

AN APPLIED RESEARCH ON INTEGRATING READING AND SPEAKING ACTIVITIES TO FOSTER CRITICAL THINKING IN EFL STUDENTS

Yokie Prasetya Dharma¹, Ilinawati^{2*}, Ferdinanda Itu Meo³

STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa, Indonesia^{1,2,&3}

*Corresponding Author: selvinilina@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The previous studies have examined reading and speaking as separate skills in EFL instruction, there remains limited understanding of how their integration can enhance students' critical thinking, reading comprehension, and oral communication. Addressing this gap, the present study investigated the impact of an integrated reading–speaking model, *From Text to Talk*, on 32 third-semester EFL students at STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang. Using a one-group pretest–posttest design, the students' mean score increased from 45.88 (SD = 19.65) to 63.97 (SD = 11.70); a paired-samples t-test showed a significant improvement ($t(31) = 10.65$, $p < .001$) with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.88$). Triangulated quantitative and qualitative data revealed that integrating reading and speaking promotes deeper cognitive processing, authentic communication, and consistent learner performance. The novelty of this study lies in the development and validation of the *From Text to Talk* model, which positions reading as a foundation for spoken reasoning and highlights the pedagogical value of integrating receptive and productive skills to foster higher-order thinking and communicative competence in EFL contexts.

Keywords: Active Communication Learning, Critical Thinking in EFL, Integrated Skills.

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, the ability to think critically is an essential skill for learners in higher education. Critical thinking is not only a desirable academic skill but also a necessity for active participation in modern society and professional life. According to Facione (2015), critical thinking involves purposeful, self-regulatory judgment that includes interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, and explanation. It requires learners to engage deeply with content, question assumptions, and make reasoned conclusions. In higher education, students are expected to move beyond memorization and develop reflective and analytical abilities to interpret and evaluate information effectively.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), critical thinking carries particular importance. EFL learners must simultaneously acquire language proficiency and develop the cognitive skills needed to analyze, reason, and communicate effectively. Halpern (2014) describes critical thinking as a transferable skill applicable across academic and professional domains, while Liu and Stapleton (2014) note that many EFL learners, particularly in Asia, perform well in grammar and vocabulary but struggle with critical engagement and argumentation due to traditional, exam-oriented education systems. These systems often emphasize rote learning over reasoning, leaving students with limited opportunities to practice higher-order thinking.

Language learning, however, involves more than mastering linguistic accuracy, it requires interpretation, reflection, and judgment. Paul and Elder (2008) argue that language and reasoning are interconnected; without critical thinking, learners risk becoming passive language users who can decode text but cannot evaluate ideas or express opinions persuasively. Therefore, integrating critical thinking into EFL instruction helps students engage more deeply with texts and communicate meaningfully in academic and real-world contexts.

Reading is a key component of this process. Grabe and Stoller (2019) emphasize that academic reading should go beyond literal comprehension to include interpretation, evaluation, and critical response. They argue that effective academic readers not only understand the surface meaning of a text but also analyze the author's purpose, assess the strength of arguments, and integrate new information with prior knowledge. Critical reading involves questioning author intent, identifying assumptions, and assessing argument strength (Wallace, 2003). Studies such as (Rahimi and Hosseini, 2011) and (Yang and Gamble, 2013) show that when EFL learners receive explicit instruction in reading strategies and argumentative texts, their critical thinking skills improve significantly. However, reading instruction in many EFL classrooms remains superficial, focusing mainly on comprehension questions or vocabulary drills that rarely stimulate higher-order thinking.

Speaking, on the other hand, provides an avenue for students to process and articulate their thoughts actively. (Goh and Burns, 2012) argue that speaking requires real-time organization of ideas and interaction with listeners, demanding cognitive engagement. Activities such as debates, discussions, and presentations allow students to justify opinions, construct logical arguments, and respond critically to others.

Integrating reading and speaking offers a promising approach to fostering critical thinking. Reading provides input and exposure to diverse perspectives, while speaking allows learners to evaluate and extend those ideas through interaction. Richards and Renandya (2002) and Cahyono and Widiati (2011) highlight that integrated-skill instruction mirrors authentic communication, transforming passive knowledge into active use. For instance, students who read an argumentative text and then participate in a debate must comprehend, analyze, and articulate positions, an iterative process that strengthens both language and reasoning skills. Research by Yang and Gamble (2013) and Rahimi and Hosseini (2011) supports the effectiveness of this integration, showing improvements in inferential comprehension and analytical reasoning.

