English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Students’ Perception of Critical Literacy in Indonesian Context

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Abstract

This research explored the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students’ perspectives about critical literacy and the possibility of implementing critical literacy practices in Indonesian context by revealing the opportunities and challenges. Ten English Education students who have taken a critical literacy course at one of the state universities in Yogyakarta, Indonesia were involved in this study. Their views related to critical literacy, the beneficials and the opportunities of practicing it were gathered through unstructured interview methods. The data were analyzed by using inductive content analysis. The results of the data analysis revealed that all the participants realized the importance of critical literacy in Indonesia toward the enhancement of critical awareness and social justice. The finding also holds a firm conviction in its suitability for implementation since the critical literacy is a mandate in Pancasila Principle. The students also revealed the little teachers’ understanding of critical literacy as the obstacle of implementing critical literacy in Indonesia.

Keywords: Critical Literacy, EFL Students, Indonesian Education, Students’ Perceptions

Abstrak

A. Introduction

Critical literacy in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context has proven to be effective in involving students to be capable of reading, writing, thinking and acting in their life.\(^1\),\(^2\),\(^3\),\(^4\) In the last four decades, critical literacy has been researched extensively in varied contexts of schooling, vocational, and higher education in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States.\(^5\),\(^6\) Critical literacy is constructed to explore individuals, sociopolitical, economic, intellectual and to affirm that individual can change society through words and actions.\(^7\) This benefit of critical literacy for language learners is not in an alignment with the availability of critical literacy research in body knowledge of EFL. There is still a modicum of critical literacy research in EFL contexts.\(^8\)

Teaching critical literacy to the students can make them learn the past to build a good society in the future.\(^9\) The students’ competences in critical reading, reflecting on the problem around them and acting for support the

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social justice will be developed in critical literacy approach. In critical literacy
the learners are not seen as the vessel into which the teachers pour their
knowledge. However, the teachers provide the students with opportunities
to actively acquire the knowledge through dialogue, contemplation and
action. Furthermore, it would need to involve the students in the analysis,
shaping, and reconstruction of learning materials for acting upon the world
and going beyond the development of specific skills. The learning materials
can be novels, poetry, stories, news, songs, dialogues, films, images, etc. As
a result, the students are involved in critical literacy activities that enhance
their capacity to read, to write, and to act in this world.

Besides, Critical literacy also gives immerse impact on the education
field, it allows the students to recognize the issues of power and inequality
through a critical view\textsuperscript{10} but for applying critical literacy in the classroom it is
challenging.\textsuperscript{11} The low level of students’ critical literacy skills, the lack of
teachers’ knowledge,\textsuperscript{12,13,14} the lack of specific instructions,\textsuperscript{15,16} unsupported
teaching facilities\textsuperscript{17} and the textbook are the concrete example of challenges
in applying critical literacy.\textsuperscript{18} Hence, there is need for educators or experts
who yearn to critical literacies for engaging critical literacy in Indonesian
education program, so the teachers in Indonesia can employ it in their
classroom with the practical steps as the guidance.


\textsuperscript{11} Ari Setyorini, ‘The Practice of Critical Literacy Teaching in EFL Classroom: A Case Study in a

\textsuperscript{12} Raden Aulia Utami Hidayat, Gin Gin Gustine, and Sri Setyarini, ‘Critical Literacy Strategy and
Challenges: Voice from a High School EFL Teacher’, \textit{Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan} 20, no. 3 (31 December

\textsuperscript{13} Gin Gin Gustine, ‘A SURVEY ON CRITICAL LITERACY AS A PEDAGOGICAL
APPROACH TO TEACHING ENGLISH IN INDONESIA’. \textit{Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics} 3,
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\textsuperscript{14} Raden Aulia Utami Hidayat, ‘An Inquiry Study on Teachers’ Beliefs and Knowledge of Critical
Literacy Pedagogy in Indonesia Context’ (Twelfth Conference on Applied Linguistics (CONAPLIN 2019),

