A Need Analysis of Environment-Based Learning Critical Thinking Skills Development in English Reading Materials for Senior High School

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ABSTRACT

The growing emphasis on meaningful English language learning has increased the need for reading materials that not only develop students' reading comprehension but also promote environmental awareness and critical thinking skills. However, existing English reading materials used in Indonesian senior high schools primarily emphasize language proficiency, with limited integration of environment-based learning and critical thinking skills. This study aimed to analyze the need for developing environment-based English reading materials infused with critical thinking skills for 10th-grade students. The study employed the analysis phase of Design and Development Research (DDR), involving document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The existing reading materials were analyzed using indicators of environment-based learning, critical thinking skills. Principles of effective reading materials development, Kurikulum Merdeka Phase E, and CEFR B1 reading descriptors. In Addition, interviews were conducted with English teachers to explore their perceptions of current teaching materials and identify classroom needs. The findings revealed that the existing materials only partially integrated environmental issues and predominantly focused on lower-order comprehension activities, providing limited opportunities for students to develop higher-order thinking skills. Although the materials generally aligned with curriculum objectives and CEFR B1 descriptors, they lacked systematic integration of authentic environmental contexts, contextual learning activities, and critical thinking tasks. The teachers also expressed the need for more relevant, engaging, and contextualized reading materials that support both language learning and students' environmental awareness. These findings indicate a clear need to develop environment-based English reading materials that systematically integrate critical thinking skills to support meaningful reading instruction for senior high school students.

ABSTRAK

Meningkatnya tuntutan terhadap pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris yang bermakna mendorong perlunya bahan ajar membaca yang tidak hanya mengembangkan kemampuan membaca siswa, tetapi juga menumbuhkan kesadaran lingkungan dan keterampilan berpikir kritis. Namun, bahan ajar membaca Bahasa inggris yang digunakan di sekolah menengah atas di Indonesia masih berfokus pada penguasaan kompetensi kebahasaan, dengan integrasi pembelajaran berbasing lingkungan dan keterampilan berpikir kritis yang masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kebutuhan pengembangan bahan ajar membaca Bahasa Inggris berbasing lingkungan yang terintegrasi dengan keterampilan berpikir kritis bagi siswa kelas X. Penelitian ini menggunakan tahap analisis dalam metode *Design and Development Research* (DDR), yang meliputi analisis dokumen dan wawancara semi-structur. Analisis dokumen dilakukan terhadap bahan ajar membaca yang ada menggunakan indicator pembelajaran berbasis lingkungan, keterampilan berpikir kritis, prinsip-prinsip pengembangan bahan ajar membaca yang efektif, Kurikulum Merdeka fase E, dan descriptor CEFR B1. Selain itu, wawancara dilakukan dengan guru Bahasa Inggris untuk mengidentifikasi kebutuhan pembelajaran dikelas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa bahan ajar yang dianalisis hanya mengintegrasikan isu-isu lingkungan secara terbatas dan masih didominasi oleh aktifitas membaca pada Tingkat pemahaman dasar, sehingga belum memberikan kesempatan yang memadai bagi siswa untuk mengembangkan keterampilan berpikir kritis Tingkat tinggi. Meskipun telah selaras dengan capaian pembelajaran Kurikulum Merdeka dan descriptor CEFR B1, bahan ajar tersebut belum mengintegrasikan konteks lingkungan, aktivitas pembelajaran kontekstual, dan tugas berpikir kritis secara sistematis. Temuan ini menunjukkan adanya kebutuhan yang kuat untuk mengembangkan bahan ajar membaca Bahasa Inggris berbasis lingkungan yang mampu mengintegrasikan keterampilan berpikir kritis secara sistematis guna mendukung pembelajaran membaca yang lebih bermakna bagi siswa sekolah menengah atas.

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Critical thinking skills, English reading materials, Environment-based learning

