

## The Development of a Critical Reading Learning Model to Promote University Students' Critical Awareness

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### Abstract

Critical reading awareness can empower readers through critical reading skills used to understand ideological messages and domination act in language practice. The aim of this research was to develop and test a critical reading learning model to enhance university students' critical awareness. This Research and Development study was carried out by following three main steps that were product development, product validation, and examination of product effectiveness. 56 students participated in this study. They came from the Indonesian Language Department, Negeri Makassar University, Indonesia. The qualitative data was analyzed with the use of domain analysis and the quantitative data was analyzed using t-test. The developed learning model was proven valid and feasible through experts' validation. In addition, the results of the effectiveness test indicated that the learning model could improve students' critical reading skills and students' critical reading awareness of understanding, evaluating, and responding to texts.

*Keywords: critical reading, critical awareness, language learning, teaching reading*

### Introduction

Critical language awareness has become an important component in life. The latest advancement has forced people to use language not only as a communication tool, but also as a means to execute hegemony functions. Moumou (2004)

states that there has been a meaningful change applied to language practice in society, which is marked by the appearance of domination act in a more explicit way. Social control has been transformed from coercion to hegemony through language (Fairclough, 1992). As a result, the use of language provides an opportunity for people to control the direction of various professional relationships, such as between a doctor and his/her patients, a teacher and his/her students, and a journalist and his/her respondents. Therefore, critical language awareness plays a role in helping language users reveal hidden language practice which represents domination act.

Critical language awareness refers to a language competence which is needed to help people use language effectively. Fairclough (1989) proposed two alternatives of language learning: (1) developing communication skills and (2) promoting critical awareness. The development of communication skills aims to make learners able to make use of language in order to fulfill their needs. Meanwhile, to promote students' critical awareness means to improve students' ability to reflect on the use of power in language. Fairclough (1992) argues that language learning which is only focused on the development of language skills and overlooks critical language awareness has abandoned its responsibility.

Critical reading can help enhance critical language awareness. It makes readers recognize, detect, respond to, and connect the ideological purposes of diction used by the author of a given context. Wallace (1998) states that there are three purposes of critical reading: linguistic, critical conceptual, and cultural. From the linguistic aspect, critical reading aims to involve readers in texts so that they can identify ideological messages delivered by the texts. From the critical conceptual point of view, critical reading provides readers with an opportunity to develop convincing arguments, connect their knowledge with the social context, and question the content to construct knowledge. In cultural perspective, critical reading is believed to give a chance to the readers to enrich their knowledge by understanding different cultures from different points of view.

Critical reading can be perceived as a process in which readers, text, and writers interact with each other. The interaction between readers and text are psychological and social (Bloome, 1993; Hudson, 2007; Wallace, 2010). Reading as a social process can be seen from two perspectives: (1) writer-readers interaction and (2) social relationship built during the process. Related to the interaction between readers and text, critical reading in this study was situated in the sociocultural context. The reading process was aimed at promoting university students' critical awareness, especially in revealing ideological and domination practice. Thus, the reading activity covered (1) the activity to construct personal perspective (2) the

activity to criticize the effect of language use and language ideas revealed from the text, (3) the activity to involve skills in identifying ideology and domination act in the text (Wallace, 1998).

A previous study conducted by Sultan, Rofuuddin, Nurhadi, & Priyatni (2016) to investigate university students' critical awareness has shown that 65.99% of students preferred textual to ideological meaning; only 8.22 % of students developed different perspective; 9.03% of students attempted to identify discrimination acts in the text; and 3.48 % of students were convinced by the text. In conclusion, the students' critical reading awareness was categorized low.

O'Hallaron, Palincsar, & Schleppegrell (2015) have developed a scientific text-based critical language awareness. They designed learning activities in such a way that students could explore the writer's ideas and attitude. The activities encouraged the students to use self-evaluation in building their knowledge. The learning process covered five stages, which were to help students (1) understand that texts contain not only information and facts but also the writers' perspectives, (2) discover the writers' perspectives, (3) understand the use of language that reveals the writers' attitude, (4) provide critical responses towards the way the writer positions their readers in a text, and (5) interpret texts from new perspectives. The research findings showed the fact that teachers needed assistance in making an instructional decision, especially to determine the meaning of a text.

In addition, Huh (2016) developed a learning model to promote university students' critical awareness in Korea. Classroom interaction was developed through text decoding and text comprehension, also text personalizing and text analysis to reveal assumptions and ideologies. The results of the study proved that the learning model could help university students to practice critical reading and provide critical responses to ideology found in the text.

Therefore, this study was aimed to (1) develop a learning model based on critical reading learning principles to promote university students' critical awareness, (2) conduct a validity test based on experts' evaluation, and (3) investigate the effect of the model on students' critical reading skills. This learning model consisted of some procedures or steps which directed students technically to critical reading activity and, as a result, to produce critical awareness. In addition, it is also characterized by a set of steps to achieve specific objectives, define communication patterns between teacher-students, the role of teacher and the role of students, and supporting tools to implement the steps (Joyce, Well, and Coulhon, 2009; Eggen & Kauchak, 2012). The steps, therefore, could improve students' skills to interpret, analyze, make inferences, evaluate, explain, and regulate themselves while reading (Facione, 2015).

