

Students' Evolving Response to Text:

What changes in students' reading as part of critical literacy

Endang Setyaningsih*

English Education Department
Sebelas Maret University
Surakarta, Indonesia

*endang_setyaningsih@staff.uns.ac.id

Bachrudin Musthafa, Nenden Sri Lengkanawati

English Education Department
Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia
Bandung, Indonesia

Abstract—The purpose of this paper is to explore how students' interaction with texts evolved upon an introduction to Critical Literacy (CL). Two questions posed were (1) how the students respond to texts within CL framework and (2) how they shifted their reading conception. This exploratory case study involved 35 first-year students majoring EFL teacher education. The data were collected by means of participatory observation, questionnaire, and analysis of students' works (artifacts). The data were analyzed to find the general pattern of students' responses to CL and to compare students' definition of reading before and after the CL introduction. The results of the analysis indicated that the students responded well on CL. The students, at varying degree, showcased changes in terms of the reader roles when responding to a text. Students with a relatively strong basis of reading practice and proficiency were able to well expand their engagement to text user and analyst roles. Meanwhile, students with weaker baseline were struggling in the code-breaking and text participant roles. The critical stance built by these students tended to be off target. Nevertheless, all students' definitions of what they called as reading were shifted regardless of their baseline. Their interaction to text has shifted from passive recipient of information to active, questioning reader.

Keywords—code breaker; critical literacy; reading; text analyst; text user; text participant

I. INTRODUCTION

Critical Literacy (CL henceforth) has been receiving growing concern and acceptance as well as endorsement in the field of education, including in the EFL setting. Since the publication of TESOL Quarterly in 1999 which highlight CL in its special issue, studies of CL continues to grow. In the context of EFL, however, CL is still a less explored area. While, studies by Ko, Kuo and Gustine have shed some lights on CL in the perspectives of teacher and students particularly in Taiwan and Indonesia, they do not particularly highlight the changing role of readers and how it affects the changing response to text [1,2]. This study aims at exploring the enactment of CL teaching using Luke and Freebody's four resources framework. It focuses on the students' responses to text as code breaker, text participant, text user, and text analyst.

II. THEORETICAL REVIEW

A. Critical Literacy

Critical literacy (CL) is viewed as an important skill of the 21st century, particularly when the spread of texts meets no borders. CL transcends the traditional definition of literacy as skills to read and write. Shor defined that critical literacy is "language use that questions the social construction of the self [3]. When we are critically literate, we examine our ongoing development, to reveal the subjective positions from which we make sense of the world and act in it". McDaniel wrote that critical literacy "incorporate critical thinking, questioning, and transformation of self or one's world." [4].

In the narrow context of reading as part of larger CL, texts are viewed as something crafted thus subject to questioning. This view has brought changes in the teaching of reading. Previously, the teaching of reading was more on 'functionality' i.e. as a means to study the language. By then, texts were viewed as self-sufficient and readers' task was to decode their messages. The comprehension was basically achieved when the readers were able to 'echo' content of the texts. Today, a growing number of practitioners begin to see the teaching of reading as a means to equip students with the ability to question texts. Texts are viewed in its social, economic, cultural, and political contexts. Readers' task does not stop at decoding the texts but it goes further to make evaluation and act based on well-founded reasoning. Under the view of CL, Reading is no longer taught as a detached course from other skills: Listening, Speaking, and Writing.

B. Reader Roles

The changing view on reading influence the way reader roles are perceived. Luke and Freebody mentioned the four roles of reader in the framework of critical literacy [5,6]. The four roles of reader gained wide acceptance as it accounts the development and changing trend in the teaching of reading instead of contradicting them or offering a totally new concept. Synthesized from the early work of Luke and Freebody and MyRead.org which provides support for the implementation of the CL framework, table 1 presents the description of the roles [5,6].

