

Critical Literacy Strategy and Challenges: Voice from a High School EFL Teacher

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Naskah diterima tanggal 13/06/2020, direvisi akhir tanggal 23/12/2020, disetujui tanggal 31/12/2020

Abstract

This qualitative case study is proposed to investigate the implementation of critical literacy strategy in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom by one English teacher from one of the public senior high school in Indonesia. The qualitative analysis of the data collected from classroom observation and interview show that the teacher implements the five-steps instructional framework of critical literacy. In the implementation stage, the teacher conducted the framework's whole steps and emphasized the group discussion session where the students could be free to state their opinion. Although the material was taken from the textbook, the teacher could combine her teaching between the book and critical literacy teaching. She provoked her students by posing essential questions and helped students to read and think beyond the text. She also tried to develop her students' social awareness, tolerance, and responsibility through the discussion they shared. However, the teacher encountered some challenges in implementing critical literacy, such as the lack of students' language proficiency, classroom practice transformation, and the lack of teaching resources and facilities.

Keywords: Critical Literacy; EFL; Teaching Strategy.

I. INTRODUCTION

The term critical literacy has existed since a few decades ago. This new concept broadens the definition of 'literacy' which initially only focused on the ability to read texts, into the ability to 'read the world' (Freire, 1970). The ability to 'read the world' aims to increase students' awareness of their society situation includes power, equality, and social justice (Coffey, 2009; Kim, 2016). This expansion certainly also affects the field of education (Ko, 2013), not least in Indonesia.

In Indonesia, the literacy movement has been recently initiated by the government through the local act called "*Gerakan Literasi*" implemented at various schools since 2017. Although it was initially aimed at increasing students' interest in reading but this local movement is expected to improve students' critical literacy at the end of the spectrum as evident in (Kementrian

Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2017). Critical literacy is, indeed an important tool for students to survive in today's era marked by abundant of information circulated among people in its various forms. As a response to this, critical literacy act as one of the strategies to help develop students' social awareness, tolerances, and motivation to read and share their ideas (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). Therefore, the teaching and learning practice which is conducted through the critical literacy strategy will be very useful to help students adapt to this current era.

Against this backdrop, the research on the implementation of critical literacy strategy in the EFL context is still quite limited (Huang, 2011; Ko, 2013), especially in Indonesia (Gustine, 2018). Furthermore, many teachers in Indonesia reported their lack of understanding on what critical literacy is and how to create a critically-literate English classroom (Gustine, 2018).

This critical literacy strategy may not be

well known by all teachers specifically by English teachers in Indonesia. Many EFL teachers might not fully understand the essence of critical literacy and critical literacy strategy in teaching (Gustine, 2018). In addition, the research on the implementation of critical literacy strategy in the EFL context is still quite limited (Gustine, 2018; Ko, 2013), especially in Indonesia (Huang, 2011). Thus, teachers who want to start implementing this strategy still lack of knowledge about how to implement this strategy in the classroom (Ko, 2013). Therefore, teachers who want to start implementing this strategy still lack of knowledge about how to implement this strategy in the classroom (Ko, 2013).

Based on the aforementioned explanation above, there is a need to investigate the implementation of critical literacy strategy and the challenges faced by the EFL teacher in classroom. In order to achieve these purposes, there are two research questions related to this research (1) How does an English teacher teach critical literacy in EFL classroom in Indonesia?; and (2) What challenges does the teacher encounter in implementing critical literacy strategy in EFL classroom?

1.1. Critical Literacy in EFL Context

As mentioned earlier, there were only a few empirical studies on critical literacy practices in the EFL context especially in Asian country (Ko, 2013). In Indonesia, the literature relating to critical literacy is limited, especially in English language education. The study conducted by Gustine (2018) investigated English teachers' knowledge, perception, and effort in developing a critical literacy-oriented classroom and found that the majority of teachers did not seem to have sufficient knowledge on the difference between critical thinking and critical literacy. However, they believe that critical literacy may help students read and understand the meaning beyond the text even though teachers did not have a clear idea on how to create critical classroom. Even so, the teachers yearn for a tailored professional development related to critical literacy implementation in

English classroom.

