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Critical literacy in the Indonesian classroom: challenges and opportunities

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the implementation of critical literacy strategies in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom by three English lecturers at the Universitas Muhammadiyah Bulukumba, Indonesia. The study aims to understand how these lecturers integrate critical literacy into their instruction and to identify the challenges encountered in this process. Data were collected through classroom observations and interviews involving three lecturers and 90 students, providing a comprehensive insight into their approaches and experiences. The findings reveal that the lecturers effectively employed the five-step instructional framework of critical literacy, which includes engaging students in questioning, facilitating group discussions, and encouraging them to read and think critically beyond the text. Despite relying on textbook materials, the lecturers successfully blended traditional teaching methods with critical literacy practices. By posing essential questions and fostering collaborative discussions, they created an environment that encouraged students to express their opinions freely. This approach not only enhanced students' critical thinking skills but also promoted social awareness, tolerance, and responsibility. However, the study also highlights several challenges in implementing critical literacy strategies. The primary challenge was the students' limited language proficiency, which hindered their ability to engage deeply with the texts and discussions. Additionally, transforming classroom practices to incorporate critical literacy proved difficult due to entrenched teaching methods and a lack of familiarity with critical literacy concepts. The lecturers also faced constraints related to inadequate teaching resources and facilities, which limited the effectiveness of their instruction.

Keywords: Critical literacy, EFL classroom, Teacher training, Language proficiency.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of critical literacy has evolved significantly over the past few decades, expanding the traditional definition of literacy from merely the ability to read written materials to a broader skill set that includes interpreting and understanding the world around us (Janks, 2009; Akpan, et al., 2016; Akpan, & Uko, 2019). Critical literacy

encourages students to “read the world” by examining and questioning societal contexts, power dynamics, equality, and social justice (Iniobong et al., 2013; Leska, 2016; Akpan & Itighise, 2019). This broadened understanding of literacy has profound implications for education, particularly in Indonesia.

Initiatives like the “Gerakan Literasi” campaign, implemented in various schools since 2017, have pushed Indonesia to enhance literacy in recent years. The Ministry of Education and Culture (Pratiwi et al., 2022) highlighted that this campaign initially aimed to foster a love of reading among students but also expects to improve their critical literacy skills. In today's world, where information disseminates rapidly in multiple formats, critical literacy is crucial. It helps students develop social awareness, tolerance, and the ability to articulate their thoughts (Durach et al., 2024). Thus, integrating critical literacy into the teaching and learning process can significantly aid students in adapting to contemporary demands.

Despite these advancements, there remains a notable gap in research on the application of critical literacy strategies within the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, especially in Indonesia. Many educators in Indonesia have reported a limited understanding of critical literacy and a lack of familiarity with creating a classroom environment that fosters these skills (Riwayatiningsih et al., 2021). This gap is particularly pronounced among EFL lecturers, who often lack a comprehensive grasp of the fundamental principles and strategies associated with critical literacy. Research on the application of critical literacy in EFL settings is scarce, with few studies addressing this topic in the Indonesian context (Novianti, et al., 2021).

Given this background, it is critical to investigate the implementation of critical literacy in Indonesian EFL classrooms and pinpoint the challenges lecturers face in this endeavor. This study seeks to address these gaps by focusing on the following research questions: (1) How do English lecturers in Indonesia integrate critical literacy into EFL classrooms? (2) What challenges do lecturers face when implementing critical literacy strategies in EFL classrooms?

By examining these questions, this research aims to provide insights into the practical application of critical literacy in Indonesian EFL classrooms and offer recommendations for overcoming the identified challenges. The findings will contribute to the broader discourse on EFL teaching methodologies and highlight the importance of adopting innovative approaches to enhance language education in diverse contexts.

CRITICAL LITERACY IN EFL CONTEXT

Early in the 1970s, challenges to the traditional definition of literacy emerged, shifting the emphasis from decoding and encoding skills to comprehension skills (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). Vygotsky and Cole (1978) emphasized the importance of understanding a child's literacy within the context of their environment, suggesting that social interactions play a critical role in literacy development. Advances in cognitive psychology have further expanded the concept of literacy to include a broader understanding of the social and psychological factors involved. Barton and Hamilton (2000) contributed to this evolving perspective by explaining the socio-cultural aspects of literacy. They emphasized the importance of social relations within groups or communities in developing literacy skills. This shift acknowledged the deep embedding of literacy in social practices and cultural contexts, not just as an individual cognitive skill.

