

DEVELOPING CRITICAL READING THROUGH TEXTUAL ANALYSIS TO PROMOTE DEMOCRATIC DISCOURSE: A STUDY ON ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDENTS

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pengembangan keterampilan membaca kritis melalui analisis tekstual untuk mempromosikan wacana demokrasi di kalangan mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di FKIP Universitas Madura. Dalam konteks era pasca-kebenaran, di mana informasi yang salah menantang komunikasi rasional, literasi kritis sangat penting untuk memelihara kompetensi demokrasi. Penelitian deskriptif kualitatif ini melibatkan 25 mahasiswa semester lima dan menggunakan observasi kelas, tanggapan tertulis, dan wawancara semi-terstruktur untuk mengumpulkan data. Analisis berfokus pada kemampuan siswa untuk menafsirkan teks, mengevaluasi argumen, dan merefleksikan secara ideologis. Temuan ini mengungkapkan peningkatan yang signifikan dalam kompetensi membaca kritis siswa, karena mereka semakin mengidentifikasi tema sentral, niat penulis, dan konteks sosial dalam teks. Selain itu, para siswa menunjukkan kesadaran yang tinggi akan bias, intertekstualitas, dan nilai-nilai hegemonik yang tertanam dalam narasi media. Kompetensi ini diwujudkan baik dalam tugas tertulis maupun diskusi kelas, di mana siswa terlibat dalam dialog deliberatif yang ditandai dengan toleransi, rasa hormat, dan argumentasi rasional. Studi ini menegaskan bahwa analisis textual adalah pendekatan pedagogis yang efektif untuk mengintegrasikan keterampilan bahasa dengan literasi sipil, menumbuhkan tidak hanya dimensi kognitif tetapi juga dimensi afektif dan etis membaca. Implikasinya termasuk perlunya pelatihan guru dalam literasi kritis dan penggabungan prinsip-prinsip pendidikan demokratis ke dalam kurikulum bahasa Inggris. Penelitian di masa depan dapat mengeksplorasi intervensi jangka panjang dan integrasi literasi digital untuk lebih meningkatkan keterlibatan kritis siswa dengan teks di berbagai media.

Kata kunci: *Bacaan Kritis, Analisis Tekstual, Wacana Demokrasi, Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Literasi Kewarganegaraan*

ABSTRACT

This study explores the development of critical reading skills through textual analysis to promote democratic discourse among English Education students at FKIP Universitas Madura. In the context of the post-truth era, where misinformation challenges rational communication, critical literacy is essential for nurturing democratic competencies. This qualitative descriptive research involved 25 fifth-semester students and employed classroom observations, written responses, and semi-structured interviews to collect the data. The analysis focused on students' abilities to interpret texts, evaluate arguments, and reflect ideologically. The findings reveal a significant improvement in students' critical reading competencies, as they increasingly identify central themes, authorial intentions, and social contexts within texts. Moreover, the students demonstrated heightened awareness of bias, intertextuality, and hegemonic values embedded in media narratives. These competencies were manifested in both written assignments and class discussions, where the students engaged in deliberative dialogues marked by tolerance, respect, and rational argumentation. The study confirms that textual analysis is an

effective pedagogical approach for integrating language skills with civic literacy, fostering not only the cognitive but also the affective and ethical dimensions of reading. The implications include the necessity for teacher training in critical literacy and the incorporation of democratic education principles into the English curriculum. Future research could explore long-term interventions and the integration of digital literacy to further enhance students' critical engagement with texts across various media.

Keywords: *Critical Reading, Textual Analysis, Democratic Discourse, English Education, Civic Literacy*

INTRODUCTION

In the *post-truth* era, information is no longer judged based on accuracy and objective facts, but is often constructed by emotions, personal opinions, and the power of narrative (Dokić-Mrša, 2023). This condition raises serious challenges in education, especially in developing critical literacy among students of English education. As future language educators, they are expected not only to be able to convey structures and vocabulary but also to form students who can think reflectively, interpret texts deeply, and understand the socio-political context of the discourse they consume (Bria, 2025). However, the reality on the ground shows that students of English study programmes in higher education institutions, including Madura University, still tend to be at the stage of surface literacy, which is understanding the content of the text without evaluating the ideological assumptions and interests inherent in it (Villamizar, 2018).

