

Questions-Based Critical Journal Reviews and Students' Engagement in Co-constructing of Text

Sri Minda Murni

{srimindamurni63@gmail.com}

English and Literature Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Medan,
Medan, Indonesia

Abstract. Despite the potential benefits of writing critical journal reviews (CJRs) for enhancing student engagement in co-constructing text, university policymakers have not sufficiently addressed the lack of student competency in this area. This study explores how a question-based approach to CJRs can help students improve their ability to contribute meaningfully to the world of knowledge through meaningful and well-structured reviews. Mix-method was used to collect data from the CJR products submitted by the third-semester students enrolled in the English Drama Performance class at the English Language and Literature Department, State University of Medan and the interviews. The results show that the question-based CJR approach helped students better understand the articles they reviewed, organize their thoughts, and actively participate in co-constructing the text. The study recommends wider adoption of this approach to foster student engagement in meaningful academic tasks.

Keywords: Critical Journal Reviews, Co-constructing Text, Question-based Approach

1 Introduction

"The saying 'When you ask well, you teach well' is a popular pedagogical idiom among educators. The idiom underscores the pivotal role that effective questioning plays in the teaching and learning process. In pedagogy, asking thoughtful, well-crafted questions can be one of the most powerful teaching tools. As questions play a crucial role in co-constructing knowledge and fostering deeper understanding [1], in the context of writing journal reviews, critical questions are particularly important too. Questions enhance both the quality and relevance of the reviews. Writing a Critical Journal Review (CJR) can be challenging for undergraduate students, especially those with no experience in writing or publishing academic articles. We often observe that students submit their CJRs without fully understanding the articles they are reviewing. Their CJRs may contain copied ideas with unclear sources, weak and subjective analyses of the strengths and weaknesses, an insufficient number of clauses to properly express their opinions and arguments, or simply retell the content of the article.

However, practicing CJR writing is beneficial for developing students' analytical thinking as it requires them to critically examine the content, structure, methodology, and relevance of the work. Unlike a simple summary, a CJR demands deeper engagement with the text, involving critical questioning of its arguments, assessing its strengths and weaknesses, and evaluating its contribution to the field.

A Critical Journal Review (CJR) typically includes components such as a summary, critical analysis or evaluation of the author's arguments, an assessment of its academic relevance and contribution, practical applications, personal reflections or perspectives, and

recommendations. In writing a CJR, students are expected to do more than passively summarize the text. They engage in a co-construction process, where they actively question, evaluate, and offer insights, thereby contributing to the academic discourse surrounding the text. This process fosters higher-level thinking and encourages active participation in knowledge creation.

As the role of questioning in education has garnered significant attention as a pivotal mechanism for enhancing student learning and engagement, in the context of Critical Journal Reviews (CJR), a question-based approach not only guides students in their analysis and reflection but also fosters deeper levels of understanding and critical thinking. By employing predetermined questions, educators can help students focus on the core messages of the text, structure their reviews effectively, and articulate their insights in a coherent manner.

The impact of question-based CJR on student engagement and the benefits of guided questioning in promoting academic success and empowering students as active learners have been drawn from various studies. Through a comprehensive examination of the existing literature, it is important to highlight the transformative potential of question-based strategies in cultivating essential skills that are vital for both academic achievement and lifelong learning.

The didactic concept of questioning is closely connected to the process of student learning, fostering deeper levels of understanding and developing critical thinking. It fosters deeper levels of understanding and develops critical thinking [2]. Their study on the questioning process highlights its role in engaging respondents, revealing that questioning enhances both critical thinking and learning [2].

As shown by Firdani and Fitriani [3], writing is challenging for EFL students without substantial teacher guidance, and the Guiding Questions technique significantly enhances students' writing, particularly in content and organization. The process of formulating questions can guide reviewers in meaningfully contextualizing their topics, and structuring questions around established frameworks is recommended [4].

