"Critical Media Literacies for 21st Century Educators": Introducing Critical Literacies to Indonesian Prospective Teachers of English

Keterampilan Literasi Media Kritis Untuk Pendidik Abad Ke-21": Memperkenalkan Literasi Kritis Kepada Calon Guru Bahasa Inggris Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This community service activity was conducted in the form of a public lecture on introducing principles of critical media literacies to learners studying at the English Language Education Study Programme of Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa (UST), Yogyakarta. The public lecture was conducted at the Faculty of Teachers' Training and Education and was attended by as many as 37 learner participants from different semesters. Among the key contents of the session, the facilitator raised the participants' awareness that texts are never neutral. They are made by someone, somewhere, for some reason. They are created from a particular perspective to tell particular messages. The participants were also facilitated to realise that various media around them such as movies, TV series, news, and advertisements are also 'texts' that are not free from the influences of the authors behind them. By the end of the lecture, as seen from the question-and-answer session, it can be seen that the participants have been successfully facilitated to have a certain degree of critical media literacies. Despite the possible limitations, this community service activity could pave the way for more endeavours to facilitate prospective teachers to be critically literate, and able to facilitate their future students to be able to do so as well in the future.

Keywords: Critical media literacies, Indonesian prospective teachers of English, public lecture, texts

ABSTRAK

Kegiatan pengabdian masyarakat ini dilaksanakan dalam bentuk kuliah umum untuk memperkenalkan prinsip-prinsip literasi media kritis kepada mahasiswa yang belajar di Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa (UST), Yogyakarta. Kuliah umum tersebut dilaksanakan di Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan dan dihadiri oleh sebanyak 37 peserta didik dari semester berbeda. Salah satu konten utama sesi adalah fasilitator meningkatkan kesadaran peserta bahwa teks tidak pernah netral. Teks dibuat oleh seseorang, di suatu tempat, untuk beberapa alasan. Teks diciptakan dari sudut pandang tertentu dengan tujuan menyampaikan pesan tertentu. Peserta kegiatan juga difasilitasi untuk menyadari bahwa berbagai media di sekitar mereka seperti film, serial TV, berita, dan iklan juga merupakan 'teks' yang tidak lepas dari pengaruh para penulis di baliknya. Pada akhir sesi kuliah umum, dari sesi tanya jawab, terlihat bahwa peserta telah berhasil memiliki tingkat literasi media kritis sampai tahap tertentu. Kegiatan pengabdian masyarakat ini dapat membuka jalan dalam upaya membantu calon guru agar menjadi literat kritis, mampu membantu siswa mereka nantinya untuk mampu melakukannya juga di masa depan.

Kata kunci: Literasi media kritis, calon guru Bahasa Inggris Indonesia, kuliah umum, teks

INTRODUCTION

Teachers have a paramount role in education. They become the forefront of the field and facilitate learners to learn, translating policy into practice. Richards and Rodgers (2014) stated that teachers heavily influence what learners learn and how they learn it. For this reason, teacher education programmes play a crucial role in preparing future teachers to be ready to assume such an important role as educators.

In the era where people, including learners, can access numerous forms of media and information, it becomes critical that these learners are equipped with the necessary skills to critically evaluate all of this information. That is to minimise the possibility of consuming hoaxes, biased information, and repeated stereotypes in the media (Ford et al., 2023). That is considering the rampant hoaxes and biased news that one can easily access through various available online platforms (Manurung, 2023). For this reason, it was deemed important to introduce learners to principles of critical media literacies.

In Indonesia, attempts have been made to delve into critical literacies among Indonesian learners through quite recent empirical studies (Gustine, 2018; Hidayat et al., 2020; Subekti, 2020a; Suparno et al., 2023; Supratman & Wahyudin, 2017). For example, a mixed-method study by Gustine (2018) involving 21 experienced English teachers revealed that some teachers lacked knowledge of critical literacies as a method of instruction. A qualitative study by Hidayat et al. (2020) reported that introducing critical literacies to learners, despite the challenges, could be done step-by-step by raising thought-provoking questions and facilitating discussions. In an earlier study, it was reported that a critical literacy approach could improve learners' critical reading skills (Sultan et al., 2017). These data suggest that whilst critical literacies could benefit learners, efforts still need to be made because this area is still in its infancy in the Indonesian education context.

