

Strategic Role of Parents in Developing Critical Literacy in Children

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Abstract

Critical literacy in children is the initial ability to read texts actively, interpret explicit and implicit messages, and filter perspectives contained in various forms of discourse. This study aims to analyze the strategic role of parents in shaping critical literacy in elementary school-aged children through secondary data review based on Critical Literacy Theory. The study uses a qualitative approach with data sources in the form of scientific journals relevant to literacy practices at home. The analysis process was carried out using thematic analysis to identify consistent patterns of findings in various previous studies. The results of the analysis show that children's critical literacy develops more optimally when parents create a dialogic environment that encourages exploration of meaning, reflective thinking, and directed interaction with texts and digital media. The lack of critical thinking stimulation at home causes children to tend to accept information as it is without the ability to assess or evaluate the content. This finding confirms that the strategic role of parents is a key factor in developing critical literacy in elementary school students as a preparation for facing various discourses in the digital era.

Keywords: Critical Literacy, Parents, Children, Critical Literacy Theory

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology has enabled information to be disseminated and accessed quickly and easily by anyone. The internet, social media, and digital devices make the flow of information available without time or space limitations. The ability to search for, receive, and disseminate information is now very instantaneous, whether through digital text, video, or multimedia content. Such widespread access gives people the opportunity to obtain information from various sources anytime (Segara & Nasution, 2025) . This ease of access also exposes

elementary school children to various texts, images, videos, and interactive digital media intensively from an early age (Ramadani et al., 2025) .

Elementary school children are in a vulnerable position because they often consume digital media for both entertainment and learning. The content they receive is very intense, whether it comes from social media, games, videos, or other online platforms. This intensity can make it difficult for children to sort out which information is trustworthy and which needs to be treated with caution (Wijayanti et al., 2025) . This situation places a heavy cognitive burden on children because they do not yet have the experience and maturity to select information independently. In addition, intense exposure to information has the potential to disrupt the development of critical literacy skills in children (Robbiansyah & Prayitno, 2025; Zayadi, 2025) .

Critical literacy is the ability to read, understand, and evaluate information and media reflectively and actively. This ability is not limited to recognizing words or sentences, but also understanding the context, implied and explicit meanings, perspectives, and potential biases in texts or media. This type of literacy places readers, including elementary school children, as active subjects in the process of interpreting texts, rather than passive recipients. Critical literacy helps individuals realize that information is not always neutral and that every discourse has a specific social, ideological, or interest-based context (Oktariani & Ekadiansyah, 2020; Sarasati, 2020).

The phenomenon of critical literacy crisis among elementary school children demands practical and effective solutions to overcome it, considering that elementary school children are the nation's precious future generation. According to , parents are the front line in protecting children from excessive exposure to information from digital media. However, there are many cases that show that parents actually become facilitators for their children by providing them with devices such as smartphones or tablets equipped with internet connections, allowing children to view digital media for long periods of time (ipb.ac.id, 2025) . As explained earlier, this has the potential to cause an intense flow of information received by children, which in turn can interfere with the development of children's critical literacy. This shows a lack of deep understanding of the role of parents in the process of forming children's critical literacy. In this case, some parents tend to be short-sighted in facilitating their children with devices and the internet because of their busy schedules or other interests that must be carried out.

Empirically, previous studies have mostly focused only on the role of parents in controlling children's use of gadgets, such as the studies by (Nugroho et al., 2022) , (Rahmania et al., 2024) ; and (Sembiring, 2024) . These studies have not touched on the scope of critical literacy in children, which is declining due to the intense impact of information received by children from the use of gadgets. Based on this, this study was conducted with the aim of examining the strategic role of parents in the formation of critical literacy in

elementary school children. The study was conducted using the Critical Literacy Theory perspective with qualitative analysis using secondary data.

