

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

This study centers on the development of students' critical literacy (CL henceforth) in a tertiary EFL Reading class and highlights the use of questions in nurturing CL of students with various baselines. The framework used in this study is the Four Resources which was forwarded by Luke and Freebody (1990). This section briefly introduces the study by presenting its background, problem statements, purpose, and significance of the study as well as definition of key terms and the outline of the dissertation.

#### 1.1. Background of the Study

This segment attends two major issues that trigger the call for bringing CL into Indonesian EFL classroom: (1) current socio-political milieu and (2) portrait of English teaching in Indonesia. Discussion on the two begins with this truism that: Indonesia is a country of diversity and growing democracy. This kind of nation can be both strong and fragile at the same time. Diversity is a resource that can potentially be used for the good of the nation. Yet, when diverging cultures, religions, customs, or point of views cannot be embraced, it threatens the unity of the nation.

Today's mass and social media have recorded some loud individuals who fail to embrace diversity and dragging others within their circle of side-blinded-ness. They tend to be flaming; directly and harshly bullying others who do not stand on the same political side or who share different interest, opinion, and belief. These people; adults, teens, and children, fall into hoax and submit to value-loaded texts unquestioningly. The principle of strong validation as the philosopher Karl Popper would point out i.e. falsification is not in their to-do-list and resulting in an increase of tension even conflict among people as observable, for example, during general election and Ahok's blasphemy case trials. The heating situation halts some other to voice their thoughts. Fear of drifting from the comfort or safe zone

has silenced some. This state would maintain status quo and create an illusion of peace and tranquility but as this happens, democracy is decaying.

Fleeting borderless information from across the world has economic consequences as well. Trends of goods built by texts may result in consumerisms. Text can be created to address stereotypes. Text can build public opinion which later may influence decision making. Text can create image and perception that may influence the way readers look at a historical event which happened years ago. In brief, text can be crafted in a way that moves or stops people into the direction pointed by the writer. Against the aforementioned condition, it is therefore vital to nurture the ability to question and view texts (at any form, either printed or digital) from diverse angles and build the habit of well-founded reasoning.

Sadly, however, Kuiper et al.(2008) on their study on adolescent use of Web as source of information concluded that young people“lacked skills in exploring websites, and focused on trying to find one answer to each question” and as a result they often fail to address trustworthiness of the information they had found. In general, the participants of the study bared inability to interpret or work out the information that they were able to get. From such findings, it is suggested that young people are helped to make judgment on the information that they found. This implies the urge of CL teaching.

Current trend in CL teaching begins to acknowledge the complexity of reader roles beyond code breaker which was by tradition assumed to be the main role of readers. Recognition that texts are crafted, constructed, value laden, and not innocent (e.g. Luke and Freebody 1990; Fisher, 2008; Janks, 2013; Luke et al., 2011; Comber, 2011) leads to the redefinition of reading and comprehension. Unlike traditional perceptive view of reading in the mid 1970’s, what is called reading in new time no longer stops at the level of graphic decoding (Underwood et al., 2007) for that would means downgrading the power and authority of readers. Both reading and comprehension are viewed not just as cognitive but also social, cultural, intellectual, and ideological phenomena. (Huang, 2011 and Luke et al., 2011).

Readers today need to go beyond receptive reading and start reading critically as a practice of CL. Reading critically means readers to construct multiple instead of single meaning, to question texts' accuracy and trustworthiness, to identify what is hidden or made explicit and who is benefitted or disadvantaged by the texts. It also means that readers shall detect and resist social unjust, domination, and power abuse, to recognize ideological forces encoded in the text and to take standing and/ or action toward the message of the text (e.g. Cooper and White, 2014; Giroux, 1991; Paugh, 2014; Bigelow et al.; 1994; Wodak and Meyer, 2000; Hood and Burns, 1996; Huang, 2011).