In response to this need, it is deemed relevant to make an effort to introduce learners who are also prospective teachers to critical media literacies. Learners who are also prospective teachers occupy a unique position in which their education mainly prepares them to be future teachers. Hence, facilitating such learners to possess critical media literacies may also empower them to facilitate their students to do so as well in the future. Of the various attempts to introduce critical media literacies, community service activities in this area are thus far very scarce, if not non-existent. Specific in the area of language education, community service activities typically focus on the development of language skills, such as speaking (Subekti et al., 2022; Subekti & Susyetina, 2020; Winardi et al., 2023) writing (Subekti, 2020b, 2021; Subekti & Kurniawati, 2023; Subekti & Susyetina, 2019), or integrated skills through projects (Ermerawati et al., 2022; Subekti et al., 2023). For this reason, it is strategic to conduct a community service activity focusing on introducing participants to critical literacies, equipping them with skills to 'read' the world around them. Such a programme is also in line with one of the core values of Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana (UKDW), the institution where I, the facilitator of the current community service

activity, work. This value is "Service to the World", mandating all parties within the institution to do service to the surroundings (Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana, 2017).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The partner institution was the English Language Education Study Programme (ELESP) of Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa (UST) Yogyakarta. The cooperation between the English Language Education Department (ELED) of UKDW and the ELESP of UST started several years prior and this community service activity was one of its implementations. The ELESP of UST was established in 1986 and has produced numerous high-quality graduates of English teachers since then (Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa, 2023). Despite that, the study programme continuously facilitates enrichment to equip its learners with the necessary skills and knowledge amid increasingly global challenges and rapid advancement of technology. For this reason, I was invited to deliver a public lecture on critical literacies.

The public lecture was conducted on Friday, 22nd of March 2024 at the Faculty and Teachers' Training and Education at Jalan Batikan, Tahunan, Umbulharjo, Yogyakarta. The event was titled "Introducing Critical Media Literacy for 21st Century Educators". It started at 13.00 local time and was concluded at 14.30. The lecture was conducted in the form of a presentation allowing impromptu questions during the presentation. A total of 37 student participants from various semesters attended the lecture. Before the event, the ELESP of UST broadcasted in their *Instagram* account a poster detailing the event to advertise it to all the ELESP students. The poster can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The Poster of the Event

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The session started with a discussion on four main skills necessary for learners in the 21st century and these are known as the 4Cs: communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity (Battelle for Kids, 2019). One of the ways to achieve these skills and to facilitate their future students is through having critical literacies as a possible lens or perspective on how they could see things around them to help acquire the skills and facilitate learners to have these skills.

The next step was to facilitate the participants to understand the world as "texts" that can be read. It was explained that the concept of "texts" within the framework of critical literacies extends beyond written materials to encompass all forms of communication found in everyday life, such as television advertisements, news broadcasts, movies, plays, speeches, cultural practices, and traditions (Janks, 2010). In this sense, critical literacies allow for the analysis and interpretation of the world itself as a text using its framework.

To allow for more relevant discussion, I used several famous Disney movies such as *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Aladin*, as examples. This can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Critical Analyses on Movies

I posited several questions related to each of the movies and the participants came up with impromptu responses. Table 1 illustrates the posited questions and the participants' responses.

Table 1. Questions and Responses

No	Questions	Participant Responses
1.	How does the "*Cinderella*" movie portray *Cinderella* (in terms of, for example, body, and skin colour?	White woman, slender, having long hair
2.	How does it portray the stepmother and step-siblings?	Unfair, evil
3.	How does it portray the prince?	A handsome, young, white man, having power
4.	In "*Beauty and the Beast*", how is the beast portrayed?	Ugly, but rich
5.	Does the beast stay the same at the end of the movie?	No, he turns into a handsome prince.
6.	In "*Aladin*" movie, what does Aladin ask the Genie?	Wealth to marry the princess

As seen in Table 1, the participants could come up with responses based on what they knew about the famous stories. This became the stepping stone to the next discussion on typical characteristics of male protagonists as being young, rich, and powerful white men, and female protagonists as slender long-haired white women. The participants were also facilitated to realise that repeated exposure to such movies may shape the viewpoints of the audience on what is considered good for females and males, respectively.

This discussion led to the explanation of the definition of critical literacies. Those who are critically literate know "how power operates and it shows up in texts" (Janks, 2017, p. 135). Power influences the way people talk about things and how this power shows up in various texts. More importantly, as Janks (2017) mentioned, texts and practices are positioned by the authors and eventually, these texts and practices work to position readers. With that understanding, the participants were facilitated to realise the importance of having this ability to "'read' the world to understand how power works to include and exclude and to privilege some at the expense of others" (p. 132). For example, the continuous exposure to Disney movies such as "*Cinderella*" and "*Beauty and the Beast*" portraying white women as good-looking protagonists may lead many of the audience to associate beauty with light-coloured skin, or even further, white women.

The discussion continued to Hollywood movies in general. I asked them a question "Who are often pictured as bad guys in the movies?" Several participants came up with answers such as Japanese and African-Americans. I helped them create a list of groups often pictured negatively in Hollywood movies and the participants could come up with how these groups were often pictured in the movies. Table 2 illustrates the results.

