# Envisioning Critical Literacy through Literary Work for EFL Pre-Service Teachers

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| ABSTRACT | KEYWORDS |
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| *Teaching English seems to discredit literary works status as learning media, even though it has the inherent vigor to increase critical literacy. This is the fundamental case this research envisages to explore how literature as a bridge for critical literacy in the perspective of EFL pre-service teachers. Theoretically, this research is based on the concepts of literature, literacy, critical thinking, and EFL pre-service teachers. This research is a qualitative research. The approach used is a case study. The data in this study are responses or statements taken from several English education students who are EFL pre-service teachers. Data were taken from a discussion forum with 3 pre-service teachers as subjects. They are 7th semester students of English Language Education study program from 3 private universities in Surabaya. The technique of data is forum group discussion. The technique of data analysis is content analysis. From the analysis of the data, it results that the EFL pre-service teachers think that literary works are crucial to take portion because it can enhance the level of critical literacy through critical thinking, creativity, and open-mindedness.* | Literary Work; Critical Literacy; EFL Pre-Service Teacher. |

| ABSTRAK | KATA KUNCI |
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| *Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris nampak mendiskreditkan karya sastra sebagai media pembelajaran, padahal karya sastra memiliki potensi untuk meningkatkan literasi kritis. Inilah yang menjadi inti masalah dalam penelitian ini dan tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah mengeksplorasi bagaimana karya sastra sebagai media untuk literasi kritis dalam perspektif calon guru Bahasa Inggris. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini berpijak pada konsep sastra, literasi, berpikir kritis, dan calon guru Bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah studi kasus. Data dalam penelitian ini adalah tanggapan atau pernyataan yang diambil dari beberapa mahasiswa pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, yang merupakan calon guru Bahasa Inggris. Data diambil dari forum diskusi dengan 3 calon guru Bahasa Inggris. Mereka adalah mahasiswa dari 3 perguruan tinggi swasta di Surabaya dan yang berada di semester 7 di program studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan forum diskusi. Teknik analisis data menggunakan analisis isi. Dari analisis data diperoleh hasil bahwa calon guru Bahasa Inggris berpendapat bahwa karya sastra sangat penting karena dapat meningkatkan tingkat literasi kritis melalui berpikir kritis, kreativitas, dan keterbukaan pikiran.* | Karya Sastra; Literasi Kritis; Calon Guru Bahasa Inggris |

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## INTRODUCTION

The level of literacy and communication skills in English in Indonesia is fairly low (Agustina, 2021). In effect, low level of literacy is relevant to the rise of hoaxes in Indonesia because people consume information without any filter, analysis, and validation. It is a shade of the low literacy of the society and it is also a reflection of the low interest of Indonesians to read (Khalifatussalam, 2021; Susilo et al., 2020; Anisa et al., 2021). As language in global mobility, English is a decisive substance of communication, subsequently, thus the urgency to improve communication in English is inevitably. Many institutions, agencies, or institutions offer English language learning modes, styles, or systems, with their own peculiarities. The *mainstream* of them focuses on the *technical* aspects of communication, such as memorizing vocabularies through games, fun way, language structure, or grammar, listening section, and speaking section, as if, learning English is just about technical things. This is the issue that the study strives to aim at exploring the non-technical thing to teach English. The non-technical thing to be considered is envisioning literary works as media to learn English and in the process of learning directly through literary works, critical literacy can be grasped. Moreover, literary works exist, not just for additional information of types of texts, but for distributing and stimulating the level of thinking, creativity, and open-mindedness through messages and meanings for EFL pre-service teachers.

From the researchers' perspective, literary works (novels, short stories, fairy tales, and etc.) themselves have important roles as a bridge for language learning. In this portion, literary works refer to narrative texts. Narrative texts offer language styles, structures, tenses, and vocabularies. In that matter of fact, by reading narrative texts, students enjoy reading the story while absorbing and adapting to the language, and practically, they learn English. Therefore, narrative texts or literary works can be considered as an established edifice to learning *a foreign* language and this is the fundamental axis of how narrative texts become material that must exist and be involved on the pages of English textbooks in Indonesia.

In terms of its relevance, narrative texts, as part of literary work for learning media for students can *provide* critical literacy; moral value. Moral is a set of attitudes about manners. In contrast, demoralization refers to moral decay. Moral terminology always refers to binary opposition, good and bad, of human beings (Audi, 2011). At that point, an attitude with morals is called morality (Chanan, 2018). In short, morality is an attitude embodied in social behavior. Conclusively, morality is the conformity of attitudes developing us as hostages of social values and indirectly demands us to obey it.

