

Critical and Creative Literacy in Argumentative Writing Course: Students' Needs

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Abstract

Critical and creative literacy (CCL) is crucial for students as it focuses on critical and creative thinking processes and the object of what to think in balance concern. While many teaching models might integrate critical literacy in teaching English, its practical implementation in argumentative writing course is not well-explored. In an argumentative writing course, critical reading tasks of argumentative writing models can facilitate the thinking process and their English development for constructing a new one with a localized issues for contextualized the learning. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the students' learning needs to improve their CCL level as well as their argumentative writing skills development. The study involved 124 university students from four universities in Lombok, Indonesia, using a survey-style research design. Data was collected through questionnaires and in-depth interviews and analyzed qualitatively with a five-Likert scale analysis method. The analysis revealed significant gaps between the current and desired conditions of students' CCL skills integrated into the argumentative writing course, indicating high needs. The results of the needs analysis could be used to develop a conceptual framework for promoting CCL integration into the course.

Keywords: *Critical And Creative Literacy, Argumentative Writing, EFL Classes, Students' Needs.*

INTRODUCTION

In the context of higher education, it is essential to establish effective learning opportunities to promote critical and creative literacy (CCL) in response to the significant impact of technology and social media in the students' life. Social media platforms enable a quick dissemination of diverse and often sensational information, transcending linguistic, educational, and cultural boundaries, which need high thinking skills for comprehending, interpreting textual information, and constructing meaning creatively. These skills might be integrated across the curriculum in the higher education. These skills require strong linguistic and reading skills (Tanggaard, 2019) because texts play a crucial role in addressing specific issues (Anderson et al., 2001; Wang, 2022). In the context of argumentative writing classes, authentic sociocultural, political, and injustice social issues around the students might serve as valuable instructional resources for teaching argumentative essays materials, which often revolve around controversial issues and logical reasoning. Despite some research efforts in primary and secondary education (Ko, 2013), the integration of critical literacy (CCL) practices in EFL teaching remains inadequate.

CCL is defined as the ability to read and write critically and creatively about sociocultural, political, and social action issues (Luke, 2000, 2012). Kaya et al., (2022) confirmed that critical literacy is an educational service to facilitate social justice issues mapping and transform them into social action. Their analysis of critical literacy in Canada recommends integrating critical literacy across curricula. Although the indicators of critical literacy and creative literacy are arguable, the high-order thinking skills proposed by Bloom (1984) can be utilized as indicators of critical literacy because of overlapping domains (Lee, 2011) with a different focus. Critical literacy will not happen without the objects or things that an individual is thinking about. In this case, Kiosses (2019) confirmed that literacy is not merely a linguistic concept, but it is linked to social, economic, political, and ideological issues. Literacy is not only focused on the linguistic factor but also the social issues that are delivered

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through language, which addresses social, economic, political, and cultural issues in a community. Furthermore, Bishop (2014) argues that critical literacy is a learning process of reading and writing of having a high consciousness of an individual's experience as historically built within specific power relations. Also, Luke (2012) stated that as a practical approach to curriculum, literacy melds social, political, and cultural debate and discussion with the analysis of how texts and discourses work, where, with what consequences, and in whose interests. In addition, Patston et al., (2021) stated that creativity is the production of something new, relevant, and useful to the people who created the product within their social context. Creative literacy requires the performance for producing the issues through well-grammatically and semantically linguistic construction. These theoretical perspectives prove that the integration of critical and creative literacy matches with the principles of argumentative writing, which requires deconstructing a set of writing models (Lau, 2011) and constructing new, relevant, and useful writing by utilizing the prior knowledge within the social context (Patston et al., 2021) built within a particular essay structure.

