

Critical Literacy in Indonesian EFL Reading Materials

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Abstract: In respond to 21st century demands, the society needs to acquire certain core skills and competences. In line with the demands, many countries including Indonesia possess more focus on implementing approaches and teaching and learning framework to promote critical thinking and literacy. Critical literacy approach suggests that reading should not only focus on language but also on developing students' critical literacy. Critical literacy encourages students to question, analyze what they read, listen and accept and to reveal various point of views. This paper discusses how critical literacy is integrated in Indonesian EFL reading material, its challenges and opportunities. Based on the literature study, beside its positive impacts of the integration of critical literacy on reading materials, critical literacy in reading has not been implemented immensely yet due to certain reasons.

Keywords: *critical literacy, ELT, reading materials*

Abstrak: Menanggapi tuntutan abad ke-21, masyarakat dirasa perlu memiliki beberapa keterampilan dan kompetensi inti tertentu. Sejalan dengan tuntutan tersebut, banyak negara termasuk Indonesia lebih memfokuskan pada penerapan pendekatan dan kerangka belajar-mengajar untuk mempromosikan pola berpikir kritis dan literasi. Pendekatan literasi kritis menyarankan agar membaca tidak hanya fokus pada bahasa tetapi juga pada pengembangan literasi kritis siswa. Literasi kritis mendorong siswa untuk bertanya, menganalisis apa yang mereka baca, dengar dan terima, dan untuk mengungkapkan berbagai sudut pandang. Studi ini membahas bagaimana literasi kritis terintegrasi dalam bahan bacaan EFL (Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing) di Indonesia, tantangan serta peluangnya. Berdasarkan studi literatur, terlepas dari sisi positif dari integrasi literasi kritis pada bahan bacaan, ditemukan bahwa literasi kritis dalam membaca belum dapat di implementasikan secara masif karena beberapa alasan.

Kata-kata kunci: *literasi kritis, pembelajaran bahasa inggris, materi baca*

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In this 21st century era, certain core skills and knowledge are required for better and well-prepared generation which is going to face demanding life. According to Trilling and Fadel, (2009), 21st certain skills are creativity, innovation, critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, information, media and ICT Literacy, life and career skills, flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural skill, productivity and accountability, and leadership and responsibility. Therefore, high scores or many achievements are not solely determining point to someone's success in today's life.

With regard to the importance of certain capabilities and skills, such as critical thinking, leadership, communication and problem solving, it is required to implement teaching and learning methods to promote these skills. As it is in line with Care and Luo, 2016 cited in Lamb, Maire & Doecke, 2017 p.9) that many countries, schools, education policymakers are now posing more deliberate focus on developing teaching and learning framework to promote critical thinking, leadership and other important skills which are predicted to be essential for future living and workforce.

Indonesia has tried to accelerate the implementation of 21st-century teaching and learning and the demands and challenges of 21st teaching and learning by adjusting the curriculum and programs in that to survive in fast-changing and widely globalized life. Concerning that, Indonesian Ministry of Education made some curriculum adjustments that consider certain points such as what students should learn, how is the content and learning sequences given to the students, and how will the lesson started (Hartoyo, 2011). The implementation and revision of Curriculum 13 (K13) is aimed at meeting the demands and goals of the 21st century learning. As supported by Hidayat (2013, p. 122), the implementation of K-13 is expected to reform the educational paradigm to encounter 21st century.

K-13 has been implemented since 2013 and has some revision in 2016 to 2018. The 2017 revision prescribed the teaching and learning process standard should develop students Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) and literacy (Mulyasa, 2018). These two skills are integrated into what is called as critical literacy. Papadopoulos and Griva (2017) state that in response to the continually growing demands of 21st era, the

society needs active members who are able to think critically and to be literate in what they read, see, touch, smell or come across. Thus, critical literacy should be promoted in teaching and learning process. Furthermore, Hikmat (2017) stated that critical literacy approach has become an essential issue which integrated and promoted by high order thinking skill and has replaced the skills-centered model of learning to read and write, and becomes increasingly important nowadays as students need to interact with more media of information and filter all the information so that they can select which information is useful for them and which one is not.

