

**Enhancing Undergraduate Students' Reading and Writing Skills through the  
RELEASE Model: A Critical Literacy-Based Inquiry Approach**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study focuses on the development and evaluation of the RILIS Model, which is a Critical Literacy-Based Inquiry framework designed to improve the teaching of reading and writing in tertiary education. The model is structured around five interrelated essential learning tasks: Research, Inquiry, Literacy, Interpretation, and Synthesis, where students are expected to develop higher-order thinking skills within an inquiry-centered pedagogical framework. A mixed-methods developmental research design was used to assess the effectiveness of the model. The model's evaluation included tests, classroom observations, and interviews with students and lecturers who participated in the educational activity. Findings indicate that the RILIS Model's implementation produces positive outcomes for students' critical literacy skills, particularly in analyzing texts and constructing arguments. It enables learners not only to articulate reasoned and logically structured arguments, but also to increase their willingness and motivation to engage in learning activities. While there are several issues, including the method's time-consuming nature and uneven student preparedness, the potential of the model for fostering critical literacy-based teaching practices at the tertiary level is encouraging. This study contributes to the discussion on curriculum development and the use of inquiry-based teaching approaches in post-secondary education by encouraging thoughtful educational discourse.*

**Keywords:** RELEASE model, literacy-based inquiry, reading-writing skills, Undergraduate Students, Public Sector University, Karachi

**INTRODUCTION**

Understanding English is fundamentally important for communication, interaction, education, and business globally (Zaman et al., 2025). In modern times with widespread digitization, the need for critical literacy skills has increased for almost everyone, particularly for university students. Critical literacy as defined by McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) as a form of being able to read that encompasses evaluation and analyzing not only what is written but also the hidden messages. This skill is extremely necessary for academic achievement, but also serves as a prerequisite for a socially responsible and sensitive society that practice constructive criticism. According researchers, the set conditions and frameworks of higher learning institutions have failed to attain the desired level of critical literacy skills (Zaman et al., 2025). During their learning processes, especially in reading and writing, learners tend to superficially analyze information on texts without attempting to evaluate them critically.

### **Research Objectives**

- To develop and implement the RELEASE Model as an alternative reading and writing learning framework in higher education.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the RELEASE Model in enhancing students' critical literacy skills.
- To examine the impact of the RELEASE Model on students' ability to engage in reflective and analytical reading.
- To assess the role of the RELEASE Model in improving students' writing skills, particularly in constructing critical and coherent arguments.
- To explore the correlation between the RELEASE Model and the development of students' critical thinking abilities.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does the RELEASE Model function as an alternative approach to reading and writing instruction in higher education?
2. To what extent does the RELEASE Model enhance students' critical literacy skills?
3. How does the RELEASE Model influence students' ability to read reflectively and analytically?
4. What impact does the RELEASE Model have on students' writing proficiency, particularly in terms of critical expression and coherence?
5. How does the implementation of the RELEASE Model contribute to the development of students' critical thinking skills?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The teaching methods used from institution to institution often emphasize text comprehension or rote learning. Thus, there is no active learning in probing, evaluation and synthesis of the information (Freire, 1970). This illustrates how there is a need for new types of pedagogy that engage the students meaningfully and promote critical thinking.

As with everything else, this gap highlights the necessity of new approaches. In this context, a critical literacy based inquiry approach comes on the scene as a feasible remedy of the discrepancies detected in reading and writing instructions at the college level. This takes the approach beyond comprehension to meaning making where learners perform extensive analysis and appreciate the context. The inquiry approach facilitates learning in which the learner seeks to find or research crucial questions pertaining to the topics taught (Dewey, 1938). Thus, it offers a new approach to learning which seeks to motivate students to actively participate in the learning process and excel in critical analyses. In this scenario, the inquiry approach to teaching reading and writing for the purpose of developing critical literacy skills is likely to serve as a remedy to the problems faced in teaching these skills at the university or college level.

This method requires students to not only grasp the text, but also participate in meaning-making, performs analysis, and appreciate the context. The inquiry-based learning strategy encourages the learners to conduct investigations and address critical, significant questions pertaining to their field of study (Dewey, 1938). This simulative approach helps students to appreciate and conduct research and answer relevant critical questions, thus enhancing their competencies in critical thinking. One educational model that effectively combines the inquiry approach with critical literacy is The Release Model, which stands for Research, Inquiry, Literacy, Interpretation and Synthesis. This model aims to engage the learners in an active and ongoing process of learning, starting from basic research on a given topic, developing critical issues, conducting content analyses of texts, then finally synthesizing the information into a cohesive argument.

