

**Building Students' Critical Thinking Through
The Literary Critical Reading Class**

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Abstract

Being critical is an important and urgent condition for students in a mission to enrich their knowledge. Indonesian Students have a chance to sharpen their critical thinking for example through the activity of critical reading class. Here, the students have chance to practice how to make analysis after they have completed their reading process. Giving comments related to the topic of the text discussed is a routine activity in critical reading class. Here, the students can explore their opinion freely based on their mindset as long as it is still in the topic area discussed. There will be possibly known styles on the students' opinions and style, characteristics of their thinking, and level of knowledge they have. Students with good bravery and high attention towards their surrounding life are basically good assets for teacher and school. Some students are usually too critical in responding certain issues found on a text. Often, they also show their rather extreme opinion for sharp and sensitive issues. This study, therefore, is in a mission to explore the contribution of literary critical reading class in building students motivation to have a critical thinking. In fact the critical thinking may take the students to be rather extreme but this is natural since their existence give a color for the progress of the development of education especially Indonesian Education.

Keyword : Critical Thinking, Literary Critical, Reading Class

Abstrak

Menjadi kritis adalah kondisi penting dan mendesak bagi siswa dalam misi untuk memperkaya pengetahuan mereka. Pelajar Indonesia memiliki kesempatan untuk mempertajam pemikiran kritis mereka misalnya melalui kegiatan kelas membaca kritis. Di sini, para siswa memiliki kesempatan untuk berlatih bagaimana membuat analisis setelah mereka menyelesaikan proses membaca mereka. Memberi komentar terkait dengan topik teks yang dibahas adalah kegiatan rutin di kelas membaca kritis. Di sini, para siswa dapat mengeksplorasi pendapat mereka secara bebas berdasarkan pola pikir mereka selama masih

dalam topik yang dibahas. Mungkin akan ada gaya yang diketahui tentang pendapat dan gaya siswa, karakteristik pemikiran mereka, dan tingkat pengetahuan yang mereka miliki. Siswa dengan keberanian yang baik dan perhatian yang tinggi terhadap kehidupan di sekitarnya pada dasarnya adalah aset yang baik untuk guru dan sekolah. Beberapa siswa biasanya terlalu kritis dalam menanggapi masalah-masalah tertentu yang ditemukan dalam sebuah teks. Seringkali, mereka juga menunjukkan pendapat mereka yang agak ekstrem untuk masalah yang tajam dan sensitif. Studi ini, oleh karena itu, dalam misi untuk mengeksplorasi kontribusi kelas membaca kritis sastra dalam membangun motivasi siswa untuk memiliki pemikiran kritis. Sebenarnya, pemikiran kritis mungkin membuat siswa menjadi agak ekstrem tetapi ini wajar karena keberadaan mereka memberi warna bagi kemajuan perkembangan pendidikan khususnya Pendidikan Indonesia.

Kata Kunci : Pemikiran Kritis, Literasi Kristi, Kelas Membaca

1. Introduction

Joe Lau stated that critical thinking skills are essential in virtually any field of study or practice where individuals need to communicate ideas, make decisions, and analyze and solve problems. *An Introduction to Critical Thinking and Creativity: Think More, Think Better* outlines the necessary tools for readers to become critical as well as creative thinkers. By gaining a practical and solid foundation in basic principles that underlie critical thinking and creativity, readers will become equipped to think in a more systematic, logical, and imaginative manner.¹

In addition he also recommended that creativity is needed to generate new ideas to solve problems, and critical thinking evaluates and improves an idea. These concepts are uniquely introduced as a unified whole due to their dependence on

each other. Each chapter introduces relevant theories in conjunction with real-life examples and findings from cognitive science and psychology to illustrate how the theories can be applied in numerous fields and careers. An emphasis on how theoretical principles of reasoning can be practical and useful in everyday life is featured, and special sections on presentation techniques, the analysis of meaning, decision-making, and reasoning about personal and moral values are also highlighted.

Learning to be critical is always needed since the students want to grasp all they want to know about the message in a certain texts. Someone who has the ability to think critically in reading will also has the ability to write and speak critically. Through the writing of this manuscript, the writer doesn't mean to give the deep discussion on literature analysis. This chance gives the writer time to introduce the comparative literature along with its existence so far and its relation with critical

¹ Joe. Y. F. Lau, *An Introduction to Critical Thinking and Creativity* (Hoboken, NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118033449>.

reading ability. In line with the discussion of comparative literature and critical reading, the writer is adopting the statement of Emerson. The scholar, says Emerson is the man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. He must be a university of know ledges.