The concept of critical literacy was significantly redefined by Paulo Freire. He emphasized that literacy extends beyond the ability to read and write printed words, proposing that true literacy involves “reading the world. He states:

To acquire literacy is more than to psychologically and mechanically dominate reading and writing techniques. It is to determine these techniques in terms of consciousness; to understand what one reads and write what one understands; to communicate graphically. Acquiring does not involve memorizing sentences, words, or syllables- lifeless objects unconnected to an

existential universe- but rather an attitude of creation and re-creation, a self-transformation producing a stance of intervention in one's context (Freire, 2001, p.86).

Critical literacy is an educational philosophy that emphasizes the importance of understanding and examining the practice of power in various domains of life. Within the educational context, critical literacy promotes the practice of social justice in classrooms by engaging students in discussions about socio-political issues (Akpan & Babayemi, 2022). Morgan (2002) explained that critical literacy extends beyond the traditional skills of decoding and encoding words. It aims to develop an awareness of one's history and culture, to recognize the connections between individual lives and the broader social structure, and to believe that change in one's life, others' lives, and society is both possible and desirable. Morell (2009) defined critical literacy:

The ability to challenge existing power relations in texts and to produce new text that delegitimizes these relations; a consciousness of the relationship between the dominant culture's use of language, literacy, and social injustice; the ability not only to read words but to read the world into and onto the text and recognize the correlation between the word and the world; and the ability to create political texts that inspire transformative action and conscious reflection (p.57).

Classroom practices typically do not ensure equal participation between teachers and learners in understanding texts. Critical literacy, however, provides a detailed and nuanced way of comprehending both the world and the text, encouraging learners to broaden their mental horizons and recognize the role of power and politics in classroom pedagogy. Cervetti et al. (2001) explain the critical literacy approach as “A critical literacy approach places in the foreground issues of power and explicitly attends to differences across race, class, gender, sexual orientation and so on” (p.9). Shor and Pari (1999) talked about how critical literacy challenges the “status quo” of the learners and how it helps in the social and self-development by “words rethinking worlds, and selfdissenting in society.” (pg.1).

Critical literacy talks about developing higher-order skills while dealing with the text as there is a ubiquitous presence of power relations in teaching and learning. There is no single widely accepted definition for critical literacy and a “template for bringing critical literacy to pedagogical practice” (Beck, 2005, p.395). Various theorists tried to define critical literacy as –

In addressing critical literacy, we are concerned with the extent to which. And how actual and possible social practices and conceptions of reading and writing enable human subjects to understand and engage the politics of daily life in the quest for a more genuinely democratic social order. Referring to critical literacy only where concerted efforts to understand and practice reading and writing in ways that enhance the search for democratic emancipation (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993, p.19).

Critical literacy empowers learners by transforming them into autonomous and free thinkers. This educational approach fosters the ability to critically interpret and delve into the underlying currents of meaning within texts. Fairclough (1992) examines the relationship between language, power, and knowledge, fostering an attitude towards texts and discourses that challenges the social, political, and economic conditions that shape these texts. Critical literacy extends beyond mere reading and writing; it involves assessing texts to understand the power and dominance relationships that inform them.

Furthermore, critical literacy is a learner-centered philosophy that shapes learners' personalities. It places learners in an active role, encouraging them to consider multiple perspectives and reflect on their learning experiences. Lewison et al. (2014) reviewed several definitions and identified four dimensions of critical literacy: disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on socio-political issues, and acting to promote justice. Janks (2000) defined critical literacy as both a skill and a social

practice capable of changing its form. She emphasized the essential idea of literacy within the “domination model,” highlighting how critical literacy empowers readers to synthesize various readings and understand the author's knowledge in contrast to their multiple viewpoints about the text.

In essence, critical literacy cultivates a voice within learners, enabling them to be active participants and think beyond mere cognition, fostering analytical awareness. This approach encourages learners to not only comprehend the text but also to critically engage with it, questioning and challenging the power structures that influence its creation and dissemination. Critical literacy helps learners become more informed, reflective, and engaged citizens, capable of contributing to social justice and change.