Because of the global citizens with high social and technological media engagement, students in the EFL classes must be exposed to high critical and creative literacy learning tasks inside and/or outside the classroom. Also, the importance of CCL skills across the subject matters at higher education is due to the rapid global change and high global competitiveness (Kiosses, 2019; Sánchez & Ensor, 2021), which need adaptability to solve any problems in their work fields in the future and academic tasks completion. Consequently, a high exposure frequency (Arfah & Zamzam, 2017) to the argumentative writing course using various technological media and integrative critical reading tasks should be exposed to the students before and after joining the face-to-face meeting. As a deconstruction process (Elen et al., 2019; Griffin et al., 2012), the critical reading activities can be focused on linguistic skills improvement, writing organization, and the controversial or arguable issues delivered through the texts as initial steps of constructing (Kiosses, 2019; Norton, 2007) an argumentative essay. Graham et al., (2017) confirmed that argumentative reading is required for argumentative writing. Then a creative use of the metacognitive process for a guided and/or independent argumentative writing construction (Clerehan, 1997) can be the next alternative. The students are involved in activating their background knowledge and skills that are internalized through deconstructing a chosen argumentative essay model before joining the face-to-face meeting to creatively produce a new argumentative essay. These reasons are the basis of critical and creative literacy integration in the teaching of argumentative writing courses with the deconstruction and (re)construction learning processes.

The integration of critical and creative literacy into the EFL curriculum has been conducted by teachers, but designing more suitable learning experiences remains a significant challenge (Defianty & Wilson, 2022; Novianti et al., 2020, 2021). Some teachers have focused solely on critical or creative thinking skills without addressing sociocultural or political issues as the subject of the thinking process and the linguistic aspects. Research conducted by Suhardiana et al., (2023) has confirmed that lecturers have used various strategies to promote critical literacy in the teaching of English as a foreign language in higher education. The strategies employed are influenced by the lecturers' understanding or perceptions of critical literacy. Therefore, it is essential to explore the actual needs of the students to develop a comprehensive set of instructional designs for promoting critical and creative skills throughout the EFL curriculum, particularly in the argumentative writing course. This underscores the crucial importance of this research in EFL curriculum development.

METHOD

This research aims to explore the gaps of the current and desired conditions of the EFL learners in the argumentative writing courses at higher education in Lombok, Indonesia. To achieve this goal, a case study design is considered most appropriate. The study involved 124 university students from the second or third year at two state and three private universities in Lombok, Indonesia. These students were required to have passed paragraph writing and essay writing courses as prerequisites.

The participants' perceptions of the implementation of CCL integrated into the argumentative writing course were collected by using two sets of standardized closed and open questionnaires and field-notes. The closed questionnaire was designed by using a Likert scale with five choices, strongly agree to strongly disagree. The questionnaire domains and items were adapted from the theoretical review (Anderson et al., 2018; Bishop,

2014; Ennis, 2018; Ennis, 1993; Mabruroh & Suhandi, 2017; Novianti et al., 2020; Wang, 2022 and Huang, 2020) for both deconstruction and construction modes. The CCL questionnaire consisted of seven domains with sixty items: the focusing domain consists of seven items; the analyzing domain is nine items; the reasoning domain consists of ten items; making inference is eight items; evaluating domain consists of eleven items; drawing implication domain is six items; and elaborating domain consists of nine items. Each item is presented in both current condition and desired or expected condition. The validating process was conducted by using the SPSS program with a Pearson Correlation analysis, and the reliability was measured by using Cronbach's alpha. Based on the validity criterion most of the correlations are only modest, somewhere between .3 and .6 (Mohajan, 2017). It can be concluded that the sixty items are valid, with significant values lower than .05. And, the questionnaire is reliable shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Reliability Testing Results of CCL Skills

No	Domains	Reliability Statistics		
		Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
1	Focusing Skills	.804	.964	9
2	Analysis Skills	.794	.973	6
3	Reasoning Skills	.791	.980	11
4	Making Inference Skills	.795	.975	9
5	Evaluating Skills	.786	.978	7
6	Drawing Implication Skills	.818	.976	8
7	Elaborating Skills	.797	.983	10

The obtained data regarding the participants' responses to the validated questionnaire were evaluated by using a comparative analysis model by comparing the gaps between the students' current condition and expected condition. This was carried out to examine the suitability of the instrument. If the current condition exceeds the desired conditions, it is given a maximum point of 5 (five) while the desired condition is a minimum point of 1 (one). So, the value is $5 - 1 = 4$; However, the lowest suitability is if the current condition is less than the desired condition. The maximum point 1 (one) and the maximum 5 (five) are given to each item. So, the value is $1 - 5 = -4$. Therefore, the suitability range is -4 to 4. Then it is used to compute the interval with the following formula.