The results of this study are expected to provide benefits, both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study enriches the development of critical literacy studies in children by offering a new perspective that links the intensity of digital information exposure with the strategic role of parents in shaping critical literacy in children. This research also expands the application of Critical Literacy Theory in the context of elementary education in Indonesia, which has been rarely explored. Practically, the results of this study can be a reference for parents, teachers, and education stakeholders to design more effective strategies for improving children's critical literacy, which can be applied in school and home environments.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Critical Literacy Theory

According to Paulo Freire, Critical Literacy Theory stems from the view that the educational process must liberate learners from a passive position to an active position as subjects who think, interpret, and act consciously. Freire rejects the traditional educational model that places students as obedient listeners and teachers as the sole source of knowledge. Such education only makes students empty vessels that are filled with information without the opportunity to assess or criticize the meaning of that information. Freire emphasizes that students no longer play the role of passive listeners, but as critical co-investigators, individuals who are actively involved in dialogue, meaning-making, and the search for truth together with teachers (Hendriani et al., 2018).

Critical Literacy Theory views literacy as an active process to understand and critique texts through the analysis of meaning, social context, and the ideology underlying a discourse. Critical literacy learning positions readers as subjects who are able to interpret explicit and implicit messages, identify biases, and understand the power relations implied in texts. This perspective emphasizes that texts are never neutral because they are always influenced by the interests of the author and certain social structures. Critical literacy serves as an important foundation for students in developing reflective, analytical, and evaluative thinking skills regarding information in various media, including digital media, which is currently the main source of information for school-age children (Hendriani et al., 2018; Sayekti et al., 2022).

Critical literacy pedagogy can strengthen students' ability to recognize media bias, understand discourse construction, and build stronger arguments in text-based learning activities. The integration of this theory in learning is highly relevant given the prevalence of misinformation and unvalidated digital

content, which has the potential to reduce the quality of students' understanding of social reality (Kusuma & Wibowo, S., 2025) .

The Concept of the Role of Parents in Children's Education

A role generally refers to the functions, responsibilities, and behaviors expected of a person within a particular social structure. People perform roles based on their position, norms, and social expectations within the social system in which they exist. In the context of family and child education, the concept of role includes the functions of educating, guiding, supervising, and supporting children's development in academic, moral, social, and emotional domains. Sociological and psychological perspectives view the family as the first and primary social unit that has a fundamental responsibility in facilitating children's growth and development (Fatimah & Martoyo, 2025) .

The meaning of the role of parents in children's education includes aspects such as being the first educators, learning guides at home, facilitators of social and moral interaction, and mediators between the formal world of school and the family environment. Parents are responsible not only for meeting their children's physical needs but also for providing an environment conducive to the development of literacy, character, and social values. Active parental involvement, such as accompanying the learning process, supervising media use, and guiding media interactions, has a positive impact on children's academic achievement, literacy, and character development (Munthe & Yunus, 2022) .

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review design to analyze the strategic role of parents in shaping critical literacy in elementary school children. This approach was chosen because the focus of the study lies in exploring concepts, patterns of findings, and theoretical interpretations from various relevant scientific sources. The researcher did not collect field data but systematically reviewed publications discussing critical literacy and the role of parents in the education of elementary school-aged children.

The data sources used were scientific journals published in the last ten years and relevant to the topic of this study. Data collection was carried out through searches using Google and Google Scholar databases. The inclusion criteria included articles published in the last 10 years that discussed critical literacy in children and the role of parents in the education of elementary school children. The exclusion criteria included articles published more than five years ago, articles that did not provide empirical findings, articles that did not examine the role of parents and critical literacy, and articles that did not focus on basic education. All literature was then compiled and selected to ensure its suitability for the focus of the study. Data analysis in this study was conducted using thematic analysis, a qualitative method that aims to identify,

group, and interpret patterns of meaning that emerge from various sources of literature (Rozali, 2022) .

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The search for scientific journals was conducted using the keywords "role of parents," "critical literacy," "children," and "elementary school." The search results using the Google database yielded 29,600 publications, while the Google Scholar database yielded 38,700 publications. However, there were no journals that specifically examined the role of parents in relation to the formation of critical literacy in elementary school children. Therefore, the keywords used were changed by removing the keyword "role of parents." The search results using the Google database yielded 89,900 publications, while the Google Scholar database yielded 70,100 publications. Based on these results, a screening was then carried out based on the suitability of the keywords, and five suitable journals were obtained.

