

Transformative Education in Teaching Critical Reading of Arabic through Case-Based Learning

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Keywords: transformative education, critical reading, Arabic language learning, case-based learning, critical pedagogy

Abstract

This paper examines the application of transformative education in teaching critical reading of Arabic texts through a case-based learning (CBL) approach. Traditional methods of Arabic reading instruction have been limited to grammar analysis and literal comprehension, which fail to foster critical thinking and social awareness. Transformative education, informed by the theories of Paulo Freire, Jack Mezirow, and Ki Hajar Dewantara, emphasizes critical reflection, dialogue, and empowerment, making it highly compatible with CBL strategies. Through conceptual analysis, this study highlights how CBL can be used as a transformative pedagogical model for developing critical Arabic reading skills. The findings suggest that integrating CBL with transformative education principles enables students to analyze Arabic texts within broader cultural, political, and social contexts, thus preparing them for intercultural dialogue and global citizenship.

Introduction

Arabic language learning in Indonesia, particularly in the domain of reading, has long relied on translation and grammatical analysis. While effective for structural understanding, this approach often fails to equip learners with the critical reading skills needed to interpret texts in social and cultural contexts. In an era where students must engage with issues such as global communication, intercultural understanding, and socio-political awareness, critical reading becomes essential.

Transformative education provides a framework that promotes critical reflection, dialog, and learner empowerment (Melling & Pilkington, 2018; Mezirow, 2014; Sahoo, 2025). Within this framework, case-based learning (CBL) offers a practical pedagogical strategy. By situating Arabic texts within real or hypothetical cases—such as historical events, cultural debates, or ethical dilemmas—CBL challenges students to analyze, interpret, and evaluate language use critically.

Critical reading is no longer a purely cognitive skill of decoding and literal comprehension; it is a situated, interpretive practice that requires readers to recognize embedded ideologies, power relations, and social contexts within texts. In many Arabic-language learning contexts—especially those that rely heavily on grammar-translation methods—reading instruction remains focused on morphological analysis, literal translation, and mastery of classical texts. Such approaches often produce learners who can parse forms but lack strategies for interrogating authorial stance, bias, or socio-political implications of texts. This gap is particularly consequential when students are expected to engage with contemporary Arabic media, socio-political discourse, or literary texts that carry contested meanings.

Transformative learning theory provides a principled basis for reorienting reading pedagogy toward deeper criticality. Mezirow's concept of transformative learning foregrounds the process by which learners critically reflect on and revise their meaning perspectives after encountering disorienting dilemmas, enabling a substantive shift in how they interpret experience and text. This theoretical lens emphasizes critical reflection, perspective transformation, and the social dimension of meaning-making—features that are central to educating critical readers rather than merely competent decoders (Mezirow, 2018). In parallel, Freire's pedagogy of conscientização highlights

dialogical learning and reading as an act of problem-posing that connects literacy to social consciousness and action; the dialogue between Freirean and Mezirowian perspectives has been shown to enrich conceptualizations of critical, emancipatory pedagogy (Takona, 2025).

Case-based learning (CBL) is an instructional strategy that naturally aligns with transformative aims because it situates texts within real or plausible socio-historical contexts and poses complex, often ill-structured problems that require interpretive judgment, collaborative inquiry, and action-oriented solutions (Ali et al., 2025). Originating in professional education, CBL's explicit purpose is to link theory with practice through inquiry around authentic cases—an orientation that fosters problem-solving, argumentation, and reflective judgment rather than rote memorization. When adapted to language classrooms, CBL presents learners with text-centred cases (e.g., historical declarations, media reports, literary episodes, policy documents) that demand not only comprehension but also critique and situated interpretation (Agustina & Ro'isatin, 2024; Ayu & Dharmayanti, 2021).

Recent research in Arabic reading pedagogy indicates growing interest in strategies that build higher-order reading skills and critical literacy rather than only form-focused competence. Studies that apply reciprocal teaching, systemic functional linguistics (SFL)-based critical approaches, and inquiry-based activities have reported gains in students' interpretive depth, metacognitive awareness, and ability to connect texts to social contexts (Banks, 2024). For instance, classroom-based interventions in the Arabic context demonstrate that when learners engage with authentic media and are scaffolded through discussion and metacognitive questioning, their capacity for critical interpretation increases—pointing to the pedagogical promise of dialogic and inquiry-based models for Arabic critical reading (Haimeur, 2024).

