

The Importance of Implementing Critical Literacy in Teaching and Learning Activities for EFL Learners in Indonesia

Devi Purmayanti

English Education Department, Social Science and Humanity Faculty, Universitas Ibrahimy, Indonesia
devipurmayanti@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores the importance of implementing critical literacy in teaching and learning activities for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners in Indonesia, especially in today's digital world where misinformation spreads easily. The highlights three major benefits of critical literacy: enhancing student's critical awareness, enabling deeper examination of texts within social and cultural contexts, and recognizing the crucial role of teacher readiness in its application. Although there are challenges—like students coming from different backgrounds and limited support for teachers—the paper suggests that with the right strategies and support, both students and teachers can benefit from bringing critical literacy into the classroom.

Keywords: critical literacy, English language learning, student awareness, teaching strategies

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas pentingnya penerapan literasi kritis dalam kegiatan pembelajaran bagi siswa EFL (English as a Foreign Language) di Indonesia, khususnya di era digital saat ini di mana informasi palsu mudah menyebar. Artikel ini menyoroti tiga manfaat utama dari literasi kritis: meningkatkan kesadaran kritis siswa, mendorong analisis teks yang lebih mendalam dalam konteks sosial dan budaya, serta menekankan pentingnya kesiapan guru dalam penerapannya. Meskipun terdapat berbagai tantangan—seperti latar belakang siswa yang beragam dan keterbatasan dukungan bagi guru—artikel ini menyarankan bahwa dengan strategi dan dukungan yang tepat, baik siswa maupun guru dapat memperoleh banyak manfaat dari penerapan literasi kritis di dalam kelas.

Kata kunci: literasi kritis, pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, kesadaran siswa, strategi pengajaran

Introduction

In recent days, the spread of the use of information has globally immersed in people's daily life. This condition will automatically bring several challenges for them in selecting any information mindfully. In addition, this could also drive people to have various skills to be able to survive such as problem-solving, collaboration, critical thinking as well as critical literacy. In this essay, I will refer critical literacy as an approach that emphasizes on the use of critical thinking in interpreting the text (Esquivel, 2020). That being said, in Indonesian context, applying some critical thinking skills is tremendously significant as facts show that most of Indonesian society is quite vulnerable to get hoax information spreading out on the internet which indicates low of critical thinking skills among the society members (Kurniawati, Sugaryamah, & Hasanah, 2020)

Besides, in implementing the critical literacy in educational context, critical literacy could actually assist the students to be actively and reflectively read texts in order to understand more about diversity, power, and also injustice in human relationship (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016). Moreover, it is also known that applying critical literacy concepts in the classroom enables students to engage more in a way that they could interpret meaning in the text in the appropriate context of life (Damaianti, Damaianti, & Mulyati, 2017). For example, students could analyze deeper the different meaning of a text align with the progress of science and the technology. Consequently, this condition will help students to perform even better in their classroom. However, not all of the students and even the educators in Indonesia could acknowledge these numerous advantages of implementing critical literacy in the learning process proven by teachers' consideration about the lack of critical literacy skills (Kurniawati et al., 2020). Therefore, in this essay, I would like to explore and critically examine the importance of implementing critical literacy in Indonesian classroom context. Besides, I will also begin the discussion with explaining three main benefits of critical literacy such as enabling students

to improve their critical awareness, using it as a key tool to examine text in a broader context, and also analyzing teachers' readiness towards critical literacy implementation. Finally, I will finish this essay by giving several recommendations and conclusion.

1. The Importance of Critical literacy in Indonesian Secondary School

1.1 Critical literacy enables students to enhance their critical awareness

One of the advantages of implementing critical literacy in the classroom is that enabling students to sharpen their critical consciousness. Students are assumed to have more interest in having critical dialogs in the classroom because they have chance to explore themselves by using treatment creatively on different topics instead of focusing merely on one interpretation. That being said, the way students wrote the given topics variative becomes one of the signs from their critical awareness (Abednia & Izadinia, 2013). For instance, students seem to understand the issues by analyzing the topics align with the context, then scrutinizing the problems and giving the suitable solutions without neglecting their focus and also other diversities of the social context (Tanudjaya & Doorman, 2020). Besides, bringing the critical literacy in the learning activities could also help students to either understanding the topics or interpreting them from different context which enables them to create their learning styles in more reflective ways (Poulus & Exley, 2018). It could improve the students' ability to construct the meaning on the text more critically. Then, by immersing critical literacy skill in the learning process, students could be more confident in expressing their ideas which will also reflect their responses emotionally and critically to certain areas.