INTRODUCTION

Environment-based learning is grounded in the principles of Environmental Education (EE) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), as promoted by UNESCO through the Tbilisi Declaration (1977) and the ESD framework (UNESCO, 2005; UNESCO, 2017). This approach originated from Environment-Based Education (EBE), introduced by Ernst (2012), which emphasizes the use of environmental issues and authentic environmental experiences as meaningful contexts for learning. Rather than merely transmitting academic knowledge, environment-based learning encourages students to develop environmental awareness, problem-solving abilities, and critical thinking skills through contextualized learning experiences. UNESCO (2005; 2017) further emphasizes that education should prepare learners to make responsible decisions and actively contribute to sustainable development. Consequently, integrating environmental issues into classroom instruction has become increasingly important to ensure that students connect academic learning with real-life environmental challenges.The growing severity of environmental problems, including climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and environmental degradation, has further strengthened the need to integrate environmental education into school curricula. UNESCO (2017) argues that environmental education should move beyond raising awareness by enabling learners to engage critically with sustainability issues through transformative learning experiences. Previous studies have demonstrated the positive contributions of environment-based learning in various educational contexts. Nugraha et al. (2022) reported that eco-literacy modules improved students' environmental awareness, enthusiasm, and problem-solving abilities. Similarly, Anggraini et al. (2021) found that integrating environmental sustainability into classroom instruction enhanced students' scientific literacy and learning effectiveness. Furthermore, Marda et al. (2025) highlighted the importance of incorporating environmental awareness elements into instructional materials. These findings indicate that environment-based learning promotes meaningful learning experiences and strengthens students' environmental literacy.

Beyond environmental education, environment-based learning also offers valuable opportunities for English language teaching. Environmental issues provide authentic contexts through which students can simultaneously develop language proficiency and environmental awareness. Previous research has shown that integrating environmental themes into English learning contributes positively to students' language development and engagement. Asriadi et al. (2019) found that environment-based learning significantly improved students' vocabulary achievement while fostering curiosity and critical thinking. Likewise, Alpiyah et al. (2021) demonstrated that environment-based picture storybooks effectively increased students' reading interest and served as appropriate reading resources. Wahyuni and Apriani (2024) further revealed that environmental issues could be integrated into English learning materials, classroom activities, projects, and instructional media both inside and outside the classroom. These studies suggest that environmental themes provide authentic and meaningful contexts for English language learning. However, most previous studies have primarily focused on improving environmental awareness or language skills without systematically integrating critical thinking skills into English reading materials.

Reading is one of the most essential language skills because it enables students to construct meaning, develop comprehension, and engage critically with information presented in texts. In English language learning, reading activities should not only facilitate comprehension but also encourage students to analyze ideas, evaluate evidence, and draw logical conclusions. According to Facione (2013), critical thinking encompasses interpretation, analysis, inference, and evaluation, all of which are fundamental cognitive processes required for meaningful reading comprehension. Nevertheless, previous studies indicate that many students still experience difficulties in critical reading. Niculescu and Dragomir (2023) reported that students often show low engagement in reading activities because classroom reading tasks tend to emphasize literal comprehension rather than analytical thinking. Similarly, Fan (2023) found that senior high school students' critical reading skills remain at a moderate level, particularly in analyzing, evaluating, and interpreting textual information. These findings highlight the importance of integrating critical thinking skills into English reading materials to promote higher-order thinking alongside reading comprehension.

The importance of improving English reading materials is also reflected in the objectives of Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka. At Phase E, senior high school students are expected to comprehend, interpret, analyze, and evaluate various text types while responding critically to information presented in written texts. These competencies are broadly aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) B1 descriptors, which require learners to identify main ideas, infer implicit information, interpret authors' intentions, and evaluate ideas presented in texts. Therefore, English reading materials should support not only language development but also the cultivation of critical thinking through authentic and contextualized learning experiences.

Despite the increasing emphasis on environmental education, critical thinking, and curriculum expectations, existing English reading materials continue to demonstrate several limitations. Environmental topics are often presented only as reading content, while accompanying activities primarily focus on identifying explicit information and testing literal comprehension. Consequently, students have limited opportunities to analyze environmental issues, evaluate evidence, formulate logical conclusions, and propose possible solutions to real-world environmental problems. Moreover, environmental contexts are rarely integrated systematically with critical thinking activities that encourage students to engage actively with the texts.These limitations indicate the importance of conducting a comprehensive needs analysis before developing instructional materials. Need analysis provides essential information regarding the strengths and weaknesses of existing reading materials, teachers' instructional needs, and the extent to which current materials accommodate environment-based learning and critical thinking skills. By identifying these needs, educators and material developers can ensure that future English reading materials are more relevant to curriculum expectations, students' learning needs, and twenty-first-century competencies.