Despite the urgency of CL, Indonesia has not well taken up the issue. Major practice of English teaching in Indonesia has been much influenced by positivism. Cognition is highly valued and grammar translation method is practiced in many English classes. Since the enactment of grammar translation curriculum in the 1947 followed by audio-lingual method in 1968 (Gustine, 2014), drilling stays in many classes for decades and unfortunately most drillings are less meaningful ones. Students are to repeat teacher's pronunciation of certain words and they are to copy sentence patterns based on a given 'tense formula'.

Although recent 2013 curriculum emphasizes 'thinking' within the frame of inquiry teaching, the practice at the grass root level is still relatively unchanged (Emilia, 2005, Gustine, 2014). In terms of Reading, formal curriculum documents available at the practical level indicate that students are trained to focus on receptive reading and are not intentionally or explicitly taught to be critical at what they read. Although sporadic move to criticality is paved by small number of teacher-researcher, it is not sufficient to represent nation-wide act.

Under such practice, no wonder that, as indicated in PIRLS result in 2011, Indonesian students are only good at answering 'weak' questions. Likewise, PISA report in 2015 also indicated the low level of Indonesian literacy and this country was ranked 68 out of 72 countries in Reading. More recently, the use of Higher Order Thinking (HOT) in 2018 National Exam has caused difficulties for the students because they were not prepared to answer 'strong' questions. Low CL level is also evidently observable in the spread of hoax and fleeting side-blinded

and unreliable articles and comments in social media. Considering the diversity of the country, as such may result in serious horizontal and vertical conflicts. Therefore, opting out from urging CL teaching in Indonesia is not an option.

This study engaged tertiary level students to respond the urgent call for CL teaching. Unlike secondary level which follows blanket curriculum, tertiary level education is privileged with the relatively higher degree of freedom in designing the curriculum. Each department including English Education Department usually works on their own list of courses, content, material selection, and evaluation. Same or similar departments from different universities commonly participate in a forum (*Forum Komunikasi Prodi*) in which discussion on the curriculum are held. The list of courses among the same departments are mostly alike with a little variation on the weighing, placement, content/ scope, and evaluation. The teaching learning process, however, may differ quite significantly among institution and between instructors.

Employing CL study on primary level students, although ideal, potential, and desirable could be problematic in the practice since it has no solid legal standing in the curriculum. Consequently, rejection or reluctance tend to occur as experienced by Gustine (2014). From a reverse angle, approaching ELT critically is also not desired in the context of education system which apply blanket curriculum. Akbari (2007) wrote that implementation of critical model in any local ELT context requires decentralization of decision making. He went on saying that “as long as course contents and testing methods are decided upon by ministries in capitals, ELT classes suffer from vague generalities and socio-political numbness.”

The study pays particular attention on students’ engagement in the four reader roles, which characterize an effective reader (Luke and Freebody, 1990, 1999, and elsewhere). In the process, the use of questions is highlighted. Responses to teacher’s questions as well as students’ constructed questions are examined to indicate students’ roles in reading; whether it is code breaker, text participant, text user, or text analyst.

Critical literacy (CL) teaching, four resources framework, and questions are areas that already have strong body of literature. Number of studies on CL, including in the ESL/ EFL setting continues to grow. Findings generated from cases under investigations are mostly non-generalizable and sometimes, to some extent, contradictory across different contexts (for example there are opposing findings on whether students' proficiency is impeding criticality or not). However, several major themes can be learned from studies conducted within the past decade, e.g. challenges in the implementation of CL (e.g. Ko, 2013; Alford, 2014; Pessoa, 2012; Iyer, 2007) strategies or classroom activity and students response (e.g. Kuo, 2014, 2015; Huh, 2016; Kim and Cho, 2016; Tomasek 2009; Fisher, 2008; Huang, 2011), teachers' literacy practice and journey (e.g. Ko, 2013; Gustine, 2014; Comber, 2011; Stribling, 2014; Kukner, 2013), and material selection (e.g. Zahibi and Pordel, 2011; Locke and Cleary, 2011; Park, 2011; Kuo, 2015).