There is a notable scarcity of empirical studies focusing on critical literacy practices within the EFL context, particularly in Asian countries (Huh, 2016). In Indonesia, the existing literature on critical literacy is especially limited in the realm of English language education. Hidayat et al., (2020) study explored English teachers' knowledge, perceptions, and efforts in fostering a critical literacy-oriented classroom. The findings revealed that most teachers lacked a sufficient understanding of the distinction between critical thinking and critical literacy. Despite this, they believed that critical literacy could aid students in interpreting and comprehending deeper meanings within texts, though they were unsure how to effectively create such an environment. Additionally, the teachers expressed a strong desire for tailored professional development programmes focused on the implementation of critical literacy in English classrooms.

In broader EFL settings, several studies have investigated the implementation of critical literacy, offering insights relevant to this research. Fajardo's (2015) study demonstrated that integrating critical literacy can transform teaching strategies from traditional didactic methods to a more critical, dialogic approach, shifting from what Freire (1970) termed “banking pedagogy” to “empowering pedagogy.” The study emphasised that teachers' capacity to become critically literate is essential for establishing a classroom oriented towards critical literacy (Akinsanya & Ojotule, 2022). Lenters & McDermott (2020) further supported this by highlighting that teachers' own critical literacy is fundamental to fostering students' critical literacy. The study also emphasised the need to contextualise critical literacy practices within the school environment, teacher identity, and professional role.

In summary, while there is a dearth of research on critical literacy in EFL contexts, especially in Indonesia, the available studies underscore the transformative potential of critical literacy. They highlight the need for professional development and a shift in teaching paradigms to fully realise its benefits. This research aims to build on these findings by exploring the practical challenges and opportunities of implementing critical literacy in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

CRITICAL LITERACY TEACHING STRATEGY

Critical literacy teaching strategies can empower students to engage with texts from a critical perspective, encouraging them to analyse and question the underlying messages. These strategies must be dynamic, contextually adaptable, and designed to foster critical discussions that lead to meaningful action. According to McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004), there is no single, definitive method for teaching critical literacy. However, the development of critical literacy teaching strategies is crucial as they guide students in conducting critical analyses, such as examining social issues and power dynamics within texts.

Behrman (2006) and Cervetti (2004) identified various strategies that promote critical literacy, encouraging students to adopt a critical stance towards texts through activities like textual analysis, dialogue, and questioning or problem-posing. These methods help students to scrutinise texts critically, uncover hidden agendas, and understand broader social and political contexts. One effective teaching strategy is the five-step instructional framework proposed by McLaughlin and Allen (2002). This framework suggests that teachers should scaffold student learning through a structured process: explain,

demonstrate, guide, practice, and reflect. This approach helps students gradually build their critical literacy skills by providing clear, incremental steps to follow.

The Five-Step Instructional Framework for Critical Literacy (McLaughlin & Allen, 2002) is a valuable resource.

1. **Explain:** Introduce the concept of critical literacy and the importance of critically analysing texts. Explain the lesson's purpose and objectives.
2. **Demonstrate:** Model the process of critical analysis using a text. Show students how to identify and question the underlying messages, biases, and perspectives within the text.
3. **Guide:** Assist students as they begin to apply critical literacy strategies to their own reading. Provide guidance and support to help them navigate the process.
4. **Practice:** Allow students to practice critical literacy techniques independently or in groups. Encourage them to engage in discussions, ask questions, and explore different interpretations of the text.
5. **Reflect:** Facilitate a reflection session where students can share their insights and experiences. Discuss what they have learned and how their perspectives have changed.

By implementing this framework, teachers can cultivate a supportive learning environment that inspires students to engage deeply with texts and the world around them. This approach not only sharpens their critical thinking skills but also fosters a more socially aware and informed student body. Teachers can further expand the scope of critical literacy through various strategies. First, they can demonstrate critical literacy techniques using think-aloud or read-aloud methods. By articulating their thought process while analysing a text, teachers can show students how to identify and question underlying messages and biases.

Secondly, teachers can provide a critical perspective that encourages students to question and challenge the text. This involves presenting different viewpoints and prompting students to consider the social, political, and cultural implications of what they are reading. Thirdly, students can work in pairs or small groups to discuss and respond to the text. This collaborative approach allows them to share insights, challenge each other's ideas, and develop a deeper understanding of the text from multiple perspectives. Teachers guide their reading and facilitate discussions, allowing students to practice reading from a critical stance.

