Designing and implementing a critical literacy-based approach in an Indonesian EFL secondary school

Gin Gin Gustine

BIODATA

Gin Gin Gustine is a PhD candidate at Deakin University, Australia. Her research interests are in critical literacy, teachers’ professional learning and EFL secondary school students. Her contact email is ggg@deakin.edu.au.

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the design and implementation process of a critical approach to teaching English, one that is termed Critical Literacy, in an Indonesian secondary school. Despite its popularity as pedagogy and a way of thinking in the West, there is a gap in terms of the implementation of a Critical Literacy approach in South East Asian countries, especially in Indonesia. The methodology of this study is action research involving a teacher at one school in Bandung, West Java province and his classroom consisting of 39 students. Data includes classroom observation, students’ reflective journals and interviews both with the teacher and the students, as well as reflective dialogue between the teacher and me as the teacher-researcher. This study also investigates the benefits as well as the challenges of this new approach that is expected to bridge the gap between its implementation in Western countries and in Indonesia. For teacher educators, this project provides both theoretical and practical frameworks that are needed to prepare pre-service teachers to teach this critical approach in English language teaching.

Keywords: Critical literacy, Action research, EFL secondary teacher

INTRODUCTION

English teaching in Indonesia has been dominated mostly by conventional grammar teaching that emphasizes memorisation of language and linguistics rules and conventions. Despite a number of curriculum changes in Indonesia (Depdiknas, 2006), this approach continues to prevail in most English classrooms throughout the archipelago. This practice of English language teaching is not without criticism. Critical language educators in Indonesia such as Alwasilah (2001), Dardjowidjojo (2003) and Mistar (2005) argue that the grammar-driven methodology is not sufficient to enable students to communicate well; moreover, it does not support learners to think critically.
One of the key factors contributing to the overuse of grammar-driven methodology is the national examination system that emphasises rote learning packed into multiple choice test items, which neglects students’ critical thinking abilities.

Grammar and other language rules are by no means unimportant; in fact, knowledge of grammar is a prerequisite in language learning. However, English teaching that over emphasises this aspect is often regarded as insufficient and irrelevant for learners living in the information era (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Literacy in language education

Critical literacy is grounded in critical social theory and rooted in the Frankfurt School (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000) where researchers such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Herbert Marcuse worked together in the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany, in the mid-1930s. Inspired by Kant’s critical viewpoint and Marx’s critique of ideology, this school of thought pursued the objective of discovering and revealing basic inequalities and hypocrisy in society by means of “immanent critique” and “dialectical thought” (McDaniel, 2006). Paulo Freire (1970), the Brazilian educator, also developed and popularised the notion of critical pedagogy, transferring critical theory into schools’ practices, in his well-known book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. His work has made a significant contribution to the concept of critical literacy in language curriculum as a conscious act to empower disenfranchised groups to unpack the unequal power relations in society and transform themselves through literacy education. Similarly, Janks (2000) also argues that critical literacy education should teach learners to understand the complex relationship between language and power.

Although this approach has been widely defined based on the contexts of its use in language education, some argue that it should not be viewed simply as an instructional strategy but as a philosophical belief embodied in literacy education that “students are language users, not language recipients” (Lee, 2011, 100).

For the purpose of this paper which examines critical literacy and English as a foreign language, I would like to draw a definition from Luke and Dooley (2011).
Critical literacy is the use of texts to analyse and transform relations of cultural, social and political power... to address social, economic and cultural injustice and inequality... it views texts – print and multimodal, paper-based and digital - and their codes and discourses as human technologies for representing and reshaping possible worlds. *Texts are not taken as part of a canonical curriculum tradition or received wisdom that is beyond criticism* (Luke & Dooley, 2011, 1, my italics).

Within this framework, critical literacy is viewed as empowering students to be able to develop their own critical stance or ideological standpoint while learning a language, to challenge the taken-for-granted point of views, and to discover hidden ideologies embedded in texts. Texts in critical literacy are not limited to printed and digital texts presented in words but also audio, visual images and representations, toys, video games, comics, advertisement, television shows, comics and many more (Gee, 2010).

