

Critical Thinking Values in Religious Narratives: CDA of ELT Learning Materials for Young Learners

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of religious narratives, specifically the story of "Ibrahim, the Father of Prophets," from the bilingual collection *Nabi & Rasul Allah* (2018), to cultivate critical thinking among young English language learners in Indonesia. This study explores how the morals and language of a story can foster critical thinking in young students. Employing Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and the transitivity framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the research investigates the critical thinking skills embedded in the English version of the Ibrahim story.

The analysis includes a discourse-based examination of the story's strategies and social practices, supplemented by interviews with English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Indonesian religious elementary school. This integrated approach highlights the role of critical thinking in selecting appropriate learning materials and emphasizes socio-cultural contributions of religious narratives to material development and instructional design in ELT to young learners. The paper concludes that integrating moral values into English teaching does not negate the necessity of fostering critical thinking. Teachers can use critical thinking to select stories that enhance students' moral understanding and linguistic proficiency. This research contributes to ongoing discussions on the use of storytelling in education and provides insights into effective pedagogical strategies for incorporating critical thinking into ELT for young learners.

Keywords: critical thinking, english, young learners, religious stories, cda

INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking, within the context of children's elementary school education, is a fundamental aspect of early childhood education. International education standards increasingly prioritize equipping children with the cognitive skills needed to navigate complex environments, necessitating educators to explore new approaches to incorporate critical thinking concepts into the curriculum and learning materials from an early age. ELT for young learners offers a unique opportunity for integrating these skills, due to the intrinsic relationship between foreign language learning and cognitive development in children.

Critical thinking skills have been included in Indonesia's education system law, specifically Law no. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which aims to develop students' abilities, including their capacity for critical think. However, the integration of critical thinking into the education process remains a challenge, particularly in teaching English to elementary school and *Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah* students. This is evident in the development of English learning materials for elementary-level students in Indonesia, which still primarily focus on providing theoretical,

conceptual, and prescriptive content for rote memorization. Such an approach to teaching English limits students' creativity and prevents them from exploring the material more deeply.

From the author's experience, during four observations of English teaching activities in two elementary schools (SD) and one *Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah* (MI) in Indonesia, it was found that students primarily listened to examples of English grammatical formulas provided by the teacher. They were then asked to memorize and imitate these examples. However, students were not encouraged to creatively and independently apply the theory taught in a way that would allow teachers to assess whether their understanding was correct. Students were also not prompted to ask questions if they did not understand the material, nor were they given the opportunity to explore other possibilities relevant to the content being taught. After imitating the teacher's example, students were given a quantitative score on their worksheet (e.g., 65, 70, 75, 80, etc.), but they received no feedback on the meaning behind these scores, nor were they informed of areas where their performance was lacking, which could have led to better results.

ELT materials for Muslim learners, particularly young learners, should address both cognitive and affective domains, incorporating moral values that promote positive, universal, and Islamic principles while fostering critical thinking (Feyza & Seyda, 2023; Mambu, 2016; Preece & Asraf, 2017). Critical thinking and linguistic competencies are interrelated but are not developed in isolation (Martínez, 2012; Uçan, 2022). Critical thinking is linked to both narrative and expository discourse, as well as to the use of complex syntax and literate words, such as metacognitive verbs (Nippold & Marr, 2022). English religious stories for young learners can serve as valuable sources of learning material, as they often convey moral values that can stimulate children's creative thinking while simultaneously developing their linguistic skills. Texts - both visual and written - across various genres in textbooks frequently present a range of moral values (Sukma et al., 2021). Recent studies have shown that reading short narratives improves critical thinking skills in EFL learners more effectively than non-narrative texts

(Pashangzadeh et al., 2016). In other words, young EFL learners' critical thinking and linguistic competencies can be developed through the moral values embedded in religious narratives.

However, despite the availability of numerous theories on critical thinking skills for teachers, there has been limited research on the integration of these skills into English learning materials. Previous studies have indicated that ELT materials for young learners show low integration of critical thinking skills (Al-Rahbi et al., 2022). Most British ELT textbooks focus on entertainment, while American ELT textbooks tend to emphasize occupational and business issues (Baleghizadeh & Motahed, 2012). Western discourses dominate English Language Teaching in Indonesia, and teachers often marginalize Islamic discourses. This highlights the need to incorporate moral values and critical thinking skills into ELT materials to enhance the linguistic development of Indonesian young learners through religious narratives.

