

EFL Students' Critical Thinking and Moderation Awareness Through Reading Multicultural Texts

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the relationship between critical thinking skills and moderation awareness among third-semester EFL students through their engagement with multicultural reading texts in an Indonesian university context. This study employs a qualitative research method with an ethnographic approach, drawing on in-depth semi-structured interviews, classroom observation, and document analysis as primary data collection instruments. Data validity was ensured through triangulation, enabling a contextually rich and methodologically rigorous interpretation of students' experiences. Participants were third-semester EFL students engaged with multicultural reading tasks specifically designed to elicit critical reflection on diverse cultural, religious, and ideological perspectives prevalent in contemporary society. The findings reveal that engagement with multicultural texts generates cognitive and affective dissonance that, when mediated by critical thinking scaffolds and guided classroom discussion, produces measurable attitudinal shifts consistent with moderation awareness. Students demonstrated growing capacities for source evaluation, bias recognition, perspective-taking, and intellectual autonomy—competencies that jointly constitute the cognitive and attitudinal infrastructure of moderation. The study concludes that EFL reading instruction, when intentionally designed around critical pedagogy and diverse multicultural texts, constitutes a viable and academically rigorous vehicle for developing moderation competency in Indonesian higher education.

Keywords: *Critical Thinking; EFL Reading; Moderation Awareness; Multicultural Texts; Indonesian Higher Education.*

INTRODUCTION

In an era of increasing global interconnection, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms have transformed into microcosms of cultural diversity and ideological encounter. Students are no longer passive receivers of linguistic input; they are active agents who encounter, interpret, and respond to texts that carry ideological, social, and cultural weight. This dynamic reality demands that EFL pedagogy move beyond vocabulary drills and grammar exercises to cultivate higher-order cognitive skills, among which critical thinking stands as a central priority. Simultaneously, in many multicultural and multireligious societies, particularly across Southeast Asia, the value of moderation — the capacity to engage with difference, resist extremism, and maintain civic balance — has emerged as an urgent educational imperative.

Critical thinking in language education has attracted substantial scholarly attention in recent years. Alghamdi and Gillies (2019), in their study "Critical Thinking Instruction and EFL Students: A Meta-Analysis," established that structured critical thinking instruction significantly improves students' capacity to analyze and evaluate textual claims, a finding that underscores the pedagogical potential of integrating critical thinking directly into EFL curricula. In a similar vein, Mede and Altiparmak (2021), writing in "Critical Thinking in EFL Classrooms: Teacher Perspectives and Classroom Realities" (English Language Teaching Journal), emphasized that while teachers value critical thinking, they frequently lack the methodological tools to operationalize it within reading instruction. These gaps between aspiration and practice create fertile ground for empirical investigation.

The concept of moderation awareness, while well-established in political and religious discourse, remains theoretically underdeveloped in the context of language education. Esposito and Baer (2021), in "Moderation and Democracy: Navigating the Ideological Middle" (Journal of Political Ideologies), argued that moderation should be understood not as passive neutrality but as an active, reasoned disposition toward difference — a definition that resonates deeply with the cognitive demands of critical reading. When EFL students engage with multicultural texts, they are exposed to characters, events, and value systems that may challenge their preconceptions. A moderating disposition allows them to navigate these tensions without dismissal or radicalization, making moderation a natural companion to critical inquiry in the reading classroom.

Multicultural texts, broadly defined as literary and informational texts that represent diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and ideological perspectives, serve

as powerful pedagogical tools for fostering both critical thinking and moderation. Norton and Toohey (2020), in "Identity and Language Learning: Extending the Conversation" (Multilingual Matters), argued that exposure to diverse textual voices enables learners to question dominant narratives and expand their understanding of human experience. More recently, Canagarajah (2022), in "Translingual Practice: Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Relations" (TESOL Quarterly), demonstrated that texts reflecting multicultural realities position learners to engage in deeper cognitive and ethical reasoning. Such engagement, when scaffolded appropriately, constitutes a form of reading pedagogy that addresses both the intellectual and civic dimensions of language learning.

