

**TEACHING CRITICAL READING OF LITERARY TEXTS:
A PROPOSAL FOR CRITICAL PEDAGOGY
IN EFL CONTEXT**

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Abstract

The idea to teach critical reading through literary texts comes from the analogy that language and literary works are like two sides of a coin. Therefore, teaching the content (language) can be done through its form (literary work). Literary works as the real example of how language works. Considering the importance of literary works in teaching English, this paper is aimed at exploring the possible literary works which can be incorporated in teaching English critical reading. It stresses on the exploration literary works by encouraging the learners to interact with literary texts based on their background knowledge and to acquire the new one. Such exploration is crucial since understanding the text type by merely reading and answering comprehension questions is not sufficient enough to stimulate EFL learners' critical thinking. Incorporating reasoning skills in the reading comprehension to some extent will help EFL learners to develop a habit of thinking critically. Accordingly, by applying the seven critical reading strategies as well as the learning prompt introduced in this paper, the goal of critical pedagogy can be achieved.

INTRODUCTION

Language and literary works are like two sides of a coin. Both of them create a mutualism and complementary relation. In such relation, language is the content, meanwhile literary work is its form. Following this analogy, teaching the content (language) can be done through its form (literary work). Literary works as the real example of how language works.

In English language teaching, literary works can help students to expand their linguistic and cognitive skills as well as their sensitivity to cultural knowledge. According to Langer, literature can open horizons of possibility, allowing students to question, interpret, connect and explore positive contributions as it exposes the learners to different registers types of language (in Alim 2010). In this sense, the use of literary works treats the students as the social creatures who are studying others' social patterns, norms and values. Further, using literary work in language teaching can create a joyful atmosphere.

Considering the importance of literary works in teaching English, this paper is aimed at exploring the possible literary works which can be incorporated in teaching English critical reading. It stresses on the exploration literary works by encouraging the learners to interact with literary texts based on their background knowledge and to acquire the new one (Langer in Alim 2010). Hadaway et al., (2002) also proposes literature-based instruction; it is an instructional approach for language teaching using authentic materials.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Critical thinking has become a very important educational goal over the last two decades. Students need to have 'good thinking' by using reasoning and logic focusing on what to believe or do based on the mechanism such as conducting conceptual and argument analysis for problem solving and decision making (Pithers & Soden, 2001). Therefore, educators believe that this competence belongs to an important cognitive skill to be acquired.

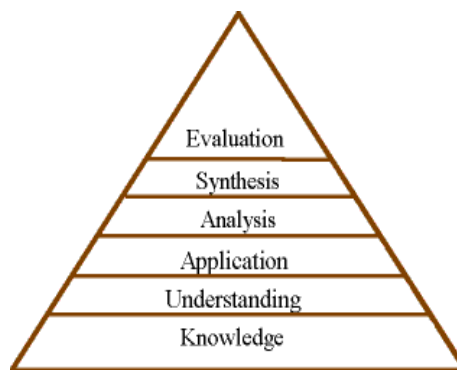
Developing critical thinking has also emerged in Indonesian education. Referring to the international benchmark of education, the current 3R basic literacy (*reading, writing, arithmetic*) seems to be insufficient today. It needs to be completed into 4R basic competence (*reading, writing, arithmetic, and reasoning*), so that learners are equipped with skills needed to support their current and future life economically, socially and culturally (Hayat & Yusuf, 2010; Depdiknas, 2004). This issue has become more significant particularly in facing the more challenging world.

Critical thinking skills belong to the crucial outcome of higher education. This is in line with the Indonesian Government Regulation (*Peraturan Pemerintah Republik Indonesia/PPRI*) No. 70/2010 section 84.2 which states that the aim of education to "*membentuk insan yang kritis, kreatif, inovatif, mandiri, percaya diri dan berjiwa wirausaha*" or to develop human beings who are critical, innovative, independent, self confident and entrepreneurship-minded is one of the objectives of tertiary education. Therefore, the teaching of language, including writing skills, should incorporate the critical pedagogy.

