

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the background of the study, research questions, research purposes, research significance, research scope, conceptual framework, and a review of previous studies.

A. Research Background

Information and communication technology has developed rapidly in the twenty-first century. This has drastically transformed the way individuals obtain, think about, and exchange knowledge. Digital platforms are now the dominant means by which individuals communicate with the world, supplanting many older means of communication and information exchange. This has created a more technologically educated culture where people must be able to consume information and critically evaluate its veracity, reliability, and motives.

English is the lingua franca of global communication. This includes digital communication such as social media in our global digital environment. English is a lingua franca. It is what allows people of different cultures to communicate with one another and share ideas across borders. It is an invaluable skill for those who aspire to participate in global dialogue. This fact suggests that EFL learners should not only gain their linguistic competency but also be able to interact with English-language literature in digital contexts in a critical way.

The change from print to digital reading has brought new obstacles to teaching literacy. In general, digital texts are shorter, more fragmented, and embedded with multimodal information (e.g., photographs, videos, and hyperlinks) than traditional printed texts. The structure is geared towards rapid intake of information, and this can reduce the motivation for readers to engage in deep, introspective reading. Thus, literacy training in the digital age should be more than decoding and comprehension, and greater focus should be put on educating learners with capacities to evaluate, question, and assess the texts they encounter.

In response to these expectations, critical thinking has been increasingly acknowledged as one of the fundamental talents of the twenty-first century,

especially in higher education. The role of universities is to equip students with the disciplinary knowledge and cognitive and analytical abilities needed to negotiate complicated, information-saturated situations. This means being able to evaluate the veracity of information sources, recognize implicit biases, and draw logical conclusions rather than take information at face value.

This particular expectation is very much connected to the development of critical reading abilities in the training of the English language. With the digital explosion of authentic English texts that learners are confronted with, English language education programmes have a responsibility to prepare learners for critical engagement with such texts rather than conceptualising language learning as a matter of grammatical accuracy or vocabulary acquisition. This is particularly true for university students since they are obliged to utilize critical literacy skills not just in their academic lives but also in their digital lives every day.

In this larger perspective, critical reading is a vital competency for youngsters in today's digital information ecology. Critical reading is an ability for students in scholastic conditions now. In studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL), reading is not only a process of knowing the vocabulary and sentence structures, but also the process of interpreting meanings, analyzing arguments, and being able to discern the views buried in a document.

Critical reading allows learners to examine assumptions, inspect authors' aims, and determine the truth of the material presented in the texts (Wallace, 2003; Grabe & Stoller, 2011). Critical reading is a reading technique that helps students develop higher-order thinking skills to interpret material beyond the text. Therefore, students need to engage with texts critically, not just on a surface level of knowledge. Of the many abilities involved in critical reading, one of the most crucial is the capacity to recognize bias because bias reveals how a writer's point of view, both overt and covert, affects the meaning that a reader eventually creates from a text. No matter how good they are at assessing vocabulary or sentence structure, students are in danger of lingering on the surface of a book if they cannot recognize this kind of bias.

What is more, critical reading is not just about grasping the literal meaning of a book as indicated by Marschall and Davis (2010), but it also entails an evaluation of the logic, arguments, and the possible bias given in the text. Critical readers are supposed to evaluate assertions in connection to the evidence, differentiate facts from views, and judge whether the text is balanced or biased. Based on these, recognizing bias is part of critical reading.

Bias is the writer's attitude toward the material presented, particularly how much the writer favors one side of an issue and minimizes or ignores alternative views. According to Van Dijk (1998), bias in discourse can be identified in vocabulary choices, evaluative language, generalisations, or the absence of contrasting perspectives. Such linguistic tactics might impact the way that readers digest information without even knowing it. Those who cannot recognize bias will accept content uncritically and overlook the ideological statements in a document. Thus, recognizing bias is important for students to critically assess material and not be misled by biased or unbalanced accounts.

The capacity to discern bias is directly related to the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA considers language as a social practice that reflects and constructs social reality. Discourse is not a neutral representation of reality but is constituted by social, cultural, and ideological settings (Norman Fairclough, 1995). Fairclough (1995) defines discourse as a concrete representation in terms of text (written or spoken) that may be critically studied to uncover hidden ideological biases. Such texts are seen as the results of their production process and thus reflect their socio-cultural context, allowing for the tracing of intertextuality and its part in shaping public attitudes or reinforcing the hegemony of dominant power structures, as seen in the analysis of political news or media representations.