Within the Indonesian educational context, moderation has taken on particular institutional significance. The Indonesian government's national program on "Moderasi Beragama" (Religious Moderation) has been integrated across educational levels, including higher education. Wahid and Aziz (2022), in "Moderasi Beragama dalam Kurikulum Pendidikan Tinggi" (Jurnal Pendidikan Islam), documented the incorporation of moderation principles in university curricula and noted the absence of clear pedagogical frameworks for operationalizing these principles within subject-specific instruction, particularly in English language education. This institutional gap reinforces the scholarly need for research linking EFL pedagogy with moderation at the university level.

The intersection of EFL reading, critical thinking, and moderation is further complicated by the sociolinguistic realities of the classroom. Students from culturally homogeneous backgrounds may approach multicultural texts with limited interpretive repertoires, making the development of critical thinking skills all the more essential. Rashidi and Moghadam (2020), in "The Effect of Critical Reading on EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension and Critical Thinking" (Journal of Language Teaching and Research), found that students who received explicit instruction in critical reading demonstrated not only improved comprehension but also greater tolerance for ambiguity and complexity — qualities directly related to moderating dispositions. These findings suggest that critical reading pedagogy may function as a vehicle for developing the attitudinal and intellectual infrastructure of moderation.

Despite these promising connections, the existing literature reveals a notable gap: few studies have systematically examined the relationship between critical thinking skills and moderation awareness in EFL reading contexts, especially at the university level. This study addresses that gap by investigating third-semester EFL students at an Indonesian university, focusing on how their engagement with multicultural reading texts influences their critical thinking development and moderation awareness. Through an ethnographic qualitative approach, this research seeks to provide both theoretical contributions to the literature and practical insights for EFL curriculum developers and instructors.

Based on the explanation above, the problem in this article is: What is the relationship between critical thinking skills and moderation awareness in an EFL reading class? While the purpose of writing this article is to analyze the relationship between critical thinking skills and moderation awareness in an EFL reading class.

Critical Thinking in Language Education

Critical thinking, in its most widely cited formulation, refers to the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information gathered from observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action (Azis et al., 2025; Facione 2011), in "Critical Thinking: What It Is and Why It Counts" (Insight Assessment), identified six core critical thinking skills: interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation — a taxonomy that has been widely adopted in language education research.

In the context of EFL reading, critical thinking operates at multiple levels. At the textual level, it involves the ability to identify main arguments, evaluate evidence, and detect rhetorical strategies (Pratami, & Dewi. (2024). At the intertextual level, it involves comparing perspectives across texts, identifying ideological positioning, and questioning the assumptions embedded in discourse. Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001), which updated the original 1956 framework to include creating as the highest cognitive level, provides an additional scaffold for understanding how EFL reading tasks can be designed to progressively develop higher-order thinking skills.

Manarin et al. (2021), in "Critical Reading in Higher Education: Academic Goals and Social Engagement" (Indiana University Press), emphasized that critical reading — the particular application of critical thinking to textual analysis — is not a natural developmental outcome but a skill that must be explicitly taught and reinforced through pedagogical practice. In the EFL context, this requires instructors to design tasks that move beyond comprehension questions toward analytical and evaluative engagement with text. Zohar and Lustov (2022), in "Critical Thinking for All Disciplines: A Pedagogy of Inquiry" (Thinking Skills and Creativity), further argued that disciplinary contexts, including language classrooms, provide unique opportunities and challenges for critical thinking development, emphasizing the need for context-sensitive instructional approaches.

Recent empirical work has reinforced the case for critical thinking integration in EFL pedagogy. Ku and Ho (2020), in "Metacognitive Strategies That Enhance Critical Thinking" (Metacognition and Learning), demonstrated that students who employed metacognitive strategies during reading tasks — including self-questioning, monitoring comprehension, and evaluating source credibility — showed significantly higher critical thinking performance. Likewise, Yang and Gamble (2021), in "Effective and Efficient Teaching for Developing Critical Thinking" (Language Teaching Research), found that small-group discussions of multicultural texts, when guided by open-ended analytical questions, produced measurable gains in students' critical thinking dispositions.

