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THE TEACHING OF CRITICAL READING IN AN EFL CLASSROOM

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Abstract

This study exposes the process of teaching critical reading in an EFL classroom in one public senior high school in Bandung, Jawa Barat, and Indonesia. This study was conducted as an effort to help students to develop their critical reading. The teaching of critical reading in senior high school level is considered very potential in that the students face a lot of choices of sources of information and that they will face a lot of more reading material at the higher level college. This study used a qualitative method in the form of case study design. The data were obtained from several sources; those are field notes, classroom observations, student's journal, group interview, and questionnaire in the end of teaching program. The finding reveals that the teaching of critical reading to some extent may increase students' critical reading skills. With the reference to the finding, it is recommended that critical reading be taught in the senior high school level with some modification to the material used in the classroom and better classroom management. Further, research on critical reading is widely open in other content subjects, and in other language skills.

Keywords

Critical Reading, EFL Classroom

1. Introduction

This study is intended to investigate the teaching of critical reading in an EFL classroom at one public senior high school in Bandung West Java. The study is intended to do so as reading does not only increase our life skills and extend our knowledge but in many respects also determines how people able to think. Reading has a fundamental effect on the development of the imagination and exerts a powerful influence on development of an emotional and moral on the kind of person we are capable of becoming (Harrison, 2004). In the similar view about the importance of reading, Eskey (1986 in Sary, 2006: 29) & Grabe (1991 in Sary, 2006: 29) mention that the students' ability to read and understand English texts are important skills in learning English as a second or foreign language around the world.

Critical reading, the focus of this thesis, is particularly important in this era as advanced societies that change from industrial to informational societies. In this era, the search, selection, application of information, and the creation of knowledge play an important role in both individual and social development (Oliver & Utermohlen, 2005; Zhang, 2007). In line with the statements above, Kress (2003) states that nowadays the change from book to page to screen and the change from the traditional print-based media to the new information and communication technologies intensify the needs of potential and communicational action by their users (in this regards the reader). Kress's statement describes recent condition that nowadays, in information era people are demanded to be more critical because people face a lot of choices of sources of information. Therefore, as Fisher (2001) argues, to process the information, high-order thinking skills are needed.

In Indonesia, the change to the information era has led to the need for human resources who have the ability to think critically. In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), leading to the development of language skills, critical thinking, and critical literacy, the need to teach English that is relevant to current situation in Indonesia is really suggested (Alwasilah, 1998; Bundhowi, 2000 cited in Emilia, 2005). Thus, it can be said

that alternative ways of teaching reading that will produce critical readers are needed.

Given the importance of high order thinking in reading, as inferred from the above description, this study attempts to apply the teaching of critical reading in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom particularly in senior high school to help the students to become the critical reader.

2. Literature Review

Critical reading originally comes from the concept of critical thinking. It is the application of critical thinking in the process of reading. Highered (2010) points out that critical reading means readers think as they read. Furthermore, Highered (2010) explains that being critical means reacting to the text and the writer, consciously rejecting or accepting the writer's assertions, asking questions, and applying what we are reading to what we know and belief. Highered's (2010) opinion on critical reading is similar to Kurland's (2011) opinion who defines it as a technique for discovering information and ideas within a text. Whereas critical thinking is a technique for evaluating information and ideas, for deciding what to accept and believe. To sum up, critical reading refers to critical thinking which is applied to the process of reading and writing (Chaffee, 2000; Reichenbach, 2001).

The definitions above lead us to the conclusion that the process of critical reading will develop one to become a critical reader. Kress (1990), Pennycook (1997), & Luke (2004) as cited in Kustini (2010) state that in the field of language studies, proponents of critical theory would like the learners to be more active and critical when they attempt to make sense of the text, rather than to be a passive consumer of the texts. In the same vein, Wallace (2003) argues that in the critical reading perspective, a reader actively pursues the meaning of the text as opposed to an earlier definition that reading is usually classified as a passive skill. Furthermore, Wallace (2003) asserts that as a critical reader, readers not accepting point of view of the text in silence, rather they analyze the reasons why the author develop it, then continue evaluate its credibility. In this regard, it can be said that critical reading actively involves the writer and the reader and can be seen as a dialogic connection.

As previously stated, in critical reading readers actively try to discover information and ideas within the text. It is done by analyzing, synthesizing, drawing inference, forming interpretations and evaluating what they read. Moreover, Kurland (2000) states that in reading

the text the readers try to understand the author's tone and persuasive elements through classifying the nature of language choices and to recognize bias through classifying the pattern of choices of content and language.

In conclusion, critical reading is an activity of reading that applies the concept of critical thinking. The readers attempt to read using analytical ways, so they understand the message of the text, the language used in the text, and the arrangement of the text. Furthermore, critical readers hopefully can respond to the writers' position and purpose based on different point of view related to their previous knowledge to the issue of the text.

