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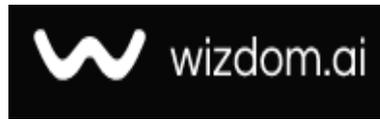
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EFL Students Perceptions of Online Articles for Critical Reading: Persepsi Mahasiswa EFL terhadap Artikel Online dalam Membaca Kritis

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Abstract

General Background: In the digital transformation era, critical reading has become a key higher-order literacy skill required to evaluate abundant online information. **Specific Background:** Despite increased access to digital resources, Indonesian EFL students still demonstrate limited critical reading competence, particularly in interpreting and evaluating academic texts. **Knowledge Gap:** Existing studies predominantly emphasize learning outcomes and instructional methods, while limited attention is given to students' perceptions as a psycho-pedagogical factor underlying the gap between digital access and critical literacy. **Aims:** This study aims to analyze EFL students' perceptions of using online articles to develop critical reading skills. **Results:** Using a quantitative descriptive design with 31 undergraduate students and a 17-item questionnaire (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.881), findings show mean scores ranging from 2.81 to 3.61, indicating generally positive perceptions. Students reported that online articles support identifying main ideas, analyzing arguments, and evaluating information credibility; however, difficulties remain in articulating deeper interpretations. **Novelty:** This study addresses the Digital Literacy Paradox by highlighting the discrepancy between frequent use of online resources and limited critical engagement from a perception-based perspective. **Implications:** The findings suggest that while online articles serve as valuable tools for critical reading and digital literacy development, educators should incorporate targeted strategies such as reflective writing and guided analysis to foster deeper interpretation skills.

Highlights:

- Positive learner attitudes toward digital texts in academic reading contexts
- Analytical ability supported, yet deeper explanation remains limited
- Evidence of gap between access frequency and higher-order literacy

Keywords: Online Articles; Critical Reading Skills; EFL Students; Digital Literacy; Student Perception

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Introduction

In this era of rapid digital transformation, critical reading skills have become an essential competency for students, especially when faced with the unlimited flow of information in the virtual world [1]. Critical reading skills are not merely basic literacy skills, but rather higher-order thinking skills that enable individuals to weigh, analyze, and respond to various texts with reflective and argumentative thinking[2].

Digital transformation does indeed provide easy access to various sources of knowledge, but on the other hand, it poses new challenges in terms of the ability to interpret, analyze, and evaluate information in depth [3][4]. In today's world where people are constantly exposed to an overwhelming amount of information students regularly encounter texts that differ widely in perspective and writing style and trustworthiness [5]. Against this backdrop the ability to read critically becomes indispensable because it cultivates a mindset that is reflective and questioning and grounded in careful analysis. Scholars in the field have long argued that critical reading stands out as a fundamental competency for the 21st century precisely because it demands more than just grasping what a text says. Readers must also weigh the strength of the author's reasoning and arrive at judgments supported by solid evidence.

Despite growing recognition of how important critical reading is Indonesia's overall literacy performance continues to lag behind expectations. The results of the 2022 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that the reading skills of Indonesian students are still below the average of OECD member countries [7]. This indicates that most Indonesian students still focus on literal understanding of texts and not many have mastered analytical and evaluative skills. Similar findings were revealed by the UNESCO Survey (2022), which showed that the reading interest of Indonesians is still at an alarming level[8]. This low reading interest has implications for the weak critical thinking culture among students.

This condition is also reflected in the context of learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia. In English reading instruction, many students still struggle to interpret implied meaning, understand author bias, and evaluate arguments in academic texts [9][10]. The national education curriculum has actually placed critical thinking skills as one of the core competencies, but its implementation in the field still faces various obstacles, such as limited relevant teaching materials, conventional teaching methods, and low integration of digital literacy in teaching and learning activities [11].

In addition , Handayani highlighted that many EFL lecturers in Indonesia still use traditional teaching methods that emphasize vocabulary memorization and literal comprehension, so that students have fewer opportunities to explore readings critically [12]. As a result, students tend to receive information passively without attempting to analyze, evaluate, or relate the content of the text to a broader social and cultural context. This teaching approach has the potential to hinder the development of higher-order thinking skills needed in the modern academic world. In the past five years, various studies have attempted to explore innovative strategies to improve the critical reading skills of EFL students in Indonesia. One approach that has begun to be widely used is the integration of digital technology in the learning process, including the use of online articles as learning resources. [13]found that the use of critical literacy-based materials developed

from authentic digital sources can improve students' analytical and reflective skills in relation to texts. Meanwhile, research by [14] shows that students who are accustomed to using online articles in their reading activities demonstrate a significant improvement in their ability to evaluate arguments and identify author bias.