## **Research Methodology**

The research employed a Research and Development design which was adapted from Borg and Gall. There were three main steps to conduct this kind of study, namely product development, product validation and experiment (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). The learning model was developed based on the model suggested by Joyce, Weills, and Calhoun (2009), which contained stages of learning.

The two main activities done in the presented research were to develop a model and test its effectiveness. They covered: (1) development of a prototype, (2) product validation by experts, and (3) revision. Product validation was performed by experts, who are competent in reading and designing learning models.

The effectiveness of the product was tested through a quasi-experiment designed with the pretest-post test *control group design*. This test was aimed to measure the effectiveness of the model towards university students' critical language awareness. The experiment was conducted during 10 weeks/meetings. Each meeting lasted 150 minutes. The pretest was administered in the first week. During the treatment, the students received four texts; they were (1) a news item text which contained racial discrimination issues, (2) an editorial text which contained religion-based propaganda, (3) an advertorial text which represented consumerism ideology, and (4) an opinion text which presented a political figure. There were two meetings devoted to discussion on each kind of text. The experimental group of students applied six stages of learning taken from the critical reading model developed in this study while the control group of students learned through guided discussion. Post-test was distributed in the tenth meeting.

The effectiveness test involved 56 students from Indonesian Language Teaching Study Program, Negeri Makassar University, Indonesia. The students were grouped in an experiment class and a control class. Try-out samples were students who were enrolled in a reading class, aged between 19 and 21. There were 41 female and 15 male students selected to this group. Besides those groups, there were 26 students involved in the instrument trial.

Data was collected through a questionnaire and a critical reading test. The questionnaire was distributed to the experts and practitioners in order to obtain their responses to the product. They needed to leave a check mark to respond to each item in the questionnaire. There were four categories used to measure the results of the Likert-scale questionnaire: not feasible (score: 1), feasible enough (score: 2), feasible (score: 3), and very feasible (score: 4). In addition to the scores, the experts and practitioners were required to leave comments, critique, and suggestions concerning every item. The critical reading test consisted of 40 multiple choice and

essay questions. All the items of the test covered six critical reading skills, which are interpreting, analyzing, making an inference, explaining, and self-regulating.

Data was categorized into qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data was data collected in the form of responses, advice, and critique given by the experts or practitioners. Quantitative data was collected in the form of test scores. Qualitative data analysis was conducted by classifying the data based on the research domain: interpretation, reflection, and conclusion. Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire was descriptively analyzed. The results of the product validation are presented in Table 1. Quantitative data obtained from the test was analyzed using t-test SPSS program for Windows.

**Table 1.** Criteria of product validity

Range	Criteria
3.26–4.00	Very feasible
2.51–3.25	Feasible
1.76–2.50	Feasible enough
1.00–1.75	Not feasible

## **Research Results**

This section describes the research results including the description of the critical reading learning model, model validation, and the results of the effectiveness test.

### **Description of the critical reading learning model**

The critical reading learning model contains a set of structured learning activities which can be used as guidance in the classroom. The structure is organized in stages of learning. Each stage of learning represents main learning activities in the classroom. Based on this learning model, the stages are: (1) exploring texts, (2) identifying the problems, (3) detecting domination act in the texts, (4) providing responses and evaluating arguments, (5) improving comprehension, and (6) self-reflecting.

**Table 2.** Stages of critical reading learning to promote critical awareness

Learning stages	Learning activities	Competences
Stage 1: Exploring text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize the characteristics of the text</li> <li>• Follow the steps of critical reading</li> <li>• Discuss examples of language use which represent domination act</li> <li>• Connect the text with domination theories</li> </ul>	Conceptual knowledge of text characteristics and text ideological and domination practice

Learning stages	Learning activities	Competences
Stage 2: Identifying problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify main problem discussed</li> <li>Identify domination diction</li> <li>Reveal the effect of particular diction</li> </ul>	Interpretation skill
Stage 3: Detecting domination act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elaborate ideas of domination practice</li> <li>Elaborate arguments on domination practice</li> </ul>	Analysis skill
Stage 4: Responding to and evaluating arguments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draw a conclusion</li> <li>Consider evidence provided by the author</li> <li>Evaluate arguments</li> <li>Propose alternative ideas</li> </ul>	Inference skill and evaluation skill
Stage 5: Improving comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make a decision towards the idea/information presented by the author</li> <li>Present counter arguments</li> <li>Propose alternative attitude</li> </ul>	Explanation skill
Stage 6: Self-reflecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approach the text based on personal perspectives</li> <li>Connect the text with personal experience</li> </ul>	Self-regulation skill

### Product validation

The critical reading learning model was validated by three experts in reading, learning model, and teaching reading. The results of product validation are shown in Table 3. Based on the table, it can be concluded that the learning model is possible to implement in the classroom.

