# INVESTIGATING CRITICAL LITERACY LEVEL OF MULTILINGUAL CADETS IN POLITEKNIK PENERBANGAN SURABAYA (CIVIL AVIATION POLYTECHNIC OF SURABAYA)

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating critical literacy level of multilingual cadets and to know cadets' responses to the activities designed from a critical perspective. There were 3 cadets of "English Bites", an extracurricular activity of improving English ability outside the classroom in Politeknik Penerbangan Surabaya (Civil Aviation Polytechnic of Surabaya). This study was a case study conducted at the first semester of Civil Aviation Polytechnic of Surabaya in 2020/ 2021 academic year. To collect the data, this study used observation, interview, and documentation. The cadets' written and verbal responses were analyzed on the basis of content analysis. In analyzing data, constant comparative method was used. The findings reveal that the multilingual cadets have higher level of critical literacy than the monolingual student. They are more critical, able to see the text from different point of view. The cadets also give response based on their influence in language ability and their background of culture. In conclusion, to help cadets cultivating a critical competence; critical literacy learning needs to get more attention to be implemented.
*Keywords: Critical Literacy, Multilingual Cadets, Case Study*

## ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui tingkat literasi kritis taruna yang memiliki multibahasa dan mengetahui respon taruna terhadap kegiatan yang dirancang dari sudut pandang kritis mereka. Ada 3 taruna *English Bites*, sebuah kegiatan ekstrakurikuler peningkatan kemampuan bahasa Inggris di luar kelas di Politeknik Penerbangan Surabaya. Penelitian ini merupakan studi kasus yang dilaksanakan pada semester I Politeknik Penerbangan Sipil Surabaya tahun ajaran 2020/2021. Untuk mengumpulkan data, penelitian ini menggunakan observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Tanggapan tertulis dan lisan para taruna dianalisis berdasarkan analisis isi. Dalam menganalisis data digunakan metode konstan komparatif. Hasil temuan menunjukkan bahwa taruna yang memiliki kemampuan 3 atau lebih bahasa memiliki tingkat literasi kritis yang lebih tinggi daripada taruna yang hanya memiliki 1 kemampuan bahasa. Mereka lebih kritis, mampu melihat teks dari sudut pandang yang berbeda. Taruna juga memberikan respon berdasarkan pengaruh mereka dalam kemampuan bahasa dan latar belakang budaya mereka. Kesimpulannya, untuk membantu taruna mengembangkan kompetensi kritis; pembelajaran yang memfasilitasi literasi kritis perlu mendapat perhatian lebih untuk diterapkan.
*Kata Kunci: Literasi kritis, Taruna Multilingual, Studi Kasus*

**INTRODUCTION**

Critical literacy has already developed well in English-speaking countries. Critical literacy presupposes a set of skills and strategies from the part of students in order to analyse critically the author's message, and to become critical consumers and users of information (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). It refers to alternative language instruction that stimulates students to explore hidden textual messages, question the status quo, and undertake action for a more equitable society (Dozier, Johnston, & Rogers, 2006). According to Janks (2010), texts are always informed by authorial bias. It contains messages that reflect the author's beliefs, assumptions, opinions, and interpretations of reality. To help the students to construct their own perceptions of the reality, students need to be encouraged to evaluate what is said and how it is said in the foreign language in order to reveal hidden ideas, to state disagreement, and reconstruct textual representations in a Foreign Language.

According to Freire (1970), "critical literacy views readers as active participants in the reading process and invites them to move beyond passively accepting the text's message to question, examine, or dispute the power relations that exist between readers and authors. It focuses on issues of power and promotes reflection, transformation, and action". Jones (2006: 67) states, "critical literacy is like a pair of eyeglasses that allows one to see beyond the familiar and comfortable; it is an understanding that language practices and texts are always informed by ideological beliefs and perspectives whether conscious or otherwise". Critical literacy is "a 'new basic' required in contemporary society. Being critically literate enables learners to navigate through the numerous texts available to them while questioning what the text claims and its authority. Students examine how the text aims to influence the reader, and how they can use the text to imagine other possible perspectives" (Luke, 2007). Luke (2014) approaches critical literacy in a more comprehensive manner as "the use of the technologies of print and other media of communication to analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of institutions and everyday life".

