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FROM REVIEW TO REFLECTION: EXPLORING STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON CRITIQUING ACADEMIC ARTICLES

Muhammad Arif Sanjaya[1], Irma Dewi Isda[2], Mulyani[3]

1,2,3Department of English Language Education, Samudra University, Indonesia
Corresponding author's E-mail ariev2209@unsam.ac.id

Abstract

This study investigates perceptions of, attitudes toward, challenges in, and how critique is influencing students' academic and reflective growth. Data were collected according to a mixed-methods study design through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with 25 undergraduate students enrolled in a Critical Reading course at Universitas Samudra. It has been found that appreciation by the students of the significance of critique in building critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and academic writing exists, but they find it challenging to handle complex terminologies, identifying arguments, and being objective. Time also seems to be a limiting factor. Students perceive that guided practice, group discussion, and further practice would make them more competent in critiquing. The literature addresses the need for learning processes that enable students to transition from recapitulation to critical thinking, and eventually to more intellectual engagement and confidence in scholarship. The literature guides the overarching argument about critical reading and its role in college learning.

Keywords: *Critical Reading, Academic Article, Reflective Critique, Higher Education*

INTRODUCTION

In schools and colleges, critical thinking is not just learning facts; it requires students to critique the information offered to them, question ideas that they are exposed to, stamp biases where necessary, and form intelligent conclusions (Bakhshandeh, 2021; Hanscomb, 2023; Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). This means students need to do more than study; they need to be capable of analysing, comprehending, and applying the knowledge. However, it drives the colleges to promote critical thinking skills since scrupulous teaching procedures and solid methods of examination are essentially mandated (Mascarenhas et al., 2023). The majority of instructors have been stressing the incorporation of critical thinking into general education courses. As an illustration, Southworth (2022) maintains that since critical thinking is key in helping learners solve real-life problems, it should be part of general education. By focusing on these abilities, teachers can better prepare students to tackle difficult issues in the classroom.

Either reading and reviewing research journal articles is one of the best ways in enhancing critical thinking, reasoning, and analytical skills among students (Sari & Prasetyo, 2021; Zulyusri et al., 2023). It entails requiring the students to analyze research structure, main arguments, methodology, and evidence while questioning assumptions, considering alternative viewpoints, and connecting the content to their experience and previous knowledge (Chukwuere, 2024a). Critical interaction with scholarly literature not only facilitates independent thinking and articulation of opinions

that are well-supported but also improves students' synthesis, argument critique, and scholarly writing (Demircioglu et al., 2023; Karanja, 2021; Kovpik, 2023; Rivas et al., 2022). While there is extensive literature emphasizing the intellectual benefits of critical reading, there is limited research on how students engage with and perceive criticizing academic writing, its reflective dimension in particular, so that gaps in understanding them internalize and implement these approaches in the long term (Chukwuere, 2024b; van Klink, 2023).

Recent studies have sought to close knowledge gaps among students in structured peer critique. Empirical evidence indicates that formal peer review enhances the overall quality of student assignments in all (Latifi et al., 2021; Man et al., 2022). However, such studies focus predominantly on procedural aspects and outcomes of peer review rather than on students' inner psychological experience. For instance, while the effectiveness of feedback structures and the nature of critiques have been questioned, very little attention has been given to how students emotionally and cognitively interact with the articles they are (Clark et al., 2022). On the other hand, fewer studies explore students' own experiences when carrying out critique tasks. Previous research on students' criticism of research papers has tended to prioritize technical or evaluative aspects of feedback at the expense of their subjective concerns (Yeh et al., 2023). This limited emphasis overlooks more critical aspects such as challenges experienced by the students, coping strategies, and overall impacts of criticism on learning development. A more detailed examination of students' reflective processes would be capable of revealing how they internalize feedback, build critical thinking.

It is therefore necessary to bridge this gap to better understand how students learn from academic writing and to inform pedagogical practice that will assist them in their progress as reflective learners and critical thinkers (Almulla & Al-Rahmi, 2023). This study therefore attempts to examine students' perception of the academic article critique process, identify issues that confront students, and explore how critiquing enhances their academic and reflective growth.

