

Article

Critical Literacy Practice for EFL Reading Classroom

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Abstract: Critical literacy becomes increasingly known in the EFL context because it plays a significant role in encouraging the learners to think critically about the linguistic hierarchy, to be aware of cultural domination, and to develop their voice in social justice within the target language. Despite this, many EFL teachers and teachers-educators are still unfamiliar with how it is enacted. The abstract tenets of critical theory and the nature of critical practice cause this unfamiliarity. In this paper, the researchers elaborate on some books, articles, and previous research to assist the teachers in understanding the complexity of critical literacy practice and to propose the appropriate practical steps for implementing critical literacy. The teachers can follow these practical steps in their EFL reading classroom. First, appropriate teaching materials are reviewed. Second, the teaching strategy to implement critical literacy is discussed. Third, practical ways of applying critical literacy are proposed in this practical framework.

Keywords: Critical Literacy; Reading class; EFL teaching



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1. Introduction

Critical literacy in English education subject has a long history, especially in English-speaking countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States, and the United Kingdom (Abednia & Crookes, 2018), those countries have been extensively produced many empirical and conceptual studies on critical literacy (Fajardo, 2015). However, the appearance of critical literacy studies in the non-English-speaking region like Asia is still lower than in English native countries, but for last 10 years a number published reports from EFL regions were increasing (Abednia & Crookes, 2018). In Indonesia, critical literacy studies begin to evolve, such as research by (Gustine, 2013, 2014) about the implementation of critical literacy-based approach in secondary school, a review study for portraying critical literacy in Asian classroom (Setyaningsih, 2016), and a study in investigating EFL students' critical reading and challenging from critical literacy perspective by (Suarcaya, 2017). Furthermore, Setyaningsih et al. (2019) conducted an exploratory study how students interact with texts after engaging critical literacy practice in reading classroom. Then, Aulia & Hidayat (2020) did a study from fifteen English teachers in primary schools, secondary schools, and universities in related to their knowledge of critical literacy. This spread of studies shows that critical literacy is being a concern in Indonesia EFL classroom.

EFL teaching-learning in Indonesia has been criticized as focusing primarily on lexical acquisition and grammatical knowledge to help students pass a high-stakes reading test (Gustine, 2014). The primary objective in reading activities is still to concentrate on understanding the content of a reading text; in these situations, students have no space to use language in social practices (Widodo et al., 2016). To do the social practices in today's diverse media, EFL students should be able to analyze the information from a text. Fur-

thermore, the definition of reading comprehension needs to be reconsidered because critically, the passages' messages, purposes, values, and ideology are crucial (Suarcaya, 2017). The EFL learners require connecting the information from texts with the values beyond the text in order to become more aware of hidden messages in texts.

Equipping students with awareness beyond the text and acting to promote social justices in society is the essence of critical literacy. Critical literacy form has historically rooted by (Freire, 1970) philosophies of power relation work in social justice pedagogy. Many scholars have defined critical literacy, Leland, Harste, & Huber (2005) define critical literacy as an avenue for examining social injustice issues in several kinds of text and media. Critical literacy not only as the ability to read and to write but also relates to go beyond the superficial meaning of the text (Gómez Jiménez & Gutiérrez, 2019) understanding the ideologies (Luke, 2012) power relation (Janks, 2014) and seeking equality and social justice as the process of learning in which to make meaning to do action and change the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Acting as a part of reading activities involves interpreting the text by analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing the idea of passages (Suarcaya, 2017). Moreover, acting in encouraging social justice in critical literacy does not always demand someone be a social activist, but a change in attitude from reading activities can be categorized as taking action (Gustine, 2013; Lewison et al., 2002). Then, literacy elements as the basis for changing actions are utterly center to (Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987) understanding of education.

Proposing critical literacy in education has been done by (Abednia, 2015) but that study only suggest the practical way to do the critical literacy without explaining teaching materials and teaching method. This paper elaborates some steps to practice critical literacy in Indonesia EFL reading instruction. By providing the steps in before, during and after reading a text, the teachers get reasonable opportunities for increasing their students' critical consciousness. The practical ideas below refer to implemented for young learners in grade 4 in EFL reading classroom.

2. Practicing Critical Literacy in Teaching EFL Reading

2.1. Teaching Materials

Critical literacy sets a major emphasis on students' engagement with social issues and suitable media constitute the main source of classroom materials. For finding the proper materials, teachers should consider a topic of the text that would examine students to think in diverse perspectives. The chosen topics are based on the today's social phenomenon, political and cultural issues to engage students to be familiar with the recent conditions and reflect the problem from the text into their daily lives (Setyorini, 2019). The classroom text involves the transaction between personal and cultural resources, so the learners can understand the current issue in the world. These include popular canonical literature books, children's literature, and poems (Abednia & Crookes, 2018). Teachers can also address the picture books in their teaching for critical engagement with important social issues. Further, other media like videos, documentaries, movies, advertisement and news have applied by many critical literacy practitioners. To make the reading activity more interactive the students can bring the passages to the class. Then, teachers should ask each to briefly explain what their passage is about and encourage the whole class to discuss their perceptions of how suitable and useful the passage. Another even less time-consuming, this paper attempts to show the use of the online article with the title "The new kid in class". Before decided a central text, this text was considered by the contents and the readability for EFL young learners. The readability consensus revealed that this text's standard or average reading level and suitable for reader's age 9-10 years old.