There are a number of existing critical literacy pedagogies such as Janks (2000) on a synthesis of critical literacy education, Luke and Freebody (1997) on the four resource model, Lewison and colleagues (2002) on four dimensions of critical literacy. Each model describes ways to understand critical literacy practices for students, teachers, teacher educators and researchers. In designing, implementing as well as analysing critical literacy in this study, I used the four dimensions of critical literacy (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008). This theory was chosen as it emphasises a link between personal and cultural resources in critical literacy instruction. Lewison, Leland et al. (2008) believe that it is “a transaction among the personal and cultural resources we use, the critical social practices we enact, and the critical stance that we and our students take on in classrooms and in the world” (5). From this point of view, they also see a connection between critical literacy in the classroom and as a way to understand the world.

This framework divides critical literacy practices into four dimensions (1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) considering multiple viewpoints, (3) focusing on socio political issue and (4) taking actions.

The first dimension of this framework is disrupting the commonplace which suggests investigating widely held beliefs using a new lens (Van Sluys, 2005). This dimension may also involve an analysis of how media represents people as in television, video games, toys (Marsh, 2006; Shannon, 1995; Vasquez, 2000). Considering texts and experience from different points of view is the core of the second dimension. This dimension also requires readers to identify marginalised voices in the texts (Harste et
An important point in the third dimension is focusing on socio-political systems. This particular focus emphasises the need to link literacy education with the socio-political context. Indeed, this characteristic separates critical literacy from critical thinking (Lee, 2012). The last dimension of this framework is taking action which is often considered as the heart of critical literacy (Van Sluys, Lewison, & Flint, 2006). Taking action to promote social justice does not always require someone to become a social activist, but a shift in attitude or the way one develops from a superficial reading to critical reading can also be categorised as taking action (Van Sluys, 2005).

**Critical Literacy and English as a Foreign Language**

Despite a vast development of literature on critical literacy in English-speaking backgrounds, the theory and its implication in EFL classrooms are limited (Ko & Wang, 2009) but gradually show development. According to Kim (2012), there are at least two reasons why critical literacy is a neglected field of research in EFL settings, especially in Asian countries. First, there is insufficient understanding on the need of critical literacy in this region and second is a lack of knowledge and skills on its implementation in non-Western contexts. Related to this, Kuo (2009) argues that the absence of critical literacy in Asian countries may be related to some cultures that are typically marked by compliance, as in Taiwan. Meanwhile, Falkenstein (2003) states that the lack of critical literacy in EFL context might be due to foreign language educators who underestimate the capability of these learners to take a critical attitude using a variety of texts to nurture social justice.

Despite a limited inquiry on critical literacy in EFL settings, some studies in this area indicate that EFL students, with appropriate support and adequate time, are capable of implementing a critical stance using English language as a basis to develop social justice and critical awareness.

In the Indonesian context, despite a call for a more critical approach in English language teaching (Alwasilah, 2001), critical literacy has not been embedded in the curriculum. Consequently, this study is expected to shed light on the feasibility of designing and implementing critical literacy in Indonesia as well as to fill the gap in term of its implementation in EFL and mainstream English classrooms.
THE STUDY

Research questions

There were three main research questions that I explored in this study.

1. How is critical literacy designed and implemented in an Indonesian secondary school?
2. Does critical literacy pedagogy empower students to become critically literate?
3. What impacts does critical literacy have on students’ motivation to learn English?