Finally, both teachers and students can reflect on their learning experience. They can discuss what they have learned about being critically aware and how it has enhanced their understanding of the text. This reflection process is crucial for reinforcing the skills and insights gained through critical literacy.

METHODS

This article investigates the implementation of critical literacy in EFL classrooms at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bulukumba, Indonesia, and the challenges encountered by the lecturers. We employed a qualitative case study approach to maintain the wholeness and integrity of the research subject. We deemed a case study appropriate to delve deeply into this specific context, given the novelty of critical literacy implementation in Indonesian higher education.

The study focused on three English lecturers at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bulukumba, Indonesia, teaching first-year students. These lecturers collectively possess over ten (10) years of teaching experience in English language education. While they had prior exposure to concepts like critical thinking and higher-order thinking through professional development activities, their understanding of critical literacy was limited. However, their participation in a master's thesis research project sparked their interest in critical literacy, leading them to investigate its implementation in their classrooms.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia, classroom observations were limited, necessitating a reliance on interviews and informal conversations with the lecturers. These

interactions provided valuable insights into the lecturers' journey in understanding and applying critical literacy strategies. We conducted two rounds of interviews with each lecturer: one before the course, which focused on their prior teaching experiences, and another after the course, which focused on their experience with critical literacy strategies. All interactions were recorded for analysis.

We transcribed and descriptively analyzed the data from classroom observations, interviews, and informal conversations to explore the lecturers' attitudes, behaviors, and experiences with critical literacy. Following Thompson's (2011) approach, this method enabled a thorough exploration of the lecturers' perspectives and challenges encountered during the implementation process.

We analyzed the observations and interviews to identify emerging themes related to the lecturers' implementation of critical literacy and the challenges they faced. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in integrating critical literacy into the EFL curriculum at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bulukumba.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section addresses the findings related to each research question examined in this study. The initial part delves into the implementation of critical literacy strategies in the EFL classroom, while the subsequent section highlights the challenges encountered by teachers during the implementation process.

Result

Before the classroom observations were conducted, a first round of interviews was held with the three lecturers: Lecturer 2, Lecturer 3, and Lecturer 1. Regarding their teaching practices, all three lecturers shared similar experiences. Before understanding critical literacy strategies, they relied heavily on the government-issued textbooks and used students' worksheets as supplementary materials.

Lecturer 2 mentioned, "Before I knew the critical literacy strategy, I only used the textbook because it is the required textbook given by the government. I also used students' worksheets and some supplementary materials suitable to the lesson."

Lecturer 3 shared a similar sentiment, stating, "My teaching was very textbook-oriented. I followed the provided materials closely and supplemented with worksheets when necessary."

Lecturer 1 echoed these thoughts, saying, "I primarily depended on the government-issued textbooks and occasionally added worksheets to support the lessons."

As they developed more knowledge about critical literacy, each lecturer attempted to implement these strategies in their classrooms. However, they often felt apprehensive about their critical literacy skills and worried about their ability to prompt students effectively.

Lecturer 2 explained, "Sometimes, when I try to implement critical literacy, I feel afraid because I think that I am not critically literate enough. I always try to think harder to be critical and give my students a chance to share their ideas with or without my prompts. It is a great experience to apply the critical literacy strategy because I have to think critically before my students do to develop their critical literacy skills."

Lecturer 3 shared a similar experience, stating, "I find it challenging but rewarding to integrate critical literacy into my lessons. There is always a fear of not being critical

enough, but it encourages students to express their ideas freely.”

Lecturer 1 added, “Implementing critical literacy in the classroom is both fun and challenging. It pushes me to think more deeply and helps students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts.”

When asked about the materials they would deliver in the classroom, all three lecturers planned to teach a lesson about songs before the midterm examinations. They each brought their projectors and speakers to the class due to the lack of equipment.

Lecturer 2 stated, “Today I will teach the material about songs. Students have to analyze the lyrics. I will do it in a critical way. But I have to bring my own laptop, speaker, and projector because the class doesn’t have them.”

