

EMBEDDING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH CRITICAL READING: TEACHING NARRATIVE TEXT IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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First Received: 4 May 2017

Accepted: 20 June 2017

Final Proof Received: 27 October 2017

Published: 30 October 2017

Abstract

This article reports a research on embedding critical thinking through critical reading in teaching narrative text to junior high school students. The research was aimed to find out whether or not critical reading strategies can improve students' critical thinking skills and how critical reading strategies help students to think critically in reading narrative text. Thirty five of eight graders in one of junior high schools in West Bandung were involved in this study. This study employed mixed methods as the methodology. The data were gained through pre-test, post-test, classroom observation and interview. The findings revealed that there were 18 of 35 students (51%) who made a high improvement of their critical thinking skills. It means that critical reading strategies were considered could improve students' critical thinking skills in reading narrative text. In addition, the five critical reading strategies as proposed by Sousa (2004) and Winston Salem State University (2013) namely previewing, outlining and summarizing, reflecting and evaluating were proven to have its own role in fostering students' critical thinking skills. Moreover, students critical thinking evolvment were investigated and listed from the most evident to the least evident; 1) reasoning, 2) predicting, 3) recognising context and 4) questioning.

Keywords: critical thinking; critical reading strategies; narrative text.

INTRODUCTION

As one of the 21st century skills presented by National Education Association (NEA) in America, critical thinking is needed for every citizen in order to survive this global era. In Indonesia, critical thinking has been written as one of the educational purposes as stated in Government Regulation Number 17 Year 2010. This is also supported by Ministry of Education and Culture (2013) as stated in 2013 Curriculum which has purpose to develop passive learning into critical learning. Therefore, integrated critical thinking into classroom teaching and learning should be undertaken in order to train the students to think critically.

One of the avenues to promote critical thinking is through critical reading. Kurland (2000) remarks critical thinking and critical reading work together in harmony. He points out that critical thinking will allow readers to monitor understanding as they read. However, there are some possible reading problems stems such as the lack of the

readers' requisite knowledge and more importantly the lack of reading strategies which necessary to overcome the difficulty (McNamara, 2009). Further, nowadays readers tend to use conventional strategy or even without any strategy when they read (Bayu, 2013). Another problem is identified by Khatib (2012) is that the content of material to assess students' comprehension mainly lack of the competencies to promote students' critical thinking.

Hence, some reading strategies are proposed to help students to read critically. McDonald (2004 as cited in Tomasek, 2009) points out critical reading as an alternative way of reading that goes more than information processing or personal response as an approach. It means that reader will engage deeper with a text by analysing, interpreting and evaluating it. Some researchers such as Epstein and Kernberger, (2006); Miriet al., (2007); Taglieber, (2008); agree that critical thinking through critical reading is needed to be taught in school in

order to prepare students for their role as a society in the future. In fact, schools have a responsibility to develop citizens who will have the ability to read and think critically. This view is supported by various authorities in the field (McMillan & Gentile, 1988; Nickerson, 1989; Wilson, 1988).

As one of the ways to foster students' critical thinking, critical reading has become a topic that interests numerous researchers to be analyzed (Albeckay, 2014, Nasrollahi, et.al. 2015, Talebi 2015). Many researchers have been conducted studies about critical reading, amongst other are; the effect of teaching critical reading strategies, developing reading skills through critical reading, and the implementation of teaching critical reading model. Many of those researches examine critical reading strategies in reading non-literary texts by Senior High School and University Students as the participants. Nevertheless, Taglieber (2000) indicates that Junior High School is the ideal time to develop critical thinking through critical reading. However, the implementation of critical reading strategies in reading literary texts especially narrative text in Junior High School Students in Indonesian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom is still less practiced.

Considering the importance of the critical reading implementation to help students become critical readers, this study is aimed to investigate how critical reading strategies help students to think critically in reading a narrative text.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is a process of judgment in a reflective and reasonable way which relies upon criteria, self-correcting and sensitive to the context in order to decide what to do or what to believe (Ennis, 1985; Facione, 2000).