The project will look at text in the form of digital text. CDA allows the research to explore how language choices in texts build certain points of view and ideological orientations. It is therefore important that students are able to recognize bias, as this will allow them to critically assess how language generates meaning and social reality.

Today, in the digital age, the advent of social media has transformed the process of information creation, sharing, and understanding in society today. The survey, entitled “The State of Digital Literacy in Indonesia 2021,” was conducted by the Katadata Insight Center (KIC) in collaboration with the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kominfo). The survey results show that 73% of Indonesians get their main news through social media platforms, while only 59.5% of Indonesians get their main news from television (Katadata Insight Center, 2021).

The fast expansion of social media as a key source of information and communication has led to an increased importance of such critical competencies. Users are not just consumers of information, but also producers of digital texts expressing thoughts, perspectives, and interpretations (Hall, 1997; Fairclough, 1995). However, the open nature of social media also enables the spread of information that may contain subjective views, selective representations, and ideological positions (Van Dijk, 1998). Thus, students need to learn how to critically assess digital texts so they will not be affected by biased information.

In addition to being sites of information consumption, social media platforms allow users to actively generate meaning, viewpoints, and attitudes through language (Hall, 1997; Fairclough, 1995). Among the many social media sites, Threads on Instagram is one of the most widely utilized platforms among university students. Texts are brief forms of writing that usually go with pictures or videos on Instagram Threads. Texts are generally brief, yet they are significant pieces of text that serve as explanations, opinions, and context for interpreting the visual material. Linguistic choices are typically embedded in texts that express the writer’s attitudes, perspectives, and objectives on a certain problem. These features provide Instagram Threads texts with an excellent context in which to explore how bias may manifest in student-generated digital texts. Thus, through the analysis of texts, researchers can study how students use language to generate meaning and to communicate perspectives.

Prior research has focused on students’ critical engagement with digital texts and social media debate. Hutasuhut et al. (2024) conducted a study to examine the attitudes of EFL students towards making English texts on Instagram as one of the

English language learning activities. The results revealed that students may use English in real communication by writing texts on Instagram, and it raised their motivation to utilize the language. The study reveals that Instagram Threads texts can be effective learning texts in real communication situations. But the study remains focused on students' thoughts and language practice and not on essential aspects of language such as bias within the texts themselves. This study is unique since it considers Instagram texts as critical discourse and assesses students' recognition of bias in these texts.

With the growing role of social media in everyday communication, it is important for students to learn how to critically analyze the language of digital writings. The capacity to recognize bias allows students to not only engage in more critical analysis of material, but also to become more responsible language users when creating their own digital content. Without this knowledge, students could unknowingly absorb biased views in their reading. Thus, assessing students' recognition of bias is a key step in understanding how critical literacy is utilized in digital communication contexts.

Introduction of students to theoretical notions of bias, ideology, and discourse analysis to meet academic needs in the Critical Academic Reading course at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung. In this course, students are supposed to acquire critical reading skills so that they can read texts more reflectively and critically. The course also encourages students to apply such analytical abilities to a range of texts, including digital texts seen on social media. However, there is still minimal information on whether students can effectively use their understanding of critical reading in real-world circumstances, especially in analyzing and reading Instagram Threads texts. In practice, students may have a theoretical understanding of the notions of bias but may not be able to properly recognize how these features exist in authentic digital writings. This gap between knowing about and using in practice suggests a possible problem in how students are developing critical literacy abilities.

Therefore, this study intends to explore Indonesian EFL students' recognition of bias in Instagram Threads texts. The texts utilized in this study are actual texts

for analysis and are extracted from social media platforms. Students are asked to study these texts and to find indications of bias. Students' replies are used to understand the reasoning behind their recognition of bias, particularly for those who participated in the Critical Academic Reading course.

Therefore, it is vital to examine how the critical information that students learn from Critical Academic Reading is represented in their writing skills on social media. The data source of students' English Instagram Threads texts provides a precise contextual view of their capacity to recognize and apply bias. The purpose of this study is to explore Indonesian EFL students' recognition of bias in reading Instagram Threads texts, using a qualitative case study approach and document analysis based on Critical Discourse Analysis, drawing on Fairclough's (1995) theory.

B. Research Questions

How do students recognize bias in Instagram Threads texts using Fairclough's (1995) framework of Critical Discourse Analysis?