Lecturer 3 echoed this, “I’m teaching song lyrics today and will encourage critical analysis. Unfortunately, I need to bring my own tech equipment as the classroom lacks these resources.”

Lecturer 1 confirmed, “I’ll be focusing on song lyrics and guiding students to analyze them critically. I’ve had to bring my projector and speaker since the class isn’t equipped.”

The classroom observations began by setting up cameras in the classrooms. Each lecturer then proceeded to teach the lesson on song lyrics. Throughout the observations, the implementation of critical literacy strategies began to emerge as the lecturers guided their students through critical analysis and encouraged open discussions.

The initial meeting

We examined the experiences of three lecturers—Lecturer 2, Lecturer 3, and Lecturer 1—in the initial classroom observation. We identified three steps of the five-step instructional framework for critical literacy during this session: explain, demonstrate, and guide. Each lecturer focused on explaining the materials and used various teaching aids they had brought with them. The lesson topic was about analysing song lyrics, with the goal of helping students express, appreciate, and understand the song's meaning.

Explanation Stage:

The lecturers began the class by explaining the lesson objectives and activities. This stage was predominantly teacher-centred, with the lecturers taking responsibility for explaining the material while the students listened attentively.

Lecturer 2: “Today, we will learn how to analyse song lyrics. Our goal is to understand the meaning behind the words and appreciate the art of songwriting.”

Lecturer 3: “We will also look at how these lyrics can relate to our own experiences and emotions. This will help us express our thoughts more clearly.”

Lecturer 1: “I want you to pay attention to the different layers of meaning in the lyrics. This will be crucial for our discussions later.”

Demonstration Stage:

As the lesson progressed to the demonstration stage, the classroom dynamics changed. The lecturers distributed the song lyrics to the students, asking them to analyse and understand the content. They read the lyrics together with the students, occasionally translating difficult words.

Lecturer 2: "Let's read the lyrics together. If there are any difficult words, I will explain them to you."

Lecturer 3: "To grasp the full meaning of the song, we need to understand every line. Let's take it step by step."

Lecturer 1: "Feel free to ask questions if you're unsure about anything in the lyrics."

Classroom Discussions:

With Lecturer 2:

Lecturer 2: "Now, you have to understand the lyrics. I will ask you some questions. Don't be afraid of being wrong, ok? What is the song about?"

"Someone becomes a vagrant," says Student (Via).

Lecturer 2: "Why do you think it is about a vagrant?"

"Someone with no future." (Via)

Lecturer 2: "Alright, this passage implies that he will become insignificant as he ages. "Do you think that a vagrant has no future?"

Student (Reza): "They have."

Lecturer 2: "How?"

Reza: "By changing their way of thinking."

Lecturer 2: "Can you give me an example?"

Reza: "For example, when they have dreams, they must make them come true and do their best to reach them."

Lecturer 2: "Other opinions?"

Student (Haikal): "Explain the meaning of a struggle." So, the struggle can arise when someone feels down or sick; he has potential, but many people underestimate him."

Lecturer 2: "Good." How do you feel after reading the lyrics?"

Haikal: "I feel sad and amazed."

With Lecturer 3:

Lecturer 3: "Let's dive deeper into these lyrics. What do you think the song is about?"

Student (Rina): "It seems to talk about a person who has lost everything."

Lecturer 3: "Interesting. Why do you think they have lost everything?"

Rina: "The lyrics mention that he will be nothing as he grows older."

Lecturer 3: "Does that mean his future is bleak?"

Student (Tomi): "Not necessarily. He can still change."

Lecturer 3: "How could he change?"

Tomi: "By finding a new purpose or dream."

Lecturer 3: "Can you provide an example?"

Tomi: "He might decide to learn a new skill and rebuild his life."

Lecturer 3: "Any other thoughts?"

Student (Fahmi): "Struggle can make someone stronger, even if others doubt them."

Lecturer 3: "Very good. How do these lyrics make you feel?"

Fahmi: "They make me think deeply and feel inspired."

With Lecturer 1:

Lecturer 1: "Now, I want you all to think about the lyrics. What is the song conveying?"

Student (Maya): "It's about someone who feels hopeless."

Lecturer 1: "Why do you think they feel hopeless?"

Maya: "It's because the lyrics suggest that they will ultimately have nothing."

