

PROBLEMS FACED BY ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS IN CRITICAL READING

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ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to find out problems faced by students in critical reading because based on preliminary research, it was found that the students had problems in reading. For that reason, this research used descriptive method to analyze the problems faced by students in critical reading. Population of the research was English department students of a university in Padang. Cluster sampling technique was used to choose sample. The sample was a class that consisted of 34 students. Data were taken by using test and interview. Try Out was also conducted before taking data. The result of test showed that the scores of students in the sub skills of critical reading were poor in average. From all students tested, none got scores in the range of 66-100. In contrast, 50.00 % of the students got score in the range of 41-55 (D), 35.29 % of them had score in the range of 0-40 (E), and there were only 14.70% students got score in the range of 56-65 (C). Then, based on interview done, the students admitted that they had problems in answering questions related to critical reading especially to the sub skills tested, writer's purpose, writer's tone, and writer's point of view. The problems were vocabulary, background knowledge, complex sentences, knowledge of the skills, knowledge of strategies to know the skills, and others. Based on explanation above, it can be concluded that students' critical reading ability is still poor and based on the interview, they had problems in critical reading. For that condition, it is suggested to English Department to revise the syllabus for teaching Reading Class. The lecturers are also hoped to give extra exercise and assignment related to critical reading to the students to make them become accustomed to reading.

Keywords: critical reading, writer's purpose, writer's tone, and writer's point of view

INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the most important skills. First, reading helps people get information from many sources, cultures, and countries. Then, reading also helps people increase their knowledge. People can learn from many sources from around the world if they have good reading ability. People can also get information from both academic and professional contexts. In addition, reading can be a pleasure. A lot of people spend their times to read novel or short story in order to get pleasure. So, it can be said that people need to have good reading ability to get these advantages.

Critical reading is one of the reading skills that the students need to

master. Various and different reading materials require the students to be able to understand what the writer really conveys in the text. In critical reading activity, readers involve their background knowledge to understand reading materials. As stated by Turner in Alexander (1988: 186), critical reading is reading with an awareness of similarities and differences between what the reader has already viewed and what he is viewing in the text. It compares previous experience to elements in the new material such as content, style, expression, information and ideas, opinions, or values of author. Turner also states that critical reading is a kind of interactive reading. It means that the readers interact with the writer

through the text. If readers can recognize what the writer brings through the text, they have critical reading ability.

Harris and Hodges (1981) in Alqatanani (2017) define critical reading as the process of understanding and appraising a text in order to evaluate it. So, the readers are free to show their opinion. They may agree with the writer and they may not. Then, as stated by Wood (2000), critical reading is reading to analyze, evaluate, and come up with new ideas. So, after reading text or other materials, readers will not only recount or accept the content, but they will think what beyond the text by analyzing and evaluating it. Furthermore, Elder (2004: 169) and McWhorter (2009: 133) also underline some sub skills that are parts of critical reading. The sub skills are: distinguishing facts from opinion, determining the author's purpose, tone, point of view. But, they also have different opinions in dividing critical reading; Elder (2004: 187) includes making inferences and drawing conclusion and intended readers and McWhorter (2009: 148) includes figurative language.

Based on data from preliminary research, the students admitted that reading is a difficult activity to do. They admitted that it was hard for them to understand reading materials that were given to them. Some of the students also admitted that reading was hard because they did not have sufficient background knowledge about the texts. It is hard to recognize what the writer wants, how writer sees the problem, and how the writer feels in a passage, text, or even articles if they do not have knowledge about the text. They also informed that reading was a boring and uninteresting activity to do. Some of students also admitted that they do not like reading and are not

accustomed to reading since they were kids.

