

## **ENCOURAGING CRITICAL LITERACY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH EXTENSIVE READING ACTIVITY IN AN EFL (ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE) CONTEXT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study is an attempt to address the issue of how extensive reading (ER) as a supplementary reading approach is able to encourage students' critical literacy. Further, how ER influences students' perception of critical literacy related to students' viewpoint of the texts is examined thoroughly. ER in this study was employed as a supplementary reading activity where students were engaged to read in a large number of materials on a wide range of topics and they had freedom to select the reading material based on its relevance to their interests, knowledge, and experience (Day & Bamford, 2002). Relating the characteristics of ER, it seemed to us that students' understanding of the text through ER activity should be scrutinized as one important aspect in English language teaching (ELT). In order to get more comprehensive picture, questionnaires were distributed to 38 students in the class. Yet, only 3 (three) students were willing to return the questionnaire and to be interviewed based on their answers in the questionnaire. The findings revealed that ER is evidenced to motivate students to approach texts critically, challenge taken knowledge, relate the texts to world's issues, improve their awareness of how to see and understand human beings, and question the intention of the texts from distinct viewpoints.

**Keywords:** extensive reading, critical literacy development, EFL

### **ABSTRAK**

*Penelitian ini merupakan upaya untuk mengatasi masalah bagaimana membaca ekstensif (ER) sebagai pendekatan membaca tambahan mampu mendorong literasi kritis mahasiswa, dan bagaimana ER memengaruhi persepsi mahasiswa terhadap literasi kritis yang berkaitan dengan sudut pandang mereka terhadap teks yang diperiksa secara menyeluruh. ER dalam penelitian ini dianggap sebagai kegiatan membaca tambahan di mana mahasiswa terlibat untuk membaca sejumlah materi dengan berbagai topik dan mereka memiliki kebebasan untuk*

memilih bahan bacaan berdasarkan relevansinya dengan minat, pengetahuan, dan pengalaman mereka (Day & Bamford, 2002). Berkaitan dengan karakteristik ER, terlihat bahwa pemahaman mahasiswa terhadap teks melalui aktivitas ER harus diteliti sebagai salah satu aspek penting dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris (ELT). Untuk mendapatkan gambaran yang lebih komprehensif, kuesioner dibagikan kepada 38 mahasiswa di kelas dan hanya 3 mahasiswa yang mengembalikan kuesioner dan bersedia diwawancarai berdasarkan jawaban mereka dalam kuesioner. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa ER dapat memotivasi mahasiswa untuk mendekati teks secara kritis, menantang pengetahuan, menghubungkan teks dengan isu-isu dunia, meningkatkan kesadaran mereka tentang bagaimana melihat dan memahami manusia, dan mempertanyakan teks dari sudut pandang yang berbeda.

**Kata kunci:** membaca ekstensif, pengembangan literasi kritis, EFL

## A. INTRODUCTION

The term *critical literacy* appeared in the 1980s, and from that period it has gained much significance in education and has been widely practiced in classrooms across level of education in the western countries (Behrman, 2006; Stevens & Bean, 2007). However, Alford (2001) pointed out that critical literacy in English as a Second language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educational systems seem to be marginalized. Several language practitioners and researchers have conducted research about critical literacy in EFL classrooms in Asia, yet the relevance between the case is still limited (Kuo, 2014).

Based on the aforementioned reasons, this study was conducted as an attempt to explore more on (1) how students' understanding of critical literacy could be developed after Extensive Reading (ER) as a supplementary activity was assigned and (2) how ER could affect students' critical literacy in EFL classroom. ER was adopted because it gives students more freedom to choose the texts based on their level of competence, the purpose is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding, and it indirectly encourages students to read as much as possible (Day & Bamford, 2002). Additionally, ER was chosen as a supplementary activity because we had the responsibility to teach English prose analysis course. What is more, introducing to the various kinds of literary works to the students was one objective of this course, particularly to familiarise the students with literary works. In this instance, students were encouraged to analyse and understand texts not only based on the intrinsic elements but also in a broader sense, for instance "by allowing students recognize how language is affected by and affects social relations" (Behrman, 2006).

Correspondingly, ER designates students to read multiple texts based on their interest. From his review, Behrman (2006) concluded that "reading multiple

texts encourages students to understand authorship as situated activity.” He added that students who are allowed to read multiple texts are able to consider “who constructed the text, when, where, why and the values on which it was based. By experiencing different treatments of the same topic or event, students begin to recognize that text is not “true” in any absolute sense but a rendering as portrayed by an author” (Behrman, 2006). Thus, ER can be considered as a repository where students are allowed to make meaning from multiple perspectives based on their level of competence and their topics of interest.