In line with this, Harmer (2015) emphasizes that effective language learning involves the integration of receptive and productive skills, as real-life communication rarely occurs in isolation. He argues that combining reading and speaking tasks provides meaningful contexts where learners process language input and immediately transform it into output, reinforcing both comprehension and fluency. Such integration not only develops linguistic competence but also encourages higher-order thinking as learners interpret, respond to, and build upon the ideas they encounter through texts.

In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language, often through teacher-centered and exam-oriented methods emphasizing grammar and memorization (Cahyono & Widiati, 2011). While such approaches may build linguistic accuracy, they often neglect higher-order thinking. In EFL classrooms, students' varying proficiency levels and anxiety when engaging in critical tasks further complicate teaching practices (Suryani, 2023). As a result, many students perform well on standardized tests but struggle with analytical and evaluative tasks.

Despite these challenges, integrated approaches show considerable promise in Indonesian EFL contexts. Studies indicate that combining reading activities with group discussions and debates can enhance engagement, analytical ability, and language proficiency (Suryani, 2023). However, such practices remain uncommon, and empirical research on the impact of integrated reading–speaking instruction on students' critical thinking is still limited, particularly at the tertiary level.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating how integrated reading and speaking activities summarized under the concept “From Text to Talk” can foster critical thinking among third-semester EFL students at STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang. At this stage, students are expected to move beyond literal understanding toward analytical

discussion, yet many still rely on memorization and struggle with expressing critical responses. By implementing the From Text to Talk model, the study seeks to provide an instructional framework that transforms reading input into meaningful spoken reasoning, encouraging students to interpret, evaluate, and articulate ideas critically.

The novelty of this study lies in its design and validation of an integrated model that connects reading and speaking to promote higher-order thinking and communicative competence. While previous research has treated these skills separately, this study demonstrates their cognitive interdependence through empirical data. It also contributes context-specific evidence from Indonesian tertiary EFL classrooms, where fostering critical thinking remains a pedagogical challenge.

This research is important because it aligns with national and global priorities emphasizing the development of critical, reflective, and communicative learners. By integrating reading and speaking, the From Text to Talk model offers a pedagogically sound and practically feasible approach to cultivating critical thinking in EFL contexts. The study's findings are expected to inform EFL practitioners, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking effective strategies to enhance both language proficiency and higher-order thinking in 21st-century education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a pre-experimental design using a one-group pretest–posttest approach. This design was chosen to measure the effectiveness of the *From Text to Talk* instructional model in improving students' critical thinking, reading comprehension, and oral communication skills. The one-group pretest–posttest design is widely used in educational research to determine the impact of instructional interventions when random assignment or control groups are not feasible (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). It allows researchers to observe measurable changes in the same participants before and after the treatment, providing clear evidence of learning improvement (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

The participants of this study were 32 third-semester EFL students from the English Education Study Program at STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. These students were selected through purposive sampling because they had completed basic English courses and were ready to engage in higher-order language tasks involving reading and speaking. The participants represented an intermediate level of English proficiency, making them suitable for investigating critical-thinking and communicative development. As noted by Pinza-Tapia et al. (2021), learners

at this stage benefit most from instructional designs that integrate cognitive engagement with active language use.

Two instruments were used to collect the data: (1) a Critical Thinking Test designed to assess students' ability to analyze, evaluate, and infer information from reading passages, and (2) a Reading Comprehension Test measuring students' understanding of texts, including literal and inferential comprehension. The development of these instruments was guided by existing frameworks of critical thinking assessment (Facione, 2015) and recent research highlighting the connection between reading comprehension and critical thinking in EFL contexts (Alshehri, 2024). Both instruments were validated by expert reviewers and piloted to ensure reliability and clarity.