Fostering critical thinking in students during the writing process is a considerable challenge [5]. The effectiveness of writing depends largely on students' ability to develop critical thinking skills that enable them to make sound judgments independently. Exploring questions is vital in helping students enhance their critical thinking and engage meaningfully in the writing process.

The predetermined questions in the Question-based CJR are essential for guiding students to concentrate on the main messages in the text, comprehend the CJR structure, and determine what to include in their reviews. This aligns with the findings of Biggers and Luo [6], who found that students perceived guided notes positively and noted that these notes improved learning outcomes, especially in complex knowledge areas [6].

Wang [7] argues that when students actively create their own knowledge, they play a role in collaboratively building an online archive of oral history testimonies. This process enhances their critical thinking abilities and empowers them to become knowledge creators.

Ma and Li [8] investigated the relationship between students' critical thinking abilities and their performance in argumentative essay writing, finding that students with lower levels of critical thinking struggled to construct effective arguments.

Furthermore, the question-based CJR aligns with the findings of Wendimu and Gebremariam [9], who note that despite the inherent challenges of writing, many students and lecturers hesitate to address these difficulties. Their study on guided-writing instruction demonstrates its effectiveness in assisting students with writing challenges and enhancing their motivation.

In conclusion, incorporating question-based approaches in Critical Journal Reviews is an effective strategy for increasing student engagement and fostering critical thinking. The research

consistently highlights the significance of guided questioning in facilitating deeper understanding, improving writing skills, and empowering students to take ownership of their learning. By fostering an environment where students can actively participate in the construction of knowledge, educators can help them navigate complex content, enhance their analytical abilities, and ultimately become more effective writers and critical thinkers. The findings underscore the need for continued exploration and implementation of structured questioning techniques, which not only support academic growth but also cultivate essential skills for lifelong learning. As we move forward, embracing these strategies will be crucial in addressing the challenges students face in their educational journeys and equipping them for future success.

The paper explores the following questions:

- a. How does a question-based Critical Journal Review (CJR) encourage active participation in the co-construction of the articles being reviewed?
- b. Why does a question-based Critical Journal Review (CJR) enhance students' engagement?

2 Method

The paper argues that question-based Critical Journal Review (CJR) can enhance students' engagement and encourage active participation in co-constructing the articles they review. The study uses a mixed-method approach, combining document analysis and interviews. Data on active participation were gathered from students' CJR writings, while their engagement was assessed through interviews.

The article to review titled "Analysis of Causes of Tragic Fate in Romeo and Juliet Based on Shakespeare's View of Fate" written by Li Jie."

Abstract: *Romeo and Juliet* is Shakespeare's most renowned play, with the tragic fate of its characters largely driven by the ill-fated love between Romeo and Juliet. This love story is rich in literary aesthetics and artistic value. This paper explores Shakespeare's perspective on fate, examining the societal and personal factors that ultimately lead to the deaths of Romeo and Juliet. It delves into the characters' weaknesses and how these traits propel the narrative forward. The analysis identifies several contributing factors to the tragic outcome, including the longstanding feud between the two families, Paris' love for Juliet, Romeo's idealistic approach to love, Juliet's desire for autonomy in love, and the influence of a patriarchal and feudal society. Ultimately, it suggests that Shakespeare used the tragic fate of the characters to express his discontent with the feudal and patriarchal system of his time, critiquing the outdated societal structure.

The instrument which is the question-based CJR is presented as follows:

Question-based CJR

- I. Orientation
- II. Interpretative Recount
- III. Evaluation
 - Paragraph 1: Write the causes of the tragic fate found by the author
 - Discuss which cause (s) that you think is major. Provide your arguments.
 - Paragraph 2: Answer these questions:

Do you have a memory of Indonesian tragic love story? Are the causes similar to Romeo and Juliet?

Paragraph 3: Define Shakespeare's view of fate by referring to the line *"Shakespeare would like to express his indignation to the feudal society and the patriarchal rules by the tragic fate of R and J."*

Write your view of fate (What is your opinion on fate).