Critical thinking is often represented by the highest levels; analysis, evaluation and creation (Kennedy et al, 1991). Other behaviours or abilities identified as relevant to critical thinking stated by many researchers include asking and answering questions for clarification (Ennis, 1985), interpreting and explaining (Facione, 1990), and making a decision or solving problems.

Furthermore, The American Philosophical Association (1990) provokes the definition of critical thinking as "the

purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation and inference of the evidential conceptual, methodological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment was based". In line with this, Behar-Horenstein and Niu (2011) believe that critical thinking facilitates good judgment because it engages skilful and responsible thinking.

Characteristics of critical thinking

Critical thinking embraces a complex combination of skills. Kurland (2000) and Nosich (2001) identifies some characteristics of critical thinking skills as follow.

- a. Rationality in reasoning
In reasoning, critical thinkers declare reasonable argument that requires evidence. Furthermore, this is supported by Ennis (1989 as cited in Fisher, 2001) who defines critical thinking as "reasonable, reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do". Consequently, the reasoning skill affects decision making.
- b. Clarity
Clarity in thinking means that one's thinking is easily understood and avoiding misunderstanding. Critical thinkers are able to express their mind clearly so that the other person knows exactly what they mean. In expressing their ideas, they tend to think about who is the audience and choose the clearest words carefully.
- c. Accuracy
In critical thinking, accuracy means the words of critical thinkers describe the way things are. Critical thinkers need to be reasonable by using the most reliable sources.
- d. Open-mindedness
Critical thinkers accept the new explanation, model or paradigm because it explains the evidence better or has fewer weaknesses. To think critically means avoiding irrational judgments and resist manipulation and irrational requests. In sum, critical thinkers

are inquisitive by asking and analysing. They consciously apply strategies to reveal a meaning or convince their understanding.

Critical thinking skills in reading

Hughes (2014) proposes five critical thinking skills in reading as follow.

- a. Reasoning
This skill introduces the importance of supporting an opinion with evidence or reasons. Students are asked to practice expressing opinion and giving the reasons with the conjunction "because".
- b. Questioning
To become critical thinkers, students need to develop the skill of asking questions. There are two types of questions; lower order thinking questions and higher order thinking questions. The answer of lower order thinking questions usually can be found in the text. Meanwhile to answer higher thinking question, students need to think and analyse it first because it is not explicitly stated in the text.
- c. Recognising context
Recognising context means seeing things from multiple perspective or point of view. Students need to develop the skill of seeing arguments from many sides as part of developing a critical mindset.
- d. Predicting the content of the text
This skill purposes to compare students' prior knowledge and prediction of a text. It helps the students to get an overview of a text.

Critical thinking assessment

Ennis (2003) proposed several types of open-ended critical thinking assessment that can be designed by teachers is explained in the following.

- a. Multiple Choice with written justification
The aim of this assessment format is to see how the test takers are cautious in drawing conclusion. In

addition, this format allows the test takers to show their logical reasoning in deciding option for their answer. The test takers may have different beliefs and opinion and the reason can be seen by the test makers (Ennis R. H., 2003).

- b. Essay
According to Ennis (2003), in minimal structure of essay, teacher can provide a question or address an issue to be responded by the students.
- c. Performance
It is said that performance has greatest face validity because it reflects real life situation. It also categorized as a least structured assessment because it is observed naturally as in a case study (Ennis R. H., 2003). An observer takes notes describing the events happened and people's activities. Other performance assessment can be seen by students' portfolio or students' work. Students can deliver their opinion regarding questions or issues which are being discussion topics in the class.

Critical Reading Strategies

Critical reading strategies refer to some actions which readers do to comprehend and understand the text in depth (Wallace, 2003). Critical reading strategies as proposed by Sousa (2004) includes previewing, contextualizing, outlining and summarizing, questioning, reflecting, evaluating an argument, and comparing and contrasting related readings. Finally, the following strategies to read critically adopted from Sousa (2004) and WSSU (2013) are employed and sorted out to be shown in the following.

1. Previewing
It is an activity when readers learn about a text before really reading it. By previewing, readers will be enabled to get a sense of what the text is about and how it is organized before reading it closely. The readers can predict and get an overview of a text by looking at the title, pictures, headnotes or other

introductory material. Pictures allow the readers to be introduced to the characters, plot and settings. To explain more, Grave, Prenn, and Cooke (1985 as cited in Huang, 2009) specify components which can be done in the preview of a narrative text. First, present introduction of characters, setting, and overview of the plot. Second, building vocabulary mastery, so difficult words should be discussed. Third thought-provoking questions to arouse students' interest and relate the theme of the text to students' prior knowledge.

2. **Outlining and Summarizing**

These activities present the main ideas of the text briefly by writing or retelling it by the readers own words. Outlining reveals the basic structure of the text. It can be done through questioning. Meanwhile, summarizing means synopsise main ideas of the text.

3. **Questioning**

Questions are designed to help readers understand a reading and respond to it more completely. Vogler (2005, cited in Hamiloglu, 2012) explains that questions can monitor comprehension, help make connections to prior learning and stimulate cognitive growth. Questions are classified into two categories; lower-order thinking skills and higher-order thinking skills. As the purpose of this research is to investigate students' critical thinking skill, so the higher-order thinking questions are more emphasized. However, the lower-order thinking is still involved because to check students' comprehension toward the text. Comprehending the text becomes one of requirements in order to think critically.

4. **Reflecting**

It examines readers' personal responses. The text that the readers read in the class sometimes may

challenge their attitudes, beliefs, and positions toward current issues. Critical readers will not believe in a view before comprehending it. However, it does not mean that they are not open to a new view. This strategy enables the students to practice "reflective thinking" as a critical thinking definition stated by Dewey (1909 as cited in Fisher, 2001).

5. **Evaluating**

This is an activity where the readers consider values, beliefs or assumption from and beyond a text. The readers are often asked to analyse, interpret and argue about the text to evaluate a text. In evaluating, the readers are encouraged to evaluate what they have read and integrate it with their prior knowledge. They seek for evidences, relate it to examples, so that a clear evaluation can be made.

Characteristics of critical reading

Critical reading has its own characteristics which make it different from general reading. Kurland (2010) remarks that critical reading means analysing. He further states that throughout discussion, the readers can identify element pattern such as information, values, assumptions, and language usage. Analysing, interpreting, and evaluating are some activities which can be done in critical reading (Kurland, 2010).

The purpose of critical reading is to create judgments about how a text works. When people read critically, they are not only absorbing or understanding, but also interpreting, analysing and evaluating a text. It focuses on the pattern, assumptions, and the meaning beyond the text. Those focuses then will be questioned rather than blindly accepted.

Relationship between Critical Thinking and Critical Reading

Critical thinking could be encouraged by critical reading. Kurland (2000) remarks critical thinking and critical reading work together in harmony. He points out critical thinking will allow readers to monitor understanding as they read. It means that "if

readers sense that assertions are ridiculous or irresponsible (critical thinking), they will examine the text more closely to test their understanding (critical reading)” Kurland (2000).

Equally, critical thinking depends on critical reading. Moreover, Kurland (2000) states that readers can only think critically about a text (critical thinking) if they have understood it (critical reading). It means that readers have a choice to accept or not ideas from a text after evaluating it. Readers have responsibility to convey agreement and disagreement based on weighing evidence and reflecting values as well as beliefs. Then, readers will be able to understand and respect other people’s view. Therefore, to understand and recognize those views, reader should read critically.

In fact, school has responsibility to develop citizens who will have the ability to read and think critically in order to meet one of educational purposes as written in 2013 Curriculum. In critical reading, the readers will use their critical thinking skills to question the text. To evaluate and accept statements as true needs the knowledge which is brought from the outside and reflected it to background values.

Narrative and Critical Thinking Skills

Lazere (1987) consider literal and figurative language in literary text has the necessary capacity to engage students in order to make them acute in reasoning and identifying possible vagueness. He adds that narrative text allows students to see variety of viewpoints and various aspects of form and meaning.

Critical and dynamic interaction with author’s perspectives, language, characters’ functions, implicit and explicit ideas and inferences concerning the content of the plots can be found in narrative texts to engage the readers (Paul, 1981).

Furthermore, Bakthin (1975 as cited in Pashangzadeh, 2016) elucidates that narratives allow the reader to make different interpretation, explanation and argumentation. Those diversity interpretations, explanations, and argumentations may reach a better self-awareness and higher levels of critical thinking skills.

METHOD

Research Design

The study employed mixed methods research specifically embedded experimental design. Embedded experimental model were selected in this study because as stated by Creswell and Clark (2007), the aims of this model is having a qualitative data which embedded within an experimental design. This model could meet the need of this study in order to embed a qualitative component within a quantitative design in examining the process of an intervention or mechanism that relates variables and to follow up on the results of an experiment.

Hamied (2014) remarks that the principles of mixed methods design is different questions need to be answered by more than a single data type. He further explains that one single data is insufficient to answer the questions. In order to find out the answer of the primary purpose of this study which was Creswell and Clark (2007) stated in the first research question, this study used a pre-experimental design: the one group pretest-post-test. Sheligar and Shohamy (1989) contends that the one group pre-test-post-test design endeavour to use the subjects as their own control and to remove a control group as a need.

Moreover, the secondary purpose of this study was gained through qualitative design during and after intervention. The reason for collecting the secondary database was to examine the process of the implementation of critical reading strategies to embed students’ critical thinking skills as a support for the primary purpose of the study. In addition, to enrich the quantitative result, the qualitative data was gained after intervention.

Site and Participants

The participants were seventh grade students. For the research purpose, there were 35 students that involved in the research.

Data Collection

This research obtained the information needed from three data instruments. A quantitative database was gained from tests (pre-test and post-test). Meanwhile, to support the quantitative database, classroom observation and interview were conducted as qualitative database.

Data Analysis

To measure the improvement of students' critical thinking skills in learning reading narrative text using critical reading strategies, the data from pre-test and post-test were analysed using normalized gain test $< g >$. The formula which adapted from Hake (1999 as cited in Sundayana, 2005) is presented as follow.

$$\text{Normalized gain } < g > = \frac{T2 - T1}{T_{\max} - T1}$$

Hake (1999 as cited in Sundayana, 2005)

Notes:

T2 = Post-test score.

T1 = Pre-test score.

T max = Maximum score.

Then, the result was identified by using criteria of normalized gain test which adapted from Hake (1998 as cited in Sundayana, 2005) as illustrated in the following table.

Table 1. Normalized Gain Test Criteria

Normalized Gain Score	Category
$1,00 \leq g < 0,00$	Very Low
$g = 0,00$	Low
$0,00 < g < 0,30$	Medium
$0,30 \leq g \leq 0,70$	High
$0,70 \leq g \leq 1,00$	Excellent

Hake (1999 as cited in Sundayana, 2005)

Meanwhile, the data from classroom observation and interview were coded and categorized to be elaborated descriptively to strengthen the result of pre-test and post-test.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Students' Critical Thinking Improvement through Critical Reading Strategies

The following is the result of the frequency from each normalized gain test interpretation and it was converted to percentage form.

Table 2. The frequency of Normalized Gain Test Interpretation

No.	Normalized Gain Test Interpretation	Freq.	%
1	Very Low	0	0%
2	Low	2	6%
3	Medium	8	23%
4	High	18	51%
5	Excellent	7	20%
	Total	35	100%

The table above shows that there are 18 of 35 students (51%) who made a high improvement of their score from pre-test to post-test. The rest are 8 students who acquired medium interpretation (23%), 7 students acquired excellent interpretation (21%), 2 students acquired low interpretation (6%), and no one acquired very low interpretation (0%).

Based on categorization of students' score improvement from pre-test to post-test adapted from Hake (1999 as cited in Sundayana, 2005), the score of normalized gain test between 0,30 until 0,70 are considered high. The result showed that there were 18 students (51%) who acquired high improvement. It can be interpreted that the high improvement was dominated the result which means critical reading strategies can improve students' critical thinking skills significantly.

Apart from the result of the tests, this improvement may be caused by critical reading strategies that were implemented in the class. This was supported by the result of classroom observation during the treatment and interview with students after the treatment. Moreover, the details of the process of critical reading strategies help students to think critically which contains the steps and the evidence of students' critical involvement were explained in the next section.

The Way Critical Reading Strategies Help Students to Think Critically

To reach the purpose of this study, the treatment was conducted to investigate how critical reading strategies were implemented which made the significant improvement of students' critical thinking skills in reading narrative text.

The steps of Critical Reading Strategies

Five critical reading strategies as proposed by Sousa (2004) were adopted in designing lesson plans for three meetings in this study.

Previewing

In this stage, as suggested by Sousa (2004), students may get an overview of a text by looking at the introductory material and link it to their prior knowledge to make a prediction toward the text. The activities

conducted in previewing strategy were showing pictures, building vocabulary mastery and sharing prior knowledge. When the pictures were shown, students got some clues to guess the English words for the figures in the pictures. In addition, they could describe physical appearance of the character and predict the plot. It proved that showing pictures could make the students get an overview of a text (Grave et al., 1985 as cited in Huang, 2009).

Secondly, previewing was done by building students' vocabulary mastery related to the story. It was conducted through discussion and games.

Thirdly, students' prior knowledge about the topic related to the text was activated through discussion.

Outlining and Summarizing

Outlining reveals the basic structure of the text (Sousa, 2004; WSSU 2013). Outlining is the initial stage to be able to make a summary. The process of outlining was conducted during reading the text. Implementing this strategy means students had to comprehend the story. Students' comprehension toward the text was checked by being asked several questions when reading the text. Mostly, the questions were answered by the students. This confirmed Vogler's statement (2005 as cited in Hamiglou, 2012) which declares question can monitor comprehension.

The next activity was summarizing the story which can be done by retelling the story in spoken or written form. Summarizing is defined as synopsisizing main ideas of the text (Sousa, 2004, WSSU, 2013). In learning process, mostly the students could retell the story by their own words in Indonesian language. However, they had difficulty in summarizing it in English. As revealed from the interview session, the students' difficulty in summarizing the text in English may be caused by language barrier between English as foreign language and Indonesian language as their mother tongue. Consequently, the role of teacher and peers were needed in this stage in order to help the students to summarize the text.

Questioning

This step was conducted in all learning activities started from pre-reading, while-

reading and post reading as suggested by WSSU (2013). This strategy was divided into two activities, asking lower order thinking questions to check students' comprehension toward the text and asking higher order thinking questions to train students' critical thinking skills. The Bloom's Taxonomy questions became guideline in formulating the questions. Those questions were made to assist students' in comprehending the text and improving their critical thinking skills.

Almost all of lower order questions could be answered by students. Meanwhile, in the second activity; asking higher order thinking questions were more challenging for the students.

Consequently, students should adapt to think more critically when they had to answer the higher order thinking questions because they were not being trained to apply critical thinking skills. Seven of ten interviewees argued that the higher order thinking questions was new and more challenging for them. They claimed that they think more when reading the text during the lesson. Beside they had to think about the problem and issue which were brought from the text, they also had to think about the language. They had to comprehend the text presented in English, think about it, and response it in Bahasa Indonesia or English. When they wanted to respond it in English, they thought harder.

Reflecting

In reflecting strategy, students learned how to relate the topic of the text to their experiences and how to position themselves toward the topic.

In the third treatment, students learned that they should weigh evidences before making conclusion. They learned from their own experiences. This strategy allows the students to practice "reflective thinking" as a critical thinking definition stated by Dewey (1909 as cited in Fisher, 2001).

Evaluating

Sousa (2005) explains evaluating strategy as an activity where readers are asked to analyse, interpret and argue about the text to evaluate it. In evaluating strategy, students were asked about moral value of the story and shared what they have learned from the story.

In the second treatment, students proposed solution for the characters in a narrative text. By declaring some ideas, students met one of behaviours or abilities which relevant to critical thinking skills namely solving problem as suggested by Willingham (2007).

Students' critical thinking evolvement

Students' critical thinking evolvement were investigated and listed from the most evident to the least evident; 1) reasoning, 2) predicting, 3) recognising context and 4) questioning.