Lecturer 1: "Is there a chance for them to have a future?"

Student (Dian): "Yes, if they change their mindset."

Lecturer 1: "How might they do that?"

Dian: "By believing in themselves and working hard."

Lecturer 1: "Can you give a specific example?"

Dian: "If they start a new journey or project, they might find success."
Lecturer 1: "Does anyone have a different opinion?"
Student (Ilham): "Yes, struggle can push someone to achieve great things."
Lecturer 1: "Excellent. What emotions do the lyrics evoke in you?"
Ilham: "They make me feel determined and hopeful."

Guidance Stage:

The lecturers continued the activity by showing the song's music video. The students were excited to watch it. The lecturers posed critical questions about the video and its connection to the lyrics after viewing it.

Lecturer 2: "So, what is it about?"

Reza: "A father who works and struggles for his child."

Lecturer 2: "Does the video represent what we think?"

Student (Sulthan): "Yes, for some parts."

Lecturer 2: "Which part?"

Sulthan: "The streets, homeless people."

Lecturer 2: "Now, if you were the director, would you change the video to better represent the song?"

"No, because of copyright issues," Sulthan replied.

Lecturer 2: "Ok. How about you?"

Student (Ari): "I think I would change it a little. The video only showed the struggle of a father who wants to make his child proud. I would add a scene where the father becomes a successful person."

Lecturer 3: "What do you think the music video tells us?"

"It shows a father working hard for his child."

Lecturer 3: "Is this what the lyrics suggest?"

Student (Fahmi): "In some ways, yes."

Lecturer 3: "Which scenes match the lyrics?"

Fahmi: "The parts showing the father's daily struggles."

Lecturer 3: "If you were the director, would you change anything?"

Fahmi: "Maybe I would add more about the father's dreams."

Lecturer 3: "Interesting. What about you?"

Student (Rina): "I'd add a scene showing the father's success."

Lecturer 1: "How does the video align with the lyrics?"

Dian: "It's about a father's struggle."

Lecturer 1: "Do you think the video fully represents this?"

Student (Ilham): "Partly, yes."

Lecturer 1: "Which scenes are most relevant?"

Ilham: "The scenes of hardship on the streets."

Lecturer 1 asked, "Would you change the video if you could?"

Ilham: "I would show more of the father's aspirations."

Lecturer 1: "And you?"

Student (Maya): "I'd include a scene where the father achieves his goals."

After the discussion, the lecturers guided the students to work in groups to answer some critical questions. They provided time for discussion and tracked their progress, ensuring that the implementation of critical literacy strategies began to take shape in the classroom.

The Second Meeting

In the second meeting, the research focused on the experiences of three lecturers—Lecturer 2, Lecturer 3, and Lecturer 1—as they implemented the critical literacy instructional framework. During this session, three steps of the framework (guide, practice, and reflect) were observed. The lecturers continued the group discussions from the previous session,

encouraging students to analyse critical questions.

Guidance Stage:

After opening the meeting as usual, the lecturers asked the students to continue their group discussions. The students were prompted to share their ideas within their groups to answer the critical questions, while the lecturers monitored their progress. The students continued to analyse the song lyrics and the music video, actively engaging in discussions.

Group Presentations:

After providing time for group discussions, the lecturers asked the students to present their ideas to the class. Each group shared their answers and opinions about the song, leading to several interesting exchanges.

Group 2 Discussion with Lecturer 2:

Lecturer 2: "What do you think of the music video? Why?"

Student (Azkia): "The video is amazing because it shows the father's struggle. It's very touching, making us aware that we can fight too."

Lecturer 2: "Very good. Why do you find it touching?"

Azkia: "Because the father gets up early and works hard to support his children without showing his daughter his real job. He doesn't want her to be ridiculed for his work as a scavenger. He wants his child to be proud of him."

Lecturer 2: "Are you proud of the child? Why? What do you think about the child?"

Azkia: "Yes, because all parents think about their children. Many children mock others without knowing the real situation. Mocking hurts, especially if they know the child's father works like this."

Lecturer 2: "Do you think the child is proud of her father?"

Azkia: "Yes."

Lecturer 2: "What would you do if you were in the child's position?"

Azkia: "I would be proud of my father for working hard and struggling."

Group 3 Discussion with Lecturer 1:

Lecturer 1: "What did you think of the song's lyrics? Why?"

