



# **Materials and Media *in* English Language Teaching**

*Editors*

**Bambang Yudi Cahyono  
Fika Megawati**



STATE UNIVERSITY OF MALANG PRESS

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**State University of Malang Press**

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Cahyono, B. Y., & Megawati, F.  
Materials and Media in English Language Teaching — By: Bambang Yudi Cahyono & Fika Megawati (Editors) — First Printing—Malang: State University of Malang Press.

522, xxii pages, 23 cm  
ISBN: 979-495-026-2

© State University of Malang Press, 2013

Cover Design : Nur Aida Ikrima  
Layout : Yusuf

#### Printed and Published by

**State University of Malang Press**  
Member of the Indonesian Publishers Association (IKAPI) No. 059/JTI/89  
Jalan Semarang 5 Malang, Post Code 65145, Indonesia  
Telephone 62-341-551312, ext. 453, Fax 62-341-566025  
E-mail: penerbit@malang.ac.id

First Printing, 2013

Printed in the Republic of Indonesia

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## FOREWORD

This edited volume, *Materials and Media in English Language Teaching*, contains 32 chapters that were selected from 95 papers presented in the *Fifth National English Language Teachers and Lecturers (NELTAL) Conference* conducted at State University of Malang, East Java, Indonesia, on March 30, 2013. The title of this edited volume is exactly like the theme of the annual conference, *Materials and Media in English Language Teaching*. The theme was chosen due to the great interest in the development of various kinds of materials as well as application of low-tech and hi-tech media in English Language Teaching and Learning. With the increasing number of presentations (2 plenary and 93 parallel sessions), selection was a really tough process. However, out of a number of criteria determined paper selection, "direct relevance to the theme" was the first in the rank. For papers which are not presented in this book, we returned the copyright to the authors and they are suggested to send their papers to other kinds of publications.

The NELTAL conference was initiated from the awareness that so far there have been limited opportunities for English language teachers working in secondary schools to present their thoughts, reflections and experiences related to English language teaching and learning. Thus, the conference is conducted as a response to the need to provide an opportunity for the teachers to take part in the academic forum as presenters. The conference has been maintained with the academic spirit *from, by, and for* English language teachers and lecturers. Hopefully, the NELTAL conference can breed productive teachers and lecturers who will continuously write and present their academic work in various kinds of conferences and publications. The effort that has been made so far is relevant to the spirit of learning as expressed in the motto of the host university, State University of Malang, "The Learning University."

A number of people contributed to the organization of the conference and the publication of this book. Accordingly, we would like to thank the Dean (Professor Dawud), the Assistant Dean on Academic Affairs (Dr. Yazid Basthomi), and the Head of the Centre for Language and Culture (Dr. Suharmanto), and the Head of the English Department (Dr. Johannes Ananto Prayogo) of the Faculty of Letters of State University of Malang. We express our gratitude to all of the paper presenters and especially presenters whose

# **Reformulating Reading Materials to Foster Students' Critical Thinking**

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## **Abstract**

This paper proposes the formulation of reading materials to meet the need to improve students' critical thinking. It is based on Bloom's revised taxonomy covering six levels of critical thinking namely remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating. Reading is an effective way of engaging students in critical thinking which can be done either through printed or electronic materials. This enables teachers to incorporate between the teaching of critical thinking and language skills. The idea to incorporate between the two mainstreams is rooted from the new paradigm of 4R basic competences (*reading, writing, arithmetic, and reasoning*) stated in the international benchmark of education. In this view, learners are equipped with critical thinking skills needed to support their current and future life economically, socially and culturally. Therefore some ways to foster learners' critical thinking which is developed through the medium of reformulated reading materials are explored using examples. The materials encourage students' involvement to the activities suitable with the cognitive domains through a number of key verbs associated with higher order critical thinking skills which can also be done through digital materials. This process requires some phases such as material selection, evaluation and adaptation to meet the feature of critical thinking based reading materials.

**Keywords:** *Critical thinking, reading materials.*

Equipping students with the ability to think critically is equal to improving the quality of Indonesian human resources (National Education Department, 2009). In ELT context, it can be implemented through reading classes supported by critical thinking based reading materials. Regarding this issue, this paper is intended to review the nature of reading and critical thinking, and the incorporation of critical thinking in reading materials.

