

Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction: Theory, Method and Its Application in Text and Discourse Studies

Muhammad Saikhudin ^{1*}, Eva Dewi ²
^{1,2*} UIN Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau
*evadewi@uin-suska.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory as a critical approach to understanding text, language, and reality. Deconstruction emerged as a response to the Western philosophical tradition that emphasizes certainty, unity, and absolute truth a tendency that Derrida referred to as logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence. This study aims to describe the theoretical background of deconstruction, explain its concepts and principles, elaborate on the deconstructive reading method, and illustrate its application in text and discourse studies. This study employs a library research approach with a descriptive-analytical method. The findings indicate that deconstruction is grounded in a critique of logocentrism, binary opposition, and the metaphysics of presence in Western philosophy. Its core principles include the instability of meaning, rejection of binary hierarchies, and the concept of différance as both deferral and difference of meaning. The deconstructive reading method involves identifying binary oppositions, reversing hierarchies, exposing internal contradictions, tracing the trace of meaning, and opening new possibilities of interpretation. In text and discourse studies, deconstruction is used to uncover hidden meanings, power relations embedded in language, and to foster critical thinking in educational contexts. Deconstruction, therefore, functions not only as a method of textual analysis but also as a mode of critical thinking relevant to the development of contemporary knowledge.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of contemporary philosophical inquiry reflects a significant paradigm shift in the understanding of text, language, and reality. One of the most influential approaches driving this transformation is deconstruction theory, developed by Jacques Derrida. Deconstruction serves not only as a critique of the Western philosophical tradition, but also as an important method for critically reading texts across various academic disciplines. In the evolution of modern thought, there has been a growing recognition that meaning can no longer be understood as something fixed and stable. Derrida criticized the metaphysics of presence, which assumes that meaning is always fully present in language. He demonstrated that meaning is perpetually deferred and dependent upon relations between signs (Derrida, 1976: 44–45). In contemporary scholarship, this insight remains highly relevant, as language is now understood as a dynamic and never-final system. Deconstruction emerged as a response to structuralism pioneered by Ferdinand de Saussure. Where structuralism emphasized the ordered system of signs, post-structuralism highlighted its inherent instability. In recent developments, this approach has been increasingly applied to the study of literary texts, culture, and media particularly in examining how meaning is produced and negotiated (Culler, 2023: 65–70).

In academic practice, there remains a persistent tendency to interpret texts in a singular and objective manner. Yet texts carry complex layers of meaning. Deconstruction offers a critical approach by dismantling binary oppositions and exposing internal contradictions within texts. This approach has been widely employed in recent research to reveal hidden ideologies and power relations within discourse (LSF Discourse, 2026). In the context of Epistemology and Integration of

Knowledge, deconstruction plays an important role in cultivating critical and reflective thinking. It enables the integration of diverse scholarly perspectives by questioning foundational assumptions that have long been taken as absolute. Against this backdrop, this article addresses four key questions: (1) the theoretical background of deconstruction, (2) the definition and principles of deconstruction theory, (3) the deconstructive reading method, and (4) the application of deconstruction in text and discourse studies. Numerous review articles on Derrida's deconstruction have been published in Indonesian academic discourse, primarily focusing on philosophical exposition or application within a single domain such as literary criticism. The present article distinguishes itself in three respects. First, it provides an integrated review that synthesizes both the theoretical foundations and the methodological procedures of deconstruction within a single framework. Second, it explicitly articulates the five-step deconstructive reading method as an operational guide applicable across multiple text types. Third, it connects deconstruction to the Islamic higher education context of Epistemology and Integration of Knowledge, a dimension that remains underexplored in existing Indonesian literature on the subject. By doing so, this article aims to serve not only as a theoretical reference but also as a practical methodological resource for researchers in humanities, education, and discourse studies.

