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Enhancing Students' Critical Reading Skills through the Integration of Critical Literacy Pedagogy and Teacher-Parent Collaboration Program

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of an innovative instructional model that integrates critical literacy pedagogy with structured teacher–parent collaboration to enhance elementary students' advanced critical reading skills. Grounded in the principles of critical literacy, the model extends literacy learning beyond the classroom by aligning school-based instruction with guided home literacy practices. The study responds to the urgent need to strengthen Indonesian students' higher-order reading abilities in the context of information overload and persistent low literacy achievement. A quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test control group design was employed involving 37 fourth-grade students from a public elementary school in West Bandung Regency. The experimental group (n = 21) participated in the innovative collaborative literacy model, while the control group (n = 16) received conventional language instruction. The intervention was implemented through three stages problematization, cultural discussion, and social action—using thematic texts on bullying and environmental issues. Students' critical reading was measured across six dimensions: interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, explanation, and self-regulation. Data were analyzed using independent sample t-tests. Results showed no significant pre-test differences between groups. However, post-test findings revealed a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group ($p < 0.05$) with medium normalized gain scores. Teachers demonstrated high pedagogical understanding, and parents showed adequate readiness, supporting effective implementation. These findings indicate that innovative family–school literacy integration can effectively advance critical reading development and offers a scalable approach to strengthening advanced literacy in primary education.

Keywords: advanced literacy skills, advanced learning, advanced critical reading, critical literacy pedagogy, innovative literacy pedagogy, higher-order thinking skills, transformative literacy practices

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1. Introduction

Changes in education in the era of technology and information advancement have indirectly altered the order and ways of thinking and acting in receiving information (Hidayat et al., 2025; Yumna et al., 2024). Therefore, a form of student self-awareness is needed to improve the ability to receive and understand information critically (Turiman et al., 2012).

The ability to understand and interpret information critically is part of the critical reading skills requirement, even by elementary school students (Rini, 2018). Critical reading is an active process of discovery, since when readers read critically, they are not passively receiving information. The essential relevance of reading in today's information-saturated world cannot be overstated, as individuals are constantly inundated with vast amounts of data, opinions, and perspectives (Gustine, 2018; Janks, 2014; Setiawan et al., 2023).

Critical literacy not only inspires students to engage in textual analysis and critical thinking but also empowers them to devise and implement solutions to problems and to reflect on a text (Vasquez et al., 2019; Yoon & Sharif, 2015). This is what Freire & Macedo (1987) call the ability to read words and read the world.

In Indonesia, PISA data from 2018 show that most students' reading skills are limited to low-order thinking skills (LOTS), while students in other countries are already answering material that requires high-order thinking skills (HOTS). In addition, based on the analysis of the PISA report, it was also found that the average student still has difficulty in answering questions that are analytical or reflective in a text (Suprayitno, 2018).

This issue is further compounded by national literacy rates, with Indonesia ranking 42nd out of 45 countries in the 2011 PIRLS survey. It indicates a prevalent low literacy stage among children, where approximately half of third-grade elementary students can decode text but lack comprehension (Mullis et al., 2011). Therefore, given the reading index's low score, it underscores the urgent need for enhanced literacy initiatives, particularly those focused on critical reading. This is done so that they can engage with global scientific and informational advancements (Nurhasanah et al., 2023; Suherman et al., 2020).

The critical literacy pedagogical approach in this research was used to help improve essential reading skills. The basis of this approach is taken from the views of Freire (1982) and Giroux (2003) who view literacy as a tool to awaken critical awareness and provide space for students to have freedom (autonomy) in expressing opinions and ideas, to share problems, and be responsible in solving problems based on their experiences and social realities.

Several studies show that a critical literacy pedagogical approach can help students understand reading and encourage students to analyze texts in order to criticize forms of social oppression or inequality through social action (Vetter et al., 2020; Zhang, 2023).

