Critical Reading Skills Analysis Among Seventh-Grade Students at SMP Negeri 5 Padangsidimpuan

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the critical reading skills of seventh-grade students at SMP N 5 Padangsidimpuan. Using a quantitative descriptive approach, the research assessed 30 students through a critical reading test based on Nurhadi's six aspects of critical reading: remembering explicit facts, interpreting implied meanings, applying concepts, analyzing content, synthesizing content, and evaluating reading material. Results indicate that students demonstrate very good abilities in five aspects, with scores ranging from 80 to 100, particularly excelling in remembering explicit facts (scores of 97-100) and evaluating content (scores of 90-97). However, synthesizing reading content emerged as an area needing improvement, with scores of 70 and 57. The overall average score of 85 places students' critical reading abilities in the "Very Good" category according to Arikunto's rating scale. These findings suggest that while students have developed strong foundations in most aspects of critical reading, targeted instruction in synthesizing information would benefit their comprehensive critical reading development. The study recommends implementing diverse reading materials, collaborative learning activities, and cross-curricular integration of critical reading skills to enhance students' abilities, particularly in synthesizing textual information.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Reading is a crucial language skill that must be mastered by every language user in today's information-rich world (Prasetyoningsih et al., 2021). Through reading, individuals can access a wealth of information and insights that enhance their thinking abilities. This access to diverse texts—books, articles, magazines, and other resources—provides readers with broad and in-depth knowledge across various topics, allowing them to better comprehend the world around them (Harahap et al., 2019).

Beyond simply acquiring knowledge, reading significantly improves critical thinking and analytical skills (Amalia & Kustijono, 2017). When engaging with text, readers encounter different ideas and arguments, which encourages them to consider various viewpoints, evaluate presented evidence, and develop more complex thoughts. Additionally, exposure to different writing styles, vocabulary, and sentence structures enriches language skills and broadens understanding of language use.

Critical reading, in particular, is essential in educational settings. It requires readers to understand both explicit and implicit meanings in texts using higher-level cognitive functions. As pointed out by (Widyamartaya, 1992), reading is the heart of education, suggesting that education cannot function properly without reading activities. For students, reading ability is the key to accessing and understanding the knowledge required for their studies.

However, many students struggle with reading skills, particularly when it comes to English texts. Several factors contribute to these difficulties: unfamiliar vocabulary, complex grammar structures including different sentence structures and tenses, idiomatic expressions with special meanings, cultural context differences, and processing information at the speed required by the language (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). These challenges highlight the need for focused research on critical reading skills, especially among English language learners.

Recent studies have emphasized the importance of critical reading strategies in improving students' reading comprehension. For instance, research by (Lestari, 2021) demonstrated that implementing Critical Reading Strategies significantly contributes to enhancing students' reading comprehension abilities. These strategies help students apply concepts within reading contexts, analyze content more carefully, synthesize information, and critically assess the truth and relevance of the material.

Similarly, (Kurniati, 2021) found that explicit critical reading strategies were categorized as "good" with a percentage of 70.59% based on classification scores. The research showed that these strategies assisted students in understanding texts more deeply, including identifying explicit facts and implied meanings. These findings provide evidence that explicit critical reading strategies can be effective approaches to teaching and learning reading comprehension.

More recently, (Sudarwati, 2022) conducted a study examining critical reading skills among high school students, finding that many students struggle with higher-order thinking skills despite having adequate lower-level comprehension abilities. Their research highlighted that critical reading involves not just basic comprehension but also the ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information—skills that many students have yet to fully develop.

The digital era has also brought new dimensions to critical reading. As discussed by (Afflerbach & Harrison, 2017), today's students need to develop critical reading abilities that extend beyond traditional printed texts to include digital and multimodal texts. Their research emphasizes that critical reading in the digital age requires new skills including the ability to evaluate the credibility of online sources, understand the impact of medium on message, and synthesize information across multiple platforms.

Moreover, (Gillis et al., 2017) argue that critical reading is increasingly important in an era of information abundance and "fake news." Their work suggests that educators must focus not just on teaching students to decode and comprehend texts, but also to question, analyze, and critically evaluate the information they encounter—skills essential for informed citizenship in the 21st century.

Focusing specifically on the Indonesian context, (Khusniyah & Hakim, 2019) found that Indonesian students often face difficulties in critical reading due to a combination of linguistic challenges and a lack of exposure to critical thinking practices in their early education. Their study suggests that a more systematic approach to developing critical reading skills could help address these issues.