The researchers selected the story of Ibrahim, the Father of Prophets as Ibrahim is one of the most well-known figures in Islamic history. Most Muslim children who learn about Islamic civilization are familiar with the miracles associated with Ibrahim, such as his survival from the fire set by King Namrudz. Parents or teachers commonly teach this story. However, there is a noticeable gap, particularly among teachers of young learners, in discussing Ibrahim's characteristics as a critical thinker. The concept of being critical, especially in religious matters, is often considered taboo for young children. Nevertheless, Ibrahim's critical attitude offers numerous lessons that can be valuable for children's cognitive and moral development. In this story, Ibrahim's critical thinking is portrayed with various interesting linguistic features to study and teach to children. Therefore, this research focuses on the linguistic features used by the author to describe Ibrahim's critical thinking, particularly during his search for the truth about God.

The simple vocabulary employed in telling the story of Ibrahim reflects the discursive strategy of the text, which is intended for child readers within the context of Indonesian culture, predominantly Muslim, and already familiar with the story of

Prophet Abraham. The linguistic choices central to this research are identifying processes, participants, and circumstances, within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics' (SFL) ideational metafunction, to explore the representation of critical thinking skills.

Religious stories, such as that of Prophet of Ibrahim, are well-known, especially within the Indonesian Muslim community. However, not many English teachers utilize these stories as a medium for teaching English to their students. Historically, the stories of the prophets contain numerous values and multidimensional contexts – social, cultural, religious – which can be linked to develop critical thinking skills in students, particularly young learners. For the researchers, the story *Ibrahim, the Father of Prophets* is rich in both cultural and educational value. The story highlights the importance of religious values and presents a complex narrative that invites in-depth analysis and reflection. This complexity can provide engaging English teaching material, especially for children who generally enjoy stories or fairy tales.

The following research questions guide this study, based on the conceptual framework and research background outlined above: *First*, How does the story *Ibrahim, the Father of Prophets* present critical thinking to young learners? and what linguistic features were chosen to convey this?; *Second*, How does the representation of critical thinking in this story contribute positively to ELT practices for young learners?

RESEARCH METHOD

The researchers chose to integrate Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Halliday's SFL ideational metafunction as they highlighted the interconnected dimensions of critical thinking representation in religious discourse. Fairclough's CDA theory itself proposed the SFL approach at the textual analysis level, which could be adapted to meet the specific needs of the analysis, according to the research questions raised (Fairclough, 2004). In relation to the representation of critical thinking skills in religious narratives explored in this study, the SFL ideational

metafunction analysis was emphasized as it investigates, at the micro-linguistic level, the types of processes within the contexts of clauses in the discourse. According to Eggins, the ideational metafunction in SFL represents the experiential meaning of clauses, which could be interpreted through the context of events or actions performed by the agents (Eggins, 2004). Critical thinking is a cognitive process shaped by various occurrences and experiences, both physical and mental (Ilyas, 2018; Jin-young, 2015). Thus, the complexity of these experiences in texts or short stories that represent critical thinking skills, particularly those in religious genres, was most appropriate analyzed using the SFL ideational metafunction.

An investigative-qualitative approach was adopted as it allows the researchers to gain detailed insights into the linguistic and discursive features of texts and their effects on learners and teaching approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To emphasize lexical choices and their relation to critical thinking, this research aimed to explore how a religious story is organized to encourage critical thinking within ELT for elementary school students.

Data Source

The primary data source for this study was the children's short story "*Ibrahim, the Father of Prophets*," taken from *Bilingual Stories of Nabi & Rasul Allah* (2018) published by Genta Group Production, Indonesia. This text was part of a collection that presented Islamic religious narratives in both English and another language, making it an ideal material for examining the interplay between religious content and language learning (Esposito, 2002). The story of Ibrahim was particularly suitable for this study because it was rich in moral and ethical dilemmas, as well as complex narrative structures, providing ample material for critical discourse analysis.

Data Collection

Data collection in this study involved two main processes: textual analysis of the story "*Ibrahim, the Father of Prophets*" and qualitative data gathered through observations and interviews with

ELT teachers. These methods were designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the story's linguistic features could promote critical thinking and how educators perceived and utilized this potential (Yasa, 2021; Yin, 2014).

