

BEYOND READING: ASSESSING STUDENTS' CRITICAL READING SKILLS IN ACADEMIC ARTICLE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the level of critical reading skills of sixth-semester students of the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar in analyzing complex academic articles. Recognizing that critical reading is essential for academic success and future thesis writing, this research employed a descriptive quantitative design to systematically assess these competencies. The sample consisted of 32 sixth-semester students who participated fully in the study. Data were collected through a specially designed Critical Reading Test consisting of 25 multiple-choice questions. This instrument was formulated to accurately measure five core reading indicators across high-level cognitive processes: interpreting meaning, analyzing author bias, evaluating evidence, drawing valid conclusions, and synthesizing scientific information. The collected data were processed and analyzed using descriptive statistics with IBM SPSS Statistics version 25. The results revealed that the mean score of the students' critical reading ability was 94.75, with a median of 96.00, a mode of 96.00, and a standard deviation of 5.962. The minimum score obtained was 80, and the maximum score was 100. Based on the established classification criteria, 100% of the respondents (32 students) achieved the "Excellent" level. Notably, no students were classified into the Good, Average, Poor, or Very Poor categories. These findings indicate that the students possess outstanding higher-order thinking skills and an advanced capacity to effectively evaluate academic arguments, research methods, and scientific evidence. Ultimately, this high proficiency is closely linked to the successful curriculum integration of sequential reading courses and intensive research methodology training, which could serve as a valuable model for similar educational programs.

Keywords: *Critical Reading Skills, Academic Articles, Analyzing Article*

A. Introduction

In university English Language Education programs, critical reading skills are becoming increasingly important. Students are not only confronted with complex academic texts but are also required to analyze various English-language scholarly

articles that demand both language proficiency and in-depth analytical thinking skills. Critical reading in this context encompasses the ability to understand the structure of academic discourse, identify main ideas and supporting details, analyze the author's arguments, and evaluate

conclusions based on the empirical evidence presented. Thus, critical reading is a multidimensional skill that integrates high-level linguistic and cognitive aspects.

However, the reality on the ground often shows that students' critical reading skills have not yet developed optimally. Many students still tend to read academic texts superficially, focusing primarily on understanding the content without conducting an in-depth analysis of the strength of the arguments or the research methodology used. Students often accept information in scientific articles as absolute truth without questioning the validity of the data, the relevance of the theory, or the limitations of the existing research. This situation highlights a significant gap between the academic demands of higher education institutions and the actual critical reading skills possessed by students.

Sixth-semester students represent a particularly interesting transitional group to study in the context of academic literacy. At this stage, students begin to transition from basic language learning to far more complex academic learning. They are increasingly tasked with

analyzing journal articles, writing research-based papers, and preparing proposals for independent research or their final theses. Ideally, sixth-semester students should already possess a sufficient foundation in critical reading skills to dissect academic articles systematically and objectively. However, differences in academic backgrounds, reading experiences, and learning strategies can lead to a wide variation in proficiency levels among students.

In addition to these academic transition challenges, the characteristics of academic articles themselves add to the complexity of the reading process. Scientific journal articles are not merely passive presentations of information, but rather products of knowledge reconstruction that contain scientific claims, specific methodologies, and data interpretations steeped in the author's argumentative perspective. To analyze such articles, students are required to possess the cognitive acuity to distinguish between empirical facts and opinions, detect the strength of supporting evidence, and evaluate the validity of the pedagogical implications and scientific contributions offered by the

researchers. If these evaluative skills are not honed, students will merely become passive consumers of knowledge, unable to identify research gaps that are crucial for the development of their independent studies.

At Muhammadiyah University of Makassar, particularly within the English Language Education Program, the development of critical reading skills is a crucial component of efforts to improve the quality of graduates. Although the curriculum has been designed to support mastery of academic aspects, empirical data specifically mapping students' critical reading proficiency in analyzing scholarly articles remains very limited. The absence of this objective data can hinder the effectiveness of designing learning strategies based on students' actual needs. Weak critical reading skills have the potential to have negative impacts, such as difficulty participating in academic discussions, low quality of reference-based assignments, and high student reliance on secondary summaries or others' opinions without independent evaluation.