The lack of mastery of critical reading skills is a major barrier to developing democratic communication competencies. Democratic communication presupposes openness to different views, respect for social justice, and the ability to deconstruct dominant discourses that shape public opinions (Gil-Rojas et al., 2025). Students who are not equipped with critical reading skills tend to receive texts passively and lack the awareness to question the narrative or point of view offered (Tugtekin & Koc, 2020). This has implications not only for understanding the text but also for how students respond to the social reality around them.

In this context, *textual* analysis is a significant pedagogical approach for developing students' ideological awareness and reflective thinking skills (Bjerkvik & Hilli, 2019). Through analysing the structure, lexical choices, and narratives in texts, students are invited not only to read "what is said", but also "how and why something is said in a certain way." This approach allows readers to realize that texts are not neutral representations of reality but products of complex social, cultural, and political processes. This approach allows readers to realize that texts are not neutral representations of reality but products of complex social, cultural, and political processes (Liu et al., 2022). Thus, learning English is no longer merely technical-linguistic but rather a means to build critical consciousness and an agent of social change. Furthermore, strengthening critical literacy through text analysis can be the foundation for democratic pedagogical practices in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context (Alzubi et al., 2023). Students are encouraged to develop sensitivity to social issues, such as inequality, media bias, gender, and language power. In this process, they not only learn to understand texts in a foreign language but also form ideological and ethical positions towards real-world problems (Novianti et al., 2020). Therefore, critical reading skills cannot be separated from democratic values, including deliberation, participation, and reflection (Morales, 2018).

Unfortunately, the reality of learning in the FETT environment is often still stuck in a structural and repetitive approach, with a dominance of grammar exercises, translation, and literal understanding. Curricula and teaching methods rarely explicitly integrate ideological

dimensions into the meaning of texts (Dobkiewicz et al., 2023). As a result, students' ability to read critically and build democratic discourse has not been optimally developed. This is a serious gap in teacher education, as FETT students are future educators who will foster a culture of literacy in schools. Critical literacy should not be regarded as an additional competence but rather as a core component of English language education (Derince, 2023a). In a local context such as Madura, where social and religious dynamics are very strong, strengthening students' critical abilities is very important so that they can address differences and diversity constructively. Critical literacy allows students to be not only consumers of discourse but also producers of meaning who are aware of their values and alignments (Willis, 2023).

Based on this urgency, this research was conducted to address pedagogical needs in developing learning models that can foster critical reading skills and encourage the emergence of democratic discourse practices in the classroom. This research adopts a text analysis approach as the main strategy in learning, focusing on how students of the English Language Study Programme at FKIP Universitas Madura respond to texts within a critical literacy framework. Although the literature on critical literacy in English language learning has grown globally, most of it revolves around the development of basic reading skills or the linguistic aspects of texts (Alford, 2021; Weng, 2023). Studies that explicitly examine the relationship between critical reading skills and democratic discourse formation in higher education are relatively limited (Suh & Huh, 2023). In contrast, grand narratives in education often overlook the importance of dialoguing texts as tools for social and political reflection (Derince, 2023b). In addition, very few studies have explored local contexts such as Madura, which has distinctive cultural, social, and educational characteristics. No in-depth study has explored how FETT students, especially in culturally diverse areas such as Madura, build critical thinking skills through a text analysis approach in English language learning. Therefore, this research not only answers academic needs but also offers contextually relevant contributions to the development of teacher education in the region.

Starting from the background and research gap, this article aims to answer two main questions: first, how the application of a textual analysis approach can develop students' critical reading skills; and second, to what extent the process encourages democratic discourse in their thinking and responses to the texts they read. To answer these questions, the main objective of this study aimed to develop and evaluate a *textual analysis-based* learning strategy to improve critical reading skills. In addition, this study aims to identify indicators of democratic discourse that appear in students' responses to texts, both oral and written. The scientific contribution of this research lies in the integration of three important concepts—critical literacy, text analysis, and democratic discourse—that have rarely been woven into an integrated pedagogical framework in the EFL context. In addition, this research seeks to build a pedagogical model that is relevant for the EFL environment, especially in supporting the civic-oriented *literacy* needed in an increasingly complex and polarized world of education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach that focuses on an in-depth understanding of the process of developing critical reading skills and democratic discourse practices through text-analysis strategies (Abalkheel, 2024). This approach was chosen because it is suitable for exploring subjective dynamics, interpretations of meaning, and patterns of interaction that occur during the learning process (Hromova et al., 2021). In certain contexts, this method can also open the possibility to be applied as classroom *action research*, especially if the research is developed in a continuous cycle of learning improvement.

