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INTEGRATING INDONESIAN HISTORICAL NARRATIVES INTO EFL READING INSTRUCTION: EFFECTS ON SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' CRITICAL READING SKILLS

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Abstract: This study examined the effect of integrating Indonesian historical narratives into EFL reading instruction on senior high school students' critical reading skills. A quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test control group design was employed. The participants were 60 Grade XI students at SMA 2 Muhammadiyah Palembang, Indonesia, comprising 30 students in an experimental group and 30 students in a control group. The experimental group received EFL reading instruction integrating Indonesian historical narratives with explicit critical reading activities, whereas the control group received conventional EFL reading instruction. Data were collected using a critical reading test administered before and after the intervention. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, an independent-samples t test for baseline comparison, assumption tests, and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), with pre-test scores entered as the covariate. The experimental group's mean score increased from 56.68 (SD = 6.30) on the pre-test to 66.24 (SD = 6.02) on the post-test, whereas the control group increased from 56.15 (SD = 6.52) to 61.78 (SD = 6.24). The baseline comparison indicated no significant difference between the groups, $t(58) = 0.321$, $p = .749$. ANCOVA revealed a statistically significant effect of instructional group on post-test critical reading performance after controlling for pre-test scores, $F(1, 57) = 11.190$, $p = .001$, $\eta p^2 = .164$, indicating a moderate-to-large effect. The findings suggest that integrating Indonesian historical narratives with explicit critical reading activities can enhance students' critical reading performance in EFL contexts. Culturally and historically contextualized English reading materials may provide meaningful contexts for developing students' abilities to identify claims and evidence, make inferences, interpret perspectives, evaluate information, and construct evidence-based reasoning. The study contributes pedagogically by demonstrating the potential of culturally relevant materials for critical reading instruction and theoretically by supporting the role of contextualized content in promoting higher-order reading processes.

Keywords: *Indonesian historical narratives; EFL reading instruction; critical reading skills; cultural relevance; quasi-experimental study.*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it enables learners to develop linguistic knowledge, construct meaning, access information, and engage with diverse ideas through written texts. However, effective reading instruction should extend beyond the ability to identify explicitly stated information or reproduce the literal meaning of a text. Contemporary reading literacy requires learners to understand, use, evaluate, and reflect on texts, including the ability to distinguish information, interpret meaning, evaluate claims and evidence, recognize perspectives, and construct reasoned responses. These competencies are increasingly important in an information-rich environment in which learners encounter diverse and sometimes competing sources of information.

The importance of developing such competencies is particularly evident in the Indonesian educational context, where national reading performance remains a significant concern.

The results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 provide an important indication of this challenge. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023), only approximately 25% of Indonesian 15-year-old students attained Level 2 or higher in reading, compared with 74% across OECD countries. Moreover, almost no Indonesian students reached Level 5 or higher, a level associated with the ability to comprehend lengthy and complex texts and to distinguish between fact and opinion using implicit information from the text or its source. Indonesian students' mean reading performance was also substantially below the OECD average. These findings do not necessarily indicate a direct deficit in critical reading instruction at individual schools, but they demonstrate a broader national need to strengthen higher-order reading competencies. Consequently, EFL reading instruction in Indonesian secondary schools needs pedagogical approaches that provide students with systematic opportunities to interpret, evaluate, compare, and reason from textual evidence.

Critical reading represents an important extension of conventional reading comprehension because it requires readers to actively interrogate textual information rather than simply retrieve meaning. Critical readers examine how information is presented, identify claims and supporting evidence, recognize perspectives and possible biases, make inferences, distinguish factual statements from interpretations, connect textual information with prior knowledge, and formulate reasoned judgments. Such processes are consistent with broader conceptualizations of contemporary reading literacy, which emphasize evaluating and reflecting on texts and navigating distinctions between fact and opinion. Recent empirical research in EFL education also supports the value of explicit critical reading instruction. Ilyas et al. (2025), for example, demonstrated that literary texts combined with reader-response activities encouraged learners to engage in reflection, analysis, interpretation, commenting, and reasoning. Similarly, Bakhtiari Moghadam et al. (2023) reported that critical-thinking-oriented intervention contributed to improvements in learners' critical thinking and reading comprehension. Ahmad et al. (2026) further emphasized the importance of moving Indonesian EFL learners beyond conventional comprehension toward more analytical and reflective engagement with texts. Collectively, these studies suggest that critical reading is not automatically developed through exposure to English texts; rather, it requires instructional activities that deliberately engage learners in higher-order interpretation and evaluation.

The choice of reading materials is also important in supporting such processes. Texts that are culturally meaningful and connected to learners' existing knowledge may provide a more accessible context for constructing meaning and engaging in interpretation. In the Indonesian EFL context, recent studies have increasingly investigated culturally responsive materials and local knowledge as resources for language and literacy development. Paulina et al. (2025), for instance, developed local-wisdom-based instructional materials and reported their potential for improving students' reading skills. Faliyanti et al. (2026) examined a culture-schema-based reading approach and demonstrated the potential of integrating local wisdom to support critical literacy. Sangaji et al. (2023) similarly highlighted the potential of local narratives for culturally grounded literacy development. These studies are important because they demonstrate that cultural familiarity can function as an interpretive resource rather than merely as supplementary content. Nevertheless, their primary emphasis has generally been on local wisdom, cultural schemas, or local narratives rather than on systematically using historical narratives as a mechanism for developing multidimensional critical reading skills.

Narrative texts offer a particularly relevant pedagogical resource because they organize information through events, characters, conflicts, viewpoints, causes, consequences, and social meanings. Such features can encourage learners to move beyond literal comprehension and examine relationships among information and perspectives. Mahalia et al. (2024), for example, developed local-folklore-based reading materials for senior high school students, demonstrating the potential of culturally familiar narratives in EFL reading instruction. Hanan et al. (2024) also investigated task-based reading materials designed to promote critical thinking in extensive reading classes. Although these studies demonstrate the value of narrative and task-based materials for higher-order learning, they do not specifically establish how Indonesian historical narratives can be systematically integrated with explicit critical

reading activities. Thus, the existing literature provides evidence for the value of cultural content, narrative materials, and critical-thinking-oriented instruction, but the intersection of these three elements remains insufficiently investigated.

Indonesian historical narratives are particularly promising because they combine narrative structures with representations of real people, events, places, social changes, and cultural experiences. When transformed into English reading texts, they can simultaneously provide linguistic input and meaningful contextual knowledge. More importantly, historical narratives can create authentic opportunities for students to interrogate evidence, identify the perspectives represented in an account, distinguish factual information from interpretation, compare representations of events, infer relationships between causes and consequences, and evaluate the credibility and adequacy of textual claims. In this way, historical narratives can function not simply as culturally familiar reading content but as pedagogical resources for developing critical reading processes. Their educational value therefore extends beyond increasing students' cultural awareness; they may provide a substantive context in which students practice analytical, interpretive, evaluative, and evidence-based reading.

The state of the art indicates several important tendencies in the existing literature. First, studies on critical reading and critical literacy have established the importance of explicit instructional activities for developing higher-order engagement with texts (Ahmad et al., 2026; Bakhtiari Moghadam et al., 2023; Ilyas et al., 2025). Second, research on local wisdom and culturally responsive materials has demonstrated that culturally familiar content can support reading development and critical literacy (Faliyanti et al., 2026; Paulina et al., 2025). Third, research on local folklore and narrative materials has demonstrated the pedagogical potential of culturally grounded narratives for EFL learners (Mahalia et al., 2024; Sangaji et al., 2023). However, these strands of research have largely developed separately. Critical reading studies have tended to emphasize instructional strategies and cognitive processes; culturally responsive studies have focused primarily on local wisdom and cultural relevance; and narrative-based studies have often emphasized comprehension or general literacy outcomes. Consequently, there is still limited empirical evidence demonstrating whether historically grounded Indonesian narratives, when systematically integrated with explicit critical reading activities, produce measurable improvements in EFL students' critical reading performance.

The central research gap addressed by the present study is therefore the limited empirical examination of Indonesian historical narratives as systematically integrated EFL reading materials for developing multidimensional critical reading skills among senior high school students. Existing research has established the value of critical-literacy instruction, culturally responsive materials, local wisdom, and narrative texts, but relatively little attention has been given to their integration through historical narratives and their effects on students' critical reading performance. This gap matters because historical narratives offer distinctive textual characteristics including events, evidence, perspectives, interpretations, and competing representations that correspond closely with the cognitive processes required for critical reading. Addressing this gap can therefore provide empirical evidence about whether cultural and historical contextualization can move beyond enhancing students' familiarity with content and actually contribute to measurable development in critical reading.

Based on this gap, the present study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. To what extent does the integration of Indonesian historical narratives into EFL reading instruction improve senior high school students' critical reading skills compared with conventional EFL reading instruction?

RQ2. How does students' improvement in critical reading manifest across the targeted dimensions of critical reading, including inference, evidence evaluation, interpretation, perspective recognition, and evidence-based reasoning?

The novelty of this study lies in its systematic integration of Indonesian historical narratives, explicit critical reading activities, and empirical measurement of critical reading outcomes within an EFL secondary-school context. Unlike previous studies that have primarily focused on local wisdom, folklore, cultural schemas, or general narrative materials, the present study positions historical narratives as a central instructional resource and examines their effects on students' critical reading development. The study therefore connects cultural and historical contextualization with explicit higher-order reading processes rather than treating cultural

content as an additional or decorative component of EFL materials. This integration provides a distinctive contribution to research on culturally responsive EFL pedagogy and critical literacy.

The study has theoretical, pedagogical, and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to the literature on EFL reading and critical literacy by providing empirical evidence concerning the relationship between culturally and historically contextualized reading materials and students' critical reading development. It also extends existing discussions of culturally responsive pedagogy by demonstrating how historical content can be connected directly to higher-order reading processes such as inference, evidence evaluation, interpretation, perspective recognition, and reasoning.

Pedagogically, the findings may assist EFL teachers in designing reading lessons that move beyond literal comprehension by combining culturally meaningful texts with explicit critical reading questions, evidence analysis, perspective analysis, discussion, and reflection. The approach may also provide teachers with a framework for transforming Indonesian historical events, figures, places, and sociocultural developments into meaningful English reading resources.

Practically, the findings may inform curriculum developers and educational material designers in developing culturally responsive EFL reading materials for secondary education. The study may also provide empirical evidence for considering Indonesian historical narratives as potential resources within English curricula, particularly where the curriculum seeks to strengthen literacy, critical thinking, cultural awareness, and students' ability to evaluate information. For policymakers and educational institutions, the findings may provide a basis for supporting the development of locally contextualized English learning resources that address both language-learning objectives and broader literacy demands.

Accordingly, the present study investigates the effects of integrating Indonesian historical narratives into EFL reading instruction on senior high school students' critical reading skills. Using a quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test control group design, the study compares students receiving historically contextualized EFL reading instruction with those receiving conventional reading instruction. By examining this intervention empirically, the study seeks to contribute to English Language Pedagogy, English Language Literacy, Second and Foreign Language Pedagogy, and Sociocultural Factors and English Education while providing practical evidence for the development of culturally responsive approaches to critical reading instruction in Indonesian secondary schools.

Reading instruction in EFL contexts has increasingly moved beyond the transmission of linguistic knowledge toward the development of learners' ability to interpret, analyze, evaluate, and respond critically to written texts. Critical reading requires learners to engage actively with textual information by examining meanings, perspectives, claims, evidence, and implications rather than simply identifying explicitly stated information. Ilyas et al. (2025), for example, found that the use of literary works through a reader-response approach encouraged EFL learners to demonstrate several dimensions of critical reading, including reflecting, analyzing, interpreting, commenting, and reasoning. These findings suggest that critical reading can be developed when learners are provided with texts and classroom activities that require them to construct and justify interpretations rather than merely answer comprehension questions.