Given these circumstances, this study is urgently needed to

systematically measure and map the critical reading skills of sixth-semester students in the English Language Education Program at Muhammadiyah University of Makassar in analyzing academic articles. The results of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to literacy studies and serve as a practical foundation for instructors in developing effective pedagogical strategies.

B. Research Method

This study employed a quantitative approach with a descriptive design to obtain an objective picture of students' critical reading skills. The study was conducted in the English Language Education Program at Muhammadiyah University of Makassar. The sample consisted of 32 sixth-semester students who had completed a series of reading courses and fully participated in completing the assessment instrument.

Data collection was conducted using a Critical Reading Test instrument consisting of 25 multiple-choice questions. The test questions were specifically developed to measure higher-order thinking skills

(HOTS), which include the dimensions of analysis (C4) and evaluation (C5) based on Bloom's revised taxonomy. The test instrument contains five main indicators of critical reading ability, namely identifying, understanding, analyzing, evaluating, and drawing conclusions.

Each correct answer on a test item is assigned a score of 1, while incorrect answers are assigned a score of 0. The raw scores obtained by the students are then converted to a standardized score on a 100-point scale using the following formula: $\text{Final Score} = (\text{Raw Score}/25) \times 100$. The collected quantitative data was then processed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25 software to perform descriptive statistical analysis and frequency distribution analysis. To determine students' proficiency levels, the converted scores were classified into five standard adaptation proficiency levels: Excellent (80–100), Good (70–79.99), Average (60–69.99), Poor (50–59.99), and Very Poor (0.10–49.99).

C. Findings and Discussions

Based on the analysis of raw data from 32 respondents who completed the Critical Reading Test, a

distribution of standard scores on a 100-point scale was obtained. A summary of the results of the descriptive statistical analysis conducted using SPSS is presented in full in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Summary of Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Critical Reading Ability Scores of Students in English Language Education Classes

Descriptive Statistics	Scale 100	Category
N (Valid)	32	32
Missing	0	0
Mean	94,75	5
Std. Error of Mean	1,054	0
Median	96,00	5
Modus	96,00	5
Std. Deviation	5,962	0
Variance	35,548	0
Range	20,00	0
Minimum	80,00	5
Maximum	100,00	5
Sum	3032	160

Referring to the descriptive data in Table 1, the collective mean score achieved by the students was 94.75. This very high average score indicates an exceptionally satisfactory group performance in analyzing scientific articles. The median of the data distribution is 96.00, and the most frequently occurring score (mode) in the class is also 96.00. The level of data heterogeneity is very low, as

evidenced by a small standard deviation of 5.962 and a variance of 35.548. This demonstrates the even distribution of critical reading skills among students in the class (homogeneous) without any significant score gaps. The lowest score (minimum) obtained by respondents was 80.00, while the highest score (maximum) reached a perfect score of 100.00, with a total accumulated score of 3032.

To provide a more detailed breakdown of the frequency distribution of the final scores of the 32 respondents on a scale of 0 to 100, a frequency distribution analysis was conducted and is presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2 Frequency Distribution of Critical Reading Ability Scores (100-Point Scale)

Score Range	Skill Categories	Frequency (f)
80 - 100	Excellent	32
70 – 79,99	Good	0
60 – 69,99	Average	0
50 – 59,99	Poor	0
0 – 49,99	Very Poor	0
TOTAL		32

The frequency distribution data in Table 2 show a very strong trend of

data concentration in the high-score group. Three students (9.4%) scored 80, three students (9.4%) scored 88, and two students (6.3%) scored 92. The majority of respondents predominantly scored above 95. The highest frequency was achieved by the 96-point group, with 14 students (43.8%), which also served as the mode in this study. An astonishing achievement was demonstrated by 10 students (31.3%) who successfully answered all 25 test questions correctly without a single error, thereby earning a perfect score of 100.00. This fact confirms that more than 75% of the total respondents scored above 90.