The following is a summary of the five journals:

Table1 . Summary of Journals Examining Critical Literacy in Elementary School Children

No	Author((Year), Title	Research Objective	Research Method	Research Findings
1	(Ninawati, 2019) . The Effectiveness of the Concept-Based Critical Literacy Learning Model	To analyze the effect of concept-based critical literacy learning on elementary school students' creative writing skills, as well as the difference in writing results between the group given the model and the control group.	Quantitative research; Quasi-Experimental Design, Nonequivalent Control Group; two groups (experimental and control); pretest-posttest; analysis using the Wilcoxon test because the data were not normally distributed.	Concept-based critical literacy learning was proven to improve elementary school students' creative writing skills, and there was a significant difference between the experimental and control groups.
2	(Hendriani et al., 2018) . Critical Literacy Pedagogy: History, Philosophy, and Development	Analyzing the concept of critical literacy pedagogy from the perspectives of history, figures, and its development in education.	Concept analysis; generic analysis design (McMillan & Schumacher) / integrative review (Whittemore & Knaff); data sources in the form of scientific literature related to the history and	cal literacy is rooted in Freire's idea of reading the world and words. cal literacy education encourages students to understand social injustice and become agents of change, which is

			theory of critical literacy.	relevant to apply in primary education to foster critical awareness from an early age.
3	(Rahman & Atjalau, 2019). Cultivating Critical Literacy	Analyzing how to cultivate critical literacy to improve student competitiveness in the global era.	Explanatory research; data on literacy management in schools; data sources in the form of information on elementary school students' reading practices.	Students' interest in reading is still low (1–2 times per week), so the role of teachers and parents is needed. Critical literacy is considered capable of expanding thinking patterns, social sensitivity, and reflective abilities from the elementary school level.
4	(Alamsyah et al., 2025). Building Critical Literacy in Gen Alpha through Technology	Developing a technology-based critical literacy formation model accompanied by the instillation of ethical values for children aged 1–14 years.	Qualitative descriptive; exploration of the use of digital learning media; data sources from literature and digital education practices.	Technology effectively enhances critical literacy when combined with character building. Children learn to sort information, think analytically, and develop moral awareness in the face of a flood of digital information.
5	(Rahman & Damaianti, 2019). Critical Multiliteracies Model in Elementary School Student Learning	Describing the effectiveness of the critical multiliteracy model in improving the activity and thinking skills of elementary school students.	Literature review; analysis of various studies related to critical multiliteracy and its practice among elementary school students.	The critical multiliteracy model encourages students to be more active in asking questions, expressing opinions, and drawing conclusions independently. This model has been proven to support the development of critical literacy and communicative

				character in elementary school students.
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Based on various research findings, the formation of critical literacy in elementary school children is effective when the learning process is designed as an activity that encourages analysis, reflection, and the courage to express opinions from an early age. The concept-based critical literacy learning model has been proven to improve creative thinking skills and writing skills, because students are involved as active interpreters of texts and social situations (Ninawati, 2019). Literature on critical literacy pedagogy also emphasizes that the Freirean approach, which emphasizes dialogue, social awareness, and reading the world, is an important foundation in building children's ability to understand injustice and act as agents of change (Hendriani et al., 2018). In addition, the cultivation of critical literacy requires the support of a consistent learning ecosystem, including the role of teachers and parents in stimulating children's interest in reading and reflective abilities (Rahman & Atjalau, 2019). In the digital era, critical literacy can be strengthened through the targeted use of technology to train children to sort information, think analytically, and develop moral awareness, as long as the use of technology is combined with character building (Alamsyah et al., 2025). The critical multiliteracy model also shows that exposure to various types of texts and media encourages children to be more active in asking questions, discussing, and drawing conclusions independently, so that the process of critical literacy formation becomes more integrative and participatory (Rahman & Damaianti, 2019).

These various research findings can be explained through the perspective of critical literacy theory, which is based on Freire's idea of education as a dialogical and liberating process. In this context, the formation of critical literacy in elementary school children requires the active involvement of parents as companions who help children read critically while understanding the social structures that surround them.