The subjects of this study were fifth-semester students of the English Education Study Programme, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP) Universitas Madura. This group was purposively selected because they had taken advanced reading skills courses and were exposed to authentic texts that demanded a high level of discourse analysis. The number of participants ranged from 20 to 30, who were academically at the transition stage from learners to future educators. This makes them an ideal population for observing the development of critical literacy and the potential for democratic discourse in teacher education.

This study collected data using three main techniques. First, classroom observations were conducted to record the dynamics of the learning process, students' verbal responses to the text, and the interaction patterns that emerged during the discussion. The observation was conducted non-participatively and was supported by field notes and audio recordings. Second, the researcher collected written documents in the form of student responses to the texts that had been analyzed during the learning process. These texts included editorials, opinion articles, and media news, which were selected because they contained complex ideological and narrative content. Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a representative number of students to explore their views on the critical reading process, awareness of text bias, and their reflections on the democratic values that emerged.

To support the validity and richness of the data, this study utilised several evaluative instruments (Almanasreh et al., 2019). The first instrument was a rubric for assessing critical reading skills based on indicators of interpretation, analysis of the point of view, evaluation of arguments, and ideological reflection. This rubric was used to systematically and objectively assess students' written responses. The second instrument was a democratic discourse analysis guide developed based on deliberative communication and civic literacy theories. This guide was used to identify the expression of democratic values in student discussions, such as tolerance, rational argumentation, and respect for differing opinions.

Data were analyzed using a thematic coding approach to identify key themes related to critical literacy and democratic discourse practices (Ciardiello, 2004). The coding process was conducted in two stages: first, recording units of meaning from the written and spoken data; second, grouping the units into thematic categories based on the theory. In this case, the critical literacy dimension was analyzed through evaluative indicators in the text, while the democratic discourse dimension was analyzed through interaction discourse and expression of value ideas.

To maintain the validity of the findings, the researcher used data triangulation techniques by comparing observations, response documents, and interviews to ensure consistency and depth of interpretation (Kern, 2018). Validation was also performed through a *member-checking* process with some of the interview participants to confirm that the researcher's interpretations were in line with their experiences. The analysis process in this study seeks to capture the complexity of meaning and change that occurs in critical literacy practices in EFL classrooms in a contextualized and reflective manner.



Figure 1. Cycle of Critical Literacy and Democratic Discourse

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Table 1. Indicators of Critical Reading Competence

Competency Indicators	Description of Upgrades	Manifestations / Examples
Text Interpretation	Students improve in identifying the central themes, authors' goals, and social context of the text.	Written responses are not only descriptive, but demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between language and social messages. Students began to question the narrative structure and diction choices, especially related to power dominance and stereotypes.
Argument Evaluation	Students are increasingly able to critique the arguments in the text, recognizing logical flaws, biases, and lack of alternative perspectives.	Class discussions reflect the ability to deconstruct arguments based on facts, logic, and ethics. Students are also able to formulate counter-arguments that refer to the value of social justice and diversity of perspectives.
Ideological Reflection	Students began to realize that texts contained ideological content and were not neutral representations.	Through guidance, students write critical reflections related to the formation of public opinion by the media and the position of readers in shaping meaning. The cognitive and affective-ethical aspects of critical reading are seen to increase.

The results showed a significant increase in students' critical reading competence after the *textual analysis* approach was applied to learning. The first indicator that appears to improve is the ability to interpret the text, which is shown through students' ability to identify the central

theme, the author's purpose, and the social context of the text read. Their written responses are no longer merely descriptive but reflect an effort to understand the relationship between language form and the social message conveyed in the text. Students began to question narrative structure and the use of diction, especially when dealing with texts that implied power domination or stereotypical portrayals of the marginalized.

The second indicator observed is evaluative ability, which is the extent to which students can criticize the arguments contained in the text. Students showed improvement in recognizing logical flaws, argumentative bias, and the absence of alternative perspectives in the narrative. In some cases, they were even able to develop counterarguments that referred to the values of social justice and diversity of perspectives. This ability is reflected in class discussions, where students not only agree or reject the content of the text in general but are able to deconstruct arguments based on facts, logic, and ethics.