Despite these promising developments, three persistent gaps limit the field. First, much of the existing Arabic reading research addresses general comprehension strategies or applies single methods (e.g., reciprocal teaching, SFL-GBA) without explicitly framing the pedagogy within a transformative learning paradigm; consequently, the link between perspective-change (transformative outcomes) and reading instruction remains under-specified (Hasanah et al., 2022). Second, empirical studies that adapt CBL specifically for Arabic critical reading are scarce—most literature on CBL concerns professional education (medicine, law) and only a few language studies have systematically tested CBL's effects on learners' critical interpretation and disposition to act on textual insights. Third, assessment practices in many programs continue to prioritize accuracy (grammar, translation) over evaluative and action-oriented competencies (critical argumentation, reflective journals, civic engagement), resulting in a misalignment between instructional aims (criticality, empowerment) and evaluation.

This paper addresses those gaps by articulating a theoretically grounded and pedagogically actionable model that integrates transformative education principles with a case-based learning design tailored to critical reading of Arabic. The novelty of this study lies in (a) explicitly combining Mezirowian/Freirean transformative constructs with CBL instructional design for Arabic reading, (b) proposing concrete case-types and pedagogical sequences that foreground disorienting dilemmas and critical reflection in reading tasks, and (c) recommending aligned assessment practices that capture both interpretive sophistication and transformative disposition (e.g., reflective narratives, policy briefs, community-oriented projects). By situating reading tasks in ethically and socially resonant cases (historical charters, contemporary media accounts, human-rights narratives), the proposed framework aims not only to improve textual comprehension but to cultivate learners' critical consciousness and readiness for intercultural, civic engagement—outcomes that remain underexplored in existing Arabic pedagogy research.

Research on Arabic reading pedagogy has shown diverse approaches to enhance learners' comprehension and interpretive skills. Early studies primarily relied on structural and comprehension-focused methods. For example, (Abu Hatab, 2017) applied reciprocal teaching strategies such as predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing to Arabic learners in Saudi Arabia, finding significant improvements in comprehension and participation. However, this approach concentrated mainly on cognitive strategies without extending to critical reflection or socio-cultural interpretation. Similarly, Al-Saidat (2010) examined the grammar-translation

method, highlighting its effectiveness in developing structural accuracy but also its limitations in fostering critical literacy.

Later studies began to explore more critical perspectives. (Potter, 2016) employed a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)-based critical discourse analysis of Arabic news texts, which enabled learners to uncover ideologies and bias embedded in language. While insightful, this study was largely theoretical and lacked structured classroom application. (Raddawi & Troudi, 2018) further emphasized critical pedagogy in the EFL and Arabic context, promoting dialog, questioning, and social awareness. Despite these advances, their work did not provide a systematic framework for case-based or transformative reading practices.

More recent research has shifted toward inquiry-based learning and the use of authentic materials. (Haimeur, 2024) demonstrated that inquiry-based approaches encouraged autonomy, engagement, and higher-order thinking among Arabic learners. Similarly, (Asmin et al., 2024) found that using authentic media texts improved students' ability to interpret contemporary socio-cultural issues in Arabic. Yet, both studies were limited in scope: they enhanced inquiry and contextual understanding but did not explicitly situate learning within transformative education theory, nor did they provide sustained mechanisms for perspective transformation.

Meanwhile, case-based learning (CBL) has gained recognition in professional fields such as medicine, law, and ESL education. CBL situates learning around authentic or simulated cases, prompting learners to analyze, evaluate, and propose solutions collaboratively. Studies consistently show that CBL enhances critical thinking, reflective judgment, and problem-solving skills. However, its application in Arabic language education, particularly in the teaching of critical reading, remains extremely limited. Existing research has yet to adapt CBL into Arabic literacy instruction or integrate it with the principles of transformative education.

Taken together, these studies reveal three major gaps. First, much of the research focuses on comprehension or discourse analysis but does not explicitly link reading instruction to transformative learning outcomes such as perspective change or critical consciousness. Second, while CBL has proven effective in fostering critical thinking in other disciplines, it is underexplored in Arabic reading pedagogy. Third, there remains a misalignment between instructional goals (criticality, empowerment) and assessment practices, which often prioritize grammar and literal comprehension.

This study seeks to fill these gaps by proposing a framework that integrates transformative education principles with case-based learning to advance critical reading in Arabic. The novelty lies in designing case-based reading tasks that not only enhance textual comprehension but also cultivate learners' ability to critique, reflect, and apply insights to social and intercultural contexts—thereby positioning Arabic learning as both a linguistic and transformative enterprise.

