



Phenomenology of Critical Literacy for Preservice Teachers in the 21st Century Era

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Abstrak

Kemampuan literasi kritis masih perlu dikembangkan mengingat belum maksimalnya daya kritis siswa yang ditandai dengan mudah terprovokasi dan kesulitan memecahkan masalah. Calon guru sekolah dasar nantinya memegang kendali pada jenjang pendidikan dasar diharapkan menguasai kemampuan tersebut sebelum mereka mengajarkannya ke siswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis sejauh mana penguasaan literasi kritis mahasiswa Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar. Metode yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologi. Penelitian dilakukan di Jurusan Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar dengan subjek berjumlah 142 mahasiswa. Cara pengumpulan data menggunakan wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Teknik analisis data menggunakan model Bogdan dan Biklen yakni analisis data dengan mempersempit temuan berdasarkan fenomena. Hasil penelitian ini adalah penguasaan literasi kritis yang dimiliki mahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar sudah cukup baik walaupun penguasaan ini tidak merata dimiliki oleh seluruh mahasiswa. Penguasaan literasi kritis diwujudkan dalam kegiatan kolaborasi, pengaitan sosial budaya, dan keterlibatan pemikiran reflektif. Penelitian ini memberikan implikasi bahwa pembelajaran literasi kritis hendaknya menjadi bagian dari kurikulum agar mampu memberikan dampak yang nyata dan terarah.

Kata Kunci: Literasi Kritis, Mahasiswa Guru Sekolah Dasar. Fenomenologi

Abstract

Critical literacy skills still need to be developed, considering that the essential power of students is not yet maximized, which is characterized by being easily provoked and having difficulty solving problems. Candidates for elementary school teachers who will later be in control at the basic education level are expected to master these abilities before they teach them to students. This study aims to analyze the extent of critical literacy mastery of elementary school teacher education students. The method used is qualitative with a phenomenological approach. The research was conducted at the Department of Elementary School Teacher Education, with 142 students. To collect data, this study used interviews, observation, and documentation. The data analysis technique uses the Bogdan and Biklen model, namely analyzing data by narrowing the findings based on phenomena. The result of this research is that the mastery of critical literacy, owned by the Elementary School Teacher Education Study Program students, is quite good even though all students do not evenly share this mastery. Mastery of critical literacy is manifested in collaborative activities, socio-cultural linkages, and the involvement of reflective thinking. This study implies that essential literacy learning should be part of the curriculum to have an honest and targeted impact.

Keywords: Critical Literacy, Pre-Service Teacher, Phenomenology

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information technology marks the era of the 21st century. This is predicted to be the century of openness in which fundamental changes occur. Currently, data is not only sourced from mass media or books. Even social and electronic media provide access to information so quickly. The rapid development of the times should be balanced with individual skills in the era of the 21st century. Individuals should be able to select and sort out information that has emerged in the community. When talking about 21st-

century skills, one element that exists is literacy. Literacy indicates ongoing multidimensional proficiency in reading and writing skills (Setiawan et al., 2017; Wallendorf, 2001). The definition of literacy is increasingly being expanded with the ability to understand, process, and interpret information wisely. Today's literacy needs to develop a coherent understanding of skills that reflect many skills required for the 21st century, even technology-related (Pilgrim & Martinez, 2013; Rintaningrum, 2009). Literacy is a developing set of knowledge, skills, and strategies that individuals build throughout life in various contexts through interactions with their peers and society at large. Furthermore, a person's literacy skills can be applied in everyday social interactions. Literacy skills are basic things that students should master to prepare for their future abilities.

To achieve mastery of literacy skills, it needs to be based on critical thinking. Everyone requires this essential literacy ability because in everyday life, someone needs information, and necessary literacy skills must be used to obtain information. In today's 21st century, the ability to understand text and knowledge alone is not enough. An information seeker must be wiser in processing the data, and this is where the role of critical literacy is needed (Albro & Turner, 2019; Freire, 1968). When an information seeker carries out literacy activities, it is not autonomous but situated and contextualized. This means that literacy skills must be related to situations and conditions in the environment where information and information seekers are located (Koo Y et al., 2011; Norris et al., 2012). The need to present a social and cultural context and not just be decided by personal experience is needed when viewing the text. The key to developing critical literacy is how an information seeker can connect the existing reality with the local socio-culture (Norris et al., 2012; Vasquez et al., 2019; Wattimena, 2018). Socio-cultural linkages and the local environment are needed in critical literacy because each individual sometimes has different interpretations of understanding the text, so that is where the essential role of literacy is involved. Especially in the current era where information is proliferating, it can be said that information is the main thing in everyday life (Farida & Putra, 2021; Sujana & Rachmatin, 2019). Critical literacy is also a person's ability to understand, select, and evaluate the information obtained.