2. METHODS

This study employs a library research approach using a descriptive-analytical method. Data were gathered through a systematic review of literature from multiple sources, including textbooks, academic journal articles, and relevant online sources related to Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory. Primary sources include Derrida's own works, particularly *Of Grammatology* (1976), as well as works by other leading theorists such as Culler (2021, 2023), Tyson (2023), Norris (2022), and Glendinning (2020). Secondary sources comprising journal articles in philosophy, literary studies, and discourse analysis were also consulted to strengthen the scholarly foundation of this study. Data collection was conducted through a structured library search process. Literature searches were performed using the following academic databases: Google Scholar, JSTOR, ProQuest, and Garuda (for Indonesian-language sources). Search terms employed included "deconstruction," "Derrida," "logocentrism," "différance," "binary opposition," and "discourse analysis." Sources were limited to publications from 2000 to 2026, with the exception of primary works by Derrida (*Of Grammatology*, 1976) and classical secondary sources whose historical relevance necessitated inclusion. Articles were screened based on relevance to the four research questions, theoretical depth, and credibility of publication venue. A total of 28 sources were identified, of which 21 were selected for final inclusion after relevance screening. Analysis was carried out in a descriptive-critical manner by describing the key concepts of deconstruction, analyzing its principles, and elaborating on its application in text and discourse studies. The analytical technique employed is content analysis of the relevant literature, followed by theoretical synthesis to produce a comprehensive understanding of Derrida's deconstruction theory. The research process proceeded through three stages: (1) data reduction, in which the collected sources were read, coded, and filtered according to thematic relevance to each research question; (2) data display, in which the extracted theoretical ideas were organized into thematic clusters corresponding to the four sections of the findings; and (3) theoretical synthesis, in which the clusters were integrated into a coherent interpretive framework. Table 1 below presents the primary and secondary references used in this study, along with their thematic contribution to the analysis.

Table 1. Primary and Secondary References Used in This Study

No.	Author / Source	Year	Type	Thematic Focus
1	Derrida, Jacques	1976	Book (Primary)	Logocentrism, différence, sign

2	Culler, Jonathan	2021; 2023	Book (Secondary)	Deconstruction principles, reading strategy
3	Tyson, Lois	2023	Book (Secondary)	Instability of meaning, critical theory
4	Norris, Christopher	2022	Book (Secondary)	Logocentrism critique, binary oppositions
5	Glendinning, Simon	2020	Book (Secondary)	Différance, trace of meaning
6	Azzahra, A.R. et al.	2025	Journal Article	Deconstruction in contemporary text analysis
7	Altiria, S.	2023	Journal Article	Binary opposition in Derrida
8	Syafri, M. et al.	2025	Journal Article	Deconstructive reading in literary analysis
9	Rusmulyadi, R. & Hafiar, H.	2018	Journal Article	Deconstruction of meaning in media discourse
10	Wibowo, I.S.W.	2023	Book (Secondary)	Opening new interpretive possibilities

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theoretical Background of Deconstruction

Deconstruction is a mode of thought developed by Jacques Derrida as a critique of the metaphysics of presence within the Western philosophical tradition. Derrida was born in Algeria on July 15, 1930, and moved to France in 1949. He taught at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris and is regarded as one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century. He passed away on October 9, 2004, following an illness with cancer (Hardiman, 2015: 34–35). Derrida rejected the notion that meaning is stable and can be conveyed directly through language. In his seminal work *Of Grammatology*, he demonstrated that meaning is perpetually deferred and dependent upon the relations between signs, while also critiquing Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralism for its rigid separation of signifier and signified (Derrida, 1976). One of the primary theoretical motivations behind deconstruction is Derrida's critique of logocentrism the tendency within Western philosophy to assume that there exists a fixed center of meaning or truth that undergirds all things. Derrida argued that no such stable center of meaning truly exists; what is considered 'truth' is in fact a construction produced by particular linguistic and cultural systems (LSF Discourse, 2026). Beyond logocentrism, deconstruction also emerged as a critique of the metaphysics of presence: the belief that genuine meaning is that which is 'present' directly in mind or language. Derrida contended that meaning is never fully present, as every meaning always contains an element of absence dependent upon other signs in language. Deconstruction was also shaped by several earlier currents of thought. Phenomenology contributed to it through its emphasis on the importance of subjective experience in understanding reality, while the philosophy of Martin Heidegger particularly his critique of Western metaphysics and the concept of being provided Derrida with grounds for questioning the fundamental assumptions of philosophy. Additionally, Derrida's critique of binary opposition in Saussure's linguistic theory became an important foundation for the development of deconstruction as a method.