Literature itself as the creation of human thinking has the potential ability to give readers not only amusing point but also knowledge of social, cultural, psychology, and political experience. This reality is based on variation of reasons. Palardy² states that through literature readers will have the opportunity to develop insights and understandings of the cultures and people of the world; to develop their imagery and visualization abilities; and to gain new perspectives by testing their ideas with those found in books. "Likewise, Root³ maintains that literature helps the readers better understand themselves, their world, and the aesthetic values of the written text. Alwasilah⁴ also emphasizes that "by reading literary works, students share the problem, concerns, values, and issues common to all human being. Those reasons

actually have the same concern; the importance of literature.

Deep comprehension then is quite needed in this process. This chance should have been used by the readers as a very valuable input and counsel. By reading literature especially imaginative literatures, therefore people will have the opportunity to conduct critical reading and make review of reading.

Students who have the ability to think critically may also have possibility to be a critic or event an extremist in literature. This is a usual phenomenon since the students don't have the advisor or teacher near them.

Extremism indeed sometimes seems to be very unique and strange matters. In the world of education, especially in-class activity, this phenomenon will possibly also exist. In my opinion, extremist in a class activity especially in a session of giving comments on text discussion many students usually give a sharp and deep opinion on some issues. These students usually have a wide view on some happenings and trending topics.

2. Method

This research is a descriptive qualitative study that explores the advantages or effectiveness of using imaginative literature in literary critical reading class as media to motivate the students in improving their ability in critical reading. This paper described how imaginative literature appear in students' critical thinking practice, especially when they are in literary critical reading class.

² YM Chen - Asian EFL Journal and undefined 2006, "Using Children's Literature for Reading and Writing Stories," *Asian-Efl-Journal.Com*, accessed December 16, 2019, https://www.asian-efl-journal.com/December_2006_EBook.pdf#page=210.

³ Journal and 2006.

⁴ AC Alwasilah, *Language, Culture, and Education: A Portrait of Contemporary Indonesia* (Bandung: Andira, 2001).

The data are taken from imaginative literature forms or products such as short stories, poems, and novels. The further analysis used some theories explaining about the advantages or effectiveness of using imaginative literature in literary critical reading class.

3. Literary Texts

Literary text are not created for the specific purpose of teaching. Instead, they talk about things which mattered to the author when he wrote them. Thus, compared to the language samples in the text books, the language is far richer and more varied. Many genuine features of the written language such as “ the formation and function of sentences, the variety of possible structures, and the different ways of connecting ideas” are presented at many levels of difficulty.⁵

Literature is also a doorway into another culture. Reading literature enables students “ to understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own time and space, and to come to perceive traditions of thought, feeling, and artistic form within the heritage the literature of such cultures endows. Students learn to see a world through another’s eyes, observing human values and a different kind of living, and discovering that others living in very

different societies. They will understand and become broadly aware of the social, political, historical, cultural events happening in a certain society through literature, learners can deepen their cultural understanding.

Literary texts, so often touch on common themes and values which range from individual concerns to social issues such as death, love, pollutions, ethnic conflicts. Even the genres, conventions and devices portrayed are universal. Poetry has rhythm, rhyme and figurative usage; short stories and novels have plots with crisis, conflicts, and resolutions. These topics and conventions are “readily recognizable to foreign language learners from their mother- tongue experience”⁶ Literature exposes students to fresh themes and unexpected language. In this sense, ‘a literary text is authentic text, real language in context, to which we can respond directly’⁷

Literature offers universal themes which are relevant to the students’ own experience. It, unlike many teaching inputs, is a mirror that reflects and heightens each learner’s perception of social world. Thus, literary texts are open to multiple interpretation and genuine interaction.⁸ Students may relate the ideas, events, and

⁵ J Collie and S Slater, *Literature in the Language Classroom: A Resource Book of Ideas and Activities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁶ A Maley and A Duff, *The Inward Ear: Poetry in the Language Classroom*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁷ RA Carter and CJ Brumfit, *Literature and Language Teaching* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1986).

