

Between Theory and Practice: Exploring Lecturers' Perceptions on the Critical Literacy Approach in Critical Reading Classes

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Abstract

This study explores university lecturers' perceptions and experiences in implementing the Critical Literacy Approach (CLA) in teaching Critical Reading within the context of Indonesian higher education. In contrast to most previous research that focused on students' learning outcomes or curriculum design, this investigation centers on lecturers' pedagogical agency and their contextual adaptations of CLA. Using a descriptive qualitative case study design, three lecturers from different universities participated in in-depth interviews and semester-long classroom observations. Thematic analysis revealed that lecturers' entry into critical literacy emerged through distinct pathways: self-directed study, reflective classroom practice, and formal graduate education. These trajectories informed how each lecturer interpreted and modified CLA that ranging from integrating discourse analysis and media literacy to using literature for social critique. Despite methodological variations, all lecturers shared a strong commitment to cultivating students' critical thinking and sociopolitical awareness. However, the implementation was not without challenges: emotional discomfort around sensitive topics, student disengagement, and limited instructional time frequently emerged. Even so, the lecturers employed adaptive strategies to sustain dialogue and scaffold critical reflection. These findings highlight that effective CLA practice depends not only on theoretical understanding but also on emotional intelligence, contextual sensitivity, and institutional support. By foregrounding lecturers' voices, this study contributes a practice-oriented perspective on critical literacy, urging a reorientation of research and policy to recognize educators as key agents of critical pedagogy in Indonesian higher education.

Keywords: *Critical Literacy, Higher Education, Lecturers' Perceptions.*

Introduction

The ongoing literacy crisis in Indonesia is still a considerable challenge for national development, especially in higher education. While there is broader access to information and education, students' engagement with materials remains superficial. As the PISA dataset of reading literacy from 2022 showcased, Indonesia scored a staggering 359 and ranked 68th out of 81 countries with merely 28% of students passing minimum competency levels (OECD, 2022). This score showcases the nation's enduring struggle with reading comprehension and interpretation. Alongside this, the National Digital Literacy Index of Indonesia from 2023 also shows a mere moderate score of 3.65 out of 5, largely driven by the poor performance in the areas of critical thinking and digital

resilience (Ministry of Communication and Informatics, 2023). These figures emphasize students' inability to filter in, evaluate, and effectively interrogate the information put forth, which is imperative in today's world dominated by knowledge and misinformation.

Critical Literacy Approach (CLA) has emerged in response to global calls for higher-order literacy skills as a transformative pedagogy that aims to enable learners to interrogate texts, dispute power relations, and generate new meanings. CLA is grounded in critical pedagogy (Janks, 2010; Luke, 2000) which advocates for active learner engagement and shifts from interpretation to passively receiving discourse.

CLA is yet to be integrated into Indonesian classrooms, illustrating a gap between theory and practice. Most study prioritizes students' cognitive skills, curriculum and textbook development at the expense of lecturers, who are central to pedagogical innovation. Recent studies, including Susilowaty & Setyarini (2025), Giovany et al., (2024) and Marwa et al., (2025), show that implementation of critical literacy in Indonesian higher education is developing. However, the focuses noted are limited to student scaffolding, religious literacy, or even the design of teaching materials, and the layered aspects of lecturers' stance towards their concepts of teaching practice, teaching leadership, and institutional hurdles remain understudied. This indicates a lack alignment between conceptual support and practical teaching. Consequently, the implementation of CLA in Indonesian higher education is largely unexplored, particularly regarding lecturers' perspectives on its implementation, shaped by their beliefs, experiences, and the challenges they face.

The absence of lecturers' experiences is a considerable gap in study. Although there is literature on the importance of critical literacy from the curriculum and student perspectives, very few focus on how lecturers, who are pivotal as CLA implementing change agents, confront the challenges of CLA in their teaching. Since lecturers can choose to accept or reject progressive literacy practices, their philosophies, teaching selves, and contextual hardships are sharply contested.

In particular, there is greater expectation for lecturers to mediate not only texts, but also discourse, ideologies, and the diversity among students as Indonesia moves towards a more digitalized and democratized nation. The challenge of text mediation is exacerbated by the absence of administrative backing, systematic mentorship, and reflective teaching spaces.