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LITERATURE LANGUAGE AND ACADEMIC STUDIES} 2, no. 03 (25 December 2023): 92–97.
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\textsuperscript{16} Joshua Kunmath and Arika Jackson, ‘Developing Student Critical Consciousness: Twitter as a
Tool to Apply Critical Literacy in the English Classroom’, \textit{Journal of Media Literacy Education} 11, no. 1

\textsuperscript{17} Julie Chuah Suat Chooa and Manjet Kaur Mehr Singh, ‘Enhancing Critical Literacy in
Writing by Employing Media in Explicit Instructional Approaches’, \textit{Procedia - Social and Behavioral
Sciences}, The 2nd International Conference on Education and Educational Psychology 2011, 29 (1 January

\textsuperscript{18} Anitha Thalib Mbau and Bambang Sugeng, ‘Critical Literacy for ELT in Indonesia: What EFL
Teachers Should Be Aware Of’, \textit{Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics} 4, no. 2 (29 August
The critical literacy program is relevant to Indonesian context which claims to be a democratic country. Indonesia’s demographic comprises of separated thousands of islands, hundreds of ethnic and local languages, and around 270 million populations, therefore critical literacy brings an important role in nourishing democracy in the classroom. Moreover, based on the social and political situation in Indonesia, the information related to political leaders and their movements were published daily. Some people or students perceive that information as the truth without any further investigation. Then, critical literacy is a need, because it guides students to think about the ideologies and consequences behind the choices to voice and silent. It is important in almost every aspect of life, not only for the social and political aspect but also for education aspect. Indonesia must accelerate its development and effectively equip students with critical literacy skills in order to address future challenges.

In critical literacy education, the goal is one step ahead. Both educators and learners engaged in begin thinking from a wider and more critical perspective; in particular, when the students read something, they should be able to question whose voice is heard, why this text is written that way and who benefits, how this text is trying to position the readers. The critical literacy also shifts the social effects of students who learn that approach. The essence of critical literacy is aware of injustice and do action for taking social

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justice.\textsuperscript{24,25,26,27,28,29} Although applying critical literacy in Indonesian education context has much importance but it has challenges and consequences for the educators to practice it.

The studies of critical literacy in Indonesian education are relatively new. The previous research conducted by\textsuperscript{30} found that the teachers in various school level have a limited knowledge related to critical literacy. However, these teachers expected the critical literacy could be practiced in Indonesian education. They saw critical literacy can increase the students’ ability to questioning and examine the text. Furthermore, Diani and Yusuf\textsuperscript{31} also study about teachers’ perspective of critical literacy in EFL classroom. The result of that study is similar with what Hidayat has done. Since both of those researches examined the teachers’ views who have been studied critical literacy, this study investigates the perspectives of students who have been trained with critical literacy in formal education. The outcomes of this research would be beneficial for the body of knowledge in critical literacy study because the participants already knew the critical literacy is. Through this research, the evidences and the students’ perspectives of critical literacy implementation are discovered. This study's aim to reveal students' view about the possibilities and challenges of practicing critical literacy in Indonesia.


\textsuperscript{25}Nathaly S. Batista-Morales, Cori Salmerón, and Samuel DeJulio, ‘Their Words, Their Worlds: Critical Literacy in Bilingual Spaces’, \textit{Bilingual Research Journal}, 2 October 2019, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15235882.2019.1675804.\textsuperscript{25} [Citation]


B. Method

To investigate the students’ perspectives about the needs of implementing critical literacy in Indonesian context, the qualitative research design is utilized in this research. Qualitative research is usually applied for understanding a social reality and mostly involving special participants. Since this research design focuses on studying social phenomena, voice and feelings of the participants as the aim. Therefore, the qualitative design is employed to investigate the learners' view of critical literacy applications.

