



Adolescence Students' Critical Thinking Skills in The Context of Christian Education

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to assess the critical thinking skills of adolescent students at junior high schools in Rantepao, particularly in the context of Christian education. This study used quantitative design research and a proportionate stratified random sampling method to select the sample. There are 66 students became the sample of this study. Data were collected through a questionnaire that assessed the student's critical thinking skills based on the critical thinking indicators. The collected data was then analyzed using descriptive statistics calculation related to the variables of critical thinking skills. This study found that adolescent students at Junior High School in Rantepao have only a fair level of critical thinking skills in the context of Christian Education. This study highlights the need to improve students' critical thinking skills in Christian Education. Teachers should foster students' growth by focusing on their learning process and offering appropriate activities.

INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking skills are essential for survival in the 21st century. These skills are one of the 12 skills needed in education worldwide. Similarly, critical thinking is a crucial topic in Christian education as it involves a profound understanding of religious teachings and their application in daily life. Often, Jesus used numerous parables when teaching His disciples. Every believer does not easily understand these parables without the help of the Holy Spirit to provide understanding to each individual. Therefore, critical thinking is required to avoid interpreting each parable or other teachings literally. This need is even more pronounced for teenagers going through a period of turmoil and self-discovery.

Research has highlighted the importance of developing critical thinking in teenagers. Adolescents have shown greater improvement when comparing the effectiveness of teaching critical thinking through embedded instruction and direct instruction methods, scaffolding critical thinking and involving dialogue and debate as an instructional method (Walker & Kettler, 2020). Adolescents with good critical thinking skills tend to evaluate information carefully, understand other people's perspectives, and make better decisions in complex situations. Moreover, in the rapidly evolving technological era, there is up-to-date empirical research on the association between teen well-being and the use of digital technology (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020). Furthermore, research has also pointed out the impact of technology and social media on adolescent thinking. Excessive technology use can affect their focus and reflection abilities and influence how they process information daily.

The current curriculum developed by the Indonesian government is the "Merdeka" curriculum, which focuses on meaningful learning according to students' needs and developmental stages. It aims

to establish a joyful learning environment from both parties' perspectives without placing undue pressure on obtaining a specific level of learning outcomes or grades (Yunaini et al., 2022). Parents, schools and teachers need to encourage students to develop critical thinking and question the information they receive, which will positively impact their cognitive development. The student-centered approach and intellectual challenges are essential aspects of the "Merdeka" curriculum.

The teenage years are significant development and changes, including sexual, physical, and emotional changes. These transformations shape teenagers' identities, as discussed by (Turan et al., 2023). Each teenager undergoes unique cognitive development. The environment, education, and life experiences also play essential roles in their cognitive development. Hence, parental and educator attention and support are crucial in helping teenagers hone their critical thinking skills and understand the world better, as Vygotsky (1978) claimed that Students' growth as critical thinkers required time and was correlated with some significant academic and social events (Wass & Wass, 2015; Gantini & Suhendar, 2017). Learning and cognitive development occur through social collaboration, where knowledge and skills are exchanged and conveyed through social interactions.

According to Johnson (2014), critical thinking is a clear and directed process used in mental activities such as problem-solving, decision-making, persuasion, analyzing assumptions, and conducting scientific research. Those who think critically can conclude their knowledge, understand how to use information to solve problems, and seek relevant information sources to support problem-solving. Critical thinking is a reflective ability; students need this skill to face various personal and social problems.

Considering that middle school students generally operate at the stage of abstract cognitive development, this age range should be utilized to instill religious values and critical thinking skills. Adolescents often face challenges in analyzing and interpreting problems, making high critical thinking abilities essential. Therefore, activities and ideas should consider students' age and thinking abilities when planning the learning process. Age significantly affects thinking and analyzing a problem. Students must understand the learning process and enhance critical thinking skills to help them interpret learning materials effectively.