This study aims to answer the research question: How do university lecturers perceive, adapt, and experience the implementation of the Critical Literacy Approach in teaching Critical Reading within the context of Indonesian higher education? The study intends to clarify the multifaceted nature of lecturers' engagement with the Critical Literacy Approach, including their prior knowledge, pedagogical modifications, and the outcomes both positive and challenging of their classroom implementation. Through this inquiry, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how critical literacy is contextualized, operationalized, and experienced by educators in diverse institutional settings.

This study offers a novel contribution by providing an in-depth, case-based exploration of lecturers as central agents in implementing the Critical Literacy Approach (CLA) within Indonesian higher education as an area largely underrepresented in existing study. While most prior studies emphasize student learning outcomes, curriculum design, or textbook content, this study shifts the focus to the lived pedagogical realities of lecturers, uncovering how their prior experiences, disciplinary perspectives, and context-specific modifications shape the enactment of CLA in critical

reading classes. Furthermore, the study reveals that successful implementation of CLA is not merely a matter of theoretical knowledge, but rather depends on lecturers' adaptive strategies, emotional sensitivity, and their ability to foster safe, dialogic learning environments. This perspective introduces a practice-oriented framework for understanding critical literacy, highlighting that lecturers' reflective decision-making plays a pivotal role in mediating both the transformative and contested dimensions of CLA in the classroom.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative case study design to explore lecturers' perceptions of the Critical Literacy Approach (CLA) in the context of teaching critical reading. A qualitative approach was considered most appropriate as it allowed for a deep, contextualized understanding of participants' beliefs, experiences, teaching strategies, and classroom dynamics, which are essential for capturing the complexities of pedagogical practices rooted in critical literacy.

Participants and Sampling

The participants in this study consisted of three university lecturers who taught critical reading courses by integrating principles of CLA. Each lecturer was affiliated with a different higher education institution in Indonesia:

1. Mr. AFB from the English Literature Study Program, Universitas Sawerigading Makassar
2. Mrs. FK from the English Literature Program, Universitas Hasanuddin
3. Mr. WGG from the English Literature Program, Universitas Muslim Indonesia

The selection of participants followed a purposive sampling strategy, guided by two key criteria:

1. the lecturers' knowledge and experience in applying CLA in their teaching; and
2. their availability and willingness to participate in extended data collection processes, including interviews and in-class observations.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected from two primary sources:

1. Semi-structured interviews, and
2. Direct classroom observations conducted over the course of one academic semester.

The interviews were designed to elicit detailed information about the lecturers' perceptions, pedagogical motivations, instructional challenges, and adaptations related to the use of CLA in critical reading classes. Each interview was conducted individually and followed a flexible protocol that allowed for in-depth probing based on emerging themes.

Simultaneously, classroom observations were conducted to gain insight into the practical enactment of CLA, focusing on instructional delivery, materials, classroom discourse, and patterns of student engagement. The aim was to align lecturers' stated beliefs with their actual teaching practices.

Instruments and Validation

Both the interview guide and observation protocol were developed based on critical literacy pedagogy frameworks, drawing particularly from theorists such as Janks (2010); Luke (2000). The instruments were subjected to expert validation through a panel of scholars in literacy education and qualitative study to ensure content relevance, clarity, and construct validity.

Table 1. Lecturer's Interview Guideline

EXPERIENCES
1. How do you have prior Critical Literacy Approach experience?
2. In implementing the critical literacy approach, did you add or modify anything from the existing approach? If yes, what did you add or modify, why, and what is the background for that?
3. Based on your experience, could you tell me what positive and challenges experiences are?
4. How do you keep students interested in Critical Literacy Approach?

Data Analysis Techniques

This study employed a thematic analysis approach, following recent frameworks in qualitative research (Permata & Alfian, 2022), to identify recurring pedagogical themes from interview transcripts and classroom observations. This analytical approach was chosen because it allowed the researcher to systematically explore recurring pedagogical insights, instructional challenges, and adaptive strategies derived from lecturers' lived experiences with the Critical Literacy Approach (CLA).

All interview transcripts and classroom observation fieldnotes were coded manually using an iterative process that combined both inductive and deductive coding techniques. Inductive coding allowed themes to emerge directly from the data without preconceived categories, while deductive coding was guided by the study questions and key concepts in critical literacy pedagogy. Once coding was completed, the codes were grouped and refined into thematic clusters, each representing significant dimensions of the data. These included:

- Participants' prior exposure to CLA,
- Modifications and pedagogical adaptations,
- Challenges and resistance encountered,
- Positive outcomes and critical learning moments.