The participants of the research were chosen based on purposive sampling. The master students who took critical literacy course in their academic study are the participants of this research. They were deliberately chosen as the researcher’ consideration that they would be able to provide the richest data on this research. Purposive sampling is referred to selecting specific participants to answer the research questions. Ten students majoring English education, at one of state university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia were interviewed. These students were, therefore, free to decide if they wanted to join in this study. These students were chosen because they have taken critical literacy course. Their knowledge about critical literacy might provide some information to respond to the research questions of this recent study. Before the researchers collecting the data, the researchers informed that any information on research data would be kept confidentially.

To investigate students' knowledge of critical literacy and their perspective related to the application of critical literacy in Indonesia, the open-ended questions are asked to the students. The open-ended questions are comprised of two parts. The first part is related to the participants’ perspectives about the implementation of critical literacy in Indonesia. The second section is about the students’ views about how the opportunities and challenges of implementing critical literacy in Indonesian school. The students’ experiences and also their knowledge related to the critical literacy in their course will be beneficial to find out. Since they already knew the critical literacy principles and they also recognized the education atmosphere in Indonesia.

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The researchers applied conventional qualitative analysis of content, in which coding categories are gained inductively and directly from the raw data. There are eight steps in analyzing data by using inductive content analysis. First, prepare the data. The data were in form of interview transcript. Second, in this step the basic interview transcript is classified before they are coded into some unit. Third, develop categories and a coding scheme. The data are coded based on the research questions. Fourth is the test coding scheme on a sample of data through coding sample data, checking coding consistency, and revising the coding rule. The fifth is code all the data. After all the data are sufficient consistent, the data are coded repeatedly. Next, the sixth step is to assess coding consistency. After coding the entire data set, the researchers rechecked the consistency of the coding result. The seventh, drawing conclusion from the coded data, in this step the theme or categories identified, are inferenced and presented with the meaning. The last step is to report methods and findings of the research.

C. Result and Discussion

After analyzing all the data, it was found that the students who took critical literacy course in their master degree viewed the critical literacy is for fostering awareness and more importantly it increasing to do the action for support the social justice. Furthermore, the students also realized that critical literacy has a huge opportunity to be applied in Indonesia education. As critical literacy was mandated in Pancasila principle number 5. The principle of Pancasila is manual for all the Indonesia rules. The Pancasila also can be a basic orientation for regulating the Indonesian education. Another result also found that the students highlighted the lack of Indonesian teachers’ knowledge of the importance critical literacy and the limited teachers’ role in implementing it effectively.

Critical Literacy to Foster Awareness and to Do Action for Supporting Social Justice

The students completely agreed on the establishment of critical literacy in Indonesian education. The students’ agreement is around the belief that critical literacy is an essential resource for enhancing awareness, understanding the crucial issues, and doing action on social justice. The data analysis revealed that critical literacy enables students to develop the abilities necessary for understanding justice, impartiality, as well as appreciating global and various perspectives. As shown by the participants 3, when the

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participants were asked about their agreement in practicing critical literacy in their teaching and in Indonesian education, the participant answered “Absolutely agree. We need students who have competencies to act for equity, equality, and social justice and master global and multicultural perspectives”. It is implied that the students who learned critical literacy in their classroom must be understood the essence of critical literacy. The primary goal of critical literacy is to inspire the students learning and acting for more equitable society. Critical literacy in the language classroom goes beyond simple reading and writing skills. It entails a thorough awareness of how knowledge is formed and how language usage is intertwined with power dynamics. Critical literacy is considered a social practice and the main dimension of it is taking and promoting social justice.

The majority of participant indicated that the significance of critical literacy in opposing the traditional definition of literacy as simply reading and writing. They suggested that critical literacy encourages the learners who study critical literacy to extend their perspectives, appreciate the cultural diversity and think critically about societal issues. It empowers the learners to have their own voices and critical awareness for the world. More importantly, critical literacy enables the learners to navigate and to respond effectively to their environment because language and literacy education can disrupt power relations, critique texts and help the learners construct critical texts to find the truth and establish social justice.

