



Going the Extra Miles in a Reading Lesson: Insights from a Thai EFL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

With the rise of the digital age and social media in the 21st century, our language learners as readers are constantly exposed to a surge of textual information daily. Inevitably, there has been a pressing need for language teachers, particularly in the EFL context, to consider higher-level comprehension and reading skills that help prepare their students for such an influx of information. This classroom-based study aimed to investigate students' perception of 1) critical reading abilities and 2) critical literacy practice implemented in a reading lesson. The participants were 32 first-year students who studied an English foundation course at a public university in Thailand. The data were collected by means of a questionnaire and focus group interviews. Using descriptive statistics and descriptive narrative, findings revealed positive overall performance and active engagement in the lesson, while language difficulty and concerns over the abilities to read between the lines were reported. The focus group interviews reported significant engagement in the lesson. Critical reading skills and classroom discussion were found to be valuable. Critical literacy practice appeared to contribute to the participants' positive take on learning about multiple perspectives in classroom discussion.

Keywords: critical reading, critical literacy, critical pedagogy, English as a Foreign Language, higher education
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Introduction

We have entered an era of social transformation that has changed how we perceive and interact with information, posing challenges for language learners. There has been a pressing concern of the availability and access of information which might contain misleading content “that can quickly disorient readers and users, let alone the Internet materials that are intentionally designed to deceive” (Ng & Graham, 2017, p. 21). With the centrality of language as a means of communication in such a fast-changing world, critical skills and competences are instrumental to succeed. In the Framework for 21st Century Learning (2015), critical skills are a core element that helps prepare students for “more and more complex life and work environments in the 21st century” (P21 Framework Definitions, p. 3). So how should we as language teachers respond to this ever-changing social landscape with language playing a central role in the information to which our students are constantly exposed? How could we make sense of and make use of these critical skills and prepare our students for these new challenges? These questions have set the stage for the present study to explore concepts and practices that can be useful for classroom implementation, particularly in the English as a foreign language (EFL) context.

From a language teaching standpoint, the questions I posed above appear to align with the overall agendas of critical applied linguistics, an approach “to language use and education that seeks to connect the local conditions of language to broader social formations” (Pennycook, 2008, p. 169). Specifically, critical applied linguistics can be used “as an approach to questions of language education, language policy, language learning, workplace communication and so on...” (Pennycook, 2022, p. 8). This essentially implicates a wider, pedagogical goal in education and the (critical) ways in which teachers can help their students in class. Ng and Graham (2017) further elaborate that critical readers with critical reading abilities are of vital importance in this new platform of reading and acquiring information. Therefore, it is important that teachers are aware of the ways they teach and help students deal with information, particularly textual opinions, that necessitates the abilities to think from a critical stance. The present study thus focuses on students’ reading abilities because of the multiple reading texts they had to interact with throughout their course. For this reason, I drew on the concept of critical literacy as a frame to be exploited in texts and translated into classroom practice.

Research Objectives

In an effort to address and promote critical literacy and critical reading in the EFL classroom, the present study aimed at investigating first-year students' perception of critical reading abilities in a single reading lesson and critical literacy practice.

Review of Literature

Critical Literacy and Critical Reading

The notion of critical literacy yields different interpretations and varying definitions, but the term has generally been associated with language and education. The definition of “*critical*” in critical literacy, according to Janks, specifically means “analysis that seeks to uncover the social interests at work, to ascertain what is at stake in textual and social practices” (2010, p. 12-13). Similarly, Wallace (2003) refers to this particular view of *critical* as a stronger view of “critical thinking” in which social issues concerning power and ideology are the main concern. This suggests the move beyond an exclusive focus on texts in a language classroom. Furthermore, the importance of critical literacy is more evident than ever when technology has brought about new ways that people can interact with information. To address this, Luke (2014) notes that critical literacy “refers to the use of technologies of print and other media of communication to analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of institutions and everyday life” (p. 21). Due to its far-reaching use in the field, the critical perspectives in language learning and teaching have been threefold:

- 1) a focus on ideology critique, cultural and political analysis of texts as a key element of education against cultural exclusion and marginalization
- 2) a commitment to the inclusion of working-class, cultural and linguistic minorities, indigenous learners, and other marginalized on the basis of gender, sexuality, or other forms of difference, and
- 3) an engagement with the significance of text, ideology, and discourse in the construction and reconstruction of social and material relations, everyday cultural and political life.

