CRITICAL LITERACY IN EFL CLASSROOMS: VOICES FROM TEACHERS IN A RURAL SCHOOL

Winda Diani[1*], Fazri Nur Yusuf[2]

[12]English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Language and Literature Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, 40154, Indonesia

*winda.diani@upi.edu

ABSTRACT

In the context of Indonesia, several approaches to the study and teaching of languages, including critical literacy, are frequently considered foreign. One of those strategies is the teaching of critical literacy, which is one of those approaches that aim to help students to distinguish between knowing language abilities and being able to make use of language. Due to the fact that critical literacy is still a relatively unexplored area, particularly in rural Indonesian schools, the purpose of this study was to investigate the current issue of the participants' perspectives on critical literacy practices in EFL classrooms. Specifically, this was done so because critical literacy is a relatively unexplored area. In this study, descriptive and qualitative research methods were utilized, and two English teachers from senior high schools participated in the research. Interviews were used to compile the data for this study. The findings of the analysis of the data led to the conclusion that almost all of the teachers had a less persuasive knowledge of what critical literacy was, and it was highly likely that none of the teachers were familiar with the term "critical literacy." It can be attributed to a few different things. It is important not to ignore the reality that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in EFL environments such as Indonesia still lack critical literacy understanding and skills. That indicated that teachers still needed support in expanding or deepening their expertise of critical literacy. This study shows that teachers should be encouraged to cultivate critical literacy in their classes because of the limitations that were discussed earlier.

Keywords: *critical literacy, English as a foreign language (EFL), rural school*

1. INTRODUCTION

The requirement is a result of the current situation of the Indonesian educational system, in which the Indonesian Ministry of Education mandates teachers to integrate the principles of critical literacy within the curriculum of their various topics. In this sense, schools that implemented the new curriculum in 2013 (see Widodo, 2016) are supposed to integrate higher-order thinking abilities (such as critical literacy characteristics) into the various school disciplines (Gustine & Insani, 2019). In view of Indonesia's educational system, it is of special relevance that the emphasis of this research is on learning more about the critical.

Furthermore, critical literacy is an educational strategy that focuses on assisting students in accepting multiple perspectives and possibilities while they are reading a text (Papadopoulos & Griva, 2017). The goal of this strategy is to help students recognize the difference between learning language skills and being able to use language effectively (Tohidian & Taskoh, 2020).

The previous study conducted by Cho (2015) carried on a study that explored critical literacy with pre-service and in-service teachers in teacher education courses offered in the United States. It showed both groups of teachers addressed the absence of critical literacy understanding. In the Indonesian context, Gustine & Insani (2019) described a study that looked into English teachers' strategies for supporting secondary school students in becoming critically literate by analyzing narrative texts. The findings revealed that the four resources model of critical literacy, to some extent, assisted students in becoming critically literate, particularly at the stage of meaning-making and text criticism.

While some previous studies offered some insight into critical literacy from the viewpoints of instructors and students, they did not highlight critical literacy in a variety of areas. In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), critical literacy is still a relatively untapped field, especially in rural Indonesian schools, and there has not been a great deal of study describing how critical literacy is utilized in rural schools.

As a result, this study was aimed at investigating the current issue of the participants' perspectives on critical literacy practices in EFL classrooms in a rural school with the following research questions: a) How do EFL teachers in rural schools teach critical literacy in their classrooms? b) What challenges do the teachers in rural school face in the practice of critical literacy in EFL classrooms?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 Critical literacy

Various researchers and practitioners define critical literacy differently. Critical literacy, according to Anderson and Irvine (1993), is the process of learning to read and write in order to become aware of experiences that have been historically formed in a specific connection of particular power. In addition, critical literacy is a way of dealing with information in texts that goes beyond simply decoding letters and words. It enables learners to engage with various sources of information and encourages them to question "the social contexts, purposes, and possible effects that

they have on their own lives" questioning "their opinions, biases, and perceptions of reality" in comparison with others' (Duzer, Florez, & Cunningham, 1999). Thus, critical literacy is essential in today's society because people are constantly bombarded with new information systems and rapid technological breakthroughs. As a result, developing students' critical literacy skills is critical in the classroom.

2.2 Principles of critical literacy

Many studies have been carried out in order to debate the pedagogical underpinnings of critical literacy. The shifting understanding of reader roles is influenced by the evolving experience of reading. In their critical literacy paradigm, Luke and Freebody (1990, 1999) identified four reader roles. The four reader roles have received universal acceptance because they take into account the evolution and shifting trends in reading education, as opposed to refuting or introducing entirely new notions. Table 1 offers a description of the roles drawn from the early work of Luke and Freebody (1990, 1999) that supports the implementation of the CL framework ((Novianti et.al., 2021).

