

Improving Critical Reading of English Exposition Texts through Problem-Based Learning and Picture Media

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DOI: 10.37729/scripta.v13i1.7126

Abstract. This study investigates the implementation of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model assisted by picture media to enhance students' critical reading skills in English exposition texts. It addresses the decline in literacy observed during the COVID-19 pandemic and emphasizes the need for innovative teaching strategies to improve student engagement and outcomes. Conducted with class XI-D students at SMA Negeri 1 Purworejo, the research utilized a Classroom Action Research approach over two cycles. The findings revealed a significant improvement in students' critical reading performance, demonstrating the effectiveness of integrating PBL with picture media. The findings highlight the potential of this method for fostering critical thinking and literacy, particularly in underperforming students. This study contributes to the development of innovative reading instruction strategies that integrate visual media and problem-based approaches to foster students' critical literacy.

Keywords: Problem-Based Learning, Critical reading, Exposition texts, Picture media, Literacy

1. INTRODUCTION

In the fierce competition of the 21st century, critical reading literacy has become a central focus in education and society. The occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic disaster certainly has a long-term effect on the Indonesian education sector, especially in student reading competence, which has declined since 2018 [1]. Indonesia's consistently low PISA reading performance since 2018 reflects enduring challenges in reading comprehension among Indonesian youth. These outcomes suggest that today's high school students, particularly in rural areas, continue to experience the long-term effects of insufficient literacy foundations established during earlier schooling stages [2].

The decline in literacy competence is not only experienced in Indonesia. Students in grades 1 to 3 in the United States have experienced a 30% decline in reading literacy skills due to learning loss experienced by students during the COVID-19 pandemic [3]. In 2022, Indonesia improved its position in PISA by 5 to 6 ranks compared to 2018, reaching the 68th rank. The country's reading literacy position also improved by 5 positions compared to the previous year. However, the average reading ability of Indonesian students in 2022 was below the OECD average, indicating a continuous decline in rank [4]. However, the data could not represent the data of all Indonesian children, as PISA and Nadiem Makarim as the former Indonesian Minister of Education, only applied the research to students living in big cities [5]. Indonesia ranked 74th out of 79 countries in reading literacy competency. Rural areas with less than 3,000 inhabitants have a very low literacy level, where they are only able to do simple calculations, such as integers that require detailed instructions, such as being defined using short texts and low sentence structure [6]. This needs to be addressed, especially by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, by continuing to pay attention to the quality of teacher and student competencies, especially in remote areas of Indonesia.

English language learning in the Merdeka Curriculum at the high school level emphasizes the importance of mastering reading skills, one of which is the critical reading of exposition text [7]. In the Merdeka Curriculum designed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology itself, students have the achievements of understanding the content of the text, identifying social goals, analyzing detailed text information, main ideas, and critically evaluating the content of the text. In the implementation of exposition text learning activities for Indonesian high school students, there are several challenges faced by teachers and students. Based on research conducted. The majority of teachers still use traditional learning methods [8]. The low competence of teachers also has a contribution, where as many as thirty-five percent reported that their main difficulty in teaching exposition texts was the students' limited ability in writing

exposition texts [9]- [11]. Lack of understanding in designing learning models in teaching modules is also one of the challenges experienced by Sumedang high school teachers in teaching expository texts. In addition to the challenges in designing exposition text learning experienced by teachers at Sumedang High School, challenges in exposition text learning activities were experienced by students in the aspect of their lack of competence in English [12]. Lack of language knowledge was identified as the main problem (48.04%), which is then followed by the challenge of student readiness to learn expository text at 49.07% and low student motivation at 46.59%. Through these two studies, it is necessary to improve teachers' pedagogical and literacy competencies in order to be able to design learning in accordance with the abilities and characteristics of students so that expository text learning can be achieved well.

While many studies have focused on improving writing through PBL and visual media, this approach is equally powerful for enhancing reading comprehension. Picture media stimulate visual association and contextual understanding, allowing students to interpret exposition texts critically [13]. When combined with PBL, it encourages active inquiry and text analysis rather than passive reading [14]. The use of the PBL Learning model itself is considered effective for the development of exposition text learning [15]. It stated that the implementation of the PBL learning model with picture media can improve students' exposition text writing skills, with the average score in cycle 1 at 72.5 and cycle 2 at 85 [15]. Similar findings stated that the use of image media was able to improve students' writing competence from 68.57 to 75.54 in the post-test activity [16].