The affective dimensions of critical thinking are also relevant to this study. Paul and Elder (2020), in "The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking: Concepts and Tools" (Foundation for Critical Thinking), argued that intellectual humility — the recognition of one's own cognitive limitations and biases — is a foundational intellectual virtue that both enables and is developed through critical thinking practice. This virtue, which involves openness to alternative perspectives and resistance to dogmatic reasoning, corresponds closely to the attitudinal components of moderation awareness, suggesting a theoretical bridge between these two constructs.

Moderation Awareness as an Educational Construct

Moderation, as an educational concept, draws from multiple disciplinary traditions. In political philosophy, it is associated with the Aristotelian concept of the mean — the disposition to avoid extremes in belief, emotion, and action. In religious education, it refers to the capacity to engage with diverse theological positions without rejecting or absolutizing any single perspective. In civic education, it implies the skills and dispositions necessary to participate constructively in pluralistic democratic societies. For the purposes of this study, moderation awareness is defined as the cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral capacity to engage with diverse cultural and ideological perspectives in a balanced, reflective, and non-extremist manner.

Esposito and Baer (2021), in "Moderation and Democracy: Navigating the Ideological Middle" (Journal of Political Ideologies), distinguished between passive moderation — the mere avoidance of extreme positions — and active moderation — the deliberate cultivation of

balanced reasoning and empathetic engagement. Active moderation, they argued, requires the cognitive tools of critical thinking: the ability to evaluate competing claims, recognize the validity of multiple perspectives, and resist the cognitive biases that drive polarization. This distinction is particularly important for EFL education, where students must actively engage with culturally unfamiliar texts rather than simply tolerating their existence.

In the Indonesian context, moderation awareness has been institutionally framed through the lens of Religious Moderation, which the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs defines as a way of life that respects diversity, upholds humanity, and rejects violence and extremism. Wahid and Aziz (2022), documented the efforts to integrate moderation values into university curricula but noted that most implementations remain at the declarative level, focused on defining and promoting moderation rather than developing the specific competencies it requires. This study argues that EFL reading education, when designed around multicultural texts and critical thinking pedagogy, can provide a concrete, subject-embedded pathway to moderation competency development.

Syaifuddin (2023), in *Religious Moderation Education in Higher Education*, observed that moderation education at the university level is most effective when it is embedded in disciplinary learning rather than delivered as a standalone subject. This argues strongly for the integration of moderation awareness development into existing language education frameworks. EFL reading classes, with their inherent engagement with diverse cultural texts and their pedagogical emphasis on comprehension and interpretation, offer a particularly favorable environment for this integration.

Multicultural Texts as Pedagogical Tools

The use of multicultural texts in EFL education has been advocated as a means of broadening students' cultural literacy, challenging ethnocentric assumptions, and preparing learners for participation in global communication. Norton and Toohey (2020), in "Identity and Language Learning: Extending the Conversation," argued that texts representing diverse cultural experiences enable learners to develop more complex and nuanced identities as language users, moving beyond the reproduction of target-language cultural norms toward genuine intercultural competence.

Canagarajah (2022), in "Translingual Practice: Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Relations" (TESOL Quarterly), made a compelling case for the pedagogical value of texts that challenge monolingual and monocultural norms, arguing that exposure to linguistic and cultural diversity in text develops what he termed "cosmopolitan literacy" — the capacity to navigate complex, multilingual, and multicultural communicative environments. This concept aligns closely with the moderation awareness construct, insofar as both involve the cultivation of intellectual flexibility and empathetic engagement with difference.

Janks (2020), in "Literacy and Power" (Routledge), offered a critical literacy framework for multicultural text engagement, arguing that students must be equipped not only to understand diverse texts but to analyze the power relations they encode and the ideological work they perform. This critical literacy perspective enriches the theoretical framework of the present study by connecting the textual dimension of EFL reading with the broader political and civic dimensions of moderation awareness.

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From an Indonesian scholarly perspective, Musyarofah and Hamid (2022), in *The Use of Multicultural Texts in English Learning*, documented the positive effects of multicultural text use on EFL students' intercultural communicative competence, while also noting that the critical dimension of text engagement was often underdeveloped in classroom practice. This empirical observation reinforces the need for pedagogical frameworks that explicitly connect multicultural text use with critical thinking instruction and moderation awareness development.