- 1. Textual Analysis:** The story was analyzed using Fairclough's CDA framework, which focused on the relationship between language and power, and how linguistic and discursive features of a text shaped social practices and identities (Fairclough, N. & Wodak, 1997). This analysis included an examination of how the narrative constructed characters, actions, and events to promote critical engagement. Specific attention was given to the use of transitivity (how actions were represented), modality (the degree of certainty or obligation conveyed), and thematic structure (how information was organized in the text [Halliday. & Matthiessen, 2014]).
- 2. Observations:** Classroom observations was conducted where the story "*Ibrahim, the Father of Prophets*" was used as teaching material. These observations aimed to capture how teachers introduced and discussed the story with young learners, particularly focusing on instances where critical thinking was encouraged. This observational data provided insights into the practical application of the story and how its linguistic features were highlighted in an educational setting (Angrosino, 2007).
- 3. Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ELT teachers who had used the story "*Ibrahim, the Father of Prophets*" in their Teaching. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility and ability to elicit detailed responses, allowing participants to express their views in their own words (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). These interviews explored the teachers' perceptions of the story's potential to encourage critical thinking, the challenges they faced in using religious narratives for this purpose, and the strategies they employed to maximize the story's impact on students' cognitive development. The interviews also sought to understand how teachers interpreted the linguistic features of the story and how

these features influenced their instructional practices (Patton, 2015).

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted in two phases, each grounded in established methodologies:

1. **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):** The text was analyzed using Fairclough's three-dimensional model at three levels:
 - a. **Textual Level:** This level involved the examination of linguistic features within the story, focusing on the ideational metafunction as described by Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The analysis included an exploration of transitivity, modality, and thematic structure to understand how the story represented actions, participants, and events, and how these representations were designed to encourage critical thinking (Fairclough, 2004; Halliday. & Matthiessen, 2014).
 - b. **Discursive Level:** This phase focused on how the text was interpreted by teachers and learners, as captured in the interviews and observations. The analysis investigated how the linguistic features identified at the textual level were perceived and utilized in the classroom context (Gee, 2011).
 - c. **Social Level:** This level considered the broader social and cultural context in which the story was situated. It involved an examination of the role of religious narratives in education and their impact on young learners' cognitive and moral development (Fairclough, N. & Wodak, 1997; Rogers, 2011).
2. **Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) Analysis:** The SFL framework was employed to conduct a detailed linguistic analysis of the story's text. The focus was on the ideational metafunction, particularly on how the story constructed reality through language. The analysis examined:
 - a. **Transitivity:** This component explored how the story represented processes, participants, and circumstances, and

how these representations encouraged learners to engage critically with the text (Thompson, 2014).

- b. Thematic Structure:** This aspect investigated how information was organized within the text, including the sequencing of events and the emphasis placed on certain ideas or themes, and how this structure supported critical thinking (Martin & Rose, 2007).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Representation of Critical Thinking in the Text and Its Linguistic Choices

The concept of critical thinking is frequently associated with problem-solving and inquiry-based learning activities (Chalak & Ghasemi, 2017; Fisher, 2001; Kamin et al., 2001; Lipman, 2003; Peterson et al., 2020; Reid & Kelestyn, 2022). It also involves skills such as finding clues, asking effective questions, deeply considering the context and concepts of a subject (Chen, 2019; Gilmore, 2015; Karagiannaki & Stamou, 2018). In this research, the story portrays the characteristics and struggles of the prophet Ibrahim in spreading Allah's messages regarding the oneness of God and the prohibition of idol worship. It also illustrates how young Ibrahim searched for and questioned the existence of God in his life. Through a series of events, Ibrahim ultimately received a clue about the existence of God, whose truth he could no longer doubt. This journey of searching for God reveals many of the critical thinking characteristics displayed by Ibrahim as he explored and sought to prove a truth.

The story consists of twelve paragraphs, six of which were found to reflect critical thinking skills. The following six paragraphs, comprising 14 sentences, represent examples of critical thinking within the narrative.

As prophet Ibrahim grew up, he started questioning about what made a stone that could not do anything worshipped and adored by his people.

As Ibrahim grew up, he started thinking about God. When the night came, he saw a star, he thought, "it is god." When the star disappeared

in the morning, he thought that star was not God, because God would never disappear.

So did when Ibrahim saw the moon and sun; they both disappeared. He thought that God would never die because if God died, life would be over.