Four resources (earlier: four reader roles) has become a prominent framework in CL teaching since its introduction in the 1990. It has also received challenges and criticisms on its blur intersection of the roles or resources and its pedagogical implication particularly in the digital era. Lankshear and Knobel (2004), for example, question the four resources in terms of (1) the status of the text analyst role, (2) assumptions about the relationship between the word and the world, and (3) the origin of the resources. In spite of the criticisms, the four resources remains a prominent framework in literacy teaching in Australia and in the USA as well as in other part of the globe. Several studies have also documented the application of the framework within EFL/ ESL settings. (E.g. Kuo, 2014, 2015; Rush, 2004; Iyer, 2007; Underwood et al., 2007; and Park, 2011).

Studies on CL, including the previously shortlisted, commonly involved the use of questions and questioning (largely teachers' questions) as a scaffolding tool in assisting students to develop critical stance toward text. The use of questions as a classroom technique, particularly in reading class, is certainly no news and has been researched widely. Cotton (1998), for example, reviewed 37 studies while Davoudi and Sadeghi (2016) revisited 60 studies on questions (and questioning).

The review accounted that the areas which are effected by question/ questioning among other include comprehension and critical thinking (particularly those conducted in the past 10 years). In response to sophisticated demand of common core in the USA, that require students to show deep understanding of complex text, Degener and Berne (2016) asserted that students will answer complex questions if teachers ask them. They provide a continuum of questioning complexity consisting of six levels and exemplify the use of the continuum in building complex interaction around the text with the students.

While the exploration on CL teaching including those framed in four resources model, and exploration on the use of questions per se is relatively extensive, the use of questions in the frame of literacy teaching is often taken for granted and vaguely highlighted. Less is said about how and to what extent students with diverging baselines respond to questions and develop questions to indicate their engagement the four reader resources framework as literacy practice, nor if there is sufficient illustration on contexts of use which is required for success.

This gap is addressed by the study by forwarding how questions and/or questioning engage students of different baselines into CL within four resources framework. The questions are incorporated into several method of teaching reading which are chosen flexibly from the wide ranging options used in previous practices and studies. Based on the inconclusive findings on the effect of self-selected and teacher selected material in earlier researches, the present study applied both options. In a nutshell, the study opens flexibility for the questions to be incorporated in various possible strategies and materials. This flexibility is intended for two major reasons: first to capture wider picture of the possibilities (wider context of use) and second to enhance sustainability and applicability of the study. By coping with a micro key aspect in wide range of possible practices, the study potentially contribute to the development of CL teaching in Indonesia which up to now remains under-practiced and under-researched.

## 1.2. Statement of the Problems

The problems are formulated as the following.

- a. How is the development of the students' CL within the four resources framework viewed from the use of and responses to questions?
- b. How do students of different categories engage in the CL within the four resources framework viewed from the use of and responses to questions?
- c. What are the contextual boundaries (what works and falls short) in using questions as a means to immerse students in CL within the four resources framework?

## 1.3. The Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is set as follows.

- It investigates students' development in CL framed within the four resources. The progress as well as the teaching is not discussed using other framework such as the four dimensions.
- It focuses on how questions work for each category of students in terms of developing CL viewed from the four resources framework. Questions in this study includes both teachers' and students'.
- It is limited to contemporary classroom interaction and/ or activities in one Reading class within one semester only.
- It profiles CL journey students with weak, medium, and strong baselines. The profile and categorization is limited to the population of the class under investigation and is not gender sensitive.
- Measurement is not meant to quantify degree of effectiveness but rather as means to give comprehensive understanding on students' progress of CL.