Research design

As the study seeks to provide ways to design and implement a critical literacy approach in EFL classes, action research is employed as the methodology of this research. Action research is a methodology that emphasises diagnosis, action and reflection (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). It usually starts with identifying problems faced by participants in the research that require improvement. According to Zuber-Skerritt (1996), action research is aimed at practical improvement, innovation and a better understanding from the practitioners involved with their own practice. As a tool for change and innovation in education, action research can be used as an appropriate methodology of research in different areas including in learning strategies, evaluative procedures, and continuing professional development for teachers and teaching methods as in replacing a traditional method with a discovery method (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Therefore, action research is relevant to this study because it involves a change and innovation in the practice of English language teaching at the research site.

The method of action research applied in this study is based on the seminal contribution of Kemmis and McTaggart (1990) who described cycles of action research: plan, act, observe and reflect. This will be further explained in the Procedures Section below.

Participants

This study is part of my doctoral research that I conducted in Bandung, West Java province. My fieldwork started in July – December 2010. I began recruitment by sending letters to several schools in this region. The school that participated in the study was
the one that responded most swiftly to the letter. After receiving their response, I visited the school and talked with all English teachers. In the beginning, I imagined it would be more beneficial to have the three of them take part in the study but out of three teachers, only one teacher volunteered: Bagas.\(^{1}\) Apart from the teacher, this study also involved his Year 11 class consisting of 39 students. Based on regular English tests conducted in this class, students’ English language proficiency in this study may be categorised as basic to intermediate. Students’ English responses in this article were written as they were, including grammatical or spelling mistakes. English translation is provided under students’ responses in Indonesian language.

Teachers’ decisions not to participate in educational research, especially in literacy education, is nothing new as reported by O’Mara and Gutierrez (2010) and Comber and Kamler (2008). Daily teaching routines as well as administrative roles seem to give teachers little time to take part in the research. Moreover, as this project requires teachers to be involved in professional learning, the teachers at the school were concerned with rescheduling the classes they missed as they attended the professional learning. Furthermore, in action research projects, the study often involves a change in the teachers’ practice in order to improve their teaching; consequently, resistance can spring from teachers’ ‘unreadiness’ to accept new ideas (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1990).

**Data formation and analysis**

Data collected in one semester included classroom observation, interviews with both the teacher and students, and students’ reflective journals. The classroom observation was in the form of video and audio recording as well as field notes. The interviews with the teacher and students were audio recorded and conducted twice: once in the middle and once at the end of the project. Students’ reflective journals were collected once every two weeks. These journals were read, commented on by me and the teacher and returned to the students.

Different methods of data collection were employed within the study to enrich the validity of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, students’ behaviour and their responses in the class were verified and compared with their journal or interviews in order to provide richer and more meaningful information. Another method employed

---

\(^{1}\) All names are pseudonyms.
to ensure trustworthiness was to validate the students’ English responses by using their native Indonesian language. This technique was employed to ensure that the information students provided in the target language was accurate and that they had said what they really intended to say in their mother language.

All data were analysed using existing critical literacy frameworks such as the framework provided by Lewison et al (2008), as I elaborated in the previous section. As this study involves classroom discussion, critical discourse analysis is also used especially to analyse classroom talk (Gee, 2005). Data from both students and teachers during the design and implementation process were categorised according to each of the dimensions.

**Procedure**

Each of the processes of designing and implementing a critical literacy approach in this study were divided into four cyclical stages of action research: plan, act, observe, and reflect (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1990). The cycle applied throughout the research, consisted of planning each lesson, putting the plan into practice, carefully observing effects of our teaching, reflecting on our practice and replanning our next teaching. In implementing the cycle, I, who acted as the teacher-researcher, worked collaboratively with the teacher.

**Plan**

- I observed Bagas’ class to learn about and experience his teaching practice. Then we had a discussion regarding problems that he identified in his class.

- Based on the problems that he presented, I offered a suggestion to his teaching practice which was the critical literacy approach.