After watching the mighty universe and thinking deeply for a long time, Prophet Ibrahim believed that Allah was the only God to worship. He also believed that there was no God but Allah.

Prophet Ibrahim asked Allah for a sign of how He made a corpse come back to life. Allah then ordered Prophet Ibrahim to bring him four birds in different types. after that he chopped them all. Prophet Ibrahim placed those bird meats on the four different mountains.

Then Allah asked Ibrahim to call those birds. How surprised Prophet Ibrahim was at that time those birds flew toward him. Instantly, he bowed, watching a miracle. Ibrahim believed in Allah deeper and deeper.

Transitivity and Agency

The researchers analyzed the 14 sentences in the presented corpus from a SFL perspective. To explain the representation of critical thinking skills, the corpus was interpreted using the ideational metafunction, with a specific focus on transitivity and agency analysis. The transitivity and agency analysis findings for each sentence from the paragraphs above are presented in the tabulation below.

Table 1. Transitivity analysis of sentence 1

Sentence 1		
<i>As prophet Ibrahim grew up, he started questioning about what made a stone that could not do anything worshipped and adored by his people.</i>		
Processes	Participants	Circumstances
<i>Grew up: Material process (representing action or doing).</i>	<i>Prophet Ibrahim: Actor (Material process: grew up).</i>	<i>As Prophet Ibrahim grew up:</i>
<i>Started questioning: Mental process</i>	<i>He: Senser (Mental process: started questioning).</i>	<i>Circumstance of time.</i>

(representing cognition). <i>Made</i> : Relational process (representing causation/explanation).	<i>A stone</i> : Token/Carrier (Relational process: made). <i>His people</i> : Sayer/Behaver (Relational process: worshipped and adored)	<i>By his people</i> : Circumstance of agency.
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Table 2. Transitivity analysis of sentence 2 &3

Sentence 2 & 3		
<i>As Ibrahim grew up, he started thinking about God. When the night came, he saw a star, he thought, "it is god."</i>		
Processes	Participants	Circumstances
<i>Grew up</i> : Material process. <i>Started thinking</i> : Mental process. <i>Came</i> : Material process. <i>Saw</i> : Mental process. <i>Thought</i> : Mental process. <i>Is</i> : Relational process.	<i>Ibrahim</i> : Actor (grew up), Senser (thinking, saw, thought). <i>The night</i> : Actor (Material process: came). <i>A star</i> : Phenomenon (Mental process: saw). <i>It</i> : Carrier (Relational process: is). <i>God</i> : Attribute.	<i>About God</i> : Circumstance of matter. <i>When the night came</i> : Circumstance of time.

Table 3. Transitivity analysis of the sentence 4

Sentence 4		
<i>When the star disappeared in the morning, he thought that star was not God, because God would never disappear.</i>		
Processes	Participants	Circumstances
<i>Disappeared</i> : Material process. <i>Thought</i> : Mental process. <i>Was</i> : Relational process. <i>Disappear</i> : Material process.	<i>The star</i> : Actor (Material process: disappeared). <i>He</i> : Senser (Mental process: thought). <i>The star</i> : Carrier (Relational process: was not). <i>God</i> : Attribute. <i>God</i> : Actor (Material process: disappear).	<i>In the morning</i> : Circumstance of time.

Table 4. Transitivity analysis of the sentence 5

Sentence 5		
<i>So did when Ibrahim saw the moon and sun; they both disappeared.</i>		
Processes	Participants	Circumstances
<i>Saw:</i> Mental process. <i>Disappeared:</i> Material process.	<i>Ibrahim:</i> Senser (Mental process: saw). <i>The moon and sun:</i> Phenomenon (Mental process: saw), Actor (Material process: disappeared).	Not stated

Table 5. Transitivity analysis of the sentence 6

Sentence 6		
<i>He thought that God would never die because if God died, life would be over.</i>		
Processes	Participants	Circumstances
<i>Thought:</i> Mental process. <i>Would die:</i> Material process. <i>Would be:</i> Relational process.	<i>He:</i> Senser (Mental process: thought). <i>God:</i> Actor (Material process: die). <i>Life:</i> Carrier (Relational process: would be). <i>Over:</i> Attribute.	Not stated

Table 6. Transitivity analysis of the sentence 7

Sentence 7		
<i>Watching the mighty universe and thinking deeply for a long time, Prophet Ibrahim believed that Allah was the only one God to worship.</i>		
Processes	Participants	Circumstances
<i>Watching:</i> Behavioral process. <i>Thinking:</i> Mental process. <i>Believed:</i> Mental process. <i>Was:</i> Relational process.	<i>Prophet Ibrahim:</i> Behaver (watching), Senser (thinking, believed). <i>Allah:</i> Carrier (Relational process: was). <i>The only one God to worship:</i> Attribute.	<i>For a long time:</i> Circumstance of duration.