Interval = (higher score - lowest score) / number of groups = $(4 - (-4)) / 5 = 1.6$ So, the interval can be formulated in Table 2.

Table 2 The Conversion Table of The Ccl Needs Level

Interval	Category
-4 to -2.4	Very Low Needs
-2.4 to -0.8	Less Needs
-0.8 to 0.8	Sufficient
.8 to 2.4	High Needs
2.4 to 4	Very High Needs

Adapted from Sukardi et al., (2022)

The final step of data analysis is consulting the gap score in Table 2 to determine the gap level or category between the current and desired conditions. These data were strengthened with the data obtained from interview to the participants.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The Needs of Critical and Creative Literacy in the Argumentative Writing Course

Based on the participants' responses, critical and creative literacy (CCL) integrated into the argumentative writing course is a critical need in the EFL classes context in higher education. They really need these critical and creative skills, which consist of seven domains: focusing skills; analyzing skills; reasoning skills; making

inference skills; evaluating skills; drawing implication skills; and elaborating skills. These results are proved with the average gaps between current and desired conditions presented in Figure 1.

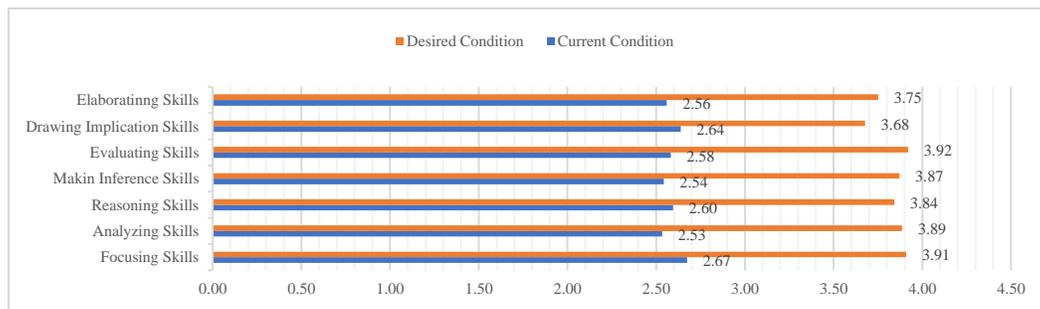


Figure 1. The Average Gaps between the Current and Desired Conditions of CCL Skills integrated into Argumentative Writing Course

In Figure 1, the average of current conditions (2.59) of the overall the domains shows that the students have prior knowledge and skills to acquire CCL skills melted in the target course content and learning experiences. Meanwhile, the average of desired conditions over all the domains is 3.84, not reaching the highest point (5). The average gap between current and desired conditions overall in the domains is 1.25, high need category after consulting it to Table 2. After consulting it to Table 2, it is categorized into high needs. It indicates that the participants might doubt that they cannot achieve the peak of CCL performance. It can be understood that the argumentative genre is one of the most difficult writings (Ferretti et al., 2007; Jumariati et al., 2021). However, the average gap between the current and desired conditions of each indicator across the seven domains revealed that CCL skills are highly necessary in the EFL classes, in this case, in the teaching of one or two-sided argumentative writing.

The Integration of CCL Skills in Argumentative Writing

Literacy, the ability to read and write, is a basic skill for academic success, job satisfaction, and/or self-professional development in any work field in the world. For these purposes, the integration of critical and creative literacy developed into the seven domains is a must-teaching model that should be promoted across the EFL curriculum. The results of the participants' responses reveal that these CCL domains are in high need in the learning of one- or two-sided argumentative writing with various writing structures and issues.