- As the approach may be appropriate to change the classroom issues above, the teacher was interested in the method but had vague ideas on what it was or how it could be implemented in the classroom, consequently:

- I designed a professional learning session consisting of workshops for the teacher in order to introduce critical literacy, its importance and implementation. Professional learning in an education field is similar to a teacher education course where educators introduce and provide teachers with new ideas to teaching.
• I also provided students with critical literacy questions synthesised from different theorists (see Table 1 below)

• Both the teacher and I planned our syllabus informed by critical literacy for the whole semester

Act

We put our plans into practice and taught the students with the critical literacy approach in English classrooms. As the teacher was new to this concept, in the first two lessons I demonstrated the teaching before he moved to his own independent teaching practice.

Observe and Reflect

• What effect did this approach have on students’ motivation to learn English?
• Did critical literacy help students to become critically literate?

Table 1. Examples of critical literacy questions and its theoretical foundations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Literacy Questions</th>
<th>Objectives and Theoretical foundations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What kind of text is this? Who wrote this text? What is this text about?</td>
<td>To crack the code (Luke &amp; Freebody, 1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are the characters in the text presented?</td>
<td>To analyse how people are constructed and positioned in multimedia (Marsh, 2000, Vasques 2000, Van Sluys et al., 2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the text have a balanced point of view?</td>
<td>To consider multiple viewpoints (Lewison et al., 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whose voice is heard? Whose voice is not heard?</td>
<td>To use different voice to examine texts (Luke and Freebody, 1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does the text want you to believe or</td>
<td>To realise that no text is neutral or free of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
bias (Fairclough, 1989)

Do you agree with the information in the text? Does the text change the way you think? To be aware that texts are written to persuade people to the points of views presented by the author.

Findings

For the purpose of this paper, data in the findings will be divided into two sections: from the critical literacy point of view and from the viewpoint of English language teaching. The first part consists of the four dimensions of critical literacy and the second one focuses on evidence from the students’ increased motivation in English learning. Data from findings are from both the students and the teacher.

Disrupting the commonplace

In the first dimension of disrupting the commonplace, critical literacy helps students to question the everyday issue from a critical inquiry perspective and problematise all subjects of study (Shor, 1987). This practice highlights the importance of challenging the taken-for-granted assumption that has long been believed as a fact. Popular culture can also be used to disrupt the common belief, especially to analyse how people are positioned and constructed by media (Van Sluys, et al., 2006).

In this study, I invited students to analyse one television commercial advertising women’s deodorant which was highly popular at the time the research was being conducted. The commercial starts with two young girls driving a convertible car when suddenly they have a flat-tyre and are forced to stop and try to find help. When the first girl in short sleeves waves her hand, her dark underarms are revealed, no one stops to help them. Then, when the second girl tears off her long sleeves and shows her white underarm skin and waves her arm to get help, a car full of young boys stop to help the girls. Before it ends, the commercial contrasts both of the girls’ underarm skin and finally finishes with a slogan “putihnya kulit ketiakmu, perhatian pun tertuju padamu” (the whiter your underarm skin is, the more attention you’ll get).
In the beginning, students seemed to be confused and asked why we should discuss a television commercial. This may indicate that they viewed the commercial as a neutral text which has no hidden meanings. I encouraged them to view the advertisement with a critical lens by using critical literacy questions provided in Table 1 as well as to think about other advertisements in daily life. Using these questions, students started to gain awareness that the representation of girls and boys that they thought as normal before was unfair as it advantaged one group against another. In a journal, Rani expressed her concern

I think stereotype is what people think and we take granted for it. Like a girl with fair skin and long hair always get the first attention, and that’s not fair. Cause honestly my skin is not white and my hair is short. Now I realize that beautiful does not only mean long hair and fair skin. After I learn stereotype I think there are more stereotype in our life, I also learn that it’s not fair. I’m scared that there are a lot of things that is normal but after we discuss it it’s not normal anymore.

Rani’s first sentence was a clear definition of gender representation in which she gave an example from the commercial that we all watched in the classroom. She examined that the advertisement benefited females with certain qualities (fair skin and long hair always get first attention) and disadvantaged female with opposite traits similar to her (my skin is not white and my hair is short). There was a significant adjustment when engaging with critical literacy for her as she wrote now I realize that beautiful does not only mean long hair and fair skin. Further, she also disrupts her own belief about what has been considered as normal is in fact the opposite as she described there are a lot of things that is normal but after we discuss it it’s not normal anymore.