Definition and Principles of Deconstruction Theory

Deconstruction is a reading approach that aims to dismantle the structures of meaning within texts and to reveal their inherent instability. According to Culler (2021: 85–95), deconstruction is a reading strategy that highlights internal contradictions within a text, thereby demonstrating that meaning is never singular but always open to multiple interpretations. Tyson (2023: 257–262) affirms that deconstruction proceeds from the assumption that language is fundamentally unstable: the relationship between signifier and signified is never truly fixed, so meaning perpetually shifts with context. Azzahra et al. (2025: 102–105) further explain that deconstruction is an approach that rejects claims to absolute truth within texts and places greater emphasis on the plurality of meaning produced through the interaction between text and reader. There are several core principles in

deconstruction theory. First, the instability of meaning: meaning is never stable and always harbors diverse interpretive possibilities. Tyson (2023: 257–262) affirms that meaning does not reside in a text in any fixed way, but is formed through the interrelation of signs within the language system. Second, the rejection of binary oppositions: deconstruction refuses the division of concepts into two hierarchically opposed poles. Culler (2021) explains that binary oppositions are often hierarchical in nature, and deconstruction aims to dismantle such hierarchies while showing that both sides are mutually dependent. Third, the concept of *différance*: this is the core of Derrida's thought, combining the meanings of 'difference' and 'deferral.' According to Glendinning (2020: 112–120), *différance* reveals that meaning always emerges through the difference between signs and is never fully present; it is always in process and never final. Fourth, the critique of logocentrism: Norris (2022: 60–70) explains that logocentrism is a foundational assumption of Western philosophy that supposes meaning can be determined with certainty within texts, and deconstruction dismantles this dominance of singular meaning. Fifth, deconstructive reading: Culler (2021) explains that deconstructive reading focuses on contradictions, ambiguities, and hidden meanings within texts in order to expose the instability of meaning and open up multiple interpretive possibilities (Syafri et al., 2025: 617–620).

The Deconstructive Reading Method

The deconstructive method proceeds by identifying binary oppositions within the text, inverting their hierarchy, and exposing internal contradictions. This approach demonstrates that a text never possesses a singular meaning and is always open to new interpretations. There are five principal steps in this method. The first step is identifying binary oppositions in the text. According to Norris (2022: 60–70), binary oppositions in texts are rarely neutral; they carry a hierarchy that positions one concept above the other. By identifying oppositions such as good/evil, rational/emotional, or center/margin, the reader can uncover the hierarchical structures that shape meaning within the text. Binary oppositions are frequently employed to sustain the dominance of particular meanings, making this initial step crucial (Altiria, 2023: 271–272). The second step is inverting the hierarchy of meaning. Having identified a binary opposition, the next step is to reverse its hierarchy so that the concept previously considered inferior is shown to be important or even dominant. Culler (2021) states that this reversal is intended to demonstrate that the hierarchy within the text is not natural but constructed. Inverting the hierarchy also proves that meanings considered 'marginal' actually play a significant role in constituting the text as a whole (Azzahra et al., 2025: 105–108). The third step is exposing internal contradictions within the text. According to Glendinning (2020: 112–120), deconstruction seeks to show that a text always contains tension between what it intends to convey and what it actually reveals. Internal contradictions are taken as evidence that meaning within a text is unstable and perpetually open to new interpretations, making contradiction a key to unlocking hidden meaning. The fourth step is tracing the trace of meaning. The deconstructive method also involves tracing the trace, or residual trace of meaning, within the text referring to other meanings that are not directly visible yet influence interpretation. Derrida affirmed that every sign always carries the trace of another sign, so meaning can never stand alone. Tracing the trace helps reveal hidden connections between meanings in the text (Rusmulyadi and Hafiar, 2018: 120). The fifth step is opening new interpretive possibilities. Once the structure of a text has been dismantled, the reader does not stop at a single meaning but explores the various meanings that may emerge. Tyson (2023) states that the primary goal of deconstruction is to demonstrate that a text is always open to different readings, and this method encourages the reader to think critically rather than accept meaning passively (Wibowo, 2023: 203–204).

Applications of Deconstruction in Text and Discourse Studies

The deconstructive approach has made significant contributions to the study of text, literature, culture, and discourse. In the context of text and discourse studies, deconstruction works