Globally, the use of online articles in learning has been proven to provide benefits in improving critical reading skills. For example, research conducted by [15], The quantitative data in this study were analyzed using mean values, standard deviation (SD), and paired t-tests (dependent t-tests). The results of the analysis show that the efficiency of online-based reading learning meets the success standard of 75/75. Furthermore when looking at academic achievement data it became clear that students' reading scores on the post test administered after they had engaged in online learning activities rose considerably compared to their pre test scores with the difference reaching statistical significance at the 0.05 level. Students themselves reported feeling quite satisfied with the online reading approach noting that they found it practical and beneficial for strengthening their reading capabilities. However, in the Indonesian context, the integration of online articles into EFL learning still faces various challenges. [16] mentions that most higher education institutions do not yet have clear operational guidelines on how online resources can be used effectively to improve students' critical thinking skills. In addition, the culture of reading among students is still low, as found in research. [17] Research in this area has revealed a troubling pattern. While over seventy percent of EFL learners make regular use of digital materials only roughly one third demonstrate the ability to engage with texts at a critical level. This gap highlights a disconnect between how frequently students access digital content and how effectively they are able to process it in the Indonesian context.

Yogyakarta is widely recognized as one of Indonesia's key hubs for higher education and it mirrors this broader trend. Provincial statistics indicate that the region is home to more than fifty universities drawing a large and diverse student body. A preliminary investigation conducted in 2024 found that around 72% of EFL students in Yogyakarta regularly turned to online articles for academic purposes yet only 34% could critically engage with the material they consumed. These numbers make it clear that simply having access to digital content does not translate into stronger critical reading abilities. What matters is the presence of well designed teaching approaches that guide learners toward processing information reflectively and evaluatively.

Within this educational landscape incorporating online articles into classroom instruction emerges as a promising avenue for nurturing the critical reading capacities of EFL learners. These articles offer authentic and context rich material that connects to students' everyday experiences which in turn can boost their motivation to participate actively in reading tasks. When exposure to online texts is paired with opportunities for online discussion students gain the chance to sharpen their critical thinking through collaborative dialogue and the sharing of diverse viewpoints. Research by [18] supports this view by showing that digital discussion-based learning can improve students' ability to analyze and evaluate academic texts.

However, most existing studies still focus on the effectiveness of learning methods or learning outcomes, while studies examining students' perceptions of the use of online articles in developing critical reading skills are still very limited. In fact, student perceptions play an important role in determining the success of implementing new learning methods. Positive perceptions can increase motivation, participation, and learning outcomes, while negative perceptions can actually hinder student engagement in the learning process [19].

The sharp research gap (scientific novelty) is rooted in the Digital Literacy Paradox that occurs in the context of higher education. Despite a massive quantitative increase in access to digital resources—where the majority of EFL students actively use online articles as academic references—this has systematically failed to translate into high critical reading competence (Higher-Order Thinking Skills or HOTS). Existing research tends to focus too much on external variables, such as the effectiveness of teaching methods and measurable learning outcomes, leaving a crucial analytical void: the failure to further explain the psycho-pedagogical mechanisms underlying persistent critical failures.

Current research has not been able to bridge the gap between why students (who have mastered basic information-seeking competencies) fail to transition to a higher level of literacy, namely the ability to evaluate, analyze bias, and use information ethically. Based on this background, this study aims to analyze students' perceptions of the use of online articles in developing critical reading skills in an EFL learning environment, particularly in Yogyakarta. This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of the concepts of digital literacy and technology-based language learning.

Method

A. Research Design

This study uses a quantitative descriptive design that aims to describe students' perceptions of the use of online articles in developing critical reading skills. According to [20], quantitative descriptive research is used to collect numerical data that describes the tendencies, attitudes, or opinions of a population through analysis of a representative sample. In line with this, [21] explain that descriptive research is conducted to systematically describe the characteristics of a phenomenon as it is, without manipulation or treatment by the researcher. In the context of this study, the researchers collected data through questionnaires given to students to measure their perceptions of the use of online articles as a medium for improving critical reading skills. The data obtained was analyzed then quantitatively to produce an objective description of the students' attitudes and experiences, thus providing a factual picture of their views on the integration of online sources in reading learning.

