

Salasika

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Table of Content

The Role of Dayak Bakati Women in Kiung Village in Making <i>Bia</i> as a Form of Maintaining Food Traditions Jaklin Ana, Theresia Pratiwi Elingsetyo Sanubari, Firdhan Aria Wijaya	61
Realizing Inclusive Public Services: “Lapo Bra” Innovation in Building a Literacy Culture for People with Disabilities in Malang Denny Iswanto, Dewi Bayu Pamungkas, Farida Nurani	71
How Women Lead Podcast Series: Feminist Media Framing in Challenging Symbolic Annihilation of Indonesian Women Leadership Gisa Maya Saputri	81
Reception Analysis of Breastfeeding Mothers towards the Instagram Feeds of @Olevelove Account Jordy Satria Widodo, Oki Turatula Narendra Wigati	95
Cultivating Gender Sensitivity and Critical Reading Skills Using Fiction: A Classroom Action Research for the Students of English Department Anggraeni Ayu Puspitaning Winhar, Higendika Rizky Sahid Nugroho, Dewi Candraningrum	107
Index	135

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Cultivating Gender Sensitivity and Critical Reading Skills Using Fiction: A Classroom Action Research for the Students of English Department

Anggraeni Ayu Puspitaning Winhar

English Department, Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta, Indonesia

Higendika Rizky Sahid Nugroho

English Department, Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta, Indonesia

Dewi Candraningrum

English Department, Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta, Indonesia

Corresponding email: dcandraningrum@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The importance of Critical Reading Skills (CRS) and gender sensitivity to support every individual's success in academic, personal, and social life has long been acknowledged. The accelerating advancement of technology makes CRS and gender sensitivity more crucial. However, CRS development through the educational process has not been satisfactory due to various factors. This research reviews current ideas and studies on the nature of CRS, gender sensitivity, the nature of fiction, and their role in developing CRS. To get ideas about using fiction to promote CRS and gender sensitivity, this study ends with the practical description of a step-by-step of using fiction with gender sensitivity to promote CRS through an instructional model.

This study employs Classroom Action Research (CAR). Action research designs are systematic procedures used by teachers to gather qualitative data to address improvements in their educational setting, their teaching, and their students' learning. This study investigates gender sensitivity and the critical reading strategies employed by Indonesian English as Foreign Language (EFL) students. Throughout the study, students are also encouraged to believe that the difficulties in reading were due to a lack of strategies and gender sensitivity rather than a lack of ability and skills.

Keywords: Stringer's Classroom Action Research model, Indonesian EFL Students, Critical Reading Strategies, fiction, gender sensitivity, Bloom's Taxonomy.

INTRODUCTION

There has been little progress in developing gender sensitivity and critical reading in EFL (English as

Foreign Language) classrooms in the last two decades. There is some concern regarding students' poor

thinking skills, which may be due to the neglect of critical reading and thinking in the school curriculum. Helping EFL students develop critical reading can be a challenging undertaking. A search of the literature related to critical reading provides guidelines for a definition or includes studies by others who have been observed in classrooms to learn about critical reading. Using the classics of children's literature to teach critical reading skills and gender sensitivity, Combs (1992) defines critical reading as reasonable, reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do. Critical reading is an interactive process that uses several levels of thought simultaneously, and critical readers are constantly asking questions about the text they are reading. Hence, individual students increased their Critical Reading Skills (CRS) in varying degrees and became problem solvers. Using activities and instructions based on Bloom's taxonomy, the students developed a strong foundation in critical reading, and their progress in critical reading should continue in future reading instruction.

Gender equality does not deny biological differences. Gender responsiveness means changing mindsets and attitudes by creating and fostering an environment in which all learners are appreciated, respected, and treated equally. Textbooks and learning materials can perpetuate a skewed focus on gender. Gender-sensitive communication ensures that women and men—and those who do not conform to the binary gender system—are treated as persons of equal importance and dignity.

Indicators of gender-sensitive skills include: refraining from discriminating against or stereotyping clients on the basis of sex or gender, treating all learners with equal respect, offering gender sensitivity training to all students, and providing adequate representation of female students and teachers. Gender sensitivity skills in the educational context could be put into the reading texts to foster students' critical thinking.

The notions of critical thinking were acknowledged about 2,500 years ago when Socrates introduced the need to promote human reasoning skills quality by developing the Socratic Method, the process of questioning that constitutes the early criteria of what we know today as CRS. CRS was in a vacuum for twenty centuries until Descartes revived and implemented it in the 17th century (Rfaner, 2006). However, it began to be a prominent component in educational programs by the mid of the twentieth century after Dewey (1934) contended that the fundamental purpose of the education system should be learning to think. He referred to that as "reflective thinking" and an "active, persistent, and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of grounds which support it" (p. 9).

Prompted by Dewey's ideas, the high importance of CRS for academic success and social life keeps on being accentuated in education (Facione, 2015; Moon, 2008). The need for CRS was later strengthened by the accelerating advancement of technology which overloads people with information. The ease of accessing a wealth of information requires people to think

critically to discriminate factual from fake information; see logical connections between ideas; be open-mindedly view things from diverse perspectives; identify, construct and evaluate problems; and get relevant information to solve them. The World Economic Forum even suggested that in the present economy of constant change and disruption, CRS is a skill vital to surviving (Gray, 2016). The importance of CRS has recently become a buzzword among educators. Unfortunately, CRS development among students is still unsatisfactory. Hirose (1992:1) reported that many students today “lack the basic skills to function effectively when they enter the workforce. A common complaint is that entry-level employees lack the reasoning and CRS abilities needed to process and refine information”. Belkin (2017) clarified it and reported that large groups of seniors at colleges scored only at basic or below basic levels, and even at “high-profile colleges,” over a third of seniors scored “below-basic skills.”

In line with this, Berr’s (2016) survey of over 76,000 managers and executives revealed that 60% of new college graduates lack CRS. The unsatisfactory development of CRS was found in Asian countries. Rashid and Hashim (2008) indicated that the graduates of the Malaysian education system could not meet employers’ expectations due to a lack of CRS and poor communication skills. In the Indonesian context, CRS development has not been seriously supported in primary and secondary education. Sadli (2002) stated that education in Indonesia does not promote CRS. Rujivanarom (2016)

reported that the CRS of Thai students are very limited. A study evaluating the logical thinking and analytical skills of 6,235 students in ten Thai provinces revealed the average final score was just 36,5%, and only 2,09% of participants passed the exam.

Tung and Chang (2009) listed three major causes of the problem in the Asian context. First, in their prior learning, students mainly went through reproduction-oriented learning activities. They rarely had the opportunities to question, explain, or evaluate the “knowledge” instructed in the classroom. Second, primary and secondary school teachers received little guidance or support regarding CRS instruction. Their opportunity to integrate CRS into curricula is also deprived due to their teaching load and time constraints. Third, students are more accustomed to a collectivist society, so they lack the individual voice necessary for CRS. These factors make CRS development seem to be more challenging for Indonesian EFL learners than their counterparts from other ethnicities. Various current studies confirm these points. Ahn (as cited in Oh, 2017) stated that since secondary education in Korea heavily focuses on rote memorization, most Korean students do not have much experience in critical thinking. Japanese learners are depicted as group-oriented, harmony-seeking, hierarchical, and non-critical thinkers (Atkinson, 1997; Fox, 1994). Taiwanese students in high school classrooms are depicted as holding the belief that “being quiet is good” because students are supposed to be quiet in the classroom (Harklau,

1994). This happens as well in the Indonesian classroom.

Several language learning theorists (Davidson, 1998; Kabilan, 2000; Tang, 2016) have highlighted students' crucial need for CRS for their success in learning, workplaces, and social life. They proposed integrating CRS development into the English language curriculum. Kabilan (2000) accentuated that the ability to know the meaning and use of English is not enough. Proficient ESL/EFL learners should display CRS through the language. Moreover, CRS tends to expand students' learning experience and drives language learning more significant and meaningful. This study reviews current ideas and studies on the nature of CRS and the promotion of CRS in EFL classrooms through the use of English fiction. To get ideas about how to implement using fiction with gender sensitivity to promote CRS, this research ends with the practical description of a step-by-step instructional model.

3. How can English Fiction be implemented to improve CRS and gender sensitivity, motivation, and autonomous learning?

FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM

This study investigates the implementation of English Fiction to improve the students' CRS and gender sensitivity. To this end, the study formulates the following questions:

1. Can CRS and gender sensitivity be improved by using English Fiction?
2. Can motivation of the CRS and gender sensitivity be improved by English Fiction?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives

The taxonomy of educational objectives created by (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, and Krathwohl, 1956) has been used to explore concepts related to higher-order thinking and the relationship between language and cognition in today's classrooms (P. Himmele and W. Himmele, 2009). Potentially, the taxonomy is applicable in all contexts of teaching and learning, including non-verbal and verbal areas. In other words, Bloom's Taxonomy assists feelings and movements, and what is seen can be remembered, comprehended, applied, analyzed, synthesized, and evaluated just as much as ideas expressed in language. Both covert and overt "behaviors" can be classified using Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956). Therefore, this study used Bloom's taxonomy to describe the ability to think simply for high school EFL students (Clark, 2004). Blooms et al. (1956) elaborate on three domains of educational objectives: i) Cognitive: mental skills (Knowledge), ii) Affective: growth in feelings or emotional areas (Attitude), and iii) psychomotor: manual or physical skills (Skills).

Critical Reading Strategies

According to Axelrod and Cooper (2002), Annotate, Preview, Contextualize, Outline, Analyze Opposition, Summarize, Paraphrase, Synthesize, Question, and Reflect are the most important applicable strategies for reading critically. Along with the same view, Hall

(2004) adds, "being an effective reader means being able to evaluate your own practices, working to develop your critical reading skills and gender sensitivity." Thus, critical reading strategies are best taught by using "real" assignments. Programs to improve these skills should involve changes in the structure, not necessarily the content, of assignments (Barton-Arwood et al., 2005). They can be taught in one-to-one sessions with consultants, in classroom settings by teachers, or at home by parents, siblings, or friends (Harvey and Chickie-Wolfe, 2007).

In the literature, the most common type of critical reading strategies requires posing and answering questions about the text. According to Axelrod, Cooper, and Warriner (1999), Peirce (2006), and Linkon (2008), the basic critical reading strategies include annotating, which means circling keywords and writing comments or questions about the material in the margins, and contextualizing, which requires putting a text within its original historical or cultural context. Tovani (2000) discusses that critical readers need to analyze and then interrogate a text. However, before analyzing, it is necessary to understand the text. For this reason, the reader should develop a personal reading strategy for better comprehension and remembering the information.

Based on all these facts, the following critical reading strategies are suggested by Tovani (2000) to help the reading process: setting a purpose for reading (before reading a text), previewing the text before reading, paying attention to print features and text structures, marking the text while reading, making

connections between the text and reader personal experience and knowledge, monitoring comprehension of the text, summarizing the key points when finished reading. Applying the mentioned strategies empowers students' critical reading skills and gender sensitivity, including their judgment and evaluation. It also leads them to reach a real understanding of texts and to think about them. Peirce (2006) states that reading is clearly a thinking process. Hence, using good strategies allows a better understanding than obtaining the core elements of a text. In addition, using sound questioning strategies and asking the right kind of questions are important.

The Nature of Critical Reading Skills (CRS)

CRS involves a complex mental process, employing a diverse and multidimensional cognitive ability employed to clarify and evaluate the activities and actions (Kong, 2007). Due to the complexity, although considerable attempts to define the skills have been made, a single definition accepted by all has not been formulated. Up to now, different pundits have defined the skills differently (Evers, 2007; Lun et al., 2010) because it is "difficult to define satisfactorily and hard to measure" (Black, 2007, p.4). However, the majority of ideas attempting to clarify CRS offers interpretations that are not very different from another (Pardede, 2015). Halpern (1993) pointed out that the existing definitions share overlapping similarities. The various available definitions all characterize CRS as a mental process, strategies,

or representations with slightly different emphases. Some of them regard CRS as a process of evaluating, some view them as a process of thinking, and others regard them as a means to an end. Halpern (2010), for instance, defined CT as the use of cognitive strategies to improve the expected ideas. Thus, CRS cover the skills employed in conclusion drawing, decision making, problem-solving, and the like. According to Ennis (1993), CRS are the reasonable reflective thinking focusing on deciding what to believe or do, which comprises thirteen CRS dispositions and a set of CRS abilities (skills).

The consensus definition of CRS derived by Facione (1990) from a panel of 46 CRS experts is probably the most comprehensive, for it covers the cognitive and dispositional dimensions of CRS. The definition views CRS as "purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based" (Facione, 1990: 2). The definition adds personal traits of an ideal critical thinker to the construction of CRS, i.e., open-mindedness, inquisitiveness, fair-mindedness, flexibility, trust in reason, honesty in facing personal bias, prudence in making a judgment, and clarity about issues. This definition is supported by Jones et al. (1995), who described CRS as interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, presenting, arguments, reflection, and dispositions. Besides, Paul and Elder (2007) described that a critical

thinker is capable of formulating relevant questions, accumulating appropriate information, and evaluating it for drawing sound conclusions. At the same time, a critical thinker is also willing to accept different systems of thought and share them with others to find a common solution. Paul and Elder (2007) accentuated that Critical Reading Skills (CRS) is a “four-self-incorporating concept” as it is “self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored and self-correcting thinking.” (p. 4). One of the major breakthroughs resulted from the interest in developing CRS as an integral part of education is the increasing publication on CRS taxonomies and dispositions, among which the works of Bloom (1956), Ennis (1987) and Facione (1990) are the most influential. Bloom (1956) presented the skills of CRS in a hierarchical order. Since his taxonomy differentiates the lower-order thinking skills (application, comprehension, and knowledge) from the higher-order thinking skills (evaluation, synthesis, and analysis), integrating these skills in the curriculum and evaluating them becomes fairly easy. The taxonomy of Ennis (1987) identifies a group of abilities that a critical thinker should possess as well as several dispositions that will encourage him/her to use these abilities. Facione (1990) acknowledged six CRS: analysis, interpretation, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation—and two sets of dispositions: approaches to life in general and approaches to specific issues and questions.

Developing CRS in EFL Classroom

Synthesizing the ideas above, in the context of promoting CRS in EFL classrooms, CRS can be viewed as the ability of students to passionately and responsibly apply and control their thinking skills (question, analyze, criticize, reflect, and synthesize), develop proper principles and standards to evaluate their thinking, and willingly judge, accept or reject new ideas, concepts, and viewpoints. When teachers develop CRS in EFL classrooms, students should be encouraged to apply and evaluate their thinking skills and nurture honesty, open-mindedness, inquisitiveness, flexibility, and trust in reason in themselves. Shirkhani and Fahim (2011) listed three notable reasons for the significance of promoting CRS into EFL classrooms. First, CRS enables students to take charge of their thinking. Employing this ability, they can monitor and evaluate their ways of learning more successfully. Second, CRS expands students’ learning experience and makes the language more meaningful for them. Third, CRS significantly and positively correlates with students’ achievements (Fong et al., 2017). Different studies have confirmed the role of thinking in improving students’ language skills. Rosyati and Rosna’s (2008) study involving Malaysian undergraduate students revealed that the participants’ English proficiency is positively related to their CRS ability. Malmir and Shoorcheh (2012) reported that CRS training significantly affected Indonesian EFL learners’ speaking skills. The study also showed that CRS strategies assisted the students in becoming active participants who

listened carefully to other students' lectures, judged those utterances, and decided properly what to say to respond to others during the interaction process. Kamali and Fahim (2011) reported that levels of CRS significantly impacted students' reading ability of texts containing unfamiliar vocabulary.

To facilitate CRS development in EFL classrooms, every learning activity can and must be integrated with CRS development. To illustrate, while reading a passage, the students should not only get information from it but also be encouraged to employ their critical skills to understand, question, and evaluate the text so that they can draw a relevant conclusion from it. They should also passionately discuss their understanding one to another for the sake of getting a common ground. To take another illustration, in a class focusing on listening and speaking, students should not be taught to memorize and drill certain expressions. On the other hand, to involve their CRS skills, they can be assigned to watch a speech video and analyze the speaker's pronunciation, word, and grammar and share the results in small workgroups. The students are finally asked to evaluate the speaker's main ideas and supporting details (facts or fabricated data), presentation style, and arguments presented in terms of weaknesses and strengths. Based on this evaluation, the students (individually or in a group) are asked to make a presentation. In short, in EFL learning, students should not only be encouraged to discuss and negotiate words, grammar, dialogues, and discourse meaning but also be facilitated to analyze, assess, question, synthesize, reflect,

and be skeptical of topics, data, and evidence brought into their classroom (Bedir, 2013).

The Use of Literature in English Classrooms

Literary works (poetry, drama, and fiction) have long been used in ESL and EFL classrooms. Many writers and researchers (Collie and Slater, 1991; Erkaya, 2005; Kaplan, 2000; McKay, 1987; Murdoch, 2002; Pardede, 2011; Savvidou, 2004) advocate the use of literature in ESL and EFL classrooms because literature provides authentic materials, offers meaningful input, improves linguistic knowledge, increases language awareness, enhances communicative competence, develops interpretive skills, promotes cultural understanding, facilitates CRS and creativity, and stimulates social development.

Fiction

Among the three literary genres, fiction is regarded as the most suitable to use in EFL classrooms. A poem communicates thoughts and emotions in a condensed language without spoiling meter and rhyme. To achieve these, poets exploit linguistic convention by producing deviated language (in terms of the lexical, semantic, phonological, morphological, and syntactical domain). To attain the goal of communicating an idea and feeling briefly but beautifully, poets also employ figurative languages that enable them to elicit emotion, help readers form mental images, communicate in a more meaningful, vivid, and expressive way, and draw

readers into the poem. The deviated and figurative language requires extra thinking and time to grasp the meaning so that students may get bored and discouraged. Drama is a literary genre written to be transformed into actions, dialogues, or sights (Angelianawaty, 2019). To use drama in the EFL classroom, the students must first deal with the language structures and items of the work through reading and analysis. After that, they should prepare and plan how to act the workout. Wessels (1987) affirmed: "... drama requires meticulous planning and structuring." Thus, although using drama "allows the teacher to present the target language in an active, communicative and contextualized way" (Mattevi, 2005) so that it is very potential to teach the four language skills, pronunciation and gesture, many teachers find it difficult to use due to the preparation complexity. The use of drama could also be problematic in public schools with overcrowded classes, overloaded syllabus, and limited time. Pardede (2011) asserted that to act out a play in crowded classes within limited course hours is difficult.

Fiction refers to invented stories or stories constructed based on imagination, including novels, short stories, novellas, romances, fables, and other narrative works in prose (Baldick, 2001, p.96). Unlike poetry, which is typically written in stanzas, and drama, which is written to be performed on a stage, fiction is written in prose. Derived from the Latin word "fictus," meaning "to form," or "fictiō," meaning "the act of making, fashioning, or molding," the term fiction denotes that this literary work uses prose written words to contrive something (the

subject matter) which represents human life. The subject matters of fiction may vary. However, they are all related to human experience or conduct employed to interpret life, entertain, educate, inspire, or express the spirit of its age. It could be based on realities or merely a fantasy. It can be used to explore inner feelings and thoughts, superior but forgotten paradigm, or conflicting values or ideas. It may be placed in a setting taken from the familiar daily life patterns or in an unfamiliar and inventive time or place. Although the subject matter is taken from realities, it is not the real actualities for the author has selected, altered, and rearranged everything to achieve focus and make clear his vision of life clear. Although the subject matters of fiction are all related to human life, they are all a creation of the author, so are the characters, events, settings, and other elements that construct fiction.

Those elements are not reality. A fiction may include characters or events that look like individuals or historical events in the actual world. However, they are not identical. The characters and events are the creation of the author. Encyclopedia Britannica (2019) accentuated that fiction is "created from the imagination, not presented as fact, though it may be based on a true story or situation." Among the many types of fiction, novels and short stories are the modern and living forms of narrative works (Taylor, 1999), and both are the most popular literary work since they are the most written and read. A novel is "normally a prose work of quite some length and complexity which attempts to reflect and express

something of the equality or value of human experience or conduct” Taylor (1991:46). In the same vein, Hawthorn (2001) stated that a novel is a “fiction prose narrative or tale of considerable length in which character and action are representative of the real life” (p. 5). Therefore, a novel conveys a connected sequence of events (story) involving a group of people in a particular place and time to present, elaborate, or reflect various real-life problems (as the subject matter).

Although a short story also tells a story, it typically focuses on a single event involving only a few characters. A short story is essentially short, usually 3,500-7,500 words in length. Unlike a novel, which involves some major characters, conflicts, sub-plots, complications, viewpoints, and settings so that it needs to be read over days, a short story omits a complex plot, discloses the character in action, and limits the setting. Poe (as cited in Abrams, 1970, p. 158) defined the short story as “a narrative that can be read at one sitting of from one-half hour to two hours, and that is limited to a certain unique or single effect, to which very detail is subordinate.” Siaj and Farrah (2018) listed three benefits of using novels in EFL classrooms. First, novels are motivating and enhancing learning materials. Most students enjoy reading novels, so they find novels interesting to use as learning materials. Also, since a novel deals with events related to life, it enhances students’ motivation to read it (Tsai, 2012). Second, novels are believed to enrich the cultural knowledge among students (Alkire, 2010; Lazar, 1990; Tsai, 2012). Alkire (2010) found that novels enable

students to understand other peoples’ cultures, including how the characters think, behave, and believe. Third, the use of novels, just like other literary genres, develops students’ language proficiency. Tsai (2012) found that students improve the four language skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—while reading novels. Fourth, using novels enhances students’ ability to interpret and understand the target language. Pinar and Jover’s (2012) research showed that novels facilitated students to infer meaning and explain because they have more than one level of meaning.

Despite these advantages, students may face two challenges while reading novels. First, novels may include a large number of unfamiliar words. To overcome this, teachers can provide a glossary for students or encourage them to guess words meaning from the context and infer the general idea instead of focusing on details. Second, some novels can be very long. Lazar (1990) suggested that teachers should suit the length of the novel to be read with the students’ level of proficiency. Teachers can also ask different students to summarize different chapters to manage class time more effectively.

The importance of gender

A person is identified as a man or a woman by physical attributes and many believe that gender and sex are the same. However, a person’s sex is what s/he has been born to and gender is a person’s perception of themselves defined by the society and culture he/she lives in (The Global Partnership for Education, 2017). Gender identity consists of

three different parts: body, identity, and expression. The body is gendered very much by the cultural context that the individual resides in—the body is seen through masculine or feminine attributes that define the outside world if the body is a male or female (Genderspectrum, 2017). Society sends strong messages to girls and boys about what is acceptable or expected. When these signals hinder the possibilities of an individual, gender equality does not actualize. Gender equity is the process of fairness to both men and women. Gender equality, on the other hand, is the result of equity. It means that women and men have the same possibilities to take part in society and realize their full human rights. Gender equality recognizes women and men as full partners at home, communities, and societies (UNESCO, 2003). When gender awareness replaces gender stereotyping, gender equality is possible. Only then can a person's individual needs and strengths be utilized to their full potential. Gender awareness does not happen automatically and needs to focus on girls and women, as they are still often at a greater disadvantage compared to boys and men.

Gender stereotypes

Stereotypes are assumptions or generalizations connected to a certain group of people. The group is assumed to be homogeneous, and all members are seen to possess certain attributes instead of being individuals with their characteristics. This helps us categorize the world and understand it and is often done unintentionally. Stereotypes form in

our interactions with other people in the cultural context that we live in (Cook and Cusack, 2010). For example, someone might believe “a human's destiny is to be her/his family's provider.” Thus, because of the categorization of a human, all men are seen as someone who has a family and must provide for it. At worst, stereotyping can limit a person's possibilities to fulfill one's potential, make personal plans for the future, and develop one's identity (Cook and Cusack, 2010). For instance, if a woman's role is seen as a homemaker and child bearer, her society will not approve of her plans to study and build a career instead of starting a family. Gender stereotyping refers to classifying men and women by socially and culturally constructed categories that the genders are seen to possess. Gender stereotyping can consist of assumptions of personality, roles, behavior, appearance, or sexuality. The stereotypes are not constant, as they vary according to cultural context. Gender stereotyping becomes harmful when it does not take into consideration an individual's wishes or needs (Cook and Cusack, 2010).

Gender stereotypes differ from region to region and may change over time. The history, culture, and development of a country have their impact, so do the socioeconomic backgrounds, race, religion, education, and ethnicity of individuals. The gender stereotypes a woman or man faces are not identical globally, but often they are united by status, i.e., male dominance and female subordination (Anunobi, 2002). Reacting against gender stereotypes in a culture where they are strongly

embedded requires courage. For education, this means reforming and being open-minded to break gender norms. It also means a change in society's thinking because if girls are seen to be better off at home than school, then a school reform is useless.

Gender-sensitive education

Governments worldwide are seeing the benefits of educating girls for greater economic development, and thus the focus on gender is growing (Paddison, 2017). Awareness of gender-sensitive education is highlighted in laws and policies. Gender-sensitive education can be included in teaching in all forms of education, from kindergarten to university. Paddison has looked at youth work and gender sensitivity. He defines gender sensitivity as understanding society's expectations for men and women and how these presumptions guide us to make decisions in our own lives. Gender is seen as more than the biological sex of an individual. It means acknowledging the differences of men and women, being aware of gender identity formation, and being able to recognize inequality. Expectations and stereotypes are noted, examined, and transformed. Adolescents are encouraged to be themselves and work together equally. Gender-sensitive education is perhaps often, especially in high income countries, taken for granted. Even though societies in high-income countries are considered pioneers in gender rights, the questions around gender have diversified, and educators need to recognize this. The concern is not only the equality between men and

women but also gender stereotypes, masculinity, femininity, and binary gender. For a teacher working in high-income or low- and middle-income countries, the starting points in curriculum or the classroom will be different as resources and cultures differ. However, in both, the teacher must explore his/her own views on gender and be open to diversity. In low- and middle-income countries, the focus could start with how to keep girls in school despite possible drawbacks like child marriage, menstruation, labor issues, or gender-based violence (Paddison, 2017). It could be concluded that gender sensitivity has to be considered on a governmental level, in education from kindergarten to university and in grassroots curriculums and classrooms. The teacher ensures that both girls and boys have equal means of participation. It is the educator's responsibility to support the students as individuals and break gender norms.

Gender Sensitivity in Classrooms

Gender inequality refers to unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender. It arises from differences in socially constructed gender roles. Gender systems are often dichotomous and hierarchical, and gender binary systems may reflect the inequalities that manifest in numerous dimensions of daily life. Discrimination based on gender is a common civil rights violation that takes many forms, including sexual harassment, pregnancy discrimination, unequal pay for women who do the same jobs as men, and discrimination in

employment and education. To overcome gender inequality, we need to have a gender-sensitive society. Gender awareness is more analytical and critical since it clarifies issues about gender disparities and gender issues. It pertains to one's effort to show how gender shapes the role of women and men in society, including their role in the development and how it affects relations between them. Our education system needs to be gender-sensitive and gender-friendly. One of the best possible strategies to minimize gender discrimination in society is to promote gender awareness at all levels of society.

Schools can play an important role in inculcating gender sensitivity in the etiquettes and manners of students. It is necessary to create a gender-responsive school in which the academic, social and physical environment and its surrounding community take into account the specific needs of girls and boys. A detailed action plan with a definite road map is required in the school curriculum to achieve gender equality. Teachers play a critical role in the early upbringing of a child. Their idea and beliefs can change the thought processes of young children. Children in the formative years easily nurture values and virtues taught to them. Gender sensitivity training should be mandatory for teachers. The training will enable them to disseminate the desirable attitude based on mutual respect and trust between girls and boys. We all know that the teachers sometimes "inadvertently" make disparaging remarks about capabilities or characteristics of either gender, so

we need to cope with knowledge, attitude, skills, and methodologies that promote gender equality. With growing concern over the lack of gender sensitization among youth, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has developed "a kit on gender sensitivity" for teachers to enable them to ensure unbiased participation of both boys and girls in the learning process.

Classrooms need to be gender-sensitive. We have to take care of a few do's and don'ts for making classroom interaction gender-sensitive, such as:

1. encourage both males and females to be class leaders (perhaps one of each sex),
2. appoint two monitors in each classroom, a boy and a girl;
3. address and call on girls and boys equally,
4. do not segregate boys and girls in the classroom in primary classes,
5. make mixed groups for group activities and games,
6. try to 'switch roles' for breaking down gender barriers and stereotyping of gender roles,
7. make both boys and girls share activities like cleaning, moving furniture, to the chalkboard during a lesson;
8. plan and conduct activities that give an opportunity to all children accepting one another as equals.

Academic contents with lessons on gender sensitivity and moral traditions will unconsciously mould the character of the tender mind. It

is time to transform all text reading materials and books that should be free of notion of gender equality as bias is embedded in textbooks and lessons. In this connection, our government has started taking initiatives regarding gender concerns that have been included in the curriculum and the textbooks.

The role of an educator

Even though many of the issues girls and women face when it comes to education can be resolved through funding or policy making at a government or regional level, it is worth noting that, in fact, the foundation of information is laid in society through education. Teachers can act as role models, challenge gender norms, and start open discussions diminishing the stigma around growing up and sexuality. They can provide equal opportunities for their students by taking less gender-stereotypical approaches into their teaching. This can be done by paying special attention to gender-responsive pedagogy and developing gender-responsive schools. It has been found that female teachers make going to school easier for girls. School seems more inviting and safer, and thus, the probability of staying in school is higher. In addition, studies show that the number of female teachers in primary education collates with how many girls continue to secondary education (UNESCO eAtlas of Teachers, n.d.). It is important for teachers to investigate their attitudes towards gender as they spend a measurable amount of time with their students during the years the children are growing up and

forming their identities and views of the world. Even though the school system might not acknowledge it, gender stereotypes are very rooted in everyday school interactions. Teachers regard boys and girls differently, such as giving boys better grades more leniently than girls, encouraging boys towards physical activities instead of handicrafts, enduring boys' noise in the classroom better than girls, praising boys for their opinions and girls for their studiousness or neatness or, asking boys instead of girls for help when needing physical assistance. Teachers need to look at new ways of teaching instead of relying on traditional lecturing or repetition teaching styles. As teaching focuses more on the students and their working together and encourages reflection, students are more inclined to critical thinking. Teaching becomes more interactive, and gender roles can be challenged. It is easy not to be aware of the everyday occurrences that strengthen or weaken a student's identity and define how they should act or be. It is important to acknowledge this when it comes to gender equality in schools and students' feeling secure about who they want to be. Igbo (2015) discovered that gender stereotypes influence learning as they can cause cognitive or emotional barriers. Therefore, educators should be careful of gender stereotyping to provide all students with the same rights and privileges. Igbo (2015) found that gender stereotypes have a profound effect on academic learning which strengthens the need for gender-sensitive teachers globally. In turn, Jegede's (1994) research detected that when girls and boys were equally motivated to

study English, they achieved equal success – indicating that gender was not the reason for possible poor achievement for English language studies in Indonesian schools as was first thought. Nevertheless, a teacher should not ignore or neutralize gender as the world outside school has very gender-stereotyped expectations for girls and boys, which are relayed to students in everyday relations. An educator must thus recognize gender differences and support students in forming their own gender identities while learning and growing up. To promote gender equality, a teacher needs further training and tools, and this action research is an attempt to do that.

Stringer's Model of Action Research (1999-2010)

The approach to action research was presented by Stringer (1999, 2004, 2007) and Stringer, Christensen, and Baldwin (2010), which was derived from interpretive research processes suggested by Denzin (1997). In Stringer's (2007) view, action research, therefore, seeks to give voice to people who have previously been silent research subjects. Like other forms of interpretive research, he points out that action research seeks to reveal and represent people's experiences, providing accounts that enable others to interpret issues and events in their daily lives (Stringer, 2007). Stringer's model of action research is a collaborative approach to inquiry or investigation that provides people with the means to take systematic action to resolve specific problems. Stringer (2007) argues that action research is not a panacea for all ills

and does not resolve all problems but provides a means for people to "get a handle" on their situations and formulate effective solutions to problems they face in their public and professional lives. Stringer provides a basic action research routine that provides a simple, powerful framework—Look, Think, Act—that enables people to commence their inquiries straightforwardly and build detail into procedures as the complexity of issues increases. Stringer's model is cyclical in nature since research participants continuously cycle through processes of investigation as they work towards effective solutions to their research problem.

Stringer (2007) argues that as participants work through each of the major stages, they will explore the details of their activities through a constant process of observation, reflection, and action. At the completion of each set of activities, they will review (look again), reflect (reanalyze), and re-act (modify their actions).

METHOD OF RESEARCH

The study adopts Action Research which aims at "making a situation such as a classroom or whole school system better by responding to the continuous need for development or change" (Bradbury, Lewis, and Embury 2019, p.7). In particular, it employs Classroom Action Research (CAR), in which the research focuses on what happens in the classroom. According to Allwright and Bailey (in Khasinah, 2013, p.108), CAR is considered "not only a tool to solve pedagogic problems identified at the onset of research but a means to help

develop alternative ways of thinking and improve practices” (Dikilitaş and Griffiths, 2017, p.3). Furthermore, Costello (2011, p. 7) describes action research as “cyclic, with action and critical reflection taking place in turn. The reflection is used to review the previous action and plan the next one’. Lewin (in Costello, 2011) divides action research into four cyclical stages: plan, act, observe, and reflect.

The data in this study are the information regarding the implementation of the English Fiction Application to improve students’ CRS and gender sensitivity skill. The source of data in this study consists of informants, document, and the event. The informants refer to the lecturer and the students. The document in the study will refer to the lecturer’s observation and reflection notes, students’ journals, completed questionnaires, and interview transcripts. The event in this study refers to the teaching and learning process while the English Fiction Application is being implemented.

The current study is intended to investigate whether CRS and gender sensitivity of the third-semester students of English education, academic year 2021/2022, is improved when using the English Fiction Application. To collect the data regarding the CRS improvement, the study will employ a CRS test in which the students will be requested to read set of Fiction texts consisting of targeted CRS. To gather data regarding students’ motivation, the study will adopt observation using an observation checklist and questionnaire.

This study employs triangulation to validate the data. Patton (in Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, and Neville 2014) describes triangulation as the use of several methods or sources of data to understand a phenomenon. Furthermore, Denzin and Patton list four types of triangulation: (a) method triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) data source triangulation (in Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, and Neville 2014). This study adopted the method and source data triangulation. The method triangulation used in this study refers to multiple techniques of collecting data: interview, questionnaire, observation, test, and document analysis. The source data triangulation refers to the informants, document, and event.

The data in this study consist of quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data was collected from the pre and post-CRS tests. The data would then be analyzed by comparing the percentage of achievement scores between pre and post-test. The qualitative data derived from interviews, journals, and observation were analysed using a constant comparative method.

ANALYSIS

Utilizing Stringer’s Action Research Model

In recent years, action research has become increasingly popular in second and foreign language teaching classrooms (Nunan, 1993; Wallace, 2000; Haley, 2005; Burns, 2009; Latief, 2010; Stringer, 2007; Stringer et al., 2010). Over the last

two decades, language teachers have been committed to their professional development and attracted to the idea of doing action research in their classrooms. In the present action research study, the teacher-researcher employed Stringer's model of action research as a map for a systematic process of teaching and inquiry.

1 Lesson Planning and Preparation (Phase 1)

This phase lasted for four weeks where each week included two sessions. In Phase 1—lesson-planning and preparation, the teacher-researcher followed the usual syllabus of teaching reading in Indonesian EFL reading classrooms. During the teaching process, the data collection procedure was done based on the current research design. Throughout Phase 1 (Look), to identify the critical reading strategies employed by Indonesian EFL students, the principal researcher identified the most common reading strategies that the Indonesian students used naturally before, during, and after reading. By selecting, sorting, and organizing information (Think) through this phase, the researcher formulated a lesson plan (Act). The final product of Phase 1, the lesson plan, embraced the cognitive domain of Bloom's taxonomy and was supported with critical-thinking strategies to foster students' learning and growth. In addition, through the triangulation of the observation checklist, semi-structured interview, and teacher's journals, the researcher assessed the students' knowledge and understanding of reading and

students' usage of critical reading strategies.

2 Instruction (Phase 2)

This phase lasted for ten weeks, and each week included two sessions. Throughout the phase of Instruction, the researcher conducted the study based on the lesson plan that was prepared in Phase 1. Stringers et al. (2010) emphasize that "as the students engage in learning, the teachers need to keep track of the multiple activities in which the class is engaged and the progress of each student." Therefore, the action research is continued in Phase 2, Instruction, by applying the proposed selected critical reading strategies through the prepared worksheets in the Indonesian EFL reading classroom. The researcher began each lesson by giving students a short illustration and explanation of the proposed critical reading strategy. Primarily, the students would actually practice the strategy

as their homework. In the next session, the researcher checked the homework and took notes of the principal points. Then, the researcher asked the students about the strategy they used to work out “what it means and what they did.” The class brainstorming allowed the students to share the strategy that they previously practiced as homework. Indeed, each of the ten worksheets focused on particular critical reading strategies: Annotating, Previewing, Scanning and Skimming, Distinguishing Facts vs. Opinions, Drawing Conclusions, Monitoring One’s Own Comprehension, Summarizing, Paraphrasing, and Questioning. Each worksheet was adapted to teach particular critical reading strategies systematically. The used worksheets and accompanying strategies helped the students meet the standards set by the Ministry of Education and grow in the key areas of CRS. At the beginning of the Instruction phase, the researcher held a pre-test to focus more on class procedures and

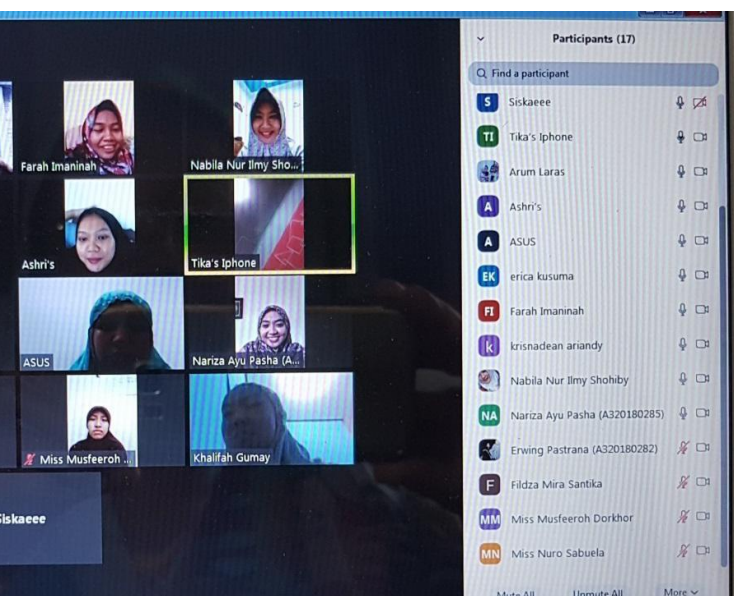
students’ performance useful in addressing practical problems in the classroom. The researcher also used the interview to assist students in extending their understanding.

3 Look: Observing Students Activities, Performances, and Behaviors

This part lasted for three weeks. As the students were engaged in learning activities, the researcher tried to monitor and record each student’s progress through observation checklists. Based on Stringer’s model of action research, the researcher carefully observed the students’ participation, performance, and behavior during the teaching processes (Look). The researcher used the observation checklists as the key tools to see “what is happening and what the students are doing.”

4 Think: Assessing Students’ Performance and Behavior

This part lasted for four weeks. In the continuity of Stringer’s model, the researcher concentrated on the nature of problems students were experiencing (Think). Based on Stringer’s model, the researcher first tried to identify problems, issues, gaps, or inadequacies in student work, proved reasons for these problems—for example, lack of understanding, carelessness—and identified key issues needing an instructional process (Analyze). Then the researcher evaluated the quality of each student’s work and assessed whether students understood the content of the work and whether students were clear about the activities they needed to engage in (Assess). Throughout this cycle



(Think), the researcher also tried to monitor the students, watched all the students work, really kept an eye on them, and observed what they were doing through the observation checklist.

5 Act: Affirming and Remediating

This part lasts for three weeks. The Instruction phase continued in the third cycle, called “Affirming and Remediating.” During the first week, the researcher provided positive feedback to encourage and assist students in improving or extending their performances (Act). The researcher also tried to understand the nature of the problems the students experienced. Hence, the researcher let the students know “what they are doing right” and asked students “what they think of their work.” In some circumstances, the students did not clearly understand the nature or steps in the activity they were engaged in. Hence the researcher reviewed and repeated the instructions to clarify and show students what to do. Throughout this cycle, the researcher encouraged them to work in pairs and share their work with the class.

6 Assessment and Evaluation (Phase 3)

Phase 3 lasted four weeks. It included reviewing lesson outcomes, reviewing student performance (Look), identifying successes and strengths, identifying weaknesses and gaps (Think), planning remedial actions, and planning ways of improving instructions and learning. The researcher looked at students’ demonstration/performance (Look), thought about the quality of the students’ work (Think), and tried to provide feedback or demonstrate correct performance (Act). Indeed, the researcher attempted to evaluate the students’ performance and then provided feedback that indicated how to correct or improve the performance. The use of the Look-Think-Act cycle throughout the phase of “Assessment and Evaluation” provided the researcher with a systematic process to evaluate their teaching success concerning overall student learning. The researcher provided opportunities for students to practice and review the critical reading strategies with their peers and independently. Hence, the researcher helped students to evaluate the critical reading strategies in a cooperative group setting in terms of their learning and understanding of the strategy.

Choose your words with care

Gender-biased terms	Gender-neutral terms
• Mankind	• Humanity
• Steward/Stewardess	• Flight attendant/Cabin crew
• Man hours	• Human hours
• Miss or Mrs	• Ms
• Forefathers	• Ancestors
• Salesman/Saleswoman	• Salesperson

Developing CRS and Gender Sensitivity through Fictions

Two underlying reasons support the use of novels to promote CRS and gender sensitivity skills. First, like other literary works, a novel is allegorical. It has a literal meaning and implied meaning which is beyond the surface. To get the appropriate meaning, the reader should reflect, infer, analyze, and synthesize the presented information. By doing it, the reader has practiced CRS and gender sensitivity skills. Tung and Chang (2009: 291) accentuated that literature reading is a complex process requiring the readers to recall, retrieve, and reflect on their prior experiences or memories to construct meanings of the text. To do so, they should exhibit various capacities, including

1. distinguishing facts from opinions,
2. comprehending the literal or implied meanings and the narrator's tone,

3. identifying details related to the issues discussed,
4. searching for the causal relationship or the connections between the events or actions
5. inferencing the relationship of the details perceived,
6. considering the multiple points of view,
7. making ethical reasoning and fair-grounded judgments, and above all,
8. applying what they have learned from this process to other fields or real life.

Secondly, as previously described, novels are closely related to life; they are even about life. Although the subject matter is about life, a novel presents it uniquely. The characters may look like people in reality. The actions can take place as if they belong to daily life. However, they are different from the people and the actions in actual life. These

features let novels be perceived as a “simulation of society,” which allows the students to explore from other perspectives to improve their understanding of others (Oatley, 2016). As novels are close to life, reading them also facilitates students to promote the ability to make a decision, which is one of the major features of CRS. By studying novels containing matters directly related to daily life, the students can get schemata about particular matters, store them in their minds, and use them later as a reference in taking up action. Riecken and Miller (1990) supported these ideas by stating that students will evaluate evidence, draw conclusions, make inferences, and develop a line of thinking if they approach fiction through a problem-solving perspective. Lazere (1987) accentuated that “literature...is the single academic discipline that can come closest to encompassing the full range of mental traits currently considered to comprise Critical Reading Skills (CRS)” (p. 3).

Selecting Fictions to Use

One of the crucial factors to consider in using fictions to promote CRS is selecting the work. McKay (1982) highlighted that selecting suitable literature is “the key to success in using literature in the ESL classroom.” The most important criteria of selecting the literary works to use include student’s language proficiency, personal involvement, length (it suits the time available), cultural competence, intellectual merit (issues and ideas explored in works should be relevant, interesting, and challenging to students), literary merit (the work is really worthy of academic study),

and contemporary (it uses modern English). To meet the length and complexity criteria, we were fortunate because fictions include novels and short stories. Since novels are generally longer and more complex, they could be employed in advanced and upper intermediate classes. Short stories, due to their relative simplicity and shortness, are appropriate in primary and intermediate levels.

Instructional Models for Promoting CRS in EFL Classrooms

By combining the conceptual frameworks of how people think critically and creatively and teaching experiences, various researchers (Bobkina and Stefanova, 2016; Savvidou, 2004; Sousa, 2004; WSSU, 2013) have developed their teaching models for developing CRS in English classrooms. Bobkina and Stefanova (2016) built a model by covering the New London Group’s four curricular components for addressing the full range of literacies (p. 68). The model consists of four stages: (1) situated practice, (2) overt Instruction, (3) critical framing, and (4) transformed practice. This model is essentially generic. So, it could be easily adapted to suit any classroom environment and meet the students’ needs. It should be underlined that the objective of including CRS in the teaching-learning process is not to teach about CRS but to let students employ their thinking skills in the learning process. In short, the aim is to facilitate students to infuse their CRS while studying. To see how the model works, in the following section, it is described in the scenario of studying *Animal Farm*, a novel by Orwell (1944).

CONCLUSION

There is a great deal of evidence for the importance of critical reading strategies and gender sensitivity. One source of evidence is that successful readers know when and how to use deliberate strategies to repair comprehension. One implication from the current research findings is that teaching critical reading strategies to struggling readers may be a key toward helping them to improve CRS, gender sensitivity, and higher-order thinking abilities. The suggested procedure in this study attempts to increase utilizing critical reading strategies directly as a medium for improving the deep understanding to find the concepts behind the lines. Comprehension will also be facilitated by instructional attention to teaching reading based on the cognitive domain of Bloom's taxonomy. Critical reading in the current study was supposed to be a more systematic reading activity than other reading models. Hence, the students were encouraged to employ critical reading strategies systematically thorough their reading process to engage gender sensitivity. The Instruction of the critical reading strategies based on cognitive domain of Bloom's taxonomy was also explicit and direct, so students were able to ask many organized and higher-order questions. Throughout the study, students were also encouraged to believe that their reading difficulties were due to a lack of strategies and gender sensitivity rather than a lack of their ability and skills.

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ABOUT

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SJ is inspired by the need to put into visibility the Indonesian and South East Asian women to ensure a dissemination of knowledge to a wider general audience.

SJ selects at least several outstanding articles by scholars in the early stages of a career in academic research for each issue, thereby providing support for new voices and emerging scholarship.

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There are other journals which address those topics, but SJ approaches the broad areas of gender, sexuality and feminism in an integrated fashion. It further addresses the issue of international collaboration and inclusion as existing gaps in the area of academic publishing by (a) crossing language boundaries and creating a space for publishing and (b) providing an opportunity for innovative emerging scholars to engage in the academic dialogue with established researchers.

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