TABLE I. READER ROLES

Role	Description
Code breaker (CB)	Understanding the symbolic graphic conventions which make up the code. Decoding the codes and conventions of written and spoken texts. Drives meaning from text by making sense of written words including specific terms. Observable e.g. as students reading the graphic symbol of written text; attends to the function and use of various categories of words, e.g. parts of speech, synonyms, prefixes; using a range of strategies to support identification of words, e.g. sounds in words, letter patterns, and word meaning; using headings/pictures to predict storyline/ content/ word.
Text participant (TP)	Understanding literal and figurative meanings within the text. Comprehending written, spoken and visual texts. Derive and infer meanings and analyzing reading with respect to prior knowledge, research, and experience or by making connection: text to self, text to text, text to world. Indicate full comprehension of the text and probe related points presented in the texts. Observable e.g. as students constructing meaning through the before reading stage; monitoring predictions; linking text ideas to real life issues; drawing on background and prior knowledge to construct meaning; mentioning/ writing the lateral and inferential meaning of the language used in the text; using pictures to predict the text; responding to texts on a personal level i.e. raising follow up questions or probing.
Text user (TU)	Using the text in social situations to achieve social purposes and participating in events in which the text plays a part. Understanding the purposes of different written, spoken and visual texts for different cultural and social functions. Includes redesigning / reconstructing text by making use the understanding of the text in achieving its purpose. Or able to contextualize the connection made with the text (e.g. participating in genre/ responding to the text). Observable e.g. as students exploring the features of different text types to determine how an author's purpose shapes the way the text is formed; using an understanding of author purpose to determine the main facts and to organize information from the text; drawing on a range of sources to synthesize information and express points of view to respond to text (e.g. construct/ design response text or generate new questions); writing a meaningful summary or constructing text.
Text analyst (TA)	Looking for implicit meanings, opinions, and bias, and either endorsing or rejecting the point of view put forward by the text. Understanding how texts position readers. Considering written words from various perspectives, track accuracy and reliability, uncover meaning, intentions, agendas, assumption, and priorities, choose important ideas/ thoughts, recognize bias, take a standing toward the text, and provide another ways of doing/writing. Observable e.g. as students developing a critical response; presenting reasons to endorse position taken by the text or develops own position ; exploring how the writer influences reader perceptions examining the trustworthiness of the information; identifying the attitude, point of view, and/ or position of the writer toward the topic.

(Adapted from Setyaningsih [7])

Luke and Freebody posited that the four roles/ resources are neither developmental nor taxonomic [5]. Underwood et al. explained that the roles/resources play a starring role on a different occasion and they asserted that competent reader is

one who recognizes that on different occasion, different roles or resources occupy the center stage while others play supporting roles from the wings [8]. Underwood et al. exemplified that while code breaker role is involved in any encounter with text, it occupies center stage when the cipher is obscure or knowledge is weak [8]. This is, nonetheless, subject to further discussion, particularly on what supporting role that the other roles play when one is struggling with phonics decoding.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study took the design of an exploratory case study. Case study is selected for this design allows in-depth exploration of a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals which fits the aim of this present investigation [9].

A. Setting and Participants

The introduction to CL was offered to 35 students taking a compulsory Reading course in a state university in Indonesia. The students consist of 8 males and 27 females but this study is not in particular gender specific. The students admitted that they had never had CL teaching prior to the study. Their previous Reading class experience was mainly fell into conventional intensive reading type. The study was conducted in a regular class for one semester. There were 15 sessions with each session lasted for approximately 100 minutes. In each session, students were presented with teacher selected materials and a worksheet for the students to fill in. The worksheet was designed to guide students to follow the steps of SQ3R reading strategy and to encourage students to create their own critical questions, monitor their comprehension, and writing a short review. A critical approach to text was modeled by the teacher by posing critical questions and had a discussion on them as a whole-class activity.

B. Data Collection

Data were collected by means of observation, questionnaire, and artifact. The observation was carried out as participatory. In every session, students' activities, in particular, their responses toward the presented text were recorded in a field note. Meanwhile, two similar questionnaires were distributed at the beginning and end of the semester. The major aim of the questionnaire was to allow students to compare their reading definition and practices before and after CL instruction. Artifacts in this study refer to students' works which cover both individual and group works. The artifacts were mainly students' review on certain texts and students' group worksheets. The students' worksheet recorded students' constructed questions and their responses to predetermined questions. The students' review and worksheets were analyzed based on a pre-developed rubric and guidepost checklist to examine students' evolving roles in reading.

C. Data Analysis

Data analysis for the first research question (how the students responded to text) began with data immersion to build initial open coding. To ease the coding and classification of

data, a pre-developed categories list was prepared as an instrument. The instrument was adapted from four resources guidepost [10]. Meanwhile, collected data for the second questions on students' concept of reading were organized by means of tabulation. The students' definitions of Reading before and after the instruction were tabulated and keywords that indicate major changes in their reading concepts were highlighted. The changes were then described and compared and triangulated with the result of artifact analysis and interview.

D. Maintaining the Integrity of the Specifications

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IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Students Evolving Reader Role

1) Code breaker and text participant: The evolving reader roles of the students was examined based on the four reader-roles framework [5]. The framework offered a balanced approach to both conventional and critical literacy.