First, the concept-based critical literacy model (Ninawati, 2019) is in line with Freire's principle that children are not passive listeners but subjects who construct meaning. Parents can apply this principle by involving children in open conversations about texts or information encountered in daily life, for example, inviting children to assess the reasons behind a story, advertisement, or online information, and asking simple critical questions. This kind of guidance positions parents as dialogical partners, not one-way instructors.

Second, a pedagogical study of critical literacy (Hendriani et al., 2018) focused on the values of social awareness and reflective practice. In line with these findings, parents can encourage children to see the relationship between texts and social reality, such as discussing issues of justice, empathy, or diversity through storybooks. This kind of dialogue helps children understand

that reading is not only about processing words but also about interpreting social experiences, as stated by Freire in Critical Literacy Theory.

Third, research on critical literacy cultivation (Rahman & Atjalau, 2019) shows the need for parental involvement to overcome low reading interest. From a critical literacy perspective, this strategic role is not only to ensure that children read, but also to help them ask questions such as "why" and "what for" certain information is created. Parents can stimulate critical awareness by exemplifying a selective and reflective attitude towards information.

Fourth, the use of technology to build critical literacy (Alamsyah et al., 2025) is highly relevant in a digital context full of information flows. With a critical literacy approach, parents do not just limit screen time, but accompany children in understanding information bias, content objectives, and the moral values that may be contained therein. This kind of guidance helps children develop ethical awareness and evaluative skills that are in line with Freire's framework of liberation through critical understanding.

Fifth, the critical multiliteracy model (Rahman & Damaianti, 2019) emphasizes the importance of diversity in sources and media. For parents, applying this theory means providing various types of texts (stories, pictures, videos, everyday dialogues) and inviting children to assess the messages, perspectives, and values contained therein. Thus, family interactions become a space for critical multiliteracy practice that allows children to practice reflective and communicative thinking.

Through all these findings, it is evident that the strategic role of parents in the perspective of critical literacy theory is not only based on reading habits, but also on dialogical guidance that fosters children's ability to analyze, question, and interpret the world critically from elementary school age. This approach helps children develop critical thinking habits from an early age, so that they do not easily accept information at face value. In addition, active parental involvement provides emotional support that makes children more confident in expressing their opinions and engaging in reflective. It can be said that the habit of egalitarian dialogue between parents and children is an important foundation for the formation of solid critical literacy in elementary school students.

CONCLUSION

Based on the overall discussion, it can be concluded that the formation of critical literacy in elementary school children requires an integrated approach between pedagogical practices at school and the strategic role of parents at home. Findings from various studies show that critical literacy is not only related to reading and writing skills, but also a process that trains children to understand texts as social products, question their meanings, and relate information to a broader reality. The strategic role of parents is a key element

that strengthens this learning through dialogic guidance, providing space for reflection, and developing children's sensitivity to social issues and digital information.

Effective critical literacy for elementary school children grows from a combination of a challenging learning environment at school and parental support that opens up space for critical thinking from an early age. Parental dialogic guidance has proven to be an irreplaceable function in helping children develop the ability to interpret texts, distinguish bias, and form the analytical character needed to deal with increasingly complex information flows. These efforts not only strengthen academic abilities but also prepare children to become reflective learners who are able to participate more consciously in social life.

Based on the research conclusions, two important suggestions can be put forward for consideration. First, schools need to systematically design critical literacy-based learning by integrating multiliteracy models, dialogic approaches, and digital media that are relevant to children's lives. Teachers need to be trained to apply in-depth questioning strategies, provide space for alternative interpretations, and facilitate discussions that encourage students to analyze various texts. The curriculum also needs to adopt materials that encourage children to see the relationship between texts and social contexts, including issues of justice, diversity, and digital ethics.

Second, parents need to be more active in building a critical literacy environment at home. Efforts that can be made include discussing reading materials or digital information with children, providing examples of analytical thinking, and encouraging children to identify certain values or perspectives in various types of texts. Parents are also advised to facilitate reading activities together, watch educational content with supervision, and encourage children to ask questions and express their opinions. Synergy between schools and parents will be a strong foundation to ensure that children truly benefit from critical literacy, both in their academic development and in the formation of their social character.

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