1. Research: The presenting phase, which in my opinion is the most interesting, is aimed at introducing some forms of basic content and declaring a structure of the expected argument. Each student must prepare

literature on the assigned complex and in class they present it as an argumentative speech. This speech integrates various arguments and examples from theoretical and empirical works that support the topic of discussion. Additionally, students are required to explain their stance on the matter and justify it. The objective of this stage is to prepare the learners with comprehensive knowledge that will aid them in the next steps.

**Inquiry:** In the inquiring phase, students are asked to come up with a wide range of essential questions stemming from the topic under study. This stage is important in developing the inquisitiveness and analytical skill of learners since they are required to go beyond the bare minimum obtained during the research stage. Students are expected to pose deeper questions that will enable them to deal with more intricate issues as well as cover a wider scope in relation to the topic.

**3. Literacy:** The 'literacy' component of the Release Model defines involving a text or literature in a certain level of detail and critique. Students are invited to comprehend, analyze, and synthesize the material in a stepwise way. At this point, learners are expected to start telling the difference between an opinion and a fact, and whether there are some premises and biases in the given text. The objective of the literacy phase is to enable students to develop the ability and skill to read critically and reflectively, which is an important aspect of thinking critically.

**4. Interpretation:** At this stage, learners try to look at various pieces of information simultaneously and within a wider context. In this stage, interpretation assists students to connect the concepts learned with their own experiences and real-life situations. This stage guides students to think about the problems from different perspectives which challenges their understanding of the topics further.

**5. Synthesis:** In the synthesis step, which comes last in the Release Model, learners try to construct a sound and logical argument based on the insights and information gathered from the prior stages. This step requires summary skills and a level of creativity sufficient to construct new ideas or concepts. Synthesis promotes logical reasoning among students and assists in the formation of coherent arguments which is later translated into a response to the question that calls for reasoning and critical thinking.

With the Release Model, it is possible for a shift in approach to teaching reading and writing in universities from the traditional 'receiving' model to one that is more hands on is a reality. Each of the phases in the model aim at improving a student's reading and writing capability alongside making them critically and reflectively self-dependent. With the integration of critical literacy in the inquiry-based approach, the opportunity for students to deepen and broaden their analysis of information is made possible

This study is focused on developing the Release Model with the intention of using it as a reading and writing instruction framework that improves advanced students' critical literacy skills. The purpose of this qualitative research was to assess the effectiveness of the Release Model in developing learners' critical thinking skills, as well as determining how it affected their ability to read and write in a critically reflective manner. The results from this research are expected to be significantly useful in formulating instructional approaches aimed at developing critical literacy in the context of higher education and improving the literacy teaching levels in Pakistan.

### **Release Model**

The Release Model can transform the approaches used to teach reading and writing at the university level by replacing passive learning with active learning engagement. This model aims to enhance student proficiency in reading and writing at each level, along with developing them into critical, reflective, and autonomous learners. When students are encouraged to think deeply and analyze information using an inquiry-based approach, integrating critical literacy helps in motivating them. The aim of this research is to design and execute the Release Model as an additional strategy for teaching higher education reading and writing that emphasizes the development of students' critical literacy.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In Schwardt's view (2007), research methodology refers to a carefully designed blueprint anticipating the manner in which a particular study will be undertaken. It includes the analysis of the methodologies as well as the techniques, principles, and assumptions of a particular method. In this case, the researcher used a qualitative approach that involved literature review and observations (Zaman et al., 2025). The relevant literature for this study was collected from diverse sources related to the development of critical literacy and inquiry-based learning model. The body of literature reviewed included books and journal articles as well as previously published studies on critical literacy and inquiry-based education. Also, the data collection was done through observations and interviews with some faculty and students from two public universities in Karachi, Pakistan that have implemented the Release Model of teaching reading and writing. This approach aims at understanding how effective the model is in a real-life practical learning context. The data collected were analyzed through description focusing features of interest to the Release Model implementation and the students' critical literacy skills. The researchers interpreted the observations and interviews along with the literature review and noted many similarities.

### **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

This study's findings stem from data gathered through participant observation, interviews, document review, and surveys. Each finding is evaluated in terms of the effectiveness of the Release Model in developing students' critical literacy skills and its effect on the standard of instructional practice in reading and writing at the tertiary level.