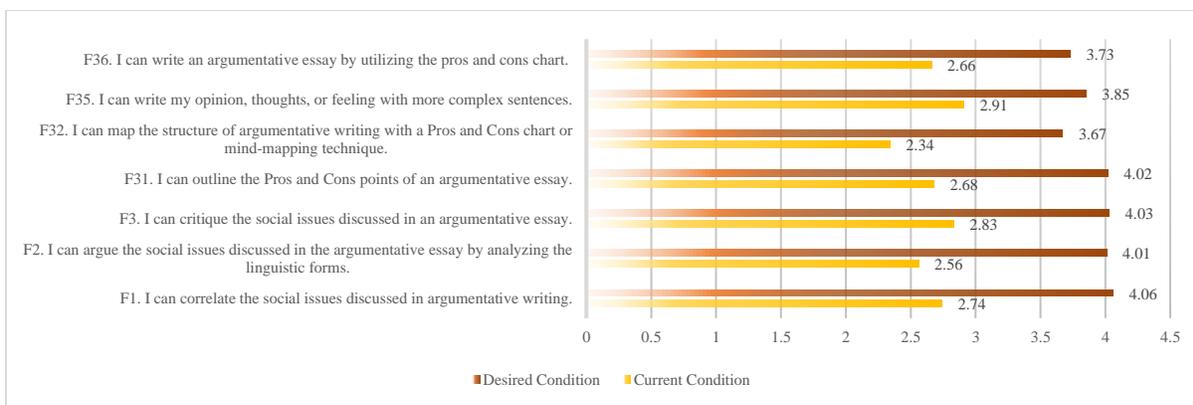


Figure 2. The Average Gaps between Current and Desired Conditions in Focusing Domain

The first domain of CCL skills is the student's performance in focusing on the issues that they read or write. This domain consists of seven valid items. They are the ability to correlate, argue, critique, outline the pros and cons, map the structure of argumentative essays, and write opinions, thoughts, or feelings by utilizing the pros and cons charts. The average of the participants' responses overall to the items (1.23) in Figure 2 proved that there is a large gap between the current condition (2.67) and the desired condition (3.91). The average gap which is categorized into high needs (Table 2) proved that the indicators of this domain are necessary for

deconstructing (Lau, 2011) a chosen argumentative model before constructing (Patston et al., 2021) the other argumentative essays with different topics.

The second domain is analyzing skills. This domain was addressed with nine indicators. Data in Figure 3, the gap between the students' responses in the current condition (2.53) is lower than the desired condition (3.89) with an average gap of 1.35 in the high-need category. It means that all indicators are necessary for designing and developing instructional materials and learning tasks through deconstruction and (re)construction processes.

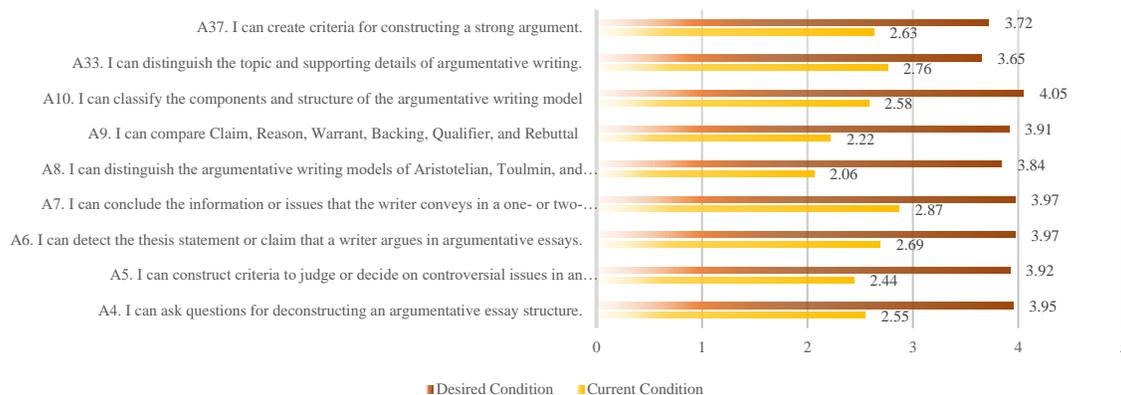


Figure 3. The Average Gaps between Current and Desired Conditions in *Analyzing Domain*

In the deconstruction process, the items address the students' needs in recognizing and drawing the argumentative essay structures and components, detecting the thesis statement and the supporting points, and concluding or establishing a relationship between the components to account for the local or global issues delivered in the argumentative essay. These skills are needed to comprehend the ideal model of an argumentative essay. Before the students learn to write argumentative writing, they need high exposure to the argumentative writing model analysis. These analysis activities will trigger the CCL skills because they are not only forced to think critically but also the object of what they are thinking about because the thinking will not happen without the issues or information to think (Shively et al., 2018).