Table 7. Transitivity analysis of the sentence 8

Sentence 8		
<i>He also believed that there was no God but Allah.</i>		
Processes	Participants	Circumstances
<i>Believed:</i> mental process <i>was:</i> relational process	<i>He:</i> senser <i>There</i> (Carrier), <i>No God but Allah</i> (Attribute)	None

Table 8. Transitivity analysis of the sentence 9

Sentence 9		
<i>Prophet Ibrahim asked Allah for a sign of how He made a corpse come back to life</i>		
Processes	Participants	Circumstances
<i>Asked:</i> Verbal process. <i>Made:</i> Material process. <i>Come back:</i> Material process	<i>Prophet Ibrahim:</i> Sayer (Verbal process: asked). <i>Allah:</i> Receiver (Verbal process: asked). <i>A corpse:</i> Actor (Material process: come back). <i>He:</i> Actor (Material process: made).	<i>For a sign of how He made a corpse come back to life:</i> Circumstance of purpose.

Table 9. Transitivity analysis of the sentence 10

Sentence 10		
<i>Allah then ordered Prophet Ibrahim to bring him four birds in different types.</i>		
Processes	Participants	Circumstances
<i>Ordered:</i> Verbal process. <i>Bring:</i> Material process.	<i>Allah:</i> Sayer (Verbal process: ordered). <i>Prophet Ibrahim:</i> Receiver (Verbal process: ordered), Actor (Material process: bring). <i>Him:</i> Goal (Material process: bring). <i>Four birds:</i> Goal (Material process: bring).	<i>In different types:</i> Circumstance of manner.

Table 10. Transitivity analysis of the sentence 11

Sentence 11		
<i>Then Allah asked Ibrahim to call those birds.</i>		
Processes	Participants	Circumstances
<i>Asked:</i> Verbal process.	<i>Allah:</i> Sayer (Verbal process: asked).	Not stated explicitly
<i>Call:</i> Material process.	<i>Ibrahim:</i> Receiver (Verbal process: asked), Actor (Material process: call). <i>Those birds:</i> Goal (Material process: call).	

Table 11. Transitivity analysis of the sentence 12

Sentence 12		
<i>How surprised Prophet Ibrahim was at that time those birds flew toward him.</i>		
Processes	Participants	Circumstances
<i>Was:</i> Relational process.	<i>Prophet Ibrahim:</i> Carrier (Relational process: was).	<i>Toward him:</i> Circumstance of location.
<i>Flew:</i> Material process.	<i>Those birds:</i> Actor (Material process: flew).	

Table 12. Transitivity analysis of the sentence 13

Sentence 13		
<i>Instantly, he bowed, watching a miracle.</i>		
Processes	Participants	Circumstances
<i>Bowed:</i> Behavioural process.	<i>He:</i> Behaver (Behavioural process: bowed, watching).	<i>Instantly:</i> Circumstance of manner.
<i>Watching:</i> Behavioural process.	<i>A miracle:</i> Phenomenon (Behavioural process: watching).	

Table 13. transitivity analysis of the sentence 14

Sentence 14		
<i>Ibrahim believed in Allah deeper and deeper.</i>		
Processes	Participants	Circumstances
<i>Believed:</i> Mental process.	<i>Ibrahim:</i> Senser (Mental process: believed). <i>Allah:</i> Phenomenon (Mental process: believed).	<i>Deeper and deeper:</i> Circumstance of manner.

The research findings identified 28 processes within the presented corpus, categorized as follows: 9 material processes, 7 mental processes, 6 relational processes, 3 behavioural processes, and 3 verbal processes. Material processes were the most frequent, occurring 9 times. Material processes represent actions or events and are typically used to describe physical actions, events, or changes in the material world (Gunawan, 2020). According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), material processes are central to representing actions and changes in the physical world. They answer "*What happened?*" or "*What did X do?*" These processes are particularly dominant in narratives or texts that focus on physical events, as they vividly describe actions.