⁸ Maley and Duff, *The Inward Ear: Poetry in the Language Classroom*.

things found in literary text to their own lives. It will help “ to stimulate the imagination of the students, to develop their critical thinking abilities, and to increase their personal awareness.”⁹ It also develops students' pleasure in reading.

When students enjoy reading literature and have motivation to interact with a text, they will develop their reading proficiency. When they try to comprehend the meaning of the text, students must make inferences, drawing both on context of the reading and their own experience.

Literature, thus, has a wider function because it fosters personal development in the readers. It helps the students to grow as individual as well as in their relations with the people and institutions around them.¹⁰

From the opinions in various discussions, it can be concluded that the use of literary texts offered many benefits. The most important thing is that literary texts can educate the whole person.¹¹ Literary texts sharpen linguistics and cognitive skills and provides for some deepening of the students' understanding of human condition.

4. Critical Reading and Critical thinking in Literary Critical Reading Class

In a process for thinking critically, the aim of critical thinking is to try to maintain an 'objective' position. This means that students should try to be aware of any preconceptions they have that might be skewing the way they think about an argument. As students read, they will have opportunities to check their understanding and revisit sections. Although there is no one 'right' way of thinking critically, students will find it useful to get some basic tasks done before moving on to an evaluation of any material. These, for example are in the following three steps:

1. Identify the thrust of the information.
2. Analyze the material.
3. Compare and apply the information.

Being critical, like what have been stated by Goodwin and Stables¹² also means:

- a. Adopting an attitude of skepticism towards one's own and others knowledge in the field of enquiry (e.g. a theory, research findings or prescription for improving practice) and the process of producing the knowledge (e.g. “armchair theorizing, research investigation, reflecting on practice)
- b. Habitually questioning the quality of one own and others specific claims to knowledge about the fields and

⁹ G Lazar, “Using Literature at Lower Levels,” *ELT Journal* 48, no. 2 (1994).

¹⁰ RA Carter and MN Long, *Literature and Language Teaching* (London (England), 1991).

¹¹ Lazar, “Using Literature at Lower Levels.”

¹² Andrew Goodwyn and Andrew Stables, *Learning to Read Critically in Language and Literacy*. (SAGE PublicationsSage UK: London, England, 2005).

the means by which these claims were generated.

- c. Scrutinizing claims to see how far the students are convincing in the light of checking (e.g. whether the components of a theory are logically consistent, whether there is sufficient evidence to back a generalization based on research findings, or whether the values underlying prescriptions for improving practice are acceptable)
- d. Respecting others as people at all times. Challenging others' work is acceptable, but challenging their worth as people is not.
- e. Being open- minded, willing to be convinced if scrutiny removes the doubts, or to remain unconvinced if it does not.
- f. Being constructive by putting the attitude of skepticism and the open mindedness to work in attempting to achieve a worthwhile goal. Critical reading is not simply close and careful reading. To read critically, one must actively recognize and analyze evidence upon the page. Challenging others' work to find a better way of doing things is acceptable, but indulging in destructive criticism of others' work just to demonstrate the intellectual prowess at the expense is not.

Kurland (2000) stated that textbooks on critical reading commonly ask students to accomplish certain goals:

- to recognize an author's purpose
- to understand tone and persuasive elements
- to recognize bias

Notice that none of these goals actually refers to something on the page. Each requires inferences from evidence within the text:

- recognizing purpose involves inferring a basis for choices of content and language
- recognizing tone and persuasive elements involves classifying the nature of language choices
- recognizing bias involves classifying the nature of patterns of choice of content and language

In a mission to appreciate other nation is, for example by reading, analyzing, and adopting the good lessons from their imaginative literature creations. In this activity of reading, students are trained to get accustomed to understand how people from different countries and culture act, communicate, and perceive the world around them. Hence, comparative literary approach may help the students in conducting further analysis.

As the expert said comparative study either within or beyond the limits of a national literature must be regarded as a fundamental principle of literary research. In the world of research along with the relation to history and knowledge, comparative literature is a branch of literary world. In this comparative

literature, there is work to tie between one discipline and another. In the final projects of works, usually also give the influence and contribution of comparative literature. The movement from one literature field towards another is also the branch of comparative literature analysis.