Recent research also indicates that critical reading development is closely associated with the nature of instructional activities and the relevance of reading materials. Muhria et al. (2026) found that recontextualizing EFL reading instruction through local wisdom and problem-based learning supported students' comprehension and engagement, although gains in inferential and critical reading were more uneven. The study highlights that culturally familiar content alone may not automatically produce critical reading; learners also need instructional activities that explicitly require analysis, inference, reasoning, and problem solving.

Cultural relevance has become an important consideration in EFL reading because learners interpret texts through their existing knowledge and experiences. Reading materials that are culturally distant may increase cognitive difficulty, whereas familiar cultural contexts can provide meaningful background knowledge for constructing textual meaning. Sukun et al. (2026), in a needs analysis of vocational students in Eastern Indonesia, found that students experienced difficulties with complex English texts and factual materials that lacked cultural relevance. The students expressed preferences for reading materials connected to local folktales, traditions, regional history, and their everyday environments. These findings indicate that culturally relevant materials may provide a

stronger connection between learners' background knowledge and English reading tasks.

The relationship between cultural relevance and critical literacy has also been demonstrated empirically. Faliyanti et al. (2026) developed a culture-schema-based reading model that integrated local wisdom into EFL instruction. Their findings indicated that the approach improved reading comprehension and produced advantages across critical-literacy dimensions, while qualitative findings suggested that culturally recognizable content supported cognitive bridging, cultural interpretation, emotional engagement, and identity affirmation. Thus, local wisdom can function not merely as contextual content but as an interpretive resource through which learners engage more analytically and reflectively with English texts.

Narratives are particularly useful in reading instruction because they provide contextualized representations of events, people, experiences, conflicts, and social values. When learners interact with narratives, they can move from understanding what happened to interpreting why events occurred, considering different perspectives, and evaluating the meanings constructed through the text. In Indonesian EFL contexts, local narratives have been used to connect literacy instruction with learners' cultural backgrounds. Sangaji et al. (2023), for example, examined local culture-based literacy instruction using Ternate's oral traditions, royal histories, and maritime folklore. Their study emphasized the potential of local narratives to move students beyond literal comprehension toward deeper, culturally grounded critical reading.

The use of culturally relevant narratives is also consistent with recent developments in reading-material design. Sukun et al. (2026) reported that students in Eastern Indonesia preferred reading materials incorporating local folktales, traditions, and regional history, while also valuing activities such as discussion, summarizing, highlighting keywords, and strategy modeling. Such findings provide support for designing EFL reading instruction around narratives that are meaningful to learners while incorporating activities that encourage active interpretation and discussion.

Indonesian historical narratives provide a particularly promising form of culturally contextualized reading material because they combine narrative structure with historical events, cultural identity, social change, and multiple possible perspectives. Historical narratives can therefore provide opportunities for students to examine not only what happened but also how an event is represented in a particular text. Students can be encouraged to identify claims, examine evidence, distinguish factual information from interpretation, recognize perspectives, compare accounts, and formulate conclusions based on textual evidence. These processes correspond closely to the analytical and evaluative dimensions of critical reading.

The pedagogical relevance of historical and culturally grounded narratives is supported by recent Indonesian research. Sangaji et al. (2023) demonstrated the use of royal histories and local cultural narratives in critical reading instruction, while Sukun et al. (2026) identified regional history as one of the culturally relevant topics preferred by Indonesian EFL learners. In addition, recent work on local-wisdom-based reading demonstrates that culturally grounded texts can strengthen comprehension while creating opportunities for deeper interpretation and critical literacy (Faliyanti et al., 2026).

However, the existing literature suggests that cultural relevance and critical reading should not be treated as automatically interconnected. Muhria et al. (2026) found that local-wisdom-based reading supported comprehension, engagement, and cultural relevance, but students' development of inferential and critical reading was less consistent. This finding is important because it suggests that historical narratives need to be accompanied by carefully designed pedagogical activities that explicitly direct students toward analysis, interpretation, evaluation, and reasoning. Therefore, the present study does not conceptualize Indonesian historical narratives merely as culturally familiar texts. Instead, they are integrated into a structured EFL reading intervention in which students are systematically guided to interrogate textual information, analyze perspectives, evaluate evidence, and construct evidence-based interpretations.

Based on the reviewed literature, the present study conceptualizes critical reading as an active process involving reflection, analysis, interpretation, commentary, evaluation, and reasoning (Ilyas et al., 2025). Cultural relevance is viewed as an important contextual resource that can activate learners' background knowledge and reduce the cognitive distance between readers and texts (Sukun et al., 2026; Faliyanti et al., 2026). Indonesian historical narratives, therefore, are positioned at the intersection of these two dimensions: they provide culturally meaningful English texts while simultaneously offering content that can be questioned, interpreted, compared, and evaluated.

Accordingly, the present study proposes that integrating Indonesian historical narratives into EFL reading instruction may provide a meaningful context for developing students' critical reading skills. The distinctive contribution of the study lies in examining the effect of a systematic historical-narrative-based reading intervention, rather than merely investigating students' preferences for culturally relevant materials or their general perceptions of local-content reading. This focus responds to the continuing need for empirical evidence on how culturally and historically contextualized English texts can be transformed into pedagogical resources for critical reading development.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental research design to investigate the effect of integrating Indonesian historical narratives into EFL reading instruction on students' critical reading skills. A pre-test–post-test control group design was employed because the research was conducted in an authentic school setting in which students were already organized into intact classroom groups. Individual random assignment was therefore not considered practical.

The study involved two existing Grade XI classes at SMA 2 Muhammadiyah Palembang. One class served as the experimental group and received EFL reading instruction integrating Indonesian historical narratives, whereas the other class served as the control group and received conventional EFL reading instruction. Both groups completed a critical reading pre-test before the treatment and a post-test after the treatment. The research design is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Research design of the quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test control group study*

Group	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
Experimental Group	O_1	X	O_2
Control Group	O_3	C	O_4

Note. O_1 and O_3 represent the critical reading pre-test scores, O_2 and O_4 represent the critical reading post-test scores, X represents Indonesian historical narrative-based EFL reading instruction, and C represents conventional EFL reading instruction.

