



## **Enhancing College Students' Reading Comprehension Through Critical Reading**

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### **Abstract**

Reading comprehension is the main pillar during reading activity in order to build the understanding of the text. Improving reading comprehension skills can positively impact many facets of student academic performance. However, it is not an easy activity to do. Vocabulary limitation and a complex process of reading comprehension lead to students' failure in reading. This paper discusses how to implement critical reading as one of ways to help students in reading comprehension. Critical reading means that a reader applies certain processes that result in enhanced clarity and comprehension. The process starts from previewing the physical appearance of the text, contextualizing (after reading the whole text), questioning to understand and remember, to answering and evaluating argument. By applying the stages of critical reading, the teacher can facilitate their reading comprehension.

**Key words:** *Reading Comprehension, Critical Reading, College Students*

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Reading is one of the four skills in English that should be mastered by students. For students who involve in academic life, reading is very useful in order to obtain information and knowledge. This is in line with Harmer (2007) who says that reading is a good thing for language students. Through reading, the students can get knowledge. Reading comprehension needs to be mastered since it requires interaction between the reader and the text; the reader has to decode the meaning of the written words to be able to understand the writer's point of view (Qrgezand Rashid, 2017). Reading comprehension can be defined as reading to process the text, understand the meaning, and integrate it with student's background knowledge.

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As it is known, college students always work by doing much reading in order to get sources of information and knowledge which then will be processed. The process leads to the students' understanding about the subject matters they are learning. For English students, reading is absolutely crucial. Since they study English as a foreign language, they need to master good reading skill in order to get understanding from all sources they use to learn a language. Even, it will be difficult for the students to understand and master other three skills (speaking, listening, and writing) if they do not have the ability in reading critically. This is due to the fact that the materials used to learn the three skills are also presented in English.

Even though reading comprehension has many advantages, reading comprehension is not easy as it is said. First, there are many difficult words in the text so it is hard to comprehend the text. Having limited vocabulary will make students face problem in comprehending the written ideas. Second, as it is known that reading comprehension is a process, so it is not something that can be got instantly. To have the comprehension ability, students should be train to be able actively participated in learning process.

Critical reading is one of the ways to help students in reading comprehension. According to Mulumba (2016) critical reading is one of the skills the language students need to acquire if they are to attain effective knowledge in language education. Missori (2007) introduced seven critical reading strategies which he claims help students to read critically and confidently. These strategies are: Annotating, Previewing, Contextualizing, Questioning, Reflecting, Summarizing, and Evaluating an argument. Critical reading involves: carefully considering and evaluating the reading, identifying the reading's strengths and implications, identifying the reading's weaknesses and flaws, looking at the 'big picture' and deciding how the reading fits into the greater academic context. It can be said that critical reading can enhance students reading comprehension.

## **B. REVIEW OF RELATED LITARATURE**

### **1. The Nature of Reading**

There are many definitions about reading proposed by many researchers. According to Alyousef (2006) reading can be seen as an "interactive" process between a reader and a text which leads to automaticity. Based on this definition, in order to have the interactive process, the reader try to understand the text by looking at the information contained. In order to get the meaningful information of the text, the readers use any kind of knowledge and features presented in the text.

Lismayanti et al. (2014) stated that reading is considered as one of the important areas of teaching, and it is one of the most important academic skills. As a field of teaching, reading is a major pillar in which teaching and learning process is built. This can be seen in all activities related to education in which learning will not happen if there is no reading. This is due to the fact that most of the materials are presented in the written form. In other words, being able to read

becomes really important in learning since the majority of input for students comes from their reading and how the students can get the knowledge from that. Thus, reading is a skill which play a big role in the success of teaching and learning process.

Reading comprehension is a complex process that demands much from the reader. Coe (2009) defined reading comprehension as the intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed between the reader and text. This implies that the reader interacts with the text content, using his or her vocabulary, background knowledge, skills, motivation to read that text, knowledge of text structure, and strategies to construct meaning.

Qrquezand Rashid (2017) also stated that reading comprehension is not simply recognizing individual words, or even understanding each individual word as our eyes pass over it. From this definition, it can be seen that reading comprehensively does not mean just read the words stated. The process of comprehension requires the readers to build up a mental representation of text. It is a process that requires integration across a range of sources of information, from lexical features to knowledge concerning events in the world.

## **2. Strategies in Reading Comprehension**

Since reading comprehension requires complex skills, some strategies needed to be implemented by the teachers in order to help students comprehend the text. Coe (2009) stated that some strategies can be used in helping students to do reading comprehension. They are activating prior knowledge, Cooperative learning, using graphic organizers, and asking and generating questions. The explanation for each is as following: In activating prior knowledge, teachers need to first find out what students know and consider students' background knowledge (schemata) before presenting a new topic. Deshpande (2016) stated that schemata or knowledge structures serve as frameworks for related concepts. The next one is cooperative learning. Students can benefit from reading and discussing what they read with peers. Cooperative learning strategies can help create a positive classroom environment, build student-to-student interactions, allow them to share strategies and ideas, and facilitate discussions that can support comprehension due to cooperative learning can overcome students' anxiety in reading (Nejad and Keshavarzi, 2015).