There are different frameworks of practicing critical literacy. Freire (1970) gives "banking education model" against to critical pedagogy, which treats students as passive learners. Frerie proposes that teacher should act as an agent to help students know the world around them through critical practice. Teachers should empower students to exert their own power to change social order. Blommaert (2005) and Fairclough (1995, 2001) delivers critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA aims to deconstruct the power taken for granted, namely, hegemony, and address how language can provide a deep understanding of broader spectrum of power relations in society. Luke and Freebody (1999) call for a framework "four resources model" to implement critical practice in the

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classroom: code break, text participant, text user and text critique (Luke & Freebody, 1999). The model then modified into: coding competence (ability to decode and Critical Literacies in Historical Context encode the text), semantic competence (ability to make meaning of the text), pragmatic competence (ability to use the text appropriately in a context), and critical competence (ability to critique and evaluate the text).

Suarcaya & Prasasti (2017). Conducted a research which found that in criticizing the text given, the students were facilitated by two values. The first value deals with their own lived experiences based on sociocultural values while the second is insight about values universally adhered to by human beings. The students were also able to negotiate the meaning in the text by reconstructing their own values, or by compromising on a particular value (deconstruction), or by both strengthening a particular value and yet at the same time compromising on another value. The students' critical stance is shown in three language acts, namely, negating, comparing, and confirming the values promoted in the text. Another research is conducted by Liu (2017). The result found that critical literacy practice (CLP) is necessary and feasible in EFL reading classes. Secondly, CLP can enhance EFL learner's motivation, and optimize learning efficiency. Thirdly, EFL learners' identities do shape and be reshaped by critical practice. Fourthly, reading is a social practice. Being aware of critical literacy, EFL learners realize that they are empowered to voice themselves and challenge social injustice.

Students' critical awareness of encouraging themselves to challenge social injustice and fulfill responsibilities as global citizens is still relatively weak. As a global citizen, they can be multilingual and multicultural. The multilingual learners should be equipped with the ability to critically question the information of a text, and to increase their awareness that a text may contest their own value. Multilingual students are rich in language skill. They are able to communicate flexibly in a variety of language contexts. Communicative and literate exchanges between and among students who can use more than a single language system creates opportunities for developing expertise and knowledge in a variety of forms. Students who speak more than one language flexibly and fluently perform better than their monolingual counterparts on tests of academic achievement (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994). Communicating across culture and linguistic context enables students to identify richer and more complex solutions to complex problems.

To formulate critical literacy, a variety of multilingual perspective must be considered. According to Gort (2006: 330 - 331), A multilingual perspective is based on a holistic view of the bilingual learner including validation of students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds as resources for learning, an understanding of the role of primary language (including literacy) in the acquisition of a new language, and a consideration of

sociolinguistic, sociohistorical, and sociocultural factors that contribute to the child's development and experiences. Based on this opinion, a multilingual perspective incorporates sociolinguistic as well as sociocultural concepts. Sociolinguistic views examine the connections between language and society, bringing intofocus how social relationships are organized within a particular community and how languages are used for particular purposes. Sociocultural factors impact values, attitudes, beliefs and assumptions of language and literacy learning. They relate to past and present relationships between cultural groups. This perspective acknowledges students' entire linguistic, literate, and cultural repertoire including languages, dialects, and uses of language and literacy in many contexts. By adopting this perspective, learning experiences are enhanced and extended by linking language, communication and literacy together as interrelated constructs for learning. Kern (2000: 126) states that the more learners redesign meaning by manipulating both language and context, the more they expand their communicative capacity.

A multilingual perspective recognizes that all students benefit from learning to be critical of what they read, hear and encounter in a variety of settings, especially because perspectives embedded in reading materials and the media can be hegemonic, culturally biased, and unreliable. A multilingual perspective involves developing multiple cultural frames of reference for recognizing and responding to bias, domination, and inequality in order to respond critically through interpretation, evaluation, and reflection. Stereotypes are combated and multiple viewpoints encouraged when students and teachers interactively construct knowledge, develop consciousness, and share reflections, experiences, and reactions through critical inquiry in the classroom.

Based on the discussion above, this study was aimed to investigate critical literacy of multilingual cadets and to know cadets' respond to an activity designed from a critical perspective. It was conducted to answer the following questions: 1) How was the critical literacy level of multilingual cadets in Politeknik Penerbangan Surabaya (Civil Aviation Polytechnic of Surabaya)? and 2) How did cadets respond to the activities designed from a critical perspective?

**METHOD**

The method used to explore the research question was a qualitative case study approach. A case study requires "extensive material from multiple sources of information to provide an in- depth picture of the case" (Creswell, 2007, p. 96). It was conducted in the English Extracurricular Activity named "English Bites" for the first semester of cadets in Politeknik Penerbangan Surabaya. There are 3 participants involved in this research. The first participant is A, he comes from Timor Leste and only can speak in English. The

second participant is B, he comes from Kalimantan and can speak in Bahasa Indonesia and English. The third student is C, he is Javanese and can speak in three languages (Bahasa Indonesia, English and Javanese). The participants were chosen in purpose to investigate their critical literacy level and to know the students' respond towards activities designed from the critical perspective.

Multiple data sources included classroom observation, documentation, and interviews. The data were analyzed using constant comparative method. The steps in analyzing the data can be as follows: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion. Triangulation was used to confirm the credibility of the findings. These included member-checking which allowed the participant to clarify and confirm her interpretations, while data triangulation insures that the data sources are compared to provide corroborating evidence (Yin, 2008).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
### 1. The Critical Literacy of Multilingual Cadets in Politeknik Penerbangan Surabaya (Civil Aviation Polytechnic of Surabaya)

This mini research was conducted in three meetings. The researcher conducted classroom observation, interview, and documentation. The result is found that cadets having multilingual ability have higher level of critical literacy. They are more critical, able to see the text from different point of view. During the research process, there are three topics given for the cadets. In the first meeting, it talks about racist advertisement. In the second meeting it talks about mix race relationship and in the third meeting it talks about differences between British and American.

### a. First Meeting

The instructor of "English Bites" asked the cadets to look at the advertisement appeared on the screen. It was body lotion advertisement product of 'Nivea'. The instructor asked the cadets to focus on the slogan and relate it to the picture. The slogan is "White is Purity" and at the bottom of the picture it is stated "Keep it clean, keep bright. Don't let anything ruin it. the picture is a woman wearing white shirt have a sit facing the window, the opposite direction/blocking the camera. We can only see her back and hair. When the cadets are asked to give their comment, one of the cadets said "I think it's good, nothing wrong with it". then the instructor asked them to take a look at the other advertisement. It is a soap product "Dove". There are three pictures. The first one is a black woman wearing brown t-shirt, second picture she took off her t-shirt, then the third one she changes into a white woman. The instructor said, "in relation to the previous one what do you think

now?" A raised his hand, "It's racist sir" the instructor asked, "Can you elaborate your statement?" "Yeah black woman turning into white…racist" C gave his comment, "the slogan is not appropriate… White is purity…does it mean black is not pure or something? at the bottom of the page it is stated keep it clean, keep bright. Don't let anything ruin it. So, when it is not white anymore it means that it is not clean? not bright? It's all a mess? we cannot choose our skin color… it's just not appropriate".

Next, the instructor asks the cadets to work in group to discuss the slogan and picture of product advertisement. The first product is coming from Sony. There is a picture of two persons, a black and a white woman, fighting. The white one catches the mouth of the black woman. The slogan is "PlayStation, Portable White is Coming". B gave comment that from the slogan and picture there will be an assumption that white woman is stronger than the black one. A white person is powerful so that her coming should be a warning for the black people. Next product is coming from Intel. The picture is about six runners who are taking their start by kneeling, they are facing a white man who is standing in the middle. The slogan is "multiply computing performance and maximize the power of your employees. C gave comment that from the slogan and the picture, black people are being marginalized. The interpretation can be a white man is the employee while the black people are the employees. Last picture from skin color advertisement is coming from Vinolia soap. There are two kids, one of them is white while another one having black skin. The slogan is "You dirty boy, why don't you wash yourself with Vinolia Soap?". A said that the slogan hurts his feeling since he comes from Timor Leste. Saying black people as dirty boy is humiliating and intolerant.

