



The Role of Metacognitive Awareness in Critical Literacy Learning on The Reading Comprehension Ability of Elementary School Students

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is a crucial core competency for elementary school students' success, yet many challenges remain in the practice of reading instruction. Learning often focuses on the literal aspect without addressing deeper cognitive aspects, such as critical thinking about texts. Critical literacy, which positions students as active readers, can be a solution in developing reading comprehension skills. This study aims to analyze the role of metacognitive awareness in critical literacy learning on elementary school students' reading comprehension skills. Using a quantitative, explanatory design, this study shows that critical literacy learning positively influences reading comprehension skills. Furthermore, metacognitive awareness plays an important role in mediating this influence, as students with strong metacognitive awareness tend to be better able to understand texts in depth. The analysis results show that critical literacy learning not only improves reading comprehension skills directly but also increases students' awareness of their thinking processes while reading. These findings suggest that a critical literacy approach integrating metacognitive awareness can improve the quality of elementary school students' reading comprehension and have important implications for the development of Indonesian language learning at the elementary level.

Keywords: Critical Literacy, Elementary School Students, Reading Comprehension, Meta cognitive Skills

Peran Kesadaran Metakognitif dalam Pembelajaran Literasi Kritis Terhadap Kemampuan Membaca Pemahaman Siswa Sekolah Dasar

Abstrak

Kemampuan membaca pemahaman merupakan kompetensi dasar yang krusial dalam keberhasilan belajar siswa Sekolah Dasar, namun masih banyak tantangan dalam praktik pembelajaran membaca. Pembelajaran sering kali terfokus pada aspek literal tanpa memperhatikan aspek kognitif yang lebih mendalam, seperti berpikir kritis terhadap teks. Literasi kritis, yang menempatkan siswa sebagai pembaca aktif, dapat menjadi solusi dalam mengembangkan kemampuan membaca pemahaman. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran kesadaran metakognitif dalam pembelajaran literasi kritis terhadap kemampuan membaca pemahaman siswa Sekolah Dasar. Menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dan desain eksplanatori, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran literasi kritis memiliki pengaruh positif terhadap kemampuan membaca pemahaman. Selain itu, kesadaran metakognitif berperan penting dalam memediasi pengaruh tersebut, dimana siswa yang memiliki kesadaran metakognitif yang baik cenderung lebih mampu memahami teks secara mendalam. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran literasi kritis tidak hanya meningkatkan kemampuan membaca pemahaman secara langsung, tetapi juga melalui peningkatan kesadaran siswa terhadap proses berpikir mereka selama membaca. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan literasi kritis yang mengintegrasikan kesadaran metakognitif dapat meningkatkan kualitas pemahaman membaca siswa di Sekolah Dasar, serta memberikan implikasi penting bagi pengembangan pembelajaran Bahasa Indonesia di tingkat dasar.

Kata kunci: Kemampuan Membaca Pemahaman, Literasi Kritis, Metakognitif, Siswa SD

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a fundamental competency that significantly determines the success of elementary school students, particularly in learning Indonesian. Reading is no longer understood simply as the activity of recognizing words or sentences, but rather as a complex cognitive process involving understanding meaning, drawing inferences, and critically evaluating text content (Fazliddinovich, 2025). At the elementary level, reading comprehension serves as the foundation for mastering various subjects, so low reading comprehension can hinder students' overall academic development (Aatikah et al., 2025).

However, reading instruction in elementary schools continues to face various challenges. Learning often focuses on literal aspects, such as finding explicit information in texts, without providing adequate space for students to think more deeply, question the content of the reading, or connect it to social contexts and personal experiences (Gita et al., 2025). This condition tends to make students passive in the reading process and unaccustomed to using higher-order thinking strategies to fully comprehend texts.

Along with the development of educational paradigms, the critical literacy approach has increasingly been viewed as a strategic alternative in reading instruction (Rizqiani et al., 2024). Critical literacy positions students as active readers who not only understand the content of a text but also analyze, evaluate, and reflect on its messages (Mariyati et al., 2025). Through critical literacy learning, students are encouraged to ask questions, identify the author's point of view, and understand the relationship between the text, context, and the surrounding social reality.

While research by Arifin (2020) shows that critical literacy learning can improve reading comprehension, most studies still focus on the final learning outcomes. Research by Wihastyanang et al., (2024) indicates that critical literacy is effective in improving reading comprehension, but it has not yet fully explored the cognitive mechanisms underlying this improvement. In other words, the "how" and "why" aspects of critical literacy can improve reading comprehension remain relatively underexplored, particularly in elementary school students.