## **B. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

### **1. What is Critical Literacy?**

The definition of critical literacy is complex because critical experts and researchers classify it based on distinct theoretical frameworks and different approaches. For instance, McDaniel (2006:5) points out that “critical literacy transcends conventional notions of reading and writing to incorporate critical thinking, questioning, and transformation of self and/or one’s world.” In the similar vein, Freire (1972) as one of the pioneers of critical literacy, spotlights that critical literacy cannot be understood as one unitary approach, instead should be viewed from different socio-political perspectives. Decades ago, by means of a problem-posing pedagogy, Freire taught Brazilian-Chilean workers how to read by introducing them to meaningful and profound vocabularies that were useful to their daily usages (Freire, 1974). Freire employed words as motivation and stimulus, he engaged them in critical reflection on the oppressive realities in the society at that time, he taught them how to free themselves from the oppression and change their worlds. As a result, Freire uncovered that the workers were easier to acquire vocabulary after they had been led to a critical discussion of the real situations. Freire’s insights and experiences have shed the light that reading and writing skills can be accelerated by an exploration of the causes and effects of students’ lived realities.

Moreover, Luke (2000:454) points out that critical literacy education is also “a theoretical and practical attitude.” In this instance, critical literacy has changed the narrow skills-based model of learning to read and write, it becomes more crucial as students encounter with ‘web and net’ age nowadays than decades ago. As Janks (2012:150) mentioned that:

“In an age where the production of meaning is being democratized by Web 2, social networking sites and portable connectivity, powerful discourses continue to speak us and to speak through us. We often become unconscious agents of their distribution. At the same time, these new

media have been used for disseminating counter discourses, for mobilizing opposition, for questioning and destabilizing power. This is the context within which we need to consider the role of critical literacy in education.”

Based on the aforementioned explanation, it can be said that critical literacy plays a quite significant role for students’ live. Many researchers state its significance, Blanton (1999) affirms that critical literacy creates an important transformation in academic success because it involves more than learning to read and write. It demands that students should be able to engage in questioning, arguing, evaluating, and writing about what they have read. Comber (2001) intensifies that it is the use of language in powerful ways and to question freedom and injustice that happen in the society. Knobel and Lankshear (2002) suggest that when students become critically literate, they can scrutinize on-going development, the parts they play in the world, and how they make sense of experiences.

Thus, by employing critical literacy, students are encouraged to improve their understanding about language learning, to develop their awareness about themselves and to be capable to question the accepted knowledge in the society. Moreover, students are not only literate; know how to read and write, but also able to see thoroughly the assumptions hidden in the texts (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004).

## **2. Extensive Reading**

Extensive reading is defined as an approach to language teaching in which students read a lot of easy materials in the new language (Bamford & Day, 2003). In this case, the students select their own reading material and read it independently of the teacher. They read for general, overall meaning and they read for information and enjoyment. When they read extensively, they become fluent readers. It helps to increase their reading but also their oral fluency. In other words, students who read a lot develop positive attitudes toward reading and increased motivation to study the foreign language (Day, 2003).

Day & Bamford (2002) believed that extensive reading approach has ten principles, they are:

- a. The reading material is easy. In this principle, students read material that contains few or no unfamiliar items of vocabulary and grammar.
- b. A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics is available. For an extensive reading approach to succeed, students have to be able to find things they want to read, whatever their interests. So, it is recommended to have a large number of books on a wide variety of topics.

- c. Learners choose what they want to read. This is the basis of extensive reading approach, to allow the students to select what they want to read based on their interests.
- d. Learners read as much as possible. The language learning benefits of extensive reading approach come from quantity of reading. It means teachers need to make sure that their students are given the opportunities to read and read more.
- e. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower. Because the students choose by themselves of what to read, so they can easily understand and it encourages fluent reading.
- f. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding. Again, as the students choose their own reading; extensive reading encourages reading for pleasure and information.
- g. Reading is individual and silent. Most extensive reading is done out of the classroom in the students' own time, when and where the students choose.
- h. Reading is its own reward. Extensive reading is not usually followed by comprehension questions. The follow-up activities respect the integrity of the reading experience, and that it encourages rather than discourages further reading.
- i. The teacher orients and guides the students. Teachers need to explain to students what extensive reading is, why they are doing it and how to go about it. They also need to make sure that the students keep on the track by finding out of what and how much the students read as well as the students' reactions toward the readings.
- j. The teacher is a role model of a reader. If the teacher reads some of the same material that the students are reading and talks to them about it, this gives the students a model of what it is to be a reader.

There are many reasons on why extensive reading is good for language development. It: (1) allows students to meet the language in its natural context and see how it works in extended discourse beyond the language met in textbooks, (2) builds vocabulary, (3) helps students to build reading speed and reading fluency, (4) builds confidence, motivation, enjoyment and a love of reading, (5) allows students to read and listen so they can develop good reading and listening habits, and (6) helps students get a sense of how grammatical patterns work in context.