(Luke, 2014, p. 23)

For classroom practice, critical literacy aims to help encourage students to go the extra mile. Apart from basic comprehension of texts, being

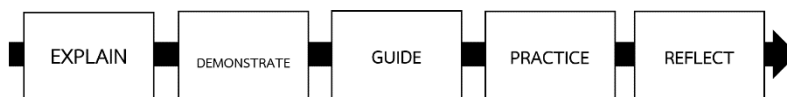
critically literate “gives us potent ways of reading, seeing and acting in the world” (Janks et al., 2014, p. 1) and benefits our students in ways that “expand their reasoning, seek multiple perspectives, and become active thinkers” (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004a, p. 1). A typical concept is that there are no right or wrong answers in dealing with a critical task providing that they are still arguable. Other strategies include, for instance, additional questions posed in class (Brown, 1999). According to Brown, these questions aim at asking what is not directly presented in a text, moving beyond the basic comprehension level of reading.

As an integral part of critical literacy practice, the concept of critical reading is instrumental to the understanding of the two concepts and provides teachers with key reading skills to be implemented in their lessons. Hudson (2007) categorizes reading into four different skills: 1) word attack skills, 2) comprehension skills, 3) fluency skills, and 4) critical reading skills. The mention of critical reading skills is in the last category which “provide the reader with the skills to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate what is read. This process involves such activities as seeing the cause-and-effect or comparison relationships in the text, or adopting a critical stance toward the text” (p. 80). The term *critical reading* also holds a similar view when it concertedly appears in *critical reading and writing* as it partially refers to “resisting the assumptions on which “rational” arguments are based, by explaining and questioning how common-sense “logic” establishes its category in the first place” (Goatly & Hiradhar, 2016, p. 1). Here, *critical reading* has a close relation to the social elements of language use and power, thus constituting part of the notion of critical literacy and its practices.

To properly design and adapt critical literacy practice in this context, some form of instructional guideline is required. Two relevant frameworks were identified: *the Strategy Instructional Framework* and *the Critical Literacy Lesson Framework* proposed by McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004b). As a guideline to teach critical strategies in class, *the Strategy Instructional Framework* (Figure 1) indicates a process of instructions for teachers.

Figure 1

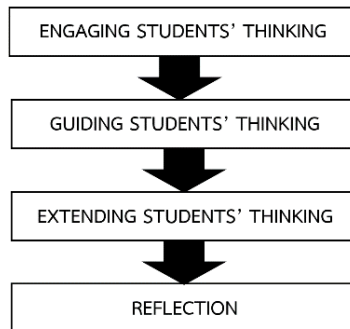
The Strategy Instructional Framework (McLaughlin and DeVogd, 2004b)



It first begins by explaining what critical literacy strategies are and how they are able to help students, followed by demonstrating how these strategies can be applied. (The implementation of the two frameworks will be discussed in more detail in the methodology section.) These early (micro-level) steps are useful for the study if the teacher and the students are unfamiliar with the concept, and it can help create a common understanding and a more meaningful learning experience afterwards. The next step in the framework involves guiding students through group work, providing an opportunity for discussion with their peers. Students then practice using these strategies in an assigned task. This pair-work assignment is appropriate for a moderate to large class size, guiding them through peer-discussion before engaging in an actual task. The final step includes both teacher and students' reflections on using these strategies. This serves as a wrap-up of the whole learning process and a retrospective lens which can be an insightful source of data.

Figure 2

Critical Literacy Lesson Framework (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004b)



The second model, *the Critical Literacy Lesson Framework* (Figure 2), serves as a guideline to plan and design a lesson integrated with critical literacy practice at a macro level. According to McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004b), this four-step process helps guide an effective, critical lesson, which starts with engaging students' background knowledge related to the content at the beginning of the lesson and then continues with incorporating specific techniques to help guide students while they are reading. This is important because students are likely exposed to various topics in their English courses, and their engagement is everything. After this, group discussions are arranged to extend their critical thinking exercise. This collaborative effort and the idea exchanges are helpful for a better reading comprehension especially for students with different learning paces, providing them a chance to engage

with a reading text step-by-step. Similar to the Strategy Instructional Framework, the last step includes reflections from both teachers and students on the lesson that has been completed. It is clear that in both frameworks, reflection plays a key role at the end of the lesson. Not only does it help recap on what has been done, but importantly, 'why' it is critical to do so. Because both frameworks are complimentary in nature, the combination of them is useful for a more well-rounded lesson design and a more detailed guideline to be adapted to the study at both macro and micro levels of the lesson in focus.

Studies on critical literacy (with integrated critical reading) have focused on different levels of learners and contexts. However, the focus is largely on primary and secondary education which, for instance, explored critical literacy and the role of the teachers (Comber & Nixon, 2011), its association with digital literacy and standardization (Avila & Moore, 2012), and critical dialogues between students and teachers (Shin & Crookes, 2005). Being more emergent in the literature, studies at tertiary level have attempted to explore different perspectives of critical literacy practice, particularly in EFL context. Kuo (2009) investigated a group of university students in Taiwan and their dialogues based on picture books on social issues. The study helped affirm that learning English through social perspectives was effective for creating meaningful discussions, which, in turn, helped promote critical literacy. A college teacher's experience in critical literacy teaching was explored in Ko (2013). The study revealed the importance of critical dialogues between teachers and students. Through classroom observation, discussions, and interviews, Ko found that a teacher with a critical mind and knowledgeable in critical literacy is a key factor to success.

Even though certain studies (Kuo, 2009; Shin & Crooke, 2005) have noted the capability of East Asian students in dealing with critical tasks and discussions, a study in Malaysian context by Kaur and Sidhu (2014) addressed the challenges worthy of consideration in critical literacy practice. The study underlined some concerns over reading difficulties including, for instance, understanding author's message, distinguishing fact from opinion, and low English proficiency. The study, moreover, addressed the need for incorporating critical literacy particularly in tertiary education and how its practices could help prepare graduates of the future. Despite the gradual emergence of critical literacy research in Asian, EFL higher institutions (Abednia & Crookes, 2019), critical literacy work remains relatively scant and uncharted (Ko, 2013), particularly in the Southeast Asia region. The present study thus aims to implement critical literacy practice in the specific EFL context of a Thai higher institution. Insights from the students' critical reading abilities and their perceptions about the critical literacy practice

should benefit the teaching and learning of English in light of critical literacy practice, particularly university-level English courses that aim at making reading lessons more engaged and critical.

Methodology

Research Design and Context

The present study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate students' critical reading abilities and their perceptions on critical literacy practice in an English foundation course at a Thai public university. Using a mixed-method or multi-method approach "allows the researcher to explore a research question from multiple angles potentially avoiding the limitations inherent in using one approach, quantitative or qualitative, independently" (Mackey & Bryfonski, 2018, p. 104). The study aligns with a classroom-based research agenda to "bridge the gap between the ideal (the most effective ways of doing things) and the real (the actual ways of doing things) in the social situation" (Burns, 2009, p. 290). Therefore, the study draws on the 4-stage model of action research by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, p. 10, as cited in Burns, 2009):

1. develop a plan of critically informed action to improve what is already happening
2. act to implement the plan
3. observe the effects of the critically informed action in the context in which it occurs
4. reflect on these effects as the basis for further planning, subsequent critically informed action and so on, through a succession of stages.

In this study, I took the role of teacher-researcher (Burns, 2009; Lew et al., 2018) which represents "a form of self-critical inquiry" related to one's own teaching practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, as cited in Lew et al., 2018, p. 89). The participants included 32 first-year students majoring in education. A reading lesson took place in the second half of the semester, and there was no specific pattern in the selection of the lesson used in this study. A commercial textbook (CEFR level: B2) was used as a core material, each unit of which consists of reading lessons based on different themes across units. The reading text in the selected lesson explores different types of risk and how a government manages them legally. The entire lesson surrounding the reading text in focus comprises three main sections; within each there are activities that the students go through:

Section	Activities
Pre-reading	This section consists of three sub-activities in which the students are guided into a pre-reading discussion of the related topic of the reading. After that, they familiarize themselves with vocabulary and terms related to the theme of risk (e.g., prudence, regulations, and infringe) in a gap-fill exercise. The last activity asks them about the issues they think should be controlled by governments such as national security, disease prevention, and provision of healthcare.
While-reading	The main reading text of the lesson is in this section. The 450-word, 4-paragraph text is entitled: “A government has a duty to protect its citizens from personal, professional, and financial risk.” The reading is accompanied by reading for main ideas and a scanning practice for specific key terms in the text. Finally, making inferences (reading between the lines) is also incorporated in this section by asking them a set of questions that require them to infer information from the text.
Post-reading	The last activity centers around peer discussion questions, including their take on whether dangerous sports should be banned, personal responsibility for risks, and new laws that should be legalized to protect people from risks.

Lesson Design and Implementation

First, *the Strategy Instruction Framework*, was integrated into the lesson with two specific critical reading strategies:

1. Asking questions related to the students’ experience (pre-reading)

This specific strategy involved questions related to students’ experiences and viewpoints in relation to Thailand and relevant rules and regulations that were currently in place. The other strategy was implemented in the last activity:

2. Letting the students set their own questions based on the reading text (after-reading)

Apart from the existing discussion questions from the textbook, this strategy allowed the students to work in groups and come up with at least one question related to the reading text. Then they presented their questions to the class, and every group engaged in a whole-class discussion.

Second, *the Critical Literacy Lesson Framework* with the four-step process was implemented:

1. Engaging Students' Thinking (asking pre-reading questions that activate motivation)
2. Guiding Students' Thinking (implementing Patterned Partner Reading: Read-Pause-Summarize)
 - a. Each pair of students read a paragraph and paused to summarize the content with their partner before moving on to another paragraph.
3. Extending Students' Thinking (adding an additional group activity)
 - a. In groups of four, the students brainstormed, creating at least one question based on the reading text, and shared the question with the class.
4. Reflection
 - a. The teacher explained and reflected what had been learned in the lesson and pointed out the critical features of the lesson.

Data Collection and Analysis

Before collecting the data, consent forms were distributed to the students, informing that their identities would be kept strictly confidential, and the data provided would be used for research purposes only. The study collected students' demographic information, including names, fields of study, and their English proficiency scores obtained via a standardized proficiency test arranged by the university. The majority of the students (81.25%) acquired moderate English proficiency equivalent to CEFR B1, followed by 15.65% of A2, and 3.125% of B2.

To assess their critical reading abilities, the students were asked to assess different areas of their own performance and rate between “*excellent*,” “*good*,” “*moderate*,” “*poor*,” and “*very poor*” on a Likert-scale self-reflection questionnaire. The questionnaire items included 1) their overall performance in the lesson, 2) their understanding of the objectives of the lesson, 3) their engagement in the lesson, 4) their overall understanding of the reading text, 5) their abilities to read between the lines, 6) their contribution in the group discussion, and 7) their reasoning in the group discussion. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze and report the findings. Moreover, an open-ended section for additional comments was provided for the students in case they would like to leave any comments on the lesson.

In the second phase of the study, focus group interviews were conducted to further investigate the students' perceptions based on the 4 stages of the Critical Literacy Lesson Framework. There were 12 participants (n = 12) in the interview, divided into three groups, each consisting of 4 participants. The interviews were conducted in Thai to ensure that the

participants were able to fully voice their opinions and reflect on their learning experience regardless of their English proficiency. The interviews were recorded, transcribed into English, and reported based on the four stages of the critical literacy lesson framework by means of the descriptive narrative method.

Findings

Students' Perception of Critical Reading Abilities

This section reports on the participants' self-assessment on their critical reading abilities drawn on statistical data (Table 1). Moreover, their comments provided at the end of the questionnaire are presented as additional qualitative data under relevant topics with individual coding (S1 to S32) assigned to each participant (N = 32). To begin with, the majority of them rated their overall performance at *good* (46.87%) and at *excellent* (3.12%), while a large number of them (43.75%) reported at *moderate*. This high overall performance was reflected in the comment:

“I liked the way the lesson went on gradually. I wish every lesson is taught like this.” (S7)

In terms of the understanding of objectives, almost 70% reported a *moderate* level, followed by over 30% at *good* and *excellent*. The vast majority of them (approximately 80%) rated at *good* and *excellent* in their engagement with the lesson. A comment further revealed that:

“The way the teacher delivered the lesson encouraged us to think and follow step-by-step.” (S3)

With regard to comprehension, more than 50% of them thought their understanding of the text was *good*, and almost 40% *moderate*. Some of the comments related to comprehension were found to be mixed:

“I would like to have a more detailed explanation of certain technical terms.” (S4)
 “I wish the whole lesson would be separated into smaller modules, rather than chains of activities.” (S17)
 “I didn't quite understand the text. My English proficiency is not so good.” (S24)
 “The vocabulary was quite difficult. And I myself wasn't focused on the lesson.” (S27)

Table 1

Percentages of the students' perception of critical reading abilities

Items	Levels of Self-Assessment				
	Very Poor	Poor	Moderate	Good	Excellent
1. My overall performance in this lesson was	0	6.25	43.75	46.87	3.12
2. My understanding of the objectives of this lesson was	0	0	68.75	21.87	9.37
3. My engagement in this lesson (e.g., attempt to read the text, attempt to look for unknown vocabulary, and concentration on the lecture) was	0	6.25	15.62	68.75	9.37
4. My understanding of the text was	0	6.25	37.5	56.25	0
5. My abilities to read the text between the lines were	0	25	50	25	0
6. My contribution in the group discussion was	3.12	18.75	34.37	37.5	6.25
7. My reasoning in the group discussion was	0	6.25	59.37	28.12	6.25

When it comes to reading between the lines, there was a clear divide between *poor* and *good* (25% each), while the other half of the class thought this was *moderate*. This resonated in their comments:

“I liked the analytic discussion of each paragraph in the text such as figuring out what the writer wants to say.” (S2)

“I think I was able to analyze the text better.” (S3)

“The questions were more complicated. I wish I could speak more English.” (S12)

“The lesson was difficult.” (S30)

In terms of contribution in the group discussion activity, their perceptions were varied with about 34% at *moderate*, almost 19% at *poor* and almost 38% at *good*.

“Today’s activity was quite open to discussions and opinions.” (S3)

“We needed more time during group discussions. I could have been more engaged in the lesson.” (S7)

In the final topic, the majority of the participants (about 60%) thought that their reasoning abilities were again at *moderate*, and about 28% rated their performance as *good*.

Students’ Perception of the Critical Literacy Practice

In this section, the students’ focus group interviews are presented based on their thoughts and experience in the critical practice. The following codes are applied to the three focus group interviews. There were 4 participants in each group:

G1, G2, and G3 refer to group 1, 2, 3 respectively;

S1, S2, S3, and S4 refer to student 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively.

The findings are reported based on the four steps of the Critical Literacy Lesson Framework with integrated critical strategies.

Engaging Students’ Thinking

The first step involved a set of pre-reading questions and a discussion to enhance students’ motivation and relate the topic to their experience. Several students reported that they found the activity very useful, and it was an opportunity to think about the topic to the text:

“I liked it a lot. It’s like we had a chance to think about it first, rather than jumping right to the reading text.” (G1, S4)

“It was really good. I had a chance to express my own opinions about the topic first before reading what the text was about.” (G2, S4)

“I think it [the activity] triggered our interest and prompted us to think about the issue.” (G3, S2)

Guiding Students’ Thinking

This step was based on the Read-Pause-Summarize strategy. The students worked in pairs while reading the text. They were asked to pause after they finished a paragraph, then summarize the paragraph in their pairs and move on to the next paragraph. The activity went on in this fashion until the whole reading text was complete. The findings from the interview revealed that the students favored the activity as it helped improve their comprehension of the text:

“It’s like connecting the dots. And it’s good for slow learners.” (G1, S2)