### **Reading and Critical Thinking**

Reading is an activity characterized by the translation of symbols, or letters, into words and sentences that have meaning to the individual. The ultimate goal of reading is to be able to understand written material, to evaluate it, and to use it for one's needs (Chall & Stahl, 2009). Getting the meaning and understanding the text is not only the business done in reading, it benefits more when the reading materials can foster the reader's critical thinking.

Reading has three levels namely literal, inferential and evaluational reading. Literal reading is comprehending text which refers to identifying written facts involving identification and recall of main ideas and supporting details, also analysis and reorganization of ideas by summarizing. The inferential reading is comprehending text covering interpretive or interpreting implicit meaning, general inferential or interpreting the whole supporting details, and predictive or predicting the development of the content in the text. While, the evaluational reading is comprehending text covering judgment by showing philosophical judgement on the author's agreement or disagreement, appreciative by giving emotional reactions to the text, and critical by questioning the information in the text (Barret in Indah, 2002). Critical reading is applied in evaluational reading but it does not mean that the literal reading and inferential reading have nothing to do with critical thinking. In all the three levels, critical thinking skills can be accommodated.

Critical thinking is defined as a technique for evaluating information and ideas, for deciding what to accept and believe, whereas critical reading is a technique for discovering

information and ideas within a text (Kurland, 2000). This technique involves reflecting on the validity of reading in light of the prior knowledge and understanding of the world. Whereas, in smaller scope, it can be applied in reading as critical reading activities. Critical reading refers to a careful, active, reflective, analytic reading. It can be inferred that critical reading is a part of critical thinking.

In critical reading there are some suggested ways to look for thought pattern in the reading materials. *First*, determining the central claims or purpose of the text. *Second*, making some judgments about context. *Third*, distinguishing the kinds of reasoning the text employs. *Fourth*, examining the evidence (the supporting facts, examples, etc) the text employs. And *fifth*, making a series of judgments about how a text is argued (Knott, 2009).

In reading classes today, many reading skills and strategies for use in everyday situation have been put in various emphases. Unfortunately, attempts at dealing with the many complex reading skills frequently come too late, at university level (Heaton, 1989). Therefore, critical thinking based reading materials should be introduced earlier.

Dealing with the nature of reading in second language setting, readers should use their background knowledge regarding the topic, text structure, their knowledge of the world, and their knowledge of print to interact with the text and to make predictions about it (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). This process resembles the incorporation between reading process and the dynamic of critical thinking skills. In doing so, good materials is the fundamental requirement. Not only functioning as good exposure to English and good models for English writing, it should stimulate student's critical thinking. Good reading texts can introduce interesting topics to stimulate discussion, excite imaginative responses and be the spring-boat for well-rounded, fascinating lessons (Harmer, 1998). Through these characteristics, the augment of critical thinking as the expected outcome can be attained as well.



Another consideration is also made due to reading principles which go together with the critical thinking skills applied in reading. There are some basic principles of reading viewed from content, purpose and expectation, and receptive skills (Harmer, 1995). On the content aspect, reading can be done due to interest such as for enjoyment, pleasure or intellectual stimulation; and to usefulness like understanding manual or instruction. The purpose and expectation of reading deal with finding out or discovering certain information. Usually readers also have expectation about the content of the text before reading it. The receptive skills involved in reading cover six abilities namely predictive skills, extracting specific information, getting the general picture, extracting detailed information, recognizing function and discourse patterns, and deducing meaning from context.

### **Critical Thinking Based Reading Materials**

In reading, there are four identifiable skills. *First*, skimming which is reading for gist, e.g. quickly glancing through an article to see if it interests the reader. *Second*, scanning or reading to locate specific information, e.g. locating a telephone number in a directory. *Third*, intensive reading where the reader is trying to absorb all the information given, e.g. reading dosage instruction for medicine. *Fourth*, extensive reading where the reader deals with a longer text as a whole, which requires the ability to understand the component parts and their contribution to the overall meaning, e.g. reading a newspaper article, short story or novel (Wright, 1992). The whole skills are included in dealing with critical thinking based reading materials.