In this case, one participant said “I do agree that critical literacy is implemented in Indonesian schools, so that the practice of literacy at school is no taken for granted as a practice of reading and writing. By having this critical literacy at school, students will be able to broaden their views and understanding. Especially, they will be more respectful to any difference they might meet in their surroundings. It is

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highlighted here, because Indonesia has various cultures; then we need to be able to appreciate and embrace it.” This view surfaced mainly in relation to emphasize the learners’ understanding of Indonesia’s multicultural background, as well as the need of learners developing a respectful attitude toward cultural diversity. A number of the participants reported that including critical literacy into the Indonesian educational curriculum will better prepare the learners for successfully understanding the complexity of world around them. The young Indonesian learners are the future of Indonesia generation who have to aware of their environments. The learners’ differences should have a place in the classroom as a source of learning.44 The various culture in Indonesia is a potential material for the teachers to be used in their classroom. These diversities don’t make the differences but create a consciousness. The learners can use their diverse background, language or experiences as a reflection that they lived in multicultural society and give values for them to be familiar with the issues around them.45

All of the students agreed that critical literacy effects to learners’ perspectives. It is critical to make the learners being the decision makers for against injustice in the society. This students’ rational is not impossible, since several studies in Indonesia have been practiced such as critical literacy practice-based approach in EFL secondary school by.46 Moreover,47 also applied critical literacy in reading classroom for university students. This result further supports the idea of employing critical literacy to the mainstream curriculum.

Critical Literacy as a Mandate in five of Pancasila Principle

The opportunities of practicing critical literacy in all Indonesian school showed the positives responses from all the participants. All the participants shared the same opinions that critical literacy could be applied in Indonesia. Since there is the integration of critical literacy within Indonesia’s principles of Pancasila. The participant suggested that critical literacy was established with Pancasila principle number 5, which promotes social justice and equality. As one of the participants said “Critical literacy is mandated in Pancasila Principle 5. We don’t start from scratch since we’ve already had the basis. As long as

the teachers and school community have the awareness of its importance, its implementation should be possible”. This result reflects that of 48 who also stated that critical literacy is relevant to Indonesia’s principle of Pancasila, there are Just and Civilized Humanity (Kemanusiaan yang Adil dan Beradab) and social justice for all the people of Indonesia (keadilan sosial bagi seluruh rakyat Indonesia).

It was obvious that the practicing critical literacy should be have a great opportunity to be applied in Indonesian education contexts. Following the fact that national principle has the integration with critical literacy’s aim to against injustice and inequality. When the learners are studying critical literacy, they will be perceived that they are a person or a citizen who are understand of the social issues around them.49 However, the implementation of critical literacy needed supports from government in term of policies, regulations, school rules, and social empowerment activities in promoting critical literacy in the educational system. This is in agreement with that obtained by Novianti that one significant resource to design and to practice critical literacy in the EFL classroom is curriculum.50 The curriculum standard in the EFL classroom is not explicitly embedded critical literacy.51 Critical literacy is commonly substituted as complementary item in the existing materials. Hence, the teacher can only integrate it into course unit52,53 or as extracurricular activity.54 Subsequently, providing the new learning theory and practice in national policy needs all stakeholders to be involved.

The participant also revealed the possibility of bringing critical literacy into all elements of teaching and learning throughout all educational courses. They argued for critical literacy to be integrated into curriculum’s concepts.
content, procedures, and learning outcomes. Talking about this issue one interviewee responded “I think critical literacy will have great opportunities to be integrated in the teaching and learning for all subjects at school. It can be as theme, content, process or the product of learning”. Subject that proper to be applied critical literacy is social studies, as previous studies have implemented it such as.\textsuperscript{55,56,57,58} The critical literacy can be included as the learning materials, activities or even learning outcomes.\textsuperscript{59}