In the story, the author illustrates Prophet Ibrahim's faith journey through actions that demonstrate God's power (Allah). The material processes employed in the story serve to narrate key events in Ibrahim's life that highlight Allah's power and existence. Ibrahim's actions, such as calling the birds and witnessing their revival, demonstrate Allah's power and underscore Ibrahim's faith and belief. Material processes like "*he brought four birds*" and "*he called those birds*" reflect Ibrahim's practical engagement with Allah's commands in seeking proof of His power. The clause "*Allah then ordered Prophet Ibrahim to bring him four birds in different types*" represents Ibrahim's physical actions, which can be interpreted as an application of critical thinking, as he follows through on his cognitive process to seek evidence. Other material

processes, such as *'flew'* in the clauses *"the birds flew toward him"* provide concrete evidence for Ibrahim's belief, thereby completing the cycle of critical thinking that begins with questioning and culminates in action-based confirmation.

Another dominant type of process in the corpus is the mental process. Halliday (2014) and Eggins (2004) define mental processes as an individual's engagement with ideas, cognition (e.g., thinking, believing, reasoning), and perception (e.g., seeing, noticing, and forming beliefs). The mental processes in the corpus reflect Ibrahim's internal cognition (Sulistiyo et al., 2020), representing him as a critical thinking model, even in challenging situations. These processes highlight Ibrahim's mental journey, marked by observation, reasoning, questioning, and evaluation, as he reaches conclusions about faith and the existence of God. Mental processes like *"he thought"* or *"he believed"* demonstrate Ibrahim's ability to question and analyse his surroundings – fundamental components of critical thinking.

For instance, the mental process *"thought"* in the clause *"He thought that the star was not God, because God would never disappear"*, demonstrates evaluative reasoning, as Ibrahim assesses the star's nature based on logical principles. Similarly, the phrase *"Watching the mighty universe and thinking deeply for a long time"* highlights deep evaluation and reflection, which are core aspects of critical thinking. Lastly, Ibrahim's rejection of the star, moon, and sun as gods and his logical progression in seeking the truth, exemplify his inferential reasoning abilities as he searches for the true nature of God.

Influence of Critical Thinking Representation in Religious Narratives on ELT Practices for Young Learners

In addition to the textual analysis presented above, as part of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, discursive practices and social practices were explored to investigate the socio-cultural influence of the representation of critical thinking in religious narratives—particularly the story of Ibrahim, the Father of Prophets—on English Language Teaching (ELT) practices for young learners. Observation and interviews

were conducted with five English teachers at a religious primary school in Bogor.

The teachers employed several strategies to implement the story, and its potential for fostering critical thinking emerged from the classroom observations. These strategies, including facilitated group discussions, role-playing activities, and discursal writing prompts, encouraged students to examine the text's themes from multiple perspectives. In one observed lesson, students engaged in a role-playing activity where they debated a hypothetical argument between Ibrahim and his father. This exercise allowed students to express and defend opposing viewpoints, thus providing collaborative opportunities for practicing critical thinking.

However, EFL teachers identified certain challenges at Bogor's religious elementary school (MI) when incorporating critical thinking through religious narratives in ELT practices. The most prominent challenges included students' limited English language proficiency, particularly their low level of vocabulary mastery, which required additional time for teachers to explain the moral context and the situations described in the story. As a result, many teachers often mixed their explanations with Bahasa Indonesia to ensure understanding. Additionally, students needed a more comprehensive understanding of critical thinking. Three teachers, in interviews, emphasized the importance of carefully teaching young learners about critical thinking skills through the story of Ibrahim. They noted that it is essential not to encourage students to criticize everything around them indiscriminately but rather to engage them in deeper discussions about specific issues, allowing them to consider multiple points of view and understand how to behave appropriately.

These challenges suggest that while "*Ibrahim, the Father of Prophets*" is an important historical figure for promoting critical thinking, its use in the classroom must align with the students' language proficiency, cognitive development levels, and the pedagogical context. For teachers to feel confident using the narrative, they must be able to do so without confusing their students (Puspitasari et al., 2023). Therefore, teachers must

comprehensively explain the historical context in Islam, bridging the socio-cultural aspects of the story with the contemporary world.