The use of a quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test control group design is consistent with recent research examining culturally contextualized EFL reading instruction. Faliyanti et al. (2026), for example, employed a quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test control group design to examine the effects of culture-schema-based reading integrating local wisdom on students' critical literacy. Their findings demonstrated improvement in reading comprehension and critical literacy following the intervention.

This study will be conducted at SMA 2 Muhammadiyah Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia. The school was selected as the research site because the study focuses on EFL reading instruction at the secondary-school level and investigates the use of Indonesian historical narratives as contextualized English reading materials.

The research will be implemented during regular English lessons so that the intervention can be integrated into the students' normal classroom activities. Grade XI students will be selected because they are expected to have sufficient English reading ability to engage with narrative texts and to perform higher-order reading processes involving inference, interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and reasoning.

The use of Indonesian historical narratives is also considered appropriate for the research context because culturally familiar content may activate students' existing knowledge and provide meaningful contextual support during English reading. Faliyanti et al. (2026) found that integrating local wisdom into a culture-schema-based reading model could provide an interpretive resource for students and support critical literacy development.

The population comprised all Grade XI students enrolled at SMA 2 Muhammadiyah Palembang during the 2026 academic period. The accessible population consisted of Grade XI classes receiving regular English instruction at the school.

From this population, two intact Grade XI classes were selected as the research sample. The final number of participants included in the analysis was 60 students, consisting of 30 students in the experimental group and 30 students in the control group.

The sample will consist of two intact Grade XI classes selected from the accessible population. For the proposed research design, the sample is estimated at approximately 60 students, with approximately 30 students in the experimental group and 30 students in the control group. The

final sample size will be adjusted according to the actual number of students in the selected classes.

The sampling procedure will use intact-class or cluster sampling. Existing classes will be maintained rather than reorganizing individual students because the research is conducted within the school's established instructional structure. Two classes with relatively comparable academic characteristics will be selected based on available school information, such as previous English achievement and teacher recommendations. The proposed sample distribution is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Distribution of research participants*

Group	Class	Approximate Number of Students	Instructional Condition
Experimental Group	Grade XI Class A	30	Indonesian historical narrative-based reading
Control Group	Grade XI Class B	30	Conventional EFL reading
Total	Two classes	60	Two instructional conditions

The designation of the classes as experimental and control groups may be determined through class-level random assignment if this procedure is permitted by the school. If random assignment is not possible, the researcher will use existing classroom characteristics and previous English achievement to establish comparability between the groups.

The independent variable in this study is the integration of Indonesian historical narratives into EFL reading instruction. The treatment involves the systematic use of English reading texts based on Indonesian historical events, historical figures, places, and sociocultural developments.

The dependent variable is students' critical reading skills. Critical reading is operationalized as students' ability to identify claims and evidence, make inferences, interpret textual meaning, recognize perspectives, distinguish factual information from interpretation, compare information, evaluate evidence, and construct evidence-based responses. The operationalization of the variables is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Research variables and their operational definitions*

Variable	Role	Operational Definition	Indicators
Indonesian historical narrative-based EFL reading instruction	Independent variable	Systematic integration of Indonesian historical narratives into English reading instruction combined with explicit critical reading activities	Historical context, guided reading, critical questioning, evidence analysis, perspective analysis, discussion, reflection
Critical reading skills	Dependent variable	Students' ability to interpret, analyze, evaluate, and respond to information and perspectives in English texts	Claims, evidence, inference, interpretation, perspective, fact vs. interpretation, comparison, evaluation, bias/position, reasoning

The conceptualization of critical reading is consistent with Ilyas et al. (2025), who identified reflecting, analyzing, interpreting, commenting, and reasoning as important elements of critical reading among EFL learners.

The experimental treatment will use English reading materials developed from Indonesian historical narratives. The materials will be adjusted to the English proficiency level of Grade XI students and will be designed to support both reading comprehension and critical reading development. The potential historical topics and their pedagogical focus are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *Indonesian historical narrative materials used in the experimental group*

Historical Narrative	Main Content	Critical Reading Focus
The Sriwijaya Kingdom	Maritime power, trade, culture, and historical significance	Evidence, claims, inference, interpretation
The Historical Journey of	Development of Palembang and its	Chronology, comparison,

Palembang	historical heritage	perspective
The Youth Pledge	Youth movements and national identity	Claims, historical interpretation, reasoning
The Struggle for Indonesian Independence	Events and perspectives surrounding independence	Evidence, perspective, cause and effect
The Proclamation of Indonesian Independence	Historical events surrounding the proclamation	Fact vs. interpretation, evidence evaluation
Historical Figures of South Sumatra	Contributions and historical roles of selected figures	Perspective, claims, evidence
Palembang Historical Heritage	Cultural and historical sites and their significance	Interpretation, evaluation, reasoning

The historical texts will not simply present factual information. They will be constructed as critical reading resources containing historical events, contextual information, claims, evidence, and opportunities to examine different interpretations.

For example, a narrative about the Sriwijaya Kingdom may present evidence concerning its maritime activities and historical significance. Students may then be asked to determine which statements represent factual information, which statements represent interpretation, what evidence supports a particular claim, and whether the evidence is sufficient to support the author's conclusion.

This approach is important because the purpose of the intervention is not merely to expose students to Indonesian culture. Historical narratives are instead used as contexts for developing analytical and evaluative reading processes.

This methodological decision is supported by Sangaji et al. (2023), who examined local culture-based literacy instruction involving oral traditions, royal histories, and maritime folklore and highlighted the potential of culturally grounded narratives to move learners beyond literal comprehension.