**Table 3.** The results of product validation

Evaluation Aspects	Indicators	Results (average)	Criteria
Stages of learning	Stages of learning comprise structured learning activities	3.67	Very feasible
	Stages of learning comprise feasible learning activities	4.00	Very feasible
	Stages of learning comprise learning activities which improve students' critical reading	4.00	Very feasible
	Stages of learning train students' critical reading skills	4.00	Very feasible
Social system	Learning environment is relevant to developing students' competence of critical reading	3.33	Very feasible
The role of lecturer	Lecturer's activities are defined clearly	3.33	Very feasible
	Lecturer's activities demonstrate his/her role as an adviser/facilitator	3.67	Very feasible

Evaluation Aspects	Indicators	Results (average)	Criteria
Supporting system	Supporting system is relevant to learning model produced	4.00	Very feasible
Nurturant effect	Nurturant effect is relevant to stages of learning	3.33	Very feasible

### Results of the effectiveness test

The results of statistical analysis show that there was a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group. The average score of the experimental group in posttest was 70.86, while the control group only achieved 48.02 on average. Therefore, the difference found was 22.839.

**Table 4.** Students' post-test average score

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest scores	Experimental group	28	70.86	5.995	1.133
	Control group	28	48.02	6.575	1.243

Based on the results, it was found that the value of  $t$  was 13.358 with the level of significance 0.000. It demonstrates that there was a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in critical reading ( $p < 0.05$ ). This result, thus, proved that the learning model developed was highly effective since it successfully improved the students' critical reading skills and resulted in the students' developed critical awareness.

**Table 5.** The results of the t-test

F		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
								Lower	Upper	
Posttest scores	Equal variances assumed	.232	.632	13.582	54	.000	22.839	1.682	19.468	26.211
	Equal variances not assumed			13.582	53.546	.000	22.839	1.682	19.467	26.211

## **Discussion**

Based on the previous explanation, it can be concluded that critical reading learning had a significant effect on the students' critical reading skills. This learning model consists of practical and structured learning activities, which contribute to the development of university students' critical awareness. There are six learning activities that can be performed to guide students to understand, evaluate, and provide critical responses to texts. These steps represent the reading process which (1) was focused on domination issues and attempted to develop students' reflecting ability, (2) was used to enhance students' ability in evaluating various perspectives, (3) was directed to analyze social-political issues, and (4) was developed to encourage students to propose alternatives (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004b; Lewison, Flint, & Sluys, 2002; Norris, Lucas, & Prudhoe, 2012). The students may ask several critical questions about the texts to improve their critical awareness afterwards (Cervetti, Pardales, & Dominico, 2001; Sharp, 2012).

Stages of learning in the critical reading learning model reflect ideological assumptions behind the texts. Critical reading in this learning model involves the process of understanding ideological messages and the writer's purposes. Learning activities must be oriented to the revelation of those messages because critical reading refers to reading not only propositional messages, but also ideological messages conveyed by texts (Wallace, 1992).

This learning model encourages students to act and behave critically. The critical attitude and action are realized through the development of counter arguments and alternatives to resolving problems found in texts and also through self-reflection. Similarly, Beck (2005) states that there are three characteristics of learning to improve critical awareness: (1) learning makes students actively engaged in text and context discussion; (2) learning makes use of the meaning of a text to reflect on; and (3) learning encourages students to critique a text and reveal particular ideology conveyed by the text.

The unique characteristic of the critical reading activity reflected in this learning model is that it accommodates an open classroom atmosphere in which every student is given an opportunity to express their ideas from different perspectives. This kind of situation is needed to boost students' self-esteem and self-confidence in critical reading. The lecturer plays the role of a facilitator, who provides stimuli so that students can express their critical-alternative thoughts. Students may ask questions related to texts and relate the questions to the concept of ideology, power, and domination. In line with the findings of the presented study, McLaughlin & DeVoogd (2004a) propose critical reading learning steps which consist of (1)



encouraging readers to think, (2) providing guidance, (3) broadening the thinking process, and (4) helping readers reflect on a text.

The results of the effectiveness test indicated that the implementation of the critical reading learning model had encouraged students to conduct an investigation of a text. They were, thus, motivated to analyze language features, information, and arguments presented by the writer to influence readers' attitude and perspective. As a result of the investigation, the students were able to reveal meanings implied by the text. This learning model is beneficial since it approaches students' cognitive and affective aspects holistically (Svalber, 2007; Farahian & Rezaee, 2015).

## **Conclusions**

Based on the description, it can be concluded that the critical reading learning model developed in this study comprises structured and feasible learning activities. These results proved that the learning model was effective in developing students' critical reading competence. This learning model has special features which make students more active in assessing and criticizing domination acts found in texts, developing their perspectives and capability of self-reflection. Empirically, this learning model has been found to have an effect on university students' critical awareness since it helps students to understand, evaluate and respond to texts.

Based on the results, it is recommended to implement this learning model in the classroom. The importance of university students' critical awareness has been increasing as language roles have been developed to carry ideological messages. In recent contexts which are marked by the increasing use of language to present ideological purposes, this learning model is relevant to help students practice critical reading and promote their critical awareness.

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