In light of the reading materials, the matter is not on how various the materials are but on how effective the instruction provided in leading students to critical thinking. A research by Hayes-Bohannon & Spievak (2008) found that using critical thinking based instruction in guiding students' reading leads to some benefits. Students reported that they had learned how to break down tasks, especially when reading articles. Many students reported that they had

learned to apply the lower order skills of reading an article several times of note-taking, of summarizing, and using a dictionary to look up unfamiliar words. Some reached higher levels of critical thinking and reported that they looked for similarities and differences in articles, or considered how the information applied to their own lives to make it more meaningful to them and to critically analyze the information.

Good reading materials enable student to develop their cognitive skills which become the primary domain of reading activities. The skills of analyzing, inferring and interpreting a text activate cognitive skills which become the major elements of critical thinking. The cognitive skills blended in the model of critical thinking are rooted from Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive skills including things like logic, analysis, evaluation, inference, interpretation, explanation, and synthesis (Ellis, 2008). Alternatively, some other lists that decompose these into further more specific skills could also be used. For instance, analysis can be decomposed into deconstructing, contrasting, and comparing. Accordingly, whatever reading strategies applied by EFL teachers in the teaching and learning process will always involve critical thinking skills.

Bloom's revised taxonomy covers six levels of critical thinking namely remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating. The first three levels are covered in reading comprehension that is *knowing* which includes recognizing sentence structure and recalling factual information, *comprehending* which refers to finding meaning and paraphrasing sentences, and *applying* which aims at being able form generalization and drawing conclusions (Oka, 1992).

The three top levels of the original taxonomy consist of analysis, synthesis and evaluation. The first is characterized by the ability to separate material or concepts into component parts so that its organizational structure may be understood including the ability to distinguish between facts and inferences. The middle is on building a structure or pattern

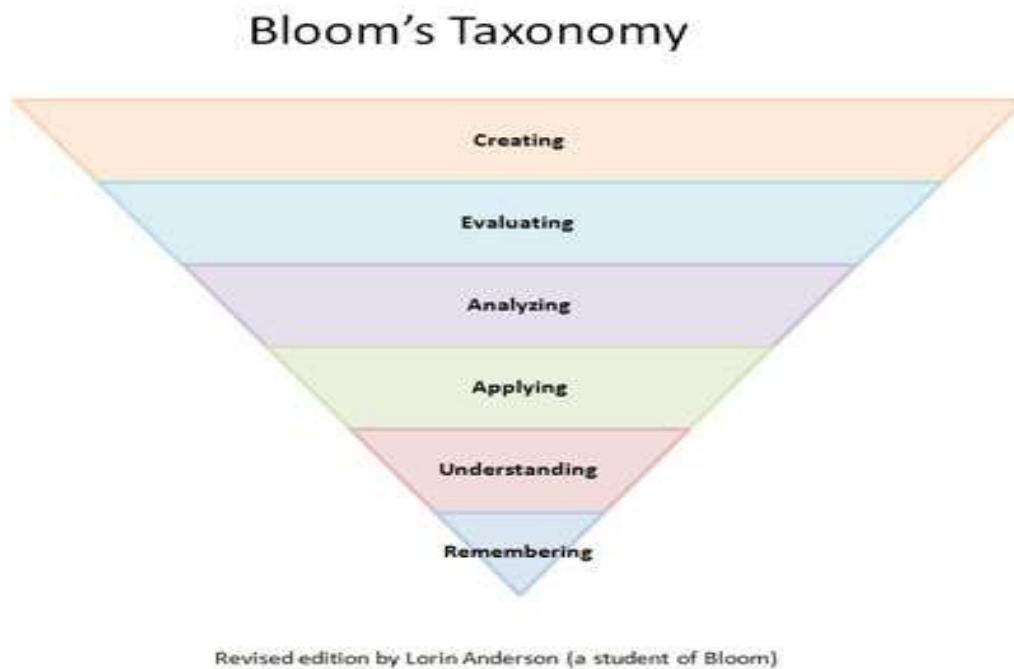
from diverse elements. This is done by putting parts together to form a whole, with emphasis on creating a new meaning or structure. The last is to make judgments about the value of ideas or materials (Clark, 2010).