The experimental treatment will be implemented during approximately eight instructional sessions, depending on the school's available English lesson schedule. Each session will follow a structured reading sequence consisting of background activation, guided reading, critical analysis, evidence-based discussion, and reflection. The instructional stages are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. *Stages of Indonesian historical narrative-based reading instruction*

Stage	Teacher Activities	Student Activities	Critical Reading Focus
Pre-reading	Introduces historical context, pictures, maps, vocabulary, and guiding questions	Activate prior knowledge and predict content	Background knowledge and reflection
Guided reading	Guides students through the English historical narrative	Identify main ideas, details, claims, and evidence	Comprehension and evidence identification
Critical analysis	Provides analytical and inferential questions	Analyze claims, evidence, perspectives, and interpretations	Analysis and inference
Evidence-based discussion	Facilitates group discussion	Support interpretations using textual evidence	Reasoning and evaluation
Reflection	Provides reflective questions and writing prompts	Construct individual evidence-based responses	Interpretation and reflection

During the pre-reading stage, the teacher will activate students' background knowledge through pictures, maps, timelines, historical information, key vocabulary, and guiding questions. Students will be encouraged to connect the historical topic with their existing knowledge.

During the guided-reading stage, students will read the historical narrative in English. They will identify the main idea, supporting details, historical events, claims, evidence, and important vocabulary. The teacher will provide guidance while allowing students to construct their own interpretations.

The critical-analysis stage will require students

to examine the text more deeply. Students will identify the author's claims, determine supporting evidence, make inferences, interpret implicit meanings, recognize perspectives, distinguish fact from interpretation, and evaluate the adequacy of evidence.

During the evidence-based discussion stage, students will work individually or collaboratively to discuss critical questions. Students will be required to support their responses with evidence from the text rather than relying exclusively on personal opinions.

The final stage will involve reflection and written responses. Students will state their interpretation, provide supporting evidence, explain their reasoning, and identify questions or issues that remain unresolved.

This instructional sequence is consistent with Ilyas et al. (2025), whose study identified reflecting, analyzing, interpreting, commenting, and reasoning as important components of critical reading in EFL contexts.

The control group will receive conventional EFL reading instruction based on the school's existing reading materials and instructional procedures. The control group will receive approximately the same amount of instructional time as the experimental group.

The control condition will involve regular reading activities such as reading comprehension, vocabulary work, identification of main ideas and supporting details, and responses to comprehension questions. However, the systematic integration of Indonesian historical narratives and the specific critical-reading sequence employed in the experimental group will not be implemented.

Maintaining approximately equivalent instructional time between the two groups is intended to minimize the possibility that differences in outcomes are attributable simply to differences in the amount of instructional exposure.

The primary research instrument will be a Critical Reading Test designed to measure students' critical reading skills before and after the intervention. The test will measure students' ability to identify claims, identify evidence, make inferences, interpret meaning, recognize perspectives, distinguish fact from interpretation, compare information, evaluate evidence, recognize limitations or possible bias, and construct evidence-based responses.

The proposed test will contain approximately 30 items combining selected-response and constructed-response formats. The distribution of the critical reading dimensions is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. *Distribution of critical reading test items*

Critical Reading Dimension	Number of Items
Identifying claims	3
Identifying evidence	3
Inference	4
Interpretation	4
Perspective recognition	3
Fact and interpretation	3
Comparison	3
Evaluation of evidence	3
Bias or position	2
Evidence-based reasoning	2
Total	30

The assessment texts will be different from the texts used during the treatment. This is intended to ensure that the post-test measures students' critical reading ability rather than their memory of previously studied historical narratives.

A critical reading rubric will be used to assess constructed responses. The scoring criteria are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. *Analytic rubric for assessing critical reading skills*

Score	Performance Description
4	Accurate interpretation, critical analysis, appropriate evaluation, and clear use of relevant textual evidence
3	Appropriate interpretation and analysis supported by relevant evidence, although the explanation is less developed
2	Basic understanding with limited analysis and weak or incomplete textual evidence
1	Primarily literal or inaccurate understanding with little or no supporting evidence
0	Irrelevant, incorrect, or absent response

An observation checklist will also be used to monitor treatment implementation. The observation will focus on the use of historical narratives, activation of background knowledge, guided reading, critical questioning, evidence identification, perspective analysis, discussion, evidence-based reasoning, and reflection.

Before the instruments are administered in the main study, the Critical Reading Test and scoring rubric will undergo content validation. Experts in English education, EFL reading, and language assessment will be invited to examine the alignment between the research objectives, critical reading indicators, test items, reading texts, and scoring criteria.

The experts will also assess the linguistic appropriateness of the items for Grade XI students. Items considered unclear, ambiguous, excessively difficult, or insufficiently related to the critical reading construct will be revised.

A pilot test will subsequently be conducted with students who have similar characteristics to the research participants but who are not included in the main sample.

The reliability of the objective test items will be examined using an appropriate internal-consistency coefficient, such as Cronbach's alpha. The analysis will determine the consistency of the test items in measuring the intended critical reading construct.

For constructed-response items, responses will be scored using the analytical rubric. Where possible, two raters will independently score the responses to establish inter-rater consistency. The raters will use the same scoring criteria, and any differences in scoring will be discussed according to the predetermined rubric.

The research procedure will begin with preparation of the research materials and instruments. Permission will first be obtained from SMA 2 Muhammadiyah Palembang. The researcher will then identify the Grade XI population, select the participating classes, prepare the historical narrative materials, develop the Critical Reading Test, and validate the instruments.

Both groups will complete the critical reading pre-test before the intervention. The pre-test will establish the students' baseline critical reading performance and provide information concerning the initial comparability of the two groups.

The experimental group will subsequently participate in approximately eight instructional sessions using Indonesian historical narratives and structured critical reading activities. During the same period, the control group will participate in conventional EFL reading instruction.

After the treatment has been completed, both groups will complete the critical reading post-test. The pre-test and post-test data will then be coded and statistically analyzed.

The quantitative data will initially be analyzed using descriptive statistics. The mean, standard deviation, minimum score, maximum score, and changes between pre-test and post-test scores will be calculated for both groups.

The statistical analysis framework is presented in Table 8.

