



THE ROLE OF CRITICAL READING SKILLS IN FINDING MORAL MESSAGES IN READING

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Abstract

This study aims to improve the critical reading skills of grade VI A students of SDN 1 Malabar in finding moral messages in reading. The research method used is qualitative observation-based, with direct observation of the learning process in the classroom. The results of the study indicate that most students have been able to analyze texts, draw conclusions, and convey ideas in writing, but there are still 50% of students who need further attention and guidance to improve their critical reading skills. Factors such as learning experience, learning environment, and cognitive abilities influence students' critical reading skills. This study suggests the importance of strengthening critical reading skills in Indonesian language learning to improve students' ability to find moral messages in reading.

Abstrak

Kata kunci: Membaca kritis, Siswa, Pengalaman belajar, Kemampuan kognitif, Pesan moral.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kemampuan membaca kritis siswa kelas VI A SDN 1 Malabar dalam menemukan pesan moral dalam bacaan. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif berbasis observasi, dengan pengamatan langsung terhadap proses pembelajaran di kelas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar siswa telah mampu menganalisis teks, menarik kesimpulan, dan menyampaikan gagasan secara tertulis, namun masih terdapat 50% siswa yang memerlukan perhatian dan pendampingan lebih lanjut untuk meningkatkan kemampuan membaca kritisnya. Faktor-faktor seperti pengalaman belajar, lingkungan belajar, dan kemampuan kognitif mempengaruhi kemampuan membaca kritis siswa. Penelitian ini menyarankan pentingnya penguatan keterampilan membaca kritis dalam pembelajaran bahasa Indonesia untuk meningkatkan kemampuan siswa dalam menemukan pesan moral dalam bacaan.

INTRODUCCTION

Reading is a basic skill that plays a crucial role in the learning process and the development of individual thought patterns. Through reading, readers not only explore and obtain information directly, but also are encouraged to understand the implicit meaning behind the text. From early childhood to adulthood, reading is a primary means of exploring the world, whether through textbooks, literary works, or various other informative texts. Every piece of reading, whether physical or non-physical, carries an implicit message and certain values that can influence how

individuals view the world and live their lives. Therefore, reading cannot be viewed merely as the activity of recognizing letters and words, but can also be a process of deeply understanding the content of a text.

Reading is also a complex process that involves interpreting written symbols to understand the meaning contained therein. This process requires the involvement of cognitive aspects, such as the ability to think, reason, and connect new information with previous knowledge. In line with Rohim & Rahmawati (2020), the rapid progress of knowledge requires every student to have greater reading and writing skills, with the aim that students have sufficient insight and knowledge to be able to compete and keep up with the developments of the times. Reading ability has a role and is caused because all access to information and knowledge that is owned is always related to reading activities.

Essentially, reading is a process of interaction between the reader and the text. In this process, the reader attempts to interpret the language symbols composed by the author to convey a particular message. Saputra et al (2025) stated that in the context of Indonesian language learning, reading is not only interpreted as an activity of recognizing words and understanding the contents of the text superficially, but also as a thinking process that involves the ability to interpret, evaluate, and integrate information in depth. As 21st-century competency requirements develop, literal reading skills are no longer sufficient. Students are required to have critical reading skills, namely the ability to analyze text structure, assess the accuracy of information, understand the author's intent, and draw out the implicit meanings implied in a reading. Fadilla & Pramudianli, (2023) argue that reading involves more than just looking at text, but also involves the process of thinking to understand information from a piece of writing and functions as a tool to expand a person's language knowledge.

A person (student) is said to be skilled at reading if he can understand the meaning contained in the reading. To fulfill this, students must be trained to read continuously, of course with various reading strategies that suit the students' needs. (Yaqin, 2012). In the learning process, one of the important aspects that must be achieved through reading activities is the ability to find moral messages in the

reading. Moral messages are positive values conveyed by the author, either explicitly or implicitly, which can be used as behavioral guidelines for readers. The presence of moral values in the reading not only enriches insight, but also functions as a means of forming the character of students. This is in line with the objectives of national education which emphasize the importance of character development, integrity, and ethical values in students. However, various studies show that many students, especially in elementary schools, still experience difficulties in finding moral messages in texts, especially when the message is not conveyed directly. This difficulty arises because students tend to only understand reading at a surface level (Surface understanding) without conducting deeper reasoning on the content and context of the text. Malahayati et al (2021) explain that people's reading abilities vary; there are good readers and bad readers. Judging from the level of reading ability, there are three groups of readers: literal readers, critical readers, and creative readers. One thing that can deepen our understanding of a reading is the ability to read critically.