The teaching of critical reading in this research was limited to the teaching of some skills and aspects proposed by various experts such as Ennis (1989), Chaffee (2000), Diestler (2001), Reichhanbach (2001), and Wallace (2003).

The teaching of critical reading in this research focus on following skills and aspects:

- Identifying the basic information of the text the topic of the text, the thesis of the texts, the purpose of the writer.
- Differentiating fact to opinion; understanding the definition of those two terms, identifying fact to opinion in the text, providing reason on the analysis about fact and opinion in the text.
- Identifying truth and falsity; distinguishing Statements and sentences, identifying statement in the sentence, identifying and determining whether the statements are true or false.
- Identifying qualifier and quantifier terms; determining whether the qualifier term weakening or strengthening the context, determining whether the quantifier term is universal or particular.
- Distinguishing different use of language, and identifying the emotive impact of words.
- Analyzing argument; identifying elements of argument, constructing sound argument, identifying implied meaning in the argument.
- Identifying fallacies; identifying kind of fallacies in the text, and identifying the cause of the fallacies.

3. Research Methodology

In this study, qualitative design in the form of case study with multiple data collection methods was conducted. The qualitative study was used to describe the implementation of critical reading in classroom. The design employed multiple techniques of data collection at the beginning of the study, in an ongoing way, and at the end of the study (Fraenkell & Wallen, 2012).

The data were gathered in the ongoing way that comprised classroom observations for ten sessions and students's journals. Meanwhile, students' interview, and questionnaire were conducted at the end of the study. The participant of this study was one class of the second grade of senior high school. The researcher took them as the participants because it was considered potential to equip them with critical reading skill.

4. The Implementation

The stages of the teaching program were elaborated mainly based on the data from classroom observation that consisted of two broad activities: (1) the preliminary phase of the program, and (2) the explicit teaching of critical reading in the classroom. Each of them will be elaborated below:

4.1 The Preliminary Phase of the Teaching Program

Before conducting the teaching program, the researcher conducted some activities as the preliminary phase. Those activities were conducted to meet the objectives: (i) to "establish rapport" or "gain entry" as suggested by Alwasilah (2002: 144), & (ii) to inform the students about the teaching program. In this phase of teaching, some activities were carried out. As a researcher during this phase the researcher observed the class, while as a teacher during this phase the teacher introduced the teaching program to the students, and negotiated the topics for the reading text.

4.1.1 The Introduction of the Teaching Program

The introduction phase of the teaching program was conducted primarily to provide thorough information on the nature of the teaching program. The first step of the introduction phase was arranged to invite students to get involved in the program. In this step, the researcher's intended was to explain the purpose of the study, to provide them with the explanation of the

nature of the program, and to inform the importance of their participation in the program.

Concerning the duration of the program, the researcher explained that it would last approximately for about one and half months, with twice a week meeting, one and half hours for each meeting. Informed consent was elaborated after the explanation about the duration of the program. Informed consent is one form of researchers' awareness of ethical consideration application in research. In this phase the researcher also informed the steps of the teaching program, and the students' requirements needed in the program. The students' requirements needed in this program among others: to write journal in several meetings, to do students' worksheets, to take part in group interview, and to answer the questionnaire.

The next information given was about confidentiality. The students were informed that they will be protected from any harm caused by the research, and that the researcher ensured confidentiality of the research data. They were also informed that pseudonyms would be used in the research so that their identity will be kept in confidence.

4.1.2 The Negotiation of the Topic to be discussed

After introducing the teaching program and gave informed consent, the teacher negotiated the topics to be discussed. The current controversial issues were suggested in the teaching of critical reading as it triggers student's interest. The text choosing was followed the text's characteristics that used in critical reading proposed by Chaffee (2000) & Wallace (2003). Chaffee (2000) argues that current controversial issues are considered as a means to develop students' critical reading. It was believed that article with controversial issues will intrude into personal lives that continue taking the reader from level of abstract into immediate experience.

In terms of an EFL classroom context the second principle put forwarded by Wallace (2003) is applied in choosing the authentic materials. Wallace (2003) second principle stated that critical readings consider *equality between native speaker reader and non-native speaker reader in reading non pedagogic texts*". Wallace's opinion above is similar with Chaffee's opinion (2002) that the choice of authentic material was generally assumed to be more interesting than those written for a pedagogic purpose. Beside the characteristics above, issues that familiar, relate, and appropriate with students' interest and students' age were also suggested. Huckin (2004) as cited in Coreira (2006) suggests the importance of assigning reading material that pertains to a subject and culture of the students. He argues that in the search for authentic material for the students, teachers need to

consider students' age and interest so that the lesson will be more relevant to their experience, thus it more profitable for the research on the teaching of critical reading.

