



DEVELOPING TASK-BASED READING MATERIALS USING SHORT STORIES TO PROMOTE CRITICAL THINKING IN EFL STUDENTS' EXTENSIVE READING CLASSES

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Submit: 21-09-2025; Revised: 24-09-2025; Accepted: 25-09-2025; Published: 04-10-2025

ABSTRACT: This study developed task-based reading materials using short stories to enhance EFL students' critical thinking, particularly inference and evaluation, in the Extensive Reading course. Employing a Research and Development (R&D) design, 60 fifth-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Pendidikan Mandalika were assigned to an experimental group ($n = 30$) and a control group ($n = 30$). Data were obtained through validation checklists, pre- and post-tests, and questionnaires. The results showed that the materials were valid (77,5%), practical (81% of students achieved the minimum passing grade), and effective, with the experimental group significantly outperforming the control group ($t(58) = 3,99$, $p < ,001$, $d = 1,03$). The implementation fostered active participation, critical discussion, and substantial improvement in inference and evaluation skills. These findings highlight the importance of integrating Task-Based Learning with short stories as an effective approach to promote critical literacy in university-level extensive reading instruction.

Keywords: Critical Thinking, Extensive Reading, Inference and Evaluation, Short Stories, Task-Based Materials.

How to Cite: Terasne, T., Hanan, A., & Nafisah, B. Z. (2025). Developing Task-Based Reading Materials Using Short Stories to Promote Critical Thinking in EFL Students' Extensive Reading Classes. *Panthera : Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Sains dan Terapan*, 5(4), 1015-1027. <https://doi.org/10.36312/panthera.v5i4.682>



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INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking is widely recognized as a core 21st century competency that enables learners to navigate the rapid and complex flow of information effectively (Rahardhian, 2022). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, critical thinking goes beyond literal comprehension and requires engagement in higher-order processes. Two essential dimensions in this regard are inference, the ability to derive implied meanings from textual clues, and evaluation, the ability to judge the quality, credibility, and relevance of information or characters' actions. These skills are prioritized in this study because they bridge the gap between surface-level comprehension and deeper analytical reading. Without inference, students struggle to construct meaning beyond what is explicitly written, while without evaluation, they remain passive recipients of information rather than reflective readers capable of forming independent judgments (Eragamreddy, 2025).



However, reading practices in Extensive Reading courses at Universitas Pendidikan Mandalika largely emphasize surface-level comprehension. Preliminary interviews and classroom observations revealed that while many students could answer factual questions, they faced difficulties identifying implied meanings or evaluating characters' decisions in short stories. For instance, students often reported that they "did not know what to say" when asked about the author's message or the moral lesson implied in the text. This finding aligns with previous studies indicating that Indonesian EFL learners have limited exposure to instructional practices that foster inferential and evaluative skills (Gandana et al., 2021; Terasne et al., 2022).

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has been recognized as a promising pedagogical approach to address these challenges. Ellis (2021) emphasizes that TBLT fosters both linguistic and cognitive engagement through meaningful tasks, which in reading activities may include interpreting implied meanings, evaluating characters' decisions, and comparing perspectives. Short stories, with their compact plots, conflicts, and moral dimensions, are particularly suitable for task-based instruction. Empirical evidence supports this claim, Haghverdi & Marzban (2020) reported that integrating short stories with reflective tasks enhanced students' critical thinking, while Kurniawati et al. (2020) found that critical literacy pedagogy using folklore stimulated EFL students' critical reading.

Despite these promising insights, the implementation of TBLT in Indonesia remains limited. Prianty et al. (2021) revealed that teachers hold positive attitudes toward TBLT but lack sufficient knowledge and contextually relevant materials. International studies further highlight its potential Zúñiga (2016) demonstrated TBLT's effectiveness in integrating the four language skills and enhancing communicative competence, while Yundayani & Ardiasih (2021) and Tran (2022) confirmed its positive impact on writing and reading comprehension. Nevertheless, these studies primarily addressed general comprehension or writing outcomes, leaving a gap in systematic research on task-based reading materials that explicitly foster critical thinking particularly inference and evaluation in extensive reading courses.