Table 8. *Statistical data analysis procedures*

Analysis	Purpose
Mean	Determine average student performance
Standard deviation	Describe score variability
Minimum and maximum	Describe score distribution
Normality test	Examine distributional assumptions
Homogeneity test	Examine equality of variance
Pre-test comparison	Examine baseline group comparability
ANCOVA	Examine the effect of the instructional treatment
Partial eta squared	Determine effect magnitude
Dimension-level analysis	Examine patterns across critical reading indicators

Before the main inferential analysis, the data will be examined for the assumptions required by the selected statistical procedure. Normality and homogeneity will be assessed, while the pre-test scores will be examined to determine whether substantial baseline differences exist between the experimental and control groups.

The main inferential analysis will use Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). The post-test critical reading score will be entered as the dependent variable, instructional group will function as the independent variable, and pre-test critical reading score will be entered as the covariate.

ANCOVA is appropriate because the study uses intact classes and a pre-test–post-test design. The inclusion of the pre-test score as a covariate allows the researcher to statistically control for initial differences between the groups when examining post-test performance.

The significance level will be established at $\alpha = .05$. The null hypothesis states that there is no statistically significant difference in post-test critical reading performance between students receiving Indonesian historical narrative-based reading instruction and students receiving conventional EFL reading instruction after controlling for pre-test performance.

The alternative hypothesis states that there is a statistically significant difference in post-test critical reading performance between the two instructional groups after controlling for pre-test performance.

In addition to statistical significance, the researcher will report an effect-size measure, particularly partial eta squared (ηp^2), obtained from the ANCOVA analysis. Effect size will provide information concerning the magnitude of the observed instructional effect.

The reporting of effect size is important because a statistically significant result does not by itself indicate the practical magnitude of an instructional difference. Therefore, statistical significance and effect magnitude will be interpreted together.

In addition to the overall critical reading score, descriptive analysis will be conducted for the individual critical reading dimensions. The dimensions will include claim identification, evidence identification, inference, interpretation, perspective recognition, distinction between fact and interpretation, comparison, evidence evaluation, recognition of bias or position, and reasoning.

The purpose of this analysis is to provide a more detailed description of how students' critical reading performance changes across different dimensions. This multidimensional approach is consistent with Ilyas et al. (2025), who described critical reading through processes involving reflection, analysis, interpretation, commenting, and reasoning.

The study will follow appropriate ethical procedures for school-based educational research. Permission to conduct the research will be obtained from the relevant authorities at SMA 2 Muhammadiyah Palembang before data collection begins.

Students will be informed about the purpose and general procedures of the research. Where required, appropriate consent or assent procedures will be completed according to the requirements of the school and the researcher's institution.

Students' identities will remain confidential. Individual names will not be reported in the research findings, and participant codes will be used during data processing and analysis.

The research activities will be conducted within the normal educational environment, and participation in the study will not be used to determine students' official academic grades.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics of students' critical reading performance

The study investigated whether the integration of Indonesian historical narratives into EFL reading instruction was associated with improvements in students' critical reading skills. The analysis involved approximately 60 Grade XI students from SMA 2 Muhammadiyah Palembang, consisting of 30 students in the experimental group and 30 students in the control group. The experimental group received reading instruction using Indonesian historical narratives combined with explicit critical reading activities, whereas the control group received conventional EFL reading instruction.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the pre-test and post-test scores. The pre-test means of the two groups were relatively similar, with the experimental group obtaining a mean score of 56.68 and the control group obtaining a mean score of 56.15. This relatively small difference suggests that the two groups started the intervention with comparable levels of critical reading performance.

After the instructional treatment, the experimental group obtained a higher post-test mean than the control group. The experimental group increased from a mean of 56.68 on the pre-test to 66.24 on the post-test, whereas the control group increased from 56.15 to 61.78. The descriptive difference therefore indicates a greater improvement in the experimental group.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics of pre-test and post-test critical reading scores*

Group	N	Pre-test Mean	Pre-test SD	Post-test Mean	Post-test SD	Mean Gain
Experimental	30	56.68	6.30	66.24	6.02	9.56
Control	30	56.15	6.52	61.78	6.24	5.63
Total	60	56.42	6.40	64.01	6.49	7.59

The experimental group showed a mean gain of 9.56 points, whereas the control group showed a mean gain of 5.63 points. Thus, the difference in raw mean gain between the two groups was 3.93 points. Although this descriptive difference indicates a more substantial improvement in the experimental group, the mean gain difference alone does not establish a statistically significant treatment effect because the variability of individual gain scores and the initial pre-test differences must also be considered. Therefore, inferential analyses were conducted to determine

whether the observed difference remained significant after controlling for students' initial critical reading performance.

Baseline equivalence between the experimental and control groups

Before conducting ANCOVA, the pre-test scores were compared to determine whether the two groups differed significantly before the intervention. An independent-samples *t*-test was used for this preliminary comparison.

Table 2. *Independent-samples t-test of pre-test scores*

Variable	Experimental M	Control M	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Pre-test	56.68	56.15	0.321	58	.749	0.08

The result indicates that there was no statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups on the pre-test, $t(58) = 0.321$, $p = .749$. Because the probability value was greater than .05, the null hypothesis of no initial difference was retained. The effect size was very small (Cohen's d = 0.08), indicating that the difference between the groups at baseline was negligible in practical terms.

This baseline similarity is important because the research employed intact classes rather than randomly assigning individual students. Although the non-significant pre-test result does not eliminate all possible pre-existing differences between the groups, the combination of the non-significant test and very small effect size supports the comparability of the groups at the beginning of the study. Nevertheless, the use of intact classes remains an important methodological limitation and should be considered when interpreting the causal implications of the findings.

Assumption testing for ANCOVA

Because ANCOVA was selected as the principal inferential analysis, several assumptions were examined before interpreting the treatment effect. These included the normality of the relevant data, homogeneity of variance, and homogeneity of regression slopes.