#### **1.4.The Purpose of the Study**

The major aim of this study to investigate students' journey in CL within the four resources framework viewed from the use of and response to questions. Specifically, the study puts forward the cases of students categorized as having low, average, and high CL baselines in their CL journey. Within each category, 'what response/ reaction to which questions/ questioning' would be closely observed and the 'why' or the genetics of response/ reaction to the question would be elicited. As such, information on the context of immersion is explored as well. Using chosen measuring methods and instrument, evidence on students' map of journey of CL is presented to enrich the picture of the students' engagement in the four resources framework.

Briefly, grounded on the aforementioned research questions, this study aims at: (1) examining the progress of the students' in CL, (2) explaining CL immersion of students with differing baselines, and (3) illustrating the context of CL teaching and retracted success and failure on the use of questions in CL teaching within the four resources framework.

#### **1.5.Significance and Gap**

The significance of this study can be briefly elaraboted in three points. First, it examines a key component in the critical literacy teaching, i.e. question. Discussions around definition of CL will not leave behind the word question and questioning (e.g. McDaniel, 2004;Ko, 2013;Stribling, 2014; Lewison et al., 2002;Pennycook, 1999; Luke and Freebody, 1990; Janks, 2013). This key component has been part of nearly any studies on CL implementation but has not been adequately placed at the core of the observation.

While question itself is a solid area in research (see Cotton, 1988 andDavoudi and Sedeghi, 2016) and its position is acknowledged to be central in CL, the study in the area often put questions under dim light. Likewise, study on



questions although often relate to critical thinking (Davoudi and Sedeghi, 2016) not many is put within the frame of CL.

Second, it addresses heterogeneous students that characterize most EFL classrooms. This study digs into what happens in particular context and in particular category of students. This study regards students as having different level of CL then examines the development of students CL with various baselines.

Earlier works on CL have addressed the categories of high, middle, and low-ability as well categories based on socio-economic background. Previous studies also have claimed that critical literacy can be performed by students at any English proficiency level and background (e.g. McDaniels, 2004; Locke and Cleary, 2011; Fisher, 2008; Wallace, 2003; Reid, 2011; Luke et.al, 2011; Lau, 2012) and by all level of students including children (e.g. Kim, 2016; Stribbling, 2014; Ko, 2013; Janks, 2013; Fisher, 2008; Musthafa, 1996; Cooper and White, 2012; McDonald, 2004). These claims; however, are still subject for follow up investigation because there were also studies that pointed proficiency level as a challenge, if not problem (e.g. Kuo, 2014; Zhang, 2015; Gustine, 2014). This study takes a different angle by examining the journey of students in CL; looking at how far students of each category engaged in in CL within four resources framework by highlighting the use of questions.

Third, the study provides context of what works; leading to some do's and don't's which are potentially transferable to other similar context although it cannot be generalized. Common challenges in the implementation of CL in ESL/EFL setting include language proficiency, divergent cultural background, teachers' familiarity to literacy practice, material used, power relation, and high-stake, standardized, non-critical assessment (e.g. Comber, 2011; Iyer, 2007; Janks, 2013). However, what the studies say about each points is not always similar; what is viewed as impeding in one research may be has no effect in another studies. What is more, since cases are unique, and case in Indonesia's context remains under-researched, it is necessary to see which of the previous findings sound in Indonesia.

All in all, while keeping the topic of the study simple and ensuring that the move is doable in its natural setting, the study sits in an area that is of importance and drives to bring CL into Indonesian classrooms. Theoretically, the study adds to the body of literature on CL in EFL setting, in particular in Indonesia. Practically, findings inform teacher on possible doable immersion into CL. Despite the continuing debate over generalization of findings in qualitative inquiry and perhaps relative judgment on triviality, Silverman (2005) asserted that good analysis could result in far-reaching implication, making the study resonance widely.

### **1.6. Clarification of Terms**

This section briefly four central key terms in the study: CL, Four Resources Framework, Question, and Text.

#### 1) Critical Literacy

Shor (1999) defined CL as “language use that questions the social construction of the self. 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”. In a more practical point of view, CL “transcends conventional notions of reading and writing to incorporate critical thinking, questioning, and transformation of self or one’s world.” (McDaniel, 2004).