Therefore, this study aims to develop task-based reading materials using short stories to enhance students' critical thinking skills, particularly inference and evaluation. By systematically integrating TBLT principles with short stories in Extensive Reading instruction, this study seeks to provide theoretically grounded, pedagogically relevant, and empirically validated materials suited to the Indonesian EFL context.

METHOD

This study employed a Research and Development (R&D) design, adapting the steps of Borg & Gall (1983) to suit the extensive reading classroom context. It was further grounded in the framework of Educational Design Research (EDR) as described by McKenney & Reeves (2019). The research procedures consisted of seven stages: 1) needs analysis to identify students' learning problems and expectations; 2) planning and designing task-based reading



materials using short stories; 3) expert validation covering content, design, and language; 4) product revision based on expert feedback; 5) limited field trial with a small group of students; 6) further revision; and 7) field testing to measure the effectiveness of the materials.

The participants were 60 fifth-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Pendidikan Mandalika, selected through purposive sampling since they were officially enrolled in the extensive reading course during the academic year 2024/2025. They were divided into an experimental group (n=30) and a control group (n=30). In addition, a smaller group of 10 students from the same cohort participated in the limited field trial to provide feedback on the clarity, difficulty level, and engagement of the draft materials. The instruments included expert validation checklists, questionnaires, and pre-test and post-test instruments. The validation checklist assessed content, design, and language on a four-point Likert scale (1 = strongly invalid, 2 = invalid, 3 = valid, and 4 = strongly valid). The reliability of the student questionnaire was examined using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients above 0.70 considered acceptable. The pre- and post-tests were piloted prior to implementation, and their reliability was measured using KR-20, which yielded acceptable internal consistency.

Data were analyzed both descriptively and inferentially. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize validation scores, questionnaire results, and students' performance, while an independent-samples t-test was applied to examine the significance of differences between the experimental and control groups. Effect sizes (Cohen's d) were also calculated to determine the magnitude of treatment effects. Ethical considerations were addressed throughout the study. Permission was obtained from the Faculty of Education at Universitas Pendidikan Mandalika, and informed consent was collected from all participants. Students' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and participation was voluntary. To interpret the validation results, the feasibility percentage (K) was calculated using the following formula (Arikunto, 2013).

$$K = \frac{F}{I \times R \times N} \times 100\%$$

Information:

K = Eligibility percentage;

F = Total response score;

I = Number of items;

R = Number of respondents; and

N = Maximum score per item.

The resulting feasibility percentage was interpreted based on the criteria presented in Table 1, which served as the basis for determining the product's validity (Arikunto, 2013).

Table 1. Product Feasibility Criteria.

Eligibility (%)	Category
85-100	Very Valid
70-84	Valid
55-69	Fairly Valid



Eligibility (%)	Category
50-54	Less Valid
0-49	Not Valid

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Needs Analysis

The needs analysis was conducted through interviews with fifth-semester students in the Extensive Reading course. The interviews revealed that most students still focused on literal comprehension when reading texts. Several students admitted struggling to identify implied meanings and found it difficult to evaluate characters' decisions or the messages conveyed in stories. As one student noted, "I can answer the questions if they ask about the text directly, but I don't know what to say when the question asks about the author's message or what the character really means". These responses indicate that students' critical thinking skills, particularly in inference and evaluation, were not yet well developed.

In addition, students expressed the need for more engaging and varied materials. They suggested that stories with clear plots and relatable characters would be more effective for class discussions compared to lengthy or abstract texts. For instance, one student remarked, "Short stories are easier to follow, and they make me think more about the characters' choices." Considering these insights, short stories were selected as the primary material for task-based reading activities, as they provide rich contexts for designing meaningful tasks and are considered suitable for fostering both language learning and critical thinking (Ellis, 2021; Haghverdi & Marzban, 2020).

Planning and Design

Following the needs analysis, the next step was planning the development of task-based Extensive Reading materials using short stories. The objectives were to: 1) enhance students' critical thinking skills, particularly inference and evaluation; 2) provide contextual and engaging materials to increase motivation; and 3) support independent learning. The needs analysis confirmed that existing Extensive Reading practices were dominated by literal comprehension, with limited opportunities for inference and evaluation. This is consistent with Terasne et al. (2022), who found that EFL students at Universitas Pendidikan Mandalika demonstrated low levels of critical thinking due to conventional approaches. Similarly Gandana et al. (2021), emphasized that integrating literature into classroom activities can foster deeper reflection and critical responses.