In the construction process, the students need the analyzing skills to organize information, distinguish more appropriate argumentative writing models, classify reasons, warrant, and rebuttal, and create a set of criteria for deciding or judging controversial issues for writing strong arguments. These analyzing skills are needed as a thinking process for both well-linguistic and well-meaning constructions as the thinking objects because thinking skills (Al-Makhalid & K.S.B.-M, 2022; Janks, 2000; Luke, 2000; Mabruroh & Suhandi, 2017) are essential in critical and creative literacy skills. So, in argumentative writing class, the students need prior knowledge or background knowledge that can be achieved through analyzing the argumentative essay model to independently or collaboratively construct new argumentative essays with different arguable topics or issues.

The third domain of CCL skills is the student's performance in reasoning. This domain was addressed with ten questionnaire items for two argumentative writing stages: deconstruction and construction process. As shown in Figure 4, the average of participants' responses overall for the ten items in the current condition are 2.60 and 3.84 in the desired condition. The average gap of 1.24 of the indicators strongly indicated that these skills are in high demand although most did not believe that they might not reach the peak of reasoning skills.

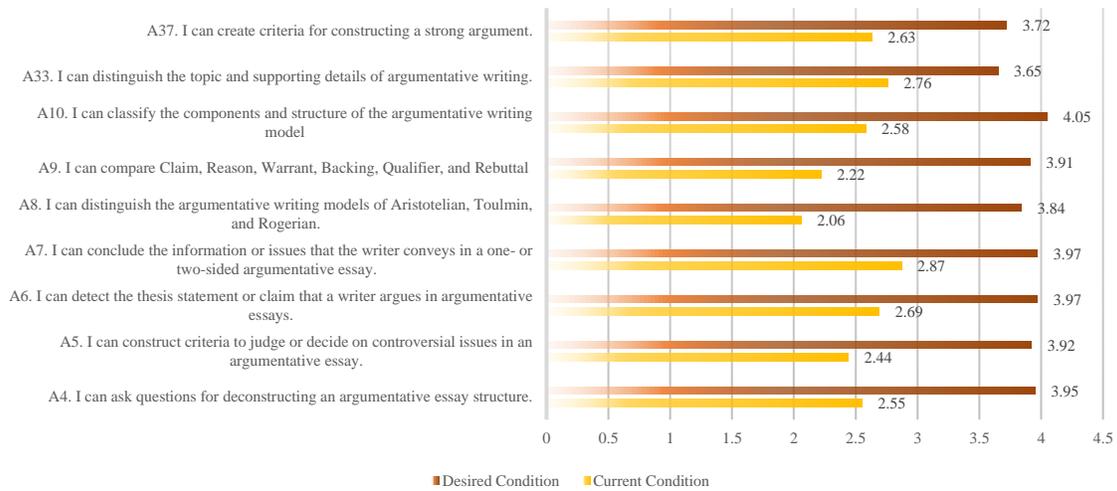


Figure 4. The Average Gaps between Current and Desired Conditions in the Reasoning Domain

Because logical reasoning with strong evidence from credible resources is an essential feature of argumentative writing, the reasoning skills in Figure 4 are necessary for deconstructing and (re)constructing an argumentative essay. Through the deconstruction process in the form of critical reading, the students should be actively engaged in recognizing language features (vocabulary and syntactic patterns) of logical reasoning and text structure on the argumentative essay model. Then in the construction process, reasoning skills are needed in synthesizing different information to support a claim, presenting opposing opinions, and providing a rebuttal to strengthen the argument for convincing or persuading the readers.

