
Students' Critical Thinking on Reading Comprehension Based on Contextual Reading Material: An Experimental Study

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Abstract

In this article, the researchers delve into the paramount role that critical thinking plays in the realm of reading comprehension, particularly for eighth-grader students who learned English in one of junior high schools in Jambi city. It is well-established that English language proficiency, especially in the domain of reading, is pivotal for students to access high-quality education and seize research opportunities. As we navigate the multifaceted landscape of education, it becomes evident that nurturing critical thinking skills among students is crucial for their academic and intellectual growth. The research undertaken herein embarks on a journey to explore the intricate connection between contextual reading materials and the development of student's critical thinking abilities. This endeavor involved a rigorous and systematic approach, employing a quasi-experimental research design that featured an experimental group and a control group. The outcomes of this investigation are of significant import, as they point to a compelling revelation: the utilization of contextual reading materials has a profound and positive impact on enhancing students' reading comprehension and fostering their critical thinking skills. These findings underscore the transformative potential of innovative pedagogical strategies that incorporate real-world context into the learning process, ultimately enriching the educational experience for students.

Keywords: Contextual Reading Material, Critical Thinking, Reading Comprehension



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1. Introduction

English plays a pivotal role in the contemporary era, and its significance cannot be overstated. In an age where the world is more interconnected than ever, English serves as the universal bridge, facilitating interactions between individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Many of the world's top educational institutions employ English as their primary medium of instruction, emphasizing its importance in accessing quality education and research opportunities. English learning is divided into four skills; including writing, speaking, listening and reading. These skills are needed to be mastered by the students in order to have capable and reliable English language skills to face competition in education in the future. According to (Larsson, 2017) to succeed in the modern workforce, students must master 21st-century competencies. One of the abilities that will be discussed in this research is reading, especially reading comprehension.

The reading skill in English holds undeniable significance. It serves as the cornerstone of effective understanding and communication in the English language, with far-reaching impacts across various aspects of life. Reading skill is the foundation for the development of other English language skills, such as writing and speaking. Strong reading skills aid in grasping grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structures, all of which are crucial in effective communication in English. Reading skill is not about understanding written text but also contribute to the development of critical thinking. Therefore, developing students' critical thinking abilities is crucial (Kusmaharti & Yustitia, 2022). This skill is valuable in making informed decisions, understanding diverse perspectives, and interpreting data accurately.

Critical thinking is one of the important skills expected to be obtained through reading comprehension learning. Modern educators and policymakers should place high importance on the development of critical thinking skills (Abrami et al., 2015; Bekele et al., 2022) On the other hand, this skill can be trained through reading. The reading comprehension sessions undertaken by students always involve critical thinking, where students need it to analysis and infer the text being studied. In addition, critical thinking can be obtained and honed with exercises to analysis and conclude text that is usually done during the reading comprehension session. That is, critical thinking is considered important and becomes part of the skills and intelligence criteria needed by students. Critical thinking has a close relationship and is

inseparable from reading comprehension and implicitly also becomes a part of national education goals.

A lot of problems have happened in schools because of the stress on junior high school kids to be able to think critically. One big problem that has come up is that students are getting more and more stressed, especially when they have to read long texts. In a school in Jambi City, Indonesia, this has been seen to happen based on researchers' preliminary research showing that the reading materials are making the kids stressed out. Readings that are too long and hard to understand, even though they are meant to encourage critical thought, have made things very hard for students. The stress and anxiety have gotten worse because of the pressure not only to understand but also critically examine the material. Students find it hard to understand all the knowledge in a short amount of time, which makes them feel inadequate and frustrated. So, the very thing that is supposed to help students think critically is actually making it harder for them to really understand the subject.

The stress resulting from the demand for critical thinking can adversely impact students' overall health, potentially affecting their mental well-being and academic achievements. To address this issue, schools and teachers should adopt a balanced approach that prioritizes both students' mental health and their ability to think critically. It is essential to strike a balance between encouraging students to think critically and providing them with a safe, stress-free learning environment, such as appropriate learning materials and settings, to ensure their success in both their academic pursuits and personal lives.