Based on these findings, the instructional design adopted short stories as authentic texts to structure TBLT cycles. The initial product was developed in units consisting of the short story as the main text, task instructions, reflective and analytical questions, group and individual discussion activities, and a rubric for inference and evaluation. This design provides a more motivating alternative to conventional materials while also aligning with the intended learning outcomes.

Validity Test of the Materials

The validity of the TBLT-based Extensive Reading materials was evaluated by three experts: a content expert, a design expert, and a language expert. The results indicated different levels of validity across the three aspects, as summarized in Table 2.



Table 2. Summary of Overall Validation Result by Each Expert.

No.	Validator	Average Score	Max. Score	Eligibility Percentage	Category
1	Content Expert	78	120	65%	Fairly Valid
2	Design Expert	105	120	67.5%	Fairly Valid
3	Language Expert	96	120	87%	Valid

The content expert rated the materials as fairly valid (65%). Although the materials were aligned with course objectives, improvements were required, particularly in providing exercises that promote higher-order thinking skills such as inference and evaluation. This supports prior observations that many Indonesian EFL reading materials remain dominated by literal comprehension, with limited attention to critical thinking (Gandana et al., 2021; Terasne et al., 2022). The design expert rated the product as very valid (87,5%), emphasizing that the sequence of tasks (pre-task, task cycle, post-task) was logical, systematic, and consistent with TBLT principles (Ellis, 2021). This indicates that the pedagogical structure already supports meaningful engagement with tasks, a crucial feature of TBLT (Prianty et al., 2021).

The language expert rated the materials as valid (80%). The validator noted that the materials were clear, readable, and adhered to academic conventions, although minor improvements in grammar and diction were recommended. This finding aligns with Yundayani & Ardiasih (2021), who argued that linguistic aspects are generally easier to refine than content design, which requires more complex integration.

Overall, the validation process confirms that the materials are feasible for classroom use, with validity levels ranging from fairly valid to very valid. Continuous refinement, however, remains necessary, especially to strengthen the integration of critical thinking skills. This reflects Haghverdi & Marzban's (2020) view that EFL reading materials should not only support comprehension but also systematically train learners to infer, evaluate, and reflect. Importantly, this validation highlights the novelty of the present study developing and empirically validating TBLT-based short story materials that explicitly target inference and evaluation skills in the Indonesian EFL context.

Validation of the Post-test

The post-test instrument was validated to ensure alignment with the competencies targeted in the TBLT-based extensive reading course. Three expert validators evaluated the instrument based on four aspects: 1) alignment of items with learning competencies and critical thinking indicators (inference and evaluation); 2) accuracy and readability of academic language; 3) absence of ambiguity and ability of items to encourage text analysis; and 4) clarity of the relationship between information in the short story texts and the questions posed. The validators provided both qualitative comments and quantitative ratings using a rubric designed for test validation. Feedback was carefully analyzed and used to revise several items that lacked clarity or sufficient alignment with the targeted competencies. Particular attention was given to ensuring that the revised items promoted higher-order thinking skills, especially in making inferences and evaluating textual evidence. After revisions, the instrument underwent a second



round of validation to confirm improvements. The validation process ensured that the post-test effectively measured students' ability to analyze and interpret literary texts within the TBLT framework. The rigorous validation strengthened the post-test's reliability and validity in the TBLT-based reading course. The results of this validation are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Expert Validation of the Post-test Items.

No.	Assessment Aspect	Validation Result (Average)	Category
1	Alignment of the test items with learning competencies and critical thinking indicators (inference & evaluation).	95%	Very Valid
2	Accuracy of academic language use and readability for students.	94%	Very Valid
3	Absence of ambiguity and ability of the items to promote text analysis.	96%	Very Valid
4	Clarity of the relationship between information in the short story texts and the questions.	95%	Very Valid
Overall Average		95%	Very Valid

The validation results of the post-test items (Table 3) indicate that all aspects achieved scores above 90%, placing them in the very valid category. Specifically, the alignment of test items with learning competencies and critical thinking indicators reached 95%, the accuracy of academic language and readability scored 94%, the absence of ambiguity and encouragement of text analysis obtained 96%, and the clarity of the relationship between textual information and the questions reached 95%. The overall average score was 95%, confirming that the post-test items are very valid for assessing students' inference and evaluation skills. This finding is consistent with Anderson & Krathwohl's, taxonomy of higher-order thinking skills, which emphasizes that well-aligned assessment instruments are more effective in measuring analytical, inferential, and evaluative competencies. Similar conclusions are supported by more recent studies, which highlight the importance of HOTS-oriented assessment in fostering critical literacy.

