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Fostering Students' Critical Thinking Through Literature Circles in EFL Classrooms: A Contribution to Sustainable Development Goal 4

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Critical thinking is recognized as an essential 21st-century skill and a key component of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which promotes quality education and lifelong learning opportunities. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, however, fostering students' critical thinking remains challenging due to linguistic and pedagogical constraints. This study aimed to investigate how Literature Circles (LCs) facilitate the development of students' critical thinking skills in an Indonesian EFL classroom. **Method:** The study employed a qualitative case study design conducted at a private senior high school in Sidoarjo, Indonesia. Twelve EFL students participated in the study. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, including students' worksheets, dialogue journals, and lesson plans. The collected data were analyzed through data reduction, categorization, and thematic interpretation. **Results:** The findings revealed that the implementation of LCs involved several contextual adaptations, including reading material selection, group formation, independent reading, and role-based tasks. The learning process facilitated six dimensions of critical thinking: interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, explanation, and self-regulation. Through independent reading, collaborative discussions, and structured role tasks, students actively engaged in questioning, analyzing texts, connecting ideas to real-life contexts, and constructing evidence-based arguments. **Novelty:** The study extends previous literature by demonstrating how adapted Literature Circles can be effectively implemented in Indonesian secondary EFL classrooms to foster critical thinking skills. It also provides practical evidence of how role-based collaborative reading activities contribute to the achievement of SDG 4 by promoting higher-order thinking and student-centered learning.

INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking has become a crucial skill in the information age. The rapid development of information technology demands that people understand from various sources and think critically. People must be able to evaluate thoughts, ideas, or judgments critically with awareness, inventiveness, and refinement as required. (Mataniari et al., 2020). Critical thinking skills help people understand themselves better and function more effectively in their complex lives by valuing and considering others' opinions and viewpoints. They will be more objective, less emotional, and open-minded (Raj et al., 2022). Critical thinking is a highly valued skill and a pressing issue in education. Therefore, applying it to learning has gained widespread attention. As a fundamental skill, it should be included in the educational setting. (Ennis, 2018; Schleicher, 2018; Yuan et al., 2021, 2022). To develop the skills, they need to be reinforced and applied consistently throughout the learning process. (El Soufi & See, 2019). It is suggested that teaching be supervised. (Raj et al., 2022) and to evaluate the application regularly (El Soufi & See, 2019)

The importance of critical thinking is also reflected in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4: Quality Education, which emphasizes ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning