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Chapter 3

Creating Critical Thinkers with The Four Dimensions Model of Critical Literacy Pedagogy

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Abstract: *Language choices, influenced by mass media editors, political elites, lawmakers, educational designers, and other text producers, can be used to oppress the public. Readers need to be sensitive to the underlying messages in all texts. Critical literacy pedagogy is a tool to reveal injustice and unequal power relations in text, enhancing students' critical language awareness and empowering them to examine both the word and the world critically. However, many readers remain unaware of the subtle ways language can reinforce critical issues such as inequality and sustain dominant ideologies. This research aims to develop language learning tools using the four dimensions model of critical literacy pedagogy to uncover power, domination, and social systems within texts. This model explores how the Four Dimensions Model—disrupting the commonplace, considering multiple viewpoints, focusing on socio-political systems, and taking action, which can improve students' critical literacy skills by asking students critically to generate critical thinking. Integrating the Four Dimensions Model improves students' ability to critically recognize biases and articulate more socially aware interpretations.*

Keywords: *Critical literacy, Critical questions, Four dimensions model*

1. INTRODUCTION

Language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for control, enabling one party to dominate another. The media, which holds significant power, is key in spreading news and influencing language use and preferences. Through the authority of mass media editors, political leaders, lawmakers, educational planners, and other text creators, language can be manipulated to dominate the public. Therefore, readers must develop a critical awareness of texts to avoid being influenced by the media (Santoso, 2015). Moreover, news consumers should wisely interpret the writer's choice of language. This involves recognizing persuasive language favouring one party's dominance in politics. At the same time, gender discourse includes identifying the language that reflects male dominance over women and vice versa, allowing analysis from the perspective of the oppressed.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

In Indonesia, awareness of language analysis faces several challenges. A study conducted by UNESCO in Indonesia revealed an alarming statistic: only 0.001% of the population shows interest in reading. Additionally, a 2016 Central Connecticut State University study ranked Indonesia 60th out of 61 countries in terms of literacy levels. Further, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)

reported that Indonesia's educational Human Development Index (HDI) was just 14.6% (Anisa et al., 2021). In the 2019 HDI ranking, Indonesia was 111th out of 189 countries (Pramana et al., 2021). The World Population Review ranked Indonesia 54th in education out of 78 countries in 2022. These low literacy rates indicate the need for an effective educational strategy.

The poor literacy rate in Indonesia is worsened by the spread of illegal media in the digital space. According to Prasetyo, Chairman of the Press Council, nearly 80% of Indonesian media outlets are fake, disseminating inaccurate and unverified news to the public (Mahmudi, 2019). These outlets often have hidden agendas, publishing sensational or misleading information to attract readers, the blasphemy case, and the provocative comments, all of which contributed to social chaos. Such issues arise when language is interpreted only textually without considering its broader context. This situation worsens societal tensions, as individuals who are not critical in evaluating the news may accept it at face value without verifying its accuracy.

The public's lack of critical language awareness, including students, significantly contributes to social chaos. Understanding how to interpret language in the media and analyzing the truth of a text by considering its context (societal, institutional, or cultural) is key to comprehending its meaning. Critical analysis is important in helping students develop the language awareness needed to engage with media and avoid contributing to social discord responsibly. Indonesia's lack of critical awareness highlights the need for a learning framework that fosters these skills.

3. OBJECTIVE

To build critical language awareness, critical literacy serves as an effective teaching approach by encouraging students to think critically, solve problems, and take action in their social environment. Critical literacy involves reading texts analytically, viewing multiple perspectives, focusing on socio-political issues, and using one's voice to effect positive change (Abdenia, 2015). The four dimensions model as one of the critical literacy pedagogy approaches focuses on power, ideology, domination, and social construction. These dimensions include disrupting the norm, analysing multiple viewpoints, examining socio-political issues, and taking actions (Batista-Morales et al., 2019; Chafel & Neitzel, 2012; Lewison et al., 2002). Lewison et al.'s (2002) model serves as both a pedagogical guide for teachers and an assessment tool for analysing EFL classrooms (Hayik, 2016). Using this model, teachers can ask students thought-provoking questions to elicit their perspectives on texts. This encourages students to critically analyse texts, which is a fundamental goal of critical literacy education. Throughout the learning process, teachers present a series of critical perspectives by some scholars (Abdenia, 2015; Alford, 2021; Govender, 2019; Huang, 2011a; Kuo, 2014). Several EFL researchers have found that discussions and critical response writing in journals, essays, and papers can lead to positive outcomes in developing critical awareness (Huang, 2011a; Izadinia & Abednia, 2010; Park, 2011).

