



Exploring Junior High School Students Critical Reading Strategies and Reading Comprehension

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ABSTRACT

The ability to understand reading is a fundamental skill that supports students' academic success. In the era of globalization, this ability becomes increasingly important because students are required to be able to understand, interpret and evaluate information available in various types of texts. This study aims to explore the relationship between critical reading strategies and reading comprehension abilities in junior high school students. This research uses a correlational design to analyze the relationship between critical reading strategies as an independent variable and reading comprehension as a dependent variable. Critical reading strategies have been proven to have a significant influence on reading comprehension, helping students identify main ideas, evaluate arguments, and understand explicit and implicit meaning in texts. This research highlights the importance of a combination of basic and advanced skills, including background knowledge, in improving students' analytical thinking abilities. This study also confirms the effectiveness of project-based learning approaches in supporting deeper and analytical understanding of texts. However, research limitations lie in the limited sample coverage and the use of instruments that are not fully comprehensive. For further research, it is recommended to use more varied methods and a wider population to provide a more holistic insight into the application of critical reading strategies.

Keywords: Critical reading strategies, Reading comprehension, Background knowledge, Project based learning, Analytical skills

Introduction

The ability to understand reading is a fundamental skill that supports students' academic success. Reading is a key skill necessary for academic success and lifetime learning (Muhria et al., 2025). In the era of globalization, this ability becomes increasingly important because students are required to be able to understand, interpret and evaluate

information available in various types of texts. In an educational context, critical reading strategies are an effective approach to help students think analytically and understand the content of texts more deeply (Hidayati, 2020).

Globally, the application of critical reading strategies has received great attention because it has been proven to support the development of higher order thinking skills, such as the ability to synthesize and draw logical conclusions. On the other hand, at the local level, many junior high school students still face obstacles in improving their reading comprehension skills. One of the main causes is the lack of exposure to effective teaching of reading strategies. Mirasol's (2024) research shows that although students have an awareness of the importance of critical reading, their reading test results often do not reflect this ability.

Critical reading strategies offer students the opportunity to not only understand the content of the text, but also evaluate and analyze the information in depth. This strategy plays a role in encouraging the development of higher-order thinking skills, such as the ability to connect information between texts, evaluate arguments, and make logic-based conclusions (Yapp et al., 2021). However, even though the benefits have been widely expressed, the implementation of this strategy in the classroom is still not optimal.

Previous research, such as that conducted by Kartomo (2024), focused on the effectiveness of critical reading strategies, but little has explored how these strategies relate directly to the level of reading comprehension of junior high school students. So based on this, there is a research gap that needs to be bridged. This study aims to explore the relationship between critical reading strategies and reading comprehension abilities in junior high school students. By using a correlational research design, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to improving critical reading teaching practices in schools.

Methods

This research uses a correlational design to analyze the relationship between critical reading strategies as an independent variable and reading comprehension as a dependent variable. This design was chosen because it aims to determine the extent to which the two variables have a significant relationship (Munte et al., 2023).

The population in this study were class VIII students at a junior high school in Batam City. The research sample was selected using a purposive sampling technique with the criteria of students who had taken critical reading lessons in English subjects. A total of 24 students participated in this research as samples.

The data in this study was collected using questionnaire instruments and reading comprehension tests. The main instrument used to measure reading strategy use is A Modified Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS), developed by Nguyen (2016). This questionnaire is designed to assess students' use of reading strategies including global, problem-solving, and reading support strategies. Then the reading comprehension test is used to measure students' level of understanding of the reading text. This test consists of several multiple choice questions that assess students' ability to understand, analyze and evaluate the content of the text.

This research was conducted at a junior high school called SMP Restu Bunda located in Batam City. The selection of this school was based on the consideration that the school had implemented critical reading learning in the English curriculum. The collected data was analyzed using statistical software. Analysis was carried out to calculate the correlation value (r) which shows the relationship between critical reading strategies and reading comprehension. Then a significance test (p -value) was carried out to ensure that the relationship found did not occur by chance.