The fourth domain of CCL is making inferences with eight items. As shown in Figure 5, the average of the participants' responses overall in the current condition was 2.58, and 3.92 in the desired condition showed a gap of 1.34 which is categorized as high needs (see Table 2). Although the students do not believe that they can perform at the highest level when it comes to making inference, most of them (strongly) agree that these skills are critical needs. Some students stated that inferring implied messages or unstated messages, for example, in argumentative essay is not easy. Inferring messages, a clearly-stated thesis statement and evidence to convince the reader delivered in an argumentative essay model are still challenges in the deconstruction and constructions learning process. These might be reasons for the students responding to the indicators with the highest points. However, inferring skills are the integral parts of the argumentative writing measurement indicators (Yamin et al., 2023).

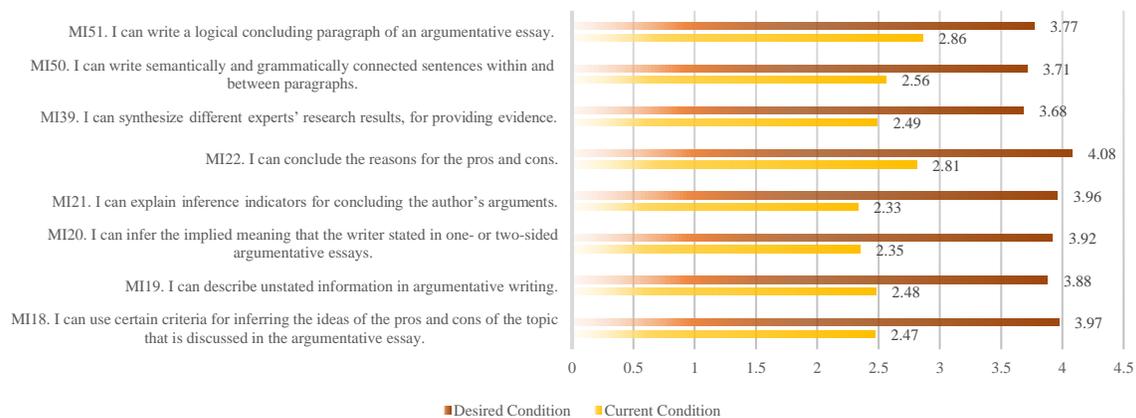


Figure 5. The Average Gaps between Current and Desired Conditions in Making Inferences Domain

In argumentative writing classes, making inferences might be implemented through deconstruction and construction learning stages. In the deconstruction with critical reading activities, the students should be involved in using several criteria for inferring the ideas of the pros and cons, exploring unstated information, and implied meaning in the text. Also, this domain refers to their performance in formulating indicators of the writer’s argument or reasons provided to support the claim in the pros and cons writing genre. The average of the participants’ responses in Figure 5 revealed that these skills are in high demand for CCL skills development. Although some disagreed that they can reach the peak of making inferences discussed in argumentative writing, however, most of them (strongly)agree these skills are highly needed in learning one- or two-sided argumentative writing.

The fifth CCL domain is evaluating skills. As shown in Figure 6, the average gap of the students’ responses overall eleven items show different in the current condition (2.54) and desired conditions (3.92) with an average gap of 1.34, which is categorized into high needs (see Table 2). Of the eleven items, item E58 regarding the students’ ability to evaluate and write the complex structure of noun phrases as subject, object, or complement showed the lowest gap (.93). It indicates that most students’ prior knowledge of the item but they do not believe in achieving the peak of this knowledge through argumentative writing course. Furthermore, the highest need for evaluating skills is item E24 (gap 1.57) concerning the students’ ability to decide whether the structure of body paragraphs is semantically and grammatically connected or not.