The next strategy is using graphic organizers. Graphic organizers can help students to organize information and to identify how ideas are related to each other. These organizers can take the form of charts, graphs, pictures, or other graphics that help students organize information.

The last one is asking and generating questions. Questioning is effective for improving comprehension because it gives students a purpose for reading, motivates them to continue to read, focuses attention on what must be learned helps to develop active thinking while reading, and monitors comprehension. Generating question promotes student interaction with the text.

### 3. Critical Reading

Critical reading is a technique for discovering information and ideas within a text. It is the task of a critical reader to 'read between the lines' and undertake an analysis of a text to comprehensively grasp its full meaning (Larking, 2017). When facing a text, the readers may find difficulties in discovering the ideas contained due to the fact that there may be biased views presented in the texts. Discovering the ideas by considering views and evidences in the text is what is called by critical reading. Elmahdi (2012) stated that there are some strategies in which critical readers usually use: previewing, contextualizing, questioning to understand and remember, reflecting on challenges to beliefs and values, outlining and summarizing, evaluating an argument, comparing and contrasting related readings. In previewing, the readers learn about a text before really reading it. It can be in the form of observing the title of the text or see any picture provided in the text. This will be useful in order to predict what the text will be about and relate it with the background knowledge that the readers have.

## C. DISCUSSION

### 1. Teaching Preparation

#### a. Authenticity

Due to the fact that the teacher teaches English in the EFL context, it will be much better if the students are given an authentic text. The authentic text can help students to learn in the English context, not in their native language. If the teacher uses authentic texts, the students will be advantaged by realizing that the language they are learning is English, not Indonesian translated literally to English. In addition, students will be able to see the not only the written expression of the text, but also the culture behind the text which is English culture.

#### b. Up to date

The teacher can find many different types of texts under different topics on any source. For example, there are so many examples of texts provided on the internet or on in reading book. However, teacher should put much consideration in taking the example from it since the example of text needed is the one which discuss the current issue.

#### c. Level consideration

Text level should also be considered by the teacher. Choose a text which is appropriate for the students' level. (See appendix 1)

## **2. TEACHING ACTIVITY**

### **a. Pre Teaching**

In this stage, the students are prepared by the teacher so that they will be ready to learn. The first thing that the teacher should do is to greet the students. Starting the lesson without greeting the students are impolite, and students will feel that they are not engaged in the process. After the teacher greets the students, the next thing to do is motivating the students. Checking attendance is also done in this stage. After the students are motivated enough and are ready to study, it is time for the teacher to start reviewing previous materials. It can be in the form of asking volunteers to explain the previous topics, or it can be in the form of questions and answers. The next step to do is introducing the students to the topic or lesson to be learn today as well as its objectives.

### **b. Whilst Teaching**

#### **1) Previewing**

In this stage, the goal to achieve is that the students can preview the text physically. Previewing enables readers to get a sense of what the text is about and how it is organized before reading it closely. In order to do this, the teacher gives students a text and asks them to pay attention just to the main features of the text (e.g title, subheading, picture, etc.). The teacher needs to inform students that their task is to get general description about what the text is about, and the description got is still in the form of prediction.

After that, the teacher asks students some questions in order to see the students' background knowledge related to the text they are going to comprehend. The teacher may ask these sample questions:

1. After reading the title, can you guess what the text is about?
2. What do you think Ferdinand Magellan has to do with the text?
3. What do you see in the picture?
4. What do you think the picture has to do with the text?
5. What do you think the following dates (16th century, 1493, September 20, 1519) have to do with the text?

While they are doing this, encourage the students to make notes in the margins or in a notebook about what they think the reading is about.

#### **2) Contextualizing**

In this stage, the students are asked to read the whole text. To read critically, the teacher needs to encourage students to be able to contextualize and to recognize the differences between what things they experience and those represented in the text. In doing this, the teacher needs to guide students with some questions. The teacher can ask these following questions, as examples.

- a) What do you already know about this?
- b) What comes to your minds when you read the title?
- c) What experiences have you had?

d) Have you ever seen the picture (if there any) before?

### 3) Questioning to understand and remember

In this stage, the teacher asks students to read the text for the second time. Now, it is time for them to ask their own selves about everything coming to their minds while they are reading. It is important for the teacher to give example first about how to raise questions related to the text. Besides, the teacher needs to emphasize that the ones to ask are not about the words stated in the text, but it is about the idea presented in the text. These things need to be remained to the students. However, if the students find difficult words in the text, it is better to ask them guessing the meaning from the context first. Thus, they will focus on asking the ideas, not asking words anymore. Each question should focus on a main idea, not on illustrations or details, and each should be expressed in their own words, not just copied from parts of the paragraph.

