

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Extensive reading has a high urgency in English language learning because it plays an important role in improving reading comprehension through continuous interaction with a variety of meaningful texts (Liu & Saad, 2025). This activity not only enriches vocabulary and sentence structure, but also supports academic writing skills more effectively (Taye & Teshome, 2025). In addition, extensive reading habits help learners of English as a foreign language develop reading fluency and speed (Schmidtke et al., 2024). Thus, the application of extensive reading is an important strategy to improve students' literacy competence, critical thinking, and learning independence in the context of modern language learning.

There has been a lot of previous research on *extensive reading* (ER) in the context of language learning, but it has generally focused on the impact of ER on second and foreign language mastery. Sangers et al. (2025) conducted a meta-analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of ER as well as identify key elements of its success, and found that this approach is still underutilized in language education. Furthermore, Liu & Saad (2025) highlight that ER plays an important role in vocabulary mastery and critical thinking skill development, while increasing learners' motivation through diverse reading options. Research by Riad et al. (2025) demonstrated the effectiveness of dialogical reading in improving children's oral language skills in kindergarten, proving the relevance of an extensive reading approach from an early age.

Other research on gender literacy and the representation of masculinity in literature also shows important developments. Leproni (2025) examines digital literary literacy (DLL) by emphasizing how gender influences the production, distribution, and reception of digital literature, and calls for inclusive and ethical practices. Meanwhile, Zhumaev (2025) discusses the role of national and cultural codes in shaping gender identity in Russian and Uzbekist literature, highlighting how traditionalism has been the basis of the evolution of modern literature. In addition, Ono and Endo (2024) examined the gap in women's representation in global politics, finding that gender bias emerges at every stage of political recruitment, thus reinforcing the urgency of structural change towards representative equality in various social spheres.

In the context of learning, drama is also widely researched as a medium for developing critical and social literacy. Iivari et al. (2024) describe a critical design project that empowers children to analyze social issues and design creative solutions through digital theater activities. Hu & Shu (2025) show that collaboration and communication in drama significantly strengthen critical thinking skills and core literacy (5Cs), with regression results supporting the positive effects of collaboration on multiperspective analysis. Meanwhile, Low et al. (2025) examined digital literacy through #BookTok phenomenon, discovering how "algorithmic imagination" shapes the way humans interpret relationships with technology, thereby expanding the understanding of critical literacy in the digital age.

The novelty of this research lies in the combination of Extensive Reading with drama texts with gender and masculinity themes as the main source to build critical literacy and gender literacy. Different from previous research that emphasized drama as a performative medium or as a hands-on learning tool, this study places drama within the framework of extensive reading so as to open up new perspectives on how dramatic texts can influence the construction of identity and social understanding through the process of repetitive and profound reading. This approach has not been widely explored and offers a new mapping of the relationship between reading practices, gender awareness, and the development of students' analytical abilities.

To find out the actual problems occurring, the researcher conducted preliminary research on the fourth-semester students of TBI UINFAS Bengkulu on April 15, 2026, by conducting classroom observations and interviews with all students. The observation results showed that students still experienced difficulties in developing critical ideas and organizing argumentative essays systematically, especially in relating gender issues to academic arguments. Most students tended to write descriptively without providing critical analysis of gender representation in the drama texts they read. In addition, students' participation in reading activities was still low because they were less interested in conventional academic reading materials.

The interview results revealed that the students understood the importance of critical thinking skills and gender literacy in English language learning. However, they still encountered difficulties in expressing their opinions through argumentative writing. The major challenges included limited academic vocabulary, insufficient understanding of gender issues, difficulties in organizing arguments, and a limited ability to connect the

outcomes of extensive reading activities with argumentative essay writing. The students also stated that the use of masculinity-themed drama plays was more engaging and helped them understand social conflicts and gender issues in a more contextual manner. Therefore, the students needed a learning strategy that could effectively integrate extensive reading, critical gender literacy, and argumentative writing in a more interactive and reflective way (Appendix 1 contains the classroom observation sheet for the preliminary research, Appendix 2 contains the observation results, Appendix 3 contains the interview blueprint, Appendix 4 contains the interview guidelines for the preliminary research, and Appendices 5–9 contain the preliminary research interview results)

B. Identification of the Problem

Based on the research background above, several problems can be identified as follows:

1. Although extensive reading (ER) has been widely applied in EFL learning, its contribution to the development of university students' critical literacy in argumentative essay writing and in promoting students' critical gender literacy through argumentative essay writing has not been thoroughly explored, particularly in relation to gender literacy and masculinity issues.
2. Research on gender literacy and the representation of masculinity in literary texts is still mostly discussed from literary, cultural, and political perspectives, without integrating it into extensive reading pedagogical practices in EFL learning contexts.
3. There has been no empirical study focusing on fourth-semester students of the TBI Study Program at UINFAS Bengkulu that examines how students construct and negotiate their understanding of gender and masculinity through extensive reading of masculinity-themed drama plays and how these activities influence their critical reflection and argumentative writing development.