Table 1. Reader roles

Role	Description
Code breaker	Understanding the symbolic graphic conventions that make up the code. Decoding the codes and conventions of written and spoken texts. Drives meaning from text by making sense of written words including specific terms. Observable e.g., as students read the graphic symbol of written text; attends to the function and use of various categories of words, e.g., parts of speech, synonyms, prefixes; use a range of strategies to support identification of words, e.g., sounds in words, letter patterns, and word meaning; use headings/pictures to predict storyline/ content/ and word.
Text Participant	Understanding literal and figurative meanings within the text. Comprehending written, spoken and visual texts. Derive and infer meanings and analyze reading with respect to prior knowledge, research, and experience or by making connections: text to self, text to text, text to world. Indicate full comprehension of the text and probe related points presented in the text. Observable e.g., as students construct meaning through the before reading stage; monitoring predictions; linking text ideas to real life issues; drawing on background and prior knowledge to construct meaning; mentioning/ writing the lateral and inferential meaning of the language used in the text; using pictures to predict the text; responding to texts on a personal level i.e., raising follow up questions or probing.
Text User	Using the text in social situations to achieve social purposes and participating in events in which the text plays a part. Understanding the purposes of different written, spoken and visual texts for different cultural and social functions. Includes redesigning / reconstructing text by making use the understanding of the text in achieving its purpose. Or able to contextualize the connection made with the text (e.g., participating in genre/ responding to the text). Observable e.g. as students exploring the features of different text types to determine how an author's purpose shapes the way the text is formed; using an understanding of author purpose to determine the main facts and to organize information from the text; drawing on a range of sources to synthesize information and express points of view to respond to text (e.g. construct/ design response text or generate new questions); writing a meaningful summary or constructing text.
Text analyst	Looking for implicit meanings, opinions, and bias, and either endorsing or rejecting the point of view put forward by the text. Understanding how texts position readers. Considering written words from various perspectives, track accuracy and reliability, uncover meaning, intentions, agendas, assumption, and priorities, choose important ideas/ thoughts, recognize bias, take a

	standing toward the text, and provide another way of doing/writing. Observable e.g. as students developing a critical response; presenting reasons to endorse position taken by the text or develops own position; exploring how the writer influences reader perceptions by examining the trustworthiness of the information; identifying the attitude, point of view, and/ or position of the writer toward the topic.

Luke and Freebody (1990) state that the four roles/resources are neither taxonomic nor developmental in character. According to Underwood et al. (2007), roles/resources play major roles on numerous times, and a competent reader understands this on numerous occasions. Occasionally, certain roles or resources may take center stage, while others fill the supporting cast. While the role of code breaker exists in all textual encounters, it assumes a prominent position when the cipher is obscure or information is limited, as Underwood et al. have established. This is still being discussed, particularly the supportive role of the other roles when phonics decoding is problematic (Novianti et.al., 2021).

2.3   Critical literacy in EFL settings and in Indonesian context

Indonesia has embraced the genre-based approach, often known as the text-based approach, for English language instruction. Genre theories and their application in language learning and teaching serve two purposes: to comprehend the relationship between language and settings and to apply this comprehension to language and literacy education (Hyland, 2002).

Moreover, few empirical studies on critical literacy practices in the EFL context, particularly in Asian nations, have been done (Ko, 2013). In Indonesia, there is a dearth of critical literacy literature, notably in English language instruction (Hidayat, et.al., 2020). The main focus of research on critical literacy teaching in Asian EFL has been on the perceived barriers experienced by teachers and students in these settings. Cultural appropriateness (Kuo, 2009; Hu, 2002), insufficient understanding of the need for critical literacy and a lack of implementation skills (Kim, 2012), the tradition of a banking pedagogy (Ko, 2010), underestimation by foreign language educators of EFL students' ability to take a critical perspective (Falkenstein, 2003), and the persistence of stereotypical views of Asian students as pacifists (Kuo, 2009; Hu, 2002) are at least five of the issues (Shin & Crookes, 2005).

3.   METHODS
3.1   Research design
The research design for this study was descriptive qualitative research. In order to investigate the phenomenon through the use of words, stories, and pictures, the descriptive qualitative design was put into action (Creswell, 2012). Using semi-structured interviews

as a means to gain a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives on critical literacy in EFL classrooms in a rural school.

3.2   Research participants and site
This research was contributed by two different teachers. To be more exact, they were English teachers from a rural senior high school in one of the villages of South Ogan Komering Ulu, which is a city in the Southeast Sumatra region of Indonesia.

3.3   Research instrument and data analysis
The author used interviews as the primary method of data collection in order to achieve the research aims of investigating critical literacy in EFL classrooms, particularly in rural school settings. The interviews were done in order to obtain the data from the teachers.

The purpose of the interviews was to get insight into the responses of the participants to have participated in the critical literacy program and to shed light on any challenges that might have been encountered. In addition, ethical considerations were given careful attention. In order to gather information for the study, the author requested the participants' authorization to conduct an interview with them about their experiences in English language lessons. The participants were made aware of the objective of the study as well as the fact that they would be taking part in it. The information collected was kept private, no names were used, and participation was entirely optional. This helped to decrease the researchers' potential for bias. When it came to dealing with participants and data, the use of fictional identities guaranteed that both confidentiality and integrity were maintained.