#### **Active Participation of Students in the Learning Process**

At first, when the Release Model was implemented, it was noticed that some learners were overwhelmingly passive with regards to posing questions and engaging in conversations. However, after some sessions of the so-called inquiry-based class, there is clear evidence of enhanced participation by the learners. They are now more likely to pose appropriate questions, formulate their own ideas, and actively participate in numerous group discussions. The same way, in the Inquiry phase, students are tasked to think of questions they would like to ask that are associated with the reading they are supposed to do. Students are able to ask many probing questions, for example, why are there so many assumptions made in the statement? What does the author think? or What is the point of the information being provided in the present context? This clearly indicates that the Inquiry stage of the Release Model is beneficial to learners in that it motivates them to want to learn and think critically.

In more informal interviews with some teachers, it became obvious that students, who previously didn't participate in class, started showing willingness to learn with the Release Model. One of the teachers commented that the Release Model has a step by step approach which makes learners more comfortable and ready to face challenges in education. The Release Model enables students to participate in the critical learning process, which implies that the Model forms a solid foundation for enhancing student literacy.

#### **Enhancing Students' Critical Literacy Abilities**

The analysis for the students' growth concerning critical literacy was accomplished through the assessment of the documents prepared by the students which included essays and reflection notes prepared during the implementation of the Release Model. The results of the document assessment analysis suggested that the Release Model contributed positively to the students' achievements in most areas of critical literacy such as information analysis within texts, evaluation, interpretation, and even synthesis.

**Examination:** In the Literacy stage, students were able to analyze the texts with greater depth such as identifying the main arguments, distinguishing between facts and opinions, and revealing biases that were disguised in the text. Prior to the application of the Release Model, many students could only skillfully describe the subject matter of a given text without any attempt practice critical thinking. With the application of the model several times, they gradually showed increased able to assess and analyze the arguments that claim presented in the given text.

**Assessment:** During the interpretation stage, the students' skill in assessing the information they came into contact with was improved. They started recognizing what portions of the text related to their experiences

or matters in society and were able to use it in social and academic contexts. A process that demonstrates true critical thinking such as pondering the consequences of the information consumed was practiced by many students. In conclusion, the results of the analysis of the documents indicate a noteworthy change in relation to the students' abilities to critically analyze written texts. The students enhanced their comprehension of the novel as well as the ability to synthesize information, which measures the effectiveness of the Release Model in nurturing critical literacy.

#### **Assessment of Student Contentment with the Release Model**

The analysis of the survey results performed after using the model indicated that the majority of students are content with the Release Model in regard to the reading and writing skills. Survey result explained that eighty percent of students believed that the Release Model is very helpful in developing their critical appreciation of the texts while, 15 percent considered it moderately beneficial. Five percent of college students thought less of the model as it was not helpful to them in developing critical questions and performing thorough analyses. In the follow-up interviews, students reported that the Release Model assists them in adopting a more organized learning strategy which enables them to develop advanced reading and writing skills in stages. Also, some students mentioned that they were able to approach some other academically oriented tasks that demanded a higher level of literacy with greater confidence.

At the same time, some students also noted difficulties related with the other aspects of the model. For example, some students view the Inquiry phase as requiring too much time as they need to formulate critical questions and debate them in groups. There is a need for greater practice in asking questions that can be deemed pertinent and worthwhile. Nevertheless, they understand that this improves their ability to think independently and critically.

#### **Challenges in Carrying Out the Release Model**

There are challenges that the Release Model has to face in its practice. One issue is the difficulty that students face in grasping the notion of critical literacy in the initial stages of its application. The patients' lecturers participating in the study remarked that there are steps of the model for the students which is particular, support teaching is needed especially in the Inquiry and Synthesis phases. These phases were further guided by the lecturers in framing of critical propositions and in constructing of a coherent argument. Another obstacle is the time required to accomplish each of the phases of the Release Model as it is much longer than that of traditional teaching methods. The students and teachers raised it with regard to the time allocation towards the implementation of the particular model, it should be more flexible depending on the number of classes in the semester. This would enable students to be able to meaningfully engage with each phase as they are allocated adequate time.

#### **Positive Impact on Other Academic Skills**

From my explorations of these topics, I have learned that skills developed using the Release Model are beneficial to students' academic performance beyond reading and writing courses. For instance, students reported feeling more competent in fulfilling other higher-order responsibilities like drafting research proposals, giving academic presentations, or participating in classroom discussions. This indicates that the critical literacy fostered within the Release Model has transferability and is of value to students when facing diverse academic challenges.