Critical reading itself is a reading activity that not only aims to foster understanding of the text but also fosters social awareness. One way to promote social awareness is through a dialogue or discussion between students and educators (Freire, 1982; Janks, 2019). Speaking of social contexts, Yoon & Sharif (2015) stated that critical literacy, or reading, is an approach that can explore literacy learning and activities grounded in social literacy practices experienced by children in family, community, and school environments.

Critical reading, which is the focus of this study, is not always related to motivation issues, but also to the social environment, such as parental and teacher involvement (Capotosto et al., 2017; Snow, 2002). The involvement of parents and teachers is one of the factors that can help children understand a reading text (Bano et al., 2018).

Prastikawati et al (2024) ecological theory also states that various environmental factors, including the family and school environment, influence children's development.

Several studies also mention the impact of parental and teacher involvement on students' critical reading development. One of them is research by Paakkari et al (2024), which states that parents possess several competencies that can support students' critical reading development. In addition, several studies highlight the role of parental involvement in home learning in improving children's reading comprehension (Caliskan & Ulas, 2022; Ihmeideh & Oliemat, 2015; Tukur, 2023).

Moreover, other studies also mention that teachers and parents can also cooperate in guiding and directing students in reading activities (Bano et al., 2018). Meanwhile, the research of Vázquez-Cano & Hervás-Gómez (2020) tries to show an overview of the influence of family socio-cultural and economic backgrounds, and collaboration between families and schools can moderate children's critical reading development.

Despite the fact that family and school relations affect children's reading skills (Kamal et al., 2022), research that involves intervention involving cooperation or collaboration between teachers and parents in a program is still rarely done (Villiger et al., 2012), indicating the research gap in this area of study. Other findings also showed several research gaps, stating that there was a link between parental involvement in reading activities and teacher-parent interaction in improving students' reading skills. However, there is a need for further studies that can illustrate the extent of the effectiveness of teacher-parent involvement and cooperation in the development of critical reading, packaged in a program as well as teacher and parent (Graff, 2020; Ihmeideh & Al-Maadadi, 2020).

Despite increasing attention to parental involvement and critical literacy, few studies have developed and empirically tested an innovative integrated instructional model that systematically combines classroom critical literacy pedagogy with structured home-based literacy practices. This study addresses that gap by proposing an advanced collaborative literacy framework designed for elementary learners.

Nevertheless, there remains a paucity of research examining how teachers and parents collaborate to improve critical reading skills within a learning program. Therefore, this study examines a critical literacy pedagogical program that uses teacher-parent collaboration to enhance essential reading skills among elementary school students.

2. Method

The aim of the research is to investigate the effect of a critical literacy pedagogy based on a teacher-parent collaboration program on students' critical reading skills. The research question is whether there is a difference in students' critical reading ability between the group that received the program and the group that did not receive the program.

A quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test control groups, without randomization, was employed in this research. The experimental group received the intervention, and its effect on students' critical reading was assessed. Both experimental and control groups completed the critical reading test before and after the intervention. The experimental process design is outlined below:

Table 1. Research Design

Group	n	Treatment	Post-Test
Experimental	21	X1	O_1
Control	16	X2	O_2

Information:

X1: Treatment in the experimental group using a critical literacy pedagogical program based on teacher-parent collaboration;

X2: Treatment in the control group using the current teaching program;

O_1: Post-test of students' critical reading skill in the experimental group;

O_2: Post-test in the control group

n: Number of samples

In the research, the critical reading test was administered to the experimental and control groups as pre- and post-tests. The experimental group was given the critical literacy pedagogical program based on teacher-parent collaboration, while the control group did not receive it.

The experimental process started after the pre-test was applied to the experimental and control groups. During the process, students of the experimental group carry out the program activities. This study implemented an innovative critical literacy instructional model based on structured teacher–parent collaboration, aims to provide teachers and parents with understanding and skills to improve the critical reading skills of fourth-grade elementary school students. The model represents an instructional innovation that extends critical literacy beyond classroom boundaries into guided home literacy engagement.