One aspect of internal cognition that has the potential to play a significant role in reading learning is metacognitive awareness (Mustopa et al., 2024). Metacognitive awareness refers to students' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own thought processes while reading (Rinaldi & Rahmatillah, 2022). Students with strong metacognitive awareness tend to be better able to choose appropriate reading strategies, recognize when they are having difficulty understanding a text, and adjust their strategies to achieve better comprehension.

In the context of critical literacy learning, metacognitive awareness is thought to play a strategic role, serving as a mechanism that bridges critical literacy activities with improved reading comprehension (Ikawati et al., 2024). However, empirical studies specifically examining the role of metacognitive awareness in critical literacy learning among elementary school students remain limited. Therefore, this research is crucial for examining the role of metacognitive awareness in critical literacy learning on elementary school students' reading comprehension skills, thereby providing theoretical and practical contributions to the development of Indonesian language learning in elementary schools.

This study aims to analyze the role of metacognitive awareness in critical literacy learning on elementary school students' reading comprehension skills. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) examine the influence of critical literacy learning on elementary school students' reading comprehension skills, (2) analyze the influence of critical literacy learning on students' metacognitive awareness, (3) test the influence of metacognitive awareness on students' reading comprehension skills, and (4) explain the role of metacognitive awareness as a mechanism that mediates the relationship between critical literacy learning and elementary school students' reading comprehension skills.

METHODS

This study used a quantitative, explanatory design to analyze the relationships among critical literacy learning, metacognitive awareness, and elementary school students' reading comprehension skills. This design was chosen because it allowed researchers to systematically test the effects of variables and explain

the role of metacognitive awareness as a mechanism linking critical literacy learning and reading comprehension skills. The study was conducted with upper-grade elementary school students, as at this level, students already possess sufficient basic reading skills to engage in critical literacy activities.

The study subjects were selected using a purposive sampling technique, taking into account class characteristics and students' readiness for critical literacy learning. Learning was implemented through critical literacy stages, encompassing pre-reading, reading, and post-reading activities that emphasized analysis, reflection, and evaluation of texts. The research instruments consisted of a reading comprehension test covering literal, inferential, and evaluative aspects, as well as a metacognitive awareness questionnaire that measured students' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate reading strategies. Additionally, observation sheets were used to ensure the implementation of critical literacy learning in accordance with the research plan.

The research data were analyzed using inferential statistical techniques, beginning with prerequisite analyses, including tests of normality and homogeneity. Next, regression analysis and mediation tests were used to examine the relationships between variables and the role of metacognitive awareness in critical literacy learning on reading comprehension. This analytical approach was selected because regression and mediation analysis allow for the examination of both direct and indirect relationships among variables, which is consistent with theoretical learning models that emphasize the role of cognitive mechanisms, such as metacognitive awareness, in explaining learning outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Table 1, the critical literacy learning implemented in this study had an average score of 78.45 and a standard deviation of 6.32, placing it in the high category. This result suggests that critical literacy learning was implemented consistently across students, as reflected in the relatively small variation in scores. Students' metacognitive awareness had an average score of 74.18 and a standard deviation of 7.10, placing it in the moderate category, indicating that students had begun to develop awareness of their cognitive processes while reading, although this awareness had not yet reached an optimal level. Meanwhile, students' reading comprehension had an average score of 76.92 with a standard deviation of 6.85, placing it in the high category, indicating that students generally understood the texts well.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

| Variabel | Mean | SD | Kategori |
|-------------------------------|-------|------|----------|
| Critical Literacy Learning | 78,45 | 6,32 | High |
| Metacognitive Awareness | 74,18 | 7,1 | Medium |
| Reading Comprehension Ability | 76,92 | 6,85 | High |

Furthermore, based on Table 2, regression analysis results indicate a significant relationship between critical literacy learning and students' reading comprehension skills, with a coefficient value of 0.42 and a significance level of 0.001. This result suggests that higher levels of critical literacy learning are associated with better reading comprehension performance. In addition, critical literacy learning was significantly associated with students' metacognitive awareness, with a coefficient of 0.47 and a significance level of 0.000. These results indicate that higher levels of critical literacy learning tend to be associated with higher levels of students' metacognitive awareness. Furthermore, metacognitive awareness was significantly associated with reading comprehension skills, with a coefficient of 0.39 and a significance level of 0.002.