To trigger students' participation and attention, some topics that were considered interesting for the students at that current time were offered to the students, among others:

- The use of uniform in school
- The importance of gadget in classroom
- Terrorisms
- Contradictory advertisement
- Jakarta governor's election (Jokowi)
- Students brawl
- Super Junior's Performance
- "Perahu Kertas" the movie
- Smoking issue
- Junk food and obesity
- Gangnam style phenomena

As the result of negotiation, the teacher and the students decided to chose the topics below:

- Terorrism
- Contradictory advertisement
- Jakarta governor's election (Jokowi)
- Students brawl
- Smoking issue
- Junk food and obesity
- Gangnam style phenomena

The teacher and the students were agreed that the topics above would be Discussed in the teaching of critical reading as those topics were considered interesting.

4.2 The Explicit Teaching Program Based on Critical Reading Principles

The step of the teaching of critical reading proposed by Norris & Ennis (1990), Reichenbach (2001), & Wallace (2003) was adopted in this study. To fit the nature of the study, some necessary modifications were made, particularly in terms of length of the study, skills of

critical reading taught to the students, and materials presented in the classroom.

The teaching program in this study was conducted for ten sessions, twice a week that last for one and half hours for each session. Regarding to the skills of critical reading to be taught to the students, the teacher mostly synthesized skills in critical reading theory from Reichenbach (2001) et al. Those skills among others critically analyze the content of the text, language use and the structure of discussion. The materials presented were the authentic materials of chosen issues that were taken from various sources such as electronic newspaper i.e. *The Jakarta Post*, websites i.e. *adbusters.org* and some books.

The first step of explicit teaching of critical reading was the explanation of critical thinking definition. Following Ennis and Norris's suggestion (1990), explicit teachings of critical thinking definition were necessary as critical reading basically comes from the theory of critical thinking. These definitions were provided so that students understand the key terms of the teaching program.

Having explicitly taught the critical thinking and critical reading definition, the teacher started teaching the critical reading skills. The procedures to teach the critical reading skills were adopted from Wallace (1992). They consisted of three major phases (i) pre reading activities, (ii) while reading activities and (iii) post reading activities. In these three stages some questions were addressed to the students as these questions are believed could activate students' existing schematic knowledge. The stages also required the students to raise further question on the topic in the course of reading (Wallace, 1993). Wallace (1993) believes that these three phases in reading are some ways to help the learners to relate their existing schematic knowledge to the text they are reading, to facilitate readers' interaction with text, and to provide orientation to context and content.

The explanation of those three phases is presented below:

4.2.1 Pre Reading Activities

This preliminary phase of reading simply consists of a short talk about the topic Related to the text given for the session. The short talk was done between teacher and students to trigger students' knowledge about the topic being discussed and to set the goal of the teaching learning activity.

In pre-reading activities, the role of the teacher was considered very crucial as the teacher

should be able to provide questions that lead the students' interest to the topic to be discussed. In critical reading, the objective of a short talk is not only to gain answers from the students, but also to activate students' existing schematic knowledge, and to raise further question on the topic in the course of reading (Wallace, 1993). Thus, the short talk was consisted of several questions which function as a trigger to students' prior knowledge.

4.2.2 While reading activities

In this part the teacher combined the explicit teaching of critical reading skills continued by reading and analyzing the text based on the skill that have been taught. The combination was conducted to enhance the appropriateness between the skills of critical reading and its use in analyzing the text.

In this phase, the teacher explained the skills to the students. The teacher showed the Example to the students then together identified the elements in the text based on the skill taught. After explaining the skill, the teacher provided a short article to be analysed and discussed based on the skills taught.

4.2.3 Post reading activity

Post reading activity can serve as a phase when the readers answered several Questions followed a text. In a common reading course, multiple choice questions followed the text (Wallace, 1993). Whereas in critical reading class the question followed the text is in the form of open ended question. In this study, in every meeting, worksheets were distributed to the students in which questions are given so that students identified the text using the skill that have been taught. The questions followed the text were in the form of open ended question. Then, the students were asked to explain the reason of their answer briefly.

For several meetings, students were asked to write reflective journals at the end of the Teaching program. In this study, these journals were requirement of the program as it was also an instrument to identify students' progress and to gain information about the benefits And difficulties faced by the students in the teaching program.

In critical reading, the process of writing a journal is considered crucial as students were required to explain what they had learnt from the lesson, the benefits of the lesson, and the difficulties they experienced in the class activity. This is in line with Norris and Ennis (1990) argument that journals can be useful sources of information in evaluating students' progress and

knowing students' opinion as it contains records of and reflections on what has occurred in school. During the study, every session followed a similar procedure as above with some adjustment on different conditions.

5. Conclusion

The finding implies that critical reading can be taught to the senior high school students, as critical reading opens up students' opportunity to discuss and share their ideas, provides opportunity to express their opinion, and empowers students in developing their judgment toward texts. Furthermore, students must be frequently exposed to authentic materials. Moreover, classroom management should be prepared and arranged carefully and thoroughly as the CR teaching could work successfully in good classroom management. The study of teaching CR needs more time and should be conducted continually because CR involves interconnected skills.

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