Problems in the field show that there are still some teachers who do not have critical literacy competence. This is indicated by the teacher's shared understanding of the essence of literacy learning in the classroom and the teacher's lack of attention to students' critical thinking skills in learning. Literacy skills are closely related to necessary thinking skills (Giselsson, 2020; Rohman et al., 2022). This is because literacy skills require readers to understand the meaning of reading and how they can interpret and even evaluate based on their experience and knowledge. The problem is that literacy learning is still about how to equip students with reading comprehension. As a result, when a minimum competency assessment is carried out, many students complain about how difficult the questions are. The questions presented in the AKM itself are more directed at critical literacy because students are required to be able to reflect and evaluate the information in the reading.

Furthermore, talking about the not-yet-maximal learning of critical thinking in the classroom, there were several problems, especially related to students who were only considered empty glasses that needed to be filled with water. Teachers seem to dominate learning because they think students still need guidance. This attitude will turn off students' critical thinking skills.

There have been many types of research on critical literacy possessed by prospective teacher students. These studies found necessary literacy skills are essential for future teacher students (Boyd & Darragh, 2020; Hendrix-Soto & Mosley Wetzell, 2019). However, critical literacy studies owned by prospective elementary school teachers in Indonesia are rare. This issue must be studied more deeply because providing essential literacy skills for future teachers will help develop literacy skills and learning in schools. Moreover, Indonesia is

facing the problem of low literacy skills, which has been occurring for the past few years. When teachers understand critical literacy, it is easier to develop and solve issues with the necessary thinking skills in learning (Abdel Latif, 2022; Yustiwa & Madiun, 2022).

In Indonesia, elementary school teachers have at least the criteria for pursuing a bachelor's degree in the Department of Elementary School Teacher Education (PGSD). Talking about critical literacy, students have been equipped with these abilities since college. Essential literacy skills in universities are continuously developed and expected to become campus culture. One of them happened at Sanata Dharma University. Sanata Dharma University is one of the universities that prepare prospective elementary school teachers who are expected to be able to contribute to primary education. In this 21st-century era, all campuses, including Sanata Dharma University, try to equip students with 21st-century competencies. Critical literacy skills are no exception. Critical literacy is one of the abilities prospective elementary school teachers must have to solve problems in academic and social life. If students have a vital soul, they will quickly instill and teach it to their students.

The elementary school aims to provide basic knowledge, attitudes, and skills as an academic unit. Aspects of strengthening character and literacy culture are also emphasized in primary education. Education provides basic skills such as numeracy and literacy to support sustainable development (Md-Ali et al., 2016; Sari et al., 2020). These demands make elementary school teachers must be able to assist students in mastering cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. Elementary school teachers must also be able to cultivate character education and literacy culture, including critical literacy skills. As early as possible, students are expected to have essential literacy skills so that at the next level, they already mature these abilities.

Mastery of critical literacy that must be mastered early may make it easier for children to grow essential thinking skills accommodated in literacy learning. The literacy ability from the elementary school level will determine students' success at the next level (Hamilton et al., 2016; Suggate et al., 2018). Regarding learning, literacy will relate to the teacher as one of the learning elements. Teachers at the education level should be able to provide and cultivate critical literacy skills in their students. Before carrying out knowledge that can foster critical literacy skills, they should experience how the learning process promotes critical literacy. Previous studies have revealed that universities are responsible for shaping teacher candidates to become essential practitioners of the world of education (Kidman, 2012). Therefore, this study aims to analyze the mastery of critical literacy skills prospective elementary school teachers possess. Essential literacy skills must be mastered by prospective elementary school teachers so that when they teach in schools, they can practice learning experiences that emphasize critical literacy.

2. METHODS

This study is done using a qualitative research type with a phenomenological design. Phenomenology is research to understand other phenomena that arise in the surrounding environment. These phenomena can appear in various forms, such as events, experiences, perceptions, concepts, and situations (Van Maanen, 2011). This study's phenomenological design was chosen to examine the critical literacy experience of prospective elementary school teacher students (Creswell, 2009).