However, several students stated that they witnessed some limitations once they apply their critical literacy skills in the classroom such as solving the social problem as well as using their critical awareness in different cultural background (Yaqoob, 2011). Moreover, in Indonesia where most of the students are lack of literacy leading them to confusion once the teachers aim to apply the critical literacy approach in the classroom. It is also proven by some students who mentioned feeling overwhelmed due to bombarded by lots of information from texts and online resources that contains many different perspectives and ideologies (Kurniawati et al., 2020). This condition will affect the students in receiving a better understanding in the classroom. Once the students are unable to critically process the information might lead them to inability to take a part actively as a social member in the place where they live.

Furthermore, implementing the critical literacy skill in the learning activities could actually stimulate the students to engage more and understand more the lesson in more various ways which also appropriate with the context (Abednia & Izadinia, 2013). Besides, providing the students with various questions in the classroom could also assist them to enhance their ability in critical thinking and also able to attain a deeper consciousness level on social life realities that oftentimes are covered by social norms and rules (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016). By this realization, students are hoped to be able to deepen their critical awareness and try to implement it through their social life. In short, teaching students with critical literacy skill is indeed beneficial in terms of sharpening students' critical awareness. However, there is another evidence mentioned that it could also have some limitations due to the students' different background. Finally, it is refuted by stronger argument mentioning about more positive impacts of applying critical literacy in the classroom.

1.2 Critical literacy as a key tool for examining the complex meaning existed on text

Another significant impact from implementing critical literacy in the classroom is that it is considered as one of the tools to examine text complexity on the text. As it is known that text could consist a set of complex linguistic structure which aims to make the readers could see the world in some certain ways (Janks, 2013). Moreover, students who read the texts bringing their personal background might lead them to interpret the meaning in various contexts. The critical literacy approach could then help the students to stimulate their understanding and discover a particular text in a wider context such as reflecting the economic, ideological, and social-cultural (Kurniawati et al., 2020). In other words, through the critical literacy practices in the classroom, students could explore more the social and historical impacts through their life. From this case,

they could also learn to acknowledge the way to construct opinion in different topics and they will also realize that the text is not neutral. Besides, they will also know that certain languages as well language devices could affect the students' understanding and how the way they interpret the meaning from the text.

However, in Indonesia context where the students come from different cultural background, some students often experience the stereotype position because the different race, culture, ethnic, and religion. In several classrooms, students are oftentimes treated as different individuals whom considered as less competent students compared to the local ones or do not have enough knowledge and language skills related to the education system exist in the local areas (Yoon, Yol, Haag, & Simpson, 2018) Therefore, having critical opinion on literacy in the learning process will drive students to feel unjust and unequal with other local students (Esquivel, 2020). Another interesting point is that students who come from different backgrounds are assumed to bring their personal culture and understanding into the classroom. Therefore, they seem to be unable to engage well in such complex classroom situation which runs in the opposite direction of the critical literacy nature. As a consequence, students may end up with feeling stuck between two different words that is caused by the role of power, ideology, and language that operates in different contexts (Yol & Yoon, 2020).

Furthermore, providing the students with integrated tasks that aligns with their interest could also help them to express their creative thoughts effectively (Riley, 2015). The inclusion of critical literacy activities using creative visual aspects and interesting topics will acutely catch the students' attention and it might allow the students to state their opinion freely (Esquivel, 2020). Then, by immersing this strategy, it could mitigate the inequity and lack of power discourses in the classroom as well as in the society. In addition, in terms of recognizing the students' diversity, it is definitely fundamental for teachers to facilitate and guide the students to be more aware of the students' diversity and not abandon all the values that they have (Gajdusek, 1988). Teachers could also need to encourage the students to implement the critical literacy skill in the classroom in a proper way without neglecting other important aspects such as students' different background as this might drive the students to feel more confident in expressing their ideas in the learning process. In short, in this section, there are some strong evidence about critical literacy in which considered as important tools to examine power that exists on the text. Even though there are also several opposing arguments related to it, those are refuted by more significant information.