Paragraph 4: The author writes two important phrases on Romeo and Juliet, they are: a) *"The rebellion against the feudal society and the patriarchy; b) The pursuit of free love in Romeo and Juliet"*

Formulate the theme of the play by adding the predicate and the object (A theme should comprise Subject + Predicate + Object). Argue why such themes of the 16th century can be so strong and popular up to these days (21st century).

Paragraph 5: The author also writes that in Romeo and Juliet *"female individuals were weak and vulnerable and they must follow all kinds of family and social rules."*

Write all possible sufferings faced by the society if the same situation still exist.

Describe what male and female can do together to fight this.

IV. Evaluative Summation

Describe, write how the play reshape your values of love, feudal society, and patriarchy.

3 Results and Discussion

In general, question-based CJR has helped the students about how to write (39.6%), what to write (36.2%), and surprisingly it also helps them understand the article to review (24.2%), as shown in the data below.

Table 1. The question-based CJR help students

No	The questions help	Number of Students	%
I	To get deeper understanding of the content of the journal/the play	19	24.2%
II	To know how to write a good CJR (to structure the review)	31	39.6%
III	To know what to write	28	36.2%
		78	100%

3.1 The Question-based Critical Journal Review (CJR) Encourage Active Participation in the Co-Construction of the Articles Being Reviewed

Co-construction occurs when students actively engage in knowledge creation by analyzing, critiquing, questioning, evaluating, and offering insights. A question-based CJR effectively guides students in this process, enabling them to co-construct the article's meaning.

3.1.1 Co-construction in choosing the major cause of Romeo and Juliet's tragic end

From several factors discussed in the article, students co-construct the text by choosing the major cause of Romeo and Juliet's tragic end and provide arguments to support the choice. As shown in the data, 53% of students identified the two households' resentment and rage as the primary cause of Romeo and Juliet's tragic end, followed by 22% who pointed to the old patriarchal society. The rest (25%) do not choose any choice or choosing one without arguments.

This implies that 75% of the students were able to co-construct meaning from the text, while 25% struggled and may need additional guidance.\

Examples of Student Paragraphs:

Two Households' Resentment and Rage: "In my opinion, the major cause of the tragic ending is the two households' resentment and rage. Their animosity forced Romeo and Juliet to hide their relationship from their families. Paris was matched with Juliet to elevate the Capulet family's status. I believe that if the Montague and Capulet families were on good terms, Romeo and Juliet wouldn't have needed to marry in secret, and their love story could have unfolded peacefully" (Student A).

Patriarchal Society: "In my view, the main cause of the tragedy is the patriarchal society. The patriarchal norms of the era made men feel entitled to control women. Without such pressures, Juliet's father might have asked for her opinion on marriage rather than forcing it upon her. Similarly, Romeo and Juliet's love might have been accepted by their families. This is comparable to the household resentment and the societal rules under the feudal and patriarchal system that led to their tragic fate" (Student B).

Family Hatred: "I think the primary cause of the tragedy is the deep-seated hatred between the two families, which made Romeo and Juliet's love forbidden. Without this hostility, their story might not have ended so tragically" (Student C).

3.1.2 Co-construction in Comparison to Indonesian Love Stories

Students also drew parallels between *Romeo and Juliet* and Indonesian tragic love stories, highlighting how similar themes of family conflict and social constraints lead to tragedy.

The data shows that 59% of students compared the story of *Siti Nurbaya* to *Romeo and Juliet*, followed by *Roro Mendut* and *Pronocitro* (14.8%), *Roro Jonggrang* (11%) and *Other* (15.2%). One student wrote, "*Siti Nurbaya* mirrors *Romeo and Juliet* in that Siti loves Syamsul Bahri but is forced to marry a wealthy merchant, Datuk Maringgih, to save her father from debt. The story ends tragically when Datuk Maringgih and Syamsul Bahri fight, and both die. Like *Romeo and Juliet*, the tragedy stems from family decisions that deprive them of the right to choose their own partners" (Student D).