The primary focus of this program is to equip fourth-grade students with the knowledge and skills to enhance their critical reading by involving teachers and parents. The program formulation is based on a critical literacy pedagogical approach with the critical schemata method (Freire & Macedo, 1987). The learning steps used in the critical literacy pedagogy program include: (1) problematization stage (pre-reading), (2) cultural discussion stage (reading), and (3) social action stage (post-reading). The program is expected to improve students' critical reading skills, which in this study were measured through the levels of critical reading skills from Facione (2011) and Krathwohl (2002) thinking stages, including: 1) interpreting skills, 2) analyzing skills, 3) inferencing skills, 4) evaluating skills, 5) explanatory skills, and 6) self-regulation and creative skills. The program's learning steps are divided into several activity steps, including learning activities for teachers, parents, and students. The program procedure is used as shown in Figure 1.

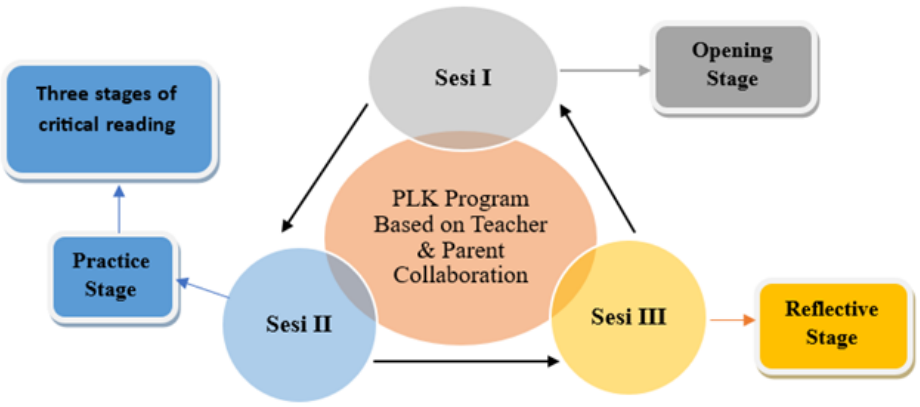

Figure 1. Program Procedure

The program implementation procedure was divided into three activity sessions, including Session I (Opening Stage), Session II (Practice Stage), and Session III (Evaluation and Reflection Stage). Session I provides teachers and parents of fourth-grade students with information, knowledge, and basic skills on critical reading and its development strategies through critical literacy pedagogy. This session was carried out over two online meetings, during which the researcher provided material on critical reading and the steps involved in critical reading activities, to be done in the classroom with teachers and at home with parents. After the first session, the researcher posed several questions to assess teachers' and parents' understanding of the critical reading material provided.

Then, Session II is a practice stage in which teachers, parents, and students apply literacy practices (reading) based on critical literacy pedagogy, both in class and at home. Critical reading activities focus on two themes: bullying and the environment (waste problems). The researcher determines the steps of reading activities that teachers and parents must carry out, in the form of guidelines that can be followed. The guide contains steps and syntax for activities ranging from pre-reading, reading, and post-reading, carried out by teachers, parents, and students. It also includes a list of triggering questions that teachers and parents can use to encourage students' reading skills. The guide also includes a student worksheet with questions to be answered based on the story. There is also a reading record journal that teachers and parents need to fill out after completing reading activities.

This guide is given as a guide or compass for parents and teachers related to the steps of critical reading activities that have been prepared in the program. During the second session, teachers and parents were also provided with essential reading materials, specifically storybooks addressing themes of bullying and environmental issues, which could be accessed online via a link or read directly from the physical book. This session lasted approximately two weeks.

Finally, Session III is a reflective or evaluation session between teachers and parents regarding the literacy activities conducted. This session was conducted through interviews or focus group discussions between teachers and parent representatives in one meeting after the two program sessions were completed. The results of this reflective session can be used to improve the program's development.

The research subjects were elementary students (4th grade) in IV A and IV B, and the parents of students in the experimental class at one of the public schools in Bandung Barat Regency. Class A as the experimental group and Class B as the research control group. The experimental class had 21 students and parents. Besides, the control class had 16 students. The number of samples was also determined by the number of parents willing to participate in the research and who would later accompany their children in carrying out critical reading activities at home.