Building on these foundations, the present study aims to analyze the critical reading skills of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Padangsidimpuan for the 2023/2024 academic year. This research utilizes (Nurhadi, 2010) six aspects of critical reading to measure these abilities: (1) remembering and recognizing explicit facts in reading, (2)

interpreting implied meanings in reading content, (3) applying concepts in reading content, (4) analyzing reading content, (5) synthesizing reading content, and (6) assessing reading content.

By obtaining a comprehensive understanding of students' critical reading skills, this research seeks to contribute to the development of more effective teaching strategies to enhance these crucial abilities, particularly in English language contexts. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights for educators and curriculum developers seeking to improve critical reading instruction and, by extension, students' academic success and lifelong learning capabilities.

B. LITERATUR REVIEW

1. Analysis and Reading Comprehension

Analysis involves breaking down complex information into constituent parts to gain deeper understanding. According to (Catts, 2022), it's "the breakdown of a group into its various parts" to better understand the whole. (Tianingrum & Sopiany, 2017) describe it as an in-depth study of language structure, while Komarudin (Hidayatullah, 2022) sees it as "an activity of thinking to break down a whole into components" to recognize their relationships and functions. Reading comprehension is essential in educational contexts. (Grabe & Stoller, 2019) note that it improves students' ability to understand texts and integrate new ideas. (Silberstein, 1994) defines reading as "a complex information processing skill" where readers interact with text to create meaningful discourse. Reading is crucial because it provides access to knowledge through written texts and helps students develop thinking processes related to moral, emotional, and verbal intelligence.

(Harmer, 2009) identifies key benefits of reading: exposure to language acquisition (where students unconsciously learn new vocabulary and grammar) and access to good models of English that help students recognize language patterns. Skilled readers set goals before reading, note text structure, and create mental outlines to determine relevance.

The reading comprehension process involves several stages. (Capin et al., 2021) outlines a model where readers establish expectations, identify vocabulary and grammar structures, activate background knowledge, connect to the text's topic, and make predictions about content. This process requires active interaction between

readers and texts, with readers establishing purposes, applying appropriate strategies, and formulating responses.

2. Critical Reading

Critical reading goes beyond basic comprehension. (Wallace, 2007) describes it as processes focused on text interpretation, involving identifying main issues, finding strengths and weaknesses, critiquing logic, and analyzing the text. Ozdemir (Guneş, 2014) defines it as a process where readers construct opinions related to the text's message while evaluating it during reading. (Nurhadi, 2010) outlines six essential aspects of critical reading:

a) Remembering explicit facts: Recognizing factual information directly conveyed

b) Interpreting implied meaning: Understanding meanings not explicitly stated

c) Applying concepts: Connecting text concepts with prior knowledge

d) Analyzing content: Examining text components like structure and language use

e) Synthesizing content: Combining information to produce comprehensive understanding

f) Assessing content: Evaluating the validity of arguments and ideas

(Wallace, 2007) categorizes critical reading purposes as linguistic (understanding ideological meanings), conceptual (developing epistemic literacy), and cultural (perceiving cultural assumptions and differences).

3. Recent Research

Recent studies have expanded our understanding of critical reading. (Afflerbach & Harrison, 2017) examined how critical reading has evolved in the digital age, emphasizing new skills needed for evaluating online source credibility and synthesizing information across platforms.

(Gillis et al., 2017) highlight the importance of critical reading in an era of information abundance, suggesting educators must teach students to question, analyze, and evaluate information as essential citizenship skills.

In the Indonesian context, (Khusniyah & Hakim, 2019) found that students often struggle with critical reading due to linguistic challenges and limited exposure to critical thinking practices. (Al Roomy, 2022) showed that incorporating critical reading strategies improved students' comprehension and analytical skills.

