

Mapping Key Aspects for A Critical Thinking-Integrated B1 Reading Curriculum in French Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

The role of critical thinking in foreign language curricula remains underdeveloped, particularly in B1-level reading instruction for French as a Foreign Language in non-Francophone higher education contexts. Although critical thinking is frequently stated as a curricular goal, it is rarely operationalized in instructional practices, while assessment continues to prioritize linguistic accuracy over reasoning quality. This study aims to map key aspects required for designing a CEFR-aligned B1 reading curriculum that explicitly integrates critical thinking for Indonesian university students. A descriptive research design was employed, primarily based on a student needs-analysis questionnaire, complemented by document analysis of CEFR/CECRL descriptors, relevant pedagogical literature, and brief instructor interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data supported interpretation through thematic analysis. The findings identify four interrelated curriculum aspects: alignment of B1 reading outcomes with critical-thinking skills, selection of authentic and culturally relevant texts, use of inquiry and reasoning-oriented learning strategies, and assessment practices that integrate comprehension and critical-thinking performance. This mapping provides a context-responsive foundation for B1 reading curriculum development in non-Francophone contexts.

Keywords: *B1 reading, CEFR/CECRL, critical thinking, curriculum design, French as a foreign language.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension at the CEFR B1 level represents a critical stage in proficiency-oriented language education. At this level, learners are required to move beyond the identification of explicit information toward interpreting perspectives, recognizing argumentative patterns, and constructing meaning through the relationships among ideas in a text (Council of Europe, 2020). In non-Francophone contexts such as Indonesia, the attainment of these competencies presents substantial challenges. University learners generally encounter limited exposure to authentic French input beyond formal instruction, rely predominantly on memorization-based learning strategies, and display uneven development of critical reading abilities (Andriani et al., 2022; Miqawati et al., 2023). These contextual constraints significantly influence the development of foreign language literacy and raise critical concerns regarding curriculum relevance and instructional practice.

Aligned with Taba's (1962) assertion that curriculum design should be grounded in a systematic diagnosis of learner needs, recent studies reveal pronounced

discrepancies between CEFR B1 reading requirements and the instructional realities faced in Indonesian higher education. Research across Southeast Asia points to inconsistent implementation of intermediate CEFR descriptors, particularly those related to inferential and evaluative reading skills in contexts characterized by limited language exposure (Yusupalieva, 2024). Such discrepancies are further exacerbated by entrenched pedagogical traditions that emphasize surface level comprehension rather than deeper analytical engagement with texts.

Concurrently, developments in foreign language pedagogy increasingly underscore the integration of critical thinking (CT) within curriculum planning. Conceptualized as the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information through reasoned judgment (Ennis, 2018; Irfan et al., 2025), CT supports both linguistic proficiency and academic literacy. Nevertheless, critical thinking frequently remains an implicit curricular ideal rather than an explicitly articulated instructional objective (Dhari et al., 2025; Saleh, 2019). This situation reflects the type of curricular misalignment described by Tyler (1949), wherein stated objectives fail to materialize in instructional practices or assessment systems capable of fostering higher-order reasoning.

The Indonesian higher education context amplifies these concerns. Students frequently struggle to distinguish facts from opinions, demonstrate limited habits of source verification, and encounter relatively few culturally relevant authentic texts (Ilyas & Istaryatiningtias, 2025; Renandya & Jacobs, 2016). At the same time, empirical studies on authentic-text modules, project-based tasks, and guided reasoning activities indicate promising potential for enhancing critical reading engagement among intermediate learners (Kuek & Eng, 2025; Tsang & Lam, 2024). Together, these findings represent the current state of the art, suggesting that contemporary B1 reading curricula should be CEFR-aligned, context-responsive, and explicitly oriented toward the development of critical thinking competencies.

Despite these advances, empirical research that systematically connects learner needs diagnosis with curriculum objectives, content selection, learning experiences, and assessment design for CEFR B1 reading in low-exposure contexts remains limited (Council of Europe, 2020; Butler, 2011; Yusupalieva, 2024). In Indonesian higher education, critical thinking is still predominantly articulated as a broad curricular aspiration rather than explicitly operationalized through instructional tasks and assessment practices (Saleh, 2019; Dhari et al., 2025). Consequently, context-responsive B1 reading curriculum models that coherently align CEFR competencies with critical thinking development through established frameworks such as those proposed by Taba (1962) and Tyler (1949) are largely absent.