In the new version of the cognitive classification, the top competence is on *creating* which deals with the learners' skill to create new product or point of view. It is reflected by the verb to *assemble, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, and write*. This is done after the learners pass *evaluating* stage in which they can justify a stand or decision by using the verb *appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, or evaluate*. This ability requires *analyzing* or the skill to distinguish between the different parts of a discourse revealed by the verb to *appraise, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, or test* (Clark, 2010). These three top competencies demand the accomplishment of *applying* the information in new way, *understanding* ideas or concept and *remembering* certain information.

In the process of critical reading, some questions following each of the cognitive level. In remembering, the basic information is recalled through asking "Who? What? When? Where? How? Why?" Then, the question of understanding is "How can I retell this using my own words?" To indicate applying, the question is "How can I apply this knowledge or procedure to produce a certain result?" When one applies analyzing, he asks "How do the parts or sections fit together to make up the whole?" On the stage of evaluating, the question is "What factors should I consider to decide whether these ideas are worthwhile?" As the peak cognition of creating, the question is "What other explanations or solutions are there?" (Dole & Taggart, 2012).

The change of the taxonomy is not only on the use of verb but also on the form of the pyramid as shown in Figure 1 below. The revised edition serves another perspective of

understanding the cognitive taxonomy where from the activity of creating, the cognition proceeds as a cycle so that remembering knowledge becomes an acquisition.



**Figure 1** Revised edition of Bloom's Taxonomy (in Clark, 2010)

Creating is the largest portion of the revised taxonomy as shown in Figure 1 as it involves more dimension of thinking namely critical and creative thinking. Critical thinking employed in evaluation and creative thinking integrated in synthesis are classified as techniques used in problem-solving and decision-making (Huitt, 1998).

### **Reformulating Instruction in Reading Materials**

When the cognitive skills are applied to reading, this process requires some phases such as material selection, evaluation and adaptation to meet the feature of critical thinking based reading materials. Therefore some ways to foster learners' critical thinking which is developed through the medium of reformulated reading materials are needed. The materials should encourage students' involvement to the activities suitable with the cognitive domains through a number of key verbs associated with higher order critical thinking skills.

In the reading material which is related to literature, the instruction can be suited with the targetted cognitive skills. On *remembering*, the materials are set at random so that as the instruction students are asked to arrange scrambled story sentences in sequential order. Given the story, students can also be asked to recall details about the setting by creating a picture of where a part of the story took place.

To train the *comprehension*, the reading materials should provide the student an opportunity to demonstrate a basic understanding of the story. Success at this level will be evidenced by the student's ability to interpret pictures of scenes from the story, to explain selected ideas or parts from the story in his or her own words, or to draw a picture showing what happened before and after a passage or illustration found in the text. In addition, the students are expected to be able to predict what could happen next in the story before the reading of the entire story is completed. Another way to instruct students to explore their thought is by asking them to construct a pictorial time line which summarizes what happens in the story and explain how the main character felt at the beginning, middle, or end of the story.

A good reading materials to enhance the skill in *application* should provide the students an opportunity to use information from the story in a new way. Success at this level will be evidenced by the student's ability to classify the characters as human, animal, or thing, and to transfer a main character to a new setting. Another effective instruction is to ask them to think of a situation that occurred to a character in the story and write about how he or she would have handled the situation differently, and to give examples of people the student knows who have the same problems as the characters in the story.

The above three levels are not sufficient without completing the top three levels of the cognitive domain. In the level of *analysis*, through the materials students take parts of the story and examine the parts carefully in order to better understand the whole story. Success at

this level will be evidenced by the student's ability to identify general characteristics (stated and/or implied) of the main characters and to distinguish what could happen from what couldn't happen in the story in real life. Further analysis is made when the students are instructed to select parts of the story that were funniest, saddest, happiest, and most unbelievable. In addition, they can compare and/or contrast two of the main characters.