This practice has assisted Rani, in particular to develop critical awareness based on everyday texts that are present in our daily life. Student began to change their perspective that texts are not neutral and not free of bias. Other data also shows that another student, Ilham, problematises images of a husband and wife in another commercial. He challenged a stereotype of a wife who was busy in the kitchen preparing the meal while her husband relaxed in the living room watching television. Ilham said “Why in the tea commercial, a wife is busy in the kitchen and her husband just relax in front of television with the children?”. 
Considering multiple viewpoints

The second dimension of critical literacy helps learners to include different perspectives rather than one’s own in order to understand other people’s experience, feelings and perspectives. We practised this dimension by engaging students to identify voices that are heard and missing (Luke & Freebody, 1997), also perspectives that have been silenced or marginalised (Harste, et al., 2000).

Another topic that we included in our curriculum was homophobia. Controversial and real life topics are recommended in the critical literacy classroom (Lewison, Leland, & Van Sluys, 2002) as they represent that society needs to be examined using a critical lens. The teacher and I chose this topic as we were concerned about the chaotic demonstration in the capital city, Jakarta, undertaken by an anti-homophobia group, the Islamic Defender Front (locally known as FPI which stands for Front Pembela Islam). This group led a destructive rally in Jakarta and demanded a gay film festival be abandoned. They attacked the office of the event organisers that they deemed responsible for the festival.

Bagas started the lesson by asking students to read a text about this demonstration. After that, we engaged in a discussion about the essence of the demonstration, which centred on the issue of homophobia. We asked students whether it was wrong to hate people who had different sexual orientation. In the beginning, some students said that being homosexual was “disgusting”. Then Bagas showed a video co-starring a famous transgender actor in Indonesia, I also showed an article about the life of a homosexual youth who almost killed himself due to lack of social acceptance. We also invited students to think about equity for people who were different in Indonesia in areas such as job opportunities. Our reasons to conduct the teaching in this manner were to demonstrate our students the importance of viewing an issue from different perspectives. This approach is in line with Delgado and Stefancic (2001) who believe that considering multiple points of views in critical literacy education is to build agenda and strategies towards a more just society, for a broader range of people and avoid underestimating human experience.
In the discussion, students started to identify marginalised people and silenced voices, not only in the text but furthermore in Indonesian society. They seemed to have shown social awareness and sympathy towards people who were not accepted in the mainstream society, such as people with different sexual orientations.

One student even showed respect to homosexual people, the group that she initially condemned. Maya said in a mixed Indonesian and English:

*Dulu aku pikir homosexual itu jijik ya karena mereka ngga beragama. Now after discussing with my teachers and friends, aku jadi sadar kalau itu pilihan seseorang. Maybe that's not what they want. Aku pernah nonton Oprah Show ada perempuan yang jadi lesbian karena disiksa sama bapaknya. So now I will think about many things before I...apa tuh, menjudge gitu. Sekarang kalau ada yang ngga 'normal' aku berusaha mengerti kenapa gitu...juga tentang homosexual ini. Menurut aku negatif sih, tapi kita harus menghargai karena itu kehidupan mereka.*

[I used to think that homosexual is disgusting, because they have no religion. Now after discussing with my teachers and friends I realize that homosexual is someone’s choice. Maybe that’s not what they want. I watched *Oprah Show*, a girl becomes a lesbian because her father abuses her. So now I will think about many things before I judge something. Now when there’s something beyond normal, I’ll try to understand the situation not just say that is wrong...like homosexual, I think it’s negative but it’s their life and we have to respect].