UNESCO (2004) emphasizes the importance of teaching critical literacy in this fast-growing information era which often presents text with symbolic violence in order to avoid the oppression and preserve the diversity of civic life (Street, 1995; Wagner 1999). Regarding this notion, Freire (1973) says that illiteracy is not a neutral condition. Thus, he suggests that educational institution should focus on teaching literacy to awake students from the domination of the social and economic oppressive structures. Although it is broadly noticed that critical literacy has been on the spot of light for years ago in Western Education, particularly through L1 classroom. In EFL context, Ko and Wang (2009) noted that the theory of critical literacy and its implication in EFL classroom is limited. However, critical literacy has been gradually explored by literacy practitioners in these recent years.

Critical literacy is "learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one's experience as historically constructed within specific power relations" (Anderson and Irvine, 1993, p. 82). Another definition is given by Luke and Dooley (2011), describing critical literacy as the use of texts to analyse and transform relations of cultural, social and political power ... to address social, economic and cultural injustice and inequality... it views texts print and multimodal, paper-based and digital - and their codes and discourses as human technologies for representing and reshaping possible worlds. Texts are not taken as part of a canonical curriculum tradition or received wisdom that is beyond criticism (Luke & Dooley, 2011)

The position of the students in critical literacy are the user of the language who digest the text and the information and

question the message behind the text, as stated by McLaughlin & De Voogd, (2004), critical literacy is different from traditional reading in which the author who has the power. In critical literacy the readers have the power to analyze and be critical toward the hidden meaning and message. However, students who learn the language not only need critical literacy but also basic literacy to be able to take a position clarifying the issues and point of views conveyed in a text.

A study conducted by Gustine (2013) shows that the focus on designing and implementing a critical literacy-based approach is in an Indonesian EFL secondary school level. However, it could be implemented for all levels regarding to the importance of teaching critical literacy. The development of students' critical literacy helps students realize the social and ideological dimension of the language (Hatzisavvidis et al., 2010). In a critical literacy teaching context, the focal point is to make students realize the way people value the linguistic and text choices through the language texts and the visual reproductions, as well as to help them construct their own perceptions of the reality (Hatzisavvidis, 2010).

Modern EFL practices should not be limited in enhancing students' four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking), but aim at developing a variety of critical awareness skills and reasoning abilities, such as examining authors' intentions and viewpoints, questioning, juxtaposing, reconstructing and exploring multiple perspectives. All these skills could be enhanced within multimodal learning environment and a task based context, by engaging students in problem solving activities such as debates, role-plays, simulations, raising critical questions, rewriting texts from another perspective

Critical literacy in EFL reading encourages students need to evaluate what is said and how it is said in the foreign language (FL) in order to 'uncover' ideas, to disagree, and reconstruct textual representations in a FL (see also Gainer, 2010). Also, students need to be trained to direct and reflect on their own learning process, collaborate with others, and develop ways of handling/managing complex issues that require different kinds of expertise and critical stance (Murnane & Levy, 1996).

Considering what the literature documented concerning critical literacy in EFL reading, this study will focus on the challenges and opportunities in promoting

critical literacy in Indonesian EFL reading materials.

Critical Literacy Theories

The term critical literacy firstly appeared in the 1970s and thus the trend that the term designates is a quite new development (Stevens & Bean, 2007). It became popular at the institutional level during the mid-1990s when its concepts were discussed and then applied in the classrooms in English-speaking countries. Critical literacy refers to alternative language instruction that stimulates students to explore hidden textual messages, question the status quo, and undertake action for a more equitable society (Dozier et al., 2006).

The definition of critical literacy varies based on many researchers and practitioners. According to Freire (1970), Critical literacy encourages readers to question, explore, or challenge the power relationships that exist between authors and readers. Critical literacy helps examine issues of power and promote reflection, transformative change, and action. Furthermore, Critical literacy focuses on the connection between literacy and power (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993a). It does not subscribe to the notion of reading and writing skills as autonomous, technical, neutral, and universal (Searle, 1993), but rather regards literacy as "the process of becoming conscious of one's experience as historically constructed within specific power relations" (Anderson & Irvine, 1993, p. 82).