The research procedure consisted of five stages. First, the preparation stage involved developing and validating the lesson plans, instruments, and rubrics for evaluating critical thinking, adapted from Facione's (1990) indicators. Second, the pretest stage was conducted to measure students' initial performance before the treatment. Third, during the treatment stage, students participated in a series of integrated reading–speaking sessions designed under the From Text to Talk model. These sessions combined reading input with interactive speaking tasks such as debates, group discussions, and oral presentations. This integration follows the findings of Javorčíková et al. (2021), who emphasized that combining reading and speaking promotes deeper comprehension and reasoning. Fourth, in the posttest stage, students completed the same tests to assess changes after the intervention. Finally, data analysis was carried out using paired-sample t-tests to examine pretest–posttest differences, as recommended for small-group educational research (Dörnyei, 2020).

Throughout the implementation, the instructional model encouraged students to engage critically with texts and express their understanding through communicative tasks. This approach aligns with international studies showing that integrated-skill instruction enhances not only language competence but also higher-order thinking (Rahimi & Hosseini, 2011; Yang & Gamble, 2013). Moreover, it addresses the pedagogical need in Indonesian EFL contexts for active, student-centered methods that foster analysis and reasoning rather than rote learning (Dhari & Maisarah, 2025).

Each stage produced measurable outputs: validated instruments, baseline data, students' active participation in reading–speaking activities, post-intervention scores, and statistical evidence of improvement. These data provided a comprehensive understanding

of how integrating reading and speaking supports the development of critical thinking and communicative competence among EFL learners.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. FINDING

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of the research. It integrates quantitative and qualitative results to explain the effect of the integrated reading and speaking activities on students' critical thinking skills. The chapter begins with the quantitative results from the pretest and posttest analysis, followed by a discussion of the qualitative findings from student interviews and the triangulation of both data sets. The discussion concludes with an interpretation of the results in relation to previous research and theoretical perspectives.

1. Implementation of the Integrated Reading–Speaking

a. Students Result

This research investigated the effect of integrating reading and speaking activities on students' performance in reading comprehension and oral communication. The research used a pre-experimental (one-group pretest–posttest) design involving 32 students from the third semester of the English Education Program at STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang. The same group of participants was tested twice before and after the implementation of the *From Text to Talk* instructional model, which integrated reading analysis with speaking activities such as discussion and oral presentation. The data were analysed using a paired-sample t-test to determine the significance of improvement between the pretest and posttest scores.

b. Descriptive Statistics

| No. | Test | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|-----|----------|-------|--------------------|
| 1. | Pretest | 45.88 | 19.65 |
| 2. | Posttest | 63.97 | 11.70 |

The descriptive results reveal a substantial increase in students' mean scores after the instructional treatment. The pretest mean score of 45.88 suggests that students' initial reading comprehension and speaking ability were relatively limited. However, following the intervention, the posttest mean score increased to 63.97, reflecting clear improvement.

The standard deviation decreased from 19.65 in the pretest to 11.70 in the posttest, indicating that students' performance became more consistent after receiving the integrated

instruction. This consistency implies that weaker students made progress, thereby narrowing the performance gap within the class.

c. Inferential Statistics

| Statistic | Value |
|-----------|--------|
| T (31) | 10.65 |
| p-value | < .001 |
| Cohen's d | 1.88 |

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the integrated reading and speaking activities on students' achievement. The results revealed a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores, $t(31) = 10.65, p < .001$. This means the observed improvement was not due to chance but rather the effect of the instructional treatment.

The effect size, Cohen's $d = 1.88$, demonstrates a substantial effect (Cohen, 1988), confirming that the intervention had a strong and meaningful educational impact.

2. Discussion of Implementation

The results of this research demonstrate a clear and statistically significant improvement in students' performance after the implementation of integrated reading and speaking instruction. The findings strongly indicate that combining reading and speaking activities is an effective way to enhance comprehension, develop critical thinking, and build communicative competence among EFL students.

The remarkable increase in the posttest means score (from 45.88 to 63.97) and the large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.88$) confirm that the "From Text to Talk" instructional model created substantial learning gains. This section discusses the findings in relation to (1) the integration of skills in EFL instruction, (2) the role of critical thinking in language learning, (3) the contribution of active learning environments, and (4) the pedagogical implications for teachers and curriculum design.

a. The Integration of Reading and Speaking Skills

Traditional EFL instruction often separates the four language skills reading, writing, listening, and speaking into independent courses. However, research and practice have increasingly shown that such separation can limit authentic communication and comprehension (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The integrated approach used in this research reflects a shift toward whole-language pedagogy, which views language as an interrelated system where skills support and reinforce each other.

