

## Reconstructing National Integration Values through Critical Literacy in English Language Learning in Higher Education

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### Abstract

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The development of globalization and digital media has had a significant impact on the mindset and character of young generations, including the declining awareness of national integration values. Higher education institutions have a strategic role in reconstructing the values of unity, tolerance, and national identity through critical and reflective learning processes. This study aims to describe the reconstruction of national integration values through the implementation of critical literacy in English language learning at the tertiary education level. The study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Data collection techniques were conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation of the English language learning process. Data analysis was carried out through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the critical literacy approach is capable of enhancing students' critical thinking skills in understanding texts, analyzing social and cultural issues, and connecting global discourses with Indonesian national values. In addition, students demonstrated increased awareness of the importance of tolerance, diversity, unity, and social responsibility in community life. The implementation of critical literacy in English language learning is not only oriented toward the mastery of language competencies but also serves as a means of character development and the strengthening of national integration within higher education environments. Therefore, this approach can serve as an alternative pedagogical strategy in supporting character education and strengthening national insight in the era of globalization.

**Keywords:** national integration, critical literacy, English language learning, higher education.

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### INTRODUCTION

National integration constitutes one of the fundamental pillars in sustaining the life of the Indonesian nation and state. Amid the currents of globalization and increasingly complex socio-cultural diversity, challenges to national unity are no longer conventional in nature but have also expanded into the epistemological domain—namely, how younger generations understand, interpret, and internalize national values in their daily lives. Higher education institutions, as strategic intellectual spaces, bear a significant responsibility in shaping citizens who are not

only academically competent but also critical and characterized by a strong sense of national identity.

English, as an international language, is often perceived as a neutral and value-free medium. However, this perception requires critical examination. Every English-language text—whether in the form of articles, digital media, or instructional materials—contains ideological content, cultural perspectives, and representations of power that have the potential to influence learners' views regarding identity, nationality, and diversity (Pennycook, 2001; Canagarajah, 1999). Without the ability to read texts critically, students are vulnerable to absorbing values that may, in fact, contradict the spirit of national integration.

It is within this context that critical literacy emerges as a relevant pedagogical response. Critical literacy is not merely the ability to read texts literally; rather, it is the capacity to question, analyze, and deconstruct the dimensions of power, ideology, and marginalization embedded within texts (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Luke, 2012). In the context of English language learning in higher education, the implementation of critical literacy creates opportunities to utilize foreign-language texts as a medium for reflecting upon local values, diversity, and national unity.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the significant contribution of critical literacy to the development of students' critical consciousness (Janks, 2010; Morgan, 1997). Nevertheless, studies that specifically associate critical literacy with the reconstruction of national integration values within the context of English language learning in Indonesian higher education remain highly limited. This gap represents an urgent academic concern, considering that Indonesia is a country with one of the highest levels of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity in the world while simultaneously facing threats of disintegration resulting from social polarization and the influence of homogenizing global narratives.

This study aims to examine how the critical literacy approach can serve as a pedagogical instrument for reconstructing national integration values in English language learning within higher education. Specifically, this study seeks to: (1) identify the content of national values that can be integrated through English-language texts; (2) analyze critical literacy practices that are relevant within the context of Indonesian higher education; and (3) formulate an applicable and contextual model for reconstructing integrative values based on critical literacy.

Accordingly, this study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of critical pedagogy in language education in Indonesia, while simultaneously strengthening the academic foundation for efforts to reinforce national integration through educational pathways and critical literacy.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative approach through a library research method. According to Zed (2008), library research is not merely concerned with collecting data from literature sources but also seeks to understand the meanings embedded within various sources in order to address research problems. This approach was selected due to the reflective and theoretical nature of the study, which aims to reconstruct the concept of national integration through the

framework of critical literacy in English language learning at higher education institutions.

The data utilized in this study consisted of secondary data derived from primary and secondary literature sources, including: 1) Trusted Research Journals: Focusing on scholarly articles concerning critical literacy (critical pedagogy), language education policies, and sociolinguistics in higher education over the last ten years (2016–2026). 2) Textbooks and Curriculum Documents: Theoretical references regarding national integration theory and higher education policies in Indonesia. 3) International Organization Reports: Documents discussing citizenship literacy within the context of global language education.