In the research, the critical reading skill success levels of the experimental and control groups were measured using pre- and post-test measures. For the measurement tool, 19 elective questions (nine multiple-choice and ten essay/ descriptive) were prepared to assess the level of critical reading. The score for multiple-choice questions is 0 for wrong

answers and 1 for correct answers. The highest score for multiple-choice questions is 9 points. In addition, the essay questions are scored 1 to 5 (1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = sufficient, 4 = good, and 5 = very good). Each assessment category has its own rubric. The highest score for essay questions is 50, and the lowest is 10. The validity level of the test instrument used in this study was tested using the Pearson product-moment correlation. Based on the validity results of nine multiple-choice questions and ten essay/descriptive questions, three multiple-choice questions have low validity values. However, two of them are still significant at the 0.05 level, while one question is not accepted (not valid). There are eight multiple-choice questions and ten essay/descriptive questions available. The reliability test used Cronbach's alpha. Based on the results of the critical reading test reliability calculation, the alpha value was 0.827, which is categorized as very high, indicating that the critical reading test instrument is reliable.

Data analysis was based on the results of the written tests (pretest and posttest). This data was analysed quantitatively using the average difference test (t-test) in SPSS 29. The purpose of this quantitative data analysis is to measure the effectiveness of a critical literacy pedagogical program that uses teacher and parent collaboration to improve the critical reading skills of fourth-grade elementary school students.

3. Result and Discussion

The pretest was conducted to determine the initial state or extent of students' critical reading abilities in both the experimental and control classes before receiving the critical literacy pedagogical program, developed through teacher-parent collaboration.

Afrer the pretest results were obtained, the data were processed to get the average score, the lowest score, the highest score, and the standard deviation. The data are depicted in the following table:

Table 2. Pre-test Critical Reading Ability of Experimental and Control Classes

Group	n	Ideal Score	Lowest Score	Highest Score	Average Score	Standard Deviation
Experimental	21	58	18	36	27.21	5.656
Control	16	58	22	36	28.06	3.746

Table 2 shows that the lowest score in the experimental class was lower than the lowest score in the control class. However, the highest score in both the experimental and control classes was 36, with standard deviations of 5.65 and 3.74, respectively, indicating variation in scores among students in both classes. The average critical reading ability score in the experimental class was lower than that in the control class. However, the difference in average scores between the experimental and control classes was only 1.46 points. These findings indicate that the critical reading ability in the two experimental and control classes before being treated in the form of a program was not too different.

After a pretest was conducted to assess students' initial critical reading skills in both the experimental and control classes, a posttest was administered to determine their critical reading skills after treatment. In this case, the experimental class received a literacy pedagogical program based on

teacher-parent collaboration. In contrast, the control class received treatment through the Indonesian language learning program currently implemented in the classroom by the teacher. After the posttest results were obtained, the data were processed to obtain the average score, the smallest score, the largest score, and the standard deviation. The data are depicted in the Table 3.

Table 3. Post-test Critical Reading Ability of Experimental and Control Classes

Group	n	Ideal Score	Lowest Score	Highest Score	Average Score	Standard Deviation
Experimental	21	58	41	51	44.81	2.704
Control	16	58	30	42	29.41	3.437

Table 3 shows that the average critical reading ability of fourth-grade students in the experimental class and control class increased from the pretest. However, the average critical reading ability in the experimental class was higher than that in the control class. The average score in the experimental class was 77.27 with a standard deviation of 2.70. In the control class, the mean was 57.96 with a standard deviation of 3.42, indicating variation in scores among students. The average difference in the two classes was 19.31 points. This suggests that the critical reading ability in the experimental class, after being treated with the pedagogy literacy program, was higher than that of the control classes that received only the class treatment.