Method

This study employed a conceptual–descriptive research design, as its primary objective was not to test hypotheses empirically but to synthesize relevant theories and pedagogical practices in order to develop a framework for teaching critical Arabic reading based on transformative education and case-based learning. The research process began with an extensive review of transformative learning theories proposed by Mezirow, Freire, and Dewantara, particularly in relation to their implications for critical literacy, alongside a critical examination of pedagogical studies in Arabic reading that included approaches such as reciprocal teaching, systemic functional linguistics–based discourse analysis, inquiry-based learning, and the integration of authentic texts. In addition, relevant literature on case-based learning from various disciplines, including law, medicine, and ESL education, was analyzed to identify transferable principles, strategies, and instructional components that could be adapted to the context of Arabic language learning.

Based on this theoretical exploration, the study then mapped the major challenges in current Arabic reading pedagogy, including the continued dominance of grammar–translation methods, the limited incorporation of critical reading practices, low levels of learner engagement, and an overreliance on assessments that prioritize linguistic accuracy over critical reflection. This mapping process revealed significant gaps in existing research, particularly the lack of application of case-based learning in the teaching of Arabic critical reading and the limited integration of

transformative education theory within this field. In response to these gaps, a pedagogical framework was constructed by integrating the core principles of transformative education with the procedural stages of case-based learning. The proposed model emphasizes the use of authentic and socially relevant texts that are capable of stimulating critical reflection on contemporary issues, and it is structured through a sequence of instructional stages that include pre-reading orientation, presentation of the case, collaborative analysis and dialogue, critical reflection, and action-oriented tasks. Assessment within this framework is aligned with its transformative objectives, employing rubrics that measure not only comprehension but also the depth of critical interpretation, the quality of reflective engagement, and the ability to apply insights to broader sociocultural contexts.

Finally, the study employed descriptive analysis to examine how the principles of transformative education could be operationalized through case-based learning in the context of Arabic critical reading, while also comparing the proposed strategies with existing approaches in order to highlight their innovative contributions and practical feasibility. Although the research does not involve empirical data collected from classroom settings, it offers a theoretically grounded and pedagogically informed framework intended to guide future instructional design, implementation, and empirical investigation in the field of Arabic language education.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study try to provide a description of the integration of transformative education concepts that can be included in Arabic critical reading learning and at the same time combined with a case-based learning model. Based on a literature review of 3 educational figures who discuss transformative education, namely Freire, Mezirow, and Ki Hajar Dewantara, then the examination of transformative education theories shows their close relevance to the goals of critical literacy. Freire's notion of conscientization stresses the importance of dialog and the act of reading as a pathway to reveal hidden ideologies and connect literacy with social change. While Mezirow's transformative learning highlights the role of critical self-reflection and perspective transformation, suggesting that Arabic learners can greatly benefit from reflective activities after engaging with complex or controversial texts. Dewantara's educational philosophy contributes an emphasis on cultural and moral grounding, ensuring that language learning is not detached from character development and societal values.

Together, these perspectives reinforce the idea that Arabic reading instruction should go beyond decoding meaning and instead help learners develop awareness, critical reflection, and empowerment.

Problems Identified in Arabic Critical Reading

Based on his experience while teaching critical reading Arabic, the researcher encountered several problems with students in class. Analysis of current practices highlights several recurring issues:

- a. Reading instruction is still dominated by translation and grammar drills, limiting learners' ability to engage with texts critically.
- b. Opportunities for questioning authorship, ideological stance, or contemporary relevance are rarely provided.
- c. Many learners show low motivation, perceiving Arabic texts as disconnected from present-day realities.
- d. Evaluation systems are still mainly concerned with accuracy, leaving little room for assessing analytical or reflective depth.

These issues illustrate the gap between the expectations of critical literacy and what current Arabic pedagogy is able to achieve.

Case-Based Learning Framework for Arabic Critical Reading

Based on the synthesis of theories and the identified challenges, a case-based framework was proposed with the following features:

1. **Case Selection:** Choosing authentic texts such as historical charters, media reports, or literary pieces that trigger ethical or social questions.
2. **Pre-Reading Stage:** Activating learners' prior knowledge and providing background to stimulate curiosity.
3. **Collaborative Case Analysis:** Students work together to examine the text, identify problems, and construct different interpretations.
4. **Critical Reflection:** Learners engage in reflective writing or guided discussion to reassess initial assumptions.
5. **Action Tasks:** Students apply what they learn from the case into concrete outcomes such as debates, proposals, or community projects.

This model aims to bring transformative principles into practice by embedding dialog and reflection throughout the reading process.

Pedagogical Implications

The resulting framework points to several implications:

- a. Teachers need to function as facilitators of inquiry, encouraging students to interpret and critique rather than simply absorb information.
- b. The curriculum should be enriched with authentic and socially relevant texts to connect language learning with students' realities.
- c. Assessment methods must be broadened, combining analytical rubrics, reflective outputs, and collaborative projects alongside traditional tests.
- d. Ultimately, learners are expected to achieve not only linguistic proficiency but also critical consciousness and intercultural sensitivity, positioning Arabic as a medium for global and civic engagement.