B. Sample population

The participants in this study were drawn from the undergraduate population specifically those who had already completed English reading courses during their third semester. Selection followed a convenience sampling approach which is a nonprobability method where individuals are included based on how easily

they can be reached and their willingness to take part. This technique is considered appropriate in situations where researchers face time within tight time frames and limited resources while still needing access to respondents who can offer meaningful insights. [22] Methodological literature supports this view noting that convenience sampling allows for efficient data collection from groups that are readily available. [23] It should be acknowledged however that because participants are not chosen at random this approach carries the risk of selection bias and may constrain how broadly the results can be applied. As noted by Sampling: Design and Analysis, nonprobability sampling restricts the ability to make statistical generalizations beyond the sampled group. Therefore, the results of this study should be interpreted as applicable primarily to students with similar characteristics.

C. Research Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire that contained statements related to students' perceptions of using online articles to improve critical reading skills. Creswell [24] stated "questionnaire is a form used in a survey design that asks the participants to complete and return to the researcher". In this research, the researcher adapted the questionnaire from the previous study conducted by[25], [26]and[27]. The questionnaire is a closed type by using Likert scale as the scoring method. The questionnaire is comprised of 7 categories and divided into 17 statements. The questionnaire used a 4-point Likert scale to measure the degree of agreement, as shown below: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The researcher will use Google form to distribute the questionnaire in order to make the researcher easy to analyze the data while making the report.

Table 1. *Category Items and Corresponding Statement Numbers*

No	Category
1.	Online Article Submission as a Learning Medium. (S1, S2, S3)
2.	Development of Critical Analysis Skills. (S4, S5)
3.	Reliance on Digital Media as a Compensation Strategy. (S6, S7)
4.	Weaknesses of Metacognitive Reading Strategies. (S8, S9)
5.	The Role of Scaffolding in Improving Understanding. (S10, S11, S12)
6.	Difficulty in explaining the meaning of critical reading (S13, S14)
7.	Strengthening Digital Literacy and Information Evaluation (S15, S16, S17)

Note: Table 1 presents the seven thematic categories and the corresponding statement numbers (S1–S17) used in the questionnaire.

Prior to its deployment the instrument underwent a validation process involving two specialists in English education who assessed it for clarity and relevance. Internal consistency was evaluated through Cronbach's Alpha and the resulting coefficient of 0.70 or higher confirmed that the instrument met acceptable reliability standards.

D. Technique of Data Collection

Researchers distributed questionnaires to students after they completed reading activities using online articles. Students were asked to answer each statement honestly [28]. The questionnaire results showed students' perceptions of the use of online articles in developing critical reading skills. To begin, researchers provided explanations on how to answer the questionnaire. Data were obtained from research instruments. Once participants had completed the questionnaire the responses gathered through Google Forms were compiled and examined. The analysis focused on the percentage distribution of answers across each item enabling the researchers to paint a descriptive picture of how participants responded. Across the sample students exhibited varying viewpoints about the potential of online articles as tools for cultivating critical reading skills. The analytical approach relied on descriptive statistics specifically frequency counts and percentage breakdowns and mean score calculations.

Mean scores were interpreted according to a predefined set of criteria:

Table 2. *Likert Scale Classification for Interpretation*

Mean Range	Category	Interpretation
16.01 – 20.00	Very High	Strong positive perception/need
12.01 – 16.00	High	Positive perception/need
8.01 – 12.00	Moderate	Average or neutral perception/need
4.00 – 8.00	Low	Weak perception/need

Result And Discussion

A. Results

The research instrument consisting of 17 statements regarding students' perceptions of the use of online articles in developing critical reading skills was tested for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha . The analysis results showed that the Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.881 , which indicates that the instrument has a very high level of internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.8$) and is suitable for use in research data collection.

Table 3. *Results of Instrument Reliability Test*

Reliability statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Item
.881	17

The reliability value shows that each item in the questionnaire is positively correlated and consistent in measuring the same perception, namely the effectiveness of using online articles in students' critical reading learning.

Descriptive analysis was conducted to describe the tendency of respondents' responses to each statement using minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation (SD) values.

Table 4. *Descriptive Statistics of Items (N = 31)*

Description	Items	Mean	SD
Utilization of Technology and Online Media	1- 3	3.24	.597
Critical Reading Strategies	4 - 8	3.08	.590
Text Comprehension and Analysis	9 - 17	3.07	.554

Item-Total Statistics analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which each item contributes to the overall consistency of the scale. In examining the item level statistics the Corrected Item Total Correlation column captured how strongly each individual item related to the overall scale score with that item excluded. Meanwhile the Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted column indicated what overall reliability would look like if a given item were dropped.