To solve this problem, the researchers want to conduct the use of contextual reading material. Contextual teaching and learning as a concept that helps teachers and students relate the meaning and real-world situations with the subject matter in the right way (Hasruddin et al., 2017). Besides the previous definition, the constructivism philosophy is the reason why teachers choose CTL as an alternative teaching and learning approach. In this case, Kawita Sarwari & Kakar, (2023); Xu, (2011) the students are expected to learn through "experiencing" not by "memorizing" the subject matter. Sabroni (2017) mention its method of instruction that places a strong emphasis on student participation throughout the entire process of locating knowledge and relating it to practical circumstances that motivate students to put it to use in their daily lives. According to Marsuki et al., (2019), the CTL approach entails seven essential elements: constructivism, questioning, inquiry, learning community, modeling, reflections, and authentic assessment. Start from those theory and the statement from (Hidayati & Sinaga, 2019) the researchers believe that the use of contextual reading material can help the students critical thinking in reading comprehension.

Xu (2011) proposed including the contextual reading text on reading comprehension to improve students' critical thinking and alleviate any discomfort they might feel as a result of being forced to think critically. It already proved by some studies that applied from (Jasper-Abowei & Victor-Ishikaku, 2023; Sarwari & Kakar, 2023; Sastrawati, 2019). From those

precious research, the researchers want to test the students critical thinking in reading comprehension by using contextual reading material. Experimental research fosters the ability to make predictions and draw generalizations. Data was collected, trends were examined, and conclusions were drawn through a rigorous scientific process that allowed for generalizability beyond the immediate context of the experiments. The researchers conducting the research expected its findings would be useful to educators in reducing students reports of fairness and stress condition.

1.1. Research Question

Drawing from the provided context, the researchers identified two key questions that serve as the primary objectives of this research:

- a. Does the utilization of contextual reading material have a significant effect on students' critical thinking in reading comprehension?
- b. Is there a significant difference between the control class and experimental class in the use of contextual reading material for enhancing students' critical thinking in reading comprehension?

1.2. Theoretical Framework

1.2.1. Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is the intellectual ability to assess, analysis, and evaluate information, arguments, or situations objectively and systematically. It involves the capacity to question assumptions, identify logical fallacies, consider various perspectives, and make well-informed judgments. To arrive at a thorough understanding, critical thinking requires the capacity to pose and/or respond to insightful questions in a most fruitful manner (Hildson, 2008). It entails self-control, interpretation, analysis, appraisal, and synthesized justification. Critical thinkers are adept at distinguishing between credible evidence and unsupported claims, and they engage in reasoned, evidence-based decision-making. This skill is vital in problem-solving, effective decision-making, and the pursuit of deeper understanding in various academic, professional, and everyday contexts. To improve students' problem-solving, decision-making, and communication abilities, critical thinking needs to be incorporated into the teaching and learning process for higher education students (Abrami et al., 2015).

To develop thinking abilities at a more complicated level, a person has to possess certain fundamental skills, which are referred to as critical thinking. According to the United States-based Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21), critical thinking is one of the thinking abilities that should be required in the twenty-first century. These skills from the twenty-first

century can enhance the standard of instruction, support students in developing engagement, foster collaboration, and boost participation (Hidayati & Sinaga, 2019). Critical thinking is of paramount importance in education as it forms the bedrock of a well-rounded and effective learning experience. It goes beyond rote memorization and passive absorption of information, encouraging students to question, analyze, and apply knowledge. This skill is essential for problem-solving, allowing students to tackle complex challenges in a structured and analytical manner. Moreover, it fosters effective communication by helping students express their thoughts and arguments coherently.

1.2.1.1 Strategies for Improving Students' Critical Thinking Skills

Improving students' critical thinking skills is an essential objective in education, as these skills empower individuals to navigate the complexities of our rapidly changing world. Critical thinking abilities can be strengthened by engaging in problem-solving activities. (Sarwari & Kakar, 2023) argues that critical thinking should and can be taught to students, and in fact, schools are responsible for developing citizens to have the ability to think critically. The goal of critical thinking is to make decisions about what may be trusted and performed. Humans do not naturally possess the ability to think critically from birth. The learning process must include instruction in critical thinking skills. The five indicator components of critical thinking are fundamental support, inference, advanced support, strategies and tactics, and clarification (Hidayati & Sinaga, 2019).