C. Research Purposes

This research examines students' recognition of bias in Instagram Threads texts. Based on the research question above, this study aims to explore how students recognize bias in Instagram Threads texts written in English, using the six bias indicators drawn from Fairclough's (1995) framework, and to examine the reasoning behind their recognition through supporting interview data.

D. Research Significance

1. Theoretical Significance

This study is likely to contribute to the advancement of critical literacy and discourse studies, particularly in understanding how bias occurs in digital writings. This study extends previous theories of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995), which have been applied mostly to news discourse and institutional texts, by evaluating English Instagram Threads texts written by students. The results expand the understanding that bias is not only identified in the content students read but also in how it is represented in the language and views students use while reading Instagram Threads texts.

This study can contribute to strengthening qualitative perspectives highlighting the nexus of language, ideology, and power in digital communication, offering a contextualized account of students' critical awareness in relation to academic literacy practices and contemporary social media environments.

2. Practical Significance

The results of this study can expand educators' knowledge of the crucial involvement of students with digital texts, particularly with the students' recognition of and use of bias in Instagram Threads texts. Through identification of student strengths and weaknesses in critical reading and understanding of texts, teachers can develop their teaching methods in courses on critical academic reading and literacy. The findings may contribute to the development of more context-based learning assignments that use social media texts as authentic materials to strengthen students' critical reading skills.

This review has important implications for curriculum development, especially for the integration of digital literacy and critical discourse consciousness in ELT. Insights can be used by learning institutions to strengthen educational practices that encourage introspective, responsible, and discriminating communication in virtual situations.

Besides its value to educators and institutions, this research is also expected to provide immediate benefits to the students. Participants were invited to reflect on their own reading patterns and to become more aware of how language could influence opinions in online contexts through studying bias in real Instagram Threads texts. The findings of this study may also have further implications in terms of raising the awareness level of the role of reading in the daily digital literacy of university students and motivating them to consume social media content more critically and responsibly and not merely accept information at face value.

E. Research Scope

This study is limited to the analysis of English-language Instagram Threads texts and focuses on texts as written documents, with the main focus of this study being on a critical aspect of language, namely bias. This study employs a qualitative case study approach and focuses on students' recognition of bias in Instagram

Threads texts as the central phenomenon, examined through students' critical reading competence in identifying and interpreting biased linguistic features.

To obtain the data, students are assigned to recognize selected Instagram Threads texts using indicators derived from Critical Discourse Analysis by Fairclough (1995). Bias is analyzed through the use of evaluative language, unbalanced perspectives, generalizations or stereotypes, emphasis on particular viewpoints, and omission of alternative perspectives.

The main data source in this study was documents in the form of English-language Instagram Threads text analysis, while supporting data was obtained through interviews, which consisted of questions to confirm and analyze the students' awareness of bias in the texts. Instagram Threads Texts served as digital documents that were systematically analyzed using document analysis techniques and the interview was conducted with notes and also recorded as evidence during interviews with students.

F. Conceptual Framework

This study is based on the view that texts on social media are social constructs and not neutral texts, but rather discursive constructions that reflect particular perspectives, ideologies, and intentions. Therefore, students' ability to interpret such texts critically becomes essential, especially in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. The conceptual framework of this study integrates three major theoretical foundations: Critical Reading, Critical Academic Reading, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), including bias, which together explain how students recognize, interpret, and produce meaning in Instagram Threads texts.

Critical Reading and Critical Academic Reading provide the foundational competence for this study. As Grabe and Stoller (2011) and Wallace (2003) point out, critical reading is an active and evaluative process in which readers grasp not only the literal meaning of a text, but also the author's purpose, the logic of the argument, and the possible bias behind it. This skill is further developed in critical academic reading, which uses the same evaluative abilities in an academic environment, where students are required to understand assumptions, evaluate