This perspective that Maya offered was rich and deep; she described how she changed her point of view about something. She tried to consider multiple perspectives into her thinking as in *I watched Oprah Show* and an important step in critical literacy *so now I will think about many things before I judge something.*

**Focusing on the socio-politics**

Another topic that we discussed was the catastrophes that happened in Indonesia during October 2010. In this period there were three disasters: the tsunami in Mentawai, the volcanic eruption in Central Java and the flash flood in Papua. The aim of this lesson was to view catastrophes in a critical lens as some people in Indonesia perceived disasters as merely God’s will and hardly question authority, such as the government’s accountability.

Bagas firstly asked students questions such as “*Can we predict when the disasters happen? Can we do something to prevent or minimize the effect of it? Are we prepared for the disasters? Are there any information/signs or system to make us better prepared? Does disaster mean God is angry with us? Who should be responsible for it?*”. Next,
students examined news that broadcasted different disasters. Our plan was to compare which disaster gained more publication and attention in the media and assisted students to relate this with a larger socio-politics system. As students were getting better and more familiar with critical literacy practice, they were able to identify easily which voices were heard and which were silenced. According to them, the Merapi eruption in Yogyakarta, Central Java was the one that gained more attention from media as it dominated the news while the other two were hardly recognised. The discussion centred on why there was imbalanced perspective in reporting the news.

A critical reason that related to a larger socio-political system can be found in a classroom dialogue where one of the participants in the discussion, Kirana, distanced herself with people from West Papua. She admitted that she did not know about any flash flooding in Papua as she said "they don't know what happen in Papua because it's far from us". She used exclusive language (‘us’ versus ‘them’) that may show no solidarity with people outside her. In critical discourse analysis, the use of exclusive and inclusive language marks the opposing motivation of status and solidarity (Gee, 2001). In this case, Kirana indicated that she did not seem to share any commonalities with the West Papuan people and that she was different to the West Papuan people who were described as far from her and the island of Java where she lived. This may mean the students felt their identity as a nation was different to the people of West Papua whose appearance looked more like the Pacific Islanders than Indonesians.

After the above dialogue, we also asked students the reason why the national media preferred to broadcast the disasters in Java Island. Some students linked the lack of news on the tsunami and flash flood with the ethnicity and political issues as revealed by Kinan below.

Well because people have the newspapers they are Javanese they live in Java that’s why they’re more interested with the news in Java, if they live in Sumatra or Papua there’ll be more news about it.

Their response may reflect the fact that in reality West Papuan people were underrepresented in the central government as indicated by a lack of their representation in the administration. On the other hand, the Javanese who inhabit Java Island can be found in many strategic administration positions including those who become chief executive officers of giant media companies in Indonesia. These
executive officers dominate the information distributed in the country, at the same time they also dominated the country. The imbalanced social welfare students raised in the discussion was in line with Fairclough (1989) who referred to the relationship between social class and economics production; as he said, “the power of capitalist class depends also on its ability to control the state” (Fairclough, 1989, pp. 32-33).

Another response was expressed by Erwin in the discussion who was worried he may die if tsunami strikes his classroom as the result of lack of knowledge on what to do. He contrasted the Indonesian situation with the one in Japan as he said

_Aku pernah nonton TV tentang tsunami di Jepang, Anak-anaknya tahu harus ngapain karena informasinya jelas terus mereka latihan sering kan. Katanya daerah kita di Jawa Barat bisa kena tsunami juga tapi terus ngga pernah denger berita itu lagi. Kalau kejadian di sekolah, mungkin aku bisa mati kali karena ngga tau harus ngapain._

[I watched on TV about tsunami in Japan, the children know what they should do because the information is clear, they have enough practice too. I heard we are in West Java area can also be affected by tsunami, but then the news just gone. If it happens here at our school, maybe I’ll be dead because I don’t know what to do].