Other students referenced *Roro Mendut and Pronocitro* (14.8%), one of which stated, "*Roro Mendut falls in love with Pronocitro, but their love is thwarted by Tumenggung Wiroguno, who forces her to marry him. Roro chooses to flee with Pronocitro, but Tumenggung captures and kills him. Rather than marry someone she does not love, Roro Mendut takes her own life by stabbing herself with a keris*" (Student E).

Students' writing classified into 'Other' (15.2%) wrote, "*I recall an Indonesian tragic love story titled Kukira Kau Rumah. In this story, the main male character dies at the end, and the cause is similar to Romeo and Juliet: a lack of parental blessing. However, in this case, only the male character dies. The female character attempts to commit suicide, but her family intervenes and prevents her*" (student F)

3.1.3 Co-construction on Gender Equality :Student Reflections on Patriarchy

When asked to reflect on the possible consequences of women remaining weak and vulnerable in patriarchal societies, students highlighted several issues such as hindrance to social progress, persistent discrimination and injustice, lack of decision-making rights for women, and continued occurrences of arranged marriages. In terms of solutions, students suggested enacting new laws and regulations, raising awareness and challenging social norms, empowering women and supporting women's rights, courageously voicing opinions.

The co-construction of the text is further evident in student reflections on gender equality. For example, one student noted:

"The potential consequences of continuing patriarchy include emotional pressure, where women feel weak and silenced, leaving them vulnerable to oppression. To counter this, both men and women should promote open communication, advocate for gender equality—especially in education—and work together to prioritize love and personal freedom" (Student G).

Another student added:

"If patriarchal structures persist, many women would suffer, unable to pursue their dreams or make their own choices. This frustration might even be passed down to their children, perpetuating the cycle. To break this cycle, men and women should respect one another's opinions, support each other's dignity, and promote moral freedom" (Student H).

Lastly, a student commented on the emotional impact:

"Patriarchy can lead to depression, anxiety, and stress. To combat this, men and women must provide education that challenges traditional gender roles and highlights women's strength and independence. Advocacy for women's rights, including equal access to education and career opportunities, is essential" (Student I).

3.2 The Question-Based Critical Journal Review (CJR) Enhances Students' Engagement

Students' engagement is demonstrated through self-regulated learning where students take ownership of their learning, set goals, monitor their progress, and actively seek feedback; and intrinsic motivation which is fostering long-term commitment to both academic and personal growth.

The data reveals that students benefit from the question-based CJR introduced in the course. One student finds it applicable to other subjects requiring similar tasks, implying that the question-based CJR encourages them to take ownership of their learning and monitor their progress. She wrote:

"Yes, it helps me a lot to write a good CJR. The steps are neatly arranged, so just by following them, a well-structured CJR can be produced. These steps also make the process more effective because students know exactly what to write. The structured steps help develop my critical thinking, allowing me to critique within my current ability. These steps are brief, clear, and applicable to other subjects for writing good CJRs." (Student J)

Additionally, the data shows that students value the questions as an effective guide in their journey to becoming better reviewers and writers, particularly for beginners. This suggests that question-based CJRs can help sustain motivation and commitment, both academically and personally. The student wrote,

"Yes, the questions are the first step in developing critical thinking for beginners. They really opened my mind because they were clear and guided me well. Many people struggle with creativity or deciding on a writing topic, and I'm one of them. Sometimes, I find it very hard to begin, unsure of what to say. These CJR questions were incredibly helpful, guiding me on how to structure my writing for each paragraph. I believe they are very suitable for beginners like me." (Student K)

Further supporting this, another student stated, *"Yes, these questions helped me produce a good CJR. Before starting, I understood the topic of the drama to be discussed. The questions prompted me to think deeply and in detail about how to analyze the topic and apply theories effectively. Although it's still challenging for me, this is a new experience in reviewing drama, and expressing my opinions helped me enhance my analysis skills."* (Student L)

Other students echoed the following sentiments:

"Yes, the questions helped me review the drama well. Many of us are confused about how to start, including myself. The questions helped me think critically and broadly, allowing me to write and analyze the work effectively. I hope to review future CJRs better, building on what I've learned from this experience." (Student M)