(Sudarwati, 2022) discovered that many Indonesian students possess adequate lower-level comprehension abilities but struggle with higher-order thinking skills, emphasizing that critical reading involves not just basic comprehension but also analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

C. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive analysis method with a quantitative approach. As (Sukardi, 2015) explains, descriptive research provides an accurate picture of individuals or groups, while the quantitative approach involves systematic scientific research focused on phenomena and their relationships (Sarwono, 2006). This methodology aligns with the research goal of examining current issues and presenting findings as significant statistical data (Sudjana & Ibrahim, 2001). The research aims to describe in detail the critical reading abilities of seventh-grade students at SMP N 5 Padangsidimpuan for the 2023/2024 academic year. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 5 Padangsidimpuan in Padang Matinggi, Padangsidimpuan City. The study spanned approximately two months, with one month for data collection and one month for data processing and thesis preparation. The population consists of all seventh-grade students at SMP N 5 Padangsidimpuan (9 classes with 289 students). Due to the large population size, purposive sampling was used to select class VII-1 (30 students) as the research subject. This sampling technique was chosen to save time in data collection and analysis, and because the selected class was deemed representative of the desired population characteristics.

The primary instrument was a critical reading skills test designed to reveal students' abilities to read and analyze texts critically. Students were given specific texts and asked to answer questions testing their understanding, ability to identify relevant information, recognize valid arguments, evaluate evidence, and draw conclusions. The test format was multiple-choice, administered during the fourth meeting as the final evaluation. Before the main research, a preliminary test verified the instrument's validity and reliability.

Analysis involved examining test results, assigning scores (0 for incorrect, 1 for correct answers), analyzing skills per indicator and as a whole, converting scores to

grades, and calculating averages. The rating scale used follows Arikunto's (2006) classification:

Table 1

Rating Scale

Score	Category
80-100	Very Good
66-79	Good
56-65	Enough
40-55	Less
0-39	Failed

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Result of Research

   a. Summary of Student Performance

   The study involved 30 seventh-grade students from SMP N 5 Padangsidimpuan. The assessment of their critical reading skills yielded the following summary statistics:

Table 2

Rating Scale

Summary of Student Performance	Value
Number of Students	30
Highest Score	100 (achieved by 3 students)
Lowest Score	70 (achieved by 3 students)
Total Score	2550
Average Score	85
Standard Deviation	8.20
Performance Category (Arikunto's Scale)	Very Good

The relatively low standard deviation of 8.20 indicates consistent performance across the sample. Based on Arikunto's rating scale, the average score of 85 places the overall critical reading ability of the sampled students in the "Very Good" category.

b. Analysis of Critical Reading Skills Components

To gain a deeper understanding of students' critical reading abilities, the data was further analyzed according to Nurhadi's (2010) six aspects of critical reading.

Table 3

Results of Students' Critical Reading Skills Aspects

Indicators	Question items	Frequency	Score	Category
1) Remembering and recognizing explicit facts in the reading	1	30	100	Very Good
	3	29	97	Very Good
2) Interpreting the implied meaning in the contents of the reading	4	27	90	Very Good
3) Applying the concept in the contents of the reading	2	25	83	Very Good
	5	24	80	Very Good
4) Analyzing the contents of the reading	7	26	87	Very Good
5) Synthesizing reading content	6	21	70	Good
	9	17	57	Enough
6) Assessing the contents of the reading	8	27	90	Very Good

Table 3 illustrates the distribution of results across various aspects of critical reading skills. Each aspect plays an important role in developing students' deep understanding of texts.

The following provides a detailed explanation of each aspect of student reading performance. Students demonstrated excellent ability in remembering and recognizing explicit facts in reading, as reflected by scores of 100 and 97, indicating a strong capacity to identify information directly presented in texts. Their skills in interpreting implied meaning were very good, with a score of 90, showing competence in reading between the lines and understanding messages not explicitly conveyed by authors. In applying concepts from reading content, scores of 83 and 80 suggest a very good ability to connect textual information to real-life situations. Analytical skills were also well developed, as evidenced by a

score of 87, which reflects students' effective capacity to decipher elements contributing to the overall meaning of a text. However, synthesizing reading content was the lowest-performing area, with scores of 70 and 57, suggesting that students may require additional support in integrating information from various parts of texts to form broader conclusions. Finally, evaluative skills in assessing reading content were very good, with scores of 90 and 97, demonstrating students' strong abilities to critically examine information presented in texts.

These findings offer valuable insights into the critical reading abilities of seventh-grade students at SMP N 5 Padangsidimpuan. While students generally performed well across most aspects, synthesizing reading content emerged as an area warranting targeted instructional attention to further enhance comprehension skills.

2. Discussion

The research results provide valuable insights into the critical reading skills of seventh-grade students at SMP N 5 Padangsidimpuan. The assessment has identified varying levels of proficiency across different aspects of critical reading.