At the early stages of the study, students' responses to texts were mainly indicating code breaker and text participant roles. Observation and artifact analysis identified the following eight features/ activities which characterized the engagement in the two roles.

- Read graphic symbols of written words
- Use heading/ pictures to predict storyline/ content
- Construct meaning through before reading stage
- Differentiate sample and non-sample
- Provide relation to other texts
- Monitor prediction
- Link text to real life issues and background knowledge
- Understand the lateral and inferential meaning of language, and general and specific ideas of the text

Close examination on students' artifacts revealed that depending on how strong their baseline is, the eight features were addressed at various degree, in terms of consistency and depth. Stronger students relatively performed better in understanding the lateral and inferential meaning and showcased consistency in providing relation to other text and in making predictions.

In average, students' artifacts indicated that the students' role as text participant and code breaker were at the milestone which means that the students did not continually derive

accurate literal or figurative meaning of the text and made less connection to the text. In this case, the students failed to gain basic comprehension. Several students' responses either taken as is from the text (copied sentences) or reflected partial comprehension. In the students' review assignment, some students missed important points of the text thus failed to spot on the writer's intention although attempts were made. The students' denoted difficulty in understanding long and complex sentences as observed from incorrect phrasing when requested to read the text aloud. In addition, the students admitted lack of background knowledge on the topic presented and were not familiar with genre.

At least two views can be forwarded to explain the comprehension problem: the schema theory and the short-circuit theory. In the view of schema theory, text does not by itself carry meaning. Comprehension is predicted by the ability to retrieve or construct meaning from students' previously acquired knowledge. The students' responses to comprehension questions during the instruction denoted problems on both content and formal scheme. Carel and Eisterhold noted that efforts of second language readers to provide schemata to make sense of texts, "will fail if the reader cannot access the appropriate existing schemata, or if the reader does not possess the appropriate schemata necessary to understand a text." [11].

Referring to the short-circuit theory of Alderson, for the weaker students, the problem was seemingly more on the language than the reading [12]. The students admitted that there were relatively no difficult words except for a few technical terms but still they were unable to make meaning of the sentences due to its complexity and length. Even after they were guided and asked to do repeated reading, paying attention to opening and closing sentences per paragraph, and divided the reading into smaller chunks, basic and general ideas of the texts were not obtained.

In spite of the comprehension problem, students' constructed questions bared a shift from category of scaling information to probing. At the beginning of the study, students' generated questions were mainly 'testing' what they had read and the questions centered at the text but at the end of the study, the proportion of probing questions increases with the decrease of scaling ones. Viewed from question-based approach, probing questions are desired because they are the nature of questions [13].

2) Text user and text analyst: Approaching the end of the study, it was observable that the students attempted to approach text critically as text user and text analyst. Their engagement as text user and analyst was characterized by the following five features/ activities.

- Write meaningful summary or constructing text
- Use understanding of author purpose to determine the main fact and to organize information from the text\
- Determine how the author purpose shapes the way the text is formed
- Examine the trustworthiness of the information

- Identify intention/ motives, the attitude, point of view and position toward the text

Similar to the features of code breaker and text participant roles, the five features of text user and text analyst roles were addressed at various degree by the students. In the later roles, strong students by far outperformed other students.

Another significant evidence on the students evolving response was indicated in their constructed questions. In this study, the students were encouraged to construct questions prior and as they read texts. Data on students constructed questions which were collected at the beginning of the semester bared that there was no question indicating text analyst role was addressed. The questions raised were mainly indicating text participant role. This confirmed the interview and questionnaire result which revealed that the students were not familiar and had never experienced CL prior to the study. At the end of the semester, the proportion of students' questions indicated increased participation as text user and analyst.

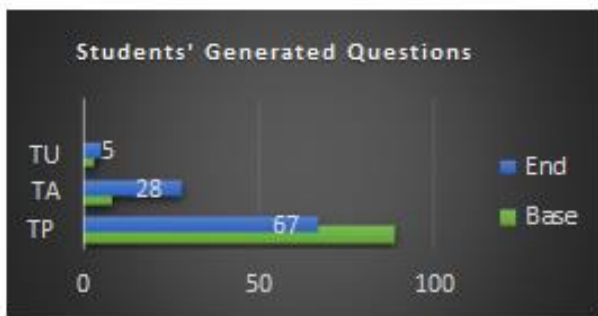


Fig. 1. Students' generated questions.

Regardless of the growing percentage in the number of questions indicating text analyst and text participant role, careful examination on students' work indicated two major issues i.e. inconsistency and inaccuracy. Students' inconsistency refers to the on and off response as text analyst and text user. Students' inaccuracy in this study refers to the critical evaluation which was made based on a false basic understanding of the text.