Table 2. Stigmatised Groups and How They are Stigmatised based on the Participants

No	Groups	Typical Stereotypes or Stigmas
1.	Asians (E.g.: Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese)	Gangs, gamblers, enemies (in war movies)
2.	Middle Eastern people/Muslims	Terrorists
3.	African-American people	Criminals, impolite
4.	Native American people	Less civilised group of people
5.	Latinos	Drug cartels

From Table 2, it can be seen that at this point, the participants had understood how Hollywood movies negatively presented certain groups of people. For example, the participants realised that Middle Eastern or Muslim people are often pictured negatively as organised terrorists. This may lead some audiences to have some Islamophobia if the audience does not have critical literacies as these portrayals could be accepted as truth. The participants were then facilitated to understand that this should not happen as the portrayal may be unfair and does not represent the majority of peace-loving Muslim communities

across the world. Audiences should be aware of the hidden messages and the stereotypes conveyed in movies so that they are not easily led into believing what is portrayed as the truth (Bergstrom et al., 2018). With that in mind, the participants were also advised to carefully reflect on whether they have stigmatised or stereotyped certain groups of people due to portrayals in media.

The next step was to make some kind of conclusion highlighting biases in texts. The participants were to realise that all texts are created by someone, somewhere, for some reason. They are created from a particular perspective to tell particular messages. To interrogate this hidden message, the participants were provided with four basic questions with which they could analyse texts from a critical literacy lens. These questions are *"What is the purpose of text?", "Who is the audience?", "How does the text try to position readers/us?",* and *"Whose voices are silent? Who may disagree with the text?"* (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). At this stage, the participants had been facilitated to realise that critical media literacies should be an integral part of learners' learning experiences. This is because, in a world with numerous circulating fake news and information as well as stereotyping media, learners should be aware of and have the ability to critically analyse the relationships between media and audience as well as between information and power behind it (Bergstrom et al., 2018).

To strengthen the participants' understanding of the biases of texts, I invited them to interrogate similar events reported by different news outlets. For example, the event of an attack on Israel in the Gaza Strip was covered differently by CNN and Al-Jazeera. This may be related to the people (the owner of the media, the reporters, and many others) behind each of the news outlets: who they are and who they are supporting. Another example was a diplomatic event involving the Indonesian president, Joko Widodo, and the People's Republic of China (PRC) president, Xi Jinping, which may be reported differently by ANTARA and CCTV, the national news bureaus of Indonesia and PRC, respectively. The former may focus on the national interest of Indonesia whilst the latter may focus its coverage on the national interest of the PRC.

The next step was to facilitate the participants in realizing that not only are texts not neutral, but also that the way one reads texts is never neutral either. People read texts from a particular position(s). They have their partiality or bias when 'reading' texts around them. To deepen the participants' understanding of this, I posed several questions which were then responded to. The posed questions and the participants' responses can be summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Questions on Readers' Bias and The Participants' Responses

No	Questions	Participant Responses
1.	Were you angry when you heard the news of the attack on the Gaza Strip? Why?	Yes
2.	Did you feel happy when Indonesia won gold medals in the Olympic Games? Do you think Thai people would be equally happy when Indonesian athletes win gold medals?	Yes. Thai people would not feel as happy.
3.	Do you feel satisfied when your favourite Korean drama ends the way you want it to end?	Yes.

The participants seemed to have difficulty in formulating their arguments supporting their answers. Hence, I posed confirmatory questions such as "You were angry about the attack because you supported the independence of Palestine, right?" and "You felt happy because your country, the country that you love, won a gold medal, right?", to which the participants agreed, saying "Yes". From these discussions, they were facilitated to realise that their backgrounds, beliefs, and many other individual factors come into play affecting the way they approach any texts around them.

The lecture concluded with several important points to take away regarding critical media literacies. The participants need to realise all media around them can be seen as texts to read and these texts are never neutral. Texts position readers in a certain viewpoint. Next, the power behind texts influences what a text conveys or delivers and how to deliver it. Repeated exposure to these texts can influence the participants' way of thinking. For this reason, the participants need to realise that and they need to be 'careful' not to accept texts at face value.

A photo session was done by the end of the lecture with all the participants and one of the pictures can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Photo Session with All the Participants

CONCLUSION

Conclusions can be drawn from this community service activity. The participants were generally enthusiastic throughout the lecture. It can be seen from their impromptu responses to several questions that I posed. It is realised that one session may not be sufficient to facilitate the internalisation of keys of critical media literacies. The participants still need more exposure as well as practice in analysing texts using a critical literacy lens. Nonetheless, this community service activity can be seen as a stepping stone as well as an initial step to probably integrate critical literacies in language instruction.

Several recommendations can be suggested as well. Community service activities partnering with universities should be encouraged. This allows for the exchange of knowledge among university teachers and learners. Specific regarding the development of learners' critical media literacies, prospective teachers of English should not only be facilitated to understand how to be critically literate. The next step is to facilitate them, as future teachers, to design language instructions using a critical literacy approach. This way, they can be empowered to help their future students to be critically literate as well.

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