Themes were then compared within and across cases to identify commonalities and variations in how CLA was understood and enacted by the three lecturers.

Results

Lecturers' Prior Experiences and Learning Pathways in Understanding the Critical Literacy Approach

The experiences of lecturers in adopting the Critical Literacy Approach (CLA) in their critical reading classes were shaped by distinct personal, academic, and professional pathways. This study explored how Mr. AFB, Ms. FK, and Mr. WWG encountered and developed their understanding of CLA based on their prior educational backgrounds, teaching practices, and disciplinary orientations.

Mr. AFB described having limited exposure to Critical Literacy during his undergraduate studies, noting that it was not part of the formal curriculum at the time. His early understanding of CLA was developed independently through self-directed learning, including reading literature on the topic and engaging in informal discussions with peers. It was not until his postgraduate studies that he encountered structured instruction in CLA. He credited a particular lecturer during his master's program for inspiring him to adopt the approach in his own teaching. As he reflected:

"First, I don't really know. None of my lecturers teach me. I got this subject through books, and through discussions with my friends. That's from my S1. And for my S2, I studied this for the first time from the lecturer named BA. I learnt a lot of information, a lot of approaches from him, and with him. So, it triggered me to apply it in my class when I became a lecturer, and I did it, right?" (Mr. AFB, Interview, 10 January 2025)

In contrast, Ms. FK's experience was marked by an iterative and reflective process of professional learning. Rather than gaining exposure through formal academic instruction, she developed her understanding of CLA organically through teaching practice. For her, the classroom became both a learning site and a space for experimentation, where instructional strategies were continuously refined. She emphasized the importance of ongoing development, collaboration, and the integration of CLA with other approaches. She explained:

"I gained experience with the Critical Literacy Approach through learning and teaching... So, while teaching, I also learn, don't get me wrong, because we have to improve every semester." (Ms. FK, Interview, 3 February 2025)

Meanwhile, Mr. WWG's understanding of CLA emerged primarily from formal academic training during his master's studies at Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM). His interpretation of critical literacy is grounded in the interrelation between text and socio-cultural context. He emphasized that critical reading involves more than textual comprehension. It requires interrogating the ideological and cultural forces that shape meaning. As he recalled:

"Previously, I thought that the Critical Literacy Approach in critical reading was closely related to understanding two things: understanding what text is and understanding what context is. I gained this experience when I was studying at UGM." (Mr. WWG, Interview, 7 February 2025)

These varied accounts demonstrate the diverse entry points and epistemological orientations through which the lecturers engaged with CLA. While Mr. AFB's trajectory underscores the influence of academic mentorship and postgraduate exposure, Ms. FK's pathway highlights the importance of experiential and practice-based learning. In contrast, Mr. WWG's development reflects a strong theoretical grounding, shaped by literary and cultural studies. Collectively, their experiences reflect a spectrum of learning processes that ranging from self-study and informal dialogue to structured academic instruction and iterative classroom practice. It shapes how Critical Literacy is interpreted, internalized, and enacted in Indonesian higher education contexts.

Pedagogical Adaptations and Rationale for Modifying the Critical Literacy Approach

Following the lecturers' varied educational backgrounds and experiential entry points into the Critical Literacy Approach (CLA), this section explores how they implemented CLA in classroom practice and the specific modifications or augmentations they introduced. The analysis not only identifies what was modified but also unpacks the rationale behind those adaptations and the contextual factors that informed them.

Mr. AFB significantly enriched his implementation of CLA by integrating structured discourse analysis techniques into his critical reading instruction. He observed that students often struggle with abstract directives to "think critically" and therefore benefit from concrete, systematic tools that guide textual interpretation. Motivated by his academic grounding in sociolinguistics and exposure to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) particularly the works of Norman Fairclough and Michel Foucault, he constructed a pedagogical approach that emphasized the linguistic and ideological structures embedded in texts. As he reflected:

"Yes, I feel it's very beneficial to significantly incorporate discourse analysis into my critical literacy approach. The background stems from my own interest in sociolinguistics and critical discourse analysis, particularly the works of Norman Fairclough and Michel Foucault. Oh... yes... I've found that simply encouraging students

to 'think critically' isn't always enough; they need concrete analytical tools to dissect texts effectively." (Mr. AFB, Interview, 10 January 2025)

By training students to interrogate linguistic choices, rhetorical devices, and power relations, Mr. AFB's adaptation moved CLA from general critical reflection to a more structured, analytical engagement with text, aiming to uncover the socio-political ideologies operating beneath the surface.