Most items showed corrected correlations above the 0.3 threshold confirming solid discrimination and a positive relationship with the total scale. Items S15 and S17 stood out with the strongest correlations at 0.724 and 0.655 respectively suggesting they were the most representative of the construct being measured. On the other end S3 had the weakest correlation at 0.160 meaning it contributed relatively little to overall reliability. Still since the Alpha if Item Deleted value for S3 at 0.890 did not exceed 0.9 removing it would not have meaningfully improved the instrument so it was retained.

B. Discussion

1. Overall Perception and Instrument Reliability

The results of the study indicate that students' perceptions of the use of online articles in developing critical reading skills are in the positive category , with an overall average of , falling into the "Agree" category. Taken together these results suggest that the majority of students are convinced that working with online articles enhances their capacity to comprehend and analyze and critically assess academic texts in a thoughtful and reflective manner.

The overall Cronbach's Alpha of 0.881 speaks to the strong internal consistency of the questionnaire indicating that the individual items work well together in measuring a unified construct of student perception. Based on the item-total correlation , most items have values above 0.30, the general threshold used to indicate good item validity [25]. The highest correlation values are found in items S15 (0.724) and S17 (0.655), This shows that students' ability to connect the content of online articles with their prior knowledge and their

ability to understand the main ideas in depth are key indicators of a positive perception of the use of digital media in critical reading learning.

What stands out from these findings is that students are not simply reading to absorb information. They are actively engaging in analysis and connecting what they read to their prior knowledge and experiences. This kind of engagement supports the development of logical and evidence driven conclusions and appears to bolster students' confidence when it comes to presenting and defending their ideas. Thus, the higher the students' ability to analyze and draw conclusions based on evidence from the reading, the more positive their perception of the effectiveness of online articles as a medium for critical reading learning.

Meanwhile, item S3 (0.160) has the lowest contribution to the total scale, has the lowest contribution to the total scale, indicating that the initial strategy of understanding the main idea before reading has not been consistently implemented by some students. This condition indicates that some students still find it difficult to apply a systematic reading approach to printed reading materials (print-outs).

Instead, when faced with difficulties in understanding the reading material, students tend to seek help through online media such as online articles or other digital sources. This shows a dependence on digital sources to support understanding, rather than as part of a planned reading strategy. In other words, the use of online media serves as compensation for the weak application of metacognitive strategies in reading academic texts conventionally..

The high overall reliability indicates that students' experiences in using online articles are quite homogeneous and consistent, especially among EFL students who are starting to integrate digital reading materials into their daily academic activities. This is in line with Tinmaz et al.'s [5] statement that digital literacy is not only about the ability to access information, but also about the ability to evaluate and use information critically in an academic context.

2. Linking Mean Score Differences to Specific Learning Behaviors

The descriptive results show that item S4 (mean = 3.61) has the highest score, indicating that the majority of students agree that reading texts from simple to complex helps them think analytically. This strategy reflects the scaffolded reading approach , which is a gradual learning process that facilitates mastery of higher -order thinking skills . This finding supports Khongtan's research [17] which proves that the application of metacognitive strategies in online reading learning can improve students' abilities in planning and evaluating the process of understanding texts independently.

Item S6 (mean = 2.81) had the lowest score, which concerns the ability to explain the meaning or significance of the reading. This indicates that although students can understand the content of the reading, some still have difficulty articulating that understanding critically and deeply. This is consistent with Handayani's findings [15], which state that most EFL lecturers in Indonesia still apply conventional methods that emphasize vocabulary memorization and literal understanding rather than evaluative ones. As a result, students are accustomed to receiving information passively without assessing the author's arguments or biases.

Critical literacy- based teaching materials from authentic digital sources can improve students' analytical and reflective skills. In this way online articles go beyond serving as passive reading material. They become instruments of critical engagement prompting students to question and analyze and evaluate authorial perspectives in a reflective manner.

The notable 0.80 point difference between the highest rated item S4 with a mean of 3.61 and the lowest rated item S6 with a mean of 2.81 carries meaningful implications for teaching practice. This disparity suggests that learners feel relatively confident when applying structured and step by step reading strategies that move from simpler to more complex texts but they encounter real difficulty when asked to independently articulate the deeper significance of their reading. In practical terms this means that while the current use of online articles may do a good job of supporting basic comprehension and analytical sequencing it falls short when it comes to fostering genuine interpretive depth. From a pedagogical standpoint there is a clear need for direct instruction in skills related to reflective articulation. Think of guided summarization exercises and critical annotation tasks and think aloud techniques all of which can help bridge the gap between analytical reading and genuine critical expression.