In order to achieve the goals of critical pedagogy, the learning principles are rooted from Bloom's Taxonomy which combine six levels of learning principles starts in a

chronological order (Overbaugh & Schultz, 2008):

1. **Knowledge:** arrange, define, duplicate, label, list, memorize, name, order, recognize, relate, recall, repeat, reproduce, state
2. **Comprehension:** classify, describe, discuss, explain, express, identify, indicate, locate, recognize, report, restate, review, select, translate
3. **Application:** apply, choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, practice, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write
4. **Analysis:** analyze, appraise, calculate, categorize, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test
5. **Synthesis:** arrange, assemble, collect, compose, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, manage, organize, plan, prepare, propose, set up, write
6. **Evaluation:** appraise, argue, assess, attach, choose compare, defend estimate, judge, predict, rate, core, select, support, value, evaluate



READING LITERARY WORKS

Readers read aesthetically, when the readers' predominant interests are on the effect of text on them. Their attentions are on what they are experiencing, thinking and feeling and disregard the inaccuracy of the information written in the text (Rosenblatt,

1991). During reading, readers make associations, images, ideas and sensation in their minds; and these still hang on to their mind after reading it.

If the purpose of teaching language is to develop language skills and thinking skills of the students, teachers need to understand what their students bring to their class. Hence, learners bring with them personal experiences, interests, ideas, problems, worries and attitude (Alwasilah, 2003). Teachers can choose literary texts because these texts are the imitation of life, so that learners can apply their top-down strategies to acquire the language and develop the students' thinking skills. Teachers can scaffold their students by understanding how a reader response a text and makes a transaction with a text in order to acquire the language skills, especially reading, and develop their critical thinking.

CRITICAL LEARNING TODAY

The vast amount of information available on the internet means that critical learning and literacy skills are more important than ever before. More than ever, reading now means reading between the lines. Teachers should help learners think critically at the micro-level, for example, by analyzing the perspectives and biases of literary works available in World Wide Web sites.

Learning a language involves both textual and contextual meaning. The first refers to all aspect related to language system, meanwhile the later refers to all environment where the language used. In this case, understanding the context is actually as important as understanding the text itself. Contextual understanding can broaden students' critical perspective and knowledge about all issues related to the topic which is being studied to be a critical learner. This wider horizon can give a direct

impact in the form of cultural knowledge. Since language has a close relationship to its culture, cultural understanding is important in shaping more comprehensive meaning and critical learning.

Taking into account the importance of critical learning, integrating the cultural understanding through literary work becomes more significant. Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence can be seen as a representative model of what elements the process of this learning should aim to develop in learners (Byram, 2000: 9-10). It consists of:

1. **Attitudes:** curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own.
2. **Knowledge:** of social groups and their products and practices in one's own in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction.
3. **Skills of interpreting and relating:** ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own.
4. **Skills of discovery and interaction:** ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction
5. **Critical cultural awareness:** an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries.

In the learning of critical thinking today, it is commonly integrated with various disciplines such as four language skills (reading, listening, writing, speaking), mathematics, sciences and many others. Recent studies on the integration of critical thinking with language skills especially on reading skills indicated significant increase of

reading and writing skills when critical thinking skills are inclusively integrated in the teaching and learning process (Crook, 2006)

Reading skills will not be optimally comprehended without incorporating critical thinking in its process of understanding. Understanding the text type by merely reading and answering comprehension questions is not sufficient enough to stimulate EFL learners' critical thinking. Incorporating reasoning skills in the reading comprehension to some extent will help EFL learners to develop a habit of thinking critically. The following is the discussion on the strategies involved in incorporating between reading and critical thinking.

CRITICAL READING STRATEGIES

The following is the strategies to be applied not only to the content-area reading but also to literary texts. Although mastering these strategies will not make the critical reading process an easy one, it can make reading much more satisfying and productive and thus help critical readers handle difficult material well and with confidence.

Fundamental to each of these strategies is annotating directly on the page: underlining key words, phrases, or sentences; writing comments or questions in the margins; bracketing important sections of the text; constructing ideas with lines or arrows; numbering related points in sequence; and making note of anything that strikes you as interesting, important, or questionable.

Most readers annotate in layers, adding further annotations on second and third readings. Annotations can be light or heavy, depending on the reader's purpose and the difficulty of the material. The seven critical strategies below can be used for literary texts such as novel review. While, for any other type of literary texts need some adaptation of

the strategies.