Revision of the Materials

Based on the validation results, the TBLT-based short story materials still required revisions. The revisions were guided by items in the validation sheets that received relatively low scores as well as comments from the content, design, and language experts. The main revisions included: 1) strengthening the tasks that explicitly targeted inference and evaluation; 2) improving the clarity of instructions to ensure student comprehension; and 3) refining linguistic accuracy and diction for greater readability. A summary of the revisions is presented in the appendix, while concrete examples are illustrated in Picture 1. These revisions ensured that the developed materials not only met validity standards but also addressed the novelty of this study: providing contextually relevant TBLT-based reading materials in Indonesia that explicitly cultivate inference and evaluation skills in EFL learners. The overall revisions of the materials are presented in the appendix, while concrete examples of the revisions are illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Presents Examples of the Material Revisions Made Following Expert Validation. Specifically, (a) The Initial Book Cover Was Redesigned into (e) A Revised Version with a Clearer Layout; (b) Instruction Texts Containing Grammatical Errors Were Corrected, Resulting in (f) Improved and More Accurate Instructions; (c) The Short Story Initially Presented in a Single Paragraph Was Reformatted into (g) A More Reader-Friendly Version with Illustrations to Enhance Engagement; and (d) General Comprehension Questions Were Refined into (h) Improved Comprehension Questions that Explicitly Targeted Inference and Evaluation.

Field Trial

The field trial was conducted over three meetings with 60 fifth-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Pendidikan Mandalika, divided into an experimental group (Class A=30) and a control group (Class B=30). The researcher acted as the lecturer in collaboration with an observer. In the first meeting, students in the experimental class demonstrated enthusiasm toward the newly introduced TBLT-based short story materials. They engaged actively in reading, group discussions, and answering inference and evaluation questions, although some students remained passive and required scaffolding. This observation corresponds with Prianty et al. (2021), who found that despite TBLT's potential, learner participation often requires teacher support.

The second meeting applied a different short story within the task cycle. Students worked collaboratively on group tasks and presented their outcomes, which promoted more balanced participation and peer interaction. Ellis (2021) notes that the task cycle stage in TBLT creates opportunities for learners to engage meaningfully with both language and ideas, as reflected in the collaborative classroom atmosphere. The third meeting emphasized inference and evaluation through retelling and summarizing activities, followed by a post-test to measure learning outcomes. The test was administered in a controlled environment, and students demonstrated serious engagement. This aligns with



Tran (2022), who reported that task-based instruction using authentic texts improves students' reading comprehension.

Some challenges were identified: 1) a small number of students remained passive during group work; and 2) difficulties arose in understanding unfamiliar vocabulary. These issues were mitigated through additional scaffolding, the provision of a glossary, and motivational prompts. Overall, the field trial confirmed the effectiveness of the TBLT-based materials, supporting previous findings that TBLT can integrate skills, enhance motivation, and foster critical engagement with texts (Zúñiga, 2016). Importantly, the trial demonstrated the novelty of this study in applying TBLT with short stories to explicitly foster inference and evaluation skills within Indonesian EFL Extensive Reading instruction.

Further Revision

To document the outcomes of the field trial, a practicality analysis of the developed materials was conducted.

Practicality Test Results

The practicality test evaluated the extent to which the TBLT-based short story materials were feasible and suitable for use in Extensive Reading classes. The materials were considered practical if they met the following indicators: (a) experts declared the product feasible for use, either with major, minor, or no revisions; (b) tabulated field trial evaluations fell into the *good* or *very good* categories; and (c) student activity observation sheets demonstrated that the materials could be implemented with minimal adjustments. Such criteria are consistent with Nieveen, who emphasized that practicality refers to the ease of use and applicability of instructional products in real classroom contexts. Construct validation was carried out by three experts content expert, instructional design expert, and language expert to assess the feasibility and practicality of the developed materials. The detailed results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Construct Validation Results of the Teaching Materials.