The use of visual media has been observed by the scholar. It can prove the effectiveness and it is able to raise the students' comprehension. The previous study of comic and the relationship to their life [15]-[18], some easy way to evaluate young learners by using visual aid, some interactive games and asynchronous learning media are more popular in ELT than classical learning [19]-[22]. Therefore pictures in English learning helps students understand the text more deeply than without using pictures [23]-[26]. Gallery walk is also one of the learning techniques that can encourage students to participate by giving input to learning [16]. It highlighted how Gallery Walk learning is able to help students in pouring out their ideas so that it can foster direct knowledge, so that the teacher does not become the main source of knowledge [29], [30]. Students' speaking ability improves with Gallery Walk learning due to increased communication in learning [28]-[30]. The same thing where students can better understand learning after using the Gallery Walk strategy [34]. This study addresses a critical gap: the lack of empirical evidence on how PBL with picture media enhances students' critical reading of exposition texts. Previous research emphasized writing skills, leaving limited exploration of reading comprehension. Therefore, this study focuses specifically on improving students' critical reading abilities through a visually supported, problem-based approach.

This research answers the existing gap by applying the Problem-Based Learning model with image media in exposition text learning to improve students' reading skills. The study focused on class XI-D at SMA Negeri 1 Purworejo because the group represented a balanced range of student abilities and engagement levels. This class had a history of moderate literacy achievement, making it suitable for evaluating how PBL and picture media interventions can elevate critical reading skills within a realistic classroom setting. Unlike previous research that examined writing proficiency, this study uniquely investigates how PBL combined with picture media enhances reading comprehension. It explores how students engage critically with text meaning, argumentation, and inference-making skills that are central to reading literacy yet often neglected in writing-oriented studies.

2. METHOD

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach based on the Lesson Study model to evaluate the effectiveness of the Problem-Based Learning model with picture media to improve students' critical reading literacy in exposition texts. The four-week implementation aligned with the regular school schedule, allowing sufficient time for two PBL cycles without disrupting other curricular activities. This duration was considered optimal for observing measurable changes in students' reading performance and participation. The researcher chose to use the study approach because this approach emphasizes collaboration between master teachers, PPL teachers, students, and observers so that learning can be achieved more effectively and participatively.

The research was conducted during the first semester of the 2024/2025 academic year (October 21–November 18, 2024). The research process took place over two cycles. In each cycle, the designed process consisted of the stages of planning, implementation, and reflection, designed to create feedback so that in each cycle, there was an increase in student skills and participation.

No specific randomization was used since the study adopted a classroom action research design within an existing class. The focus was on collaborative learning improvement rather than between-group comparison, ensuring natural classroom dynamics while maintaining fairness in participation.

Cycle 1

The research began through the Planning stage by designing a Learning Implementation Plan (RPP) using the Problem-Based Learning model combined with collaborative learning techniques, think-pair share, and group presentations. The second stage is developing research instruments, such as observation sheets, Learner Worksheets (LKPD), and writing skills assessment rubrics. The last stage is discussing with the host teacher to get feedback on the learning design and things that need to be improved for the next meeting. The last stage of planning is to prepare learning media and improve the learning design according to the discussion that has been done with the Supervising Teacher.

The Implementation Stage (Do) is the stage where researchers carry out learning in accordance with the lesson plans that have been designed in accordance with the syntax that has been prepared. At the core of the learning activities are carried out by orienting students to the problem by inviting students to observe the picture and match the text that matches the image presented. Then the teacher divided the students of class XI-D into small groups randomly and gave student LKPD. At the end of learning, student groups present the results of their exposition text analysis, and other student groups should provide Peer Feedback. In the second meeting of cycle 1, the teacher invited students to do Think-pair Share which aimed to increase the participation of low-ability students. The core learning activities ended with giving feedback from the teacher to the students' learning outcomes.

The Reflection Stage (See) in cycle 1 consisted of evaluating students' critical reading skills through the Post-test and also observations based on the rubric that had been designed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of learning to be the basis for designing in cycle 2.

Cycle 2

The transition from Think–Pair–Share in Cycle 1 to Gallery Walk in Cycle 2 was made to enhance student interaction and participation. Gallery Walk provided a more dynamic, student-centered learning environment that encouraged peer evaluation, active movement, and deeper engagement with the reading material.

The Implementation Stage (Do) is carried out by continuing the learning process using more structured and centralized learning techniques. The focus of the core learning activities is on strengthening the analysis of the relationship between the pictures and the exposition text presented, analyzing the details of the exposition text information, as well as holding discussions between groups through *Gallery Walk* activities and providing more in-depth feedback.