Several behaviors or activities indicate critical thinking. Each student has different characteristics in their thinking and learning styles. These reasons drive researchers to assess the extent of critical thinking skills of junior high school students in Rantepao, specifically in Christian Religion education. In Christian Religion Education, in-depth analysis is required to understand the intentions and commands in each text found in the Bible. The teachings in the Bible are often conveyed in metaphors, parables, simplicity, empathy, paradoxes, or commands. In this regard, every reader of the Bible needs critical thinking skills to comprehend the conveyed meaning.

Based on the background explained above, this research aims to measure the extent of critical thinking skills of adolescent students at junior high schools in Rantepao, particularly in the context of the Christian education they receive at school. Understanding the critical thinking abilities of junior high school students will provide essential information to schools and teachers to help students develop their critical thinking abilities through effective and efficient approaches as desired by the "Merdeka" curriculum promoted in Indonesia.

METHODS

Research Design

This research utilized a quantitative descriptive design to assess the critical thinking skills of junior high school students in Rantepao, Toraja. The primary goal of a quantitative descriptive research design is to provide a clear and comprehensive description and measurement of the phenomenon under investigation (Baker, 2017). This design thoroughly examines the phenomenon's characteristics and identifies patterns and relationships among variables. The data collected within this framework serve as an initial step in the research process and the foundation for informed decision-making. Furthermore, the quantitative descriptive design is valuable in evaluating interventions or programs' potential effectiveness. Its outcomes yield statistical data that can undergo in-depth analysis, facilitating a more scientifically grounded understanding of the phenomenon under scrutiny (Stone & Bloomquist, 2008).

Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of adolescent students at the junior high school level in Rantepao City, Toraja. Two schools, namely SMP N 1 Rantepao and SMPN 2 Rantepao, were selected from this city. The students were between the ages of 12-14 years old. The researchers used the proportionate stratified random sampling method to select the sample. This sampling method ensured a representative selection of students from different strata, thus enhancing the generalizability of the findings. The total sample size was 66, with 34 students from SMPN 1 Rantepao and 32 from SMPN 2 Rantepao.

Data Collection Techniques and Instrument

Data collection involved face-to-face interactions with the sample of this study, and permission was obtained from the teachers and headteachers of the selected schools. The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire that assessed the students' critical thinking skills. The indicators of CT skills, based on the work of [Suhendar \(2017\)](#), are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Critical Thinking Indicators

Critical Thinking Indicators	Indicator Description
Focus on Questions	Ability to identify question formulas
Answering Questions	Ability to identify possible answers
Argument Analysis	Ability to identify inconsistencies in answer
Making and Drawing Conclusions	Consequences of accepting or rejecting answers

Students' scores in Critical thinking skills are categorized into four categories: low, fair, and high, as adopted by [Arikunto \(2021\)](#).

Data Analysis Techniques

In analyzing the data, researchers applied descriptive statistics calculations related to the variables of critical thinking skills. These descriptive statistics include measures of central tendency (mean and median) and variability (standard deviation, range). These statistics will provide a summary of the overall performance of students in each critical thinking skill. There will be a frequency distribution of the categorial data based on students' responses. It aims to see the distribution of responses for each critical thinking skill. It will give an overview of how students performed on individual items related to CT. This study will use SPSS as statistical software for data analysis.

RESULTS

The result of students' scores in critical thinking skills is presented in Table 2, which describes the students' mean scores.

Table 2. Critical Thinking skills of students at SMPN 2 Rantepao

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Low category	13	38.2	38.2
	Fair Category	21	61.8	100.0
	Total	34	100.0	100.0

There were 34 students from SMPN 1 Rantepao, and the percentage of students who scored in critical thinking skills are as follows: 61.8% of them have fair critical thinking skills, and 38.2% of them have low critical thinking skills, on the other hand, none of them have a high level of critical thinking skills.