Because it seems that it is too large discussion if critical reading is discussed all, this study only focused on analyzing the problems faced by the students in answering questions on writer's purpose, writer's tone and writer's point of view. Writer's purpose is the reason of the writer in writing (Elder 2004: 211 and McWhorter, 2009: 137). The writer has different purposes in writing. Bazerman (2010: 103) adds that the writer's purpose can be manipulative like in propaganda or advertising, or can be more straightforward like in informative materials. He emphasizes that knowing the writer's purpose will help readers interpret the context of the writing and realize why the writer decides every detail that he writes. Then, Elder (2004: 212) defines writer's tone as the author's use of words and writing style to convey his or her attitude toward a topic. It means that the tone is what the writers encode through a passage or text in a word that describes their feeling of the topic. And the last one, a writer's point of view refers to his or her position on an issue or, in other words, the writer's opinion or belief regarding an issue (Elder, 2004: 212). It means the position of the writer in facing an issue that he or she writes. The writer may take a position in favor of one side of the issue and against the others.

Based on the explanations above, it is very important to conduct research about the problems faced by the students in critical reading. The data were collected through test and interview. Test and interview were given to identify the students' ability and problems in each skill.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was a descriptive design because it described students' ability in answering questions on

writer's purpose, tone, and points of view in reading and problems they faced in doing that activity. Gay (2009: 189) states descriptive research involves collecting data in order to test hypothesis or to answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of the study. A descriptive study determines and reports the way things are. This type of research simply described achievement, attitudes, behaviors, or other characteristics of a group of subjects. This research was categorized as explanatory mixed methods design which involved both quantitative and qualitative data. Bergman (2009: 69) says that in this kind of research, the researchers start with quantitative methods and then follow up with qualitative methods. They usually use qualitative data to explain quantitative data.

The sample of this study was taken by using cluster sampling. Gay (2009: 129) mentions that cluster sampling is the process of selecting sample in such a way where the groups of individuals have similar characteristics. So, it could help the researcher to identify students' ability because they had similar characteristics, got similar treatment, and learned from the same lecturers. The sampling technique follows Gay's suggestion (2009: 130). The population was all English education department students in the same level. The desired sample size was one class. Because there were four classes, the sample was chosen by using random way. The sample was provided test and interview.

The data were collected by using test and interview. Brown (2004: 3) mentions that test is a method to measure a person's ability, knowledge, or performance in a given domain. Test type that was used is achievement test. Hughes (2003: 13) says achievement test is test to determine how successful individual students, groups of students,

or the courses themselves have been in reaching objectives. Since the students were asked to answer some questions through test, their problems in answering the questions were found by analyzing their scores. The test was given in multiple choices.

The validity of the questions of test was measured by using content validity method that is proposed by Gay (2009: 129). This method was done by comparing the content of the test to the domain being measured. Content validity requires both item validity and sampling validity. Item validity is about whether the test items represent measurement in the intended content area, and sampling validity is about how well the test samples the total content area. So, before asking an expert to see the validity of test, test items was checked by using syllabus to see whether it represented what it was supposed to test.

In addition, the reliability was measured by doing Try Out to other students who had the same ability and came from the same grade with the sample. Reliability was checked by using single test-double trial which means researcher conducted Try Out twice to same students in different times and the questions were identical. The questions that were tried out were 46 items. Then, in order to know the reliability, first, the data were analyzed by using the Spearman rho formula to find the correlation coefficient (McMillan&Schumacher, 2006: 487) as follow:

$$\text{Spearman rho } (\rho) = 1 - \frac{6\sum D^2}{n(n^2-1)}$$

Where:

(ρ) = the correlation coefficient between variable X (scores of the first test) and variable Y (scores of the second test)

D = Difference between rank of variable X and variable Y (D= R1-R2)

6 and 1= Constanta number

N = Testee

The general correlation coefficient of the test was categorized as below (Arikunto, 2002: 245):

Table 1.

Correlation coefficient of reliability

No	Correlation Coefficient	Classification
1	0.00-0.20	Very low
2	0.20-0.40	correlation
3	0.40-0.60	Low correlation
4	0.60-0.80	Moderate
5	0.80-1.00	High correlation
		Very high correlation

Slameto (2001) also adds that a test said reliable if the correlation coefficient is same or more than 0. 60. The result of the test demonstrated that the reliability index of this test was 0.686 (see Appendix 1).