to dismantle apparently stable structures of meaning and to demonstrate that every text is always laden with ambiguity, contradiction, and boundless interpretive possibility. In literary studies, deconstruction is employed to analyze literary works by exposing internal tensions within the text. It rejects singular and authoritative readings, opening space for alternative interpretations. For instance, in a novel or poem, deconstruction highlights how binary oppositions such as good/evil, center/margin, or male/female are never fully stable but are mutually dependent and subject to reversal. A narrative that appears to endorse certain values may, through deconstructive reading, reveal the weaknesses or contradictions inherent in those values. In discourse analysis, deconstruction is used to identify how language is employed to construct and sustain relations of power. For example, in media discourse, particular terms may be used to frame an event in a specific way, thereby shaping public understanding. Deconstruction helps reveal how word choices, metaphors, and narrative structures can reflect particular ideologies. It also foregrounds the voices that are marginalized in discourse those often ignored or suppressed by dominant perspectives. Through deconstruction, researchers can identify these absences and examine their implications (Rusmulyadi and Hafiar, 2018: 120). One of deconstruction's most important contributions is its capacity to expose power relations concealed within language. Language is never neutral; it always carries particular values, ideologies, and interests. Deconstruction demonstrates that binary oppositions in language are frequently hierarchical as in the rational/emotional opposition, where 'rational' is associated with positive value while 'emotional' is regarded as negative. By dismantling this hierarchy, deconstruction opens up the possibility of understanding how language can function both as an instrument of domination and as a vehicle of resistance.

In educational contexts, deconstruction plays an important role in developing learners' critical thinking capacities. It encourages students not to receive texts passively, but to actively question the meanings, assumptions, and ideologies embedded within them. The application of deconstruction in education can take various forms, including the analysis of literary texts, critical discussion of media, or the examination of discourse in everyday life. Deconstruction also helps students understand that knowledge is not fixed or absolute but is always open to contestation and reinterpretation. To illustrate how the five deconstructive steps operate concretely, consider a media news headline such as "*Terrorists Attack Again: The Threat of Radicalism Cannot Be Stopped.*" Step 1 (identifying binary oppositions) reveals the pair civilization/barbarism, where the state and mainstream society occupy the "civilized" pole while the labeled group is positioned as "*barbaric.*" Step 2 (inverting the hierarchy) prompts the question: who defines "*terrorism,*" and whose acts of violence are excluded from that label? Step 3 (exposing internal contradictions) shows that the word "*again*" implies an inevitable cycle, yet the text presents no structural explanation for why such events recur, thereby undermining its own claim to provide understanding. Step 4 (tracing the trace) reveals that terms like "*radicalism*" carry residual traces of earlier political discourses colonial, Cold War, post-9/11 that silently shape how readers interpret the event. Step 5 (opening new interpretive possibilities) invites readers to consider alternative framings: structural inequality, political grievance, or media sensationalism as co-constitutive factors. Through this brief illustration, it becomes clear that deconstructive reading does not merely destabilize meaning for its own sake, but actively reveals the ideological work performed by seemingly neutral language in public discourse. Despite its many strengths, the deconstructive approach is not without criticism. A principal objection is that deconstruction tends toward relativism, treating all interpretations as equally valid, which can create difficulty in establishing a basis for analysis. Furthermore, deconstruction is often considered too abstract for practical application, particularly in basic educational settings. Nevertheless, with appropriate pedagogical framing, the core concepts of deconstruction can be simplified and adapted to suit different learning needs.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing analysis, it can be concluded that Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory constitutes a comprehensive critical approach to understanding text, language, and reality. Deconstruction arose as a profound critique of the Western philosophical tradition's emphasis on certainty, unity, and absolute truth through logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence. Derrida's thought demonstrates that meaning is always dynamic, deferred (*différance*), and dependent upon the interrelations of signs in language. No text ever possesses a final meaning; rather, it remains open to multiple interpretive possibilities. The deconstructive reading method proceeds through systematic steps: identifying binary oppositions, reversing hierarchies, uncovering internal contradictions, tracing the trace of meaning, and opening space for new interpretations. The application of deconstruction in text and discourse studies offers important contributions to uncovering ideology, power relations, and hidden meanings in language. In educational contexts, deconstruction can foster the development of critical, reflective, and open-minded thinking across diverse perspectives. Deconstruction, therefore, functions not only as a method of textual analysis but also as a mode of critical thinking that is relevant to the advancement of contemporary knowledge particularly in integrating multiple scholarly perspectives in a dialogical and open manner. Future research is recommended to apply the deconstructive reading method to specific contemporary discourses that remain critically underexplored, particularly digital political discourse, artificial intelligence narratives in public media, and religious-educational texts in the Indonesian Islamic higher education context. These domains present urgent sites for deconstructive inquiry, as their language is replete with binary structures, ideological assumptions, and power-laden representations that have yet to be systematically examined through a Derridean lens.

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