

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Reading instruction in English Language Teaching (ELT) should not be confined to literal comprehension, such as identifying main ideas or recognizing vocabulary, but should also foster higher – order thinking skills. The Critical Reading Approach (CRA) has been recognized as an effective way to engage learners in analyzing, evaluating, and interpreting texts beyond surface – level understanding (Anderson, 2020; Bushisho, Mekuria, & Wallace, 2003; Wubshet, 2024).

The Critical Reading Approach (CRA) emphasizes questioning the credibility of arguments, identifying the author’s purpose, and analyzing rhetorical structures to promote reflective and independent readers (Arast, Pupah & Syuhda, 2024; Seyyedrezaei, & Kheirzadeh, 2017). This approach encourages learners not only to understand textual meaning but also to evaluate underlying assumptions and perspectives. Through CRA, students develop the ability to construct meaning critically rather than passively receive information. Such skills are essential for academic success, particularly in higher education contexts where analytical and interpretive reading competence is highly valued.

However, in many EFL contexts, reading instruction still focuses mainly on surface-level comprehension tasks such as vocabulary recognition and factual recall (Dhari & Maisarah, 2025; Viani & Roswati, 2025). These practices often neglect higher-order thinking processes that are crucial for fostering critical awareness. As a result, students tend to approach texts mechanically, with limited opportunities to

question, interpret, or respond reflectively. This condition reveals a gap between the goals of English language education and the actual classroom practices in many tertiary institutions.

At Artha Wacana Christian University (UKAW), English Education students are expected to engage critically with academic texts both for academic achievement and professional readiness. The ability to read critically enables them to become thoughtful teachers who can later guide their own students toward deeper textual understanding. Yet, several challenges persist in classroom practice, including limited access to updated resources, lack of digital reading materials, and the continued dominance of teacher-centered instruction (Sudarmanto, Lobo, & Rejeki, 2024). These factors often hinder the development of students' critical reading competence and reduce opportunities for interactive, discussion-based learning.

The urgency of implementing CRA in undergraduate English education lies in its capacity to cultivate independent, reflective, and analytical readers who can navigate complex texts critically. In today's academic world, students are constantly exposed to diverse sources of information—some of which may be unreliable or biased. CRA provides them with the tools to examine such information thoughtfully, promoting academic integrity and intellectual maturity (Arast et al., 2017; Dhari & Maisarah, 2025). Furthermore, it aligns with global educational trends emphasizing critical literacy as a core graduate attribute in higher education (Pupah & Syuhda, 2024; Viani & Roswati, 2025).

Therefore, examining how students perceive the implementation of the Critical Reading Approach in ELT classrooms at UKAW is both timely and

significant. Understanding their perceptions provides valuable insights into current pedagogical practices and informs future improvements in reading instruction at the undergraduate level. Such findings can contribute to curriculum development, teaching innovation, and the promotion of a more critical and reflective learning culture at Artha Wacana Christian University and similar EFL institutions (Arast et al., 2017; Dhari & Maisarah, 2025; Pupah & Syuhda, 2024; Sudarmanto et al., 2024; Viani & Roswati, 2025).

1.2. Research Problem

In line with the purpose of this study, the following research question is formulated to guide the investigation, i.e., *'How do students of Artha Wacana Christian University perceive the implementation of the Critical Reading Approach in the ELT classroom, particularly regarding its effectiveness in enhancing their engagement, comprehension, and critical thinking toward academic texts?'*

1.3. Aims of Study

This study aims to investigate students' perceptions of the Critical Reading Approach in ELT classrooms at Artha Wacana Christian University, with specific attention to how it contributes to their engagement, comprehension, and critical thinking when working with academic texts.