Table 3. Critical Thinking skills of students at SMPN 2 Rantepao

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Low Category	16	47.1	50.0	50.0
	Fair Category	10	29.4	31.3	81.3
	High Category	6	17.6	18.8	100.0
	Total	32	94.1	100.0	
Missing	System	2	5.9		
Total		34	100.0		

Table 3 shows that there were 32 students from Junior high schools 2 Rantepao, and the percentage of their skills in critical thinking are as follows: 18.8% of them have high score, 31.3% have fair scores, and 50% have low scores.

Table 4. The frequency and the percentage of students' scores in CT skills

Category	Frequency	Percent
Low Category	29	43.9
Fair Category	31	47
High Category	6	9.1
Total	66	100

The frequency and the percentage of students' critical skills in all samples of this study can be seen in Table 4. This table describes that the highest percentage of students' scores in CT skills in the context of Christian Education was in the fair category (47%), which means students only have a fair level of CT skills. In addition, 43.9 % of them have low levels of CT skills, and only 9.1% have high levels of CT skills.

DISCUSSION

This study found that students at Junior High Schools in Rantepao only have fair critical thinking skills in Christian Education. This fact shows that they need more treatment to improve their CT skills as CT skills are one of the 21st-century skills that must be owned by students in the era of society 5.0, and more importantly, in the context of Christian religious education, students need it to understand well of the bible content to be applied in their lives.

Furthermore, In the Bible, many of Jesus' responses to his disciples and the crowd were not direct answers to the questions posed to Him. Instead, His responses often came in the form of parables, metaphors, simplicity, and empathy. Jesus' answers required the listeners to analyze and discern the meaning behind His statements. Therefore, in the context of this research, students need high-level critical thinking skills to understand the intended meaning of Jesus' statements or answers. It aligns with [Jensen Eric's \(2011\)](#) opinion that critical thinking involves effective and reliable mental processes to pursue relevant and accurate knowledge about the world.

In addition, [Rosmaini \(2023\)](#) adds that factors influencing critical thinking skills in learning include 1) students' physical conditions, 2) intellectual development, and 3) students' motivation. The teacher's skills in learning also play a crucial role, where encouraging discussions and providing constructive feedback can help students develop critical thinking abilities. The results of [Johnson's study \(2014\)](#) also showed that students with adequate critical thinking skills are more likely to systematically study problems, face challenges in an organized manner, formulate questions, innovate, and design relatively novel solutions. Therefore, individuals must possess critical thinking skills and learn to cultivate them, as these skills are valuable assets in facing present and future life challenges.

Critical thinking skills enable individuals to think rationally and logically when receiving information and systematically solving problems. It means that critical thinking enhances analytical and

creative skills. Those with critical thinking skills can leverage ideas or information, seek relevant additional information to evaluate and modify to produce the best ideas, and use them to self-evaluate decisions made. High-level thinking abilities impact students' ability to analyze issues that arise in biblical stories. It is consistent with [Panggabean's opinion \(2022\)](#) that critical thinking is very suitable in Christian education as it connects social, emotional, and moral experiences for social transformation.

In the [Bible \(1996\)](#), several examples point to the need for students to engage in critical thinking during the learning process. Some of these examples are as follows:

1. The parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7): When questioned by the Pharisees and the law teachers about dining with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus responded with a parable about a lost sheep. Through this parable, Jesus conveyed that He genuinely loves all His people, including those who have sinned. The Pharisees and the law teachers had to analyze the meaning behind the parable, as Jesus did not directly answer their question.
2. Healing a woman on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10-17): In this instance, Jesus healed a woman on the Sabbath, which conflicted with the Jewish tradition. The head of the synagogue protested against Jesus for doing so. Jesus responded by illustrating a person who would untie their ox or donkey and lead it to water on the Sabbath. His answer meant that following God's will is more important than merely adhering to religious traditions. Understanding this response required critical thinking skills from the head of the synagogue.
3. The woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11): The scribes and Pharisees confronted Jesus about a woman caught in adultery, and according to the Law of Moses, she should be stoned to death. Jesus challenged them, stating that the one without sin should cast the first stone. This response left the scribes and Pharisees unable to act, as they realized they, too, were sinners.
4. The case of the two mothers and the baby (1 Kings 3:16-28): This story presents a dispute between two women claiming to be the mother of a baby. King Solomon had to use his wisdom and critical thinking skills to uncover the truth. He proposed to divide the baby into two and give each woman half of the baby. The mother showed great compassion and asked Solomon to give the baby to the other woman, revealing her true identity. Solomon's decision was based on the critical thinking needed to understand the mother's genuine love for the child.