In a contrasting context, Ms. FK introduced a media-oriented modification to CLA. Drawing from concepts in media literacy education and insights from cognitive bias study, she placed a strong emphasis on critical news consumption, particularly through skimming and scanning techniques. Her goal was to equip students with the ability to quickly assess the credibility, objectivity, and bias of information in the digital media landscape. This practical, skills-based adjustment was driven by growing concerns over the proliferation of misinformation and the erosion of public trust in traditional media. As she explained:

"Yes, I have modified this approach to place greater emphasis on critical news consumption, especially through skimming and scanning techniques." (Ms. FK, Interview, 3 February 2025)

Through this modification, CLA was reframed as a civic and cognitive skill set, enabling students to become not just critical readers of texts but informed and discerning participants in the digital information age.

Meanwhile, Mr. WWG adapted CLA by placing literature at the center of his critical reading pedagogy. Drawing on his expertise in literary theory and inspired by scholars such as Bell Hooks and Edward W. Said, he argued that literary texts such as poetry, novels, short stories, and drama offer a nuanced platform for critical engagement. Literature, in his view, inherently grapples with complex moral dilemmas, exposes power structures, and amplifies marginalized voices. He shared:

"Certainly, I have adapted the critical literacy approach to be more centered on literary texts such as poetry, novels, short stories, and drama. I find that focusing on literature allows for a richer and more nuanced exploration of social issues, power dynamics, and diverse perspectives." (Mr. WWG, Interview, 7 February 2025)

For Mr. WWG, the narrative and symbolic dimensions of literature provide a powerful vehicle for fostering empathy, introspection, and political awareness. His adaptation demonstrated that CLA can be successfully aligned with literary pedagogy, helping students engage not only with texts but with the cultural and ethical tensions embedded in them.

Collectively, these findings illustrate that although the lecturers shared a commitment to critical pedagogy, their implementation of CLA was mediated by disciplinary training, personal pedagogical philosophy, and institutional contexts. Whether grounded in discourse analysis, media literacy, or literary interpretation, each adaptation reflected a deliberate, reflective effort to make critical literacy more accessible, contextually relevant, and impactful for students in Indonesian higher education.

Positive Outcomes and Challenges in the Practical Application of Critical Literacy

This section explores the positive and challenges experiences encountered by the three lecturers in implementing the Critical Literacy Approach (CLA). Each perspective is shaped by the specific pedagogical focus and modifications introduced in their respective teaching contexts. Collectively, these reflections reveal both the transformative potential and the pedagogical tensions inherent in CLA.

Mr. AFB emphasized the development of critical thinking skills as the most significant outcome of his implementation. He viewed CLA as a cognitive defense mechanism an empowering tool that equips students to resist manipulation and misinformation, particularly in the form of hoaxes or politically motivated narratives. As he remarked:

“There are many positive aspects. First, it makes you become critical. The second positive thing is that we are not easily deceived or fooled. Because actually, hoaxes are created by those with vested interests in power. And indeed, as powerless people, we are easily influenced and fooled.” (Mr. AFB, Interview, 10 January 2025)

He further warned that students lacking critical faculties are more vulnerable to deceptive discourse, emphasizing that without a solid grasp of CLA principles, learners remain exposed to external ideological influence. Thus, he underscored the need to build foundational interpretive and analytical competencies before CLA can be fully effective.

In contrast, Mrs. FK’s account captured the emotional dynamics and sociopolitical sensitivities of critical literacy pedagogy. In a session analyzing a text about student demonstrations, she observed high levels of student engagement and dialogic participation. However, post-class feedback revealed emotional discomfort among some students who felt that the discussion was provocative and potentially supportive of activism. Though polite, they expressed concern that the topic touched too closely on controversial real-world issues:

“...after class, some students came to see me in my office. They were polite in how they spoke, but the gist of it was that they weren’t happy that I brought up the topic of student demonstrations, because it was as if I was provoking. So, the challenges experience was that the students could get ‘baper’ [overly sensitive] after all.” (Mrs. FK, Interview, 3 February 2025)

Her experience illustrates the emotional complexity of CLA, while it encourages critical engagement, it also risks triggering defensive or affective responses if not facilitated carefully. She emphasized the importance of topic sensitivity, creating psychological safety, and maintaining pedagogical neutrality when addressing politically charged content.