Critical thinking is paramount for effective reading comprehension. When readers approach a text with a critical mind set, they are better equipped to dissect complex information, discern bias and perspective, and make inferences. Critical thinking enables the evaluation of evidence and the identification of logical fallacies. It also encourages the synthesis of information from various sources and fosters problem-solving abilities. Critical thinking promotes a free medium of learning where students will share positive experiences through an inquiry process that is based on curiosity (Wulandari et al., 2018). Furthermore, it empowers individuals to reflect on their own beliefs and values in relation to the text. Ultimately, critical thinking in reading comprehension not only leads to a more profound understanding but also nurtures creativity, independence, and the ability to make informed decisions.

1.2.2. Contextual Teaching and Learning Approach

In Indonesia, the contextual teaching and learning approach is rarely used as an approach to improve students' reading ability. This study used the contextual teaching and learning to discover the advantages and strategies used in the contextual teaching and learning approach to teaching reading. Contextual teaching and learning have been differently defined by many experts. Some experts define contextual teaching and learning as a concept that helps teachers and students relate the meaning and real-world situations with the subject matter in the right

way (Hildson, 2008; Larsson, 2017). Besides the previous definition, (Xu, 2011) has argued that the constructivism philosophy is the reason why teachers choose CTL as an alternative teaching and learning approach. In this case, the students are expected to learn through “experiencing” not by “memorizing” the subject matter.

Contextual teaching and learning in reading comprehension is an instructional approach that places reading within meaningful and real-life contexts, enhancing students' understanding and retention of the material. Critical teaching and learning, according to (Sabroni, 2017), is a method of instruction that places a strong emphasis on student participation throughout the entire process of locating knowledge and relating it to practical circumstances that motivate students to put it to use in their daily lives. This approach recognizes that reading is not merely a mechanical process of decoding words, but a dynamic activity where comprehension is enriched through relevance and practical application.

In Contextual teaching and learning, the students are encouraged to relate what they read to their own lives and prior knowledge. This can involve discussions, group activities, or projects that tie the text to real-world situations. By doing so, students not only absorb the content but also gain a deeper understanding of how the information is relevant and applicable. According to (Marsuki et al., 2019) the CTL approach entails seven essential elements: constructivism, questioning, inquiry, learning community, modeling, reflections, and authentic assessment. Students must also possess life skills, including the capacity for cooperation, communication, and persistence in learning, as well as the ability to make wise choices when faced with challenging situations.

2. Method

A quasi-experimental method was used in this research to explore the impact of contextual reading materials on eighth-grade students' critical thinking in reading comprehension abilities, (Check & Schutt, 2012; Cohen et al., 2018). There were two groups in the research: an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group received reading materials that included contextual information such as background knowledge, images, and real-world links, whereas the control group received typical reading materials that did not include these contextual additions. The research lasted eight weeks, with both groups completing pre- and post-test examinations to determine their reading comprehension ability. Because random assignment of students to groups may not be possible, a quasi-experimental design is required, although careful matching and control for any confounding variables would suffice.

To choose the participants, the researchers used random sampling which randomize in the process of selecting the participants. Random selection makes sure that every class in the research has an equal chance of being put into either the experimental group or the control group. This method helps get rid of bias and factors that can change the results, which makes

the research stronger and the results more reliable. The researchers get VIII C for control class and VIII E for experimental class. All of these participants are from one of junior high school in Jambi City as the population of the research. Before having those classes, the researchers already make sure the homogeneity by using try out. The process of choosing of the class also already have the permission from the teacher and students itself.

In order to collect data for this research, test was administered to a select number of high school students. After the research instrument has been put through its paces and the researchers has determined that it is suitable for use, the researchers employ the instrument in the form of a Pretest and a Posttest in order to evaluate how well students were able to respond to the reading test. The pretest was administered to a set of 22 students from the control class and 22 students from the experimental class before any treatment was administered to either group of students. There are a total of five sessions for every class. During those particular sessions, the experimental class will receive a certain treatment, but the control class will not. Following that, a post-test evaluation was carried out with both of the groups. The researcher created a table that included the findings from the pre- and post-tests that were administered to both the control group and the experimental group in earlier research. Before and after the test, students in both the control class and the experimental class had their results compared using normality and homogeneity tests. These tests looked at the students' average performance on the test. According to the findings of the research, both samples followed a normal distribution and were of consistent quality. This indicates that their starting points are comparable to one another. On the basis of the example that was provided, additional research might be carried out.