In wider EFL settings there are a number of critical literacy studies relate to the implementation critical literacy in their classrooms at that are relevant to this study. The study conducted by Ko (2013) showed that the implementation of critical literacy in could transform the teacher's teaching strategy form a traditional didactic classroom to a critical dialogic approach or from banking pedagogy to empowering pedagogy (Freire, 1970). Furthermore, the study found that teachers' capacity of becoming critically literate is prerequisite to create a critical literacy-oriented classroom. In addition, Riley (2015) found that in implementing critical literacy teachers' own critical literacy become the basic thing to enact students' critical literacy and critical literacy practices should be considered in relation to school context, teacher identity, and professional position.

1.2. Critical Literacy Teaching Strategy

Critical literacy teaching strategy could assist students to think about texts from a critical perspective. The strategy has to be dynamic and adapt to the contexts in which it is used, promote critical discussions, and resulting action. Although McLaughlin & DeVogd (2004) state that there is no single method to teach critical literacy. The existence of critical literacy teaching strategy is important since its purpose is to provide direction for students as they FMengage in critical analysis such as examining social issues and power relations.

Furthermore, Behrman (2006) and Cervetti (2004) found some varied strategies to foster critical literacy that could encourage students to take a critical stance toward text include textual analysis, dialogue, and questioning or problem posing. One of the teaching strategies was proposed by McLaughlin & Allen (2002) who suggested that the teacher should scaffold student learning by using a five-step instructional framework: explain, demonstrate, guide, practice, and reflect. Below is the table of the framework of critical literacy instruction by McLaughlin & Allen (2002).

Table 1. The Framework of Critical Literacy Instruction

Steps	Activities
Explain	Explaining what critical literacy strategy is and how it works
Demonstrate	Demonstrating the strategy, using a think-aloud, a read-aloud, and an overhead projector or chalkboard.
Guide	Guiding the students to work in small groups or with partners to create responses.
Practice	Practicing by having students work with partners or independently to apply the critical literacy strategy.
Reflect	Reflecting on how the strategy helps students read from a critical stance.

McLaughlin & Allen (2002)

Based on the framework above, in the first stage, teachers explain the meaning of critical literacy and its strategy. Secondly, teachers can further expand the meaning of critical literacy through demonstration and may use think-aloud or read-aloud strategy. Thirdly, the teacher provides a critical perspective from which students question and challenge the text. Then, students can work in pairs or in small groups to offer responses as the teacher guides their reading and as they practice reading from a critical stance. Finally, the teacher and the students reflect on what they know about being critically aware and how it helped them to understand the text. Despite these suggestions and guidelines, critical literacy teaching is dynamic and continually needs to be revisited and refined (Coffey, 2009).

II. METHODS

This article investigates the implementation of critical literacy in EFL classroom in Indonesia and the challenges faced by the teacher. A qualitative case study was employed as the research methodology. This methodology was selected because a case study seeks to preserve the wholeness

and integrity of the case (Silverman, 2005). Furthermore, a case study was applied because it is relevant to the present research. In this way, the study focused on investigating one case concerning the implementation of critical literacy in one class of one senior high school. It is in line with the statement that a case study refers to an in-depth study which investigates an implementation of a particular theory or method which has not been much known in the certain case (Silverman, 2005). As critical literacy has not been widely known and implemented in Indonesian senior high school, the case study was conducted to portray the implementation of critical literacy in on senior high school.

The study was conducted in an eleven grade English class at one of public senior high schools in West Java province, Indonesia. The participant was an English teacher who teaches at eleven and twelve grade students and has been teaching English for over 16 years at the time of the study. Her teaching experience started when she was still a student in high school and continued until now in which she holds a Master degree majored in Educational Management.