2.2. Teaching Strategies

Reading class is divided into pre-reading, while reading and post-reading activity (Wallace, 2003). In this paper, the reading strategy “Who’s Telling It?” is proposed. By using this strategy students explore the same perspectives central text from various viewpoints and identify author, speaker point of view, publication date, intended audience and characters from the text. Besides, this strategy helps students examine the varying point of view in a familiar, comfortable situation, then implementing their learning to familiar texts and topics. In the global and multicultural world, learners must learn to understand, to value and to respect different vantage points and perceptions. In literacy development, students need to recognize multiple perspectives and voices.

2.3. Practicing Critical Literacy

2.3.1 Pre-reading

Step1: Familiarizing Learners with Critical Literacy

Start by familiarizing students with critical literacy through leading a class discussion about objectives, advantages, and limitation and how the classroom can be practised. In this stage, students are introduced to know the activities that they will do in this reading classroom. This is important to offer as the basic understanding to prepare their selves in the lesson.

Step2: Doing the Dialogic Story

The students are asked to think about a real event in their lives that common and happen to all students. In this case, students describe their live experience while meeting new friends in the first day of school. To describe the event, students use the dialogic story (see the sample dialogic story for suggestions to get students started). After students completed the dialogic story, teacher compared the description as a class. Then, highlight how details and events vary depending on point of view.

2.3.2 While-reading

Step3: Reading a selected article

In this step students encourage to read the text with the title “The new kid in class”. This text is available in <https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/texts/the-new-kid-in-class>. This passage inevitably becomes a source of the class because the content is about emphasizing empathy and friendship of refugee friend. This passage is used to challenge their perceptions and help them become more aware of the differences.

Step 4: Asking and discussing critical questions

After students read the text, they go beyond the text and deal with the presented issues in a wider scope through reflection and discussion. To make the reflection and discussion experience more immediately relevant and significant, students are asked to consider who is telling the story and what they know about that issue while they are reading. Then, students compare and contrast the following aspects of the text using critical questions, for instance, “who will read this text and why?”, “who is in the text?”, “who is not in the text?”, “is this text useful to you? how?”, “who is telling the story? What if someone else tells the story?” (See appendix for completed questions). Classroom discussion is not only

the opportunity for students to reflect and dialogue related to the text. Another task, writing reflective journals can be used as an activity in post-reading (Abednia, 2015).

2.3.3 Post-reading

Step5: Writing Reflective Journals

Writing a reflective journal helps students take their time and reflect on their views and those of others such as their peers', the teacher's and authors'. Writing a reflective journal also can be happened out of school after they are engaged in classroom discussion. This last step is the great opportunity to rethink and to reflect about the previous activities (Abednia, 2015). In this process students can obtain more information about the topic of racism in coronavirus diseases, in particular reading other relevant texts, watching related videos, and making use of others' real-life experiences.

3. Conclusions

Critical literacy is increasingly recognized in the educational field, but the reality is that many educators are still unfamiliar with what it is and how it is enacted. Educators who want to move toward a critical pedagogy should start with an epistemological paradigm shift, knowledge should consider as relational and culturally based (Yoon & Sharif, 2015). This paper proposes the way of familiar theoretical practices to support the educators to apply critical literacy in the classroom. Begin by making familiarize students with the activity in critical literacy class. In the main activity, students read the central text to answer the critical questions and interrogate the text. This process facilitates students to do discussion and dialogue related to the passage. Last, students write a reflective journal as a reflection after the lesson and as the action to create civil and inclusive school communities where children are respected, valued and welcome to participate. These practical ideas of critical literacy in the reading classroom hopefully inspire English teachers who are contemplating methods to teach critical literacy. Since the study grounded by the actual classroom experience by (Beach & Cleovoulou, 2014; Gustine, 2013), conceptual practices (Abednia, 2015) and adopt from <https://www.tolerance.org/>. Further experimental investigations are needed to practice these conceptual ideas in EFL reading classroom.

Appendix

Sample Dialogic Story

Topic: Meeting new people		
	Person 1	Person 2
I feel excited to see new friends on the first day of school because...
I usually approach new friends at classroom by...
Then I initially introduce myself to make new friends with telling..
I always treat the same all my friends without seeing their background because..

Critical Questions

Area of Critical Literacy	Examples
Text purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will read this text and why? • Why are we reading this text? • What does the author say? • For whom is the story written?
Characters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is in the text? • Who is not in the text?
Power and Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this text useful to you? How? • To whom is this text useful? • What is the role of girls/boys, young/aged?
Gaps and Silence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is missing from the text? • Who has been left out of the text?
Interrogate the Author	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is the author? • What are some of the author's beliefs? • What is someone else write this text?

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