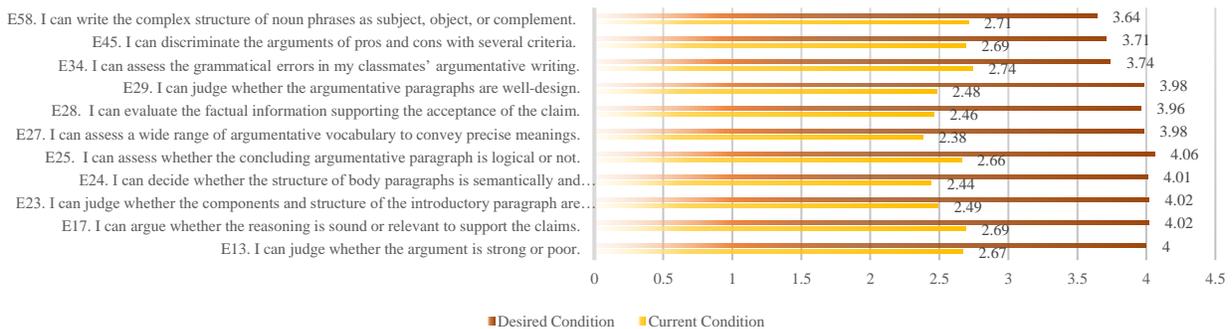


Figure 6. The Average Gaps between Current and Desired Conditions in *Evaluating Domain*

The importance of evaluating skills in a writing course is also confirmed by Fajrina et al., (2023) that evaluating a writing sample is used as an integral item of total prewriting strategies in the writing classes.

The sixth domain of CCL skills is drawing implications. Understanding an implication or implied meaning of what someone reads or writes needs a high ability of the linguistic forms, prior knowledge, and contexts in which the meaning is inferred. In the argumentative writing class, drawing implications is an important skill needed for deconstructing the essay model at the beginning stages and (re)constructing a new argumentative writing.

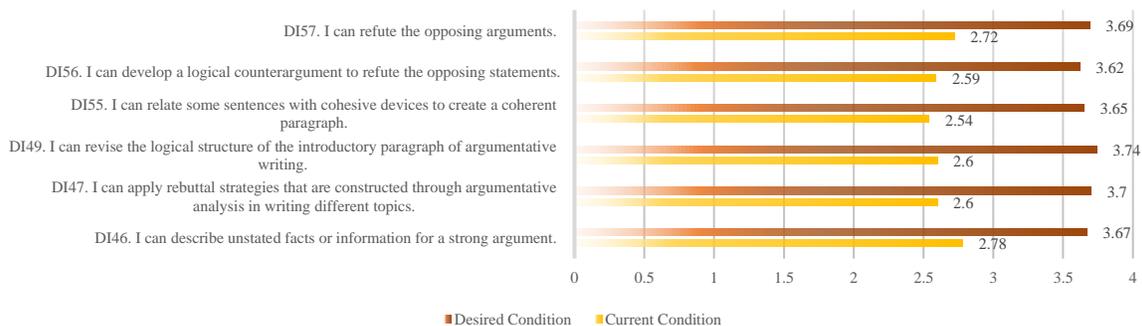


Figure 7. The Average Gaps between Current and Desired Conditions in *Drawing Implication Domain*

Data presented in Figure 7 showed that the average gap between the current condition (2.64) and the desired condition (3.68) over the six items is 1.04 with the high needs category (see Table 1). These indicators are a high necessity in argumentative writing courses because they allow the writers to construct their argument more persuasively and compelling, or refute the opposing side with logical reasoning for reducing the fallacies, and common errors in reasoning in proving the claim. The importance of drawing implications in an argumentative writing course is also to strengthen the writer's argument and rebuttal of the counterargument by creating logical connections, supporting evidence, and solving the problems as stated by Ferretti & Graham (2019) that argumentative writing is problem-solving.

The final domain of CCL skills is elaborating. With nine questionnaire items, the students' performance in elaborating ideas, opinions, facts, and several types of evidence through a wide range of vocabulary, phrasal structure, sentences, paragraphs, and writing organization and conveying precise meanings with sound reasons and relevant evidence (Kymes, 2005) are the integral components of this domain. The students should provide specific details, evidence, illustrations, and examples to support the main claims and counterargument in their writing effectively. As stated in Oktavia (2016), students find it difficult to use these abilities since they are unable to provide sufficient justification for rejecting or rebutting the counterarguments. As shown in Figure 8, it is also relevant to the average gap between the current condition (2.56) and desired condition (3.75) overall for the items in this domain, which showed high needs (1.19) after consulting it to Table 1.