Related to critical literacy, she confirmed that she had prior knowledge on knew critical thinking and higher order thinking from some professional developments she attended. Further on critical literacy, she admitted that she heard the term before without proper understanding or knowledge about it. However, one day she has become a participant in a master's thesis research that discussed critical literacy implementation. From then on, she began to understand and apply critical literacy strategy in her class. However, she reckoned her first encounter on critical literacy during her master degree research meetings where one of the speakers discussed critical literacy strategy which raised her interest and curiosity. Therefore, she responded positively to my invitation to participate in this study.

The data sources in this study included classroom observation, interviews, and several informal conversations with the teacher. However, due to Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia, classroom meetings observations were very limited. The informal conversations

continued regularly throughout the course, which provided valuable data to capture the teacher's journey in understanding critical literacy and critical literacy strategy. The interview was conducted for two times with the teacher, it was respectively conducted prior to the course and after the course. The pre-course interview was about her earlier teaching experience in reading and teaching practice and the post-course interview was about her experience with critical literacy strategy. All the classroom observation and interviews were video and audio-taped.

Furthermore, the data from the classroom observation and the interviews were analyzed and transcribed. The descriptive data analysis was used as the way to explore teacher attitudes, behavior, and experience along with the teaching program. In line with this, Thompson (2009) states that this method can be a way to discover participants' attitude, behavior, and experience. Moreover, the data from both the observation and the interview were analyzed into some emerging themes related to the teachers' implementation of critical literacy and the challenges faced by the teacher.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section concerns with discussing the findings for each research question in this study. The first section elaborates the implementation of critical literacy strategy in EFL classroom and the second section focuses on the challenges faced by teacher in implementing the strategy.

3.1. Result

Before the classroom observation was conducted the first round of interview was held. Related to her teaching practice, she said that before she understands critical literacy strategy, she was too focused on the textbook given by the school and she also used students' worksheet as the additional source for the students.

"Before I know the critical literacy strategy, I only use textbook because it is the requirement textbook given by the government and I also use students'

worksheet and some supplementary materials suitable to the lesson."

As she developed more knowledge on critical literacy, she made a few attempts to implement it in her classroom. However, sometimes she was afraid of being not critical and failed to give prompts to her students. Moreover, she said that employing critical literacy into classroom practice was fun and challenges because it could make students shared their idea freely.

"Sometimes, when I would try to implement critical literacy, I feel afraid because I think that I am not critical literate enough. I always try to think harder to be critical and give my students chance to share their ideas with or without my prompts. It is a great experience to apply critical literacy strategy, because I have to think critically before my students does to develop their critical literacy skills."

Further, the question about the material she would deliver in the classroom was asked. She said that she would teach the last chapter about song before the midterm examination to the students. She brought her projector and speaker to the class. Then, the classroom observation was started.

"Today I will teach the material about song. Students have to analyze the lyric. I will do it in a critical way. But I have to take my own laptop, speaker, and projector because the class doesn't have it."

The classroom observation began by setting the camera in the classroom. Later, the teacher taught her students the material about song. In the classroom observation, the implementation of critical literacy strategy started to emerge.

The first meeting:

In the first meeting, three steps out of five steps in instructional framework of critical literacy (explain-demonstrate-guide) were identified. In this meeting, teacher focused on explaining the materials. She used all her teaching and learning media she was brought before. The teacher started the class by explaining the materials, its objective, and the activities that the students would be done. The chapter was about song, students would learn

about how to express, appreciate, and understand the meaning of the song. In this stage, teacher took her own responsibility to explain the material and students only paying attention to her.

When the activity moved to demonstrate stage, the situation inside the classroom changed. The teacher gave students the lyric of the song and asked them to analyze and understand the lyric. After handing her students with the lyric, teacher read the lyric together with the students and sometimes she translated the difficult words to the students. Later, the classroom discussion started to emerge. Teacher asked some questions to the students and students.