Bloom's taxonomy is widely used to promote higher-order thinking skills in the teaching and learning process. Relevant to the concept of critical thinking, which requires these skills, Anderson et al. (2001) revised Bloom's taxonomy into two-dimensions: (*cognitive process* and *knowledge*). Anderson's revised taxonomy includes six cognitive process categories: *remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create*. In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) context, these categories reflect a combination of material and mental processes. This suggests that teachers can implement ELT strategies that reflect these higher-order thinking categories, similar to the critical thinking practices demonstrated by Ibrahim in the story.

Analysis of Interview Responses

From CDA perspective, the teaching and learning process is viewed as a social process involving multiple parties rather than being carried out by a single entity (Babaii & Sheikhi, 2017; de los Heros, 2009). Several stakeholders are engaged in this process, including teachers, students, parents, schools, and institutions (Wahyuni et al., 2022). In this context, interviews are essential for understanding the individuals' perceptions in the educational process being studied. The interviews with five English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers provided valuable insights into how the story "Ibrahim, The Father of Prophets" can be utilized to foster critical thinking among young learners. Several key points emerged from their responses:

1. Positive Perceptions of the Story

All teachers recognized the potential for students to engage in critical thinking through the story, particularly due to its use of moral dilemmas and the way it prompts questioning of societal norms. This aligns with the idea that religious narratives can serve as valuable cognitive tools in ELT, especially when they relate to students' personal experiences (Lazar & Marzouk, 2018). The teachers noted that students were encouraged to reflect on the moral lessons of the story and apply them to their

daily lives, both at home and at school. This suggests that in this context, critical thinking is not limited to religious learning but also involves cultivating awareness and adaptability to diverse situations encountered in students' daily activities.

2. *Variations in Teaching and challenges*

The teachers employed various strategies to encourage students to engage critically with the story, including role-playing, Socratic questioning, group discussions, journal writing, and sentence creation. For instance, during sentence-making exercises, students actively explored specific vocabulary from the text and use it to construct their own sentences in English. This approach successfully allowed students to explore different perspectives within the narrative, thereby enhancing their critical thinking skills. However, the teachers also highlighted challenges related to balancing the respect required for religious content with encouraging critical analysis. To address these challenges, teachers structured discussions in a way that invited students to explore ideas, rather than critique them directly. This approach allowed students to engage critically with the material without feeling uncomfortable or disrespectful.

3. *Effect on the Learners and Teachers*

The teachers observed that learners interacting with the story become more inquisitive, analytical, and receptive. These observations suggest that, when used appropriately, religious narratives can be powerful tools for fostering critical thinking skills among young learners. Furthermore, the representation of critical thinking within religious narratives notably impacted the teachers' instructional approaches. Teachers who used the story tended to adopt a more dialogic and open-ended approach to Teaching and discussion (Alexander, 2008). This approach invited students to follow up on their contributions with questions or speculative ideas. This stands in contrast to traditional, teacher-centered methods and aligns with the principles of critical thinking, emphasizing active student engagement and the development of independent thought.

CONCLUSION

This study explored using a religious narrative (Ibrahim, the Father of Prophets) to develop critical thinking in ELT for young learners. The research employed a qualitative approach, utilizing SFL and CDA to examine aspects of the story that promote critical thinking and to understand how ELT teachers perceive, interpret, and apply these aspects in a classroom setting.

The study revealed significant linguistic features through transitivity analysis based on SFL's ideational metafunction. Material and mental processes, which dominate the textual features of the narrative, highlight Ibrahim as an intelligent, analytic, and critical figure. These processes position Ibrahim as a transformative character and offer a valuable model for young learners. The findings suggest that religious stories, such as the story of Ibrahim, can be effectively utilized to embed critical thinking in ELT. Dialogic teaching methods and reflective activities were found to be particularly effective in promoting student engagement, especially within the English language learning process.

The research also carries essential implications for the use of religious narratives like "Ibrahim, The Father of Prophets" in ELT practices in Indonesia. By drawing on religious and cultural themes, these narratives can help establish a deeper connection between the students and their socio-cultural context. Many language teaching experts argue that there is no universally "best" teaching strategy, but rather that the most effective Teaching is carried out by teachers who understand the needs and contexts of their students (Harmer, 2001; Richards & Renandya, 2001). Consequently, the most effective teaching strategies are tailored to the learners' specific needs, situations, and socio-cultural contexts.

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