

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This opening chapter provides an overview of the thesis. It is divided into six major sections. They are background of the study, purposes of the study, scope of the study, significances of the study, clarification of terms used in present research, and organization of the thesis. Each of those parts will be described in the following passages.

1.1. Background

It becomes common knowledge that since the dawn of Reform in 1998, Indonesian citizens have gained almost unlimited freedom in expressing their opinions after 32 years living under the repressive New Order regime. Suddenly, printed and electronic mass media easily spread all over the country. Supported by information technology advancement, now, 18 years after the Reform, Indonesian citizens are often overwhelmed by different and even contradictory conflicting information. In such context, it is crucial for Indonesian citizens to think critically. As a consequence, as it is written in the Indonesian 2013 official curriculum, schools in all levels are required to equip students with critical thinking.

Critical thinking is a necessary skill that should be performed by students to fully comprehend particular information and to be able to decide what to believe and what to do (McLaren, 2002; Ennis, 1996a; Giroux, 1997; Dam & Volman, 2004; Brodin, 2007). Furthermore, this higher level thinking is needed by students in dealing with the huge amount of information in the rapidly changing era. It is useful as a tool for students to gather, evaluate, and use information and choices effectively (Ennis, 1996a; Chaffee, 2012). Critical thinking is also important for students to be successful in their academic, daily, and social lives in the recent virtually borderless and oversaturated information era.

By thinking critically, students can not only protect themselves from believing and using false information for their interests, but also prevent them from recklessly making statements without evidence or argument (Cottrell, 2007). Moreover, by being open-minded as one of the critical thinking dispositions (Lipman, 2003), students are more tolerant in encountering the differences within a multicultural community such as Indonesia.

It is not sufficient to merely view information and knowledge as separate parts of the larger entities such as power and culture. Information and knowledge are always socially constructed (McLaren, 2003). Therefore, the awareness that there is no neutral information and apolitical knowledge is also needed to be possessed by students to prepare them to become global democratic citizens in the future. In the meantime, for teacher students, the participants of the present research, the conception that education can not be separated from politics, economic system, and social values is important.

Nowadays, information and knowledge are massively distributed in the form of writings. Therefore, reading class is one of the potential sites for schools to teach critical thinking and to discuss the political nature of information (Alwasilah, 2004). It is because of every reading class focuses its activity in learning how to make sense of information presented in the written language. Reading class provides enough space for both teachers and students collaboratively learn and practice to make meaning, think, discuss, and rethink the constructed information about various themes and its relation with the larger contexts. Furthermore, the lack of reading comprehension is recognized as one of the barriers to critical thinking (Bassham *et al.*, 2011). It also becomes one of the reasons why the present study uses reading class as a site.

It is undeniable that English plays a crucial role in this global era. It is because of English is used as an official language in many fields around the globe among the different language speakers. A huge number of knowledge is internationally written and talked in English. Meanwhile in Indonesia, although it is not used in daily communication, English is considered as the first foreign language to be taught in schools under the name of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). According to Benites (2002), EFL class is potential to develop critical thinking. Therefore, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is selected as the context of this study.

It is believed that the critical pedagogy principles are important to be promoted to the EFL teacher students as a teaching approach in order to provide a critical tool for both teacher and students in understanding the political nature of knowledge and education. In addition, the use of critical pedagogy principles in EFL curriculum and classroom is in line with the call for EFL education reform in Indonesia (Alwasilah, 2004; Emilia, 2005; Hayati, 2010; Gustine, 2014; Larson, 2014). Critical pedagogy, as Phipps and Guilherme (2004) emphasize, provides crucial guidelines for language study and intercultural communication.

Critical pedagogy has some similarities and shares common concerns with critical thinking (Emilia, 2005; Thinsen, 2015). One of those similarities is both critical pedagogy and critical thinking are closely related and interwoven especially in the term of ‘dialogue’ (Burbules & Berk, 1999). Alongside the differences and contradictories between the two traditions, ‘dialogue’ is the crucial term for both and might be utilized to combine them. Moreover, both critical pedagogy and critical thinking view learning as the activity that should be based on real-life situations (Dam & Volman, 2004; Freire, 2005b). Therefore, although critical pedagogy and critical thinking come from two different traditions and philosophical bases, this study uses both together by focusing on their similarities.