1.3 Teachers' readiness towards critical literacy practices in the classroom

In terms of assisting the students in maximizing the use of critical literacy skills in the classroom, teachers' readiness truly gives the significant impact as teachers' critical literacy ability is also considered as a part of critical literacy education (Riley, 2015). Teachers need to accustom themselves to adjust their learning style from the traditional method into the modern one, especially by integrating the learning activities with the use of critical literacy skills. Their role is also important to guide students in the whole learning activities rather than solely focus on giving learning instructions and ask students to discover by themselves. At the same time, teachers also need to encourage the students to implement their critical literacy skills in the learning activities by giving them lots of opportunities and more learning options (Yoon et al., 2018). For instance, teachers do not need to expect too much from the students to take the whole learning responsibilities as they may not have certain skills to support the learning activities. At this point, teachers should provide the students with useful and helpful guidelines that can help them to figure out each step of understanding the lesson (Abednia & Izadinia, 2013).

However, it is not only the students who are sometimes difficult to implement the critical literacy in the classroom, but also the teachers also find themselves confused and frustrated. It is due to the different knowledge and social background of the students leading the teachers to misdirect the lesson thought in the classroom (Sultan, Rofiuddin, Nurhadi, & Priyatni, 2017). In addition, in Indonesian context, some teachers also did not have adequate support from both the government and the institutions where they teach in order to improve their critical literacy skills before they teach the students (Damaianti et al., 2017). This condition will automatically become one of the serious problems for them since only the teachers themselves who are aware

of the important aspect of critical literacy inclusion. As a result, this could affect the teachers' teaching quality in the classroom.

Furthermore, even though the teachers have several limitations in implementing the digital literacy in the learning activities, it could be mitigated by involving themselves into the teacher community. This action aims to assist and support the teachers to be able to teach better in the classroom. Teachers could use the group to share any insights about the set of the class that they want to create and could also discuss the strategies to develop the teaching practices along with the challenges that they have (Riley, 2015). Besides, by engaging in the community, it could also help teachers to be more ready to face any teaching barriers, especially those which related to critical literacy implementation. They will not only share and discuss the teaching challenges but also will give them a large opportunity to provide the alternatives dealing with the problems. Each teacher could also help and support each other to enacting more critical literacy practices in the classroom (Abednia & Izadinia, 2013). Moreover, teachers who realize the complexity of their students' background will have tendency to think critically and tend to create several creative teaching strategies to enhance their students' critical literacy skill. Finally, as regards students' readiness towards critical literacy practices in the classroom, it highly needs teachers' support. Even though some teachers in my context argued that they are faced with students' cultural diversity and lack of support from the institution, they could still find other alternatives to prepare their critical literacy teaching skills through joining the teacher learning communities.

2. Recommendation

After critically examined the importance of critical literacy implementation in the classroom, I actually found several research studies which support as well as opposed to my topic. Even though there several challenges for students in Indonesian context in implementing the critical literacy skill, some significant aspects also have analyzed. That being said, I believe that the implementation of critical literacy in the classroom could give students many positive impacts as it has explored in the discussion. However, if it comes to different context, especially in Indonesian context, there are some debates that should be considered well. Through my observation through several research studies and critically examine the supporting arguments and the opposition ones, I would like to give several recommendations for students and teachers. For students, I suggest them to consider more about the importance of digital literacy in their learning activities. By knowing its importance, it could hopefully help them to engage more and could be more critical in analyzing meaning on the text in deeper understanding.