The Reflection Stage (See) contains an evaluation by comparing students' critical reading skills between the first and second cycle post-test results, which aims to assess how effective the applied learning methods and techniques are.

Instrument reliability was ensured through expert validation by two English education lecturers who reviewed the observation sheets, tests, and rubrics. Inter-rater agreement was used to verify scoring consistency, ensuring that the instruments accurately measured critical reading skills. Observations were made using the recording of student activities during learning, such as participation in group discussions and group presentations. The exposition text critical reading literacy test was given at the end of each cycle, with an assessment based on a rubric that covers understanding of text content, analysis of argumentation, critical assessment, and understanding of vocabulary. Before the cycle started, a diagnostic test was administered to all students in class XI-D to identify their constraints in reading. Documentation included the collection of photos of learning activities, student presentation results, and reflection notes during the research.

Data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative data, such as diagnostic and post-test results, were analyzed descriptively using averages and percentages to measure students' improvement in critical reading skills across cycles. Quantitative data, including diagnostic and post-test scores, were analyzed using Microsoft Excel for calculating means and percentages. This ensured transparency and accuracy in the analysis of students' reading improvement across cycles. This combination of approaches allowed the researcher to identify learning progress quantitatively and interpret classroom interactions qualitatively to assess the overall effectiveness of the PBL model with picture media.

Through this procedure, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive view of the effectiveness of using picture media and the Problem-Based Learning model learning in improving students' critical reading skills.

3. FINDINGS

Initial Condition

Before the implementation of the action, the research began with observation activities and diagnostic tests (Pre-test) to measure the basic abilities of students in class XI-D SMA Negeri 1 Purworejo in critical reading skills of exposition text. Based on the observation results, the majority of students already have basic English language skills quite well, but there are still some students who experience difficulties, especially in the skill of critical reading of logical exposition texts. The difficulty is influenced by several main factors, among others:

Vocabulary Limitations

Students with moderate and low abilities experienced difficulties in reading complex exposition texts, so that students have difficulty finding and analyzing text information data and difficulty in finding synonyms and antonyms of English words.

Low Scanning and Skimming Reading Skills, English Literacy and Self-Confidence

Low scanning and skimming skills stemmed primarily from limited exposure to structured reading strategies. Many students had not been trained in techniques for identifying key information efficiently, underscoring the need for explicit instruction in reading strategies during PBL activities. Students with moderate and low abilities experienced difficulties in reading complex exposition texts, especially in reading complex English exposition texts. This can be seen from the high number of students who have not been able to answer the question of reading ability to analyze paragraphs with each other, so it can be concluded that students still have low English literacy skills. Through direct interviews with random students at the introduction of the lesson, the majority of students stated that one of the difficulties in completing the critical reading test was that students were afraid of deciding the right answer because of the similarity between one answer and another.

Cycle 1 Results

In cycle 1, learning activities were carried out by adopting the *Problem-Based Learning* model combined with *Collaborative Learning* and *Think-pair Share* techniques. Learning in cycle 1 was carried out in two meetings with 3 hours of learning each, where in the core activities, students were divided into small groups to analyze the exposition text and present the results of their analysis at the end of the learning. After presenting the results of the exposition text analysis, students were directed to report their feedback on the results of the other student groups' presentations.

Improvement in Average Score

Table 1. Distribution of Reading Skill Scores in Cycle 1

Category	Value Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Excellent	90 - 100	10	27.78%
Very Good	80 - 89	10	27.78%
Good	79 - 70	7	19.44%
Fair	50 - 69	5	13.89%
Low	< 50	4	11.11%
Total		36	100%

In cycle 1, the teacher began to use image media, where in the diagnostic test, the teacher only tested the basic knowledge of students regarding critical reading skills and exposition text. The results of the cycle 1 post-test showed a slight decrease in student achievement compared to the diagnostic test results. This was due to the following factors: limited learning hours so that learning activities cannot be achieved perfectly and lack of teacher coordination with the LKPD work guidelines, so that students experience a slight misunderstanding in understanding the material and analyzing the images.

Cycle 2 Results

Peer feedback in Cycle 1 encouraged collaborative correction, enabling students to learn from each other's analytical errors. Through this process, misunderstandings about text interpretation were reduced, though limited time hindered deeper discussion, prompting refinements in Cycle 2. there is improvement in average Score; the average score of students' critical reading of exposition texts increased to 87.0. and the percentage of completeness increased to 97.22% from 75% with an increase in the number of students in the excellent category from 10 to 21. Students with low scores according to the previous number of 4 students to 0.