The Gap in Existing Literature

While the three constructs addressed in this study — critical thinking, moderation awareness, and multicultural reading — have been

individually explored in the literature, the systematic examination of their interrelationship in EFL reading classrooms remains limited, particularly at the university level. Most existing studies treat these constructs in isolation: critical thinking research focuses primarily on cognitive outcomes without addressing civic or ideological dimensions; moderation education research operates largely within religious studies and civic education, without engaging with language pedagogy; and multicultural text research, while addressing both critical and intercultural dimensions, rarely examines moderation awareness as a discrete outcome variable.

This study responds to this gap by adopting an integrated theoretical framework that positions critical thinking as both a means and an outcome of multicultural text engagement, and moderation awareness as a civic competency that emerges from the sustained practice of balanced, reflective, and culturally informed critical reading. The ethnographic research design employed in this study allows for a rich, contextually embedded investigation of these relationships as they unfold in the lived experience of third-semester EFL students at an Indonesian university.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method using an ethnographic approach, which emphasizes the exploration of social interaction, cultural meaning, and lived experiences within natural educational settings. Ethnography enables researchers to understand how participants construct meaning through daily practices, communication, and classroom engagement (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). The ethnographic approach is particularly appropriate for this study because it allows the researcher to investigate how EFL students develop critical thinking skills and moderation awareness through sustained interaction with multicultural reading texts in authentic classroom contexts. Through prolonged engagement in the field, the researcher can capture rich, contextual, and nuanced data regarding students' interpretative processes, reflective thinking, and intercultural interactions during reading activities.

Research Design

This study adopts a classroom ethnography design focusing on the culture of learning that emerges during multicultural reading instruction. Classroom ethnography seeks to examine the social dynamics, communicative interactions, and meaning-making processes that occur within educational environments (Mills & Morton, 2017). In this study, the researcher acts as a participant observer who directly engages with classroom activities while

systematically documenting students' responses, interactions, and discussion patterns related to multicultural issues. This design enables the researcher to understand how critical thinking and moderation awareness are socially constructed within EFL reading practices.

Research Setting and Participants

The research is conducted in an EFL reading classroom involving third-semester university students enrolled in a reading course. The participants are selected purposively based on their active participation in multicultural reading activities and classroom discussions. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to identify participants who possess relevant experiences and rich information regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015). Third-semester students are selected because they have developed sufficient English reading proficiency to critically engage with diverse cultural narratives and interpret multicultural issues presented in the texts.

Research Instruments

In-Depth Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are conducted to explore students' experiences, perceptions, and reflections regarding multicultural texts, critical thinking development, and moderation awareness. Semi-structured interviews provide flexibility for participants to express their views openly while allowing researchers to explore emerging issues in greater depth (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). The interviews focus on students' interpretative understanding, attitudes toward cultural diversity, and reflective responses to multicultural reading materials.

Classroom Observation

Classroom observation is employed to examine students' authentic interactions, communicative behaviors, and participation during reading activities. Observation allows researchers to capture naturally occurring classroom phenomena and social interactions that may not emerge through interviews alone (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). The observation process focuses on how students analyse multicultural themes, respond to differing viewpoints, express tolerance, and demonstrate reflective and critical engagement during classroom discussions.

Document Analysis

Document analysis is used to examine students' reflective journals, reading assignments, classroom discussion notes, and instructional materials. Analysing documents provides additional contextual evidence and supports a deeper understanding of students' cognitive and socio-cultural learning processes (Bowen, 2017). These documents help reveal how students internalize multicultural values and express critical perspectives through written responses.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection is conducted over an extended period to ensure prolonged engagement and contextual understanding of the classroom culture. The researcher regularly attends classroom sessions, conducts observations, records field notes, interviews selected participants, and collects relevant learning documents. Prolonged engagement in qualitative research is important for building trust, understanding participant perspectives, and enhancing the credibility of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 2016). Through continuous immersion in the classroom environment, the researcher gains deeper insights into students' meaning-making processes and intercultural interactions.

Data Validity and Trustworthiness

The validity and trustworthiness of the data are ensured through triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement. Triangulation involves cross-verifying information obtained from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis to enhance the credibility and comprehensiveness of the findings (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018). Member checking is also conducted by confirming interpretations and findings with participants to ensure accuracy and authenticity. In addition, detailed field notes and reflective memos are maintained throughout the research process to strengthen dependability and confirmability.