“It’s a good way to read because it went step-by-step. I think I could understand more when compared to going through all the text at once. It’s like we kept adding more information bit by bit.” (G2, S4)

“I think we had more time to grasp the main points of the text. Then we could combine them together.” (G3, S1)

Extending Students’ Thinking

After the students’ group discussion activity was completed, they engaged in this extra activity integrated with critical literacy strategy—setting their own questions based on the text they read. Below are samples of the actual questions posed in class. It can be seen that some of them are ungrammatical, but for a critical practice purpose, the students’ ideas and thoughts were prioritized:

- Do you think too much protection from government will make citizens ignore their own risk? Why?
- What are the similarities or differences of risk management law between Thailand’s government and the UK?
- If the law in Thailand has penalties for criminal like the UK, what will affect to Thailand?
- How would you like your government to protect population in your own country?

The students’ responses to the activity appeared to be affirmative:

“Most of the questions were totally unexpected. It’s interesting to see these questions coming from other groups as well. And it gave me a fresh perspective I wouldn’t have thought of before.” (G1, S4)

“I got to learn what were the answers to the questions we posed, like what most people thought about the question.” (G2, S2)

“I think in this activity we did not just take the information from the text but we had to practice the comparison. And I got to listen to others’ opinions as well.” (G3, S2)

Reflection

In the final step, the lesson was summarized in terms of the content, activities, and how critical literacy was highlighted and fostered throughout the lesson. The present study found that the students became more aware of the importance of critical literacy through certain tasks in class. The students were also more likely to realize that there could be different ideas and viewpoints in class discussion, and that this was okay:

“I felt that when we seriously discussed about this [law and protection], we could actually apply this to our daily lives. It’s like we had to imagine the possibilities of risks that could happen in real life and how we would like the laws to protect us.” (G1, S4)

“I got to learn what my friends were thinking. For instance, for those who agreed that these dangerous sports should be banned [discussion activity], they provided reasons as to why they believed so. It’s like we had a chance to learn new perspectives from them.” (G2, S4)

“...I really liked it when I had a chance to share my ideas with my friends. It didn’t have to be the same. My friends and I had a lot of different opinions.” (G3, S2)

“It’s like I got to broaden my view, not just my own but from others’ too. I learned that sometimes I knew just one side of the whole story, but when listening to my friends, I could see that there were other sides as well. Something like that.” (G3, S1)

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate first-year university students’ critical reading abilities as well as their perception of the critical literacy practice implemented in a reading lesson. Regarding their critical reading abilities, the fact that the vast majority of the participants endorsed their overall performance on a positive note, it was likely that the critical literacy strategies and the framework, to a certain extent, helped engage the students in reading the text and the group discussion activities. When teaching critical literacy, the fact that students are actively engaged and motivated is of vital importance, and this can be achieved by, for instance, creating individual connections with the text (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004a). Such active engagement could also account for better understanding of the text despite the reported difficulty of language use in the lesson/text and the unfamiliarity of the issues on laws and government reported by some students.

More particularly, regarding the abilities to read between the lines, i.e., identifying purposes and audience, a large number of the participants felt that they did not perform well in this area, with specific concerns over language difficulty and their own English proficiency. This is, in fact, similar to the difficulty understanding author’s message found among EFL university students in Malaysia (Kaur & Sidhu, 2014). Such evidence suggests that EFL learners are likely to experience a certain level of difficulty when dealing with this type of reading ability and, importantly, may require appropriate instructional scaffolding prior to engaging in a task. To better deal with different types of text, Ng and Graham (2017) remark that a combination of strategies such as clarifying, questioning, summarizing and interpreting the text should be applied. In addition, the way that the students read the text could account for better interpretation. According to Goatly and Hiradhar (2016), written language, similar to spoken words, is often read in sequence, so readers tend to go from the first point and move to the next. As the interview findings revealed, it is likely that the strategic reading technique integrated as part of the lesson framework provided them more time to

collaboratively discuss and deal with the text, thus improving the students' overall comprehension and interpretation of the text.