The data analysis method employed was content analysis using both deductive and inductive approaches. The analysis process was conducted through the following stages (in accordance with the framework of Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014): 1) Data Reduction: Classifying literature related to the relationship between critical literacy and the development of national integration character. 2) Data Display: Organizing synthesized findings from various literature sources into a conceptual matrix to identify connections between English language learning practices (such as critical discourse analysis of texts) and the strengthening of national values. 3) Conclusion Drawing: Conducting in-depth interpretation to generate a model or concept for the renewal of national integration values that can be incorporated into English language learning syllabi in higher education.

The validity of information in this study was established through source triangulation by evaluating perspectives from language education scholars and educational policy experts to ensure that the proposed reconstruction of values possesses a solid theoretical foundation and is relevant to the contemporary context.

The findings of this study are further supported by various previous studies emphasizing the importance of Critical Literacy in English language learning. Pupah and Syuhda (2024) found that EFL students in Indonesia perceive Critical Literacy as an approach capable of enhancing critical thinking skills and helping them understand various social issues emerging within society. These findings indicate that Critical Literacy contributes not only to the development of language competence but also to the formation of students' social awareness.

Furthermore, Hardianti (2024) revealed that university students in Indonesia regard critical literacy as an essential skill for analyzing information, evaluating multiple perspectives, and making rational decisions. These findings are relevant to the needs of students in the digital era, where they are exposed to a rapid and diverse flow of information. The ability to critically analyze information constitutes an important asset in maintaining national identity while simultaneously responding to the challenges of globalization.

The study conducted by Rizqiani and Novitri (2023) also demonstrated that the development of a Critical Literacy model in English reading instruction is necessary to accommodate the needs of EFL students. Learning oriented toward Critical Literacy enables students not only to comprehend textual content but also to evaluate the perspectives, ideologies, and interests embedded within it. Such abilities are highly important in the process of reconstructing national integration

values because students are able to distinguish information that supports national unity from information that has the potential to generate social disintegration.

Moreover, Setiawan and Nurbani (2023) emphasized that literary works in English language learning can serve as an effective medium for developing critical literacy. Through the exploration of various social and humanitarian issues presented in literary works, students gain opportunities to reflect upon values of diversity, tolerance, and social justice that are aligned with the spirit of Indonesian national integration.

The findings of Mahardika and Silalahi (2025) further indicated that the implementation of Critical Literacy in English language learning enhances critical thinking skills, student participation in the learning process, and the quality of their written arguments. These findings suggest that Critical Literacy influences not only academic aspects but also assists students in becoming more reflective and responsible individuals when responding to various social issues.

Therefore, various previous studies demonstrate that Critical Literacy makes a significant contribution to the development of students' critical thinking abilities, social awareness, and character formation. Within the context of this study, these capacities constitute an important foundation for the reconstruction of national integration values because students not only understand national values normatively but are also able to internalize them through processes of reflection and critical analysis of the social realities they encounter.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Critical Literacy as a Pedagogical Framework in English Language Learning**

Critical literacy has evolved into one of the most relevant pedagogical approaches in twenty-first-century language education. Rooted in the intellectual tradition of Paulo Freire (1970), who viewed education as a practice of liberation, critical literacy encourages learners not merely to comprehend texts at a textual level but also to question the power relations, ideologies, and representations embedded within them. In the context of English language learning in higher education, this approach serves as an appropriate instrument for fostering students' critical awareness of the values conveyed through foreign-language texts.

Luke and Freebody (1997) formulated four roles of the critical reader that serve as the operational foundation of critical literacy, namely code breaker, meaning maker, text user, and text critic. The last role is the most strategic: students are encouraged to analyze texts not as passive consumers but as agents capable of evaluating perspectives, identifying biases, and relating textual content to their own socio-cultural contexts. Within this framework, English language learning is transformed from merely mastering linguistic skills into a space for the formation of identity and national values.