**Critical Literacy Need to be Promoted to The Teachers**

The perspectives of the participants highlighted the complex and interconnected challenges of applying critical literacy in Indonesia. These challenges included teacher’s preparedness and curriculum alignment. However, the majority of the participants commented that the most challenging of applying critical literacy in Indonesia is the limited knowledge among teachers. They indicated the need of enhancing teachers’ awareness of the importance of critical literacy and their role in implementing it effectively. For example, an interviewee stated that “The challenge will be from the teachers. How to make teachers consider the importance of critical literacy and their roles to implement it. We must make the teacher realize it. Educate the teacher to be critically literate first is also needed”. The participants see the teachers’ less knowledge as the significant challenges in practicing critical literacy. They argued that teachers must be trained to be critically literate before they can effectively teach critical literacy skills to the students. It is encouraging to compare this result with that found by Hidayat et.al. that the teachers still have a lack of knowledge about critical literacy. This includes addressing

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{55} Mary Dougherty, ‘Representation of Historical Events within Social Studies Textbooks Using Critical Literacy to Enhance the Social Studies Classroom’, \textit{Education Masters}, 1 August 2012, https://fisherpub.sjf.edu/education_ETD_masters/225.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Jessica Stenshorn, ‘Encouraging Students to Become Critical Thinkers: Using Critical Literacy and Young Adult Novels in the Social Studies Classroom’, \textit{Education Masters}, 1 December 2011, https://fisherpub.sjf.edu/education_ETD_masters/198.
\end{itemize}
knowledge gaps in teachers as a reduction misconception that may occur as a result of incorrectly applied critical literacy programs.  

The ability of how the teachers know about definition of critical literacy and how to addressing it into learning effects to the misconception of learning results. Another interviewee, when they asked about the challenges of implementing critical literacy in Indonesian context, said “The issue is in the teachers' awareness and ability to teach it. If it’s wrongly implemented, people would get a wrong idea that critical literacy teaches students to be rebellious and disobey orders”. This perspective appeared because of one-dimension critical literacy is disrupting the commonplace, it concerned with asking the common perspectives such as habits, stereotypes or even society believe through critical lenses. However, critical literacy does not inherently make the learners into disobedient or rebellious people. Rather, critical literacy encourages the development of ability to analyze, question, and think critically. In order to understand power dynamics, prejudices, and assumptions, critical literacy encourages the students to critically analyze texts, media and social structures.

These findings may provide some implication for developing critical literacy in Indonesian education context. The practice of critical literacy could be applied in all school level and all students’ level. Since the research on critical literacy in the EFL field is relatively scanty, this recent study is expected to add knowledge of the students view about the critical literacy practices in Indonesian classroom. However, this research only gathering the data from a limited group of students in an Indonesian university, the longer

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study with more participants from around Indonesia would be beneficial to plan a better program for increasing literacy program for future Indonesian education.

D. Conclusion

Despite growing critical literacy practice in education has been improved successful to support students view of text and built their multicultural perspectives to do action and to promote social justice. In Indonesian context, practice of critical literacy is still limited. The practice of it mostly found in university students in reading class. This recent research examined the students who take critical literacy course about their perspectives related to the definition of critical literacy for them and their view about the possibilities and challenges of implementation of critical literacy practice in Indonesian classes.

They also agreed critical literacy is appropriate to be integrated into curriculum and school practices. The rationale for implementing critical literacy in Indonesia because the essences of critical literacy aspects are relevant with Indonesia national principle (Pancasila) there is fairness to all humanity, democracy led by the inner wisdom of deliberations of justice and social justice for all Indonesia citizens. Moreover, the interviewee highlighted the limited knowledge among teachers regarding critical literacy. The insufficient training of teachers in critical literacy principles undermines the successful implementation of critical literacy initiatives in Indonesian schools. Our finding can only represent several students' voices about critical literacy in a university. For the future study, the more participants can enrich the data, so the comprehensive study involving students in all regions of Indonesia might add the contribution of the body of knowledge in critical literacy study.

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