In addition to the language barrier, borrowing the concept of Skill Acquisition Theory, the students' CL had not reached an automated level of skill [14]. The explicit teaching of CL and exposure to CL 'prone' topics as presented in the selected materials might be sufficient to bring some sort of declarative knowledge which sparked students' awakening on CL as indicated in their attempt to evolve their role as readers. Yet, they were not ideal or at least not enough.

There is a need for systematic practice for the students to gain CL as an automated skill. As noted by Freebody, Ludwig, and Gunn, "literacy sessions to be haphazard, with sudden shifts on focus, and little or no provision for in-depth engagement with the texts" [15]. Luke and Freebody also mentioned the need for systematic teaching although it somehow contradicts their claim on the framework which they called as non-developmental [5,6]. Yet, earlier studies on CL implementation by Kuo and Park confirmed that the basic

comprehension that Kuo referred to as 'traditional skill' is required before attempting to approach text critically. Systematic and ample amount of practices are required to achieve automated and sustainable CL [2,16].

In spite of the remaining issues, the students indicated that their response to text evolved from passive recipients of information to questioning readers.

B. Changing Perspective in Reading

The changing concept of reading confirmed the students' shifting roles of readers which lead to the evolving response to texts. The students, in general, indicated a move from passive, conventional definition of reading to one that acknowledged texts as something 'crafted' thus required questioning. Four of the students' responses in the questionnaires were taken randomly and are presented in table 2.

TABLE II. STUDENTS' READING CONCEPT

Before	After
Reading is activity which need skill to understanding the information of the text (DefRead/Quest/041)	Yes, I have different now. Reading is an activity to understand a text, through various points of view such as the author's background, the content of text. (DefRead/Quest/041)
Reading is the process of looking at a series of written symbols and getting meaning from them. (DefRead/Quest/044)	After joining the course, I realize if we read an article or text we should check the trust worthiness (DefRead/Quest/044)
Reading is a activity to know the information and knowledge. (DefRead/Quest/045)	Reading is not only activity that we can find some information there, but we also know about the meaning of the writer why write this and we know the aim for the writer too. (DefRead/Quest/045)
Reading in my definition is understanding the content of the text (DefRead/Quest/076)	It's different. After joining the course my definition of reading changed to be: "finding the information of the text, understanding about the text, knowing the intention of the author, knowing the efforts of the text, an uncovering underlying messages of the text. (DefRead/Quest/076)

As students perceived reading differently, the way they read shifted as well. Before the introduction of CL, the students were mainly passive receivers of information. They did not aware of nor question the value which is encoded to text. In the post-questionnaire, the students revealed their experience as follows.

- "I think, when practiced in this course I have different with my previous reading practice. In the previous class/ practice, I only read the text. But I'm not only read, but also understand the contents, the author's background, and the purpose of the text. (ReadEx/Quest/ 041)"
- "It's highly different because I thought reading class would be reading and answering, similar like on my previous reading class which is not using my critical literacy. But after I joined this course I knew that

reading is not only read but also speak, write and listen. Because in this course I had seen many perceptions from different people who tried to cross their line of thinking to produce a new text as well. Produce here also means when we speak up our mind and debate our ideas (ReadEx/Quest/ 049)”

- “On my previous reading class/ practice, I just read a text and understanding the content of the text, then answering some questions about the text. But at this course, I have to question the text and predict the content of the text based on the questions that I 've made. I also have to know the intention of the author, finding the underlying messages of the text, and knowing the effects of the text to the people. I think in this course, I need to be more open minded and think in many point of views. (ReadEx/Quest/ 076)”

The activities in Reading that the students mentioned in their responses no longer placed reading as a discrete skill. In addition, the reading was not text-centered. The students were aware that the meaning of the text had to be placed in context for example by considering the identity of the author, what other texts say about it, and how the reader might interpret the text based on its social, economic, cultural, and political context.

V. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the students’ responses to text in Reading class evolve as they were introduced to the concept of CL. The study showed that the students’ responses shifted from ‘echoing’ the text to ‘questioning’ the text. At the beginning of the study, the students’ responses to text and their constructed questions were mainly aimed at scaling basic comprehension. They asked and answered questions which answers were available in the text either explicitly or implicitly. Texts were viewed as self-sufficient. At the end of the study, the students’ responses to text indicated attempt to move to the ‘questioning’ pole. While students’ responses were found problematic due to language issue (proficiency) the students performed some sort of declarative knowledge in CL which is potential for further

development to consistency/ automaticity with the provision of systematic CL practice.

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