Although numerous studies have investigated environment-based learning and critical thinking in education, relatively few have specifically examined the need for integrating these two dimensions into English reading materials for senior high school students. Most previous studies have focused on science education, environmental literacy, vocabulary learning, or the implementation of environmental themes in English classrooms rather than evaluating the adequacy of existing reading materials. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the need for environment-based English reading materials that foster critical thinking skills for senior high school students. The findings are expected to provide empirical evidence regarding current instructional needs and serve as a foundation for designing English reading materials that simultaneously promote reading comprehension, environmental awareness, and critical thinking skills.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate the need for environment-based English reading materials integrated with critical thinking skills for senior high school students. The study represents the initial stage of a Design and Development Research (DDR) framework proposed by Richey and Klein (2007), focusing specifically on the needs analysis phase. The purpose of this phase was to identify the strengths and limitations of existing English reading materials and to explore teachers' needs and expectations regarding the integration of environment-based learning and critical thinking skills into reading instruction.

The needs analysis was conducted through document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Document analysis was carried out to examine the suitability of the currently used English reading materials with the principles of environment-based learning, critical thinking skills, Kurikulum Merdeka Phase E learning outcomes, and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) B1 descriptors. The analysis focused on identifying the extent to which the materials incorporated environmental contexts, authentic learning experiences, critical thinking activities, and reading competencies expected in the curriculum. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with English teachers to obtain in-depth information regarding classroom practices, students' learning needs, challenges in teaching reading, and teachers' expectations for future instructional materials. The interview

protocol was developed based on the theoretical framework of environment-based learning and critical thinking skills and consisted of open-ended questions that allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences and perceptions.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, identifying recurring themes, reviewing and refining the themes, defining and naming the themes, and interpreting the findings. The themes emerging from both document analysis and interview data were synthesized to identify the essential requirements for developing English reading materials that integrate environment-based learning and critical thinking skills. The findings of this needs analysis provide the empirical foundation for the subsequent development of instructional materials.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings of the needs analysis obtained through document analysis and in-depth interviews with English teachers. The document analysis examined the extent to which the existing English reading materials for tenth-grade students integrate the principles of environment-based learning, critical thinking skills, and the reading competencies outlined in the Kurikulum Merdeka and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) B1 level. Meanwhile, the interview data provide insights into teachers' experiences, perceptions, and expectations regarding the existing reading materials and the need for integrating environment-based learning and critical thinking skills into English reading instruction. The findings from both sources are discussed to identify the strengths and limitations of the current materials and to establish the pedagogical needs that serve as the basis for developing more contextualized English reading materials.

Existing Environment-Based Learning in English Reading Materials

The document analysis was conducted to examine the extent to which the existing English reading materials integrate the principles of environment-based learning. The analysis was based on six environment-based learning indicators adapted from Ernst (2012), including the integration of environmental issues, relevance to students' daily lives, authentic environmental contexts, connections to students' experiences, opportunities to analyze environmental problems, and activities promoting environmental responsibility. The findings revealed that the integration of environment-based learning in the existing reading materials was still limited.The results are described using the table as shown (Table 1) below.

Table 1. Summary of Environment-Based Learning in the Existing English Reading Materials

Environment-Based Learning Indicator	Findings
Integration of environmental issues and sustainability topic	Not identified
Relevance to students' daily live and surroundings	identified
Authentic environmental contexts	limited
connection between environmental issues and students' experiences	limited
Analysis of environmental problems and possible solutions	Not identified

As presented in Table 1, the analysis showed that only the indicator related to students' daily lives and surroundings was consistently represented in the reading materials. Several texts were situated in familiar contexts such as schools, public places, forests, and neighbourhood environments, enabling students to relate the reading passages to their everyday experiences. However, these environmental contexts mainly served as settings for the stories rather than as learning resources for understanding environmental issues or sustainability.

Furthermore, explicit environmental themes were rarely incorporated into the reading materials. None of the analyzed texts addressed major environmental issues such as climate change, pollution, biodiversity conservation, waste management, or environmental sustainability. Likewise, the accompanying reading activities primarily focused on comprehension questions and vocabulary exercises, with very limited opportunities for students to investigate environmental problems, evaluate alternative solutions, or reflect on responsible environmental actions. Consequently, the existing materials only partially reflected the principles of environment-based learning. These findings are consistent with Ernst (2012), who emphasizes that environment-based learning should provide authentic environmental experiences that encourage students to investigate real-world issues and construct meaningful knowledge through interaction with their surroundings. Similarly, UNESCO (2017) highlights that environmental education should not merely introduce environmental concepts but should also develop learners' awareness, critical reflection, and responsible decision-making toward sustainable development. The limited representation of these principles in the analyzed materials suggests that students have few opportunities to connect English reading activities with authentic environmental challenges.