Teacher : Now, you have to understand the lyric.

I will ask you some question, don't be afraid of being wrong, ok?

What is the song about?

Via : Someone who become a vagrant

Teacher : Why do you think it is vagrant?

Via : Someone who has no future.

Teacher : Ok, *karena disini dikatakan* he will be nothing when he is getting older.

Do you think that vagrant has no future?

Reza : They have.

Teacher : How?

Reza : By changing the way of thinking.

Teacher : Can you give me the example?

Reza : For example, when they have dreams, they have to make their dreams come true and do their best to reach their dreams.

Teacher : Other opinions?

Haikal : The meaning of a struggle. So, the struggle can arise when someone feels down, when someone feels sick, then he has the potential but many people underestimated him.

Teacher : Good.

What do you feel after reading the lyric?

Haikal : I feel sad and amazed.

The teacher continued the classroom activity by showing her students the music video of the song. Students seemed excited to watch the music video. After watching it, teacher asked some other critical questions related to the music video and its relation to the lyric.

Teacher : So, what is it about?

Reza : A father who works and struggle for his child.

Teacher : Do the video represent what we think?

Sulthan : Yes, for some parts.

Teacher : Which part?

Sulthan : The streets, homeless people.

Teacher : Now, when you become a director. Do you want to change the video to represent the song?

Sulthan : No. Because of the copy right.

Teacher : Ok.

How about you?

Ari : I think I want to change it a little.

The video only showed the struggle of a father who wants to make his child proud of him. I want to add the scene where the father become a successful person.

After the classroom discussion finished, teacher guided the students to work in group to answer some critical questions. Then, she provided them time to discuss and monitor

their progress.

The second meeting:

In the second meeting, there were three steps happened (guide-practice-reflect). The teacher continued the previous group discussion. She asked her students to work in group and analyzed the critical question given by her.

After opening the meeting as usual, teacher asked her students to do the group discussion continuing the last discussing. She prompted them to share their ideas in group to answer the critical questions. Then, she provided them time to discuss and monitor their progress. The students continued to analyze the song lyric and the music video, and the teacher continued to monitor the discussion. After providing time for group discussions and monitoring students' progress, teacher asked students to share their ideas with the class. She asked each group to present their answer and opinion of the song. In this session, many interesting things happened.

Group 2:

Azki : What do you think of the music video? Why? The video is amazing, because I can see the struggle of the father in the video. It is very touching, making us aware that we can fight too.

Teacher : Very good, because the video of the father is very touching, Ok, why are you so touching?

Azki : Because as you can see that the father getting up early, not all fathers can do that to get up early and work hard to support their children, and then he doesn't show his daughter that his real work is. Maybe if he gets caught, his daughter will be ridiculed because his father is a scavenger. His father was also afraid of his son being hurt; he wanted his child to be proud.

Teacher : Are you proud of the child? Why? What do you think about the child?

Azki : Because Mam, surely all parents will think about their children in my opinion, let alone see his father work like that. Viewed from today, most children like to mock without knowing what it really is. Because if it's mocked it hurts, especially if you know that the child's father works like this.

Teacher : What do you think about the child?

Azki : The child already knows that his father is not like that, but she wants to feel that his father is like "my daughter is proud of me".

Teacher : Do you think that the child is proud of her father?

Azki : Yes.

Teacher : Would you do if you were in the child position?

Azki : If Azki is in the position of her child, I will be proud, my father has worked hard already, he has struggled, thank you.

Group 4:

Ari : Is the meaning of the song delivered well? Why? In my opinion is yes Mam. Because the property, the place, and the actor have conveyed the meaning of the song, the struggle of a father.

Teacher : Very good, the scene, property, deliver what is the song about, ok if you were the director will you add something or cut away something?

Ari : I may add something mam, the scene in the landfill. So, the scene of the fathers who works picking up the trash will be delivered well to the audience.