Before testing the effect of the critical literacy pedagogy based on the teacher-parents collaboration program on student critical reading skill outcomes, prerequisite tests for normality and homogeneity were conducted to determine which statistical tests were necessary. The normality test at this stage was conducted using the Shapiro-Wilk because the sample was less than 50. The test was conducted by comparing the probability (sig.) with the alpha value (α). The test results are said to be normally distributed if the value (sig.) is greater (>) than the alpha value (α, 0.05). However, if the value (sig.) is smaller (<) than the alpha value (α, 0.05), then the data is not normally distributed. In addition to the normality test, a homogeneity test was conducted at this stage to assess the data's homogeneity. The homogeneity test was conducted using the ANOVA test assisted by SPSS version 27 by comparing the significance number (Sig.) with the alpha value (α). The test results criteria are the same as the normality test criteria: if the significance value (Sig.) is greater than the alpha value (0.05), then the data are homogeneous. Conversely, if the significance value (Sig.) is smaller than the alpha value (0.05), then the data is not homogeneous. After conducting a normality test and a homogeneity test, a difference test was conducted to assess the difference in the average reading ability pretest scores between the experimental and control classes using the Independent Samples T-Test in SPSS version 27.

The results of the post-test normality test of student critical reading are stated in Table 4.

Table 4. Normality Test Result

Group	Sig	Dec
Experimental	0.348	Normal
Control	0.857	Normal

The results show that the data for both the experimental and control classes are normally distributed. Additionally, a homogeneity test was performed to assess whether the data sample originated from a population with equal variance. The results of the homogeneity test for post-test critical reading are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Homogeneity Test Result

Group	Sig	Dec
Experimental	0.138	Homogeneous
Control	0.138	Homogeneous

Based on these data, it can be concluded that critical reading ability in the experimental and control classes is homogeneous.

After both data sets are declared normally distributed and homogeneous, a difference test can be conducted. The detailed results of the difference test for average pretest scores in the experimental and control classes are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Independent Sample T-Test Result (Pre-test)

Group	Mean Score	df	Sig	Dec
Experimental	46.97	35	0.832	There is no significant difference
Control	48.37			

The data in the table above show that the difference test of the pretest averages for critical reading ability in the experimental and control classes at a significance level of 0.05 yielded a p-value (sig. 2-tailed) of 0.832. The significance value (2-tailed) of 0.832 is greater (>) than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in the average pretest scores for critical reading ability between the experimental and control classes at the 95% confidence level. This also indicates that the critical reading ability in the two classes before treatment does not differ significantly.

Post-test data were also examined to determine the difference in the average reading ability scores between the experimental and control classes. The results of the post-test normality test of student learning outcomes are stated in Table 7.

Table 7. Normality Test Result

Group	Sig	Dec
Experimental	0.129	Normal
Control	0.114	Normal

The two significance values in the table show that the posttest data on critical reading ability in the experimental and control classes are normally distributed. Meanwhile, the results of the homogeneity test for post-test critical reading are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Homogeneity Test Result

Group	Sig	Dec
Experimental	0.862	Homogeneous
Control	0.862	Homogeneous

This indicates that the sig value of 0.862 is greater than 0.05, indicating that the posttest data for critical reading ability in the experimental and control classes are homogeneous. Once the data are found to be normally distributed and homogeneous, a difference test can be conducted. A detailed explanation of the results of the difference test for the average posttest for critical reading ability in the two groups can be seen in the following table:

Table 9. Independent Sample T-Test Result (Post-test)

Group	Mean Score	df	Sig	Dec
Experimental	77.22	35	0.00	There is a significant difference

Control	57.96

The data in the table above show that the difference test of the post-test averages for critical reading ability in the experimental and control classes at a significance level of 0.05 yielded a p-value (sig. 2-tailed) of 0.000. The significance value (2-tailed) of 0.000 is smaller (<) than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in critical reading ability between the experimental and control classes at the 95% confidence level. In other words, this shows that the program can help improve students' critical reading skills. N-Gain result are presented in Figure 2.