By combining reading and speaking activities, students were not only required to understand written texts but also to interpret, evaluate, and articulate their understanding orally. This process aligns with Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis, which argues that learners develop their language system more effectively when they are pushed to produce language. When students verbalized their interpretations, summarized arguments, and engaged in discussion or debate, they transformed passive reading comprehension into active communicative output.

This skill integration also mirrors what Nation (2009) describes as the *four strands of language learning*: meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. The "From Text to Talk" approach engages all four strands by starting from meaningful text input (reading) and leading students to meaningful language output (speaking). The improvement in test results reflects the synergy created when receptive and productive skills are developed together rather than separately.

b. The Role of Critical Thinking in Language Learning

Another important aspect of this research is the role of critical thinking. The design of the instructional sessions intentionally encouraged students to analyze arguments, identify claims and evidence, detect assumptions, and discuss or defend their opinions. This method follows the Facione (2011) framework of critical thinking, which includes six core skills: interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation.

EFL students often read texts passively, focusing mainly on vocabulary and grammar. However, when guided to look for the author's claims, biases, or reasoning, they begin to interact with the text intellectually. The activities in this research, such as argumentative discussions and problem-solving debates, helped students move beyond surface-level comprehension toward deep processing of meaning.

Moreover, when students discussed texts orally, they were required to justify their reasoning and respond to differing opinions. This aligns with Paul and Elder's (2014) view that critical thinking is cultivated through dialogue, not memorization. The sustained interaction and reasoning practice during the speaking sessions likely contributed to students' higher posttest performance particularly in questions assessing inference and argument evaluation.

The findings, therefore, support the integration of thinking-based instruction in EFL classrooms. As Halpern (2014) and Ennis (2018) have emphasized, critical thinking is a transferable cognitive skill that enhances academic success across disciplines. In the EFL context, it strengthens comprehension and communication simultaneously.

c. The Impact of Active and Interactive Learning

Another significant contributor to the positive outcomes is the active learning environment created during the instructional treatment. Unlike traditional reading lessons, where students read silently and answer comprehension questions individually, this approach required students to collaborate, discuss, and engage in peer dialogue.

The decrease in score variability from the pretest ($SD = 19.65$) to the posttest ($SD = 11.70$) also demonstrates that the active learning format supported a wider range of learners, not just high achievers. This inclusive classroom dynamic contributed to not only higher average scores but also a more equitable distribution of success. Students who were initially quiet or hesitant gained the confidence to express themselves and improved their fluency through repeated participation.

d. Pedagogical Implications

The success of this instructional model holds several important implications for EFL teaching and curriculum design. First, EFL teachers should consider adopting integrated-skill activities that link reading and speaking, especially when teaching academic or argumentative texts. This combination encourages comprehension at a conceptual level and reinforces retention through verbalization. Second, teaching reading should not be limited to identifying main ideas or details. Instead, reading should be treated as a platform for discussion and reasoning. Teachers can design tasks such as text-based debates, problem-solving discussions, or critical response presentations to make reading lessons more dynamic and cognitively stimulating. Third, this research demonstrates that critical thinking can and should be developed alongside language proficiency. Finally, this research contributes to the growing body of literature supporting communicative and cognitive approaches to EFL instruction. It provides empirical evidence that even in resource-limited or rural educational settings, learners can achieve meaningful progress through carefully designed, interaction-rich lessons that connect reading with speaking.

3. Discussion and Implications of Students' Challenges

The students' emotional, linguistic, and environmental challenges do not indicate weaknesses in the integrated model itself, but rather reflect the transitional difficulties that commonly emerge when learners shift from passive reading to active speaking. As Nunan (2004) notes, moving toward communicative and task-based approaches requires learners to assume greater autonomy and interactional responsibility, which can initially provoke anxiety and performance tension.