Teacher : Will you add the wife? There's no wife in the video.

Ari : No Mam, because if the wife is added to the music video, the chemistry between father and daughter will be decreased.

Teacher : Ok thank you very much

The teacher gave the opportunity for the rest of students to give their opinion when it was necessary. After the discussion about song ended, the teacher and students talked about the reflection of the whole classroom activities they have passed. The teacher and students also proposed some suggestion and recommendation that they might give to the song writer and the listeners. After that, the teacher closed the meeting of the song chapter.

When the classroom observation ended, the teacher could manage her class well. She could provide her students prompts to provoke students critical thinking. She also gave some students help to understand the critical questions and actively included to the discussion. She was not only monitored her students' progress but also gave them time to do their task independently in order to make them more critical without her prompts. However, some students seemed to be not really confident to share their ideas. They look hesitant when they want to answer questions for fear that their English is wrong. On the other hand, some students ventured to give opinions by mixing English and Indonesian, usually they asked permission from the teacher to answer with Indonesian before giving an opinion.

The after-meeting interview was conducted after the class ended. A few questions were asked to the teacher. One of them is her feelings after implementing critical literacy in the classroom. The teacher replied that she quite enjoyed using the strategy in class because she felt her class was livelier.

"I am quite happy with the response given by my students. I think this strategy won't suit them, but in reality, they can be more active in class. Then, the things that make me shocked are the answers of students that sometimes beyond my personal thought. Even so, I still deny that my students are not able to fully

speak English well. "

In addition, the questions related to the challenges faced by her when implementing critical literacy in class were also been asked. As can be seen above, the teacher's answer has referred to one of the challenges in implementing critical literacy. Further discussion about this will be discussed in the next section.

3.2. Discussion

This section presents the challenges faced by teachers in implementing the critical literacy strategy in classroom practice. There are two main challenges faced by teacher in implementing the strategy. The challenges are students' proficiency in English and the change from traditional classroom to critical-oriented classroom.

The first challenge is students' language proficiency. During the observation process, many students were afraid to state their opinion as they seemed to not fully capable to speak in English completely. Some of them also asked if they were allowed to express their opinion in Indonesian language.

Furthermore, the teacher believed that her students might face some difficulties in sharing their critical thoughts in English. She further explained that even in Indonesian language, some students seemed to experience this challenge.

"Actually, what worries me most to teach students through critical literacy strategy is their English skills. Not all students can and are able to use full English in the classroom. Even in Indonesian, when students are told to answer critical question, it might be difficult. Especially in English, after thinking about the answers, then they have to think about grammar and vocabulary. But I have to try, this can be a place for students to develop their courage in speaking English. "

This was seen during the classroom discussion activity. Some children who are active and have the courage to answer teacher's questions by using English and Indonesian language in answering questions. Furthermore, the rest of students were afraid to answer the questions even though in

Indonesian language, as the result, they only silence.

Teacher : Do you like the content of the song? Why?

Student : Yes, because *menyentuh*.

Teacher : Do you like the content of the music video? Why?

Student : Yes, because *ada seorang ayah yang rela berkorban dan ingin merubah hidupnya*.

The evidence is line with Kim (2016) who states that many EFL students might be not equipped by the higher linguistic process skills that required in critical literacy learning. In addition, Ko (2013) found that the level of students' English proficiency influences their perceptions of critical literacy learning. Students who have higher English proficiency show greater interest than students who are lack. It is because the critical literacy reading materials are commonly written in English. Thus, students who are lack of English proficiency do not see the texts as the discussion material to be discussed otherwise they feel that it was too difficult and boring.

The second challenge is the change of traditional classroom to critical-oriented classroom. In Freire (1970) term, it stated that critical literacy transforms students learning from "banking pedagogy" to "critical pedagogy". The reason of this situation was the teacher who act as the bank of knowledge which is contrasted to critical literacy learning. In line with this, McLaughlin & DeVogd (2004) state that critical literacy learning places students as active participants to examine the issues, transformation, and action.