Furthermore, in order to know whether the items of the test were easy or difficult, the researcher used the following formula suggested by Sudijono (2001: 372).

$$P = \frac{B}{JS}$$

P = Items difficulties

B = Sum of the students who answer correctly

JS = Sum of all the students who follow the test

The item difficulty ranges between 0.00-1.00 and it is symbolized as “P” that refers to “proportion” in the evaluation term. The classification of item difficulties is shown in table 3.2.

Table 2.

Classification of item difficulties

No	Item Difficulties	Classification
1	Less than 0. 25	Difficult
2	0.25-0.75	Moderate
3	More than 0. 75	Easy

Based on the criteria, the questions that were taken to be tested were the questions with moderate difficulty. After conducting Try Out, the questions that had moderate difficulty index were 29 questions; there were 11 questions for writer tone, 10 questions for writer’s point of view, and 8 questions for writer’s purpose. Since the questions that were tested were 30 questions, so 1 moderate question for writer tone was discarded and 2 questions for writer’s purpose were revised.

Then, interview was also done to get more information as detail as possible about the student’s reading problem in critical reading. Interview is a purposeful interaction in which a person gets information from other people (Gay, 2009: 370). The interview was recorded by using recorder and also noted in written form.

Test was done to find students’ problems in answering questions on writer’s purpose, tone, and point of view through multiple choice forms. It was conducted twice. For each test, there were thirty questions; ten questions about writer’s purpose, ten questions about writer’s tone, and ten questions about writer’s point of view. Before the test was conducted, test was tried out to some students from another class. After getting data from the test, the respondents’ answers of each item were scored. First, the students’ scores from test 1 and test 2 were combined and then found the mean to get the real scores. The scores of students’ reading ability were analyzed by using this formula:

$$M = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

M: the mean score, \sum : the sum of all scores, N: total number of respondents.

The result of the mean score was grouped in categories following the system of the university where this research was conducted

Table 3.
The Categories of Score

Average score	Score	Explanation
81-100	A	Very good
66-80	B	Good
56-65	C	Fair
41-55	D	Poor
0-40	E	Failed

Then, the data that came from test were also analyzed by using formula that is proposed by Sudjana (1991) to see the percentage of students' score in each indicator.

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

P= percentage

F= Frequency

N=Number of respondent

Therefore, interview was done after conducting test to find students' problems in answering questions on critical reading. During interview, the data were recorded by using an audio recording and through writing. After that, the data were transcribed to be written form. Students chosen to be the interviewee were taken based on their score in the test. There were 3 students with the highest score, 3 students with medium score, and 3 students with the lowest score. Data from interview were analyzed only by describing the answer of each item from the recording and note that had been taken during interview. Then, answers of the interviewees were analyzed to find students' problems in answering questions and critical reading. Finally, the students' ability and problems in critical reading were described.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the result of students' critical reading test, the result of the research can be seen in the table below.

This table shows that the students' highest score in critical reading test was C and none of them got

A and B. A half of the students number got score D and the rest of them got E. It can be said that students had problems in critical reading. Therefore, the data of the students' ability for each sub skill tested are shown below.

The data in the table above show that none of the students got score A. This table also indicates that five students (14.70%) got the highest score (B) and nine students (26.47%) got the lowest score (E). Almost a half of the students or fourteen students (41.17%) obtained score D. Then, six students (17.64%) had the score C. It can be concluded that the students had problems in determining the writer's purpose.

Table above shows the distribution of students' score in determining writer's tone. The table depicts that the percentage of the students (41.17%) who got the lowest score was bigger than those (2.94%) who got the highest score. It means there were fourteen students who obtained score E and there was only one student who got score A. Surprisingly, the table represents that 17 out of 34 students (50%) got score D. And there was only one student (2.94%) who got score C and only one student too (2.94%) who gained score D. To sum up, the students got problems in determining writer's tone.