RESEARCH METHOD

In order to understand the process of critiquing the article done by the students, challenges they faced, and how it impacted to their critical thinking, the mixed-method approach was employed in this study to comprehend more deeply the students' experiences during critiquing journal article (Smith & Brown, 2021). There were 25 undergraduate students of Universitas Samudra studying English Language and Teaching who took part in the research, all studying the Critical Reading course; they were selected as they had conducted an article review as an alternative to their last exam, an activity aimed at achieving significant learning objectives such as the development of the skill of critical reading of academic materials, identification and assessment of arguments and evidence, questioning assumptions, synthesizing information from multiple sources, and articulating well-supported criticism both on paper and discussion.

Considering the data collection instruments, surveys and semi-structured interviews are employed in this study. A questionnaire was utilized to provide quantitative data on students' perceptions and experiences. The questionnaire was employed by combining 10 Likert-scale questions and 5 open-ended responses using Google Form. Likert-scale items assessed the students' self-perceived confidence in critiquing the articles, their awareness when reviewing and reflecting, and the challenges they encountered (Lee & Carter, 2022). Moreover, open-ended questions were stated in the form to provide the elaboration of their experiences.

For additional information, 5 students were interviewed through semi-structured interviews. Simple random sampling was utilized to ensure that each student in the group had an equal chance of being chosen, thus reducing selection bias and enhancing the representativeness of the sample. The interviews followed the journey that the students went through from reading to critical thinking in the area of critiquing articles, the challenges they encountered during the way, and their appreciation of the effect of the critique on their learning process themselves (Adams & White, 2023). The interviews were of order 10–15 minutes' duration, face-to-face, and were subsequently transcribed for content analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The report on student perception on journal article critique suggests the perception of the exercise with awareness of its positives and negatives. The findings fall into such categories as: (1) Confidence and Skills Acquired, (2) Challenges Encountered, (3) Suggestions for Improvement, and (4) Value of Critiquing. These themes are supported by both quantitative data (Likert scale responses) and qualitative results (open-ended responses).

1. Confidence and Skills Acquired

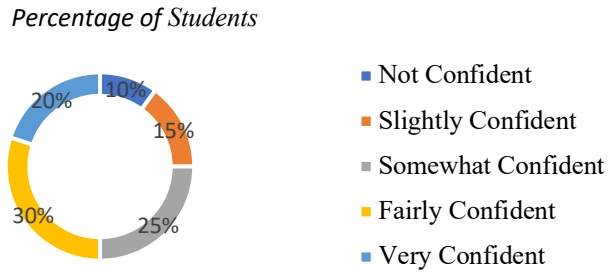


Figure 1. *Students' Confidence*

Students were somewhat confident in their academic article critique skills with a mean rating of 3.5 out of 5 on the item, "*I feel confident in my ability to critique academic articles*". The mean rating was interpreted as demonstrating a moderate confidence level in which, on average, students were somewhat competent rather than highly confident in their critique skills. Although 30% of students expressed high levels

of confidence (scores of 4 and 5), a significant percentage (40%) marked their confidence to be 3 or less, indicating the need to enhance confidence among students. Despite this, students conceded that the process of critique has remained central to students' learning improvement.

The majority of the students (75%) agreed or strongly agreed that critiquing articles enhances their critical thinking, and 65% reported that they have enhanced their analytical ability. Another 50% of the students reported that their writing ability at the academic level had been enhanced through critiquing articles. One student stated, "*Critiquing articles has made me think more critically and analyze arguments better, which has also improved my writing*". The findings suggest that students will be less confident initially but critiquing articles improves valuable skills in academia.

The moderate level of confidence displayed by students (average score of 3.5 out of 5) shows that while most students recognize the significance of critiquing articles, they are still not sure of their ability. This is also in consonance with Dwyer et al. (2014) research, where students lack faith in critical analysis activities due to a lack of adequate practice and direction. However, knowledge acquired through critiquing, i.e., critical thinking, analytical ability, and enhanced writing, is firmly established in present research. Li et al. (2024) emphasized that students' understanding and ability to craft the arguments were deepened through engaging in critical analysis. They believed that critiquing the academic articles assisted the, to think in a critical way and delivered the arguments in a systematic way. Kuhn (2019) further noted that in order to achieve the academic and professional environments, it is essentially needed to incorporate such skill as critical thinking ability.