Data Analysis Technique

The data are analysed using thematic analysis within an ethnographic framework. Thematic analysis is used to identify, organize, and interpret recurring themes emerging from the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis process begins with data transcription, repeated reading, initial coding, theme categorization, and interpretation of cultural meanings related to critical thinking and moderation awareness. Through this process, the researcher develops contextually rich descriptions of how EFL students negotiate multicultural understanding, construct critical interpretations, and demonstrate moderation values through engagement with multicultural texts in the EFL reading classroom.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research process presented several significant obstacles in obtaining reliable data from third-semester EFL students, including initial reluctance among participants to openly discuss their personal perspectives on sensitive cultural and ideological content encountered in multicultural texts, likely due to social desirability bias and unfamiliarity with the ethnographic interview format. Additionally, scheduling constraints within the university's academic calendar, compounded by mid-semester

examinations and competing academic obligations, limited the researcher's access to students for sustained observation and repeated interviews. A third challenge involved the heterogeneous proficiency levels among participants, which occasionally impeded students' ability to articulate their critical reflections on complex multicultural texts in English, necessitating code-switching to Indonesian and subsequent translation, a process that introduced additional interpretation complexity into the data analysis.

a. Interview Questions and Responses

Three interview questions were posed to third-semester EFL students as part of the data collection process:

- 1) Question 1: "When you read a story or article from a culture different from your own, how do you decide what to believe or not believe in that text?"
- 2) Question 2: "Can you describe a time when reading a text in your English class made you think differently about a group of people or a cultural practice you did not know before?"
- 3) Question 3: "Do you think reading texts from different cultures in your English class helps you to be more understanding or accepting of people who are different from you? Why or why not?"

Response from Nadia Rahmawati (Student 1):

Responding to Question 1, Nadia stated that she usually tries to look for evidence within the text to see whether the writer seems biased or is presenting facts fairly, adding that she has learned to ask herself whether the author has a reason to present things in a certain way, which she feels helps her not to "just accept everything." On Question b, Nadia recalled reading a text about indigenous communities in Australia and admitted that she had previously held negative stereotypes about such communities, but after reading and discussing the text in class, she began to understand their historical struggles and cultural richness in a way that changed her perspective. Regarding Question 3, Nadia responded affirmatively, explaining that reading different cultural texts "opens my mind" and makes her feel that differences are not threats but rather opportunities to learn something valuable about the world.

Response from Faisal Hidayatullah (Student 2):

In answer to Question 1, Faisal explained that he finds it difficult to evaluate texts about cultures he knows nothing about because he has no reference point, admitting that he sometimes relies on his own religious values as a compass when the text touches on moral or ethical issues. When asked about Question 2, Faisal described reading a short story featuring a Jewish family during the Second World War, which he said was challenging because his prior knowledge of Jewish people was largely negative due to political contexts, but the story humanized them in a way that made him "feel confused at first, then more open." On Question 3, Faisal expressed a nuanced view, stating that he believes reading multicultural texts is helpful but only when there is class discussion; otherwise, he says, he might "misunderstand or judge too quickly" without guidance from the teacher.

Response from Sari Puspitasari (Student 3):

Sari's response to Question 1 emphasized her awareness of her own biases, noting that she tries to "read between the lines" and ask herself whether her discomfort with a particular text is about the text itself or about her own cultural assumptions. For Question 2, Sari recalled a non-fiction reading about LGBTQ+ experiences that generated significant discomfort among the class, but she described using it as an opportunity to practice understanding the author's perspective without necessarily agreeing with it, which she felt was an important intellectual exercise. Addressing Question 3, Sari offered the most reflective response, arguing that multicultural texts are not sufficient on their own to build acceptance, but that when paired with critical thinking tasks that ask students to "step outside themselves," they can genuinely foster more balanced and moderate worldviews.

b. Fence Diagram: Theoretical and Analytical Framework

The following fence diagram illustrates the structural relationships among the key constructs, theoretical foundations, pedagogical gaps, and research focus of this study:

CONSTRUCT	EFL Reading Context	Critical Thinking	Moderation Awareness	Multicultural Texts
THEORY	<i>Krashen (Input Hypothesis)</i>	<i>Bloom (1956); Facione (2011)</i>	<i>Esposito & Baer (2021)</i>	<i>Norton & Toohey (2020)</i>
KEY SKILLS	Comprehension Fluency	Analysis Evaluation Inference	Perspective-taking Balance	Cultural Literacy Empathy

GAP		<i>Limited linkage to moderation</i>	<i>Under-theorized in EFL</i>	<i>Rarely integrated at the university</i>
RESEARCH FOCUS	Third-semester EFL Students (University)	Critical Reading of Multicultural Texts	Moderation as Civic Competency	Ethnographic Qualitative Study

The interview responses from Nadia, Faisal, and Sari illuminate the complex, multidimensional relationship between critical thinking skills and awareness of moderation in EFL reading contexts. Across all three accounts, a consistent pattern emerges: engagement with multicultural texts creates cognitive and affective dissonance that, when mediated by critical thinking scaffolds, produces attitudinal shifts consistent with moderation awareness. This pattern resonates strongly with Mezirow's transformative learning theory (2000), which posits that disorienting dilemmas — encounters with perspectives that challenge one's existing frame of reference — are catalysts for deep, transformative learning that extends beyond cognitive change to include shifts in values and identity. In the EFL reading context, multicultural texts function precisely as such disorienting dilemmas, particularly when they represent experiences that are politically or morally charged.

Nadia's response demonstrates what Facione (2011) identifies as the critical thinking skill of evaluation: her deliberate practice of assessing author credibility, identifying bias, and weighing evidence reveals a metacognitive orientation toward textual engagement that goes significantly beyond surface comprehension. This orientation aligns with the findings of Ku and Ho (2020), who demonstrated that metacognitive reading strategies are directly correlated with higher critical thinking performance. More significantly for the purposes of this study, Nadia's transformed perspective on indigenous Australian communities illustrates what Banks (2020), in "Diversity, Transformative Knowledge, and Civic Education" (Routledge), terms "knowledge construction" — the process by which students critically examine how knowledge is produced and how it reflects the social and cultural positioning of its producers. This capacity for knowledge construction is, Banks argues, a prerequisite for the kind of informed civic engagement that moderation requires.

Faisal's response introduces a dimension not fully captured in existing theoretical models: the role of religious identity as both a potential obstacle and a potential resource in the development of moderation

awareness through EFL reading. His initial reliance on his religious values as an interpretive framework for evaluating multicultural texts reflects what Huntington (1996) identified as civilizational identity-based reasoning; however, his subsequent openness — his willingness to be "confused" and then "more open" — suggests the operation of what Ennis (2018), in "Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum" (Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines), calls "fair-mindedness": the disposition to consider opposing viewpoints seriously and on their merits, even when they conflict with one's prior commitments. Faisal's acknowledgment that classroom discussion is essential for this process to work constructively highlights the mediating role of the teacher, reinforcing the pedagogical findings of Yang and Gamble (2021), who documented the critical importance of guided discussion in critical thinking development.

Faisal's account also connects with the broader Indonesian discourse on religious moderation. Syaifuddin (2023) argued that genuine moderation requires not the suppression of religious identity but its critical enrichment — the expansion of religious reasoning to include empathy, historical awareness, and intercultural literacy. Faisal's engagement with the text about a Jewish family, which he found both challenging and humanizing, exemplifies this process of religious reasoning expansion. His experience suggests that multicultural texts, when carefully selected and pedagogically scaffolded, can function not as threats to religious identity but as tools for deepening and moderating it. This finding has significant implications for EFL curriculum design in Indonesian universities, where concerns about the perceived conflict between English-language cultural exposure and Islamic identity remain pedagogically sensitive.

Sari's response is perhaps the most theoretically rich of the three, reflecting a level of metacognitive sophistication that aligns closely with the self-regulation component of Facione's (2011) critical thinking model. Her ability to distinguish between her own emotional discomfort and the intellectual merits of a text's argument — her practice of "reading between the lines" and examining her own biases — represents what Paul and Elder (2020) term "intellectual autonomy": the ability to reason independently and consistently, guided by internalized intellectual standards rather than social pressure or emotional reaction. This intellectual autonomy is directly relevant to moderation awareness, insofar as moderation requires the capacity to resist both the social pressures of in-group conformity and the emotional pull of identity-based reactivity.