Today the general and generating principles of comparative literature are widely accepted in the entire scholarly world, at least in theory. That European culture which includes all national cultures expressing themselves in European languages –forms an indivisible whole has been recognized for a long time. Here in Indonesia hopefully will soon have the same condition.

The purpose of the research, as have been stated before is to give contribution to the readers especially the students or the lecturers working at an advanced level of research with learning what it might mean to be critical and how to become more critical consumer of literature in a particular area of enquiry.

Literary text are often rich in multiple levels of meaning and demand that the reader/learner is actively involved in “teasing out” the unstated implications and assumption of the text. Thus, by encouraging the students in literary reading class, it is greatly hoped that they are able to grapple with the multiple ambiguities of the literary text. Hence, they are trained to develop their interpretative abilities.

When students conduct the process of reading comparative literature analysis, for example, they will indirectly conduct critical reading process and literature review and the vice versa. So in this process, students are willing not only to look insights into a key aspect of the area of study but also demonstrate high quality literature review.

The process of academic enquiry reflected in post graduate courses has its historical roots in this tradition. But with rapid globalization it is increasingly being adopted in higher education institution right across the world as a way of thinking and informing practical action. Here, while all individuals are entitled to respect as people, there is a cultural expectation that any person's work may strong enough grounds for doing so. Therefore, it is quite acceptable for students to questions the ideas of leading academic figures in their area of study, as long as they can give convincing reasons for their view.

The students not only concerns himself with the internal relations of the republic of letters, but also with the connections of literature with other disciplines, notably with the fine arts. The comparative field, furthermore, touches upon philosophy, religion, psychology, sociology, history, and political science, though this efforts are centered on literary works.¹³ The statements above, for example, can be applied in the form of the following descriptions:

¹³ Francois Joss, *Introduction to Comparative Literature* (New York: The Bobs-Merrill Company, 1974).

By reading Guy de Maupasant's the jewel, for example, the readers will not just get the information about the characters, setting, and plot of the story. More than that, they will also have the chance to observe the cultural performance from certain area used as a setting in the story. The wife of M .Lantin will not ask somebody else to accompany her to go to the theatre except her own husband. As the eastern women at this era they must have been in the great salute to this condition.

It is often claimed that comparative literature has its specific critical methods. This is not quite true: the procedure of investigation is basically the same whether the subjects matter belongs to one single literature or to several literatures.¹⁴ This statements may interpreted that there is a type of comparative literature analysis that use just one object of literature work but the analysis will be related to other disciplines such as psychology and history.

Through the process of reading single English product of literature, indirectly we have compared our culture with cultural life found in The Jewel. In this process of reading and reviewing we should relate the novel with other disciplines such as psychology and history.

By reading Indonesian and American detective novels, for example, the reader will be able to make review on two cultural lives. American and Indonesian is totally different but still we can see the same matters between these two nations.

This, for example is lied on the reasons why the villain do the crime.

One of the ways to appreciate both the creation of imaginative arts or imaginative writings is by giving comments or criticism on that works. It is not an exaggerated situation since the one who give criticism or comments still hold the rule of politeness in the process of stating opinion.

Giving criticism and opinion actually is also the way to show that the students give care and attention. This, for example, is when most of us our caring and attention to our surrounding by giving, helping, and visiting them when they are sick.

The existence of criticism, therefore in a certain case and phenomenon is very important. Extremism, however is one of a product and effect of critical thinking. Without critical thinking, students will find difficulty in getting to know how the situation around them happen.

4. Metacognition in Literature

According to Joe Lau "Metacognitive Education: Going beyond critical thinking" In Davies and Barnett metacognition is a matter of having knowledge about cognitive processes and being able to monitor and control these processes. This paper argues that the teaching of critical thinking should be expanded and re-conceptualized as part of a broader program for enhancing metacognition, especially at the university level. Metacognitive competence is necessary for

¹⁴ Joss, 23.

coping with rapid changes in the modern world, and provides the foundation for improving thinking and learning. It is proposed that metacognitive competence includes four components: meta-conceptions, general knowledge about cognitive processes, meta self-knowledge, and self-regulation.