Mr. WWG, drawing from his literary training, used *To Kill a Mockingbird* as the central text in his critical reading class. The novel provided students with opportunities to analyze themes such as racial injustice, moral ambiguity, and systemic power. He reported strong student participation, meaningful discussions, and clear connections between literature and contemporary realities:

“My most memorable positive experience was when I taught them critical reading through a critical literacy approach using the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I see it offers many opportunities to analyze social issues and question values within society. The results were very clear in the lively discussions, the exchange of views, and the ability to connect the novel’s themes with current social realities.” (Mr. WWG, Interview, 7 February 2025)

However, this success was tempered by pedagogical and emotional obstacles. As discussions touched on colonialism and racial identity, some students expressed discomfort and questioned the relevance of the issues to their own experiences. Tensions emerged as students with opposing views debated each other, with some feeling personally criticized. Additionally, time constraints limited the depth of discussion, leaving students with lingering questions and incomplete reflections:

“Unfortunately... some students felt uncomfortable discussing these sensitive issues and showed resistance to an approach that they considered too critical or controversial... Discussions that were supposed to provide deeper understanding were

cut short and superficial, leaving students with more questions than answers.” (Mr. WWG, Interview, 7 February 2025)

This duality between literature’s critical potential and the emotional/logistical barriers in classroom discussion emphasizes that CLA’s success depends not only on content but also on the conditions for discourse. Mr. WWG’s experience reinforces the importance of student preparedness, textual relevance, and facilitation strategies that balance intellectual rigor with emotional care.

Drawing from all three narratives, the implementation of CLA in Indonesian higher education reveals a complex pedagogical duality. Positive experiences emerge when students are actively engaged, critically reflective, and able to relate classroom texts to real-world issues. In such cases, CLA fosters dialogue, ethical reasoning, and civic consciousness. Conversely, challenges experiences often stem from student resistance, emotional discomfort, or superficial engagement, challenges exacerbated by time limitations, topic sensitivity, or a mismatch between pedagogical intent and student readiness. CLA, therefore, is not a one-size-fits-all methodology. It demands flexibility, reflection, and empathy from educators to ensure that students are not only challenged intellectually but also supported emotionally in their critical literacy journeys.

Based on the interview results, the level and quality of CLA implementation among the lecturers can be examined across three key dimensions:

1. Prior exposure and understanding of Critical Literacy
2. Nature and rationale of pedagogical adaptations
3. Positive and challenges outcomes during classroom practice

These dimensions are synthesized in Table 2, which offers a comparative overview of the lecturers’ pathways, strategies, and critical incidents in implementing CLA.

Table 2. Evaluation Criteria of Experiences

Level of Experiences	Prior Experiences	Implementation Process	Positive Aspects	Challenges Aspects
High Level of Experiences	Extensive experience in teaching and applying approaches	Actively modifies and enhances existing approaches	Many benefits, such as high student engagement	Faces challenges but can find solutions
Moderate Level of Experiences	Sufficient experience but not fully engaged in innovative approaches	Follows existing approaches with minimal modifications	Some benefits can be identified	Faces challenges but does not always find solutions
Low Level of Experiences	Minimal experience in teaching or applying approaches	Does not modify approaches and follows standard methods	Struggles to identify benefits	More likely to encounter unresolved difficulties

Adapted from: (Hammond et al., 2017)

Considering the criteria presented in table 2 above, it can be concluded that the level of experiences of the three lecturers in implementing the Critical Literacy Approach in Critical Reading Classes is **High Level of Experiences**.

Discussion

Lecturers' Prior Experiences and Learning Pathways in Understanding the Critical Literacy Approach

The varying levels of prior exposure to the Critical Literacy Approach (CLA) among the three lecturers are consistent with patterns documented in both national and international literature. Mr. AFB's pathway, which began with self-directed exploration before encountering formal training during graduate studies, mirrors the experiential trajectories discussed by Weng (2023), who observed that lecturers in EFL contexts often acquire critical literacy knowledge informally before formalizing it through academic programs. Similarly, Ms. FK's iterative and reflective learning process, shaped primarily through teaching practice, aligns with Cleovoulou & Beach (2019) model of professional growth, wherein educators refine their understanding of CLA by adapting to situational classroom needs over time.

In contrast, Mr. WWG's graduate-level academic exposure, which emphasized theoretical underpinnings and contextual interpretation, exemplifies what Johnson & Keane (2023) describe as a structured institutional framework that fosters awareness of CLA's socio-political dimensions. These patterns are also echoed in Wardani (2021) studies in the Indonesian context, both of which highlight that mastery of CLA among lecturers often stems from either formal coursework or cumulative classroom experience. Thus, the data support the notion that lecturers' critical literacy expertise is multifaceted, evolving through a combination of academic, reflective, and experiential learning processes.

Pedagogical Adaptations and Rationale for Modifying the Critical Literacy Approach

All three lecturers introduced discipline-informed adaptations of the CLA framework, each reflecting distinct pedagogical aims. For instance, Mr. AFB incorporated tools from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly drawing on the works of Fairclough and Foucault, to help students uncover hidden ideologies embedded in language. This strategy aligns with what Dewi et al., (2022) describe as an epistemological deepening of the CLA, wherein critical literacy extends beyond surface-level interpretation and engages students in rigorous analytical practices that reveal power dynamics and ideological constructs within texts.

Meanwhile, Mrs. FK's emphasis on media and news literacy in her implementation of the Critical Literacy Approach (CLA) closely aligns with recent findings by Afrilyasanti et al., (2025) who advocate for integrating Critical Media Literacy (CML) into English Language Teaching (ELT) to enhance students' ability to identify misinformation and critically evaluate digital content. Their study underscores the importance of teacher-led strategies, such as using guiding questions and modeling media creation, as effective means to navigate Indonesia's increasingly complex digital landscape. This approach resonates with the Merdeka Belajar policy's call for student-centered, flexible learning and supports Mrs. FK's rationale for equipping students with tools to assess credibility, bias, and reliability in news media. Furthermore, Afrilyasanti et al., (2025) found that while Indonesian EFL students demonstrated creativity and structure in argumentative writing, they often struggled to form sound conclusions indicating a need for continued focus on critical reasoning and judgment formation. In this regard, Mrs. FK's modification of CLA through digital literacy practices represents a timely and contextually relevant pedagogical innovation.

Mr. WWG's literature-based adaptation, which emphasized empathy, ethical reflection, and social critique through narrative texts, reflects the insights of Abdel Latif

(2022). He argues that literary texts provide fertile ground for developing students' critical awareness of marginalization, identity, and power. These adaptations, though varied, are consistent with Cleovoulou & Beach (2019) and Vasquez (2017) positions that CLA is inherently flexible, allowing educators to align its core principles with disciplinary specificity and learner context. The data from this study strongly affirm the customizability of CLA without compromising its foundational goals of promoting critical inquiry and social justice in the classroom.

Positive Outcomes and Challenges in the Practical Application of Critical Literacy

The implementation of CLA across all three cases yielded both transformative educational benefits and pedagogical complexities, reinforcing the dual nature of the approach. On the one hand, the lecturers reported clear gains in student engagement, analytical depth, and the ability to connect texts to real-world issues that align with prior findings by Weng (2023) and Pupah (2023). These scholars emphasize the empowering function of CLA in EFL contexts. Weng (2023) highlights how the approach fosters interpretive autonomy and enables students to critically engage with sociopolitical discourse, while Pupah (2023) underscores its role in raising learners' awareness of linguistic hierarchies, cultural domination, and their own agency in advocating for social justice. Despite the complexities involved in implementing critical literacy which often due to its theoretical abstraction, Pupah provides practical strategies and structured frameworks to guide teachers in translating CLA theory into classroom practice, particularly in EFL reading instruction. This synthesis between theory and grounded pedagogical steps affirms the potential of CLA as both a critical and applicable instructional approach when thoughtfully contextualized.