After having discussion on criticizing advertisement which are marginalizing black people, the lecturer asked them to work individually to criticize the other advertisement. The first one coming from Malaysia. It promotes the product of "Robovoc". The slogan of this product is "Fire your Indonesian Maid Now". A gives opinion on this "This sentence (slogan) is too racist to Indonesian. It's like they underestimate Indonesian maid. It's okay to write a slogan in an advertisement, but you don't have to be offensive to a country. And I think that human is better than robot".

The second product is coming from a cigarette industry. The slogan is "Don't quit, let's do it". C states that "in that advertisement there are notice *"Merokok dapat menyebabkan kanker…"* but the slogan of the advertisement is "Don't quit, let's do it". if they know smoking is dangerous for human's life why they keep making a

lot of cigarettes and make the other people in a dangerous. They shouldn't ask people to keep smoking if they do know smoking is not healthy".

The last advertisement is coming from Van Heusen. The picture is about a man and a woman. The man is on the bed, the woman serves him with food and drink but she does it while lying on the floor. The slogan is "Show her that it is a man's world". B said "I don't think so with this one. Now it is not like the old time. We all the women can be a leader too but we still appreciate the man. Let's see some examples there were a lot of achievement that women have more than a man. All the perception depends on their perception but I didn't agree with that, Never!"

b. **Second Meeting**

Before the instructor asked the cadets to read, he asked them to discuss the problems faced by people in mixed-race relationships. He asked the cadets to pay attention on the following questions: How might they be treated differently from people in same-race relationships? How might friends and parents react? Why do people from some religions prefer their family to marry someone of their own race? Do you think that young people are more tolerant of mixed-race relationships than the older generation? Before the cadets look at the article, the researcher also elicited the following words and phrases: to target someone, nationalist, harassment, to reject, verbal, hate mail, Muslim, Orthodox Jews, to convert to.

During reading, the instructor asked the cadets to predict the answers to the following: What kinds of harassment do people in mixed-race relationships often face? What might happen if someone from a strict religious group chooses a partner their parents don't approve of? How do many people believe mixed-race marriages affect their culture? Then, the instructor asked to read Suzie's story as a class. He asked them to discuss her problem and to suggest possible solutions. After the discussion, he asked the cadets to give advice and to write some advices on the mentimeter application then asked them to rank those advices. B gave advice that "she should give up". He said that it's not easy to continue a relationship you're your parents and friends are against it. They can feel that they disappoint their families if they have relationship with someone of a different race. A said the opposite thing, "she should carry on". He added "We should never give up towards racist attitudes". C said "they should try to convince the family that they will be okay". He added that "Go out with someone from different ethnic background is often cause of a lot arguments with your family and friends. The solution is that one person should convert religion. When they have shown effort

and it does not work, there is no other way, they should end their relationship". They should explain the reason of their ranking. To close the lesson, the instructor gives a question to be answered by all students, "Why do British cities have very ethnically diverse populations?"

c.  **Third Meeting**

Before reading, the instructor discussed British and American stereotypes to the class. Then, he wrote on the screen "How do British and American people behave differently? He also put the following headings on the screen: the people, Children, Food and drink, Weather, Houses and Television. He asked the cadets to work individually to write one sentence about the differences between Britain and America for each heading. The instructor pre-teaches the following words and phrases: to look after; number one; to accept your lot; class system; clingfilm; to make up your mind; to assume; attention span.