Importantly, the critical literacy practice in the present study appeared to be highly supportive of students' learning. Apart from the pre-reading activity which promoted active engagement as discussed above, the other implemented strategies were found to play an important role in encouraging the students to go the extra mile. The fact that the students had an opportunity to brainstorm and come up with their own questions based on the text might appear to be challenging at first, but as the activity progressed and all the questions were posed, the students were highly engaged in discussing the questions and expressing their ideas. Both the pre-reading activity and the brainstorming session seemed to draw on "learners' background knowledge" (Abednia & Crookes, 2019, p. 11) and how they brought it to the classroom while engaging in critical literacy practice. To illustrate, some groups associated the ways the laws in the UK are enforced with their own local context, along with whether excessive protection from a government would make citizens take their legal protection for granted. This added activity, as the interviews revealed, allowed the students to look back at the text from a different point of view and, importantly, learn that there could more than one possibility to respond to a question. This is similar to Chen's study (2018) in which the students drew on their background knowledge and experiences related to cyberbullying and participated in a group discussion before doing their project. The perk of asking questions, not just focusing on answers, is held true in educating critical readers. Importantly, Wallace (1992 as cited in Brown, 1999) when students are going to respond to a text, they "may reveal not just their strategies as readers at the micro level of response to individual utterances, but their stance both critically, conceptually and affectively, influenced by their personal and social histories as readers" (Wallace, 2003, p. 22). Therefore, this activity not only appeared to nurture engagement but foster a critical stance of the students towards the text they were reading.

Towards the end of the lesson, the students had an opportunity to ask questions they might have, and the teacher summarized and reflected on the entire lesson. Crucially, it was interesting to find that several students were aware of multiple perspectives shared in the class. This, according to Abednia and Crookes (2019), can benefit students' criticality development given the "consideration of diverse perspectives" where students share "their views and understandings" (p. 14). Such awareness appeared to arise during the discussion session with their peers in what Brown (2022) calls "dialogic spaces in EFL classrooms" (p. 19). The fact that the students had a chance to brainstorm and come up with their own questions related to the text may also

account for active participation in the lesson. This is in line with previous work (Huh, 2016, as cited in Brown, 2022) in which “becoming socialized into the process of critical inquiry may enable learners to gradually assume more responsibility for this process” (p. 19).

While being a small-scale study, the present study provides evidence of critical literacy practice as part of the existing curriculum in the context of English as a foreign language. Importantly,

applying a critical literacy lens to dominant curricular elements is one way to make sure students learn the dominant practices for which they will be held accountable through assessment, while also being able to critically evaluate those practices through the lens of multiple perspectives and other culturally affirming approaches.

(Williams, 2022, p. 14)

The study implies a possibility for EFL university students to be critically engaged in their language learning experience of texts and critical discussions with their teacher and peers. The findings align with a study of EFL college students in Taiwan (Ko & Wang, 2013) which suggests the potentiality of EFL learners to master critical literacy without having to wait until their English proficiency reaches a specific level. Culturally speaking, the present study uncovers the fact that EFL learners, especially Asian, are able to actively engaged in a task which is contrary to the long-held conception of passiveness among Asian learners. This is held true in a study conducted in Korea (Shin & Crookes, 2005) where such traditional belief was proved the opposite. Another key factor to succeed in critical literacy is that the students should feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and sharing ideas. Ko (2013) contends that “a supporting environment where learners can consider a variety of perspectives” (p. 106) should be provided. Even for beginners, classroom conditions that facilitate open and critical discussions...” were deemed crucial (Lau, 2013). This is also supported by Shin and Crookes (2005) in which active participation was evident given that the right context as well as the open atmosphere for discussion were provided.

Considered as one of the “progressive pedagogies” (Williams, 2022, p. 14), the main goal of critical literacy practice is to foster students to be critical readers, and it is imperative that teachers consider applying critical literacy in their English classes and moving perhaps a little bit beyond what they do in their regular lessons. That is to say, not only do students acquire language skills and fulfill academic commitments, but they also have an opportunity to experience critical ways of learning and thinking and be ready to be part of a larger community in which their abilities to think from a critical stance can be put to good use. This study was an effort to improve the

everyday language classroom, a step further to change our teaching practice that adds the extra miles to the learning experience.

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