Findings

Normality Test

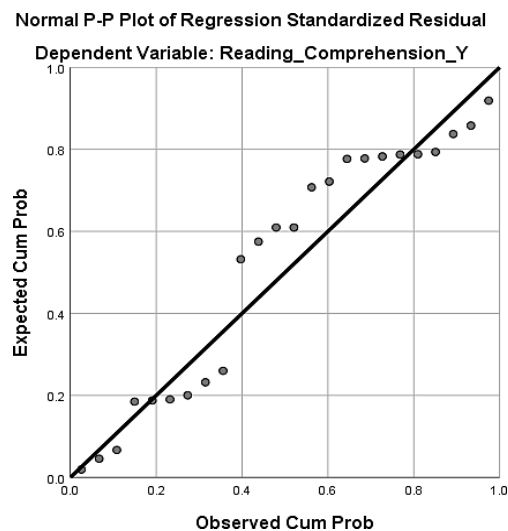


Figure 1 Normality Test

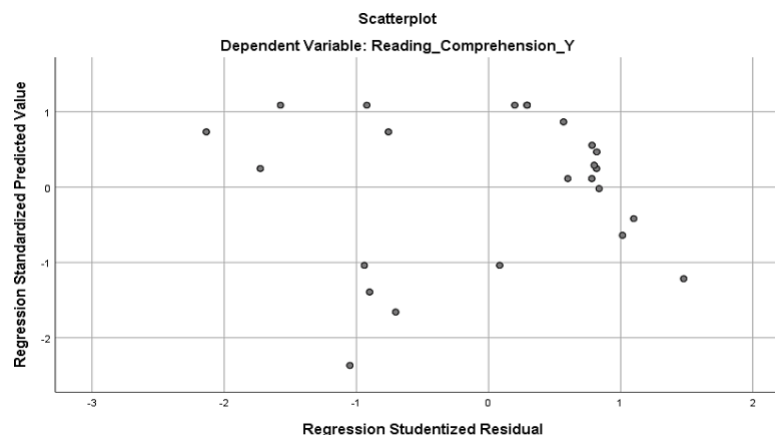


Figure 2 Normality Test

Table 1 Normality Test

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test		
		Unstandardized Residual
N		24
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	0.0000000
	Std. Deviation	11.00970497
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	0.170
	Positive	0.120
	Negative	-0.170
Test Statistic		0.170
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.071
a. Test distribution is Normal.		
b. Calculated from data.		

Simple Linear Regression

Table 2 Simple Linear Regression Test

Coefficients ^a					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	2.345	13.241		0.175
	Critical_Reading_Strategies_X	0.678	0.104	0.386	1.960

a. Dependent Variable: Reading_Comprehension_Y

The simple regression equation obtained is $Y = 2.345 + 0.678X$. In this equation, the constant of 2.345 shows the predicted value of the dependent variable if the independent variable is zero. Meanwhile, the regression coefficient of 0.678 indicates that every one unit increase in the independent variable will cause an increase of 0.678 units in the dependent variable, assuming other factors are constant. The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.536 indicates that 53.6% of the variation in the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variable, while the remainder is influenced by other factors. The model significance value of 0.000 which is smaller than 0.05 indicates that this regression model is statistically significant, so it is suitable to be used to predict the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

T Test

Table 3 T Test

Coefficients ^a					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	2.345	13.241		0.175
	Critical_Reading_Strategies_X	0.678	0.104	0.386	1.960

The T test findings show that the calculated T value is 3.561 which is greater than the T table (for example 2.000), with a significance value (Sig.) of 0.001 which is smaller

than 0.05. This shows that the independent variable has a significant influence on the dependent variable partially. Thus, the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected, which means there is a real relationship between these variables at the 95% confidence level.