1.4. Significance of Study

This study gives important insights into how students develop and apply critical reading skills in the English Language Teaching (ELT) classroom, since critical reading is a vital part of higher education literacy and promotes deeper understanding of texts (Wallace, 2003; Grabe, 2009). It provides a better understanding of how students interpret, evaluate, and respond to texts in an

academic setting, helping teachers design learning activities that encourage students to think critically and read analytically (Alyousef, 2020). For students, the study increases awareness of the strategies they use when reading critically and supports improvement of their comprehension and reasoning skills in English reading (Fahim & Sa'eepour, 2011). For teachers, it offers practical information about classroom approaches that can promote students' critical thinking through reading tasks (Ennis, 2018; Paul & Elder, 2014). For the English Education Study Program of Artha Wacana Christian University, the findings contribute to curriculum development and strengthen the quality of ELT instruction by integrating critical reading as a core learning objective (Brown, 2007). Finally, this study serves as a valuable reference for future researchers who wish to explore how critical literacy supports students' academic and personal development in diverse educational contexts (Kurland, 2000).

1.4.1. Implication

The implications of this study are closely related to the theoretical framework of Critical Reading Theory (Wallace, 2003) and the Critical Thinking Framework (Paul & Elder, 2014). The findings indicate that students' ability to read critically in the ELT classroom supports Wallace's view that reading is not a passive process of decoding meaning but an active engagement with texts that reflects social and ideological awareness. Moreover, the study reinforces Paul and Elder's (2014) framework, showing that the development of critical reading skills enhances students' reasoning, interpretation, and evaluation abilities. These results imply that integrating critical reading practices in language teaching can operationalize both theories by linking linguistic comprehension with critical judgment and reflection.

The study also partially aligns with Grabe's (2009) Interactive Reading Model, as it demonstrates that effective reading instruction requires both bottom-up decoding and top-down analytical processing. Therefore, the implications of this study strengthen the theoretical connection between critical reading, critical thinking, and interactive meaning-making, contributing to a deeper understanding of how these theories function in EFL and ELT contexts.

1.4.2. Application

Practically, of the results of this study are expected to provide benefits for various stakeholders of the present study

A. ELT Teachers of Reading Class

This study can serve as guidance for teachers in designing effective strategies that encourages students to move beyond literal comprehension toward critical analysis and interpretation of texts. CRA allows teachers to employ questioning techniques, guided discussions, and analytical tasks that foster deeper engagement with reading materials (Anderson, 2020; Arast, Seyyedrezaei, & Kheirzadeh, 2017). The benefit is that teachers gain practical frameworks to enhance classroom interaction and improve students' critical reading performance.

B. ELT Students of Reading Groups

For students, CRA supports the development of higher-order thinking skills, such as analyzing arguments, evaluating credibility, and synthesizing multiple perspectives. These skills promote autonomy as readers and prepare students for academic challenges that require reflective and critical engagement (Rizqiani & Elida, 2025; Pupah & Syuhda, 2024). The benefit is that students become more independent learners, able to approach academic texts with critical awareness and

confidence.

C. ELT Curriculum Designers

Findings of this research provide input for integrating CRA into curriculum design, ensuring that reading instruction develops not only linguistic competence but also analytical and critical skills. Embedding CRA into syllabi allows curricula to better align with global educational standards while addressing local needs in Indonesian higher education (Nation & Macalister, 2021; Viani & Roswati, 2025). The benefit is that curriculum designers can create more balanced programs that produce linguistically proficient and critically literate graduates.

In conclusion, the implementation of the Critical Reading Approach (CRA) offers meaningful contributions to multiple stakeholders in English Language Teaching. For teachers, CRA provides a practical framework to design interactive and analytical reading lessons that guide students beyond literal comprehension toward critical analysis and interpretation of texts (Anderson, 2020; Arast, Seyyedrezaei, & Kheirzadeh, 2017). For students, this approach supports the development of higher-order thinking skills such as analyzing arguments, evaluating credibility, and synthesizing diverse perspectives, which in turn foster independence and critical awareness in reading (Pupah & Syuhda, 2024; Rizqiani & Elida, 2025). For curriculum designers, the findings of this study offer valuable insights for integrating CRA into syllabus so that reading instruction emphasizes not only linguistic competence but also critical literacy in line with global educational standards (Nation & Macalister, 2021; Viani & Roswati, 2025). Overall, the study is expected to enhance the quality of reading instruction and cultivate a more reflective and analytical learning culture in ELT classrooms.