Another consideration is also teachers' readiness through critical literacy implementation in the classroom. Knowing that the role of them is definitely crucial, therefore, I recommend the teachers to prepare well before they teach the students and invite them to take a part in critical literacy activities. By preparing well, hopefully that teachers could facilitate the students to be more active in the classroom and anticipate several challenges that they could face in its implementation. I think that the teachers' role is also definitely important as they are considered as the guidance that the students solely rely on them in the classroom. In short, I believe that the importance of digital literacy implementation in the classroom could benefit students and teachers once they realize the positive impacts and followed by several effective and creative learning practices in the classroom.

3. Conclusion

To conclude, there are three main fundamental aspects that the students could gain in implementing the critical literacy in the classroom. First, critical literacy could improve students' critical awareness as the students are provided by lots of opportunities to express their ideas in the classroom. They will also tend to have more freedom in choosing their learning style that suit best to their learning preference. However, its benefits could be a challenge for students in Indonesia due to their diversity background. Coming from different places and cultures will prevent them to successfully implement their critical thinking in the classroom. Furthermore, students are assumed to have other more positive impacts driving them to consider again about implementing the critical literacy skills in the learning process. Second, critical literacy is also a

tool to comprehend the text in broader context. Even though there are several gaps among the students once it is implemented, it still could be solved by maximizing the role of the teachers in the classroom as both teacher and critical literacy mediator. Third, it is also important to have the teachers' ready for applying the critical literacy activities in the classroom. Albeit their difficulties in the practices, teachers still could mitigate those problems by engaging themselves to teachers' community in order to support them in arranging the critical literacy activities in the classroom.

REFERENCES

- Abednia, A., & Izadinia, M. (2013). Critical pedagogy in ELT classroom: Exploring contributions of critical literacy to learners' critical consciousness. *Language Awareness, 22*(4), 338-352.
- Bobkina, J., & Stefanova, S. (2016). Literature and critical literacy pedagogy in the EFL classroom: Towards a model of teaching critical thinking skills. *Studies in second language learning and teaching, 6*(4), 677-696.
- Damaianti, V. S., Damaianti, L. F., & Mulyati, Y. (2017). Cultural Literacy Based Critical Reading Teaching Material with Active Reader Strategy for Junior High School. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education, 6*(4), 312-317.
- Esquivel, J. (2020). Embodying critical literacy in a dual language classroom: critical discourse analysis in a case study. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies, 17*(3), 23. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/15427587.2019.1662306>
- Gajdusek, L. (1988). Toward wider use of literature in ESL: Why and how. *TESOL quarterly, 22*(2), 227-257.
- Janks, H. (2013). The importance of critical literacy. In *Moving critical literacies forward* (pp. 50-62): Routledge.
- Kurniawati, N., Sugaryamah, D., & Hasanah, A. (2020). Proposing a Model of Critical Literacy Program for Fostering Indonesian EFL Students' Critical Thinking Skills. *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn), 14*(2), 234-247.
- Poulus, D., & Exley, B. (2018). Critical Literacy for Culturally Diverse Teenagers: "I've Learned Something That Is Actually Useful". *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 62*(3), 271-280.
- Riley, K. (2015). Enacting critical literacy in English classrooms: How a teacher learning community supported critical inquiry. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 58*(5), 417-425.
- Sultan, S., Rofiuddin, A., Nurhadi, N., & Priyatni, E. T. (2017). The effect of the critical literacy approach on pre-service language teachers' critical reading skills. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research, 17*(71), 159-174.
- Tanudjaya, C. P., & Doorman, M. (2020). Examining Higher Order Thinking in Indonesian Lower Secondary Mathematics Classrooms. *Journal on Mathematics Education, 11*(2), 277-300.
- Yaqoob, M. (2011). *Reader and text: Literary theory and teaching of literature in the twenty first century*. Paper presented at the International Conference on Languages, Literature and Linguistics IPEDR.
- Yol, Ö., & Yoon, B. (2020). Engaging English language learners with critical global literacies during the pull-out: Instructional framework. *TESOL Journal, 11*(2), e470.
- Yoon, B., Yol, Ö., Haag, C., & Simpson, A. (2018). Critical global literacies: A new instructional framework in the global era. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 62*(2), 205-214.