond understanding a text and to evaluate the arguments in the text. In critical reading approach, readers are recommended not simply accept or reject what is argued, but evaluate it critically from different perspectives seeking to identify its strengths and weaknesses.

In the fourth indicator: evaluate, there are two sub-indicators: (1) detecting differences and similarities in text, and (2) criticizing value/ point of view, and text purpose. The research on students' performance in this indicator could be seen in table 5. The result of the research showed that the students were still poor in evaluating the text (47.22%) both in detecting differences and similarities (53.1%) and criticizing the text (41.32%). It implies that the students have not had the evaluative skill to support critical thinking.

Table 5. Students performance on evaluating text

Indicator 4: Evaluate evaluate the text based on several criteria and standards		Item number	Percentage
j.	detecting differences and similarities in text	MC5, MCM18, M24	53.1
k.	criticizing value/ point of view, and text purpose	MC10, MCM14	41.32
		Average	47.22

3.5   Students' Critical Reading Skill

The main purpose of this research was to find out the students' critical reading skill based on four (4) indicators: Understand, Implement, Reflect, and Evaluate. The result showed that the students had moderate level (68.92%) on understanding text, poor level (52.31%) in implementing background knowledge to the text, moderate level (62.27%) in reflecting the text, and poor level (47.22%) in evaluating the text. The diagram of the students' critical skill indicators could be seen in the following figure.
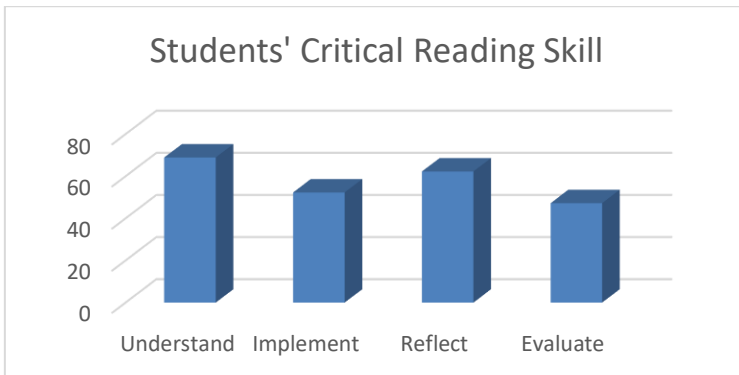
Fig. 1. Students' Critical Reading Skill per Indicator

The average of all four indicators was 57.68%. it implied that the junior high school students in Surakarta was still in moderate level and still under the Indonesian minimum criteria of mastery learning (KKM), which means it needs to be improved. This result

was in line with several previous researches reviewing the critical reading skill in Indonesia. [13] researched on reading literacy in undergraduate students in Jakarta. The results of the research showed that the students' reading literacy skills are still unsatisfactory. Still with the same subject level, [14] examines critical thinking skills in reading in EFL students in Indonesia with the research subjects were undergraduate students in Yogyakarta. The results of his research stated that students have sufficient declarative knowledge related to critical thinking in reading, but their procedural and conditional knowledge were still insufficient. [3] in his research found that in the reading process, students were still focused on knowing and understanding each word in the reading, and had not put their point of view on broader things including criticizing the reading. It implies that the level of students' ability is still limited to literal reading and interpretive reading, and has not yet reached critical reading.

4   Conclusion

Critical reading is considered as an importance skill in reading since the open information accessibility. The students as young as possible need to have critical reading skill to support their learning. Despite the importance of critical reading skill, the junior high school students in Surakarta still have moderate level of critical reading skill. Understanding this condition, and the importance of critical reading, the students' skill in critical reading needs to be improved. Based on the findings, the next researcher could develop their research on finding out the reasons causing the inadequate competence and the alternatives to improve the students critical reading skill.

References

1. Koswara A N . 2018 Pengaruh Kemudahan Akses Informasi Internet melalui Konteks Sesial Pelajar terhadap Kecenderungan Tindakan Plagiarisme dalam Penulisan Karya Tulis Dikalangan Pelajar *Masy. Telemat. dan Inf. J. Penelit. Teknol. Inf. dan Komun.*
2. Arifin S 2020 The Role of Critical Reading to Promote Students ' Critical Thinking and Reading Comprehension **53** 318–26
3. Galuh Nur R 2018 Critical Reading: Students' Problems, Strategies, and Reflections *J. English Lang. Lit. Teach.* **2** 1–6
4. Kadir N A, Subki R N, Haneem F, Jamal A and Ismail J 2014 The Importance of Teaching Critical Reading Skills in a Malaysian Reading Classroom *2014 WEI Int. Acad. Conf. Proc.* 208–19
5. H.M Robinson 1964 Developing Critical Readers *Proceedings of the Annual Education and Reading Conferences* pp 1–12
6. Patching W, Kameenui E, Carnine D, Gersten R and Colvin G 1983 Direct Instruction in Critical Reading Skills *Read. Res. Q.* **18** 406
7. Martha L K 1967 *Critical Reading* (Philadelphia: Lippincott)
8. Zhang L J 2007 Teaching Critical Reading to In-service EFL Teachers in Singapore (Chinese background) *41st TESOL Int. Conv.* 1–14
9. Quang T and Tran N 2015 *Critical Reading: A Guidebook for Postgraduate Students* (Hue: Hue University Publishing House)

10. Diman H, Jusnita N, Dahlan S and Daud A H 2020 Students' Competence in Critical Reading *J. Biling.* **10** 32

11. Din M 2020 Evaluating university students' critical thinking ability as reflected in their critical reading skill: A study at bachelor level in Pakistan *Think. Ski. Creat.* **35** 100627

12. Anderson L W, Krathwohl Peter W Airasian D R, Cruikshank K A, Mayer R E, Pintrich P R, Raths J and Wittrock M C 2001 *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Complete Edition*

13. Wijayanti S 2020 Indonesian Students' Reading Literacy *Adv. Soc. Sci. Educ. dan Humanit. Res.* **390** 61–5

14. Mbato C L 2019 Indonesian EFL Learners' Critical Thinking in Reading: Bridging the Gap between Declarative, Procedural and Conditional Knowledge *J. Hum.* **31** 92

15. Mertler C A 2014 *Penelitian Tindakan Kelas : Meningkatkan Sekolah dan Memberdayakan Pendidik* (Jakarta: PT indeks)

16. McHugh M L 2003 Descriptive statistics, Part II: Most commonly used descriptive statistics. *J. Spec. Pediatr. Nurs.* **8** 111–6

17. Johansson M 2022 "It was Difficult. And a Little bit Boring." Swedish Middle School Students' Reception of Narrative Texts *Scand. J. Educ. Res.* **0** 1–14

18. Smith R, Snow P, Serry T and Hammond L 2021 The Role of Background Knowledge in Reading Comprehension: A Critical Review *Read. Psychol.* **42** 214–40

19. Zarza N and Abedalazeez N 2014 Simple versus complex stems in multiple-choice tests and their effects on students' performance *Int. J. Appl. Linguist. English Lit.* **3** 237–41

20. Tasnimi M 2017 Critical reading : An introduction *Humanising Lang. Teach.* **19** 1–7