The collection technique can use semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. The questions used to conduct semi-structured interviews were developed based on the literature on critical literacy. The semi-structured interview aims to find problems more openly, where the parties invited to the discussion are asked to give their opinions. In conducting interviews, researchers used the help of interview guidelines to

facilitate and focus the questions to be asked. The interview grid was developed based on critical literacy theory (Kern, 2002). Critical literacy indicators used as interview grids include: 1) Involving collaborative activities, 2) linking socio-cultural, and 3) involving reflective abilities.

This research was conducted at the Elementary School Teacher Education Study Program, Faculty of Education, Sanata Dharma University Yogyakarta, with 142 students. Sanata Dharma University (USD) is one of the universities that uphold the value of multiculturalism. Students studying at USD are students of various ethnicities and religions. Although this university is under a Catholic foundation, many students are religious other than Christians. This is also the background for researchers to conduct a critical literacy study of students in a multicultural environment.

Data analysis uses data analysis by narrowing the findings according to the research objectives, leading to the phenomenon to be studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The data obtained from the interviews were then classified based on the sub-themes that had been set. The next step is to reduce the data and then present it in tabular form. Then develop the sub-theme into verification of results.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Prospective elementary school teacher students at Sanata Dharma University Yogyakarta are prepared to become humanist, innovative, and transformative elementary school teachers, as stated in the vision of the study program. Critical literacy is needed by prospective elementary school teachers in facing the challenges of globalization. Essential literacy skills are also required so that students have sensitivity in interpreting information so that later if they become teachers, they can teach it to students. The study's results were obtained through interviews with second-semester students as the primary informants in the study. The results of the interviews stated the students' experiences in carrying out critical literacy practices in lectures. Based on the interviews were mapped into three themes: implementation of critical literacy, supporting factors, and inhibiting factors for critical literacy abilities. Findings regarding critical literacy in students from the results of data analysis obtained four topics which include 1) habituation of critical literacy skills; 2) collaboration in building critical literacy; 3) socio-cultural linkages; 4) reflection in building critical literacy. More results of data reduction can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Theme 1 Implementation of Critical Literacy

Response	Subtheme	Result Verification
Critical literacy is accustomed since students are still in semester 1 through courses and habits in learning	Habituation of critical literacy skills	Critical literacy skills are not something that can be mastered instantly. Critical literacy must always be accustomed since elementary school teacher candidates enter the first semester.
The habit of critical and scientific writing is raised in university courses		
Lecturers and students play an active role in critical literacy activities		
Students collaborate to support critical literacy skills	Collaboration in building critical literacy	Collaboration is one of the indicators of building critical literacy. The partnership serves to build positive relationships for joint problem solving
Collaboration is also carried out with course lecturers		
Lecturers and students exchange sources of information in the form of joint journal		

Response	Subtheme	Result Verification
reviews Sanata Dharma University students who come from multi-racial and ethnic groups as capital in developing critical literacy skills	Socio-cultural linking	One of the indicators of critical literacy is the local socio-cultural linkage. All the information obtained is not necessarily appropriate for other socio-cultural backgrounds. Therefore, essential skills of literacy are needed
Knowledge obtained from one source is interpreted from the perspective of each social and cultural perspective		
The information obtained is evaluated based on own experience	Reflection on building critical literacy	Critical literacy requires reflective thinking skills. Reflection is needed to connect the knowledge obtained with previous knowledge to bring a conclusion to solve new problems.
Students are asked to reflect on the problems found in the information and write them in a journal.		

The findings in [Table 1](#) show that the critical literacy skills developed in prospective elementary school teachers have been prepared since the beginning of students entering college. Furthermore, support from the campus through learning from lecturers also helps to strengthen the habit of positive critical literacy. Students have also begun to practice essential literacy indicators, such as linking collaboration, socio-culture, and reflection. These activities are packaged in courses or through activities outside of lectures. The respondents stated that the critical literacy skills of PGSD USD students have developed since their first semester. Moreover, essential literacy skills are cultivated by applying several aspects such as collaboration, socio-cultural linkages, and reflective activities. The prospective elementary school teacher students have also tried to carry out these activities.

Collaboration is one aspect of strengthening critical literacy. In collaborative activities, students will work together to solve existing problems. The existence of an element of cooperation will be able to increase the social and cognitive aspects. Students with more abilities will provide scaffolding for their less capable friends. On the other hand, students with less knowledge will be helped and motivated by friends with more knowledge. This assumption will provide a great social experience for students. In addition to developing cognitive abilities, social skills will also grow. But sometimes, collaboration has a negative impact when students are not wise in interpreting its essence. This also happened in the class studied. Some of the answers to student assignments showed similarities. Even though from the beginning, the lecturer had said that the pouring of the results was still based on their thoughts, in solving problems, they could collaborate. Another weakness is that some students are less responsible and unable to work as a team. Finally, these types of students only depend on other team members and do not want to contribute to the team. Of course, this can be extra attention from the lecturer.