Consistent with Taba's needs-based curriculum framework, the present study conducted a learner-centered diagnostic involving over 80 university students, complemented by interviews with instructors. Analysis of the data revealed convergent

patterns across cognitive reading skills, contextual relevance of learning materials, learning strategies, assessment expectations, and broader learner needs, pointing to a pressing need for a fundamental rethinking of B1 reading instruction. Accordingly, guided by Tyler's principle of curricular alignment and Taba's inductive model, this study seeks to map the key aspects required for a CEFR-aligned, critical thinking-integrated B1 reading curriculum in french language learning.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design primarily grounded in quantitative needs analysis survey data, with qualitative input used to support interpretation and triangulation. This approach is consistent with Taba's (1962) view that curriculum development should begin with a systematic diagnosis of learner needs, while also reflecting Tyler's (1949) emphasis on using empirical evidence to inform curricular decisions. By prioritizing quantitative patterns and complementing them with qualitative insights, the study aimed to generate a comprehensive and context-sensitive mapping of the competencies required for integrating critical thinking into B1-level reading instruction (Brown, 2021; Richards, 2017)

3.1. Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive, quantitatively driven research design. Quantitative data from a structured needs-analysis questionnaire constituted the primary analytical basis for identifying key aspects of B1 reading curriculum requirements. Qualitative data derived from open-ended questionnaire responses and instructor interviews were employed to contextualize, elaborate, and triangulate the quantitative findings. This design aligns with Taba's (1962) needs-based curriculum model, in which curriculum reconstruction begins with diagnosing learner needs and contextual realities.

3.2. Participants of the Study

A total of 101 students from French-language departments participated in the needs-analysis survey, with 84–86 valid responses recorded for each questionnaire component. All participants were enrolled in courses targeting CEFR B1-level reading competence. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with instructors responsible for teaching reading and related language skills to obtain complementary perspectives on curriculum implementation, instructional practices, and alignment challenges.

3.3. Instruments

Data were collected using two instruments. First, a structured needs-analysis questionnaire was developed based on CEFR B1 reading descriptors, critical-reading

constructs (Ennis, 2018), and curriculum-alignment principles. The questionnaire comprised five components measured on a four-point Likert scale. Several open-ended items were included to capture additional learner perspectives on reading challenges and instructional expectations. Second, semi-structured interview guidelines were used to explore instructors' views on reading instruction practices, the integration of critical thinking, material selection, and assessment alignment. These interviews were intended to complement student survey data and provide instructional-context insights.

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and minimum–maximum values, to identify patterns of learner needs across curriculum aspects. Statistical processing was conducted using SPSS to support systematic interpretation of the findings.

Qualitative data from open-ended responses and instructor interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) reflexive thematic analysis procedures. The analysis focused on elaborating and validating quantitative trends related to cognitive reading skills, contextual relevance, learning strategies, and assessment expectations. Triangulation across data sources enhanced the credibility of the findings, in line with Tyler's (1949) principle of aligning multiple forms of evidence in curriculum evaluation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the learner needs analysis indicate a consistent pattern across all aspects of B1 reading instruction. As summarized in Table 1, students reported high levels of need in all five aspects, with mean scores above 3.00 on a four-point Likert scale. This overall trend suggests that learners expect reading instruction to move beyond literal comprehension toward more analytical, interpretive, and evaluative engagement.

Table 1. Summary of Learner Needs

Aspect		Mean	Std. Dev
Cognitive Skills	Reading	3.33	0.55
Contextual Relevance of Texts		3.22	0.57
Learning Strategies		3.21	0.60
Assessment Expectations		3.26	0.52
Learner Expectations		3.24	0.56

Scale 1=not needed, 4 = highly needed

The highest mean score was observed in the aspect of cognitive reading skills (M=3.33), indicating a strong need for explicit support in inferential comprehension, argument identification, and the interpretation of relationships between ideas. These competencies correspond directly to CEFR B1 reading descriptors, which emphasize understanding viewpoints, tracking arguments, and recognizing textual coherence (Council of Europe, 2020). The findings therefore demonstrate a clear alignment between learners' perceived needs and CEFR-based expectations, while simultaneously revealing gaps in current instructional practice.

Contextual relevance of reading materials also received a high mean score (M=3.22), reflecting learners' preference for authentic, contemporary, and culturally meaningful texts. Given the limited exposure to French outside the classroom in Indonesian higher-education contexts, this result highlights the importance of selecting texts that support not only linguistic comprehension but also sociocultural interpretation. Such findings reinforce the view that reading development is strengthened when texts are embedded in authentic discourse contexts.

In terms of learning strategies, students expressed strong expectations for inquiry-oriented and reasoning-based activities (M = 3.21). This suggests readiness for pedagogical approaches that involve discussion, guided interpretation, and collaborative meaning-making. Rather than favoring simplified instruction, learners appear prepared to engage in cognitively demanding tasks that require justification, evaluation, and reflection.

Assessment expectations similarly point toward the need for curricular reform. The high mean score for this aspect (M = 3.26) indicates a preference for assessment formats that evaluate reasoning processes, such as argument analysis and interpretive responses, rather than tasks focused solely on factual recall. This finding underscores the importance of aligning assessment practices with instructional objectives and CEFR-oriented learning outcomes.