Previous studies also support these findings. Ludwig (2021) argues that environmental themes in language learning are frequently presented only as contextual reading topics without encouraging deeper exploration of environmental problems. Likewise, Garzón-Díaz (2021) found that environmental issues in English language teaching are often used to provide contextualized reading materials but rarely engage learners in critical discussions or problem-solving activities. As a result, students may improve their reading comprehension without simultaneously developing environmental literacy. Overall, the findings indicate that the existing English reading materials have not yet fully accommodated the principles of environment-based learning. Although several texts are related to students' everyday environments, they do not systematically integrate authentic environmental issues or activities that foster environmental awareness and sustainability. These findings demonstrate the need for English reading materials that incorporate meaningful environmental contexts and learning activities capable of promoting both reading comprehension and environmental literacy among senior high school students.

Existing Critical Thinking Skills in English Reading Materials

The document analysis also examined the extent to which the existing English reading materials foster critical thinking skills. The analysis was conducted using the critical thinking framework adapted from Facione (2013), which includes interpretation, analysis, distinguishing facts and opinions, inference, explanation, and evaluation. The findings indicate that although critical thinking skills were incorporated into the analyzed reading materials, their implementation remained uneven across the different indicators. The results are described using the table as shown (Table 2) below.

Table 2. Summary of Critical Thinking Skills Indicators in the Existing English Reading Materials

Critical Thinking Skills Indicator	Findings
Interpretation	identified
Analysis	Frequently identified
Distinguishing facts, opinions, and supporting reasons	limited
Inference	Frequently identified
Explanation	identified
Evaluation	limited

As presented in Table 2, the analysis and inference indicators appeared most frequently in the existing reading materials. Students were commonly required to identify the main ideas, interpret textual information, infer implicit meanings, and answer comprehension questions based on the reading passages. Several activities also encouraged students to explain ideas or express opinions regarding the texts. These findings suggest that the existing materials have begun to promote higher-order thinking beyond literal comprehension. However, other critical thinking indicators were less evident. Activities requiring students to distinguish facts from opinions, evaluate arguments, justify responses using textual evidence, or critically assess different viewpoints were relatively limited. Most post-reading activities remained focused on answering factual comprehension questions rather than engaging students in reflective discussion, evidence-based reasoning, or problem-solving. Consequently, students had limited opportunities to practice evaluative and argumentative thinking through reading activities.

These findings are consistent with Facione (2013), who argues that critical thinking involves not only interpretation and analysis but also evaluation, explanation, inference, and reasoned judgment. Effective reading instruction should therefore provide balanced opportunities for students to engage in all dimensions of critical thinking rather than emphasizing only comprehension and information retrieval. Similarly, Tomlinson (2023) emphasizes that language learning materials should promote meaningful cognitive engagement by encouraging learners to question, interpret, evaluate, and respond critically to the information presented in texts. The findings also support previous research on critical reading in English language teaching. Niculescu and Dragomir (2023) reported that many reading materials continue to emphasize literal comprehension while providing limited opportunities for analytical and evaluative thinking. Likewise, Fan (2023) found that students often encounter difficulties in interpreting implicit meanings, evaluating information, and constructing evidence-based arguments because these skills are not consistently practiced during reading instruction. Without systematic exposure to such activities, students may achieve basic reading comprehension but remain less prepared to perform the higher-order thinking expected in twenty-first-century education.

Overall, the document analysis demonstrates that the existing English reading materials have incorporated several elements of critical thinking, particularly interpretation, analysis, and inference. Nevertheless, the limited representation of evaluation, justification, and evidence-based reasoning

indicates that critical thinking has not yet been fully integrated into reading instruction. These findings highlight the need for English reading materials that systematically incorporate balanced critical thinking activities, enabling students to develop not only reading comprehension but also the analytical, evaluative, and reflective skills required for academic learning and real-life decision-making.

Teachers' Needs for Environment-Based English Reading Materials Integrated with Critical Thinking Skills

The interview findings provided valuable insights into teachers' perceptions of the existing English reading materials and their expectations for future instructional resources. Overall, the teachers acknowledged that the current reading materials generally align with the learning outcomes of the Kurikulum Merdeka and the CEFR B1 level. However, they emphasized that the materials still focus predominantly on reading comprehension and vocabulary development, with limited opportunities for students to engage in higher-order thinking and authentic environmental learning. These findings indicate a clear need for English reading materials that integrate environment-based learning with critical thinking skills. The results are described using the table as shown (Table 3) below.