In order to do this activity, the teacher needs to provide space at the margin of the text. It will be used by the students to write down the meaning of every word they are confused with and to write questions about the content they do not understand in the text. Before asking students do read the text and do highlighting to difficult words, the teacher needs to provide example on how to do this activity.

### 4) Answering and evaluating an argument

In this stage, the teacher tries to encourage students to answer and evaluate their arguments got from the previous stages. The questions they have been written before are answered by themselves. The teacher needs to emphasize that the students should answer the questions based on their own words. It is better for teacher to give students much time in responding to the questions. In doing this, the teacher asks students to answer the questions they write in the previous stage. For example, if the students write question like, “Why did Ferdinand lose the king’s favor?” Then, the students need to write down the answers. After the students finish answering the questions, the teacher asks students to change their answers in pairs, and asks each student to check friend’s work. To ease this activity, the teacher can provide this format. (See appendix 2)

### 5) Writing summary

In this stage, the students are asked to write a summary based on the results of their thought in the previous stages. Their understanding towards the text can be seen from the summary they write. In doing this, the teacher should not focus on the grammatical elements of the summary. However, the main focus should be on the ideas which students deliver. Besides, the teacher should make sure that the students do not just copies paste the words from the text. Instead, every word is the ideas from their minds, and the words are purely owned by the students.

### **c. Post Teaching Activity**

In this stage, the teacher reflects what the students have learned in the meeting. Both teacher and the students discuss the achievement of the process of critical reading the students did. In order to make sure if the students really involve in the process of critical reading is by reviewing some of the students' summaries. The teacher just needs to put a glance of the students' writing. Then, the teacher tries to draw a good and clear conclusion about the text read. Besides that, the teacher also needs to encourage students to speak about the summary their writing. Thus, the process of thinking do happens.

## **D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

### **1. Conclusion**

As it is known, college students always work by doing much reading in order to get sources of information and knowledge which then will be processed. The process leads to the students' understanding about the subject matters they are learning.

Critical reading is one way to help students in reading comprehension because it is a language skill students need to acquire if they are to attain effective knowledge in language education. In doing this, some stages of activities are done: previewing, contextualizing, questioning to understand and remember, answering and evaluating an argument, and writing summary. These sequences of activities help students in a complex process starting from easy step to the most complex one. Thus, these activities engage students in critical reading.

### **2. Suggestion**

In order to help students engage in the teaching and learning process, the teacher should have good preparation before coming to the class. The preparation can be about the materials and media which will be used in the class. Good preparation will always result in good process and good result. The critical reading process offered in this paper will not give students advantages if there is no preparation by the teacher about how to use it especially in the way of how the teacher encourages the students to think. In addition, it is suggested that the teacher passes the steps of teaching and learning offered below as a sequence. Thus, the students can be really involved in the activity – mastering reading comprehension through critical reading.

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## Appendix 1

In the 16th century, an age of great marine and terrestrial exploration, Ferdinand Magellan led the first expedition to sail around the world. As a young Portuguese noble, he served the king of Portugal, but he became involved in the quagmire of political intrigue at court and lost the king's favor. After he was dismissed from service by the king of Portugal, he offered to serve the future Emperor Charles V of Spain.

A papal decree of 1493 had assigned all land in the New World west of 50 degrees W longitude to Spain and all the land east of that line to Portugal. Magellan offered to prove that the East Indies fell under Spanish authority. On September 20, 1519, Magellan set sail from Spain with five ships. More than a year later, one of these ships was exploring the topography of South America in search of a water route across the continent. This ship sank, but the remaining four ships searched along the southern peninsula of South America. Finally they found the passage they sought near 50 degrees S latitude. Magellan named this passage the Strait of All Saints, but today it is known as the Strait of Magellan.

One ship deserted while in this passage and returned to Spain, so fewer sailors were privileged to gaze at that first panorama of the Pacific Ocean. Those who remained crossed the meridian now known as the International Date Line in the early spring of 1521 after 98 days on the Pacific Ocean. During those long days at sea, many of Magellan's men died of starvation and disease.

Later, Magellan became involved in an insular conflict in the Philippines and was killed in a tribal battle. Only one ship and 17 sailors under the command of the Basque navigator Elcano survived to complete the westward journey to Spain and thus prove once and for all that the world is round, with no precipice at the edge.

<https://www.testprepreview.com/modules/reading1.htm>

Appendix 2

|                     |         |
|---------------------|---------|
| 1.                  |         |
| My question         | : _____ |
| My answer           | : _____ |
| My friend's comment | : _____ |
| 2.                  |         |
| My question         | : _____ |
| My answer           | : _____ |
| My friend's comment | : _____ |
| 3.                  |         |
| My question         | : _____ |
| My answer           | : _____ |
| My friend's comment | : _____ |