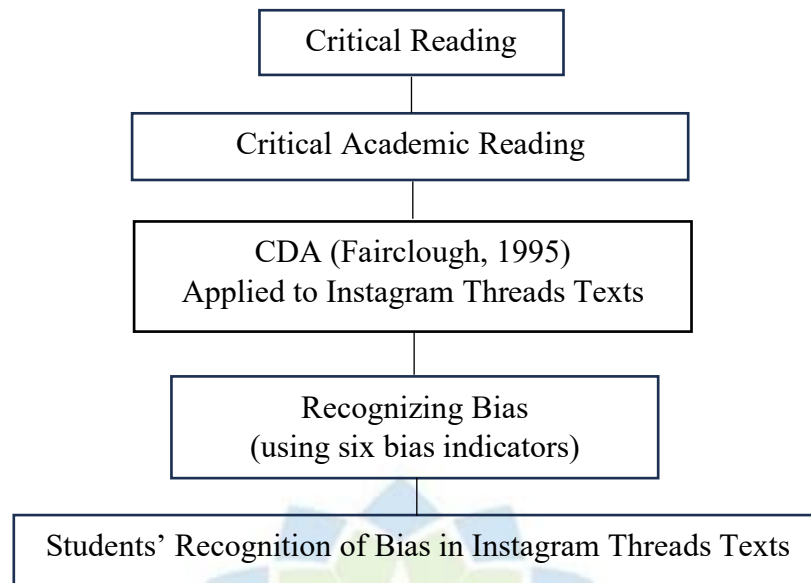
evidence, and recognize bias in a more formal and disciplined fashion (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). This research views critical academic reading as a competence that is built through the Critical Academic Reading course, and so contributes to students' capacity for critical reading in general. This critical reading ability becomes the basic skill that students need before they are able to recognize bias in a text, including in Instagram Threads texts.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995) provides an analytical perspective to explore how language operates as a social practice that reflects and reproduces power, ideology, and social reality. In this study, CDA is used to conceptualize bias as a linguistic and ideological phenomenon that appears through evaluative language, lexical choices, unbalanced representation, and omission of alternative perspectives. Thus, students' recognition of bias reflects their capacity to uncover hidden ideological meanings in texts.

Conceptually, this study analyzes students' recognition of bias as the result of the interaction between their understanding of critical reading and their practice of text analysis. Instagram Threads texts are positioned as alternative academic texts that are relevant to the digital context, so they can be used to assess the extent to which students apply critical literacy in reading and writing.



Figure 1. 1 Conceptual Framework



The conceptual relationship in the figure reflects that students' exposure to critical academic reading concepts will develop their critical reading ability. Then, critical reading ability enables students to recognize bias, a process grounded in their engagement with the textual evidence available in the text.

Therefore, this conceptual framework demonstrates that students' recognition of bias in Instagram Threads texts is not an isolated skill, but the result of the interaction between theoretical knowledge, critical reading competence, and real-life engagement with digital texts. By positioning Instagram Threads texts as an authentic text, this study highlights how critical literacy is applied in contemporary communication contexts, particularly in students' critical reading practices.

G. Previous Studies

Some recent studies have investigated students' critical engagement with digital texts in different educational and social contexts, especially concerning media literacy, critical thinking, and language production in social media. These studies mainly focus on how students read, evaluate, and produce online content, and the factors affecting their critical awareness. However, there are differences between the studies in terms of the research focus, analytical framework, data sources, and specific aspects of digital discourse under investigation.

In this context, a study conducted at Stanford University by Knutson et al. (2024) studied the bias and influence of news source tweets on Twitter. The study was based on nearly 30 million Twitter tweets posted by 182 American news sources over a ten-year period. It was determined that biased news sources to the left and right generated more high-arousal negative affective content compared to balanced sources, with the generation of more high-arousal negative affect being accompanied by an increase in the number of reposts for biased vs. balanced news sources, a trend not observed for any other category of affect. As such, bias within online discourse is clearly not just a linguistic issue but a communicative strategy used to influence audience involvement and information spread, just as it is within the Instagram Threads texts investigated in this research. However, the difference is that the study primarily investigates bias within online discourse as a communicative strategy used to influence audience engagement, whereas the present research specifically analyzes students' recognition of bias in Instagram Threads texts using discourse analysis perspectives.

The next is the opinion of university students regarding the practice of writing English texts on Instagram as part of their language learning experience by Hutasuhut et al. (2024). The present study was conducted to evaluate students' views on the use of Instagram Threads texts as a medium of practice for English communication. Data were collected through interviews and analysis of students' Text-writing activities. The findings revealed that students considered Instagram Texts as an authentic and motivating platform for practicing English in real-life communication contexts. The similarity between this study and the present research lies in the use of Instagram Texts as the research data. However, the difference is that their study focuses on students' perceptions and language practice, whereas the present research analyzes texts from a critical discourse perspective, particularly focusing on the identification of bias in the texts.