Data on the table above reveal that there was no student who got score in A. However, 18 out of 34 students (52.94%) obtained score E. Then, nine students (26.47%) got score D. Four students (11.76%) were in the category fair because they got score in C. There were only three students (8.82%) who obtained score B. So, it can be concluded that the students had problems in determining the writer's point of view.

Furthermore, the following data were obtained from interview. The interview was conducted to get some

data on some problems students might face in critical reading.

Based on the data from critical reading test and interview, it can be said that defining critical reading was not a problem for the students, but they had problems in vocabulary, sentence structure, and clues to understand the text. Having background knowledge related to the text is obviously important in critical reading. Huijie (2010: 44) informs that Wassman and Paye state that critical readers relate what they read to what they have already known. This opinion strengthens that background knowledge is very necessary for critical readers. In addition, Duffy (2009: 15) mentions that meaning cannot be constructed if the readers do not have experiences related to the topic. It can be said that both of background knowledge and vocabulary are very necessary and related each other. Critical readers need to have both of these in critical reading. The explanation below discusses the result of the research about students' problems in critical reading.

Problems Faced by Students in Answering Questions on Writer's Purpose

After conducting the test to the students, it can be identified that most of students got low score in answering questions on writer's purpose (see Table 2). Based on the interview, they knew the definition but they did not know the clues to find the writer's purpose. Bazerman (2010: 104) explains that even though readers cannot read what lives on writer's mind about his purpose, readers can still reveal some clues to recognize it. However, the students only knew some clues to find writer's purpose. So, it can be said that the clues to recognize writer's purpose was a problem for students in critical reading.

Problems Faced by Students in Answering Questions on Writer's Tone

From the students' score in answering questions on writer's tone, it is clear that the students' score was very low (see table 3). They told that the problems arose because they had no ideas about writer's tone definition. Moreover, they could not find the clues of writer's tone in the text. As informed by Smith (2003: 357), the clues are actually in the way the writer presents the information. It means that the readers must be aware of the writer's style because it will help them know the writer's feeling of the topic he writes. Additionally, McWhorter (2009: 141) states that readers can identify the tone by paying attention to descriptive language and shades of meaning that are used. It can be concluded that defining the writer's tone and finding the clues to determine writer's tone were the problems for students in critical reading.

Problems Faced by Students in Answering Questions on Writer's Point of View

Students' score in determining writer's point of view indicates that the students had problems in answering questions on this sub skill (see table 4). Data from interview reveal that the students did not know the definition of the writer's point of view and the clues to find it. From this explanation, it is obvious that the students had problems in defining the writer's point of view and finding the clues to determine it. Smith (2003: 344) tells that the writer's choice of words and information provides the clues for readers. Then, point of view can be also known by evaluating the content of the text and determine which one the fact and which one the opinion of the writers. To sum up, the students had problems in determining the writer's purpose, the

writer's tone, and the writer's point of view in critical reading activity.

Table 4.
The Classification Of Students' Critical Reading Ability

Score Range	Frequency	Percentage	Score	Criteria
81-100	-	-	A	Very Good
66-80	-	-	B	Good
56-65	5	14.70%	C	Fair
41-55	17	50.00%	D	Poor
0-40	12	35.29%	E	Failed

Table 5.
The Classification Of Students' Ability In Determining Writer's Purpose

Score Range	Frequency	Percentage	Score	Criteria
81-100	-	-	A	Very Good
66-80	5	14.70%	B	Good
56-65	6	17.64%	C	Fair
41-55	14	41.17%	D	Poor
0-40	9	26.47%	E	Failed

Table 6.
The Classification of Students' Ability In Determining Writer's Tone

Score Range	Frequency	Percentage	Score	Criteria
81-100	1	2.94%	A	Very Good
66-80	1	2.94%	B	Good
56-65	1	2.94%	C	Fair
41-55	17	50.00%	D	Poor
0-40	14	41.17%	E	Failed

Table 7.
The Classification Of Students' Ability In Determining Writer's Point Of View