"Yes, because all the questions relate to my personal understanding, encouraging me to think more critically and connect my thoughts with Shakespeare's works. This made working on the CJR easier." (Student N)

"Yes, the questions guided me in writing a good CJR by helping me focus my thinking and analysis on key aspects. By answering the questions, I was encouraged to reflect personally, analyze critically, and articulate my thoughts in a structured manner. This improved the quality of my writing." (Student O)

"The predetermined CJR questions were very helpful in creating the review. The simple questions provided a starting point for me to think critically and integrate personal experiences into my writing, making the process easier." (Student Q)

Finally, one student summarized the effectiveness of the CJR questions:

"Yes, they were very helpful. They helped me organize and structure my evaluations more effectively. They also made me more critical when reviewing the journal, realizing that there are many aspects to review, critique, and learn from." (Student R).

This data highlights how question-based CJRs not only help students navigate the process but also deepen their critical thinking and analysis, motivating them to engage more fully with the material.

4 Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the significant role of question-based approaches in enhancing student engagement and fostering critical thinking within the framework of Critical Journal Reviews (CJR). By integrating structured questions into the CJR process, students are not only guided in their analysis of texts but are also encouraged to reflect deeply on the material, thus promoting a richer learning experience. This aligns with the insights of Sula, Lama, and Gjokutaj [2], who emphasized that effective questioning is closely linked to student learning and facilitates deeper cognitive engagement. Their research supports the notion that well-crafted questions can stimulate critical thinking and enable students to interact more meaningfully with the content.

The findings also relate closely to the application of guiding questions in writing instruction, as highlighted by Firdani and Fitriani [3], who illustrated the positive impact of guiding questions on EFL students' writing performance. Their study revealed that guiding questions enhance not only content comprehension but also organizational skills, which are essential components of effective writing. This is particularly valuable for students who often

struggle with writing, as the technique provides them with a clear framework to express their ideas coherently.

The importance of question formulation as a valuable guide for reviewers to contextualize their analyses appropriately in question-based CJR is further supported by Harris et al. [4]. Moreover, the capacity of questions to shape student engagement and drive the learning process validates the findings of Riwayatiningsih [5], who demonstrated that questioning significantly bolsters students' critical thinking and involvement in meaningful discourse. This synergy between questioning and critical analysis is crucial for developing independent judgment and nuanced perspectives in students' writing.

The results of this study also support Wang [7], who argued that student-generated knowledge, fostered through guided questioning, empowers learners to become active contributors to their educational experience. This is particularly relevant in the context of CJR, where students are encouraged to co-construct knowledge through critical engagement with texts. The active role of teachers, as emphasized in this study, remains essential in providing support tailored to students' needs, enabling them to achieve deeper levels of understanding.

In addition, the results are consistent with Ma and Li [8], who identified a direct correlation between students' critical thinking abilities and their success in producing argumentative essays such as CJR. This relationship underscores the necessity of cultivating critical thinking skills alongside writing instruction, particularly in complex genres like CJR.

The alignment of question-based CJR with the findings of Wendimu and Gebremariam [9] further demonstrates its effectiveness in addressing students' writing challenges and enhancing their motivation. Structured guidance through question-based instruction equips students with the necessary tools to navigate the complexities of writing, ultimately leading to improved outcomes.

The findings also validate the contribution of question-based CJR to enhancing student learning. The data show that question-based CJR strengthens students' co-construction of texts and their engagement, providing strong evidence of its benefits. Students gain guidance on understanding article content, knowledge of how to structure a proper CJR, and clear cues on what to include in their reviews.

Furthermore, question-based CJR promotes self-regulated learning. This aligns with Susanto[10], who found that prompting students with questions enhanced their self-regulation and improved learning outcomes. Such practices demonstrate how question-based CJR fosters higher-order thinking. Similarly, Kauffman et al. [11] highlighted that structured questioning formats yield better results than unstructured approaches, ensuring students are equipped to complete CJRs effectively across academic subjects.