Narrative text, which is one of literary work forms, with the intimacy of story, distributes moral values (stories, plots, conflicts, etc.) that overshadow the readers to feel the aesthetics of language, to touch the meaning, and to dive into the ocean of conflicts. Conflict can evoke empathy, sympathy, and ethical awareness of readers. It is the magnitude of how literary work works. It puts the readers to a corridor of interpretation of the moral value of these conflicts. Therefore, narrative texts are vital in the learning and teaching of moral values (Dymock, 2007). In the context of research here, teachers face the contestation of gauging the extent to which aspiring English teachers can express critical thinking on issues through literary texts as an effort to improve critical literacy.

To stimulate critical sense, we can use issues about social problems which phenomenologically become comprehensive topics, matters, or areas to be discussed,

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namely gender, social, environment, and other issues. The fundamental reason why these issues must be enshrined in the minds of the public at large is certainly related to the facts that occur in society in Indonesia. For example, the problem of women in Indonesia, which exists, as if the law has no protection to solve women problem in Indonesia (Alfitri, 2020; Eleanora & Supriyanto, 2020; Mahfud & Rizanizarli, 2021; Nilan et al., 2014; Noer et al., 2021; Son et al., 2019). In addition, social problems are also a crucial problem in Indonesia, ranging from poverty, discrimination (including religious issues), human rights, and so on ( Alfitri, 2020; Eleanora & Supriyanto, 2020; Mahfud & Rizanizarli, 2021; Nilan et al., 2014; Noer et al., 2021; Son et al., 2019). Then, there are also environmental problems, which are also moderately decisive issues in Indonesia, ranging from floods, weather, pollution, and so on (Kartiasih & Pribadi, 2020; Kiswanto et al., 2020; Parker & Prabawa-Sear, 2019; Saleh et al., 2021). Of course, there are many things that can be discussed and explored by teachers, especially EFL pre-service teachers, about those critical issues.

Of course, this research does not stand alone with its issue, there are many researches discussing the similar issue about critical literacy. Research entitled, "Using Science Fiction Films to Advance Critical Literacies for EFL Students in China" (2019), written by Shuyuan Liu, exposed the importance of enhancing critical literacy and she uses Sci-Fi films to work it out (S. Liu, 2019). It is different from this research whose object refers to literary works, or narrative texts in the English coursebook. Another research entitled, "Critical Literacy Practices in EFL Reading Classroom-An Experimental Study towards Chinese University Students" (2017), written by Yang Liu, also discussed about the importance of enhancing critical literacy but the researcher pointed out on general texts to improve critical point of view of the students (Y. Liu, 2017). It is different from this research which has specific type of texts to enrich critical literacy. The last to compare is research entitled, "An approach to creative media literacy for world issues" (2021), written by Abduljalil N. Hazaea, that pointed it out on the importance of world issues to be learned by the students (Hazaea, 2021). It is the points of this research to expose but it is not the kernel of the research because this research's point of view is to explain that literary works can stimulate critical literacy and critical literacy can widen EFL students' knowledge about the critical world issues.

Conclusively, literary works can be a bridge to solve the problems of EFL students to have good English competence because learning English is not just about technical skills, but it is also about how they practice. This practice can be implemented through reading literary works and reading literary works can lead the students' critical literacy through critical thinking, creativity, and open-mindedness. Of course, those can happen to the extent the capacity of the EFL teachers to comprehend how literary works can work it out. By envisioning literary works, EFL students can have both English competence and critical literacy through critical thinking, creativity, and open-mindedness.

**METHOD**

This research is a qualitative. The approach used is a case study because this research issues the case of pre-service teachers who think of the importance of critical literacy in learning English. The data in this study are responses or statements taken from several English education students who are EFL pre-service teachers. Data were taken from a discussion with 3 pre-service teachers as subjects. They are 7th semester students of the English Language Education study program of 3 private Universities in Surabaya. They were

selected from the experience of teaching and they have good record during the study and it can be looked from their GPA. The instrument refers to the questions to drag responses from the subjects during the discussion, the questions are basically about what they think about literary works in learning English, the importance of critical literacy, their knowledge about critical issues, the correlation about digital world/literacy, and how critical literacy works on enhancing EFL students' competence. With the form of forum group discussion, the questions work in flexibility and it grows during the process of discussion. The discussion leads to the objective of the research to expose the importance of literary works for critical literacy.