Previewing: Learning about a text before really reading it.

Previewing enables readers to get a sense of what the text is about and how it is organized before reading it closely. This simple strategy includes seeing what to learn from the head-notes or other introductory material, skimming to get an overview of the content and organization, and identifying the rhetorical situation.

Contextualizing: Placing a text in its historical, biographical, and cultural contexts.

Reading a text needs to go through the lens of the reader's own experience. The understanding of the words on the page and their significance is informed by what the readers have come to know and value from living in a particular time and place. But the texts being read were all written in the past, sometimes in a radically different time and place. To read critically, the readers need to contextualize, to recognize the differences between the contemporary values and attitudes and those represented in the text.

Questioning to understand and remember: Asking questions about the content.

The questions on the text content are designed to help readers understand a reading and respond to it more fully, and often this technique works. With this strategy, readers can write questions any time, but in difficult literary texts, readers will understand the text better and remember it longer if they write a question for every paragraph or brief section. Each question should focus on a main idea, not on illustrations or details, and each should be expressed in their own words, not just copied from parts of the paragraph.

Reflecting on challenges to reader's beliefs and values: Examining personal responses.

The reading of literary texts might challenge readers' attitudes, unconsciously held beliefs, or positions on current issues. Readers can mark each point of the text

part where they feel personal challenge to their attitudes, beliefs, or status to see further on the pattern occurred.

Outlining and summarizing: Identifying the main ideas and restating them.

Outlining and summarizing are especially helpful strategies for understanding the content and structure of a reading selection of literary texts. Whereas outlining reveals the basic structure of the text, summarizing synthesizes a selection's main argument in brief. Outlining may be part of the annotating process, or it may be done separately. The key to both outlining and summarizing is being able to distinguish between the main ideas and the supporting ideas and examples. The main ideas form the backbone, the strand that holds the various parts and pieces of the text together. Outlining the main ideas helps readers to discover this structure. Summarizing begins with outlining, but instead of merely listing the main ideas, a summary recomposes them to form a new text. Whereas outlining depends on a close analysis of each paragraph, summarizing also requires creative synthesis. Putting ideas together again shows how reading critically can lead to deeper understanding of any literary texts.

Evaluating an argument: Testing the logic of a text as well as its credibility and emotional impact.

All writers make assertions that want readers to accept as true. Yet, critical reader should not accept anything on face value but to recognize every assertion as an argument that must be carefully evaluated. An argument has two essential parts: a claim and support. The claim asserts a conclusion -- an idea, an opinion, a judgment, or a point of view -- that the writer wants readers to accept. The support includes reasons (shared beliefs, assumptions, and values) and evidence (facts, examples, statistics, and authorities) that give readers the basis for

accepting the conclusion. To assess an argument, it needs the process of reasoning as well as its truthfulness. At the most basic level, in order for an argument to be acceptable, the support must be appropriate to the claim and the statements must be consistent with one another.

Comparing and contrasting related readings: Exploring likenesses and differences between texts to understand them better.

Many of the authors concerned with the same issues or questions, but used approach to discuss them in different ways. Fitting a text into an ongoing dialectic helps increase understanding of why an author approached a particular issue or question in the way he or she did.

When the literary text chosen is in the form of prose or short stories, Tung & Chang (2009) suggest some learning prompts as follow:

- Pick out at least five phrases or sentences which you think are especially important to the story and briefly describe why you chose each
- Who is the most impressive or your favorite character in the story? What qualities does he/she exhibit in the story? How does he/she exhibit them? What qualities does he/she lack?
- What do you think this story is about? How does the writer present the message(s) in the story?
- Write your questions:

Using the above prompts the literary reading develops learner's critical thinking which proceeds to a few implications for future pedagogy. Students can further explore the depth of their thoughts and challenge themselves. Through group presentation, they can cultivate their critical thinking as well as enhance their teamwork skills and

employability. In this way, the momentum of students' critical thinking can be sustained and further exalted over a long-term process.

CONCLUDING REMARK

Regarding critical thinking in reading, it can be inferred that the need to incorporate reading and critical thinking skills becomes more significant in EFL context. Therefore, by applying the seven critical reading strategies as well as the learning prompt introduced in this paper, the goal of critical pedagogy can be achieved.

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