Critical literacy encourages students to challenge what Bourke (2008) terms as the "rule of text: the perception that a text is authoritative and final, and an underlying belief that suppresses the reader's license to challenge, question, deconstruct or rewrite the assumptions, beliefs, ideologies, concepts embedded, implicitly or not, within the perspective of the text" (p. 309). Critical literacy educators provide students with the opportunity to question, resist, and reconstruct textual representations that do not correspond to their own identities (Gainer, 2010; Vasquez, Muise, et.al, 2003).

Critical literacy involves the exploration of multiple perspectives. This consideration of varied perspectives on a topic has been applied in the classroom using different approaches such as reading different versions of the same topic (Ciardiello, 2004), reading a story that reveals varying points of view (Clarke & Whitney, 2009), discussing the perspectives of people with different cultural backgrounds (Iyer, 2007), or identifying the dominant and

silenced voices in a text (McDaniel, 2004). Listening to different perspectives does not necessarily mean changing or denying one's stance on an issue (Alford, 2001) but rather leads to an awareness that "truth" is really a partial and limited perspective (Robinson, 2011), and that no single version of an event tells the entire story (Ciardiello, 2004). By engaging students in activities such as debates, rewriting texts from another perspective (Haydey, Kostiuk, & Phillips, 2007), role-plays, think-aloud, juxtaposing texts of varying viewpoints on the same topic, or raising critical questions, teachers guide learners to view an issue through different lenses, be more sympathetic to others in different situations, and enrich their reasoning abilities (Morgan & York, 2009).

Indonesian Students' Critical Literacy

In a global context, literacy has become one of the measurement subjects on human resources by various international surveys. A study conducted by Central Connecticut State University (2016) found that Indonesia is the second-least literate nation in the world in a list of 61 measurable countries, besting only Botswana. A report of OECD program (2016) for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) stated that less than 1% of adults in Jakarta, Indonesia attain the highest levels of proficiency (Level 4 or 5) in literacy, at this level, adults can integrate, interpret and synthesize information from complex or lengthy texts that contain conditional and/or competing information. And the latest result of the 2016 PISA showed that Indonesia is ranked 64th out of 72 countries surveyed (PISA, 2016). All these studies showed Indonesian poor position in literacy level and English Proficiency Index.

In 2015, World Economic Forum (WEF) released a report on the skills that must be mastered to face the 21st century, including literacy, competence and character. This report encourages literacy to become a national issue in Indonesia. The government of Indonesia through the ministry of education and culture (MOEC) started to change the literacy focus. The literacy is not about the ability to read (or spelling), write and to count anymore but it's about ability to comprehend the content of the reading materials, to write a logical argument, and ability to solve problem. This goal is in line with the definition of literacy on international surveys such as PISA and PIAAC.

Critical literacy in Indonesian EFL Reading Materials; Challenges and Opportunities

Indonesian government places critical thinking as one of the most important skills to be taught and learned at schools, and universities, as evidenced in the 2013 school curriculum and in the issue of 2010 Decree No. 17 about Indonesian education system and its implementation. However, the implementation of critical thinking inside the classrooms in Indonesia is lacking. Part of the problem in the teaching of critical thinking in Indonesia is the lack of clarity of instruction in the curriculum about what critical thinking is, and the unfavourable culture as well as the teaching learning processes inside the classrooms for students' critical thinking to grow (Lengkanawati, 2004). In addition, many teachers may be restricted by a predetermined curriculum but the use of codes could be implemented periodically to take a critical look at some of the topics that are addressed in the typical EFL class in Indonesia (Larson, 2017)