On the other hand, the lecturers also encountered emotional, logistical, and instructional challenges. Student discomfort with controversial topics, resistance to critical viewpoints, and time constraints emerged as recurring issues in implementing the Critical Literacy Approach (CLA). Suh & Huh (2023) emphasize that successful integration of CLA in EFL contexts requires educators to carefully scaffold instruction and address emotionally sensitive content to mitigate resistance and support student voice. Similarly, Mitsikopoulou (2020) argues that without adequate preparation, scaffolding, and emotional awareness, efforts to cultivate critical literacy may fall short, especially in diverse or multicultural university settings. These findings suggest that while CLA holds strong potential for fostering deep learning, it must be implemented with emotional intelligence, structured support, and pedagogical sensitivity to classroom dynamics.

The complexity of CLA was further illuminated when cross-referenced with the researcher's previous work, Ruing et al., (2025) which examined critical reading strategies in international legal education. That study found that structured reading models such as SQ3R and Legal Case-Based Reading (LCbR) enhanced students' ability to detect bias and critique underlying assumptions. These parallels reinforce that CLA's core principles especially in terms of developing reflective, analytical readers are transferable beyond language or literature courses, and applicable in cross-disciplinary academic settings.

Moreover, the Discovery Learning Method, as explored by Damayanti et al., (2023), offers further pedagogical insights. Their study revealed that a step-by-step, inquiry-based approach characterized by problem identification, data collection, verification, and generalization not only improve reading comprehension but also fosters motivation and critical thinking. This learner-centered design shares several affinities with CLA,

particularly in its emphasis on student agency, reflective questioning, and deep meaning-making. Together, these findings suggest that blending CLA with structured, participatory frameworks may optimize both student engagement and conceptual depth.

In sum, the three lecturers' experiences demonstrate that CLA, when implemented thoughtfully, can transform reading instruction into a space for empowerment, ethical inquiry, and democratic engagement. However, it also demands a delicate balance between intellectual challenge and emotional care, as well as ongoing adaptation to evolving student needs and classroom realities.

Conclusion

This study explored the perceptions and lived experiences of three university lecturers in implementing the Critical Literacy Approach (CLA) in critical reading classes within Indonesian higher education. The findings revealed that lecturers' engagement with CLA is shaped by diverse entry points: through self-directed exploration, reflective teaching practice, or formal academic training. These differences significantly influenced how they conceptualized, modified, and enacted the approach in their classrooms. Despite these varied pathways, all participants demonstrated a clear commitment to critical pedagogy, characterized by efforts to foster student agency, analytical thinking, and sociopolitical awareness. The pedagogical adaptations observed that ranging from the use of discourse analysis and news literacy strategies to literary interpretation reflect both the flexibility and contextual responsiveness of CLA. Furthermore, the study affirmed the dual nature of CLA implementation: while it promotes deep engagement, critical reflection, and meaningful learning, it also presents emotional and instructional challenges that require thoughtful facilitation and curricular sensitivity. Importantly, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by foregrounding the lecturers' perceptions, the perspective that has been underrepresented in CLA scholarship in Indonesia. It highlights that successful CLA implementation depends not only on theoretical understanding but also on pedagogical adaptability, emotional intelligence, and institutional support.

Nevertheless, the study is limited in its small sample size and contextual scope, involving only three lecturers from English literature programs in three universities. As a qualitative case study, the findings are not intended to be generalized but rather to provide rich, situated insights into the practical realities of applying CLA in higher education.

Based on the findings, several implications for future study and educational practice can be drawn:

- For educators and institutions: Training and professional development programs that introduce CLA should be designed to include practical, context-sensitive strategies. Institutions should also consider fostering a supportive environment that encourages lecturers to address controversial topics with pedagogical safety and clarity.
- For policy-makers: There is a need for curriculum frameworks that integrate critical literacy not only at the tertiary level but across disciplines and educational stages, particularly in the face of increasing misinformation in digital spaces.
- For future researchers: Further studies could expand the sample across different regions and disciplines, including STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) and social sciences, to examine how CLA functions beyond

language and literature contexts. Comparative studies between novice and experienced lecturers could also shed light on the development of critical pedagogy over time.

- For curriculum developers: It is recommended to explore the integration of CLA with structured reading models such as SQ3R, LCBR, or Discovery Learning to enhance students' engagement, comprehension, and critical response.

In closing, this study underscores the importance of viewing critical literacy not as a fixed method, but as an evolving pedagogical stance that is shaped by educators' professional identities, contextual realities, and reflective practices. Its implementation requires not only conceptual understanding but also courage, creativity, and care.

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