These examples demonstrate that critical thinking is crucial in learning Christian teachings, as students need to analyze and interpret the meanings behind the expressions found in the Bible. Students must develop higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) to comprehend these answers properly.

There are differences between how adults (andragogy) and middle school students approach critical thinking. These differences include:

1. Life experience and knowledge: Adults generally possess more life experiences and knowledge than students. They have encountered various situations, acquired more information, and have a broader knowledge base, making their thinking more informed and experience-based.
2. Problem-solving ability: Adults typically have more mature problem-solving skills than students. They are more analytically and logically adept, able to foresee the long-term consequences of their actions, while students are still developing their problem-solving skills and may rely on simpler approaches.
3. Abstract concepts: Understanding and working with abstract concepts develop with age. Adults tend to grasp complex and abstract concepts, such as philosophy or scientific theories, based on their experiences. In contrast, students still comprehend concepts and may feel more comfortable with concrete and tangible ideas.
4. Social considerations: Students are often more influenced by social norms and peer views than adults. They may be more susceptible to peer influence and consider social approval when making decisions. In contrast, adults tend to have more independent views and can look beyond peer opinions.
5. Attention span: Students typically have a shorter attention span than adults. They may struggle to maintain focus on tasks that require prolonged concentration. Adults, on the other hand, can focus on complex and time-consuming tasks.

The Vygotskian method offers a theoretical framework that aids in comprehending the development of critical thinking skills in children. Additionally, it provides teachers with strategies to foster student growth by focusing on their learning process and offering appropriate activities.

Strategies for teaching critical thinking skills include building categories, finding problems, and enhancing the environment (Bonnie & Potts, 2003). Characteristics of critical thinking learning include increased interaction among students as learners, asking open-ended questions, providing adequate time for students to reflect on questions or problems given, and teaching for transfer, enabling students to apply newly acquired skills to other situations and their own experiences. In conclusion, critical thinking skills are crucial in Christian education, and student-centered approaches can foster these skills effectively.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that students at Junior High Schools in Rantepao have only a fair level of critical thinking skills in the context of Christian Education. It suggests that there is room for improvement in their critical thinking abilities. Since critical thinking is one of the essential 21st-century skills required in the era of Society 5.0, it becomes crucial to provide students with the necessary treatment and interventions to enhance their critical thinking skills.

Improving critical thinking skills is vital as it enables students to effectively analyze and understand the content of the Bible and its application in their daily lives. With better critical thinking abilities, students will be better equipped to interpret and apply the teachings and parables of Jesus in a meaningful and relevant manner. This skill is essential for them to navigate the complexities of modern life and make well-informed decisions.

As the world progresses and transforms, critical thinking skills are becoming increasingly valuable. Thus, educators and schools in Rantepao and across the globe should focus on incorporating strategies and activities that foster critical thinking in their curricula. By providing ample opportunities for students to engage in critical thinking processes and encouraging discussions and debates, educators can help nurture students' ability to think critically and independently. As a result, students can develop a more profound understanding of Christian values and principles and apply them effectively in their lives.

In conclusion, this study highlights the need to improve students' critical thinking skills in Christian Education. With the increasing importance of critical thinking in the 21st century and its relevance in understanding and applying biblical teachings, efforts to enhance these skills must be prioritized to prepare students for the challenges of modern society.

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