As for the socio-cultural linkage in critical literacy activities, students also began to be involved. Sanata Dharma University is one of the universities under the Catholic foundation. But interestingly, USD does not only accept students who share the same belief with the foundation. Students who have other ideas are also welcome with open arms. These cultural differences become one of the indicators of critical literacy. The culture in question is related to the student environment. If we look further into culture regarding socio-cultural

backgrounds, what the researchers caught from the phenomenon in the 2nd-semester students of PGSD USD, did not show a significant difference. Students from Sumatra are not much different from students from Java or NTT. All of them have almost the same critical literacy skills.

The difference is only in the skills to convey criticism. Suppose Javanese students think more about diction. They are very considerate of the language shared so as not to hurt the heart of the interlocutor. Meanwhile, students from outside Java are usually more direct in their criticism. This is indeed motivated by their respective cultures. Finally, reflective abilities are associated with learning to strengthen critical literacy. Reflection is used to compare the information contained in the text with other sources or knowledge. The respondent's presentation revealed that students had tried to involve consideration when they read or searched for information, but they still had difficulties. If you look at Bloom's taxonomy, reflection activities are high-level thinking that requires practice and habituation. However, at this habituation stage, students can collaborate or discuss with their peers to make it easier to reflect on information with their experiences or use their epistemic abilities. Some of the supporting factors in critical literacy activities are shown in [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Theme 2 Supporting Factors

Response	Subtheme	Result Verification
The curriculum used in the USD PGSD Study Program supports critical literacy skills	External	Critical literacy skills should be supported by various parties, one of which is the campus. Developing the curriculum used by the PGSD Study Program is expected to equip prospective elementary school teachers to master critical literacy. Critical literacy can be internalized into learning outcomes to become the focus of course studies. In addition to the curriculum, campus culture will undoubtedly play a role in equipping students. The learning environment becomes positive when the campus culture has led to critical literacy skills.
Positive learning environment Habits from campus Self-motivation to master knowledge and skills	Internal	The internal support is self-motivation. How a student has self-efficacy towards his abilities will trigger motivation to learn and achieve goals in learning.

The respondents expressed some of the supporting factors in critical literacy activities. Necessary literacy skills are, of course, not mastered instantly but require habituation. One habituation that is possible to do is through learning activities. Even though it's only semester 1, it doesn't mean that students haven't been able to be invited to think critically because the ideal learning is learning that prioritizes dialogue so that it gives birth to critical thinking.

If, in the previous section, the supporting factors of critical literacy owned by PGSD USD students were stated. Then based on the respondent, describe the inhibiting factors for essential literacy skills. Most students mentioned that the inhibiting factors for critical literacy skills are low interest in reading, reading motivation, and the surrounding environment. Interest in reading and the reading culture that most students have is still

lacking. This will have an impact on students' critical literacy skills. Essential skills of literacy are rooted in reading literacy and critical reading.

Discussions

Critical literacy is a person's ability to respond to information and problems by linking their culture and socio-culture. In formal education, habituation can be started when the child is in elementary school. Before equipping students with critical thinking skills, it is necessary to fix the teacher's mindset regarding critical literacy. This is the university's responsibility as a producer of teachers who will later contribute to the school. Elementary school teacher candidates at Sanata Dharma University Yogyakarta have habituated critical literacy skills since the first semester. This is shown in the courses given by the campus. The hope is that if teachers are equipped with essential literacy skills when teaching them, it will be easier to apply them to students and for themselves (Hendrix-Soto & Mosley Wetzel, 2019; Rogers et al., 2016).

Mastery of critical literacy will also involve collaboration, socio-cultural linkage, and reflection. To create critical thinking, having views and opinions from several thoughts is necessary. It can be made through collaborative learning, which refers to shared (distributed) education that encourages students to collaborate in designing something, not just absorbing the knowledge provided through various patterns of interaction, discussion, and peer assessment (Napitupulu et al., 2021; Sumtsova et al., 2018). Collaborative learning has also improved cognitive and social skills (Johnson et al., 2007; Le et al., 2018).