By following structured questions, students are better able to devote cognitive resources to active engagement rather than passive information absorption. The approach enables them to access higher-level thinking skills, interact critically with content, and integrate new insights with prior knowledge. It also allows students to compare their reasoning against the logic of provided questions, improving both coherence and self-monitoring. Additionally, question-based CJR contributes to enhanced motivation and the development of internal learning strategies.

The idiom "*When you ask well, you teach well*" encapsulates the pivotal role of effective questioning in teaching and learning. In pedagogy, thoughtfully crafted questions function as powerful tools for stimulating critical thinking, engaging students actively, guiding learning, encouraging curiosity, fostering reflection, building confidence, and cultivating a culture of dialogue. The quality of teachers' questions significantly influences the depth and effectiveness of the learning experience.

In summary, this discussion highlights the multifaceted benefits of question-based approaches in CJR, reinforcing their importance in enhancing student engagement, critical thinking, and writing proficiency. As educators refine their instructional strategies, the integration of guided questioning remains a vital means of promoting academic success and fostering lifelong learning skills. It is therefore recommended that university policymakers develop and institutionalize question-based approaches to CJR in order to address the low quality of submissions currently observed. Such actions will not only improve students' competency in reviewing academic articles but also better prepare them for thesis writing and advanced scholarly work.

References

- [1] G. M. Jacobs and W. A. Renandya, "Any questions? Ideas for encouraging more and better student questions," *LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Teaching*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 349–363, 2021, doi: 10.24071/llt.v24i2.3140.
- [2] A. Sula, I. N. Lama, and M. Gjukutaj, "Improving the quality of learning through the questions of texts," *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, vol. 36, pp. 106–115, 2011.
- [3] F. Firdani and S. S. Fitriani, "Teaching Writing through Guiding Questions Technique to Improve Students' Writing Skill," *Research in English and Education (READ)*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 41–52, Dec. 2017, [Online]. Available: https://www.academia.edu/92523256/Teaching_Writing_through_Guiding_Questions_Technique_to_Improve_Students_Writing_Skill
- [4] J. L. Harris *et al.*, "Cochrane qualitative and implementation methods group guidance series—paper 2: Methods for question formulation, searching, and protocol development for qualitative evidence synthesis," *J Clin Epidemiol*, vol. 97, pp. 39–48, 2018, doi: 10.1016/j.jclinepi.2017.12.014.
- [5] R. Riwayatiningih, "Improving writing skill with questioning: A path on critical thinking skill," *METATHESIS Journal of English Language, Literature, and Teaching*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 203–213, 2019, doi: 10.31002/metathesis.v3i2.2118.
- [6] B. Biggers and T. Luo, "Guiding students to success: A systematic review of research on guided notes as an instructional strategy from 2009-2019," *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2020, doi: 10.53761/1.17.3.7.
- [7] S. Wang, "Teaching for empowerment: Creative use of student-generated knowledge to enrich learning," *Creat Educ*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 897–906, 2021, doi: 10.4236/ce.2021.124061.
- [8] F. Ma and Y. Li, "Critical thinking ability and performance in argumentative essays of the education major students," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 143–149, 2022, doi: 10.17507/tpls.1201.18.
- [9] S. G. Wendimu and H. T. Gebremariam, "Teacher-students collaboration: Using guided-writing instruction to assist learners with writing difficulties and low motivation to write," *Sage Open*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2024, doi: 10.1177/21582440241258020.
- [10] R. Susanto and W. Rachbini, "Sustainable Action and Transformation of Change in Teachers Learning Leadership Model: Promoting Students Independent Learning," *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, Jun. 2024, doi: 10.26822/iejee.2024.350.

- [11] D. F. Kauffman, R. Zhao, and Y. S. Yang, "Effects of online note-taking formats and self-monitoring prompts on learning from online text," *Contemp Educ Psychol*, vol. 36, no. 4, pp. 313–322, 2011, doi: 10.1016/j.cedpsych.2011.07.002.