Discussion

The analysis of case-based learning (CBL) in the light of transformative education illustrates how the two approaches can complement one another in the teaching of Arabic critical reading. CBL provides learners with authentic and challenging contexts that invite deeper inquiry, while transformative education ensures that these inquiries lead not only to comprehension but also to reflection and potential perspective change. In this way, learners are positioned not as passive recipients of textual information but as active participants in meaning-making.

A central contribution of this approach lies in its ability to move learners from surface-level understanding—decoding vocabulary and translating sentences—towards deeper comprehension, which involves identifying themes, questioning ideological underpinnings, and evaluating the broader social significance of texts. Such engagement aligns with Freire's call for dialogical literacy practices and Mezirow's notion of critical reflection as the gateway to transformation.

Furthermore, this model highlights the changing role of the teacher. Rather than functioning as an authoritative transmitter of knowledge, teachers are called to act as facilitators who design meaningful cases, scaffold discussions, and encourage multiple interpretations. This shift demands professional development and pedagogical innovation, particularly in the areas of text selection, critical questioning, and reflective assessment.

From the learners' perspective, the integration of CBL and transformative education enhances motivation by linking Arabic reading with issues of real-world relevance—ranging from historical documents like the Medina Charter to contemporary media articles on global concerns. This connection affirms Dewantara's vision that education should be both culturally grounded and socially responsive.

Finally, assessment practices must evolve to capture the multidimensional outcomes of this pedagogical approach. Traditional grammar-based tests are insufficient for evaluating critical literacy. Instead, rubrics should measure interpretive depth, reflective insight, and the ability to apply textual understanding to broader civic and intercultural contexts. By doing so, the teaching of Arabic reading is redefined as not merely a linguistic exercise but as a transformative experience that empowers learners to engage thoughtfully with their world.

Conclusions

Transformative education, when combined with case-based learning, provides a powerful pedagogical framework for teaching critical reading in Arabic. It enables students to interpret texts beyond surface meaning, connecting them with broader cultural, historical, and socio-political contexts. This approach fosters critical awareness, intercultural empathy, and lifelong learning skills, equipping students to use Arabic as a tool for social engagement and global dialogue.

Future research should empirically test the impact of this framework in Arabic classrooms, exploring its effectiveness in improving both critical reading skills and students' transformative learning experiences.

Acknowledgement

The researchers extend their sincere appreciation to all parties whose support and contributions have been invaluable to the successful completion of this study.

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Appendix

Case Example 1. Critical Reading of a Contemporary Arabic News Article

Case Selection

An authentic Arabic article from *Al-Jazeera* (2024) reporting on the impact of climate change in the Middle East. [التغير المناخي.. ظواهر طبيعية وأنشطة بشرية تهدد كوكب الأرض | الموسوعة | الجزيرة نت](#)

The text discusses rising temperatures, water scarcity, and government responses to environmental crises. This case was chosen because it:

- a) Connects with global and local concerns (sustainability, environment).
- b) Contains ideological positions (e.g., government responsibility, international cooperation).
- c) Encourages ethical reflection (human responsibility for the earth).

Instructional Stages

1. Pre-Reading Orientation

- a) Teacher introduces the case: “How is climate change affecting Arab societies, and what should governments and individuals do?”
- b) Students brainstorm in Arabic vocabulary related to climate and environment.
- c) Guiding questions provided: “What do you expect to read? Who might be responsible for the problem?”

2. Case Exploration and Group Analysis

- a) Students read the Arabic article in small groups.

- b) They underline key arguments (*e.g.*, “الحكومات تتحمل مسؤولية أكبر من الأفراد” – governments bear greater responsibility than individuals).
- c) Groups identify implicit perspectives, *e.g.*, whether the article blames local governments or international policies.

3. Critical Reflection

- a) Individually, students write a short reflective journal in Arabic answering: “كيف يمكنني أن أساهم في مواجهة مشكلة تغير المناخ على المستوى المحلي؟”
- b) Class discussion: comparing different interpretations of responsibility and solutions.

4. Action-Oriented Task

- a) Groups create a short **position paper in Arabic** proposing solutions to climate change, integrating perspectives from the article and their own critical reflections.
- b) Each group presents their recommendations in a mock “climate summit” role play.

Critical Reading Outcomes

1. Comprehension: Students understood main ideas and arguments.
2. Critical Awareness: Students identified ideological stance of the article (government vs. individual responsibility).
3. Reflection: Students related the issue to their own lives and local context in Indonesia.
4. Action: Students proposed practical responses, thereby transforming reading into civic engagement.