Critical reading is not simply the ability to understand words on paper, but also involves a deep analysis of the author's intended purpose and meaning. (Fauziah, 2024) argues that many people lack good reading habits. This can be a barrier to developing critical reading skills. Reading requires practice and habit, and without it, a person will have difficulty understanding complex texts and analyzing information critically. Some people may not see the immediate benefits of critical reading and feel unmotivated to develop this skill. This can be overcome by showing them how critical reading can help them in their daily lives, such as work, study, and personal life. Critical reading can be key to discovering the moral message contained in a reading. Furthermore, critical reading also involves the ability to identify biases, contradictions, or even errors in a reading. A text may contain values that differ from what we believe, or even contradict our moral principles. With a critical approach, we can be wiser in filtering information and not be easily influenced by other things that may not align with the good values we wish to uphold. According to (Prayitni, 2014) critical reading with close reading states that the evaluation process in critical reading begins from reading carefully, observing carefully, and thoroughly, every idea, information, statement or argument presented in the text. In critical reading, the

reader actively recognizes what the text says, then analyzes what is in the text to gain a complete understanding, followed by reflecting on what is in the text by providing examples, arguments, attracting sympathy, making contrasts to convey a problem, and drawing conclusions from the text based on the results of the analysis that has been carried out.

Critical reading skills are very relevant in overcoming these problems. Critical reading enables students, especially in elementary schools, to make more complex interpretations, identify hidden messages, and evaluate the actions of characters and their implications. Through the process of critical thinking, students can develop reflective abilities that help them understand the moral values contained in the reading. Basically, critical thinking aims to shape students to be able to think neutrally, objectively, reasoned, logically, clearly and precisely. SARIYEM (2016). Critical reading has a deep understanding, namely a reading process accompanied by a wise, deep, evaluative attitude and not to find errors in the reading text. Critical reading is understood in depth; it is done to discover the truth of a text, then seek or analyze the author's intent within the text. Critical reading skills can help us seek information objectively from the author's perspective, and avoid focusing on controversial issues whose veracity is still questionable (Rosita & Supriatna, 2020). For example, in fictional stories, we are often confronted with characters with both good and bad traits. Critical reading will help us understand that these characters are not just tools to move the plot, but also play a role in illustrating certain moral values. Characters who consistently act with integrity may be good examples for readers, while characters who commit mistakes or crimes can provide valuable lessons about the negative impacts and wrong behavior. Thus, every reading, whether in the form of a story or an argumentative text, always has a moral layer that we can explore further.

The application of critical reading skills in learning allows students to filter information carefully and build a deeper understanding of the reading. Through this process, students can identify moral messages more accurately, assess the relevance of the values conveyed, and relate them to their experiences and daily lives. This makes critical reading skills a key element in literacy learning, especially in efforts to form students who are not only able to read texts, but also have reflective and

reasoning abilities in understanding the meaning of reading in a complete and meaningful way. According to Hermawati et al, (2023) Critical reading skills are one of the many skills that are very central to the development of adult students. This basic part of learning and life has an impact on their readiness to communicate and absorb information in society.

Critical reading is essential for successful learning. Therefore, good critical reading skills can be used as a basis for describing students' critical thinking skills. To determine students' critical reading skills during learning, the reading materials provided to students are accompanied by several questions that guide students toward critical thinking activities, including asking the following: 1) the essence of the reading; 2) the author's purpose in writing the reading; and 3) the conclusions from the reading (Muttaqiin & Sopandi, 2015). Strengthening critical reading skills is also in line with the direction of educational policy in Indonesia, which places literacy as a fundamental competency in the Merdeka curriculum. This curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning and encourages the development of higher-order thinking skills. Students are not only directed to read and understand texts literally, but are also trained to analyze the content of the reading, evaluate the information presented, and interpret implied meanings according to the social context and values contained therein. Thus, learning to read becomes an active process that demands students' comprehensive intellectual involvement.