In addition, the third indicator, ideological reflection, is one of the most striking achievements in this learning process. Through structured guidance in reading texts that are full of ideological content, such as gender issues, state power, or social inequality, students begin to realize that texts are not neutral representations of reality. They began writing critical reflections on how the media shapes public opinion and how the position of readers shapes meaning. This process shows that critical reading skills not only include the cognitive dimension but also touch on the affective and ethical aspects of the reader.

Table 2. Indicators of Student Critical Awareness and Expression of Democratic Discourse

Aspects/Categories	Description of Increased Awareness and Ability	Manifestations/Examples
Awareness of Viewpoints & Bias	Students are able to identify authorial biases and biases in editorial texts, cite sections that show bias, and compare with other sources that are more neutral.	The task of analyzing editorial texts shows the ability to critically select and assess partiality.
Intertextual Awareness	Students begin to develop an awareness of the relationships between different texts and contexts, as well as the influence of socio-cultural contexts on the meaning of texts.	Discussion and written responses demonstrate the ability to relate texts to alternative sources and cultural contexts.
Sensitivity to Cultural Assumptions & Stereotypes	Students question existing cultural assumptions, such as ethnic and gender stereotypes, and express discomfort with narratives that normalize social inequality.	Interview statements and class discussions showcase students' critical and ethical positions on the content of the text.

Awareness of Hegemonic Values in Texts	Students can distinguish facts, opinions, and propaganda; and uncovering media narratives that maintain social injustice.	Classroom writing and discussions demonstrate the skill of unraveling hegemonic narratives in texts.
Expression of Democratic Discourse	Students demonstrate deliberative skills in discussion: rational argumentation, tolerance, listening to other views, and non-confrontational responses.	Active group discussions; Students who were previously passive began to dare to argue supported by critical text analysis.
Establishment of Micro Democracy Practices in the Classroom	Critical text-based discussion spaces are an arena for the formation of micro-democracy, training students to actively participate and responsibly in discourse.	Classroom interactions become inclusive, with the practice of dialogue and argumentation that respects diversity of opinions.

Furthermore, student responses in the form of writing and discussions showed increased awareness of the points of view, bias, and values contained in the text. In one of the editorial text analysis tasks, students were able to identify that the author voiced the interests of a certain group while downplaying the voices of other groups. They selectively cite parts of the text that show partiality, both explicitly and implicitly, and compare them with more neutral sources. This shows that students are beginning to develop intertextual awareness when reading texts.

Awareness of text bias also appeared in students' statements during the interviews. They began to question the cultural assumptions built up in the text, such as the use of ethnic or gender stereotypes, and expressed their discomfort with narratives that normalized social inequity. In this context, students are not only passive readers but also critical actors who position themselves ethically towards the content of the text. This awareness is an important indicator of the formation of social sensitivity and communication ethics.

Students also begin to recognize that the values implied in texts are often hegemonic. They can distinguish between facts, opinions, and propaganda in texts and demonstrate skills in dismantling narratives constructed by the media to perpetuate unjust social structures. This improvement shows that the *textual analysis* approach has succeeded in developing students' ideological awareness, an essential ability in forming complete critical literacy.

Another prominent finding was the emergence of democratic discourse expressions in class interactions and student writing. In group discussions, students began to demonstrate their deliberative skills by making rational arguments, listening to the views of others, and responding in a non-confrontational way. Some students who initially tended to be silent or avoid debate began to express their opinions supported by strong text analysis. This shows that

critical text-based discussion spaces serve as arenas for the formation of micro-democratic practices in the classroom.

The practice of tolerance and openness to differences is a visible part of the class interaction. Students stated that they began to understand that reading texts also means reading from someone else's perspective and that not everyone has the same background and experience in understanding reality. Discussions about social issues, such as poverty, gender inequality, and symbolic violence, become more inclusive as students learn to build empathy for narratives that differ from their own experiences. In other words, the process of critical reading not only results in a deeper understanding of the text but also broadens their moral and social horizons.

In addition to oral discussions, the expression of democratic values also appears in students' written reflective assignments. In their writings, students used texts as a starting point to voice their personal views on social justice, human rights, and the importance of freedom of speech. They do not just voice opinions but learn to frame their arguments by taking into account the diversity of perspectives and the importance of equal public spaces. This shows that *textual analysis* functions as a cognitive tool and a transformative means of shaping the citizenship character of EFL students in the FKIP environment.

