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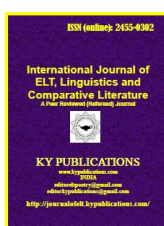
## DEVELOPING INGRAINED CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM THROUGH CRITICAL LITERACY

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### ABSTRACT

Understanding the superficial and deeper meaning of the text and also analyzing the text critically is a need in the present world so as to understand the local and global issues of the world. Many issues like justice, gender, equity and power are understood and addressed by our students through critical literacy. This paper is making attempts to examine the importance of critical literacy in the present scenario and also to examine the ways of developing critical literacy in English language classroom as well in the English language classroom. The study is qualitative in nature and the objectives are analyzed with strong review of related literature. From the in-depth analysis, it is revealed that critical literacy is helping the students for developing civic education, for effective navigation through the text, criticizing the text and also for developing refined social and political views. The investigator also explored ways for developing critical literacy in English language classroom. Promoting narration, textual analysis, convergent and divergent thinking, developing critical lens, making use of supplementary reader and projects in English language classrooms will help a lot for developing critical literacy. The paper is an eyeopener for the teachers and administrators as well; that they may ponder on the need and importance of critical literacy in the classrooms to develop ingrained critical perspectives, especially in the present scenario.

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### Introduction

Critical literacy is a learning approach where the proper examination and analysis of the texts are being done by the students for identifying the relationship between the power of language. There occurs critical analysis of the text when the topic is related to justice, gender, equity and power. "Rooted in the socio-cultural perspectives of reading, critical literacy has used learning to build access to literate practices and discourse resources for use as social capital in the community" (Lankshear & Knobel, 1998). Critical literacy occurs in different learning environment through which the reader becomes aware of one's own experience relative to power relations through reading and writing. Critical literacy motivates the reader to make proper judgement and there by accepting, rejecting or reconstructing ideas prescribed in the texts.

"Critical literacy has been defined as "learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one's experience as historically constructed within specific power relations" (Anderson & Irvine, 1993). "Critical literacy moved the reader's focus away from the "self" in critical reading to the interpretation

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of texts in different environmental and cultural contexts” (Luke, 2000). This give provision to students and teachers to go through the text, analyse and evaluate it and lay foundations for constructing and reconstructing texts. Critical literacy provides opportunities for readers to identify the real purpose of the text. “As they read, individuals can accept, reject or reconstruct the ideologies presented in the text (Cervetti, Pardales, Damico, 2001) to support their own life experiences” (Luke, 2000). While constructing and reconstructing texts, students themselves get the power of developing their own concepts and perspectives to more critically evaluate other aspects of their lives. “Some may interpret this examination and critique of texts and the process of reading as a form of “activism,” (Morrell, 2004) or “cyber-activism in the online space”. (McCaughy & Ayers, 2003). Activities in the classroom like purposeful questioning, discussion, and improvised drama might influence how students engage with literacy lessons. Critical literacy is beyond the conventional thinking which focusses on relevant issues like equity, gender and social justice, fairness etc. Freire views critical literacy as a vehicle for students and their teachers to learn to “read the world.” Freire and Macedo (1987) point out that “Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world”.

***Four dimensions of critical literacy identified by Lewison, Flint and Sluys (2002) include:***

- “Disrupting a common situation or understanding (seeking to understand the text or situation in more or less detail to gain perspective)”
- “Interrogating multiple viewpoints (standing in the shoes of others or thinking about texts from perspectives of different characters or from perspectives not represented in the texts)”
- “Focusing on sociopolitical issues (thinking about power in relationships between and among people and exploring how power relationships shape perceptions, responses, and actions)”
- “Taking action and promoting social justice (reflecting and acting to change an inappropriate, unequal power relationship between people)”

**Objectives**

- To examine the importance of critical literacy in the present scenario
- To examine the ways of developing critical literacy in English language classroom

**Analysis*****Examining the importance of critical literacy in the present scenario***

- **To give civic education:** There is a great need for civic education in the present scenario. Younger generation in the present world has the tendency to accept any news or information without checking its authenticity. Civic education could be improved through critical literacy. While spreading information, people may not be able to make proper judgement whether the information is correct or wrong. Critical literacy will help them to get more education and develop their own individual thoughts and perceptions in all sense. Critical literacy will promote them to develop civic education so that they will not become puppet in the hands of others. Divergent thinking will be developed which is relay to the critical.
- **Effective navigation though text:** “Critical literacy should not be a topic to be covered or a unit to be studied. Instead, it should be looked on as a lens, frame, or perspective for teaching throughout the day, across the curriculum, and perhaps beyond” (Vasquez, 2018). Moving through the literature and



reading between the lines could be promoted through critical literacy in the English classroom. It is a skill of making us culturally aware and avoid the confusions. Critical literacy helps to critically evaluate all the pros and cons of the text in the traditional print or in the forms of media.

- **To criticize the text:** Critical literacy will lead to identifying the biases, discrimination embedded in the text. Criticizing the text will help in identifying the reason behind the descriptions given in the text and whose voice is being depicted in the text. It also helps to form an idea about on what basis the facts and principles are being presented in the text instead of blindly accepting the text. The reason behind avoiding or neglecting certain point of view is judged through critical literacy. Instead of moving in the direction of what the author want to take the reader, the reader himself/herself will choose their own direction of thinking in an independent way.
- **To develop art of questioning:** Questioning is a skill to be developed among students and need to be directed in an effective way. Instead of accepting what is mentioned in the text blindly, there is a need to satisfy our conscience by asking, 'why it is so'? in the present world, we face many challenges, discriminations and bias and the same should be discussed and questioned displayed in literature, media, symbols and signs, by the students in the classroom. Its high time to understand the importance of questioning. "Critical literacy is defined as analysing the language and visuals created by the author, and using this information to question the social issues" (Winograd, 2015).
- **Developing refined social and political views:** It seems more prudent to develop critical literacy among students. "However, as this shift also suggests, a rapid progression for a more united, global society, and by extension a more intense modification of literacy education, and the education establishment itself, may require much more time, discretion and subtlety than a drastic shift of the traditional model" (Bolstad, 2012). Developing social and political views is also equally important as academic achievement in the schools. There are different social issues existing in the society and certain issues will emerge in the meantime also. Critical approach to the issues in the society is inevitable to make a refined stand in these issues. Language give opportunity for students to select subjects according to their choice and such that they are leading gradually to the world of critical literacy without forceful participation from the part of teachers. Critical literacy is governed by a set of beliefs. It cannot be viewed in the angle of a set of method of teaching.