Thus, by employing extensive reading approach in a classroom, students are helped to become readers. Moreover, students' general language competence and general knowledge are also developed as well as their autonomous learning (Maley, 2010).

## C. METHOD

### 1. Setting and Participants

This study was conducted in Cultural Sciences Faculty, Mulawarman University, Samarinda, East Kalimantan. There were 38 (thirty eight) students in the class who were asked to read any kinds of texts every day based on their level of competence and interest. Because ER was neither a compulsory nor an elective subject, assessment was not provided for the students. After one semester had finished, self-completion questionnaires were distributed to all the students in order to get their demographic backgrounds immediately. Moreover, to get more immense insights and thorough understandings from the students, they were also invited for an interview. The interview took around one hour for each student. Yet, only 3 (three) students who were willing to be questioned based on their answers in the questionnaire. All the interviews, totally 3 hours, were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English. Besides the interviews, we also had several follow-up phone calls with the interviewees for clarification.

**Table 1.**  
**Participants' Demographic Background**

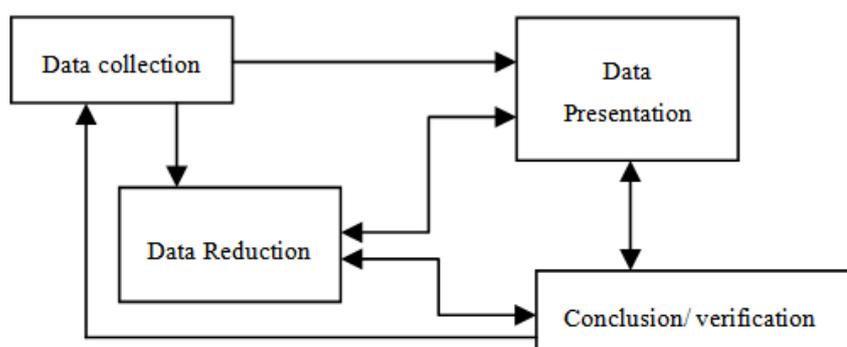
Name/Sex	Background	Favourite reading
Theo/Male	Theo is a second year student of cultural sciences faculty, Mulawarman University. He participates actively in in-campus organization and becomes the member of student executive board in the campus.	Theo likes to read fiction especially <i>Batman Arkham Knight</i> . According to Theo's opinion, all the articles and stories about Batman are able to attract his interests to read more. He added that by reading Batman he could add his knowledge about Marvel's superheroes characters and stories.
Faqih/Male	Faqih is a second year student of cultural sciences faculty, Mulawarman University. Faqih is a member of photography club in the campus and he likes spending his time capturing pictures about nature and people.	Faqih likes to read fiction-novel. One of his favourite novels is <i>Percy Jackson and The Olympians</i> . Faqih said that this novel was able to bring his fantasy between myth and modern lives. He added that this novel could make him imagine about Percy Jackson's adventures and journeys.
Nisa/female	Nisa is also a second year student of cultural sciences faculty, Mulawarman University. Because of her hobby, Nisa joins a photography club in the campus.	Nisa likes to read non-fiction stories, short stories, articles, and magazines. One of her favourite stories is <i>The Little Prince</i> . But recently, she read about young marriages that happened in some countries in the world. She said that those stories had opened her mind and knowledge about the difficulties of being women even in this modern era.

## 2. Research Procedures

- a. Based on the aforementioned explanation, ER characteristics were adopted and the concepts were used in this study. Further, ER was considered as a supplementary activity for the second year students who took English prose analysis course, so the teachers asked the students to have additional reading at home for at least one hour a day. Moreover, we also introduced the concept of critical literacy to the students by focusing on the notions of text critics as explained by Luke (2000) and Freire (1974).
- b. In each meeting, the teacher would have a discussion about students' reading materials. In order to make the students examine and discuss critically about the text, we adopted Rice's (1998) question frameworks about critical literacy. The questions focused on the topic of the text, the purpose, author, and the source. The examples of the questions are as follows:
  - 1) What is the topic?
  - 2) What is its purpose? (What is its genre?)
  - 3) Why was the text written? Are there any economic/material interests affecting why it has been written in the way it has?
  - 4) Why has the text been written? (the reasons)
- c. After the students had completed the course, the teacher distributed 38 (thirty eight) questionnaires regarding to their ER activity at home. Then, they were invited to have an interview. However, not all the student were willing to be interviewed, there were only three students who answered our invitation regarding to the interview. The purpose of the interview was to clarify students' answer based on their answers in the questionnaires.
- d. The interview was conducted for an hour for each student and the questions were delivered in both Bahasa Indonesia and in English.