Discussion

The results of this study confirm that the application of *textual analysis* as a pedagogical strategy is able to develop students' critical literacy, as stated by the theory of critical literacy based on Van Dijk' s thought, (Van Dijk, 1989) and further developed by Hong & Hong, (Hong & Hong, 2020). Freire emphasized that reading is not merely understanding the text, but understanding the world, that is, realizing that the text is shaped by social structures and power relations. In this study, students showed improved ability to read critically; they not only understood the content but also analyzed the ideologies, biases, and interests hidden behind the text. This is in line with the goal of critical literacy, which is to form readers as subjects who are aware of their position in the social structure and are able to act reflexively on the discourses they encounter.

Furthermore, the development of reflective and evaluative abilities observed in students' writings and discussions shows that critical literacy is not only a cognitive practice but also a transformative praxis. Students not only assess the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments in a text, but also demonstrate moral and ethical involvement in reading. This shows that the *critical literacy* approach effectively bridges the gap between language skills and the formation of social awareness. In other words, learning English no longer operates in a linguistic vacuum but is actively connected to real social, cultural, and political contexts.

The integration of critical literacy in English learning also opens up space for developing *democratic education*. In this context, the practice of reading reflective and dialogical texts becomes a medium for forming deliberative values, tolerance for differences, and respect for freedom of thought. In line with the ideas of Marasno et al. (2024), Democratic education cannot be achieved through information transfer alone, but must involve a participatory process in which students learn to take positions, formulate arguments, and interact ethically in public spaces. The findings of this study show that the *textual analysis approach* can create such a space in the classroom, namely, as a laboratory for micro-democratic discourse that allows the practice of freedom and responsibility at the same time.

In the observed learning process, students demonstrated the ability to dialogue texts with their social realities, as well as open up conversations across perspectives. This reinforces the thesis that literacy is not neutral and that English teaching can also be a field for the

formation of democratic character. When students learn to identify biases in media narratives, discuss issues of gender injustice, and respond to texts about structural poverty, they build critical citizenship skills. Therefore, integrating critical literacy and democratic education is a strategic approach to creating meaningful and transformative language learning.

The implications of these findings for the FKIP curriculum are significant. It is necessary to reposition the role of English learning from being merely an instrument for mastering linguistic skills to a space for the development of civic awareness. Critical literacy and democratic discourse must be explicitly included in learning outcomes, syllabi, and assessment design. The development of authentic text-based teaching materials that address contemporary social issues is also urgently needed. Thus, FKIP can act as a teacher education incubator that not only produces educators who are linguistically competent but also socially reflective.

However, it is important to note that this research was conducted in a local context with certain social, cultural, and institutional characteristics. Madura, a region with strong religious values, collective communication patterns, and hierarchical social structures, presents challenges and opportunities in the implementation of critical literacy. In such an environment, the expression of democratic discourse must be adapted to the sensitivity of the local culture to avoid provoking resistance. On the other hand, higher education institutions in the region also face limited resources, such as access to authentic texts, critical pedagogical training for lecturers, and policy support for curriculum innovation. Therefore, any effort to integrate critical literacy and democratic education must consider the local context holistically so that it can be implemented sustainably and with far-reaching impact.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and analysis in this study, it can be concluded that *textual analysis* strategies that are systematically applied in English learning at the higher education level are effective in developing students' critical reading skills. Through this approach, students not only show improvements in terms of text interpretation, argument evaluation, and ideological reflection, but also show the expression of democratic values in their responses to written and oral discourses. Critical literacy, in this case, serves as a bridge between language skills and social awareness, allowing students to become active readers who are sensitive to biases, biases, and power structures hidden in the text. Thus, English teaching can be directed not only to technical-linguistic aspects but also to strengthening reflective and participatory civic competence.

To support the sustainability and expansion of the implementation of this approach, it is recommended that teacher training institutions, especially FKIP, initiate training programs for lecturers and teachers related to *critical literacy* and transformative pedagogy. This training is important not only for improving conceptual understanding but also for equipping educators with practical skills in designing socially meaningful text-analysis-based learning activities. In addition, follow-up research needs to be conducted to reach aspects of long-term interventions, such as changes in students' attitudes towards certain social issues after undergoing critical learning for several semesters. In addition, the study of the dimensions of digital literacy, especially how students construct meaning and position in the digital text landscape, is a new exploration space that is relevant to the needs of 21st century literacy. By strengthening the synergy between pedagogical approaches, institutional support, and research development, critical literacy can grow as a key foundation for contextual, inclusive, and transformative English language education.

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