Score Range	Frequency	Percentage	Score	Criteria
81-100	-	-	A	Very Good
66-80	3	8.82%	B	Good
56-65	4	11.76%	C	Fair
41-55	9	26.47%	D	Poor
0-40	18	52.94%	E	Failed

Table 8
Data From Interview

Skills	Categories	Explanations	Students' response
Critical Reading	Defining critical reading	Most of students (77.78%) told that they knew the definition of critical reading	Critical reading is reading activity that does not only understand the information in the text, but readers also see how the writer conveys his idea included his emotion and purpose.
	Language problems	Most of the students (88.89%) got problems in vocabulary and 66.67% of them could not understand well the sentence structure	I found some difficult words and I think the structure is more complex and complicated than what I have ever read.
	Background knowledge	All students (100%) argued that they could activate their background knowledge when they read the passages	Yes, I can. Background knowledge is very influential. For example, it was American race. I have ever heard about it before, at least I have ever known it.
	The most difficult sub skill	Most of students (66.67%) admitted determining the writer's point of view was the most difficult sub skill and the others (33.33%) said that determining the writer's tone as the most difficult sub skill	Writer's point of view. It is because we need more complex understanding and background knowledge to find out writer's point of view.
Determining the writer's purpose	Defining the writer's purpose	All students (100%) knew the meaning of writer's purpose	Writer's purpose is the reason of the writer to write the text.
	Clues and strategies to find the writer's purpose	Most of the students had insufficient knowledge about the clues and strategies to find the writer's purpose	It's main idea, words, title, and supporting sentences.
Determining the writer's tone	Defining the writer's tone	Most of the students (77.78%) knew the meaning of writer's tone	Tone is about feeling, how the writer's feeling and emotion when he writes and there are words that contain expression of anger and taboo.

Tabel 8 lanjutan

The writer's point of view	Clues and strategies to find the writer's tone	66.67% of students knew that tone can be recognized through the words used by the writers, 22.22% of students recognized that tone can be recognized through the way writer writes the text and 33.33% of the students did not know the clue to find tone	Wait, what is tone? Since the beginning, I did not understand about it. What is focused on tone?
	Clues and strategies to find the writer's point of view	55.5% of students did not know at all the clues to find the writer's point of view	I do not know

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

After interpreting the result of the research, it can be concluded that the students had problems in critical reading. Their problems were limited vocabulary, understanding complex sentences, and determining the writer's purpose, writer's tone, and writer's point of view. They also faced problems in finding clues to recognize these sub skills. In addition, they admitted that the writer's point of view was the most difficult sub skill in critical reading. To sum up, the following data show the problems that the students faced in critical reading. In general, the ability of students in determining writer's purpose is very poor. It was proven that students got score 51.47 (poor) in average. This fact indicates that the students had problems in determining writer's purpose. The problem was in finding the clues to recognize writer's purpose. The ability of students in determining writer's tone was also poor. The data show that the students got score 45.29 in average. It means the students had problems in determining writer's tone. Some students did not know the definition of writer's tone and the clues to find the writer's tone. Then, there were some students (33.33%) that

admitted if finding writer's tone was the most difficult skill for them among these three critical sub skills. The ability of students in determining writer's point of view was poor. It can be seen from the data that the students got score 44.26 in average. It represents that the students had problems in recognizing writer's point of view. Some of the students did not know the definition of writer's point of view and did not have any idea about the clues to find writer's point of view. Then, some of students (66.67%) said that determining writer's point of view was the most difficult sub skill among these three sub skills.

Based on the conclusions above, the researcher proposed some suggestions. First, since the ability of the students in critical reading – determining writer's purpose, writer's tone, and writer's point of view was poor, it is suggested that English Department revises the syllabus of teaching Reading and emphasizes the importance of teaching critical reading to the students. Second, the lecturers are expected to give more critical reading exercise to the students so that the students can improve their critical reading ability. Then, strategy to build

vocabulary is very crucial to be included in Reading class. And the last, the students who want to do research about students' problems in skills or in courses should also interview the lecturers in order to get the more comprehensive and complete data.

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