Both Bagas and I engaged students more in the discussion by further questioning why we did not know. From the discussion, students seemed to understand that the authorities were the ones who should also be responsible for the catastrophes especially in providing the alarm systems. Lintang said

_I think we don’t know because we don’t have…apa sih kaya tanda bahaya itu [what do you call it like a warning system]. If the government buy them and give them to people, I think that will help. Kayanya kita sering banget kena tsunami tiap tahun [It seems like every year tsunami hits us]. It is true that tsunami and volcano eruption can happen anytime, but why our technology and knowledge still limited?_

**Taking actions**

The last dimension of taking action is often considered as the heart of critical literacy (Van Sluys, et al., 2006). Although seeking justice is inseparable from critical literacy practice, taking action does not mean that critical literacy educators should entail themselves in becoming activists in social and political movements (Lee, 2012). According to Van Sluys (2005), taking social action can also include a change in reading, for example through resistant reading.

In this project, some participants in this study demonstrated a significant change in the way they read. Before they became involved in the project, they viewed reading only as a practical set of skills. For example, they read only to find the main ideas of a
paragraph as often found in traditional textbooks and tended to exclude reading critically. An example of this shift was well represented by Satria in the interview.

Now I learn not to trust the news instantly. Also when my friends talking to me, I don’t want being fooled too. I will select what they say, not to trust them straight away, I have to know it’s uhmm… menjerus atau engga. Juga lau baca artikel di koran, dulu saya serap semua, saya percaya semua namanya udah ada di koran pasti bener, sekarang saya tahu itu salah jadi ngga saya serap semua. Saya ngga percaya semua informasi begitu aja [is it leading me to something or not. Also when I read articles in the newspaper, I used to absorb all information, you know when it’s in the newspaper it must be right. Now I know it’s wrong so I don’t absorb all information. I don’t trust all information now.

Satria seemed to be more careful in reading and interpreting texts given to him, e.g. the newspaper. He displayed a resistant reading now as he reflected on his experience in the past when he used to believe all information in the newspaper.

**Critical literacy and motivation to English learning**

Data from classroom observation, students' journals and interviews indicated that the approach empowered students to gain more motivation and interest in English learning. Motivation, as some students revealed, mostly arrived from some principles of critical literacy we implemented in the class such as encouraging students to express different opinions in the class and engaging them in real life issues as revealed by Zahwa and Dimas.

Zahwa: *Belajar kaya gini itu bikin kita terpacu jadi lebih semangat buat belajar bahasa Inggris karena kita disuruh ngomong terus ditanggepin sama gurunya juga sama teman, jadinya enak.*

[Learning English this way makes me more excited to learn because we are asked to talk, and teacher and other kids listen and comment on it, so it’s good]

Dimas: *Belajar seperti ini udah enak, kalau bisa dipertahankan soalnya kita ngga bosen, ngga terpacu sama teori atau ngerjain latihan di buku teks, kita bisa sharing dan diskusi tentang berita-berita yang baru, tentang kehidupan nyata gitu lah. Saya jadi lebih termotivasi buat tahu lebih banyak soalnya nanti kan ditanya apa pendapat kita…*

[Learning like this is good, please keep it like that because it doesn’t make us bored, we’re not stuck to theory or doing exercises from the textbook. We can share and discuss about news, I mean real things. I’m more motivated to know more because later in the class the teachers will ask what we think].

Unlike the conventional English teaching which may be based mostly on school textbooks, in critical literacy pedagogy teachers empowered students to discuss and analyse real and current social issues. This kind of engagement, according to students like Zahwa and Dimas, was “exciting” and “good”; therefore, they were more motivated to learn English. Critical literacy educators places a premium importance on students’ voices in the class (Janks, 2000; Lewison, et al., 2008). Consequently, teachers should
encourage students to articulate their viewpoints and not dominate the classroom talk. Zahwa and Dimas seemed to cherish the opportunity to engage in classroom discussions because they believed that their opinions mattered (…*makes me more excited to learn because we are asked to talk, and teacher and other kids listen and comment on it, so it’s good*).