Table 3. Summary of Teachers' Needs Identified from the Interview

Aspects	Findings
Existing Reading Materials	Reading materials mainly rely on the *Work in Progress* textbook and focus on comprehension, vocabulary, and translation activities.
Students' Reading Needs	Students experience difficulties with vocabulary, inference, interpretation, and text analysis, indicating the need for greater support in developing higher-order reading skills.
Environment-Based Learning	Environmental topics are rarely integrated systematically. Teachers considered environmental themes meaningful and relevant to students' daily lives and strongly supported their inclusion in future reading materials.
Critical Thinking Skills	Existing activities occasionally encourage analysis and interpretation, but evaluation, justification, and problem-solving tasks remain limited.
Teachers' Recommendations	Future reading materials should integrate authentic environmental issues, contextual reading activities, explicit critical thinking tasks, vocabulary support, and meaningful discussions connected to real-life situations.

The interviews revealed that students continue to encounter challenges in reading comprehension, particularly when dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary, implicit meanings, interpretation, and analytical reading tasks. Although most students are able to identify main ideas and locate explicit information, teachers reported that many learners struggle to infer meanings, evaluate information, and formulate well-supported responses. Consequently, teachers highlighted the

importance of providing reading materials that gradually develop students' higher-order reading skills while remaining appropriate to their English proficiency levels. Another prominent finding concerns the integration of environmental themes into English reading instruction. Teachers agreed that environmental issues are highly relevant to students' daily lives and have the potential to increase learning engagement because they present authentic contexts that students can easily relate to. Nevertheless, environmental content in the existing textbook remains limited and is generally presented only as contextual information followed by comprehension questions. Teachers therefore recommended that future reading materials include authentic environmental topics, such as pollution, waste management, climate change, and environmental conservation, accompanied by activities that encourage students to analyze environmental problems and explore possible solutions.

The interview findings also demonstrate that teachers recognize the importance of integrating critical thinking skills into reading instruction. Although some existing activities require students to express opinions or interpret information, opportunities for evaluation, evidence-based reasoning, and problem-solving remain relatively limited. Teachers emphasized that future reading materials should encourage students not only to understand texts but also to justify their ideas, evaluate different perspectives, and propose solutions to real-world issues. Such activities are expected to promote students' analytical and reflective thinking while simultaneously strengthening reading comprehension.

These findings support previous studies emphasizing the importance of developing contextualized English learning materials. Tomlinson (2023) argues that effective language learning materials should address learners' needs, interests, and learning contexts while promoting meaningful cognitive engagement. Likewise, McGrath (2016) highlights that instructional materials should be responsive to learners' characteristics and classroom contexts to maximize learning effectiveness. Regarding environmental education, Ernst (2012) emphasizes that authentic environmental experiences enable students to connect classroom learning with real-world issues, while UNESCO (2017) identifies environmental education as an essential component of Education for Sustainable Development. Furthermore, Facione (2013) argues that reading instruction should provide opportunities for learners to develop interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, and reasoning as essential dimensions of critical thinking. Overall, the interview findings confirm that teachers require English reading materials that move beyond conventional comprehension-based activities. Future materials should systematically integrate authentic environmental contexts with explicit critical thinking activities while remaining aligned with students' proficiency levels, the learning outcomes of the Kurikulum Merdeka, and the CEFR B1 reading descriptors. These findings reinforce the results of the document analysis and demonstrate a strong pedagogical need for developing environment-based English reading materials that foster students' critical thinking skills.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the document analysis indicate that the existing English reading materials have not yet fully integrated the principles of environment-based learning. Environmental contexts were only represented in a limited manner and primarily served as settings for reading texts rather than as opportunities for students to explore authentic environmental issues and sustainability. In addition, although critical thinking skills were incorporated into the reading materials, the activities mainly emphasized interpretation, analysis, and inference, while evaluation, justification, and problem-solving tasks remained limited.

The interview findings further revealed that teachers recognized the importance of integrating environment-based learning and critical thinking skills into English reading instruction. However, they reported that the current materials predominantly focus on reading comprehension and vocabulary

development, providing limited opportunities for students to engage in analytical thinking and authentic environmental learning. Teachers also expressed the need for reading materials that include meaningful environmental topics, contextual learning activities, explicit critical thinking tasks, and adequate vocabulary support to facilitate students' reading development.

Overall, this needs analysis demonstrates that the existing English reading materials require further improvement to better accommodate the integration of environment-based learning and critical thinking skills. The findings provide an empirical basis for the development of English reading materials that are more contextual, meaningful, and responsive to students' learning needs while supporting the objectives of the Kurikulum Merdeka and fostering higher-order thinking skills.

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