Finally, learner expectations regarding overall curriculum alignment and task difficulty were also high (M = 3.24), suggesting strong awareness of CEFR standards and a desire for more challenging reading instruction. Taken together, these results address the study's objective of identifying key aspects required for a CEFR-aligned, critical-thinking-integrated B1 reading curriculum. The consistent patterns across all aspects provide an empirical basis for proposing a context-responsive curriculum framework grounded in learner needs and contemporary curriculum theory.

While the results demonstrate clear patterns in learners' perceived needs across key aspects of B1 reading instruction, these findings require further interpretation to understand their curricular significance. The following discussion situates the empirical results within CEFR-based reading theory, critical-thinking pedagogy, and curriculum

development frameworks, to explain why these needs emerge and how they inform the design of a context-responsive B1 reading curriculum.

The findings of this study highlight a persistent perceived misalignment between CEFR-based reading expectations and instructional practices in Indonesian higher education. Although CEFR B1 descriptors emphasize inferential comprehension, viewpoint recognition, and coherence interpretation (Council of Europe, 2020), the consistently high learner needs reported in this study suggest that such competencies are not yet systematically developed through existing curricula. Within a needs-analysis framework, learners' self-reported perceptions constitute a valid basis for curriculum diagnosis, as they reflect experiential engagement with instructional practices and curricular demands (Brown, 2016; Richards, 2017). These findings corroborate previous research indicating that intermediate-level reading instruction in low-exposure contexts remains largely dominated by literal comprehension practices (Yusupalieva, 2024; Miqawati et al., 2023)

From a curriculum development perspective, the results support Taba's (1962) assertion that effective curriculum design must begin with a diagnosis of learner needs rather than the uncritical adoption of external standards. The strong demand for cognitive and inferential skill development indicates that current B1 reading syllabi have not sufficiently translated CEFR objectives into concrete learning experiences. In Tyler's (1949) terms, this reflects a breakdown in alignment between stated objectives, instructional activities, and assessment practices.

The importance attributed to contextual relevance further underscores the role of sociocultural factors in foreign-language reading development. Learners' preference for authentic, contemporary, and culturally meaningful texts points to the need to bridge the gap between classroom materials and real-world discourse, particularly in environments with limited access to the target language. This finding aligns with Macalister's and Nation's (2019) view that curriculum content should be systematically informed by learners' environmental conditions, institutional constraints, and future language-use needs.

Learners' expectations regarding learning strategies and assessment provide additional insight into pedagogical readiness. The preference for inquiry-oriented activities and reasoning-based assessment formats suggests that students are prepared for more cognitively demanding forms of instruction, even if such approaches are not yet consistently implemented. This challenges deficit-oriented assumptions about learners in non-Francophone contexts and reinforces the pedagogical value of explicitly integrating critical-thinking instruction into B1 reading courses (Ennis, 2018; Al-Nofaie, 2013).

Taken together, these findings indicate that the central issue is not a lack of learner capacity, but rather a curricular structure that insufficiently supports the

development of higher-order reading skills. Recent scholarship conceptualizes curriculum as a dynamic, adaptive, and context-responsive system that must continuously negotiate learner needs, institutional conditions, and evolving societal demands (Biesta, 2020; Priestley et al., 2021). Within this perspective, effective curriculum frameworks are expected to align intended learning outcomes, instructional practices, and assessment formats in ways that are sensitive to learners' environments and future language-use needs (Macalister & Nation, 2019; Priestley & Philippou, 2024). Such a flexible and responsive approach provides a principled basis for redesigning CEFR-aligned B1 reading curricula that not only address linguistic competence but also foster critical engagement and interpretive competence in non-Francophone higher-education contexts.

4. CONCLUSION

This study mapped key aspects required for the development of a CEFR-aligned B1 reading curriculum that explicitly integrates critical-thinking competencies within the context of Indonesian higher education. Drawing on a quantitatively driven needs analysis supported by qualitative insights, the findings demonstrate that effective curriculum design in low-exposure environments must be grounded in a systematic diagnosis of learner needs and contextual realities, in line with Taba's (1962) inductive curriculum framework. Learners reported consistently high needs across core dimensions, including inferential and analytical reading skills, the use of authentic and socioculturally relevant texts, inquiry-oriented learning strategies, and assessment practices that evaluate reasoning processes rather than factual recall.

The findings further reveal a perceived misalignment between CEFR-based learning objectives and existing instructional and assessment practices, reinforcing Tyler's (1949) principle that curriculum effectiveness depends on coherence among objectives, learning experiences, and evaluation procedures. In response to this gap, the study proposes a context-responsive curriculum framework that aligns CEFR B1 reading competencies with critical-thinking development through needs-based design and curricular alignment principles. While the study does not evaluate instructional outcomes, the proposed framework provides a principled foundation for course-level and institutional curriculum redesign aimed at strengthening critical reading engagement in non-Francophone higher-education contexts.

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