Student (Rina): "The lyrics are very moving, especially the part about the father's sacrifices."

Lecturer 1: "Which line in particular moved you?"

"The line where it says he works tirelessly to give his child a better future."

Lecturer 1: "Do you think this kind of sacrifice is common in real life?"

Rina: "Yes, many parents work hard without their children realising it."

Lecturer 1: "What emotions did the song evoke in you?"

Rina: "It made me feel grateful for my parents and their hard work."

Lecturer 1: "If you were to rewrite the song, what message would you emphasise?"

Rina: "I would emphasise the importance of recognising and appreciating our parents' efforts."

Group 4 Discussion with Lecturer 3:

Lecturer 3: "Is the meaning of the song delivered well? Why?"

Student (Ari): "Yes, because the setting, the place, and the actors convey the father's struggle."

Lecturer 3: "Very good. Would you add or cut anything if you were the director?"

Ari: "I might add a scene in the landfill to show the father's work more clearly."

Lecturer 3: "Would you add the wife? There's no wife in the video."

Ari: "No, because adding the wife would decrease the chemistry between the father and daughter."

These discussions highlighted the students' engagement and critical thinking. The lecturers' questions prompted deeper analysis and reflection, fostering a more interactive and thoughtful classroom environment.

Reflection Stage:

After the group presentations, the lecturers provided an opportunity for the rest of the students to share their opinions. They then guided the class through a reflection on the entire activity, discussing the insights gained and proposing suggestions for the songwriter and listeners. The lecturers closed the meeting, having effectively managed the class and provoked critical thinking among the students. They helped students understand the critical questions and encouraged independent thought.

However, some students appeared hesitant to share their ideas, fearing mistakes in their English. Others mixed English and Indonesian, seeking permission from the lecturers before expressing their opinions in Indonesian.

After-Meeting Interview:

The after-meeting interview was conducted to gather the lecturers' reflections on implementing critical literacy. All three lecturers expressed enjoyment in using the strategy, noting that their classes were livelier and the students more active.

Lecturer 1: "I am quite happy with the response from my students. I thought this strategy wouldn't suit them, but they were more active in class than I expected. Some of their answers surprised me, as they were beyond my personal thoughts. However, many students are still not fully comfortable speaking English."

The lecturers also discussed the challenges faced while implementing critical literacy, which will be explored further in the next section.

Discussion

This section presents the challenges faced by three lecturers—Lecturer 2, Lecturer 3, and Lecturer 1—in implementing the critical literacy strategy in classroom practice. Two main challenges were identified: students' proficiency in English and the transition from a traditional to a critical-oriented classroom.

Students' Language Proficiency:

The first challenge observed was students' language proficiency. Many students were hesitant to express their opinions in English, fearing they were not fully capable. Some even asked if they could share their thoughts in Indonesian. The lecturers noticed that their students struggled with articulating critical thoughts in English and sometimes even in Indonesian.

Lecturer 2: "What worries me most about teaching students through the critical literacy strategy is their English skills. Not all students can use full English in the classroom. Even in Indonesian, some students find it difficult to answer critical questions. In English, they have to think about grammar and vocabulary after coming up with the answers. But I have to try; this can help students develop their courage in speaking English."

During classroom discussions, some students who were more confident mixed English and Indonesian, while others remained silent, afraid to make mistakes.

Classroom Discussions:

With Lecturer 2:

Lecturer 2: "Do you like the content of the song? Why?"

Student (Via): "Yes, because menyentuh." (Translation - Yes, because it's touching).

Lecturer 2: "What about the lyrics made you feel that way?"

Via: "Because the song tells a story that is very emotional."

Lecturer 2: "Can you give an example from the lyrics?"

Via: "The part where it talks about the sacrifices people make."

With Lecturer 3:

Lecturer 3: "Do you like the content of the song? Why?"

Student (Rina): "Yes, because it's touching."

Lecturer 3: "Which part of the song do you find touching?"

Rina: "The story about the struggles of life."

Lecturer 3: "Can you relate to the struggles mentioned in the song?"

Rina: "Yes, it reminds me of the challenges we all face."

With Lecturer 1:

Lecturer 1: "Do you like the content of the song? Why?"