C. Limitation of the Problem

In order for this research to be focused and in-depth, the limitations of the problem are set as follows:

1. This study is limited to the use of extensive reading activities through masculinity-themed drama plays as the primary reading materials in promoting students' critical gender literacy. Other literary texts such as novels, short stories, poems, and non-literary texts are not included as the objects of this study.

2. This study focuses only on fourth-semester students of the TBI Study Program at UINFAS Bengkulu in the academic year 2026; therefore, the findings of this study are not intended to be generalized to all EFL students or other higher education institutions.
3. This study specifically examines the contribution of extensive reading to the development of students' critical literacy and how critical literacy is reflected in students' argumentative essays, particularly in the analysis of gender issues, organization of arguments, and critical responses toward drama texts.

D. Research Questions

Based on the background of the above problem, this study focuses on exploring students' gender literacy through reading masculinity-themed dramas; Therefore, the research problem is formulated in the following questions.

1. How does extensive reading contribute the development of university students' critical literacy in argumentative essay writing?
2. In what ways is critical literacy reflected in student' argumentative essay after engaging in extensive reading activities?

E. The Objective of the Research

The purpose of the research is focused on the objective of the research:

1. To explore contribution of extensive reading contribute the development of university students' critical literacy in argumentative essay writing
2. To examine critical literacy reflected in student' argumentative essay after engaging in extensive reading activities

F. The Significance of the Research

This research has significant importance in developing English language learning oriented toward critical literacy through extensive reading activities. The focus of the study on the contribution of extensive reading to argumentative essay writing skills provides new insights into the relationship between reading activities and students' critical thinking abilities. In addition to improving academic skills, this research also highlights how students construct arguments based on analysis, reflection, and interpretation of various texts they read. Therefore, this study is expected to enrich language learning approaches that are more critical, reflective, and contextual in modern higher education.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of critical literacy theory in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. This study reinforces the understanding that extensive reading not only functions to improve reading skills, but also plays a role in developing students' analytical and argumentative abilities. In addition, this research expands studies concerning the relationship between reading activities and argumentative essay writing skills in the EFL context. The findings of this study are expected to serve as an academic reference for developing critical literacy-based learning concepts that integrate reading, reflection, and academic writing in a more comprehensive manner relevant to the needs of twenty-first century learning.

Practically, this research is expected to provide benefits for lecturers, students, and educational institutions in developing more effective English language learning strategies. Lecturers can use extensive reading activities as a means to improve students' critical thinking abilities and the quality of their argumentative writing. Students may also gain more reflective learning experiences through active engagement with various meaningful reading texts. Furthermore, the findings of this study can serve as a consideration for educational institutions in designing curricula and literacy programs that support the continuous and systematic development of students' academic abilities, critical communication, and argumentative writing skills.

Overall, this research is expected to make a meaningful contribution to the development of critical literacy-based English language learning in higher education. Through exploring the contribution of extensive reading to argumentative writing skills, this study emphasizes the importance of integrating reading activities and critical thinking into students' academic processes. The findings are expected to encourage the creation of more active, analytical, and reflective learning environments, enabling students not only to understand texts linguistically but also to construct logical and critical arguments. Furthermore, this research may serve as a foundation for future studies in the fields of critical literacy and English language education.

G. Operational Definitions of Key Terms

To clarify the scope and focus of this research, several key terms need to be defined operationally according to the context of the research.

1. ***Extensive Reading*** is the activity of reading a large and diverse number of texts independently to improve comprehension, vocabulary, and critical reflection.

2. ***Critical Writing*** is the ability to construct reasoned arguments, evaluate evidence, integrate sources, and articulate positions clearly, coherently, and persuasively in academic contexts.
3. ***Gender Literacy*** is the ability to understand, analyze, and interpret social constructions of gender critically through literary texts and language learning contexts.
4. ***Drama Plays*** Literary works in the form of dialogues and dramatic actions used as a medium for literacy learning, social reflection, and critical thinking development.
5. ***Argumentative Essay Writing*** involves composing structured essays presenting claims, supporting reasons with credible evidence, addressing counterarguments, and concluding logically to persuade an intended academic audience.