Table 2. Cycle 2 Reading Skill Score Distribution

Category	Value Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Excellent	90 - 100	21	58.33%
Very Good	80 - 89	6	16.67%
Good	79 - 70	8	22.22%
Fair	50 - 69	1	2.78%
Low	< 50	0	0
Total		36	100%

Cycle 2 is successful, the students were able to analyze the relationship between a picture and the topic of the exposition text well, they were able to analyze the relationship between each picture and the topic of the exposition text more accurately and confidently. Their analytical skills in linking visual information to textual meaning improved significantly compared to Cycle 1. They demonstrated greater ability to identify main ideas, issues, and supporting details within exposition texts, showing deeper comprehension. The Peer Feedback process during Gallery Walk activities became more structured and interactive, encouraging collaborative learning and critical dialogue among peers. The proportion of students achieving excellent scores increased sharply from 27.78% in Cycle 1 to 58.33% in Cycle 2, indicating substantial improvement in their analytical reading skills. This gain resulted from a clearer learning organization, stronger collaboration, and the effective use of picture media that helped students interpret exposition texts more critically. Moreover, students with lower English proficiency showed the greatest progress. The use of visual aids during Gallery Walk sessions allowed them to connect abstract textual ideas with concrete images, improving both comprehension and confidence in reading and interpreting English exposition texts.

4. DISCUSSION

This study revealed that the application of the Problem-Based Learning model with image media and Collaborative Learning and Gallery Walk techniques proved to be effective in improving the ability to critically read exposition texts of class XI-D students. The average post-test score of students increased from 81.1 in cycle 1 to 87 in cycle 2. In addition, the percentage of students who reached the level of completeness increased from 75% to 97.22% in cycle 2. These results show that Problem-Based Learning the learning with image media is successful, and *Collaborative Learning* and *Gallery Walk* techniques succeed in encouraging students' active participation and helping students with moderate and low abilities in improving critical reading comprehension of exposition text to the next stage. This is supported by previous research, which states that by using image media, the reading ability of elementary school students increased by 53.54% in a total of 3 cycle processes [35]. This finding aligns with previous research showing that visual media enhance comprehension and motivation, confirming that image media can serve as an effective tool for improving critical reading skills [36]. The use of image media assistance can increase student motivation and student participation in learning literary text reading skills so they are motivated to compete each other [32]-[35]. While Gallery Walk proved effective in smaller classes, its implementation in larger classrooms would require careful management. Teachers can adapt by dividing students into rotation groups or using digital galleries to ensure every learner remains engaged. The PBL with picture media framework can be adapted for subjects such as history, biology, or civic education, where visual problem prompts and collaborative interpretation enhance conceptual understanding and critical discussion.

5. CONCLUSION

This research focuses on efforts to improve critical reading skills of exposition text through the use of the Problem-Based Learning model with picture media in students of class XI D SMA Negeri 1 Purworejo. During the two cycles of learning implementation, it was found that this method succeeded in improving students' exposition text critical reading skills based on students' initial abilities through the implementation of diagnostic tests. Picture media provide contextual clues that bridge gaps in vocabulary knowledge. For low-proficiency students, visuals make abstract text content accessible and aid in constructing meaning without relying solely on linguistic cues. The use of picture media proved highly beneficial, particularly for students with moderate and low proficiency levels, who have low knowledge of English vocabulary. The use of picture media particularly benefited students with lower English proficiency, enhancing both motivation and comprehension, which gave students the space to give direct feedback to their peers.

Although picture media strongly benefit visual learners, auditory and kinesthetic students also gain through group dialogue and movement-based Gallery Walks. The multimodal nature of PBL activities

ensured inclusivity across learning styles. Beyond exposition texts, the PBL approach with picture media strengthens students' overall analytical literacy by training them to question, interpret, and evaluate information critically—skills applicable across reading genres and academic subjects. The use of image media can help students with low ability to better understand the topics described in the exposition text, especially for complex exposition texts. Therefore, teachers are advised to use this method in learning practices, especially the implementation of the independent curriculum, so that students not only improve critical reading literacy skills but also critical thinking and communication skills. Increased student participation in this study needs to be the focus of teachers' consideration, especially in the aspect of providing learning facilities, such as discussion rooms and differentiated learning activities. Further research is recommended to apply this approach in different contexts or subjects to evaluate its broader effectiveness. Future research should employ larger and more diverse samples with extended implementation periods to explore the long-term effects of PBL with picture media. Comparative studies across multiple schools could also determine the model's generalizability in various educational contexts.

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