3. Digital Literacy, Critical Reading, and the Indonesian Context

In general, the results of this study indicate that the use of online articles has become an important platform for developing critical thinking skills, especially in the digital learning era where academic texts are available in online formats and easily accessible to students on various platforms.

Students who have a positive perception of the use of online articles generally show better reflective skills in understanding main ideas, distinguishing between facts and opinions, and assessing the credibility of reading sources. This phenomenon is in line with the concept of the digital literacy framework explained by Pilgrim and Martinez [21], that digital literacy in the 21st century requires not only reading skills, but also the ability to assess the reliability, bias, and ethical value of the information consumed.

Within the Indonesian setting the persistently low level of reading literacy poses a distinct challenge for universities. Even though digital resources are more widely available than ever not every student possesses the skills to filter and evaluate and synthesize information with a critical eye. Some researchers have described this as a kind of Digital Literacy Paradox which refers to a situation in which greater digital access does not automatically produce stronger critical thinking abilities. [18]

This research offers concrete evidence that when students view online articles favorably it may signal their readiness to engage meaningfully within digital learning environments. When learners report that online articles help them dissect arguments and spot potential author bias they are essentially putting critical literacy principles into practice in a digital setting. Such findings align well with international assessments that position digital literacy as a cornerstone of critical thinking development in contemporary education.

These findings reinforce the research findings of Ilyas and Arifin [7], who found that students who were accustomed to using online articles showed significant improvements in their ability to evaluate arguments and distinguish between facts and opinions. Furthermore, these results are also in line with global

research by Khongtan [17], which proved that online-based reading learning with metacognitive strategies improved students' analytical abilities at a significance level of 0.05.

Meanwhile, nationally, research by Rizqiani and Yuliani [14] found that the use of critical literacy-based teaching materials in EFL classes was able to improve students' analytical and reflective abilities regarding academic texts. Altogether these results reinforce the idea that weaving digital media into instructional practice does more than simply motivate learners. It also enriches their experience of critical thinking.

4. Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations

At the same time the data brings to light emerging pedagogical needs. Even though students hold positive views overall the comparatively low scores on items measuring the ability to explain meaning in depth particularly S6 point to a pressing need for more targeted practice in reflective articulation. Accordingly the use of online articles in the classroom should be complemented by activities such as reflective writing assignments and peer review sessions. These additions would help ensure that students move beyond simply understanding content to being able to express their critical interpretations in an academically rigorous way.

From a scholarly perspective this work demonstrates that favorable student perceptions of online articles can serve as a valuable starting point for strengthening digital literacy curricula. Higher education institutions could leverage online articles within project based learning frameworks and reflective discussion formats fostering a deeper critical awareness of both global and local issues among their students.

On the pedagogical front these findings highlight the importance of collaborative efforts between instructors and learners when it comes to integrating authentic digital sources into coursework. Instructors can take on the role of facilitators guiding students as they navigate the digital information landscape and identify potential biases and evaluate source credibility. This shifts the focus of reading instruction away from text comprehension alone and toward the cultivation of thinking skills that are critical and creative and ethically grounded.

This approach is consistent with the concept of constructive learning proposed by Ilyas and Arifin (2024) [16], namely learning that positions students as active subjects who construct knowledge through interaction with an authentic learning environment. In this context, online articles act as authentic media that can bring together theory, data, and student reflections simultaneously.

Conclusion

This In summary this study reveals that EFL students hold a generally positive view of how online articles contribute to their critical reading development. These digital texts support learners in identifying key ideas and analyzing and understanding arguments and evaluating information with greater reflection. Authentic digital materials also play a role in strengthening digital literacy and encouraging evidence based reasoning. Moving forward it would be beneficial to incorporate active learning strategies more deliberately. Reflective writing tasks can help students express their understanding more thoroughly. Guided questioning techniques can sharpen their ability to assess content and detect author bias. Group discussions can promote

the exchange of diverse perspectives and the strengthening of argumentation skills. Ultimately integrating online articles into instruction contributes not only to improved reading comprehension but also to the broader development of analytical thinking within English language education.

It is important to acknowledge however that this study is not without its constraints. The relatively small participant pool and the focus on a single educational context mean that the findings are best understood as reflective of the specific group studied rather than broadly generalizable. Moreover because the data draws on student perceptions rather than direct performance assessments it does not fully capture the extent of students' actual critical reading abilities when confronted with real tasks

Thank-you Note

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