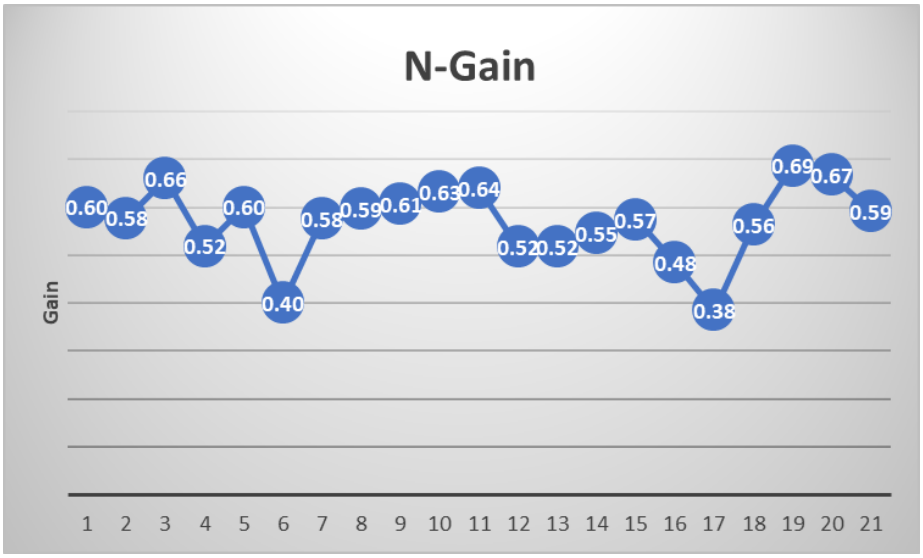

Figure 2. N-Gain Value

Figure 2 presents an overview of students' critical reading skills before and after treatment in the experimental class. From the graph, it can be seen that the rate of increase in critical reading varies. The critical reading improvement category for all students is in the medium range (0.40 to 0.69), indicating that all students have improved, though not by the same amount. Some students have experienced considerable improvement, even though their critical reading scores before treatment were at the class average. This at least shows that there is an effect on students' critical reading skills after treatment.

The researcher also gave a comprehension test to teachers and parents regarding critical reading material. The results of the comprehension test are shown in the following table.

Table 10. Parent and Teacher Comprehension Test

Group	Number	Mean Score	Highest Score	Lower Score	SD
Teacher	1	80	80	-	16.6
Parents	21	63.81	80	53.33	7.09

It can be concluded from Table 10 that teachers' understanding of critical reading materials is in the high category, indicating a good understanding of critical reading materials. Meanwhile, parents have a moderate understanding of the category,

indicating that parents' understanding of the material provided is quite good. This suggests that teachers have a better understanding of critical reading material than parents' understanding.

This finding aligns with previous research indicating that collaboration between teachers and parents in learning can help improve students' reading skills significantly (Javier & Jr, Jubay, 2019). Align with Dozier et al (2006) that pedagogical interventions can substantially enhance students' reading achievement, particularly when pre- and post-test scores demonstrate a notable increase (Susilawati, 2020). This further supports the rejection of the null hypothesis, as a substantial difference was observed between the groups. This result indicates the efficacy of the implemented intervention, demonstrating a statistically significant improvement in critical reading abilities within the experimental group compared to the control group. This robust outcome aligns with Fuadi (2025) studies that highlight the positive impact of teacher-parent collaboration on students' academic improvement. Fuadi (2025) also noted that parental involvement in children's learning activities and the link between classroom and home learning are beneficial for students in deepening their understanding.

Another study also found that parents involvement in reading activities has a significant effect on students' reading and literacy skills (Kamal et al., 2022; Mustadi & Amri, 2020). The collaborative approach between home and school reinforces learning strategies, contributing to improved academic performance, and can foster an environment conducive to academic growth, supporting the development of higher-order thinking skills such as critical analysis and interpretation (Fullan, 2015).

The increase in n-gain values in critical reading ability after treatment (i.e., a program) could be one of the factors driving the difference in critical reading ability between the experimental and control classes. This is also supported by the findings on teachers' and parents' understanding of critical reading, which are rated as good or quite good. This suggests that reading activities guided by critical literacy pedagogy, in collaboration between teachers and parents, can effectively improve students' reading skills.