The findings from this research indicate that the Release Model has positively improved students' critical literacy in participation, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information. Also, this model has improved student attitude toward learning besides the scope of the model's limits, although there are some challenges to its implementation, particularly with regard to time use and perceptions of critical literacy. These results present new challenges in the development of teaching models aimed at fostering critical literacy in higher education, especially for reconsidering the model to be more useful and efficient.

#### **DISCUSSION**

The analysis conducted suggests that the Release Model, which is a constructivist approach to teaching reading and writing, poses a great possibility of fostering critical literacy in higher education. In this review, I will address the strategies of the Release Model aimed at fostering critical literacy, the strategies that



motivate students to participate, the problems experienced in executing the model, and how the literature addresses these problems.

Because the students require not only the ability to analyze a text in order to find its meaning, but also to evaluate the text through different lenses and contexts, a model for critical literacy education ought to be designed and implemented within higher education. This has been found useful because of its holistic nature. The Release Model captures the components of Research, Inquiry, Literacy, Interpretation, and Synthesis.

The analysis shows that with the Release Model, students' self-reported ability to analyze and synthesize information improved significantly. In the Inquiry and Literacy stage, learners want to ask relevant questions and evaluate the available information to find out its usefulness. This stage needs more cognitive engagement as the learners are required to think about and express the accompanying text and its context. These results correspond with prior studies that suggest the usefulness of inquiry pedagogies in developing critical thinking skills among learners, particularly concerning information evaluation and the construction of reasoned arguments (Arends 2012; Brookfield 2017).

For the Release Model to work, attendance is essential. The research suggests that the Inquiry stage is like a "driving motor" that stimulates more participation and engagement from the learners. Students are no longer passive recipients of information; provided they are given proper inquiry and discussion opportunities, they can fully partake in the learning experience. From a constructivism point of view, active engagement is one of the requirements for substantial learning.

Learners who are more engaged in their learning tasks tend to understand the material more deeply and remember it for a longer period of time (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, the Release Model, which motivates student's participation through active questioning, facilitates a setting where students can build their understanding based on their explorations. These observations correspond to studies that demonstrate that learning models which include inquiry activities enhance students' conceptual understanding and reasoning skills (Savery & Duffy, 2001).

Though the study was effective, he points out several difficulties concerning the implementation of the Release Model. One of the major hurdles faced is the problem students have with understanding what they are supposed to do under critical inquiry, especially during the initial phases of implementation. Most of the students find it challenging and frustrating to ask meaningful questions because they are still in the process of learning more sophisticated levels of critical thinking.

The changes in literacy refinement demonstrate the necessity for growth over time and purposeful instructor input. Instructors have a fundamental responsibility in the Release Model, particularly in the Inquiry and Synthesis steps that are called creative and critical portions of the model. Following Brookfield (2017), the view "critical" implies passive functional literacy; it is much more a system of particularly constituted other aspects of thinking and attitudes, which are clearly mental and development. This study in particular attempts to impose proactive forms of intervention, primarily formative coaching, to improve the model's usage among students.

Besides, time limitations is one other difficulty concerning the application of the Release Model. In particular, some learners feel that all phases require more time than is really available, which leads to anxiety regarding meeting the deadline. This evidence suggests that applying the Release Model should not only consider the phases of the model but also good time management in order for each stage to be handled properly.

#### **IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

These results are particularly crucial for educators and colleges focused on improving students' critical literacy skills. The Release Model offers a learning strategy that meets the various students' learning patterns and aids them in the processing of complex information. Thus, this study recommends that institutions of higher education implement the Release Model or its modifications as a pedagogical model designed to develop critical literacy.

For broader dissemination of its benefits, it is preferred that instructors be trained on this model, particularly on how to foster students' critical questioning abilities. Also, changes in curricula to allow more of the Inquiry Teaching approach ought to be considered so that this model can be adopted without other undue restrictions related to time.

In conclusion, this study has argued that the Release Model is likely to aid in developing students' critical literacy skills but this is one goal with a number of hurdles to jump through first. The importance of these outcomes is significant in the development of educational paradigms of higher learning which integrate and develop competencies for critical thinking and deep literacy that are crucial for graduates in the current world with an overload of information.

### CONCLUSION

According to the conducted research, implementing the Release Model (Critical Literacy-Based Inquiry) in educational programs pertaining to reading and writing at the tertiary level enhances students' critical literacy skills. This model includes five stages, namely Research, Inquiry, Literacy, Interpretation, and Synthesis, which empowers students to think, analyze, and integrate information critically.

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