The evidence for this challenge is firstly, the use of textbook as the main source to be applied in teaching and learning process and secondly, students who still placed the teacher's position as the center of learning. The teacher mentioned that she could not avoid the use of textbooks given by the government because students would face the examination according to what was taught in the textbooks. Meanwhile, students' textbooks only contain a variety of texts genre with the same questions for each chapter. In Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan

addition, the teacher concerned with the out of date texts and the limitation of examples and activities on the textbook. Those problem made her to search some additional materials from other books, internet, YouTube, etc.

"Some example of texts in the textbook are out of date. One of them in this material about song. The example of songs written on their textbook are from year 1974, 2002, 2003 which may not be appropriate for students. almost all students in the class were born in 2002 or 2003 and they may not be familiar with the songs written in their textbook. so, I think I should look for a song that is quite appropriate for their age and knowledge in order to attract their attention to the materials. But it doesn't mean that the previous song was bad, it would be better to match the text to students' experience first. The, the examples from the textbook can be used as the additional texts to increase students' knowledge."

For the second evidence, placed the teacher's position as the center of learning, it is showed by the domination of teacher in teaching and learning process. Beside students' English proficiency, fear of making mistakes and being scolded by teacher made students reluctant to share their opinions. It is in line with Beck (2005) and Kramer-Dahl (2001) who found that in traditional learning teacher usually dominate the class and when critical literacy is implemented, students still have view that teacher has the highest authority in the class. Thus, the main purpose of critical literacy may not be reached because the classrooms do not indicate democratic power sharing.

Furthermore, the last question for her was about her future plan to teach using critical literacy strategy. She answered that she wanted to develop her own critical literacy ability since she felt that she was not critically literate enough.

"For my future plan, I think I want to increase my knowledge of critical literacy strategy and get use to apply this strategy in the class that I teach. So that I and also my students can easily understand and use this strategy. But, the most important thing is my critical literacy ability, I have to

develop my own critical perspective to teach this strategy to my students.”

Her answer about she wanted to develop her own critical literacy ability to teach critical literacy strategy is in line with Riley (2015). He stated that the teacher should become critically literate to conduct a critical based class.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study illustrates the process of implementing a critical literacy strategy by EFL teachers in one of the state high schools in Indonesia. There are two important findings described in this study, namely the strategy used by the teacher in implementing critical literacy in the class and the challenges that the teacher faces in the implementation process.

First, in implementing critical literacy in the classroom, the teacher applies the five-step instructional framework from McLaughlin & Allen (2002) which includes explain, demonstrate, guide, practice, and reflect. To bring this strategy into the classroom, the teacher first prepared material from the textbook and several other sources, after which the teacher prepared the types of activities that would be carried out in class. In two class observations, the teacher was seen to apply the five steps in the framework. However, the teacher was not satisfied with the results she had obtained in class. This refers to the second finding regarding challenges faced by the teacher.

The second finding is the challenge faced by the teacher, the dissatisfaction previously mentioned is related to the ability of students to speak English. The teacher considered that the students could not use English properly. In addition, teachers also experience the challenge in the transformation from traditional teaching to critical literacy-oriented teaching in class, because students still view the teacher as the teaching and learning centered or the bank of knowledge. The use of textbook also indicates this second challenge. The teacher feels that she was too focused on books given by the government, even though the books provided sometimes lack the things that should be taught.

Therefore, teachers usually look for additional material from other sources.

Finally, some suggestions are provided for teachers and school officials to implement critical literacy in EFL classes: First, since teachers play an important role in critical classrooms, teacher training programs must be held to foster teacher critical thinking and to develop critical teaching skills of teachers. Second, for high school officials, they should create and provide an environment that supports students to be able to develop their critical literacy skills. This is all very necessary for teachers, students, and schools because critical literacy is very important today.

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