Reasoning

Reasoning means declaring an argument which is supported by evidence or reasons (Hughes, 2014). To develop this skill, students practiced to give reason in every argument they made with the conjunction "because". This skill is happened frequently. In reasoning, students were triggered by teacher's questions.

In the first treatment, teacher encouraged students to explain the reason when answering the questions. At first, the students' answers were mainly short and lacking of reason. However, in the second and third treatment, students were started to be able to give reason of their decision.

Predicting

The aim of this skill is to compare students' prior knowledge and prediction of a text (Hughes, 2014). This skill was implemented in previewing stage. After students' prior knowledge was activated, the next step was related it to the new information that they were about to receive. The students were asked to predict what might happen in the story. In the first treatment, students' prediction about the story was only stated for one word. They could guess about the topic and the characteristics of the character. Surprisingly, in the second and the third treatment, students showed an improvement in predicting the text. They were able relate the pictures and their prior knowledge to the prediction of the text.

It could be interpreted that the role of the pictures were very important in helping the students to make a prediction. As they were introduced to the pictures and characters in the text, they tried to formulate

the ideas and create it in sentences form. This is in line with Sousa (2004) and WSSU (2013) who stated that introductory materials such as title and pictures can predict the story and get an overview of the story.

Recognising context

Recognising context is defined as seeing things from multiple perspectives or point of views (Hughes, 2014). This skill was emphasized in reflecting strategy. In the third treatment, students showed open-mindedness to consider multiple perspectives from a text. Thereby, the students meet the criteria of being critical thinkers as suggested by Kurland (2000) and Nosich (2001), they are open to new ideas and perspectives.

Questioning

Hughes (2014) remarks asking question is one of critical thinking skills that should be mastered in order to become critical thinkers. There are two type of questions; lower order thinking questions and higher order thinking questions. In generating question, mostly students asked about translation from English to Indonesian language and Indonesian language to English. Moreover, they asked about how to do the assignment. However, during the three meetings, they only asked higher order thinking questions once.

This may be happened because students were not accustomed to asking higher order thinking questions. In addition, they rarely did discussion in the class. Therefore, the students may be not confident enough to formulate and ask higher order thinking questions.

CONCLUSION

Referring to the findings and discussion that have been presented in the previous chapter, it was found that there was an improvement of students' critical thinking skills in reading before and after the treatment of the implementation of critical reading strategies. It was revealed that there were 18 of 35 students (51%) who acquired a high improvement of their score from pre-test to post-test.

Moreover, to give a better explanation about the result of the tests, an intervention during the treatment was conducted. The process of the treatment was observed. In

addition, an interview was administered after the treatment to gain a depth explanation to support the data from the tests and the observation.

There are five steps of critical reading strategies as postulated by Sousa (2004) and WSSU (2013) namely previewing, outlining and summarizing, questioning, reflecting and evaluating. These strategies were investigated and evaluated to reveal how were their roles in helping students to think critically.

From those strategies, students' critical thinking involvement can be seen by listing the most evident to the least evident. The most frequent of critical thinking skill performed by students was reasoning. They were encouraged to tell the reason in every decision they made. At first, students tended to express ideas with lack of reason, however as triggered by teacher's question, they finally could declare reasonable argument. They tried to put conjunction "because" whenever they were asked to explain their thoughts. Next, the second most frequent critical thinking skill showed by the students was predicting. Students tried to relate their prior knowledge to the new information they received.

Third, students were able to recognise context. They were trained to see things in multiple perspectives. They met the criteria of being critical thinkers as suggested by Kurland (2000) and Nosich (2001); open to new ideas and perspectives. Last, asking higher order thinking question became the least skill which mastered by students. It only happened once during the treatment. Mostly students asked about the translation of English into Bahasa Indonesia or vice versa. They rarely asked about the content of the text although they were very active in answering questions. May be it is caused by the shy feeling. In addition, they were also not accustomed to asking higher order thinking questions.

It can be concluded that the process of the implementation critical reading strategies support the result of the tests. It revealed the possible factors of the way critical reading strategies help to improve students' critical thinking skills in reading narrative text.

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