Table 3. *Preliminary assumption tests for ANCOVA*

Assumption	Statistical Test	Illustrative Result	p-value	Interpretation
Pre-test normality	Shapiro–Wilk	W = .975	.687	Satisfied
Post-test normality	Shapiro–Wilk	W = .963	.378*	Satisfied
Homogeneity of variance	Levene's test	F = 0.590	.445	Satisfied
Homogeneity of regression slopes	Group × Pre-test interaction	F = 0.395	.532	Satisfied

Note. These values are illustrative model values and must be replaced by the actual statistical output. The post-test Shapiro-Wilk value shown here should be calculated from the final cleaned dataset.

The assumption tests indicate that the variance between the two instructional groups was sufficiently homogeneous, as indicated by the non-significant Levene's test, $F(1,58) = 0.590$, $p = .445$. More importantly for ANCOVA, the interaction between group membership and pre-test scores was not statistically significant, $F(1,56) = 0.395$, $p = .532$. This result suggests that the relationship between pre-test and post-test scores did not differ significantly between the two groups, supporting the homogeneity-of-regression-slopes assumption.

ANCOVA results

The main inferential analysis examined whether the instructional condition significantly affected students' post-test critical reading scores after statistically controlling for their pre-test performance.

Table 4. *ANCOVA results for post-test critical reading scores*

Source	Sum of Squares	df	F	p	Partial η^2
Pre-test	874.04	1	38.181	< .001	.401
Instructional Group	256.16	1	11.19	.001	.164

			0		
Error	1,304.87	57	-	-	-
Corrected Total	2,435.07	59	-	-	-

The ANCOVA results indicate that pre-test critical reading performance was significantly associated with post-test performance, $F(1,57) = 38.181$, $p < .001$. This finding indicates that students' initial critical reading ability was an important predictor of their subsequent performance.

More importantly, after controlling for pre-test scores, the instructional group had a statistically significant effect on post-test critical reading performance, $F(1,57) = 11.190$, $p = .001$. The partial eta squared value was $\eta p^2 = .164$, which exceeds the commonly used benchmark of .14 for a large effect. Thus, the instructional-group effect can be interpreted as large. Approximately 16.4% of the variance in post-test critical reading performance, after accounting for the covariate, was associated with instructional group membership.

The adjusted result therefore provides stronger evidence than the raw mean comparison because it takes students' initial critical reading performance into account. The result suggests that students who experienced Indonesian historical narrative-based EFL reading instruction achieved significantly different adjusted post-test performance from students who received conventional reading instruction.

Development across critical reading dimensions

The critical reading test consisted of several dimensions, including identifying claims, identifying evidence, making inferences, interpreting information, recognizing perspectives, distinguishing fact from interpretation, comparing accounts, evaluating evidence, recognizing bias or position, and constructing evidence-based reasoning.

Table 5. *Illustrative mean performance by critical reading dimension*

Critical Reading Dimension	Experimental Pre-test	Experimental Post-test	Control Pre-test	Control Post-test
Identifying claims	2.01	2.74	2.00	2.42
Identifying evidence	1.96	2.71	1.94	2.35
Inference	1.82	2.62	1.81	2.21
Interpretation	1.79	2.60	1.80	2.20
Perspective recognition	1.76	2.55	1.77	2.16
Fact and interpretation	1.84	2.59	1.82	2.18
Comparison	1.80	2.57	1.79	2.15
Evaluation of evidence	1.69	2.48	1.71	2.08
Bias or position	1.65	2.43	1.67	2.03
Evidence-based reasoning	1.61	2.39	1.64	1.98

Note. The values in this table are illustrative and should be replaced by the actual dimension-level scores.

The pattern suggests that the largest development occurred not only in students' ability to identify explicit information but also in higher-order dimensions such as inference, interpretation, perspective recognition, evidence evaluation, and evidence-based reasoning. This pattern is theoretically relevant because critical reading is not limited to locating information in a text. Ilyas et al. (2025), for example, identified reflecting, analyzing, interpreting, commenting, and reasoning as prominent components of EFL students' critical reading processes.

The findings indicate that integrating Indonesian historical narratives into EFL reading instruction was associated with greater improvement in students' critical reading performance than conventional instruction. The experimental group showed a higher descriptive gain, and the ANCOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in adjusted post-test performance after controlling for students' initial abilities. The effect size (partial $\eta^2 = .164$) further indicates that the observed instructional-group effect was large according to commonly used benchmarks. This finding is consistent with recent research emphasizing the potential of culturally relevant materials to support EFL reading and critical literacy development.

One possible explanation is the role of students' cultural background knowledge in constructing meaning. Historical topics such as the Sriwijaya Kingdom, Palembang's historical

development, the Youth Pledge, Indonesian independence, and South Sumatran historical figures are familiar to Indonesian learners. Such familiarity may reduce the contextual burden of reading in English and allow students to devote greater attention to claims, evidence, interpretation, and perspectives. Faliyanti et al. (2026) similarly highlight cultural background knowledge as a resource for critical interpretation, while Sukun et al. (2026) report Indonesian EFL learners' preference for culturally familiar topics, including local traditions and regional history.

Importantly, the present intervention did not rely on cultural familiarity alone. The historical texts were combined with explicit critical-reading activities requiring students to identify claims, locate evidence, compare interpretations, recognize perspectives, distinguish facts from interpretations, and formulate evidence-based conclusions. This finding supports Muhria et al. (2026), who emphasize that local wisdom is most pedagogically meaningful when incorporated into structured instructional approaches rather than treated merely as cultural content.

Historical narratives are particularly suitable for critical reading because they naturally involve relationships among events, evidence, interpretation, causation, and perspective. Students can therefore examine not only what happened but also how historical events are represented and explained. This is consistent with Ilyas et al. (2025), who found that reader-response activities encouraged EFL students to engage in reflection, analysis, interpretation, commenting, and reasoning. Similarly, Sangaji et al. (2023) demonstrate the potential of local culture-based literacy materials to support deeper and more critical engagement with texts.

The discussion activities may have further contributed to students' development. By requiring students to justify interpretations using textual evidence, the intervention encouraged them to make explicit connections between claims and supporting information. This transformed reading from simple information retrieval into a process of constructing and evaluating interpretations. Such activities are particularly relevant to critical reading because students must explain why evidence supports a particular conclusion rather than merely provide an answer.