Coefficient of Determination

Table 4 Coefficient of Determination

Model Summary ^b				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.386	0.149	0.110	11.257
a. Predictors: (Constant), Critical_Reading_Strategies_X				
b. Dependent Variable: Reading_Comprehension_Y				

A correlation coefficient of 0.732 indicates a strong and positive relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. This positive relationship indicates that an increase in the independent variable is followed by an increase in the dependent variable. In addition, a significance value (Sig.) of 0.000 which is smaller than 0.05 indicates that the relationship is statistically significant, so it can be concluded that the independent variable has a relevant correlation with the dependent variable.

Discussion

Critical reading strategy is an approach that involves cognitive processes to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information in text. The results of this study show that there is a significant relationship between the use of critical reading strategies and students' reading comprehension. This strategy allows students to recognize arguments, evaluate evidence, and assess the credibility of text content, which is in line with Mirasol's (2024) opinion that critical reading strategies can improve students' analytical thinking skills so that they have an impact on deeper understanding of texts.

Reading comprehension itself is defined as the ability to process text, understand implicit meaning, and integrate new information with previous knowledge. These findings support the theory of Duke et al. (2021), who explain that reading comprehension requires a combination of basic reading skills with higher-order thinking abilities, such as making conclusions and inferences. Additionally, Smith et al. (2021) emphasize that background knowledge plays an important role in forming a reader's situation model, which helps create a better understanding of the text.

The findings of this research are also in line with previous research, as found by Hidayati (2020), which shows that students who consistently use critical reading strategies have better abilities in analyzing texts and answering questions that require high-level thinking skills. Gustanti and Ayu (2021) also noted that cognitive-based reading strategies, such as scanning for important information and taking notes, can improve students' reading comprehension. This similarity shows that the application of critical reading strategies has a consistent positive impact on reading comprehension abilities.

Although supporting previous research, this study has a unique contribution in the

local context. By focusing on junior high school students in Batam City, this research provides new insights into how critical reading strategies can be applied to certain age groups in the Indonesian educational context. This research also highlights the importance of integrating critical reading strategies in the curriculum, especially to support students in understanding complex texts more deeply and analytically.

In addition, the results of this research strengthen the findings of Sari and Prasetyo (2021), which show that the project-based learning model can improve students' critical thinking skills, including reading. This research highlights the importance of real context in learning, such as solving problems or making decisions based on available information. Thus, critical reading strategies not only encourage in-depth understanding of texts but also develop thinking skills that are relevant to real life.

These findings also support the research of Smith et al. (2021), which emphasizes the role of background knowledge in supporting reading comprehension. Strong background knowledge allows students to connect new information to concepts they have previously learned, thereby creating relevant context and strengthening their mental models. In this case, critical reading strategies not only focus on mastering advanced reading skills but also encourage students to build deeper connections between texts and their own experiences.

By emphasizing the importance of combining basic and advanced reading skills, this study reinforces the views of Duke et al. (2021) that effective reading learning must include various approaches. Students not only need to be taught to read critically, but also to master basic skills such as word and phoneme recognition. In this context, this research makes an important contribution to understanding how comprehensive reading instruction can support the balanced development of students' reading skills. This shows that the application of critical reading strategies can expand the scope of reading learning towards a more integrative and holistic approach.

Conclusion

The research findings show that critical reading strategies have a significant influence on reading comprehension. This strategy helps students identify main ideas, evaluate arguments, and understand explicit and implicit meaning in texts, which has an impact on improving students' analytical skills. Additionally, the importance of background knowledge and multifaceted learning approaches, such as project-based learning, emphasizes that successful reading comprehension requires a combination of basic and advanced skills.

However, this study has several limitations. The sample used is limited to one school in a particular area, so generalizing research results to a wider population needs to be done with caution. In addition, this study only used one instrument to measure critical reading strategies, which may not fully describe the more complex dimensions of reading strategies.

For future research, it is recommended to expand the population coverage and use more varied research methods, such as mixed methods, to explore qualitative aspects of the application of critical reading strategies. In addition, the development of a more comprehensive instrument can provide a more in-depth picture of the relationship

between critical reading strategies and reading comprehension. This approach can provide a more holistic insight into how these strategies can be effectively integrated in various learning contexts.

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