Student (Fahmi): "Yes, because *ada seorang ayah yang rela berkorban dan ingin merubah hidupnya.*" (Translation - Yes, because there is a father who is willing to sacrifice and wants to change his life)

Lecturer 1: "What did you think about the father's sacrifice?"

Fahmi: "It's inspiring because he wants a better life for his child."

Lecturer 1: "How do you think the child feels about the father's sacrifice?"

Fahmi: "Probably grateful and motivated to succeed."

This challenge aligns with Kim (2016), who states that many EFL students lack the higher linguistic processing skills required for critical literacy. Ko (2013) also found that students' English proficiency influences their perception of critical literacy learning; those with higher proficiency show more interest than those who struggle with the language.

Transition to a Critical-Oriented Classroom:

The second challenge was shifting from a traditional classroom to a critical-oriented one. According to Freire (1970), critical literacy transforms learning from "banking pedagogy" to "critical pedagogy," where students become active participants in examining issues, transformation, and action (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004).

Evidence of this challenge included the reliance on textbooks and students viewing the lecturer as the central figure of knowledge. The lecturers noted that they couldn't avoid using government-prescribed textbooks, as exams were based on them. However, the textbooks were outdated and lacked diverse examples and activities, prompting the lecturers to seek additional materials from other sources.

Lecturer 1: "Some examples of texts in the textbook are out of date. For instance, the songs listed are from 1974, 2002, and 2003, which may not resonate with students born around 2002 or 2003. I look for songs that are more appropriate for their age and knowledge to engage them better. The older songs can still be used as supplementary texts to broaden their understanding."

Additionally, students' fear of making mistakes and being reprimanded by the lecturers contributed to their reluctance to share opinions. This dynamic is consistent with

Beck (2005) and Kramer-Dahl (2001), who found that traditional classrooms are often dominated by the teacher, hindering the democratic power-sharing essential for critical literacy.

Future Plans:

When asked about their future plans for teaching using the critical literacy strategy, all three lecturers expressed a desire to enhance their own critical literacy skills.

Lecturer 2: “For my future plan, I want to increase my knowledge of critical literacy strategy and get used to applying it in my classes. This way, my students and I can understand and use this strategy effectively. But the most important thing is developing my own critical perspective to teach this strategy.”

This sentiment echoes Riley (2015), who emphasizes that teachers need to become critically literate to effectively conduct a critical-based class.

CONCLUSION

This study delves into the implementation of critical literacy strategies by EFL lecturers at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bulukumba, Indonesia. It identifies two key findings: the methods employed by the lecturers and the challenges they encountered during the process. Initially, the lecturers adopted the five-step instructional framework proposed by McLaughlin & Allen (2002), which includes explanation, demonstration, guidance, practice, and reflection. To put this strategy into practice, the lecturers prepared materials from textbooks and other sources, followed by planning various classroom activities. During two observed classes, the lecturers applied all five steps of the framework. Despite their efforts, the lecturers expressed dissatisfaction with the outcomes, leading to the second finding regarding the challenges faced.

The second finding highlights the difficulties encountered by the lecturers. Their dissatisfaction primarily stemmed from the students' limited English proficiency, which impeded their ability to fully engage with the critical literacy activities. Additionally, transitioning from traditional teaching methods to a critical literacy-focused approach was challenging, as students still perceived the lecturers as the primary source of knowledge. The heavy reliance on government-issued textbooks, often lacking comprehensive content, reinforced this traditional view. Consequently, the lecturers frequently sought supplementary materials from other sources to address these gaps.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the implementation of critical literacy in EFL classes. Firstly, it is essential to establish training programs for lecturers to improve their critical thinking and develop their skills in critical literacy instruction. These programs would provide lecturers with the necessary tools and strategies to effectively integrate critical literacy into their teaching practices.

Secondly, school administrators should create and sustain an environment that fosters the development of students' critical literacy skills. This includes providing adequate resources, supporting innovative teaching methods, and encouraging a classroom culture where students feel empowered to think critically and express their ideas freely.

Implementing these measures is crucial for the success of lecturers, students, and schools, given the growing importance of critical literacy in today's educational landscape. By enhancing lecturers' instructional capabilities and creating a supportive learning environment, we can better equip students with the critical thinking skills needed to navigate and interpret the complex world around them.

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