During reading, the instructor asked the cadets to underline anything they wrote that is mentioned in the article. He told the cadets that what they wrote under the heading of 'the People' may be mentioned in the paragraph with the heading 'Themselves'. The instructor asked the class to look again at the paragraph entitled "Themselves". The Americans could be described as 'self-centered' or 'focused' depending on your point of view. Likewise, the British could be described as 'considerate' or 'snobbish'. The cadets were asked to give comment on this. A said, "Well, the text wants me to believe that British are simply ordinary while Americans are ambitious. Since I don't know the truth, I follow what the text wants me to do, believe it". C gave his point of view, "take a look again at the text, it makes me having assumption that this text is made by British. I keep wondering who is the author? it happened because the character of British in the text is completely good while Americans, we cannot say it is bad but it has human things like being greedy and so on. I think the voice of Americans as a whole is missing. They are not heard. It's only coming from one side point of view". B said he cannot agree more on C's point of view. He said "well everyone can have their own interpretation, but neglecting group's opinion is not really good. It will be better when the author gives others' point of view on his text".

The instructor asked the cadets to work individually to make a list of positive and negative adjectives for each nationality, using the other paragraphs. During feedback, the instructor asked the cadets what stereotypes there are of their nationality. For each heading ask the cadets to describe their country's traits.

2.  **The cadets' respond to activities designed from a critical perspective**

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When having observation on cadets' respond to activities designed by the instructor, the researcher can assume that the cadets give response based on their influence in language ability and their background of culture. It is actually suitable with the previous research conducted by Suarcaya & Prasasti (2017). Conducted a research which found that in criticizing the text given, the students deals with their own lived experiences based on sociocultural values.

Cadet A, who is monolingual and originally live in a region which has the same characteristic and religion, see the case as in the surface. He gives opinion based on what the text wants the reader to believe or do and what the author wants readers to believe. Cadet C, who is multilingual and live in Javanese context which is complex, is able to see the text from whose viewpoint the text is expressed. He wondered how the characters in the text are presented and whose voices are missing or marginalized. Cadet B, who is bilingual and live in Kalimantan, is able to see the text from how the text depicts age, gender and/or cultural groups and what different interpretations of the text are possible.

## 3. Discussion

By conducting the research, it can be found that by conducting critical literacy practice cadets can be motivated to read the text. It is proven that critical literacy practice is important. Cadets' identities do shape and be reshaped by critical practice and they can be aware that they are empowered to voice themselves and challenge social injustice. It is in line with the research conducted by Liu (2017).

From the observation, the researcher confirmed the assumption by interviewing the participants. The researcher asked some questions, for example "According to you, how we should analyze the text critically?" A respond, "to criticize the text, we should know the text type and why the author writes this text". C said, "to analyze critically, we should know what view of the world the text is presenting, whose voice is heard and whose voice is not heard, how else the text could have been written, and who would get benefit from text?". B shared his opinion that we can critically identify the text by finding the assumptions behind the statement and what the contradictions and unsuitable parts are in the text". From those opinions, it is clearly seen that communicating across cultural and linguistic contexts enables students to identify richer and more complex solutions of problems.

**CONCLUSION**

**1. Conclusions**

The findings of this study found that:

a. Cadets having multilingual ability have higher level of critical literacy. They are more critical, able to see the text from different point of view. Communicating and exchanging literacy among multilingual students creates opportunities for developing expertise and knowledge in a variety of forms. Being multilingual can increase cognitive flexibility, the ability to think more abstractly, and the ability to think independently of words

b. The cadets give response based on their influence in language ability and their background of culture. The multilingual cadet gives opinion based on whose viewpoint the text is expressed. He wondered how the characters in the text are presented and whose voices are missing or marginalized. Monolingual cadet gives opinion based on what the text wants the reader to believe or do and what the author wants readers to believe. Bilingual cadet gives opinion based on how the text depicts age, gender and/or cultural groups and what different interpretations of the text are possible.

**2. Suggestions**

It is suggested that further research on this area is conducted considering that this research is conducted in a short period of time and small number of participants. Further research can be conducted to longer period and bigger number of participant and this research can be used as additional references and stepping stone to take the first step in conducting further research in this area.

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