In order for learners to understand and develop skills of critical thinking in reading, they need to possess declarative, procedural and conditional knowledge of critical thinking in reading (Brown, 1987). Paul and Elder (2008) provide eight criteria which need to be met when one applies critical thinking in reading, i.e., the abilities to understand and determine the article's purpose, the key question, the most important information and ideas in the article, the key conclusions, the author's line of reasoning, the main assumption(s) underlying the author's thinking, the consequences upon accepting or rejecting the author's line of reasoning, and the author's main point(s) of view (p. 13). Cottrell (2005, p. 13) provides 25 elements of critical thinking in reading and writing covering knowledge, skills and attitudes such as knowledge about line of reasoning and argument patterns, skill in determining the key ideas, and feeling good at criticizing someone's writing. Mbato (2019) noted that Indonesian students have indicated the importance of their understanding of and ability to use some critical thinking in reading, but to become critical, they need to be in a learning environment where their critical thinking could be intensively and regularly nurtured. In another words, they have sufficient knowledge on conceptual and declarative knowledge about critical thinking however they are still found lacking in

implementing critical thinking in the reality.

Other challenges faced in implementing critical literacy in Indonesian EFL reading is the authenticity of reading materials and teacher incompetence. In his study, Rambe (2017) found that teachers are advised to gain more understanding toward the differences of conventional reading and critical literacy-based reading to avoid students' misunderstanding; in selecting their materials, teachers are suggested to know students' socio-cultural background related to the reading topics given. The finding further showed that students consider that the reading materials are sometimes too easy and boring, they need richer of illustration sources, wide-range of topics, which are not merely taken from government book as many teachers do in the classroom. This is supported by Rohadi's (2018) findings that the reading materials are incompatible to students' English level; they are sometimes too easy and too difficult. Importantly, the existing materials focus on teaching how to answer questions not to know the value behind the text given.

On the other hand, the positive impacts of critical literacy in reading can be promoted through various teaching and learning. Behrman (2006) concludes that "reading multiple texts encourages students to understand authorship as situated activity ." Through this method, students who are allowed to read multiple texts are able to consider "who constructed the text, when, where, why and the values on which it was based. By experiencing different treatments of the same topic or event, students begin to recognize that text is not "true" in any absolute sense but a rendering as portrayed by an author" (Behrman, 2006) . Thus, extensive reading can be considered as a repository where students are allowed to make meaning from multiple perspectives based on their level of competence and their topics of interest.

In a study by Asanti (2017), the interview session was conducted to measure students' critical thinking on the texts. The result of the study shows that students critical literacy can be improved through extensive reading . It moreover can develop students' understanding about the texts which is not limited to the content only, but also to its construct.

Another study by Hikmat (2017) the integration of critical literacy in reading makes the students critical as not only to

receive the information but also to analyze it based on any aspects which may be involved, such as ideology, opinions, socio-politics, perceptions of reality, and to consider those of others. For Indonesian English learners, critical literacy can be a means of comprehensively exploring the new language and culture through various texts. To support them, teachers need to develop their own understanding of language as well if they are to help students question and understand how language works and how texts are used for particular purposes so that they can teach their students to become critically literate. Developing critical literacy is a challenging task for EFL teachers in a skill-oriented cultural context . However, teachers should be professionals to improve themselves and creative in planning and implementing the strategies used in developing critical literacy .

CONCLUSION

Promoting critical literacy in reading material is inevitably essential for future needs as it helps students build their comprehension, analytical thinking to reveal the value of certain piece of information based on the social, politic, economic point of views. It further helps students to understand not only the content of a text but also how the information or text is constructed and the real message delivered through the text. This need requires many elements of education starting from government, teachers, parents and students to take a part in implementing this approach. Since it can be a good filter toward fast-paced and globalized worlds where borderless information can be easily accessed all over the world. However, it cannot be denied that this trend brings about some challenges to society especially to teachers. Some challenges documented in this review of literatures are lack of teachers' competences in selecting authentic and compatible materials, and the teaching methods, the unclear curriculum and syllabus towards critical literacy approach in certain education levels. It is hoped that Indonesia can catch up the development and well equip the students with critical literacy skills for future demands.

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