2. Challenges Encountered

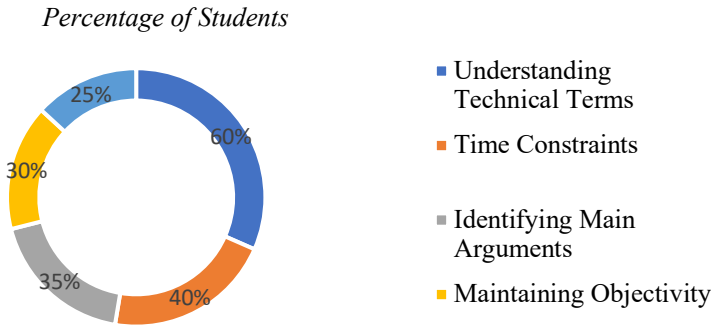


Figure 2. *Students' Challenge*

In spite of the benefits, students enumerated some difficulties that deterred them from critiquing academic articles effectively. The most frequently cited difficulty was the identification of the technical terms and complex concepts presented in the articles, as noted by 60% of the students. This was done by dividing the number of students who had found this challenge to be a problem (15 out of 25) by the number of participants and then multiplying by 100. They also experienced problems in understanding the

context of the articles, particularly if the topic happened to be beyond their present knowledge. For example, one of the students responded, "*I think it is hard to understand the technical vocabulary and the system of knowledge of the article; therefore, it is quite hard to criticize*".

Another common challenge was identifying the main arguments as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the articles. Students also got difficulty in distinguishing the argument of the author, as one student put it, "*The hardest thing is to separate the argument of the article and the argument of the author because they sound alike but not identical*". Other students also got difficulty in maintaining objectivity during the critique, with some students were afraid if their critiques might turn out to be too negative or biased. Time constraints also emerged as a significant thing, with the majority thought they need for extra time to read and study articles thoroughly.

Such challenges faced by the students as understanding of technical terminologies, identifying the main arguments as well as the objectivity appears to be the common challenges to effective critical analysis. Katajamäki (2020) indicated that students usually challenged with academic article terminologies that with technical and complex can possibly hinder them from effective critiquing. This concurs with the findings of this study, where 60% of the students said they find it difficult to comprehend technical terms and abstract concepts. Further, objectivity in critiquing is a phenomenon that has long been documented. Friedman (2017) quoted that students were reluctant to be too critical or prejudiced, and this could prevent them from providing sincere and helpful critiques. This aligns with the students' fears "sounding too negative" or "being too critical". Wolters & Brady (2021) also set up that to achieve the effective critical analysis, time constraints made the students felt pressured to speed through their critiques. That is why some students mentioned they need for more time to read to be able to analyze the articles thoroughly.

3. Suggestions for Improvement

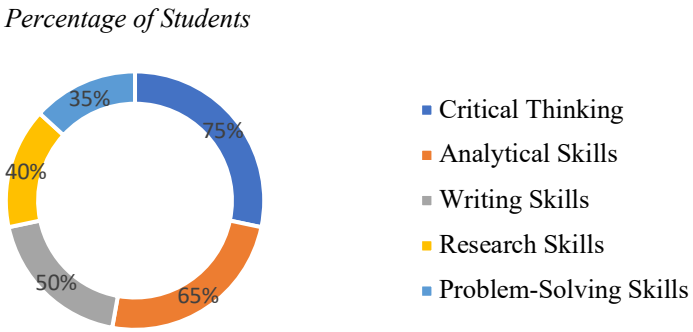


Figure 3. *Students' Improvement*

Students gave recommendations to enhance the critiquing process. First, there should be given extra time for critiquing because most of them complained that they did not have any sufficient time to complete their work. Second, students asked for clear instructions and examples of how to critique in such a good way as a template.

One of the students suggested, "*it would be probably better if there are examples of finished critique so it can be used as a guidance*". Another suggestion was to undergo group discussions along with the critique process. Students believed that they would learn and make better critiques by working together. One student offered, "*We should have more group discussion to consider other perspectives so that our critiques become better*". Furthermore, several students proposed the requirement of doing it regularly to get accustomed to the process of critique. As another student summed it up, "*The more articles you read and critique, the more you'll be able to understand and give good critiques*".

Recommendations sounded by the students on how to enhance the critique process, i.e., providing more time, clear, comprehensible instructions, and space for group discussion, are in line with some literatures. Golden (2023) mandated that guided instruction and clear instructions are necessary so that the students' critical analysis competencies can be improved. Similarly, Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist model, re-interpreted in the more contemporary research such as Rho & Van Veen (2025), also focuses on collaborative learning benefits, whereby students are able to learn from each other via either peer feedback or alternative perspectives. The research students echoed this, and some of the students proposed "more group discussion to see different perspectives" and "clear guidelines and examples of good critiques." These highlighted a need for the development of critical analysis in a more aided and collaborative one.