In addition, another study was conducted by Calosa et al. (2023) on the relationship of social media use, cognitive bias, and political awareness of college students. In this research, the researchers explored the effects of bias on how the college students interpret the information that they encounter on social media

websites. The student participants provided data through surveys, interviews, and observations. The results showed that cognitive biases played a significant role in the perception and comprehension of information by students, particularly in political consciousness and choice. The commonality between this study and the present research is the discussion on bias in social media contexts and student audiences. But the difference is that the study focuses on psychological aspects of cognitive bias in political contexts. Whereas the present research analyzes linguistic bias in texts.

Moreover, an analysis on media bias recognition was conducted by Rodrigo-Ginés, Carrillo-de-Albornoz, and Plaza (2024) to understand the concept of media bias, its types, and the development of automated systems for media bias recognition. The study reviewed 63 relevant articles and identified 17 forms of media bias using the PRISMA methodology and also summarized the techniques, models and datasets commonly used for automatic media bias recognition. The results indicated that media bias could be expressed through several linguistic and discourse strategies, such as coverage bias, gatekeeping bias, statement bias, spin bias, and ideology bias. However, the study also found that existing automatic media bias recognition methods have limited accuracy and robustness and that further development is needed in this area. The similarity with the present research is that both focus on finding the way bias is constructed through linguistic features in media texts. However, the difference is that their study looks at media bias from a computational point of view by reviewing automated recognition systems, whereas the present study looks at EFL students' recognition of bias indicators based on Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis framework in Instagram Threads Texts.

In the next step, Orhan (2023) investigated the influence of critical thinking dispositions and new media literacy as predictors for recognizing false news on social media among 157 university students enrolled in an English preparatory program in Turkey. The study utilized the Critical Thinking Dispositions Scale, New Media Literacy Scale, and a news recognition task. The study revealed that both critical thinking dispositions and new media literacy significantly predicted

students' fake news recognition ability, with critical thinking dispositions having the stronger effect. The present work is similar to this study in that both focus on the critical evaluation of potentially misleading social media content by EFL students at the university level. However, the difference is that the study by Orhan (2023) quantifies recognition ability in a scale-based design, while the present research studies students' concrete recognition of specific linguistic indicators of bias in authentic texts qualitatively based on the framework of Fairclough (1995).

Matthews (2022) also interviewed undergraduate students in a university in the United States to examine college students' self-generated definitions of bias and the techniques they adopted to mitigate their own bias when consuming news. We found that students mostly conceptualized bias as an external problem, something that news producers impose, rather than an internal disposition that drives their own interpretation. Students employed strategies such as reading multiple or opposing sources to counteract perceived bias. This is similar to the current study in that both studies draw on interview data to elicit students' own understandings of bias. The difference, however, is that while Matthews (2022) focuses on students' self-perceptions and coping strategies towards bias in general news consumption, the present research investigates students' real analytical performance in recognizing concrete linguistic indicators of bias in Instagram Threads texts.

The feminist movement on Instagram has been analyzed under a critical discourse analysis conducted by Tohari (2024), where this research detects the way the construction and negotiation of social issues related to gender are discussed through the discourse on Instagram. As it was shown in the qualitative interviews and broad analysis of the Instagram accounts, Instagram is a place of discourse where ideological positions are created and negotiated through language manipulation. This was analyzed in the studies. Like the current study, discourse analysis was conducted on Instagram. The only difference between the two studies was that Tohari's (2024) study was limited to only one thematic topic, that is, feminism movement, but did not analyze the broad typology of the bias indicators. On the contrary, the current study analyzed EFL students' recognition of the six-indicator framework of Fairclough (1995) on different texts.

Previous studies have examined students' critical literacy skills, particularly in relation to social media usage and language production in different situations, such as fake news, critical reading, and writing Instagram Texts. However, these studies tend to focus on specific aspects, including students' critical thinking dispositions, linguistic errors, or general media literacy skills.

None of these studies specifically examine how students critically analyze Instagram Threads texts by recognizing bias as part of their analytical performance. In addition, limited attention has been given to how students apply their critical reading knowledge when analyzing authentic digital texts provided to them. Therefore, drawing on Critical Literacy theory (Freire, 1970; Luke & Freebody, 1999), which views readers as active meaning-makers who critically engage with texts, this study aims to investigate students' recognition of bias in Instagram Threads texts through their analytical responses.