The technique of data collection in this research is forum group discussion. Steps are taken in the discussion forum: First, choosing a topic; Second, determining the scope and hypothesis of the study; Third, determining the subject and group questions; Fourth moderating the discussion during the discussion, and last is classifying the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The technique of data analysis in this research is *content analysis* because this analysis emphasizes the meaning in communication (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The steps of analysis are: Data Identification (it is the process to identify the data from the result of the discussion), Coding (it is the process to classify the data and encode it into some issues (critical thinking, creativity, and open-mindedness)), Validity and Reliability (it is the process to validate the data internally by using multi-case study (it is selected because this research compares to other research to increase the validity of the completeness by comparing with other studies that have been conducted by other people in different contexts, and by comparing them, researchers can provide information and results of data analysis that are typically valid), and Analysis (it is the process of analysis by exposing the data, describing the explanation, and exploring the interpretation and correlated references.

There is also a diagram to elucidate immaculately the logical way of thinking of this research. The diagram can be seen below here.
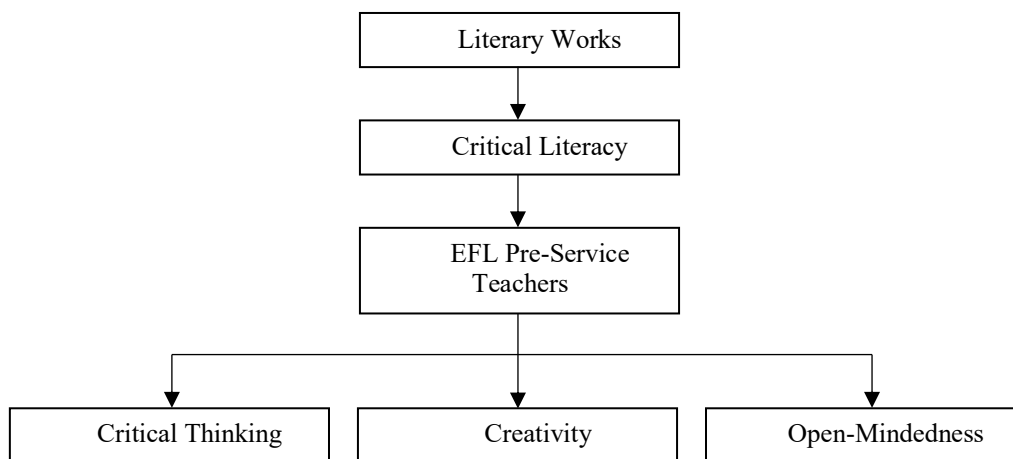
Figure 1. The Research Diagram

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### Finding

From the forum group discussion, it can be resulted that for EFL pre-service teachers, it is important to consider the presence of literary works can be a way to make the students have good critical literacy and with critical literacy the students can stimulate their critical thinking, creativity, and open-mindedness. Of course, with this finding, it can be stated, learning English using literary works, implemented by good-literate teachers, can be very magnificent for EFL students because it can improve both their English competence and critical literacy.

With the development and advancement of information technology, civilization undergoes an extreme transformation. In addition, the ease of accessing information also provides opportunities and opens up a great potential for errors in behaving, sorting, and selecting information. The number of information is abundant and it has blurry border between clear and hoax information. This situation requires everyone, especially students, to have a critical way of thinking. Therefore, school should equip students with critical literacy skills in order to obtain accurate and reliable information.

For researchers, critical literacy can be understood as an ability or competence enabling someone to read with good understanding analytically. A good understanding will be manifested in the way someone communicates, because every communication requires insight and it comes from the level of literacy. The more we read, the more we are good in thinking. Any information that is received could be put in the process of analysis and this is the critical side. It is a manifestation of the management of knowledge and logic stimulated by reading. The more reading, the higher the level of thinking, and the higher the level of thinking, the better we absorb information. That way, in the process of understanding, a person involves cognitive ability, awareness, and experience. In other words, critical thinking and all its components explain the level of literacy in a person's cognitive aspects.

In the realm of learning, a student is required to be more active in reacting to problems and creative in finding solutions to these problems. In conventional education, which tends to be student-centred, a student is only given material containing information or insight, then they are asked to memorize it, even the material is irrelevant in the real world or related to what students need when they enter the world of work (Morel, 2021; Phaosavasdi et al., 2003). For researchers, this could be said to be a *pseudo-doctrine*, but whatever the terms are, this mode is not fruitful or efficacious enough to make students discover their potentiality. On the contrary, they get lost because they have to understand something that does not even match their passion or competence. Here, students are less able to think critically about the obtained information; they tend to study because they are demanded and under the haunting shades of standard scoring, they read because of pressure, and they answer because of *threat* (Affouneh & Hargreaves, 2015; Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014; Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017; Johnson, 1979; Putwain & Best, 2011). For researchers, if classroom only shares fears, then it is not a learning. Learning should not seem to be like a court process, where the students are the defendants and the teachers are the *narcissist* prosecutors.

At present, critical literacy education requires students to *play* an active and creative role in class. Education like this can instil critical thinking in students. For example, a student can discuss or have dialogue with fellow as well as with the teacher. The importance of critical literacy education is also correlated to the massive growth of technology, which requires

students to be able to selectively choose the information they get, subsequently, they do not fall into wrong information. In this point, students can make the right decisions about the problems they face.

By thinking critically, a student can properly deal with problems critically for the problems they face. Not only problems in the academic world but also problems in reality that exist in real life. With this critical literacy, students are required to think critically. A student can play a role in the problem to offer solutions. A subject (Alpha) who is an EFL pre-service teacher said,

> When I was *Teaching Internship* (*translated*), my friend and I had a class (Senior High School level) where the students were very submissive. I think, students do not read enough. We've sparked them to ask, but they did not ask. When we provoked them with questions that made them think, they also just kept quiet. We had time to reflect, whether we were lacking or were we less creative in teaching. I had such a thought (Alpha, 2022).

From this statement, it can be said that the *submissive* attitude of students is a situation that needs attention. The assumption of the pre-service teacher is that students do not read enough. This is also confirmed by another pre-service teacher, who was the second subject (Beta) interviewed.

> "Do you know Dilan?" some said they did, but when I asked them if they had read the novels, they knew Dilan is a movie. They also know movies like The Hunger Games, Divergent, and Maze Runner, but they do not know that from the novels (Beta, 2022).

If it dragged into a debate arena, it would come to an edgeless road. Reading is a traditional activity, when the digital world with its visualization dominates our literacy civilization, definition of reading shifts partially. The purpose of reading is to get the substance, insight, or meaning of a text. That is to say, it is not about our ability to read, but our ability to interpret or catch the message conveyed, either explicitly or implicitly from a text. In other words, if visualization replaces the role of written text to become visualized text, then it is not an issue that needs to be debated. This is fair enough when students get literacy or meanings from visual literary works like film or movie, but the question will refer to, do they understand what they are watching? "Of course (*they do not understand the meaning of the film*) ... They watch it as a hobby." (Beta, 2022). In another class, another subject explained that students like watching movies, especially popular ones. They also know about the story of *Malin Kundang*, *Tangkuban Perahu* with its notable character *Sangkuriang*, the origin of the *Prambanan Temple*, and other traditional narratives. However, to be more critical, they experience difficulties.

This difficulty in critical thinking refers to how they rigidly perceive the polarization of right and wrong. They always see Malin as a villain with arrogance and haughtiness, Sangkuriang as an iconic man with impulsive-obsessive love and tragical-ironic ending, Bandung Bondowoso as a rogue betrayed by woman's vow, and other narratives with other characters. There are stringent and rigid borders for conveying meaning and this is the

situation. To think critically, we must open those rigid borders. When the researcher gave samples of the *dynamics* and *deconstructive* meaning, the subjects (the pre-service teachers) were silent in a second as silent as a night. "Do you realize that Malin's mother was also wrong for cursing her son? That is not a good example for the parenting world. Do you realize that if only Sangkuriang's mother had told the truth from the start, then the tragedy and Sangkuriang's obsession would not have happened? Do you realize that Bandung Bondowoso was not always wrong, he was deceived by a woman who wanted to cancel her vows? These questions and statements seem to open the pre-service teachers' mindset that those ideas are beyond their mind (Omega, 2022).

For researchers, being critical refer to seeing the crisis of an entity, including the narrative and the process of forming meaning. We have to open ourselves to be more flexible and dynamic. The pre-service teachers realized that they also have to be more open-minded in conveying meaning. It is no longer about what they read, because what they read can be replaced by what they visually consume. Critical literacy can change mindsets and mindsets can lead them to something better. Hatred of difference, acceptance of difference, and openness to difference are the roots of humanity. We can all study technology with all its progressions, but we need also to keep our humanity (Yamamoto & Ananou, 2020).

In the context of today's society, the meaning of the text has been contextualized with what so called *Information Literacy Skill*. Information literacy combines the ability to recognize when information is needed, how it is used, and sort out information that is needed or not. The digital world provides massive information that can be consumed by the public without rigid and firm filters, with the intention of, it causes information chaos.

We spend a lot of time on social media and we, just maybe, consume more information on media than our stomachs can provide us with nutrients. With the flood of information, we do not know which information is correct or hoax. In other words, reducing hoaxes is not by eradicating accounts on social media that spread hoaxes, but by increasing our literacy level (Khasri, 2020; Sabrina, 2019; Tsaniyah & Juliana, 2019). Therefore, critical literacy in the context of information (digital world) refers to the process of sorting, analysing, evaluating, and synthesizing any information on social media, platform, or anything in digital world precisely and ethically. Literacy can guide us in good communication in social media, such as sharing information wisely so that we are off of problems.

In short, this is what so called information literacy. It is the ability to *diagnose* information to solve problems, develop ideas, ask significant questions, use countless information in a good response, determine appropriate and relevant information to entrust. This literacy starts with the ability to recognize what information is needed, evaluate the content of the information that is certainly foreseen, then use and communicate it effectively. The internet has shifted traditional literacy (reading and writing) to something more multifaceted, because text is currently calibrated with the internet and social media, so that information literacy is synonymous with mastery of information and communication technology. One subject said that he and his students like to read *Webtoon* and *Wattpad*.

I like reading Wattpad, many of the stories there are also made into films (*ecranisation*). I'm so inspired. Some of my students also like to read stories on Wattpad, some others read Webtoons, and some of the rest like inspiring stories on Instagram (Alpha, 2022).

The pre-service teachers' assumptions about how students did not read seemed to be refuted when they realized that students still like to enjoy literary works, however, the media has shifted from traditional books to social media or digital platforms. *Wattpad* is an online platform that allows users to read and write stories. *Webtoon* is a combination of the words of *web* and *cartoon*, which means cartoons or comics that can be enjoyed via online and it is in the form of a website. Of course, this also needs assistance because on the platform, the stories available or written by freelance writers can contain elements that students are not yet ready to accept; "They do not hate reading in general, they like to spend a lot of time in front of smartphones, and they should get the meaning of the story right which triggers elements of critical thinking" (Beta, 2022). In short, literary works are a way to increase the level of literacy and critical thinking competence possessed by the teacher which clearly influences the mindset of students. The two sides, teachers and students, must synergize and be calibrated in a critical thinking. From there, literary works become critical literacy media.

In other words, information literacy is very important and an inevitability for all people because this sort of literacy is correlated to the aptitude to recognize information needs, find sources of information, analyse, filter, and evaluate the content in the information. Nonetheless, in the up-to-date era, information technology has become an urgent need, exclusively in dealing with the fluctuating vibe that demands accurate, fast, and compact information. Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, are in race to provide space for content creators and the viewers to keep screening up and down with one-minute-shortened Information. All are on screen of their smartphone and literacy, in the end, becomes a pillar of this progressive culture, because it turns to be a point of increasing the quality of cognition which is very useful and desirable for today's digital civilization (Marbun et al., 2020; Nielsen, 2015; Sawyer, 2011).

The quality of a country depends on its intelligence and knowledge, "this country needs a smart generation, the country needs to provide easier access to reading, and educators who turn on their talents, not force them to study things that are not passion" (Omega, 2022). The more knowledge we get, the more intellectual we would be. The law of causality has indeed become awareness of education and the State; the consequences are actual and neither clichéd nor biased. Knowledge is obtained and accessed from many *corridors*. Media, such as books, newspapers, curriculum, schools, social media, platforms, or whatever it is, provide information. There is no space for us not to keep silence while the world spins faster than before, "the more people who study with enthusiasm, the higher the civilization of a nation; a country will only progress if the generation likes to read" (Beta, 2022). Conclusively, internet can be useful with all information access it provides, thus we cannot just snore, fake ourselves and pretend things are not rushing. We just stroll while the others run.

At present, the rapid expansion of science and technology requires us to swiftly learn and master all categories of science and technology. If not, the world will leave us behind and insist us to lose the competition in various fields. If most people are able to master science and technology, the nation's progress will be true story. Humans can learn science and technology by using adequate literacy skills (writing and reading) and on the other edge, high literacy skills can encourage the development of science and technology to a higher level.

From this, a wide-ranging portrayal can be drawn; literacy is just a competency or ability to read and write. This ability to read and write provides a shortcut access to aisles or corridors

of prolific knowledge, required skills, and even competitive competence, which enable a person to have the ability to think critically. From the researchers' interpretation, critical thinking provides a kind of *fuel* for someone to be able to solve problems in various contexts and be able to communicate effectively. This understanding makes us aware that literacy will broaden our horizons which will make us more dynamic and flexible in dealing with and solving problems, conflicts, or summative dilemmas when we make problematic decisions.

Critical thinking is an elementary concept for responding to a narrative or perspective. Critical thinking is an intellectual discipline process to actively and skilfully conceptualize, apply, analyse and/or evaluate information. Critical thinking aims to cultivate and process incoming ideas so that they are not immediately accepted raw, but strictly considered, analysed, compared, and verified, so that the perceptions drawn as conclusions become the most strategic and wise answers (Bucsescu & Eng, 2020; Mulnix, 2012; Pithers & Soden, 2000). The process is taken in order to elaborate a problem in *resolution* or formulate conclusions, so that there are no *blunders* in making decisions, acting, or reacting in a case. In other words, literacy greatly stimulates critical thinking skills. In the world of education, literacy can clearly increase vocabulary. By increasing the number of vocabularies, linguistic competence and communication, both verbal and textual, will encourage analytical and thinking skills. From there, the cognition's performance turns out to be optimal at its finest, so that it helps to improve focus and concentration. From these positive sides, literacy will provide many optimistic and constructive vibes for students, educators, and all doers in the education universe, "... having broader insights opens our minds in dealing with problems, conflicts, or in addressing life's problems" (Alpha, 2022).

Awareness of the importance of literacy in critical thinking skills, as we all know, is absolutely compulsory and it needs to be increased; "It seems that the people here are difficult to develop, they need to be encouraged to read" (Alpha, 2022). In Indonesia, the literacy rate is very poor. The results of the survey can be accessed openly and publicly on the UNESCO site, without censorship, without data manipulation, and without drama. Indonesia is ranked in the lowest 10 out of 70 countries. Indonesian people's reading interest is less than 1% percent. That means, out of around 1000 Indonesian, only 1 person likes to read (see www.kominfo.go.id). It is sad, it is a fact, and it is needed to be accepted. We cannot be naively denying this ugly truth. If we have to find and highjack a scapegoat, then the traces of trouble will swirl endlessly. The world of education will certainly find fault with aspects of sociology, economics, the environment and even policies which are part of the legal and political domains. To be sure, the most inherently low student interest in reading is the lack of support from internal parties: the family. In a statement from one of the subjects, "there were students who once said that if their parents told them, just to go to school, the important thing is just certificate" (Omega, 2022).

Families must shape a reading culture at home so that culturally and psychologically, when they have dialogue, communication, and interaction to someone, they speak with insight, not instincts, feelings, or emotions. They will make the book as a source of information. In addition, a number of areas have not had access to quality books. This was confirmed by the statement of one subject, "I think many underdeveloped areas, such as in Eastern Indonesia, receive less attention, so they have difficulty accessing reading and information" (Beta, 2022). In other words, the government is considered unable to develop literacy programs evenly.

*Rahmat Setiawan[1] and Armelia Nungki Nurbani[2]*
*J-SHMIC : Journal of English for Academic*
*Vol 10, No 1, February 2023*

Once again, literary works are a simple way to increase literacy and critical thinking. The three subjects who are the source of this research data also agree on this.

Of course, from the researchers' experience as lecturers, there are several ways to increase the literacy level of students, so that a culture of literacy that is firmly rooted will be formed in a good shape. Improving the quality of education is a necessity because in the world of formal education, students are formed to learn and be familiar with texts. The world of education certainly levels up the facilities and human resources. The absence of schools, deficiency of teachers, or minimal facilities certainly make it difficult for people in East Indonesia. Apart from that, the researchers put opinion that we have to build more libraries as comfortable places to read in various regions, have a large collection of books, and provide interesting activities. Lastly, we need to plan a sustainable framework to introduce more reading books, especially literature books at schools and the community, and stimulate interest in reading books. Reading is an elementary thing that needs to be rooted in and from the elaboration above, literary works can be stated as the best means. Knowledge can be obtained by reading books. Reading activities will add insight as well as affect one's psychology and behaviour. This reading enthusiasm will form a literacy culture that will play an important role in improving critical thinking skills. Therefore, let us together build awareness of the importance of a literacy culture in order to improve critical thinking skills. With our literacy culture, we have given birth to a bright young generation in Indonesia. Literacy culture can also shape a better civilization. The key to advancing this country is to improve literacy culture.

Language Learning, including English, if combined with learning critical issues, will certainly be useful and effective, without reducing learning technical things of English namely grammar, vocabulary, writing, reading, listening, and speaking. It should be realized that redefinition of critical literacy and how it works on teaching literacy emerges from the changing student demographics with a linguistic repertoire that has increased significantly since the age of social media, and various transformations of the digital world. Technology has further contributed to the modification in the definition of literacy. This *fledgling* generation is grappling with the traditional demands of academic literacy, while simultaneously consuming disinformation from hoaxes and managing the universe of their daily lives, which is increasingly densely populated with dynamic digital activities. In the field of language education, there is still confusion regarding the difference between the critical of the Enlightenment period, which focused on critical thinking and reasoning, and the critical of socio-politics as the analysis of power (Comber, 2015; Luke, 2013; Vasquez, 2004). The point is, critical *literacy* should be seen as a critical device that contributes to a study

With critical literacy, things that look like they do not have problems, but logically, they look like they have problems. Of course, this does not mean looking for trouble, but exposing a problem that is still clandestine, covert, or obscured. With this *tracing* model, the critical *nature* here actually divulges a crisis from what is *seen*. Cultivating a critical nature and attitude here is a *contest* because not everyone wants or likes the problem, while the problem makes us learn and find solutions. Teachers, in negotiating critical literacy practices, certainly rely profoundly on the affordability of students' mindsets in classroom. Hence, critical literacy can be enjoyable and transformational as well as pedagogical and transgressive (Janks, 2012; Novianti et al., 2020; Serpa & Santos, 2020; Vasquez et al., 2019).

*Rahmat Setiawan[1] and Armelia Nungki Nurbani[2]*
*J-SHMIC : Journal of English for Academic*
*Vol 10, No 1, February 2023*

Some authors deliberately highlight social issues in books for children and thus create space for critical literacy discussion. However, since texts and practices are never neutral, any text can be used for critical literacy to consider the pivotal points. This means the world, as a text, can be read from a critical literacy perspective, especially given that what makes up the text is constantly changing. For example, a classroom can be read as text; even everyday objects can be read as text (Janks, 2014). Any issues and topics for learners, from experiences or any facts, can and should be used as texts to build curricula that have significance in their lives.

Teaching literature in the twenty-first century would demand more flexibility as the margins becomes less clear between literary criticism, creative writing, exploration of meaning, and interpretation which are becoming increasingly biased and blurred. This is the process of stimulating creative way of thinking because students should find an alternative meaning from how the text shares idea. As it has been exposed before, narrative text in a conventional term, is mostly used to expose a binary option between right or wrong or black or white, while there is another option; grey. Malin is wrong but cursing a son is also wrong, so everyone has a mistake. Or maybe, another narrative text to teach, Bandung Bondowoso is wrong for forcing love to Roro Jonggrang, but Roro Jonggrang is also wrong for defying Bandung Bondowoso. One forces, one defies, and of course, that is not good morality. It is not an attempt to change the story because the essence of involving narrative text is sharing moral value to learn and the way to learn moral value should be changed. It is the creativity at its purest. This creative way to rethink is relevant to the dynamic social phenomena which makes a variance in theoretical basis, ethical values, and/or concrete moral issues involved in teaching materials, which gives rise to many meaning options in literary teaching (Febriani et al., 2022; Muthmainnah et al., 2020).

For the researchers, in addition, due to the practicality of literature, literature loses its identity as an instrument for diving into the meaning and analysis of a crisis that occurs. People begin to emphasize literature as a medium, rather than critical learning literature. As a result, current students tend to lack the ability to think creatively and critically and, it gets worse, they do not seem to want to use their *ratio* to dig further, *stitch* texts with reality, *analogize* conflicts in literary texts with social reality, and *ponder* other critical drives. They tend to just do what they are told to do without thinking critically. Classroom should revive students' idea and if classroom does not provide it, harshly speaking, based on the researchers' experience, teachers and classroom is similar to a *doctrinal factory*.

More surprisingly, in my personal experience, as a researcher and a lecturer, of teaching literature in the classroom, students with *respectable* grades had a more rigid and narrow perspective on understanding things with conventional thinking. In contrast, students with lower appreciation seemed to be more critical to question and reconsider. Students who had an *outstanding image* (usually a nerd with glasses on eyes and acnes on cheeks) tended to be reluctant to take the time to think about different, creative, and critical ideas, because they were too busy focusing on, even almost obsessed, acquiring technical English proficiency and grades as achievement and complacency. Regarding this tendency, there were certainly many voices expressing concern about the identity crisis in the teaching literature, especially as an object of study in the English Language Education study program, and many debates and opinions offered about how to deal with this crisis among English scholars, researchers, and educators. However, most of them remain abstract, cliché, and bias without concrete and

practical examples, maximally it ended up in theoretical narrative and discourse. In other words, we cannot assume that one teaching method or another will solve the problem, because in essence, there is no one method that can interlace all the demands of learning in a frame (Gregory, 2001). Therefore, it is very important for teachers or EFL pre-service teachers to be eclectic and flexible in implementing a theory, study, or method, not just following the fixed and tough in improvising. They have to be able to go with the flow and take whatever is needed for every moment in the classroom. This is not to say that we do not need to prepare for class. Good and effective improvisation actually has a good and effective preparation (Bruno, 2019). Good class requires good plan and good plan reflects on good teacher.

In short, we can direct our intelligence more effectively if we are prepared in the sense of mastering the literature, studies, and roots of a wider topic. The main point of teaching literature in the current era is no longer about teaching *right* and *wrong*, but it is already about the *softer* truths; the halves in the gap between right or wrong side. It is no longer about black and white, but about *grey* and even about how black can also be associated with a good thing and vice versa, Lastly, the teaching literature is very pointedly contributive to students' critical thinking and students of EFL pre-service teachers should be more sensitive to crises. It should be put in a spotlight that the more students have critical thinking in facing problem, students can be more open-minded. Open-minded is not an instant situation where the students can have it in a fast track. It is a process of critical thinking and creativity. It can be seen from how the students reflect a problem and react it.

The curriculum of the English Language Education Study Program aims to produce competent human resources in English as well as being able to teach English. However, changes in civility in the digital industry are also a concern so that the English Language Education Study Program no longer produces conventional English educator candidates (teachers in an institution or school), but also transform them to become creative English educators, such as establishing educational institutions, for instance, becoming *content creators* in the realm of English.

As already mentioned above, the level of English competence of the Indonesian is relatively low and their literacy level is in the same line. Learning or improving a foreign language is basically about habituation and it can be mastered by communicating actively (for example speaking and writing) and passively (listening and reading). Both are literacy realms. In other words, placing English learning through critical literacy (stimulating sensitivity to critical issues through written works, including literature) is a matter of urgency because it will shift the orientation of English teachers in teaching; this is no longer about lack of vocabulary, lack of ability to organize sentences, but it is how to make aspiring educators see the urgency of inserting critical issues in literary works as an effort to improve students' English competence. Literary works bring a package of critical literacy. With good critical literacy, EFL students have critical thinking skill, creativity in creating ideas, and open-mindedness in facing situations. It is like to kill birds with one stone.

The last to say, literary works have potentials to be a media that bridges EFL students to get both English competence and critical literacy. From the perspective of the EFL pre-service teachers responses, the researchers interpret that there are three aspects that can be figured out: 1) by learning English with literary works and teachers' with good literacy, EFL students can gain critical thinking skill; 2) 1) by learning English with literary works and teachers' with

good literacy, EFL students can gain creativity in creating idea, and 3) 1) by learning English with literary works and teachers' with good literacy, EFL students can gain open-mindedness.

**CONCLUSION**

As a global language, English is a crucial communication foundation, so the urgency to improve is inevitably crucial. Many institutions, agencies, or institutions offer English language learning modes or systems, with their own peculiarities. The majority focuses on the technical aspects of communication, such as vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar, listening, and speaking. From the discussion, it can be concluded that it can be an option to put literary works as an important part of learning English because literary work is not just a media to learning reading, but it can be a media for EFL students to have critical literacy while critical literacy can stimulate critical thing, creativity, and open-mindedness.

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