On the stage of *evaluation*, the materials provide students with an opportunity to form and present an opinion backed by sound reasoning. Success at this level will be evidenced by the student's ability to decide which character in the selection he or she would most like to spend a day with and why. In addition, they can judge whether or not a character should have acted in a particular way and why. Further, they may decide if the story really could have happened and justify the decision as well as consider how the story can help the students in their own life. Through evaluating the story, the students can appraise the value of the story, compare the story with another one the student has read and write a recommendation as to why the story should be read or not.

As the largest portion, more activities can be done in the *creating* level which provides the students with opportunity to put parts from the story together in a new way to form a new idea or product. Success at this level will be evidenced by the student's ability to write three new titles for the story that would give a good idea what it is about. They may create a poster to advertise the story so people will want to read it or to create a new product related to the story. It would be more interesting to ask the students to restructure the roles of the main characters to create new outcomes in the story. They also can be challenged to write a diary account of daily thoughts and activities based on their imagination of one of the main characters of the story (Teacher Created Resources, 2004).

Through the above examples of the instruction provided to foster the students' critical thinking, it can be inferred that leading the students to the targeted critical thinking skills



depends on the effective instruction. Any materials will do for critical thinking skills. It does not mean that critical reading only needs argumentative texts because in the explanation above literature is a good alternative.

### **Critical Thinking Skills through Digital Reading Materials**

Beside the choice of the genre, the critical thinking based reading materials also varied in types. Because reading is an effective way of engaging students in critical thinking, it can be done either through printed or electronic materials. In digital world, reading with the light of critical thinking also agrees with the elements of the taxonomy.

As a way of *remembering*, inferring the retrieval of online materials can be simply made by bullet pointing which is analogous to listing but in a digital format. Students can also use highlighting which encourages them to pick out key words and phrases from the online text as a technique for recall. They may also use bookmarking for later use web sites, resources and files.

The *understanding* is established through the digital reading materials when the instruction is to use advanced searching so that students require a greater depth of understanding to be able to create, modify and refine searches to suit their search needs. Blog journaling is another way of this level where a student simply "talks" "writes" or "types" a daily- or task-specific journal. The blog can be used to develop higher level thinking when used for discussion and collaboration. Twittering is a tool that lends itself to developing understanding and potentially starting collaboration. Understanding is achieved when the reading instruction lead students to the activity of categorizing through digital classification - organizing and classifying files, web sites and materials using folders etc.

On the next level, *applying*, the digital reading materials can provide students with the opportunity to make report, to upload and share for instance by uploading materials to

websites and the sharing of materials via sites like Flickr etc. This is a simple form of collaboration, a higher order thinking skill. Editing also belongs to this category.

Digital reading materials provide students for *analyzing* by doing mashing or integrating several data sources into a single resource. The activity of linking also belongs to analysing skills. Instruction for validating is also effective because with the wealth of information available to students combined with the lack of authentication of data, students of today and tomorrow must be able to validate the veracity of their information sources. To do this they must be able to analyze the data sources and make judgments based on these. In addition, analyzing can be made through tagging. This includes a way of organizing, structuring and attributing online data, meta-tagging web pages etc. In this case students need to be able understand and analyze the content of the pages to be able to tag it.

As the way to elevate the critical thinking skills through *evaluating*, the digital reading materials should be completed with the instruction for conducting blog commenting and reflecting. Here, students are exposed to constructive criticism and reflective practice which are often facilitated by the use of blogs and video blogs. Students commenting and replying to postings have to evaluate the material in context and reply. The instruction should also encourage posting comments to blogs, discussion boards, threaded discussions. These are increasingly common elements of students' daily practice. Good postings like good comments, are not simple one-line answers but rather are structured and constructed to evaluate the topic or concept. Another way to augment the evaluation skill is by collaborating and networking. Collaboration is an increasing feature of education. In a world increasingly focused on communication, collaboration leading to collective intelligence is a key aspect. Effective collaboration involves evaluating the strengths and abilities of the participants and

evaluating the contribution they make. While, networking is a feature of collaboration, contacting and communicating with relevant person via a network of associates.

As a more complex cognitive domain, *creating*, the digital reading materials can be supplemented with the instruction to encourage students' publishing – whether via the web or from home computers, publishing in text, media or digital formats. It needs teachers' creativity to modify the instruction supporting the enhancement of the targeted critical thinking skills through the digital reading materials.