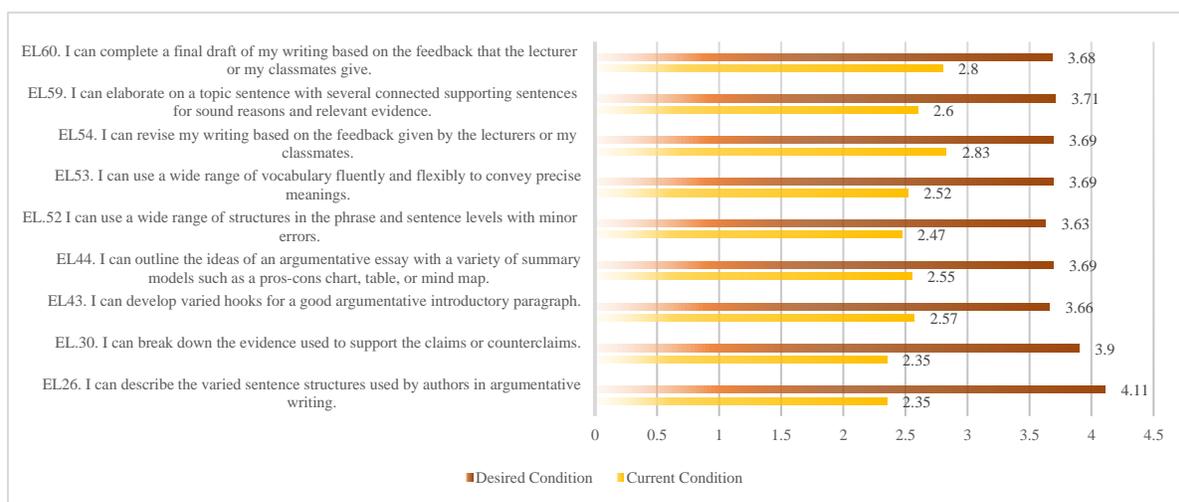


Figure 8. The Average Gaps between Current and Desired Conditions in *Elaborating Domain*

The average of the students' responses overall sixty items through the seven domains prove that they acknowledged the critical and creative literacy skills, which focus on both the thinking process and the object of what to think is deemed necessary for writing an argumentative essay. Consequently, the integration of critical and creative literacy skills in the EFL learning materials development and learning experiences design is a must-instructional task. It can be melted in the instructional materials or the teaching methods for promoting highly literate students for their academic success, self-directed learning for professional development in the work fields, and well-being persons in the global era. In the argumentative writing class, the students can be exposed to comprehensible linguistic inputs and writing structures through the deconstruction process (Elen et al., 2019; Griffin et al., 2012) with critical reading activities. In this process, the students need focusing skills for searching relevant information, analyzing skills for recognizing and internalizing the syntactic patterns of the texts and the delivery of the message through the text, making inferences on what they read, and evaluating whether the evidence inferred from critical reading activities can be used as strong evidence to prove the argument or rebuttal of the counter-argument. Deconstruction activity is the initial step of text construction (Kiosses, 2019; Norton, 2007). Also, the students need the deconstruction process of the argumentative essay model to construct and develop their argumentative writing (Aloqaili, 2012; Graham et al., 2018). As the results of deconstructing the argumentative essay model, then, the knowledge can be a basis for constructing a new argumentative essay with different sociocultural, political, economic, and environmental issues as the

implementation of creative literacy as stated by Clerehan (1997) that the creative use of the metacognitive process can be internalized through guided and/or independent construction. Furthermore, Patston et al., (2021) state that creativity is producing something new, relevant, and useful to the people within their sociocultural context. So, through the deconstruction and construction process, critical and creative literacy skills of the seven domains with sixty indicators can be integrated and implemented across an integrated curriculum such as argumentative writing courses in the EFL context in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

The research revealed that the current and expected conditions of the students' responses in the seven critical and creative literacy (CCL) skills showed significant gaps. The necessity of these CCL skills stems from the widespread use of social media in global interactions, academic tasks completion, and future professional development. In the argumentative writing course, these CCL skills can be melted in the instructional materials and/or challenging instructional tasks implemented through deconstructing linguistic forms, generic structure and language features of the text, and issues mapping for constructing a new argumentative essay. However, further research is needed for other EFL courses, as this study is solely focused on the argumentative writing course.

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