Jeynes' (2016) research states that involvement and cooperation between parents and schools can improve students' abilities and overall achievements. This aligns with studies showing that parental involvement can increase students' reading comprehension (Cawasan et al., 2024). The study's results also identified an urgent need for collaboration to facilitate a more holistic understanding of students' needs and challenges, enabling tailored interventions that address specific learning gaps, especially in reading skills.

Based on the study's results, some students whose n-gain scores increased significantly, even though their critical reading pre-test scores were below the class average. This shows that program delivery can impact students whose initial critical reading ability is below average, and at the same time illustrates that program delivery can be delivered effectively to all students, even with different critical reading skill backgrounds. This aligns with the research of Hake (2002) who stated that an increase in n-gain scores can occur when interventions in activities or learning are effective enough to encourage improvements in students' abilities.

A good understanding of the teacher's and parents' critical reading material can also be one of the factors that support the improvement of critical reading skills. This aligns with several studies that show that teachers with a positive perception of parental involvement and competence in mastering reading activities can significantly improve students' reading skills (Bano et al., 2018; Sulistyanto et al., 2022). In addition, parents who have contributed or are actively involved in programs or training related to reading activities can also improve students' reading skills (Tukur, 2023)

This collaborative framework also ensures consistency in educational objectives and reinforces the application of critical reading skills across contexts, both within and outside the classroom. This integrated support system not only enhances reading comprehension but also fosters deeper engagement with complex texts, which is crucial for developing robust critical thinking skills (Olbata et al., 2022).

Based on parents' and teachers' notes and journals, the program's critical reading activities also indirectly encourage parents and children to read together and discuss, using questions that can help children better understand their reading.

This comprehensive approach, which integrates critical reading, intertextuality, and collaborative learning, underscores the importance of multifaceted interventions in fostering advanced literacy skills (Abudlridha & Latiff, 2020). This underscores the importance of a coordinated effort between educators and parents to cultivate a profound understanding and application of critical literacy. This includes implementing effective reading strategies and fostering an environment that encourages deep engagement with diverse texts (Rehman et al., 2020). Additionally, such collaborations can enhance reading comprehension, which is fundamental for developing a student's capacity to analyze information and foster critical reading skills (Brown & Poortman, 2018).

Beyond improving reading outcomes, this study contributes to the field by demonstrating how an innovative family–school literacy model can operationalize advanced literacy pedagogy in primary education settings. The integration of home and school literacy practices represents a form of pedagogical innovation that aligns with 21st-century learning demands.

Furthermore, reading activities that involve interaction and in-depth discussions between teachers, parents, and students are one of the keys to learning to read based on meaningful critical literacy pedagogy (Janks, 2019; Yoon & Uliassi, 2018). In addition, the support from teachers and parents also helps students to navigate challenging texts and develop essential lifelong reading skills (Baki, 2024). It is crucial to implement these methods strategically, especially those that foster student engagement with text, to improve reading comprehension and cultivate independent and critical readers (Elleman & Oslund, 2019; Wexler et al., 2020).

4. Conclusion

This study provides empirical support for an innovative and scalable literacy learning model that promotes advanced critical reading through cross-context collaboration between teachers and families. From the findings, we can conclude that the critical literacy pedagogy based on the teacher-parent collaboration program effectively improves students' critical reading skills. There is a difference in critical reading ability in the experimental class and the control class, one of which is due to a significant increase in critical reading ability in the experimental

class, which is assisted by the competence of teachers and parents in understanding the critical reading material provided quite well.

However, the research has limitations, including a limited number of subjects, so the results of this study cannot be generalized. In addition, due to limited research time, critical reading activities in program sessions are not very optimal. Therefore, for future research, in addition to providing broader, deeper critical reading material to teachers and parents, programs can also be offered for a more extended period, so that program evaluation can be more measurable.

However, this program can indirectly provide teachers and parents with an overview of steps, especially for critical reading activities that can be done in the classroom or at home. In addition, this critical literacy pedagogy program can serve as a basis for selecting alternatives to improve students' critical reading skills.

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