The next step is to categorize or group the respondents' final scores into the five proficiency levels defined in Chapter III. The results of the classification of students' critical reading proficiency levels are presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3 Classification of Students'

Final Score	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
80	3	9,375
88	3	9,375
92	2	6,25
96	14	43,75
100	10	31,25
TOTAL	32	100,0

Critical Reading Skills

Table 3 presents the main findings that address the research questions of this study. Based on the results of the index grouping, it is clear and unequivocal that out of a total of 32 respondents, all 32 students (100%) fell into the “Excellent” proficiency category. Not a single student was found to be in the “Good,” “Average,” “Poor,” or “Very Poor” categories. The lowest score obtained by a student was 80, which automatically falls at the lower limit of the Excellent index, thus placing the entire sample at the highest level of reading cognitive performance.

Based on these highly impressive empirical findings, it was established that the critical reading skills of sixth-semester students in the English Language Education Program at Muhammadiyah University of Makassar collectively reached the “Excellent” level (100%), with an average class score of 94.75. This “Excellent” rating reflects the students’ mature academic readiness to engage with, analyze, and critique international scholarly texts.

This high level of critical reading proficiency is evidenced by the students’ success in completing multiple-choice tests that do not

merely test rote memorization (LOTS), but rather require the application of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in the cognitive dimensions C4 (Analysis) and C5 (Evaluation) according to Bloom’s Taxonomy. Students have proven capable of precisely identifying main ideas, understanding the logical structure of articles, analyzing the relationship between claims and the validity of evidence, and evaluating the appropriateness of research methods, research limitations, and the pedagogical implications offered by the authors of scientific texts. The high consistency of correct answers on methodological evaluation items demonstrates the integration of their literacy competencies.

There are several fundamental academic factors underlying this overall “Excellent” rating. The first factor is the tiered curriculum implemented in the English Language Education Program at Muhammadiyah University of Makassar. Before entering the sixth semester, students are required to take and complete a series of reading competency courses in a rigorous and step-by-step manner, ranging from Literal Reading and Interpretive

Reading to the Critical Reading course itself. Additionally, they are equipped with the Research Methodology course. Students' repeated exposure to the anatomy of scientific texts in daily lectures makes them very familiar with the components of a journal article, ranging from the structure of the Abstract, Introduction, Literature Review, Research Method, Findings and Discussion, to the Conclusion. This strong cognitive framework enables students to quickly and sharply identify crucial information.

The second factor relates to a conducive and equitable academic atmosphere in the classroom. The small standard deviation (5.962) indicates that the level of understanding within the class is homogeneous. Interactive learning processes, group discussions based on journal analysis, and consistent faculty guidance strategies are believed to have successfully bridged the differences in learning pace among students, ensuring that the transfer of critical reading strategies was absorbed with equal quality by all class members.

This remarkable achievement is a positive indication that sixth-

semester students are no longer passive readers who accept textual claims at face value, but have transformed into active readers who are critical, reflective, and analytical. This success in literacy serves as a very strong academic foundation for students, as in subsequent semester they will be faced with final assignments such as writing proposals and theses, which absolutely require the ability to synthesize literature from high-impact journals. Although the research results are highly satisfactory, the program is recommended to maintain this quality by continuing to diversify the range of scientific articles in terms of topics and research methodologies in the curriculum.

D. Conclusion

Based on the results of the descriptive statistical analysis and the discussion in this study, it can be concluded that the level of critical reading ability in analyzing academic articles among sixth-semester students in the English Language Education Program at Muhammadiyah University of Makassar is at the Excellent (Very Good) level overall, with an absolute

percentage of 100%. The average class score achieved was 94.75, with a score range from 80 to 100, and a homogeneous data distribution. Students demonstrated a highly mature mastery of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in analyzing arguments, identifying the structure of scientific discourse, evaluating the validity of methods and data, and drawing critical conclusions regarding the quality of scientific articles. This collective achievement is strongly supported by the tiered curriculum design of the reading course and the intensive exposure to research articles during lectures. As a recommendation, the program is encouraged to maintain this achievement by providing more varied scientific text reading exercises to ensure the consistency of students' analytical acumen in preparation for writing their theses.

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