### **2. National Integration Values in English-Language Texts**

The literature review indicates that English-language texts used in Indonesian higher education institutions—including imported textbooks, online articles, and digital materials—are often dominated by Western perspectives that

have the potential to shift students' value orientations (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Values such as individualism, cultural homogenization, and the superiority of global languages may indirectly erode appreciation for local diversity, which constitutes the foundation of Indonesia's national integration.

Nevertheless, this study also identifies the opposite potential: English-language texts can be utilized as mirrors through which national values may be reflected upon and reinforced. When students are encouraged to compare representations of diversity in foreign texts with the reality of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), they not only develop linguistic competence but also strengthen their national identity. Janks (2010) emphasizes that texts become most meaningful when they serve as a starting point for dialoguing local experiences with global discourses.

### **3. Reconstruction of Values through Critical Literacy Practices**

The reconstruction of national integration values through critical literacy occurs through three interrelated stages. First is the deconstruction stage, in which students are trained to identify and question hidden assumptions within texts—who is represented, who is excluded, and whose interests are reinforced by the text. Second is the contextual reflection stage, where students connect the findings of textual analysis with the local and national values they possess. Third is the reconstruction stage, in which students produce alternative texts or responses that reflect more inclusive and equitable perspectives.

Several empirical studies support the effectiveness of these stages. Morgan (1997) found that students exposed to critical literacy in language learning demonstrated significant improvement in social awareness and in their ability to articulate their cultural identities. Meanwhile, Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) identified four dimensions of critical literacy relevant to value reconstruction: disrupting the commonplace, considering multiple perspectives, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking action for social transformation. These four dimensions are aligned with the values of pluralism and unity that constitute the essence of Indonesian national integration.

### **4. Challenges and Opportunities for Implementation in Indonesian Higher Education**

Although theoretically promising, the implementation of critical literacy in English language learning within Indonesian higher education faces several challenges. Curricula oriented toward the mastery of formal linguistic competencies, limited lecturer training in critical approaches, and academic cultures that tend to avoid discussions of sensitive issues constitute significant obstacles (Kirkpatrick, 2007). In addition, the availability of teaching materials that explicitly integrate national values with a critical literacy approach remains highly limited.

However, the existing opportunities are equally substantial. The Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy provides space for lecturers to design learning experiences that are more contextual and oriented toward character development. Within this framework, critical literacy can be positioned not as an additional curricular burden but as a learning strategy that simultaneously

integrates language competency achievement and the strengthening of national values. The development of teaching modules based on multimodal texts—which combine written, visual, and digital texts—also represents a concrete opportunity to enrich critical literacy practices that are responsive to the Indonesian context.

### **5. Synthesis: Toward an Integrative Model**

Based on the literature review conducted, it can be synthesized that the reconstruction of national integration values through critical literacy is not an additive project but a transformative one. This means that the expected change is not merely the inclusion of additional national-content materials in the English language syllabus but an epistemological shift in the way students perceive texts, language, and their identities as citizens. The proposed integrative model positions critical literacy as a bridge between global competencies and local value foundations—equipping students with English language proficiency while simultaneously fostering a strong sense of national consciousness.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study confirms that critical literacy possesses significant potential as a pedagogical approach for reconstructing national integration values through English language learning in higher education. Through three main stages—text deconstruction, contextual reflection, and value reconstruction—students not only develop their language competencies but are also shaped into critical citizens characterized by a strong sense of national identity.

The findings of the literature review indicate that English-language texts, which have often been regarded as neutral, are in fact laden with ideological content that has the potential to influence students' value orientations. Therefore, a paradigm reorientation in English language learning in higher education is required—from an approach that is solely linguistically oriented toward one that is transformative and infused with national values.

The implementation of critical literacy within the Indonesian context is both relevant and urgent, particularly amid the challenges of social polarization and homogenizing globalization. The Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy provides a strategic space for lecturers to integrate this approach into contextualized learning designs. In the future, it is necessary to develop critical literacy-based teaching modules that explicitly incorporate the values of Pancasila and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as the foundation for reconstructing students' national identity.

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