Socio-cultural linkages are also the key to the success of critical literacy. Students are trained to be sensitive and able to relate to their respective socio-cultural backgrounds. Moreover, students at Sanata Dharma University are known for being multicultural, so it will be easy to apply these aspects. Culture, in this case, can be raised in the selection of discussion or reading topics. Texts relevant to cultural backgrounds allow students to make meaningful connections (Rogers et al., 2016; Wood & Jocius, 2013). The characteristics of the text needed are authentic and relevant to the student's socio-cultural background. The social problems presented can also arouse students' interest in criticizing a phenomenon. A previous study found that social practices and actions were presented through discourse analysis (Boyd & Darragh, 2020). This study also did the same thing. It turns out that social topics will be more able to arouse students' critical abilities.

Another characteristic of critical literacy is the involvement of reflection in understanding information. The ability to criticize statements indeed cannot be separated from reflection activities. The review compares the data with existing theories or socio-cultural (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016; Koh, 2019). Reflection activities must go hand in hand with critical literacy because this activity can develop student competencies, especially in scientific thinking (Aldegether, 2020; Deng et al., 2019). Mastery of student critical literacy will be more effortless if supporting factors such as university support, motivation, and the environment exist. These three elements will affect the success of achieving critical literacy. When the campus, in this case, the study program, deliberately designs the curriculum by equipping students with essential literacy skills, learning outcomes will be more directed toward realizing these abilities.

The courses taught at USD PGSD are carefully designed in detail by the MBKM curriculum applied in the study program. The learning outcomes in the curriculum clarify this. In learning outcomes, it is explained that students are expected to be able to apply logic critically and systematically. From the learning achievement, it is then lowered into study material which will later be included in the course. Looking at the curriculum documents used by PGSD USD, it is clear and systematic how lectures are designed to equip students

with critical literacy skills. The essential skills of literacy development courses include Reading Literacy, Academic English, Learning Evaluation, and Innovative Learning Design.

Furthermore, another factor is support from within, namely the intrinsic motivation needed to master critical literacy. If someone already has high learning motivation, achieving goals will be more manageable. Without explanation, a person will be challenged to move to master knowledge or skill. In addition to cause, environmental factors are also one of the supporters of critical literacy mastery. A positive learning environment in the form of an academic climate and the influence of friends will significantly impact achieving individual critical literacy.

However, several inhibiting factors such as low interest in reading and a less supportive environment were also found in the mastery of critical literacy found in prospective teacher students. The problem of intense interest in reading is not new. This problem finally impacts the ability of crucial literacy because essential reading and critical literacy are interrelated. Critical reading interprets literacy as an internal cognitive process that uses the reader's background knowledge or "schemata" (Kivunja, 2014; Pandya & Ávila, 2014). From the elementary school to college level, reading learning is taught through an approach that evaluates the author's thinking and relates to the reader's interpretation and cultural background (Koch & Spörer, 2017; Ramirez, 2021). This opinion strengthens the evidence that reading skills are still lacking and will impact the difficulty of critical interpretation of a reading. This study's findings are similar to the research findings about barriers to critical literacy. Their study found that some of the obstacles faced by prospective teachers were difficulties in interpreting discourse, conflicts with personal ideologies, and anxiety if critical thinking caused controversy (Hendrix-Soto & Mosley Wetzel, 2019). This means that the findings of this study are somewhat different, especially regarding ideological barriers and discussions. Students who are research subjects have not yet linked their thoughts with personal ideology.

The concern about causing controversy does not become a significant obstacle in mastering critical literacy at Sanata Dharma University because the culture inherent in the campus is very humanistic and tolerant, affecting how students convey their receipts to minimize controversy. The findings of this study can be related to previous research that critical literacy is needed for prospective teachers. The limitations of this study are only conducted at one university. Further research should analyze the essential literacy mastery of elementary school teacher candidates on a broader scale. This study implies that students have a critical climate and culture that can be applied to the academic environment and daily life. The inhibiting factor comes from the students themselves and the environment.

4. CONCLUSION

Critical literacy skills are not abilities that are acquired quickly and easily. Indeed, mastering it requires a process, practice, and habituation. Primary school teacher candidates must have critical literacy skills to strengthen professional teachers' competence. This research implies that when elementary school teachers have essential literacy skills when they become teachers, they will easily teach their students later. Implementing critical literacy in students of the Elementary School Teacher Education Study Program at Sanata Dharma University is quite good, even though all students in the study program do not evenly distribute this mastery. The implementation of critical literacy is manifested in collaborative activities, socio-cultural linkages, and the involvement of reflective thinking. Factors supporting essential literacy skills, the campus has tried to familiarize and instill critical literacy skills through the curriculum and learning environment.

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