## 3. Data Analysis

In order to get more immense insights of the students' viewpoints, the data were analyzed based on the interactive models from Miles and Huberman (1994).



This model consists of three main components, which then adopted in this study as follows:

**a. Data reduction**

Firstly, the data were collected from the questionnaires and the interviews of three students. The answers which are related to students' activity in doing ER and their perceptions toward the texts were then reduced. After the data were reduced, some related answers from the students were given notes in order to separate and differentiate them from irrelevant data.

**b. Data display/presentation**

The reduced data, then displayed and verified based on the conceptual frameworks of critical literacy. The answers from the students were dispersed and analyzed. In this instance, the answers which had been marked then presented.

**c. Conclusion and verification**

After the data were presented, then they were explained descriptively in order to make it more comprehensible.

## **D. FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Theo**

During the interview, Theo described that his favorite reading was Batman. He delineated the stories about Batman and why Batman becomes the most resilient superhero form Marvel. Theo mirrored Batman's life in Gotham City and the real situation in his town. He said that if all the rich people in Samarinda (the town where he is staying) would like to help one and another like Batman, he was sure that the societal problems could be solved. Another important point that he highlighted was that if he was as rich as Batman, he would like to create more sustainable job vacancies. He explained that East Kalimantan province really depended on mining industries and Crude Palm Oil industry, he believed if these kinds of industrial activities kept being maintained, Samarinda would become a 'dead city' in the near future because the environment was already destroyed. That was why; he would like to build sustainable tourism industry. By creating more sustainable tourism industry, he was certain of Samarinda's potential. Because according to Theo sustainable tourism industry would bring a beneficial impact on both the environment and the society. From Theo's explanation, it was through ER activity that his awareness about the societal issues happened in his hometown had escalated. During the interview, he was also able to challenge and question

the basic assumption in the society about the industrial activities that were still going on in his hometown.

## 2. Faqih

Faqih's favorite reading during ER activity was *Percy Jackson and The Olympians*. The interview was quite interesting because Faqih mostly told about one of the women characters in the story. He explained about Annabeth, instead Percy. At the first time when he read the novel, he did not really like Annabeth's characterizations because she was portrayed as an intelligent woman, she was good at making plans and war strategies and the most important thing was her architecture skills were beyond average. According to Faqih, it was a bit strange when the story about knights and heroes also positioned woman character as an influential character. He assumed that woman like Annabeth in real life must be annoying and irritating because the existence of independent and smart woman was a threat for man. But then, the more he read the story, the more he was aware that women should also be seen as individuals. They had the right to express their opinions, to voice their thoughts and to be what they want to be without any social judgement from the society. From Faqih's explanation, it is evidenced that ER activity has played a crucial role in his critical literacy ability. He challenges the basic notions about woman where the Indonesian patriarchal society seems to uphold the perception about what woman should be.

## 3. Nisa

Nisa's favorite story was *The Little Prince*. But during the interview, she delineated about some young marriage articles that she had read. The articles told about a Pakistani girl who was forced to get married at eleven years old and another story was from Bangladesh that talked about underage girls who were forced to get married by her family. At the first time, Nisa thought that to get married in a very young age was not a big problem and it was accepted based on her religious belief. But then, she gradually started to change her point of view and when she read the articles about young marriage issues, she realized that those things actually dehumanized women because women should be given a freedom to voice their thoughts and opinions. The facts about child marriage that happened really tore her heart because it did not only happen in Pakistan (where the stereotype was mostly related to religious belief) but it happened in all over the world. She said that there were two influential factors why child marriage still happened until today, they were cultural and financial problems. According to Nisa, it

was not the fault of the child to be born as a girl and to be born in the society that sustained such a traditional view. The society should be aware enough to differentiate between traditional values and humans right. She added that one day in the future she wanted to work in the UN (United Nations), she wanted to help all the women who suffered and struggled for their life and education. She wanted to work in the United Nation (UN) because by working in UN, she believed that she would be able to make a small change in the society. It was all the articles and stories that Nisa read during ER activity that finally shaped her awareness about the global issues related to child marriages.

From the interview, it can be said that students can improve their critical literacy if critical questions that relate to the text are incorporated. By conducting this practice, students' awareness can be developed and their understanding about the texts is not limited to the content only, but also to its construct. Moreover, this study has demonstrated us that such activities to encourage students to develop their level of critical thinking need to be frequently practised in the classroom.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

The aforementioned explanation above has shown us as the researcher that ER has played a significant role in developing students' critical literacy. They are able to motivate students to approach texts critically, challenge basic assumption in the society, relate the texts to global issues, improve their awareness of how to view and understand human beings, and question the intention of the texts from distinct perspectives.

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