### **Questions to Lead Critical Thinking Skills**

In the following, samples of questions leading to the critical thinking skills are given.

The text is an extract adapted from Campbell-Lendrum & Corvalán (2007).

(1) Climate change is highly inequitable, as the greatest risks are to the poorest populations, who have contributed least to greenhouse gas emissions. (2) We review the specific health vulnerabilities of urban populations in developing countries, and highlight the range of health effects of energy policies that are concentrated in urban areas. (3) The rapid economic development and urbanization of poorer countries mean that cities in developing countries will be both vulnerable to health hazards from climate change and, simultaneously, will also increasingly contribute to the problem. (4) Thus, climate change is not only an environmental issue; it is also an emerging threat to global public health.

- A. Is it true that climate change brings great risks to all people?
- B. Write the outline of the paragraph.
- C. Which sentence contains supporting sentences?
- D. Which part is the testable prediction?
- E. Did you find this reading informative? Why?
- F. List some questions related to the issue presented by the author.

Based on the above sample of questions, it can be inferred that even a short passage consisting of four sentences can be used as critical thinking based reading materials.

Question A is an example of practicing *remembering* the basic information which is given in the form of true-false question. Another way to practice this skill can be done by asking the following questions:

- Who or what is the reading about?
- Identify the topic of this passage.
- What is the main subject of the reading?
- Define the key terms related to the issue presented.
- List the order of events in this story.

Question B is related with *understanding* as it requires the explanation of the ideas presented by the author. Student's ability to create an outline, or a summary or an explanation of the information to someone else verbally is proof that s/he understands. Other possible types of question are:

- Which of the following best restates the main idea of the passage?
- Which of the following statements best summarizes this reading?
- Discuss the four key details that contributed to the issue.
- Which of the following best paraphrases the issue of this reading?

Question C deals with *applying*, in which students practice identifying patterns of organization they learned in class. The other examples are:

- The author's example in the first paragraph demonstrates which of the following?
- Organize the following ideas from most general to least general.
- Diagram the author's experiment as described in the last paragraph.
- Which of the following best illustrates the author's claim?

Question D practices *analyzing* so that students learn the part of the paragraph and to see how it relates to another part. The following is another question related with analyzing:

- Which of the following does the author imply?
- Explain how the following detail supports the author's main point.
- Examine the following statements and decide which one is the fact.
- Investigate and explain the figure provided

Question E as an example of *evaluating* covers the students' ability to decide the value of the information provided in the text. The other ways to practice evaluation are:

- Does the author do a good job of supporting her argument? Explain your thoughts.
- Assess the author bias found in paragraph 1.
- Rank the author's support of the claim from strongest to weakest.
- If you were to judge the situation found in this reading, who would you find guilty?
- Critique the author's plan. Do you think it will work? Why or why not?

In the last part, question F, students are expected to draw conclusion to come up with their own ideas. The other types of question are as follow:

- The author criticizes the current model. Can you create a new design?
- Imagine that you were in the situation described in this text. What would you do?
- Adapt the following short story so that it has a happy ending.

(Adapted from Dole & Taggart, 2012)

### **Concluding Remark**

There are a lot of ways to foster learners' critical thinking one of which is by reformulating the instruction in the reading materials. It should be noted that the core is to encourage students' involvement to the activities suitable with the cognitive domains through a number of key verbs associated with higher order critical thinking skills. Any reading

materials will be good and applicable as long as it fulfills the need and interest of the students. This paper has suggested some useful examples in varying the questions following various type of texts either printed or through digital materials. Even the material related to literature can be a very good source for leading students' critical thinking skills. It is the role of the instructions or the questions which drive the reading materials into critical thinking based. Through the questions the students will learn better.

*"Feeding students endless content to remember (that is, declarative sentences to remember) is akin to repeatedly stepping on the brakes in a vehicle that is, unfortunately, already at rest. Instead, students need questions to turn on their intellectual engines and they need to generate questions from our questions to get their thinking to go somewhere."*  
-- Dr. Paul (in "Role of Questions in Teaching, Thinking, and Learning")

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