4. Value of Critiquing

Despite the difficulties, all the students except one agreed that reading academic articles is a rewarding learning activity. This concurred with Mohamed Nor & Sihes (2021), who had proposed critical analysis as a higher-order thinking skill in achieving successful learning. The students in this research concluded that criticism allowed them to "more fully engage with the subject" and "better understand research methods." These are moving towards higher education goals that seek to encourage the ease of critical thinking and engagement by students with upper-level ideas. Furthermore, Awidi & Klutsey (2024) concluded that those students who daily exercise critical thinking perform better academically and are more confident about their own capabilities, and thus endorse critique as an instructional tool.

Furthermore, the students' responses during the interview session are inferred in some striking themes and patterns explaining their experiences and thoughts as they reviewed the academic journal articles. The interview questions used to inquire from the interviewees are provided as follows:

Table 1. *Questions During the Interview*

Q. 1
How do you define the difference between reviewing and reflecting on an academic article?
Q.2
What challenges do you face when transitioning from reviewing to reflecting?

Q.3
How do you determine what aspects of an article are most important for reflection?
Q.4
What strategies do you use to improve your reflective thinking skills?
Q.5
How does writing a critique of an article contribute to your academic development?
Q.6
Have you noticed any improvements in your analytical skills since you started engaging in reflective writing?
Q.7
How do you overcome writer's block when reflecting on an article?
Q.8
Do you think reflecting on academic articles has influenced your confidence in academic discussions?
Q.9
What advice would you give to students struggling to move beyond summarizing?
Q.10
How do you think reflection as a skill will benefit you beyond academic settings?

Based on the students' responses, it highlights some of the key themes regarding the transition from reviewing to reflecting on academic articles, the challenges students face, and how they attempt to develop their reflective thinking capacity. Here, we describe these themes with the support of existing literature.

1. Reviewing vs. Reflecting

The students agreed unanimously that reviewing is summarizing what an article states, yet reflection is far more intensive and critical than such. Student A and Student B indicated that reflection is about comparing the ideas from the article with one's understanding and experiences, whereas Student C indicated that reflection is a method of analysis and questioning. This is in accordance with current research that theorized reflection as a process of higher-order thinking instead of summarizing, marked by critical analysis and personal interpretation (Barbashina, 2022). Student D and Student E also further stated that reflection involves presenting a personal interpretation and judging the validity and appropriateness of the arguments of the article. This distinction means that reflection is a higher-order ability that is developed from the original act of review, consistent with Dienichieva et al. (2024) argument that reflection results in enhanced learning and cognitive growth.

2. Challenges from Reviewing to Reflecting

This change from reviewing to reflecting poses some dilemmas for the students. Subjectivity was a dominant concern, with Student A worrying about bringing in too much personal opinion and Student E fearing misrepresenting the author's arguments. This is also evidenced by Alt et al., (2022)'s study, in which it was found that students

struggle with achieving a balance between personal voice and scholarly formality in reflective writing. Student B and Student C struggled to move beyond summarizing and connecting the content of the article to their own experiences, especially when the topic was not well known to them. This echoes findings by Thompson (2021), where the inability to confidently and routinely undertake reflective tasks was listed as significant barriers. Student D also added that reflection is longer since it entails higher-order thinking. Such difficulties highlight the necessity for practice and support in developing reflective capacities, as promoted by contemporary pedagogical research (Harvey et al., 2025).

3. What to Reflect On

Various students used various approaches in determining what matters most within an article to reflect on. While Student A analyzed the central dispute of the article and Student C analyzed inflammatory comments, Student B analyzed portions of the article that were different from what they once knew. This aligns with Chan & Lee (2021), who noted students' discussion about what in a text contradicts their assumptions or is unknown to them. Students D and E were keen on connecting the ideas of the article to practice and evaluating evidence and methodology. These strategies suggest that reflection is highly personalized, with students having in mind what matters most to them within their academic or personal interest for the article, an event which Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia et al. (2020) has also noted.

4. Strategies in Reflective Thinking

To facilitate the students' reflective thought, students also employed such diverse strategies as taking notes on early responses or free writing who employed by Student A and Student D to organize their thinking. Supported by Overmann (2025) study, he highlighted that the application of free writing can overcome cognitive blocks in reflection. Student B and Student E also referred outside by discussing articles with friends or reading other reflective essays, a practice that is in line with social theories of learning (Sudirman et al., 2024a). Student C employed guiding questions to support their analysis, a practice that is supported in recent research as a scaffolding technique for reflective thinking (Yaacob et al., 2020).These methods imply that reflective thinking can be developed through a combination of individual practice, peer discussion, and exposure to examples of reflective writing.