The interviews were carried out in Indonesian, audio recorded, and then subsequently transcribed by the researchers who had conducted them. After unitizing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) the transcript of each interview, we divided it into units of meaning or theme units and then moved on to open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This was followed by analysis using open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The process of open coding consisted of regularly comparing, naming and labelling the data, opening up the data to find key concepts, and breaking the data open.

A qualitative analysis was performed on both the interview data and the author's notes in order to identify recurring patterns across the various points of view. A comprehensive analysis was performed on the transcripts, focusing on identifying recurring themes and perspectives. As a direct consequence of this, the author was able to draw his/her own conclusions and offer potential suggestions.

4.   RESULTS & DISCUSSION
Discussion of the findings for each of the research questions addressed in this study took place in this section. In the first section, the teachers discuss the specifics of their understand about critical literacy and in the second section the discussion focus on the challenges that the teachers faced while putting critical literacy into practice in EFL classrooms.

How do EFL teachers in rural schools teach critical literacy in their classrooms?

The findings presented in this section were derived from interviews with participants. In response to this question, the first inquiry that

I did to study the manner in which teachers instruct critical literacy was to inquire about the teachers' concept of critical literacy in and of itself. Without a shadow of a doubt, every participant possessed a less persuasive comprehension of what constitutes critical literacy. It was highly possible that almost all classroom teachers had never heard of the term "critical literacy."

In addition, all teachers continued to hold the belief that critical literacy was synonymous with critical thinking. Critical thinking, on the other hand, focuses solely on the ability of an individual to read and comprehend a text as a whole and to think critically about it.

Besides, virtually all teachers specified the manner in which the critical literacy strategy was implemented, which meant that all teachers concentrated on the textbook supplied by the school and some teachers used the worksheets that students had created as an additional source for the students. When trying to learn more about critical literacy, almost all teachers were afraid of being labeled as critical.

Teachers' competence, particularly in rural schools, had a significant impact on critical literacy understanding in EFL classrooms, for example, due to a lack of critical literacy training. This was especially true in rural schools. According to what was said in the interview, even while teachers were making efforts to include critical literacy in the courses they teach, they did not yet possess the knowledge and abilities necessary to do so successfully.

Thus, it is important not to overlook the fact that English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher in ESL/EFL contexts such as Indonesia still lack critical literacy understanding and skills. What this indicates is that teachers still have a need for support in expanding or strengthening their critical literacy expertise.

What challenges do teachers in rural schools face in the practice of critical literacy in EFL classrooms?

This section discussed the challenges of critical literacy practice in EFL classrooms.

Students, particularly educated students, must be able to not only comprehend the material they read but also evaluate it and think critically about it in order to be able to make informed choices based on the knowledge they acquire.

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture's 2016b report, secondary school students should ideally be able to participate in higher-level reading activities such as analyzing and reflecting on texts that have a high level of complexity. One of the teachers claimed that the teachers' overall reading level was still considered to be quite low. As a consequence of this, individuals had difficulty revealing information, developing and integrating interpretation, reflecting on and evaluating complicated texts, and the like when requested to do so.

Concerning the issue of critical literacy in the Indonesian context, as discussed above, the author identified some issues.

To begin, students' levels of critical literacy were consistently below average. Students in their senior year of high school, in particular, should be able to interact critically with texts that are difficult to understand. That is to say, students should have the capacity to understand, evaluate, and reflect on the information that they obtain from the texts they read.

Moreover, they still had difficulty critically engaging with the texts they read. The critical literacy of teachers should be developed because they are facilitators. It does involve a great deal of effort in addition to time, of course. The conditions of the schools' buildings continue to be inadequate. It also suggests that the classroom setting should be accommodating and responsive to the requirements of the students so that they can develop their essential literacy skills.

Teachers expected that their students would struggle to express their critical ideas in English. Additionally, Ko (2013) discovered that students' understandings of critical literacy learning are shaped by their degree of English competency. They believe that implementing critical literacy can encourage students to be more critical because it is thought necessary to think beyond what they read, to comprehend the text thoroughly by seeking appropriate sources, to analyse texts from various perspectives in order to avoid disagreement and become fair readers, and to become intelligent readers who can prevent themselves from being deceptive, where possible.

5.   CONCLUSION

According to the interview data, the majority of the teachers in this study might not fully comprehend the understanding of critical literacy in English education. Nonetheless, some participants appeared to have a better awareness of what critical literacy was and how it was performed in the classroom. Teachers, however, believe that socialization, workshops, and research would remain important in establishing critical literacy-oriented English lessons.

As a result, a more complete study including more teachers from various regions of Indonesia will be tremendously valuable for future research. This enables others to explore further into the subject and pay attention to changes and issues that teachers may face in their classrooms.

6.   ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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