By using this method, the researchers create a number of possible hypotheses that will help them figure out what the real point of this research is. They can explore and test different hypotheses and assumptions using this structured method to get a better understanding of the research's goals, which are:

- H₀₁ : There is no significant effect of using contextual reading material in students' critical thinking in reading comprehension
- H_{a1} : There is a significant effect of using contextual reading material in students' critical thinking in reading comprehension
- H₀₂ : There is no significant difference between control class and experimental class in using contextual reading material for students' critical thinking in reading comprehension
- H_{a2} : There is a significant difference between control class and experimental class in using contextual reading material for students' critical thinking in reading comprehension.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Findings

The use of contextual reading material in the context of reading comprehension and its impact on critical thinking abilities has been a topic of considerable attention and research. This research aimed to examine the influence of contextual reading material on students' reading comprehension skills, particularly their ability to engage in critical thinking. In order to evaluate the efficacy of this teaching method, we utilized paired sample t-tests and independent sample t-tests, which offered a reliable framework for assessing the data. In this empirical investigation, our objective was to obtain insights into the possible advantages of contextual reading materials in improving both students' reading comprehension and their capacity for critical thinking. This inquiry shows the results obtained from these statistical tests and provides a complete review of the ramifications for both instructors and students.

3.1.1 Paired sample T-test

In this research, the researchers used Paired Sample T-test to test 2 paired samples so that researchers got the average difference from the 2 paired samples. Researchers used it for the first hypothesis.

If $(H_a1) = ro < 0,05$ there is a significant effect of using contextual reading material in students reading comprehension. However, if $(H_01) = ro > 0,05$ there is no significant effect of using contextual reading material in students' critical thinking in reading comprehension.

	Means	std. Deviation	Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
			std. Error Means	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper			
Pair 1 Pretest Experiment - Posttest Experiment	-19,773	11,900	2,537	-25,049 -14,497	-7,793	21	.000
Pair 2 Pretest Control - Posttest Control	-6,136	10,110	2,156	-10,619 -1,654	-2,847	21	.010

Figure 1. Paired Sample T-test

As shown in the picture above, the value of Sig. (2-Tailed) is $0.000 < 0.05$ then (H_a1) accepted and automatically (H_01) rejected. From these results it can be concluded there is a significant effect of using contextual reading material in students' critical thinking in reading comprehension.

3.1.2. Independent Sample T-Test

Apart from using the Paired Sample T-test, the researchers also used the independent sample T-test which aims to see significant differences in the control class and the experimental class in the use of contextual reading material in students' critical thinking in reading comprehension.

If $(H_{a2}) = \alpha < 0,05$ There is a significant difference between control class and experiment class in using contextual reading material in students' critical thinking in reading comprehension. However, if $(H_{02}) = \alpha > 0,05$ There is no significant difference between control class and experiment class in using contextual reading material in students' critical thinking in reading comprehension.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Differences	std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Student's Score	Equal variances assumed	6,356	.016	4,222	42	.000	11.136	2,638	5,813	16,460
	Equal variances not assumed			4,222	34,087	.000	11.136	2,638	5,776	16,497

Figure 2. Independent Sample T-Test

Referring to the data output table in Figure 2, the researchers obtained statistical evidence to compare the test results after receiving treatment. The data obtained by researchers using IBM SPSS version 25 for desktop shows that the degrees of freedom (df) is 42 and the critical value or **Ttable** from df – 42 with a significance of 0.05 is 2,847. Meanwhile, if seen from the table above the result is 4,222. which means that the posttest score in the experimental class is higher than the posttest score in the control class. Besides that, we can also prove it with Sig. (2- tailed) p is lower than 0.05, namely $0.000 < 0.05$. So, this proves that there are

significant differences in the posttest scores in the experimental class and the control class in using contextual reading material in students' critical thinking in reading comprehension.

3.2 Discussion

After going through a lengthy process, the researchers' objective was to determine whether or not using the contextual reading material as a material made a significant difference, as well as whether or not there were significant differences in the ways in which class VIII E (the experimental class) and class VIII C (the control class) used the contextual reading material. The researchers have been successful in gathering sufficient data to provide responses to the research questions. The purpose of this research is to investigate whether or not students' reading comprehension is significantly impacted by the use of contextual reading material and whether or not there is a discernible gap between the experimental group and the control group.