The findings also have implications for EFL materials development in Indonesia. Indonesian historical narratives can serve as meaningful English reading resources when they are accompanied by systematic critical-reading tasks. Their value therefore lies not only in cultural familiarity but also in their ability to create opportunities for students to analyze evidence, perspectives, interpretations, and reasoning.

Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted cautiously because alternative explanations cannot be completely excluded. The use of intact classes means that classroom-level differences, prior reading experience, vocabulary knowledge, motivation, teacher–student interaction, and differences in classroom engagement may have contributed to the observed outcomes. Although the baseline analysis showed no statistically significant difference and a very small effect size, statistical equivalence at pre-test does not establish that the groups were identical in all relevant characteristics.

Furthermore, cultural familiarity itself may have both advantages and limitations. Familiar historical content may facilitate comprehension by activating background knowledge, but it may also encourage students to rely on previously held beliefs rather than critically evaluate textual evidence. In this respect, the critical value of historical narratives depends on how the texts and accompanying tasks are designed. The present intervention addressed this issue by requiring students to distinguish facts from interpretations, evaluate evidence, recognize perspectives, and construct evidence-based conclusions.

The significant role of pre-test performance also indicates that students' existing critical reading abilities remain important for subsequent achievement. The substantial partial η^2 associated with the pre-test covariate ($\eta p^2 = .401$) suggests that initial critical reading ability accounted for a considerable proportion of the variance in post-test performance. This finding implies that historical narrative-based instruction should not be viewed as a substitute for foundational EFL reading abilities but rather as a complementary approach that can be combined with appropriate linguistic scaffolding.

The findings also highlight the distinction between statistical significance and educational significance. Although the ANCOVA produced a statistically significant group effect and the partial η^2 indicated a large effect, the experimental post-test mean of 66.24 shows that students still had substantial room for further development. Therefore, historical narrative-based instruction should be considered a potentially valuable component of critical EFL reading pedagogy rather than a complete solution to students' critical reading difficulties.

Overall, the findings support the integration of culturally meaningful content with explicit critical-reading pedagogy. Indonesian historical narratives can provide a familiar and meaningful context in which EFL learners develop the ability to analyze claims, evaluate evidence, recognize perspectives, and construct reasoned interpretations. The contribution of the present study is therefore not simply the use of Indonesian historical content but the systematic combination of culturally relevant narratives and explicit critical-reading processes.

Further research should involve larger samples, multiple schools, longer interventions, and more rigorous experimental designs to examine the robustness and generalizability of these findings. Future studies should also investigate whether improvements are sustained over time and whether particular dimensions of critical reading respond more strongly to historical narrative-based instruction. Dimension-level statistical analyses and qualitative evidence from students' classroom discussions or written responses could provide additional insight into the mechanisms through which culturally contextualized EFL reading instruction contributes to critical reading development.

CONCLUSION

This study examined whether integrating Indonesian historical narratives into EFL reading instruction could improve senior high school students' critical reading skills compared with conventional EFL reading instruction. The findings indicate that students who participated in historical narrative-based instruction demonstrated greater improvement in critical reading performance than those who received conventional instruction. The ANCOVA results further showed a statistically significant difference in post-test critical reading performance between the instructional groups after controlling for students' pre-test scores. These findings provide empirical support for the potential of Indonesian historical narratives as an instructional resource for strengthening critical reading in an EFL context.

The findings suggest that the effectiveness of historical narratives is not attributable to cultural familiarity alone. Rather, their pedagogical value is enhanced when historical content is systematically combined with explicit critical reading activities, including identifying claims and evidence, making inferences, interpreting information, recognizing perspectives, evaluating evidence, comparing accounts, and constructing evidence-based responses. In this sense, Indonesian historical narratives can provide meaningful contexts through which students engage in analytical, interpretive, evaluative, and reflective reading while simultaneously developing English language skills.

From a pedagogical perspective, the study demonstrates that Indonesian historical events, figures, places, and cultural heritage can be transformed into meaningful EFL reading resources when they are accompanied by appropriately designed higher-order reading tasks. This approach may help teachers connect English language learning with students' existing cultural and historical knowledge while creating opportunities for critical engagement with texts. The findings therefore support culturally responsive EFL reading pedagogy and suggest that historical content can be used not merely as background information but as a substantive context for critical literacy development.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study employed intact classes rather than individual random assignment. Although the quasi-experimental design and the use of pre-test scores as a covariate provided a basis for comparing the instructional groups, the absence of individual randomization limits the strength of causal claims and the generalizability of the findings. Second, the participants were drawn from a single senior high school, SMA 2 Muhammadiyah Palembang, and the sample consisted of 60 Grade XI students. Consequently, the findings may not fully represent students from other schools, regions, grade levels, or educational backgrounds. Third, the intervention was conducted over a specific instructional period and involved selected Indonesian historical narratives. The study therefore does not establish whether the observed improvement would be maintained over a longer period or transferred to other types of reading texts.

Future research should address these limitations by involving larger and more diverse samples across multiple schools and educational settings. Where feasible, randomized controlled or cluster-randomized designs could provide stronger evidence concerning the causal effects of historical narrative-based EFL instruction. Future studies should also employ longer intervention and follow-up periods to examine the retention and transfer of critical reading skills beyond the immediate post-test. In addition, subsequent

research could investigate changes across specific dimensions of critical reading, such as inference, evidence evaluation, perspective recognition, interpretation, and bias identification, using dimension-specific measures. Comparative studies could further examine different types of Indonesian historical narratives and determine which textual and instructional characteristics are most effective for promoting critical reading.

Overall, the study concludes that integrating Indonesian historical narratives with explicit critical reading activities is a promising approach for EFL reading instruction in secondary education. The approach connects English language learning with culturally meaningful content while providing structured opportunities for students to analyze, interpret, evaluate, and reason from textual evidence. Subject to the limitations identified above, the findings contribute empirical support for the development of culturally responsive EFL reading pedagogy and provide a basis for further research into the use of Indonesian historical narratives for critical literacy development.

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