No.	Validator	Result
1	Content Expert	Feasible with Revisions
2	Design Expert	Feasible with Revisions
3	Language Expert	Feasible without Revisions

Based on Table 4, the TBLT-based Extensive Reading materials using short stories were declared feasible for classroom implementation. The content and design experts, however, recommended several revisions to strengthen alignment with course objectives and to improve the instructional flow, while the language expert confirmed that the materials were linguistically appropriate without revision. These results reflect Nunan's principle that material development within a TBLT framework requires iterative refinement to ensure both pedagogical effectiveness and practical usability. Importantly, the revision process in this study reinforces its novelty by producing contextually relevant short story-based materials that explicitly cultivate inference and evaluation skills in Indonesian EFL settings. This shows that material development is not just a technical task but also requires awareness of local context and learner needs.



Tabulation of Trial Evaluation Results

Table 5. Summary of Post-test Mastery.

No.	Validator	Result
Mastery (≥ 75)	24 Students	81%
Not Yet (< 75)	6 Students	19%
Total	30 Students	100

Based on Table 5, There were 24 out of 30 students (81%) in the experimental group successfully achieved the passing grade, while 6 students (19%) did not. According to the mastery learning criteria (Arikunto, 2013; Sudjana, 2016), this percentage falls into the very good category. Therefore, the TBLT-based short story materials in the Extensive Reading course can be considered both practical and effective for classroom application. Moreover, the mastery rate of 81% fulfilled the requirements of the homogeneity test, allowing the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups to be further analyzed using an independent-samples t-test (Sudjana, 2016). These results confirm the effectiveness of the developed materials in enhancing students' critical reading performance, particularly inference and evaluation skills. Importantly, this finding reinforces the novelty of the study by demonstrating that systematically developed and validated TBLT-based short story materials can serve as a viable approach to fostering higher-order thinking in Indonesian EFL contexts.

Effectiveness Test Results

The effectiveness of the developed materials was examined through statistical testing. A homogeneity test was first conducted to determine whether the variances of the two groups (experimental and control) were equal. The data analyzed were the post-test scores of students in both groups after the treatment. The results of the test showed that the data had homogeneous variances, thus meeting the assumption required for conducting the subsequent t-test. The results of the homogeneity test are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Middle Semester Scores of Students in the Experimental and Control Classes.

No.	X ₁ (Experimental)	X ₂ (Control)	No.	X ₁ (experimental)	X ₂ (Control)
1	70	83	16	90	25
2	75	88	17	70	73
3	95	88	18	75	86
4	90	92	19	60	73
5	73	84	20	70	62
6	56	75	21	70	56
7	95	90	22	70	47
8	95	75	23	35	37
9	70	88	24	75	91
10	54	88	25	65	76
11	70	83	26	90	92
12	90	67	27	60	70
13	95	76	28	90	75
14	90	75	29	95	91
15	64	95	30	55	70

The results of the homogeneity test are presented in Table 7.



Table 7. Test of Homogeneity of Variances (Post-test Scores).

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
0.842	1	58	0.363

Information: The significance value (Sig. = 0.363 > 0.05) indicates that the variances of the experimental and control classes are homogeneous.

The results of the homogeneity test (Table 7) indicate that the significance value was greater than 0,05 (Sig. = 0,363). This finding confirms that the post-test score variances of the experimental and control groups were homogeneous, thereby fulfilling the assumption required for conducting the independent-samples t-test. The normality test was conducted to determine whether the students' post-test scores were normally distributed, a prerequisite for using parametric statistical tests such as the independent-samples t-test. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test results (Table 8) showed significance values of 0,284 for the control group and 0,056 for the experimental group. Since both values exceeded the significance threshold of 0,05, the null hypothesis (H_0 : data are normally distributed) could not be rejected. Thus, it can be concluded that the post-test data from both groups were normally distributed, meeting the assumptions for parametric testing. It should be noted, however, that the experimental group's value (0,056) was relatively close to the 0.05 threshold, and therefore reported with caution. These results align with Sudjana (2016), who emphasize the importance of normality testing as a prerequisite for parametric statistical analysis.