Psychological anxiety and vocabulary-related frustration are common affective and linguistic barriers in communicative classrooms. As Krashen (1982) explains in his Affective Filter Hypothesis, lowering the affective filter through teacher empathy, humor, and encouragement can significantly enhance learners' language performance. From a pedagogical perspective, these findings highlight the importance of creating emotionally safe and linguistically supportive learning environments. Teachers can build emotional safety by avoiding harsh corrections and offering supportive feedback, provide linguistic scaffolding through vocabulary previews and pronunciation practice, ensure task variety by incorporating debates, role plays, discussions, and games, and maintain balanced participation through structured turn-taking. Collectively, these strategies foster learner confidence, promote active engagement, and optimize conditions for language acquisition.

Overall, the qualitative data confirm that while students experienced temporary emotional and linguistic struggles, they also developed awareness of how these integrated activities helped them think critically and communicate more confidently. Therefore, the challenges identified here should be viewed as growth-oriented difficulties, not obstacles to success.

B. DISCUSSION

The results demonstrates that students achieved meaningful learning gains despite experiencing several emotional and linguistic barriers. The pretest–posttest analysis provided objective proof of progress. Students' initial anxiety and nervousness align with (Krashen's, 1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that emotional tension can inhibit language learning. However, the steady score improvement suggests that the integrated method helped reduce this affective barrier over time, likely through repeated exposure to interactive speaking tasks. Similarly, students' complaints about limited vocabulary and pronunciation difficulties correspond to Swain's (1985) *Output Hypothesis*, which emphasizes that language production pushes learners to recognize and fill gaps in their linguistic knowledge.

The finding that some students perceived the learning environment as monotonous or tense underscores the pedagogical value of task variation, which, as Willis and Willis (2007) and Dörnyei (2001) contend, sustains learner engagement and motivation by providing cognitive and affective stimulation through diverse communicative activities. Willis and Willis (2007) argue that varying task types such as information-gap activities, problem-solving tasks, and creative language use can prevent routine fatigue and maintain

learners' curiosity. They emphasize that well-sequenced tasks promote a balance between challenge and achievability, allowing learners to experience success while still stretching their linguistic resources.

Overall, both sets of findings support the conclusion that the integrated reading-speaking model effectively promotes critical thinking and communicative competence among EFL students. The emotional and linguistic challenges observed are typical in the transition from receptive to productive language use and should be seen as developmental steps rather than negative obstacles.

CONCLUSION

The present study investigated the effect of integrating reading and speaking activities via the *From Text to Talk* instructional model on the critical-thinking, reading-comprehension and speaking abilities of third-semester EFL students at STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang. Quantitative results show a substantial improvement: mean score rose from 45.88 to 63.97, standard deviation decreased from 19.65 to 11.70, the paired-sample t-test produced $t(31) = 10.65$ with $p < .001$, and the effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.88$) indicates a large educational impact. Qualitative interview data further reveal that while students faced psychological (anxiety, fear of mistakes), linguistic (vocabulary, pronunciation) and instructional (monotony, uneven participation) challenges, they also recognized the benefits of the integrated model in helping them engage critically with texts, articulate ideas, and improve communicative competence. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests that the integrated reading-speaking approach is both effective and complex: it supports skill development and critical thinking, but the process involves emotional, linguistic and pedagogical dynamics.

The findings indicate that the integrated reading–speaking approach enables students to engage critically with texts, articulate their ideas effectively, and enhance their communicative competence. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data suggests that this approach is both effective and complex, as it fosters linguistic development, critical thinking, and learner engagement, while simultaneously involving emotional, linguistic, and pedagogical dimensions.

Nevertheless, this research has certain limitations. The study involved a relatively small number of participants within a specific institutional context, which may limit the generalizability of the results. In addition, the research focused on short-term classroom

implementation; therefore, it did not examine the long-term effects of the integrated approach on students' communicative competence and critical thinking. Future studies are recommended to employ a larger and more diverse sample as well as longitudinal designs to validate and expand these findings.

Despite these limitations, the present study contributes to the existing body of knowledge in language teaching and learning by providing empirical evidence of the effectiveness of integrating reading and speaking activities in EFL contexts. It offers pedagogical insights into how such integration can promote both linguistic proficiency and critical awareness, thereby supporting teachers and curriculum designers in developing communicative and holistic learning experiences.

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