Therefore, this research aims to create language learning tools based on the four dimensions model of critical literacy pedagogy and to enable students to uncover power dynamics, domination, and social structures within texts. Questioning critically can significantly improve students' ability to become critical thinkers, which is essential for responsible behaviour in social contexts.

4. RELATED WORKS

4.1 Critical Questions in the Four Dimensions Model

Asking critical questions during class discussions forms a key teaching method within the four dimensions model of critical literacy pedagogy. To engage students, the teacher begins with a simple question related to a debatable and intriguing topic, such as beauty pageants. For instance, the teacher might introduce a stereotype discussion by showing an advertisement or image of a Miss Pageant competition from a website, as this provides authentic material. This initial activity sets the stage for

more complex questions designed to trigger students' critical thinking awareness. Questions such as "What do you know about the competition?", "Why are the contestants typically beautiful, tall, and slim?" or "Is it common for beauty standards to focus on being beautiful, tall, and slim?" lead to further exploration of students' critical awareness concerning beauty standards.

For the main activity, the teacher deepens students' engagement with the four dimensions framework by posing more thought-provoking questions. In the first dimension, disrupting the commonplace, questions like "How are they trying to position X?", "Which group is portrayed as more important than others?" or "Do you think X is a common phenomenon in society?" encourage students to challenge everyday assumptions. In the second dimension, considering multiple viewpoints, questions such as "Whose voices are being heard?", "Whose voices are missing?" or "Can you identify different perspectives?" prompt students to adopt others' perspectives, seek out marginalised voices, and analyse conflicting narratives. The third dimension, focusing on socio-political systems, is examined through questions like "How do unequal power relationships arise?", "Does the activity include or create opportunities for participation by subordinate groups?" or "Can you identify the author's power within the text?" Finally, the fourth dimension, taking action, encourages students to use language to enact change, challenge privilege and injustice, and promote social justice. This dimension is explored with questions such as "What actions will you take based on the text you've analysed?" or "Will you transition from being a spectator to an active participant?"

4.2 From Conventional to New Reading Instruction

Power, ideology, and dominance are central to critical literacy pedagogy. Critical literacy, with its four dimensions, equips students to read and analyse texts from different perspectives, challenge conventional viewpoints, explore socio-political issues, take meaningful action, and discover their voice in shaping a better world. It moves beyond the surface-level approach of traditional reading, which often focuses on basic comprehension and vocabulary, and pushes towards a deeper, more analytical interaction with texts. Traditional reading instruction which focuses on conventional questions about text topics, vocabulary meanings, and references dominates many educational systems. However, to meet the demands of 21st-century education, teachers need to blend traditional methods with more critical approaches. This shift is reflected in the research of Hoesny and Darmayanti (2021), which emphasises the role of teachers in facilitating flexible strategies, open assessments, and fostering creativity, critical thinking, teamwork, and communication in the classroom. Iyer (2010) also notes that many teachers struggle to adopt critical literacy methods, as it requires moving from a teacher-centred, text-based approach to a student-centred one emphasising critical thinking.

Although traditional reading methods are still prevalent, teachers can begin to introduce critical literacy gradually. One effective method is to use simple, authentic materials such as advertisements or news articles, which provide real-world connections and are easy for students to analyse critically. This gradual introduction of more complex texts aligns with Kuo's (2014) research, which suggests that critical literacy can be introduced progressively, beginning with simple texts and moving to more advanced ones.