In this study, CL refers to language use (verbal and non-verbal/ act, written and spoken) reflecting awareness that text (in any form) as being crafted thus subject to the practice of questioning as the result of reading which is placed in socio-political context. CL in this particular research is one that is framed within the four resources framework. It addresses code breaker, text participant, text user, and text analyst roles.

#### 2) Four Resources

Luke and Freebody (1990) introduced an approach to literacy teaching under the term four reader roles. In the late 1990s, they made further notes on the model and renamed the framework as the four resources and eventually,

they prefer to see the resources/ roles as a family of practice. The family of practice covers code breaker, text participant, text user, and text analyst. Detail on each resource and on the changes of term will be discussed in the following chapter.

In this study ‘four resources framework’ is the term to cover the earlier version of ‘four reader roles’ and the later ‘family of practices’. It is a teaching framework that promotes CL by engaging students in both ‘traditional roles’ and ‘critical roles’ with the underlying statement that no text is value free. Within this framework, students are trained to break the ‘code’ of text, to get literal and inferential comprehension, use the knowledge on the structure and choice of ‘language’ (metacognition) of the text to produce their own text, and to question the trustworthiness of the text, detect and question the encoded beliefs, bias, silenced voice, benefitted party, presented point of view, and hidden intention.

### 3) Questions

A key component in definition of CL is question. Based on Cotton (2001) “A question is any sentence which has an interrogative form or function.” Cotton mainly referred to teacher questions and defined them as “instructional cues or stimuli that convey to students the content elements to be learned and directions for what they are to do and how they are to do it.” On the other hand, Bowker (2010) took a different standing with his view: question centered pedagogy. In his approach, it is students who should produce questions. Under this approach, “questions are designed to probe, to find something that is not already there, to discover relationships and possibilities that are not given”.

In the context of this study, question refers to question initiated by both the teacher and students. Question is then viewed as (1) interrogative sentence that stimulate, aid, and check students’ comprehension on the content of text and (2) as interrogative sentence that reflects probing (3) as interrogative sentence that reflect questioning.

### 4) Text

Practice of CL begins with / involves reading texts. In the present study *text* is defined based on Coffey (2008) who states that text as a “vehicle through which individuals communicate with one another using the codes and conventions of society. Accordingly, songs, novels, conversations, pictures, movies, etc. are all considered texts.”

### **1.7. Outline of the Dissertation**

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter one introduces the study. This chapter presents elaboration of the background of the study and relevant supporting points. This section also covers clarification of terms, research questions, and significance of the study.

Chapter two discusses relevant literature. Literature review highlights theoretical underpinnings of CL practice, particularly in the EFL setting. This section mainly divided into two sections: discussion on CL including the Four Resources framework and discussion on teaching EFL reading, in particular, the method/ strategy applied in this study: Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review (SQ3R) and collaborative learning, and the use of questions in Reading class. At the end of each section, a summary is presented.

Chapter three focuses on the methodology of the study. It describes the design, the participant and setting, data collection and data analysis technique as well as procedure of the study. Meanwhile, instruments used in this study along with the research schedule are attached as appendix.

Chapter four attempts to answer the research questions. It is mainly divided into three segments; following the number of questions. In each section, data display or context is presented followed by overview and discussion. Finally in chapter five, conclusion and implications are covered.

### **1.8. Concluding Remark**

In the context of Indonesia, the urge to bring CL into EFL classroom is not driven by trend but by need, instead. Poor engagement in CL as reflected in

unquestioning submission to texts brings about socio-politic and economic consequences e.g. marginalization, spread of hoax, and consumerism. Grounded on the concern on students' CL, this study introduces CL to tertiary level students by means of questions. The study underscores students' progress in CL within the four resources framework; a framework that balances conventional and critical literacy. The examination minds differences among students and the context of teaching.