In accordance with the objectives of this research, evidence will be gathered to demonstrate that the utilization of contextual reading material is an effective means by which students can develop their critical thinking in reading skills, taking into account both the Theory and the findings of earlier research. Putting (Marsuki et al., 2019) theory into practice, using reading material that is contextualized offers a great deal of potential for assisting students in improving their critical thinking in reading comprehension. It is already proved by the result of paired sample t-test, it has a significant effect of using local content material in students' critical thinking in reading skill. It also proved by independent sample t-test that showed there are significance difference of students' result who used local content material than students' who are not using local content material. It showed by the result of students' results showed that many improvements rather than the control class. The experimental class has 80 as the mean score and 70 for mean score at control class. It improved by the using of local content material in the implementation experimental class.

According to the results of the paired and independent sample t-tests presented above, it is possible to deduce that providing students with contextual reading material considerably enhances their capacity to comprehend the content of the texts they are assigned to read. This discovery also has a favorable impact on the materials that teachers employ to improve their students' reading comprehension abilities. The goal of the teacher should always be to help the students understand, so they should try to use a range of teaching approaches. They are constantly on the lookout for new strategies that have been demonstrated to assist students in improving their reading abilities like what previous research already done (Anaktototy & Lesnussa, 2022; Jasper-Abowei & Victor-Ishikaku, 2023; Pratama & Sumardi, 2022; Sabroni, 2017; Sarwari & Kakar, 2023; Sastrawati, 2019; Wulandari et al., 2018).

Beside it, the process of learning in the class become, easier for them to see the practical applications of critical thinking in their lives. It can easily relate to culturally, fostering a

sense of familiarity and connection with the material. The using of critical thinking also allows students to share their own perspectives and experiences related to the local content. This creates a more inclusive and student-centered learning environment. It also fosters a positive and inclusive classroom environment where students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and ideas without fear of judgment. The use of local content material also provide positive reinforcement and recognition for students' efforts and contributions to the learning process. This boosts their confidence and motivation. By creating these positive conditions, students are more likely to enjoy the learning process, find it easy to connect with the material, and develop a genuine interest in honing their critical thinking skills within the context of local content. All of this benefit supported by some researcher which conducted by (Khairiyah et al., 2021; Pratama & Sumardi, 2022; Sastrawati, 2019; Wulandari et al., 2018; Yusuf, 2015)

The research demonstrates that using contextual reading materials significantly impacts students' critical thinking in reading skills. Thus, incorporating local content materials into the EFL curriculum can be an effective strategy. Utilizing local content allows students to connect their own perspectives and experiences, fostering inclusivity and creating a student-centered learning environment. This approach encourages students to share their insights comfortably and promotes a positive classroom atmosphere. By acknowledging students' efforts and contributions through the use of local content materials, teachers can reinforce positive behaviors, enhancing students' confidence and motivation. This positive reinforcement contributes to students' enjoyment of the learning process and their willingness to engage with the material and develop critical thinking skills.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this research was to investigate whether or not exposing students to contextual reading material improves their ability to comprehend what they read. The experimental group for this research was students in class VIII E, whereas the control group consisted of students in class VIII C. The research was successful in collecting enough data to answer the research questions and show how contextual reading material affects student performance. Constructivism, the research of how individuals learn by actively constructing their own knowledge through interaction with their surroundings and materials that are contextualized, is supported by this research. Constructivism postulates that learning takes place when individuals actively construct their knowledge.

The results of the paired and independent sample t-tests that were carried out provide evidence that the findings support the hypothesis that students' reading comprehension abilities greatly improve when they are exposed to contextual reading material. This favorable influence on students' abilities to absorb text content underlines the potential benefits that may be gained by teachers who make use of such materials to enhance their

teaching practices. The findings of this research highlight the significance of utilizing a variety of instructional strategies in fostering the reading development of students and encourage teachers to think about the pedagogical benefits of utilizing contextualized materials.

In addition, the findings of the research showed that students' interest in the educational resources they used increased, which suggests that materials that are interesting to students can contribute to a learning experience that is more stimulating and effective. This research not only contributes to the expanding body of research that bolsters the use of constructivist principles in education, highlighting the role of context and active learning in students' academic progression, but it also offers educators insightful information that they may use in their classrooms. According to the findings, more research in this field could provide new insights into the advantages of utilizing contextualized reading materials and their impact on the learning outcomes of students.

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