In teaching critical literacy, teachers should prioritise flexibility to encourage students to think critically and analytically. One effective way to achieve this is by incorporating authentic materials that students encounter in their everyday lives. Topics like beauty standards, which are relatable and relevant to students, provide an accessible entry point for critical discussions. Authentic materials, such as language found on TV, billboards, mailboxes, cafeteria menus, or even clothing labels, can serve as rich texts for analysis. Popular culture and daily interactions, including gestures, attire, and personal technology, also offer valuable opportunities for students to practice critical literacy. This approach, which focuses on real-world texts and media, is increasingly becoming a trend in critical literacy curricula (Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012). By analysing these authentic materials, students can better connect critical thinking to their own experiences, making the learning process more engaging and relevant.

Asking critical questions is key to fostering critical learners. Discussions around critical literacy inherently involve questioning, as it pushes students to think deeply and analyse content. While traditional methods of teaching reading still dominate in many educational institutions, teachers can slowly introduce critical literacy concepts by familiarising students with questioning techniques. For instance, using a two-sided coin or money as a warm-up activity encourages students to think critically. By asking questions like, “Why do I ask you to do this?”, “What do you learn from this?” or “Why do I show different coins/money to each group?” teachers engage students in thinking beyond surface-level observations. These questions prompt students to explore different perspectives, understand underlying meanings, and challenge existing ideas. This approach aligns with several academic studies (Abdenia, 2015; Alford, 2021; Govender, 2019; Huang, 2011a; Kuo, 2014), emphasising that critical questioning helps students focus on important aspects of a subject and allows them to articulate their thoughts. Through this process, students not only develop critical awareness but also gain confidence in their ability to think independently.

Lewison et al.’s four-dimensional model of critical literacy has been successfully implemented in educational settings, including in Indonesia. Gustine (2014) found that introducing critical literacy in an Indonesian EFL classroom helped shift teaching from a “banking” approach, where students passively receive information, to a “critical pedagogy” model that encourages students to become socially aware and critical thinkers.

Kuo's (2014) research also supports the idea that critical literacy can complement traditional education. By incorporating students’ personal identities and concerns into the curriculum, critical literacy can enhance traditional language learning, motivating students to use English as a tool for self-expression and research. Kuo highlights the importance of “critical moments,” where students encounter differing viewpoints and learn to appreciate multi-perspective thinking. Similarly, Lie (2010) asserts that multilingual students from diverse cultural backgrounds can develop critical thinking skills through critical literacy frameworks.

Ultimately, the goal of critical literacy is to promote social awareness. By encouraging students to question and challenge societal norms, teachers help them become active social agents. Kuo (2014) notes that students play dual roles as both language learners and social participants when they engage in critical literacy tasks. An example of this in action is seen in elementary school students in the U.S. who created a petition for gender justice as part of their critical literacy learning (Lee, 2017). This demonstrates that critical literacy enhances students’ analytical skills and empowers them to take meaningful action in their communities.

5. CONCLUSION

Critical literacy is an educational approach that encourages students to engage with texts and their world critically, helping them to solve problems and act within their social environments. It aims to enhance students’ critical language awareness through a structured framework, such as the four dimensions model: disrupting the commonplace, considering multiple perspectives, focusing on socio-political issues, and taking action. This model transitions from conventional to new reading teaching methods, emphasising student-centred learning through critical questioning and flexible thinking. Teachers can use authentic materials and guide students progressively from simple to more advanced texts. By asking thoughtful questions, teachers foster critical awareness, enabling students to challenge existing norms, understand power dynamics, and take informed actions based on their readings. Ultimately, critical literacy helps students become more socially aware, thoughtful, and active participants in society.

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8. AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

The author designed, coordinated, and carried out the experiments, prepared the data, analyzed the findings, and managed the manuscript's writing.

9. CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

I certify that the article was written by the author herself. The article has never been published before and isn't being considered for publishing anywhere else. This study hasn't been submitted for publication or published anywhere, either in full or in part. The author also confirms that she has made a substantial contribution to the study, validity, and legitimacy of the data and its interpretation for submission to the ICGSPB.

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