To achieve the level of critical reading and critical thinking skills, a high interest in reading is needed. Interest in reading is the key to the progress of a nation, because the ability to master science and technology is achieved with a high interest in reading, not because of listening or listening activities. Interest in reading grows from each individual, so to increase interest in reading requires awareness of each individual. A developed country is a country whose people have a high interest in reading. Based on a UNESCO survey, Indonesian people's interest in reading ranks 38th out of 39 countries studied. World Bank Report No. 16369-IND (Education in Indonesia from Crisis to Recovery) states that the reading level of grade VI elementary school age in Indonesia is able to achieve a score of 51.7 below the Philippines (52.6), Thailand (65.1), and Singapore (74.0). (Restuningsih et al., 2017). Low critical reading skills cause

students to be unable to connect the storyline, character traits, conflicts, and their resolutions as part of the moral ideas the author wants to convey. As a result, reading activities become less meaningful, and the moral values that should be learned from reading cannot be understood optimally.

REASERCH METHODE

This research uses an observation-based qualitative method. The qualitative method was chosen because this research aims to understand the phenomenon in depth based on real conditions that occur in the field. This method emphasizes the process, meaning, and understanding of the behavior, attitudes, and interactions of research subjects. With qualitative methods, researchers can obtain a comprehensive picture of the object being studied according to the social and environmental context that surrounds it. According to Niam et al., (2024), qualitative research methods are a research approach that aims to understand and explain the meaning of a phenomenon in its natural context. In qualitative research, researchers collect data in the form of text, images, sound, or other non-numerical data forms, to then be analyzed using an inductive approach. This means that qualitative research does not focus on hypothesis testing, but rather on developing a deep understanding of the context and dynamics of a phenomenon. Qualitative research methods involve direct interaction between researchers and research subjects, and allow researchers to gain in-depth insights into the complexity and variation within a particular context. Qualitative data collection techniques include observation, interviews, content analysis, and other techniques that are more open to interpretation.

In its implementation, this qualitative method is based on observation techniques. Observations are conducted to directly observe activities, behaviors, and situations related to the research focus. Through observation, researchers can collect data naturally without manipulating the research object. This allows researchers to capture phenomena as they are, so that the data obtained is more authentic and reflects actual conditions in the field. According to Romdona et al., (2023), each data collection technique brings a different approach to observing, recording, or understanding the reality that is the object of research. Observation techniques, for

example, this technique allows researchers to directly observe behavior, interactions, or phenomena on the spot. This technique is widely used in research that requires an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of a group or process in its original context. Observation is considered a pure approach because it involves direct observation without having to change or intervene in existing conditions, so the resulting data is more natural.

The observations were systematic and directed, guided by predetermined aspects aligned with the research objectives. Observed aspects included student engagement in reading activities, their ability to express opinions, and their responses to questions related to the reading material. Throughout the learning process, the researcher acted as an observer, observing each stage of the activity and objectively recording important findings. Data recording was conducted continuously to obtain a comprehensive picture of the learning process and student behavior during the activity.

The collected observation data will then be analyzed descriptively by grouping the findings into relevant categories. This analysis aims to identify behavioral patterns, meanings emerging from student interactions, and the interrelationships between phenomena observed during the learning process. Through this descriptive analysis, researchers can understand how students' critical reading skills develop within the context of group discussions and identify factors that influence success and obstacles in the learning process. The results of this analysis then serve as the basis for drawing conclusions and providing recommendations for improving reading instruction in the classroom.

HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted at SDN 01 Malabar, specifically on students in class VI A. In the initial stage of learning, students were divided into 4 (four) groups consisting of 2 (two) groups of girls and 2 (two) groups of boys. This group division was carried out in order to create a conducive learning atmosphere and encourage cooperation between students. Each group was given one (1) Pancasila Education (PPKN) subject book, the researcher chose to provide the Pancasila

Education book to students because the researcher adjusted it to the lesson schedule for that day. The activity began with reading together one of the stories that had been selected from the book that had been provided. This shared reading process aims to ensure that all students have the same initial understanding of the reading text before entering the discussion stage.



Figure 1. Group Division Process.

After the reading activity is completed, the lesson continues with a group discussion. At this stage, students are directed to explore the contents of the reading in more depth by discussing the characters, plot, and important events contained in the text. Group discussions provide a forum for students to exchange opinions, express their views, and provide responses to the opinions of others. Through this process, students are trained to identify important information and understand the moral values contained in the reading. Discussion activities also play a role in developing critical thinking skills, because students not only passively receive information but also learn to interpret the meaning of the reading and relate it to everyday life.