The studies which investigate the use of critical pedagogy principles and attempt to reveal its role in facilitating students to think critically are rarely found, especially within the context of EFL teaching in Indonesia. Therefore, the present research is also conducted with the intention to provide the additional literature for those who are interested in implementing the critical pedagogy principles in the EFL context.

Bearing in mind the abovementioned explanation, this study aims at investigating the use of critical pedagogy principles in teaching EFL reading as well as revealing its contribution in assisting tertiary level students perform their critical thinking skills in classroom. Furthermore, the present research attempts to identify and elaborate benefits and challenges of using critical pedagogy principles in reading class perceived by students as the participants of this study.

1.2. Purposes and Questions of the Study

Taking into account the background elaborated previously, this study has two purposes. The first one is to elaborate the way how the implementation of critical pedagogy principles assists students to think critically. The second one is to reveal and describe what benefits and challenges recognized by the students in using critical pedagogy principles in EFL reading classroom.

Considering the purposes above, the research questions are formulated as the following:

1. How does the use of critical pedagogy principles in teaching EFL reading in tertiary level assist students to think critically?

2. What are the benefits and challenges of using the critical pedagogy principles in EFL reading class from the students' perspective?

1.3. Scope of the Study

Generally, critical pedagogy is divided into two aspects: macro for the politics of knowledge and micro for the classroom practices (Cho, 2013). The present research confines the use of critical pedagogy principles only on the micro aspect of classroom teaching learning activity in the EFL reading context and relates it with the critical thinking skills performed by students.

Critical pedagogy principles used in this research are (1) dialogic education, (2) democratic classroom, and (3) reading the word and the world. Whereas participants' critical thinking skills and dispositions identified during the teaching program are (1) analysis and evaluation skills, (2) open-mindedness, and (3) the ability to make reasoned decision.

Through classroom observation, students' learning journals, questionnaire, and interview, the influence of the program on students' critical thinking and the benefits and challenges perceived by the students in using the critical pedagogy principles are identified. The participants of the research are limited to the third semester of EFL students in a private teacher education in Bandung.

1.4. Significances of the Study

There are three significances of this study. They are theoretical, practical, and professional. Theoretically, the result of this study is expected to fulfill the lack of discussion about the use of critical pedagogy principles in teaching EFL reading to the tertiary level students in Indonesia and its relation to the development of students' critical thinking skills. Practically, this study is intended to be a guideline for teachers and other education practitioners who are interested to use critical pedagogy principles in classroom especially they who work in EFL education context. Meanwhile professionally, the result of this study is crucial in terms of serving as one of the bases for educational stakeholders in making school and classroom policies related to the practice of infusing critical pedagogy in teaching reading in EFL context.

1.5. Clarification of Terms

This section is presented to avoid misunderstanding regarding some terms used in this study. It also aims at distinguishing two crucial theories and traditions; critical pedagogy and critical thinking. In addition, this subchapter provides a definition of teaching reading. Here is the brief definition of each phrase:

Critical pedagogy : Is a teaching and curriculum approach that tries to understand and critique the historical and sociopolitical context of schooling and to develop pedagogical practices that aim to change the nature of schooling as well as the wider society (Pennycook, 1990).

Critical thinking : Is the habitual carefully explored thinking process in order to make understanding and decisions making clearer and more intelligent (Chaffee, 2012).

Teaching Reading : Teaching practice consists of pre-, while-, and post-activities in order to activate students' prior knowledge and capacity to gain the literal, inferential, and critical meaning of texts. For present study, the teaching practice would be conducted in the post-secondary level reading class (Hood et al, 2005; Kress, 1985 and Wallace, 1992).

1.6. Organization of the Thesis

This research report is divided into six chapters. The first chapter serves as an overview regarding the overall content of this thesis. The second chapter elaborates the selective literature review on Critical Pedagogy (CP), Critical Thinking (CT), and Reading. Meanwhile, the third one deals with the methodology and the rationale why particular types of research design, data collection and analysis method are chosen and employed in present study. The chapter four covers the teaching program conducted while collecting data for this research. The fifth one presents and discusses data and its analysis in order to answer the two research questions. The last, sixth chapter, describes conclusions, research limitation, and recommendations of the thesis.

1.7. Conclusion of the Chapter One

This chapter has discussed the background of the study, scope of the study, purposes of the study, and the significances of the study. It also described the terms used in this study, and

the organization of the thesis. The next chapter will discuss the selected theoretical foundation related to this research.