Tabel 2. Results of the Inter Variable Influence Test

| Variabel Relationship | Koefisien (β) | Sig. | Explanation |
|--|-----------------------|-------|-------------|
| Critical Literacy \rightarrow Reading Comprehension | 0,42 | 0,001 | Significant |
| Critical Literacy \rightarrow Metacognitive Awareness | 0,47 | 0,000 | Significant |
| Meta cognitive Awareness \rightarrow Reading Comprehension | 0,39 | 0,002 | Significant |

Based on Table 3, the direct effect of critical literacy learning on students' reading comprehension before the inclusion of the mediator variable, metacognitive awareness, had a coefficient of 0.42 and was statistically significant. After metacognitive awareness was included in the analysis model, the direct effect decreased to 0.25 and remained significant. This reduction indicates that metacognitive awareness accounts for part of the relationship between critical literacy learning and reading comprehension.

Table 3. Meta cognitive Awareness Mediation Test Results

| Analysis Pathway | Direct influence | Indirect Influence | Explanation |
|--|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Critical Literacy → Reading Comprehension (without mediator) | 0,42 | – | Significant |
| Critical Literacy → Reading Comprehension (with mediator) | 0,25 | 0,18 | Mediasi Parsial |

The indirect effect through metacognitive awareness ($\beta = 0.18$) further indicates a partial mediation effect, as the direct effect of critical literacy learning on reading comprehension remained significant after the mediator was included. Thus, the results presented in Table 3 suggest that metacognitive awareness functions as a partial mediator in the relationship between critical literacy learning and students' reading comprehension.

The findings of this study indicate that critical literacy learning is positively associated with elementary school students' reading comprehension abilities. This result aligns with theoretical perspectives that conceptualize reading as an active and reflective process, in which students engage with texts by analyzing meaning, identifying perspectives, and evaluating messages (Gutiérrez & Planelles, 2022).

The improvement in reading comprehension skills, particularly in inferential and evaluative aspects, suggests that critical literacy learning may support the development of higher-order thinking skills. Through activities such as drawing conclusions, connecting textual information with prior knowledge, and reflectively evaluating content, students are encouraged to engage in deeper cognitive processing during reading (Mutiara et al., 2025). This suggest that reading learning is not solely oriented toward correct answers, but also focuses on the thinking processes that accompany the reading activity.

In addition, critical literacy learning was found to be associated with students' metacognitive awareness. Reading activities that emphasize discussion, open-ended questioning, and reflection may encourage students to become more aware of the strategies they use while reading, including recognizing comprehension difficulties and regulating their reading approaches (Aulia et al., 2025). This metacognitive awareness is reflected in students' ability to identify challenging sections of text and to adjust their reading strategies in order to maintain comprehension (Pujiastuti et al., 2022).

The moderate level of metacognitive awareness observed in this study indicates that elementary school students have begun to develop the ability to manage their cognitive processes, although these skills still require systematic reinforcement. The tendency for monitoring skills to be more developed than planning and evaluation skills reflects typical stages of metacognitive development in elementary learners (Andayani et al., 2025).

The mediation analysis suggests that metacognitive awareness partially mediates the relationship between critical literacy learning and reading comprehension. From a metacognitive perspective, this finding is consistent with theories emphasizing the role of planning, monitoring, and evaluating cognitive processes during reading (Hendaryan & Noviadi, 2023). However, because the mediation effect is partial, metacognitive awareness should be understood as one of several mechanisms contributing to reading comprehension (Shintawati et al., 2023).

These findings should be interpreted cautiously. Although significant relationships were identified, this study does not claim that metacognitive awareness fully explains the effect of critical literacy learning on

reading comprehension. Other factors, such as students' prior knowledge, motivation, and classroom context, may also influence reading outcomes but were not examined in this study.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the use of purposive sampling limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, metacognitive awareness was measured using a self-report questionnaire, which may not fully capture students' actual metacognitive processes. Third, the cross-sectional design restricts causal interpretation. Despite these limitations, the findings suggest that integrating critical literacy instruction with explicit support for metacognitive development may contribute to the enhancement of elementary school students' reading comprehension.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that critical literacy learning is positively associated with elementary school students' reading comprehension skills. Learning activities that emphasize text analysis, evaluation, and reflection may support students' deeper understanding of texts, particularly in inferential and evaluative aspects, thereby contributing to the development of higher-order thinking skills. Furthermore, metacognitive awareness was found to partially mediate the relationship between critical literacy learning and reading comprehension. The findings indicate that students who are more aware of their thinking processes while reading tend to demonstrate better comprehension of texts. Therefore, fostering metacognitive awareness through critical literacy learning may contribute to improving the quality of elementary school students' reading comprehension.

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