Figure 2. Group Division Process

To measure the critical reading skills of grade VI A students, researchers gave each student a group assignment requiring them to write down their understanding of the story they had read and discussed. This assignment demonstrated the students' ability to analyze the text's content, draw conclusions, and express their ideas in writing using their own words. The results of the assignment showed that reading activities combined with group discussions helped students understand the text more

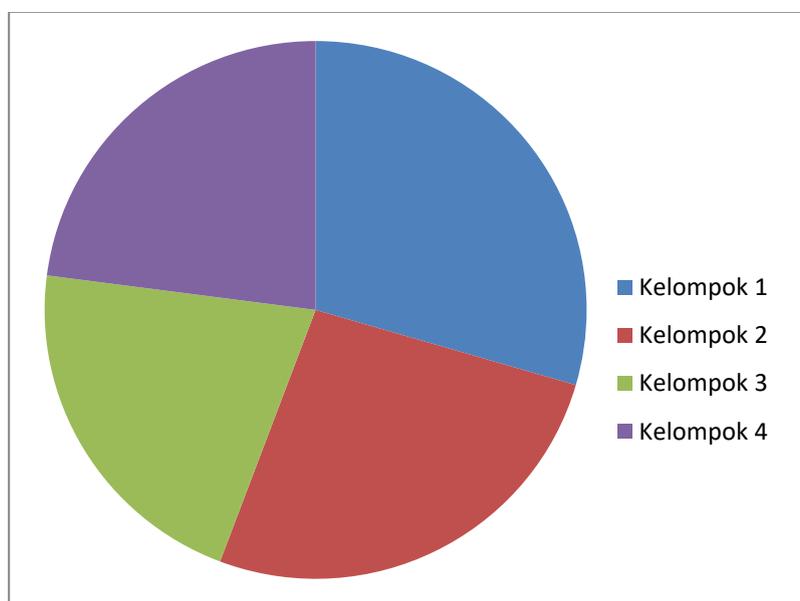
deeply. Therefore, this learning activity confirms that critical reading skills can develop effectively through an integrated process of reading, discussion, and writing within classroom learning activities..



Figure 3. Task Completion

Based on the results of a comprehensive analysis of four (4) groups of grade VI A students at SDN 1 Malabar, differences were found in the level of students' understanding of the reading material given. Each group showed different understanding characteristics in analyzing the text content, identifying the main idea, and interpreting the moral message contained in the reading material. Most students were able to understand the text in general and retell the contents of the reading material in written form. However, the depth of the analysis shown was not entirely even across all groups, thus showing variations in students' critical reading skills. These variations in ability are influenced by several interrelated factors. Previous learning experiences are one of the main factors that influence students' ability to understand reading material, especially experiences in reading and discussion activities. In addition, a conducive learning environment plays a role in encouraging student involvement during the learning process. Cognitive ability factors also influence how students process information, connect ideas in the text, and draw logical conclusions.

Table 1. Group Value Data



The results of the evaluation obtained data that approximately 50% of the total number of groups, namely two (2) groups, demonstrated good critical reading skills. Groups one (1) and two (2) were able to analyze the text in more depth, identify moral messages accurately, and convey ideas in coherent and clear language. The discussions that took place in these groups appeared more active and focused, thus helping students to understand the reading comprehensively. Meanwhile, the other two (2) groups still showed limitations in critical reading, especially in exploring implied meanings and linking the content of the reading to the context of everyday life.

Table 2. Group Value Data

| GROUP VALUE DATA | | | |
|------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Group 1 | Group 2 | Group 3 | Group 4 |
| 90 | 80 | 65 | 70 |

Thus, some sixth-grade students at SDN 01 Malabar have adequate critical reading skills, particularly in understanding the content of a reading and drawing

conclusions. However, there are still students who still need further attention and guidance so that their critical reading skills can develop optimally. Therefore, more varied and sustainable learning strategies are needed, such as intensive guidance, providing provocative questions, and strengthening discussion activities, so that all students can achieve more equitable critical reading skills.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research that has been conducted, it can be concluded that this study shows that the critical reading skills of grade VI A students of SDNL 1 Malabar are still diverse. Most students have been able to analyze texts, draw conclusions, and convey ideas in writing, but there are still 50% of students who need further attention and guidance to improve their critical reading skills. Factors such as learning experience, learning environment, and cognitive abilities influence students' critical reading skills. These results indicate that further efforts are needed to improve students' critical reading skills, such as providing more intensive and targeted training and guidance.

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