#### ***Examining the ways of developing critical literacy in English language classroom***

- **Narration in the English language classroom:** This is one of the major techniques through which you could develop the art of critical literacy. Narrating stories in the English language classroom would no doubt help the students to ponder on the content critically. English language classroom confronts with different types of prose like drama, fiction, short stories and novels. The writers are from different background having different perceptions and different attitudes. The stories are also related to the national and international perspectives. Various social, political, and emotional issues are touched in the prose and poetry directly and indirectly. English language classroom also gives students to explore their creativity by writing their own stories and poem. An effective discussion with the guidance of the teacher will definitely help in analysing the text.
- **Textual analysis for taking socially useful action:** Max Weber defines social action as "an action which is social in so far as by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by acting individual". It takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course. It includes all human behaviour when and in so far as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it. Critical analysis of the



text will lead to take social action like helping needy students in the studies, delivering speech, raising slogans, leading a procession and holding out banners when there is a need arising in the society.

- **Divergent and creative thinking:** Developing aesthetic sense is also considered to be one of the major objectives of teaching of English language. Synectic model has been widely used for this purpose in the classroom. It helps in divergent thinking of the learners. They are motivated think illogically, shattering the set principles and biases in the society. Students are developing a new view of their own in every aspect. They are not thinking in the line of what others do. Uniqueness in though is being developed in the classroom while learning prose and poem. Critical appraisal of the literature, whether it is fiction or poem, is done in the classroom in which the students develop a sense of criticizing and appreciating the text. The sense of positive vibe, that there is no need to be the shadow of the author, is developed in the students. Through critical writing, students in the English classroom are finding answers and clarifications to their question.
- **By Developing a Critical Lens:** There is a need for developing a critical lens applying it to the text in the English classroom. This could be done by the teacher. And now the question arises, how it could be done? English language teachers could make a framework of questions comprising critical aspects of the text and ask the students while teaching learning process takes place or else may conduct a discussion with the students through group work so that students themselves may interact each other with these questions. The teacher may frame questions like, what is the perception of the author? Who is targeted in the text by the author? Is the perception of the author creating gender bias? What global overview is represented in the text? etc. If the possibility of asking questions is not there in the text, the teacher could incorporate certain critical text in the classroom. It could be a fiction, a short story or even a newspaper article. For this, there is a need to examine the existing lessons so as to plan new ones to incorporate critical literacy. "Furthermore, teachers can use technology to allow students to take what they are learning outside the classroom, potentially leading to the social action component of critical literacy that was discussed earlier (Avila & Moore, 2012)". "While several researchers have provided lists of questions that can be used during a critical literacy lesson (Lester, 1995; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004)". Wood et al. (2006) "gave suggestions for questions to be used specifically with middle-school students to promote critical literacy. By asking questions such as, "Who do you think is behind the construction of this text?". "Teachers can give students opportunities to consider their own opinions about the perspectives and interpretations of a text. Such questioning also promotes higher order thinking (Wood et al.)". "Explore alternative perspectives. Exploring and working to understanding various viewpoints is an important tenet of critical literacy (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004)". "Students must develop and reflect on their own viewpoint as well as learn "to communicate with and learn from those who hold different perspectives" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004)".
- **Making use of supplementary reader:** Including multiple texts can be very important in allowing students to explore differing perspectives of multiple authors as well as see the non-neutrality of texts through comparison. As Behrman (2006) stated, "Often teachers find that to develop a critical perspective, traditional classroom texts need to be supplemented by other works of fiction, nonfiction, film, or popular culture". "Reading multiple texts encourages students to understand authorship as situated activity Supplementing canonical, traditional texts, or even the textbook, can help students gain a critical perspective of those traditional texts as well as better understand the subjectivity of authors (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004)". "It can better engage students with traditional texts that they might not identify with otherwise (Chun, 2009; Lesley, 2008; Wood & Jocius, 2013)".

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- **Creative expressions through critical projects:** Though teachers can alter lessons to teach critical literacy, they can also use projects to promote and assess critical literacy. Wood et al. (2006) offered certain ways to entertain critical projects to be used on a particular context". One of the situations to be noted is the teaching of poetry in classrooms. While teaching poetry, students are getting chances to think creatively and express their own perceptions in a unique way. Poetry Slam could be conducted that students can demonstrate their work. "Students can write letters to an editor of a newspaper or magazine on a topic that they have been studying; this would be a way for students to take the social action. (Wolfe,2010)".

### Conclusion

English language classroom could be effectively used by the teachers to develop critical literacy in the present scenario. There is an urgent need to raise our voice against the injustice in the society and make our own judgements. Students should be urged to make their own decisions, come up with relevant questions and refine their thoughts. Instead being the puppet of thoughts of the authors, students should critically analyse the text and develop their own line of thinking. English language classrooms, with the initiation from the part of teachers, could possibly make proper arena for promoting critical literacy.

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