5. Benefits of Reflective Writing

Reflective writing provided highly beneficial improvement to students' academic development. Student A and C stated that their critical thinking and content engagement in depth were enhanced. Whereas Student B and Student E felt that their potential in developing analytical ability and source judgment were improved. As aligned with H. C. Yeh et al.'s (2023) study that reflective writing helps students to critically evaluate academic texts and build well-supported arguments. Furthermore, student D emphasized the level of confidence from the process of constructing and verbalizing

scholarly arguments were increasingly good. Yaacob et al. (2020) also underscored through a correlation established with improved academic self-efficacy. Both benefits suggest that reflective writing promotes better academic students' performance.

6. Writer's Block

Students had traded real coping techniques to get through the writer's block in the reflection. The coping techniques shared were actual from the students that were able to overcome the writers' block after the reflection, which included taking a break from other people. Others were brain storming from the visual tools, mind map (Student C). These mirror what is prevailing in current studies by Evdash & Zhuravleva (2020). The techniques for overcoming creativity blocks were: cognitive breaks, brainstorming as strategies to overcoming creativity blocks. Free writing and reading other people's reflections for inspiration, research-informed reflective writing pedagogy practices (Shin & Choi, 2024), were also recommended by Student D and Student E. These practices indicate that the most appropriate way to evade writer's block is a temporary diversion from the task or inspiration from elsewhere.

7. Impact on Confidence in Academic Discussions

Reflected writing was also determined to considerably promote students' belief in scholarly arguing. Student A and Student B indicated higher self-confidence to pose their personal point of view, whereas Student C and Student D wrote of their increased articulacy as well as susceptibility to argument. This is congruent with Sudirman et al. (2024b), who ascertained reflective writing improves the students' ability to participate and comment on academic argument. Student E explained higher class involvement in contentious arguments, also attested by Penggabean et al. (2023), who credited to reflective practice to allow for higher levels of participation during class arguments. This indicates that reflective writing enhances analysis and yet makes the student more interesting within academic discussion.

8. Advice for Struggling Students

Detailed feedback was given by students to underperforming students who were having difficulty summarizing. Guide questions were in most demand as feedback (Student A), connect articles to personal life (Student C), and drill (Student E). These are repeated in existing research studies of pedagogy of reflective writing, confirming scaffolding and drill in developing reflective capacity (Khusna, 2021; Salem, 2016). Student B and Student D concurred in the requirement for reading samples of reflective writing and being at ease in airing personal opinion, behaviour. The suggestion is practice, exposure, and confidence needed in acquiring the skill of reflection.

9. Reflection Beyond Academia

Finally, the students quoted higher-order applications of reflection beyond the classroom. Student A and Student C quoted problem-solving and decision-making applications, whereas Student B and Student D quoted its application in taking multiple

perspectives alongside sound professional decision-making. Adhikari's (2023) evidence from research corroborates the findings above with its finding that reflective competence is applied in the profession and facilitates better decision-making and critical thinking. Student E too confirmed gaining developing self-awareness, a gate to personal and career growth. The result shows that reflection is a continuous process of return to use employability skill.

CONCLUSION

The study probed students' attitudes towards critique of academic works with a focus on confidence, challenges, and skills developed along the way. The findings from the study established that although the students began the exercise with a moderate level of confidence in critique, they also recognized the worldwide benefits of the exercise, particularly in enhancing critical thinking, analysis skills, and academic writing. However, issues such as understanding technical terms, identifying general argumentation, and objectivity were universal, indicating the need for more formal instruction and practice. Students also suggested improvements such as longer critique time, adequate instructions, and group discussions, which are consistent with existing research on the need for scaffolding and peer teaching in the acquisition of critical thinking skills.

Overall, the outcomes of this study have some positive implications for education and learning. First, teachers need to offer scaffolding support to the students to help them gain confidence in article critiquing. This may be through the provision of clear guidelines, exemplars of good critique performance, and practice opportunities. Second, cooperative learning activities such as group discussion and peer review need to be incorporated in the critique activity so that the students can receive a range of opinions and develop their analytical capacity.

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