A detailed analysis on a classroom transcript showed a number of occasions when students’ responses were overlapped which indicated their engagement with the topic. Students showed enthusiasm in taking part in the discussions. There were many factors in their increased engagement. According to students, this approach gave them more opportunities to speak “without rules”.

As opposed to traditional grammar teaching that emphasised language rules and conventions, the approach that we implemented highlighted the importance of being critical in dealing with everyday life. Some of the critical literacy values that we emphasised were taken from the critical literacy framework as mentioned in earlier sections. The frameworks are disrupting the commonplace, viewing an issue from multiple perspectives, considering socio-political situations and taking a social action. Within this framework, the critical literacy approach has moved far away from merely memorising the grammatical rules of English.

Today I learn about natural calamities. Many natural calamities it happened in Indonesia that is Flash Flood, Volcanic Eruption, and Tsunami. We discuss about Flash Flood in Wasior, West Papua. I think this lesson is important because the disaster happened in my country. The flood has destroyed Wasior and most of people’s home. Lot of victim from flood that is 153 have been killed in Wasior flooding, while 123 others are still reported missing. After I have the lesson I know how to understand from the text. Thanks Mrs G. I feel concerned about disaster’s it happen in Indonesia. Remember for understand a text 5W +1H what, when, where, who, why + how. I know! (Nia).

From this journal, which was all written in English, it can be inferred that she had gained mastery in complex English sentence structures such as an accurate use of the passive voice (153 have been killed, while 123 are still reported missing) and the use of present perfect tense (the flood has destroyed) which were precisely used as the flood was still occurring when we discussed this in the classroom. She was also capable of using synonymous words such as calamity and disaster that give different dimensions to the text. A very minor mistake such as capitalisation for all proper nouns in the middle of a sentence (Flash Flood, Volcanic Eruption, Tsunami), spelling (discus for discuss) and inaccurate apostrophe ‘s in disaster’s did not distract from the overall meaning. Apart
from being an avid English writer as she demonstrated, she also revealed her own strategy to comprehend a text (5W +1H what, when, where, who, why + how). This strategy seemed to become a highlight in her learning process as well as the moment of discovery as she celebrated this in a triumphant remark *I know!*

**Concluding remarks**

Critical literacy as a new approach in Indonesian EFL brings many benefits as well as challenges for the teacher and students. A benefit includes students’ critical engagement with texts and their ability to relate these texts to the world. As a new method, the teacher should be encouraged to consider this approach as an alternative approach to language teaching. This encouragement can be done through providing professional learning sessions. Challenges that the teacher and students face are likely to be their unfamiliarity with the approach. Most of the students in this study admit that English is difficult and it is more challenging to become critically literate in the foreign language. Consequently, I found some students who resisted our critical literacy approach may have done so because of difficulties in English proficiency. One of the students in the class who seldom participated in classroom discussions, Dewa, stated this challenge in the interview.

*Mengkritik berita atau teks itu susah banget, karena saya harus ngerjemahin dulu ke bahasa Indonesia terus saya harus mikir apa pendapat saya tentang itu dalam bahasa Inggris. Susah lah, kaya dua hal bareng-bareng dikerjain gitu*

[Criticising texts like in the news or something is very difficult because I have to translate it first to Indonesian. Then I have to think about my opinions in English. It's a very hard work. It's like doing the same things at the same time]

The reasons for resistance from students in this study are different from a similar study on critical literacy in Taiwan (Kuo, 2009). Kuo’s study reveals that student’ resistance in critical literacy instruction may be due to the cultural values that are marked by compliance, especially in Taiwan. Our results, however, display a similarity with the work of Huang (2011) in Taiwan. Huang (2011) argues that it is not easy for students to implement critical literacy in a foreign language where they do not feel comfortable with the language.

This study also has demonstrated how I design and implement critical literacy in a secondary school setting with the teacher who is actively involved throughout the
research. Hopefully, it sheds light for other critically literate educators to implement this technique into their schools.

REFERENCES