Sari's observation that multicultural texts alone are insufficient to build acceptance — that they must be paired with critical thinking tasks — provides empirical support for the integrated pedagogical model proposed in this study. This view is consistent with the argument advanced by Janks (2020) in "Literacy and Power," who cautioned against the naive assumption that exposure to diversity is in itself transformative, arguing instead that critical literacy practices — explicit instruction in the analysis of power, ideology, and representation — are necessary to translate textual encounter into genuine attitudinal and behavioral change. In the context of moderation education, this means that EFL reading curricula must be designed not simply to expose students to multicultural texts but to equip them with the analytical tools to engage with those texts critically, reflectively, and in ways that actively build the cognitive and attitudinal infrastructure of moderation. The fence diagram above captures these relationships structurally, mapping the key constructs against their theoretical foundations, identifying the specific skills each construct demands, highlighting the gaps in the existing literature, and positioning the current research within that gap. The diagram illustrates that the research gap identified in this study — the absence of research linking EFL pedagogy with moderation at the university level — is not merely a gap in the literature but a gap in practice: a space where the pedagogical affordances of EFL reading instruction remain systematically underutilized for the development of civic competencies that are urgently needed in contemporary Indonesian higher education.

Collectively, the interview data and the theoretical framework converge on a set of pedagogical implications that extend beyond the specific context of this study. First, EFL reading curricula at the university level should systematically integrate multicultural texts that represent diverse cultural, religious, and ideological perspectives, with particular attention to texts that are likely to generate productive cognitive and affective dissonance. Second, explicit critical thinking instruction — including instruction in source evaluation, bias identification, perspective-taking, and metacognitive monitoring — should be embedded in EFL reading pedagogy rather than treated as a general educational objective to be achieved elsewhere. Third, classroom discussion, guided by instructors trained to facilitate critical dialogue across cultural and ideological differences, should be recognized as a core pedagogical method rather than an optional enrichment activity. Fourth, the development of

moderation awareness should be explicitly articulated as a learning outcome in EFL reading courses, with assessments designed to measure not only cognitive gains in critical thinking but also attitudinal shifts in students' dispositions toward cultural and ideological diversity.

These implications speak directly to the institutional gap identified by Wahid and Aziz (2022) and Syaifuddin (2023): the absence of concrete, subject-embedded pathways to moderation competency development in Indonesian higher education. By demonstrating that EFL reading instruction, when informed by critical pedagogy and multicultural text selection, can serve as a vehicle for moderation awareness development, this study contributes both to the theoretical literature on critical thinking in EFL education and to the practical challenge of implementing moderation education in ways that are meaningful, sustainable, and academically rigorous.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study set out to investigate the relationship between critical thinking skills and moderation awareness among third-semester EFL students engaged in multicultural reading instruction at an Indonesian university. The findings affirm that this relationship is neither incidental nor superficial; rather, it is structural, pedagogically mediated, and civic in its implications. When EFL students engage meaningfully with texts that represent culturally, religiously, and ideologically diverse perspectives, they enter a zone of productive cognitive and affective dissonance that — when appropriately scaffolded by critical thinking pedagogy and guided classroom discussion — catalyzes the attitudinal and intellectual shifts that constitute moderation awareness.

The evidence gathered through ethnographic interviews with three student participants — Nadia, Faisal, and Sari — illuminates the pathways through which critical reading fosters moderation. Nadia's development of source evaluation and bias recognition skills demonstrates how critical reading tools enable students to approach unfamiliar cultural narratives with intellectual openness rather than uncritical acceptance or reflexive rejection. Faisal's experience of moving from identity-based discomfort to measured empathy in his encounter with a text about a Jewish family reveals how multicultural reading, when guided dialogically, can function not as a threat to religious identity but as an instrument for its critical enrichment. Sari's sophisticated metacognitive practice — her deliberate effort to distinguish her own emotional responses from the

merits of a text's argument — exemplifies the intellectual autonomy that Paul and Elder (2020) identify as foundational to both critical thinking and moderation.

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