Students demonstrated excellent abilities in remembering and recognizing explicit facts in texts (scores of 100 and 97), suggesting well-developed basic comprehension skills that form the foundation of critical reading. This aligns with the typical developmental stage of seventh-grade students who have established fundamental reading comprehension. The high score (90) for interpreting implied meanings indicates students can go beyond surface understanding to decipher messages not explicitly stated by authors. This inferential comprehension allows them to make logical connections between textual elements and draw conclusions based on contextual clues.

In applying concepts from reading to relevant contexts, students scored 83 and 80, showing they can effectively connect textual information to real-world situations. This reflects their ability to transfer knowledge from texts to practical applications rather than simply memorizing information. Students showed strong analytical skills in examining reading content (score of 87), revealing their ability to break down text structures and identify components contributing to overall meaning.

Their evaluative abilities were similarly impressive (scores of 90 and 97), indicating they can effectively assess the quality and validity of information presented. However, the ability to synthesize reading content emerged as an area requiring development, with notably lower scores (70 and 57). This suggests students face challenges in organizing and integrating information from different parts of texts to form comprehensive understandings.

These findings support (Taqwiem, 2018) study, which found students generally demonstrate good abilities in remembering explicit facts and interpreting implied meanings. They also parallel (Nirmala, 2019) research highlighting students' proficiency in applying concepts from reading to real situations. This study contributes new insights regarding synthesis of reading content, an area not extensively covered in previous research. The finding of lower proficiency in synthesis suggests these skills may develop later or require specialized instructional approaches. The overall pattern aligns with (Sudarwati, 2022) findings that students often master lower-level comprehension skills before developing proficiency in higher-order thinking abilities. The findings suggest several teaching implications: specialized instruction strategies for synthesis skills, balanced attention to all six aspects of critical reading, integration of critical reading across the curriculum, differentiated learning activities addressing specific strengths and needs, and comprehensive assessment measuring all aspects of critical reading.

Limitations include the small sample size (30 students), use of multiple-choice questions that may not fully capture complex reading processes, and the single-point assessment that doesn't track skill development over time. Future research could include longitudinal studies tracking critical reading development, mixed methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods, intervention studies evaluating instructional approaches for improving synthesis skills, and cross-linguistic investigations examining critical reading in both Indonesian and English. This study provides a comprehensive picture of students' critical reading skills, identifying both strengths and areas for development, offering valuable guidance for educational practice and foundation for future research.

E. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of critical reading skills among seventh-grade students at SMP N 5 Padangsidimpuan, several conclusions can be drawn about their abilities across different aspects of critical reading. The assessment using Nurhadi's six-aspect framework reveals that students excel in remembering and recognizing explicit facts (scores of 100 and 97), interpreting implied meanings (score of 90), applying concepts (scores of 83 and 80), analyzing reading content (score of 87), and assessing reading content (scores of 90 and 97). However, synthesizing reading content emerged as an area requiring improvement, with notably lower scores (70 and 57). This suggests students face challenges in integrating information from different parts of texts to form comprehensive understandings. Overall, students demonstrated good critical reading skills, with the average score of 85 placing their abilities in the "Very Good" category according to Arikunto's rating scale. While there is room for improvement, especially in synthesizing content, students have developed solid critical reading foundations.

Several recommendations can enhance students' critical reading skills. Teachers should design activities that encourage deeper questioning, inferencing, and identifying arguments in texts to help students hone their analytical and evaluative skills while practicing synthesis. Presenting varied reading materials would help students develop diverse critical reading skills and adapt their approaches to different contexts and genres. Educators should provide specific feedback on students' work, especially regarding synthesis and evaluation abilities, to guide their development. Digital learning resources can provide access to diverse reading materials and interactive tools that support critical reading development. Collaborative learning activities can enhance critical reading by exposing students to multiple perspectives and interpretations. Curriculum developers should incorporate critical reading as a cross-curricular skill rather than limiting it to language classes.

Future studies could examine the developmental progression of critical reading skills across different grade levels, investigate effective instructional strategies for enhancing synthesis skills, explore the relationship between critical reading in first and second languages, and expand research to include larger samples across different schools and regions. By implementing these recommendations and pursuing these research directions, educators and researchers can advance understanding of critical reading

skills and support students in developing these essential abilities for academic success and lifelong learning.

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