Table 8. Test of Normality Results.

	Control	Experimental
N	35	35
Mean	73.80	76.91
Std. Deviation	16.981	15.717
Most extreme differences		
Absolute	.167	.226
Positive	.113	.127
Negative	-.167	-.226
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	.988	1.337
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.284	.056

Information: Test distribution is normal.

Independent Samples t-Test (Hypothesis Testing)

After confirming through normality and homogeneity tests that the post-test data met parametric assumptions, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine differences between the experimental and control groups. The results indicated a statistically significant difference ($p < 0,05$), with the experimental group that used TBLT-based short story materials achieving higher scores than the control group that used conventional materials (Table 9). This finding demonstrates that TBLT is more effective in enhancing students' critical reading skills, as it requires active engagement in meaningful tasks that integrate language use with problem-solving (Ellis, 2021). The use of short stories within the TBLT framework provided contextualized input that encouraged inferential and evaluative thinking, thereby promoting deeper comprehension (Tran, 2022). Following (Sudjana, 2016) guidelines, the statistical procedure confirmed the



robustness of the analysis. Importantly, these results reinforce the novelty of this study by showing that systematically developed and validated TBLT-based short story materials can effectively cultivate inference and evaluation skills among Indonesian EFL university students. These results also provide valuable insights for advancing more communicative and contextual English language teaching methods in higher education settings.

Table 9. Post-test Scores of Experimental and Control Classes.

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	30	83.2	9.98	1.82
Control	30	70.2	11.90	2.17

The results of the independent-samples t-test (Table 9) confirmed that the assumption of equal variances was met (Levene's test: $F = 0,024$, Sig. = $0,877$). The analysis further revealed a statistically significant difference in post-test scores between the experimental group ($M = 83,2$) and the control group ($M = 70,2$), $t(58) = -3,985$, $p < 0,001$. These results demonstrate that students taught with TBLT-based Extensive Reading materials using short stories outperformed those taught with conventional materials. This finding is consistent with Ellis (2021), who argue that TBLT fosters active engagement and higher-order thinking through meaningful tasks, thereby improving reading comprehension. Similarly, Tran (2022) highlighted the effectiveness of task-based instruction with authentic texts in enhancing reading performance. Integrating task-based learning with extensive reading can effectively improve students' language proficiency. Following Sudjana (2016), framework for educational research, the statistical procedures ensured the reliability of these findings. Importantly, this evidence reinforces the novelty of the present study, which systematically developed and validated TBLT-based short story materials to explicitly cultivate inference and evaluation skills in the Indonesian EFL context.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the development of TBLT-based Extensive Reading materials using short stories is effective in enhancing EFL students' critical thinking skills, particularly in inference and evaluation. Validation results indicated that the materials were both feasible and practical for classroom use, while the experimental implementation showed significantly higher learning outcomes compared to the control group. These findings reinforce the potential of TBLT to integrate language learning with higher-order thinking, providing contextualized input that promotes critical literacy. Importantly, the study highlights the novelty of systematically developing and validating short story based TBLT materials for the Indonesian EFL context, addressing the longstanding gap in fostering inference and evaluation skills. Practically, the product offers an innovative alternative for teaching Extensive Reading at the university level, while theoretically contributing to the growing body of research on TBLT and critical literacy. Future studies are recommended to expand this model across different institutions and language skills to further validate its applicability.



SUGGESTION

Based on the findings, it is recommended that lecturers and material developers integrate short stories into TBLT-based instruction to enhance students' critical thinking skills in Extensive Reading classes. Challenges observed during implementation, such as students' limited vocabulary and uneven participation, can be mitigated through the use of glossaries, scaffold exercises, and collaborative learning strategies. Future research is encouraged to involve larger samples, extend the duration of classroom implementation, and integrate both reading and writing skills simultaneously. Furthermore, the development of more detailed assessment instruments for measuring critical thinking would strengthen the validity of future findings and provide broader contributions to English language teaching at the university level.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The research team would like to express sincere gratitude to the Institute for Research and Community Service (LPPM) of Mandalika University of Education for the support and opportunity provided through the university's internal research and community service program, which greatly facilitated the implementation of this study.

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