Most people would agree that the promotion of critical thinking is a central educational aim. But there are other complementary thinking skills which should not be neglected. One example is creativity. In our personal and professional life, we are always faced with problems which we need to resolve. We need creative thinking to come up with solutions, and we need critical thinking to evaluate and improve these solutions. In our website we have a learning module which is specifically about creativity.

But there is another aspect of thinking that also deserves our attention, and that is metacognition, or "thinking about thinking". Metacognition is about knowing more about our own thinking processes and being able to monitor and control them. Critical thinking must involve some amount of metacognition, because we need to become aware of our own reasoning, and find ways to improve them.

Becoming a good and effective thinker is not just a matter of learning logic or other principles of reasoning. It also requires insight into our own minds, understanding our strengths and weaknesses. It is also important to obtain some understanding of human psychology,

such as the typical cognitive biases that might influence our decisions. In addition, the successful application of theoretical knowledge also requires the right kind of personality and attitude. For example, persistence in problem-solving and a strong desire for self-improvement are both valuable traits that can enhance our thinking skills in the long run.

Following the idea of Glazzard:

By employing the tools and techniques of literary criticism, violent extremist communication can be revealed as not only potentially persuasive but also creative and aesthetically appealing, terrorists inspire their followers, they don't merely persuade them.

According to the opinion above, thus it may also can be concluded that imaginative literary products sometimes good or sometimes not good to read. There are good imaginative literary products because of the valuable moral lessons they have. So the reader will get a good and save effect after they read the kinds of imaginative literary products in the form of both text or story book.

Unqualified or unsafe or even dangerous imaginative literary products, on the other hand, often inspire and even convince the reader with some strange or odd situations which were described in a certain products of literary creations. Therefore, students together and instructed by teacher are hopefully having extra carefulness in reading such kind of this reading text.

Imaginative literatures, no matter in the form of prose, poem, or drama have some elements that can be used as a good and comfortable vehicle for the terrorist practitioners and policy makers to plant the world view of the violence and other extreme approach. This, for example, is in line with Glazzard's ideas that counter terrorist practitioners and policy makers appear to be very interested in narrative. This, for example, they often describe the world view of violent Islamist groups and movements as the "Jihad-narrative" while their efforts to confront terrorist propaganda are usually labeled as counter-narrative or alternative narrative.

He also gave the description that in London, for example, the Institute for Strategic –Dialogue (ISD) and the Quilliam Foundation have both interested heavily in countering the violent Islamist narrative, with the latter advising the home affairs select committee in the UK's parliament.

In his conclusion, Glazzard stated that narrative is central to radicalization, extremism and terrorism, in its simplest incarnation, the Islamic narrative is "Islam is under attack and we must defend it. In terrorism, it is used to promote violence, in extremist it used to promote values that are antithetical to human rights norms and in radicalization it is used to exploit vulnerable people and recruit them to the cause this narrative is sufficiently broad to apply to population all over the world, to local and international conflicts and to oppose domestic and foreign policies. It is sufficiently malleable to apply to group and

personal grievances, both real and perceived.

5. Conclusion

There are possibly various issues as a result of reading materials includes literature text and this can be good information and inspiration for students. These materials can be used by students as valuable source among many different kinds of texts that can be used to promote interesting language activities too.

Critical reading therefore can be used as media to practice how to think critically because in the session of critical reading, students will have to combine both reading text and elaborating the thinking.

Through the process of critical reading and critical thinking hopefully it will be a media for students in getting themselves accustomed to always thinking deeply and considering carefully before making comments and decisions.

One way to bring character education into a crowded curriculum is to make it part of the literacy program by embedding character lesson in reading and language arts instruction through the vehicle of high quality literatures. In a mission of embedding the lesson, critical thinking process is inseparable from literary critical reading activity. So, literature is a powerful teaching tool.

To follow up the conclusion, some suggestions are proposed to the English students especially, teachers/lecturers, and other researchers. Reading critically and

comprehensively is effective for any activities in learning English skills .It is even suitable to improve the ability of students' writing literature comparative research. The students, teachers, and lecturers are suggested applying this idea independently not only in the classroom but also outside wherever and whenever they are reading literature products. Finally, for other researches, this research hopefully can be an inspiration to do the next study and observations in the same field of research.

Critical thinking, however, should be conducted concussively in literary critical reading class by the observation and advisory consultation from teacher. It is due to the fact that some students' opinion may go too far from the topic discussed,

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